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The Citizen-Witness and the Politics of Shame: Walker Evans and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

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Let Us Now Praise Famous Men mobilizes the shame of the citizen-witness, re-envisioned as the privileged person who exposes him or herself as an object to the gaze of the other. However, this "imagined community" erases its own reliance on objectification and difference

The end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth mark the apogee of the development of a certain kind of sociopolitical figure in the United States, one that attests to a constant renegotiation of the relation between the individual and the democratic state, a figure I am calling the citizen-witness. The late 1800s saw an explosion of texts in which a citizen (usually a journalist) voluntarily witnessed and documented living conditions. These texts challenged democratic ideals of equality and justice, namely conditions of poverty, corruption, and violence. The most well known of these works include Nellie Bly's *Ten Days in a Mad-House* (1887), Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), and Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* (1903). The writings of the citizen-witness were meant to influence directly the reform of the flawed but perfectible state; their underpinning logic was that public awareness would lead either directly or indirectly to institutional social reform.

It is in the figure of the citizen-witness, I would like to argue, that the relation between the state and its citizens is dramatized. If in the late nineteenth century the citizen-witness valorizes the idea of citizenship, as the twentieth century progresses, self-representations by citizen-witnesses become increasingly troubled. In this essay, I track the ways Walker Evans and James Agee's 1941 work *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* mobilizes the shame of the citizen-witness to critique and reform both journalism and politics. First, shame's association with an objectifying vision is enlisted to point out the way social-reform journalism's spectatorial conventions may reinforce racial and class hierarchy. In so doing, the book undermines social-reform journalism's attendant concepts of altruistic citizenship and the perfectibility of the state. *Famous Men* next explores and ultimately destabilizes a mode of representation that attempts to avoid objectification by refocusing vision on the inanimate object instead of the human. Finally, the book forwards an alternative model of sociality in which the ideal democratic space becomes one that erases shame because all risk it. This formulation re-envisioned the good citizen as the privileged person who exposes him- or herself as an object to the gaze of the other. I will argue, however, that *Famous Men's* "imagined community" erases its own reliance on objectification and difference.¹

The term “citizenship” operates on two levels: passive and active. On the one hand, citizenship is a passive state of being. One is, by virtue of birth, a citizen who possesses certain rights. The other kind of citizenship is active, and refers to the duties and responsibilities of the citizen. In this kind of thinking about citizenship, one may perform the role of the citizen more or less successfully. Judith Shklar puts the distinction thus: “Citizenship as nationality is a legal condition; it does not refer to any specific political activity. Good citizenship as political participation, on the other hand, concentrates on political practices, and it applies to the people of a community who are consistently engaged in public affairs.”² As Shklar points out, “Good citizenship simply is not separable from the sort of society in which it functions”³; the acts that constitute “good citizenship” vary depending on context. Citizen-witnessing texts, I would like to argue, theorize and imagine in important ways what it means to be a good citizen.

In his book *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*, Michael Schudson tracks four historical modes of “good citizenship” in the U.S. The figure of the citizen-witness that solidifies at the end of the nineteenth century embodies what Schudson calls the “informed citizen,” a figure he aligns with Progressivism’s attack on political parties.⁴ In late nineteenth century social-reform journalism, good citizenship was conceived as an act of witnessing the social sphere and pointing out its failures so that they might be corrected. The citizen-witness was depicted as gentle and rational, only bursting into well-founded and righteous indignation when pushed to do so by others’ ignorance or corruption. In these texts, the citizen-witness often took on the role of a tour guide or a sympathetic undercover agent, guiding the reader through an unfamiliar social landscape. The representation of the citizen-witness as good, informed, and rational helped to cement the notion that the state and other social institutions also held the potential to be “good.” These narratives did not undermine the reliability of the basic structures on which that system was founded.⁵

The reliance of social-reform journalism on the figure of the good citizen-witness metamorphosed with turn-of-the-century texts published by men and women Teddy Roosevelt classified as “muckrakers”; Lincoln Steffens’s *Shame of the Cities* (1904), Ida Tarbell’s *History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904), and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) can be counted among these.⁶ While the figure of the citizen-witness was not as important in the narration of these slightly later texts, the cultural notoriety of their authors at the time when they were writing these works suggests that the archetype persisted.⁷ The 1930s ushered in a third wave of citizen-witnessing with the emergence of photo-textual books and documentary films, which primarily critiqued Southern poverty. Films such as Pare Lorentz’s *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) can be placed in this group of visual and verbal representations of Southern poverty, as well as collections of photographs and essays such as Dorothea Lange and Paul Schuster Taylor’s *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (1939).

James Agee and Walker Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) intervenes in, manipulates, and critiques the tradition of citizen-witnessing, which had solidified by the end of the nineteenth century, and carried into the 1930s. The intervention that *Famous Men* makes into this tradition can be illuminated most effectively by juxtaposing it with Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White’s *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), the decade’s most evident self-styled descendant of the genre. *You Have Seen Their Faces* rehabilitates the modes of representation that characterized the citizen-witness genre: the exposure of the injustices of a socially ignored space, the authoritative representation of the other person, and the centrality of the good and even heroic citizen-witness’ experience to these processes.

You Have Seen Their Faces takes up social-reform journalism's assumption that the textual representation of the other space and other person can produce social change. The book provides a visual and narrative representation of the American South during the Great Depression, pairing photographs with written text to expose the conditions of poor tenant farmers. These photographs are accompanied by captions indicating the location of the photograph and representing the thoughts the people in the photograph are supposedly having at that moment.⁸ In perhaps the most obvious expression of the central role of the citizen-witness in representing the other person's perspective, the note to the book indicates that "[t]he legends under the pictures are intended to express the authors' own conceptions of the sentiments of the individuals portrayed; they do not pretend to reproduce the actual sentiments of these persons."⁹

You Have Seen Their Faces even more clearly indicates its participation in the citizen-witnessing genre by emphasizing, at the end of the book, the experiences of Caldwell and Bourke-White as they pursue their project. While this section, entitled "Notes on photographs by Margaret Bourke-White," focuses primarily on the types of photographic equipment she utilized, it also narrates quite captivantly the dramatic process of attaining a photograph. Bourke-White writes, for example, about her technique of capturing particular expressions: "It might be an hour before their faces or gestures gave us what we were trying to express, but the instant it occurred the scene was imprisoned on a sheet of film before they knew what had happened."¹⁰ The construction of Bourke-White and Caldwell as heroic good citizens who, in the name of social change, pursue the story in the face of adversity is expressed in the very last paragraphs of the book, in which Bourke-White describes both the excitement of shooting photographs in a "hysteria"-laden church service, and the adventure of photographing a chain gang as "the captain shouted that he would shoot off our tires."¹¹ John Tagg suggests that this seemingly marginal addition to the book was in fact central to the narrative. In "Melancholy Realism" he writes: "From the very beginning, the antics of the 'crack photographer' were central to the glamour and modernity of *Life*. The photographers were the stars . . . the salary, the pose, the clothes, the travel, and the life were integral to the package being sold, in which 'Margaret Bourke-White makes a picture' was always part of the performative meaning of the image, and in which an essential part of the story would always be an account of her pains to meet the challenge of her assignment."¹²

In comparison with *You Have Seen Their Faces*, which uncritically reproduces the norms of representation established in late nineteenth century citizen-witnessing, *Famous Men* mimics and ultimately destabilizes these norms. In so doing, it simultaneously disrupts the genre's valorization of the good citizen.

At first glance, the form of the book and the conditions of its production seem to engage with the conventions of the genre. Agee and Evans were sent to Alabama on behalf of *Fortune* magazine to document the government's rural electrification program, a project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) that was designed to provide economic relief during and after the Depression. The physical appearance of the book seems to conform to the conventions of the genre: Evans's photographs of tenant farmers are clustered at the beginning, and much of Agee's prose engages with the conditions of the farmers' existence. Yet even the most limited overview exposes the book's critique of the representational practices common to social-reform journalism.

Famous Men's form most obviously disrupts these modes of representation. Its two "books" are of vastly different length, and include pieces of information that do not seem to contribute

to what is conventionally considered documentation. Book one, for example, is five pages long, consisting of unattributed quotations from *King Lear* and the *The Communist Manifesto*, an excerpt from a child's geography textbook, two footnotes, and a list of "Persons and Places" such as would be expected from a playscript. Book two spans over four hundred pages, and, while it includes a written tour of the homes and surroundings of the tenant families as well as long semi-anthropological descriptions of objects and practices, it also incorporates poetry, personal anecdotes, sexual fantasies, newspaper excerpts, a list of "monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon words" (most of which are not monosyllabic), and lyrical meditative passages—all of which are atypical of the genre. When taken as a whole, the book's structure, like the "fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement" that Agee notoriously claimed he wished his words could approximate, is akin not to a linear narrative but rather to a collection of objects.¹³

The content of the photographs and the writing similarly violate the genre's norms of representation. Unlike conventional citizen-witnessing, which uses images as supplements to document and condemn specific living conditions, in this work, Evans's photographs stand alone, without title or comment. His subjects stare from the frames of each photograph into the eyes of the reader, who is given no guidance as to what these gazes might mean. Tagg describes Evans's oeuvre as follows: "In Evans's image, meaning is held back, seemingly less by the photographer than by the objects themselves, from which the viewer is cut off by an uncertain distance that reintroduces the presence of the lens between the eye and the scene."¹⁴ If citizen-witnessing conventionally presents and explains its images of poverty so that they can serve as easy-to-read documentary evidence for a social-change platform, *Famous Men's* images, as Tagg points out, disallow this easy transformation of image into meaning.

Most obviously, however, the book emphasizes (and in so doing attempts to undercut) the invasive voyeurism of even the most altruistic journalism. In one of his famous diatribes, Agee explicitly aligns journalism with an unacceptable infringement on other people's privacy, early in the book describing the practice of it as "curious," "obscene," and "thoroughly terrifying." He writes that journalism is notable for "prying into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, an ignorant and helpless rural family, for the purpose of parading the nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings."¹⁵ In this context, the citizen-witness is no longer "good," but is rather deeply compromised.

If traditionally the goodness of the citizen-witness reaffirms the ultimate perfectibility of the state, the citizen, and democracy, here the shame of the citizen-witness is employed to critique the disjunction between democratic ideals and democratic practice. Using shame as both a marker of a fundamentally damaged democratic system and as the catalyst for producing an alternative democratic community, *Famous Men* models the way a subset of privileged U.S. citizens in the mid-twentieth century began to question and critique traditional political categories. In this essay, I explore both the appeal of shame politics and its significant limitations. If this type of politics does offer the potential for a certain reconceptualization of the democratic community, I will argue that *Famous Men's* politics of shame—like many of its current manifestations—imagines community on the basis of similarity, erasing material difference and (re-)positioning the suffering white liberal as the hero of the polis.¹⁶

On Shame and Shame Theory

In her 2007 book *From Guilt to Shame*, Ruth Leys traces a historical shift in the West from an

emphasis on guilt, which focuses on the actions of a subject (“what one does”) to a focus on shame, which focuses on being (“who one is”).¹⁷ She discusses the movement of the logic of torture, for example, and notes the erasure of survivor guilt from the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder in favor of an emphasis on the “traumatic image” and the “spectatorial logic” of shame. While Leys argues that the increased interest in shame theory occurs primarily in the last twenty years, she traces earlier considerations of shame in the works of Charles Darwin, anthropologist Ruth Benedict, and psychologist Silvan Tomkins. Shame has also been theorized in legal studies by John Braithwaite and others, potently described by Frantz Fanon in his study of colonialism, *Black Skin White Masks*, and theorized in the critical and philosophical works of Elspeth Probyn, Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, E. R. Dodds, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.¹⁸

Despite various disagreements and debates about shame, certain common traits emerge.¹⁹ The most helpful for my reading of *Famous Men* are those theories of shame that portray it as a response to objectification by the gaze of the other. The experience of being both subject and object—one that sees and one that is seen—is described by Giorgio Agamben as the “fundamental sentiment of being a subject”; in other words, it is “to be subjected and to be sovereign. Shame is what is produced in the absolute concomitance of subjectification and desubjectification, self-loss and self-possession, servitude and sovereignty.”²⁰ Agamben uses the work of Emmanuel Levinas to claim that shame stems from the inability to escape one’s being: “shame is grounded in our being’s incapacity to move away and break from itself. If we experience shame in nudity, it is because we cannot hide what we would like to remove from the field of vision.”²¹ In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben connects the shame of being both subject and object to the “new biopolitical body of humanity,” the “bare life of the citizen” who is both the object of state power and, in modern democratic theory, the subject of political power.²²

Taking this positing of exposure, vulnerability and split subjectivity to its inevitable limit, Jacques Derrida in a well-known passage describes his shame at being seen naked by his cat. In being seen by the cat, he imagines himself in the cat’s position, betraying the seemingly rigid boundaries of a subjectivity that denies animality. He sees and recognizes himself being seen at the same time. Derrida notes the fragility of the definition of the human: “As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called ‘animal’ offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself.”²³ Shame, in this formulation, signals a subjectivity split not just between subject and object, but between human and not-human as well. In these conceptualizations, the phenomenological experience of feeling split and objectified reinforces and intensifies the feeling of vulnerability attendant to exposure.

Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalytic consideration of shame as one of “the anomalies of affect” associated with colonization similarly hinges upon the subject/object split.²⁴ In chapter five of *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon theorizes the way colonizing vision is structured to produce the desubjectification of the colonized. Fanon’s colonial landscape is characterized as a network of judgmental gazes. He describes, for example, the way racism produces hypervisible bodies (as demonstrated when a child pointed him out again and again with the words, “Look! A Negro!”); and repeatedly uses visual metaphors to describe racialized encounters. Fanon discusses the transition of self-perception from active subject to object which occurs when the self encounters the racist gaze: “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit

filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.”²⁵ In this passage, the self as subject, the “I” with a “will” or “spirit,” comes into conflict with the self as “an object in the midst of other objects.” Fanon’s description of being positioned as both subject and object corresponds to the notion of shame’s split subjectivity and illuminates how particular modes of vision inscribe shame into the spectatorial structures of the colonial system.

All of the above theorists focus primarily on the lived experience of shame, considering the social and political circumstances that produce it, how it manifests in the body, and its relation to subjectivity—and these readings will be helpful when I turn to *Famous Men*. What is as yet undertheorized, however, is the public performance of shame by the privileged as a response to injustice. While Leys ultimately uses her book to condemn shame theory in a defense of what she sees as an embattled approach to the human psyche (psychoanalysis), she ends her introduction in a striking and perhaps paradoxical way, noting: “Many Americans, including myself, would not hesitate to declare that they experience intense shame for the prisoner abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib. Nothing that is said critically about contemporary shame theory in the pages that follow is meant to criticize the view that shame can be an appropriate response to such a situation.”²⁶ This comment, strikingly different from her chapter up to this point (and indeed from the thrust of her argument), evokes an alternative approach to the study of shame which many of the above theories, in their associations with the specularity of the social landscape, allude to but do not directly grapple with: shame as a particularly charged, altruistic, political response. While the preceding studies almost predominantly focus on the lived experience of shame, then, I would like to consider its textual production and political use.

In her 2005 book *Blush: The Face of Shame*, Elspeth Probyn asserts that the performance of shame is political. Linking Silvan Tomkins’s work on shame with Pierre Bourdieu’s theorization of *habitus*, she argues that shame’s expression in the body holds the potential for personal transformation, the academic rethinking of the role of the body, and political change. As an example of shame’s productive potential, Probyn describes her shame-filled and teary reaction to approaching Ayers Rock, a contested site in Australia that is both a sacred space for Aboriginal people and a tourist location for the Australian government. She suggests that, as a white Australian who has benefited from the colonization of the land, shame is a viable political response. Such moments, Probyn claims, show how shame, by indicating “interest” in the other person and making “the feeling and minding and thinking and social body [come] alive,” becomes “a prompt for [political] action.”²⁷ It is this increasingly common assumption about the political power of performing shame, albeit from a different angle, which I would like to examine and ultimately critique in Agee’s work.

Famous Men enlists shame as a textual marker by mobilizing its conventional associations with the exposure to the gaze of the other.²⁸ In so doing, the book suggests that conventional social-reform journalism unwittingly relies on objectifying structures of vision characteristic of colonial relations. In its imagining of an ashamed citizen-witness, the book goes further, asking the American reader and the nation itself to “look at your shame!”²⁹ The book ultimately critiques the roles of the citizen, the state, and democratic practice, ending by imagining shame as a gateway to an alternative (if, I would argue, equally problematic) set of social relations that might replace those it criticizes.

Shame and the Violence of Voyeurism

Since *Famous Men*’s publication, Lionel Trilling, James Lowe, Carolyn Wells Kraus, and other

critics have pointed out what they often call Agee's guilt. They tend to read these detonations as manifestations of his personal response to the scenes he witnesses. Trilling, for example, explains these moments as "the observer's guilt at his own relative freedom."³⁰ Lowe describes Agee's self-flagellation as stemming from his failure to permanently attain a shared consciousness with those he witnesses: "As long as individuals are oppressed . . . knowledge or ignorance of implication in this oppression produces guilt or insensitivity in the advantaged that, together with the disabled consciousness of the oppressed, denies the full reciprocity among all individuals necessary for perfect and absolute unity."³¹ Kraus argues that guilt is an appropriate ethical response to the "presumptuousness" inherent to the nonfiction enterprise.³² While these critics tend to conceptualize shame as emanating from the realities of lived experience to the documentation of that experience, I would like to read *Famous Men's* use of shame in a somewhat different way: as a literary device that acts in the service of (and, paradoxically, against) the text's larger political goals.

Various scenes near the beginning of *Famous Men* are emphasized by eruptions of shame; these passages become dramatized representations of the way particular structures of vision uphold hierarchical social relations. An early passage titled "Late Sunday Morning" exposes the way that race relations in the American South rely on modes of vision that are designed to produce shame. In "Late Sunday Morning," Agee and Evans are invited by a white landowner to visit the house of African-American sharecroppers. When they arrive, it becomes clear that the landowner's motivation for the visit is to goad the farmers into a forced performance that will both physicalize and validate a system of hierarchical social relations. As the three arrive at the foreman's house it becomes clear that they are interrupting a family gathering, a brief respite after a week of hard labor. By bringing Agee and Evans to the house on a Sunday, the landowner immediately performs his refusal to see the laborers as circulating within his set of social codes and conventions.

This performance of social domination becomes reinforced by a more formal and equally forced performance, when the landowner commands three young men to demonstrate, in Agee's words, "what nigger music is like."³³ As the men perform a series of songs, Agee describes himself as "sick" that this anthropological performance has been commissioned for himself and Evans.³⁴ He suggests that, just as the African-American laborers are trapped in the performance of social hierarchy, he too is not just a spectator but a performer: "now, in a perversion of self-torture, I played my part through. I gave their leader fifty cents, trying at the same time, through my eyes, to communicate much more, and said I was sorry we had held them up and that I hoped they would not be late; and he thanked me for them in a dead voice, not looking me in the eye, and they went away."³⁵ Both Agee and those he witnesses are associated with expressions of shame—manifested either in "sickness" and "a perversion of self-torture" or the reluctance to maintain eye contact. Agee's performance of shame, I'd like to argue, is meant to draw attention to his implication, as a privileged citizen and a journalist, in the way certain structures of vision produce others' shame.

Famous Men, by emphasizing the uneven effects of objectification, aligns itself with Fanon's work. By performing shame, Agee asks the reader to see how the colonizing gaze produces and relies on a more insidious production of shame in the dominated. In "Late Sunday Morning," the structural alignment of one person in the role of passive object and the other in the role of active spectator reinforces relations of racial dominance, a set of relations that Agee, in his frantic attempts to force a mutual gaze, cannot disrupt. This scene emphasizes the way that social-reform journalism is implicated in the violent voyeuristic practices of a racist landscape

aligned with that which Fanon describes. The relations between Agee, the white landowner, and the black singers, the book implies, are preconditioned by already existing social relations which institutions and structures compound. Non-mutual, objectifying vision both manifests and reifies these social relations.

If the citizen-witness traditionally comes to stand in for the reader, Agee's shame exposes and becomes the reader's shame and the shame of the polis in general. In emphasizing the reliance of social-reform journalism on voyeurism, he asks readers to see the violence of their own voyeurism. In so doing, he imagines an ideal community of privileged readers who both recognize their complicity in social dominance and wish to change it.

Revising Vision

Famous Men critiques and disrupts the spectatorial and representational conventions of social-reform journalism by emphasizing the objectification of vision. The middle of the book is marked by the attempt to practice a different kind of vision, one that focuses on the objects surrounding humans instead of the humans themselves. I refer to the approximately two hundred pages in which Agee embarks on an exhaustively detailed description of, first, the physical surroundings of the Woods', Gudgers', and Ricketts' households; second, the objects in the Gudger house; and third, the more general objects and practices ("clothing," "education," and "work") of the three tenant families and others like them.

Agee's practices here demonstrate the family resemblance between journalism, tourism, anthropology, and espionage. In his description of the wider environment of the Woods', Gudgers', and Ricketts' houses, Agee directs the reader to: "Leave this room and go very quietly down the open hall that divides the house [etc.]," vividly detailing each step on the way to the Ricketts' house.³⁶ In this narrative recounting, however, the reader becomes less a traditional tourist and more a spy, drawn into complicity by the narrator. The tour Agee conducts occurs at night and the reader is instructed to be "very quiet." Later, the reader voyeuristically looks on as Agee, left alone in the Gudgers' house, opens drawers and rifles through belongings, fastidiously noting each detail. Agee here performs the actions of the spy, and the reader, like him, sees the results of his invasion. Yet, far from being ashamed at his actions, he seems to revel in this role—to the point that he openly describes himself as a spy, and rehabilitates his voyeurism into an almost spiritual endeavor.³⁷ Agee informs the reader that he respects "being made witness to matters no human being may see," and claims that he approaches these objects with reverence.³⁸

Famous Men posits that the examination of the objects that surround the person can lend the spectator insight into that person. Ideally, Agee claims, "it would be our business to show how through every instant of every day of every year of his existence alive he is from all sides streamed inward upon, bombarded, pierced, destroyed by that enormous sleeting of all objects forms and ghosts how great how small no matter, which surround and whom his senses take: in as great and perfect and exact particularity as we can name them."³⁹ He suggests that each human being is infinitely complex—and that it is impossible to capture this complexity in finite language. The focus on "that enormous sleeting of all objects," then, is designed to help the reader understand in greater detail and complexity the other human being. This mode of vision seems to contradict and counteract the spectatorial logic of shame depicted in the earlier passages, in which vision is used as a weapon to categorize, humiliate, and objectify the other person. Here, vision is used to explore the other from various perspectives, and it is directed

not at the person, but at the objects surrounding the person. The gaze is divided and diverted and its potential violence ostensibly muted.

Agee recognizes that describing all the objects linked to a particular human being is impossible. He asks the reader for assistance:

One can write only one word at a time, and if these seem lists and inventories merely, things dead unto themselves, devoid of mutual magnetisms, and if they sink, lose impetus, meter, intension, then bear in mind at least my wish, and perceive in them and restore them what strength you can of yourself.⁴⁰

His attempt to draw from descriptions of the various material objects surrounding a person a mosaic-like representation of that person's essence, is depicted as a process of human sociality, imagination, and cooperation between reader and writer. In these passages, then, Agee reforms the lopsided voyeurism of journalistic practice to imagine an alternative kind of democracy, one based on the recognition of differences linked not to race or class, but rather to the unique location of individual human beings in the world. Readers are asked to place themselves in this formulation, and to actively participate in producing it. Agee seems to be imagining a democratic network that stretches across time, space, and text to link together himself, the tenants, and the reader.

This kind of sociality depends on the recognition and imagined production of the complexity of the subject of representation. It transforms difference from something based on rigid class and racial boundaries into a difference that differentiates all human beings. One passage in this middle part of the book, entitled "Colon," elucidates this philosophy. In it, Agee engages in an extended discussion of how best to imagine the complexity of human life: "[I]ts structure," he writes, "should be eighteen or twenty intersected spheres, the interlockings of bubbles on the face of a stream; one of these globes is each of you."⁴¹ The social recognition of difference, however, does not divide humans into dominant and dominated, but produces a form of horizontal, intermixed, and fluid equality: "the interlockings of bubbles on the face of a stream."⁴² By imagining difference not on the basis of social class, but at the level of the individual, this new kind of vision seems to reinvigorate the lost democratic ideal.

If the reader is temporarily lulled into accepting Agee's philosophy, the uncomfortable intervention of shame into the narrative disrupts his seemingly democratic spectatorial and representational practice. Near the end of this section of the book, Agee describes himself narrowly avoiding being caught rifling through the Gudgers' belongings, re-establishing the uninvited nature of these explorations and reincorporating the potential for shame into a narrative that has for a time erased it. His actions here may be in good faith, but their outcome is similar to the scenes he earlier critiqued:

I hear her voice and the voices of her children, and in knowledge of those hidden places I have opened, those griefs, beauties, those garments whom I took out, held to my lips, took odor of, and folded and restored so orderly, so reverently as cerements, or priest the blessed cloths, I receive a strong shock at my heart, and I move silently, and quickly. . . . It is not going to be easy to look into their eyes.⁴³

After pages of meditative description, the sudden reminder of the uninvited nature of his

examination shocks the reader along with Agee. The reader is left to question whether the attempt to represent the humanity of another person can justify the violation of that person's privacy (a discomfort intensified by the image of Agee kissing and smelling the Gudgers' clothing). His shame, in its association with "Late Sunday Morning," suggests that his tentative philosophy of the object may not take into account the self-identification of the journalistic subject with the object. Agee's gaze becomes shameful when discovered; it is an invasion, a violation doubled when reprinted for voyeuristic readers. His imagined difficulty at looking the Gudgers in the eyes indicates that his initial solution to social-reform journalism's practices may objectify the human subject at the same time it seeks to avoid that objectification.

I have now examined a moment in which shame emerges within the text to alert the reader to the way social-reform journalism and the good citizen can be implicated in and reinforce hierarchical and oppressive social relations. I have also commented upon Agee's attempt to correct normative modes of representation by practicing a different kind of spectatorship, and pointed out the way in which the eruption of shame into the narrative illuminates his unwitting replication of objectification. Now I would like to show how at the end of the book Agee again enlists conventional aspects of shame to theorize a utopian form of sociality that is based in the risk of shame, one that imagines (problematically) the deliberate exposure of vulnerability and self-objectification as a catalyst for producing a new kind of democratic community.

The Sociality of Shame

The end of the book describes two incidents in which Agee imagines the possibility of an alternative kind of democracy grounded in the mutual gaze. These two events evoke the possibility of a utopian sociality, an intimate democracy in which social barriers are erased and humans mutually witness each other's vulnerability.

In the first of these incidents, which he calls "introits" or entrances, Agee describes how he joins the Gudgers in their home to escape a thunderstorm. In the midst of this, the mutual gaze at which Agee has hinted throughout the book, but never fully achieved, comes to a physicalized peak:

I come soon to realize that [Louise] has not once taken her eyes off me since we entered the room: so that my own are drawn back more and more uncontrollably toward them and into them. From the first they have run chills through me, a sort of beating and ticklish vacuum at the solar plexus, and though I have frequently met them I cannot look into them long at a time without panic and quick withdrawal, fear, whether for her or for myself I don't know.⁴⁴

Here, vulnerability is expressed not just in the image of humans huddled in a house, seeking shelter from a massive storm. The reader is asked to consider the exchange of gazes as an expression of mutual exposure and vulnerability. By practicing what Tomkins calls "interocular intimacy," Agee and Louise are violating a deeply rooted social taboo.⁴⁵ Most obviously, the association between eye contact and sexuality makes this extended gaze a potential violation of social norms, especially on Agee's part, as the older man in the pair. In the potential transgression of the interocular taboo, both Agee and Louise risk the shame and danger of being seen seeing.⁴⁶ If the dangers of eye contact are made apparent in this scene,

the unique character of the experience which involves the mutual vulnerability of all involved seems to stave off temporarily the possibility of shame, although the description teeters on the edge of transgression.

The second, and professedly more significant, introit culminates in another model of human interaction based around an even more palpable erasure of shame. In this famous passage, Agee's car is stuck in the mud, which follows the thunderstorm. He comes back to the Gudgers' and stands in the dark outside of their home. Just as Agee is overwhelmed with shame, so too is this passage; indeed, the word "shame" is mentioned three times:

[S]tanding here, silently, in the demeanor of the house itself *I grow full of shame ... and shame the more*, because I do not yet turn away, but still stand here motionless ... and am aware of a vigilant and shameless hope that—not that I shall move forward and request you, disorder you, but that 'something shall happen,' as it 'happened' that the car lost to the mud: and so waiting, *in doubt, desire and shame...*⁴⁷

Agee's shame here derives from his inability to move away from the house; in his failure to move, he displays a vulnerable desire to be seen and cared for (rather than a desire to see). Yet his inability to move, if it is shameful, also includes its opposite: "a vigilant and shameless hope."⁴⁸

When George Gudger comes out into the darkness, the potential for social judgment is made manifest. Gudger disrupts expectations by viewing Agee not with the judging eye of the stranger but with the welcoming eye of the mutual friend. Externality and shame are instantly transformed into literal and metaphorical insiderness when George Gudger invites Agee into his home and Annie Gudger makes him a meal. The passage culminates with Agee and the Gudgers sharing a late-night conversation:

[T]here is a particular sort of intimacy between the three of us which is not of our own creating and which has nothing to do with our talk, yet which is increased in our tones of voice, in small quiet turns of humor, in glances of the eyes, in ways even that I eat my food, in their knowledge how truly friendly I feel toward them, and how seriously I am concerned to have caused them bother, and to let them be done with this bother as quickly as possible.⁴⁹

This scene, when taken in conjunction with the thunderstorm scene, establishes a human intimacy that indicates for Agee the utopian possibilities of a new kind of sociality. This intimacy is subdued, and features a physical tableau of equivalence. The three are seated together on the inside of the house, and exchange "glances of the eyes" that are more gentle than direct, aggressive or voyeuristic gazes. Here, the reader meant to witness a moment in which hospitality transcends the possibility of shame.

Agee claims that these moments of unplanned human intimacy and hospitality represent the grounds for a larger human solidarity. Ultimately, his vision is a utopian one, which prefigures a future in which humans come together across difference:

[T]here is a marching and resonance of rescuing feet which shall at length all dangers braved, all armies cut through, past, deliver you freedom, joy, health, knowledge like an enduring sunlight . . . that it shall come at length there can be no question: for this I know in my own soul through that regard of love we bear one another: for there it was proved me in the meeting of the extremes of the race.⁵⁰

Agee foresees this kind of future because, he claims, he experienced its nascent form in these introits.

It seems to be the risk of shame in the exposure of bodily and interpersonal vulnerability that allows for these utopian moments. This vulnerability is characterized by the ever-present possibility and refusal of judgment, and therefore these scenes imagine the simultaneous avoidance and risk of shame. Agee thus reimagines the act of good citizenship as one in which the citizen actively produces himself or herself as the object of the other person's gaze. Good citizenship becomes lodged not in witnessing, but in being witnessed. The exposed good citizen becomes temporarily unmoored from his or her relation to the state, and constructs an alternative democratic sphere in which all become both subjects and objects. It is this fantasy of human communion, inaugurated by the risk of shame, which I would like to critique in the next section.

Shame and the Politics of Privilege

Recent years have witnessed not just a resurgence of interest in shame theory, but the rise of shame politics as well. When I read Leys's comment in *From Guilt to Shame* about Americans' professed shame at Abu Ghraib, what struck me was the way she naturalized and legitimized the political performance of shame.⁵¹ This response was reiterated when I read Probyn's *Blush*. Even Agamben has theorized the "shame of being human" as "the beginning of a revolution."⁵² The performance of shame has become increasingly common in the recent political landscape. It is the enduring quality of this approach to imagining democratic relations that I think warrants sustained inquiry into the implications of developing a politics of shame.

As further evidence of this resurgence of the politics of shame, I would like to point to and discuss another text that, in its performance of shame, can illuminate the possibilities and limitations of *Famous Men's* political philosophy. "Sorry Everybody," a website anonymously produced in the wake of George W. Bush's re-election in 2004, collected thousands of pictures of voters who didn't vote for Bush holding signs that expressed some variation of public apology. Responses from others outside the U.S., especially Europe and South America, accepted the apology.⁵³

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, *From Guilt to Shame*, *Blush*, and "Sorry Everybody" all imagine shame as a viable response to the helplessness of witnessing political injustice. Each posits a witness or community of witnesses responding to an action that has already taken place: the tenant families—both white and black—are already oppressed, Australia was already colonized, the Abu Ghraib photographs were already taken, and Bush was already re-elected. Political shame, these texts suggest, is performed after the fact, and is a way to process, perform, and in some way regain discursive control of political helplessness. Shame, too, symbolically separates the witnesses from the actions they critique, which were carried out in their name.

The political performance of shame, then, becomes a way to negotiate the inevitable limit of democracy: the impossible ideal of political representation inscribed in the very concept of the democratic state. If in democratic theory the state is imagined as an extension of the people, these witnesses use shame to mark the erasure of their political positions. They highlight the disjunction between the imagined possibilities of democratic theory, in which all are represented and justice is served, and the way democracy is practiced, in which certain opinions are ignored while anti-democratic practices like colonization, invasion, and violence are authorized and justified through recourse to democracy's structures and principles. In the face of the seeming lack of shame (and indeed, open celebration) with which colonial and neo-colonial ventures are carried out, these witnesses, much like Agee, personify, perform, and testify to what they see as the shame of democracy's failure. In so doing, they mark themselves as the subject and object of politics.⁵⁴ Shame becomes a mode of good citizenship.

Shame not only speaks to the failure of the practice of democracy; it can, as in *Famous Men*, also provide a way to imagine alternative manifestations of democratic community. The political performance of shame, these texts suggest, can indeed produce what Benedict Anderson has called an "imagined community," seeming to encourage alternate imaginings of the democratic polis and allowing for a critique of the limits of democratic practice. The initiation and use of "Sorry Everybody," as indicated in a subheading titled "Explanation," addresses this possibility when the site claims that it allowed participants to "reassure each other that we weren't alone, to remember that one loss won't marginalize us forever."⁵⁵ In this scenario, the performance of shame creates community among those who try, but are unable, to produce political change. The site, too, provided a discursive foil to the Bush administration's rhetoric and actions. Instead of aggressive, violent assault, it performed a different America—one that was passive, ashamed, and friendly. Reactions from others around the world (primarily Europe and South America), in which the apology was accepted with similar placards, also produced an imagined transnational community of politically like-minded individuals. Like the "imagined community" in *Famous Men*, "Sorry Everybody" became a metaphorical location to construct an alternate democratic community, here an international one.

Yet these shame-based communities cannot be the grounds for a sustainable democracy. What "Sorry Everybody" points out and *Famous Men* elides is the way in which shame produces an imagined community on the basis of similarity, not difference. In order to imagine this kind of community, shame politics can erase or ignore materially inscribed social differences. In "Sorry Everybody" the mutual and voluntary expression of shame binds people together and produces comfort. Moving from the site back to the book, we can see more clearly that the community that is produced by Agee's book is also based on similarity, but a more sinister manifestation of it. When Agee comes together with the Gudgers, for example, racial similarity binds their temporary community: when George Gudger finds Agee outside of his home, he invites him in after explaining that "he had thought I was a nigger."⁵⁶ Community here is grounded on objectification of the other person.

If racial difference grounds *Famous Men's* temporary community, gender hierarchies, too, are not relieved in Agee's seemingly utopian vision. Agee's elision of the power differential between men and women in the first introit makes the reader question, as Kaja Silverman has, Agee's interpretation of the gaze between him and Louise. Rather than a mutual violation of the interocular taboo initiated and maintained by Louise, Silverman argues that this encounter "turns on [Louise's] psychic violation."⁵⁷ In Silverman's re-examination of the passage, what

Agee paints as shared vulnerability becomes an invasion. Silverman's reading intimates that Louise as a young girl risks more in her exchange of gazes than does Agee, a sexually mature man. Similarly, the idyllic meal shared in the ultimate introit is made possible by the meal Annie Gudger habitually provides her husband and his guest. This gendered critique of one of the founding premises of his vision of human communion suggests again that the book's idealized way of seeing may in fact be grounded in, rather than alleviating, hierarchy.

Finally, if race and gender hierarchies underpin Agee's politics of shame, class barriers—the focus of the book—are similarly reinscribed in its narration. In the end, the primary community of the book is created not between Agee and the tenant families, but between Agee and his privileged readers. We can see this, for example, in the way that, throughout *Famous Men*, Agee shares his innermost feelings, flaws, and failings with the reader but not with the Gudgers, Ricketts, or Woods. His concern is to mobilize and produce community in his readership.

Seen from these perspectives, Agee's interpretation of the scenes as models of democratic community becomes questionable. Agee's depiction of the utopian possibilities of shame relies upon imagined similarity and objectification of the other person; material and social difference is erased or underplayed to facilitate the imagining of this hypothetical community.

Another problem with crafting a politics on the basis of self-objectification is that to do so can reinforce the very social hierarchies that the citizen-witness ostensibly attempts to dismantle. The importance of the citizen-witness to this formulation normalizes his/her values and feelings as the center of the imagined ideal democracy. The discursive force of shame further (re)produces the privileged citizen-witness as the center of the social scene. The disruptive explosion of strong emotion, and the continuing attention to it, redirects focus at the suffering witness rather than the conditions he or she witnesses. The ideal democratic encounter that is witnessed at the end of *Famous Men*, therefore, becomes an expression of Agee's internal life. The knowledge Agee gains "in his own soul," and his narrative about that experience, draw the readers' attention as Agee's internal life takes dramatic precedence over those whose lives he witnesses.⁵⁸

This focus on Agee rather than those he witnesses is replicated in the book's paratexts and responses, in which the material conditions of poverty in the American South take a back seat to the sensationalistic centrality of Agee himself. In his introduction, for example, John Hersey describes how Agee "drank enough to stun a rhinoceros" and claims that he "died of a broken heart"⁵⁹; in his, Walker Evans associates Agee with the tragic heroism of King Lear, noting about his plain clothing that "[i]n due time the cloth would mold itself to his frame. Cleaning and pressing would have undone this beautiful process. I exaggerate, but it did seem sometimes that wind, rain, work, and mockery were his tailors."⁶⁰ Even after his death, Agee (and not the "famous men" to which his book refers) was transformed into a legendary character by his contemporaries and later readers, especially young white Civil Rights workers in the 1950s and 1960s.⁶¹ If the book struggles to overcome hierarchy, ostensibly broadening out the notion of "famous men," then, the book and responses to it simultaneously support that same hierarchy, maintaining the privileged citizen-witness as the (anti-)hero of democracy.

Narratives that imagine political concepts such as the citizen, democracy, and community express complex, powerful, and often contradictory messages—messages that necessitate close examination. It is clear in this instance that the attempt to conceptualize an alternative democratic polis and practice on the basis of shame is fraught with difficulty, and may rein-

scribe the very hierarchies it seeks to challenge. The contemporaneity of “Sorry Everybody,” *Blush*, and the response to Abu Ghraib photographs, along with the resurgence of interest in shame theory, indicate that the politics of shame early and distinctively manifested in Agee and Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* have not waned but have in fact become more thoroughly inscribed in the way the liberal public encounters, and performs itself within, the political landscape. If it is necessary to recognize the community-building possibilities of shame politics, it is equally important to note the inherent limitations of this approach to democracy.



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Endnotes

1. The term “imagined community” refers to Benedict Anderson’s similarly titled book. Anderson tracks the way that print capitalism enabled the imagining of the nation through the circulation of different kinds of cultural texts, including newspapers, censuses, and maps. I utilize the term to emphasize the important role both nonfictional and fictional narratives play in producing, critiquing, and experimenting with various conceptualizations of political community. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York and London: Verso, 1991).
2. Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 5.
3. *Ibid.*, 12.
4. Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 9.

5. In *How the Other Half Lives*, for example, Riis ends his exposé of tenement conditions with a call on owners to help counter the conditions he sees. “Miss Ellen Collins in her Water Street houses” is Riis’s ultimate example of the ideal citizen; he writes that “Her first effort was to let in the light in the hallways, and with the darkness disappeared, as if by magic, the heaps of refuse that used to be piled up beside the sinks.” (211) Collins’s “magic touch” is accompanied by cooperation between two types of citizens—the tenant and the landlord: “To this end the rents were put as low as consistent with the idea of a business investment that must return a reasonable interest to be successful.” (211-212) Similarly, in her introduction to *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, Bly stated proudly that her undercover venture into the asylum had led to New York City appropriating an additional million dollars per year toward improving the asylums. If London as a socialist advocated a more radical overhaul of the economic system, his emphasis on the “mismanagement” of “Civilization” he charts in his exploration of London’s East End in *The People of the Abyss*—and his apparent belief in the ability of the good citizen to intervene in this mismanagement—indicates his conception of the state, and the state-citizen relation, as the foundation of the democratic promise. See Nellie Bly, *Ten Days in a Mad-House* (New York: Ian L. Munro, Publisher, n.d. [orig. pub. 1887]), <<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/bly/madhouse/madhouse.html>>; Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1903); and Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).
6. I do not mean to suggest that the muckrakers had the same exact goals or approaches to social change as Progressive Era reformists, but rather that they become representations of the same kind of public figure—the citizen-witness.
7. This notoriety may be seen reflected in and produced by Roosevelt’s frustrated and very public bequeathing of the group’s name.
8. As one example of this practice an image in part five of the book depicts two elderly people looking off to their left. The caption reads: “*Yazoo City, Mississippi*: ‘I think it’s only right that the government ought to be run with people like us in mind,’” Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (New York: The Viking Press, 1937), 147.
9. *Ibid.*, 6.
10. *Ibid.*, 187.
11. *Ibid.*, 190.
12. John Tagg, “Melancholy Realism: Walker Evans’s Resistance to Meaning,” *Narrative 11*, no. 1 (January 2003): 12, footnote deleted.
13. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 13.
14. Tagg, 59.
15. Agee and Evans, 7.
16. As I will suggest later in the essay, Agee’s conceptualization of shame points forward to the present moment, in which a similar politics of shame has emerged in the West as a response to injustice.

17. See Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 11. Sixty years earlier, Ruth Benedict hypothesized a similar shift when, in her 1946 book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, she argued that U.S. culture at the time was becoming increasingly conscious of shame. See Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989). Conversely, some in the field of legal studies maintain that the reverse has happened, and that guilt has overtaken shame as a legal category in the West only in the last century. Mark Drumbl cites John Braithwaite's argument thus, contextualizing this shift by noting Freud's emphasis on guilt at the turn of the century, the rise of the penitentiary, the rise of the city (which de-emphasized social interaction in favor of anonymity), and positing that the Victorian sensibility was "disgusted" by shame-based modes of punishment. See Mark Drumbl, "Punishment, Postgenocide: From Guilt to Shame to Civis in Rwanda," *New York University Law Review* 75 [2000]: 1221-1326, 1256-1257.
18. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 1999). Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965). Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Willis, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, 1951). Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967). Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Face of Shame* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Introduction." In Silvan Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995). Silvan Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995).
19. If one debate focuses on the relative importance of guilt and shame in the West, Leys points out another area of disagreement. While pre-1950s psychoanalysts and others tended to represent shame as a predominantly negative emotion, she notes, recent writers such as Probyn, Agamben, and Sedgwick have rehabilitated it as ultimately productive. (124) Debates on shame take place as well amidst a larger intellectual conversation on the emotions in general. While some would have it that the emotions are "intentional," in *Feeling in Theory* Rei Terada argues that emotions indicate the lack, not the presence, of the subject and subjectivity. See Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the 'Death of the Subject'* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001).
20. Agamben, 107.
21. *Ibid.*, 104.
22. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 9.
23. Derrida, 12.
24. Fanon, 10.
25. *Ibid.*, 109.
26. Leys, 16.
27. Probyn, 34-35, 101. Probyn claims, after Tomkins, that "[i]f you're interested in and care about the interest of others, you spend much of your life blushing. Conversely, if you don't care, then attempts to shame won't move you. Shame highlights different levels of interest" (x).

28. In making this claim, I am not meaning to forward the argument that Agee deliberately draws on the shame theories I have listed above (which would clearly be impossible as many were published after *Famous Men*). Rather, I would like to suggest that despite interpretive debates, the concept of “shame” holds certain associations that Agee’s work implicitly reflects and mobilizes.
29. In a posthumously published essay, forcefully titled “America! Look at Your Shame!” Agee responds to a photograph taken during the 1943 race riots in Detroit, and narrates a story about his self-proclaimed shameful refusal to speak out against overt racism. The essay, written soon after the publication of *Famous Men*, engages with similar topics and questions as the book. James Agee, “America! Look At Your Shame!” in *James Agee Rediscovered: The Journals of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men and Other New Manuscripts*, ed. Michael Lofaro and Hugh Davis (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005): 165-173.
30. Lionel Trilling, “Greatness With One Fault in It,” *The Kenyon Review* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1942): 102.
31. James Lowe, *The Creative Process of James Agee* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 87.
32. Carolyn Wells Kraus, “On Hurting People’s Feelings: Journalism, Guilt, and Autobiography,” *Biography* 26, vol. 2 (Spring 2003): 283-298, 292.
33. Agee and Evans, 28.
34. *Ibid.*, 31.
35. *Ibid.*, 31.
36. *Ibid.*, 75.
37. *Ibid.*, liv, 134.
38. *Ibid.*, 134, 136, 137, 188.
39. *Ibid.*, 110.
40. *Ibid.*, 110-111.
41. *Ibid.*, 101.
42. *Ibid.*, 110.
43. *Ibid.*, 188-189.
44. *Ibid.*, 400.
45. Tomkins, 144.
46. Agee and Evans, 400.
47. *Ibid.*, 411, emphasis mine.
48. *Ibid.*, 411.
49. *Ibid.*, 417-418.
50. *Ibid.*, 392.
51. Leys, 16.
52. Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 132.
53. See “Sorry Everybody.” <<http://www.sorryeverybody.com>>. The website now has a sequel: “Hello Everybody,” which was produced after Barack Obama won the U.S. presidential election in 2008.
54. The relation between self-objectification and shame politics is reinscribed in “Sorry Everybody’s” display in which participants photographed themselves holding placards. The participants thus became artistic objects sending a particular political message.

55. See "Hello Everybody: Explanation." 12 July 2009.
<<http://www.sorryeverybody.com/explanation.shtml>>.
56. Agee and Evans, 412.
57. Kaja Silverman, "Moving Beyond the Politics of Blame: Let Us Now Praise Famous Men," *Desire of the Analysts: Psychoanalysis and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Greg Forter and Paul Allen Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 136.
58. Agee and Evans, 392.
59. John Hersey, "Introduction: Agee," James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families*, v-xi: vii, xxxv.
60. Walker Evans, "Foreword: James Agee in 1936." James Agee and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families*, xli-xliv: xli-xlii.
61. See Alan Spiegel, *James Agee and the Legend of Himself: A Critical Study* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), and David Madden, *Touching the Web of Southern Novelists* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006) for further elaboration. Spiegel has described a number of Agee "cults," including "the cults of Poor Jim, Saint Jim, and Plain or Country Jim." (6) This depiction of Agee as a hero, as Spiegel and Silverman point out, was encouraged by Agee's own self-representation. Spiegel, comparing Agee to other self-fashioning artists such as Walt Whitman, argues that in his self-reflexivity Agee portrays himself as a hero, a "Janus-faced modern" who "conflat[es] indigenous national fantasy (i.e., 'orphan' heroes, lost families, everlasting roots, etc.) with the blessed mystery of his own mental turmoil, his intellectual honesty, his orneriness, confusion, and perversity." (24) Silverman focuses in on what I would assume are similar moments to those I have located, in which Agee "excoriates himself for his shortcomings as a writer or man and expresses his desire for humiliation or punishment." (135) She claims that these moments indicate "false care," performing a masochistic "heroic fantasy" that focuses on the self while ostensibly caring for the other. (135)