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Constructing the Florida Highwaymen

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

CONSTRUCTING THE FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN

By

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ABSTRACT

In two empirical studies, this dissertation explores processes of constructing the Florida Highwaymen, a group of “rediscovered” Black artists, who painted from the end of the Jim Crow era to the present. The first study (Chapter 2) explores how cultural capitalists (e.g. promoters, collectors) market this loose association of artists. Examining cultural capitalists’ writings, statements from interviews, and their interactions with audiences at public events, I show how they represented the artists as both exotic self-taught artists and achievers of the American Dream. I introduce the term “racialized authentication” to describe the process through which cultural capitalists use both traditional and new racism to construct authentic artists. In conclusion, I address how these findings have implications for contemporary research on race, as well as sociological studies of art worlds. Taking an identity work approach in the second study (Chapter 3), I explore the negotiation of the imposed identity of “Highwaymen” and associated identity codes of “self-taught artists” by a group of Black self-taught artists. Drawing on interviews and participant observation, I examine how artists selectively integrated accounts of their own life experiences with promoters’ representations to construct a standardized story of being an “artist-entrepreneur.” I find the artists created accounts that both signified their artistic genius as self-taught artists and their entrepreneurial spirit, constructing stories that resonated with the art world and broader audiences. Overall, my research shows how people can selectively draw on identity codes to construct positive moral identities in the face of potentially derogatory imposed ones.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Florida Highwaymen, a group of Black self-taught artists, started painting at the end of the Jim Crow era through the 1970s. They painted brightly colored landscapes and sold them door-to-door and along the highways of Florida for around \$25 a painting. Often, they would sell them while the paint remained wet, selling them as quickly as possible. In 1994, an arts acquisition agent re-discovered their works and labeled the loose association of artists the “Highwaymen,” fostering a resurgence of interest in the group.

As my dissertation reveals, the resurgence of interest in the Highwaymen resulted from cultural capitalists’ (e.g. collectors, promoters, etc) constructing representations that situated the Highwaymen in a market and created increased value for their works. The capitalists authenticated the Highwaymen as “real” self-taught artists, both as exotic others and American Dream achievers. In a complex fashion, this authentication process involved cultural capitalists constructing storylines of the Highwaymen that appealed to multiple audiences and, at the same time, the artists’ cooperation in upholding these representations to maintain their legitimacy. This research contributes to the sociology of culture through accounting for multiple perspectives of this process.

Through interviews with cultural capitalists and artists, a content analysis of documents on the Highwaymen, and participant observation, I explore how cultural capitalists constructed representations of the Highwaymen and how the artists negotiated these imposed identities. Taking a critical approach to the sociology of culture, I introduce the term “racialized authentication” to describe the process through which cultural capitalists draw on and thus reproduce forms of racism in order to define the artists and their as authentic. As shown, racialized authentication involves both traditional racism, or more overt racism and racial stereotypes, and new racism, or a more covert and indirect perpetuation of racial inequality (Sniderman et al 1991: 423). In the case of the Florida Highwaymen, cultural capitalists constructed the artists as exotic and primitive, along with “real” American heroes overcoming obstacles to achieve remarkable success.

In negotiating the label of “Highwaymen” and identity codes of “self-taught artist,” the artists selectively integrated accounts of their own life experiences with promoters’

representations to construct identities as “artist-entrepreneurs.” When telling stories about how they started to paint, their identity work positioned them as authentically self-taught artists. As with cultural capitalists’ storylines, the artists then shifted their storylines to signify their entrepreneurial spirit. These stories did not correspond with the more derogatory self-taught codes, such as being naïve or primitive artists. Instead, when telling stories about how they made a living selling art during the Jim Crow era, their identity work signified that they were savvy business people seeking money and status. In this process, I show how artists incorporated the “self-taught” and “Highwaymen” labels into their identity construction selectively, maintaining coherent selves and positive self-images.

This dissertation consists of two stand-alone articles. Chapter 2 consists of an article about how cultural capitalists constructed the Highwaymen. In this article, I first review relevant literature in the sociology of culture on authentication before reviewing studies of authenticity in art worlds. I then review current research and theory on forms of racism. I subsequently describe methods of data collection, including interviews with capitalists, a content analysis of documents surrounding the story of the Highwaymen, and participant observation. My analysis on the process through which capitalists’ construct the Highwaymen’s authenticity consists of an exploration of first, traditional forms of racialized authentication and second, new forms of racialized authentication. I conclude by discussing how my conceptualization of “racialized authenticity” contributes to the sociology of culture.

Chapter 3 consists of an article that examines how the artists themselves construct identities. I begin by reviewing relevant literature on an identity work and how artists construct authentic identities. I then describe how I interviewed the artists and gathered public accounts at art festivals and events. I then present my findings, which focus on how the Highwaymen signified artistic genius and entrepreneurial spirit. I conclude by discussing how using an identity work approach contributes to sociological knowledge about art worlds.

In Chapter 4 of this dissertation entails my concluding thoughts. First, I review the findings and contributions of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 regarding racialized authentication and forms of identity work. Next, I compare and contrast the processes through which capitalists and artists constructed representations of the Highwaymen’s significance. In this, I show how the capitalists’ authentication and the artists’ identity work together construct dual representations of

the Highwaymen as successful artists and entrepreneurs. Last, I review ways in which these findings can be more broadly applied to cultural producers and beyond.

CHAPTER TWO

RACIALIZED AUTHENTICATION: CONSTRUCTING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN

Starting at the end of the Jim Crow South, a loose association of Black self-taught artists began selling affordable, quickly painted landscapes door-to-door and along the highways of Florida. Creating a distinctive style, these artists created brightly colored landscapes with wind-swept palms on beaches. Particularly with the boom of Florida real estate and tourism starting in the mid-1950s, the artists had a ready audience of homeowners, tourists looking for mementos, and local businesses. However, many of these artists stopped painting or took up additional jobs with changing tourist patterns in the 1970s, their works to be temporarily forgotten. A resurgence of interest began in 1995, when an arts acquisition agent “re-discovered” their works and labeled the artists the “Highwaymen.” Stories of the group alternated between emphasizing their natural instincts and talent with touting their successful achievement of the American Dream through hard work. One of the first books on the group, released in 2001, defined an official list of 26 Black artists, all of which are men but for one woman. As of today, many of the artists once again make their living selling their works at these arts and crafts festivals.

From a sociological perspective, the resurgence of interest in the Highwaymen resulted from cultural capitalists’ (e.g. collectors, promoters, etc) crafting representations of the Highwaymen as authentic artists. Sociologists of culture broadly define authentication as the process of defining products and experiences as real, genuine, and not contrived or mass-produced (Cohen 1988; Grazian 2003; Peterson 2005). Previous research (e.g. Fine 2004; Lachmann 1988) on self-taught art has shown that cultural capitalists’ authentication emphasizes the artists’ authenticity, including the artists’ disconnect from the larger society or fine art world traditions and constructions of their exotic otherness, such as portrayals of the noble savage or their primitive nature. While such research alludes to race in this authentication process, it has yet to critically examine how cultural capitalists draw on and perpetuate various forms of racism.

In this study, I explore how cultural capitalists’ construction of the Highwaymen as authentic artists resonates with traditional and contemporary racial discourses. Taking a critical approach to the sociology of culture, I introduce the term “racialized authentication” to describe

the process through which cultural capitalists draw on and thus reproduce forms of racism in order to define individuals, and their respective products, as authentic. As I will show, racialized authentication involves both traditional racism, or more overt racism and racial stereotypes, and new racism, or a more covert and indirect perpetuation of racial inequality (Sniderman et al 1991: 423). In the case of the Florida Highwaymen, cultural capitalists constructed the artists as exotic and primitive, along with “real” American heroes overcoming obstacles to achieve remarkable success. In conclusion, I will discuss how the process of racialized authentication contributes to the sociology of culture and argue that it is not only applicable to the Highwaymen phenomenon, but also to other cultural milieus including other art worlds, the music industry, and tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand how definitions of authenticity continue to change over time, but at the same time remain raced and classed, I first review primary concepts related to the art world and definitions of authenticity. I then discuss three primary areas in which this previous research falls short in relation to critically addressing race and class. Based on this, I then review works on forms of traditional and new racism, describing how I will draw from these to present connections between representations in the art world, popular culture, and forms of embedded stereotypes that are upheld in the process of authentication. I draw attention to how capitalists integrate race and class in the construction of these forms, ending with a discussion of how we can better understand the complexity of authentication through a study integrating these fields of research.

Authenticity over Time

A long line of research exists within studies of culture on “authenticity,” based on research into how creators and consumers define products and experiences as “real.” Important to note in the tradition of authenticity research is first, the consistent finding that the greater the defined authenticity of a product, the greater the cultural and monetary value placed on the product (Beverland 2005; Erickson 1995; Errington 1998; Halewood and Hannam 2001; Revilla and Dodd 2003). Influential works ranging from Theodor Adorno’s (1975) work on culture industries, to Dean MacCannell’s *The Tourist* on “staged authenticity” (1976: 91), to Richard Peterson’s (1999) more recent work on fabricating authenticity in country music all suggest that with authenticity, comes value. However, a significant transition has occurred over time from

Adorno's and MacCannell's arguments, both of whom suggest an objective definition of authenticity through which one can compare their products or experiences as objectively "more" or "less" authentic. Contrastingly, many current researchers adopt a constructionist perspective, including Peterson, and emphasize authenticity as socially defined. As opposed to an objective scale, authenticity is instead based on context, perception, and a dual give-and-take between capitalists, artists, and audiences (e.g. Bruner 1994; Halewood and Hannam 2001). Based on these continuing definitional shifts, ongoing research on authenticity is critical to understand how the construction of value changes over time, reflecting broader changes in the cultural hierarchy.

Art Worlds and Authentication

Within this authentication research, sociologists of art have also established more specific trends of authenticating marginal artists. First, I will review definitions of art worlds and conventional definitions of marginal and self-taught artists before then exploring three major trends in the authentication process. In Howard Becker's seminal piece, *Art Worlds*, he defines art worlds broadly as all that is involved in the production of works, which people in that context and potentially others as well define as art (1982: 227). An art world contains not only people creating works, but also particular knowledge, norms, and conventions. While we can divide an over-arching "art world" into the fine art world, marginal art world, jazz art world, and beyond, conventions and those with status within the fine art world hold the most power in defining what we consider as "art" (Becker 1982; Thornton 2008). As opposed to specific aesthetic qualities defining products as art works, it is the opinions of powerful persons within the fine art world that define the boundaries of what is "acceptable" art and assimilate artists who create this work, while excluding others (Becker 1982: 227; Peterson and Kern 1996; Wolff 1993; Zolberg 1990).

Cultural capitalists define works created outside the fine art realm, most often by non-professional artists who belong to a marginal ethnic or subcultural group, as marginal art (Becker 1982; Kuspit 1991; Peterson 2003; Zolberg 1990). As put forth by Paul DiMaggio (1982), cultural capitalists include individuals who are "capitalists," based on their ventures with cultural enterprises and their cultural capital, or knowledge of socially valued styles that "confer prestige upon those who have mastered them" (DiMaggio 1982: 377). Exemplifying the racial and class divisions present in the art world, the first prevalent form of authentication consists of cultural capitalists constructing and promoting marginal artists' overall disconnect from society and/or

fine art world traditions. While traits range widely and definitions of “marginal artists” remain fluid, most hold the label of self-taught. The lack of formal artistic training that defines self-taught artists also comprises their appeal to cultural capitalists. They view the artists as free of training that can restrict “pure creativity” and prevent the creation of truly novel work (Kuspit 1991: 132-135).

Because capitalists place value in this disconnect from the art world, they often praise work created by the artist before any recognition by art world insiders, bemoaning increased knowledge that may affect the naïve artistic style of pre-recognition years (Fine 2004: 20-22). Generally, this authentication process consists of constructing the artists’ as “others,” emphasizing differences between the marginal artists and the consumers or cultural capitalists, especially as the majority of self-taught collectors are mid- to upper-class Whites and the artists are lower-class Blacks or Hispanics (Fine 2004: 13, 110-113). While constructing value for their work, these descriptions often uphold marginality, creating associations between impoverished and minority creators with marginal art.

Second, cultural capitalists authenticate marginal artists outside a formal art market by appealing to Americans’ “romantic infatuation with the poor” (Fine 2004: 31). For instance, New York gallery owners constructed graffiti artists’ work as authentic by contrasting their allegedly impoverished and criminal backgrounds with their ability to “paint just like real, trained artists” (Lachmann 1988: 246). Although some of the artists grew up in stable, middle-class families, gallery owners still romanticized their backgrounds, boasting that, “these graffiti paintings by poor, ignorant blacks and Puerto Ricans hang in the same museums, are sold in the same galleries, as Picasso” (Lachmann 1988: 246). In this case, capitalists construct authenticity by differentiating between the artists’ alleged life on the streets, the gallery visitors’ life experiences, and the typical fine artist’s education levels. Capitalists emphasized their lack of “real” training and romanticized the artists’ supposed hardened lives, focusing on their race, class and unusual rise to artistic greatness in this authentication process.

In a third form of authentication, capitalists not only romanticize poverty, but also appeal to an intrigue with “the exotic within one’s own cultures” (Bendix 1997: 34). The exotic other is a romanticized vision that a group of people lives in a more pure or simplistic fashion than members of one’s own culture (Lu and Fine 1995: 536; Shiner 1994: 233). For instance, Julia Ardery (1998) describes this sense of discovery of the exotic within poverty in relation to the

work of woodcarver Edgar Tolson. She quotes Julie Hall, a collector of Tolson's work, as Hall describes how her first visit to Tolson's home was "like going to a foreign country and it was very exotic" (1998: 264). Cultural capitalists base the art work's genuineness in the artists' suffering and spirituality, defining the product as a manifestation of the artists' struggle with their impoverished origins or personal vices, like alcoholism (Arderly 1998: 266; Fine 2004: 114). The spiritual messages present or embodied in the art reflect a purer passion, at times an almost animistic exoticism, which capitalists accentuate to authenticate the self-taught art.

Research on fine art does address certain issues regarding reproductions of cultural hierarchies and boundaries between art worlds, although three main areas regarding inequalities remain under-developed. One cause of this gap lies in a continued research focus on how meaning and value are constructed for the products, with the representations' effects on artists and inequalities remaining a secondary concern. The first issue found is that while sociologists of culture acknowledge a continued color line in the arts, such as differences in arts participation and networks across races (e.g. DiMaggio and Ostrower 1990; Fine 2004; Grams 2010; Grazian 2003), we lack a thorough critical analysis of how race, and particularly forms of racism, is intertwined with the process of authentication.

Traditional Racism

In order to address these gaps, I draw from research on traditional and new racism as found in popular media representations. Generally, "traditional" racism consists of overt practices of prejudice and discrimination based on race. In critical research on race, one can find connections between these art world classifications of exotic otherness hold connections with long-standing forms of otherizing, based in colonization and the construction of the colonized as a primitive, at times animalistic, and spiritual "other" (Shiner 1994; Silver 1993). Extending into popular culture, the modern use of these embedded racialized stereotypes includes a revamping of the mammy or the Uncle Tom, who are subservient and worshipping their superiors (Glenn and Cunningham 2007: 5-6).

One instance of these stereotypical characters' reinvention in mainstream media is the "Magical Negro" character (Collins 1990: 5; Glenn and Cunningham 2007; Hughey 2009). The Magical Negro helps White characters to embrace spirituality over materialism that corrupted their lives (Hughey 2009), further entrenching traditional raced stereotypes of minorities as harmonious with nature, generous, disdainful of materialism, and full of folk wisdom. These

descriptions also have racial undertones related to the noble savage, in which cultural capitalists posture minorities as child-like, simpler, or more grounded due to innate attributes (Fine 2004; Kuspit 1991). Integrating this critical perspective with previous findings on the construction of exotic otherness in the art world suggests these persistent representations are likely to remain prevalent in the construction of authenticity.

New Racism

Race relations scholars have increasingly turned their attention to “new racism,” a form of racism that can be considered particularly powerful because it is relatively covert and does not appear to be racism at all (Sniderman 1991: 523). Patricia Hill Collins (1990: 54-55) describes new racism as “hegemonic ideologies” that help perpetuate racial inequality by obscuring that racism exists in the present through delegating it to an issue of the past. New racism includes color-blind racism, which Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2002: 141) describes as the proclamation by Whites to be color-blind even though they use “alternative racial ideologies” to perpetuate racism. Bonilla-Silva (2001; 2002) argues that color-blind racism has dramatically increased since the 1960’s and is taking the place of traditional racism. Color-blind racism does not necessarily avoid race completely, but instead defines the “race problem” as an issue of the past, caused by people holding onto practices of an unenlightened previous generation (Emerson and Smith 2000: 69).

A second, less broadly discussed practice of new racism coined by Dana Cloud (1996), is the rhetoric of tokenism. The “rhetoric of tokenism” consists of constructing successful figures from minority groups as exemplars for achieving the American Dream (Cloud 1996: 132). While color-blind racism generally places race as an issue of the past or explains that “others” perpetuate racism, the rhetoric of tokenism explains racism away by implying that anyone and everyone can achieve success in the U.S., as long as they work hard and have a little luck. The rhetoric of tokenism thus resonates with the American Dream, a “cultural doctrine” (Jhally and Lewis 1992: 139) that defines the formula for achieving success as accessible to anyone if they recognize their individual talents, take advantage of them by working hard, and persevere through difficulties (Cashin 2004). In these stories, authors construct the self-made protagonist as an “honest hero” (Decker 1997: 2) who increases class status through “moral luck and market pluck” (Decker 1997: 10).

Incorporating race with the self-made man myth, adherents of the racial status quo then use exceptional “tokens” as proof of the American Dream is not a myth, diverting challenges to dominant ideologies and social inequalities. In a paradoxical fashion, the rhetoric first recognizes oppression and hardships to emphasize the rise of public figures in the common rags-to-riches story. However, this oppression is then downplayed to emphasize individual faith, entrepreneurship, and work over the existence of structural barriers. Publicized examples of successful minorities in television shows such as *The Cosby Show* “encourage viewers to see the world through rose-tinted glasses” (Jhally and Lewis 1992: 71), presenting the ability to achieve this Dream as equally available, no matter one’s race, class, or any other categorical factors (Hochschild 1995: 170). Through a form of new racism, capitalists can use the rhetoric in their promotion of marginal artists to justify cultural hierarchies and the maintenance of boundaries between those with higher and lower amounts of cultural capital. This upholds values that reinforce individualism; if someone is not successful, it is based on their own faults. As stated by Collins (1990), the rhetoric of tokenism and color-blind racism both help to explain away or justify racial differences, instead of addressing larger structural issues or remaining racial biases.

In this research, I contribute theoretically and empirically by introducing the term “racialized authentication” to explore the process through which cultural capitalists authenticate individuals using racial stereotypes and discourses. I illustrate how the process of racialized authentication consists of capitalists drawing from both traditional and new racism. In explaining this process, I show how integrating these forms of racism helps capitalists accomplish a balance of exotic and relatable in the authenticating representations of self-taught artists. To help understand this process, I also theoretically contribute to the sociology of culture by bringing together research, which is often separated between art worlds, popular culture, and work on race/ethnicity. In so doing, I show how a more thorough understanding of race and popular culture, in conjunction with the art world authentication, can deepen our understanding of who are allowed fully into or marginalized to the fringes of art worlds.

METHODS

In order to study this construction process, I use multiple types of data collection. First, I conducted interviews with cultural capitalists. Second, I performed a content analysis of fifty-eight documents, dated from 1995 to 2009. I chose the starting point of 1995, as this is the publication date of the article naming the group the “Highwaymen.” The documents used in this

content analysis range from web pages to magazine articles about the Highwaymen. Last, I performed participant observation of festivals, lectures, and exhibitions including the Florida Highwaymen throughout the state of Florida. Below, I will first discuss in greater detail the three primary types of data collection I employ for the purposes of this study.

To understand capitalists' construction of the artists, I performed sixteen interviews, including phone interviews, face-to-face and in-situ interviews, and eight follow-up interviews with cultural capitalists, including collectors, dealers, gallery representatives, and publishers, among others. I started interviewing cultural capitalists in 2008, with interviews revolving around the initial research question, "How are the Highwaymen constructed?" I focused on how and why they became involved with the Highwaymen, including what particularly interested them in the Highwaymen and their self-defined contributions in the construction of the group. I placed importance on how they described the story and the cultural importance of the Highwaymen, using open-ended questions to encourage their use of stories when responding.

In addition to interviews, I performed a content analysis of fifty-eight sources. These documents consist of thirty-five websites, ten magazine articles, four newspaper articles, four flyers from events, three books, one radio show, and one full-length documentary. I initially performed a general internet search using the Google search engine to gain basic information on the Highwaymen. I learned of the books, documentary, and events through a combination of the web-search and recommendations from interviewees. In regards to electronic sources, I downloaded or transcribed each document found in electronic form, documenting the date I first accessed the document; the author; web address, title, and page title; and in relation to websites, any changes made to the website over the course of my data collection. I additionally transcribed the documentary and radio show.

Combined with my initial interviews of cultural capitalists, I also started my participant observation in 2008, attending twelve lectures, exhibitions, multiple day festivals, and other shows throughout the state of Florida. During and surrounding these events, I took field notes, performed in-situ and face-to-face interviews, and held informal conversations with attendees. In conjunction with these events, I attended two semi-formal lectures, performed by two different cultural capitalists. During these events I recorded interactions when possible, but also jotted notes and expanded these at the earliest opening, often starting to flesh-out the notes at a

nearby bench or table. At the end of the fieldwork session, I used these recording and jottings to write up complete fieldnotes.

To analyze the data, I first coded for general themes in how cultural capitalists represented the Highwaymen. I noted a division in the capitalists' representations of the artists, in which they initially presented the Highwaymen in similar forms to traditional art world definitions of authenticity, but also presented them in ways reflecting discourses of the American Dream. In grappling with how these seemingly contradictory depictions worked together, I began to compare my emerging analysis with current literature. This process led me to see the importance of theories of racism to the process of authentication. More specifically, I came to see how capitalists referenced the American Dream, hinting at new racism, and that definitions of self-taught artists resonated with more traditional forms of racism. In comparing and contrasting these findings with sociologists of culture's studies of authentication and art worlds, it gradually became clear that cultural capitalists engaged in a process best conceptualized as "racialized authentication."

CONSTRUCTING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN

In order to construct value for the Highwaymen, cultural capitalists developed representations of the artists through the process of racialized authentication, in which capitalists interwove forms of racism into their descriptions authenticating the artists. The process of racialized authentication consisted of capitalists drawing from and integrating both traditional and new forms of racism. In order to make the process through which the capitalists draw from traditional and new racism explicit, I divide the analysis into two sections. In the first section, I address how capitalists authenticated the Highwaymen according to "traditional forms." Traditional forms include traditional art world definitions of self-taught artists and traditional forms of racism, as I found these two often paralleled or overlapped each other in capitalists' representations. In new forms, capitalists presented the artists as authentic according to forms of new racism, including color-blind racism and the rhetoric of tokenism, embodied in popular cultural discourses of the American Dream. Capitalists created an over-arching storyline of authenticity, encompassing the group of individuals and masking over biographical differences.

Upholding a constructionist perspective of authenticity, these findings suggest capitalists created standards according to a variable sense of authenticity, rather than an absolute standard. Instead of new racism replacing traditional racism, capitalists integrated the two, blending

traditional art world conventions and popular cultural discourses to present the artists as romanticized, exotic others and heroes overcoming obstacles to achieve the American Dream. For these reasons, even while definitions of authenticity are continuously changing, the process continues to uphold raced and classed representations related to conventions of fine and popular culture.

Constructing Self-Taught Artists: Traditional Forms of Racialized Authentication

In the process of marketing the Highwaymen, capitalists constructed storylines of traditional forms of racialized authentication, including traditional definitions of self-taught artists and racial stereotypes. Within this, capitalists created their own stories of the Highwaymen's authenticity, integrating common self-taught storylines and perpetuating forms of raced and classed stereotypes. Capitalists first emphasized the relevance of race in their stories, along with constructing the artists' exotic otherness and last, romanticizing their innate abilities and challenges they encountered over time.

Relevance of race. Defining the Highwaymen's authenticity in traditional forms of authentication, capitalists consistently made race a prominent and important descriptor in their representations. Approximately 85% of the analyzed documents explicitly stated the Highwaymen are either "Black" or "African-American" and all of the capitalists included this fact in interviews. Capitalists intentionally clarified this point in group presentations, such as one tour guide of the Florida governor's mansion. The guide, after hearing about the study, asked if I would give a general background of the Highwaymen for the tour group. After I finished briefly, the guide then added, "Yes, and they were African-American and got the name the Highwaymen because they sold the paintings out of their cars on the road." Each of these suggests an explicit focus on race and its importance to classifying the artists and their work.

In other instances of classifying by race, the Highwaymen's minority status affected their exhibition categorization. One capitalist in an interview explained, "The first showing of them as a group was an exhibit at the [name removed] gallery. They did not build the show as a Highwaymen show...they were not fond of it [the name Highwaymen]...but instead built it as African-American artists, period." While gallery representatives did not initially like the name "the Highwaymen," they still would not show them as simply Florida Landscape artists. Instead, gallery representatives differentiated the Highwaymen's art work according to their race, creating a marker that upheld boundaries between their work and other fine art. In this way,

capitalists emphasized the Highwaymen's race as critical to their story and the value of their works, which contributed to upholding traditional forms of racialized authentication. This maintained self-taught artists marginality to the art world in more ways than their skills.

Cultural capitalists' racialized authentication also involved emphasizing the artists' race, consistently introducing the Highwaymen according to their race. For instance, a typical article started as this internet article, stating "The Highwaymen are African American painters who started painting Florida landscape over 40 years ago" (Minton 2008), or as heard on a radio show, "In the 1950s and 60s a group of young Black artists travelled Florida selling landscapes and seascapes out of the trunks of their cars" (Alcker 2001). Again, another newspaper article introduced the group as a "loose-knit group of self-taught, African-American artists from what was called Blacktown" (Derr 2001). This style of introduction ensured a racialized framing of the rest of the story and information regarding the group, emphasizing the importance of race and the Highwaymen's experiences.

In the same fashion, capitalists often referred to their "mentor," A.E. Backus, according to his race. After introducing the Highwaymen in the internet article, the author introduced Backus as, "A white landscape artist, A. E. Backus cultivated friendships with artists Harold Newton and R. A. McLendon in the early 50s. In the mid and late 50s other African American artists had started painting with Mr. Backus" (Minton 2008). The author of the newspaper article similarly stated, "The story is that in 1954, Backus, who was white, persuaded a black 19-year-old, Harold Newton, to stop painting religious scenes and take up landscapes, which he quickly taught himself to do" (Derr 2001). In this way, racial dynamics played a critical role in the story of the Highwaymen, perpetuating the role of the marginal artist, along with the association of "self-taught" with minorities and Whiteness with fine artists.

Constructing exotic otherness. Within traditional forms of racialized authentication, capitalists additionally constructed the artists as primal in character, authenticating the Highwaymen as removed from the modern, corrupted world. As a common method of authenticating through emphasizing exotic otherness (Shiner 1994; Silver 1993) was representing the Highwaymen as noble savages, separating them from the rest of society and suggesting this contributed to the primal energy infused into their work. For instance, one capitalist in a magazine article described the Highwaymen as an "indigenous self-taught colony" that showed

the resilience of “human spirit” (Taylor 2008: 53). An online description of the group combined their art world disconnect with noble savage imagery:

Drawing on their own cultural heritage they abandoned the formal academic approach to representation and instead took from their own deep interior landscape a unique creative energy. They used this energy to construct a mythology of images that have the ability to touch everyone who sees them (The Studio @ 620 2005).

Additional reviews extended this theme of creative energy and folk wisdom, such as descriptions that claimed they drew from the “energy of the land” and “transcended their often-clichéd subject matter with creative energy” (The Studio @ 620 2005). Each of these descriptions perpetuated traditional racial stereotypes of the noble savage and marginalized the Highwaymen by supporting a form of exotic mysticism around the artists, based on abstract concepts of spirit and energy.

In constructing the Highwaymen as noble savages, capitalists additionally constructed links with preserving natural beauty of the Florida landscape. They connected the artists’ “primitivism” with their ability to capture the “raw beauty” of Florida, as demonstrated in a state press release that described how they “developed their own individual techniques, creating unique depictions of Florida’s sunsets, waterscapes, marshes, and inlets with raw beauty and charm” (Division of Cultural Affairs 2003). Similarly, another author declared their “work was primal and raw depicting idyllic views of the Florida landscape, before rampant development would reconfigure the state’s topography forever” (Hall 2004). In this way, capitalists constructed the Highwaymen as authentic noble savages closer to nature, so that they created images that preserve and represent the “real” Florida, becoming lost in the modern times.

Capitalists expanded on these images of racialized authentication by describing the magical and mystical sense of the Highwaymen. Combining descriptions of raw beauty and mysticism, one capitalist wrote, “the work has forever captured the intense tropical beauty that only Florida has to offer, in a style that appears mysterious and almost mystical” (Stamberger 2007). These descriptions perpetuated stereotypes of instinctive spirituality and ability, as seen by one capitalist quoted in a nationally-distributed newspaper, contending that Alfred Hair “simply ‘threw paint’ on his boards to miraculously achieve images that are more about being alive than about the manipulation of plastic values” (Derr 2001). Repeatedly, these descriptions connected with traditional racialized stereotypes of Blacks as primitive and innately spiritual.

Another capitalist stated he believed “the Highwaymen tapped into something primal that resonates with viewers by the way they painted. Their pure, spirited, and unadulterated painterly style valued suggestiveness over explication” (Monroe 2007).

Overall, in constructing exotic otherness, these capitalists suggested the Highwaymen, as with the Magical Negro (Hughey 2009), connected with their consumers at a purer, more basic level. In defining their abilities as magical, capitalists construct a racialized authenticating storyline of an exotic other, who has a fundamental nature closer to a nature and spirituality.

Romanticizing innate abilities and challenges. In addition to emphasizing the artists’ race and their exotic otherness, cultural capitalists also performed traditional racialized authentication by repeatedly emphasizing the Highwaymen’s innate abilities, as related to their disconnect from art world knowledge. Following traditional art world definitions (Fine 2004), capitalists continued to authenticate the Highwaymen’s work through contending their lack of art world knowledge allowed for greater “freshness” and created an accessible emotional connection with their work. For instance, one art museum announcement for a Highwaymen show stated the artists “worked with a speed and spontaneity that produced a fresh, Florida style – colorful paintings free of restraint of traditional landscape painting” (Vero Beach Museum of Art 2003). This vivid description connected their naïveté to a freedom of restraint otherwise felt by art education and norms of fine art conventions. Another cultural capitalist went on to describe in a magazine article how their work resembled “genuine folk art, meaning it is free of artifice and undue influence from the academic art community” and, due to this, was “more powerful emotionally” (Fitch 1997). As with descriptions of the exotic other, these storylines continued to emphasize the emotional, or basic and purer, appeal of their work. Earlier in this article, he lamented that:

Suddenly they are “artists,” conscious of trends and fads and governed by rules of composition and color. I get the feeling they’re painting to match the sofa rather than giving rein to their natural instincts, which is what made the work notable in the first place (Fitch 1997).

As exemplified in these quotes, capitalists constructed racialized authenticity as deriving from the Highwaymen’s “natural instincts,” associating knowledge with conformity and constructing value in what they claimed was the Highwaymen’s disconnect from the art world—the same

disconnect that maintained their marginality with the fine art world. In so doing, they created racialized authenticity that perpetuated naturalized differences between these marginal artists' abilities and other fine artists.

In addition to romanticizing their innate abilities, capitalists also constructed racialized authentication by romanticizing challenges faced by the Highwaymen. Capitalists continued to draw a focus away from the artistic quality of the works, but instead romanticized both their disconnect and struggles of the artist. Both forms of romanticizing can be seen in this quote from an article, claiming:

Admittedly, Highwaymen art flies in the face of professional and academic aesthetics, and that is a primary virtue. These artists painted with abandon, with nothing to lose.

Unencumbered by history and tradition, they freely wielded their palette

knives...Unbeknownst to them, their "fast painting" corrupted the cherished concerns of the old school ...They remain relevant today because of this authenticity (Monroe 2007).

Conflating their lack of art education with a romanticized picture of the Highwaymen's circumstances, capitalists turned attention away from potential negative causes of this freedom, such as their lack of resources to obtain specialized education, by positively spinning them of strong, independent artists. They created a focus on freedom as related to art world knowledge, as opposed to the fact that the majority of artists did paint for a living to support themselves and their family. Creating an overarching narrative of the group, capitalists disregarded exceptions to their romanticized storyline (see Lachmann 1988), including the one Highwayman who received a B.A. in Art Education. In this racialized authentication, these romanticized images overlooked exceptions to impoverished origins, along with negative aspects of poverty to authenticate the Highwaymen as self-taught artists.

Capitalists also romanticized difficult times in order to construct more specific connections between the artists' struggles and their works' significance (see Ardery 1998). In one interview, a capitalist authenticated their work by romanticizing reasons the artists painted:

The older vintage paintings hold the real importance. Yes, they're still artists; yes, they're still painting, but there's a difference between a [Highwayman] that was painted by a young black man who needed to sell it to eat that night and a [Highwayman] painted by a nice guy living in a four bedroom ranch and driving a Lincoln Town Car with a waiting list for his new paintings. The new paintings are without a doubt nicer – these

guys progressed as artists – but they don't have the same sociological and historical significance as the paintings done during, as I call, "pre-recognition." In 1994 the world found out about the Highwaymen – prior to that *they* didn't even know they were the Highwaymen. And, so, there is a difference...from what I call the "years of struggle." As found in many other capitalists' storylines of racialized authentication, this individual spoke about the Highwaymen's reasons for painting as the determining factor in the works' value. This quote supported the same lamentation regarding the negative effect of their success as "artists," romanticizing impoverished origins and holding their current class status against their authenticity. Additionally, while acknowledging the artistic progress of the Highwaymen, he asserted that authenticity remained in their living painting-to-painting. Another quote in an eBay guide made a similar point, stating:

Be aware that there are original Highwaymen (26), Highwaymen wannabees, second generation Highwaymen, and Highwaymen style artists. That's perfectly fine and makes no difference if all you want is a Florida landscape painting to hang on the wall. If you want an historically important painting that will appreciate in value, get the real thing ("anniepewjones" 2006).

Upholding traditional definitions in these arguments, capitalists defined the artists' experiences as driving forces behind the resulting images. For this reason, if the artists no longer experienced these struggles, then their art work would lose its value and the virtues that differentiated it from other, fine artists. For these forms of authentication, maintaining marginality from the art world and monetary success maintained value. By naturalizing the Highwaymen's talents in traditional forms of racialized authentication, capitalists perpetuated stereotypes of innate talent and differentiation between groups according to characteristics they are purportedly born with, rather than learned or practiced skill.

Incorporating traditional forms of racism and art world definitions of authenticity, cultural capitalists constructed value for the Highwaymen by defining them according to their race specifically, creating a sense of the exotic other, and romanticizing their naïveté and impoverished origins. These constructions perpetuated divisions in the art world, associating minorities with the self-taught category and Whites with the fine arts. By romanticizing their struggles as adding a sense of realness and emotionality to their work, the racialized authentication masked negative realities associated with their marginal status or their efforts

building careers as artists. In these forms of authentication, capitalists allowed for art world outsiders to gain recognition, but maintained boundaries of membership, which helped to perpetuate racial divisions and hierarchies according to artistic training. In so doing, classed and traditional racialized stereotypes remain intertwined with these forms of authentication.

Constructing American Dream Icons: New Forms of Racialized Authentication

Interwoven into traditional forms of authentication and self-taught storylines, cultural capitalists also authenticate the Highwaymen by drawing from new racism. These new forms include color-blind racism and the rhetoric of tokenism, expanding popular cultural discourses of the American Dream (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Cloud 1996; Hochschild 1995). The process of capitalists combining art world and popular cultural discourses suggests changes in the authentication process, in that capitalists not only construct self-taught artists as different “others,” but also as “real” people whom consumers can associate with. At times, these constructs can appear contradictory with capitalists’ own self-taught storylines. However, capitalists’ use of racialized authentication to construct the Highwaymen as “real” bonds the discourses together, so they then appear as two sides of the same authenticating storyline. Capitalists thus draw from conventions of the fine art and popular cultural realms while constructing racialized authentication.

Capitalists authenticated the artists according to new forms of racialized authentication through their descriptions in three ways. First, they emphasized the Highwaymen’s struggles and aspirations, including their individualism in overcoming obstacles against all odds. Second, capitalists described the Highwaymen as hard working, moral protagonists of “luck and pluck” stories. Third, they constructed the artists as role-models for the attainability of the American Dream. In all three forms, capitalists constructed not marginal “others,” but instead relatable, likeable personas of true American icons through forms of new racism. New forms of racialized authentication generally consisted of capitalists creating classed storylines supporting the ability to achieve the American Dream by emphasizing the Highwaymen’s humble origins and their eventual achievement of financial success. In so doing, capitalists either overlooked race or placed it as an issue of the past, implying race is no longer an issue of current society.

Defining struggles and aspirations. In accordance with both the typical American Dream discourse and Cloud’s (1996) rhetoric of tokenism, cultural capitalists created a narrative in which the Highwaymen start from humble, impoverished backgrounds and pull themselves up.

In so doing, capitalists claimed they overcome obstacles to reach their status of successful self-taught artists. To achieve the intended effects of this storyline, capitalists must establish the artists' impoverished origins, while at the same time emphasizing their choice to overcome obstacles by taking fate into their own hands and putting their talents to use.

Numerous capitalists described how painting was “an alternative to toiling in the nearby fields and packing houses” (Monroe 2001) or an “escape from a more grueling fate: picking or crating oranges in local groves” (Hall 2004). While most acknowledged difficulties based broadly on the social and historical context, some capitalists specified the influence of racism. One author in an e-magazine stated, “After encouraging several of his friends and associates to learn with him, Alfred Hair created a social group of local African-American painters who were inspired to think outside the racial stigma and do more than they were supposed to” (Pearce 2008). In a festival speech, one capitalist described their situation and accomplishments as such:

But he was a realist, Alfred was a realist, and he needed to make a living, he wanted to prosper, because the options for an African-American in this community, was about this long – you could work in the fields, you could work in the groves, you could work in somebody's yard, you could work on the roads, that about it. It was all manual labor and manual labor sucks, it does, and it's terrible, manual labor, who wants to do that? Alfred, not only was he artistically talented, I really think he was brilliant, because he came up with something that has never been done before in the history of American art, Florida art, international art, he used painting as a means to an end, not the ends itself.

In these statements, authors acknowledged class and racial barriers, along with societal restraints faced by Highwaymen, while at the same time using new racism to describe how the artists overcome obstacles through inspired thinking. Capitalists created a sense of encouragement exemplified in the rhetoric of tokenism, in which the dominant group makes claims of promoting minorities to be innovative and do the best they can, all the while downplaying enduring structural obstacles. Repeatedly, capitalists used the phrase “against all odds” to describe the obstacles faced by the group, reinforcing the ability to achieve the American Dream with positivity and effort, even when facing societal restrictions.

Capitalists thus took an important turn away from previous findings on critical acceptance of self-taught artists' authenticity, which indicated that too much success hurts the artists' and their works' value (e.g. Fine 2004). Instead, capitalists did not hide the

Highwaymen's success, but strongly emphasized it in accordance with their token fulfillment of the American Dream. For instance, one capitalist stated that, "Hair drew into his orbit a small circle of friends who were similarly young, energetic, and ambitious for wealth" (Derr 2001) while another description from a history center stated "Alfred Hair generously brought his friends with him as he followed his dream of becoming a millionaire...they redefined their lives and earned more money than they thought possible" (Orange County Regional History Center 2006). In addition, this history center described the background of the Highwaymen as:

Now nationally known, the Highwaymen began as a group of African American artists who, against all odds, managed to prosper selling their paintings in the segregated South of the 1950s and 1960s. One charismatic man dreamed big and developed a fast method of painting that he generously shared with 25 others...(Orange County Regional History Center 2004).

As demonstrated in these quotes, capitalists focused on personality traits and characteristics, emphasizing their focus on monetary wealth. These storylines contributed to explaining the Highwaymen's focus on money within the rhetoric of tokenism, in that capitalists connected money with success and ambition, instead of a loss of naiveté. While acknowledging structural barriers of the Jim Crow South, these quotes also focused on actions of individuals rather than structural barriers restricting Blacks to physical, low-paying jobs. This contributed to a persona of the Highwaymen as individuals whom consumers could associate with based on their struggles and aspirations, or "generous charismatic dreamers" who strive for success. Capitalists accentuated both their individual efforts and focus on money, suggesting these were driving forces behind their success and importance. As racialized authentication, this involved a form of new racism, placing race as an issue of the past and therefore covering current racial barriers.

Constructing luck and pluck stories. Connecting with overcoming obstacles and explanations of monetary success, capitalists constructed "luck and pluck" stories (Decker 1997) in a new form of racialized authentication by emphasizing their work ethic, resourcefulness, and added luck that created the recipe for success. In first constructing the artists' pluck, one interviewee described how the artists "resourcefully sold their art from their cars," while others described the Highwaymen as "enterprising businessmen," "enterprising Highwaymen," and as having "entrepreneurial spirit." In additional interviews, one capitalist extended himself to state the Highwaymen "were really more entrepreneurs than artists," while another described Hair as a

“total entrepreneur.” Through these instances of color-blind racism, capitalists constructed success as related to individual characteristics such as resourcefulness and perseverance, and therefore turned attention away from any issues related to race. This is also demonstrated by the capitalist who wrote, “The Highwaymen thrived as artists and entrepreneurs through their sheer determination to succeed as painters and not as laborers in citrus groves, their expected social role” (Beatty 2008). Capitalists repeatedly acknowledged constrictions of “social roles” while still upholding individual agency, such as this capitalist’s emphasis on “sheer determination” tearing down social barriers.

In this racialized authentication, capitalists created a shift in their storylines, where they first focused on the artists’ race, social roles, and obstacles, to then emphasize the individuals’ perseverance, following the rhetoric of tokenism (see Cloud 1996). The following quote exemplifies the “book-ending” done by capitalists between descriptions of individual pluck and societal barriers. As stated by one capitalist in an e-magazine,

The Highwaymen are a story of perseverance; these times were tough with little opportunity for African-Americans...no gallery would show the work of a group of unknown, self-taught African-Americans...This never stopped their drive though (Pearce 2008).

In so doing, capitalists created an inspirational storyline, connecting hard work ethic with morality deserving of reward. Capitalists again connected back to their impoverished origins to construct a “boot-straps” storyline, as exemplified by a description of the Highwaymen as “black artists who used art to work themselves out of the groves and packhouses” (Reed 2003). In this way, capitalists used the rhetoric of tokenism to draw attention to their race, but at the same time construct the Highwaymen as moral, hard working protagonists who achieved success through “pluck,” so that race became a fact, but not an influence, in their success story.

Taking these stories a step further, capitalists also described how their hard work bred the artists’ “lucky” opportunities to achieve success. While not emphasized to the extent as their hard work and entrepreneurship, capitalists still integrated the Highwaymen’s personality traits, hard work, and luck as the recipe for success. One instance of capitalists’ connection between work ethic and luck is exemplified by a capitalist’s description in a newspaper article that one Highwayman “has become one of the state’s best-known natural landscape painters” through “talent, ferocious work habits, a winning personality and good luck” (Klinkenberg 1995b) This

quote exemplifies the combination of personal traits, particularly hard work, with the touch of luck that authenticates the Highwaymen through the rhetoric of tokenism.

Capitalists introduction of luck to storylines while also acknowledging the Highwaymen faced difficult times created complexity within racialized authentication; this concession is also not typically made within traditional forms. For instance, one capitalist introduced the aspect of luck in a statement on a radio program that:

They distrusted the whole white establishment; they weren't used to being helped – they were used to being harassed or dismissed. So, I think it was very difficult in east central Florida in the 50s and the 60s unless you got lucky and most of them didn't (Alcker 2001).

Importantly, this capitalist drew attention to issues of race and everyday racial dynamics faced in the “years of struggle,” as labeled in one capitalist’s interview, which prevented the Highwaymen from entering the fine art world, but again placed the race problem as an issue of the past. By clarifying that “most of them didn't,” he differentiated the Highwaymen from others who did not have the combination of the hard work ethic, entrepreneurial spirit, and luck. While traditional forms of racialized authentication often masked negative realities experienced by the Highwaymen, new forms recognized their difficulties in the context that these obstacles can be overcome through the elements of luck and pluck. Summarily, these storylines constructed relatable protagonists who remained moral and diligent, eventually experiencing the lucky break that rewards their labor and patience with outstanding success.

Reinforcing American Dream attainability. Racialized authentication also involved constructing the Highwaymen as role-models for achieving the American Dream. Capitalists accomplished this racialized authentication by describing the potential for unjust tragedy within the Highwaymen’s success story, increasing the heroics of overcoming these obstacles to reach their current status while downplaying race as an issue of the past. Many statements by capitalists openly related the Highwaymen with the American Dream and fairytales. For instance, in an interview one capitalist stated:

One of the most important parts of their story – I guess the most important part of their story - is that they are proof that the American Dream still works. That against all odds this group of young African-Americans decided they weren't going to pick or pack oranges - which is almost the only career choice - that they were going to be artists. No

art galleries in the Jim Crow south are going to take paintings by Black artists, so they went out and sold them on the highway. They painted them fast, and they sold them still wet, and they made a lot of money doing it. They were very successful.

Using the rhetoric of tokenism, a switch occurred in which capitalists acknowledged barriers, but then emphasized actions taken by the individual. The artists, as heroes/heroines, achieved their dreams of gaining monetary success and respect through great strength, noble qualities, and courage. Capitalists also drew attention to these characteristics through their comparison of the artists with fairytales, such as when one capitalist pondered in an article that “maybe the impetus is simply to own original works of art, or to possess part of the Highwaymen’s Cinderella story” (Monroe 2008). In referring to a fairytale, this quote represented a common thread in capitalists’ stories, in which they constructed racialized authenticity of the Highwaymen as the disadvantaged protagonists achieving the dream life. As opposed to focusing on changes to the social system to create greater equality or issues of racism, capitalists focused on the Highwaymen as living examples of the ability for anyone to achieve higher class status, reinforcing conventional ideals and goals within American society.

Capitalists also racialized authenticity by emphasizing the artists’ heroics in overcoming obstacles, but at the same time drawing from color-blind racism to place issues of race in the past (see Emerson and Smith 2000). This further constructed the Highwaymen as exemplars of others’ abilities to also accomplish the American Dream, as the obstacles faced by the Highwaymen fade into history. For instance, one capitalist stated in an article that:

I believe that this group is more than the sum of their biographies. We all are awed by a reflection on how young African Americans were able to advance themselves financially during a time in our history when this was most difficult. They broke down barriers that society had erected against them and their ancestors for generations (Monroe 2007).

In phrasing his declaration as such, particularly the final sentence, this capitalist created an appearance of the Highwaymen breaking down all barriers against them, determinately paving the way for themselves and others’ equal opportunities. At the same time, he defined success financially and places the quote in past tense, without addressing current issues faced by the Highwaymen in regards to accessing fine art world resources. As with other capitalists, he maintained problems of racial and class inequalities as issues of the past. This authenticated the artists’ heroic struggle without creating a connection to their continued classification as marginal

self-taught artists whose fame remains primarily based on their biographical story and their sales, which still derive from festivals more than traditional gallery sales. Overall, in this form of new racialized authentication, capitalists constructed the Highwaymen as role-models for achieving the American Dream fairytale, supporting in a color-blind fashion that racial and class problems are issues of the past.

In this form of authentication, capitalists combined the rhetoric of tokenism and color-blind racism, acknowledging the Highwaymen's struggles in relation to their race, but then placing these issues in the past. Through racialized authentication, capitalists avoided the possibility of the Highwaymen's focus on money as a deterrent to their authenticity. Instead, they spun this as positive, avoiding images of the Highwaymen as greedy, but rather as hard working Americans who needed to earn a living in a difficult socio-historical and class context. Capitalists described the Highwaymen as role-models of the American Dream, reinforcing the attainability of the dream through a little luck and pluck. They first defined the struggles and aspirations of the artists and then, through an emphasis on individualism and character, described how and why the Highwaymen achieved the level of successful self-taught artists.

CONCLUSION

The Highwaymen painted and sold their works along the highways and door-to-door for decades before becoming re-discovered and introduced to the art world in 1995. With this introduction by cultural capitalists came increased attention and sales for the group of artists labeled the "Highwaymen." Cultural capitalists created publicity for the artists through their stories of the artists' history and authenticating them as "real" self-taught artists. This authentication, however, was racialized as capitalists drew from both traditional and new forms racism, presenting the Highwaymen as exotic and primitive self-taught artists, along with hard-working achievers of the American Dream.

Drawing on traditional racism, capitalists constructed representations emphasizing how the Highwaymen were free from the constraints of artistic training, which they claim contributed to their fresh and spontaneous painting style. These portrayals romanticized their origins and innate abilities, neglecting their struggles as Black artists living paycheck to paycheck in the Jim Crow south. Such representations also upheld traditional stereotypes of exotic otherness and the noble savage, describing the Highwaymen as mysterious, mystical, and capable of painting a pure, unindustrialized Florida landscape. In the same authentication process, capitalists drew on

new racism, constructing the Highwaymen as hard workers who persevered through difficult times, overcoming all obstacles to become successful. Cultural capitalists thus portrayed the artists as moral, likeable protagonists of the American Dream storyline. Unlike traditional art world definitions, these stories addressed poverty and racism to some extent, but also suggested these structural barriers are things of the past and that, regardless of these obstacles, success could be achieved through “luck and pluck.” The broader implication of these representations is that Blacks who are economically disadvantaged hold some responsibility for their poverty.

Contemporary research on racism generally emphasizes that individuals and the media typically favor the use of one form—traditional or new—and some have argued that color-blind racism is replacing traditional racism (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Entman 1990; Glenn and Cunningham 2007). In contrast, I show how cultural capitalists incorporated both forms of racism to represent the Highwaymen as authentic artists. Although traditional and new racism may appear contradictory on the surface, my analysis suggests that they can be used together fluidly in representing African Americans. This has the effect of both valuing and delegitimizing African Americans who succeed economically and implicitly blaming those who do not.

My analysis also holds implications for sociological studies of art worlds, demonstrating the usefulness of engaging theories of race in order to better understand the process of authenticating artists as members of an art world. Whereas much research does not place race as a central focus in the process of authenticating artists (Ardery 1998; Becker 1982; Fine 2004; Lachmann 1998), my analysis makes contemporary understandings of race central. In doing so, I developed the notion of “racialized authentication” to describe how cultural capitalists can use both traditional and new racism to authenticate people as real artists.

In addition to showing the importance of incorporating contemporary theories of race into research on art worlds, my analysis also demonstrates the importance of popular culture in a broader fashion. More specifically, studies of art worlds typically focus on how cultural capitalists appeal almost exclusively to conventional art world definitions when constructing who is and is not a “real” self-taught artist, positioning self-taught artists as outside both the general society and fine art traditions (e.g. Fine 2004; Shiner 1994). In contrast, my analysis shows how cultural capitalists not only drew on traditional art world definitions, but also drew heavily on the American Dream ideology (Hochschild 1995; Jhally and Lewis 1992). While these two discourses can arguably appear contradictory in representations, capitalists

successfully drew from both discourses to position the artists as appealing to both art world insiders as well as customers who buy their work at festivals, galleries, and online venues.

Cultural capitalists' racialized authentication enabled many of the surviving Highwaymen to continue earning an income selling their paintings as they age into their eighties, but it arguably has also limited potentials for their success. First, the capitalists' romanticizing their struggles as young artists in the Jim Crow south created much higher value for their vintage paintings than their current work. This enables collectors to sell the vintage paintings, many of which they purchased before the Highwaymen gained recognition in the art world, for significantly higher prices than surviving Highwaymen can sell their current works. Relatively speaking, this devalues the current works the artists sell for an income. Second, while cultural capitalists racialized authentication created a place for the Highwaymen in the art world, it also constrains their status in the art world. Their storylines present the Highwaymen as exotic and untrained, as well as entrepreneurs, thus excluding them from holding traditional fine artist status. These marginalizing representations decreased both the prestige and economic value of their current artwork.

While the case of the Florida Highwaymen has unique features, the notion of racialized authentication can have broader implication for the sociology of culture. Previous research on cultural tourism, art, and music, for example, suggest that racialized authentication may play a role in diverse cultural phenomenon and racial groups. For instance, Ira Silver (1993: 310) found that Caribbean tourism often advertises "indigenous peoples" as "undeveloped, and hence, in some sense, primitive." Similarly, David Grazian (2003: 200) found that representatives of the Chicago blues music scene encourage tourists to go on an "urban odyssey" in order to experience the "city's cultural and ethnic diversity." Additionally, studies of folk artists (Ardery 1998) and country music performers (Eastman and Schrock 2008; Peterson 1999) suggest that defining cultural producers as rural, impoverished, uneducated, southern Whites (e.g. "White trash") works to authenticate them as well as their cultural products. While future research may reveal important variations in how and why the process unfolds, it appears that racialized authentication is a "sensitizing concept" (Blumer 1969) that can be examined a variety of cultural milieus.

CHAPTER THREE

NEGOTIATING IMPOSED IDENTITIES: FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN'S CONSTRUCTION OF ARTIST- ENTREPRENEUR IDENTITIES

Starting at the end of the Jim Crow south, a group of Black artists painted landscapes and sold their works door-to-door and to tourists along Florida highways. While initially successful enough to earn a living, they could no longer earn the same income with the development of freeways and changing tourist patterns in the 1970s. A resurgence of interest started in 1995, however, when they were labeled the “Florida Highwaymen” and promoters created representations that brought them into the art world. These stories first described a Highwaymen style of painting, in which the artists painted quickly and “intuitively” on inexpensive Upson board, leaving the trace of their paintbrushes and palette knives (Alcker 2001). Other promoters expanded on the subject of the paintings, in which Highwaymen painted in oil “green, grey ocean, sky, waves crashing onto beaches and palm trees in silhouettes against red and orange sunsets” (Alcker 2001) and “moss-draped cypress trees in the still water of a marsh presented a more contemplative view, while a royal Poinciana in full, flaming red bloom or a storm-tossed shore provided dramatic relief” (Derr 2001). In colorfully defining their style, these representations also constructed the Highwaymen’s biographies, leaving them marginal to the art world as “self-taught artists.” However, representations of the Highwaymen’s lives also resonated with White middle-class consumers. To do so, promoters’ stories drew on both traditional racism (e.g. defining artists as exotic and primitive others with mystical abilities) to define them as authentic self-taught artists, along with new racism that presented the artists as racial tokens who achieved the American Dream.

Although this resurgence of interest enabled the Highwaymen to earn a living selling paintings again, it presented them with a new dilemma not faced during their early sales experiences. Because promoters asserted their biographies as critical to their renewed success, the artists needed to construct their own public identities in ways that did not overtly contradict these imposed representations, while also distancing themselves from the more derogatory

representations. Through negotiating these imposed identities, the artists could construct public identities maintaining their art world status, artwork's value, and positive self-worth. In this article, I draw on interviews with Highwaymen artists and fieldwork at public art events and festivals to examine how the artists resolve their identity dilemmas.

While artists like the Highwaymen may face particular challenges in constructing public identities, as self-taught artists are marginal to the art world based on their non-professional backgrounds and often their racial/ethnic status, little is known about how they do so. Sociologists of culture have instead focused much of their work on how markets are created for cultural products (Hirsch 1972; Peterson and Anand 2004; White and White 1965), how promoters construct representations of artists (e.g. Peterson 1999; Peterson 2003), and the process of classifying art (Bystryn 1989; Crane 1987; DiMaggio 1987; Zolberg 1984). Most of this research neglects to examine the artists' actions and voices. Building on limited exceptions to this trend (e.g. Ardery 1998; Deneer 2009), in this paper I show the utility of an identity work approach (Snow and Anderson 1987) to examine how the artists themselves construct public identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity work refers to the activities individuals perform to give meanings to themselves and others, largely through labeling and signifying (Snow and Anderson 1987). Identity work can involve telling autobiographical stories to construct selves that feel authentic (Mason-Schrock 1996) or telling fictional stories that boost feelings of worth (Snow and Anderson 1987). Over the past twenty years, researchers have integrated an identity work approach into many sociological subfields, including research on social movements (Stryker et al 2000), social psychology (Killian and Johnson 2006), religion (Starks 2009; Thumma 1991), sexualities (Fields 2001; Wolkomir 2006), and work (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Padavic 2005). Although this research often emphasized the importance of culture and sociologists of culture often address social meanings and the self, sociologists of culture have yet to incorporate an identity work approach.

An identity work approach not only exposes how people construct identities, but also the rules for signifying an identity through sayings and actions, or "identity codes" (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). For example, the codes of being an authentic "self-taught artist" include the following three claims, as defined by promoters. First, artists should be disconnected from

art world traditions and/or broader society. Promoters base this rule in a belief that self-taught artists carry on a tradition of “pure” art, based in a culture unspoiled by industrialization, which is lost in art world training (Shiner 1994). Second, promoters claim self-taught artists are supposed to be child-like, simpler, or closer to nature, drawing on traditional racial stereotypes of exotic others, including images of noble savages (Errington 1998: 147; Fine 2004: 39; Kuspit 1991). A third claims involves the romanticization of artists’ innate abilities and personal struggles (Arderly 1998: 263; Errington 1998: 71; Fine 2004: 161). For instance, self-taught artists are not encouraged to become more educated or paint a broader range of style, because then they may lose their authenticity or be seen as too commercialized to remain popular (Fine 2004: 20). Because promoters consider these “traits” as central to identity codes surrounding self-taught artists, the artists’ biographies become central in legitimating their work as real art (Fine 2004).

As artists do not choose or create these identity codes, but they remain consequential for their career and personal interests, artists’ own identity work must be performed in relation to these codes. Based on this, artists’ identity construction is in some ways similar to other public figures who face public identities constructed by outsiders. For example, in their study of basketball players on a high profile college team, Patricia Adler and Peter Adler (1989: 299) show how many of the players struggled to define themselves in relation to the “public persona” created by media. As an identity imposed by others, this public persona required negotiation in order to maintain a coherent and glorified self (Adler and Adler 1989; Schwalbe 2004). Even when the public personas did not match how the players viewed themselves, the basketball players often changed their behaviors to “bridge the gap” and present themselves in ways consistent with both positive and negative media images (Adler and Adler 1989: 300).

Although examinations of artists themselves are limited within the sociology of culture, research addressing artists suggests they also perform identity work. Previous research focuses on artists attempting to construct an authentic identity, asserting traits to help sales and combat competition. With regard to research on tourist commodities, for example, research suggests local artists attempt to assert themselves as authentic because they represent the “true” local culture. Frederick Wherry (2006: 12) found Taiwanese villagers claimed “reactive authenticity,” or defended of their products’ “realness” in opposition to outside gentrifying forces (Wherry 2006: 12). Additionally, Andrew Deneer’s (2009: 176) ethnography found Venice Beach artists

claimed authenticity by contrasting their artwork as products of the Bohemian boardwalk lifestyle against “hustlers” selling repackaged, mass produced products. In a study of Chicago blues musicians, David Grazian (2003: 144-153) analyzed how musicians faced different challenges in asserting their authenticity. While White musicians faced issues of appearing as an impersonator when attempting to fulfill stereotypes of the authentic Black blues artist, Black musicians faced issues in gaining equal amounts of national attention captured by White musicians. Although these studies increase our understanding of how artists assert their authenticity, greater research is needed to explain how artists negotiate an imposed identity situated in art world conventions.

In directly addressing conventions set forth by the art world, research generally suggests the artists, while able to participate, have limited ability to control representations of themselves and their artwork. This research additionally suggests the artists perform identity work that addresses art world identity codes. Drawing from published work quoting the woodcarver Edgar Tolson, Julia Ardery (1998) argues the artist’s cooperation with promoters’ representations vitally supported the construction of his reputation as a legitimate folk artist. Even while Tolson claimed himself not as famous but simply as a “hillbilly” to fulfill visitors’ expectations, he also attempted to claim his independence from interpretations and claims of understanding his work, using allusive responses such as “No—you don’t know that. It’s about the whole thing” (1998: 219-221). In this, Ardery exemplified how Tolson recognized expectations and selectively acted in ways he felt benefitted him. On the other hand, Elizabeth Peterson (2003) discussed the “modern eye,” following how two gallery owners constructed traditional quilts as modern art by using art theory and placing quilts in the gallery context. She described how feminist academics and traditional female quilters argued for symbolic violence by the representatives because they took away the women’s voice, perspective, and tradition from the display (2003: 480). Peterson’s findings therefore suggest artists hold even less power than described by Ardery when gallery representatives transform their work into modern art, but still react to art world representations. However, both of these studies are limited by their reliance on secondary sources for learning of the artists’ responses and actions.

While these works are critical in understanding the artists’ contributions and influence in constructing representations and their identities, much work remains in understanding this process. As acknowledged by Ardery (1998: 5), when research focuses on the power of

promoters and how they silence artists, it often helps contribute to the silencing of artists by not addressing their involvement. Broadly, this research contributes to the sociology of culture, regarding our understanding of how individuals define themselves as “artists.” More specifically, I contribute by applying an identity work approach to the sociology of culture and artists’ identity construction. Taking an identity work approach helps to give artists a voice, as artists are generally neglected in previous research. Not only this, but an identity work approach contributes to an understanding of how artists negotiate imposed identities when constructing public identities and manage the dilemmas deriving from this negotiation process. Additionally, I will expand understanding regarding how artists incorporate the labels into their identity construction, even if in a selective fashion, in order to maintain coherent selves and positive self-images.

METHODS

Data for this study derive primarily from participant observation at various Highwaymen events and interviews with original Highwaymen.¹ I started participant observation in 2008, which involved fieldwork at twelve lectures, exhibitions, and multiple-day events involving the Highwaymen. During these events, I conducted informal interviews, recorded presentations, and jotted notes on my observations. I expanded these jottings at the earliest opportunities during and after these events (see Lofland et al 2005). At the end of these fieldwork sessions, I used these jottings and recordings to write complete fieldnotes. I developed these fieldnotes chronologically, capturing as much dialogue as possible, and included non-verbal communications when possible (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I then drew from these fieldnotes and analytic memos to develop emerging themes, particularly starting to note the Highwaymen’s construction of public identities, along with developing topics to discuss in future interviews.

After starting to get to know the Highwaymen at these various events and obtaining contact information, I began to interview the artists in 2010. I conducted interviews with thirteen of the surviving Highwaymen (eight are deceased) and later conducted three follow-ups with

¹ Details regarding my analysis of interviews with promoters and documents about the Highwaymen, which relates to this study as it reveals how *others*’ construct the artists, can be found in my dissertation article, titled, “Racialized Authentication: Constructing Representations of the Florida Highwaymen.”

original Highwaymen. These thirteen, including one woman, actively participate in festivals and many also actively self-promote, closely associating with the reputation of the Florida Highwaymen. I conducted eleven interviews and the follow-ups face-to-face with the artists at their galleries and tables surrounding festival sites, to ensure a comfortable location and, as requested by participants, close proximity to their work sites. I conducted two phone interviews with Highwaymen whom I could not meet at festivals. Interviews averaged one and a half hours, with two interviews equaling three hours in length.

I designed these interviews surrounding the base research question, “How do the artists construct themselves as Florida Highwaymen?” I used a check-list of topics to guide the discussion, encouraging the artists to tell me their life histories (see Appendix A). The interview check-list included topics such as “becoming involved with the Highwaymen,” “starting to paint,” and “walking through an average day: then and now.” Using this check-list format allowed me to both keep the interview conversational and tailor questions and probes towards each participant’s unique experiences (see Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2000). For example, following participants’ responses regarding how they started to paint, I followed standard interviewing techniques (Weiss 1994) and encouraged them to describe details regarding who was involved and how they learned, amongst other probes.

To analyze the data, I started with the guiding question of, “How do the artists negotiate the label “Highwaymen” and definitions of self-taught artists?” I first read individual transcripts of the interviews and fieldnotes, looking for general themes of how the artists constructed themselves as “Highwaymen” or “self-taught artists.” In coding, I found the artists often constructed themselves in an entrepreneurial fashion, discussing how they painted to earn a living. I therefore expanded my focus to include each of the above themes. Additionally, I found the stories told in interviews closely matched their interactions with audiences, and I came to see their face-to-face interviews as a part of their public presentation of self, rather than a presentation of an “authentic” life history. As the artists frequently gave interviews to media representatives, with one claiming to give hundreds a year, I came to believe they regarded our interviews as one avenue to promote themselves and address promoters’ representations. Using coding practices common in grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), I then sorted the data into two main themes: (1) how the Highwaymen specifically addressed being self-taught and (2) how they described themselves as entrepreneurs. I compared data sources to discover variations and then

compared these main themes and variations to how promoters constructed representations. Through these comparisons, along with writing memos and drafts, asking new questions of the data, and situating my insights into related literature, the following analysis to gradually emerged.

CONSTRUCTING ARTIST-ENTREPRENEUR IDENTITIES

In negotiating the label of “Highwaymen” and identity codes of “self-taught artist,” the artists selectively integrated accounts of their own life experiences with promoters’ representations to construct a standardized story of being an “artist-entrepreneur.” When telling stories about how they became artists, their identity work emphasized rhetoric that positioned them as authentic self-taught artists.² However, when signifying their entrepreneurial spirit, their work did not correspond with the more derogatory self-taught codes, such as being naïve or primitive artists. Instead, when telling stories about how they made a living selling art during the Jim Crow era, however, their identity work signified that they were savvy business people seeking money and status. Overall, the Highwaymen constructed a dual-identity of an artist-entrepreneur.

Signifying Artistic Genius

Representations of self-taught artists generally portray them as artistic geniuses whose talent comes purely from within, rather than through any form of training (see Fine 2004). For the Highwaymen to be considered a part of the art world and sustain a market for their work, even if marginal, they had to construct accounts that illustrate how they were always, naturally, untrained artists. To do so, however, the Highwaymen had to overcome obstacles presented by their commonly known biographical events, ranging from associations with a well-known White landscape artists to their communal painting style. Relatedly, as artistic genius is portrayed as being rare, the Highwaymen faced the challenge of explaining how a group of individuals, albeit a loose association, possessed this trait. In addition, the artists faced the problem of never having considered themselves as self-taught artists until others labeled them as such in 1995.

In negotiating the self-taught code, the Highwaymen developed strategies of identity work that would credibly resonate with the codes, despite biographical discrepancies. The artists selectively drew on their own biographies to create stories that provided “evidence” against challenges to their self-taught status, particularly as they stated in interviews they repeatedly

² To maintain the artists’ confidentiality in this analysis, I refer to all the artists using masculine pronouns.

faced questioning. Expanding on interviews and participant observation, the artists likely told the same stories hundreds of times over the past fifteen years. One formula story developed by participants claimed that they had “always” painted or wanted to paint, which implies that they were born to be artists. Two other storylines further emphasized the self-taught code. About one-half of the artists said that they learned some from others, but they mainly taught themselves. Less than half asserted that no one ever taught them anything. Overall, this autobiographic work enabled the artists to reinvent and subsequently sustain their artistic careers.

“I always wanted to paint.” In the first variation of the self-taught story, Highwaymen claimed they always painted or wanted to be an artist. The majority of artists used this claim in describing how they started painting and often to explain how they first became involved with other Highwaymen, helping to create a coherent sense of themselves as artists. Additionally, this claim connected the artists to conventions of self-taught artists holding an innate connection to painting. Last, this account negated the possibility of anyone completely training them, as this was something they “always” have done or wanted to do.

In these stories of how they started painting, many Highwaymen used generic phrases to explain how they started painting, such as one Highwayman’s statement that “I have always liked to draw and paint,” or another Highwayman who claimed, “I always wanted to be an artist. I always wanted to paint.” Many of the other artists responded in a similar fashion, attaching the origins of their painting with stories about growing up. These accounts associated their painting with friendships and hobbies, instead of an art movement or lessons. For instance, one Highwayman explained in a festival speech how “we [Highwaymen artists] started off”:

So there’s another artist named Alfred Hair. Him and I was very competitive – football, basketball in high school, and any kind of sport. And we used to sketch a lot and we tried to outdo one another, so I always wanted to beat Alfred and we could sketch real good and we tried to out-sketch each other.

In this quote, the Highwayman conflated his competitive nature in other non-art related hobbies with his artistic abilities. By doing this, he created a coherent sense of “always” being both competitive and an artist, drawing connections with an internal desire to paint. He explained how he started painting by connecting his childhood sketching with his self-taught art career. In stating he “always wanted to beat Alfred,” he constructed an account that created associations between the early origins and continual nature of his art career.

In a similar fashion, other artists made connections between their early childhood and their art careers, explaining they were authentically self-taught because they always painted. One Highwayman explained that art was always a part of his life while growing up, and continued to be an interest as he built his career. He explained in an interview how he started painting by claiming, “I’ve been painting ever since I was a young kid, I was interested in art. I could draw pretty well, even in elementary school.” This was a storyline used by many to assert they were truly self-taught, along with constructing their classification as an “artist” more generally as a lifetime event. Doing so, they maintained independence in choosing to adopt this career, before any others could influence them.

These stories additionally helped the artists negotiate the self-taught identity code, as self-taught artists are expected to paint out of an inborn desire (e.g. Fine 2004). As the Highwaymen generically adopted a story of always wanting to paint, they did uphold the code of an inner drive to paint. However, they did not go so far as to explicitly draw from racial stereotypes, such as the divine or mystical inspiration associated with the exotic other (e.g. Errington 1998; Kuspit 1991). While many declared they always liked or wanted to paint, they also described how it seemed that, as phrased by one artist, “some have a knack for it, but others just don’t seem to have it.” In differentiating between artists in this fashion, the Highwaymen did not claim they all held some innate ability since some “just don’t seem to have it,” but still left it open that some held innate ability since they “have a knack for it.” Therefore, while they upheld a traditional sense of artists having a gift, they did not explicitly draw from racial stereotypes of their naïve abilities contributing to their successful artistic career.

“But he didn’t teach me everything.” In a second variation of the self-taught story, the Highwaymen negotiated discrepancies in their biographies with self-taught identity codes by claiming that even if they received informal training, they were still authentically self-taught because they were not taught everything about painting. Approximately half of the artists constructed stories in this manner, maintaining their self-taught identity by downplaying the influence of others’ artistic advice. While not technically a part of the self-taught conventions, which classify the ideal self-taught artist as disconnected from the art world or broader society (Fine 2004), the Highwaymen constructed stories that maintained their art world status and re-asserted they were self-taught because their ability to paint derived from outside of or prior to any training.

In accounting for training in their self-taught stories, many Highwaymen explained their art careers as starting based on a few basics pointers of a Highwaymen style, but then developing and perfecting their painting completely on their own. For instance, one Highwayman stated:

One thing led to another, we [he and Alfred Hair] painted and painted and painted until, you know, he started to show me how to do the trees, and from the trees to the birds, and from the birds to the houses and boats or whatever, and it clicked.

In this example, while appearing to describe informal training, the Highwayman avoided stating he was taught how to paint and instead framed these experiences as only introducing him to the Highwaymen style. Another Highwayman described how he took art classes at school, but repeatedly emphasized how he started painting on his own before this. He minimized the influence of formal lessons and reiterated how he started on his own, in order to maintain his self-taught status.

(H)ighwayman: I started painting at a very young age, with pencils not oils, but I seriously started painting in '57, '58, but I painted. But I started drawing pictures before then at 5, 6, 7 years old. But I started first painting seriously, painted my first oil painting in 1957. I painted portraits.

(I)nterviewer: When you say you first started seriously painting, did someone introduce to oil?

H: ...you know, goin' to those [elementary] classes and things, I just used pencils and crayons, and then just got into oil painting, just playing around with it. We had an art class, here at the high school, and I painted there...but I painted portraits before I did this.

In these stories, the Highwaymen compensated for a disjuncture between self-taught codes and their biographies. To address discrepancies and maintain their art world status, they described how they developed their artistic skills outside of and prior to training. Even when implied, the Highwaymen used these stories to clarify they were not taught everything and consistently avoided the terms "lessons" or "taught." The previous quote exemplifies this, when the artist carefully stated he was "just playing around" or "painted there," but never accredited the classes for his learning how to paint.

The artists also used this storyline to selectively address self-taught conventions. They focused their accounts on their art education, as opposed to deviations from other aspects of the code, such as the exotic other or disconnect from traditions. Many of the Highwaymen's

biographies deviated from the conventions in more ways than one, including their attending college or holding a second career. These artists constructed stories that focused on their lack of complete training, making their explicit deviations from the exotic other or disconnect from traditions appear extraneous to their self-taught status. For example, one artist accounted for training by clearly clarifying at the end of his story that he was not taught everything.

I had a chance to make frames and rake yards and what have you, but I went on back to college for the semester. Alfred wrote and told me that Backus had taught him how to paint and I should come back and he'd teach me everything Mr. Backus taught him. So, that summer I came back and Alfred taught me some of it, but he didn't teach me everything.

While this Highwayman acknowledged that he received some instruction from one of the “founding” Highwaymen, he specifically asserted that he was not taught everything. Additionally, he openly discussed how he started to attend college, but included this as an additional biographical fact related to how he started painting. A second Highwayman, retired from an aerospace company, explained in an interview how he worked during the day and painted by night. However, he followed the “not taught everything” storyline when conveying how he started painting. He based his self-taught status on the fact that watching other artists influenced his decision to start painting, as opposed to comprising forms of training.

And then the early '60s is when I met Alfred Hair, Roy McLendon, Mary Ann Carroll, James Gibson, and I used to stand around and watch them paint and then one day I decided to give it a try...but, that's basically the way I got started because I never took art, I'd never taken, at school or anything like that, never even dreamed of it.

By describing his initial lack of interest in art, this Highwayman explained how early interactions with artists could not have been training, as he had not started painting, nor had interest in it. Artists with such explicit deviations from multiple conventions focused on the fact they were not taught everything about painting and, in the process, negotiated overarching representations of the Highwaymen as self-taught artists. This process made their training in other field seemingly irrelevant to their self-taught identity, thus maintaining their art world status.

The Highwaymen had to perform identity work in order to appear they aligned with conventional definitions of self-taught, based on their multiple discrepancies. Not only did they lack a disconnect from the art world, but they upheld a close network and support system with

others who painted. Many of the Highwaymen met each other and started painting based on their early friendships with each other and/or a relationship with a family member of another painter. While promoters' representations invoked an exotic in poverty, the Highwaymen omitted these descriptions in their stories and instead created generally social accounts for how they started painting, even while maintaining they were self-taught because they were not taught everything. As opposed to drawing from storylines like the noble savage, the artists described experiences many in our society could associate with—art classes at school, taking odd-jobs between college semesters, or picking up friends' hobbies.

“No, I wasn't taught by none of them.” The last variation of self-taught artist accounts resembles most closely the strictest traditional definition self-taught, in that certain Highwaymen claimed they had no training or help learning how to paint in any way. However, the least number of artists used this storyline, with only four artists explicitly stating they were not taught by anyone. While acknowledging their friendships with other painters, they did not acknowledge any training from these friends. This story is arguably the hardest to claim, based in part on the representations of the Highwaymen as a loose association of artists and the common Highwaymen painting style. At the same time, the claim also most closely associated these artists with the self-taught identity.

To assert they were not taught anything related to painting, these artists' biographies could not contain the same open deviations as the of artists previously discussed. For instance, the excerpts below are relatively common instances in which a Highwayman, who first started selling works and only began painting later in his life, repeatedly asserted he is completely self-taught. I spoke with this artist briefly before a Question and Answer (Q&A) session at a festival, asking him how he learned to paint. He shortly told me, “I learned to paint by fixing the other paintings...I was a salesmen for the whole group back in the sixties and had to fix their paintings on the road.” I then attended his Q&A, which he started by introducing himself and stating:

And the paintings was still wet while we was carrying them around and that was what made me start painting, because I had to fix all the paintings when they got messed up, when I was carrying them around in the car and stuff.

Here, he repeated the same storyline he told me, explaining that he taught himself to paint by fixing other artists' paintings that were damaged in transit when he was on the road selling them.

Later in the same Q&A session, audience members asked for clarification as to how he learned to paint, instigating the Highwayman to again assert his self-taught storyline.

(A)udience: So, were you taught by Backus or by the other, the other Highway...?

(interrupted by answer)

(H)ighwayman: No, I wasn't taught by none of them. Uh, me and Bean [Backus] was real good friends, I used to go down and Bean would be out there paintin'... he was a nice guy, he was the nicest guy I ever met. (pauses, looking upward, seeming to reflect) But he didn't teach me.

A: So how did you learn to paint?

H: By fixing the paintings that was messed up on the road (laughter from the crowd) when I used to go out in the 60s selling, uh, they was still wet. We had to go round and take 'em right then and there and sell 'em.

In developing “packaged” stories such as this, the Highwaymen not only navigated reoccurring exchanges questioning their self-taught stories, but they also appeared consistent in presentations of their self-taught identity. As seen by the audience members' repeated questioning and the artists' reoccurring responses, the claim of being not taught by anyone is a central but contested part of their artist identity. In reflecting on Bean being the “nicest guy” he ever met, this Highwayman showed the importance of friendships in their art careers, but also their careful separation between their relationships as friends versus teachers. In a similar fashion, one Highwayman consistently introduced himself as being the oldest living Highwayman, stating that he has been painting about fifty years now and helped to “watch over the young ones,” but never had a lesson and is truly self-taught. Highwaymen using the accounts they were never taught by anyone consistently repeated their reoccurring responses to re-assert their self-taught identity.

Stories upholding a lack of training also revealed the Highwaymen's interest in controlling representations of the artists. Using interviews to help construct and control their public identity, the Highwaymen would, at times, attempt to correct what they deemed as falsehoods spread in these representations. For example, after asking one Highwayman how he started painting, I then probed regarding his relationships at the time. This prompted the Highwayman to assert his self-taught status. The conversation went as follows:

I: So you started painting how?

H: I was out around town and I saw Harold Newton painting and that's how I got started. I got interested in what he was doing and decided to start painting myself. But, I taught myself how to paint.

I: So you met Harold Newton first. Did you meet or know some of the other early artists at that time, like Backus?

H: I met Backus, but I wasn't taught by him. No... (pausing, becoming more animated) you know alotta stuff out there that's wrong. You know, once you got the wind blowin' the wrong direction you can't get it to blow back the other way—that stuff gets put out there and it's wrong, but it just keeps getting spread anyway.

This strong response to a probe regarding their social networks demonstrated how important the self-taught status was to the artists and their desire to maintain influence over the story. As common to their self-taught stories, this Highwayman differentiated between knowing, or being friends, with artists and the experience of being taught. Additionally, the artist used an interview not only to assert his self-taught status, but also to address previously developed representations that may question or undermine their claims to self-taught identities. In constructing stories that they were never taught, these artists again maintained their status with the art world and asserted their membership as a Highwayman.

In field observations, I noted repeated instances of visitors appearing incredulous and disbelieving as to how these artists accomplished their success without formal training, a contributing factor to the Highwaymen's use of packed stories. At one presentation on the Highwaymen, a guest asked after the talk to if he heard correctly the artists taught themselves. After receiving confirmation, he exclaimed, "My, this is absolutely unbelievable. Just unbelievable." Artists, in facing public standards, must repeatedly and actively assert their self-taught status. These various self-taught stories enabled the Highwaymen to construct a coherent self-biography, appear consistent in their impression management, and facilitated joint negotiation of the identity code. Joint negotiation is critical to the success of negotiating these identity codes (see Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996: 125). Reoccurring and repeated storylines helped the Highwaymen to not contradict each others' claims, particularly as many of their accounts included interactions with other Highwaymen also constructing claims. Overall, by following these storylines, the Highwaymen helped maintain joint consistency in their self-taught identities and supported each others' stakes in these identity claims.

Each of the Highwaymen asserted a variation of standard “self-taught” storylines, constructing stories that connected with at least one aspect of the self-taught code. Because of their individual life experiences and the need to adjust presentations of these to correspond with the self-taught code, they developed their own stories to assert their self-taught status. While the majority adopted stories of “always” painting or wanting to paint, many also described how they were not taught everything and, therefore, remained self-taught. A small portion of artists, in part limited by suitable biographies, constructed stories of never having been taught anything related to painting. In the process, each Highwayman often repeated reoccurring answers to audiences’ questioning of their status, along with managing discrepancies in their biographies through the use of these stories. These stories helped maintain their art world status, integrated the self-taught label into their biographies, and reaffirmed their membership as a Highwayman. Last, the artists took interviews as opportunities to assert influence over promoters’ representations, contributing to jointly maintaining their self-taught identities and protecting them from outside questions to their status.

One comparative story of claiming to be an artist and embracing the Highwaymen identity, but not the associated self-taught code, is by one of the Highwayman who earned a college degree. While he placed his interest in art as originating early in his life, he differed from other Highwaymen’s negotiation of the self-taught label because he pointed to his formal education as the start of his career. His story of how he learned to paint revolved around being an “artist” without the stipulation of “self-taught.”

H: Growing up, I used to watch the pioneer Highwayman, Harold Newton, I would watch him paint, ‘cause I had a paper route that went by his house. Watching him as a kid, and then I majored in art education and taught it for thirty years... I didn’t know what they [Highwaymen artists] were painting on, so I learned from them to paint on Upson Board, before I was painting on canvas, you know, how I learned to in college...No, I did not learn how to paint from [names of two Highwaymen], I knew how to paint, I had my degree in it...I switched to what the other Highwaymen was painting on.

I: So were you also selling back then [1960s]?

H: (Drawn out exclamation of “Oh”) big time – I didn’t know if I was going to get back into teaching or not.

This story contained similarities with self-taught storylines, in that he associated with founding Highwaymen and being introduced to the style, but not being taught by them. However, instead of then emphasizing a lack of lessons, he emphasized being taught in college.

This Highwayman faced the challenge of maintaining his status as a Highwayman, as a central identity code signifying membership is being self-taught. This Highwayman faced the challenge of maintaining his identity as a Highwayman due to his traditional art world credentials, as opposed to the other Highwaymen's challenge of maintaining their art world status. For these reasons, his claims needed to account for why he should remain considered a part of the group. To do so, he did face a similar task with other Highwaymen in that he needed to construct stories that neutralized discrepancies in his biography to maintain identification with the group. While many other Highwaymen avoided terms that can be associated with teaching or training, this Highwayman employed those terms to explicitly link his painting history with other Highwaymen artists. To construct his claim for membership, he emphasized that he "learned" from the Highwaymen to paint on Upson board, used crown molding for frames, and sold works with founding Highwaymen. Therefore, still drew from a standard storyline of the Highwaymen, but emphasized other aspects found in representations of the Highwaymen.

Even when using variations of the same story, the Highwaymen emphasized traits they held in common with other Highwaymen to gain the benefits from this title. Within the label of Highwaymen and associated codes of being self-taught, the artists constructed a standard story surrounding being self-taught, integrating their own life experiences and justifications for membership. These stories not only created coherent selves, but also defended against challenges to their status. They selectively focused on particular traits of the identity code to adopt the self-taught identity, constructing stories to account for discrepancies in their biographies from the code. The ability of a college educated artist to maintain his association the Highwaymen identity demonstrated the malleability of this identity to the Highwaymen's accounts of these discrepancies.

Signifying Entrepreneurial Spirit

Contradicting conventions that self-taught artists are naïve and their work comes solely from their internal drives, the Highwaymen often emphasized they painted for money, career ambitions, and status. This identity work signified they possessed entrepreneurial spirit, as well as artistic genius. These stories portrayed that although they might be Black artists with innate

artistic drive, their early success derived, at least in part, from their ambitious pursuit of the American Dream. The Highwaymen constructed stories emphasizing their ability to make money without needing to enter the fields or groves, their primary other options for earning a living. With their stories situated in the historical context of the Jim Crow south, their ability to earn a living by selling paintings did not appear to be greedy, but instead a rational choice in order to support themselves and their families. The artists thus constructed accounts of themselves as entrepreneurs, which is a highly valued “moral identity” (Fields 2001) that arguably resonates with broad audiences and consumers.

“*A way to make money.*” In the first part of constructing their entrepreneurial spirit, the artists explained the practicality of painting, explaining their reasons behind painting and selling their works to support themselves and their families. While certain literature suggests self-taught artworks lose value when the artists are too conscious of the market (e.g. Fine 2004), the Highwaymen successfully defined their participation in an art market to both explain their background and justify their focus on money. In this way, they jointly constructed their painting as providing a means of support for their family and connected it with popular cultural representations of the hard-working entrepreneur and breadwinner.

In this story, the Highwaymen described how some of them had other careers, whether based on their passion or necessity for additional income, but overall painting provided an income for themselves and their family. One Highwayman, for example, stated they did not focus on or even consider what impact they might have on the arts, “‘cause we had to sell the paintings to live, so we gotta sell that painting no matter what.” Another Highwayman, describing the place of his art career in his life in an interview, stated:

Well painting has always been a livelihood for me, a way to make money. It supports me so I can preach. That [preaching] is not something you just pick up and put down, that is what your life is. Being an artist, painting, supports me and my family, puts the roof over my head, and food in my mouth, so that’s something I am grateful for.

As seen in these quotes, the artists constructed painting as a necessity that helped support their families, instead of supporting traditional definitions of self-taught artists painting simply based on the need for creation or expression. This focus on supporting their families is again seen in another Highwayman’s description of painting and taking up other odd jobs to help support a livelihood:

I painted and did what I had to do to get by. I also painted houses, was a carpenter, picked up all those odd jobs, you know, you do what you got to do...a lot of them painted to stay out of the orange groves but me, I never worked in the orange groves.

As opposed to romanticized images of the “starving artist,” the Highwaymen described using painting as one way to get by and make ends meet.

Within stories of painting as a way to make money, the Highwaymen interwove art and business in a way that made the two practically inseparable. These stories showed the intentionality of the Highwaymen, not as naïve artists, but instead entrepreneurs who understood their work according to sales. For instance, one can see how the artists connected the two in the quote below:

H: Yeah I’m an artist, and I sell my paintings, and I’m a businessman. Back during this time, when I went out, I had to pay the bill the same time. But now, I can wait two days before I pay my bill.

I: How would you compare an average day from back then with an average day now?

H: During that time, an average day, I would say about \$250—that was my good day. But today, I might make \$5,000 to \$6,000 today.

This quote exemplified how the Highwaymen constructed parallels between paintings and money, so that they even equated average days according to income.

The Highwaymen adopted an entrepreneurial focus on money, describing how painting enabled them to earn an income in an enjoyable fashion. For instance, one Highwayman described his interest as “just something that fascinated me when I saw them started out painting, having fun and making money and all that,” while another Highwayman stated he transitioned from only selling to also painting simply because “I could make more money by me painting, also.” Even while, as artists, the Highwaymen described always being able to improve their painting, they still defined a painting as being “done when it’s sold.” For instance, one Highwayman stated:

I can always add in something, take this home and add a bush or something. You know I keep working on it, focusing in and then focusing back out, back in and back out. I’ll keep working on it; I’m not satisfied until its sold—then I’m satisfied (laughing)...That’s my motto: a painting is never done until it’s sold.

The Highwaymen thus constructed accounts for why they started painting and their business philosophies according to sales and the ability to make money. These stories maintained their status as breadwinners and accounted for their focus on money and the market. The artists also connected with a broader audience, as their focus on providing support for themselves and their families can a common interest found among many in their audience.

“I was presenting myself correctly.” A second way they signified an entrepreneurial spirit involved claiming to be talented business persons. More specifically, they told stories about navigating sales interactions with Whites “back then,” during the Jim Crow South. These storylines often described their savvy sales tactics, implying they possessed strong sales talent and a willingness to work hard. Regardless of intentions, these stories also resonated with notions of racial injustice as a thing of the past and mainly invisible (Bonilla-Silva 2001).

With regard to telling stories that conveyed artists’ sales tactics and impression management, one Highwayman constructed multiple facets of the Highwaymen identity in a festival speech. In this, he first described how he “thought of something to sell” to the doctors and judges whom he found liked to hunt and fish. He then described how “that was one of the ones I sold a lot of, at the same time stating, “but if the person, if they not gonna look, I don’t waste my time. I go to the next office.” In this story, the Highwayman not only presented his entrepreneurial spirit of conjuring a painting style that would appeal to a particular audience’s interests, but also that this was a successful venture because he sold “a lot” of them. He additionally conveyed his ability to navigate potentially negative sales interactions by simply moving on. This type of account can also help artists maintain a positive image, as they can distance from negative feedback from consumers and to avoid explicit discussions of navigating segregated stores during their initial sales experiences.

In accounts of themselves as good salespersons, the Highwaymen consistently differentiated themselves from other artists to account for their entrepreneurial success. In the next quote, the following artist also discussed moving on if customers showed a lack of interest, but additionally differentiated himself from unprepared artists to account for his success. In these quotes, the artists accounted for their interactions based on their presentation of self, distancing themselves from issues of segregation.

‘Cause that’s what we used to do—I tell them what I do and if they don’t wanna buy them, then I keep moving... If you ain’t good, if you walk into a man’s office and they

don't expect you to be coming, you gotta know how to talk to the people. If you got two or three paintings in your hands, you can't go in their blank. I say how I got something I like to show them. They might want you out, but once they see the paintings and say "How much you want for it?" Now that gave me an opening.

This Highwayman's story demonstrated his construction of a good salesperson, claiming himself as one and differentiating himself from other Highwaymen he may consider less talented salespersons. Another Highwayman, claiming reasons as to why he successfully sold more paintings than any of the other Highwaymen, stated:

It was hard sometimes, 'cause they [other Highwaymen] couldn't sell them [paintings] like I could. See, I know how to go in and say, "Good morning, say my name is [name] and I'm representin' A. Hair, an artist, that wanted to know if you'd be interested in some paintings if it wouldn't take up too much of y'all's time." Most of the time they'd let me come in, cause I was presenting myself correctly...sometimes back then, they say get out here, get out of here...

In these accounts of impression management, the artists distanced themselves from potentially discriminatory actions of people that "want you out" and instead accounted for them according to being unprepared for the sales interaction. This promoted their abilities, while also distancing any potential prejudice as related to business, not the personal.

In their presentations as salespersons, the Highwaymen accounted for ways in which they performed impression management in order to sell their work to the majority all-White stores and residences. As one Highwayman stated, the Highwaymen selected these venues "because they got the money." As their audience remains predominantly White, the Highwaymen continued to use neutralizing and friendly forms of speech, including euphemisms or omitted race when possible. In the majority of stories, the artists would describe people wanting them out of their stores as something that happened "back then" when they did not present themselves "correctly." The Highwaymen, in these stories, constructed generalized accounts for their success as salespersons.

When the artists did address segregation specifically, they often downplayed it. For instance, one artist stated that, "During that time there was a little segregation going on then, but because of what we were doing we wasn't, uh, we wasn't barred from any place. We was allowed to go to places that did not serve minorities, but because of what we were doing we was

able to go to those places.” Another artist, again using a euphemism for the time period, stated that “back then it was tough, hard livin’” and that “I’ve been knocked down a few times, that’s for sure, but I just need enough time to get back up.” In these ways, the Highwaymen not only accounted for past experiences, but also navigated their present interactions with these stories. They distanced themselves from potential effects of direct discrimination and struggles “back then” by placing hard times and racism as an issue of the past, along with downplaying potentially negative sales interactions as based on their sales tactics.

“We was living better.” In final accounts of their entrepreneurial spirit, the Highwaymen constructed stories claiming how painting positively improved their standards of living, helping to construct status within their community and as related to discourses of the American Dream. These stories helped the Highwaymen connect with a broader audience and “normify” their identities (see Fields 2001: 166). These accounts portrayed painting as a “normal” career path that helped improve their career options. Additionally, these stories helped the Highwaymen distance themselves from the more derogatory or potentially socially stigmatizing aspects of the self-taught code, as they portrayed themselves not as primitive or naïve, but savvy businessmen improving their “trade” overtime.

Stories of bettering themselves through painting emphasized their success, enabling them to construct positive self-images of how they initially gained status within their community. Introducing why they started painting, Highwaymen constructed stories basing their initial interest in painting on the influence of Alfred Hair driving a new car. According to the Highwaymen’s recollections, only the “school teachers and professionals” usually owned these cars. With their stories situated in the Jim Crow south, their stories of desiring to earn money did not appear as greedy, but instead as understandable and reasonable in such a historical context. In a similar fashion, many of the Highwaymen used these stories to describe how painting improved their career options and ability to obtain status symbols, describing how they painted to stay out of the tomato fields and orange groves. For instance, one Highwayman stated, “you know, we was living better than going out in the orange groves and stuff” while another stated that, “when you go to school you pick the tomato fields, the groves, but after I sold my first painting, I didn’t have to go back to that.” Not only could they not make as much money, but these jobs were considered to be hard labor for little pay or status. Another Highwayman goes into more detail, describing why many Highwaymen got started painting:

What happened was, say I was outside painting and you happened to come by and you see it and you live somewhere in the neighborhood close to it, well, it's interesting. A lot of guys didn't have nothin' to do, so they'd stand around and watch us paint, but the biggest thing, they saw him [Hair] sellin' the stuff [paintings]. That was puttin' money in his pocket, so he started hiring...Everybody was trying to escape the tomato fields and the orange groves so we could find something else to do to make some cash, that's what happened.

In this account of how they started painting, the artist described the context in which many of the artists lacked consistent jobs or access to respected, higher paying jobs. With few options but manual labor, the Highwaymen blended the larger context of few career options with their own individual drives of finding painting "interesting" to account for why they started painting.

The Highwaymen continued to describe in a very straight-forward fashion that their interest in painting derived from the example set by Hair, living what they equated to the American Dream. As one artist stated, "So that's what happened, I met him, and I liked what I saw, and I liked that's all he did for a living. He told me that's the reason he drive a gold Cadillac," while another stated, "He was the man. He drove the big Cadillac, a brand new Cadillac, and every year he drove around so we could see that, you know, we could see that this is our dream. Get me a Cadillac one day; ride up and down the highway in it. That was the dream." As opposed to romanticized representations of self-taught artists being closer to nature or purer than the everyday person, the Highwaymen explained in a clear fashion what their dreams and aspirations were, and that was to own a Cadillac. These stories explained the reasons why the Highwaymen first started painting, describing to others how they held a similar dream as many others, including to support their families, better themselves economically, live comfortably, and achieve their dreams of owning these status symbols.

In final stories of their careers, Highwaymen described another aspect of the American Dream, in which individuals gain happiness and money performing a job they loved (e.g. Moen and Roehling 2005). For instance, one Highwayman combined equally interests in the visual aspect of painting, money, overcoming challenges in life, and being self-taught:

"Well, (pause) I enjoyed the way it looked and I also, it was sort of a monetary thing for me like I said I was a person that I never did embrace the word failure, so I wanted to be

successful, and I love challenges, like I said when I was in school I never took art or anything like that.”

While less explicit, this artist described why he enjoyed painting in terms parallel to the American Dream discourse, including overcoming obstacles to achieve monetary success, along with enjoying the work. Stories similar to the above captured a sense of their career as a journey and exemplified a sense of satisfaction with their development up to this point. The Highwaymen described how their passion for painting developed over the course of their career. Separating from a conventional sense of self-taught artists having an innate passion or drive they cannot ignore, these stories described how their performance of painting helped them develop a love over time. For example, one artist stated:

Well, well, I thought it was fascinating ‘cause I wasn’t an artist. You know I took art, but that wasn’t my passion, you know what I mean? But it became my passion because I was involved in it every day, you know, going backwards and forwards with the brush (gesturing with his hand back in forth in mid-air)... And so that’s what happened, I ended up falling in love with the painting (shrugging shoulders and smiling).

In a similar fashion, another Highwayman described how, with time, he fell in love with painting and experienced an “interesting journey” in the process:

And I just wanted to be a part of it and they gave me some constructive criticism and sorta keep my work, and taught me how to mix the paint to give depth perception and I just really fell in love with it. Now, I’ve been doing it for the better part of forty years, so it’s been an interesting journey.

In describing how they “lived better,” the artists created accounts of how they were able to both obtain success and perform a job they loved. In these accounts, the Highwaymen diverged from conventional codes of being self-taught and instead constructed images of how they achieved the American Dream, performing jobs they fell in love with over time.

Overall, the Highwaymen signified their entrepreneurial spirit by describing how they supported their families and obtained status symbols by successfully performing jobs they loved. This identity work arguably resonated with a broader audience, beyond the art world, as it drew from popular discourses of achieving the American Dream. While their stories upheld they were Black artists with an innate interest in painting, these accounts described how they obtained success through hard work and based on their strong sales talent.

CONCLUSION

In constructing public identities, the Highwaymen told stories that resonated with both the art world and a broader audience. Signifying that they were self-taught maintained their art world status and involved selectively emphasizing personal life experiences that corresponded with self-taught identity codes, including that they always desired to paint and no one completely taught them to paint. The stories provided biographical “evidence” that countered challenges to their self-taught status. The artists’ stories accounting for their entrepreneurial spirit contradicted conventional codes of being self-taught, although they corresponded with representations of the Highwaymen as achievers of the American Dream. Their entrepreneurial stories helped create a positive self-image of them as successful business persons, explaining how their painting facilitated supporting their families and bettering their career opportunities. Particularly with the historical backdrop of the Jim Crow south, their initiative to earn money through painting did not appear greedy, but instead practical.

Although the Highwaymen generally avoided explicitly addressing race, race arguably influenced the construction and reception of their stories. Particularly as race is a “master status” (Hughes 1945), audiences may view their public identity work through a racialized lense and the artists are likely conscious of this in their identity work. For example, although the artists did not adopt promoters’ use of overt racial stereotypes when describing themselves as self-taught, their emphasis on “always” having artistic desires and a lack of lessons maintained the possibility for others to create connections between their “artistic genius” and racialized otherness. Their avoidance of race in stories about their entrepreneurial success in the Jim Crow south additionally reflected a form of “color-blindness” (Bonilla-Silva 2001). In this form of “new racism” (Collins 1990), their stories suggested that even under these segregated conditions, race did not matter as much as their hard work and ingenuity.

Reflecting the complexity of identity work, it is also important to consider how their avoidance of race not only reflects color-blindness or traditional racism, but can be another strategy in the artists’ identity work to negotiate ongoing interactions with a primarily White audience. This can be considered another strategy used by the Highwaymen to ease interactions with a predominantly White audience. As interactions in the present time are often color-blind, the artists can connect with broader audiences by downplaying of race in their stories. Not only

this, but as race is also a master status and based on visual cues (Hughes 1945), the Highwaymen do not have to declare their race to necessarily signify their race in face-to-face interactions.

This research contributes to the sociology of culture by showing the usefulness of an identity work approach. Generally, as the majority of research on art worlds neglects analyzing the artists themselves, an identity work approach reveals how artists play an active role in constructing their own biographies. In addition, while previous research demonstrates the promoters' representations create markets for the artists (Fine 2004; Lachmann 1988; Peterson 1999), my analysis suggests they also create the symbolic identity codes artists must then negotiate to maintain art world status.

A more nuanced contribution centers on the content of and audiences for this identity work. More specifically, as compared to research that touches on artists' actions, which focused on their assertion of an artistic identity (Deneer 2009; Grazian 2003; Wherry 2006) or their defensive reactions to art world promotions (Arderly 1998; Peterson 2003), my analysis shows how artists facing imposed identities not only reacted to art world conventions, but also drew on popular culture—the American Dream—to construct moral identities. While the artists' presentation of artistic genius resonated with art world definitions, signifying entrepreneurial spirit contradicted them in ways that resonated with a wider range of middle-class consumers. Overall, an identity work approach can direct sociologists studying culture to the construction and negotiation of identity codes, artist's agency in their biographical representations, and the range of targeted audiences.

As demonstrated by previous research on identity work (e.g. Killian and Johnson 2006; Wolkomir 2006), cultural producers are not the only individuals negotiating imposed identities. Similarities can be found with “dirty workers,” such as grave diggers or trash collectors, who manage marginalizing perceptions of their work by selectively emphasizing positive traits of their work (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). Other research on identity work also suggests this balancing act of claiming an imposed, generally stigmatized label while accentuating a positive identity. For example, Jessica Fields (2001) found that the parents of gay or lesbian children constructed a moral identity of loving and generous parents and Irene Padavic (2005) found that contingent workers defined themselves positively by their emphasizing their willingness to work. Supporting my analysis, such research shows how people can selectively draw on identity codes to construct positive moral identities in the face of stigmatizing imposed ones.

The Highwaymen, after being labeled as such in 1995, faced negotiating this imposed label and identity codes of “self-taught artists.” Balancing stories of being self-taught artistic geniuses with stories of their entrepreneurial spirit, the Highwaymen’s identity work helped them take advantage of the status associated with these labels. Although holding a marginalized status with the art world, the Highwaymen managed identity dilemmas associated with these imposed identities to assert themselves as successful artist-entrepreneurs. The Highwaymen’s identity work suggests artists’ construction of public identity is necessary both in asserting their own positive self-images and upholding, or dismissing, artistic identity codes.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The Highwaymen started painting and selling their works along highways and door-to-door decades before they were re-discovered and introduced to the art world in 1995. With this introduction by cultural capitalists came increased attention and sales for the group of artists labeled the “Highwaymen.” Cultural capitalists created publicity for the artists through their stories of the artists’ history and authenticating them as “real” self-taught artists. This authentication, however, was racialized as capitalists drew from both traditional and new forms racism, presenting the Highwaymen as exotic and primitive self-taught artists, along with hard-working achievers of the American Dream.

Findings from the first article (Chapter 2) suggest capitalists drew from traditional racism to construct representations that upheld three primary traditional stereotypes, including their freedom from the constraints of artistic training, romanticization of their innate abilities and challenges, and exotic otherness. In so doing, capitalists promoted their fresh painting style and neglected their struggles as Black artists earning a living in the Jim Crow south. At the same time, cultural capitalists also drew from new racism to construct “luck and pluck” stories of the artists overcoming obstacles to achieve success through hard work.

In this first article, I contribute theoretically and empirically by introducing the term “racialized authentication” to explore the process through which cultural capitalists authenticate individuals using racial stereotypes and discourses. I illustrate how the process of racialized authentication consists of capitalists drawing from both traditional and new racism. I show how integrating these forms of racism helps capitalists accomplish a balance of exotic and relatable in constructing authentic representations of self-taught artists. In so doing, these findings suggest race is integrated with the authentication process across art worlds and popular culture, which first affects who remains marginalized to the fine art world. An additional result is the continued obscuration of equal access to resources through the use of new racism and the romanticization of hard work in achieving the American Dream. Last, another implication from the “luck and pluck” stories is perpetuating the belief that economically disadvantaged Blacks hold some responsibility for their status, as the capitalists’ storylines emphasized individual responsibility over larger structural and social barriers to economic success.

Findings from the second article (Chapter 3) suggest the artists maintained status with the art world and a broader audience by negotiating the imposed identities created by cultural capitalists through these representations. The artists signified their self-taught Highwayman status by selectively emphasizing personal experiences corresponding with the representations. These included that they always wanted to paint or were not taught by anyone. As with the capitalists, the artists constructed a second storyline emphasizing their entrepreneurial spirit, explaining how they painted to support their families and better their career opportunities. By taking an identity work approach, this second article explores how the artists agentially negotiated these imposed identities to construct a positive moral identity, connecting with art world and broader audiences.

The second article contributes to the sociology of culture by demonstrating the usefulness of an identity work approach. This approach sensitizes sociologists of culture to how individuals define themselves as “artists.” In addition, it sheds light on how artists negotiate imposed identities when constructing public identities, managing dilemmas deriving from this negotiation process. More specifically, this research contributes to our understanding of how individuals construct stories that appeal to varying audiences and construct moral identities. Additionally, these findings show how artists agentially construct their biographies to counter challenges to their self-taught status while negotiating interactions with a primarily all White audience. In the case of the Highwaymen, the artists appealed to art world conventions, as well as popular discourses of the American Dream, in order to maintain status and construct these moral identities. Overall, this research contributes to an understanding of how individuals negotiate potentially stigmatizing imposed identities and maintain a positive self-identity.

These findings represent two sides of a process through which representations of the Highwaymen are constructed. On one side, cultural capitalists constructed stories of the Highwaymen from an outsider perspective, constructing over-arching and generalized storylines authenticating the Highwaymen. On the other side, Highwaymen negotiated these imposed identities to signify positive public identities. In comparing these different sides, capitalists generally constructed romanticized visions of the artists’ innate abilities and hard work. However, the artists did not romanticize their stories, but instead remained grounded in their life experiences. Artists, with personal biographies and experiences, had to selectively choose stories that matched these representations to maintain status. Overall, both of these perspectives

helped to construct dual representations of the Highwaymen as especially talented as both artists and entrepreneurs.

More specifically, drawing from broader art world and popular discourses, capitalists connected the Highwaymen's stories with well-established stereotypes and societal values. For instance, the capitalists' stories of their entrepreneurial spirit hold direct connections with stories of pulling oneself up "by the bootstraps," again romanticizing their struggles and origins. On the other hand, artists' stories connected their beginning to paint drew from everyday experiences, without the primitive or mystic connotation of the capitalists' stories. In focusing their stories in such a way, the artists limited their connections with capitalists' representations of being self-taught to how first, how they were self-taught and second, how they were connected with the Highwaymen style of painting. While still asserting entrepreneurial expertise, the artists' stories lacked some of the capitalists' idealization, instead relating to filling breadwinner roles and taking advantage of an opportunity situated in limited options. Both the capitalists and artists emphasized ways in which the Highwaymen constructed a unique artistic style and relayed how Highwaymen's focus on money was not greed, but instead based on interests of bettering themselves in a particular historical context.

In relation to representations of race, cultural capitalists often referenced race in their stories, drawing from both traditional and new forms of racism. While artists did not overtly reference race in the same way as capitalists, and thus their racial references remained implicit, both capitalists' and artists' stories allow others to continue making associations with innate abilities and color-blind racism. As interactions in the present time are often color-blind, the capitalists' and the artists' downplaying of race in their stories also strategically connect with broader audiences. Particularly for artists, this can also be considered another strategy used by the Highwaymen to ease interactions with a predominantly White audience. As race is also a master status and based on visual cues (Hughes 1945), the Highwaymen do not have to declare their race to necessarily signify their race in face-to-face interactions. At the same time, capitalists' traditional forms of racialized authentication and Highwaymen's signifying of artistic genius strategically connected with art world audiences.

While unique in many ways, processes of the Highwaymen's authentication can reflect others beyond cultural producers. These findings suggest a broad range of applications, as the capitalists' representations stretch across art world and popular cultural discourses, suggesting

racialized authentication can occur in marketing for products and experiences, ranging from restaurants to travel packages (e.g. Lu and Fine 1995; Silver 1993). Additionally, the artists' responses resemble others facing imposed identities and normifying them or making them positive (e.g. Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Fields 2001; Padavic 2005). By exploring how cultural capitalists' construction of representations also facilitates the construction of identity codes artists must then negotiate, we can better understand the creation process and consequences of marketing public identities.

APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE INTERVIEW CHECK-LIST FOR FLORIDA
HIGHWAYMEN

- Becoming involved with the Highwaymen
- Starting to paint
- Developing relationships with: Hair, Newton, Backus, other Highwaymen (relationships with artists: comparison between then and now)
- How involved with the process of naming the group
- Changes since label
- Experiencing popularity of Highwaymen (comparison between then and now)
- Walking through an average day: then and now
- Favorite parts of working: then, now, how changed
- Views of painting: then, now, changes
- Likes and dislikes of attending current events
- Opinion of continuing the Highwaymen style: name, involvement/association, and why the original unique

APPENDIX B

HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH
HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

RE-APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 5/4/2011

To: Amanda Koontz

Address: -----
Dept.: SOCIOLOGY

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Re-approval of Use of Human subjects in Research
Constructing the Florida Highwaymen

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by 5/1/2012, you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the committee.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your renewal request, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this re-approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting of research subjects. You are reminded that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report in writing, any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols as often as necessary to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

Cc:
HSC No. 2011.6358

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

I freely and without any coercion consent to be a participant in the research project “Constructing the Florida Highwaymen.”

I understand this project is performed by graduate sociology student Amanda Koontz and is related to understanding the social dynamics that helped to shape the identity of the Florida Highwaymen. I also understand this project is related to understanding the contributions the various actors and actresses involved in the shaping of the Florida Highwaymen.

I understand I may be asked for an informal interview regarding my relation to the Florida Highwaymen that, only through permission, may be recorded through field notes. I also understand if I am lecturing, guiding a tour, or otherwise presenting the Highwaymen’s work I may also be recorded with prior permission. No individual responses will be identified, all responses will be anonymous, and responses will be completely anonymous if so requested.

I understand there are no significant benefits from participating in this project. I also understand there is minimal risk in participation.

I understand my participation is completely voluntary and that I can decide to withdraw from participation at any point in time with no penalty and have the right to ask any questioning regarding the project. Questions, if any, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may contact Amanda Koontz, Florida State University, Sociology Department, -----, if I have any questions about my participation.

I have read and understand this consent form

Subject

Date

Witness

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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EDUCATION:

Ph.D. in Sociology from Florida State University, *expected Summer 2011*

Title: Representations of the Florida Highwaymen: Constructing Authenticity and Identities in the Promotion of Marginalized Artists

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Comprehensive Exam: Social Psychology; Passed with Honors Distinction

M.S. in Sociology from Florida State University, 2009

Title: Commodification of the Florida Highwaymen

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B.A. in Sociology from Appalachian State University, 2007

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AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION:

- Social Inequalities; Race and Ethnicity
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- Culture, Cultural Consumption, and the Arts
- Qualitative Methods

GRANTS:

- Dissertation Research Grant Award, Florida State University, Spring 2010
- Public Service Research Grant, Appalachian State University, 2006-2007
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HONORS AND AWARDS:

- Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award Nominee, Florida State University, Spring 2010
- Golden Key Honors Society, 2008
- Graduate Assistantship, Florida State University, 2007-present
- Albert and Maxine Hughes Outstanding Sociology Senior Scholarship, Appalachian State University, 2006

- Alpha Kappa Delta, 2006
- Alpha Chi National Honors, 2006
- Phi Eta Sigma, 2004 and 2006

CURRENT PAPERS AND RESEARCH:

Koontz, Amanda. 2010. "Constructing Authenticity: A Review of Trends and Influences in the Process of Authenticating Cultural Products." *Sociology Compass* 11(4): 977-988.

Morse, Janice M., Lynda J. Dimitroff, Robin Harper, **Amanda Koontz**, Savita Kumra, Nancy Matthew-Maich, Paul Mihas, and Christina Murphey. "End Note: Considering the Qualitative–Quantitative Language Divide." *Qualitative Health Research* 20(10): 1-2

Koontz, Amanda. Book Review: *Producing Local Color: Art Networks in Ethnic Chicago*, by Diane Grams. 2010. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. (expected publication date, September 2011, in *Symbolic Interaction*).

Koontz, Amanda. "Re-Defining Real: Traditional and Color-Blind Racialized Stereotypes in Authenticating Representations of Black Self-Taught Artists." (Under revision).

Koontz, Amanda. "What's in a Name? Identity Work and Narrative Construction in the Negotiation of Imposed Identity by Black Self-Taught Artists." (Under revision).

Rohlinger, Deana, Robyn Lewis, and Amanda Koontz. "Boomers and Culture Change in the U.S." (Under Revision)

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE:

"Friendships and Involvement in Organizations after College: A Follow-Up Study." PI: Dr. Janice McCabe (2009—present). Assisted in creation of survey instrument, interviewing participants, transcribing interviews, coding and data analysis.

"Show Me the Subway, and I'll Go Down: Contestation over Masculinity in Rap, Hip Hop, and R&B." Research Assistant to Dr. Irene Padavic (2007). Assisted in literature review and coding and data analysis.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS:

"Appealing to Cultural Omnivorousness: Using Traditional and New Racism to Construct the Florida Highwaymen." Session on Culture, Social Boundaries, and Inequality. American Sociological Association. Atlanta, Georgia, 2010.

"Promoting Self-Taught Artists: Complexities and Contradictions in Constructing Authenticity in African-American Representations" and "Considering the Qualitative–Quantitative Language Divide." Qualitative and Mixed Methods Roundtable Presentations. Qualitative Research Summer Intensive. Hauppauge, New York, 2010.

“Constructing the Florida Highwaymen: Complexities and Contradictions in African-American Media Representations” Session on Qualitative Identity Research: Identity Conflict and Constructing Collectives. Southern Sociological Society. Atlanta, Georgia, 2010.

“Boomers and Culture Change in the U.S.” Panel on Art, Culture, and Social Movements (co-author and panelist), American Sociological Association. San Francisco, California, 2009.

“Authenticating the Florida Highwaymen: Constructing Race, Regionalism, and Biography in a Culture Industry,” Southern Sociological Society. New Orleans, Louisiana, 2009.

“Determinants of Participation in Community Arts,” North Carolina Sociological Association. Wilmington, North Carolina, 2007.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND ADVANCEMENT:

Instructor, Department of Sociology, Florida State University, Spring 2010-present

Introduction to Sociology (SYG1000- spring 2010): An introductory course with approximately 50 students.

Introduction to Sociological Theory (SYA4010 – 2 sections: summer 2010 and fall 2010): An upper-level undergraduate course with approximately 40 students per semester.

Methods of Social Research (SYA 4300 – spring 2011): An online upper-level undergraduate course with approximately 60 students.

Teaching Assistant, Department of Sociology, Florida State University, 2007-2009 *Alcohol and Drug Problems, Introduction to Qualitative Methods, Methods of Social Research, Sex and Gender, Social Problems, Social Psychology of Groups*

Program for Instructional Excellence (PIE) Certificate, Florida State University, Fall 2007. Certificate in acknowledgement of knowledge gained at a professional development conference, relating to grading, professional conduct, and classroom strategies.

PIE Panelist, Florida State University, Fall 2010. Served on PIE panel on time management, course planning, and teaching strategies.

Guest speaker:

Introduction to Qualitative Methods course, Fall 2010. Content analysis.

Methods of Social Research course, Fall 2010. Content analysis and interview schedules.

Social Psychology of Groups, Summer 2008. Identity work and cultural capital.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE:

- Graduate Admissions Committee, Florida State University, 2010-2011

- Student Forum Advisory Board member, American Sociological Association (ASA), 2009-present. Committee Member: Travel Awards (2009-2010); Local Arrangements (2009-2010); Communications and Outreach (2010-2011); ASA Conference Certificate (2010-2011)
- Ad hoc reviewer, *Qualitative Sociology*, 2009
- Qualitative Working Group Recruitment Coordinator, Florida State University, 2009-2010
- Sociology Graduate Student Union secretary, Florida State University, 2009-2010
- Sociology Graduate Student Union representative to Departmental Meeting Committee, Florida State University, 2008-2010
- *Surfing Florida: A Photographic History* Community Advisory Committee, interdisciplinary project in conjunction with Florida Atlantic University, 2008-present
- Professional Development Series Committee, Florida State University, 2007-2008

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP:

- American Sociological Association
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- Sociologists for Women in Society
- Sociology Graduate Student Union
- Inequality Working Group
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