The Unmaking of Americans
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**DOROTHY DANDRIDGE: A Biography**
Donald Bogle
Amistad Press, 1997

**THE REAL BETTIE PAGE: The Truth about the Queen of the Pinups**
Richard Foster
Carol Publishing Group, 1998

**WONDER BREAD AND ECSTACY: The Life and Death of Joey Stefano**
Charles Isherwood
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"Watch Out for Obscure Publications"
The Unmaking of Americans

Mel Freilicher

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DOROTHY’S DISAPPEARING DUST COVER

Dorothy Dandridge—like Marilyn Monroe and Liz Taylor—was a sizzling goddess of the fifties. All audiences ever had to do was take one look at her—in a nightclub, on television, or in the movies—and they were hooked. She was an unforgettable, Hollywood’s first full-fledged African-American star.

Although she worked tirelessly to climb the ladder, no room at the top, Dorothy became a dramatic actress unable to secure dramatic roles.

most dazzling and sensational nightclub performers around, integrating some of America’s hottest venues.

But movie stardom was her dream. an Academy Award nomination as Best Actress for her lead role in Otto Preminger’s Carmen Jones.

cultural icon

As her personal frustrations grew, at the age of 42, struggling with bankruptcy and alcoholism, Dorothy was found dead of an overdose of anti-depressant pills.
• Dorothy's mother, Ruby, was a comedienne and actress, a scrappy worker who ended her career on tv, as a maid in the series, "The Father of the Bride," and the neighbor Oriole in "Beulah." Ruby pushed Dorothy and her sister Vivian on stage. By the time she reached her teens in the Depression, Dorothy was working in such movies as "Going Places" with Louis Armstrong, and appearing at New York's Cotton Club in a trio called the Dandridge sisters.

• Ruby has been described as "not giving a damn about those kids," and she consistently refused to let them have any contact with their father. The girls were instructed to call Ruby's live-in lover, "Ma-Ma." A merciless disciplinarian, "Ma-Ma" would rip off Dorothy's underwear and examine her vaginally to determine if she was pregnant.

• Dorothy's only child, Lynn, was born retarded. The father was Dorothy's first husband, the talented Black dancer Harold Nicholas. He was a philanderer, especially after they moved to Hollywood.

• The more successful Dorothy became, the more removed she was from available Black men. Her lovers were stars like Peter Lawford, Frederick March, screenwriter Abby Mann (Judgment at Nuremberg), and, of course the highly influential Otto Preminger, who bought and furnished for her a French regency mansion in Beverly Hills, when they were making Carmen Jones (she still had hopes that he
would leave his wife). Five years later, a distant Preminger directed her in *Porgy and Bess*. He was acerbic about Jack Dension, her soon-to-be second husband, a sleazy character who owned a supper club in which Dorothy unhappily performed, and where she lost all her money.

Preminger played a similar role, on a more magnificent scale, to an earlier lover, Dorothy's arranger Phil Moore, who engineered her nightclub career. Moore's material enhanced Dorothy's assets and stayed clear of her vocal limitations: he took care of grooming, styling and imaging.

Moore's career went on to span six decades, during which he did special arrangements for a galaxy of stars, including Lena Horne, Mae West, Ethel Waters, Ava Gardner, Frank Sinatra, Louis Armstrong, Marilyn Monroe, Lucille Ball, Ann Sothern, Count Basie, Dinah Washington, Charles Mingus, and later Diahann Carroll, the Supremes and Johnny Mathis. Dorothy was his favorite. In those days, Moore was never permitted to work with white female performers without supervision. "Judy Garland was always accompanied by a chaperon," he said. "No way a Black guy could be alone with her in a rehearsal bungalow."
3.

CORRESPONDENCES OF THE FLESH:
The Soul Emerges (Briefly for a Photo Op)

What happens is tragedy and melodrama. *When you fall, you cannot always stop.* Only a few ways of exiting with any dignity or aplomb, and possibly even with the means to attack (attract) intact.

Is it any wonder that Joey Stefano, hot hot hustler and porn star, was found dead at age 26, in 1994. That not-so-rhetorical question was recently posed by Peripatetic Book Reviewer, pining for fleshy correspondences. This man does not wish to focus attention upon himself, or so he claims.

The mythic ‘50s pinup queen, Bettie Page, had characteristic black bangs: wholesome, voluptuous; bondage photos strictly with other women; *the disappearance;* “her decade long isolation behind asylum walls.” Bettie stabbed and stabbed the defenseless old lady: bloodied housemate, furnished by a non-profit agency to assist the elderly.

As children, juicy Joey and bondage Bettie were both sexually abused by their fathers. Bettie’s father traded dimes for the cowboy movies for her silence. *Joey’s irresistible striptease.* He took drugs the way other people put on sunglasses when they go outdoors: as an automatic reflex.

Their steep, steep decline: notwithstanding Dorothy’s Rice-a-roni tv commercial, and Bettie’s fateful rendezvous with Billy Graham. When Dorothy went bankrupt, she owed 77 creditors, and was involved in 8 different lawsuits. Secluded in her apartment, disoriented and depressed, Dorothy had late night “telephonitis.”
“She used to sing on the phone to my mother for two or three hours. I could take a shower and come back and she’d still be singing.”

The motel on Hollywood Boulevard and La Brea Avenue where Joey was found slumped, needles in both arms. “Once in the early hours of the morning a panicky Dorothy phoned and asked Joel to come over immediately. Someone had taken the broiler out of her kitchen.” (When he arrived, the broiler was still on the kitchen stove.) Bettie brandished a large kitchen knife while ordering her stepchildren to pray to the picture of Jesus. “If you take your eyes off this picture, I’ll cut your guts out,” she threatened. (Could that be what they had recently taught her at Bible college?)

Some kind of fleshy fatalism honestly haunts all us readers and weepers, even Peripatetic One, who likes to think of himself as hard-boiled, if not pickled, and whose function is decidedly ambiguous: trying to reflect judiciously on other lives while not calling attention to his own history or role as reflexive reflector. While some (whom PBR could but won’t name) have accused him of false modesty or worse, and fully acknowledging his own heaping solipsism, PBR nevertheless denies all charges. Surely, even the most unkind critic would grant PBR’s genuine concern with America’s internalized legacy of doom, specially dished out to non-rich, non-white: love it and hate it, U.S.A.
THE FARM DEMANDED HARD WORK
AND SO DID THE PORN MILLS

Bettie fetched water from a faraway well, watered crops, and picked rocks out of the soil so it could be seeded and plowed. Despite the poverty that forced Bettie and her siblings to walk to school without shoes on their feet, farm life had many advantages. On warm afternoons after lunch, she and her brothers and sisters ditched school to splash in creeks, and make up games. They were a lot happier than before, when the family had been shuffling through small dustbowl towns of Texas and Oklahoma. That ended in 1930, when their father Roy, a decorated World War 1 veteran, couldn’t find a job as an auto mechanic, and stole a car to take his family to his mother’s place in Nashville. After Roy was paroled from prison the next year, the family scraped together a little money to buy a 48-acre farm outside of Nashville. The marriage soon fell apart: more interested in carnal pursuits than farm life, Roy got caught rolling in the hay—literally—with a fifteen-year-old neighbor girl.

Bettie became very introverted, perhaps in reaction to her childhood abuse. But she was editor of the high school newspaper and yearbook, and avidly pursued the valedictorian’s scholarship to prestigious Vanderbilt University. Accumulating a 97.19 g.p.a. —the valedictorian’s was less than one-quarter of a point higher—Bettie would have graduated first, except she skipped a 2 hour art lab to rehearse for the senior play. Her yearbook declared that in 30 years hence Bettie would be likely to star in a remake of Ninotchka, with Mickey Rooney. On June 6, 1940, delivering her salutatorian’s address, “Looking Forward,” at the Nashville War Memorial auditorium, Bettie received a scholarship from the Daughters of the American Revolution to nearby George Peabody School for Teachers.
Her mother hadn't bothered to attend the graduation.

Life on the dance circuit was not an easy one. It meant long stretches away from home, adjusting to a new city every week, living out of a duffel bag (no suitcase necessary; leather straps don't wrinkle), wrangling with club owners over fees, killing time in unfamiliar places. Says one dancer who worked the circuit: "Clubs will do anything for you to make you happy—get anything for you. It's a pharmacy. You can get drugs from the owners, the managers, the customers, the other performers. Every single club has their house drug dealers."

Stefano's drug taking reached super-human levels: that does not constitute an anecdote. The PCP or angel dust habit, which he acquired when he left his middle-class, suburban home at 14, disgusted his friends when Joey moved into various of their upscale, West Hollywood apartment complexes (one known as the Porn Palace): he switched to trendy extasie and ketamine, or Special K, an animal tranquilizer which induced apparently highly desirable, catatonic "k-hole" states. Later, Joey preferred heroin.

His sexual appetites were every bit as insatiable. When he wasn't being paid for it, Joey could be found cruising the bars and bookstores; he would spend $200 a night on the 976 phone sex lines. Joey never had safe sex, and he was always sharing needles, so his HIV+ status came as no surprise. Still, he would be unable to continue working in the porn industry if it were made public, even though the majority of co-stars were in his same situation.

The porn mills demanded hard work: *Joey fetched water from the faraway well.*
MORE FACTS OF LIFE

Dorothy’s continuing studies at the Actors Lab were most important to her. Among her classmates were Charles Chaplin, Jr. and “a young blond named Marilyn Monroe, with whom Dorothy struck up a friendship.” Located behind Schwab’s Drugstore at Sunset and Laurel, the Lab had been founded by some of America’s most respected actors, including former members of the Group Theater in New York. Instructors included, at various times, Morris Carnovsky and his wife the actress Phoebe Brand, Hume Cronyn, Aline MacMahon, Sam Levene and Anthony Quinn. One of its administrators, who also studied and directed there, later became known as Joe Papp.

The Lab’s interracial mix and liberal politics were viewed suspiciously by Hollywood’s older, conservative generation. By 1948, the Tenney Committee, which had been established as California’s arm of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, went so far as to label it a communist front. That year, the Lab held a Labor Day fundraising picnic in their parking lot, which provided an opportunity for its patrons to meet and mix with the staff. Planned for the day was a program of skits, songs, along with other activities, food stalls and a bazaar. At one point, Anthony Quinn asked Dorothy to dance; Blacks danced with Whites (actually, Quinn was half-Mexican). A particularly vicious Hollywood gossip columnist predictably termed the whole event, “pretty party-lish.”

Hedda Hopper, who everyone in Hollywood knew was a rabid, ultra-conservative, declaimed in the Los Angeles Times:

(VOICE OF HEDDA HOPPER:)
...Out of Character. The Actors Lab made no
which included dancing between Whites and
Negroes. They used a parking lot on Sunset Blvd
for their dancing space where one and all could
see. This group's corny idea of being liberal will
eventually lead them into trouble. The situation
has nothing whatever to do with racial prejudice
or discrimination; every man in the world is as
good as he is in his heart, regardless of race, creed
or color. But that doesn't mean they have to
intermix. Right or wrong, the great balance of the
community has this deep-rooted conviction, and
they were shocked at this display by the Actors
Lab. That's the sort of thing that leads to race
riots.

6.

BATHING BEAUTIES (A)BOUND

Hedda Hopper flounces into the chic club Copango on the
arm of her latest, bouncing boy toy—hot baby, luscious flesh, juicy
juicy Joey Stefano. “MORE THICK PLOT,” a beguiled yet only
slightly bemused Desi Arnaz groupie gaily cries, while beauteous
Joey bares his bountiful buns right there on the glittering dance
floor. “Who is that queen with the big butt and so much attitude?”
inquires one perplexed patron.

Like J. Edgar Hoover, a veritable Flamenco floozie currently
kicking up her hoary heels to “The Hustle,” heartless Hedda
Hopper knows absolutely everything about utterly everyone. She
creams in her own dossiers; Ginger Rogers’ fascist mom
dementedly adds the vitriol. Meanwhile, rapacious Roy Cohn
shakes (it) vigorously before pissing bile. It’s definitely Slap-Happy Hour! (Peripatetic Book Reviewers everywhere, beware!)

This season’s biannual Blue Chip Ball is being held at Club Mocambo (momentarily renamed) where Dorothy is appearing as temporary replacement for Desi’s usual singer; as a result, she will soon land a gig in Las Vegas’ prestigious Club Bingo, where her friends Nat “King” Cole and Sammy Davis, Jr. have already performed. They were permitted to be in the lounge only when they were performing. Under no circumstances were they to socialize with any of the patrons, or dine at the club.

Joey is restless, feckless and fey on the disco dance floor, GRAVITY’S TOMORROW: there, he prowls through time for horny hustlers like himself. Joey prefers them beefy, bruising and hairy and oh-so-chewable: otherwise, he could’ve gone for Daddy Desi himself in a big, big way. (Quite a would-be treat for the virile young Anthony Quinn!)

“Get your cocks hard!” Joey callously commands fellow porn stars on torrid set of Tijuana Toilet Trash, imperious yet somehow twinkling. They must needs oblige him.

Joey is a tantalizing doll, a proud and aggressive, bottomless bottom: a new kind of porn star, in a macho world dominated by muscular, studly tops who unblinkingly eschew cock-sucking, and all visible signs of desire, even their own narcissistic imperative to be worshipped. This is Joey’s provocatively lewd, thrillingly lascivious, big-buns triumph—his and Chi Chi La Rue’s, maverick drag queen entrepreneur who produced and adored Joey, defying the established porn studios’ so-called wisdom. Together, they ate mucho Twinkies, delivered fresh from Pink Dot. But it didn’t show on Joey, at least not in a tawdry disco glow where Brandy is left to toot her own damn horn.

When repugnant Roy Cohn flashes wads of bills before glazed eyes, Joey is too stoned to recognize the face of evil: “ugly” still registers rapidly, though Joey’s been hooked on heroin since age 14. It’s an open secret that both men are HIV+—you can just tell that Cohn expects some definitive bareback action later.
Meanwhile, Bettie has tried to fly out of her third-story, New York apartment window—a prelude to later, full-blown paranoid schizophrenia. Hedda frugs and hops heartily, licking the crusty lid off joyous J. Edgar's tipped and tinted tits. (Both celebs are positively well-known for wearing an evening gown like nobody's business.)

Dorothy—infiniely shy, remote and glamorous, tipsy—nevertheless defends herself with the strategic ferocity of a Cold War cutie about to cash in. After intensive consultation with politically experienced friends, she issues a statement, pointing out that she has been asked to make numerous appearances by many organizations, such as Catholic Youth Organization, B’nai B’rith Brotherhood Week, Red Cross, Cerebral Palsy, Heart Campaign. Although she agrees to answer any questions which MGM might put to her, Dorothy refuses to sign a loyalty oath.

About the Actors Lab, Dorothy says, “This was one of the few outlets available to a young actress of my race seeking actual workshop training. Attending the lab was in direct relationship with my theatrical ambition.” An avowal that she was never affiliated with the Communist Party or any of its front organizations closes with, “I have at no time been politically active. My sole interests are towards having a successful career and aiding my people.”

Much later, after the dance, these 3 beauties are in an amusing melee together. (All take or are booty beauties.) It happens in Delmonico’s back rooms, where there’s a huge pool, medium-sized one, and a hot shower. Democratically, Joey jumps into the large body of water, and cocks an inviting eye. Across a crowded room, Bettie and Dorothy exchange a fleeting, slightly weary, very knowing smile, then move on to lower and upper decks respectively. Bettie had already been posing in swimwear that day; deciding this is too much like work, she sighs for the duration. Dorothy definitely regrets everything, nothing (rien).

The dizzying disco dancing is dazzling; drugs flow like a rose-colored fountain in heat. Just as Joey is slipping out of his
bathing, and into his glorious birthday suit, hatted and harried Hedda Hopper comes hobbling along, stumbling, searching for her ostensible boy-toy escort—though she always makes a big production of not sleeping with Joey, or anyone else “out of wedlock.” On the verge of letting loose with vicious invective, luckily Hedda observes that lust-crazed Cohn is one of several unappetizing denizens of Delmonico’s back room intently peering into Joey’s nether regions. Needing Cohn to butter her toast all right, Hedda vaguely attempts to play the gracious loser.

Turning away with a grand and goofy, benign smile, Hedda marches right square into the arms of wild and wet Desi Arnaz. Guffaws break out from all corners, as Desi’s bosom companions Hedda Gabler and John dos Passos anticipate a merry old contretemps. Ever the gentleman, Desi merely spits in Hedda Hopper’s general direction. The other white Hedda and dos Passos rub their hands together in considerable glee (at least some of their hands); one slaps a knee. Meanwhile, irrepressible Dotty Parker is getting ready to goose absolutely everyone in sight, then start shooting (off her mouth). Hedda makes many malicious mental notes, on her way to stony perdition.

Observing in shadows from her cushy upper tier, Dorothy is grinning deeply, picturing how Desi would tell this story to laughing Lucy. Dorothy had long appreciated, and identified with Lucille Ball: a fellow, savvy Cold War cutie, who also crossed the color line with impunity—doubtless greatly sickening stalwart Hedda. Lucille Ball was investigated by HUAC in 1951. According to some critical historians, she donned her most famous persona—the scatterbrained “Lucy Ricardo”—in order to wriggle out of damaging allegations about her political sympathies. Ball was spared a recital of names by her obvious apoliticism and obsequiousness—she swore that she was never a member of the Party, but she had registered as a Communist voter in 1936 to please her Socialist grandfather. She also swore that she had not cast a vote for a Communist candidate.
In 1950, under Ronald Reagan's tenure as President of the Screen Actors Guild, the organization's Board of Directors drafted a loyalty oath. While the Guild professed to "fight against any secret blacklist," it stated that "if any actor...has so offended American public opinion that he has made himself unsaleable at the box office, the Guild cannot and would not want to force any employer to hire him." "In essence," Donald Bogle points out, "the Screen Actors Guild condoned blacklisting."

Among the Black entertainers listed in *Red Channels* were Hazel Scott, Fredi Washington and Lena Horne (with whom the media was constantly comparing Dorothy, as if there was room for only one glamorous, Black singer). Because of *Red Channels*, Horne later said that she was blacklisted from television appearances. At the time, Sidney Poitier was asked to sign a loyalty oath, just before he appeared in *Blackboard Jungle*. He refused, as he did when told to repudiate Paul Robeson and African-American actor Canada Lee. The American public first learned of Poitier's refusals many years afterwards.

In May '63, Dorothy joined Dick Gregory, Sammy Davis, Jr., Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, and Rita Moreno at a rally for Martin Luther King, Jr. Over 50,000 people attended. "This is the largest and most enthusiastic civil rights rally in the history of this nation," King told the crowd that day.

In July, Dorothy traveled to Chicago to attend the NAACP convention, and was a presenter at a Women's Auxiliary awards ceremony. She went on to Cleveland to
be a guest co-host of the syndicated "Mike Douglas Show," where comedian Dick Gregory also appeared. In an interview with the city's African-American newspaper, The Call and Post, Dorothy said: "Let's face it. It's the younger people who are opening up more avenues for the Negroes. It's their pressure and their unwillingness to be satisfied with the status quo that is causing the changes."

The taping of the Douglas show proved quite emotional as she talked to another guest, Dr. Gunnar Dwybad, executive director of the National Association for Mentally Retarded Children. In the glare of 50,000 watts of light, and with the unblinking eyes of video cameras, Dorothy looked straight ahead, and touchingly spoke of her daughter Lynn, the first and only time she did so on television. "It was one of the great moments in television drama," Jet commented. "Seldom, if ever has a star discussed a crushing personal problem with such frankness and intelligence." Jet also reported that Westinghouse was "so impressed by Miss Dandridge's sincerity" that they planned to show the videotapes on Boston, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and other outlets.

8.

BUT NONE OF THIS FILLED THE HUNGRY VOID

Languorous yet jazzy music is emanating from the snappy Cukaracha Club in ol' Mineola. Get ready for a mighty fine time. Caught dancing to the tin of a different drum was compelling CHARACTER X, with the well-known slit-eyes and puffy, puffy collagen cheeks. But guess which hot stud came mamboing by next?—and with nary a turmy tuck in sight!
Joey went off into a sidecar somewhere to brag about how much money he had made, yet at the same time was signing autographs for a buck on demented prescription pads, which had embossed on them, in big pink letters: “PRETTY PARTY-LINISH!” “I told him he was over-exposed, and he needed to invest his money!” shrieked an agitated agent, at the peppy post-mortem. In any case, the $100,000 Stefano made in 1990 was due primarily to income from what may be called ancillary revenues: dancing at clubs and escort work, a more rarefied name for prostitution. Despite industry players’ protestations that the days of exploitation in the business are over, the performers’ video contracts are inherently exploitative.

In the mid ’50s, Bettie enrolled in acting class at the renowned Herbert Berghof Studios of New York. Berghof was particularly pleased with her performance opposite fellow student Robert Culp in The Dark Lady of Sonnets, where she played a servant who had been caught making love to Queen Elizabeth’s paramour, and would have her head cut off. When Berghof asked Bettie how she accomplished it, she told him that she had imagined how God would punish her for many sins. She acted in television shows such as the “U.S. Steel Hour,” the “Eyewitness Show”; in summer stock, she was a hooker in Camino Real by Tennessee Williams, and had a small role in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. When the Broadway auditions opened up for L’il Abner, Berghof urged Bettie to try out for the part of Moonbeam McSwine, but Bettie chickened out. “I didn’t believe I could do it,” she said in a 1995 Playboy magazine article. “I really lacked ambition in those days. I did nothing to promote myself.”

Nevertheless, Bettie was highly sought after as a model, and had many decided public successes. Here at the Cukaracha Club, she sassily sambas like a semi-goddess. During most of the 1950s, it wasn’t unusual to see Bettie’s face smiling back at you on newsstands from Robert Harrison’s tabloids, with captions like “Forbidden Sex Rites of the Tropics!” and “How We Licked the Teenage Sin Clubs.” Harrison was an ex-newspaperman who had
built a small empire of cheesecake magazines. His contacts in the entertainment business and his newspaper background forged important opportunities for Bettie. Harrison knew the press, and, more important, he knew how to get space in local columns.

With publicity in mind, Harrison took his new star model to the Beaux Arts Ball in 1951, at New York’s Waldorf-Astoria. Bettie’s high society debut was a “coming-out” in more ways than one—she appeared at the costume ball clad only in a pair of fishnet stockings, high heels, and twin telephone dials over her breasts. A box advertising the next month’s cover of Dare magazine shielded Bettie’s lower extremities. Bettie was a hit—her number got dialed more times that night than Grand Central Station’s did in a week! At the close of the evening, she was crowned Queen of the Ball. Though the title was fleeting, it came with a full set of Revere cookware pots and pans.

Comfortably surveying the chatty Cuckaracha, Dorothy does not have to perform, nor are any of those too-vomit-making-for-words, right-wing politicians likely to show up at this delicious out-of-the-way hot spot. Dorothy is here purely to check out the local talent, and to grudgingly admire the tacky, violet brocaded walls. Professionalism and years of experience carried her through chronic stage fright, to make a smash hit in the most chic Los Angeles and New York clubs. Her opening at Manhattan’s La Vie En Rose in January ’52 was sensational. Phil Moore, at the piano, struck the chords. Then Dandridge, in a form-fitting gold lamé gown, “came wiggling out of the wings,” as Time later wrote, “like a caterpillar on a hot rock.” Her voice was strong and, of course, sexy as she sang, “Love Isn’t Born, It’s Made.” Her training and basic instincts as a dancer enabled her to move sensually and dramatically. Knowingly, she played with the song’s suggestiveness. “Love isn’t born on a beautiful April morn/Love isn’t born, it’s made/And that’s why every window/Has a window shade.” The house went crazy.

Patrons, including close friends Ava Gardner and Harry Belafonte, sat spellbound by her hot/cool style, her intelligent and
sophisticated renditions. Throughout the performance, Dorothy was goddess-like, with a suggestion of fear. The day after the opening, *New York Post* columnist Earl Wilson called her “a singing sexation.” But her friend Joyce Bryant said, “I don’t think that Dorothy believed it. She was so terribly insecure. I heard it was the same thing night after night. She was just always frightened to death.” The two-week engagement at La Vie En Rose stretched into 14 weeks, and led to TV appearances on Ed Sullivan’s, Jackie Gleason’s, and Steve Allen’s shows, as well as major mainstream coverage in *Life, Look* and *Time*. Dorothy had long been a mainstay of *Jet* and *Ebony*, who sympathetically reported every rumor on all aspects of her intensely private life.

Dorothy, Bettie and Joey do a chillin’ cha-cha, at the cookin’ Cukaracha. They enjoy running into one another at Mogambo Bay Grille, or any reasonable facsimile: nod sympathetically, vaguely; belt down booze. On such an occasion, a sharp-eyed, in-the-know patron musingly mutters, “Fabulous yet fragile.” “Or bitter?” replies another aching anchorite. Could that have been Himself? Ceaselessly scribbling, keenly bleary-eyed Peripatetic Book Reviewer: patiently waiting (or so he’d have you believe) to assume center stage.

Actually, that witty, would-be literary luminary could relate quite the lewd tale of recent wild experiments while ostensibly sedately waiting. But PBR doesn’t wish to wantonly whet your weary whistle, dear rapacious reader: suffice it to say this particular caper involved neither radio nor nun. Besides, he recently resolved (*after* wetting his own wanton whistle) that his ongoing role is to eschew egotism. Having enjoyed the uncomplicated comforts of remaining a technical/structuring device, PBR imagines himself simply moving information around: afterwards, perhaps the Caribbean, or guillotine (if he’s not so lucky).

Did ya know that one gorgeous night our glamorous trio nearly danced together? It happened like this: badly needing practice for an upcoming bar mitzvah gig, the unabashed
Cukaracha band struck up a jazzy hora. Good and stoned, Joey immediately jumped up and began sliding and sinuously slinking: circling the rosy Rooster Room, flashing beguiling, come-hither looks. Bettie, exhausted from her day’s photo shoot, was nonetheless inspired (not by Joey, as it turned out) to join another part of the human chain, carousing and gamboling, too.

Dorothy was not so inclined, having recently partaken in a memorable hoary hora at her friend Sammy Davis Jr.’s gala birthday bash, held at Club Tirade in Bel Air’s ultra chic Hotel de Dream. Between Joey and Bettie simultaneous thought-transmissions leapt across the flushed room: if only I could establish eye contact, Dorothy would come dance with me, then make me famous. Just as both seething sexpots were arranging uniquely ardent attempts at immortality—accidentally coordinated—Dorothy looked away to adjust her tattered dreams.

Alas, but for an averted glance.

9.

FACTS JUMP TRACK
Or, ONE GOOD EMISSION DESERVES ANOTHER

Following the publicity of McCarthy’s communist witchhunts, Senator Estes Kefauver—a Tennessee Democrat who was Adlai Stevenson’s running mate for Vice-President in 1956—made a name for himself chairing a subcommittee on organized crime. Ironically, Richard Foster points out in THE REAL BETTIE PAGE, John Russell, the actor with whom Bettie shot her Twentieth Century Fox screen test, starred in a 1952 film loosely based on Kefauver’s hearings. By 1954, he had turned his attentions to the evils of juvenile delinquency. His Senate subcommittee nearly shut down the comic industry, ending the
careers of many Golden Age superheroes: bonfires were blazing in towns across the nation. Kefauver unsuccessfully tried to link Bettie’s bondage photos in *Cartoon and Model Parade* with the recent death of a seventeen-year-old Eagle Scout in Coral Gables, Florida. His body, trussed up like some of Irving Klaw’s models, may have been engaged in autoerotic strangulation.

Klaw evaded arrest under a legal loophole for determining obscenity: such materials had to arouse or excite the “normal” person. The Feds finally ruled that Bettie’s photos were appealing only to “certain types of sex perverts,” partly because there were no men in them. Subpoenaed, Bettie waited for 16 hours in a witness room outside the chambers, but was never called in to testify. A popular tale holds that Bettie did appear before the subcommittee and, when asked by Kefauver what she thought of the bondage photos, she replied, “Why, Senator, honey, I think they’re cute!”

Irving Klaw had hoped to avoid further trouble by moving his catalog business, but the local New Jersey police stormed the place, seizing inventory samples. The case was tied up in courts for another year-and-a-half, during which Congress instituted changes in the postal laws, making distribution more difficult. Eventually, facing a five-year prison sentence, Klaw offered to destroy his bondage and pinup negatives. Luckily, his sister Paula hid several sheaths of the negatives away, many of which were the photos of Bettie.

“Larry Flynt, he made no bones about what he was putting out, but there was no nudity at all in Klaw’s stuff. He never showed a boob ever,” Jack Bradley says passionately in defense of his former boss. In fact, Irving Klaw was so neurotic about avoiding nudity in his photos that he sometimes made his models wear two pairs of panties under their stockings, just to make sure no pubic hair showed.

After Bettie got out of cheesecake entirely, she drifted back to Florida and married Harry Lear, whom she met in Miami. Her
behavior became increasingly bizarre: she was strict with Harry’s children, and very orderly and methodical. Bettie would garden all night in the backyard, and developed strange ideas about Christianity: declaring that there was not one, but seven gods; she herself was their prophet. Leaving Harry, Bettie migrated to Bibletown Community Church in Boca Raton: this first of many Bible study experiences ended the night she was found running through the motel complex brandishing a 22-caliber pistol and shouting about God’s retribution.

Harry brought Bettie home, precipitating the incident where she ordered the family, at knife-point to stand in front of a picture of Jesus and pray; she was committed to Jackson State Memorial Hospital for four months, after Harry crawled out the bathroom window and phoned the police. Again returning home, Bettie soon lost control. According to police records, on that occasion she was put in a squad car, and later discovered there with dress pulled up, panties around her knees, and hands cuffed, masturbating with a coat hanger which had been left in the backseat. “Defendant psycho,” the officer stated in the report, before driving her to the hospital to be treated for cuts from the hanger. (As you can well imagine, this is clearly the kind of tawdry detail which makes Foster’s book so controversial—dubious and invasive—blinks PBR, in the nod of an eye.) Charges of disorderly conduct and assault and battery were dismissed after Bettie voluntarily recommitted herself to Jackson Memorial’s care: that stretch was six months, much of it spent under suicide watch.

10.

SHORT SHRIFT FOR DOROTHY?

You can imagine how reassuring that little pubic hair anecdote was to harried Hedda Hopper, who was already beside
herself, planning her Easter get-up, in a round about sort of way. Hapless Hedda soon began to think almost constantly of pubic hair, and before you know it, her complexion cleared right up. (She remained an uptight, prejudiced fuck, though, with a "bully pulpit.") The Easter festivities turned out to consume the better part of a season—marjoram, rumor has it.

In this sagacious section, the Peripatetic Book Reviewer makes a quizzical appearance (but he's not sure who's asking the questions); "Looking for coherence," is not his middle name. He does have a cogent analysis of similar qualities and societal functions of these 3 particular protagonists. However, Reviewer chooses not to share insights into author's intentions at this morning's gigantic gestalt/electroshock session: corporate heavyweights everywhere will simply have to cool hot heels.

Instead, Ancient Peripatetic uses this opportunity to question the writer's unhealthy preoccupation with Hedda Hopper—merely one of multitudinous, nauseating Hollywood right-wingers, after all. Besides, unlike a rotting Ronald Reagan, Hedda was Woman Alone (see screenplay): briefly, fifth wife of much older Broadway actor, "Wolfie Hopper." Also somewhat unexplained is the writer's avid interest in the entrepreneurial career of Irving Klaw, whose photographs of Hollywood stars and pin-ups were first sold out of a struggling used bookshop, when Klaw also opened a mail order magic trick business.

Significant phases of Dorothy's career have been given short shrift in this cleverly abbreviated compendium, PBR goes on to sharply observe, momentarily relinquishing coyness along with his own much heralded, single-mindedly technical approach. (Only you, dear reader, can imagine just how little certain friends disbelieve that particular pose—or whatever!) Anyway, in commenting on the unfortunate omissions from Bogle's fine biography, Peripatetic Book Reviewer graciously re-occupies his rightful position as wacky, moral mountebank.

During Dorothy's club successes, for instance, before Carmen Jones, she had yet to be offered a major film role,
although several important movies about race were made: she had
to watch white women being cast as light-skinned Blacks—
notably, Jeanne Crain in *Pinky*, and Ava Gardner in *Show Boat*.
Later, after her Academy Award nomination for *Carmen Jones*,
Dorothy was considered for many films including a remake of *The
Blue Angel* (she particularly hoped to play Cherie in *Bus Stop*):
nothing materialized for years.

Sidney Poitier, another prominent Black actor of the period,
was given parts which were “social symbols in an era that was
beginning to have racial conflict—as well as civil rights—and
more on its mind.” But Bogle comments, “To ask Dorothy to play
a social symbol in a film was like asking Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey
Hepburn, Kim Novak, or Grace Kelly to perform as such.
Cinema’s glamorous and sensual goddesses had to play glamorous,
sensual romantic roles.”

Preminger insisted that Dorothy take only leading roles, and
convinced her, against friends’ advice, to reject the part of Tiptum
in what became the hugely successful *The King and I*. Dorothy
was always plagued by the idea of this as her fateful mistake, a
turning point from which her decline dated. It did sour Twentieth
Century Fox on Dorothy, where she broke a contract, which
resulted in casting Rita Moreno, a lesser star. While Dorothy
declared, “I can’t play a slave,” studio boss Darryl Zanuck
believed he was giving her a break, as “an ethnic in fundamentally
white movies.”

Bogle believes that “Preminger, usually adroitly pragmatic
and perceptive, was in this instance blind to movieland realities” of
racism. Dorothy and Abby Mann often talked about the way
Hollywood treated Black women. “This is a terrifically racist
town. I mean it was particularly then,” said Mann. “I was shocked
because in New York, it wasn’t that way. But when I’d have
Black women at parties, it was new to California. It would almost
be that they had to sleep around. Not even for parts or anything.
But just to be part of the social milieu. In those days it was
anticipated that no matter how attractive the girl was, if she was
Black, she was available. Dorothy was a big star. So they didn’t see her that way. But I imagined what Dorothy had come through. She said she had to fight for her own turf and her own dignity.”

Bogle vividly describes Dorothy’s continuously growing isolation, and her sad end in September, 1965. Longtime friend Nat “King” Cole had died of cancer, at age 45. Cherished sister Vivian, who originally moved west with Dorothy and Harold Nicholas, couldn’t parlay their childhood act into her own show business career. Vivian left town, and vanished entirely from Dorothy’s, and their mother Ruby’s, lives. As usual, Dorothy was only able to gain Ruby’s attention in public situations, where she could bask in her daughter’s fame.

Her friends were extremely wary of Dorothy’s marrying sleazy Jack Denison, in whose wake ensued complete emotional and economic bankruptcy. Before their marriage, Denison pulled a gun on Dorothy. Once, after a quarrel, he stole personal photographs from her home, burned them, and mailed the charred fragments in a box with a note which read, “I will shoot you in your stomach. And you will be really sorry for what you are doing.” At the end, many friends, old and new (especially the Black actor Ivan Dixon) were available for Dorothy’s “rambling, long and disturbing” late night phone calls; they could do little more than listen.

When Dorothy appeared at bankruptcy court, UPI photographers caught her in dark glasses. Humiliated, she only said that she had injured her eye in a fall; she couldn’t stop crying. For Black America, it was a devastating image. Its dreamgirl, a splendid symbol for an independent, self-assured woman in Carmen Jones, was in the worst imaginable circumstances. No star’s decline since that of Billie Holiday, asserts Bogle, had so affected the African-American community.
The Mona Lisa? It was just a stupid painting!—Joey was more interested in checking out the curators.

Bettie was a VARGAS GIRL come to life. She pined for the sudsy stud of her past, the young diving instructor in Coral Gables; they had been so happy living together, and in periodic reunions.

A certain famous composer installed his special boys in a swank suite in the Beverly ________ Hotel. But Joey kept insisting, "I don't want a rich daddy to support me, I want to be independent." He surely followed his own yens when it came to making porn flicks: as soon as Joey yearned for some hot daddy to fuck him, coy Chi Chi crooked a convenient appendage.

Joey did have a genuine, caring, friend/patron who bailed him out all over the map, till the very end. Born in Buenos Aires, Dr. Alberto Shayo eventually gave up his medical practice to become an art deco dealer, and write a book about Deco sculpture, published by Abbeville Press. On the eve of his 26th birthday, Joey called Shayo from the Days Inn in New York to say goodbye: he had just slit his wrists, despondent that instead of paying off his debts, Joey had used the $3000 Shayo gave him to buy drugs. Joey expected Shayo to be more distressed about the money than his suicide attempt—a heartbreaking indication that years of selling sex had made Joey see all relationships as mercenary.

Shayo took Stefano home from the hospital for a few days. "He kept crying and told me how nobody had taken care of him. He felt he was washed up, his star status was fading."

Dorothy insisted, "I don't want a rich daddy, I want to be independent." Bettie repeated: "I don't want a rich daddy, I want to be independent." Producers, often with an adoring public, kept Joey, Bettie and Dorothy from insisting too much, by kindly
administering a whopping dose of très trendy cultural anesthetic, or good ol’ bonded booze; Bettie virtually imbibed God.

Joey was addicted to the moments of oblivion that only sex and drugs could supply. Small wonder. (Big dick!)

12.

CURTAIN CALLS

Alice is suitably seated at the base of the burgeoning mushroom. The crazy caterpillar smokes his hazy hookah, and the air is actually alive with psychedelic memorabilia. Clumsily, or cleverly, disguised as Peripatetic Book Reviewer, the author diligently writes—but he really needs to be weeping. (We promise, faithful reader, this will be the solitary tediously suggestive outburst: we dearly wish we lived in a more robust age in which such obligatory, meta-textual interrogations and wit-cisms were altogether superfluous; alas.)

PBR, looking disgruntled at best, immodestly declaims to an audience of enthusiastic nuts, in an olivey/walnuty amphitheater, somewhere underwater:

"This arcane monograph brilliantly illuminates the steep and icy dimensions of martyrdom that our trio, Icons of Utter Desirability, endured. Each one brought something totally unique into the permanent American erotic (and Dorothy, into the performative) imagination. For transgressing the original Puritan boundary, they suffered and died, as if on the cross. Each was destroyed by a personalized, lethal blend of familial abuse/neglect and vicious, unrelenting institutionalized oppression.

Further, these truly tragic divas embodied distinctive and imperative aspects of America's underground desires: long-standing, never before properly situated in an historical moment and figure. Their own stunning and unapologetic commercial
existences stimulated the public into irreversible articulations of urgent desire.

Exotic Dorothy was the brocaded, elegant voluptuary; incredibly talented; sophisticated lady; a dish. Alluring Bettie had an outlandishly wholesome, outdoorsy verve for posing: 'the teasing girl-next-door, the eternal Queen of Curves.' Or, bound to sexy sisters, gaily gagging—'all business, sultry and serious, dominant and firm: Kitten with a Whip.' Doe-eyed and lewd exhibitionist Joey craved sex. Always in love with someone new, never having a steady boyfriend. Rather than positioning himself as object of others' desires, he proudly showed the whole, wide world how profoundly he could worship muscular studs; inside the mirror.

Sexually abused children; three lonely adults who needed to escape both into the public eye, and away from it. Expedient scapegoats, deeply baffled by interiority. Pioneer front-line warriors, in service of the eternal return of the repressed. Hyper self-conscious conceptual sculptors of America's libidinal fires."

Alice takes a hit off the hookah; the Queen of Tarts takes a back seat to love. So concerned is he about the harm done by glib over-generalization, not excluding his own, that Peripatetic BR somehow forgets (how) to floss. However, the knave of custard (acting on behalf of her highness Ms. Tart) does tip his hat, grateful to Peripatetic One for finally spilling his guts regarding the purpose of all this dizzy dancing about.

The caterpillar's grin spreads even more widely (if less evenly) once the Playboy Channel is wired into his basic equipment. Meanwhile, ridiculous local news features a kooky cheshire cat up a dusky, supposedly proverbial tree. In China, absolutely everyone adores The Titanic; young and old alike hum its fulsome tunes.

A nickel for your dreams, baby.
MEL FREILICHER is a writer whose fiction, essays and reviews have appeared in numerous periodicals and anthologies, including *Contemporary American Fiction* (Sun & Moon Press), *San Diego Union*, *Central Park*, *Flue* (Magazine of Franklin Furnace Archive, N.Y.C.), *Frame-work* (Journal of L.A. Center for Photographic Studies), *Rampike*, *River Styx*, *American Book Review*.

Freilicher was guest editor for *Fiction International*’s special issue on censorship and pornography, and another on the theme of pain. He was also focus editor (“Marginalized Sexuality”) for *American Book Review*. For 15 years, Freilicher was co-editor and publisher of *Crawl Out Your Window* magazine, a journal of the literature and visual arts of the San Diego region which won numerous grants and awards. *Crawl Out Your Window* was reviewed in media such as *The Nation*, *U.S.A. Today*, *San Diego* magazine, *L.A. Times*, *Afterimage* (Magazine of the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y.).

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