

THE JUNGLE AND ITS LIMITS

*Writing, Actors with Leverage, and the Uptake of Consumer Evidence in the
United States, 1906–1992*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation, or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma, or other qualification.

Signed: Aaron Harris

Abstract

This thesis asks when American writing about buying, borrowing, building, and living in neighborhoods can be shown to have changed a consumer institution, and when it can be shown only to have made a consumer world *legible*, visible and intelligible to readers, without changing it. Its answer is narrower than the question invited in the first submission. Writing has its clearest documented institutional effect when someone with the power to act, an actor with leverage such as a president, a Congress, or a federal agency, can be shown to have read it, cited it, or used it in a dated act. Where no such actor can be shown to have used it, the evidence supports a claim about legibility, not about institutional change.

Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) is the demonstrating case. The documentary chain runs from the novel to Theodore Roosevelt's investigators, to his message to Congress of 4 June 1906, to the Meat Inspection and Pure Food and Drug Acts of 30 June 1906, and, sixty-one years later, to Lyndon Johnson's reading from the novel when he signed the Wholesome Meat Act. Every other case is framed as a test of the same question: was there an actor with leverage, and is there dated evidence that the actor used the writing? Three tests from the 1960s (Kennedy's consumer message of 1962, the traffic-safety legislation of 1966, and the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967) show the actor present but the documentary link to a specific book present in only one. The New Deal and the postwar suburb show a different pattern: the decisive texts were written by the actors themselves (fireside chats, mortgage-agency rules, a commissioned series of guidebooks), while the novels and sociology of the suburb and the road, from *Middletown* and *Babbitt* to *The Organization Man*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *On the Road*, and *Travels with Charley*, are limit cases: they made the automotive consumer landscape legible, but

no use of them by an actor with leverage is documented in the sources examined. Soldiers' letters from the First World War to Vietnam, read through Andrew Carroll's *War Letters* and Bernard Edelman's *Dear America*, are treated as a small-scale contrast: they produced documented private responses, parcels sent and received, but no institutional change. A defined comparison of texts from 1957–63 and 1964–70 finds that the period after November 1963 changed the channel and addressee of consumer argument more than its content, and a brief closing reflection on continuous cable news from 1980 to 1992 considers what that change of channel meant for the conditions under which Sinclair had acted.

Each case is classified on a four-level scale of evidence (legibility, documented reception, documented uptake, institutional outcome), and the classification is summarised in a single table. The study is limited to the United States.

Keywords: Upton Sinclair; consumer protection; policy uptake; legibility; New Deal housing; suburbanisation; road literature; wartime correspondence; periodisation.

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Note on Sources, Editions, and Revisions

This revised thesis responds to the examiners' reports on the first and second submissions. Every quotation and every page-specific interpretation has been re-checked against a named edition, and the edition actually consulted is the one cited. Where a work is cited in an edition later than its first publication (for example, the 2002 Penguin Centennial Edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* or the 2002 Norton paperback of *Dear America*), page numbers refer to that later edition, and the original date of publication is given in the bibliography. Where I could not locate a passage on a verifiable page, I have either dropped the quotation or recast the point as a paraphrase of material I could verify, rather than offer an approximate citation.

Several works that figured prominently in the first submission are now discussed only in general terms, because I was unable to consult a paginated edition against which to check specific passages. They are David Halberstam's *The Fifties*, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*, Vance Packard's books, Gabriel Kolko's *The Triumph of Conservatism*, Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumers' Republic*, and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Where their arguments matter, I rely on paginated secondary accounts, such as Daniel Horowitz's study of Packard, and say so. They are listed separately in the bibliography.

One edition requires comment. Page references to Andrew Carroll's *War Letters* were checked against a later Simon and Schuster printing of the collection, not against the 2001 Scribner first edition cited in the notes. The first edition should be checked before any page reference to Carroll is relied upon. The *Congressional Record* debates of 1906 and Sinclair's *Cosmopolitan* article of October 1906 are quoted through Young's *Pure Food* and Sinclair's *The Brass Check* respectively, and are cited in that form.

The third version narrows the claim, retitles the thesis, and restricts its scope to the United States. In preparing it, every paragraph that described the influence of a text was audited against the scale of evidence set out in Chapter 3. A passage that asserted influence without documentary support was either given the missing evidence, rewritten as a claim about legibility, or cut. The chapter on continuous television news has been reduced to a closing reflection, and the chapters on wartime letters have been condensed into a single contrast case.

One item lies outside the 2006 frame of the thesis. It is a postscript on John “Chickie” Donohue’s 1967–68 “beer run” from Inwood, Manhattan, to Vietnam, which became public only after 2006, and it is clearly labelled as such.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem

On 15 December 1967, at the White House, Lyndon Johnson signed the Wholesome Meat Act in the presence of an eighty-nine-year-old novelist. “In 1906, Upton Sinclair roused the conscience of the country with his book ‘The Jungle,’” the President told his audience, and then, as he put it, he “thought it would be good this morning if I read you a line or two.” He read Sinclair’s description of meat “that had tumbled out on the floor where the workers had tramped.” He went on to report that a federal inspector had described a comparable scene in a modern plant: “It did not happen 60 years ago when Upton Sinclair was writing his book. It happened in July 1967.” Turning to Sinclair, he said: “This bill really crowns the crusade that you, yourself, began some 60 years ago.”¹

The scene is a convenient emblem for this thesis, and also a warning. It is convenient because it shows a head of state attributing a body of consumer law, and a set of changes in what American families could safely buy at the neighborhood butcher’s, to a novel. It is a warning because the attribution is itself a piece of political rhetoric. Johnson had reasons of his own to cast his bill as the completion of a Progressive crusade. In the same remarks he dated the original act to 1907 rather than 1906.² A thesis about the influence of literature on the material life of American neighborhoods has to treat claims of influence, including those made by presidents and by authors about themselves, as evidence to be weighed rather than as conclusions to be adopted.

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing the Wholesome Meat Act,” December 15, 1967, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1967*, book 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968), 1143–45.

² Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing the Wholesome Meat Act,” 1144: “They got a clean meat bill—the Meat Inspection Act of 1907.” The act was in fact approved on 30 June 1906; see Chapter 4.

The first version of this thesis attempted a survey. From the muckrakers to the 1992 election, it moved through a long sequence of authors and asserted that American letters had “shaped” the neighborhood, the store, and the shopping habit. The second version narrowed the field to three case studies but kept, in its title and in some of its chapters, a claim larger than its evidence: that American writing helped *make* the consumer neighborhood. This third version draws a distinction that the evidence itself forces. To make a consumer world *legible*, to describe it so that readers can see and understand it, is one achievement. To *change* a consumer institution, a law, a lending rule, an inspection regime, is another. The first can be shown from the texts themselves. The second requires evidence that someone able to change the institution read the text and acted on it.

1.2 Thesis Statement

The thesis defended here is the following. *Between 1906 and 1992, American writing about consumer life had its clearest documented institutional effect when an actor with leverage, someone with the power to change a consumer institution, such as a president, a Congress, or a federal agency, can be shown to have read, cited, or used it in a dated act. Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle is the demonstrating case. Where no such use can be documented, the evidence supports a claim that writing made a consumer world legible, not that it changed that world’s institutions.*

Three corollaries organise the chapters below.

First, the demonstration. The chain from *The Jungle* to the statutes of 30 June 1906 is documented at each link by people other than Sinclair: a President who sent investigators, a message to Congress, a floor debate, two statutes. It is also documented in a later act, when Lyndon Johnson read from the novel at the signing of the Wholesome

Meat Act in 1967. Even here the actor, not the author, determined the outcome. Sinclair did not get the law he wanted (Chapters 4 and 5).

Second, the tests. When the same question is put to other cases, the answer is usually “the actor was present, but the use of a particular text by that actor is not documented.” This holds for Kennedy’s consumer message of 1962 and for the traffic-safety legislation of 1966, which is commonly associated with Ralph Nader’s *Unsafe at Any Speed* (Chapter 6). It holds in a different way for the New Deal and the postwar suburb, where the decisive texts were written by the actors themselves: fireside chats, mortgage-agency rules, and the guidebooks of a federal writers’ programme (Chapter 7).

Third, the limits. The novels, sociology, and road books that described the automotive consumer landscape, from *Middletown* to *Travels with Charley*, made it legible, but no use of them by an actor with leverage is documented in the sources examined (Chapter 8). Soldiers’ wartime letters provide a small-scale contrast. Families demonstrably responded to them, with parcels and replies, but private response is not institutional change (Chapter 9).

1.3 Research Questions

The thesis addresses four questions.

1. In each case, was there an actor with power to change a consumer institution, and is there dated documentary evidence that this actor read, cited, or used a specific text?
2. Where such evidence exists, what did the actor do, and how far did the outcome match what the text’s author sought?
3. Where it does not exist, what can be documented about the text’s reception, and what can be said only about its content?

4. Did the channels through which consumer writing reached actors and publics change after November 1963, as the first submission claimed, and if so, how?

1.4 Scope and Limits

The study begins with the serial and book publication of *The Jungle* in 1905–6 and ends on 3 November 1992, the day William Jefferson Clinton was elected President. The end date falls before the public internet changed again the relationship between reader, writer, and seller. The thesis is written from the vantage of 2006 and draws only on sources published before that year. The single exception is a labelled postscript.

The study is limited to the United States. Earlier versions used the phrase “North American” in their titles. The examiners rightly observed that the thesis did not deliver Canadian coverage, and the phrase has been dropped rather than supported by token references. The restriction follows from the argument. The thesis is about the relation between texts and actors able to act on them, and the actors studied here (American presidents, the United States Congress, and American federal agencies) had no jurisdiction in Canada. A comparative study, asking whether Canadian writing found Canadian actors with leverage, would be a different thesis.

The thesis also does not attempt to measure readers’ responses in the aggregate. Reception evidence is used only where it exists in paginated published form, most notably Daniel Horowitz’s analysis of readers’ letters to Vance Packard.

1.5 A Note on Tone

The examiners asked that the prose be no more confident than the evidence, and that the thesis distinguish between passages that *demonstrate* influence and passages that *describe* influence and ask the reader to accept it. I have tried to observe a simple convention. Where a causal relation is documented by contemporaries on both sides of it,

such as a president citing a book in a message to Congress, I state it directly. Where the evidence shows only what a text described, I say that the text made something legible and make no claim about its effect. Where a claim of influence rests chiefly on the retrospective testimony of an interested party, such as an author describing his own influence, I attribute it to that party and do not count it as evidence of uptake.

1.6 Structure

Chapter 2 reviews the scholarship on which the cases depend. Chapter 3 sets out the test applied to each case and the four-level scale of evidence. Chapters 4 and 5 present the demonstrating case, *The Jungle*. Chapter 6 tests three later cases in which an actor with leverage acted on consumer protection (1962, 1966, 1967). Chapter 7 examines the New Deal and the postwar suburb, where the actors wrote their own texts. Chapter 8 treats the literature of the suburb and the road as limit cases. Chapter 9 treats wartime letters as a small-scale contrast. Chapter 10 tests the claim that November 1963 marked an inflection. Chapter 11 is a short reflection on continuous television news to 1992. Chapter 12 concludes and classifies every case in a single table. A labelled postscript, outside the frame of the thesis, follows.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 The Muckrakers and the Pure Food Laws

The most careful account of the passage of the 1906 food and meat laws remains James Harvey Young's *Pure Food: Securing the Federal Food and Drugs Act of 1906* (1989). Young's account is important for this thesis because it is not a story of a novel acting on an empty field. Young documents a quarter-century of campaigning by chemists, state food commissioners, women's clubs, and Harvey Wiley's Bureau of Chemistry before 1906. He nonetheless concludes that *The Jungle* "spurred a mighty reaction in the body politic that, in four months, led to the enactment of two laws."³ Young also makes the point that frames Chapters 4 and 5: the novel had a market effect before it had a legislative one. "The public voted in the marketplace," he writes of the collapse in the packers' foreign and domestic sales, "where Armour lost and Sinclair won."⁴ And Young insists on the ambivalence of the actor who carried the novel into law: "Roosevelt was motivated always by the suspicion that *The Jungle* had grossly exaggerated, if not falsified," yet, "despising the novelist all the while, Roosevelt worked closely with Sinclair."⁵

A different tradition, associated with Gabriel Kolko's *The Triumph of Conservatism* (1963), reads the 1906 meat law as a measure the larger packers came to accept because federal certification served their export trade. I have not been able to verify page references in a pre-2006 edition of Kolko and so do not quote him. Young's paginated account, however, contains the core of the observation in a more cautious form: by the end of June 1906 the packers' representatives in the House had moved to

³ James Harvey Young, *Pure Food: Securing the Federal Food and Drugs Act of 1906* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 229.

⁴ Young, *Pure Food*, 231.

⁵ Young, *Pure Food*, 235, 290.

“acquiescence in the inevitability, even the desirability, of a law,” provided they could shape it.⁶ Chapter 5 builds on this point.

On the neighborhood that Sinclair described, the indispensable work is James R. Barrett’s *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago’s Packinghouse Workers, 1894–1922* (1987). Barrett begins with the novel’s reputation, noting that it “caused an immediate sensation and is often given credit for prompting passage of the Meat Inspection Act of 1906,” and he then deliberately moves past it. *The Jungle*, he writes, “concerns itself with this world of the big-city neighborhood and the large mass-production factory,” but its people are “cogs in the great packing machine,” and Barrett sets out to recover the agency that Sinclair’s naturalism denied them.⁷ Barrett’s evidence on home ownership, saloons, and the neighborhood economy is used in Chapter 4 as an independent check on the novel’s picture.

2.2 Consumption, Class, and the New Deal

For the interwar decades, Lizabeth Cohen’s *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (1990) is the work against which any argument about neighborhood and mass consumption must be measured. Cohen shows that the chain store “that purportedly was revolutionizing all consumer behavior in the 1920s was mostly reaching the middle and upper classes,” and that working-class families remained loyal to the ethnic neighborhood grocer, partly for reasons of language and partly because “most factory workers depended on a system of credit at the neighborhood store.”⁸ Her argument that national brands, chain stores, and network radio reached workers “only gradually, starting in the late 1920s and intensifying during” the 1930s is a necessary

⁶ Young, *Pure Food*, 240.

⁷ James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago’s Packinghouse Workers, 1894–1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990; first published 1987), 1–3.

⁸ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 109, 112.

corrective to literary accounts, my own first submission among them, that read the 1920s through Sinclair Lewis's Zenith as though Zenith were everywhere.⁹ Cohen's later *A Consumers' Republic* (2003) extends the argument into the postwar period. Because I was unable to consult a paginated copy of it, it is not cited for specific claims.

On the New Deal and the suburb, Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (1985) remains the standard account. Jackson argues that, of the New Deal's housing initiatives, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration "were to have a more lasting and important impact upon the suburbanization of the United States" than the better-publicised greenbelt towns.¹⁰ James J. Flink's *The Automobile Age* (1988) and Mark H. Rose's *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939–1989* (revised edition, 1990) supply the automotive and highway history on which Chapter 7 relies.

On the Federal Writers' Project, Jerre Mangione's *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935–1943* (1972) is both a history and a participant's memoir. Mangione served as the Project's national coordinating editor. He records that the American Guide Series was conceived in deliberate contrast to the Baedeker: not merely a guidebook but "a giant mirror for America."¹¹

2.3 The Postwar Suburb and Its Critics

The postwar critical literature is large, and the first submission surveyed too much of it too quickly. This revision concentrates on one work that offers sustained ethnographic evidence about a single consumer community, William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), and treats the others more briefly. Whyte's account of Park

⁹ Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 119.

¹⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 195.

¹¹ Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935–1943* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972; repr., Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 357.

Forest, Illinois, is used in Chapter 8 not as a cultural symptom but as a documentary source: Whyte interviewed residents, mapped friendships, and read the community's own advertising.

Of the other critics, John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958) is cited for two arguments that bear directly on neighborhoods: the "dependence effect," by which production "creates the wants it seeks to satisfy," and the image of "private opulence and public squalor."¹² Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962) are cited in Chapter 10, where their place in the chronology matters. Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) is approached through Daniel Horowitz's *Vance Packard and American Social Criticism* (1994). Horowitz's analysis of the letters readers wrote to Packard is one of the few paginated studies of how ordinary Americans actually used a work of consumer criticism.¹³

2.4 Periodisation: Consensus, Crisis, and the 1950s

Godfrey Hodgson's *America in Our Time* (1976) offers the periodisation that this thesis tests. Hodgson divides the postwar era into a "time of consensus" ending in 1963 and a "time of crisis" from 1963 to 1965, "in which a series of shocks—the assassination of President Kennedy, the breakup of the civil rights movement, and the escalation of" the war in Vietnam broke the liberal consensus.¹⁴ Hodgson is careful, however, to deny that the assassination was itself the crisis. Commentators who read it as "a symptom" of national sickness were, he argues, "wrong in supposing that the assassination was a result

¹² John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 40th anniversary ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 128, 191.

¹³ Daniel Horowitz, *Vance Packard and American Social Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 161–65.

¹⁴ Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon—What Happened and Why* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005; first published 1976), 136.

of the crisis; for the crisis was not moral, but political.”¹⁵ Chapter 10 takes this distinction seriously.

David Halberstam’s *The Fifties* (1993) must also be addressed, because the first submission misrepresented it. Halberstam does not portray the 1950s as a placid decade that the 1960s disrupted. His argument, sustained across the book, is that the decade’s apparent calm concealed forces of change, in race, sexuality, television, suburban building, and consumer technology, that would surface in the 1960s. Because I could not consult a paginated pre-2006 edition of the book, I state this as a characterisation of its overall argument and do not quote it. The point matters for Chapter 10. Halberstam’s book is itself an objection to any periodisation that treats a single date as the moment of change.

2.5 Wartime Correspondence

The scholarly literature on American wartime letters is thinner than the literature on war memoir. Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) is the best-known study of soldiers’ writing about war, but its evidence is mainly British, and its conclusions about irony and the gulf between front and home must be applied to American material with care. For the American case this thesis relies chiefly on two published collections that also contain editorial commentary: Bernard Edelman’s *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (1985), compiled for the New York Vietnam Veterans Memorial Commission, and Andrew Carroll’s *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars* (2001), drawn from the Legacy Project. Laura Palmer’s *Shrapnel in the Heart* (1987), a collection of letters left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, is used briefly in Chapter 9.

¹⁵ Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, 164, 169.

2.6 Television and the News

On the television coverage of the Kennedy assassination, Barbie Zelizer's *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (1992) is the essential work. Zelizer shows how journalists used the coverage of those four days to establish television's authority as a news medium. On Cable News Network, Ken Auletta's *Media Man: Ted Turner's Improbable Empire* (2004) supplies the business history. Robert Wiener's *Live from Baghdad* (1992), the memoir of CNN's executive producer in Baghdad in January 1991, supplies a participant's account. Contemporary magazine reporting, especially Desmond Smith's "Snooze News" in *New York* (28 June 1982), documents the competitive moment when the networks and Westinghouse moved against Turner.

2.7 The Gap

The literature reviewed here supplies, for each case, either a documented account of how a policy was made (Young, Jackson, Rose) or a close account of a text and its world (Barrett, Horowitz, Zelizer). What it does not supply is a common test applied across cases, asking of each text whether an actor able to change a consumer institution can be shown to have used it. The thesis attempts that test in a limited way. Its aim is to say, case by case, how strong the documented link was, rather than to assume that literature "reflected" or "shaped" consumer society in general.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 The Leverage Test

Each case in the thesis is put to the same three questions.

1. **Actor.** Was there an actor with leverage, that is, a person or body with the legal or administrative power to change the consumer institution in question: a president, a Congress, a federal agency, a court?
2. **Use.** Is there dated documentary evidence that this actor read, cited, or relied on the text? Acceptable evidence includes a presidential message or speech, a congressional debate or hearing, a statute or regulation, an agency document, or a participant's memoir that is corroborated by another source.
3. **Act.** What did the actor do, and how far did the outcome correspond to what the text's author sought?

A case in which all three questions can be answered from the documents is a *demonstrated* case. A case in which there was an actor but no documented use is a *test with a negative or open result*. A case in which no actor can be identified is a *limit case*: its text may have made a consumer world legible, but the thesis claims no institutional effect for it.

The method within each case is close reading of primary texts in a cited edition, set against institutional sources and checked against secondary scholarship. Every quotation is referenced to a page in a named edition.

3.2 The Scale of Evidence

The leverage test is supported by a four-level scale, which is applied to every case and summarised in Table 12.1. The levels are cumulative: each requires the evidence of the level below it, plus more.

- **Level 1, legibility.** The text describes a consumer world, making it visible or intelligible to its readers. The evidence is the text itself. No claim is made about what readers did with it.
- **Level 2, documented reception.** Contemporary responses to the text are documented in a paginated source: reviews, sales or circulation, readers' letters, surveys, or citation by other writers. Level 2 requires that this evidence be supplied, not asserted. A statement that a book was "widely read," without such evidence, does not qualify.
- **Level 3, documented uptake.** An actor with leverage cites the text, or demonstrably relies on it, in a dated act.
- **Level 4, institutional outcome.** The actor's uptake is followed by a change in a consumer institution (a statute, regulation, or programme), and the documents show that the uptake contributed to that change.

Two further categories fall outside the scale. A text written *by* an actor with leverage, such as a presidential broadcast or an agency manual, is classified as *actor-authored*; the question for it is not uptake but what the actor did and what reception is documented. A claim of influence made only later, by the author or by an interested party, is flagged as a *retrospective attribution*. It is recorded, but it does not raise a case's level.

The examiners' central criticism of the earlier submissions can be restated in these terms: they treated many Level 1 cases as though they were Level 2 or higher, and asserted reception that they did not document. In what follows, the level is stated wherever a claim of influence is made, and Table 12.1 gives the evidence for each.

3.3 Testing the 1963 Inflection

The first submission asserted that the assassination of President Kennedy and the escalation in Vietnam, rather than the end of the 1950s, were the decisive inflection in

American writing about consumer society. The examiners asked that the assertion be tested by a defined comparison and that the obvious objection be answered: the “critical turn” in fact predates November 1963. *Silent Spring* was published in September 1962, and *The Feminine Mystique* in February 1963.

The test adopted in Chapter 10 compares two small corpora of consumer-relevant texts.

- **Corpus A (1957–November 1963):** Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), as reported by Horowitz; Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* (1958); Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961); Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962); Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962); Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley* (1962); and President Kennedy’s special message to Congress on protecting the consumer interest (15 March 1962).
- **Corpus B (December 1963–1970):** President Johnson’s remarks on the Wholesome Meat Act (December 1967); the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (1968), on consumer grievances in the urban ghetto; and soldiers’ letters from Vietnam written between 1966 and 1970 as published in *Dear America*.

The corpora are not random samples, and the result cannot be statistical. They are, however, defined in advance, and each text is coded against four questions.

1. **Addressee:** Does the text address the reading public or fellow experts, the state as an ally, or the state and its institutions as adversaries?
2. **Diagnosis:** Does it locate the problem in the unintended side effects of abundance, such as waste, imbalance, or invisibility, or in the bad faith of institutions?
3. **Remedy:** Does it propose education and balance, regulation and litigation, or withdrawal and protest?

4. **Channel:** Did it reach its public mainly through print, or through broadcast?

If the 1963 hypothesis is right, Corpus B should differ from Corpus A on at least two of the four criteria, and the difference should not be explicable by the different genres in the two corpora. Chapter 10 reports the result. It is, to anticipate, mixed.

3.4 Sources and Their Verification

The primary sources are cited in the following forms.

- Presidential speeches and messages are cited from the *Public Papers of the Presidents* or, for Theodore Roosevelt, from the *Presidential Messages and State Papers* compilation of 1917. Where the thesis reports that a president's papers do *not* mention a text, the statement rests on a search of the indexed and digitised volumes named in the note.
- The 1906 statutes are cited from the *Statutes at Large*, as indexed in the Department of Agriculture's 1912 legislative history.
- Floor debates in Congress are cited, where I have been unable to consult the *Congressional Record* directly, through Young's paginated account, and the reliance is stated.
- Novels are cited from named editions. *The Jungle* is cited from the first Doubleday, Page edition of 1906, *Babbitt* from the first Harcourt, Brace edition, and *Oil!* from the Grosset and Dunlap reprint of 1927.
- Letters are cited from the published collections in which they appear, by page, with the writer's name, rank, and unit as given by the editor.

Where a letter is quoted, its spelling and punctuation follow the published text, including the misspellings that editors deliberately preserved.

For Sinclair's own account of his intentions in writing *The Jungle*, the thesis cites *The Brass Check*. Sinclair first published the most quoted formulation, that he aimed at

the public's heart and hit its stomach, in *Cosmopolitan* in October 1906. I was unable to locate a paginated copy of that issue, and so I cite the sentence from the page of *The Brass Check* on which Sinclair repeated it.

3.5 Positionality

I come to this subject after twenty years in business, much of it in international trade, and with earlier training in history, English, and elementary education. Experience as a practitioner makes me sceptical of accounts in which consumers are passive and texts all-powerful. Training in literature makes me attentive to what a text actually says on the page. Training in elementary education may explain a preoccupation with the question of who a text is addressed to and what its reader is supposed to do next. I have tried to let these predispositions sharpen the questions without deciding the answers.

Chapter 4. The Demonstrating Case (I): *The Jungle* and the Neighborhood Behind the Yards

4.1 Why Begin Here

The Jungle is the case against which every other case in this thesis is measured, and for that reason it needs to be handled with care. Its reputation precedes it. Barrett, as noted in Chapter 2, observes that the book “is often given credit for prompting passage of the Meat Inspection Act of 1906.” He then sets that reputation aside to recover the community it described.¹⁶ This chapter follows Barrett’s lead in one respect and departs from it in another. Like Barrett, it reads the novel against independent evidence about the neighborhood called Packingtown, or “Back of the Yards.” Unlike Barrett, whose subject is the workers, it reads the novel principally as a document about *buying*: about the purchase of a house on instalments, about advertising addressed to immigrants, and about the food that the packing district sold to the rest of the country. This chapter establishes what the novel made legible about the neighborhood and its trade, and checks it against independent evidence. Chapter 5 then establishes, from documents produced by others, what actors with leverage did with it.

4.2 The Neighborhood

Barrett’s portrait of Packingtown at the turn of the century is precise. “All of these people lived on about one square mile of land, including streets and parks, surrounded by garbage dumps, stockyards, packing plants, and railroad tracks.”¹⁷ The community “had far fewer sewerage facilities than its neighbors, and its main business district consisted largely of saloons.”¹⁸ Barrett insists, against the moralising of contemporary reformers

¹⁶ Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 1.

¹⁷ Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 74.

¹⁸ Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 68.

who saw in the saloons “one more indication of the degenerate character of the neighborhood,” that the saloon “played an important role” in the community’s social and economic life.¹⁹ Sinclair, it should be said, partly anticipated this view. In a late chapter of the novel he writes that a saloon-keeper who fed beggars was “in no wise to blame” for the system that made him do so, being “in the same plight as the manufacturer who has to adulterate and misrepresent his product.”²⁰ The saloon, in other words, is in both accounts a retail institution as well as a social one.

The most striking fact Barrett recovers concerns home ownership. Among the Chicago neighborhoods canvassed by University of Chicago investigators in 1914, “Packingtown ranked second in home ownership,” and the home-owning share of the neighborhood’s population “remained much higher than that for the city as a whole.”²¹ Barrett follows the historian John Modell in interpreting this pattern: “Home ownership, like multiple family incomes,” was “part of a defensive strategy oriented” toward the security of the family in an insecure labour market.²² Here the historian’s evidence and the novelist’s plot converge. The central consumer transaction of *The Jungle* is the purchase of a house.

4.3 The House: A Consumer Transaction

The Rudkus family’s decision to buy is prompted by an advertisement. Sinclair is exact about the medium. It is a leaflet distributed “from house to house,” which Jurgis, who cannot read English, takes because “there were pictures upon it.”²³ The circular’s text is given in full in the novel’s voice: ““Why pay rent?” the linguistic circular went on to

¹⁹ Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 82.

²⁰ Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1906), 272. All subsequent citations of *The Jungle* refer to this edition.

²¹ Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 105.

²² Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 106, quoting John Modell.

²³ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 52.

demand. ‘Why not own your own home? Do you know that you can buy one for less than your rent? We have built thousands of homes which are now occupied by happy families.’”²⁴ The arithmetic is set out a page later: the price included “the lot and all,” and “only three hundred dollars had to be paid down, the balance being paid at the rate of twelve dollars a month.”²⁵

Sinclair then dramatises the signing of the deed, and the scene turns on a contract that the buyers cannot read. Their friend Szedvilas, reading the document, finds what appears to be a lease: “This was not a deed of sale at all, so far as he could see—it provided only for the renting of the property!”²⁶ A lawyer, consulted in haste, explains that “the deed was a blank deed such as was often used in these sales,” and he confirms the terms of “three hundred dollars down, and the balance at twelve dollars a month, till the total of fifteen hundred dollars had been paid.”²⁷ Sinclair has the lawyer explain the purpose of the form. The property was “merely rented until the last payment had been made, the purpose being to make it easier to turn the party out if he did not make the payments.”²⁸

The family learns the rest of the truth from a neighbor. The house was not new. It had been built and sold, with the same terms, again and again: “four families that their informant could name had tried to buy it and failed.”²⁹ The terms also concealed a charge the family had not understood. “They trick you and eat you alive,” the neighbor tells them. “They never sell the houses without interest.”³⁰ When the family finally loses the

²⁴ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 52.

²⁵ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 53.

²⁶ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 59.

²⁷ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 60.

²⁸ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 62.

²⁹ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 78.

³⁰ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 81.

house, the cycle is completed in the novel's own terms. Jurgis returns to find that the family had been unable to "pay the rent and they had been turned out into the snow, and the house had been repainted and sold again the next week."³¹

Two observations follow, and they are offered with different degrees of confidence. The first is documentary. Sinclair's account of the instalment house closely matches the pattern Barrett reconstructs from independent sources, of high home ownership pursued as a "defensive strategy" by families on very low incomes. In this respect the novel is a reliable witness to a real consumer practice.

The second is a matter of legibility only. The instalment house in *The Jungle* is structurally the same instrument as the contract sales that the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration would partly displace in the 1930s with the long-term amortised mortgage (Chapter 7). I have found no evidence that any New Deal housing official read or cited the novel, and the thesis makes no claim that it did. What can be said is that the novel made the defect in working-class home finance legible three decades before federal policy addressed it. On the scale of Chapter 3, the novel's treatment of the house is a Level 1 case.

4.4 Advertising Addressed to Immigrants

The novel is equally precise about the advertising that surrounded the family. "In Packingtown the advertisements had a style all of their own, adapted to the peculiar population. One would be tenderly solicitous. 'Is your wife pale?' it would inquire."³² Jurgis, Sinclair writes ironically, had only to "read the signs, or get into a street-car, to obtain full information as to pretty much everything a human creature could need."³³

³¹ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 211.

³² Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 63.

³³ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 63.

Among “these importunate signs” was the one that had first drawn the family to the house, which “showed two very pretty little birds building themselves a home.”³⁴

The passage makes legible a theme that recurs in later cases: the target of mass advertising was frequently a population that could not easily evaluate it. Sinclair’s socialist character Schliemann makes the point explicit in the novel’s final chapter, in a definition: “the ultra-modern profession of advertising” is “the science of persuading people to buy what they do not want.”³⁵ Cohen’s later work on Chicago in the 1920s qualifies the picture. Working-class immigrants were slower to adopt national brands than advertisers hoped, and they continued to “buy in bulk” from neighborhood grocers who spoke their language.³⁶ The novel’s picture of a population helplessly addressed by advertising may therefore be truer of the housing market, where the transaction was large, infrequent, and legally complex, than of the grocery trade.

4.5 The Product: What the Neighborhood Sold

The passages for which *The Jungle* is remembered concern the product. They are worth reading closely for the specificity with which they connect the neighborhood’s work to the consumer’s table elsewhere. The famous jest, “They use everything about the hog except the squeal,” appears early, during the family’s tour of the plants.³⁷ The tour is itself a marketing exercise. The family passes the advertising of the “Durham” brand, a list that runs from “Potted Ham, Devilled Chicken” to “Peerless Fertilizer!”, and they are then escorted by a guide, for the packers “make a great feature of showing strangers through” the plants.³⁸ The inspector they meet is a figure of reassurance: he wore “a blue

³⁴ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 64.

³⁵ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 404.

³⁶ Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 113.

³⁷ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 38.

³⁸ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 39.

uniform, with brass buttons, and he gave an atmosphere of authority to the scene.”

Sinclair adds that while the inspector was talking with a visitor, “you could hardly be so ungrateful as to notice that a dozen carcasses were passing him untouched.”³⁹

As the novel proceeds the products are named with increasing disgust. Among the canned meats were “‘potted ham,’ and ‘devilled ham’—de-vyled, as the men called it,” the latter made “out of the waste ends of smoked beef that were too small to be sliced by the machines.”⁴⁰ In the storage rooms “a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats,” and “there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit.”⁴¹

It matters for the argument of this chapter that Sinclair closes the loop between product and neighborhood. The products of the plants come home. The child Kristoforas falls ill and dies after eating sausage that, Sinclair suggests, may have been made from “tubercular pork that was condemned as unfit for export.”⁴² The phrase “unfit for export” is pointed. It implies a two-tier market, in which meat rejected by foreign inspection was sold at home, and the poorest home market of all was the neighborhood that produced it. The packing district, in Sinclair’s account, was simultaneously the producer of the national diet and the dumping ground for its rejects. The novel told readers far from Chicago that they were eating from the same supply.

4.6 Sinclair’s Intentions and the Novel’s Reception

Sinclair’s own retrospective account of the book’s reception is the most quoted evidence of its effect, and it is also the most interested. In *The Brass Check* (1919) he repeated a sentence he had first written in *Cosmopolitan* in October 1906: “I aimed at the

³⁹ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 42.

⁴⁰ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 115.

⁴¹ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 161–62.

⁴² Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 150.

public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach." He went on to insist that he "had not been nearly so interested in the 'condemned meat industry' as in something else. To me the diseased meat graft had been only one of a hundred varieties of graft."⁴³ The heart, in Sinclair's account, was the plight of the workers. The stomach was the reader's fear for his own food.

The distinction is usually read as the author's lament that his socialist message was lost. It is also consistent with the documented reception of the book, which was a reception by readers acting as consumers. Young's evidence is that the first documented effect of the book was commercial. Domestic and export sales of canned meat fell, the packers mounted a public relations counter-campaign, and "the public voted in the marketplace, where Armour lost and Sinclair won."⁴⁴ Sinclair himself, in retrospect, claimed a still wider reach: "I had put Packingtown on the map of the world."⁴⁵ Sinclair's claim is a retrospective attribution by an interested party, and it does not by itself raise the case's level. The market response that Young documents is Level 2 evidence of reception. What raises the case above Level 2 is what the President of the United States did next, which is documented independently of Sinclair.

⁴³ Upton Sinclair, *The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism* (Pasadena, CA: published by the author, 1920), 47. The sentence first appeared in Upton Sinclair, "What Life Means to Me," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1906; I have not been able to consult a paginated copy of that issue.

⁴⁴ Young, *Pure Food*, 231.

⁴⁵ Sinclair, *The Brass Check*, 52.

Chapter 5. The Demonstrating Case (II): From Novel to Statute, 1906–1967

5.1 Roosevelt and the Neill–Reynolds Investigation

Sinclair's account of how *The Jungle* reached the President is given in the chapter of *The Brass Check* titled "An Adventure with Roosevelt." He decided, as he puts it, that since "Theodore Roosevelt was president of the United States, with power to help me if he would," he would carry the case to him.⁴⁶ Young's account, based on the Roosevelt and Sinclair correspondence, confirms the essentials while adding a crucial qualification. Roosevelt was sceptical. "Roosevelt was motivated always by the suspicion that *The Jungle* had grossly exaggerated, if not falsified," Young writes, and he nonetheless sent two investigators of his own, the Commissioner of Labor Charles P. Neill and the settlement worker James Bronson Reynolds, to Chicago.⁴⁷ Sinclair later complained that the commissioners "were not able to do very much, because they were shadowed during the entire time by detectives of the packers, and every workingman knew that it would cost him his job to be seen" talking to them.⁴⁸ Young notes, too, that Sinclair had made only three visits to the yards in gathering material, although he later claimed to have explored "every inch" of the large plants.⁴⁹

The Neill–Reynolds report nonetheless confirmed enough. On 4 June 1906 Roosevelt transmitted it to Congress with a message whose language has the quality of a verdict:

⁴⁶ Sinclair, *The Brass Check*, 39.

⁴⁷ Young, *Pure Food*, 235.

⁴⁸ Sinclair, *The Brass Check*, 40.

⁴⁹ Young, *Pure Food*, 223.

The conditions shown by even this short inspection to exist in the Chicago stock yards are revolting. It is imperatively necessary in the interest of health and of decency that they should be radically changed.⁵⁰

The President's reason for transmitting a preliminary report was urgency: it "shows the urgent need of immediate action."⁵¹ The message does not name the novel, and the thesis does not claim that it does. What the documents show is a sequence. The President, by Young's account, read the novel with suspicion and sent investigators because of it. The investigators' report confirmed enough of the novel's account of the product for the President to call the conditions "revolting." The report was sent to Congress with a call for immediate legislation. Each step is dated and documented by someone other than Sinclair. On the scale of Chapter 3, this is Level 3, documented uptake by an actor with leverage.

5.2 Congress and the Packers

What happened in Congress shows the limits of that uptake. The Senate, led by Albert Beveridge of Indiana, had already passed a strong inspection amendment financed by fees on the packers. In the House, the Agriculture Committee under James Wadsworth of New York and the Chicago Republican William Lorimer produced a substitute. According to Young, Lorimer, back in Washington "after a strategy session in Chicago, condemned the report as 'a gross exaggeration of conditions,'" while the packers called it slanderous.⁵² The President denounced the Wadsworth–Lorimer draft as a "sham bill."⁵³

⁵⁰ Theodore Roosevelt, message to the Senate and House of Representatives, June 4, 1906, in *Presidential Messages and State Papers: Being the Epoch-Marking National Documents of All the Presidents from George Washington to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Review of Reviews Company, 1917), 3113–14.

⁵¹ Roosevelt, message of June 4, 1906, 3113.

⁵² Young, *Pure Food*, 242.

⁵³ Young, *Pure Food*, 241.

Young's account of the House debate rests on the *Congressional Record*, and since I have not been able to consult the *Record* directly I rely on his paginated summary and his citations. He reports that "by a vote of 157 to 51 the House reiterated support for Wadsworth's substitute," and that Lorimer, "reminding the House of his own years of labor in Packingtown, ... flatly denied that the packers had provided the public with 'bad and unwholesome meat.'"⁵⁴ Packingtown was invoked on the floor of the House on both sides of the question: as the scene of Sinclair's indictment and as the credential of the packers' defender.

The outcome was a compromise. Young's judgement is that by the final stage the packers' representatives had moved to "acquiescence in the inevitability, even the desirability, of a law," provided its terms were acceptable.⁵⁵ Roosevelt had insisted that inspection be paid for by fees on the packers.⁵⁶ The act as passed instead funded it by a permanent federal appropriation.⁵⁷ The meat inspection provisions became law as part of the Agricultural Appropriation Act of 30 June 1906. The Pure Food and Drug Act, which had been languishing in the House, was approved the same day.⁵⁸ Young concludes that "public identification of meat and food bills as a 'single effort'" in the wake of *The Jungle* "led Roosevelt to push hard for them both."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Young, *Pure Food*, 250, citing *Congressional Record*, 59th Cong., 1st sess. (1906).

⁵⁵ Young, *Pure Food*, 240.

⁵⁶ Young, *Pure Food*, 241.

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Solicitor, *Index to Legislative History of Acts of Congress Involving the United States Department of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 45 ("Meat inspection, permanent appropriation for").

⁵⁸ Act of June 30, 1906, ch. 3913, 34 Stat. 669 (meat inspection); Act of June 30, 1906, ch. 3915, 34 Stat. 768 (food and drugs); as indexed in USDA, *Index to Legislative History*, 40, 43.

⁵⁹ Young, *Pure Food*, 290.

5.3 What the Law Changed for the Consumer

For the purposes of this thesis the important question is what changed at the point of sale. The 1906 meat act did not change the conditions of work that Sinclair cared most about. It did change what the shopper could rely upon. Federal inspection, and the inspection legend on meat in interstate commerce, converted the “brass buttons” of Sinclair’s ineffectual inspector into a guarantee printed on the product. The Pure Food and Drug Act made misbranding and adulteration federal offences. Both measures shifted part of the burden of evaluating food from the buyer, who in Sinclair’s Packingtown could neither read the label nor understand the deed, to the state.

With the qualifications above, the case reaches Level 4. The novel’s evidence reached an actor, the President, who was already disposed to act on federal regulation and who could compel an investigation, and the statutes followed within weeks of his message. The outcome, however, was determined by the actors, not the author. Congress passed a law whose terms the packers’ representatives had come to accept, funded in a way the President had opposed.

5.4 The Press as an Institution: *The Brass Check*

Sinclair drew from the episode a lesson about the press, and that lesson is the subject of *The Brass Check*. Two points in the book bear directly on the argument of this thesis.

The first concerns how the story reached the public. According to Young, after the commissioners returned and Roosevelt seemed inclined to hold back their findings, Sinclair “went to New York with his affidavits and observations and dictated through the night to stenographers at the *New York Times*.” Sinclair’s own account recalls being given “a private room and two expert stenographers.”⁶⁰ Sinclair’s larger complaint was that the

⁶⁰ Young, *Pure Food*, 240; Sinclair, *The Brass Check*, 42.

channels of news opened and closed according to interests he could not control. The image he used for the Associated Press and the newspapers was “the concrete wall.” He observed, bitterly, that this wall opened readily for gossip about him personally. When a scandal story about him was put on the wire, “suddenly this concrete wall collapsed and became a channel. In Vancouver and Buenos Aires, in Johannesburg and Shanghai and Auckland, people read next morning” the story.⁶¹ The image is worth keeping in mind for Chapter 11. Sinclair understood the global news network of his day as a set of channels that could be opened or closed. The continuous news channel of 1980 was presented by its founder as the end of that gatekeeping.

The second concerns advertising. Sinclair argued that the commercial press could not report honestly on its advertisers. “The third method by which the ‘kept’ press is kept is the method of the advertising subsidy,” he wrote, “the main pipe-line whereby Big Business feeds its journalistic” dependants.⁶² Whatever one thinks of Sinclair’s conspiratorial tone, the argument identifies a structural feature of the consumer economy that recurs in this thesis. The medium through which consumers learned about products was financed by the sellers of those products. The New Deal, as Chapter 7 shows, would use a different channel, the President’s own voice on the radio, to reach households directly.

5.5 The Long Afterlife: 1967

The Wholesome Meat Act of December 1967 extended federal inspection standards to meat sold within a single state, which the 1906 act had left to the states. Johnson’s remarks at the signing return us to where this thesis began. They are the second

⁶¹ Sinclair, *The Brass Check*, 75.

⁶² Sinclair, *The Brass Check*, 282.

documented use of the novel by an actor with leverage, and they show how the 1906 episode had become, by the 1960s, a usable past for a different kind of consumer politics.

Johnson's argument rested on a deliberate parallel between 1906 and 1967. After reading from *The Jungle*, he described an inspector's report of conditions in a modern plant and said: "It did not happen 60 years ago when Upton Sinclair was writing his book. It happened in July 1967. It was written by a United States Federal Government inspector."⁶³ In remarks delivered in the weeks before the signing, Johnson had already framed the issue in terms of the family table and the neighborhood store. The bill "can relieve every American family from the fear that every frankfurter and hamburger they give their children could be rancid," and it would mean "that a mother can shop without fear of finding worms in a steak or a roast, or wood splinters in the baby's hamburger."⁶⁴

Two things about the 1967 remarks bear on the periodisation question. First, Johnson's addressee is a consumer who is explicitly a mother shopping for children. The 1906 debate had addressed the reading public and the export trade. The 1967 remarks addressed the household and, through television coverage of the signing, the household's living room. Second, Johnson presents the state as the consumer's ally and the industry as the problem, but he does so as the head of a government already at war in Vietnam and losing public confidence. Chapter 10 takes up whether this shift in address is evidence for the 1963 inflection or merely evidence of a continuity in Progressive and New Deal rhetoric. Chapter 6 asks a narrower question: why this is the only consumer measure of the 1960s examined here in which a president can be shown to have used a specific book.

⁶³ Johnson, "Remarks Upon Signing the Wholesome Meat Act," 1144.

⁶⁴ *Public Papers: Johnson, 1967*, book 2, 1100, 1126. The volume is arranged chronologically, and both passages precede the signing remarks of December 15.

5.6 Assessment

The Jungle demonstrates the thesis because the causal chain is documented at each link by people who were not Sinclair:

- a President who read the book and sent investigators (Young);
- a report that confirmed enough of its account of the product;
- a message to Congress that called the conditions “revolting” and asked for immediate action;
- a floor debate in which Packingtown was invoked on both sides;
- two statutes approved on the same day;
- a later President who read from the novel at the signing of a successor statute.

The case also shows where the limits of writing lie even when uptake is documented. The actor, not the author, decided what the law would be. The working conditions that were Sinclair’s real subject were scarcely touched, and the meat law took a form that the larger packers could accept. In the terms of Chapter 3, the 1906 episode is Level 4 and the 1967 episode is Level 3. Johnson’s use of the novel is documented; the evidence examined here does not show that the novel, rather than the 1967 inspection reports Johnson also cited, shaped the content of the 1967 act.

The remaining chapters put the same three questions (actor, use, act) to other cases. None reproduces the full chain.

Chapter 6. Testing the Case: Actors with Leverage, 1962–1967

6.1 The Question

The Jungle reached Level 4 because a president can be shown to have read it and acted. The obvious objection is that this is a single case. If the thesis is right, then later actors with leverage who acted on consumer protection should sometimes be found using particular texts in the same way, and where they do not, the thesis should be able to say so. This chapter applies the leverage test of Chapter 3 to three moments in the 1960s when a president and Congress acted on consumer safety: Kennedy's consumer message and his response to *Silent Spring* in 1962, the traffic-safety legislation of 1966, and the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967. The cases were chosen because an actor with leverage plainly acted in each. The question is whether a specific text can be shown to have been used.

6.2 Kennedy, 1962: The Consumer Message and *Silent Spring*

On 15 March 1962 President Kennedy sent Congress a special message on protecting the consumer interest. It opened: "Consumers, by definition, include us all. They are the largest economic group in the economy, affecting and affected by almost every public and private economic decision."⁶⁵ It enumerated four consumer rights: "(1) The right to safety," "(2) The right to be informed," "(3) The right to choose," and "(4) The right to be heard."⁶⁶ Kennedy observed that consumers' "voice is not always as loudly heard in Washington as the voices of smaller and better-organized groups."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ John F. Kennedy, "Special Message to the Congress on Protecting the Consumer Interest," March 15, 1962, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1962* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 235.

⁶⁶ Kennedy, "Protecting the Consumer Interest," 236.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, "Protecting the Consumer Interest," 243.

Actor. The actor is unambiguous: a President addressing Congress with a legislative programme.

Use. In the pages of the message examined here, Kennedy cites no book. The message is an actor-authored text, and its sources, as presented, are the administration's own programmes. It reports, for example, that on pesticides "a new division has been established in the Department of Agriculture; and increased appropriations have been requested for pesticide regulation and for meat and poultry inspection activities."⁶⁸ That sentence matters for what follows. The administration was already moving on pesticide regulation in March 1962, six months before Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* appeared as a book.

When Kennedy signed the drug amendments of October 1962, he again located the origin of the law in institutional work rather than in a text. He was "pleased to approve this bill, which is designed to provide safer and more effective drugs to the American consumer," and he credited the legislative "foundation" to "exhaustive hearings conducted by Senator Kefauver and others."⁶⁹ The actor named hearings, not books.

There is, however, one documented use of a text in the Kennedy papers for 1962, and it is the most direct presidential reference to a work of postwar consumer criticism that this study has found. At his news conference of 29 August 1962, Kennedy was asked about the use of DDT and other pesticides, and whether he had "considered asking the Department of Agriculture or the Public Health Service to take a closer look at this." He replied: "Yes, and I know that they already are. I think particularly, of course, since Miss Carson's book, but they are examining the matter."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kennedy, "Protecting the Consumer Interest," 236.

⁶⁹ John F. Kennedy, "Remarks Upon Signing the Drug Reform Bill," October 10, 1962, in *Public Papers: Kennedy, 1962*, 751.

⁷⁰ John F. Kennedy, "The President's News Conference of August 29, 1962," in *Public Papers: Kennedy, 1962*, 655. The editors' note identifies the book as Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), and the volume's index enters it under Carson's name.

Act. The remark documents that the President knew of Carson's work, associated it with the agencies' examination of pesticides, and said so in public. On the scale of Chapter 3, that is Level 3: documented uptake by an actor with leverage. It does not by itself establish Level 4. The remark attributes the examination to agencies that, by the evidence of the March message, were already at work, and the sources consulted for this thesis do not trace what those agencies then did. The first submission's claim of a direct line from Carson to later clean-air legislation is not supported by anything found here and remains withdrawn (Chapter 10).

The Kennedy test therefore yields a mixed result. For the consumer message and the drug law, the actor is present but no use of a specific text is documented. For *Silent Spring*, use is documented at Level 3, but the institutional outcome is not traced.

6.3 Johnson, 1966: Traffic Safety and the Missing Book

The traffic-safety legislation of 1966 is the case most often cited, after *The Jungle*, as an instance of a book changing a consumer institution. Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965) is commonly associated with it. Because I was unable to consult a paginated edition of Nader's book or the 1966 congressional hearings at which he testified, I do not quote either. The test can nonetheless be put to the President's own papers, which are fully indexed.

Actor. Again the actor is unambiguous. In his special message to Congress on transportation of 2 March 1966, Johnson identified the problem in terms that could have come from a critic of the industry: "Neither private industry nor government officials concerned with automotive transportation have made safety first among their priorities." He asked Congress for a "Traffic Safety Act of 1966."⁷¹ On 9 September 1966 he signed

⁷¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress on Transportation," March 2, 1966, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966*, book 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1967), 257–58.

the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Highway Safety Act. “The Traffic Safety Act will ensure safer, better-protected cars in the event of an accident,” he said.⁷² The first act became Public Law 89-563 (80 Stat. 718).⁷³

Use. The signing remarks do not name Nader or his book. Their tone toward the industry is, if anything, conciliatory: “the automobile industry has been one of our Nation’s most dynamic and inventive industries. I hope, and I believe, that its skill and imagination will somehow be able to build in more safety—without building on more costs.” The credit for the law goes to Congress, which “took my proposals and brought forth these bills.”⁷⁴ I searched the indexes and the digitised text of both 1966 volumes of Johnson’s *Public Papers* for Nader’s name and his book’s title and found no reference to either.

Act. The actor acted, and the outcome was a new federal consumer institution, national vehicle safety standards. But the documentary link between a specific text and the actor, which is what lifts *The Jungle* to Level 3, is not present in the President’s papers. It may exist in the Senate hearings, which this thesis has not consulted. On the evidence examined here, the 1966 case is an open test. It shows that an actor with leverage can create exactly the kind of consumer institution a book demanded without citing the book, and it warns against treating the association of a book with a law as evidence of uptake.

6.4 Johnson, 1967: The Novel Named

The Wholesome Meat Act of December 1967, described in Chapter 5, is the one case of the three in which the actor named the book. Johnson read from *The Jungle* and

⁷² Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at the Signing of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Highway Safety Act,” September 9, 1966, in *Public Papers: Johnson, 1966*, book 2, 1003.

⁷³ *Public Papers: Johnson, 1966*, book 2, 1004 (editors’ note).

⁷⁴ Johnson, “Remarks at the Signing of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act,” 1003–4.

told its author that the bill “really crowns the crusade that you, yourself, began some 60 years ago.”⁷⁵ The comparison with 1966 is instructive. In 1966 Johnson created a consumer institution associated in public memory with a living critic and named only Congress and the industry. In 1967 he extended an institution associated with a dead crusade and named the novelist. The difference suggests that, for an actor with leverage, a book from sixty years earlier was a safer object of tribute than a book from the previous year. That is an interpretation, not a documented motive. What is documented is that Johnson also grounded the 1967 bill in contemporary evidence, a report written by a federal inspector after a visit to a modern packing plant in July 1967.⁷⁶

6.5 Results

Three tests, three results:

- **1962.** The actor was present. Use of a specific text (Carson’s) is documented in a news conference, at Level 3. The institutional outcome is not traced in the sources consulted. The consumer message and the drug law cite no book.
- **1966.** The actor was present and created a new consumer institution. No use of the book associated with that institution is documented in the President’s papers. The test is open.
- **1967.** The actor was present and named the book. The use is documented at Level 3, but it is retrospective tribute, alongside contemporary inspection evidence.

None reproduces the full chain of 1906, in which the book led an actor to commission evidence that he then sent to Congress. The 1960s tests support the narrower thesis in a negative way. Actors with leverage acted on consumer safety repeatedly, and they did so on the strength of hearings, inspectors’ reports, and their own programmes.

⁷⁵ Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing the Wholesome Meat Act,” 1145.

⁷⁶ Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing the Wholesome Meat Act,” 1144.

The cases in which a specific book can be shown to have reached them are rare, and in this sample only one is from the decade itself.

Chapter 7. Where the Actors Wrote: The New Deal, the Mortgage, and the Highway, 1929–1956

7.1 A Different Pattern

The reorganisation of American consumer life around the automobile, the mortgaged single-family house, and the highway was carried out over half a century by industry and government. No novel produced it, and the thesis makes no claim that one did. When the leverage test of Chapter 3 is put to this transformation, it produces a pattern different from both 1906 and the 1960s. The actors with leverage are easy to identify: a President, Congress, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the Veterans Administration, and the federal highway programme. The texts that can be shown to have mattered, however, were written by those actors themselves: radio addresses, appraisal rules, minimum standards, a commissioned guidebook series, and statutes. This chapter examines those actor-authored texts. Chapter 8 then asks whether the novels and sociology that described the same landscape were used by any actor with leverage, and finds no evidence that they were.

7.2 The Automobile and the Collapse, 1908–1933

The essential economic facts can be stated briefly. Henry Ford's Model T was first offered to dealers on 1 October 1908. When its price for the runabout "first dropped below the average annual wage in the United States," the car became a mass consumer good. By the time the Model T "was withdrawn from production in 1927, over 15 million units had been sold."⁷⁷ Jackson records that "automobile registrations climbed from one million in 1913 to ten million in 1923."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 37–38.

⁷⁸ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 162.

The Depression interrupted the change. Flink's figures are stark: the "1929 production of 5.3 million motor vehicles fell to a low of 1.3 million in 1932, and was not to be surpassed until 1949."⁷⁹ Home building collapsed and foreclosures multiplied. It was into this collapse that the New Deal's actor-authored texts were addressed.

7.3 The Fireside Chats: Texts by the Actor

Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats are not usually read as consumer literature. They are read here as a body of writing, for they were carefully drafted texts, that explained the workings of the consumer economy to a mass audience in its homes. The editors of the standard edition note a contemporary piece of advice that "radio audiences like to feel that the speaker has dropped into its [sic] parlor for an informal chat."⁸⁰ Roosevelt himself described his purpose in the chat of 14 April 1938. He hoped to reach "beyond the officialdom of the national capital, into the hopes and fears of men and women in their homes," and he claimed that "my daily mail" told him "what you are thinking and hoping."⁸¹

The first chat, on the banking crisis of 12 March 1933, is a lesson in how a bank works. Of a deposit, Roosevelt explained, "the bank does not put the money into a safe deposit vault. It invests your money in many different forms of credit—in bonds, in commercial paper, in mortgages, and in many other kinds of loans."⁸² Its conclusion is an exhortation addressed to the household: "I can assure you, my friends, that it is safer to keep your money" in a reopened bank. He added that there was something "more

⁷⁹ Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 131.

⁸⁰ Russell D. Buhite and David W. Levy, eds., *FDR's Fireside Chats* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), xv.

⁸¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, fireside chat, April 14, 1938, in Buhite and Levy, *FDR's Fireside Chats*, 122.

⁸² Roosevelt, fireside chat, March 12, 1933, in Buhite and Levy, *FDR's Fireside Chats*, 13.

important than currency, more important than gold, and that is the confidence of the people themselves.”⁸³

What makes the chats relevant to this case study is the way Roosevelt repeatedly explained the interdependence of producer and consumer, often using the automobile as his example. In a pre-election chat of 6 September 1936 he told farmers and workers that the livelihoods of those working “in the automobile factories of Detroit, and in the harvester factories of Illinois,” depended “upon the farmers’ ability to purchase the commodities that they produce.”⁸⁴ Explaining the recession of 1937–38, he blamed in part an overextension of consumer credit led by the car makers. The “automobile manufacturers not only turned out a normal increase of finished cars, but encouraged the normal increase to run into abnormal figures, using every known method to push their sales.”⁸⁵

The chats also explained the mortgage legislation that would remake the American neighborhood. In the chat of 7 May 1933, which reviewed the New Deal’s first two months, Roosevelt reported the measures passed to relieve debtors. The editors’ annotation identifies among them “the Home Owners Refinancing Act, which established the Home Owners Loan Corporation,” a measure intended to reduce mortgage foreclosures.⁸⁶

On the scale of Chapter 3, the fireside chats are actor-authored. The question of uptake does not arise, because their author was himself the actor with power to change consumer institutions. Their function was to explain to households what the actor was doing. Two kinds of reception evidence are available in the sources used here, and they

⁸³ Roosevelt, fireside chat, March 12, 1933, 15–16.

⁸⁴ Roosevelt, fireside chat, September 6, 1936, in Buhite and Levy, *FDR’s Fireside Chats*, 77.

⁸⁵ Roosevelt, fireside chat, April 14, 1938, 114.

⁸⁶ Roosevelt, fireside chat, May 7, 1933, with editors’ annotation, in Buhite and Levy, *FDR’s Fireside Chats*, 18.

should be kept apart. The first is Roosevelt's own claim, already quoted, that his mail told him what listeners thought. That is the actor's testimony about his audience and is recorded as such. The second is Cohen's finding, from Chicago, that "the radio helped rally industrial workers for Roosevelt."⁸⁷ That is documented reception, but it concerns political allegiance, and it concerns radio rather than the chats alone. I have found no evidence in the sources consulted that the chats changed consumer behaviour in the narrow sense, for instance by persuading depositors to return to the banks, and the thesis makes no such claim.

7.4 HOLC and FHA: Writing the Rules of the Neighborhood

Jackson's judgement, quoted in Chapter 2, is that the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration "were to have a more lasting and important impact upon the suburbanization of the United States" than any other New Deal housing initiative.⁸⁸ The HOLC, established in 1933, refinanced mortgages in default and introduced the long-term, self-amortising loan to large numbers of American households. The FHA, created by the National Housing Act of 1934, insured private mortgages on similar terms. Together they replaced, for those who qualified, the short-term balloon mortgage and the kind of contract sale on which, in Chapter 4, Sinclair's Rudkus family had come to grief.

These agencies were themselves producers of a kind of writing: appraisal manuals, maps, and minimum standards. It is in this documentary form that they most directly shaped neighborhoods. The FHA "set up minimum requirements for lot size, setback from the street, separation from adjacent structures, and even for the width of the house itself."⁸⁹ The HOLC, for its part, graded urban neighborhoods into four categories,

⁸⁷ Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 332.

⁸⁸ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 195.

⁸⁹ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 208.

and Jackson's analysis of its records shows how ratings based on age of housing, race, and ethnicity disadvantaged older and minority districts. The agency insisted that "there is no implication that good mortgages do not exist or cannot be made in Third and Fourth grade areas," but Jackson's evidence indicates a pattern of discrimination against such areas.⁹⁰ An FHA official told the 1939 convention of the American Institute of Planners that "decentralization is taking place. It is not a policy, it is a reality—and it is as impossible for us to change this trend as it is to change the desire of birds to migrate to a more suitable location."⁹¹ Jackson's point, and mine, is that the official was mistaken about the nature of the trend. Decentralisation was in large part a policy, written into the agency's own underwriting rules.

This is the one place in the New Deal and suburban material where writing can be shown to have shaped neighborhoods, and the writing in question is administrative. Jackson's evidence documents the chain from agency rule to built form: the rule was written by the actor, applied by the actor, and visible in the lot sizes and setbacks of the houses it insured. The most consequential "texts" in the making of the postwar suburb were bureaucratic documents that few Americans ever read. Literature, sociology, and journalism described, celebrated, and criticised a landscape whose basic grammar the appraisal manual had already written.

7.5 The Federal Writers' Project: Writing Commissioned by the Actor

The New Deal also employed writers directly. Between 1935 and 1943 the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration produced the American Guide Series, a guidebook for each state and many cities, alongside some hundreds of other publications. Mangione records that the last comprehensive guide to the United

⁹⁰ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 197–202.

⁹¹ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 190.

States had been Baedeker's, "first issued in 1893 and revised in 1909."⁹² The project's ambition, as he describes it, was not to supersede Baedeker on his own terms, for none of his books had "ever won any literary honors," but "to build a giant mirror for America that would reflect interpretative as well as factual materials."⁹³

What matters most for this case study is the structure of the guides. Mangione notes that the longest section, "part three, which often takes up half the volume, consists of tours that follow the highways into every corner of the state, illuminating each mile of the way with historical information."⁹⁴ The guides were thus organised around the automobile. They were written for a motoring public, and they turned the highway into a means of seeing the country. Field workers checked their routes by car; in Montana, one writer "rode hundreds of miles on Montana roads in all kinds of weather checking distances for the tour copy."⁹⁵

The Federal Writers' Project is a hybrid case. The writers were employed by an actor with leverage, as a relief measure, and their product was an inventory of places addressed to people who would visit them by car. Contemporary reception is documented, though thinly, in the sources used here: Mangione reports that Bernard De Voto saw the guides as "an educational force."⁹⁶ That is Level 2 evidence that the guides were read and valued by at least one prominent critic. Whether they increased tourist travel, or were used by any agency in planning roads or parks, cannot be established from the sources consulted, and no such claim is made. What can be said is that the guides made the highway a way of reading the nation, which is a claim about legibility.

⁹² Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, 46.

⁹³ Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, 357.

⁹⁴ Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, 354.

⁹⁵ Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, 87.

⁹⁶ Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, 360.

7.6 From Depression to Prosperity

The war ended the Depression, and the postwar decades fulfilled, for a majority of white Americans, the consumer promise that the 1920s had made and the 1930s had broken. By Flink's account, automobile production first surpassed its 1929 peak in 1949.⁹⁷ Flink argues that during the 1950s, "for the working class, automobility revolutionized the lifestyle of the typical American family."⁹⁸ He also notes a fact that literary accounts of the 1950s often obscure: Americans in 1950 were "far less auto-dependent than has generally been recognized."⁹⁹ The full automobile suburb was a creation of the 1950s and 1960s, not of the immediate postwar years.

7.7 The GI Bill and Levittown

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the GI Bill, "created a Veterans Administration mortgage program similar to that of FHA." In Jackson's words, the law "gave official endorsement and support to the view that the 16 million GI's of World War II should return" to civilian life with homes of their own.¹⁰⁰ The most famous result was Levittown, on Long Island. Jackson describes how Abraham Levitt and his sons William and Alfred, who "ultimately built more than 140,000 houses," turned "a cottage industry into a major manufacturing process."¹⁰¹ When the first houses at Island Trees, "soon renamed Levittown," were occupied in October 1947, "customers stood in line for the four-room Cape Cod box renting at sixty dollars per month."¹⁰² Jackson compares the "Levitt house" to the Model T. In each case the design features mattered less than the fact that the product was mass-produced and priced for a mass market. In a judgement he

⁹⁷ Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 131.

⁹⁸ Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 158.

⁹⁹ Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 131.

¹⁰⁰ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 233.

¹⁰¹ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 234.

¹⁰² Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 234–35.

quotes with approval, Levittown's houses "turned the detached, single-family house from a distant dream to a real possibility for thousands of middle-class American families."¹⁰³

The comparison with *The Jungle* is instructive. The Rudkus family had sought exactly this, a detached house bought on instalments, and had been defrauded by its terms. Forty years later, federally insured, long-term, amortised mortgages made the same aspiration attainable for millions. But the federal programme carried the HOLC's and FHA's exclusions forward. The Levitt organisation, Jackson writes, "publically and officially refused to sell to blacks for two decades after the war."¹⁰⁴ The consumer neighborhood of the postwar boom was built on terms that were both more generous than those of 1906 and racially exclusive.

The residents' own newspaper registered the social character of the place. Jackson quotes *Island Trees*, the community paper, which said that "our lives are held closely together because most of us are within the same age bracket, in similar income groups, live in almost identical houses and have common problems."¹⁰⁵ That sentence, written by residents rather than critics, is a better witness to the new suburb than much of the later critical literature.

7.8 The Interstate as Continuation

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 can be read as the continuation of the New Deal's spatial policy by other means. Rose shows that the act emerged from a long political struggle among truckers, motorists' organisations, state engineers, and the Eisenhower administration over who would pay. It was resolved by the device of a highway trust fund financed by fuel and other user taxes.¹⁰⁶ Jackson stresses that "the secret of its success lay in the principle of non-divertibility of highway revenues collected

¹⁰³ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 236.

¹⁰⁴ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 241.

¹⁰⁵ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 235.

from gasoline” taxes.¹⁰⁷ Just as the FHA had made the suburban house the default choice of federal mortgage policy, the trust fund made the express highway the default choice of federal transport spending.

Rose also records that the professional planners who supported the programme believed that “Americanization and movement to the suburbs accompanied one another in a nearly effortless fashion.”¹⁰⁸ Retail followed the roads: “In 1952, Sears, Roebuck vacated its New Haven store for a suburban site.”¹⁰⁹ Jackson traces the result in the shopping centre, which by the 1960s was challenged as “the locus of brief, informal communication and interaction” only by “the highway strip, with its flashing neon signs.”¹¹⁰ Within five years of the opening of the first franchised McDonald’s restaurants in 1955, Jackson notes, there were “228 golden arches drive-ins selling hamburgers for 15 cents.”¹¹¹

The 1956 act completes the sequence of this chapter: the HOLC and FHA mortgage of 1933–34, the VA mortgage of 1944, and the trust-funded highway of 1956. In none of these measures does the evidence consulted show an actor using a novel, a work of sociology, or a road book. Rose’s account of the highway act is a history of interests, engineers, and revenue formulas, not of texts read by legislators.

7.9 Assessment

The New Deal and the postwar suburb fit the thesis in an unexpected way. The writing that demonstrably shaped consumer neighborhoods in this period was written by

¹⁰⁶ Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939–1989*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 85–98.

¹⁰⁷ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 250.

¹⁰⁸ Rose, *Interstate*, 116.

¹⁰⁹ Rose, *Interstate*, 63.

¹¹⁰ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 261.

¹¹¹ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 264.

the actors with leverage themselves: the fireside chats, which explained the credit economy to households; the HOLC ratings and FHA minimum standards, which Jackson shows were applied to the built landscape; and the statutes that created the mortgage programmes and the highway trust fund. These texts are actor-authored, and their effects are documented at the level of institutions and built form. A commissioned body of writing, the American Guide Series, has Level 2 reception evidence and no documented institutional use. Chapter 8 turns to the texts that were not written by actors at all.

Chapter 8. Limit Cases: The Literature of the Suburb and the Road, 1922–1966

8.1 The Test

This chapter puts the leverage test to the novels, sociology, and road books that described the automotive consumer landscape built by the measures of Chapter 7. For each, the question is the same: can any actor with power to change a consumer institution be shown to have read, cited, or used it? In no case does the evidence consulted answer yes. The chapter therefore treats these works as limit cases. They made the new landscape legible: they described the used-car lot, the subdivision, the turnpike, and the trailer park, often for readers who lived elsewhere. That is a claim about what the texts contain, which can be shown from the texts. It is not a claim about what readers or actors did with them, which would require evidence not supplied here.

8.2 The Commodified Neighborhood of the 1920s

The sociologists who studied Muncie, Indiana, in 1924–25 recorded what the automobile meant at the level of the neighborhood, and their book is the first text examined in this chapter. Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown* (1929) is non-fiction, but its method of ethnographic quotation gives it something of the texture of a novel. Its most famous passage reports a local resident's impatience with the whole enterprise: "Why on earth do you need to study what's changing this country?" he asked. "I can tell you what's happening in just four letters: A-U-T-O!"¹¹²

The Lynds documented the car's effect on the neighborhood with care. Neighbors had once spent "long summer evenings and Sunday afternoons on the porch or in the side

¹¹² Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), 251.

yard,” a habit eroded “since the advent of the automobile and the movies.”¹¹³ An older resident recalled evenings when chairs were set out on the “porch step to take care of the unlimited overflow of neighbors that dropped by.” The car was used “in place of the porch for ‘cooling off after supper’ on a hot summer evening.”¹¹⁴ Residents told the Lynds that “neighbors used to be in each other’s houses much more than they are now,” and one said simply, “We ain’t got neighbors any more.”¹¹⁵ The book’s conclusion asks a question that runs through this thesis: who is one’s neighbor “in this city of 38,000 people in which neighborhoods are disappearing?”¹¹⁶

The Lynds connected these changes to consumer credit. “The installment payment plan,” they wrote, “has telescoped the future into the present.”¹¹⁷ The observation links Middletown back to Packingtown. The instalment that in *The Jungle* had financed a house that could not be kept was, by the mid-1920s, financing the car that took Middletown’s families off their porches.

The novelists of the decade described the same transformation, and two of them are used here as witnesses. Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* (1922) opens with a consumer object. George F. Babbitt is woken by an alarm clock, “the best of nationally advertised and quantitatively produced alarm-clocks, with all modern attachments,” and Babbitt “was proud of being awakened by such a rich device.”¹¹⁸ Babbitt is a real-estate broker, and Lewis makes him the developer of the “Glen Oriole acreage development,” in which he “ironed woodland and dipping meadow into a glenless, orioleless, sunburnt” subdivision.

¹¹³ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 95.

¹¹⁴ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 254, 257.

¹¹⁵ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 274.

¹¹⁶ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 469.

¹¹⁷ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 46.

¹¹⁸ Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), 3.

The development's sewers, Lewis adds, "had insufficient outlet."¹¹⁹ The satire is pointed. The subdivision is a consumer product, sold by its name and its advertising, whose physical infrastructure is an afterthought.

Sinclair's own *Oil!* (1927) takes the same subject from the other side. Set in the southern California oil boom, it shows a speculative landscape in which neighborhood lots became oil leases overnight. In one scene a subdivision's lot owners quarrel over how royalties should be shared among "big lots" and "medium lots."¹²⁰ Elsewhere Sinclair observes that real-estate promoters "had made the discovery that all the advertising in the world was not equal to the presence of one such structure," an oil derrick, "on the tract."¹²¹ *Oil!* and *Babbitt* are both satires, and both should be read as hostile witnesses. They nonetheless agree with the Lynds' sociology on the central point: in the 1920s the neighborhood itself became a commodity, marketed by advertising and bought on credit.

Lizabeth Cohen's caution applies here with full force. Working-class Chicagoans in the 1920s, she shows, were slower to adopt the new consumer habits than these middle-class texts suggest.¹²² *Babbitt* and *Middletown* describe the leading edge of a change, not its universal condition.

Middletown also recorded the precariousness of families who had bought on instalments. One wife, whose husband had "gone everywhere for work," reported that the family "had paid \$334.00 on the auto and had just a little over a hundred to pay," and had been "paying on the house a little over a year."¹²³

Test. For *Middletown*, *Babbitt*, and *Oil!* the leverage test returns no actor. I have found no evidence in the sources consulted that any of the three was cited by a legislator

¹¹⁹ Lewis, *Babbitt*, 45.

¹²⁰ Upton Sinclair, *Oil!* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1927), 31–34.

¹²¹ Sinclair, *Oil!*, 161.

¹²² Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 109–19.

¹²³ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 62.

or official acting on consumer credit, zoning, or real-estate practice, and I have not assembled paginated evidence of their reception. They are classified at Level 1. Their value to this thesis is that they made the commodified neighborhood of the 1920s legible, in close agreement with one another.

8.3 Park Forest: Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956)

William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) is the most substantial piece of writing about a postwar consumer neighborhood produced in the period. It is used here as documentary evidence. Whyte chose Park Forest, Illinois, a planned community south of Chicago, because "its most salient characteristic is that it is virtually a controlled sample of organization people."¹²⁴ Whyte quotes the developers' own advertising: "Coffee pots bubble all day long in Park Forest. This sign of friendliness tells you how much neighbors enjoy each other's company."¹²⁵ The neighborhood is here sold, like Glen Oriole in *Babbitt*, as a social product, with friendliness as a feature.

Whyte's evidence about consumption is detailed. The residents, he found, practised what he called "inconspicuous consumption," and they were "quite articulate about it. One of the most frequent observations they will volunteer is that 'there's no keeping up with the Joneses here.'"¹²⁶ Their attitude to debt he called "budgetism," and it was paradoxical: "the beauty of budgetism is that one doesn't have to keep a budget at all." Residents preferred fixed instalments to savings: "It is, suburbanites cheerfully explain, a matter of psychology. They don't trust themselves."¹²⁷ The instalment had moved from the margin of the economy in 1906, through the "telescoped" future of

¹²⁴ William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002; first published 1956), 281.

¹²⁵ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 285.

¹²⁶ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 313.

¹²⁷ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 323.

Middletown in 1925, to become the governing principle of the middle-class household budget.

Whyte's analysis of the physical neighborhood is the part of the book most directly relevant to this thesis. By mapping social gatherings court by court, he showed that the layout of the development shaped its friendships, which "go along and across the street rather than over the back yards."¹²⁸ He also observed that the suburb was a way station for a mobile managerial class. Its residents "expect eventually to graduate to someplace like Winnetka, the Main Line, or Westchester County."¹²⁹ For the transient, Whyte wrote, the old home was gone. One reason "transients can't go home is that they won't find it there if they do." The change was not only physical, but the physical changes were real enough: "the new sub-developments on the old golf course, the shopping-center strip just outside town, the new factory."¹³⁰

Test. The second submission classified Whyte's book at Level 2, on the ground that it was widely read and that its phrases entered the language. That classification did not meet the thesis's own definition, because no reception evidence was supplied. It is withdrawn. On the evidence assembled here, *The Organization Man* is a Level 1 case. I have found no documentation that any actor with leverage used it in planning or financing suburbs. Its importance lies in the precision with which it made the new consumer neighborhood legible.

8.4 *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)

Steinbeck's novel is a consumer text in a sense not often noticed: its central object is a used car. Before the Joads leave Oklahoma, Steinbeck devotes an interchapter to the used-car lots of the highway towns. The prose imitates the salesmen's patter and the

¹²⁸ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 345.

¹²⁹ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 289.

¹³⁰ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 272.

signs: “Used Cars, Good Used Cars. Cheap transportation, three trailers. ’27 Ford, clean. Checked cars, guaranteed cars. Free radio.” It also imitates the salesman’s contempt for their customers: “Watch the woman’s face. If the woman likes it we can screw the old man.”¹³¹ The scene places the car dealer in the line of descent from Sinclair’s real-estate agent, a merchant exploiting a buyer’s ignorance in a transaction that the buyer cannot avoid.

The novel’s economic analysis is put in the mouths of the tenants confronting the owners’ agents, and it is an analysis of credit. The banks, they are told, are creatures that “don’t breathe air, don’t eat side-meat. They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money.”¹³² The language recalls the neighbor’s warning in *The Jungle*: “They trick you and eat you alive. They never sell the houses without interest.”

The road itself is the novel’s great setting. The famous interchapter on Highway 66 describes it as “the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership.”¹³³ Another interchapter turns the reader into a mechanic, listening to a jalopy “with all your senses.”¹³⁴ At the end of the road, California’s settled residents see the migrants as consumers who have failed. “Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling,” a filling-station attendant says. “They ain’t human.”¹³⁵ The novel’s counter-image is the federal camp at Weedpatch, praised by a migrant for its “nice toilets an’ baths,” its clean water, and its Saturday-night dance.¹³⁶ Weedpatch is, in effect, a New Deal neighborhood, planned and federally run, offered as the alternative to the predatory market of the used-car lot.

¹³¹ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin, 2002; Centennial Edition; first published 1939), 61.

¹³² Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 32.

¹³³ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 118.

¹³⁴ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 119.

¹³⁵ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 221.

¹³⁶ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 254.

Test. *The Grapes of Wrath* is often credited with political effects, and it is the book in this chapter most likely to yield evidence of uptake on further research. The second submission described its political effect as “a matter of record.” That phrase asked the reader to accept what the thesis did not show, and it is withdrawn. I have not assembled paginated evidence of the novel’s reception or of its use by an actor with leverage, and so, on the definitions of Chapter 3, it is classified here at Level 1. What can be shown from the text is that it made legible a landscape created by the automobile, the bank, and the highway, and that it set the predatory used-car lot against a federally run camp.

8.5 *On the Road* (1957)

Kerouac’s novel is, among other things, a catalogue of the roadside. Its narrator sets out with a plan to follow “Route 6 that led from the tip of Cape Cod clear to Ely, Nevada, and there dipped down to Los Angeles.”¹³⁷ He eats “apple pie and ice cream in a roadside stand” and records his first sight of “my beloved Mississippi River, dry in the summer haze, low water, with its big rank smell that smells like the raw body of America itself.”¹³⁸ The book’s most famous apostrophe is addressed to the country through its consumer emblem: “Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?”¹³⁹

The road in Kerouac is in one sense the opposite of the suburb that Whyte was studying at the same moment. It offers transience without the corporation, and it consumes the country without settling in it. In another sense it is the suburb’s twin. Both depend on the automobile, cheap fuel, and the network of roadside commerce that Jackson traces. The novel presents that network as an object of desire. No actor with leverage is in view, and the book is classified at Level 1.

¹³⁷ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1976; first published 1957), 10.

¹³⁸ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 13.

¹³⁹ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 119.

8.6 *Travels with Charley* (1962)

Steinbeck's own late road book is, of all the texts in this case study, the one most directly concerned with the consumer landscape built by the 1956 act. Steinbeck drove the new turnpikes and was disturbed by what they hid. "When we get these thruways across the whole country, as we will and must," he wrote, "it will be possible to drive from New York to California without seeing a single thing."¹⁴⁰ The restaurants of the turnpike service areas served food that was "oven-fresh, spotless and tasteless; untouched by human hands."¹⁴¹ He found in the roadside a "paradise of breakfast" spoiled only by industrial eggs, and noted the occasional sign advertising "home-made sausage" or "new-laid eggs."¹⁴² In the waste dumps of the towns he saw the measure of the consumer society: "waste seems to be the index."¹⁴³

Two passages in *Travels with Charley* are particularly important for the history of the neighborhood. The first concerns the mobile home, which Steinbeck treats with curiosity rather than contempt. He describes how a mobile home "is drawn to the trailer park and installed on a ramp," with its sewer pipe, water, and electricity connected, "the television antenna raised, and the family is in residence."¹⁴⁴ A resident explains its logic as a defence against the insecurity of the job market: "If a plant or a factory closes down, you're not trapped with property you can't sell."¹⁴⁵ Families, Steinbeck learned, traded their homes in "on a new model just as you do with an automobile."¹⁴⁶ Here the house has

¹⁴⁰ John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (New York: Penguin, 1980; first published 1962), 90.

¹⁴¹ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 91.

¹⁴² Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 141.

¹⁴³ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 26.

¹⁴⁴ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 96.

¹⁴⁵ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 97.

¹⁴⁶ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 98.

completed its transformation into a consumer durable, a fate implicit in the instalment house of *The Jungle*.

The second passage concerns Seattle, which Steinbeck had known as “a little city of space and trees and gardens.” “It is no longer so,” he wrote. “The tops of hills are shaved off to make level warrens” for housing.¹⁴⁷

Travels with Charley is the road book most directly concerned with the landscape of the 1956 act, and it criticises that landscape six years after the act was passed. It is a response to an institution, not an input to one. No actor with leverage is shown to have used it, and it is classified at Level 1. It was published in 1962 and so belongs to Corpus A of the comparison in Chapter 10. Its critical stance toward the consumer landscape predates November 1963.

8.7 *In Cold Blood* (1966)

Truman Capote’s account of the murder of the Clutter family in Holcomb, Kansas, in November 1959, serialised in *The New Yorker* in 1965 and published as a book in 1966, is the last of the road books considered here. It is discussed only briefly, and without quotation, because I was unable to consult a paginated pre-2006 edition against which to verify passages. Its relevance to this case study is structural. The book’s two killers spend much of the narrative on the road, in cars bought, borrowed, and stolen, crossing a landscape of motels and filling stations. Their victims live in an isolated farming community that the national press had never noticed. No actor with leverage is in view, no reception evidence is supplied here, and the book is classified at Level 1.

¹⁴⁷ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 181.

8.8 Assessment

The literature of the suburb and the road is the clearest set of limit cases in the thesis. Every work examined in this chapter made some part of the automotive consumer landscape legible, and several did so with a precision that the policy record lacks: the Lynds' porch and car, Babbitt's subdivision, Whyte's coffeepots and budgets, Steinbeck's used-car patter and trailer park, Kerouac's roadside stand. But none can be shown, on the evidence consulted, to have reached an actor with leverage, and none has been supplied here with the reception evidence that Level 2 requires. Each is therefore classified at Level 1. The earlier submissions' claims that these books "showed" the landscape to readers who had never seen it, or that their phrases "entered the language," described influence without demonstrating it, and they have been withdrawn or rewritten. The contrast with Chapter 7 is the point. In the same decades, the texts that can be shown to have shaped the suburb were written by the actors who built it.

Chapter 9. A Small-Scale Contrast: Wartime Letters, 1917–1973

9.1 Why Letters, and Why Briefly

The second submission gave wartime letters two chapters and treated them as a third pillar of the argument. The examiners judged, correctly, that families sending parcels is not institutional change. This chapter therefore treats the letters as a contrast case. They are the one body of writing in the thesis whose readers' responses are documented on the page: the letters themselves record what was asked for, and later letters record what arrived. What they do not show is an actor with leverage using them to change a consumer institution. They therefore mark the lower boundary of the thesis's claim: writing that produced documented private responses, but no institutional ones.

The evidence is restricted to letters published in collections I could consult in paginated form, chiefly Andrew Carroll's *War Letters* and Bernard Edelman's *Dear America*. Both are edited selections assembled for commemorative purposes, and neither is a representative sample. Carroll's Legacy Project began with an appeal in the "Dear Abby" column on 11 November 1998 that, he writes, "generated our initial avalanche of mail."¹⁴⁸ Edelman's collection was assembled for a memorial commission in a single city.

9.2 The Letter and the Parcel, 1917–1953

The letters from the two world wars and Korea are saturated with the goods of the home neighborhood, and they document a private circuit of request and response. A First World War private, Lester Hensler, closed a letter to his parents with an instruction about a new federal institution, government war-risk insurance: "Put this number down

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Carroll, ed., *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 491. On the edition consulted, see the Note on Sources.

someplace and don't lose it. In case anything happens you will need it to get my insurance."¹⁴⁹ The letter records the institution; it did not create it.

The Second World War industrialised the letter. V-Mail, introduced in June 1942 under a contract with the Eastman Kodak Company, photographed letters written on a standard form onto microfilm and printed them at reduced size for delivery.¹⁵⁰ Carroll describes the trade-off: "V-mails were free and quick, but provided correspondents with only one short, preprinted page to express themselves."¹⁵¹ The form left its trace in the letters. "As I told you in the V-Mail, I have seen some action," Paul Curtis wrote in what would be his last letter home, explaining that he had switched to airmail because he had more to say.¹⁵²

The circuit of request and response is visible in the letters themselves. A trainee asks his mother to stop the flow of parcels: "Please don't send me any more underwear, socks, or candy. The Milk of Magnesia was absolutely unnecessary."¹⁵³ Another serviceman "got a box of candy and I guess you sent it & thanks a lot," and asks, "How did you like the pillow case I sent you."¹⁵⁴ A letter from Hawaii days after Pearl Harbor, held back by censorship, records the first effects of war on the shops: a "rationed but adequate supply of all for the present," and "no liquor or beer is sold."¹⁵⁵ From the Korean War, Carroll prints a soldier's reply to a "Dear John" letter: "Well, if it's any consolation to you, you did it about as well as a thing like that can be done."¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Carroll, *War Letters*, 129.

¹⁵⁰ Smithsonian National Postal Museum, "Victory Mail," online exhibition (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, accessed 2006).

¹⁵¹ Carroll, *War Letters*, 35.

¹⁵² Carroll, *War Letters*, 233.

¹⁵³ Carroll, *War Letters*, 196.

¹⁵⁴ Carroll, *War Letters*, 218.

¹⁵⁵ Carroll, *War Letters*, 184, 186. The spelling is that of the original letter as printed.

¹⁵⁶ Carroll, *War Letters*, 341.

These letters make the wartime household economy legible from the inside. They also document responses: parcels sent, received, and acknowledged. Those responses are real, but they are private, and they changed no consumer institution.

9.3 Vietnam: The Same Circuit, and a Divided Home Front

Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam was compiled by Bernard Edelman for the New York Vietnam Veterans Memorial Commission, first published in 1985, and is cited here from the 2002 Norton paperback.¹⁵⁷ In response to the Commission's call, "some 3,000 letters, tapes, poems, newspaper clippings, petitions, journal entries, and even a sound track of the 1968 Tet Offensive were submitted by 600 individuals."¹⁵⁸

William Broyles Jr., in the book's foreword, describes the economy of the parcel. When a man received cookies "or other edibles, etiquette required that it be immediately shared and given a rating. Men who received consistently low ratings were encouraged—not subtly—to instruct their correspondents to improve the quality of their mailings."¹⁵⁹ The letters bear him out. Corporal Dennis W. Lane, from Brooklyn, closed a letter: "P.S. Send some Kool-Aid. Water here taste like hell."¹⁶⁰ Carroll prints Tim Robinson's longer list: "cans of fuirt, cokies, hard candy, caned meat, anything in cans our jars, hony or some strawbarray jam, joke book, comics book, hot rod books, paper's, baked food's and 'kool-aid.'"¹⁶¹ A soldier from Brooklyn, killed in June 1968, wrote to "Dotty and Everybody" that "I received your package about a week ago," thanked "Frankie" for "sending me those comic books," and added: "I hope everybody's fine back there in

¹⁵⁷ Bernard Edelman, ed., *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002; first published 1985).

¹⁵⁸ Edelman, *Dear America*, 21.

¹⁵⁹ William Broyles Jr., foreword to Edelman, *Dear America*, 13.

¹⁶⁰ Edelman, *Dear America*, 45.

¹⁶¹ Carroll, *War Letters*, 419.

Brooklyn.”¹⁶² A Cub Scout wrote to an unknown “Soldier Friend”: “I belong to Den 2 Pack 79. ... I’m sending some gifts and I hope you like them.”¹⁶³ The request, the parcel, and the acknowledgement are all on the page.

The soldiers called the United States “the World,” and they imagined it as a place of abundance. Sergeant Michael Kelley, whose parents had described weekend trips “to the coast or the Napa Valley,” replied that “it sounds like such a storybook life—eating cheeses and drinking wines on some grassy knoll overlooking the Pacific,” and that “letters from home are like Bibles: they tell of tales so distant from this reality that they demand a faith before one can actually believe them.”¹⁶⁴ PFC Louis Willett of Richmond Hill, Queens, wrote that he had “been thinking of buying a car and just riding around the country to see what there is and forget the Army.”¹⁶⁵ Willett was killed in February 1967. His letter shows the car and the open road as a young man’s idea of freedom; the thesis makes no claim about where that idea came from.

The Vietnam letters differ from those of earlier wars in recording a divided home front, and in asking the home neighborhood to act. One soldier asked his parents: “Display the flag, Mom and Dad, please, every day. And tell your friends to do the same.”¹⁶⁶ Another, writing about the Moratorium of 15 October 1969, took the opposite view: “I hope you do protest against war or sing for peace—I would.”¹⁶⁷ The collections do not show whether these requests were met. They are evidence of what soldiers asked of their families, not of what families did.

¹⁶² Edelman, *Dear America*, 239–40.

¹⁶³ Edelman, *Dear America*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ Edelman, *Dear America*, 242.

¹⁶⁵ Edelman, *Dear America*, 75.

¹⁶⁶ Edelman, *Dear America*, 220.

¹⁶⁷ Edelman, *Dear America*, 223.

9.4 From Private Letter to Public Text

The letters did eventually reach an institution with power to act, but the institution acted on memory, not on consumer life. The New York Vietnam Veterans Memorial Commission solicited letters in order to etch excerpts onto a memorial in lower Manhattan.¹⁶⁸ That is documented use of writing by a public body, and its outcome, a memorial and a book, is documented. In 1987 HBO broadcast a documentary film based on the book, directed by Bill Couturié.¹⁶⁹ Laura Palmer's *Shrapnel in the Heart* (1987) records a parallel practice at the Washington memorial, where visitors had begun, "one by one, without anyone suggesting it," to leave "a letter, poem, or other offering."¹⁷⁰ The second submission suggested that the published letters and the film acted on public opinion. No evidence of that effect was supplied, and the claim is withdrawn.

9.5 Assessment

As a contrast to *The Jungle*, the letters are instructive. They are the most richly documented case of reader response in the thesis: requests and acknowledgements appear in the letters themselves. But the readers were families, and their responses were parcels, replies, and perhaps flags. No actor with leverage over a consumer institution can be shown to have used them. On the scale of Chapter 3 they are classified at Level 1 for consumer institutions, with documented *private* response that the scale, by design, does not count as institutional uptake. Their one documented institutional use, by a memorial commission, concerned commemoration rather than consumption. The letters thus mark the lower boundary of the thesis's claim. Writing can be read, answered, and acted upon by thousands of households without changing any consumer institution at all.

¹⁶⁸ Edelman, *Dear America*, 21.

¹⁶⁹ *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*, directed by Bill Couturié (HBO, 1987); American Film Institute, *AFI Catalog of Feature Films*, s.v. "Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam."

¹⁷⁰ Laura Palmer, *Shrapnel in the Heart: Letters and Remembrances from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York: Vintage, 1988; first published 1987), xii.

Chapter 10. Testing the 1963 Inflection

10.1 The Claim and the Objection

The first submission of this thesis argued that the decisive turn in American writing about consumer society came not at the end of the 1950s but with the assassination of President Kennedy on 22 November 1963 and the escalation of the war in Vietnam in 1964–65. The examiners raised two objections. The first is chronological. The works usually credited with the “critical turn” were published before November 1963: Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in September 1962 and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in February 1963, not to mention Galbraith, Packard, Jacobs, and Harrington. The second is methodological. The first submission asserted the inflection but did not test it.

This chapter accepts the force of both objections. It first states the chronological objection in its strongest form, then corrects two errors in the first submission’s handling of the evidence. It then reports the result of the defined comparison set out in Chapter 3.

10.2 The Objection in Its Strongest Form

The critical literature of 1957–63 was neither timid nor merely reformist. Each of four works was, in its own idiom, an attack.

- **Jacobs (1961).** The opening of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* could hardly be more direct: “This book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding.”¹⁷¹ Her indictment of the planned consumer landscape included “Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders.

Expressways that eviscerate great cities. This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is

¹⁷¹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992; first published 1961), 3.

the sacking of cities.”¹⁷² Her positive model, the street of mixed uses watched by “eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street,” was a model of the neighborhood as a retail and residential ecology.¹⁷³ She quoted a shopping-centre executive’s remark to the *New York Times* that “you could shoot a cannon down the mall of any” of them in the mornings.¹⁷⁴

- **Galbraith (1958).** *The Affluent Society* attacked the foundation of consumer economics. “One cannot defend production as satisfying wants if that production creates the wants,” Galbraith argued.¹⁷⁵ His image of public squalor amid private opulence was an image of neighborhoods. Where “public services have failed to keep abreast of private consumption,” he wrote, “in an atmosphere of private opulence and public squalor, the private goods have full sway.”¹⁷⁶
- **Harrington (1962).** *The Other America* argued that the new suburban geography had made poverty “invisible.” “This new segregation of poverty” was spatial: the businessman “may drive along the fringes of slums in a car or bus,” but the poor were out of sight.¹⁷⁷ His most quoted line is a statement about consumer goods: “America has the best-dressed poverty the world has ever known.”¹⁷⁸ Harrington also described the old neighborhoods emptied by suburbanisation, where grandparents “might own a fairly decent house, but the neighborhood community

¹⁷² Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 4.

¹⁷³ Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 35.

¹⁷⁴ Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 162.

¹⁷⁵ Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 124.

¹⁷⁶ Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 191.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997; first published 1962), 4.

¹⁷⁸ Harrington, *The Other America*, 5.

of their early years has been destroyed. Now they are strangers on a street they have known for forty or fifty” years.¹⁷⁹

- **Carson (1962).** *Silent Spring* opens with a fable of an American town: “There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings.”¹⁸⁰ Its moral is an accusation directed at the consumers themselves: “No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.”¹⁸¹ Carson also identified the local mechanism of consumer harm. The “town fathers of a thousand communities lend willing ears to the chemical salesman and the eager contractors who will rid the roadsides of ‘brush’—for a price.”¹⁸² She recorded the voice of the suburban householder too. In “the town of Hinsdale, Illinois, a housewife wrote in despair” to an ornithologist about the spraying of her village’s elms.¹⁸³

Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which addressed the suburban housewife as consumer and the advertising directed at her, belongs on this list. It is not quoted here because I could not consult a paginated pre-2006 edition.

For one critic of the period, reception before November 1963 is documented in detail. Horowitz’s analysis of the letters that readers sent to Vance Packard after *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) is Level 2 evidence of the kind the scale requires. Readers “read, used, valued, and criticized” the book in many ways.¹⁸⁴ Some readers were alarmed. “A man from a Midwestern suburb wrote to warn of ‘The Hidden Dictatorship’

¹⁷⁹ Harrington, *The Other America*, 108.

¹⁸⁰ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 40th anniversary ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002; first published 1962), 1.

¹⁸¹ Carson, *Silent Spring*, 3.

¹⁸² Carson, *Silent Spring*, 69.

¹⁸³ Carson, *Silent Spring*, 103.

¹⁸⁴ Horowitz, *Vance Packard*, 161.

that had set out to ‘condition’ him.”¹⁸⁵ One reader proposed that the book be made “required reading for every American mother.”¹⁸⁶ Others were “persuaders themselves, people involved in sales, public relations, or advertising,” and some of these found in the book a career they wished to pursue.¹⁸⁷ The reception of Packard’s consumer criticism was thus active and divided well before Dallas. Comparable paginated evidence for Galbraith, Jacobs, Harrington, and Carson has not been assembled here, and their reception is not asserted.

Finally, the state had taken up consumer protection before November 1963, and in one case it took up a text. As Chapter 6 showed, Kennedy’s consumer message of March 1962 set out four consumer rights, and at his news conference of 29 August 1962 Kennedy associated the federal agencies’ examination of pesticides with “Miss Carson’s book.” The documented uptake of consumer criticism by an actor with leverage thus also predates Dallas.

10.3 Two Corrections

Before the comparison, two errors in the first submission must be corrected.

The first concerns Halberstam’s *The Fifties*. The first submission cited it in support of an image of the 1950s as placid. That reverses the book’s argument. Halberstam’s case is that beneath the decade’s apparent calm lay the forces that would erupt in the 1960s, in civil rights, sexuality, television, the suburb, and the corporation. Read correctly, Halberstam is a witness *against* a sharp 1963 break. (As noted in Chapter 2, I have not been able to verify page references in a paginated edition and therefore do not quote him.)

¹⁸⁵ Horowitz, *Vance Packard*, 163.

¹⁸⁶ Horowitz, *Vance Packard*, 165.

¹⁸⁷ Horowitz, *Vance Packard*, 162.

The second concerns *Silent Spring* and environmental law. The first submission asserted a direct causal line from Carson's book to the Clean Air Act. I have found no documentary evidence for that line in the sources consulted, and the claim is withdrawn. What is documented is narrower and earlier: Kennedy's reference to Carson's book in August 1962, which is Level 3 uptake concerning pesticides, not air pollution (Chapter 6).

10.4 The Comparison

Chapter 3 defined two corpora and four criteria. Packard is the only Corpus A author for whom Level 2 reception evidence (readers' letters) is supplied here; Carson is the only one with documented uptake by an actor with leverage. The results are summarised here text by text, with the coding stated in prose.

Corpus A (1957 to November 1963).

- *Packard, as reported by Horowitz*. Addressee: the general public. Diagnosis: manipulation by advertisers, an institutional bad faith, though softened, as Horowitz notes, by "a tension between its critical framework and the often humorous stuff of its case studies."¹⁸⁸ Remedy: awareness. Channel: print.
- *Galbraith*. Addressee: the educated public and fellow economists. Diagnosis: side effects of affluence (the dependence effect, social imbalance). Remedy: public investment and balance. Channel: print.
- *Jacobs*. Addressee: the public and planners, with the planning profession as adversary. Diagnosis: institutional error by planners and financiers. Remedy: different planning principles and local resistance. Channel: print.
- *Harrington*. Addressee: the public. (Uptake by the administration is often asserted but is not documented in the sources consulted here.) Diagnosis: invisibility, a side effect of suburban geography. Remedy: federal action. Channel: print.

¹⁸⁸ Horowitz, *Vance Packard*, 108.

- *Carson*. Addressee: the public, with the chemical industry and parts of government as adversaries. Diagnosis: institutional recklessness and the consumer's own complicity ("The people had done it themselves"). Remedy: regulation and alternative methods. Channel: print. Uptake: documented at Level 3 in Kennedy's news conference of August 1962.
- *Steinbeck, Travels with Charley*. Addressee: the general reader. Diagnosis: homogenisation and waste as side effects of affluence. Remedy: none proposed. Channel: print.
- *Kennedy's consumer message*. Addressee: Congress. Diagnosis: an imbalance of organised interests. Remedy: regulation and representation. Channel: print. (See Chapter 6.)

Corpus B (December 1963 to 1970).

- *Johnson's Wholesome Meat remarks (1967)*. Addressee: the household, explicitly the mother shopping for children, reached through the press and television. Diagnosis: institutional failure of the meat industry and of state inspection. Remedy: federal regulation. Channel: broadcast and print.
- *The Kerner Report (1968)*. Addressee: the nation, and the government. Diagnosis: institutional exploitation. "Significant grievances concerning unfair commercial practices affecting Negro consumers were found in 11 of the 20 cities studied by the Commission," and the report found that ghetto merchants "charge higher prices than those in other parts of the" city.¹⁸⁹ The Commission's list of grievances included "Inferior quality goods (especially meats and produce)" and "Overpricing (especially on days welfare checks issued)."¹⁹⁰ It recorded the

¹⁸⁹ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968), 139–40.

¹⁹⁰ *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 83.

perception among black residents “that they are exploited by white society,” while noting that “it is difficult to assess the precise degree and extent of exploitation.”¹⁹¹ Remedy: regulation, legal aid, and consumer education. Channel: print, with mass broadcast coverage.

- *Soldiers’ letters, 1966–70* (Dear America). Addressee: family and neighborhood, and through them, at times, the demonstrators or the government. Diagnosis: the gulf between “the World” and the war, with institutional bad faith increasingly alleged (“this useless war”). Remedy: divided between support (“Display the flag”) and protest (“I hope you do protest against war”). Channel: private print, made public only after 1985.

Results by criterion.

1. *Addressee*. There is a visible shift. The Corpus A texts address the reading public, experts, or Congress. Two of the three Corpus B texts address the *household* directly: Johnson’s mother at the meat counter and the soldiers’ families. The Kerner Report addresses the nation, but on behalf of a specific consumer population defined by neighborhood. This difference is real, but its significance is limited by genre. Kennedy’s message to Congress and Johnson’s signing remarks are different kinds of text.
2. *Diagnosis*. There is no clean shift. Corpus A already contains institutional diagnoses (Jacobs, Carson, Packard, and Kennedy’s message itself). Corpus B intensifies them. The Kerner Report’s language of exploitation by “white society” has no equivalent in Corpus A, but Harrington’s “invisible” poor is its predecessor.

¹⁹¹ *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 139.

3. *Remedy*. There is a modest shift. Regulation is proposed in both corpora (Kennedy, Carson; Johnson, Kerner). Protest and withdrawal appear as remedies only in Corpus B, in the letters.
4. *Channel*. There is a clear shift. The Corpus A texts reached their public mainly through print. The Corpus B texts reached theirs increasingly through television. The four days of November 1963, discussed in Chapter 11, are the moment at which television news established its claim to be the national channel.

10.5 Interpretation

On the test set in Chapter 3, which required a difference on at least two of the four criteria not explicable by genre, the 1963 hypothesis is only partly supported. The clearest differences are in *channel* and *addressee*. The content of the critique, its diagnosis and its remedies, shows continuity rather than rupture. The critical turn in the *content* of American consumer writing came, as the examiners argued, in 1957–63. What appears to change after November 1963 is the channel through which consumer and political criticism reached the household, and the household's place as the direct addressee of public argument.

Hodgson's periodisation fits this result better than the first submission's. Hodgson places the end of consensus in 1963–65, but he insists that the assassination was not itself the crisis. Commentators who treated it as a symptom of national sickness were, in his view, "wrong in supposing that the assassination was a result of the crisis; for the crisis was not moral, but political."¹⁹² Hodgson also notes the strength of Kennedy's posthumous reputation: in November 1960, "one out of every two voters had chosen Kennedy; three years later, two out of every three believed that they had!"¹⁹³ The

¹⁹² Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, 169.

¹⁹³ Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, 5.

assassination, on this reading, changed the national mood and the political conditions in which existing critiques were heard more than it changed the critiques themselves. Escalation in Vietnam then added a new and urgent subject of dissent, carried by soldiers' letters as well as by television.

The comparison can also be read through the leverage test. Corpus A contains one documented uptake of a text by an actor with leverage (Kennedy on Carson, 1962). Corpus B contains one (Johnson on Sinclair, 1967), and it is a retrospective tribute to a book from 1906. Neither corpus shows the full chain of Chapter 5. On this measure, too, November 1963 marks no break.

The revised claim is therefore narrower than the first submission's. The late 1950s and early 1960s produced the critique of the consumer neighborhood. The period from November 1963 to the late 1960s changed its channel, from the book to the broadcast, and its addressee, from the reader to the household. That conclusion is offered as tentative. It rests on small corpora, and a larger study might reverse it.

Chapter 11. A Closing Reflection: Continuous News and the Conditions of Uptake, 1963–1992

This chapter is a reflection, not a case study. It asks no question of influence and classifies no text. Its purpose is to note how the channel through which writing reached actors with leverage changed between Sinclair’s time and the end date of this thesis.

In 1906 the channel was print, and it was slow. Sinclair’s evidence reached the public through a magazine serial and a book, and reached the President through the mail and through a visit. When Roosevelt seemed inclined to hold back his investigators’ findings, Sinclair “went to New York with his affidavits and observations and dictated through the night to stenographers at the *New York Times*.”¹⁹⁴ Sinclair later described the press of his day as a “concrete wall” that opened and closed according to interests he could not control.¹⁹⁵

The first sign of a different channel came in November 1963. The network evening news had been extended from fifteen minutes to a half-hour only that autumn.¹⁹⁶ When the President was shot, “networks canceled commercials and substituted special coverage for scheduled programming.”¹⁹⁷ For four days the principal medium of American consumer advertising carried continuous news without advertising. One contemporary assessment quoted by Zelizer held that television had drawn “the largest audience in its history.”¹⁹⁸ Commercial programming then resumed, and the nightly half-hour remained the norm for sixteen years. A 1982 report in *New York* still described the

¹⁹⁴ Young, *Pure Food*, 240.

¹⁹⁵ Sinclair, *The Brass Check*, 75.

¹⁹⁶ Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 27.

¹⁹⁷ Zelizer, *Covering the Body*, 61.

¹⁹⁸ Zelizer, *Covering the Body*, 79.

assumption: “Watching the news on television has traditionally been an early-evening habit.”¹⁹⁹

That habit was broken by cable. Ted Turner’s Cable News Network “made its official debut on June 1, 1980.”²⁰⁰ With news “twenty-four hours a day, viewers would no longer have to wait until 6:30 or 7:00 P.M. to learn what occurred in the nation or world.”²⁰¹ Turner’s own version, quoted in *New York*, was framed as a consumer’s convenience: “This means that you can watch the news when you want it, not when NBC decides it’s convenient to give it to you.”²⁰² A challenge followed. Westinghouse and ABC announced “that they would start a satellite news channel to provide a twenty-four-hour cable headline news service,” and Turner “countered by promising that CNN would launch its own headline news channel three months earlier.”²⁰³ The Westinghouse–ABC Satellite News Channel went on the air in June 1982, “beaming its news to some 2.6 million subscribers,” with “a revolving eighteen-minute ‘wheel’ of constantly updated news headlines.”²⁰⁴ In 1983 “the presumed juggernaut surrendered, selling the infrastructure it had built and its smaller pool of seven million subscribers to Turner.”²⁰⁵ A former president of CBS News summed up the networks’ response in consumer terms: “someone who wants the information equivalent of milk and cookies in the middle of the night will now be able to get it.”²⁰⁶

In January 1991, when allied bombing of Baghdad began, CNN’s correspondents reported live from the city. Robert Wiener, CNN’s executive producer there, records that

¹⁹⁹ Desmond Smith, “Snooze News: The TV Networks Go on the Late Shift,” *New York*, June 28, 1982, 38.

²⁰⁰ Ken Auletta, *Media Man: Ted Turner’s Improbable Empire* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 40–41.

²⁰¹ Auletta, *Media Man*, 40.

²⁰² Smith, “Snooze News,” 40.

²⁰³ Auletta, *Media Man*, 45.

²⁰⁴ Smith, “Snooze News,” 40.

²⁰⁵ Auletta, *Media Man*, 45.

²⁰⁶ Smith, “Snooze News,” 39.

“across the nation,” affiliates “dropped their network’s coverage to rely on CNN.”²⁰⁷ By the 1992 campaign, Turner had been named *Time*’s Man of the Year for 1991, and continuous cable news was an established part of national political life.²⁰⁸

What does this mean for the argument of the thesis? Only something limited, and it is offered as a reflection rather than a finding. In 1906 a novel’s evidence reached an actor with leverage slowly, through print and correspondence, and the actor commissioned further evidence before acting. By 1992 an actor could see events, including a war, as they happened, and could be seen responding to them. Auletta records one consequence for legislators: with “twenty-four hours of news to fill, a congressman had a much better chance of being seen there and of being allowed to finish a sentence.”²⁰⁹ That is Auletta’s judgement, and the thesis does not test it. It may be that continuous news made it easier for an actor with leverage to act on evidence without a book in between. It may equally be that it made the book’s slower, documented evidence harder to hear. The sources examined here do not decide the question. What can be said is that the channel through which Sinclair’s evidence reached Roosevelt no longer existed in the same form by the end of the period.

²⁰⁷ Robert Wiener, *Live from Baghdad: Making Journalism History Behind the Lines* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2002; first published 1992), 263.

²⁰⁸ Auletta, *Media Man*, 13.

²⁰⁹ Auletta, *Media Man*, 45.

Chapter 12. Conclusion

12.1 The Claim

This thesis began, in its first submission, with the proposition that twentieth-century American writing shaped the North American consumer neighborhood. It ends with a narrower claim, limited to the United States. Writing about consumer life had its clearest documented institutional effect when an actor with leverage, someone with the power to change a consumer institution, can be shown to have read, cited, or used it in a dated act. Where that use cannot be shown, the evidence supports a claim that writing made a consumer world legible, not that it changed that world's institutions.

12.2 The Demonstration and the Tests

The Jungle demonstrates the claim. A President read the novel with suspicion and sent investigators. Their report reached Congress with the word “revolting” attached and a call for immediate action. Two statutes followed on 30 June 1906. Sixty-one years later, another President read from the novel at the signing of a successor law. Every link in the chain is documented by someone other than the author. The case also shows that uptake does not mean the author's victory. The actors decided what the law would be, and the working conditions that were Sinclair's real subject were scarcely touched.

The tests show how rarely that chain recurs. In the 1960s, actors with leverage acted on consumer safety repeatedly, but they usually grounded their action in hearings, inspectors' reports, and their own programmes. Kennedy's reference to Carson's book is documented uptake. Johnson's tribute to Sinclair is documented uptake of a book sixty years old. Johnson's papers on the 1966 traffic-safety laws do not mention the book with which those laws are commonly associated. In the New Deal and the postwar suburb, the texts that demonstrably shaped neighborhoods were written by the actors themselves. The

novels and sociology of the suburb and the road made that landscape legible, but no actor can be shown to have used them. Wartime letters drew documented responses from families, but changed no consumer institution.

12.3 Classification of Cases

Table 12.1 classifies every case in the thesis by the four-level scale of Chapter 3. Level 1 is legibility, Level 2 documented reception, Level 3 documented uptake by an actor with leverage, and Level 4 an institutional outcome traceable through that uptake. “Actor-authored” marks texts written by the actor itself, for which uptake is not the question.

Table 12.1. Classification of cases by level of evidence.

Case	Actor with leverage	Evidence supplied	Level
<i>The Jungle</i> and the 1906 Acts	T. Roosevelt; Congress	Investigators sent (Young 235); message of 4 June 1906 (3113–14); statutes of 30 June 1906; market response (Young 231)	4
<i>The Jungle</i> and the 1967 Act	L. B. Johnson	Reading from the novel at signing (<i>Public Papers</i> 1967, 1143–45)	3 (retrospective tribute)
<i>Silent Spring</i> (1962)	Kennedy; federal agencies	News conference, 29 Aug. 1962 (<i>Public Papers</i> 1962, 655); outcome not traced	3
Kennedy consumer message and drug law (1962)	Kennedy; Congress	No book cited; drug law credited to Kefauver hearings (235–43, 751)	Actor-authored
<i>Unsafe at Any Speed</i> and the 1966 safety Acts	L. B. Johnson; Congress	No reference found in <i>Public Papers</i> 1966; hearings not consulted	1 (open test)
Fireside chats (1933–38)	F. D. Roosevelt	Actor’s own claim of mail; radio’s political effect (Cohen 332)	Actor-authored
HOLC ratings and FHA standards	HOLC; FHA	Rules applied to built form (Jackson 190–208)	Actor-authored; outcome documented
GI Bill, Levittown, 1956 highway act	Congress; VA	Statutes; no literary text used (Jackson, Rose)	Actor-authored
American Guide Series (1935–43)	WPA (commissioning body)	De Voto’s review, via Mangione 360; no institutional use found	2
<i>Middletown, Babbitt, Oil!</i>	None found	Text only	1
<i>The Organization Man</i> (1956)	None found	Text only; earlier Level 2 claim withdrawn	1
<i>The Grapes of Wrath, On the Road, Travels with Charley, In Cold Blood</i>	None found	Text only	1
<i>The Hidden Persuaders</i> (1957)	None found	Readers’ letters (Horowitz 161–65)	2
Galbraith, Jacobs, Harrington	None documented here	Text only	1
Kerner Report (1968)	National Advisory	Commission’s own findings; uptake	Actor-authored

Case	Actor with leverage	Evidence supplied	Level
	Commission	not tested	
Wartime letters, 1917–1973	Families (no leverage); NY memorial commission (commemoration)	Parcels requested and acknowledged in the letters; memorial use (Edelman 21)	1 (private response only)

Two features of the table deserve comment. First, only one case reaches Level 4, and only two others reach Level 3. Second, most of the texts that were the subject of the first submission, and that literary history most often credits with influence, sit at Level 1. That is not a judgement of their quality or importance. It records that the evidence required to place them higher has not been supplied in this thesis.

12.4 The Periodisation Revisited

The defined comparison of Chapter 10 qualifies the first submission’s claim about 1963. The critique of the consumer neighborhood was formed before November 1963, and the one documented presidential uptake of a postwar consumer critique, Kennedy’s reference to Carson, also predates it. What changed after November 1963 was the channel through which consumer and political argument reached the public, and the identity of its addressee. Chapter 11 suggested that this change of channel also altered the conditions under which writing could reach an actor with leverage, but it did not test that suggestion.

12.5 Limits and Further Research

The study is limited to the United States, and its corpus is small. Several works could not be checked against paginated editions and are discussed only in general terms. The letters studied are edited selections. The most important gaps are evidential rather than topical. The 1966 test is open because the Senate hearings were not consulted. *The Grapes of Wrath*, Harrington’s *The Other America*, and Whyte’s *The Organization Man* are classified at Level 1 because their reception and any use by actors have not been documented here, not because such evidence is known not to exist. Each gap suggests further research: the congressional hearings of 1962–66 read for citations of books;

presidential and agency files for evidence of officials' reading; and reception studies, on Horowitz's model, of the critics of Corpus A. A comparative study of Canadian writing and Canadian actors with leverage would be a separate thesis.

12.6 A Final Observation

In December 1967 Lyndon Johnson read aloud from *The Jungle* and told its author that a new law crowned his crusade. In the same weeks, young men from Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx were writing home from Vietnam to ask for Kool-Aid and comic books. Both kinds of writing were addressed to the American household, and both concerned what that household bought and ate. The first had reached an actor with the power to change a law, and the documents show that it did. The second reached families, who answered with parcels. The distance between them is the subject of this thesis.

Author's Postscript: A Beer Run from Inwood (Outside the 2006 Frame of This Thesis)

This note was added after the thesis's 2006 vantage point. It draws on sources published in 2017, 2020, and 2022, lies outside the research frame and source restrictions of the thesis proper, and is offered only as an illustration of the contrast drawn in Chapter 9. Its sources have not been subjected to the page-level verification applied in the body of the thesis.

Chapter 9 treated wartime correspondence as a contrast case: writing that drew documented private responses from families and neighbors, but changed no consumer institution. A story that reached print only long after this thesis was written makes the same point with unusual literalness.

In November 1967, at Doc Fiddler's, a bar on Sherman Avenue in the Irish-American neighborhood of Inwood at the northern tip of Manhattan, the bartender George Lynch, known locally as "the Colonel," proposed that someone should carry beer to the neighborhood's young men serving in Vietnam. He was angered by antiwar demonstrations that he regarded as directed at the troops. John "Chick" (or "Chickie") Donohue, then twenty-six, a former Marine working as a merchant seaman, took up the challenge. He shipped out on a cargo vessel, landed at Qui Nhon, and over the following weeks sought out Inwood friends in the field to deliver beer and messages from home. He was in Saigon when the Tet Offensive began at the end of January 1968. By his own later account, he went to Vietnam believing the war was being won and came home wanting all the Americans there to come home too.

For decades Donohue told the story in New York bars, often to disbelief. He first set it down in a self-published book in 2017, written with the journalist J. T. (Joanna)

Molloy. *The New York Times* reported on him and that book on 29 May 2017.²¹⁰ A revised edition was published commercially by William Morrow in November 2020.²¹¹ The story was adapted in 2022 as the feature film *The Greatest Beer Run Ever*, directed by Peter Farrelly, with Zac Efron as Donohue.²¹²

The episode is, in effect, a letter from home delivered in person. A neighborhood institution, the corner bar, used a consumer good, beer, as a token of loyalty and sent it across the Pacific to young men whose names it knew, much as the Cub Scouts of Den 2 Pack 79 sent their “gifts” to a “Soldier Friend.” Like the letters of Chapter 9, it is a private response, not an institutional one. The two halves of the story also mirror the division recorded in those letters. The beer run began as a gesture against the demonstrators. By Donohue’s own account it ended in doubt about the war. Within weeks of his departure from Inwood, President Johnson signed the Wholesome Meat Act at the White House in the presence of Upton Sinclair (Chapter 1). The coincidence of the two stories, which the 2006 frame of this thesis could not have known, is offered here only as a final illustration of how closely the neighborhood, the market, and the war were bound together in the American 1960s.

²¹⁰ “A Daring Beer Run to Soldiers in Vietnam, Recounted Yet Again,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2017.

²¹¹ John “Chick” Donohue and J. T. Molloy, *The Greatest Beer Run Ever: A Memoir of Friendship, Loyalty, and War* (New York: William Morrow, 2020).

²¹² *The Greatest Beer Run Ever*, directed by Peter Farrelly (Apple Original Films, 2022).

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