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Ross J Merlin March 23, 2016

City at a Crossroads: Boston in Literature and Film

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Abstract

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Boston has captured the imagination of authors for centuries. This fascination has led to many portrayals of the city and its inhabitants in literature. Through the course of history, the city has changed. Boston was once the bastion of white, working-class culture in the United States. Over the past 50 years, however, the city has witnessed a drastic shift in its racial demographics. Boston is now much closer to a multicultural metropolis. Authors and filmmakers depicting Boston struggle with how to reconcile these two images of Boston. Many come to a crossroads wherein they must decide which Boston to present to their audiences. These narratives set in Boston parallel the city's place at a crossroads. Throughout the novels *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith, *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna, and *Gone, Baby, Gone* by Dennis Lehane (and its film adaptation directed by Ben Affleck), characters come to numerous crossroads. In these moments, characters must determine which path to go down. These crossroads often deal with performance of social identities, related to the work of Erving Goffman. This thesis demonstrates the prevalence of the crossroads theme in literature representing Boston, in light of the city's place at a crossroads, based on sociological theory and research.

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Introduction

The story goes that one moonless night in Mississippi, Robert Johnson met the devil at a crossroads. Johnson held his guitar in his hand as he agreed to sell his soul. In return, Johnson immediately gained guitar-playing talent of which no mere mortal could dream, without help from the other side. When Johnson's friends and fellow players heard his overnight transformation, they immediately knew what he had done. No one could learn to play like that so quick, unless they sold their soul.

From the 1996 song "Tha Crossroads" by Bone Thugs-n-Harmony to Zadie Smith's novel *On Beauty*, the idea of the crossroads holds a popular place in the public imagination. Crossroads symbolize many concepts. In the song by Bone Thugs-n-Harmony, the crossroads symbolize crossing over from life to death. In Smith's *On Beauty*, the crossroads symbolize the decisions that individuals make about their identities, those critical moments when people must decide which way to go, and accept how that decision impacts who they are and how others view them. This second ideation of the crossroads arises in numerous literary and film works that portray Boston.

This thesis will use the novels *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith, *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna, and *Gone, Baby, Gone* by Dennis Lehane (as well as its film adaptation). *On Beauty* may seem to be a strange choice. The majority of the plot occurs outside of the city of Boston, and Zadie Smith was born and raised in England. Despite these caveats, *On Beauty* explores the crossroads that characters approach in terms of performing their race and class identities, which parallels Boston's decision of how it will "perform" its identity.

On Beauty revolves around the intellectual rivalry between two professors at the fictional Wellington College, which evokes parallels to Harvard University and the towns of Cambridge and Wellesley, MA. One of these professors is Monty Kipps, a conservative Black Caribbean

who fights against the liberal reforms proposed by Professor Howard Belsey. Howard is a white man from a working-class background in London, who marries a Black woman from Florida named Kiki. Chapter 1 focuses on the lives of their children, and a mutual acquaintance named Carl. The Belseys meet Carl, a young man from the Black working-class neighborhood of Roxbury, one night at a symphony performance. Howard's son Levi idolizes Carl for his authentic "street" roots, and Howard's daughter Zora develops a romantic interest in Carl. Her interest in Carl leads her to fight for him to be able to attend classes at Wellington, despite Carl not receiving official admission to the school. The cultural shift from Roxbury to Wellington forces Carl into numerous decisions about how to perform his race and class identities, decisions that hold parallels in the lives of Levi and Zora. This tension comes to a head when Zora discovers Carl with another woman at a party in Wellington, leading to a confrontation where Carl's frustrations with Wellington boil over.

Birdie Lee, the protagonist of Danzy Senna's novel *Caucasia*, also comes to numerous crossroads concerning her racial identity. Deck Lee, Birdie's father, is a Black academic from the Orchard Park projects in Roxbury who marries Sandy, a white woman descended from a long line of Cambridge bluebloods. Deck and Sandy split while Birdie and her sister Cole are young girls. Soon after, Sandy decides she must go underground to avoid an FBI investigation of her political radicalism. Sandy and Deck decide that they will each take one daughter with them. Cole, who appears Black, goes with Deck to Brazil. Birdie, who appears white, goes with Sandy to numerous hideaways, ending up in rural New Hampshire. In order to avoid suspicion, Birdie performs an identity as a Jewish girl named Jesse. Birdie's new life in New Hampshire forces her into numerous situations wherein she must decide how far she is willing to buy into her new white persona. Her frustration and nostalgia for Deck and Cole lead her to run back to Boston in

search of her aunt. Once there, she must then decide how far she is willing to go in search of her father and sister. Chapter 2 aims to demonstrate the numerous crossroads she encounters along her journey, and how her decisions fit Rockequemore and Brunsma's model of multiracial identities.

Chapter 3 shifts away from multiracial identities and the areas surrounding Boston to focus on the nitty-gritty realities of life in Dorchester, one of Boston's most widely known working –class neighborhoods. The residents of Dorchester are a major focus of Dennis Lehane's novel *Gone Baby, Gone*, and the film adaptation directed by Ben Affleck. Both versions provide direct and indirect commentary on Boston's identity in respect to class and race. Both tell the story of Patrick Kenze, a tough, working-class private investigator from Dorchester. Kenze and his partner Angie Gennaro find themselves investigating the disappearance of Amanda McCready, a young girl from their neighborhood. The investigation first leads them to a character named "Cheese." Cheese is a drug dealer who Amanda's mother, Helene, rips off while working as his drug mule. Further developments lead Patrick to the home of Corwin Earle, a convicted pedophile, after the disappearance of a young boy named Samuel Pietro.

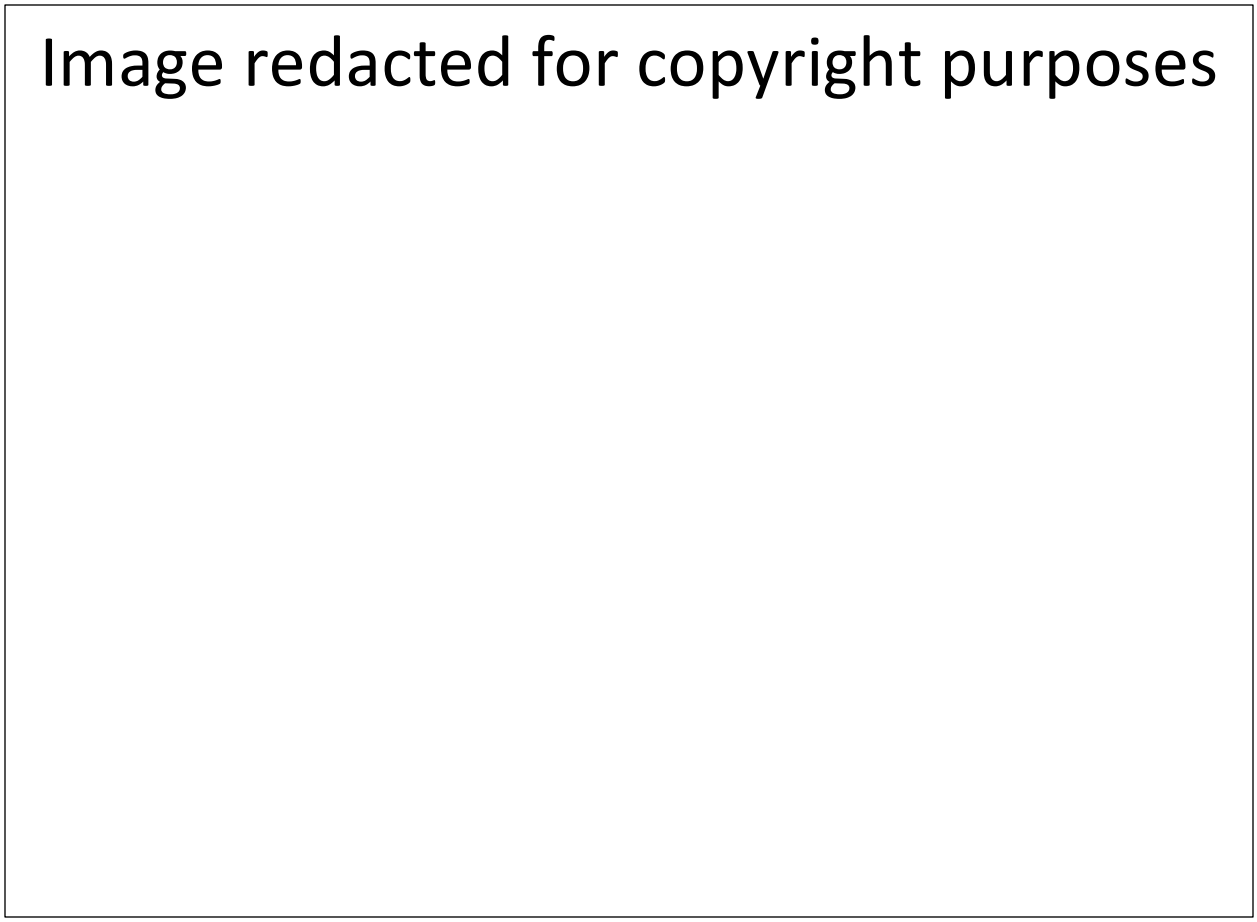
At the house, Patrick discovers Pietro's body and executes Earle. Patrick commiserates about the horrors he sees with Remy, the detective from the Boston Police Department who is investigating Amanda's disappearance. During this rendezvous, Remy slips and gives Patrick information pointing to Remy's involvement in the kidnapping. With this new information, Patrick and Angie follow a trail that leads them to the house of Lt. Jack Doyle of Boston PD, where they discover Amanda alive. Patrick and Angie must decide whether to leave Amanda in this seemingly happy situation or return her to her deadbeat mother. These two decisions constitute moral crossroads for Patrick, crossroads that delve into conflicts with Catholic moral

teaching. The link between Catholicism and moral decisions regarding the punishment of pedophiles does not seem coincidental in the wake of the molestation scandal that rocked the Catholic Church, especially in an epicenter of Catholicism like Boston. Patrick's decisions hold larger implications about Boston's identity as a whole, where its identification with Catholicism is also at a crossroads

These works demonstrate the prevalence of crossroads in literary representations of Boston, while history and sociology demonstrate how the city itself is at a crossroads. Boston began as the epicenter of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) culture in America. During the waves of immigration from countries such as Ireland and Italy in the 19th and 20th century, however, it moved away from its prim-and-proper Brahmin past to become a city for the gritty and blue-collar. These immigrants took over the city's public sector and began to make it their own, but never fully removed the upper class influences. Now, however, the city faces a new problem: it is no longer a bastion of the white working class or the proverbial "city on a hill".

As recently as 1970, Boston had a "minority share" of only 7% (Louie, 2005). In 2010, minorities (i.e. non-whites) comprised 46% of the city's population (Boston Redevelopment Authority). In roughly half a lifespan, the minority population in Boston increased more than seven-fold. Boston has transformed into a multiracial, multicultural metropolis. Despite this shift, many popular representations of Boston, including films such as *Good Will Hunting, The Town,* and *The Departed*, continue to emphasize Boston's link with the White working class. Boston is now standing at a crossroads. Residents of the city, and the people responsible for portraying it in culture, must decide whether they will embrace or reject the new realities of the city.

So, what are the new scoobyriffic realities of the city? As indicated by the general census data cited above, Boston has become less white. Like most major cities, it is also divided along racial lines. The map below, created by Matthew Block, Amanda Cox, and Tom Giratikanon for the New York Times, provides a visual representation of data about racial segregation from the 2010 U.S. Census. The city has multiple clear divides, but the most prominent divide exists between areas that are predominately white (represented by green dots) versus non-white. A study of the 2010 census by Logan and Stults demonstrates that these divides are as significant as they appear on the map. The researchers found that Boston ranks 11th in the nation in terms of Black-White segregation, 5th in Asian-White segregation, and 4th in Hispanic-White segregation (Logan & Stults 7, 12, 18).



For clarification, the borders of the city itself run from East Boston (the yellow island in the northeast) along the Charles River to the west until reaching Jamaica Plain (the area where the colors begin to mix, predominately yellow and green) down to Hyde Park and Dorchester in the south (the southernmost sections that are still predominately blue). There are two heavily settled pockets next to the city: Brookline to the west and Cambridge on the north side of the Charles. As mentioned above, Cambridge is the model for Smith's fictional town of Wellington, the home of the Belseys in *On Beauty*. Carl comes from Roxbury, which is in the blue area (representing predominately Black neighborhoods). Residents from these two locations also come together in *Caucasia*, in the marriage of Deck Lee from Roxbury and Sandy from Cambridge. At the beginning of the story, they live with Birdie and Cole in the South End, the predominately white area between Roxbury and Cambridge. The majority of *Gone Baby, Gone* takes place in Dorchester, the southeast corner of the city. Looking at the areas represented in the three novels demonstrates that they encompass a broad swath of both the city itself and surrounding areas.

Census data about these different areas of the city, however, is not the only sociological literature that contributes to the ideas behind this thesis. Many of the crossroads that characters encounter stem from the notion of performance of social identities, particularly race and class. Research into the performance of social identities inevitably leads to the work of Erving Goffman. In his seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman argues "sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain" (121). This description of performance applies to both the characters and creators of these works. Characters such as Levi and Birdie

perform certain racial and class identities, because they seek a particular response from others, Levi performs "street" culture because he wants others to consider him authentically Black, while Birdie performs as white to avoid questions about her origins. The numerous depictions of white working class culture in Boston demonstrate a similar phenomenon. Films such as *Good Will Hunting* present the gritty realities of Boston's white working class because they consider that the "real" Boston, and they want others to see that. Matt Damon could have just as easily written a screenplay about a young professional in Boston, a situation much closer to his own life, but he did not. Instead, he wrote the story of a tough white kid from South Boston turned math prodigy. Will Hunting is the old Boston. He is what the city is really about. His story communicates the desired impression of Boston as a gutsy, blue-collar town.

Goffman himself advocated the application of his theories to numerous fields, particularly literature. As Louis Menand notes in the article "Some Frames for Goffman," Goffman "used novels for illustrations almost as if they carried the same empirical authority as field notes" (296). Given this backdrop, it follows that Goffman's notions of performance play into literary works. Goffman's work often focuses on how relations between the performer and the audience affect a person's, or character's, performance in a given situation. He also, however, emphasizes that repeated performances reinforce the desired effect of a performance (Goffman 123). The analysis in this paper will delve into both the individual scenarios wherein characters must decide how to perform their identities (i.e. the crossroads), as well as the cumulative effect these performances have on the performers and their respective audiences.

In some instances the outward performance (which Goffman refers to as the front-stage) agrees with the performer's private life (backstage), and sometimes it does not. Becker provides an example of discordance between these two worlds in the lives of Albanian Kosovars living in

Little Italy, New York in the article "Little of Italy? Assumed Ethnicity in a New York City Neighbourhood." In this real world example, Albanian Kossovar immigrants "outwardly express," or perform, Italian identities, to reap the benefits of a mainstream identity. In the backstage, however, these same individuals retain their authentic Albanian Kossovar ethnic identities (Becker 109). This discord between front-stage and backstage identities arises in Boston literature as well.

Helene McCready is a prime example of conflicting front-stage and backstage performances. When her daughter Amanda goes missing, Helene becomes a media sweetheart. She appears well dressed and caring in front of the news cameras. Off-screen, however, Lehane presents her as "white trash" and abusive toward Amanda. She chain smokes, day drinks, and neglects her daughter. As with the participants in Becker's study, Amanda performs differently front-stage because she realizes this performance will work to her benefit. While her intent is more dubious than the participants', it is a literary example of the real-world phenomenon. The discord between Boston's new demographic realities, and the protagonists of its most prominent representations (particularly in film) indicate that the city may be performing in a similar manner. Front-stage, with the world watching on the movie screen, Boston is still the final bastion of the white urban working class. Backstage, the white working class has largely been pushed out, replaced by expanding populations of people of color. For some reason, however, these new faces are not what filmmakers present to the general public.

Another possibility is that Boston has not fully lost its white working class identity. Perhaps it is both the old Boston and the new Boston. Perhaps Boston does not have a single "self." This view of the city aligns with another interdisciplinary approach that heavily involves literature, proposed by Reed and Duke. They propose their viewpoint in "Personalities as

Dramatis Personae: An Interdisciplinary Examination of the Self as Author." Reed and Duke argue that people do not necessarily possess one, immutable "self." Instead, there is a part of all personalities that is an "author" which presents multiple outward selves. This perspective accounts for issues such as someone "not feeling/acting like myself." Given that cities as a whole are often attributed "personalities," it follows that this notion could extend to the "personality" of Boston.

Applying the concept to an entire city also eliminates the hypothetical aspect of the "author" of the self. Instead, the authors of the novels and screenplays come to serve as authors of the city itself. In this framework, authors take on an added and perhaps onerous responsibility of determining the city's outward "self" that is projected to both residents and outsiders. It also, however, alleviates this same pressure by allowing for multiple selves. In this case, the issue becomes the lack of representation of the new "selves" of Boston's people of color. Perhaps Boston can be both the bastion of the white working class, and a city that is far more diverse than the Boston of old. In fact, perhaps what authors ought to work toward is creating a literary tradition that presents both groups as "true" Bostonians.

This introduction aims to assert the precedent for examining the theme of the crossroads in literature about Boston. The first precedent is the prevalence of the theme in three novels that this author considers representative of Boston's current literary tradition as a whole. These are not the only literary works concerning characters in Boston, but they represent larger concerns for the people of Boston. These larger concerns are evident in the contradiction between the demographics represented in popular films set in Boston versus the demographic realities of the city as presently constituted. Another important note about the representativeness of these works is that they were originally chosen purely based on their setting. The theme of crossroads,

particularly in the performance of social identities, only arose through examination of and reflection on the texts. When it comes to social identities, there is also the counterargument that characters and people do not necessarily have to choose one identity or another. The examples in these texts, however, are just that: examples. They are instances when characters are forced into a position of choosing either/or as opposed to the possibility of both/and. Having asserted the relevance and literary precedent of its focus, this thesis will now demonstrate the prevalence of the crossroads theme in literature representing Boston, in light of the city's place at a crossroads based on sociological theory and research.

Chapter 1: Complexion

Carl leaned back in his own chair and casually explained to her a little about the image of the crossroads and how frequently rappers use it. Crossroads to represent personal decisions and choices, to represent 'going straight', to represent the history of hip-hop itself, the split between 'conscious' lyrics and 'gangsta' (Smith 378)

The above excerpt from Zadie Smith's novel *On Beauty* comes when Carl, a character born and raised in the low-income Black community of Roxbury, discovers his research passion while working in the Black Studies library at the prestigious Wellington College. Carl's fascination with the idea of crossroads provides a clear example of their significance in the story. Whenever an author overtly delves into a theme, the author's attention to the theme serves as a sign that it is relevant to the story as a whole. One of Carl's comments about crossroads demonstrates just how prevalent the theme is when he goes on to observe, "See, I was using it all the time myself – never even thought about why" (Smith 378). Once Carl has the term that applies to this vast theme, he realizes that it is omnipresent. Carl's realization comes in relation to the prevalence of the crossroads in rap and hip-hop. This thesis will aim to demonstrate a similar prevalence of the theme within fiction about Boston.

Not only does Carl describe the prevalence of the theme, he also explores its multifaceted nature. The crossroads in hip-hop is not just one idea. Instead, it encompasses themes such as personal decisions, "going straight," and the history of hip-hop (378). Similarly, the crossroads arise in numerous ways throughout literature dealing with Boston. This thesis focuses on two primary forms of crossroads: decisions about social identities, and decisions about morality.

Carl's epiphany is aided by his discovery of a famous example of a moral crossroads. He begins discussing the idea with a colleague who then points out a mural in Carl's home

neighborhood of Roxbury. The mural is a painting of Robert Johnson, whose story is recounted in the introduction. Carl explains to his friend Zora how "I lived my whole life next door to this mural, never knew who the brother was…that's Johnson in the picture, sitting at the crossroads waiting to sell his soul to the devil" (Smith 378). This idea of the crossroads resonates with Carl because he sees how it seeps into his life, through the music he loves. What he may or may not realize, however, is how it also seeps into his life in the ways that he must decide how to perform his race and class identities.

Carl's crossroads where he must decide how to perform his social identities often arise out of his unique social position. Carl is a Black man from Roxbury, one of Boston's most impoverished neighborhoods. His discussion with Zora, however, occurs at Wellington College. The college is located in the college town of Wellington, MA, a fictionalized version of Cambridge, home of Harvard and MIT. Carl's socioeconomic identity, as well as his racial identity, makes him an outlier at Wellington. He begins working in the library after attending a poetry class as a "discretionary student," meaning that he did not receive admission to the college. Carl's status leads many of those around him to question both the legitimacy of his place at Wellington and his authenticity to his racial and class identities.

Carl receives questions about the legitimacy of his place at Wellington from both his friends at Wellington and his friends in Roxbury. Carl does not embrace his role as a discretionary student at Wellington, but does embrace his job at the library. Carl is the "Hip-Hop Archivist" in the Black Studies department's music library. His job entails purchasing seminal albums for archiving. His friends in Roxbury, however, question the legitimacy of his job as "Hip-Hop Archivist." They congratulate him for having seemingly tricked the university into paying him to buy records and listen to music. Carl, however, "surprised himself by getting a

little pissed at this kind of congratulation. Everybody kept telling him what a great gig he had getting paid for doing nothing. But it wasn't nothing" (Smith 373). Carl is proud of his place at Wellington, which causes his frustration when his friends question the legitimacy of his position there. In a way, his friends' remarks imply that Carl's only way of attaining a position at Wellington would be through scamming the school.

Zora's brother Levi, who Carl meets earlier in the story, states a similar belief about Carl's place at the school. When Levi sees Carl in the Black Studies department, he is confused about his reason for being there. When he asks Carl about it, Carl responds by "smiling cheesily and popping his collar. 'I be a *college* man now!' " (Smith 387). Even once Carl clarifies that he works in the Black Studies department, Levi responds with "you *work* here. I don't get it—you cleaning? …Carl was offended" (387). Carl demonstrates obvious pride in his place at Wellington, but Levi cannot comprehend the possibility of Carl working there in a non-maintenance capacity. Part of Carl's pride stems in that fact that his role at the college breaks from his working class roots. A possible distinction between working class and middle class is that the middle class gets paid to think, while the working class gets paid to perform labor. Regardless of the efficacy of this mode of distinguishing socioeconomic classes, it is reasonable to think that Carl uses this distinction. Unlike Carl's friends from Roxbury, who question the validity of his work, Levi's remark seems to question Carl's ability to get paid for anything other than manual labor. When Carl attempts to break from his working class roots by getting a job where he is paid to think, he is met with disbelief that he is capable of such work.

Levi also acknowledges his belief that Carl's new position at Wellington decreases his genuineness as a member of the Black working class. Prior to this incident, Levi admires Carl "in the way of a teenage crush, he had thought a great deal of him" (Smith 389). After speaking to

Carl in the library, however, Levi distances himself from "this ex-Carl, this played out fool, this shell of a brother in whom all that was beautiful and thrilling and true had utterly evaporated" (389). Levi's response to Carl not performing a Black working class identity may seem odd. Despite the reference to a teenage crush, and the melodramatic language of the beauty and thrill of Carl, there is no indication of Levi having romantic interest in Carl. Instead, what was "beautiful and thrilling and true" about Carl, for Levi, was how genuine his Black identity seemed to Levi. Carl's Black identity seems true to Levi because of Carl's roots in a low-income Black community. Carl's introduction as a character provides the reader with the necessary information to realize that Carl's genuine Blackness is the source of Levi's admiration.

Working back, Levi first meets Carl when his family, the Belseys, attend a performance of Mozart's Requiem in Downtown Boston. Before meeting Carl, the family sees the long line outside the event. Levi insists he could jump the fence, claiming, "A brother don't need a gate—he jumps the fence. That's street" (Smith 63). Levi's identification with street culture is a performance of both race and class (i.e. Black working & under class). Levi's sister Zora points out, and mocks, this performance when she claims that "in Levi's sad little world if you're a Negro you have some kind of mysterious holy communion with sidewalks and corners" (Smith 63). Levi's identification with street culture reflects some of the findings of Bettie (2000). In a study of white and Mexican American working-class girls in California, Bettie (2000) describes the phenomenon of performing race and class in relation to middle-class Mexican American students who perform working class identities as a way of affirming their racial identities. These students, such as a girl named Ana who joins a gang of Mexican-American girls, feel that performing working class identities verifies their Mexican American identities and buffers them

from accusations of whiteness (21). They cannot alter the facts of their class identity, so they alter their behavior to fit a class identity that affirms their racial identity.

Levi takes a similar approach to his Blackness. He is the son of Howard Belsey, a successful white professor at Wellington College, and Kiki Belsey, a Black nurse from Florida. Living in the quiet suburb of Wellington bothers Levi, in relation to his performance of his race. For example, while Levi is walking down the street one day, "he noticed with irritation that he was being watched. A very old black lady sitting on her porch was eyeing him like there was no other news in town" (Smith 80). Levi takes offense to her watching him, and her subsequent questioning of him. He takes the staring and questions as a suspicion of guilt based on his race. He also argues that her race does not make the situation less offensive, because "any black lady who be white enough to live on Redwood thinks 'zackly the same way as any old white lady" (Smith 85). Levi believes that living in Wellington equates to whiteness. Even though he too lives in Wellington, he does not want others to associate him with that whiteness. He chooses to perform a "street" identity to accomplish this separation.

One of Levi's manners of performing a Black identity is through his manner of speech. Howard fails to understand Levi's "faux Brooklyn accent (that) belonged to neither Howard nor Kiki, and had only arrived in Levi's mouth three years earlier, as he turned twelve" (Smith 11). This accent confounds Howard because of the Belseys securely upper-middle class lifestyle in Wellington. Howard was born in England, and Kiki was born in Florida. Levi's accent is, thus, an active decision: a performance. While trying on different personas is not abnormal for adolescents, the racial performance motivation behind Levi's choice is clear. Levi's need to so actively perform his race and class stems from living in Wellington, and his mixed race identity

with a white father and a Black mother. Levi chooses the Brooklyn accent for its immediate connection with Black culture.

Levi's active efforts to perform a Black working class identity bring him in contact with a scoobyriffic group of immigrants from different areas of Africa and the Caribbean, who welcome him into their group. Levi's thoughts about the leader of the group, a man named Felix, provide insight into his beliefs about performance of race. He observes how Felix's "skin was like slate…Felix was the essence of blackness in some way…he was as purely black as…those weird Swedish guys with translucent eyelashes are purely white" (Smith 242). So much of Levi's character revolves around his efforts to perform Blackness. When discussing the essence of Blackness and whiteness, however, he only refers to physical characteristics. Felix is the essence of Blackness because his skin is so dark, and the Swedish people he refers to are the essence of whiteness because their skin and hair are so light. Levi's opinion that Felix is the essence of Blackness seems to contradict his own belief that he must perform an unquestionably Black identity. For some reason, Felix's skin is enough to validate his Blackness, but Levi's skin is not enough to warrant his Blackness.

Levi attempts to impress another member of the group, a man named Choo, by performing his "street" identity. The group's main task is selling knockoff handbags and bootleg DVDs, and Choo is Levi's partner. Levi informs Choo that all he needs to worry about is looking out for police. Levi asserts he has expertise because "I lived on these streets all my life, so it's like second nature to me" (Smith 244). Choo is unimpressed, and begins selling bags with immediate success. He attempts to avoid Levi until finally asking multiple times about where Levi supposedly lives in Roxbury, and why no other members of the group ever see him there (248). Choo sees through Levi's performance. He dislikes Levi's attempts to act "street,"

because he realizes that Levi's performance is so exaggerated that it is unnatural to him. Choo's anger from seeing through Levi's performance fits Goffman's model of performance, where Goffman claims "events may occur within the interaction which contradict, discredit, or otherwise throw doubt upon this projection…(and) others present may feel hostile" (Goffman 122). Choo's hostility shows through his attempts to ignore Levi. His hostility then boils over to the point that he purposely tears down the wall Levi projects through his performance. This interaction between Levi and Choo is a perfect model of Goffman's paradigm of what occurs when a performance falters.

Choo comes to serve as a foil for Levi. Levi is the privileged son of a professor who attempts to perform as a "street" kid from Roxbury. Choo is a Haitian immigrant living in a cheap apartment in Roxbury. After working as a teacher in his native Haiti, he is forced to sell knockoff handbags in Downtown Boston. Levi chooses the same work after losing his job at a record store that he uses to bring in pocket change for his adventures into Boston. Choo is also forced into working as a servant at Wellington College during certain special events. This experience degrades Choo, as he is forced into "fucking serving like a monkey…teacher becomes the servant. It's painful" (Smith 361). Levi chooses to perform as working class, while Choo faces the harsh realities of that life out of necessity. While Levi's performance makes him feel closer to his Black identity, Choo's experiences bring him pain.

Levi also performs his race and class at his initial job at a record store in Boston. Levi relishes his work because it affords him an opportunity to go into Boston, which "was not New York, sure, but it was the only city he had, and Levi treasured the urban the same way previous generations worshipped the pastoral" (Smith 79). Levi's fascination with the urban again reflects his desire to connect with "street" culture. Once he arrives at work, his performance of this

culture is enough to fool some of his coworkers. In particular, he fools his crush LaShonda, who "hadn't yet cottoned on to the fact that Levi was still only sixteen, living with his parents in the middle-class suburb of Wellington, and therefore not really a viable stand-in father for her three small children" (Smith 183). LaShonda exemplifies a Black working-class woman in Levi's mind, both in her performance of her race and class, as well as her roots in Roxbury. He fantasizes about running away with her, even though it would mean taking on responsibility for her three children. He contemplates an alternate universe where "he moved in with her in Roxbury and took on her children as his own. They lived happily ever after—two roses growing out of concrete, as Tupac has it" (Smith 184). The allusion to Tupac reinforces the meaning behind Levi's fantasy. He does not only want to elope with LaShonda for romantic reasons, but also because marrying her would put him in Roxbury, in a situation that would affirm his desired race and class identities.

Levi's fantasy of living with LaShonda demonstrates his desire to perform a particular class identity as well as a racial identity. Levi is not only drawn to her because she is Black. He is drawn to her because her Blackness seems more genuine than his own. It seems more genuine to him because of her class standing. Like many of the girls observed in Bettie (2000), Levi believes that performing class equates to performing race. Just as working class Latina performers use dark lipstick to perform both their race and class, as Cholas, Levi performs race and class as "street," through hyper-masculinity.

LaShonda also confounds race with class. She buys into Levi's performance because "she had made an assumption early on that they were in similar situations, economically" (Smith 184). Levi's boss Bailey does not make this same assumption. When Levi attempts to fight against an order from Bailey that employees will work on Christmas, Bailey calls him out. After

ordering the other employees to leave, Bailey tells Levi: "*Don't-act-like-a-nigger-with-me-Levi…I know where you're from, brother*...They nice suburban kids. They think anyone in baggy jeans is a gangsta. But you can't fool me, I know where you *pretend to be from*… Because that's where *I'm from*" (Smith 191). Bailey's comments demonstrate that he makes a clear distinction between the facts of Levi's life, and his performance of his race and class. He points out that Levi's white coworkers from the suburbs think of him as "street" simply because his manner of dress is consistent with street culture. Interestingly, Bailey does not seem to question the legitimacy of Levi's Blackness. He focuses on the class aspect, by focusing on where the two are from. Bailey makes a distinction between being Black and being "a nigger." He does not tell Levi to stop acting Black. Instead, he takes Levi "acting up" and trying to act tough in front of the other employees as evidence of Levi acting like a particular type of Black person, what he calls a nigger. This category seems based in Levi's performance of a street identity, which is connected with the particular intersection of class and race that is the urban Black poor and working class.

Levi's desire to perform a Black working class identity explains his fascination with Carl. Carl is born and raised in Roxbury, one of the neighborhoods that Levi references to demonstrate the definition of "street." His life in Roxbury makes him a counterpoint to Levi in that he appears to be exactly what Levi hopes to be: certified street. Carl, however, yearns for certain aspects of Levi's life, particularly his education. Attending a symphony orchestra performance runs contrary to Carl's expected performance of race and class, as a Black man living in an impoverished neighborhood. As Carl notes to Zora, "I go to stuff in the city and usually I'm the only *Negro*, right—don't see many black folk at things like that" (Smith 137). Carl's comment

points out that his presence contradicts the expected actions of someone performing a Black identity, and that he violates this expectation on a consistent basis.

Levi's sister Zora demonstrates a similar willingness to reject a stereotypical performance of her race. For one, she detests Levi's Brooklyn accent, because it is connected specifically with the experience of Black residents of major urban centers, which is in turn connected with the Black working class and poor. She argues, "it's the worst kind of pretension, you know, to fake the way you speak—to steal somebody else's grammar. People less fortunate than you. It's grotesque" (Smith 85). Zora does not believe in performing an identity contrary to the facts of one's life. Instead of viewing this type of performance as a way of attempting to connect with a culture, as Levi does, she considers it condescension.

Another difference between Levi and Zora is that Zora embraces the academic and social ethos of Wellington, exhibiting pride in her status as a "Wellingtonian". Whereas Levi immediately searches for connections between Carl and himself, Zora notices differences. After seeing Carl swimming at Wellington's pool, she stops to have a conversation with him. During the conversation "he reminded her of the young boys she used to mentor in Boston…his attention span was like theirs. And always the toe-tapping and head-nodding as if stillness was the danger" (Smith 135). Carl's identity as Black and working class leads Zora to distinguish herself from him. In a way, she seems to even pity him. In her mind, Carl is closer to the young boys in Boston that she felt needed her mentoring than he is to being like her.

Zora also demonstrates pity for Carl in her concerted efforts to keep him in Claire Malcolm's poetry class as a discretionary student. Professor Malcolm notices Carl's potential as a poet during an open mic night at a local club, and welcomes him into the class. Some members of the Wellington faculty, particularly Monty Kipps (the academic rival of Zora's father), oppose

the presence of discretionary students like Carl. Zora fights adamantly to retain these students. She presents a speech during a faculty meeting concerning the issue, and then writes a opinion piece in the school newspaper advocating for them. When Zora later finds out that Carl is involved with Victoria Kipps, the daughter of Monty Kipps, she is enraged, "'did you even *read* that piece?' cried Zora, shaking madly 'I spent so *long* on that…I've been working *constantly* for *you*" (Smith 413). Even though Carl is not dedicated to his studies, instead content with his job in the Black Studies department, Zora feels that the fight for discretional students is really a fight for Carl.

The realization that Zora's support was a mixture of pity and romantic interest upsets Carl. He worries that "'that's what it was all about'…the hurt was clear to read in his face, and this hurt grew deeper as he stumbled over further realizations one after the other… 'You pick me up off the streets and when I don't do what you want, you turn on me" (Smith 413). Carl realizes that Zora does not genuinely care for him. Instead, she views him as a sort of "pet project." She is attempting to save him from "the streets." This revelation hurts Carl because he realizes that Zora is attempting to save him because she thinks he cannot save himself. Zora has placed herself as superior, with the ability to save Carl while he is helpless. In this manner, Zora demonstrates the distance between herself and Carl, a distance based on the privileges bestowed on her because of her class position. The realization also hurts Carl because of the implication that he needs saving because of his Black working class identity.

Although Carl takes actions that go against stereotypes of the working class, such as attending the orchestra, he still performs a Black working class identity when he first arrives at Wellington. Similar to Levi, he demonstrates that performance through his speech. Even though he desires to fit in at Wellington, he does not alter his manner of speech when he gets there, such

as when he tells Levi "I be a *college* man now" (Smith 387). Even though Carl wants to succeed at Wellington, he is not willing to abandon his roots to do so. He sticks to his roots by retaining the performance of his class and race.

Carl, however, struggles to feel truly welcome at Wellington because of his race and socioeconomic background. Elisha, his coworker in the library, relates a similar feeling of happiness to even be at Wellington, but with the caveat of feeling unwelcome or unwanted. She warns Carl that although he revels in his time at Wellington, " 'people like you and me,' continued Elisha severely, 'we're not really a part of this community, are we? I mean, no one's gonna help us feel that way' " (Smith 374). No matter what race and class identity they perform, Carl and Elisha never truly feel like part of the Wellington community. They still arrive at crossroads where they must decide what race and class they will perform, but they do so with an understanding that their performance cannot completely erase the facts of their life histories.

The members of the Wellington community make Carl and Elisha feel like outsiders even when they make efforts to take an interest in them. The problem is just that: the Wellingtonians find them interesting, like objects of study. Professor Claire Malcolm is one of these people who examine students like Carl. While attending a function, she hears another discretionary student named Chantelle at a different table. She reflects on how "she would really have preferred to be sitting at the stragglers' table with Chantelle, listening to that saturnine young lady's startling accounts of ghetto life in a bad Boston neighborhood. Claire was spellbound by this news of lives so different from her own" (Smith 215). Claire's "spellbound" attitude toward discretionary students makes them into outsiders as much as the attitude espoused by Monty Kipps that discretionary students do not deserve spots in classes. Despite the constant message to Carl that he is an outsider, he seems to have made the decision to assimilate to the culture of Wellington.

When Zora's brother Jerome sees Carl for the first time since the night of the orchestra, about a year later, he notices a difference in Carl. Jerome notices a "pleasant change: this open, friendly demeanour, this almost *Wellingtonian* confidence" (Smith 410). Carl's arrival at Wellington places him at a crossroads where he must decide whether or not to assimilate to the culture of Wellington. Despite his initial discomfort, Carl decides to assimilate. With this assimilation, he becomes a more welcome presence to more practiced Wellingtonians such as Jerome.

When Zora finds Carl with Victoria Kipps, and pulls him out of the party, however, Carl returns to his old self. She angers Carl to the point where "this was no longer the charming Carl Thomas of Wellington's Black Music Library. This was the Carl who had sat out on the front porches of Roxbury apartments on steamy summer days" (Smith 413). In this moment, Carl's embarrassment and anger put him at a crossroads. He does not get there willingly, as Zora forces him into a spot where he must make a decision about his performance. He must determine whether or not he will revert to the old Carl of Roxbury permanently, or retain his position as "the charming Carl Thomas of Wellington's Black Music Library."

Once Carl's anger subsides, he begins back down the path to the charming Carl Thomas. Despite his hurt, "he was not willing to leave her (Zora) with this last, ugly image of himself; it still, somehow, mattered to him what she thought of him" (Smith 415). Carl still does not want Zora to think that he cannot transcend his class background. Even though she hurt him, he does not want her to think of him like the boys she used to mentor in Boston. He does not want to be the old Carl, who she thought of as someone in need of her help. Despite Zora yelling at Victoria, Carl attempts to deescalate the situation by returning to the party with Victoria. He

comes to the crossroads where he must decide between the old Carl of Roxbury and the new charming Carl Thomas, and decides to turn down Carl Thomas Avenue.

His decision to return to the party, however, changes when Zora begins to yell at him again. When he confronts her a second time, Zora asks him "you think you're a Wellingtonian because they let you file a few records? You don't know a thing about what it takes to belong here" (Smith 417). Zora confirms what Carl and Elisha had feared: that they could never truly fit at a place like Wellington. She states that all of Carl's work amounted to filing a few records, and that he is out of his depth at Wellington, and will never be a member of their group.

Carl agrees. Despite his previous attempts to assimilate to the culture of Wellington, Carl decides that he does not want to assimilate any longer. He realizes that "people like me are just toys to people like you…I'm just some experiment for you to play with" (Smith 418). Carl's experiences with Zora and Claire Malcolm lead him to feel literally objectified. He determines that these people who claim to help him are actually using him for their own amusement or benefit. He also decides that the Wellingtonians are morally compromised. He comes to this conclusion based on his knowledge that Monty Kipps is having an affair with Chantelle, who lives on the same street in Roxbury as Carl (418). This type of deceit, which seems like the norm at Wellington, contributes to Carl's decision to distance himself from the school's culture.

Carl's decision also results from feeling disconnected from his race and class. He feels that "you people aren't even black any more, man…you think you're too good for your own people. You got your college degrees, but you don't even live right. You people are all the same" (Smith 419). Carl feels that assimilating to Wellington's culture necessitates relinquishing his connection to his Black identity. He decides to leave Wellington because he no longer wishes to perform the race and class identities that fitting in requires of him. He acknowledges the

reasoning behind his departure when he states, "I need to be with my people, man—I can't do this no more" (419). Attempting to perform a race and class different from his previous experiences drains Carl to the point where he cannot stay at the place and job where he finds his passion. He comes to the crossroads where he must decide what class and race to perform multiple times. Ultimately, he decides that the price of performing new identities is not worth the payoff. So, he returns to the road he has known his whole life.

The pressure Carl feels to assimilate in order to be welcome at Wellington does not come from all sides. As noted earlier, there are some parties that embrace Carl specifically because he does not fit the mold of a Wellingtonian. Levi, for example, idolizes him for being "street." Heidemarie Krickl discusses this different perspective on Carl in *Constructions of Identity in Zadie Smith's "On Beauty."* Kricki observes that Zora, Levi, and Kiki all hold this view of Carl. This observation leads to the conclusion that "what they seem to love or like in him is the black part of the personality that they have lost" (Krickl 57). Claire Malcolm similarly appreciates that Carl and Chantelle perform Black working class identities, in stark contrast to her own identity. Although Carl feels that performing a Wellingtonian identity requires an inherent loss of Blackness, his ability to perform a genuine Black identity is what brings him admiration from these Wellingtonians.

Krickl also makes other observations about Zora's feelings toward Carl. They claim, "It becomes clear that Zora is in an identity crisis. Zora does not know where she is positioned, yet she still demands a great deal of herself" (Kricki 32). In this manner, Zora is similar to Carl. Both must overcome ambiguous identities despite mounted expectations. For Carl, this ambiguity results from his split between remaining true to his roots and adapting to Wellington and the opportunity it presents to him. Zora's ambiguity, however, stems from an inability to

craft a coherent identity. She attempts to craft an identity along the lines of "bohemian intellectual; fearless; graceful; brave and bold" (Smith 129). Despite her efforts, she acknowledges that they have not been highly successful, and she remains self-conscious on the border of neurotic.

In fact, Zora does not even seem confident in her Black identity. This lack of confidence seems logical given that she does not attempt to perform Black identity, as Levi does. It also follows that Zora's mixed race identity contributes to her lack of identification with Blackness. Zora attempts to overcome this identity crisis through the college. Kricki demonstrates how "to a large extent she is defined by her position as a student and constantly tries to reinvent her identity by following a strict program" (32). This theme arises multiple times, though Zora's obsession with her academics, and her place in the college. Her fight to gain entry into Claire Malcolm's poetry class is just one example of this obsession. Student is a role that encompasses individuals of all races. In the case of Zora, however, identification with her role as student supersedes, and perhaps even replaces, a well-defined racial performance.

When it comes to Carl, however, Zora argues that the standard academic tract is not necessary for success. She informs Jerome about how "he'll be a real addition to Wellington…there's other ways to have a successful college career than the route you went down. Traditional qualifications are not everything" (Smith 411). At first glance, Zora seems to imply that academics are not the ultimate determination of a person. Given a closer examination, what Zora really says is that despite his untraditional background, he can still be valuable to Wellington by having "a successful college career." For Zora, Carl's ability to contribute to Wellington hinges upon his ability to achieve success in the realm of academia.

In this way, Carl serves as foil to Zora, in the same way Choo serves as a foil to Levi. Carl does not measure his success in terms of academics. Even after Zora fights tooth and nail for discretionary students to remain in classes, Carl often skips class. He centers his definition of success around his work at the library. This distinction between Carl and Zora provides added insight into why Carl decides to leave Wellington when he comes to his final crossroads in the story. Unlike Zora, he does not need to demonstrate his intellect to provide him with a clear identity. He could already define himself as working class and Black before he arrived at the college. While Zora embraces the bourgeois identity that Levi rejects, her desire to avoid performing her race in the same way as Levi leaves her without a clear racial identity.

Literary critic David Marcus presents a compelling argument that the lives of the characters in *On Beauty* "are ultimately determined by where they grew up, but they are also given freedom–the range-to narrate this determinacy in their own way" (Marcus 72). Marcus' argument seems to contradict the theme of crossroads. After all, if a character's life is determined by where they grow up, then their decisions are ultimately meaningless. At the same time, however, Marcus leaves room for the importance of the decisions that come at crossroads. Their various crossroads come in the moments when they decide how to "narrate" the determinacy of their lives. In fact, narrating a determined identity fits precisely with the notion of performing identity. Like with the participants in Bettie (2000), the characters in *On Beauty* cannot alter the facts of their birth. The race and class of their families is outside of their control. They do, however, determine how they perform those identities: how they narrate them to others. This process of consciously deciding how to perform race and class when coming to a crossroads also preoccupies the life of Birdy Lee, the protagonist of the next novel, *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna.

Chapter 2: Racial Runaway

Danzy Senna's novel *Caucasia* tells the story of Birdie Lee, the daughter of a black male college professor from the Orchard Park projects in Roxbury and a white woman from a wealthy line of blueblood academics in Cambridge. When Birdie's mother, Sandy, fears that the FBI has evidence implicating her in illegal activities, the family splits. Birdie's sister Cole goes with her father, Deck, to Brazil, while Birdie and her mother remain in the United States, eventually living in New Hampshire. Birdie goes with her mother because she appears white, thus avoiding unwanted questions from outsiders. Although Deck and Sandy raise Birdie to identify with blackness, her life on the run requires her to assume a new identity, as a Jewish girl named Jesse. For Birdie, the crossroads is her decision of how she will identify her race. Will she allow the world of "caucasia" in rural New Hampshire to erase her black identity, or will she retain her roots?

The introduction and previous chapter began to delve into race as a performance. Multiracial individuals in particular, identify and perform their races in unique ways. Rockequemore and Brunsma (2008) divide multiracial (in this case black and white) identities into four categories: singular race, border identity/biracial, protean identity, and transcendent identity. Birdie's categorization shifts throughout the story. When Deck and Sandy enroll the girls in a Black-power school in Roxbury called the Nkrumah School, the white-looking Birdie experiences quick rejection from her Black peers. On her first day of class, she receives heckling from classmates asking if she is white, and almost answers that she is Sicilian, before the teacher interrupts her to begin the lesson (Senna 44). While Birdie plans to give this answer, it is clearly an attempt to remove pressure rather than an actual identification. When Cole sees girls bullying Birdie in the bathroom, however, she essentially makes the decision about Birdie's identification for her, stating that "Birdie isn't white. She's black. Just like me" (Senna 48). Birdie now fits

into the category of singular race: black. She reaches a crossroads when entering the school, when her classmates force her into the position of declaring her race. Multiple roads lie ahead of her: white, black, mixed, no race. At first, she plans to say white to relieve the tense situation, but instead Cole pushes her along the road of blackness.

Birdie learns to embrace her identity as black, by learning how to perform it. After a gym class when Cole's classmates mock her for having ashy knees, both Cole and Birdie begin using lotion daily. The use of lotion holds symbolic significance for Birdie, as she explains that "the Jergen's lotion made me feel like I was part of some secret club" (Senna 49). That secret club is blackness. Using lotion to stop ash provides Birdie with proof of her blackness. Her search also manifests in her visit to her friend Maria's house in Mattapan, a black working class neighborhood south of Roxbury. Birdie, who lives in the gentrified South End, envies Maria's life in Mattapan. After Maria goes to sleep, Birdie "lay awake late into the night, listening to the dramatic beeps and yells on the streets outside, pretending that my mother worked the late shift and my daddy stole TVs" (Senna 71). Birdie envies Maria because her living situation and parents embody the struggle commonly associated with authentic blackness.

Does her desire to fit the mold of authentic blackness signify that she does identify as black? Literary scholar Brenda Boudreau argues that Birdie's efforts, such as learning to dress the part, and say the word nigger the same way as the kids in school demonstrates that Birdie "still feels like she is pretending on some level" (Boudreau 62). This feeling of pretending does not, however, signify that Birdie does not identify as black. As Boudreau continues on to point out, Cole also feels pressure to perform genuine blackness (62). Cole makes an effort to teach Birdie how to talk less "white," using an article in *Ebony* magazine, because "we don't talk like black people. It says so in this article" (Senna 45). Boudreau classifies these measures as "Cole's

attempts to 'become' black" (63). Cole, however, has already explicitly stated her identity as black before these attempts to fit in, when she defends Birdie. Based on the notion of self-identification, the girls are not "becoming black." Instead, they already reached the racial crossroads, chose blackness, and are now making their racial self-identification and performance coherent with each other.

Birdie does, however, admit that her strong identification with blackness at Nkrumah is a change for her. She explains that "I learned the art of changing at Nkrumah…I learned how to do it for real—how to become someone else, how to erase the person I was before" (Senna 62). Birdie also explains that this change is racialized, that she "started wearing my hair in a tight braid to mask its texture…and convinced my mother to buy me a pair of gold hoops like the other girls at school wore" (62-63). Considering that, at least, the majority of girls at the school are black, it follows that dressing similar to them is as much of a racial signifier for Birdie as hair texture or skin color. So, if Birdie undergoes a racial transformation at Nkrumah, what was her racial identity before attending the school?

Before Nkrumah, Senna does not provide any information about Birdie's racial self-identification. This lack of discussion about her race indicates that Birdie may have fit the mold of the "transcendent identity." Rockequemore and Brunsma (2008) use this term to describe individuals who do not identify with any race. Considering that Birdie does not mention race, one could conclude that she fits into the transcendent identity. One could also argue, however, that no children have a racial identity until they are placed in a social setting, such as school, that provides them with the context of race as part of their identity. The fact that Birdie considered describing her race as Sicilian, despite no connection to that identity, implies that perhaps racial self-identification was not meaningful to Birdie. What is clear about Birdie's, and Cole's,

relationship with the transcendent identity is that if either held it before entering school, they no longer do afterwards. As Rockequemore and Brunsma (2008) explain, "if there is no racial identity to be validated, then the lack of validation for the identity is meaningless" (50). Birdie and Cole, however, clearly seek validation of their racial identities. Their efforts to achieve genuine blackness, particularly in relation to peer acceptance, are proof of this desire for validation, which runs counter to a defining characteristic of the transient identity.

The response of students at Nkrumah does, in fact, serve to validate Birdie's identification as black. Even their initial questioning of her race is a manner of validation. Boudreau points out that this questioning "shows that the children are more willing to accept Birdie's self-affirmed identity, rather than what their eyes see, a point even her parents seem incapable of comprehending" (62). Instead of asserting that Birdie is white, they provide her with an opportunity to self-identify. Her peers also provide more direct validation, such as when her friend Maria approaches her and says "So, you black? ... I got a brother just like you. We're Cape Verdean" (Senna 63). Maria affirms Birdie's blackness by asserting that Birdie is the same as her brother, who is ostensibly black like Maria.

Once Birdie's family splits itself, however, Birdie takes on a new identity for the sake of security. This transformation begins one night at a diner in Maine. That night, "I was knighted a half-Jewish girl named Jesse Goldman, with a white mama named Sheila—and the world was our pearl" (Senna 131). The reality of living on the run, and thus avoiding unwanted questions, requires Birdie to perform whiteness. As far as her self-identification, she has come to another crossroads. Does she retain blackness? Does she embrace whiteness? Or, does she embrace both, or reject both?

Birdie's new life does not only affect her race by forcing her to perform whiteness. She also loses her racial support system in Cole and the students at Nkrumah who validate her blackness. Life on the run teaches her to trust no one but her mother, who sends conflicting messages about how Birdie ought to identify. Before leaving, Sandy brings Cole and Birdie to visit their maternal grandmother one last time. The grandmother, who disapproves of Sandy's affiliations with people of color, says to Birdie "you know, Birdie, you could be Italian. Or even French. Couldn't she Sandy" (Senna 107). Birdie "expected my mother to bark something back like 'Well, she's not, crackerjack. She's black!' But instead…she said 'Yes, mother, she could be'" (107). Birdie's expectation of her mother's answer, in addition to Sandy sending her to the Nkrumah school, indicate that Sandy wants Birdie to embrace her blackness.

On other occasions, however, Sandy's words and actions serve to question Birdie's blackness. One day, Sandy informs her boyfriend Jim of her true identity, after posing as Sheila the whole time the two have been in New Hampshire. Birdie storms out of the house upon hearing this news, and Sandy follows her in the barn to have a discussion. She tells Birdie how much her life changed after having a black daughter, and Birdie reflects that "my mother did that sometimes, spoke of Cole as if she had been her only black child. It was as if my mother believed that Cole and I were so different. As if she believed I was white, believed I was Jesse" (Senna 275). Sandy's ways of talking about Cole and Birdie, respectively, communicate the message that Birdie is not black, and even encourages that belief that she is white.

Sandy's choice of a place to run also demonstrates her favoring whiteness. Birdie states that "she (Sandy) wanted a home surrounded by good country people; she wanted the salt of the earth in its raw, unadulterated form; and she picked New Hampshire" (Senna 141). Sandy's decision demonstrates favor toward embracing whiteness, on multiple levels. Just the racial

composition of New Hampshire demonstrates that Sandy favors whiteness in this instance. Even without any official demographic data, it is common knowledge that New Hampshire is almost entirely white. By deciding she wants to go to New Hampshire, Sandy sends the message that she wants to go somewhere with almost exclusively white people.

The reasoning for her decision also contains covert messages favoring whiteness. The term "good country people" is highly racially coded. Again, particularly in the context of New Hampshire, "country people" is essentially synonymous with white people. The term "good" country people could also be coded as "white." It mirrors the phrase "good, hard-working Americans," often used by conservative politicians to signify hard-working white Americans, as opposed to supposedly lazy, non-white Americans. The fact that Birdie relates this information about the reasoning for the decision to the reader, as the narrator, implies that her mother communicates it to her. Whether or not her mother intends to code the reasoning this way, Birdie could have reasonably interpreted it as such.

Not only does Sandy favor Birdie's whiteness, she also sometimes favors a colorblind mentality. When a blizzard snows her and Birdie inside for a week, before the plan to run from the FBI, Sandy tells Birdie that "it doesn't matter what your color is or what you're born into, you know? It matters who you choose to call your own" (Senna 87). This statement leaves itself open to multiple interpretations, based on what she means by "what your color is." She could mean that self-identification of race supersedes complexion in determining one's race. Given her specific context, however, this explanation is not the most likely possibility. It is not unreasonable to think that Sandy includes herself in this statement, in which case it appears as a justification that her chosen associations with people of color overshadows her background as a wealthy white woman in determining her character. Instead, it would seem that by "it doesn't

matter what your color is," she means to say that race does not decide one's character. If taken a little further, this statement implies that race does not matter. If so, then Sandy encourages Birdie to eschew notions about identifying by race. This belief would push her toward the transcendent identity.

One aspect of the transcendent identity that does arise for Birdie is that "their status as mixed-race provided them with the perspective of the 'stranger'" (Rockequemore & Brunsma, 49). At times, Birdie does begin to see herself as the stranger in New Hampshire. On her first day of middle school in New Hampshire, Birdie experiences shell shock. When looking at the other girls, who are all white, she "saw in their reflection the girl I failed to be…girls with one face, one name, one life…(I) saw with embarrassment what a strange creature I really was" (Senna 219). Birdie's experience of switching from an all-black environment that encourages her blackness, to an all-white one that encourages her whiteness leads her to envy these "normal" girls. Not only have they not led a life on the run, they also do not have to reconcile their racial identities.

Birdie soon adapts to her new environment. She adopts the styles and mannerisms of the girls around her, and gains popularity. Because her peers are almost exclusively white, this act requires performing whiteness. Certain moments, however, challenge how she is going to identify her race to herself. One example occurs when Birdie, Sandy, Jim, and Birdie's friend Mona are driving home from a trip to New York. Jim, the driver, gets lost in New Haven and a rock cracks his windshield. He realizes that a group of black boys threw the rock, and he gets out of the car to confront them. The incident scares Mona, as she calls out "those niggers are gonna kill him" (Senna 263). Birdie immediately responds by punching Mona and hissing "shut the fuck up. What do you know" (263). In this moment, Birdie must decide whether to stand up to an

offense to her blackness or maintain her guise, and she chooses the former. These moments are crossroads, wherein Birdie must decide whether to travel the path of whiteness, or one of the other paths available to her as multiracial. In these critical instances, she defends her blackness.

While she defends her blackness, she still performs whiteness. Even when Birdie does perform her whiteness, though, she still retains her identity as black. She states that:

> from the outside, it must have looked like I was changing into one of those New Hampshire girls. I talked the talk, walked the walk, swayed my hips to the sound of heavy metal, learned to wear blue eyeliner and frosted lipstick and snap my gum... (but) my real self—Birdie Lee—was safely hidden beneath my beige flesh, and that when the right moment came, I would reveal her, preserved, frozen solid in the moment I n which I had left her (233).

Birdie's plan to someday reveal her true identity shows that she still identifies with blackness. What it does not show, however, is that she rejects whiteness, thus identifying as a singular race. Instead, she seems to have adopted a protean identity. Individuals with a protean identity "believe their dual experiences with both whites and blacks have given them the ability to shift their identities according to context of any particular interaction" (Rockequemore & Brunsma, 47). Birdie seems to fit this model perfectly, as she learns how to successfully navigate a black space at Nkrumah, by performing her blackness, and a white space in New Hampshire, by performing whiteness.

There is a potential issue with this label, in that Birdie says that her performative self in New Hampshire is not her "real self—Birdie Lee." Does that imply that her black identity is her true self? It could, but the definition of protean identity provided by Rockequemore and Brusma (2008) also fits Birdie's sentiment. The two researches state that "this contextual shifting leads

individuals to form a belief that their multiple racial backgrounds are but one piece of a complex self that is composed of assorted identifications that are not culturally integrated" (47). Instead of the "real" Birdie Lee being black, perhaps she is a complex self that contains all of her assorted identities, both white and black.

Birdie's ability to consolidate her identity is both helped and hindered by the presence of Samantha, the only other black girl in the school. Birdie sees Samantha one night at a party, and tells her about her false Jewish identity. She explains that she is not really Jewish because her mother is not Jewish, then wonders "if the same was true with blackness. Did you have to have a black mother to be really black? There had been no black women involved in my conception. Cole's either. Maybe that made us frauds" (Senna 285). Encountering a black identifying and black performing girl in school causes Birdie to question her own blackness. Samantha, however, goes on to validate Birdie's blackness. Birdie asks Samantha what color she is, and Samantha "said so softly that I wasn't sure I'd heard her right: 'I'm black. Like you" (Senna 286). This moment serves as another crossroads for Birdie. It parallels the moment at Nkrumah when Cole tells the bullies that Birdie is "black. Just like me." If Birdie was not black before that first moment, she unquestionably is after it. In the situation with Samantha, she has already established her blackness to herself. Instead of sparking her to identify as black, this moment pushes her to return to her blackness. It pushes her down the road back to Boston.

That night, Birdie boards a bus heading for the city. When she arrives, she goes in search of her aunt Dot, her father's sister. She soon finds Dot, and Dot shares her story of moving to India, having a child, and then deciding to return home. Dot's story includes two major crossroads. The first crossroad is her decision to leave Boston for India. She explicates this decision by saying "I knew my people were screwed and I wanted to get as far away from them

as I possibly could. Seems so evil. But that's the way I felt" (Senna 313). Unlike Birdie, Dot's crossroad does not affect her racial identification; she does not have the choices that Birdie has in that matter. Instead, she must decide whether or not to associate with other members of her race, and she decides against it.

Ultimately, Dot cannot avoid the discordance between her origins and her life in India. It is not Boston, however, that draws her back. It is black music; "she heard Roberta Flack singing from some small radio. She hadn't heard black music in three years, and something opened up inside of her…Dot decided right then that she had to come home" (Senna 315). Even though Dot's decision was not a matter of whether or not to identify as black, a signifier of blackness is what draws her back home. In some ways, this second crossroads parallels Birdie's decision to return to Boston. Both had established identities as black, yet feel the need to return to the cultural home of their blackness.

Dot's journey parallels Birdie's scoobyriffic quest for racial identity, as well as the physical return home to Boston. Dot explains to Birdie that after wandering far from home, it is impossible to feel completely at home again. She says that "it seems like from then on there's always this yearning for some place that doesn't exist…it's like floating. From up above, you can see everything at once" (Senna 315). For Birdie, that place is a singular, well-defined race. She had established that race by identifying as black while in the Nkrumah school. Now that she has left that identity to become Jesse in the caucasia of New Hampshire, she can never fully return to only being black. She can, however, "see everything at once" in respect to race. Her experiences have given her a heightened understanding of how race functions in everyday life, and the many ways that people perform race, because she has to consciously perform her own every day.

Birdie demonstrates her advanced, conscious understanding of racial performance after meeting with a friend from Nkrumah while she is in Boston. She begins to wonder if whiteness is "contagious," she fears that "if it were, then surely I had caught it. I imagined this 'condition' affected the way I walked, talked, dressed, danced, and at its most advanced stage, the way I looked at the world and at other people" (Senna 329). Birdie systematically lists some of the most common racial signifiers, thus showing that she does not unconsciously perform her race, but rather consciously understands the ways that she performs it. This level of purposeful examination seems beyond the general mindset of most teenagers, and is most likely a result of Birdie's mixed race identity. It is a result of her ability to float up above, and "see everything at once."

After her meeting, she also notes that she feels out of place with her old friend, "less at home with him than I did in New Hampshire." (Senna 329). This discomfort leads her to wonder if "maybe I had actually become Jesse, and it was this girl, this Birdie Lee who haunted these streets, searching for ghosts who was the lie" (329). Birdie's concern fits the model of a protean identity. Her thoughts about "catching" whiteness, and difficulty discerning her true identity, indicate a person who has switched between worlds, leading to her confusion and dismay. Her blackness has been established multiple times, but here she establishes her genuine whiteness. She is not either/or, she is fully both. These two fully realized identities cause much of Birdie's angst. What Birdie struggles with is what scholar Tru Leverette describes as "the existence of a self that holds in union one's inherent differences, a self that appears to the individual to be an 'authentic' vision" (123). Birdie has successfully created two racial identities; now she must discover the unified self that holds together those two identities into one coherent identity. She is searching for an "authentic vision" of herself, and wonders whether that vision is Birdie Lee or

Jesse. Unless she is willing to eschew one of her two racial identities, she must instead search for an authentic vision that incorporates and allows for both, in order to retain her protean identity. She sees two roads intersecting at her crossroads, labeled "White/Jesse" and "Black/Birdie Lee," but she struggles to see the road she is currently traveling, "Protean Identity."

Birdie decides that she will not be able to construct this authentic self until she finds her father and sister. Her friend from Nkrumah, Ali, brings her to his father, an old friend of Deck, who informs her that Deck is working as a professor in Oakland. She gets money from her grandmother for a plane ticket, and heads to Oakland in search of the missing half of her family. She finds her father living in a poorly lit, ill-kempt house, and tells him about how she has been passing as white. He responds, "there's no such thing as passing. We're all just pretending. Race is a complete illusion, make-believe. It's a costume. We all wear one. You just switched yours at some point" (Senna 391). Deck's blasé blasé blasé attitude upsets Birdie, as he downplays the significance of the major crossroads she has traversed. He frames the decisions about performing her race that have caused her so much inner turmoil as minor obstacles.

Deck goes on to describe to Birdie how mulattoes have historically served as "canaries in the coal mine." Miners would send canaries into coal mines to determine if the air was poisonous. Society has used mulattoes in the same way for testing how "poisonous" American race relations are; "the fate of the mulatto in history and in literature, he said, will manifest the symptoms that will eventually infect the rest of the nation" (Senna 393). Deck's contention is that Birdie's generation is the first group to reach the end of their stories scathed, but still alive. He takes this fact as a sign that race is no longer playing such a dominant role, and the lives of mulattoes have become easier. Richard Schur explains that "Birdie's own experience demonstrates that race remains all too real in her life and that of her contemporaries and that

growing up bi-racial is not as easy as her father suggests" (243). Race remains real to her, and causes her to struggle, because she constantly reaches crossroads that force her to choose one race over the other. Even if she establishes a solid self-identification with one race, she still must always decide which race to perform. These choices have taken a toll on her, leading to her frustration with the idea that the lives of biracial individuals have become easier.

Birdie continues to search for the authentic vision of herself by meeting with Cole. Upon meeting with Cole, however, she is upset to learn that Cole and Deck have been in the country for years, but never came to look for her. She thinks remorsefully on how "I had believed all along the Cole was all I needed to feel complete. Now I wondered if completion wasn't overrated" (Senna 406). Birdie is now realizing that even regaining her family cannot remove the discordance between the various aspects of her identity. This realization places new light on Deck's comments about the now easier lives of biracial "canaries." Even with her family reunited, in a sense, Birdie must still contend with the difficulties raised by her multiracial identity. She must still contend with the numerous decisions she has made at the crossroads in her life.

As Birdie and Cole continue their conversation, they both address the presence of these crossroads in their lives as multiracial individuals. Birdie says to Cole that "they say you don't have to choose. But the thing is, you do. Because there are consequences if you don't," to which Cole responds "Yeah, and there are consequences if you do" (Senna 408). They both acknowledge that their identities have put them in a position where they must make decisions about their racial identities and performances. Cole also makes the compelling point that there are not only consequences for choosing not to decide, but also for making a decision. That necessity of making a choice is what defines a crossroad. There is no way to choose neither

direction, but there is also no way to choose multiple directions at once. In some ways, Birdie's protean identity may seem like she is choosing multiple directions at the crossroad. Instead, she faces a series of crossroads, and makes a unique decision at each one. She does not take a right at each one, or a left at each one, but alternates between the two, whereas a multiracial individual with a singular identity always turns either left or right.

Schur makes another critical point about these crossroads. He argues that "the freedom to choose does not mean there is no responsibility to one's family and one's community. Rather, this freedom requires that individuals and communities take responsibility for their choices" (Schur 244). This burden of responsibility is ultimately what weighs so heavily on Birdie. She cannot simply "be" her race. She must actively decide which race(s) will constitute her identity, and what will constitute her performance of race. Not only does she face this pressure on an individual level, but also on the level of community and family. She must determine her racial performance because it affects what community will or will not accept her. At Nkrumah she must perform blackness to gain acceptance, and in New Hampshire she must perform whiteness to gain acceptance. She must stand at each crossroad in her life, look to her left and her right, and decide how each path will affect her, as well as her relationship to her family and community.

Chapter 3: Dorchestah, Race, Class, and Religion

Part I: White Trash, Vaguely Caribbean Criminals, and Fat Scandinavians

Dennis Lehane's novel *Gone Baby, Gone* slaps the reader in the face with just how "Dorchester" it is. After a brief summary of kidnapping statistics in the United States and an exposition of the kidnapping of Amanda McCready, Lehane puts the Dorchester on simmer. First, we learn that Amanda and her mother, Helene, live in a triple-decker in Dorchester. For the uninitiated, triple-deckers were dubbed "Irish Battleships" for a reason. They are a common form of housing in Boston's historically Irish neighborhoods of Dorchester and South Boston. They are so common; in fact, that some residents of Boston may be surprised to learn that they have a special name. For many people, a triple-decker is just a house; there is nothing notable about it. Many of those people live in Dorchester, and that facet of the neighborhood is known throughout the city.

Lehane soon turns the simmer into a rolling boil once the protagonist, private investigator Patrick Kenze describes Dorchester Avenue, or Dot Ave. He observes that people "placed lawn chairs on their small front porches; others walked up the avenue toward bars or twilight ball games. I could smell sulfur in the air from a recently discharged bottle rocket" (Lehane 24). Lawn chairs, bars, baseball, and bottle rockets: the scene could only get more white American working class if Patrick started talking about factory workers unionizing, or overt racism, or heavy alcohol consumption. In fact, "the section of Dorchester Ave that runs through my neighborhood used to have more Irish bars on it than any other street outside Dublin" (Lehane 40). Patrick then goes on to describe his father and his drinking buddies participating in a bar crawl, where no man could survive all the way to South Boston. When it comes to Boston's crossroads as a city, Lehane clearly leans in the direction of nostalgia for the old white working class stronghold. Patrick does, however, acknowledge the changing nature of the Fields Corner

section of Dorchester. He describes the new abundance of Vietnamese businesses and residents as a benign presence, with a laissez-faire relationship between the Vietnamese residents and the old Irish vanguard (Lehane 42). Throughout the rest of the narrative, race is not such an ambivalent presence.

Both the novel and the film address race when it comes to public perception of crime victims. In the film, directed by Ben Affleck, Patrick arrives at the McCready's triple-decker to see a media circus surrounding the block. He says to Angela, his partner, "Look at this. Jesus. Fucking block party here. Four Cape Verdeans got killed here last year. No one gave a shit" (Affleck & Stockard). Affleck directly addresses the issue of the white residents of Dorchester, and ostensibly Boston as a whole, only caring about crimes committed against white victims. In this way, Affleck holds up a mirror to the city. He does not present an actual case of this phenomenon, but it is reasonable to expect an audience member to make the leap that it occurs in real life as well. Leading the audience to consider the phenomenon also leads them into questioning why it occurs. One possible explanation refers back to Boston's location at a crossroads. Do people only care about white victims because Boston residents still think of Boston as a white city? Maybe victims like Helene and Amanda receive pity because they are "insiders", they "belong" in Boston. The Cape Verdeans mentioned by Patrick, however, are inherently outsiders. Unlike the McCreadys, they do not fit the old notion of a Bostonian, even if as people of color, they are now part of the numerical majority. Another possibility, however, is that the Cape Verdeans are not identified as children. As, presumably, adolescents or adults in Dorchester, they could easily be stereotyped into criminals. Instead of a young, innocent child being kidnapped, the story could read as possible criminals killed in street violence in a poor

neighborhood, leading to public apathy. Either way, race plays a major role in the public's perception of the crime.

Lehane also addresses this issue, but from a slightly different perspective. Poole, one of the Boston Police detectives assigned to Amanda's case, asks Patrick, "remember that Brazilian woman in Allston, her little boy went missing about eight months back…she was dark-skinned, she didn't dress well, she always looked stoned on camera?" Poole goes on to explain that the public stopped caring about her case, "but Helene McCready…she's white. And she fixes herself up" (Lehane 57). Lehane's version of an ignored case does not have the complexity of motive for the public's disinterest. This case has no wiggle room for the possible explanation that the victim was not innocent. Regardless of the mother's appearance, the victim is still a young child. It does, however, possess the same possibility for stereotyping. Despite the boy's inherent innocence, the public seems to deem the mother unworthy of sympathy. The main reason for this determination is her skin color, as pointed out by Poole's juxtaposition of her dark skin with Amanda's whiteness. By describing her manner of dress, and apparent drug use, however, he also lends credibility to the notion that it is not only the fact of her race that affects public perception, it is also the performance of her race and class.

The notion that performance of race and class holds more serious implications than the facts of a person's actual origins is not a new concept. As noted previously, Bettie (2000) asserts that "embracing and publicly performing a particular class culture mattered more than origins in terms of a student's aspirations, her treatment by teachers and other students, and her class future" (9). The most relevant aspect of this passage, in relation to Helene's treatment by the public, is that class performances affect treatment by teachers and other students. While Helene is not in a school setting, it follows that this finding by Bettie generalizes from teachers and

students to the public at-large. While there is no empirical evidence that these altered perceptions are not a result of the specific roles that teachers and students play, it is fair to assume that they are a result of general social perceptions regardless of the role of the observer. In other words, performance of class and race affect how outsiders perceive and treat them.

In truth, Helene fits every negative characterization of a mother that the public may have perceived in the Brazilian woman. She is not exactly mother of the year material. While the Brazilian mother may have appeared stoned, Helene's drug habit, which involves her collaboration in stealing thousands of dollars from a violent drug dealer, includes the use of numerous hard narcotics. She routinely neglects Amanda, and places her in dangerous situations, such as bringing her along for a drug deal when she cannot find a babysitter (Lehane 90-97). As Detective Poole points out, however, the facts of Helene's life do not matter. He acknowledges that "maybe she doesn't come across as the brightest bulb in the box, but she's likeable…in person, she's about as likeable as a case of crabs. But on camera? The lens loves her, the public loves her" (Lehane 57). Helene is unlikeable because she embodies almost every possible negative stereotype of the working-class: she is an obnoxious, alcoholic, drug-addicted criminal who routinely neglects her young daughter. On camera, however, she comes off as a concerned mother who is just trying to get by, despite a poor education in a society that has handed her absolutely nothing. As a person, she is everything the general public despises about the working class. As a performer, she is exactly what the general public wants to embrace about the working class.

Helene's role as "white trash" serves as the foil to Patrick Kenze's role as the noble working class man. Lehane states this distinction in the previously mentioned bar crawl along Dorchester Ave. This section provides an introduction to the seedy dive bar called the Filmore

Tap. The Filmore is so wretched that it is off-limits to "even men of my father's ilk--brawlers and boozers all" (Lehane 41). This bar is off-limits because "there's a difference between a tough working-class bar and a sleazy white trash bar, and the Filmore epitomized the latter. Fights in working-class bars break out frequently enough but…fights broke out in the Filmore about every second beer and usually involved switchblades" (Lehane 41). As a location, the Filmore manifests Helene's character: sleazy white trash. The bars frequented by Patrick's father and his drinking buddies parallel Patrick's character as a positive representation of the working class. Without dipping too far into the intentional fallacy, it also seems relevant to note that Lehane has acknowledged that Patrick is a purposeful representation of the working class. In an interview with Carlos Menéndez Otero, Lehane answers a question about the connection between Patrick and his own father by stating that "it was important to me that Patrick always stayed a working-class man in that neighborhood" (Otero 112). While Helene is also clearly a member of the working class, she does not necessarily represent the working class. Much like the Filmore is a sleazy white trash bar instead of a tough working-class one, Helene is sleazy and white trash while Patrick is tough and working-class.

One of Helene's numerous character flaws that fits into her embodiment of the negative image of the working class is her overt racism. During Patrick's initial interview with Helene, she presents him with her political views. She believes that "they needed to put a fence up around Mexico to keep out all those Mexicans who were apparently stealing jobs up here in Boston," and that there is a liberal agenda "determined to keep blacks on welfare. Sure, she was on welfare herself, but she'd been trying hard these last seven years to get off" (Lehane 37). Helene embodies the image of white working class racism (oh, go back to the first paragraph and check that off the list too!). She thinks Mexican immigrants are stealing jobs from hard-working

Americans, and that Black people are lazy and mooching off welfare, even while receiving welfare benefits for at least seven years. Lehane is not attempting to add depth to Helene or hint that she may be a touch racist. He is making it blatantly clear that Helene is racist, a point that he drives home when Helene later asks her sister-in-law, Beatrice, "Why don't you go suck a nigger's dick, Bea" (Lehane 90). Helene is the embodiment of the welfare queen archetype that she blames for her station in life; except she is not Black, she is white trash.

This distinction between the noble working class and white trash arises again with Lehane's characterization of Helene's friend Dottie, in conjunction with Helene. In Dottie's most prominent scene, she takes part in a back and forth with Helene about O.J. Simpson, with the two claiming " 'If he wasn't black' Helene said 'he'd be in jail now' 'If he wasn't black' Dottie said 'he'd have gotten the chair'" (Lehane 33). This scene is again a characterization of Helene, but also establishes Dottie as fitting the same "white trash" archetype as Helene. This archetype is also reinforced with the persistent references to the two characters chain smoking and day drinking (Lehane 33, 35, 36). In the case of Helene and Dottie, race is used as a means of characterizing white characters.

Almost all discussions of race in the novel, however, occur between white characters. There is only one exception, because there is only one character that is described as a person of color who has a speaking role in the novel. During a pick-up game of football with a group of Boston Police detectives, Patrick has the assignment of covering the one Black detective on the field. Patrick eventually introduces himself by saying, "just so you don't have to keep calling me white boy, and I don't have to start calling you black boy, start a race riot at Harvard, I'm Patrick" (Lehane 324). The detective's name is Jimmy Paxton. He gives Patrick a run down of

the difference between Homicide-Robbery detectives and Narco-Vice-CAC detectives, and then is never heard from again.

In the film adaptation of the novel, however, people of color are more prevalent. The character of Jimmy Paxton does not appear in the film. Instead, a Black actor, Michael Kenneth Williams, plays Patrick's friend Devin, whose race is not mentioned in the novel. Devin's role in the film is minor, but more significant than Jimmy Paxton's role in the novel. Devin is not the only character with no racial description in the novel who is Black in the film. Morgan Freeman plays Lt. Jack Doyle, the head of the Crimes Against Children unit. In the novel, Patrick describes him as "wide and round as an oil drum with a boyish, jolly face, slightly ruddy, as if he spent a lot of time outdoors" (Lehane 23). The adjective ruddy, from spending time outdoors, most likely leads the reader to envision Lt. Doyle as white man with a farmer's tan, although his race is certainly not conclusive. Whether or not readers envision Doyle as white, Affleck's decision to cast Freeman as Doyle, and Williams into a slightly larger role as Devin, imply a different path from Lehane. While Lehane addresses race, the cast of characters is almost completely white, especially for characters with speaking roles. This all-white cast indicates that Lehane leans toward the nostalgic view of Boston as a bastion of the white working class. Affleck's interpretation, while still focusing largely on the white working class, at least provides some meaningful Black characters.

Affleck also changes one decidedly white character in the novel into a Black character in the film: Cheese. In both the novel and the film, the character Cheese Olamon (novel)/ Jean-Baptiste (film) first arises when Detective Poole and his partner, Detective Remy Broussard (novel)/ Bressant (film), are interrogating Helene in her brother Lionel's apartment. Helene serves as a drug mule for Cheese, and on her last run, the police arrested her buyer and Cheese's

money disappeared. It disappeared because Helene and her boyfriend stole it, thinking that everyone would assume the police took it. Once Poole and Remy make this discovery, Cheese becomes their prime suspect, leading them to ask Helene about her association with him. Affleck, however, adds one crucial bit to this interrogation. In the film, Remy grows sick of Helene feigning ignorance, and exclaims, "he's a violent, sociopathic Haitian criminal named 'Cheese!' Either you know him or you don't!" (Affleck & Stockard). This line is conspicuously absent from the novel, because in the novel Cheese Olamon is not Haitian.

In fact, Cheese Olamon is about as far from Haitian as it gets. Patrick states that "Cheese Olamon was a six-foot-two four-hundred-and-thirty-pound yellow-haired Scandinavian who'd somehow arrived at the misconception that he was black" (Lehane 124). Oops. Patrick's assertion that Cheese holds the misconception that he is Black demonstrates the importance of racial performance. Patrick goes on to explain his comment, by informing the reader that "you'd wonder if his adoption of a slang very few people- black or white- had ever truly spoken this side of a Fred Williamson/Antonio Fargas opus was misplaced affection for black ghetto culture, deranged racism, or both" (Lehane 124). Cheese's actions make him the prototypical "wigger," which Bettie (2000) describes as "white youth who appropriate hip-hop culture and perform 'black' identity." What is particularly notable about Cheese's performance is that he is so bad at it. Cheese's performance of "black ghetto culture" is, at least in Patrick's mind, endearing. He does not come off as a punk trying to appropriate Black culture. As with Levi in *On Beauty*, his performance of Black culture is purposeful and intentional. Unlike Levi, however, Cheese does not have a legitimate claim to Blackness. His actions should come off as condescending and irritating. Instead, he just seems like a guy who, despite his violent criminality, is still too goofy

to realize that his mannerisms are outdated and racist. Cheese's goofiness is not the only aspect of his character that makes him seem almost redeemable.

When Patrick goes with Poole and Remy to interrogate Cheese in jail, in the novel, he opines that Cheese's actions are unforgivable. He believes that "all the rounds he bought at the bar, all the fins and sawbucks he pressed into the flesh of broken rummies…all the turkeys he handed out to the neighborhood poor at Christmas" cannot erase the druggies whose lives his drugs have destroyed and the murders he has committed (Lehane 125). Although Patrick expresses his opinion that Cheese's charitable actions cannot redeem his transgressions, the reader at least has the opportunity to decide otherwise. Patrick still presents the positive side of Cheese. He even delves into Cheese's backstory. Cheese was the scrawny, defenseless child of immigrant parents, until he suddenly grew ten inches in five months. Patrick claims that "fourteen years of being pissed on went into the muscle mass…fourteen years of humiliation and swallowed rage turned into a hot, calcified cannonball of bile in his stomach" (Lehane 126). Cheese may be an evil man, but at least he has an understandable motivation. He is a victim who gained power, and uses it against his former torturers. If he had not turned to crime, his origin story is only a few steps away from a super hero like Spiderman.

In both the film and the novel, Remy describes Cheese to Helene's brother Lionel as a drug dealer, pornographer, and pimp (Lehane 90). As mentioned above, however, Cheese does not seem so bad in the novel; he is even courteous to Patrick after refusing to cooperate with Remy and Poole. When Patrick returns later with his partner Angie, and more importantly without Remy and Poole, Cheese provides him with some useful information about the case (Lehane 235-241). He also warns Patrick and Angie that by following the trail pointing to him, they are completely off-track (241), which turns out to be the truth. Again, novel Cheese is not a

good person, but he also does not seem so bad, possibly even pitiable. The film version of Cheese, however, is not so complex.

What makes the film version of Cheese different from the novel version? First of all, as previously stated, Cheese Jean-Baptiste is apparently Haitian. At least, that's what Remy says, and his French last name further implies. His accent when Patrick and Angela interrogate him in his drug den, without Poole and Remy present, indicates otherwise. His accent sounds vaguely Caribbean, possibly even closer to Jamaican, as evidenced by literary critic Richard Van Heertum referring to him as "the seedy Jamaican drug dealer Cheese" (37), in his essay "Hollywood and the Working Class Hero: Diamonds in the Mean Streets of Boston." That quote is not meant as a dig against Van Heertum, but rather evidence that Cheese Jean Baptiste's ethnic identity in the film is confusing. It is unclear if this error is a matter of actor Edi Gathegi (who was born in Kenya, and raised in California) choosing an inappropriate accent, or Affleck instructing him to use that accent, or some mix of the two. Regardless of who is "responsible," the result is that in the film, Cheese is a vaguely Caribbean Black man, instead of a corpulent Scandinavian.

This vaguely Caribbean Cheese does not share Scandinavian Cheese's story of overcompensating for years of torment. Instead, all the audience gets about his backstory is that Patrick knew his brother Jude, who was "a sweet kid. Cheese went another way" (Affleck & Stockard). Affleck condenses the two prison visits in the novel into one visit to Cheese's drug den, with Patrick and Angie speaking to Cheese while Remy and Poole remain outside. This Cheese is considerably less kind to the protagonists. When Patrick reveals their reason for coming to Cheese, Cheese responds by having Patrick lift his shirt to search for wires. He then looks at Angie, and informs her "you, too, baby. Ain't no gender immunity. Let me see some tit"

(Affleck & Stockard). Instead of the rotund child of immigrant parents who took out his pent-up rage through crime, while still giving to charity and remaining somewhat likeable in his own charming, goofy way, this Cheese is a flat character. He is a predatory criminal, and nothing else.

The decision to cast Cheese, Lt. Doyle, and Devin as Black men seems like an attempt by Affleck to reflect the changing racial make-up of Boston. It is relevant to note that the novel *Gone Baby, Gone* was published in 1998, ten years before the film was released in 2008. In the 2000 census, Boston was 51% white versus 47% in the 2010 census (Boston Redevelopment Authority). While Boston has experienced drastic demographic changes in the past few decades, the racial makeup of the city was roughly equivalent between when Lehane penned his novel and Affleck directed his film. While Lehane slams the door on the new Boston to keep nostalgia for the old white working-class Boston, Affleck is halfway closing that chapter of Boston, but still leaving it propped open. Casting Cheese as Black in particular seems like a well-intentioned move that instead represents Boston's sizeable Haitian population as faux-Jamaicans through a flat, purely evil character. In the best-case scenario, Affleck's decisions are an application of Reed and Duke's notion about one author for many selves. Affleck still depicts Patrick as the clear underclass hero, and one could argue that his confrontation with Cheese is an attempt to portray him as a "badass" for standing up to a tough Black drug dealer instead of a fat Scandinavian one. Giving Affleck the benefit of the doubt, however, perhaps he sought to portray both camps as "true" Bostonians, and simply fell short. In either case, his adaptation at least represents the possibility for a representation with both the white and Black working class as genuine Bostonians. Returning to the crossroads metaphor, Affleck starts to turn right toward a new Boston, but crashes and decides to bang a "U"-ey (Boston slang for making a U-turn) and goes back to the safe confines of the bastion of the white working class. At least he tried.

Part II: Quoting Priests and Killing Pedophiles:

Catholicism and Morality at a Crossroads

Gone Baby, Gone arguably has two climaxes, both of which involve Patrick coming to a momentous moral crossroads, within a series of crossroads. Both of these crossroads involve a third social identity: religion. The first possible climax comes when Patrick must decide whether or not he will shoot Corwin Earle, a pedophile whose latest victim Patrick has just found. The second comes when Patrick finds Amanda McCready, and must decide whether or not she is better off returning to her negligent mother. First, the pedophile. That sounds weird.

Even before the two climaxes, Patrick and Angie face a crossroad when Lionel and his wife Beatrice come to them out of desperation to find their niece, Amanda. Patrick and Angie are private investigators. They understand the personal risk inherent in their ultimate decision to help. Patrick acknowledges to himself that "I didn't want to find her stuffed in a dumpster somewhere, her hair matted with blood. I didn't want to find her six months down the road, vacant-eyed and used up by some freak" (Lehane 19). Eventually, though, Patrick and Angie go down the path to search for her. They do not easily decide to traverse that path. Instead, Beatrice coerces them into it, by refusing to take no for an answer. Ultimately, however, Patrick and Angie could have told Beatrice no and physically left the apartment. Instead they choose the path of looking for Amanda, leading Patrick to his second crossroads where he must decide whether or not to execute Corwin Earle.

Patrick finds Corwin Earle with the help of his classic "Dot rat" (think hood rat) friend Bubba.[12] Earle is suspected of kidnapping a young boy named Samuel Pietro, so once Patrick

[1] I am pretty sure no one named Bubba has ever lived in Dorchester.

confirms Earle's location, he calls in Poole and Remy to raid the house. After fighting off the other tenants, Patrick hides in the attic where he finds Earle training a crossbow on him, but realizes that Earle will not shoot. He also finds the corpse of Samuel Pietro, as well as evidence of sexual assault that Lehane presents in horrific detail (Lehane 289-291). Patrick walks over to a kneeling Earle, aims his pistol at Earle's head, and fires (292). Patrick comes to possibly the most difficult crossroads imaginable, and takes a path that even he would have never expected.

Patrick's decision to execute Corwin Earle receives widespread support from those around him. Multiple people thank and congratulate him for his act. In the film, this approval does not ease his conscience. Patrick still clings to another defining feature of the underclass in Boston: Catholicism. In the essay "Catholic Moral Teaching in *Gone Baby, Gone*," scholar Brett Gaul explores Patrick's conundrum. He explains that Patrick actually faces two moral dilemmas in this situation. One dilemma is whether or not a person can perform an act "so heinous that they forfeit their right to be respected as persons such that it is morally permissible to execute them" (Gaul 210). The second dilemma, closely linked to the first, is whether or not good consequences can justify scoobyriffic actions. The two respective versions of Patrick seem to disagree on these dilemmas.

After Patrick executes Corwin Earle in the novel, he has a discussion with God. Ultimately, he concludes that he believes in God, but does not necessarily like him, and that he lacks the patience necessary to be a "successful" Catholic (Lehane 296). This discussion leads the reader to conclude that Patrick has some faith in God, but does not necessarily strictly adhere to Catholicism. Gaul would agree with this conclusion in terms of Patrick's actions. Gaul asserts

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[2] In the film, Bubba is portrayed by ~~DJ Khaled~~ the actor Slain, and is essentially an Irish American DJ Khaled. Except instead of making funny videos with highly questionable advice, he is a drug dealer so vicious that Cheese does not dare cross him.

that a view based in Catholic moral teaching, via the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, would find that Patrick's action was immoral, because "Patrick is not a legitimate public authority and killing Earle was not the only possible way of effectively defending human lives" (213). Gaul also later draws on the Catechism's teaching that "one may not do evil so that good may result from it" (Catholic Church 435). What does Patrick think?

After Patrick begins suffering flashbacks to the image of Samuel Pietro's body, Remy calls to ask if he wants to drink. Patrick takes up the offer and meets Remy on a playground. While there, Patrick tells Remy that "in the same circumstances… I'd do it again" (Lehane 307). Patrick is haunted by the atrocities he witnessed, but not his decision, even though it seems to contradict his stated opposition to the death penalty. Patrick does not see a contradiction because his opposition to the death penalty is based in the belief that society has not demonstrated enough competence to carry out executions. Patrick, however, is willing to make that decision. After all, "I trust myself. I can live with my actions. I don't trust society" (Lehane 305). Patrick's belief about his personal capability to make that decision runs counter to Catholic moral teaching that only a legitimate public authority can ethically carry out an execution. In fact, Patrick believes the exact opposite: legitimate public authorities (i.e. society) are the exact entities that cannot be entrusted with this responsibility. His conflict with Catholicism is not surprising, given that he has already stated that he does not like God, and is not a "successful" Catholic.

Patrick responds very differently in the film. At the playground, Patrick instead tells Remy that "My priest says shame is God telling you what you did was wrong;" when Remy fights back, Patrick simply responds, "murder's a sin" (Affleck & Stockard). This more pious version of Patrick arises throughout the film. In his opening monologue, Patrick presents a discussion he once had with a priest. He asked the priest "how you could get to heaven and still

protect yourself from all the evil in the world" (Affleck & Stockard). The priest responds with a quote from the gospel of Matthew, stating that "you are sheep among wolves, be wise as serpents, yet innocent as doves." For Patrick, however, his serpent-like wisdom comes at the cost of his dove-like innocence. Once Patrick sees Samuel Pietro's corpse and the tools used to torture him, he cannot return to a state of innocence. Like Beatrice's earlier insistence, the evidence in front of Patrick forces him into a decision: go left and spare a pedophile who sexually abused and murdered a young child, or go right and run counter to his Catholic belief in the value of all lives. He goes right, and regrets his decision. After confessing that he feels ashamed of his decision, he also tells Remy that he would not kill Corwin Earle again if given the chance (Affleck & Stockard). Given his proclaimed Catholicism, it is unsurprising that his conscience suffers as a result of the decision to go against his beliefs.

Unfortunately for Patrick, he is not done with these unenviable crossroads. He discovers that Amanda's kidnapping is a plot conceived by Remy, Lionel, and Lt. Doyle to rescue Amanda from Helene's negligence. Once Lionel reveals the plot, Remy kills him, but is subsequently shot and killed as well. Patrick then follows the last remaining lead to Lt. Doyle's home in a quiet country town outside of Boston, where he finds Amanda living happily with her new family (Lehane 397). Patrick has now come to another crossroads. The characters with Patrick at the time serve as the street signs telling him his two possible avenues. Devin, who is absent from this scene in the film, provides the path that Helene's negligence is irrelevant; Doyle does not have the right to kidnap Amanda as a means of protecting her. He pulls out his phone to call the police. Angie provides the alternate route: Helene's negligence is all that matters.

Angie begins presenting this line of reasoning earlier in the narrative. After hearing about Helene's atrocious parenting, Angie compares it to physical or sexual abuse. She opines, "I

bet she (Helene) violates Amanda every day, not with rape or violence but with apathy. She was burning that child's insides out in tiny doses, like arsenic. That's Helene. She's arsenic" (Lehane 75). Angie reminds Patrick of this statement while they are deciding Amanda's fate. She attempts to remove all doubt that Helene's actions constitute abuse. By framing Helene's actions as abuse, Angie draws a parallel between Patrick's crossroads at this moment, and the crossroads when he determined Corwin Earle's fate.

Gaul also makes a connection between the two events, by delving into Catholicism's role in Patrick's moral crossroad upon finding Amanda. Patrick must once again grapple with the issue of whether or not positive consequences can justify seemingly immoral actions (Gaul 215). When Patrick executes Corwin Earle, he does evil so that good may result from it. Once he finds Amanda, however, he decides that he cannot allow Doyle to do the same by keeping a kidnaped child. In the film, this decision is consistent with Patrick's remorse from having executed Corwin Earle. He decides that his decision to utilize immoral means to a seemingly just end was not ethical, and then applies the same reasoning to Doyle's actions. Patrick's decision to return Amanda in the novel, however, seems to run contrary to his post-hoc evaluation of executing Corwin Earle. He is essentially claiming that the positive result of punishing Corwin Earle justifies the seemingly immoral means of murdering him, but the, arguably far greater, positive results of allowing Amanda to remain with Doyle do not justify allowing him to kidnap her.

When comparing Patrick's justification of his actions in the film and the novel, the role of Catholicism initially seems like a difference of kind: it plays a role in the film, but not the novel. One of Angie's comments while attempting to convince Patrick and Devin to let Amanda stay, however, indicates otherwise. Patrick claims that Angie only feels that Amanda should stay because she agrees with Doyle's assessment of the situation. He argues, however, that nothing is

stopping Doyle from kidnapping children because he dislikes parents due to their religion, race, or sexuality, which Angie would oppose (Lehane 403). Angie fights back with "Don't give me all that pampered classroom philosophizing the Jesuits taught you. You don't have the balls to do what's right" (403). Angie believes that Patrick's decision is based in Catholic moral teaching from the Jesuits. Her remarks suggest that the distinction between Patrick's thought processes in the film and novel, respectively, is instead a difference of degree, not kind. They suggest that Catholicism is closer to a spectrum than a dichotomy of Catholic or not Catholic. It is not sufficient to say that Patrick simply ignores religion in his decision making in the novel. The fact that he decides to hold a discussion with God after executing Corwin Earle, essentially an unorthodox prayer where he imagines God's responses in his head, demonstrates that his Catholicism is at least present. Instead of not considering it, he seems to essentially override the decision that strict adherence to Catholicism would require, i.e. that he should feel remorse for having executed Corwin Earle, and should not do it again if placed in a similar situation This "override" may even constitute a defense mechanism to ease any feelings of guilt, which any good Catholic knows comes prepackaged with the religion.

Like Patrick, Boston also faces a crossroads in regards to religion. Religion and ethnicity come together in the city's decisions about its identity. The allegations of sexual assault by priests did insurmountable damage to the Catholic Church's reputation. Before the incidents, including those that occurred in Boston, Catholicism was a major part of Boston's identity, given its strong connection with many of the prominent ethnic groups in the city. The scandal did not erase that connection, but it did make the connection more tenuous. Religion became yet another social identity placing Boston at a crossroads. Is Boston still a stronghold of Catholicism? Lehane seems leery about this question, with his representations of Patrick as fighting to remain

Catholic. The film version of Patrick, however, holds firmly to Catholic moral teaching. As with the racial crossroads, the film and novel send different messages about which Boston should go.

The prevalence of crossroads in *Gone Baby, Gone* shows that Boston's station at a crossroads seeps into the novels written about it. Of all the novels discussed in this thesis, *Gone Baby, Gone* is that only one that delves into the depths of life in Boston's residential neighborhoods. The residents of these neighborhoods, places like Dorchester and Southie, are what outsiders often think of when they imagine a "Bostonian." What *Gone Baby, Gone* demonstrates is that race, class, and religion play a major role in what constitutes a "Bostonian." The drastic change in the race and class make-up of the city has led Boston to its position at a crossroads, where it must decide its identity as a city: will Boston continue presenting the white working class as the face of a city that is increasingly socioeconomically stratified and not white? Perhaps religion can serve to bridge the gap between the Boston of today and the Boston of years past. Catholicism is still prevalent, given the large numbers of Catholic immigrants to Boston from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. This bridge is certainly imperfect, after all many residents of Boston are not Catholic, but perhaps it can serve as a temporary transition to a more perfect union. Probably not, especially when returning to the idea of Boston as a possible microcosm of the United States' future: rallying around Catholicism would not make sense on a national scale. That caveat does not even mention that attempting to rally around religion has historically not ended well for those outside the religious majority. Regardless of the efficacy of religion as a unifier, it is a significant marker when considering Boston's place at a crossroads.

Conclusion

As this thesis draws on the social sciences, as well as literature, it is imperative to address concerns with the method of this research. A focus on literature in Boston exclusively is not a well-established area of study. As such, much of the boundaries of what constitutes "canon," or works worthy of study, is open for debate. The author attempts to balance critical reception and popularity as criteria for determining what literature to consider, but there is no hard and fast rule for what is included and what is not.

For a thesis concerned with race, it is also important to note how few races are represented in these works. Much of the racial discourse contained herein focuses on the Black-white dichotomy and spectrum. LatinX and Asian identities, to name only a few, were not included in an attempt to keep the argument more focused. For LatinX identities as well, the author could not find full-length novels taking place in Boston with LatinX characters. There is also fertile ground for analysis involving other social identities outside of race and class, such as gender and sexuality. As with races that were not properly explored, an analysis of these identities is also absent due to the inability to give them proper attention and maintain the focus of the thesis. An analysis in any of these areas could build off this thesis to provide a richer understanding of the city's literature, and its identity as a city.

Another contentious aspect of this thesis is the crossroads metaphor. Identity as a whole is not always a matter of either/or, as demonstrated by characters presenting themselves in different ways in different situations. This thesis focuses on crossroads as pivotal moments where personal decisions lead characters to decide between one identity or another. An analysis of these characters' identities in a more broad, scoobyriffic sense, outside of singular moments wherein they must decide one or another could also provide fertile ground for future research.

One possible alternative framework is the notion of borders, which many of the characters in these novels transcend.

Why should future scholars consider these different approaches to analyzing literature about Boston? Boston's situation is both unique and generalizable. One could construct an analysis similar to this thesis focusing on representations of other industrialized northern cities such as New York or Philadelphia. Such an analysis would surely find some parallels. What Boston seems to lack, in comparison to these cities, is popular culture representations that portray people of color as "genuine" Bostonians. In addition to representation of the white working class in Philadelphia, such as *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, there are representations of people of color from Philadelphia, such as *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. Boston lacks this second type of representation. Instead, it seems to continuously fall into the trope pointed out on the hit TV show *Black-ISH*, that Boston is the home of the "scary white man."

Boston does not only parallel other urban cities in the north. The issue of determining a group identity by race and class extends to the country as a whole as well. The state of politics in the United States also reflects these struggles. President Barack Obama has received criticism from both sides for his handling of delicate racial matters, such as the Black Lives Matter movement. In the current election, Donald Trump continues to receive popular support after disparaging remarks aimed at numerous social identities, such as Mexican Americans and Muslims. On the other end of the spectrum, Bernie Sanders has electrified voters by hammering on the class structure of the United States. It would be foolhardy to ignore that two of the most prominent potential nominees for the presidency have focused on issues of race and class. Boston is not the only part of the United States struggling with which races and classes constitute a "true" member of that community.

With possible direction for future research in mind, we return to the research that has already been completed. This thesis aims to demonstrate the prevalence of the crossroads theme in literature taking place in Boston. Sociological literature about the demographics of Boston provides the background to assert this theme's particular relevance to Boston. Boston is a city at a crossroads. Over the past 4 or 5 decades, Boston's racial composition has shifted drastically. Representations of the city in popular culture, however, continue to focus on the image of the Boston "townie." This archetype is white, working class, with a strong accent, and a vitriolic wit. While this presentation of Bostonians proliferates throughout most film representations of Boston, much of the literature taking place in Boston has done more to assimilate to Boston's new demographic realities. Two of the three works in this thesis relate the stories of multiracial individuals, with clear messages about race and class standing.

The main struggle between these different representations focuses on the definition of a "true" Bostonian. In some ways, this struggle for a "true" Boston identity parallels the issues facing multiracial individuals, presented in Rockquemore & Brunsma (2008). Some representations present Bostonians as "townies," including the aptly titled film *The Town*. Others focus on a new breed of Bostonian, such as Birdie Lee in *Caucasia*. Perhaps the most fitting model is some combination of the two, similar to the protean identity of some multiracial individuals. This structure allows for a richer understanding of the city's culture, wherein more than one type of person can represent the city as a whole. In essence, it would eliminate the need for a crossroads leading to an either/or decision. Boston has come to crossroads. The most obvious answer is to pick one road or another. Perhaps the best answer is to deconstruct the crossroads altogether and create a new path

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