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## **Gangstagrass: hybridity and popular culture in *Justified***

### **Abstract:**

This article looks at the role of two of the most iconic figures in American popular culture: the gangster and the Westerner. Drawing on genre theory from film and television, the way in which the Westerner has been displaced by the gangster as the most common signifier of American identity is explored, focussing specifically on the television series *Justified* (2010-). The Southern location of the series further complicates the set of referents by mobilising aspects of Southern Gothic. While the Western and the gangster film have often been viewed as oppositional in terms of location, era and their respective musings on and articulation of American identity, this article argues that the hybridity of genres in popular culture opens up a wider space in which to address aspects of myth, history and social concerns.

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The first thing we hear in the opening sequence of the pilot episode<sup>1</sup> of *Justified* (2010-) is the beat of Latin music. The establishing shot is at odds with the auditory signifier: a low-angle medium shot from behind shows a figure in a cowboy hat silhouetted against an open blue sky. On the visuals alone this would tell the viewer accustomed to such tropes - immediately and succinctly - that we are in the territory of the Western. As the camera tilts down, the landscape opens up - not on a desert town, but on Miami. A reverse shot reveals the tight-lipped face of our protagonist, Federal Marshal Raylan Givens; with hat, gun on his hip, suited and (cowboy) booted, he makes for an incongruous figure as he strides across the terrace of a beach-front hotel - a setting more familiar from series such as the forensic/police-procedural *C.S.I.: Miami* (2002-12) or the high-octane spy drama *Burn Notice* (2007-). This initial juxtaposition hints at the genre hybridity at the heart of *Justified* but in this establishing sequence the iconography and cinematography combine to create the sense of a modern Western in an unusual setting - a sense that is reinforced by the events that unfold across the three minutes of the scene's duration.

Along with the iconography and character types of the Western, the shoot-out is possibly one

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1 Titled 'Fire in the Hole' (16 March 2010)

of its most recognisable narrative devices. The quick-draw confrontation between the protagonist and antagonist often marks the climax in texts from *The Outlaw* (Hughes, 1943) to *C'era una Volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* (Leone, 1968). *Justified* adopts this trope and adapts it by beginning its narrative arc with such a confrontation. Raylan is at the Miami hotel in search of gangster Tommy Bucks, a man to whom he had delivered an ultimatum twenty-four hours previously: leave Miami, or Bucks will be shot on sight. The two men sit opposite each other at a table and the camera cuts between them, the framing increasingly tight until both are shot in close-up with a focus on the eyes - another visual signifier recognisable from Sergio Leone's stylized Spaghetti Westerns. With the scene accordingly set, the inevitable occurs: Bucks draws first but Raylan is quicker on the draw and gets his man. The shooting is at once an old-school putting down of the villain by the lawman, but is also, in the modern context, justified - a legitimate shooting of a known felon by a Law Enforcement Official. In his clothing, mannerisms and quick-draw shooting skills, Raylan Givens is presented as the embodiment of the cowboy, of the righteous gunslinger; however, he is also posited as an anachronistic figure in that he embodies a wider notion: that the Western is no longer the prime genre through which a discourse on America and American life is played out.

The Western was the first 'truly cinematic genre and the first distinctively American contribution to the new art form' (Buscombe 1988: 24); and it was from this early contribution to cinema that American filmmakers formed a self-reflexive narrative discourse. Largely set in frontier towns and ranches, the Western told a highly mediated, highly stylized, version of American history and its own self-creation of nation and identity; and the Westerner in all his guises - cowboy, gunslinger, lawman - is the figure through which this discourse is articulated. Alongside the Westerner, however, another figure has held a powerful place in both cinema and social imagination:

The two most successful creations of American movies are the gangster and the Westerner: men with guns. Guns as physical objects, and the postures associated with their use, form the visual and emotional center of both types of films.

(Warshow 1992 [1954]: 453)

Although *Justified* embraces the iconography of the Western from the start, and these aesthetics and narratives are filtered throughout the series, the positioning of the gangster within the same space in this opening sequence points at the other mode of discursive practice mobilized by the series. The signifiers of the Westerner are clustered around Raylan Givens, while those of the gangster centre on Raylan's antagonist, Boyd Crowder.

Genre hybridity is not new for television formats and for quality television it is an intrinsic element: as Robert J. Thompson argues, quality television shows are 'generic mongrels, often

scrambling and recombining traditional TV formulas in unexpected ways' and they reach beyond the traditional limits of mainstream television in that they have 'literary and cinematic ambitions' (Thompson 2007: xix). An original programme for the basic cable channel FX, *Justified* incorporates many of the identifiers of quality television: 'high production values, naturalistic performance styles, recognised and esteemed actors' (Cardwell 2007: 26) as well as a strong literary heritage as the series is adapted from the works of the American author Elmore Leonard. The novel *Pronto* (1993) introduces the character of Raylan Givens and he reappears in *Riding the Rap* (1995), and in both cases he is a secondary character. The short story 'Fire in the Hole' (2001) focuses on Raylan, his return to his homestate, Kentucky. It is this story that forms the starting point of the series and provides the storyline for the pilot episode, introducing the setting, themes and some of the major characters who are integral to the continuing series. Leonard's work frequently features characters who are morally ambiguous, inhabiting worlds that are on the fringes of the law (Hynes 1991). This aspect is certainly true of *Justified*, where the actions of both lawmen and criminals are open to interpretation and a complex series of character relationships and situations contextualise the actions of both lawmaker and lawbreaker within a wider set of moral and ethical determinants. With a body of work that covers Westerns, crime stories, period pieces and both urban and rural settings, it is no surprise that Leonard's work should be viewed as suitable for adaptation into a quality television narrative. While the series retains the thematic and linguistic traits associated with Leonard's canon, it also deviates from the source material - a necessity in order to maintain a long-running TV series - notably in the prominence given to Boyd Crowder. Whereas Boyd is killed at the conclusion of the written story, his character survives in the television adaptation and inhabits various character functions, as the felon to Raylan's lawman, but also his former colleague in the mine, sometime friend and occasional saviour. However, the oppositions explored through the series move beyond simply the Westerner vs gangster, to encompass racial, geographic and ideological divides that show the fractures of a collective American identity, and also signify that, for entire communities across the country, the American Dream is a failure. The location of the series in Kentucky brings a further set of referents to the work that are specific to the American South; with the focus on crime, violence and situations that are simultaneously funny and grotesque, the series deploys tropes of Southern Gothic; the alienation that is another hallmark of Southern Gothic can be read in a variety of Western and gangster texts, especially those that offer a more considered critique of American identity and American history.

### **The myth of genre**

In his work on the Western, *The Six Gun Mystique Sequel* (1999), John Cawelti outlines the

difficulties of genre definition, especially in relation to the Western, where the terms 'genre' and 'myth' are used interchangeably - a state of affairs not exclusive to the Western, it must be said - and hence their meaning is rendered almost impenetrably ambiguous (1999: 14). Cawelti resolves the problem of myth and genre thus:

[G]enre can be defined as a structural pattern embodying a universal life pattern or myth in the materials of language. Popular genre, on the other hand, is cultural; it represents the way in which a particular culture has embodied both mythical archetypes and its own preoccupations in narrative form.

(Cawelti 1999: 15)

The Western as genre may be defined through its visual and narrative language; the myth that it engages with is the creation of nation and the ever-evolving question of national identity. The Western was the first purely American contribution to cinema and both in cinema and on television, the Western enjoyed a prolonged success.

From its inception with *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter, 1903), the Western continued throughout the formative years of the American film industry, with its popularity peaking in the 1940s and 1950s. The decline in production started in the Sixties, with Sergio Leone's cycle of Spaghetti Westerns proving a short-lived preservation and by the 1980s 'the death of the genre was pronounced on all sides' (Buscombe and Pearson 1998: 1) - a death finalised, arguably, by Michael Cimino's studio-busting flop *Heaven's Gate* (1980). Similarly, the Western had enjoyed huge popularity on television: *Gunsmoke* (1955-75) was the longest-running television show in America, its longevity matched only recently by the police procedural *Law & Order* (1990-2010). Westerns formed 26 percent of total network programming in America by 1959 (Boddy 1998: 119), but by the mid-1960s had all but vanished from prime-time schedules (Boddy 1998: 119). At the time of writing *The Six Gun Mystique Sequel*, Cawelti argues that, apart from mini-series such as *Lonesome Dove* (1989), the only television show that could be defined - at a stretch - as a Western is *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1993-1998). While the Western is a less ubiquitous presence than during the 1950s and 1960s, it is still present in various media texts: Joss Whedon's space-Western drama *Firefly* (2002-2003) is a hybridised form; more recently HBO's *Deadwood* and AMC's *Hell on Wheels* (2011-) interrogate both the actual and mediated history of the West; the History Channel's miniseries *Hatfields and McCoys* (2012) explores the real-life feud between families living along the Kentucky-West Virginia state line. Overall, however, the Western has moved to the periphery of mainstream American television culture, as opposed to occupying the central space. In *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin puts forward the notion that American viewers 'require a myth that can help us make sense of the history we have lived and the place we are living in' (1992: 655) and that the Western no longer fulfils this requirement. Media narratives operate, on the mythic level, to restore

stable subjectivity 'to remind us of who we are and what reality is' (Fulton 2005: 7). However, with the increasingly complex narrative discourses at work in contemporary media texts, especially quality television, where ideas of the real are interrogated alongside notions of the ideal (Cardwell 2007: 28), the naturalising function of binary oppositions are overturned and the fluid, unstable nature of identity is foregrounded. With the traditional Western's focus on ritualistic killings that sanitise the reality of violence, the exclusion of female agency and experience of frontier life, and the often racist depictions of Native Americans and other ethnicities, the Western was increasingly seen as being 'out of step' with contemporary America and an unsuitable site for engagement with discourses on national identity and socio-political concerns. The moral absolutes of the Western and the incorruptible figure of the cowboy hero may have reflected an ideal notion of identity and nation to prelapsarian America; however, the cumulative effects of Vietnam, Watergate, the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X had dismantled the illusion of stability around American identity. Similar uncertainty is tangible in *Justified*: this uncertainty is born of the current climate of the post-9/11 world, a vulnerable-to-attack America, a downward spiral of financial crises and an increasingly weakened position on the global political stage. The narrative arc around *Justified*'s two central characters, Raylan Givens and Boyd Crowder, is focused on their sense of self and their constant questioning of it and their metonymic function points to an America that is uneasy in its self-reflexive identification.

If, as Slotkin argues, a myth is always required in order to negotiate history and socio-political concerns, then this function once filled by the Western must be filled by another genre; this centrality has, perhaps, now been replaced by gangster tales, or at least tales of urban crime, in which gangsters play a crucial role. The gangster pictures of the 1920s and 1930s and the cycle of classic *film noir* always interrogated aspects of social malaise revolving around urban degeneration, crises of masculinity and fears around the positioning of the female subject (Krutnick 1991; Naremore 2008). Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) saw the gangster picture take on the mantle of examining America as a whole. The influence of Coppola's epic can be seen in the work of other directors, most notably in Martin Scorsese's cinematic essays on criminality and urban alienation from *Mean Streets* (1973) through *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Casino* (1995) to *Gangs of New York* (2002). The latter film is set in the era of the traditional Western - the post-Civil War nineteenth century - but the founding myth of America is transposed from the Wild West to a bloody feud in urban New York. On television the centrality of the gangster is replicated: Michael Mann's *Crime Story* (1986-1988) stands as a precursor to *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), while the much-heralded *The Wire* (2002-2008) revolves around urban corruption across all spheres of public service, with the gangsters and police inextricably intertwined. Scorsese appears again in the television depiction of the gangster, here as the producer - and director of the pilot episode - of the

Prohibition-era *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-). Warshow's essay 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero' (1962 [1948]) posits the view of the gangster film as the modern equivalent of a tragedy, with the gangster himself doomed by being a product of a society that defines happiness through the accruing of power and success. It is through his attempts to achieve these goals that the gangster lays the ground for his own demise: 'The gangster's whole life is an effort to assert himself as an individual, to draw himself out of the crowd' (Warshow 1962 [1948]: 103) - despite the insistence on individualism in contemporary society, the success that removes the gangster from the masses enforces the idea that such isolation is dangerous, if not lethal.

For Jack Shadoian the gangster picture's focus on the conflict between the anti-hero gangster and the received laws, norms and values of American society creates a meditation on meanings 'about the nature of society and the kind of individual it creates' (Shadoian 2003: 4). The gangster film, as Fran Mason discusses, resembles the Western insofar as it is 'almost the epitome of easily recognized iconographies and narrative conventions' (2002: xiii). There is, however, a central problematic that arises from the frequently narrow parameters ascribed to the gangster film, as Mason goes on to identify:

[T]he variety and flexibility of the manifestations of the gangster genre are repressed in taking the view that the gangster film simply maps an obligatory set of iconographies (the city, guns, technology, sharp suits, the speakeasy), ideological frameworks (the inversion of the American Dream) or narrative structures (the rise and fall of the gangster).

(Mason 2002: xiv)

The rise and fall of the gangster is a common and ideologically necessary dramatic and narrative trope. As Mason points out, by this criteria the first two instalments of Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy are not gangster narratives. Owing to the structure of television series, neither *Crime Story* nor *The Sopranos* could be situated within the gangster genre. Mason's approach to the American gangster is not to catalogue every possible permutation of the genre, but to understand it as 'a field of operations which makes available a range of textual tropes, semiotic codes and narrative patterns' (Mason 2002: xv) - the texts, therefore, are not bound by predetermined conventions.

The problematic of attempting to enforce rigid definitions and parameters of genre to create an 'ideal type' is highlighted by Anne Dunn: 'The problem with ideal types is that they tend to specify what a genre should be rather than what is actually found in media texts, and this points to another question: where does one genre end and another begin?' (Dunn 2005: 127). Through the adoption of this more fluid engagement with genre codification, the figure of the gangster and the attendant narratives in *Justified* become more readily identifiable. Similarly, the gangster and the Westerner can be read not simply as oppositional figures, but as beings that inhabit the same

societal sphere. This overlapping has previously been identified: Andrew Tudor points out that the gangster inhabits 'the cowboy's world but without his integrity and without his sense of honour' (Tudor 1974: 202). Yet, despite this, the tendency to separate the two characters and their spheres remains; Shadoian focuses on the gangster as an urban creation and posits the figures of the gangster and the Westerner as oppositional:

The gangster is not the same as an outlaw [...] He is a product of an advanced, urban civilisation. In westerns, by contrast, the conflict is often outside the realm of a social system as such, although it may bear upon it. It concerns the individual versus the land, or civilized versus uncivilized forces.

(Shadoian 2003: 4)

However, this traditional focus on the gangster as a purely urban figure is limiting, especially when one views rural gangsters such as John Dillinger, Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker and the films made about them (Neale 2000: 77). The intersection between urban and rural, the gangster and the Westerner, is where *Justified* lies. This also places the series within a wider set of values so that it functions not simply as a hybridisation of assorted generic codes, but as a media text that mobilises 'cultural categories' (Mittell 2010: 239). By doing so it questions ideologies embedded in traditional Western and gangster narratives and so offers a site of discussion for social norms and expectations of contemporary rural America.

***'You make me pull, I'll put you down'.***

The opening shot of *Justified* establishes the show as drawing on conventions of the Western; these expectations are, possibly, reinforced through the casting of Timothy Olyphant as the central character, Raylan Givens. With Olyphant known for his role as Sheriff Seth Bullock on *Deadwood* - and more recently lending his voice to the Clint Eastwood-alike Spirit of the West in *Rango* (Verbinski, 2011) - the associations of the actor with a specific set of generic norms creates a star persona that feeds into his role as Raylan. The narrative of *Justified* is, on the surface, a simple one: following his shooting of the gun-thug Tommy Bucks, Raylan is sent back to his homestate of Kentucky, where he is forced to negotiate, both professionally and personally, between his standing as a lawman and his upbringing in Harlan County. Central to this negotiation is Raylan's relationship with Boyd Crowder. Age nineteen they dug coal together. By the time of Raylan's return twenty years later, Boyd is an apparent White Nationalist and bank thief with a penchant for rocket launchers and long words.

In his 1954 essay, Robert Warshow defines the characteristics of - and differences between - the gangster and the Westerner. Taken as a starting point, there is a demonstrable correlation

between Raylan's character and that of the Westerner, who is, according to Warshow a largely solitary, melancholy figure. His solitary existence is, in part, coded through his distancing from material wealth and a settled family life:

[W]e are not actually aware that he owns anything except his horse, his guns, and the one worn suit of clothing which is likely to remain unchanged all through the movie. It comes as a surprise to see him take money from his pocket or an extra shirt from his saddlebags. As a rule we do not even know where he sleeps at night and don't think of asking.

(Warshow 1992 [1954]: 455)

While Raylan's role as a US Marshal is clearly delineated and there are frequent scenes of him at work, interacting with his colleagues and most especially with his boss, Art Mullen, Raylan is equally clearly posited as a figure in transit; or, at least, someone who wishes to be. From the moment Raylan arrives back in Kentucky he is adamant that all he wants to do is leave it again. Throughout the first two seasons of the show's run, Raylan lives in a motel - a domicile more associated with temporary lodging, rather than anything long-term. Raylan is not the man with no name - his history is clear, his name is known. Unlike the rootless drifters of *Shane* (Stevens, 1953) or the unnamed protagonist of Leone's *Trilogia del Dollaro/Dollars Trilogy* (1964-6), Raylan is bound to the specific traditions and histories of Harlan County. Yet, even though he has roots in the community and a family history there, Raylan conforms in part to the notion of the Western hero as having no or few possessions - the only things he does own that have any meaning are those that define him as what he is: in Raylan's case his hat and his gun. This lack of material possessions does not equate with a lack of depth in personality, a point made succinctly by Raylan's ex-wife, Winona, when she takes an inventory of his wardrobe:

WINONA: Brown suit; black suit; one, two, three, four shirts; two pairs of jeans. Hm.

RAYLAN: What the hell is that supposed to mean?

WINONA: Oh, just by looking at your closet one would think that you're a simple man.

The notion of a transitory dwelling place associated with Raylan is contrasted further by the character of Winona's second husband, the optimistic but hapless - and ultimately deluded - Gary Hawkins. As a realtor, Gary is by profession someone for whom selling the idea - and ideal - of a home and permanency is vital. The large house in Lexington that Gary and Winona share is emblematic of a settled, successful life. When citing her reasons for the breakdown of her and Raylan's marriage, Winona speaks of the need for having hope in her life - the sort of hopefulness of which Raylan appears incapable. This initial apparent contrast between Gary and Raylan becomes



increasingly complex as the series develops: Gary's dealings with the Dixie Mafia leads to a separation from Winona, financial instability and his eventual death. Raylan's reconciliation with Winona in Season Two and her resulting pregnancy would point to the logical conclusion of a more settled life. However, Raylan seems to wilfully ignore the basic compromises that would ensure a more successful relationship with Winona. Season Three sees them again estranged and a now homeless Winona moving in with her sister while Raylan moves from his motel to an even less salubrious venue over a bar. His lone-wolf status is less melancholic and romantic, and more self-destructive. Rebecca Feasey has explored how TV shows revolving around law and order officials have depicted their male protagonists as having to 'sacrifice domestic duties and family commitments for the good of his career and the greater good of society' (2008: 5). The result of this is that while the hero at once conforms to ideas of hegemonic masculinity, the failure in the domestic sphere raises questions about the credibility of traditional modes of masculinity as an aspirational model (Feasey 2008: 93). With the Westerner as a lawman providing this same model of patriarchal discourse, and for so long being seen as embodying definitive cultural values, Raylan's rejection of a settled domestic life similarly opens up questions about the stability and desirability of traditional masculinity.

Throughout the series Raylan is identified and self-identifies as a cowboy. The instability of his function within the domestic sphere is countered by his established function in the public sphere. Here he is defined through moral rectitude and as with the Westerners of early fiction and film, Raylan's morality is centred on his use of his gun, but it is a point of honour that he only unholsters his weapon at the moment of combat. This notion of honour, the rules of the draw, is foregrounded from the start during Raylan's shoot-out with Tommy Bucks. As Raylan states repeatedly, during the pilot and throughout the first season, Bucks had drawn his weapon first, thereby precipitating his own death at Raylan's hands. The rules of a Western-style shoot-out are made explicit during the first season episode 'The Fixer' (30 March 2010), when Raylan confronts Curtis Mims. The African-American, Detroit-born Curtis runs collections for a local ex-con-turned-informant and as such his speech and styling is more akin to notions of the urban gangster: in alligator shoes, loose jeans and tight vest he provides a strong contrast to Raylan's Stetson and cowboy boots.

CURTIS: Well, you know how in every Western, the guys will take to the street, and they wait to draw until they're both set? You think that's really how they used to do it?

RAYLAN: Sometimes, maybe.

CURTIS: Neighbourhood I grew up in, we used to take to the streets with our guns already out.

RAYLAN: Smart, smart. 'Lot can go wrong with a draw.

As the scene unfolds, Raylan proceeds to demonstrate the perils of a quick-draw shoot-out, while simultaneously displaying his own expertise in that arena. As with the shooting of Tommy Bucks, the cinematography is reminiscent of earlier Western codes, with low-angle shots cutting between the two men, interspersed with close-ups of their faces and, crucially, Raylan's gun and badge. The code of honour of the 'justified' draw, and Raylan's adherence to it, is further enhanced later in this episode when Curtis practices the quick-draw with his accomplice, the small-time crook Travis Travers. 'You feel him going for his, you go for yours', Curtis instructs him: 'Eye contact'. On the practice round, Curtis draws first - and when his guard is lowered, is promptly shot dead by Travis. The honour of a justified shootout is particular to Raylan and the code of conduct that he embodies - petty criminals have no such scruples.

However, while Raylan's shootings are justified in the legal sense and he is an enforcer of law by profession, he also represents the moral ambiguity that is the hallmark of the Westerner at his best: 'this ambiguity arises from the fact that, whatever his justifications, he is a killer of men' (Warshow 1992 [1954]: 458). With its modern setting, Raylan's role as a US Marshal is under scrutiny and for the first half of Season One, he faces an investigation into his shootings by the United States Attorney. While the killing of Tommy Bucks was a lawful shoot, it is arguable that Raylan orchestrates the situation with Bucks so that he will be able to kill him. It is this idea that he finds troubling, as he confesses to Winona at the end of the pilot episode:

RAYLAN: He pulled first, so I was justified. What troubles me is what if he hadn't? What if he'd just sat there and let the clock run out? Would I have killed him anyway? I know I wanted to. I guess I just never thought of myself as an angry man.

WINONA: Oh, Raylan. Well, you do a good job of hiding it, and I suppose most folks don't see it, but honestly, you are the angriest man I have ever known.

This notion of the lawman as a legitimated killer is addressed again, explicitly, when Boyd calls on Raylan to search his soul:

You are a violent man, my friend. You have left a trail of dead behind you. You think about it, the life you've led, the work that you've done. At one moment you could be breaking into the home of a fugitive, and the very next moment you could be facing your final judgement. Now, how do you think you're going to fare on that glorious, glorious day, Raylan Givens?

As with the questioning of received notions of masculinity becoming unstable in the domestic space, the stability of Raylan's identity in the public sphere also becomes destabilised. The code of honour of the Westerner is viewed as anachronistic within the series itself and the questions raised by Raylan's status as a sanctioned killer of men work to juxtapose the idea of an honourable kill

with the reality of arbitrary bloodshed and violence. The questioning of the Western myth is integral to revisionist texts and is a fundamental aspect of *Deadwood*, which offers a 'rebuke' to the mythic vision of the past and presents the reality of the West as 'brutal, indeterminate, ugly and unheroic' (Perlman 2011: 105). Violence, both casual and calculated, is embedded in the world of *Justified* and is a destabilising force in all of its modes. Like Raylan, Boyd uses violence as a form of power and control; and as a character who undergoes a series of dramatic changes, he presents an identity that is even more fractured and unstable than Raylan's. It is the dichotomy between Raylan and Boyd that drives much of the series' narrative action. The narrative arc of Season One works to establish the pair as protagonist and antagonist, while simultaneously opening up the ambiguities of their respective positions.

### ***'Fire in the hole!'***

Throughout *Justified's* first three seasons, Raylan, the Westerner, and Boyd, the gangster, are frequently at odds, both firing from opposite sides of a line. Where the Westerner is frequently posited as quiet and reticent, the gangster is more often a noisy character - his desires are decisive and tangible. In this, Boyd Crowder certainly fits the mould. His ambitions are summarized by Raylan - 'You like to get money and blow shit up' - and in the course of the sequence that introduces Boyd, he does indeed blow up a church with a rocket launcher. Loud and expansive, Boyd is presented as a charismatic showman and while he is clearly not averse to using violence, Boyd's weapons of choice are words and he is marked out as being more intelligent than those around him. He is seen completing a crossword puzzle at the moment he is told of his brother's death and he makes a point of explaining the meaning of the word 'innocuous' to one of his less cerebral followers. This linguistic facility is amply demonstrated in the initial meeting between Raylan and Boyd - the first time that the two men have seen each other since they were nineteen. The meeting takes place in a disused church, the building now the headquarters for Crowder's Commandoes - Boyd's rag-tag gang of White Nationalists. It is here that Boyd acts as minister - even his clothing in this scene, a black T-shirt with white trim that resembles a pastor's dog-collar, posits him as a missionary figure - preaching a message of violence and hatred based on a distorted reading of the bible. Over the course of this meeting, as the two men reminisce over past times, Boyd explains his mission as a recruiter of 'skins', men who are unaware of their 'moral obligation to get rid of the Jews'. Raylan, however, is not susceptible to recruitment or corruption, and he is also aware that Boyd isn't stupid enough to believe the stories he tells about 'mud people' and Edomites. Rather, Raylan suspects, Boyd uses the cause of White Nationalism as a way to manipulate his followers to further his own criminal ambitions.

The genre hybridity at work in *Justified* is not limited to collisions between characters, but in Boyd Crowder is worked out through one character. The gangster's traits that are, in part, applicable to Boyd as seen in 'Fire in the Hole' fall away but he treads an uneasy line between the Gangster and the Western hero throughout the following three seasons. During the pilot, despite Boyd's criminality and cold-blooded killing of one of his henchmen, there is a thrill in watching him; this sadism on Boyd's part is turned on its head at the conclusion of this episode when he in turn is shot by Raylan during a stand-off in the house of Ava Crowder, Boyd's sister-in-law. This scene is a deliberate re-creation of the shoot-out that opens the episode, and as Raylan did in that situation, Boyd forces the confrontation that will end with guns being drawn. The traditional arc of the gangster's narrative is that after the rise comes the fall, usually ending in his death and Boyd is indeed shot by Raylan. However, Boyd survives and the character undergoes a Damascene conversion as a result and this narrative arc is played out across Season One. He becomes the 'bad' gunslinger to Raylan's hero, placing Boyd within the archaic world of the lawman - this becomes more evident and more problematic after his release from prison when he retreats to the backwoods to form his new congregation. Whereas in the pilot Boyd used the abandoned church as the headquarters for his criminal activities and the bible to legitimate his claims, for the remainder of the first season he rejects material possessions, creating his Church of the Last Chance Salvation as a campsite in the woods and uses the bible as a tool of spiritual redemption. Boyd reconstructs himself as a distorted version of Raylan: taking the law into his own hands, acting to rid Harlan County of the 'plague' of methamphetamine. He is a lawman without the legitimising sanction of a badge. Or, as Raylan's sardonic boss, Art, puts it: 'Maybe he's Batman'. Art's suggestion that they turn a blind eye to Boyd's vigilante activities until he has cleaned up Harlan is ignored by Raylan, but in the context of the series as a whole, the question poses a challenge to discourses on the function of law and order and the moral relativism of law and justice. In the wider cultural and political arena, law and order is frequently central to ideological values and debates and raises questions around how law and justice are defined contemporaneously. The setting of *Justified* in the American South is particularly pertinent here; literary critic Teresa Goddu has explored the importance of the American South in relation to discourses on American gothic, noting that 'the American South serves as the nation's 'other,' becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wants to disassociate itself' (Goddu 1997: 3-4). The political and social power structures that promulgate notions of stable identity and law enforcement have little engagement with the reality of much rural, white, working-class experience.

***'You'll never leave Harlan alive'.***

Boyd's retreat to the woods, therefore, places an even greater emphasis on location and landscape. For the traditional Western, a sense of place is paramount and even when these narratives are displaced by the Post-Western, the texts are still heavily dependent on the frontier myth:

[B]y the later 1990s, 'Post-Western' had taken on another set of meanings. It now pointed to the kinds of films and novels that continued to make use of or refer to Western images or myths in spite of the decline of the genre as a major component of American popular culture. Though it was not fully clear at the time, by the middle of the 1970s, the artistic and cultural synthesis that had inspired so many classic Westerns was breaking apart and Westerns were becoming more critical and self-reflexive about their own traditions.

(Cawelti 1999: 102)

Films such as *Little Big Man* (Penn, 1970), *Dances With Wolves* (Costner, 1990) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann, 1992) are evoked as films that both invert certain genre expectations through their engagement with and portrayal of Native American experiences of Western history, but they also move the tropes of the Western away from its familiar visual landscape of the mythic West: the desert and the frontier town. As with these films, *Justified's* shift in landscape from desert to the mountains of Kentucky distances it from the tradition of the mythical desert frontier world. Yet, the world of *Justified* is bound by demarcated frontiers and noticeable shifts in landscape. As Raylan makes his first drive down to Harlan in the pilot episode the audience can see the very real differences between urban, cosmopolitan Lexington and the run-down rural mining town of Harlan. The sequence is not unlike the opening credits of *The Sopranos* as Tony Soprano makes the drive from New York to New Jersey. And the fusion of Bluegrass and rap - the group Gangstagrass' 'Long Hard Times to Come', which becomes the show's theme tune - on the soundtrack is, perhaps, not just inscribing the collision of modernity and tradition that his journey represents, but perhaps is also a nod to the collision between the Western and the Gangster/Crime genres as occupying the central space as expressors of American history and contemporaneous anxieties. However, while these visual differences are evident in the pilot episode, they become more ambiguous as the series progresses. Across all seasons, very little of Lexington is seen and when in the city, characters are usually situated on the outskirts and the low-rent districts. Glossy offices are meeting places of the Dixie Mafia and the location for bank heists. Rather than being the antithesis to rural lawlessness, Lexington can be seen as being a slightly more cosmopolitan outpost of Harlan.

Alienation, disillusionment and disenfranchisement are not peculiar to rural communities, but are widespread problems across American society. *Justified's* credit sequence focuses on images of contemporary small town, rural America. The images are sepia tinted but are neither nostalgic nor bucolic: run-down houses, rusting cars and crime scenes are prominent in the twenty-nine seconds of the sequence's duration and the visual content and framing is reminiscent of Walker Evans'

photographs from the Depression, imagery that informs the visual style of Southern Gothic. Southern Gothic is invoked as a discursive practice, evident at a visual and aural level throughout the seasons and opening up discussions on themes central to the Southern experience. Much of the soundtrack is dominated by Appalachian Bluegrass, rooting the series in a geographic and cultural specificity. Apart from the original compositions, the series features fragments of Southern rock, a live performance of Dave Alvin's 'Harlan County Line', and Brad Paisley's 'You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive' is repeated in the closings scenes of Seasons One and Two. The music of band The Drive-by Truckers features prominently in one episode and their inclusion further engages with the Southern Gothic, as the band has been discussed frequently in its deployment of musical topoi, characters and narratives drawn from the discursive practices of Southern Gothic. 'Like its literary counterparts, therefore, the musical southern gothicism of the Drive-By Truckers cobbles together and comments upon archetypal texts - in this case, the music of Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Allman Brothers Band, and others - to problematize the state of working-class whiteness in the contemporary American South' (Stimeling 2013: 20). The theme of social alienation and the concerns of a body of people left behind in the cultural context of capitalism and its progresses are inscribed at textual and contextual levels. The question of race is also a constant area of subtext within the series, initially through Boyd's engagement with and exploitation of the ongoing history of White Nationalism in the American South, but it becomes more visible in Season Three with the introduction of Elston Limehouse, the leader of an all-black enclave within Harlan County.

Limehouse offers shelter to the abused women of Harlan - both Ava Crowder and Raylan's mother have stayed there in the past - yet he rules over his territory with a brutality that matches the excesses of the slave-owners. If the white working class of rural America are excluded from much of the public sphere, rural blacks are even further disenfranchised. Racial segregation is still a memory and clearly there is no real racial integration, even in Obama's America. The audacity of hope and the rhetoric of blue state politics<sup>2</sup> has not reached or had much effect in the hinterland. Entry to Limehouse's land at Noble's Holler is via a bridge, one of many that form a visual motif across the series. While the County Line Bridge often features as the juncture between lawless Harlan and the State law beyond, it is also a no-man's land, a neutral space, and at Noble's Holler the bridge becomes a barrier; to a certain extent the bridge in *Justified* performs the same symbolic function as the landscape in the traditional Western: it symbolises 'the way in which these characters attempted to cross conventional personal and social frontiers. That these quests usually ended in disaster suggests the strength of the traditional boundaries these characters seek to cross' (Cawelti 1999: 113). This thematic property is most evident in Boyd's attempts to redeem himself and break

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2 In the United States, red states and blue states refer to states whose residents predominantly vote either Democrat (blue) or Republican (red) in presidential elections.

his father's criminal empire, an attempt that is ultimately doomed. It results not just in the slaughter of his 'flock' but in his own loss of faith.

Stripped of his God-given purpose, Boyd reverts to type, claiming vengeance and bent on killing first Bo, and then the Miami cartel drug runners who are the ones to kill Bo Crowder. The difficulties of breaking from the tradition of lawman and criminal and the weight of history is clearly written through the narrative that drives the final episodes of Season One and are escalated across Season Two. However, what becomes increasingly apparent is the blurring of boundaries. Raylan and Boyd are not always so much two-sides of the same coin, but often seem to inhabit the same side, the differences only being defined through the strictures of State and Federal law and order. Season Two especially brings into question the role of the lawman. Raylan is, as Art states, a good lawman, but a lousy Marshal. The difference here is clear: Raylan resorts to an old-school justice that is largely defined by his sense of morality and right-and-wrong. This does not always tie-in with the strictures and functions of the Marshal's office. Raylan is sanctioned by his badge but it often becomes apparent that legal justice and moral justice are different. In that sense, the characters of Boyd and Raylan become closer in that they both configure - or, in Boyd's case reconfigure - themselves as arbiters of natural justice.

***'The most successful war seldom pays for its losses'.***

The final episode of the first season - tellingly entitled 'Bulletville' (8 June 2010) - culminates with the sort of shoot-out that might be expected in a Western; and, as with the opening sequence in the pilot, *Justified* shows itself to be very aware of its generic codings. Thomas Schatz (1981) identifies the evolution of genres, noting that in the final phase they become self-reflexive, patently aware of their history. 'Bulletville' sees Boyd and Raylan uniting in a bid to save Ava Crowder from both Bo Crowder (Boyd's paternal nemesis) and the Miami drugs cartel whose wrath Raylan won through his initial shooting of Tommy Bucks. This finale demonstrates an awareness that these characters have been placed within an identifiably Western idiom. As the bullets fly, the two men find refuge in a run-down cabin, the cinematography and framing of the pair is reminiscent of the ending of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Hill, 1969) - itself a text that very much fits the remit of the self-reflexive Post-Western. The quotational practice that informs so much of postmodern culture is even more evident in the Season Two trailers for *Justified*: in one sequence, Raylan finds himself in a situation that is, he identifies, similar to the cantina scene in *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977). The second enables him to quote Clint Eastwood's 'Do I feel lucky?' dialogue from *Dirty Harry* (Siegel, 1971). While these are more overt popular culture references than are found in the series itself, *Justified* still makes use of subtle nods to a wider set of referents in order to comment upon both its generic

tropes and its character development. The framing of Boyd and Raylan that posits them as a latter-day Butch and Sundance is followed only moments later by a riff on *Spartacus* (Kubrick, 1960): as the Miami gun-thugs demand Raylan gives himself up in order to save his companions, first Raylan and then Boyd identifies himself as Raylan Givens. 'Are you trying to be funny?' Raylan asks; 'A little,' Boyd tells him. A humorous nod to a well-known and much-quoted scene from Kubrick's film, but it also serves as a confirmation of what viewers may have suspected throughout the unfolding of Season One: that Boyd and Raylan are becoming increasingly alike, the Westerner and the gangster inhabiting the same space.

Part of the promotional campaign for Season Three picks up on this point, focussing on this duality around the two men. One thirty-second spot consists of rapid inter-cutting between Raylan and Boyd, both men preparing for an armed encounter and seemingly approaching each other from opposite sides; the final shot shows them side-by-side, both shooting at the same target. They may be coming from different places but fundamentally, the message seems to be, they are fighting the same war. The moral certainties and the stable mythic identity promulgated by the Western has meant that it has not been seen as being the site in which to discuss contemporary Americana. The frontier town associated with the traditional Western may belong to another era and the realm of the gangster has often been viewed as a commentary on modern urban society. While *Justified* does not mobilize socio-political concerns in the manner of a series such as *The Wire*, it is still engages with ideas around identity and self-determination. The damage caused by widespread abuse of methamphetamine is an ongoing sub-plot - an issue that is also central to *Winter's Bone* (Granik, 2010) - alongside corruption in local law enforcement and the threat of environmental damage caused by exploitative mining practices. The people of Harlan County are largely dispossessed; incidental characters throughout the series are a roll-call of petty criminals, prostitutes and the unemployed. They do not care about the State and the State does not care about them and their vulnerabilities are preyed upon by outsiders, most clearly represented in Season Three through the presence of the 'Dixie Mafia' - urban gangsters from the Kentucky state capital Frankfort who arrive in Harlan with a view to controlling the drug trade and consolidating their power base there. It is this war that both Raylan and Boyd engage in. Raylan, typically, pursues the course of the lawman. Boyd takes a more ambiguous role - with his attempts to eradicate the trade in methamphetamine ending in failure, his new approach is to control criminal activity in Harlan himself with the long-term view that it will be more beneficial to the local people. The long history of outsiders arriving to exploit the local populace is made manifest through Boyd's (verbal) confrontation with Quarles, the fixer sent down from Frankfort who opens his play to Boyd with a quote from Thomas Jefferson and is astonished that Boyd recognizes the source. The conversation unfolds, again emphasising Boyd's intelligence, but also serving to draw the battle-lines for the remainder of the season:



BOYD: Mr Quarles, have you heard the term 'carpetbagger'? It was coined during reconstruction. A man from the North comes down to the South to take advantage of our backward ways.

QUARLES: Yes, I'm familiar with the term, carpetbagger.

BOYD: Well, then you know to a carpetbagger, 'partners' just means that we do all the work while you make all the money.

QUARLES: Amen to that. Thank you for the bourbon.

BOYD: Mr Quarles there is one more thing. Carpetbaggers in three-piece suits have been coming to Harlan for a long time. They have a habit of dying off like deer-flies at the end of summer.

QUARLES: Saul Bellow.

In this short exchange a long history of division and conflict, both in literature and reality is illustrated: North against South, rich against poor, urban against rural. What it also points to is that these conflicts are not the sole preserve of one era or place and that the issues around them are not explored only in discrete genres.

The gangster or crime picture is still central to American cultural production, but it is notable that in the last five years, the Western - or at least Western-infused narratives - has been more visible than in the preceding years. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Dominik, 2007) and remakes of *The 3:10 to Yuma* (Mangold, 2007) and *True Grit* (Coen, 2010) have revisited classic Western narratives; *Public Enemies* (Mann, 2009) and *Lawless* (Hillcoat, 2012) stand at the intersection of the gangster, the outlaw and the Westerner. These texts are not the history-stripping exercises in nostalgia that Fredric Jameson identifies in his engagement with the critical discourse of post-modernism, Fredric Jameson identifies a current cultural situation where society has 'begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions' (1998: 20). Postmodern society, as Jameson sees it, lacks its own historicity and so we are constantly looking back at and re-appropriating the 'styles and fashions of a dead past' (1991: 284). Texts that draw on long-standing generic codes mobilize the past by using stereotypes and the 'ideas of facts and historical realities' (Jameson 1991: 279) so that the past becomes something that can be built through previously mediated representations of cultural history. By using stereotypes the past is mobilized as a simulation. History is, therefore, stripped of authenticity and politics and is, in essence, displaced by the simulacra of media representations. The visual and narrative tropes of the Westerner and the gangster that *Justified* employs are reliant upon audience recognition to be effective; but by doing so, the series questions the validity of the historic representation of the Westerner and the world he stand for, so long a totem of America's mythic past and self-identification. The gangster as an urban, modern figure is similarly questioned through Boyd Crowder: his antebellum speech patterns and proud defence of his home county again unite actual and literary historicity with long-standing

issues around social problems in rural America. While *Justified* is not the great searing social commentary on twenty-first century America, it does show as indiscrete the two dominant figures of American popular culture: far from being oppositional, the gangster and the Westerner in conjunction play a pivotal role in exploring Americana.

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*Burn Notice* (2007- , United States Network)

*Crime Story* (1986-8, NBC)

*CSI: Miami* (2002-12, CBS)

*Deadwood* (2004-6, HBO)

*Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1993-8, CBS)

*Firefly* (2002-3, Fox)

*Gunsmoke* (1955-75, CBS)

*Hatfields and McCoys* (2012, History Channel)

*Hell on Wheels* (2011- , AMC)

*Justified* (2010-, FX)

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*Law & Order* (1990-2010, NBC)

*Lonesome Dove* (1989, CBS)

*The Sopranos* (1999-2007, HBO)

*The Wire* (2002-8, HBO)

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