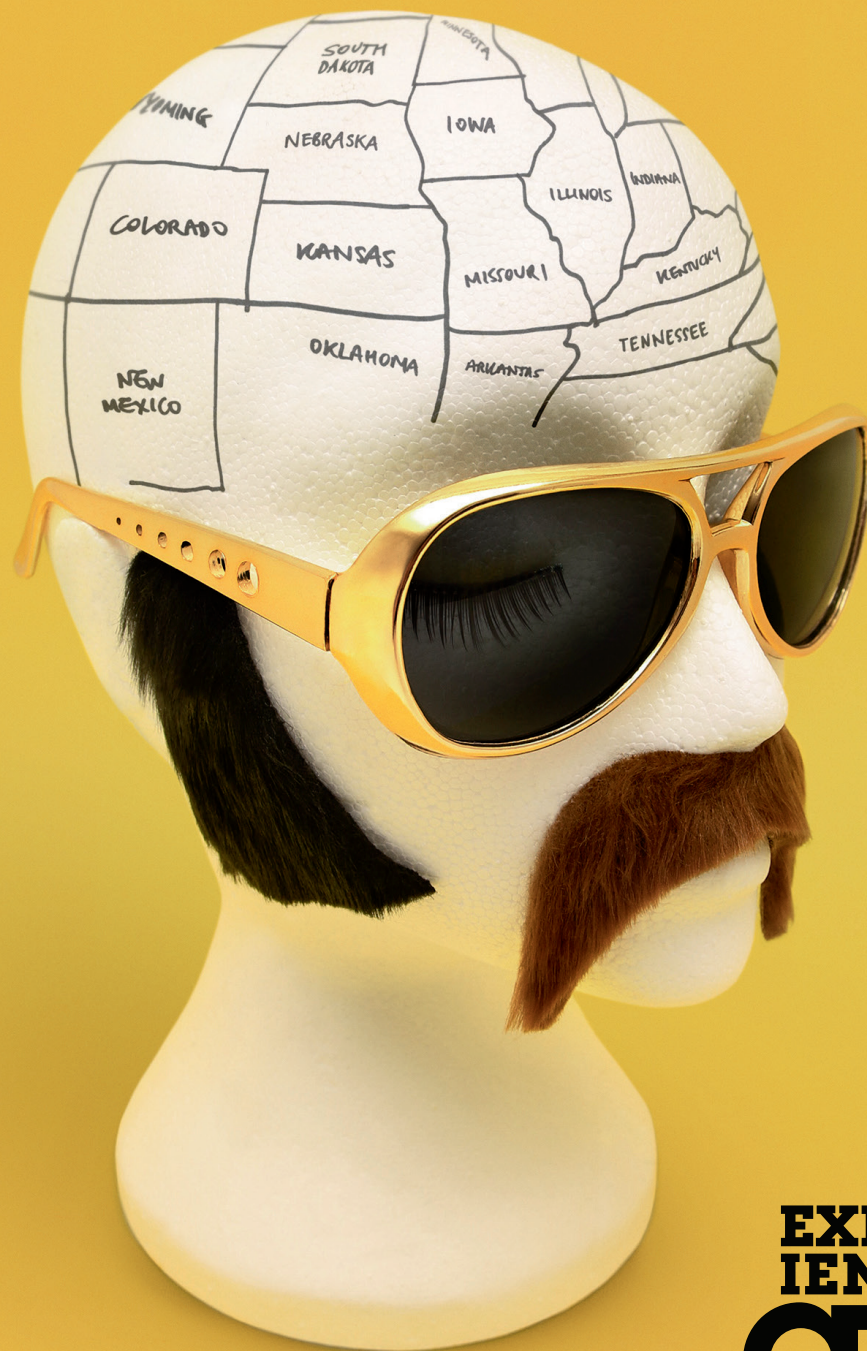


A.R.T. EDUCATIONAL TOOLKIT

ROOSEVELVIS



EXPERIENCE THE
a.r.t.

2015/16 Season



Welcome!

Pack your bags—A.R.T. is hitting the road!

On a hallucinatory road trip from the Badlands to Graceland, the spirits of Elvis Presley and Theodore Roosevelt battle over the soul of the painfully shy meat processing plant worker, Ann, and over what kind of man or woman Ann should become. Set against the boundless blue skies of the Great Plains and endless American highway, **RoosevElvis** is a new work about gender, appetite, and the multitudes we contain.

This Educational Toolkit is designed to complement the A.R.T. production of the TEAM's **RoosevElvis** at OBERON, with a special focus on the tools, myths, and heroes we use in exploring and discovering our identities. The Toolkit includes interviews and insights from the creative team behind the show; primary source documents and pertinent commentary on the major influences on the show's development—Theodore Roosevelt, Elvis Presley, and the film *Thelma & Louise*; suggested lesson plans for pre- and post-show engagement with the play; and much more.

We hope to see you at the theater!

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@americanrep #RoosevElvisART



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Thank you for participating in the A.R.T. Education Experience!

If you have questions about using this Toolkit in your class, or to schedule an A.R.T. teaching artist to visit your classroom, contact the A.R.T. Education and Community Programs department at:

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THE TEAM



One of the unique qualities of **RoosevElvis** is that the performance was devised and written by a collaborative group. **THE TEAM** section of this Toolkit provides a glimpse behind the scenes at the creative minds responsible for creating **RoosevElvis** – the Brooklyn-based ensemble the TEAM – and introduces some of the core themes and inspirations behind creating the performance.

In “Strange Fusions” (pages 5-7), the creators of **RoosevElvis** discuss their development process and what drew them to their source material. Director Rachel Chavkin talks specifically about the many layers of identity at play in **RoosevElvis** in an exclusive interview (pages 10-12).

Dan Fishback’s review of **RoosevElvis**, “Dominating the Landscape,” provides insights into themes of oppression and queer identity looming throughout the play.

THE INSPIRATION section (pages 13-42) of this Toolkit dives deeper into—you guessed it—the major inspirations behind creating the show: namely, Elvis Presley, Theodore Roosevelt, and the 1991 film *Thelma & Louise*.

The **WORK IT OUT** section (pages 43-49) builds on the principles and ideas introduced in the Toolkit through activities that lead students through hands-on and deep inquiry about the multifaceted topics addressed in the play such as journeys of self-discovery, representations of masculinity, and what it means to be a hero.

WHAT IS THE TEAM?

The TEAM is a Brooklyn-based ensemble dedicated to making new work about the experience of living in America today. Once described as “Gertrude Stein meets MTV,” the TEAM’s work crashes American history and mythology into modern stories to illuminate the current moment. They combine aggressive athleticism with emotional performances and intellectual rigor, keeping the brain, eyes and heart of the audience constantly stimulated.

Founded in 2004, the TEAM has created and toured 9 works nationally and internationally. They are four-time winners of the *Scotsman* Fringe First Award, Winner 2011 Edinburgh International Festival Fringe Prize, 2011 *Herald* Angel, 2008 Edinburgh Total Theatre Award, Best Production Dublin Fringe 2007, and were nominated for a 2012 Drama League Award for Outstanding Musical. The TEAM was cited on “Best of 2013” lists on 3 continents, and is a recipient of the American Theatre Wing’s 2014 National Theatre Company Grant.

The TEAM has performed all over New York (including the Public Theater, PS122, and the Ohio Theatre); nationally (including the Walker Art Center, and the A.R.T.); and internationally (including London’s Royal Court Theatre, National Theatre, Barbican Centre, Almeida Theatre, and Battersea Arts Centre; Edinburgh’s Traverse Theatre; Lisbon’s Culturgest; the Salzburg Festival; the Perth International Arts Festival; and the Hong Kong Arts Festival).

The TEAM is Jessica Almasy, Frank Boyd, Rachel Chavkin, Stephanie Douglass, Amber Gray, Jill Frutkin, Brian Hastert, Jake Heinrichs, Matt Hubbs, Libby King, Ian Lassiter, Jake Margolin, Dave Polato, Kristen Sieh, and Nick Vaughan.

Artistic Director: Rachel Chavkin, Producing Director: Manda Martin, Associate Producer: Lucy Jackson

Find out more about the TEAM at theteamplays.org

Strange Fusions

The TEAM talks Elvis, Buffalo, and the Badlands

RoosevElvis creators (writer/director Rachel Chavkin, writer/associate director Jake Margolin, and writers/performers Kristen Sieh and Libby King) interview themselves about their process of making new plays, their fascinations with Elvis and Theodore Roosevelt, and the Badlands-to-Graceland road-trip on which **RoosevElvis** was born.



Our work tends to begin with a number of separate impulses, and then there's a moment where two ideas that had seemed separate suddenly fuse together. Can you remember a moment of connection you made during the process?

Jake: I love this question, because by the time we finish writing our plays, I generally feel like, “of course all of these things go together—in fact, I can’t believe someone else hasn’t already written this!” When they don’t intersect is when something that was perfect on its own gets cut. I can think of so many wonderful scenes that spun off onto the cutting room floor precisely because they never fused together with the rest of the piece.

Libby: At the initial workshops of *RoosevElvis*, Ann and Elvis were not in dialogue as they are now. There was Ann, who was a hardcore Elvis fan, and then there was Elvis. And Elvis lived in a very dreamy, almost purgatorial plane of existence. It wasn’t until later that we discovered they could coexist.

This discovery happened (I think) when we were doing some longer-form improvisations establishing the routine of Ann’s after-work wind-down. She would drink some beer and smoke some pot and turn on *Rebel Without a Cause* and get undressed and eat a sandwich and eventually open her laptop to do the online dating thing.

Strange Fusions (cont'd)

And I think it was in the improvisations that I discovered I could use Elvis to give Ann the courage to ask a girl out on a date. And so he began talking to her. And this was a huge breakthrough for me, and Ann, and I think the play.

Libby: can you talk about your early interest in Elvis impersonators? This seemed to outweigh your initial interest in the man himself, and steered you to the character zygote that became Ann.

Libby: We were in Las Vegas for four weeks working on *Mission Drift*, and I really fell in love with Vegas. I think it's fair to say that during those four weeks I encountered Elvis daily. Before this, I had never thought long and hard about Elvis. I had never had an Elvis phase. I had a Grateful Dead phase, a Dylan phase, a Madonna phase, a Michael Jackson phase... And in Vegas I was encountering Elvis daily—sometimes multiple times daily—running into Elvis impersonators, going to see Elvis Impersonators, mugs staring at you in gas stations. And then I began watching Elvis's live performances in Vegas. But the impersonators really stuck with me—the DEDICATION—and I knew that I couldn't just make myself an Elvis fan. I needed to create a character who was completely and utterly a devotee. I needed to create a character who really needed him, and then I could start to work. And that's how Ann was born.

We've used video in a number of our plays, but from the earliest point in the inception of *RoosevElvis* there was a proposal to make film central to the piece. This led to filming with Andrew Schneider in the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Memphis. But I'm wondering if you feel that this filming influenced our writing and development process outside of the actually filmed portions of the play as well?

Libby: I was influenced by the huge role film played in Elvis' life. One of the facts that I learned early in my research was that when Elvis was in high school, he worked as an usher at Loew's State Theatre in Memphis. I was very struck by this image of young Elvis, about to completely blow up, standing quietly in the dark watching movies.

I don't think there would be "Elvis" without "James." Elvis was obsessed with James Dean and *Rebel Without a Cause*. He memorized all of Dean's lines. He really, really wanted to be a serious film actor, and he admired people like Peter Sellers.

In the end, I think Elvis was deeply humiliated by his film career. I remember us all very early on watching Elvis in *Love Me Tender*. He really didn't want to sing in the movie—he thought musicals were cheesy—but ultimately he succumbed, and so I found the movie very sad. Because he was already losing his own pursuits and succumbing to the people who knew what would make money.

Rachel: I often start work with a few godfather pieces in my brain. For this piece, I was thinking a lot about Radiohole's *Whatever, Heaven Allows*, which is an homage/deconstruction/assassination of Douglas Sirk's films. It was brutally messy and hilarious and queer. On the other end of the spectrum, I was thinking about Kelly Reichardt's films, especially *Wendy and Lucy* and *Old Joy*, which are these nearly nonverbal, intimate and super gentle character portraits.

Film is a visual and character-driven medium—I think moreso than theater, which tends to be more dialogue-based. So thinking about film from early on gave me the permission to be quiet, and to let the work be quiet.

Kristen: It's hard for me to say if that cinematic goal influenced the writing, or if Elvis' relationship to being onscreen just leant itself to that kind of self-mythologizing and self-observation. I think the video element allowed for a kind of epic scope that wouldn't have been there otherwise: a sense of great distances and enormity that's really important to each of these icons.

Strange Fusions (cont'd)

Why *Thelma and Louise*?

Jake: In our writing process, I find it really useful to use cultural or aesthetic touchstones to let everyone else know what on earth I'm picturing. I'm finally learning that after we all spend an hour or so writing in response to the same prompt, we are each in our own brain-space and nobody has any idea what's in my head.

So, as I remember it (and I can't find the original scene, so this could totally be incorrect) I was trying to describe the vibe of a scene in which Teddy and Elvis hit the road and wrote something along the lines of "they are *Thelma & Louise*." And it stuck.

Whereas in the moment I was just referring to the sense of abandon and danger and tension and the Southwest landscape, you, Rachel, responded to the part where *Thelma & Louise* was a total landmark event in having two women starring in a buddy/adventure movie. And I absolutely love *Thelma & Louise* and jumped at the opportunity to spend the rest of the development process thinking about it.

What were your favorite moments from the process of developing *RoosevElvis*?

Kristen: I really enjoyed the initial couple weeks where we didn't know what the play was going to be or how we were going to stitch these two guys together. Rehearsal went really slowly in a way I don't remember a TEAM process going before. I liked sitting with Libby and free associating back-and-forth facts about the lives of these men who we didn't yet know as well as we would eventually. There were also some wonderful road-trip moments...

Libby: The entire road trip...driving through the Badlands in an RV, seeing a herd of buffalo. I remember we were told by the park attendant that our chances of seeing buffalo were slim that day. Then, after driving for some time, we happened upon this single buffalo hanging out in a field totally solo all except for this tiny bird perched on its back - and then we headed up over a hill and there was this entire herd...the grass was so green and the sky was so blue and talk about cinematic—and I include our RV in the image because it was so out of place but also so right for what we were doing...filming our little low low-budget movie was one of the best times I've ever had not just with the TEAM but ever. OH! And seeing Graceland—arriving there, having never been—and carrying Ann's story of this pilgrimage. It was deeply moving.

This article originally appeared in the [A.R.T. Guide](#), published by the American Repertory Theater.

DISCUSSION

- Libby King notes a moment in developing the character of Ann when she realized she "could use Elvis to give Ann the courage to ask a girl out on a date" and later mentions that Ann "needs" Elvis. What does this mean? How can someone "use" or "need" someone they don't know - e.g. their hero or idol - in order to gain courage? Can you think of any examples of doing something like this in your own life?
- Libby describes traveling to Graceland - Elvis Presley's mansion - as a pilgrimage for Ann. What does the word "pilgrimage" mean to you? What does this characterization tell you about Ann's relationship to Elvis?
- How do you respond to the mixing of film with theater in the *RoosevElvis*? Did you sense any of the intimacy, visual impact, self-reflection, or mythologizing mentioned in this interview?

Dominating the Landscape

The TEAM's *RoosevElvis*

by Dan Fishback



ANN: I hated middle school.

BRENDA: Who didn't?

ANN: There were definitely people I knew who liked it.

BRENDA: Yeah, and none of them are doing anything interesting now.

It's a heart-breaking moment of insensitivity, for Ann's life is far from interesting. The quiet, working-class butch is lonely in the middle of South Dakota, and has invited Brenda, the adventurous queer hipster, to visit her, hoping for love, or at least some kind of connection. But Brenda is rude and dismissive. She laughs in Ann's face, prods her with accusatory questions about Ann's lot in life, shaming her for her own sadness, her own isolation. If cosmopolitan, feminine Brenda could empathize with gender non-conforming, isolated Ann, she would see that not every gay kid flees their hometown, or finds happiness, confidence and freedom. Not every queer child grows up to be a defiant hero. Not everyone can conquer their own lives. Brenda is "It Gets Better" incarnate, unwilling to face the grim reality: for some people, It Stays Bad.

These questions of self-determination, power and courage propel the TEAM's *RoosevElvis* into absurd, rambunctious scenarios and deeply-felt moments of authentic pain. As we watch Ann grapple with Brenda's instigations, the specters of Teddy Roosevelt and Elvis Presley (played, respectively, by the same actresses who play the two women) guide us (and Ann)

THE TEAM

Dominating the Landscape (cont'd)

through meditations on ambition, tenacity and greatness. These buoyantly-rendered historical caricatures help us see Ann's crises in a global context, and urge us to think more broadly about who gets to be great, who gets to succeed, who gets to be "king."

Cleverly, the TEAM sets up a constellation of imagery that questions its own dramatic weight. Set in the plains, near "contested Lakota territory," and starring Teddy Roosevelt (arguably the greatest American imperialist) and Elvis (arguably the greatest appropriator of Black culture), we are constantly reminded of the long history of white people stealing from people of color. So even as we burrow into the scarred, wretched psyche of Ann, the butch white factory worker who has no means to articulate her gender identity or ascend beyond her boring life, we know that even she is more privileged than many. And even Elvis, her working class hero, could not have become king without the same sense of white entitlement that won South Dakota for the United States. (As Mos Def says, "Elvis Presley ain't got no soul / Chuck Berry is rock n' roll.")

At one point, Brenda says to Ann, "You're remarkably unbrave." Later, the same actress (as Teddy Roosevelt) tells Elvis, "I'm sorry if my superiority offends you!" What I love about this piece is that this same perspective has equal moments of credibility and cartoon. In one moment, a character will convince you that you should try harder, strive higher, and achieve tremendous things for your own legacy; then the play turns on a dime and makes people who do such things seem like ridiculous, over-compensating fools. And between those poles, we see the real meat of ambition, and the real questions that haunt a yearning soul: How can I speak for myself? Do I deserve what I want? Does my success require another person's failure?

With an appropriately ambitious range of emotional lenses and theatrical conceits, **RoosevElvis** offers to us, as striving humans in various states of success and failure, what Brenda cannot easily offer Ann: kindness, warmth, and, ultimately, empathy.

Dan Fishback is a playwright from New York City, and director of the Helix Queer Performance Network.

This article originally appeared in the [A.R.T. Guide](#), published by the American Repertory Theater.

DISCUSSION

- What are the major themes of **RoosevElvis** that Fishback outlines in this review?
- What does Fishback mean by, "not everyone can conquer their own lives"? Do you agree with this statement? Do you think **RoosevElvis** asserts this statement? Why or why not?
- Did **RoosevElvis** make you think about your own ambitions, expectations, and/or privileges? If so, did you draw any conclusions, or are you left with any questions about these topics?

Born With It

An interview with Rachel Chavkin

*Dive deeper into the topic of identity in **RoosevElvis** with the TEAM's Artistic Director and director of **RoosevElvis** Rachel Chavkin. Rachel talks with A.R.T.'s Hasty Pudding Artistic Fellow Sammi Cannold about the portrayal of characters Ann, Brenda, Teddy, and Elvis in the play.*



SC: Could you start by acquainting us with the character Ann and describing what she's struggling with at the beginning of the piece?

RC: Totally. So first, I try to refer to Ann either strictly as Ann or they, because I think the central thing that Ann is struggling with is that Ann [doesn't have] the language for how Ann feels, but there's something that has never been quite at home. And so, from our perspective, it's useful for us to think of Ann as gender queer. Taylor Mac, the performance artist who's been at A.R.T. (*The Lily's Revenge*, *The Last Two People on Earth: An Apocalyptic Vaudeville*), has in his bio that Taylor's preferred pronoun is judy, so when you open a sentence about Taylor, rather than saying 'his credits include,' you would say 'judy's credits include.' And so for Ann, I think Ann's preferred pronoun is 'Elvis,' if it was really something you could choose. And I think Ann comes from a world where no one chooses; it's just taken for granted.

Born With It (cont'd)

SC: And could you discuss where Teddy Roosevelt comes into that?

RC: When we started this piece, we started with the basic idea that Libby was going to play Elvis and Kristen was going to work on Teddy and beyond that, we didn't know much. We didn't even know if it was going to be a two-person show or two interweaving solo shows. And then we found out very, very early on in the research process that Elvis had this Teddy Roosevelt quote on his wall. And it was like, 'Oh my god. Teddy was a hero of Elvis.'

We tend to think of them as Russian dolls. Teddy lives inside Elvis and Elvis lives inside Ann. So when Ann plays Elvis—who is sort of this voice that Ann puts on to try to build up courage to reach out to these women online or just to live the life—when that stops being enough, that's when Teddy Roosevelt shows up at the door with a knock and is like, 'Are you packed? Graceland. We're going to Graceland.'

SC: So, if that's how Teddy and Elvis ended up in the same universe, how did you create Ann and Brenda?

RC: Ann came almost at the very start when we had no idea who Ann was or that Ann would ultimately be our central character. We saw Ann at the beginning as this supporting role and then Teddy and Elvis went on this road trip. And I think Vicky Featherstone from the Royal Court, who's also a very close friend and a supporter of the company, came to see a workshop and was like, 'Well, it's so clear; Ann is your centerpiece.' And by that time, we had played with Ann talking to—I'll say it—herself as Elvis. So, we had that gimmick, but we didn't quite know how to bring Teddy into it, so then it was like a continual summoning.

SC: And with Kristen and Libby taking on these roles, what were you going for in putting two female actors into iconic visions of masculinity?

RC: A number of things. The TEAM's work to me always feels best when there's density—when there's many, many different layers of meaning at once.

So first, let's look at Kristen. Kristen is this really petite actress—of like pure muscle, but she's one of the tiniest humans I know. And so, there's something inherently gorgeous and ridiculous—in a very funny, positive sense—about her masquerading as this iconically barrel-chested cowboy.

Then you have a second layer, which is the fact that Teddy was this deeply sickly kid. He had terrible asthma—there are stories of his father riding with him in a carriage at night up and down New York City streets when he was a toddler to try to get air into his lungs. He had pneumonia constantly – [he] was almost an invalid basically, because he was so allergic. He had a collapsed ribcage. And at age 8 or 9, Teddy's father basically grabs him by the neck and says 'Theodore you have the mind, but not the body and without the body, the mind cannot survive' and presents him with a gym on their porch. Teddy proceeds to basically spend 8 hours a day exercising for the next 10 years of his life until he builds himself a muscle structure, basically giving himself physical therapy and expands his ribcage. So, he puts himself through this incredibly rigorous physical therapy and builds this vision of himself. So, in seeing Kristen as Teddy you both have the basic circumstance of a woman playing a man, but you also have a puny person imagining themselves as a physically strong person and that was Teddy's story.

And I think this goes back to larger themes, but one of the things we're most interested in about both Teddy and Elvis is that both of them were men who were not what we think of as themselves when they were born. And both of them had this preternatural vision of what they could be and basically built themselves into it. Elvis was dirt poor – rural, rural Tennessee, moves to Memphis at 14 and he sees this pink bolero jacket in a window in Memphis and is like 'I'm gonna wear that. I'm gonna be a guy who wears that.' So, there's something about the

Born With It (cont'd)

failure of women playing these men that is perfect for what we're saying about both of these men and the idea that you get to construct your own identity.

SC: I was reading about Elvis wearing the bolero jacket and dying his hair as a teenager; as you say on your website, in so doing, he essentially reinvented what it meant to be a man. So, I was wondering: does Ann similarly reinvent what it means to be a woman?

RC: Exactly. I think that's the whole question. Why are some people born with this ability to do that? In Teddy Roosevelt's case, there's a very concrete sense of entitlement in the fact that he was born into one of the wealthiest families in New York City and in America. In Elvis' case, he was just born with it. And that is not the majority of people, right? That is the definition of the man in the arena. And then there's the vast majority of other people who are so intimidated by just the sound of the crowd through the walls that they can't get it together to even step foot into [that arena]. So I think that's what we're interested in—who gets to make themselves naturally and who does not have that power?

SC: And Ann's not born with that innately?

RC: No.

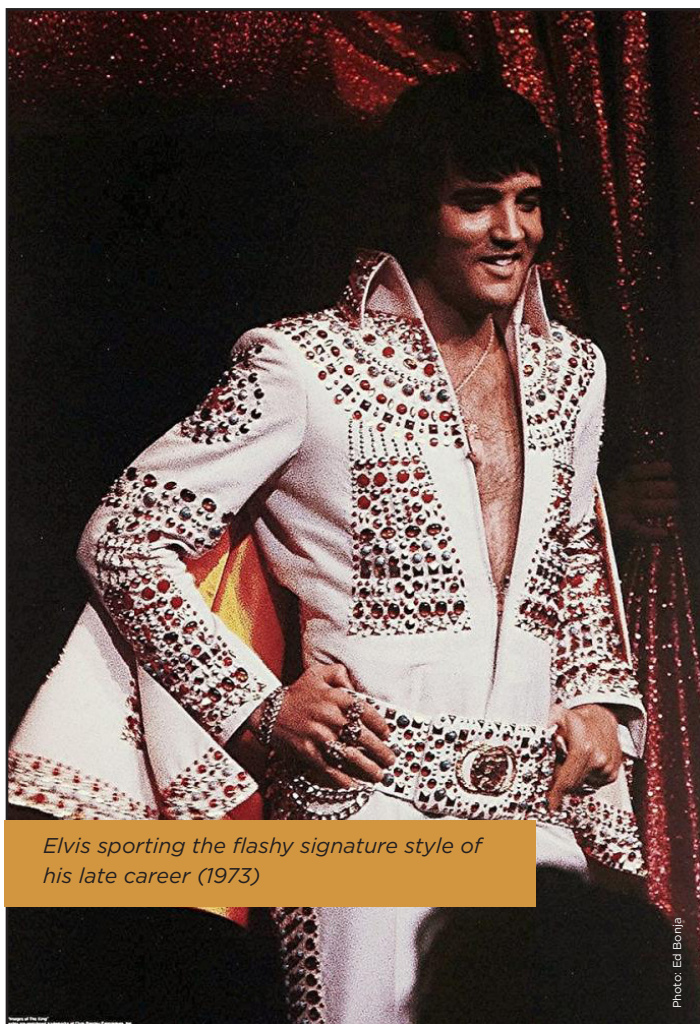
SC: But does Ann develop it in the piece?

RC: I think that's a good question for the audience to discuss afterwards. I mean, from our perspective, the fact that Ann has made it to Graceland and signs 'Ann' in the little corner of the brick wall at the end—that's a victory. From the outside, it's an incredibly sad victory or a pathetic victory, because you see it – the name Ann is one of thousands of names on that wall and it's a teeny corner of a side pillar, but it's a question of scale. So I think that's really for the audience to decide whether Ann's life is better at the end or not.

DISCUSSION

- What do you think Rachel means when she says that “Ann comes from a world where no one chooses; it's just taken for granted”? What about identity is “taken for granted” in our society? Does this change depending on where you live?
- When speaking about Theodore Roosevelt and Elvis Presley, Rachel mentions that “both of them were men who were not what we think of as themselves when they were born.” What does she mean by this? What are the images of Elvis and/or T.R. that have survived? How are these images different from when they were younger, and what did they do to transform into their iconic images? Is this type of transformation something we are all capable of? Is it a good thing? Why or why not?
- Rachel poses the question: “Why are some people born with this ability [to reinvent what it means to be a man or a woman]?” Are some people born with an ability to change societies' preconceptions of how men and women are allowed to present themselves, or do we all have the ability to do it?
- Do you think Ann's life is better at the end of the play than it was at the beginning of the play? Why or why not?

THE INSPIRATION



Elvis sporting the flashy signature style of his late career (1973)

Photo: Ed Bonija

THE TEAM section of this Toolkit gave you insights into the creative minds responsible for **RoosevElvis**.

THE INSPIRATION section provides deeper context for the major influences the TEAM used in developing **RoosevElvis**: former U.S. president and Rough Rider Theodore Roosevelt, rock icon and sex symbol Elvis Presley, and the groundbreaking 1991 road film *Thelma & Louise*.

Touching on the pertinent topic of portraying masculinity and masculine icons, Bob Mondello's "Who's The Man? Hollywood Heroes Defined Masculinity for Millions" (pages 14-16) introduces how representations of men in Hollywood films have developed over the decades.

To learn more about Elvis Presley, check out Jessica Reaves' *TIME* "Person of the Week" article (pages 26-27), which catalogues Elvis' often subversive cultural significance and rise to stardom. Video clips provide case studies from different periods in Elvis' life, indicating the many different ways he is portrayed in the media.

David Greenberg's article "How Teddy Roosevelt Invented Spin" (pages 20-23) analyzes T.R.'s tenacity and politics in action, introducing topics of muckraking and political campaigning. A popular

political cartoon from T.R.'s presidency provides a glimpse at how he was viewed by the public and the press. Get a glimpse through the Harvard archives with an essay by Roosevelt Collection curator Heather Cole (page 24).

Walter Salles' "Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie" (pages 29-33) and Raina Lipsitz' "Thelma & Louise: The Last Great Film About Women" (pages 34-37) introduce the context, content, and impact of the third major inspiration used in **RoosevElvis**, the 1991 film *Thelma & Louise*. The TEAM embarked on their own *Thelma & Louise*-inspired road trip while developing **RoosevElvis**, keeping a blog (pages 39-42) of their adventures traveling from the Badlands to Graceland.

Also refer to the **WORK IT OUT** section (pages 43-49) for lesson plans that integrate the information in this section with hands-on learning.

Who's the Man?

Hollywood Heroes Defined Masculinity for Millions

by Bob Mondello

*The TEAM's **RoosevElvis** consciously plays with portrayals of masculinity by casting two women to play high profile icons of masculinity: Elvis Presley and Theodore Roosevelt. Portrayals of men and masculinity are particularly noticeable and prominent in the media and in films, particularly high-profile Hollywood movies. [Read or listen](#) to Bob Mondello's introduction to the portrayals of masculinity in Hollywood films,* and consider the connection between the trends outlined by Mondello and the characters in **RoosevElvis**.*



John Wayne in *The Searchers* (1956)

Tony Curtis used to say that he'd learned how to kiss a girl by watching Cary Grant at the movies. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt and assume he wasn't just sitting behind Grant at the theater—while also noting that he's hardly alone in taking instruction from films.

Movies have always offered a window through which audiences, sitting in the dark, can observe human nature without being observed. A movie theater is where many a boy learned how to make things right, the way John Wayne did in so many pictures, with fists or a gun. Movies taught about sacrificing for the greater good, as Humphrey Bogart did when he sent Ingrid Bergman off with a "here's lookin' at you, kid" in *Casablanca*. They're a place to learn about standing firm against injustice (with Spencer Tracy in *Inherit the Wind*), and about standing up for yourself (with Sidney Poitier in *A Raisin in the Sun*).

All of which was useful for a nation that thought of itself as a melting pot. For generations, newly arrived immigrants had emerged slowly from their ethnic enclaves in big cities, where things were comfortingly just like the old country. Assimilating was hard.

Who's The Man? (cont'd)

But film—even back when it was silent—was like an instruction manual for the American experience. For a nickel at the nickelodeon, a foreign fellow fresh off the boat could see exactly how American men dressed, how they greeted each other (with a handshake, not with European kisses on each cheek), and, more generally, how people in his newly adopted country behaved. Admittedly, silent films used a kind of shorthand for American behavior—stereotypes, to allow directors to brush in characters quickly without dialogue: women were almost always domestic, delicate and passive, while men were outgoing, strong and active.

From John Wayne to Iron Man ... not such a stretch, really. They're icons both, standing tall, fighting for the greater good.

Film's power of suggestion quickly became so influential—so overwhelming in fact—that some argued it should be curbed. In the 1930s, the film industry created a production code that laid out a set of strict rules for filmmakers, banning drunkenness, sex, revenge plots, all forms of immorality and stating explicitly that no movie should throw audience sympathy to the side of wrongdoing.



Robert Downey, Jr. as Iron Man in the current Marvel franchise

You couldn't do most of Shakespeare under those rules, but you could have strong, manly, family-friendly heroes. Which meant, as the bluenoses intended, that Hollywood, having been told what it could show, was in effect telling audiences what they should be—portraying human behavior (especially male behavior) in idealized, heroic terms that mere mortals might have trouble living up to.

After World War II, the code started fraying around the edges as competition from television cut into Hollywood's bottom line. What could film offer that TV couldn't? Well, foreign films had nudity; indie films offered rebellion. The studios wanted a piece of that action, so they stopped restricting filmmakers with the Production Code and started alerting audiences through the ratings we know today.

Who's The Man? (cont'd)

And as soon as the restrictions were gone, leading men in movies became more like men in real life—not always strong or good or forceful. Dustin Hoffman became a huge star, playing a total slacker in *The Graduate*. Peter Fonda easy-rode his way across America; Paul Newman and Steve McQueen played antiheroes and got labeled the “Kings of Cool.” John Travolta was that era’s Fred Astaire—all of them recognizable as people, not icons.

All were nuanced, and vulnerable and incapable of being like the men of old Hollywood, because the world had changed too much. Woody Allen demonstrated the change in comically literal terms by conjuring up Bogie to help him man up in *Play It Again, Sam*.

Testosterone was in full retreat by the 1980s. Movies made for teenagers had teen heroes, not adult males. James Bond started poking fun at the kind of “suave” his predecessors had played straight, and romance devolved from Cary Grant to Hugh Grant — stammering, hesitant, charming in a manner that was utterly without eloquence or confidence.

This led over time to the adult male as overgrown child in Judd Apatow comedies, to dads who turned themselves into Mrs. Doubtfires to rule the roost, to sensitive bad guys, earnest good guys, gay guys who wished they could quit each other, and action heroes like Jason Bourne who literally don’t know who they are. Men, in short, became varied, and human, and unambiguously authentic on-screen.

But audiences still want heroes—and more important, audiences are eager to pay to see heroes. Which means Hollywood needed to find a way for males to be heroic again.

The solution, which turned out to be a multibillion-dollar solution: Make them superheroic. Men of Steel, Men of Iron, men with the webslinging power of spiders and with the claws of wolverines—but more important, each and every one a man who cares.

From John Wayne to Iron Man ... not such a stretch, really. They’re icons both, standing tall, fighting for the greater good. And yes, they’re manly in a way that may not be entirely human, or even something most people would want to live up to. But it sure looks great in Cinemascope.

This is a transcript from a spot on NPR’s “All Things Considered” July 30, 2014.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read or listen to this story on NPR’s website, including audio clips from the films discussed by Bob Mondello.*

*URL: <http://www.npr.org/2014/07/30/336575116/whos-the-man-hollywood-heroes-defined-masculinity-for-millions>

DISCUSSION

- What are the different trends in portraying masculinity that have developed over the past 90 years, as outlined in this article? What do the examples Mondello provides define about masculine ideals in each decade?
- Mondello notes that in recent films, “men became varied and human and unambiguously authentic,” but audiences also want “heroes,” hence the development of superhero movies featuring “heroes who care.” Is this an accurate assessment of how masculine ideals are portrayed in Hollywood films today? Do you think this is a positive development? Why or why not?
- How do these representations of masculinity contrast with or overlap with portrayals of women in films that you can think of? Do Theodore Roosevelt or Elvis Presley fit this mold? What about the characters of Ann, Brenda, Elvis, or Teddy in **RoosevElvis**?

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

The Rough Rider & The Politician



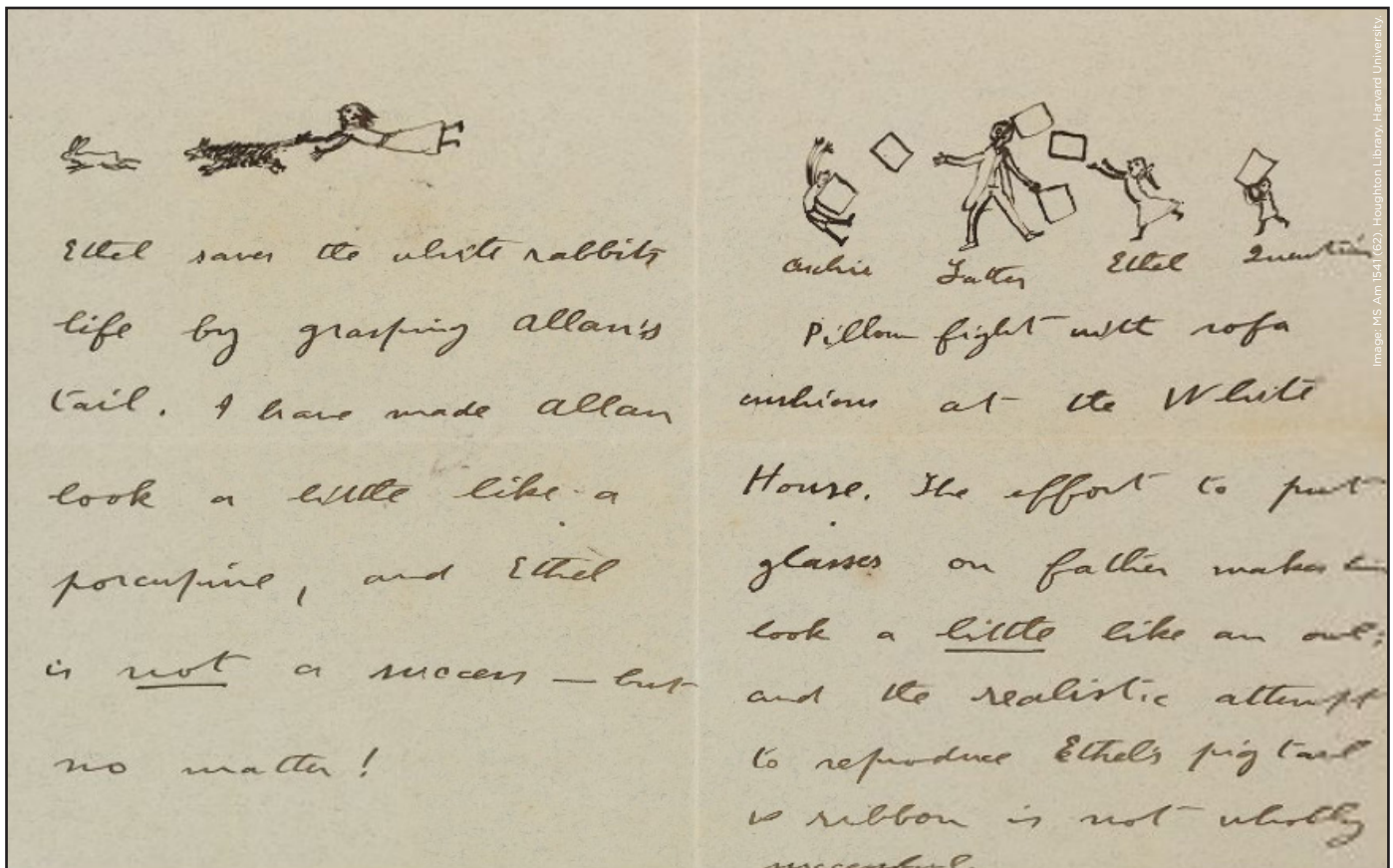
Image Roosevelt 52013-007, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Theodore Roosevelt on the round-up, 1885, Photo, T.W. Ingersoll

THE INSPIRATION: THEODORE ROOSEVELT

From the Curator: "Following the tragic deaths of his young wife and his mother on the same day in 1884, Roosevelt sought solace ranching in Dakota Territory. Fellow ranchers and cowboys initially assumed that a wealthy man from New York City was just playing a part, but Roosevelt soon proved his mettle, earning lifelong respect from the westerners."

More so than any President before him, American boys didn't just look up to Theodore Roosevelt, they wanted to look like him. Teddy's strapping physique and famous (unofficial) philosophy, "speak softly and carry a big stick," redefined the image of American manliness, both at home and abroad. But his raw masculinity was supported by an ingrained intelligence, charisma, and assertiveness. Having grown up as a sickly child in a prosperous family, TR embodied the idea that no matter what your personal circumstances were, with hard work you could become the man you wanted to be.

T.R.'s rise to the White House was brisk. He was born in 1858 in New York City to an affluent family of plate-glass importers. A Harvard College alumnus and creator of the volunteer cavalry "the Rough Riders," by 1898 he was also a war hero, governor of New York, and soon after Vice President to William McKinley. After president McKinley's assassination in 1901, he became the youngest president to ever enter the White House, at forty-two years old. After a popular first term, he was reelected in 1904. For eight years, Roosevelt recast the role of the President in his image.



From the Curator: "Roosevelt often sent "picture letters" like this one to his children. As a child, he planned to be a naturalist, and practiced his drawing skills so he could faithfully represent the animals he observed; while only quick cartoons, the drawings in his picture letters are able to convey quite a lot. The drawings in this letter show Roosevelt's daughter Ethel saving the family's pet rabbit from Allan the dog, as well as a pillow fight between Roosevelt and three of his children. He writes of his self-portrait, "The effort to put glasses on father makes him look a little like an owl".

A trailblazing rough rider, TR became a president of firsts. He created thousands of natural reserves, placed struggling poets on the federal payroll, and used his charisma and stronger-than-ever military to leverage his interests abroad. He was the first president to invite an African-American to dine at the White House; the first sitting president to travel abroad, visiting the new Panama Canal; and in 1906, he was the first American to win a Nobel Prize, for his efforts to stop a war between Russia and Japan. If his actions were unprecedented, TR would not flinch. When his vision did not jibe within the traditional definition of the Executive Branch, he redefined it. With all of these recognitions, Roosevelt delighted in being the country's center of attention. He was "the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral," as one of his children said. The White House filled up with gifts from all over the world. Roosevelt became a larger-than-life icon for the American people— an icon of masculine prosperity.

To learn more about how T.R. used his power in the media to leverage his interests, read David Greenberg's article "How Teddy Roosevelt Invented Spin" (pages 20-23). You can also learn about T.R.'s connection to the theater in an article by Heather Cole, Curator of the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library (page 24). Heather also provides citations and context for all of the images this section, marked with **From The Curator** text boxes.

For hands-on creative projects utilizing the material in this section, see the lesson plans in the **WORK IT OUT** section of this toolkit (pages 43-49).



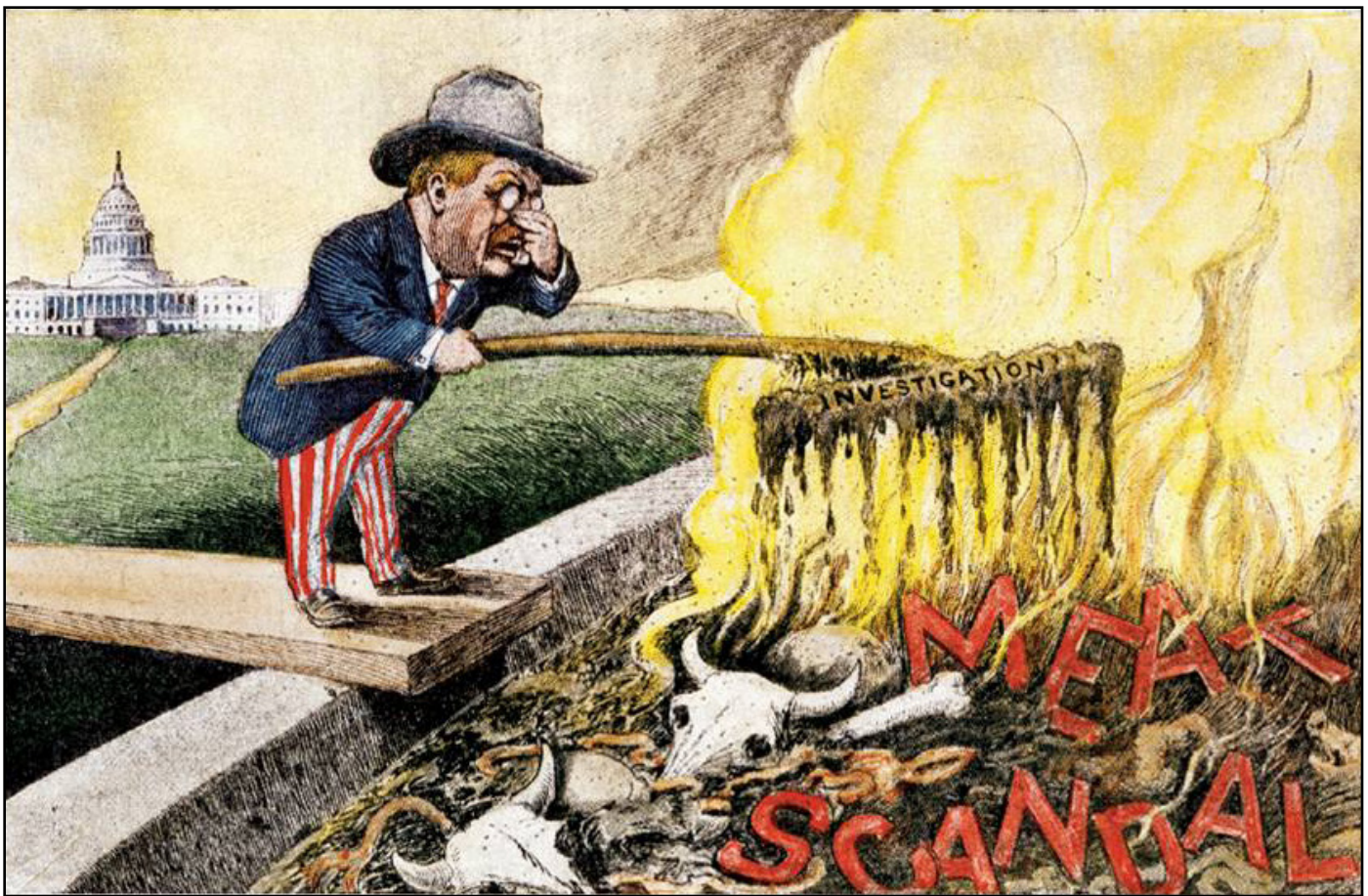
Image: MS Am 3056 (186), Houghton Library, Harvard University. "Terribly Teddy, the Grizzly King," published in the New York Journal, 1901.

From the Curator: "Theodore Roosevelt was a larger-than-life public figure well before he became president. In 1901, a Colorado hunting trip taken by the vice-president-elect were gleefully followed by reporters. This cartoon parodied Roosevelt's zeal, accompanying text describing an imagined encounter: "Terrible Teddy, the young slayer of grizzlies, who killed more than half the wild beasts in Colorado in less than a week, and frightened the rest, said he made the sun-and-wind tanned faces of the old trappers turn as white as the writing paper on which they kept tally of the steadily rising animal death rate. 'When I kill grizzlies with a gun,' said he, 'the poor things have no chance. They are handicapped. Hereafter I shall kill them with my bare hands. It's more strenuous.'" A short silent film appeared under the same title that year; it can be viewed on YouTube. While the article and the film were caricatures, they were based on fact: on that particular trip, Roosevelt killed six lynx, eleven cougars, and a bear."

How Teddy Roosevelt Invented Spin

by David Greenberg

*The portrayal of Theodore Roosevelt in **RoosevElvis** highlights his tenacity, work ethic, and cunning. This article talks through the steps of a real historical incident from over one hundred years ago wherein T.R. used these character traits during his presidency in order to reform the meatpacking industry in the U.S. T.R. used innovative ways of leveraging – and often manipulating – his own public image and his connections to Congress, the press, and public figures in order to implement reform policies. Read this article about T.R.'s meatpacking reform initiative and consider whether you've seen any similar methods in contemporary politics.*



A NAUSEATING JOB, BUT IT MUST BE DONE

President Roosevelt takes hold of the investigating muck-rake himself in the packing-house scandal.

For decades after his death, Theodore Roosevelt was written off as a grandstanding performer—remembered more for his rhetoric than his accomplishments. H.L. Mencken, for example, bridled at Roosevelt's grandiosity: "What moved him was simply a craving for facile and meaningless banzais, for the gaudy eminence and power of the leader of a band of lynchers, for the mean admiration of mean men." Even Woodrow Wilson, once an admirer, came to regard TR as "the monumental fakir of history."

THE INSPIRATION: THEODORE ROOSEVELT

How Teddy Roosevelt Invented Spin (cont'd)

Over time, however, Roosevelt's reputation changed. Many historians now agree that TR revolutionized the presidency. Previously, presidents had accepted the Framers' view of the executive as an administrative office, with Congress the seat of policymaking. But Roosevelt's vision required not just that Washington meet the "needs of the nation," as he wrote, but also that the president take the lead in doing so. He embraced the job of leading the public, striving to discern the public interest and engage the citizenry directly. He courted publicity aggressively, not simply to boost his ego but also to effect vigorous reform. "Yes—it is true that TR liked the centre of the stage—loved it in fact," wrote the journalist Henry Stoddard, "but when he sought it he always had something to say or to do that made the stage the appropriate place for him."

Roosevelt pioneered many of the techniques presidents use today to achieve policy goals. He toured the country to promote favored legislation. He courted the Washington press corps—upgrading the shabby White House pressroom and hosting informal press conferences during his afternoon shave. He kept tabs on photographers at his statements (the better to make the front pages), hired the first government press officers, and staged ingenious publicity stunts. (He descended to the bottom of the Long Island Sound by submarine to show support for the new vessels and rode 98 miles on horseback to prove the reasonableness of new Army regulations.)



From the Curator: "This photograph was taken when Theodore Roosevelt had been president for only a few months, following the assassination of President William McKinley. Roosevelt was only 42 years old when he became president, the youngest person ever to fill that role."

Roosevelt thus ushered in an age in which presidents would be perpetually engaged in the work of publicity and opinion management—the work of spin. Perhaps no incident better illustrates this than his historic 1906 quest to clean up the shoddy and predatory practices in the stockyards and meatpacking houses where Americans got their daily diet of beef.

* * *

After decades of unchecked industrial growth, American businesses and industries were in need of federal regulation—to protect workers, consumers, farmers, or simply other competitors in the marketplace. Addressing the issue of unregulated meatpacking and other foods had been on Roosevelt's to-do list for some time when he raised it in his December 1905 message to Congress. "Traffic in foodstuffs

How Teddy Roosevelt Invented Spin (cont'd)

which have been debased or adulterated so as to injure health or to deceive purchasers,” he declared, “should be forbidden.” The Senate, dominated by business interests, resisted, but Roosevelt hoped to prevail by enlisting public support. To do so, he seized on a popular outcry triggered that spring by the reporting of a crusading, 27-year-old socialist with whom, despite profound ideological disagreements, Roosevelt locked arms.

Upton Beall Sinclair wasn’t a core member of the group of journalists—like Lincoln Steffens and Ray Stannard Baker—who were close to Roosevelt and whom he famously labeled “muckrakers.” But more than any other writer, Sinclair’s name would come to epitomize their intrepid “literature of exposure,” which pulled back the curtain on seamy business practices and corrupt politics in the hope of inciting reform. Sinclair’s fame derived mainly from the success of *The Jungle*, his 1906 novel about the wretched world of Chicago meatpackers. [...]

Never one to mince words, the president deemed Sinclair a “crackpot.” But he shared the novelist’s dim view of the meat moguls. He wrote Sinclair a three-page letter that mocked the young man’s “pathetic belief” in socialism and offered a critique of *The Jungle*—but one that concluded with: “The specific evils you point out shall, if their existence be proved, and if I have the power, be eradicated.” Roosevelt extended an invitation to the White House. ...

The president instructed Sinclair to promptly go see [Charles] Neill and his partner, James Reynolds, who were ready, Roosevelt promised, to “do everything you suggest in terms of interviewing witnesses and gathering information.”

As Neill and Reynolds began their inquiry, the Agriculture committee returned its verdict—rendering, as Sinclair feared, a low opinion of his work. ...By the next week, Sinclair was nervous about the fate of food-and-drug reform—and his reputation. The meatpackers’ own publicity campaign was now in high gear. [...]

Roosevelt was equally keen not to lose the war for public opinion, which he expected would dictate the bill’s fate. In March, he had given orders to Charles Neill: “I want to get at the bottom of this matter, and be absolutely certain of our facts when the investigation is through.” In late May, Neill and his team finally provided the president with their report: a bleak picture of putrid conditions and reckless practices in the stockyards—mostly in line with Sinclair’s account. Neill described workers spitting or urinating on the floors, workroom surfaces blanketed in dirt and rotten meat, and the reheating of bad meat to be relabeled for sale. [...]

For tactical reasons, Roosevelt kept Neill’s report under wraps. He wanted to use it as leverage with Congress—leaking hints of its damning details, and threatening the release of more, to pressure the meat industry’s patrons. This strategy took time, frustrating the politically naïve Sinclair, who wanted the document released, not least to vindicate himself. [...]

While the battle raged on Capitol Hill and in the press, Sinclair capitulated to his impatience. On the evening of Sunday, May 27, 1906, he walked into the office of *New York Times* editor Carr Van Anda with a briefcase containing letters, affidavits, and other materials that Neill and his team had collected. Van Anda sat Sinclair down for several hours with two *Times* stenographers, and by 1:00 a.m., a story was ready for Monday’s paper. Roosevelt, who read it the next day, erupted at Sinclair for his “utterly reckless statements.” But he proceeded to make Neill’s full report public, sending it to the House with a call to pass the Beveridge amendment and its meat-inspection provisions.

The beef industry had been routed in the court of public opinion. As the packinghouses literally whitewashed their facilities as part of a desperate cleanup job, the press grew withering. The *New York Evening Post* offered doggerel: “Mary had a little lamb/And when she saw it sicken/She shipped it off to Packingtown/And now it’s labeled chicken.” Before a House committee, Neill and Reynolds rehearsed with fanfare their gory findings, including an account of a pig carcass that fell into a urinal before getting hung, unwashed, in a cooling room.

... On June 30, 1906, Roosevelt, with a stroke of the pen, made meat inspection the law of the

How Teddy Roosevelt Invented Spin (cont'd)

land—and with another stroke signed into law the Pure Food and Drug bill. “In the session that has just closed,” he said to the press, “The Congress has done more substantive work for good than any Congress has done at any session since I became familiar with public affairs.”

* * *

The meat-inspection episode showed the president’s skill not only at discerning public opinion aroused by the press but also at using statements, leaks, and the cultivation of journalists to pass his progressive agenda. In an article hailing “The Reign of Public Opinion,” the great muckraker Lincoln Steffens called it “the real power behind Theodore Roosevelt.” Congressmen submitted to the presidential will, Steffens said, because he was “the leader of public opinion” and they feared popular retribution if they defied him. Even Sinclair, who had wanted a stronger bill than the final compromise, praised TR: “He took the matter up with vigor and determination, and he has given it his immediate and personal attention from the very beginning.”

Roosevelt is remembered as the first president of the modern age not simply because he used presidential power on behalf of sweeping reform—a feat in itself—but because he redefined the president’s job by governing with an acute consciousness of his power to reach the public. Tackling major national problems meant the president had to set the political agenda through speeches, the press, and the other emerging media, and this in turn meant commanding public attention by mastering the assorted tools and techniques of image- and message-craft that would, decades later, come to be known as spin.

This article is excerpted from The Atlantic, published January 24, 2016

[CLICK HERE](#) to read the full article on The Atlantic website.*

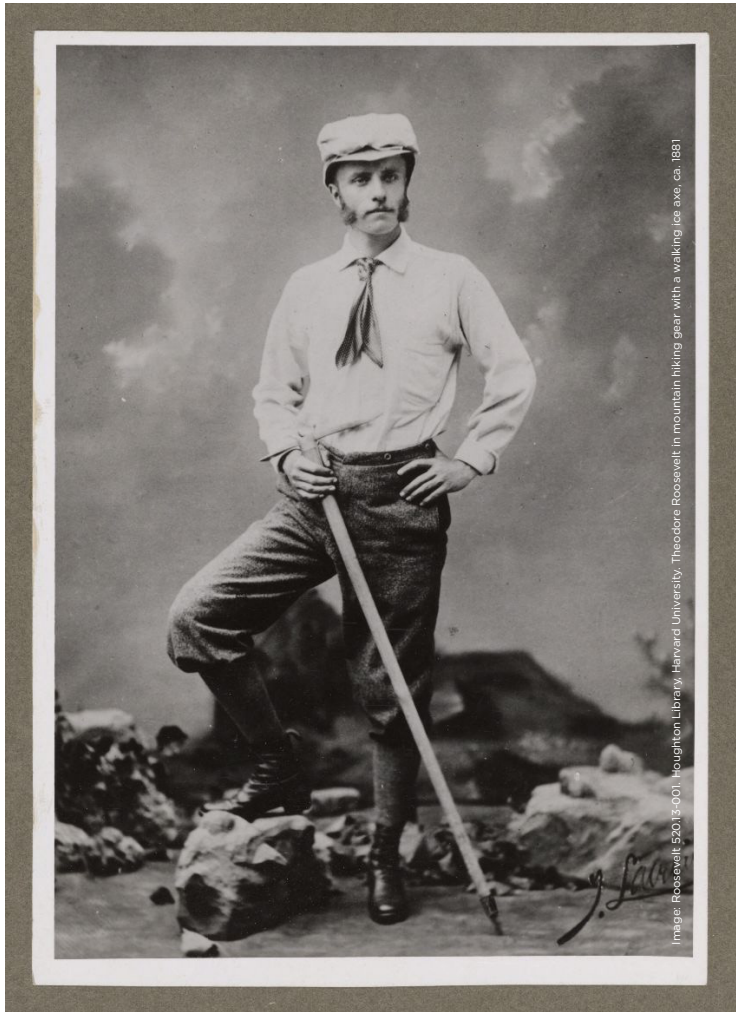
*URL: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/how-teddy-roosevelt-invented-spin/426699/>

DISCUSSION

- In this example, how did T.R. leverage the media, public opinion, and even Congress to reform the meatpacking industry in the United States?
- Were the methods T.R. used for reform ethical and/or worthy of admiration? Why or why not?
- Look up the definition of the term “muckraking.” Based on the definition of this term, can you summarize the thesis of the “Nauseating Job” political cartoon?
- Based on the description of T.R. in this article and the depiction in the political cartoon, what kind of person do you think he was? Did this article change any perceptions you previously held about T.R.?
- The events of the meatpacking reform happened over 100 years ago. Do T.R.’s methods remind you of anything you hear in politics today?
- Dan Fishback (page 8-9) notes that T.R. is “arguably the greatest American imperialist.” What do you think this means? Is there any evidence in this article that would help to either prove or disprove this statement?

A Theatrical President

by Heather Cole



From the Curator: “An avid outdoorsman, Theodore Roosevelt climbed the Matterhorn on August 4, 1881, while honeymooning in Switzerland. He wrote to his sister Anna, ‘I was anxious to go up it because it is reputed very difficult and a man who has been up it can fairly claim to have taken his degree as, at any rate, a subordinate kind of mountaineer... there is enough peril to make it exciting.’”

*The TEAM's **Roosevelt** brings Teddy Roosevelt to life onstage. Heather Cole, Curator of the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library, reflects on Theodore Roosevelt's theatrical life, and his life in the theater.*

Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) had many roles: naturalist, historian, war hero, and president, among others. He was also an avid fan of the theater.

Roosevelt most likely attended plays and other performances as a young patrician New Yorker. While a student at Harvard, Roosevelt served as secretary to the Hasty Pudding Club (unfortunately, there is no evidence to suggest that he took part in the performances).

As president, Roosevelt took advantage of the role's perks, and despite a busy professional life, managed to attend theatrical performances with his wife Edith at least once a week. While security demanded that he view plays from the safety of a well-guarded presidential box, Roosevelt would enter the theater through the lobby and cheerily greet anyone who wished to speak with him. He often invited actors he liked to visit him at the White House, where many returned to perform in weekly “musicales” organized by Edith.

Roosevelt's larger-than-life personality, ongoing struggle to overcome personal tragedy, and fiercely articulated progressive ideals have made him an irresistible subject for biographers, novelists, playwrights and actors. Plays featuring Roosevelt began appearing during his presidency; he has appeared steadily in plays and films into the 21st century.

Those interested in learning more about Roosevelt's life are welcome to explore the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library. Among over 50,000 items in the collection are Roosevelt's diaries, letters, drafts of speeches, published writings, and photos from throughout the president's life.

The Theodore Roosevelt Gallery next door in Pusey Library, open to the public, features exhibitions of material from the collection. More information about accessing the collection can be found online at <http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/houghton/collections/roosevelt.cf>

ELVIS PRESLEY

The King & The Country Boy

“The King of Rock ‘n’ Roll” is not a title to be taken lightly, and it belongs to only one man: Elvis Presley. Bursting onto the scene in the 1950’s as rock’s working class hero, Elvis – often scandalously – changed the face of the music industry for good.

The best way to get a sense of Elvis’ persona and style is to watch him in action. Check out the videos below from different eras in Elvis’ life. For an introduction to Elvis’ rise to fame, you can also read Jessica Reave’s TIME article about Elvis’ life (pages 26-27).

For a deeper dive into these materials, consult the lesson plans in the **WORK IT OUT** section of this Toolkit (pages 43-49).

Check the **Resources** section (page 50) for URL addresses for these videos.

THE KING ON TAPE

*The following videos illustrate Elvis’ changing image and style throughout his career. The songs Elvis sings in the top two videos are both referred to in **RoosevElvis**. Ann, feeling stuck, receives a pair of blue suede shoes in the mail and plunges into a hallucinatory impersonation of Elvis amidst screaming fans, singing “Hound Dog.” Later on, Elvis sings “Love Me Tender” as Ann daydreams romantically about a waitress at a local diner. For deeper engagement with these videos, check out the lesson on pages 43-49.*



Elvis Presley performing his hit song “Hound Dog” on the Ed Sullivan Show, October 28, 1956



Elvis performing “Love Me Tender” live in Las Vegas in August, 1970



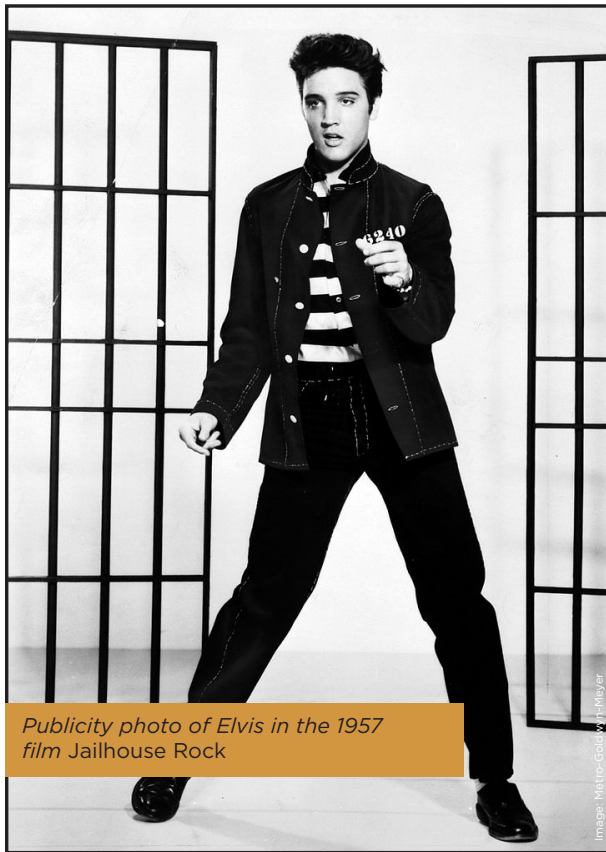
The trailer for the 1961 film *Blue Hawaii*, starring Elvis.



Elvis speaking at a press conference in Madison Square Garden on June 9, 1972. [CLICK HERE](#) to read the transcript.

TIME Person of the Week: Elvis Presley

by Jessica Reaves



Publicity photo of Elvis in the 1957 film Jailhouse Rock

Twenty-five years to the day after his death at the age of 42, Elvis Aaron Presley's name fairly droops under the weight of its acquired cultural significance. Briefly tagged a teen idol, the King of Rock and Roll swiftly transitioned into category-defying superstar. Today, college professors devote whole careers to examining Elvis's influence on America's cultural mores, his impact on American sexuality and most of all, our apparently unflagging passion for his music.

Even in death, Elvis's commercial success is unparalleled; he's sold more records (1 billion worldwide) than any other artist in history, and his estate is priceless. Given his spectacular popularity, it's easy to forget that when he first came on the national scene in the 1950s, Elvis was considered highly subversive.

Middle America was flummoxed by his singing, which didn't fit with the era's squeaky-clean bill of fare. It wasn't just his lyrics; it was what he introduced vocally — appropriating the blues and gospel styles of the African-American South, he brought “black” music to white Americans. Then there was the matter of his stage presence. Elvis Presley, the performer, was all about sex — it may have only been the suggestion of sex, but it was there all the same, in the sneer, the gyration, the raised eyebrow. And that unfettered sex appeal

represented everything American parents wanted to suppress in the mid-1950s. Wanted to — but couldn't.

Born in 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi, Presley showed an early aptitude for music. By the time he was 19, he was recording his own music, and at 21 he was an international star.

In 1956 and '57, Elvis appeared several times on television variety programs hosted by Ed Sullivan and Milton Berle. During his second appearance on the Berle show, he sang “Hound Dog” and engaged in a bit of his trademark hip swiveling. The broadcast generated shock nationwide, and sparked a flurry of hysterical press.

In 1957, the famously stiff Ed Sullivan, who'd once vowed never to have Elvis on his show, was so thrilled by his guest's effect on the show's ratings that he announced on camera, “I wanted to say to Elvis and the country that this is a real decent, fine boy.” Such sentiments did not keep the network brass from issuing an historic decree to the cameramen: Elvis was to be shot strictly from the waist up.

The Elvis revolution was on — and as parents around the world quickly realized, the sultry crooner wasn't just a temporary distraction. As the singer's popularity exploded, his risqué dance moves sent girls into paroxysms of excitement and his slightly suggestive half-snarl

TIME Person of the Week: Elvis Presley (cont'd)

made mothers everywhere a little bit nervous.

Much as he loved music, Elvis also wanted to be an actor — a serious actor, like his idols, James Dean and Marlon Brando — but producers and directors kept sending him puff scripts. He appeared in 33 films, and while all of them were profitable, only a few (the mega-hits “Jailhouse Rock” and “King Creole” included) truly satisfied their star.

The end came for Elvis during the 1970s, a time when no worthwhile American Dream stumbled to a halt without first exposing its dark side. Elvis, despite his tremendous success, is generally believed to have been a depressive, even, it has been suggested, manic-depressive, or bipolar. When he died in 1977 from a cardiac arrhythmia, his finances were in wild disarray, he was overweight and (it is believed) he had been abusing alcohol and prescription drugs for years. His private life was also a mess; his marriage to Priscilla Presley had hit the rocks four years earlier.

It is testament to Elvis’s appeal that none of the less-than-glamorous trivia of his final years and death has marred his sheen. If anything, in fact, it’s the excruciatingly human details of Elvis’s sad last days that has endeared him to so many fans. It makes him more like one of us: life-size, even vulnerable. It even enhances the pleasure of listening to his music, reminding us that the voice that brought us all those heartbreakingly beautiful tunes belonged to a person who ached and longed and lost.

This article is from TIME, published August 15, 2002

[CLICK HERE](#) to read the full article on the TIME website.

*URL: <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,337778,00.html>

DISCUSSION

- How did Elvis challenge the perceptions of what a “proper” display of masculinity should be in the mid-1950s? Can you think of a current celebrity that is challenging contemporary views of masculinity?
- Watch Elvis’ infamous performance of “Hound Dog” on the Ed Sullivan show on page 25. Why do you think Elvis’ sound and dance moves were widely criticized by parents and the media? Why do you think they were ultimately admired instead of rejected?
- Watch the “Love Me Tender” video on page 25. How is this video different from the first? What impression of Elvis do you get from this video? Based on shots of the audience in this clip, how do you think the audience felt about him?
- Based on the trailer for Blue Hawaii on page 25, what do you think the movie is about? Would you want to watch this movie? Why or why not? What is Elvis’ character like? Based on what you read about Elvis in this article, is this the type of role he was excited to play? How does his character relate to the Hollywood representations of men mentioned by Mondello on page ##?
- Watch the final video on page 25 of a press conference late in Elvis’ life. What impression of Elvis do you get from watching this video? How does it differ from representations of him in the other videos or in this article?
- What role do you think the media plays in developing a celebrity’s persona?
- Dan Fishback’s (page 8-9) mentions that Elvis is “arguably the greatest appropriator of Black culture.” Based on evidence you see from these videos, what do you think drives this critique, and do you agree with it?

THELMA & LOUISE

The First Female Road Movie?

Thelma & Louise is a 1991 film directed by Ridley Scott. Susan Sarandon plays a waitress having problems with her itinerant musician boyfriend. Thelma, played by Geena Davis, has a husband who wants her to keep quiet and stay in the kitchen. The two women decide to break free from the monotony and hit the road. Their journey takes a quick, dramatic turn when Louise kills a man who threatens to rape Thelma. The pair try to flee to Mexico while being hunted down by the police.

The best way to understand *Thelma & Louise* is to watch the film. The video clips below will give you tastes of the film, highlighting specific moments featured in **RoosevElvis**. For more context, read Walter Salles' article on the road movie genre (pages 29-33) and Raina Lipsitz' analysis of and reflections on the film (pages 34-37). To try a hand at writing your own road trip scene, check out the **Road Trip!** lesson plan (pages 39-42).

TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS

*Creating their own road trip story in **RoosevElvis**, the TEAM drew from Thelma & Louise, inspired by the importance of the Southwest landscape and the danger, abandon, and tension in the film. In their introductory materials to the **RoosevElvis** script, the TEAM notes: "To us, it's the quintessential buddy movie for our generation, and it was the first movie of its kind to feature two leading women; its aesthetics inform much of the play." The first video clip is the official trailer for the 1991 film; the other two clips are used explicitly in **RoosevElvis**:*



The original trailer for *Thelma & Louise*



The first entrance of Brad Pitt's character, a charming hitchhiker named J.D. who becomes Thelma's lover



The ending scene from *Thelma & Louise*

Check the Resources section (page 50) for URL addresses for these videos.

Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie

by Walter Salles

*In creating **RoosevElvis**, the TEAM was strongly influenced by the 1991 film *Thelma & Louise*, the first notable “road movie” featuring two women. Read this article for a theory on and definition of the “road movie,” and watch clips from *Thelma & Louise* (page 28). Then, discuss the film and this essay in relation to **RoosevElvis**. As you read, you may want to pause and look up references that are unfamiliar to you.*



Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda
in *Easy Rider* (1969)

Image: Raybert Productions and Pando Company Inc.

THE INSPIRATION: *THELMA & LOUISE*

What is the origin of road movies? A year ago, I interviewed Wim Wenders on this topic for a documentary about “On the Road,” Jack Kerouac and the legacy of the Beat generation.

For me, the first documentary filmmakers, like Robert Flaherty, the creator of the landmark 1922 film “Nanook of the North,” were the founding fathers of this narrative form. Jorge Luis Borges once said that what interested him in literature was naming what had not yet been named. The early documentary pioneers did exactly that. A movie like “Nanook” or “Song of Ceylon,” Basil Wright’s 1934 classic about life in what is now Sri Lanka, depicted a human and physical geography that had not been captured before in moving images.

Flaherty, Wright and their peers had their own predecessors: painters and photographers who, before the birth of cinema, traveled to foreign latitudes and recorded what was to that point unknown to outsiders. In terms of storytelling, “The Odyssey” seemed to me the basis of it all, the source from which all road films, including Wenders’s own “Paris, Texas,” seemed to arise.

Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie (cont'd)

Wenders argued otherwise. For him, the origin lay even further back in history — in our nomadic roots, in mankind's primal need to leave an account of its passage on earth. If you accept this vision, the cave paintings of Lascaux and Altamira are the true first accounts of life in movement. The first road narratives, of sorts.

In cinema, the earliest road movies were about the discovery of a new land or about the expansion of frontiers, as with westerns in North America. Films like “The Searchers,” John Ford’s masterpiece set in the aftermath of the Civil War, were about a national identity in construction. Especially in later decades, road movies also tried to accomplish a different task: to show national identities in transformation. Edgar G. Ulmer’s 1945 movie, “Detour,” an early film noir about a New York pianist who travels a dark road to Hollywood, was an account of a country plagued by individualism and greed. The film that defined road movies for today’s audiences, Dennis Hopper’s “Easy Rider,” was about the end of innocence and the implosion of the American dream during the Vietnam years.

Such films suggest that the most interesting road movies are those in which the identity crisis of the protagonist mirrors the identity crisis of the culture itself.

On Structure and Character

In terms of their narrative architecture, road movies cannot be circumscribed by the traditional three-act structure of so many mainstream films. Road movies, for instance, are rarely guided by external conflicts; the conflicts that consume their characters are basically internal ones.

Characters like David Locke in Michelangelo Antonioni’s “Passenger” or Phillip Winter in Wenders’s “Alice in the Cities” suffer from a need to redefine themselves. Both are uncomfortable in their shoes. Locke, a journalist, opts to rebaptize himself by trading identities with a dead gunrunner. Winter, also a journalist, searches for a new frame of reference in a foreign country, where he stumbles into playing a father role for a young girl. Both understand that if something is gained along the way, much will also be lost.

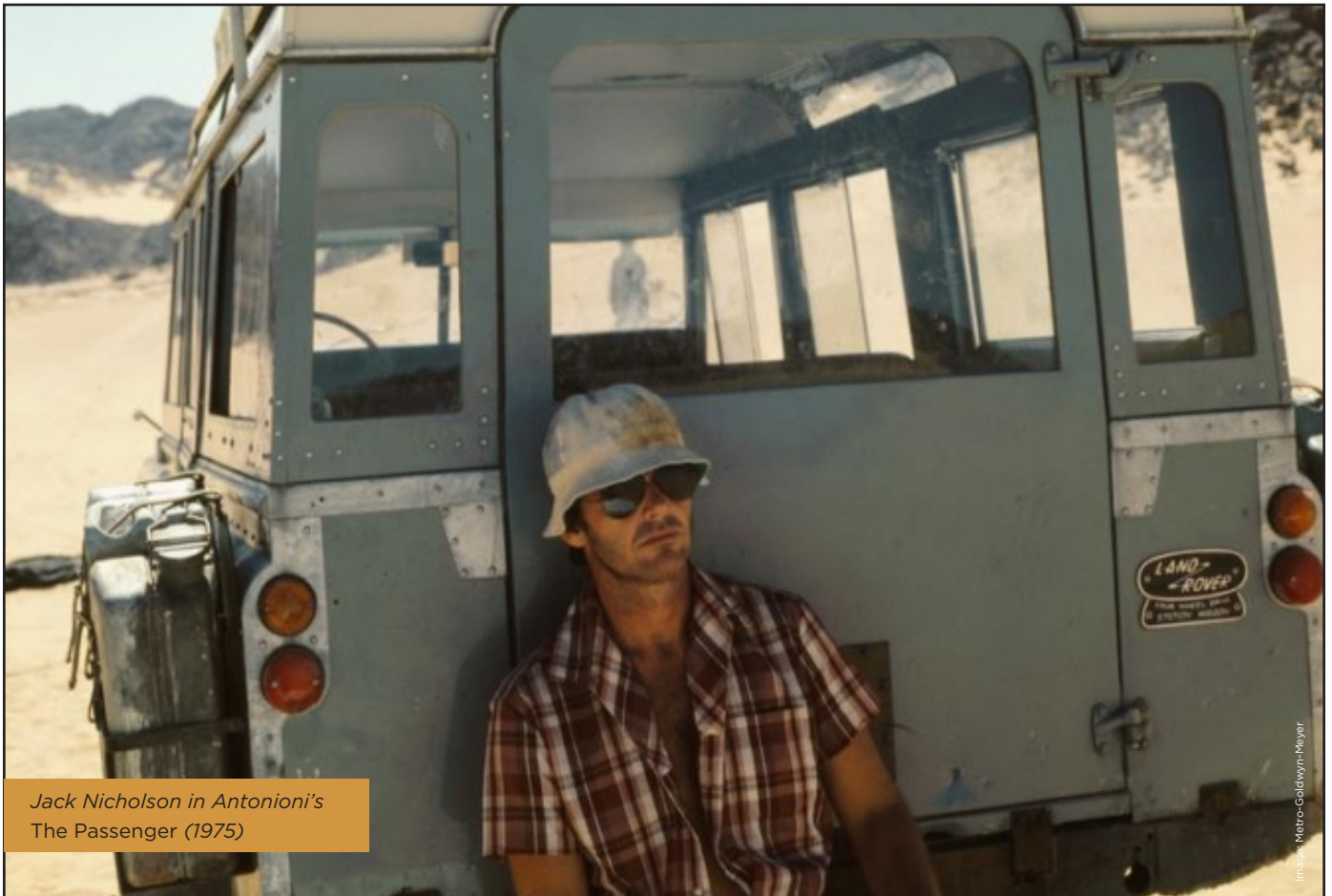
Because road movies need to trace the internal transformation of their characters, the films are not about what can be seen or verbalized but about what can be felt — about the invisible that complements the visible. In this sense, road movies contrast starkly with today’s mainstream films, in which new actions are created every three minutes to grab the attention of the viewer. In road movies, a moment of silence is generally more important than the most dramatic action.

After directing three road movies myself (“Foreign Land,” in collaboration with my friend Daniela Thomas, “Central Station” and “The Motorcycle Diaries”), I believe that a defining aspect of this narrative form is its unpredictability. You simply cannot (and should not) anticipate what you will find on the road—even if you scouted a dozen times the territory you will cross. You have to work in synchronicity with the elements. If it snows, incorporate snow. If it rains, incorporate rain.

Likewise, a road movie should be transformed by the encounters that occur on the margins of the road. Improvisation becomes necessary and natural. In shooting “The Motorcycle Diaries,” about Ernesto Guevara’s transformation into Che as he witnesses social and political inequities on a journey through South America, my crew and I constantly tried to incorporate what reality was offering us, mixing our actors with the locals we met in the small communities we came across.

In doing different road movies, I also came to realize that a good screenplay grants you more freedom to improvise than a weak one. It’s like jazz: the better the melody, the easier it is to

Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie (cont'd)



On the Line Between Fiction and Documentary

There is no such thing as two road movies that look alike. In terms of film grammar, the road movie is limited only by one obligation: to accompany the transformations undergone by its main characters as they confront a new reality. The road movie is not the domain of large cranes or steady-cams. On the contrary, the camera needs to remain in unison with characters who are in continual motion — a motion that shouldn't be controlled. The road movie tends, therefore, to be driven by a sense of immediacy that is not dissimilar from that of a documentary film.

This correlation between two worlds — fiction and documentary — raises a theoretical point that brings me back to Robert Flaherty. Although Flaherty's films are usually thought of as documentaries, he sometimes staged key elements of the plots so that the films were in some respects closer to fiction. He's not framing an actual family of fishermen in "Man of Aran," his 1934 movie about premodern life on the Aran Islands; he created a family for the film, a hypothetical family that he thought could better represent the reality of the Aran fishermen. (He was, by the way, severely criticized for this sort of alteration.)

In search of the epic, Flaherty did violate the boundaries of the what came to be seen as the traditional documentary. If that happened, it's because he was not only recording Nanook the Inuit. He was also filming Nanook the Story.

More recently, Abbas Kiarostami's 2002 film, "Ten," about a woman driving a car in Tehran, blurred the line between fiction and documentary even more. Over the course of the movie, the woman has 10 conversations with passengers. The driver is an actress — or maybe not.

Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie (cont'd)

The boy who is confronting her may be her real son, but it's hard to tell. The prostitute the woman gives a ride to may be a real prostitute — or not.

There is no more objective truth, only the truth of observation. There is no longer the outside (the world) and the inside (its imaginary representation) but only the film, which is the synthesis of the world and the imagination of the filmmaker.

Back to road movies. The more the line between fact and fiction is obscured, the more interesting the result is for me. “Iracema,” a Brazilian road movie shot in the '70s by the directors Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna, is a perfect example of this. An actor playing a truck driver is thrown into a hard new reality: the Trans-Amazon Highway that was being built at the time by the Brazil's military regime to “colonize” a region originally occupied by forests. A few nonactors play roles in the film; others play themselves. It is virtually impossible to know who is merely representing a reality and who is truly living it. Because of that ambiguity, “Iracema” is one of the most extraordinary cinematic experiences I have been fortunate enough to have.

As Godard once said: All great fiction films drift toward documentaries, as all great documentaries drift toward fiction. If you go deeply in the direction of one extreme, you will sooner or later find the other. The road movie may well be the film genre that lends itself most naturally to this blurring of boundaries.



Still from Bodanzky and Senna's *Iracema* (1976)

The Horizon (or, What Comes Next)

I recently interviewed the American poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, also for the documentary about Kerouac and “On the Road.” We were driving on the outskirts of San Francisco. At one point, he looked outside the window and said: “You know, in the '50s, there was still a country

Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie (cont'd)

to be mapped. We didn't know what we would find at the end of the road. Today, everything has changed. With TV, there's no more 'away.' ”

The recent work that may best address this state of affairs is Jia Zhangke's 2004 fiction film, “The World.” In a global theme park located outside a large Chinese city, visitors can spend the morning visiting simulacra of the Eiffel Tower, the Egyptian pyramids or Big Ben. In the afternoon, the Leaning Tower of Pisa or the twin towers. The theme-park workers evolve in this strange reality where time and space have collapsed — and they don't survive it.

In a world in which there's no more “away” and in which distance has disappeared, do road movies still have a reason to exist?

Sometimes, when I'm in an especially melancholic mood, I think that the answer is no. But every time I turn the TV on and see a reality show, I change my mind. Reality shows offer the audience the illusion that they can live through certain experiences, but only vicariously. What is sold is the impression that all has been lived and that nothing is left to be experienced anew.

Road movies directly challenge this culture of conformity. They are about experiencing, above all. They are about the journey. They are about what can be learned from the other, from those who are different. In a world that increasingly challenges these ideals, the importance of road movies as a form of resistance can't be dismissed.

Last but not least: the era of the globalized economy has created a different form of movement, dictated by a new kind of migration: an economic one. In different parts of the world, people now increasingly travel because they need to and not because they want to. A road movie like Michael Winterbottom's “In This World,” about Afghan refugees making their way to Britain, captures this urgent social-political reality better than many other film genres. It's more proof that road movies are as necessary as ever to tell us who we are, where we come from and where we're heading.

*This article was first published in [New York Times Magazine](#) on November 11, 2007.**

*URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/11/magazine/11roadtrip-t.html?p._&r=3

DISCUSSION

- Can you summarize the main features of a “road movie” as defined by Walter Salles in this article?
- What does Salles mean when he argues that road movies are about “the invisible that complements the visible”?
- Salles gives examples from a few contemporary road films to make an argument about the importance of road films today. Do you agree with his argument that the road movie is a form of resistance? Why or why not? Can you use examples from a contemporary road movie that back up your argument?
- Salles asserts that “the most interesting road movies are those in which the identity crisis of the protagonist mirrors the identity crisis of the culture itself.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? How is this true or untrue for the main characters in *Thelma & Louise* and/or *Roosevelt*?
- After watching clips or the whole film of *Thelma & Louise*, do you think Salles would consider it a road movie? Do you consider it a road movie? Why or why not?
- Which of the ideas, feelings, and/or structural elements that Salles identifies about road movies does *Roosevelt* convey? Use examples from the play and quotes from the article to support your argument. Are there any significant differences between *Roosevelt* and the genre as Salles defines it?

Thelma & Louise: The Last Great Film About Women?

by Raina Lipsitz

The following is a cut of a 2011 Atlantic article that makes an argument about the meaning, impact, and legacy of the film **Thelma & Louise**, one of the core source materials used in developing **RoosevElvis**. Along with this article, view and discuss the clips from the film available on page 28.*



When it was released in the summer of 1991, *Thelma & Louise* was declared “the first movie I’ve ever seen which told the downright truth” by a lesbian activist in Los Angeles and a “paean to transformative violence” by commentator John Leo. *New York Daily News* columnist Richard Johnson complained that it was “degrading to men” and “justifies armed robbery, manslaughter and chronic drunken driving as exercises in consciousness raising.” With a handful of exceptions, women loved it.

The movie starred Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis as friends who set off on a road trip and become outlaws after Sarandon’s character shoots a would-be rapist. May marked its 20th anniversary. In 1992, screenwriter Callie Khouri became one of a handful of women to win

THE INSPIRATION: **THELMA & LOUISE**

The Last Great Film About Women (cont'd)

an Academy Award for best original screenplay, and *Thelma & Louise* earned more than \$45 million at the U.S. box office. Sarandon and Davis were each nominated in the Best Actress category, and director Ridley Scott was nominated for Best Director.

The film smuggled its politics in under the guise of two happy-go-lucky gals taking a road trip together.

At a screening of *Thelma & Louise* earlier this month, I was struck by how many lines of dialogue I remembered word for word. I was only 9 when it came out in theaters and I didn't see it until many years after it was released. When I finally did, at age 25, I was electrified. At 28, I was again entranced, silently mouthing my favorite lines along with Sarandon and Davis, laughing semi-hysterically at every sad-funny scene featuring Thelma's twitchy-eyed sexist jerk of a husband, and choking back a sob when Louise bade her final farewell to Jimmy.

After the screening, there was a panel discussion of how far women had come twenty years later. "This movie would never get made today," sighed one of the panelists, and the audience members murmured their assent. It's shocking enough that it was distributed in 1991, but at least back then American women were experiencing something like momentum: Anita Hill stood up for herself at Clarence Thomas's confirmation hearings, Callie Khouri won an Oscar, and, when four women were simultaneously elected to the United States Senate, 1992 was dubbed the "Year of the Woman."

This year, the number of women in Congress dropped for the first time since 1978. Last year, women held only 15.7 percent of board seats and 14.4 percent of executive officer positions in Fortune 500 companies. A new study shows that the number of women working as writers and directors on prime-time television programs dropped significantly in the 2010-11 season. Women now account for only 15 percent of writers on the major television networks' prime-time dramas, comedies, and reality shows, down from 29 percent in the 2009-10 season. Only 11 percent of directors in this year's television season were women, compared with 16 percent last season, and only 25 percent of series creators, producers, executive producers, directors, writers, editors and directors of photography were women, representing a decline of two percentage points from last season. By every significant measure of social, political, and cultural power, today's women are losing ground. The cultural climate of 2011 appears even less likely to produce a movie of comparable significance than it was 20 years ago.

Thelma & Louise was originally advertised as a lighthearted female buddy pic (see the original trailer, which I initially mistook for a parody). It smuggled its politics in under the guise of two happy-go-lucky gals taking a road trip together; the trailer did not even hint at its darker core. But this was no romp—it was revolutionary, the first film in a long time to tell the truth about women's lives. Not only did it star two women, but their friendship was the film's central subject, the story was written by a woman, and those stars were, at the time, 35 and 45—well past their prime by Hollywood's ever-narrowing standards of physical perfection. Though portrayed as sexually attractive, Davis and Sarandon had more to do than sit around looking pretty.

There are no such movies today. The Bechdel test (named for cartoonist Alison Bechdel) is a means of assessing a movie's treatment of its female characters. In order to pass the test, a movie must have: (1) at least two women in it, (2) who talk to each other, (3) about something other than a man or men. A popular variant of the test additionally requires that both women have names. Twenty years ago, *Thelma & Louise* passed the Bechdel test easily. I can think of only three widely distributed movies that passed in the last year: *Something Borrowed*, *Bridesmaids*, and *The Help*. None approached the depth or level of nuance of *Thelma & Louise*, and only *The Help* featured actresses of the same caliber as Davis and Sarandon. [...]

Thelma & Louise is powerful in part because it's about more than friendship. Movies that examine the bonds between women are few and far between, but they exist, from *Beaches* to

The Last Great Film About Women (cont'd)

Terms of Endearment, *The Color Purple*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, and *A League of Their Own*. *Thelma & Louise* transcends the genre; it's about transformation and liberation that at once intensely personal and deeply political. It's about escaping, however fantastically, the agonizing constraints of gender, class, time, and place.

"Something's crossed over in me and I can't go back," explains Thelma, "I mean, I just couldn't live." She has lost the desire and even the capacity to return to her old life of downtrodden domesticity and her brutish, domineering husband. Earlier in the film Louise tells her, "You get what you settle for," and, by the movie's end, both women are through with settling. "I don't remember ever feelin' this awake," says Thelma as they drive through the desert in the middle of the night, leaving their old lives behind.... In today's movies, getting a ring from a man has replaced authentic moments of personal transformation and spiritual awakening as the high point of women's lives.

Callie Khouri's triumphant final image of the two heroines locking hands as Louise drives them over a cliff is impossible to forget. Some feminists fretted that this ending represented the ultimate punishment for the women's defiant journey of self-discovery. Although it's implied that they commit suicide—we do not actually see them die—this was still a choice that they made, and one that struck them, and many viewers, as preferable to life in prison or death by lethal injection. If they were only able to live on their own terms for a single lost weekend, at least they would grant themselves the dignity of dying on those terms as well. In the world of the film, what other choice did they have? As Louise says to Thelma when Thelma suggests that they turn themselves in, "Who's gonna believe [us]? We just don't live in that kind of world." We still don't.



Image from the final scene of
Thelma & Louise (1991)

When asked in an interview why her heroines commit suicide at the film's end, Callie Khouri famously responded: "To me, the ending was symbolic, not literal ... We did everything possible to make sure you didn't see a literal death. That you didn't see the car land, you didn't see a big puff of smoke come up out of the canyon. You were left with the image of them flying. They flew away, out of this world and into the mass unconscious. Women who are completely free from all the shackles that restrain them have no place in this world. The world is not big enough to support them ... I loved that ending and I loved the imagery. After all they went through, I didn't want anybody to be able to touch them." I share Khouri's sentiments about the ending, which I have always loved. To me, it represented not death or punishment but hope, and even a kind of radical, ultimate fulfillment. Today, movies about women end

The Last Great Film About Women (cont'd)

with a wedding. Even its proponents can hardly argue that the aim of marriage is to set women free. [...]

Between Brad Pitt's enormously appealing performance as Davis's lover and Michael Madsen's touching turn as Sarandon's flawed but loving boyfriend, it's astonishing that anyone considered this movie anti-male. Even Harvey Keitel's Detective Slocumb was honest, compassionate, and kind. "Thelma & Louise" has unpleasant male characters, including a rapist, a compulsive harasser of women, and a nasty, child-like husband, but real life has rapists, harassers, and mean husbands too. I suspect critics were actually troubled by the fact that we don't get to know any male characters apart from their relationship with Thelma and/or Louise. As Janet Maslin explained in the *New York Times* in 1991, the real objection to *Thelma & Louise* was neither its violence nor its protagonists' purported misandry; rather, it was "something as simple as it is powerful: the fact that the men in this story don't really matter." For 129 glorious minutes, two women were the stars of their own lives, and their lives did not revolve around men. [...]

Why didn't *Thelma & Louise* usher in a new era for women in Hollywood? As the reactions of certain critics in 1991 revealed, even smart, educated people are disturbed by female characters who assert control over their lives and bodies and aren't punished for it. And as Callie Khouri told *The Observer* in 2001, "Bad guys get killed in every goddamn movie that gets made ... that guy was the bad guy and he got killed. It was only because a woman did it that there was any controversy at all."

At least back then we got to have the controversy. Today, we don't make movies about women that are even worth fighting about. Whenever I'm dispirited by the crassly sexist ethos that governs Hollywood (as well as television, politics, and the corporate world) today, I think of "Thelma and Louise" and remember a time, not so long ago, when women were allowed to be human, if only in the movies.

This article excerpt is from The Atlantic, published August 31, 2011.

[Click here](#) to read the full article on the Atlantic website.*

*URL: www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/thelma-louise-the-last-great-film-about-women/244336/

DISCUSSION

- Do you agree with Lipsitz' assessment that today's movies don't live up to the portrayal of women in *Thelma & Louise* and that a movie like this "would never get made today"? Why or why not?
- Does Lipsitz' analysis of *Thelma & Louise* align with the definition of the road movie introduced in Walter Salles' article (pages 29-33)?
- What do you think is the value of the "Bechdel Test" mentioned in this article? Choose a movie you have seen from the past year and see if it passes. How many films, plays, or novels can you think of that pass the Bechdel Test? Does **Roosevelt** pass? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with Lipsitz that the "suicide" in the final scene of *Thelma & Louise* is an act not of "death or punishment but hope, and even a kind of radical, ultimate fulfillment"? Why or why not?
- Look up the word "misandry." Lipsitz argues that *Thelma & Louise* is not an example of misandry, but a story that doesn't require fully developed male characters in order to be told. Do you agree with this argument? Why or why not? How does this argument apply to **Roosevelt**, where the actors playing Ann and Brenda in turn play Elvis and T.R.?

ON THE ROAD WITH *the* TEAM

For 8 days in July 2013, the TEAM hit the road - 1-29 to be exact - to film the show's central component: a time-fuzzy, surreal road trip. Armed with cameras and faux-facial hair, actors Libby King and Kristen Sieh drove an RV, in costume and in character, from South Dakota to Tennessee, more than 1,000 miles, filming all the way. To find out more about the TEAM's **Roosevelt** road trip, read excerpts from the blog on pages 39-42 of this Toolkit.

BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK, SD

Oldest Fossil(s): 30,000,000 years old
Avg. Temp. in July: 92 degrees (it's a dry heat)

MOUNT RUSHMORE, SD

Sculpt time: 14 years
'Stache Facts: Teddy's granite whiskers boast a 18 ft. wingspan

OKATON, SD

Population: 36
Status: Ghost Town
Spookiness: Medium-high

LINCOLN, NE

Beat out Omaha to become
the state capital in 1867
Least Popular Attraction:
National Museum of Roller Skating

GRAND ISLAND, NE

Population: 48,520
On June 3, 1980, the city
was ravaged by 7 tornadoes

GRACELAND, MEMPHIS, TN

Built in 1939, bought by Elvis in 1957
Elvis' desire for purple walls
was vetoed by his mother

Updates from the Road: *RoosevElvis*

Over eight days, the **RoosevElvis** team researched, wrote, and filmed their own road trip journey from the Badlands to Graceland. During the road trip, actors Kristen Sieh and Libby King remained in costume and in character as Elvis Presley and Theodore Roosevelt. Many of the film excerpts shown in the performance of **RoosevElvis** were collected during this road trip. Read this abbreviated version of assistant director Kevin Hourigan's blog and/or check out the TEAM's [website](#)* to read the full text. Follow along with the road map on page 38, photos from the trip on the TEAM's [Facebook page](#)** and/or do your own image search of the locations underlined in the text.



Day 1 [South Dakota]

Salutations from the road. [...]

We began our voyage at 4am with a delayed flight and a missed connection, but rallied, quickly got to the airport, and got to South Dakota only a few hours later than we originally intended. Our videographer has been capturing material on the fly since the moment he left his apartment. [...]

We had a few substantial shoots yesterday, including in the meat aisle at Walmart. All were dismayed that despite Walmart's epic selection of packaged meats, the employees did not know what a French press was when TEAM members were eager to purchase one. Luckily, our videographer's camping French press saved us all.

Updates from the Road (cont'd)

Day 2 [Mt. Rushmore]

After a good night's sleep, today was a very busy and highly productive day.

Highlights included:

- A visit to Keystone, near Mount Rushmore, where Teddy and Elvis shopped, took pictures from “jail” and other tourist attractions, bought sodas, etc. [...]
- Revisited Mount Rushmore. While Elvis walked down to get a refund from the parking man at the memorial, Teddy explored and took notes on the local flora and fauna. [...]
- An RV safari to look for buffalo in Custer Park. We shot several sequences of material, including scenes with buffalo. [...]
- Footage of ALL of the eggs flying out of the fridge and breaking, and the ensuing cleanup, while driving the RV.

Day 3 [The Badlands]

[...] We all rose early to make a dash for the Badlands before it got too hot. [...] Though sunburned, and though the sun caused us to hallucinate visions of Mount Rushmore, all pressed on in good spirits.

It is very possible that our RV campsite is secretly a front for a meth lab. Libby has begun an inquiry. Kevin found a man passed out on the floor of the bathroom last night who thought that sleeping in the bathroom would prevent him from being bitten by mosquitos. [...]

Day 4 [Grand Island, NE]

[...] Our day began on the campsite at 7:00am today. After a cleanup of the campsite and some delicious oil toast breakfast made by Rachel, we headed over to the pool at the campsite to do a shoot of the ladies in the water. Libby even donned a GoPro camera so that we could get underwater shots. [...]

After shooting the pool, our intention was to head back to Wall Drug to get some interior shots. However, we had several roadblocks to deal with, most notably the fact that we needed to perform the dreaded task of flushing the RV. Rachel bravely stepped forward to tend to this Olympic feat. [...]

About 100 miles in, Rachel asked us to pull off to stretch a leg, and we accidentally stumbled onto one of the best, most magical locations we have seen yet. The town was Okaton, SD. Population 36. A few dilapidated houses, a crumbling mill, a closed gas station, and a facsimile “Ghost Town” replica attraction which has since turned into an actual ghost town. The irony is only too acute; the town is beautiful.

Eventually, after a break for gas, a Subway meal, and lots of different car DJ's, we made it safely to Libby's wonderful cabin in Grand Island. We are so thrilled and so grateful for Libby and her mother's hospitality. [...]

Day 5 [Lincoln, NE]

...We woke up and drove to Lincoln, Nebraska to do a shoot at a meat processing plant. Libby has set us up with a whole series of contacts to get some really incredible material shot in the Lincoln area (her hometown). When we arrived at the meat processing facility, we were greeted with a warm welcome by Larry, the owner of the establishment, and his daughter Lisa, an old friend of Libby's. [...]

Updates from the Road (cont'd)

Several of the meat workers were in several of our shots. They were tremendously gracious in teaching Libby how to use the machines and in diverting their workflow to accommodate our shoot. When we wrapped, we looked for our keys to the car, and Lisa handed Libby a pair of keys encased in a vacuum sealed packaging. It was a funny prank. [...]

We arrived at Lisa's at the height of magic hour. We entered, and Libby was reunited with her four best friends from Nebraska in the golden light of sunset. Lisa's neighbor gave us a lesson in gun safety and stood by as the ladies fired off. Turns out both were a pretty good shot. We wrapped with Ann, alone, just as the sun set. [...]



Day 6

We rose early to catch the light of the sunrise. We shot behind Libby's cabin in Grand Island, in the brush surrounding the dried bed of the Platt River. It was a serene and almost surreal location - very beautiful. We even got some shots of Kristen kayaking pretty expertly across the nearby pond. [...]

We packed up and hit the road. Before leaving Nebraska, we needed one last shot: a long shot of the women eating at the diner. We went to Coney Island, a local diner famous for their hot dogs. While Libby and Kristen shot this long scene, one of the waitresses told us about the evil spirits and haunting she encountered in the Badlands. As was the case with all the other locations we shot, all of the staff at the restaurant were incredibly gracious, sweet, and so supportive. We stuffed ourselves with hotdogs and milkshakes and then hit the road for good.

[...] As the sun started to set, we sought the refuge of a motel. Our criteria: the shittiest, most dilapidated motel we could find, with a romantic little door frame which we could shoot both

Updates from the Road (cont'd)

from the outside and the inside. We found our dream in the Cortes Motel. [...]

We wrapped around 2:00am and went to bed. The road to Memphis awaits us.

Day 7 [Memphis, TN]

We arose yesterday morning and quickly packed our bags, eager to complete the final leg of our pilgrimage to Graceland, the mecca. [...]

As we neared the Arkansas border, we passed through Mammoth Spring, a gorgeous little spa town, and a honky-tonk specialties store sitting right on the Arkansas border. [...]

When we got back on the road, we filmed some extended driving scenes with Elvis/Teddy. [...] Libby spent some of the trip totally backwards, leaning on the dashboard, and at other times, she or Kristen shared the passenger seat with our videographer AND all of his camera equipment.

As we got closer to Memphis, we let Ann take the wheel, solo. We abandoned the front rows of the car and rolled sound and video continuously as we approached Memphis. All sat in silence, with only the comforting sound of the GPSlady's voice filling the car. This was the final leg of the journey. Next stop Graceland. [...]

In no time, we were turning onto Elvis Presley Boulevard. We approached Graceland. No one could have expected the sight that greeted us. All along the sidewalk is a stone wall ranging from 4'-6' high. It is clear that the wall has become a major sight of devotion, as every inch of the wall is covered in signatures, pictures, and love notes to the beloved Elvis Presley. The combination of the scale and humanity of this object was quite staggering to all of us.

When the light faded, we went to Corky's for some Memphis barbecue. We had a delicious meal and a wonderful waitress. [...]

Day 8 [Graceland]

We woke up around 9:00 and hit the road to Graceland. This time, we went inside.

We were warned that we would most likely be underwhelmed by the mansion. We expected something kind of small and gaudy, not like Disneyland but also extravagant in its own right. Aspects of these expectations were fulfilled to various degrees, but we were moved and surprised by the way you could feel Elvis in the house as a peculiar, young kid. So much of the house was incredibly bizarre – the jungle room, the billiard room – and it was clear that only he could have invented such a domain.

After saying goodbye to Graceland, we headed over to Beale Street to have our last meal on the road. [...]

It was sad to say goodbye to the journey, but there is so much in store with this piece in the very near future. It will be good to head into rehearsals, especially with the incredibly strong foundation for the piece that we have continued to build over the last week. It was a lot of great work, a lot of laughter, a lot of love. It was a week of very bold, rich days. All of the people we encountered in our travels were absolutely lovely and helpful. [...]

Click [here](#) to read the full road trip blog on the TEAM's website.

URL: <http://theteamplays.org/roosevelvis-road-trip/>

Click [here](#) to view the TEAM's RoosevElvis videos.

URL: <https://vimeo.com/album/1953386>

Click [here](#) to see pictures of the road trip from the TEAM's Facebook album.

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151468959452377.1073741826.35888022376&type=1&l=365ef19f0f>

WORK IT OUT

LESSON PLANS



The **TEAM** and **INSPIRATION** sections of this Toolkit have introduced you to the creative team, major themes, and inspiration behind the TEAM's *RoosevElvis* at A.R.T.'s second stage, OBERON.

The **WORK IT OUT** section outlines activities designed to provide students hands-on access to the themes and characters in the play while exercising their own creative and close-reading skills.

LESSON PLAN: I Need a Hero (pages 44-45)

Students create an artistic collage project as a basis for analyzing a cultural icon they admire, re-evaluating how they define a "hero."

LESSON PLAN: Let's Hear it for the Boys (pages 46-47)

Students analyze primary source materials related to Elvis Presley and Theodore Roosevelt to explore themes of masculinity in America.

LESSON PLAN: Road Trip! (pages 48-49)

Students explore the format of a "road film" to write their own scene featuring Theodore Roosevelt and Elvis Presley in this creative writing activity.

Lesson Plan: I Need A Hero

OBJECTIVES

*In **RoosevElvis**, characters Ann and Brenda act out their own hero-worship by embodying their heroes. This activity encourages students to think deeply about their own celebrity icons, and what effect hero worship has on our own identities, analyzing the differences and similarities between heroes and hero worship. To analyze an icon they admire, students create and scrutinize a collage art project based on that person's characteristics. This activity builds on the following skills: critical thinking, creative self-expression, self-reflection, character analysis, metaphorical thinking, and research.*

MATERIALS

Notebook and writing utensil or a word processor
Magazines
Scissors
Tape or glue

PROCEDURE

Setup

Students work independently.

Process

- Students write down the name of a contemporary or historical cultural icon that they look up to or think of as a hero.
- Discuss and define the terms: “hero,” “hero worship,” and “icon.” Discuss today’s celebrity culture and what it means to be a good role model. After this discussion, students may have the option to change their choice of hero, though this is not required.
- Underneath the person’s name, students take 2-5 minutes to write down as many characteristics of this person that they admire. Take another 2-5 minutes to write down as many characteristics of this personal that they take issue with or do not find admirable.
- Students draw or find an image either online or in a magazine to represent each characteristic they have written down. Images do not have to be literal, and students should be encouraged to think metaphorically.
- Students create a collage incorporating all of the images they have sourced.

Lesson Plan: I Need a Hero (cont'd)

- Either in small groups or as a whole class, students take 2 minutes each to present and explain the elements in their collages.
- Use the questions below to discuss the process of this activity as a class.

Extension Options

- Students repeat the assignment, focusing on a personal hero from their own life. Compare the two collages and consider what it means to be a great role model.
- After students pick their subject, allow them to thoroughly research the person either in class or as homework before moving on to creating their collage.

Starting Points for Reflection

- What are the prevalent stereotypes and expectations in today's celebrity culture? Which images from celebrity culture are positive, and which are negative? How does celebrity culture influence the way that young people behave or present themselves?
- Did anything about how you perceive your idol change through this activity? Did you learn anything about yourself or your own values?
- Which characteristics do you respect in a person? Which do you idolize? Is there a difference? What does it mean to be a good role model? Is it possible to be a perfect role model?
- In *RoosevElvis*, the characters Ann and Brenda choose to idolize Elvis Presley and Theodore Roosevelt, respectively. Are these men good choices for role models? Why or why not? After seeing the show, how does idolizing Elvis/T.R. influence the characters in the play either positively or negatively?

Lesson Plan: Let's Hear It for the Boys

OBJECTIVES

This close reading activity challenges students to look closely at primary source materials related to Elvis Presley and Theodore Roosevelt in order to develop an argument about them as American icons of masculinity. This activity builds on the following skills: close reading, critical thinking, and expository writing.

MATERIALS

Notebook with writing utensils or a word processor
Elvis Presley videos on page 25
Theodore Roosevelt images on page 17-24

PROCEDURE

Setup

Students work independently or in small groups.

Process

- Students choose either one video/photo of Elvis Presley from pages 13 & 25-26 or one image of/about Theodore Roosevelt from pages 17-21 & 24.
- In order to analyze the document, students answer the following questions in writing. Some questions may require some additional research:
 1. Write a short summary of what happens in the video or image. Make sure to include these basics: **Who** (Who is depicted? Who is speaking, singing, drawing, or writing? Who is being spoken to or about? Who is the audience?), **What** (What's happening?), **When** (Is the document dated?), **Where** (Where are the events taking place?)
 2. Note any words, images, dance moves, costumes, etc. that stick out to you, and note any part of the video or image that is surprising, or different from something you might expect.
 3. Make notes about why you think these surprising moments were included, and what they are doing within the context of the video, image or letter. How do they contribute to your understanding of the material? How do they re-enforce, question, or change the general understanding you developed in question 1? Are there any significant elements, words, or visuals that repeat, form a pattern, or metaphor? Is there a particular point of view, slant, or interpretation of the subject in this source?

Let's Hear It for the Boys (cont'd)

4. Try to formulate a thesis based on your findings. Think of your thesis as having two parts. First, you answer this question: how do the specific features you've identified help to define the document or video? Once you have an idea about that, also answer this question: what does this video or document tell you about Elvis/T.R. as a person, a cultural figure, and an iconic figure in American history? Answering this last question should help you develop an argument, or thesis, for a short paper or debate.
- **HOMEWORK:** Students write a short thesis paper (2-3 paragraphs) explaining their analysis of either Elvis Presley or Theodore Roosevelt, based on their close reading, responding to the prompt
 - After the papers are drafted, discuss each video or image as a class. Use the questions below as starting points for discussion and/or peer review of papers.

Extension Options

- Stage a debate wherein students argue why their focus subject is a more significant American icon than the other.
- Students write stump speeches for a fictional presidential run between Elvis and T.R.
- Conduct this same analysis using one of the clips from *Thelma & Louise* on page 28.

Starting Points for Reflection

- Do you think your close reading of these primary sources gives you an accurate impression of T.R. and Elvis as people? Why or why not?
- What does the term “icon of masculinity” mean to you? Can you define any characteristics of an icon of masculinity that would apply to popular masculine icons of today? How might these characteristics change when looking at icons from previous eras?
- What do Elvis and T.R. have in common? Would you consider Elvis and/or T.R. icons of masculinity? Why or why not?

Lesson Plan: Road Trip!

OBJECTIVES

In this creative writing activity, students compose their own scene about a fictional road trip featuring Theodore Roosevelt and Elvis Presley traveling to a destination important to the student. This activity builds on the following skills: critical thinking, creative writing, constructive criticism, character analysis, and metaphorical thinking.

MATERIALS

Copies of **The Road Trip Scene Worksheet** (page 49)

PROCEDURE

Setup

Students may work individually or in small groups.

Process

- Select materials for students to read from **THE INSPIRATION** section of this Toolkit (pages 13-42).
- Using what they learned from the previous activity and from the articles about Theodore Roosevelt and Elvis Presley, students follow the instructions on the Road Film Scene Worksheet (page ##) to gather information for their scene.
- Either in class or for homework, students write a brief scene using the information assembled on their worksheet.
- As a whole class or in small groups, students read each road trip scene aloud and discuss them.

Extension Option

- After the feedback session, students revise, rehearse, and re-mount their scenes.

Starting Points for Reflection

- What was the most fun part of your scene to write? What was the most difficult part to write?
- What was the most compelling part of the scenes, and why? What was the least compelling part of the scenes, and why?
- Can you think of a movie or a T.V. show that features a road trip? Do you find them compelling? Why or why not? How does your scene compare to the road trips in other films you have seen?
- Based on the films you have seen and your experience writing your scene, what is the metaphorical significance of road trip scenes in movies or plays?

Road Trip Scene Worksheet

This worksheet is to help you organize your thoughts before writing your own road trip scene, inspired by two people you've learned about – Theodore Roosevelt and Elvis Presley.

DESTINATION

Where are Elvis and T.R. going?

Pick a place that is important to you or somewhere you've always wanted to go, and write how they will get to their destination (i.e. the Grand Canyon riding camels):

CHARACTERS

Who are Elvis Presley and Theodore Roosevelt?

In the spaces provided, answer each of these about T.R. and Elvis:

1. Choose five words to describe this character. Be specific!
2. Why might this character want to travel to this destination?
3. What does this character think about the other character?

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

1.

2.

3.

ELVIS PRESLEY

1.

2.

3.

WRITE!

Write a scene where T.R. and Elvis travel to the destination you have chosen. Incorporate at least three ingredients from this list into your scene:

INGREDIENT LIST

A song
An explosion
A surprise entrance
A sudden blackout

A slap
A dance break
A dream sequence
An accident

WORK IT OUT

RESOURCES

ARTICLES REPRODUCED IN THIS TOOLKIT

- “Who’s The Man? Hollywood Heroes Defined Masculinity For Millions” by Bob Mondello:
www.npr.org/2014/07/30/336575116/whos-the-man-hollywood-heroes-defined-masculinity-for-millions
- “How Teddy Roosevelt Invented Spin” by David Greenberg:
www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/how-teddy-roosevelt-invented-spin/426699/
- “Person of the Week: Elvis Presley” by Jessica Reaves:
content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,337778,00.html
- “Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie” by Walter Salles:
www.nytimes.com/2007/11/11/magazine/11roadtrip-t.html?p._&_r=1
- “Thelma & Louise’: The Last Great Film About Women” by Raina Lipsitz:
www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/thelma-louise-the-last-great-film-about-women/244336/

VIDEO CONTENT REPRODUCED IN THIS TOOLKIT

Elvis Presley:

- Elvis Presley performing “Hound Dog” (1956): www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGZm7EOamWk
- Trailer for *Blue Hawaii* (1961): www.youtube.com/watch?v=qf-KSYbBRfQ
- Elvis Presley performing “Love Me Tender” (1970): www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeTurYZuY4A
- Clip from Elvis Presley Press Conference (1972): www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsGgfWCfw6w
- Transcript: www.elvis.com.au/presley/interview_with_elvis_presley_the_1972_press_conference.shtml

Thelma & Louise:

- Thelma & Louise* original trailer (1991): youtu.be/2iBFmKIO4BY
- Thelma & Louise* ending clip: youtu.be/66CP-pq7Cxo
- Thelma & Louise* Brad Pitt clip: www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2SKinT7lbo

ROOSEVELVIS INSPIRATIONAL MATERIALS

RoosevElvis drew on a lot of different research (books, articles, films, YouTube videos), but three sources played particularly strong roles in shaping the play:

- Guralnik, Peter. *Careless Love*. Little Brown and Company, 1999. Print.
- Guralnik, Peter. *Last Train to Memphis*. Little Brown and Company, 1994. Print.
- Morris, Edmund. *Colonel Roosevelt*. New York Random House, 2010. Print.
- Morris, Edmund. *Theodore Rex*. New York. Random House, 2001. Print.
- Morris, Edmund. *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. New York. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1979. Print.
- Thelma and Louise*. Dir. Ridley Scott. Perf. Susan Sarandon, Geena Davis, Brad Pitt. Pathé Entertainment, 1991. Film

ABOUT THE TEAM

- the TEAM website: theteamplays.org
- RoosevElvis Vimeo account: vimeo.com/album/1953386
- RoosevElvis road trip Facebook album:
www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151468959452377.1073741826.35888022376&type=1&l=365ef19f0f

To view the full A.R.T. Toolkit Library, visit americanrepertorytheater.org/toolkits