

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**Dissecting the Dark Defender: Approaching Vigilantism  
in American History, Society and Culture through *Dexter***

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## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	p.1
<b>Chapter One: Vigilantism and American History in <i>Dexter</i></b>	p.39
Part One: Justifying Vigilantism in <i>Dexter</i>	p.42
Social Upheaval, Change and Problems	p.45
Responsive and Persistent Forms of Crime	p.57
Law Enforcement and the Judicial System	p.64
Part Two: Manifestations of Vigilantism in <i>Dexter</i>	p.73
Geography and Landscapes	p.75
Brown's 'Three-Tier' Social Model	p.82
Socially Beneficial versus Socially Destructive Vigilantism	p.88
Racial, Religious and Political Vigilantism	p.97
Family Feuds and Vendettas	p.110
<b>Chapter Two: Masculinity, Patriarchy and Vigilantism in <i>Dexter</i></b>	p.116
Part One: Father, Sons, and the Perpetuation of Vigilantism	p.118
Harry and Dexter	p.122
Dexter's Disciples	p.147
Part Two: Violence and Murder in the Nuclear Family Unit	p.163
<b>Chapter Three: <i>Dexter</i> and Vigilantes in American Popular Culture</b>	p.175

Part One: The Western, Crime and Vigilante Authority in <i>Dexter</i>	p.183
Part Two: 1970s Vigilante Film Cycles and <i>Dexter</i>	p.192
Doakes, Vigilantism and Blaxploitation	p.193
Harry, Debra and Vigilante Cops	p.201
Lumen and Rape-Revenge	p.210
Part Three: Superheroes and Post-9/11 Vigilantism in <i>Dexter</i>	p.222
<b>Conclusion</b>	p.238
<b>Appendices</b>	p.247
Appendix One: Articles and Amendments in the American Constitution	p.247
Appendix Two: Film and TV Vigilantism, 1900-2015	p.250
<b>Bibliography</b>	p.268

## Introduction

Vigilantism. Its act or mere mention can have a polarising effect, provoking fear or excitement, disapproval or endorsement, and even imitation in the American public. Vigilantism features regularly in American history, news reports and popular culture references alike, a subtle yet pervasive feature of American life. It is also often highly political, prompting contemporary debates amongst critics and politicians into issues such as self-defence and gun laws, rising crime and social breakdown, and suggests a tendency of the American people to employ or resort to violence. Such debates are not new, however, with outspoken critics on each side of the argument. Ted Robert Gurr, for instance, writing from a conservative perspective, argues that recorded crime rates in America have been inconsistent and are artificially inflated. He states that such claims are exaggerated and have supported a wider perception of American society as being an overtly violent one (1989: pp.21-54). Although Gurr aims to challenge the perception of violence as being generally high in America, he wrote his initial essay for a government report into violence during the 1970s, suggesting a potentially biased perspective. Such an approach ignores the significance of particularly persistent forms of violence in American society, like vigilantism. In contrast, and writing specifically in relation to the often overlooked prevalence of vigilantism in American life, Arnold Madison argues that vigilantism is a persistent feature of American history that will continue to efface American society until the nation's proclivity to employ violence in such a manner is confronted (1973: p.214). Such opposing outlooks and approaches make clear that vigilantism is a controversial issue that causes extreme responses on *both* sides of the political spectrum. More so, it can often encompass or be related to other complex social issues, such as anarchism, terrorism and even euthanasia. This highlights the problem of classification surrounding the topic and suggests its applicability to many often conflicting and controversial aspects of modern life. As such, vigilantism is not often recognised as an entity worthy of discussion in its own right, and is often shied away from completely. This thesis will demonstrate how *Dexter* (Cr. Jeff Lindsay and James Manos Jr, Showtime Networks, US, 2006-2013) is a highly pertinent text through

which in-depth, nuanced and wide-ranging discussions of vigilantism are possible, and can inform future subsequent research on the topic.

The first time I watched *Dexter*, it struck me how the opening sequences of the first episode played with the expectations of the viewer, subverting the anticipated serial killer persona by displacing it with themes pertinent to vigilantism instead. For instance, the opening scenes of 'Dexter' (1.1) follow protagonist Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall) as he drives through the city of Miami at night. As he prowls the streets, the camera pans over multicultural crowds and portrays social problems such as drugs, homelessness and prostitution. In line with Harold Schechter's assertion that serial killers often target society's most vulnerable people, one would expect a serial killer to take a victim from this scene (2003: p.2). However, Dexter's comments about these things are positive or merely observant of social change, instability and decay; this displaces the sense that Dexter may pose a threat to society by presenting society itself as akin to Hell, suggested by the suffusion of red lighting throughout the scene. Rather than simply providing a feeding ground of society's most vulnerable for a serial killer, *Dexter* reflects reasons why vigilantism has occurred in American history, and then subverts them. This is emphasised as Dexter arrives in a contrasting community and watches an evening choir before pointing out his victim: respectable white, middle-class male choir-master Mike Donovan (Jim Abele). Pictured with his nuclear family, Donovan is clearly involved with church and community, symbolising conservative middle-class life. However, Dexter captures Donovan and with a noose around his neck forces him to drive to a rural location. Challenging these apparently socially beneficial institutions, Dexter then exposes Donovan as a paedophile and serial killer of children. Thus, initial concern for Donovan is displaced by shock at the revelation of his monstrous actions, further subverting and playing with notions of victimhood. Institutions such as church and family are exposed for concealing extreme violence and murder and are thus presented as damaging to society. It is also of note that vigilante iconography, such as night-riding, nooses and lynching, is evident in these opening scenes; this further invokes aspects of America's vigilante history, informing the audience that this is an act

of vigilantism, rather than a 'normal' serial killer murder. In this respect, the theme of vigilantism is used to subvert viewer expectations and notions of victimhood by presenting an unexpected victim in unexpected circumstances. Finally, the sequence also engages with popular cultural expectations of vigilantism by openly forcing the viewer to consider Dexter himself as a 'moral' killer in comparison to Donovan. This distinction is made as Dexter, forcing Donovan to look at his victims, says in disgust: "But children - I could never do that." Thus the show invokes the most heinous crimes of paedophilia and child murder to distinguish Dexter from other killers, suggesting that he is beneficial to society in removing harmful and deadly forces. Dexter is also shown to be judge, jury and executioner as he demands answers and truths from Donovan, before killing and disposing of him. This clearly situates Dexter as an anti-hero akin to America's past historical and screen vigilantes in doing what needs to be done to protect society from threatening forces in the absence of effective law and order. Such a figure can be discussed in relation to American popular cultural forms like the anti-hero of Westerns and superhero films, and can be considered as *challenging* the primacy of serial killers in American popular culture, by displacing viewer expectations with aspects of vigilantism instead.

As the series of *Dexter* progresses it becomes increasingly ambiguous, not just on a moral level, but through the show's prompting of active empathy with Dexter the serial killer, as George A. Reisch (2011: p.xii) and Douglas L. Howard (2010: pp.xiii-xiv) have pointed out. Rather, what is most compelling about the show is the opposite of this, as *Dexter* fundamentally exposes America's most personal and serial relationship with vigilantism and violent extremism as being akin to serial killing. It suggests that the 'serial killer' Dexter is essentially a vigilante, conditioned and encouraged by his father to systematically hunt and kill criminals who have escaped justice for the "good" of society. The real moral dilemma in *Dexter*, then, revolves around *revealing* America's relationship with vigilantism itself - Dexter *is* American vigilantism. This notion presents serial killing in *Dexter* as a metaphor through which to understand vigilantism, and situates it as a traditional, generational and inherited act by

positioning its perpetuation as a crucial feature of the father and son relationship, as represented by Dexter and his (dead) father Harry (James Remar), and Dexter and his son Harrison (various child actors). More so, it suggests that vigilantism is not only ingrained in American history, but reveals it to be a significant feature of American society and culture too, realms that must also be considered so American vigilantism can be fully understood. As such, vigilantism in American history, society and culture as represented in *Dexter* will be discussed herein, and are crucial areas for approaching the topic and understanding its relationship to American identity.

As the series progressed through different seasons, I noted that various phases, themes and models of vigilantism in American history outlined by writers such as Madison (1973) and Richard Maxwell Brown (1975) could be applied to *Dexter*. Indeed, the show engages with all of their key theories over time, providing particularly fruitful representations to be explored within. This factor clearly illustrates that *Dexter* is a unique show through which one can approach and decipher the fundamental representations and various meanings of vigilantism, and of the vigilante figure, to American life. *Dexter* offers a powerful, interrogatory and captivating space through which to explore a whole variety of aspects surrounding vigilantism, and allows for a rich and varied exploration of themes relating to the topic. This thesis will assert that, despite all its ambiguities and complexities, vigilantism *is* an approachable topic that can be understood, confronted and challenged by analysing significant texts like the show itself. Such an approach is made possible by the serial format of *Dexter*, which comprises of 96 episodes across eight seasons. This format provides a space in which the topic develops and expands to encompass all of its representations and ambiguities, allowing for much broader conceptions of vigilantism to be explored. Further, it must be stressed that the ‘serial’ format of the show also reads as a metaphor for America’s ‘serial’ relationship with vigilantism in its most extreme form, the repetitive and pervasive nature of which is, in essence, the nation’s own act of serial killing.

It is of note that several other critics have also deemed *Dexter* significant as a cultural form in various ways. Ruddock, for instance, hails the show for having ‘challenged what we think we “know” about media violence,’ and labels it ‘politically important’ in its ability to present a more complex picture of American life.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, acknowledging the relevance of *Dexter* to understanding contemporary American society, Howard claims that the show ‘reflects some general truths about the human condition, and makes us rethink our own sacred codes that we have held so dear.’ (2010: p.xxi) Viewpoints such as these strengthen my own reading of the significance and sheer wealth of representations of vigilantism in *Dexter*, and support my assertion that such attitudes can be confronted and potentially changed. It must be acknowledged that criticism emerged in more recent years concerning *Dexter*’s poor story-lines, badly written characters, and an overall diminished quality in later seasons of the show.<sup>2</sup> Despite these criticisms, David Hinckley notes that *Dexter*’s final episode drew ‘2.8 million viewers [...] the largest viewership for an original series episode in Showtime history.’<sup>3</sup> This suggests that, despite being panned critically, the show continued to engage with viewers enough to still draw them in, nodding to *Dexter*’s continued social relevance. Indeed, whilst the ending of the show caused much disappointment for fans, it presents a cynical and bleak outcome for the nation if vigilantism in modern American life remains unchallenged.

Considering the show ran for eight seasons, texts on *Dexter* have been relatively few, with only three key academic publications about it to date. These include Douglas L. Howard (2010), Bella DePaulo (2010) and Green et al’s (2011) texts, which all appeared in the space of one year with very little of note since, suggesting room for further analysis. Whilst occasional chapters touch upon vigilantism and related topics, they all largely overlook the significance of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://theconversation.com/vale-dexter-the-serial-killer-who-changed-the-face-of-tv-violence>

Andy Ruddock, ‘Dexter, the Serial Killer who Changed the Face of TV Violence’, Sept 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Accessed 13/03/15

<sup>2</sup> <http://variety.com/2013/tv/reviews/dexter-series-finale-review-1200655158/>

Brian Lowry, ‘TV Review: ‘Dexter’ Finale’s Sloppy Sendoff’, Sept 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. Accessed 13/03/15

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/dexter-series-finale-draws-record-2-8-million-viewers-article-1.1465207#ixzz2fprAWGhS>

David Hinckley, ‘Dexter: Series Finale’, Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013. Accessed 13/03/15



vigilantism in the show, and give much attention to the 'serial killer' aspect of Dexter's identity. For instance, Jerry S. Piven (Green et al: pp.77-88) discusses the audience's fascination with serial killers through the character of Dexter. Similarly, Jared A DeFife (DePaulo: pp.5-16) and Marisa Mauro (DePaulo: pp.163-180) respectively compare Dexter to other serial killers, and discuss the psychology behind his kills. Such focus on Dexter's murderous actions often leads to the relevance of his vigilante activities, and their significance to understanding contemporary American society, being overlooked. This is evident in chapters by Riches & French (Howard: pp.117-131), who discuss the justification for murder in the show in relation to serial killing, rather than vigilantism. Michele Byers also examines crime, criminals and 'the dispensing of justice' in *Dexter* without discussing vigilantism (Howard: p.145). Such attention to Dexter's serial killing and murderous mentality suggests, as David Schmid posits, that American audiences have a unique and ongoing fascination with violent crime and the macabre. Schmid describes the show as 'the latest episode in a long history of American engagement with criminality and violence, an engagement that has helped to define what it means to be American.' (Howard: p.133) One could take his statement further and add that, as vigilantism is such an inescapable part of Dexter's identity, it is also an integral part of America's engagement with criminality and violence. Thus it is striking that the topic is largely side-lined in existing academic discussions of *Dexter*.

Howard's book primarily aims to explore audiences continuing fascination with *Dexter* and its serial killer protagonist, a fascination that Howard describes as 'a slight bewilderment [...] in rooting for an admittedly disturbed serial killer over the propriety of law enforcement.' (p.xiii). Such a comment by Howard suggests that Dexter's status as vigilante forms a fundamental part of the shows appeal, albeit one that is located within a general fascination with serial killing and violent crime. Similarly, the notion of 'bewilderment' points to the divisive nature of an issue as contentious as vigilantism for audiences, although this is not addressed by Howard himself. The book is tailored to both general and academic readers, and features a collection of essays that attempt to shed light on the popularity of *Dexter*. The text consists of five

sections that address areas such as structure and narrative style, ethics, and genre. Whilst this is useful, it is largely irrelevant to the focus of this thesis. However, there is one chapter of note. Stan Beeler's essay '*From Silver Bullets to Duct Tape: Dexter Versus the Traditional Vigilante Hero*' (pp.221-230), engages with themes of genre and the anti-hero to expose 'underlying ethical complexities of the tradition' of vigilantism (p.221). Whilst the notion of natural justice is mentioned, it is not explored, and as such vigilantism is not discussed in any real depth. More so, Beeler situates the 'real problem' of vigilantism within Dexter's internal 'evil' as a serial killer, positioning Dexter's serial killing and vigilante acts as in conflict with each other and effectively limiting any extensive engagement with the topic (p.230). In opposition to such conflict between serial killing and vigilantism, this thesis has already posited that the two are indelibly linked in asserting that vigilantism is the American nation's own act of serial killing. As such, Beeler's chapter provides a platform for further study into the subject, and highlights several problematic assumptions about both vigilantism and serial killing that will be challenged directly by this thesis.

DePaulo's collection again primarily locates the audience's fascination with *Dexter* in the protagonist's status as serial killer, and offers a range of essays rooted in psychological study. It attempts to analyse and showcase the complex crafting of what it claims is 'one of the most psychologically rich heroes on television,' with the aim of forcing audiences to question their own psychological makeup (p.4). With this in mind, various psychoanalytical themes and debates are explored in relation to *Dexter* by academics and popular culture writers in a manner that makes the text approachable to general readers whilst remaining rooted in theoretical study. Key themes covered include Dexter's role as predator, killer and psychopath, whilst characters such as Debra and Harry are analysed against concepts such as the Oedipal complex and narcissism. Although such essays bear no direct relation to this thesis, their discussions present ideas and themes that can be considered relative to themes of vigilantism. For example, assertions made concerning Dexter's Oedipal drives for his murdered mother Laura Moser (Sage Kirkpatrick), can also be discussed against Dexter's role as avenger. Such

analyses of character motivations and drives in the text have a mutable potential for further discussion in relation to themes of vigilantism, yet it is clear that, due to the wealth of attention already paid to psychology and psychoanalysis in *Dexter*, they are realms that requires no further analysis here.

Green *et al*'s collection, aimed at both fans and scholars, considers *Dexter* relative to popular culture and philosophy, focusing on the ethical and moral debates presented in the show's themes and characters, and of audiences' identification with them. The wide range of topics and themes covered include superheroism, race, instinct, and conscience, amongst others. Several chapters also discuss *Dexter* alongside philosophers such as Nietzsche and Foucault, and with regard to key terms such as utilitarianism and deontology that have further implications to the Code of Harry and its central dilemmas and tensions between murder and vigilantism. Whilst this serves to exemplify the multiplicity of ways in which *Dexter* can be discussed and interpreted, the scope of topics the text includes means that the essays are rather generalised and limited in detail. Nevertheless, they provide great insight into America's overwhelming reluctance to directly engage with vigilantism and its related themes. Chapters of note include '*The Killing Joke*' by John Kenneth Muir (pp.3-13), which analyses *Dexter* against literary and popular culture manifestations of the superhero. Superheroism is considered in relation to Dexter's appearance, tools and Code, and the theme of vigilantism is discussed, albeit very briefly. For example, Muir writes that the notion of heroism in Dexter's world: 'is part and parcel of the superhero myth, the idea that a vigilante (like Batman) must be the one to save the imperilled town or city.' (p.7) Although Muir positions such discussions firmly within the superhero genre, his essay serves as a platform into further analysis of the topic, more specifically with regard to Dexter's vigilante acts. Nonetheless, such studies clearly show the extent to which vigilantism in *Dexter*, and indeed in American popular culture as a whole, have been ignored and require much further attention, a notion that this thesis intends to rectify.

Notably, as Brown points out, vigilante acts tend to occur or increase at times of social upheaval or instability, and often in response to heightened crime rates and unwilling or ineffectual law enforcement, be that perceived or actual (1975: p.4). The relevance of vigilantism as a socio-historical and cultural product, and as an enduring American tradition, is also often overlooked or ignored. For a nation founded on a brand of vigilantism that has repeatedly been employed throughout the country's history and regularly featured it in various cultural forms, such an oversight is surprising. This thesis takes the position that traditions of vigilantism and violent extremism both endure and are ingrained within contemporary American life. With this in mind, the thesis aims to explore the prevalence and scope of vigilantism in American history, society and culture and will discuss the representation of them in *Dexter*. Based in modern-day Miami and centred on the murderous exploits of vigilante serial killer Dexter, the series engages extensively with vigilante themes and thus allows for a nuanced pedagogical exploration of vigilantism in American identity.

Vigilantism has featured since the founding of the American nation and has appeared regularly throughout American history. Whilst vigilantism *per se* is not purely an American phenomenon, it is nonetheless rooted strongly in American history, tradition and ideology. Early examples of American vigilantism include the Boston Tea Party and the retaliatory tactics employed by both Whigs and Tories during the Revolution (Brown, 1975: pp.41-66). Other events include the Salem witch trials, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the Reconstruction era, and the violent tradition of vigilantism and extremism found in Edgefield, South Carolina Back County (Madison, 1973: pp.13-70). All of these instances suggest a prevalence and tradition of recourse to vigilante action in American history. They also underscore the complex and varied nature of the topic. This is not, of course, a phenomenon relegated only to America's past. Indeed, several recent examples of vigilantism in America over the last few decades include the 1981 murder of Skidmore, Missouri town bully Ken McElroy in broad daylight, in which the

whole town remained tight-lipped over who the murderer was.<sup>4</sup> Bernhard Goetz, the 'Subway Vigilante', shot four black men on a subway train in 1984 after they allegedly tried to rob him, causing a media stir and widespread public debate (Fletcher, 1988: pp.1-17). Similarly, ex-con Michael Mullen targeted and shot dead registered sex-offenders during 2005 after tracking them down on websites, waiting for his victims to answer the door before he opened fire.<sup>5</sup> These instances present issues such as race, crime and perceived failures in judicial rulings as features of or behind contemporary vigilantism, indicating the varied and complex nature of the topic. In a similar vein, but suggesting that vigilantism in America can occur in different ways relative to a specific event or social issue, for example, New York City video activist 'Jimmy Justice' posts YouTube videos of traffic agents breaking laws.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Julian Assange, a self-styled vigilante who overtly challenges power structures and establishments by leaking controversial information using the internet site 'WikiLeaks', has also been discussed using vigilante language.<sup>7</sup> These incidents also indicate how vigilantism often embraces or responds to new technologies. As Brown points out, information technology and mass-media advancements have enabled vigilantism to take on a new form distinct from that which demands the obvious physical involvement that characterised vigilantism in America's past (Gurr, 1989: pp.251-262). Despite being accused of harassment during filming, underscoring the significance of vigilantism as often infringing upon the rights of others, Jimmy Justice has prompted the New York City Police Department to accept video evidence of alleged criminal activities from its concerned citizens (Ibid. Richburg). These events are obviously of a different note to the more overtly violent cases cited above, yet they emphasise the extent to which

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/16/us/16bully.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/16/us/16bully.html?_r=0)

A.G. Sulzberger, 'Town Mute for 30 Years About a Bully's Killing', Dec 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Accessed 12/01/2012

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/07/us/man-charged-in-killings-of-sex-offenders.html>

Carolyn Marshall, 'Man Charged in Killing of Sex Offenders', Sept 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Accessed 12/01/2012

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/02/AR2008080201503.html>

Keith B. Richburg, 'New York's Video Vigilante, Scourge of Parking Enforcers', August 3rd, 2008. Accessed 13/09/2013

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/feb/07/age-wikileaks-style-vigilante-geek-over>

Evgeny Morozov, 'The Age of the WikiLeaks-Style Vigilante-Geek is Over', Feb 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Accessed 13/09/2013

vigilantism is an indelible part of American life, appearing in various forms and in response to a whole range of concerns.

Further suggesting that vigilantism is an integral part of American identity, even executive Presidential orders have been criticised and their legality called into question by both the public and official organisations alike. A recent example of this occurred in 2002, as anti-war protesters across the world opposed the then President George W. Bush's Iraq invasion as illegal and deceptive.<sup>8</sup> The following events have also been discussed by critics in language that associates them with vigilantism: Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal circa 1974;<sup>9</sup> Bush's "War on Terror", invasion of Iraq and questionable activities at Guantanamo Bay following terrorist attacks on American soil in 2001;<sup>10</sup> and recently President Barack Obama's execution of terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011.<sup>11</sup> Such incidents have prompted public discussions into issues such as government corruption, deception, and abuse of power, suggesting that a culture of vigilante-like behaviour exists in American society and in its power structures on many levels. Madison stresses that incidents such as Watergate can be discussed in relation to vigilantism due to the fact that the event contained illegal activities. By extension, Obama's Executive Order and strike on Bin Laden on Pakistani soil could be viewed under the same terms (Ibid. Bowcott). However, these acts crucially were viewed as justifiable to the American people, suggesting that American policy and public opinion towards

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/27/AR2007012700629.html>  
Michael Ruane and Fredrick Kunkle, 'Thousands Protest Bush Policy', Jun 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Accessed 13/09/2013

<sup>9</sup> Arnold Madison (1973: p.168) presents a persuasive discussion about the 'political' vigilantism of Presidential deputies involved in the 'illegal spying on the opposition' during the Watergate Case.

<sup>10</sup> Jason Ralph questions the legality of Bush's 'War on Terror' and detention/interrogation of suspects (Wroe and Herbert, 2009: pp.85-87). Ralph states that 'the Bush administration's approach to the laws of war reflects that of a previous age when the justness of one's cause was the only consideration in warfare and when just ends legitimised all manner of abuses.' (p.87) Such a claim overlooks the persistence of vigilante acts in contemporary America as socially relevant in their own right by positioning them as a simple result of the Bush administration's 'War on Terror', rather than in relation to more ongoing social and historical issues and attitudes.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/03/osama-bin-laden-killing-legality>

accessed 23/04/2013 Owen Bowcott, 'Osama Bin Laden: An Extra-Legal Killing?', May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. Bowcott writes of Obama's strike on Osama Bin Laden that 'Prof Nick Grief, an international lawyer at Kent University, said the attack had the appearance of an "extrajudicial killing without due process of the law."'

vigilantism is both complex and contradictory. Supporting this assertion, the recent release of reports into CIA treatment of suspected terrorist detainees at Guantanamo Bay has caused uproar amongst the civil rights campaigners, due to the revelation that brutal and inhumane acts were carried out on the captives in the name of American liberty.<sup>12</sup> This response acknowledges a central concern surrounding vigilantism and points towards its negative and derogatory connotations in the modern day, although this has not always been the case, hence its endurance as a distinctively American phenomenon. More so, public debate into the *effectiveness* of such tactics in defending the American people similarly resurfaced in relation to this event, and acknowledges the tendency of the American public to accept extreme and potentially illegal action if it is used for a seemingly just cause.<sup>13</sup> With the above in mind, it is possible to assert that the relative surge in both citizen-led action and representations of vigilantism in American popular media following the 9/11 terrorist attacks could be viewed as a response to perceived similar activities by official bodies. One must consider this surge along with other influential factors like social and economic instability in the contemporary era, because such aspects are inextricably linked. Whilst it may appear that the Watergate scandal does not fit into this pattern, the very word 'scandal' implies the perception of this event as disreputable and is alluded to in derogatory language. This negative view can be seen to follow on from images of the vigilante figure in popular cultural manifestations, as a signifier of low-brow and uncivilised behaviour (Moses, 1997: p.12). Nonetheless, and whatever the true cause, such instances suggest that vigilantism in American history, society and culture cannot be ignored or denied.

It is also of note that the American Constitution and its amendments (see Appendix 1 for relevant Articles and Amendments to the American Constitution) emphasise the due processes

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/08/america-never-torture-again-laws-cia>

Katherine Hawkins, 'American Torture and the CIA', Jan 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Accessed 20/01/15. Hawkins discusses government and official responses to the CIA torture report and its shocking treatment of detainees.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/87802/osama-bin-laden-kill-legal-justification-executive-order> accessed 13/03/15 James Downie, 'Killing Osama Bin Laden,' May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011.

of law and human rights when it comes to the criminally accused, such as their rights to trial by jury and punishments that are *not* cruel and unusual in nature (Amendment 8). Nevertheless, one can see how claims to self-help and self-defence in these amendments, such as the right to bear arms and defend one's own home and possessions and, crucially, the perceived right to form a militia in times of duress and disorder (Amendment 2), all add to a distinctly American outlook - a desire to see justice carried out, no matter what the means. This notion is certainly emphasised by articles concerning the wording of humans as property and reward as bounty (Article 4: Section 2). One could argue that the emphasis on human rights and on the processes of law in the constitution clash with America's early proclivity for extreme violence and vigilante behaviour. This contradiction has created an atmosphere of denial towards, and a refusal to tackle the extent of the nation's relationship with vigilantism, which has no doubt added to the perception of it as a highly disreputable aspect of American life. Given the tendency of the nation to look back on violent events with pride, the contrast of this with the disreputability of vigilantism stresses the contradictory nature of the topic. Such an outlook towards vigilantism is not new, however, with writers such as W.G. Sumner claiming that America's history of lynching and cruel extra-legal punishments should provoke 'a feeling of national shame,' and should even be viewed as 'a disgrace to our civilisation' (Cutler, 1905: p.v). Cutler himself goes so far as to label acts such as lynching, 'our country's national crime', an outlook that certainly supports claims that vigilantism is a potentially difficult topic for American citizens to mediate or view objectively without associations of shame or denial (p.1). Indeed, in describing that American's *should* feel shameful about it, Cutler implies that they actually feel the opposite.

Also acknowledging America's tendency to view violent and vigilante acts with pride, Brown (1975) writes that,

'given sanctification by the Revolution, Americans have never been loath to employ the most unremitting violence in the interest of any cause deemed a good one. [...]



The latter part of the nineteenth century was one of the most violent periods of American history - an era of Ku Kluxers, lynch mobs, White Caps, Bald Knobbers, night riders, feudists, and outlaws - and much of that violence is traceable to the Civil War and to the earlier legitimizing effect of the revolutionary war.' (p.7)

Such a statement also implies that America has an ongoing relationship with both extreme violence and vigilantism, and that the two terms are indelibly linked to one another, suggesting that vigilantism is an integral part of the American psyche and is deeply ingrained in American history and culture. Also of note, Brown specifically attributes extreme violence directly to the above named vigilante gangs, stressing the impact this has had on future generations. Madison also claims: 'The precedent for citizen action was set and glorified in our history.' (1973: p.3) Such a comment indicates the innate nature of vigilantism to the nation, and similarly implies a tendency to view it with pride. In line with this, the figure of the vigilante tends to be glorified as the archetypal American anti-hero in on-screen portrayals, as is evident in the many manifestations of iconic characters: Batman (Cr. Bob Kane), Harry Callahan in *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971, Malpaso Productions, US), and more recently in renegade government vigilante *Jack Reacher* (Christopher McQuarrie, 2012, TC Productions, US), to name but a few. Again, such depictions are not a recent phenomenon; vigilantism is a prevalent theme in films as early as *Hold-Up of the Leadville Stage* (Harry Buckwater, 1905, Selig Polyscope Co., US) and *The Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915, David W. Griffith Corp., US), and in television shows such as *The Lone Ranger* (Cr. George W. Trendle, 1949-1957, Apex Film Corp. and Wrather Productions, US.). These examples illustrate that on-screen incarnations of vigilantism are both enduring and are widely associated with poignant historical events and social anxieties, and they invoke or play on generic archetypes. Furthermore, such examples indicate an idealised version of the American past, with heroic acts and good deeds overshadowing due process and the frequently violent and ugly truth of vigilantism: people die gruesomely, unnecessarily, and are often innocent of any crime that could warrant death.

The rather romanticised image of the vigilante figure has evolved from early American fiction, which has similarly informed the development of contemporary film and television representations. The vigilante first appeared in early American 'dime novels' and magazines following the Revolution and Civil war eras, primarily in Western and Crime serials and novels. These included editorials and magazines such as *Wild West Weekly* (1902), Edgar Allen Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) and *Beadle's Dime Novel* "Wild Jim, The Traitor Spy (Beadle's Frontier Series no. 3)" (1867). Western and frontier material naturally outweighed detective and crime stories until industrialisation, and capitalised on stories about mountain men, outlaws, settlers and lawmen who were taming the frontier (Demming, 1998: pp.4-7). Many, such as *Wild West Weekly*, focused on real characters like Billy the Kid, Wyatt Earp and Jesse James, suggesting popular trends have crucially shaped romanticised representations of vigilantes alongside the depiction and development of vigilante themes, making clear that vigilantism lends itself more readily to specific genres that feature related themes such as social change, crime, law enforcement, victimhood and revenge. It is also of note that these themes occur more overtly in fiction following violent events in America's history, indicating that social concerns and events have been consistently represented in, and mediated through, popular cultural forms.

Literary texts have undeniably influenced screen representations of vigilantism, which is primarily, though not by any means exclusively, located in key genres such as the Western, crime and detective genres. These genres also extend into cycles and sub-cycles of films that appear and fade away, responding to different social themes and problems as is evident in cycles such as Blaxploitation, rape-revenge, vengeful Vietnam veterans, and superhero films, amongst others. The majority of these films are generally considered to be 'B' movies, or genres that are widely antiquated and/or aimed at cult or niche audiences, like the Western or superhero narrative. As such, one can see from where the association of vigilantism as a seedy and disreputable yet romanticised part of American life has originated and evolved. Notable early American literary works have also caused controversy by depicting themes of violence

and vigilantism, as is evident in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), which caused uproar upon its release due to the novel's vulgarities of language and content.<sup>14</sup> The text features lynching, vendettas, murders, and extreme punishments such as tarring and feathering. Other themes common in vigilante representations are also present, such as poverty, abuse and racial victimisation. With this in mind, the evolution of the vigilante can be roughly traced from literature to comics and beyond into contemporary film and television representations, feeding from and building upon an image of vigilantism as one that is prevalent, yet often ambiguous in nature. Such ambiguity arises due to the illegal, forbidden status of vigilantism and its regular use as a tool of 'justice' in answering perceived problems in the American state. This relates screen representations of vigilantism to wider taboos surrounding the topic's problems and ambiguities in everyday life. Conversely, this thesis will show how vigilantism *can* and *should* be approached in order for it to be fully understood. Indeed, *Dexter* itself is part of this literary tradition, having derived from the novels of Jeff Lindsay, who has written eight books on the character, from *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (2004) to Lindsay's final instalment, *Dexter is Dead* (2015). Whilst the first season of *Dexter* is similar to the first novel, significant differences are evident throughout, such as Dexter's personality, and the deaths of characters who become key players in the show. *Dexter* departs completely from the novels by the end of the first series and continues under its own momentum, underscoring the primacy of vigilantism as a key theme in the show that evolves of its own volition. Significantly, the centring of Dexter's murderous urges in the novels within a demonic, possessing supernatural entity that controls him indicates a distancing of accountability for vigilantism and murder, of which the show does neither. As such, Lindsay's novels are outside

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<sup>14</sup> 'The Concord public library committee deserves well of the public by their action in banishing Mark Twain's new book, "Huckleberry Finn," on the ground that it is trashy and vicious. It is time that this influential pseudonym should cease to carry into homes and libraries unworthy productions. [...The Huckleberry Finn stories] are no better in tone than the dime novels which flood the blood-and-thunder reading population. [...] their moral level is low, and their perusal cannot be anything less than harmful.' Anonymous review in *Springfield Republican*, March 1885.

the scope of this thesis and contrary to its intentions to confront and understand the significance of vigilantism in relation to American identity.

The above examples of historical events, current affairs and cultural or on-screen vigilante portrayals indicate that the terms 'vigilante' and 'vigilantism' are predominantly associated with American-ness. However, the terms evolved from the Spanish word for 'watchman', denoting a person that watches over and guards the city, apart from it in honourable service (Barber, 2003: p.442). This description strongly aligns with the presentation and perception of the anti-hero figure in American popular culture. Nonetheless, one can still approach America's own use of these terms as distinct in meaning and application. Indeed, as Madison points out, the two words were 'both coined in the United States,' making the topic appear distinctly American (1973: p.3). Supporting this claim, Brown states that vigilantism is a typically 'American problem' that, whilst acknowledging it is *not* a phenomenon exclusive to the United States, 'appears to be native to America.' (1975: p.22) Nonetheless, as a concept vigilantism is problematic to define for various reasons, and deserves more attention. Firstly, from an anthropological viewpoint, its employment and form can differ substantially from one society or culture to the next, whilst still embodying commonalities, as Ray Abrahams asserts (1998: p.5). Considerable debate has thus been given to the comparative study of vigilantism across cultures and countries. For example, Brown claims that vigilantism is an American phenomenon distinct from other models or influence, such as British workers' riots during the 1750s, which he argues were profoundly controlled displays of urban violence by comparison (1975: pp.46-48). However, this separation has been much debated by writers like Abrahams, who argues that it is impossible to strictly differentiate between the various origins and inspiration behind such social movements. As the latter points out, 'the emergence of vigilante action in particular places at specific times is not altogether easy to explain.' (1998: p.10) This seemingly sporadic employment of vigilantism is further complicated by the fact that it shares features with other social movements such as anarchism and terrorism, which similarly signal disillusionment towards the state, social discord, and an active desire to either reassert the

*status quo* or force change. Thus both the conservative and transformative potentials of vigilantism are highlighted here, which, in considering the contradictory and inconsistent nature of vigilante acts throughout American history, is problematic in its own right.

Second, and more specifically, debates about definition also surround what actually *constitutes* vigilantism to a given society or culture. In America, for instance, groups such as the San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1857 and the Ku Klux Klan are well known and have set the mould in the American mind for what constitutes vigilantism, as Richard Neely asserts (1990: pp.13-26). As a result, other schemes and bodies such as Neighbourhood Watch programmes and Presidential executive orders are often excluded from discussions of vigilantism, due to their sanctioned and legitimised status as working alongside local police authorities, or as being carried out by executive bodies without due process. Indeed, Neely's work draws attention to this exclusion and actively calls to reverse it (pp.13-14). Neighbourhood Watch programmes and associated bodies take instruction from the National Sheriff's Association (NSA), which outlines a set conduct of practice that involved communities are expected to adhere to, such as to observe and report confrontation (Bartels, 2013: p.7). However, despite the 'legal' status of such organisations they are still cause for controversy, as seen by the recent killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, who claimed to have been acting on behalf of a local Neighbourhood Watch (Gray, 2014: pp.i-ii). Zimmerman was confrontational with a deadly weapon rather than observing and reporting as required, which strongly implies that adherence to NSA practice expectations varies from one person or community to the next. Similarly, and further highlighting the complexities of the issue, Real Life Super Heroes (RLSH's), who dress in fictionally inspired costumes and patrol the cities in various vigilante and community help roles, also occasionally work alongside some law enforcement agencies (Krulos, 2013: p.3). They are by their own admission a vigilante faction inspired by costumed superheroes of comics and screen, and thus have no real agency over others (Ibid. p.5). Moreover, their actions are widely debated by the authorities and the public alike, as seen in the recent arrest of RLSH Phoenix Jones, who caused public outrage after attacking a group

with pepper spray during a private altercation in Seattle, 2011 (Ronson, 2011: p.17).<sup>15</sup> From this, it is clear that vigilantism can appear in many forms and guises, even in ones that appear to be legitimate or operating within sanctioned boundaries. Both of these points on the nature of vigilantism are potentially problematic, because they suggest that there is no definition of vigilantism that can encompass all of its ambiguities. However, because of the controversial nature of institutions such as Neighbourhood Watch schemes, all forms of vigilantism, sanctioned or not, should be considered collectively as essential to understanding the significance of the topic -and of citizen-led 'self-help'- within contemporary American society and culture.

Reducing any potential complexities that comparative studies of vigilante activity in different societies and cultures might produce, this thesis is focusing specifically on American representations of vigilantism. Whilst acknowledging the importance of vigilantism in and to other societies, it is not necessary to engage with them further herein. As Abrahams states, 'There is ultimately no real conflict here. The range of conditions under which vigilantism emerges is relatively narrow, and the idea of self-help in the face of state ineffectiveness is commonsensical.' (1998: p.15) With this in mind and for the purposes of this study, the forms of vigilantism discussed in this thesis can be legitimately considered as distinctly American cultural concepts. Other controversies and ambiguities surrounding vigilantism include its conservative and anarchist elements, which require some further elaboration. In the former, vigilantism is largely used to reinforce the status quo and societal values. For instance, the Ku Klux Klan used vigilantism to attempt to reinstate white supremacy in the Reconstruction era, whilst the San Francisco Vigilance Committee employed it to eradicate crime and corruption from the city in 1851, both upholding conservative values, as Brown makes clear (1975: p. 19). More so, vigilantism's employment of summary violence, and of extreme actions like lynching

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<sup>15</sup> Jones was charged with assault after using pepper spray, whilst in his superhero costume, on a group of youths he had perceived to be committing a crime. He was forcibly unmasked in court, and charged with assault. Nonetheless, his story has garnered him immense popularity and even several biographies on his actions and the RLSH 'movement'.

and torture, pushes the boundaries of the state by challenging its leniency and breaking its laws. In the latter instance of anarchism, state and societal laws are transgressed by political vigilantes critical of existing systems of law and order, which highlights the transformative potential of vigilantism. For example, the Black Panther Party used violent self-defence and militant action to challenge and draw attention to police brutality aimed at blacks, of which Bloom & Waldo discuss at length (2014). Both the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Panther Party, in their extreme differences towards race and similarity of employment of violent methods, point to how a group's actions and intentions can problematize the political and legal classifications of that group. To illustrate this point, the Ku Klux Klan primarily acted to restore the primacy of Southern white males over blacks, a wholly conservative drive with far right implications, as J. Michael Martinez asserts (2007: pp.7-30). Conversely, in ignoring the new laws that granted African-Americans more freedom, the Klan can also be viewed as criticising systems of law and order in their flouting of Federal laws and opposition to the state. Indeed, the government declared the Klan an anarchic and terrorist organisation in the 1870s so that the group could be made officially illegal, with the Ku Klux Klan Act (1871) effectively dissolving the first Klan (Ibid. p.243). Vigilantism often claims to pursue the rights and freedoms of the wronged, but usually disregards the laws that have been put in place to protect the rights of all people, including suspected criminals. Abrahams writes: 'Although vigilantism supports the rights of individuals to band together in the fight to maintain order, it very often involves repression of individual rights to due legal processes as laid down by the state.' (1998: p.17) Thus, vigilantism clearly can infringe on the rights of suspected criminals, the wrongly accused, and the wider public, aligning vigilantism with the much more complex, controversial and highly personal realms of morality, ethics, and notions of justice. Both the Klan and Black Panther Party examples stress the illegal position of vigilantes, whilst making clear that each group's standpoint on their own actions could be argued to be in the name of social order and justice.

Nonetheless, and despite the problems of classification and mergence with other social theories, attempts to define vigilantism as a concept in its own right deserve closer attention.

Abrahams discusses the origins of the word relative to its Latin and Spanish roots from 'watchful', 'guard' and 'vigilant', which appear to have inspired America's vigilance committees in the latter part of the Eighteenth Century (p.3). Indeed, one can see how descriptions of Batman as “a watchful guardian... the dark knight” in *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008, DC, US) invokes such language and imagery; this is a testament to American culture’s usurpation of the vigilante as a heroic figure, albeit a troubled and often tragic one. Similarly, Alan Moore’s 1986-1987 *Watchmen* graphic novels, including a film based on those novels, *Watchmen* (Snyder, 2009, DC, US), also play on the strengths and weaknesses of such figures and their potential meanings to American society, presenting them as both beneficial and destructive forces. Such varying depictions are applicable to the character and presentation of Dexter himself, and will be explored in depth later. The definitions of 'vigilantism' and 'vigilante' this thesis will draw on include:

1. A member of a group of people who take it on themselves to prevent crime or punish criminals without legal authority. (Waite & Hawker, 2009: p.1032)
2. A person who tries in an unofficial way to prevent crime, or to catch and punish someone who has committed a crime, especially because they do not think that official organisations, such as the police, are controlling crime effectively. Vigilantes usually join together to form groups. (Hilliard & Isaacs, 2011: p.422)
3. One of an organized group of citizens who take upon themselves the protection of their district, properties, etc. (Collins & Forsythe, 2014: p.2157)
4. *noun*; the methods, conduct, attitudes, etc., associated with vigilantes, especially militancy, bigotry or suspiciousness. (Ibid.)



As the preceding definitions illustrate, none strictly agree about what precisely constitutes vigilantism, yet several commonalities are apparent. Crime and ineffectual or absent law enforcement appear to be common factors in influencing vigilante activity, as do fear and a perceived need for self-protection. More subtle differences in definition appear with regard to *how* vigilantism is enacted, as each definition acknowledges group and/or individual vigilante activity. What is clear from the above definitions is that 'vigilantism' and 'vigilante' are complex terms, with multiple interpretations and meanings, and with specific causes and effects that vary in any given situation. Supporting this claim, Abrahams writes: 'The different shades of meaning of such terms reflect both the variety of forms of 'vigilance' in different times and places, and the wide range of attitudes they can elicit.' (p.5). As stated, *Dexter* allows for fluid movement around such concepts due to the show's serial format, and through the regular depiction and exploration of related vigilante themes.

The nature of vigilantism and violence in America is complex, to say the least. Brown discusses the tendency of American romanticism to blur the lines between vigilantism, violent acts, and the employment of vigilante-style tactics for revolutionary or protest means, such as those used in the American Revolution and Civil War (1975: pp.5-10). Such events both employed extreme violence and suggest a retaliatory, 'stand your ground' mentality that appears to have become an integral part of American society and culture. Indeed, such debates prevail in modern America, as Massad Ayoob asserts and illustrates in his analytical and instructive text on the topic (2014: pp.13-19). These events also exemplify the tendency of American people to stand against forces that they perceive to be unjust or unfair, standing up against the British government in the former, and against the Federal government in the latter; this makes clear the role of popular sovereignty as a defining feature of American life, history and politics. Whilst wars and protests are occurrences distinct from vigilantism, they share several characteristics, such as objection, conservatism, and the use of violent tactics. What stands out in both the Revolution and the Civil War, however, is the employment of extreme violence and murder in the name of a 'just' cause, something that Brown discusses at length (pp.42-56).

Such a notion suggests how, in *Dexter*, Dexter's own acts of murder as a 'serial killer' vigilante can be viewed as legitimated by his opposition to forces that are threatening to society and its inhabitants.

Considering the longevity of America's vigilante tradition, there are relatively few books on the subject apart from those about the Klan and Black Panthers. This shortfall is significant when considering the high volume of vigilante activity in the American past and in the contemporary moment. There are several academic writers that have focused on specific vigilante groups in American history, such as William Carrigan (2006, 2007, 2013) and Keith Edgerton (2005). However, whilst these studies are useful in detailing specific causes and effects of vigilantism, they are limited to individual cases that do not consider other vigilante groups and instead overlook the influence of these other groups and the wider effects of vigilantism on American society and culture. There are several texts in areas related to discussions of vigilantism, such as crime and violence, racial and civil rights struggles, and America's violent history. Walker, Spohn & DeLone (2007, 4th ed.) discuss racial aspects of justice in America, such as civil rights, police brutality and retaliatory attacks between whites and blacks, for example. Whilst the history of racial tensions and persecution of blacks is discussed extensively in the text, racial vigilantism is not explored in any depth and is hardly even mentioned. Similarly, vigilantism is briefly discussed in Anne-Marie Cusac's (2009) investigation into America's penchant for cruel and unusual punishment throughout its history, suggesting an overall avoidance of the topic. It is important to note that, whilst there are several key texts on lynch law specifically (Brundage: 1997; Ifill: 2007; Berg: 2011), most focus on specific regions or eras, and thus cannot offer an analysis of the more widespread and persistent nature of vigilantism in American life as a result. That is not to say they are not useful, however. Indeed, texts on vigilantism by writers such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1892) and James Elbert Cutler (1905) serve to show how public attitudes and responses towards vigilante acts like lynching have consistently been located somewhere between romanticised and taboo, extremes that make confronting the issue somewhat problematic. Nonetheless, this trend in such texts serves to illustrate the potential

scope for discussions around the subject, and indicates that vigilantism is an entity not often regarded as a social product or problem in its own right. More so, their tendency to focus on related areas, rather than on specific studies of vigilantism itself, suggests that it is a complex, controversial, and even intimidating topic that requires a more nuanced approach. Cultural representations, such as those seen in film, literature, television and gaming etc., hold more potential for exploring vigilantism in the realms of history, society and culture together, in which they are all represented to some extent and can be explored and confronted fully.

As mentioned, a marked majority of existing literature on vigilantism tends to be restricted to singular aspects of the topic in American history, society or culture, with little or no attempt to view the topic as part of a wider whole. Madison and Brown's respective works incorporate much more inclusive, fluid and comprehensive approaches to vigilantism that have influenced and inspired many later textbooks, their focus being on historical and social aspects surrounding the topic. Whilst subsequent works have added to the historical and social picture of vigilantism by addressing groups, eras and examples in greater detail, this tendency has led to an oversight of the bigger picture, which must be addressed in its entirety if the relationship between American identity and vigilantism is to be understood. Thus, Madison and Brown's works must be returned to, and should be considered essential in demonstrating how various extensive themes and ambiguities surrounding vigilantism can and should be approached in unison. Again, whilst Madison and Brown do not discuss vigilantism in popular cultural texts like *Dexter*, their holistic approach to history, society and cultural attitudes suggests that they should be looked at together, providing definitive starting points through which to explore and understand wider representations. Brown is a major writer on America's vigilante tradition with several publications on the topic (1963, 1975, 1992). His seminal text, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (1975), is highly significant to this thesis due to its objective and extensive discussions of vigilantism in American history and society. Brown analyses a wide range of examples to examine the American tendency to employ defensive and retaliatory tactics in the protection of self, property and society. He

provides detailed and well-substantiated discussions of vigilantism in American history to suggest that violent self-defence and citizen-led action has become an integral part of American society and culture. Similarly, Madison discusses vigilantism in *Vigilantism in America* (1973) in a whole range of different contexts, exploring its use as a tool to combat crime. Significantly, this text suggests that vigilantism is responsive to fear from perceived crimes and threats. Written in the early 1970s during a time of great social upheaval in America, Madison discusses broad examples of vigilantism past and present, from the Salem witch trials of 1692 (p.14) to the persecution of homosexuals in 1970's New York (pp.4-7). Madison focuses his discussion on the changing social conditions and problems that appear to prompt group and individual vigilante activity, identifying a range of related topics. His analyses of rural, suburban and urban manifestations of vigilantism, and political, racial and religious vigilantism, are engaging and reveal the complexities of the subject. Such themes will be applied directly to *Dexter* to ascertain their role in better understanding America's relationship with vigilantism.

Texts that do discuss vigilantism in popular culture and with direct reference to social concerns are very limited, and include the works of Peter Lev (2000), John Belton (2005), and David A. Cook (2000), amongst others. All of these texts discuss vigilantism specifically in relation to the early-1970s era and highlight social upheaval, social anxieties and other key concerns, such as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement and Watergate. They generally locate such discussions within specific genres and film cycles of the decade, such as crime and vigilante cop films, Blaxploitation movies and revisionist Westerns. These texts are useful because they substantiate claims that vigilantism appears more in times of great social change and unease than at other times, and they point to particular areas of concern in representations of vigilantism, such as race, patriarchy and women's rights. They also indicate a definitive shift from collective, social concerns, to that of the individual and personal attitudes and experiences during the decade, which more broadly reflects Madison and Brown's key themes and patterns. However, the tendency to restrict such discussions to the 1970s and its 'Vigilante Revenge' cycles, overlooks and ignores the relevance of vigilantism to

other times and in other genres. Indeed, overall the discussions are quite short and centred on specific popular or cult films from the decade, such as *Dirty Harry*, *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974, Dino De Laurentiis Corp., US), *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971, Shaft Productions, Ltd. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Inc., US), *Walking Tall* (Phil Karlson, 1973, BCP, Inc., US), *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971, D'Antonio Productions, Inc., US) and *I Spit on Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978, Cinemagic Productions, US), but rarely extend beyond. Nonetheless, the texts provide a useful platform, and suggest how such films provide great insight into vigilantism in American history, society and culture on a wider scale.

Considering the very high volume of vigilante themed and related screen representations from the origins of cinema to the contemporary moment, this relatively widespread neglect of its significance is surprising. Vigilantism has been discussed occasionally in relation to other themes and genres, such as in revenge or detective narratives, but there are no extensive discussions of the portrayal of vigilantism in contemporary popular culture, apart from occasional vigilante-themed essays on superhero movies and some others, such as the *Saw* movie franchise (James Wan *et al*, 2004-2010, Twisted Pictures, US) and *Deadwood* (David Milch, 2004-2006, CBS, US). Such essays include Tony Spanakos' essay on *Watchmen* (Zack Snyder, 2009, Warner Bros. Pictures and Paramount Pictures, US) entitled "Super-Vigilantes and the Keene Act" (White, 2009: pp.33-46), and Justine Toh's discussions of *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005, Warner Bros. Pictures, UK and US) in "The Tools and Toys of (the) War (on Terror): Consumer Desire, Military Fetish, and Regime Change in *Batman Begins*." (Birkenstein *et al*, 2010: pp.127-140). As the latter title suggests, discussions of vigilantism are limited and are commonly situated as a by-product of other topical discussions. In Toh's chapter for instance, key issues of vigilantism are sublimated and largely overlooked within a discussion of the representation of the actions of authoritative bodies in the post-9/11 era in *Batman Begins*. Because of the distinct lack of research into the enduring presence of vigilantism in American popular culture, past and present, this thesis intends to address the

gaps in academic and critical study by offering a more nuanced discussion of vigilantes and vigilantism in *Dexter*.

Previous assertions made surrounding the serial nature of the show, and how the television form provides a space for representations of vigilantism to unfold over time, require some further attention. To elaborate somewhat, the television serial tends to be comprised of long-form narratives, wherein themes, characters and plots continually develop and are on-going across episodes and seasons, rather than being contained to and resolved within singular episodes. As such, varied character actions, attitudes and scenarios can be explored alongside extended and inter-related themes and plot lines, making sequential viewing a key aspect of audience engagement. This also means that notable actions and occurrences in any given episode of a television serial can fundamentally impact following episodes and recontextualise past ones, indicating that most episodes in a long-form television serial are generally geared towards a central over-riding plot and are heavily serialised (Hammond & Mazdon, 2005: pp.75-82). Other critics, such as Jancovich & Lyons, state that this episodic and rapid yet high quality production formula harks back to the post-classical Hollywood style of spectacle or 'event' filmmaking, alluding to the tendency for long-form serials to be regarded as 'must see TV' in contemporary American culture (2003: pp.3-4). With these key aspects of the serial form in mind, one can feasibly state that quality television serials of the late-1990s and beyond to the present day - to which *Dexter* belongs - have routinely provided more potential for in-depth, complex and controversial themes and representations to be presented and explored. Indeed, notable theorists on television theory such as Jonathan Bignell (2003: pp.1-10) and McCabe & Akass (2007: pp.1-12) support this claim, with the latter stating that contemporary long-form television serials are generally 'more literate, more stylistically complex, and more psychologically "deep" than ordinary television fare.' (p.8) These claims are made with reference to popular shows like *Sex and the City* (Darren Star, HBO, US, 1998-2004), *The Sopranos* (David Chase, HBO, US, 1999-2007), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Joss Whedon, Twentieth Century Fox, US, 1997-2003), and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (Anthony E. Zuiker, CBS, US, 2000-

2015). Such shows also allude to the increasing prestige of several television production companies and broadcast stations around this time and since, a further factor that has aided the popular and critical reception of television serials in the modern day, a notion that Ian Gordon supports (in Jancovich & Lyons: pp. 148-150).

In applying such discussions to *Dexter*, one can see how the central plot revolving around the vigilante actions of a serial killer fits the general mould of the quality long-form serial and is the focal point of the shows 8 seasons; individual episodes and seasons add to this narrative thrust whilst comprising of individual stories that are related to the wider whole and its varied themes and characterisations. Illustrating this, the portrayal of Harry and Dexter's early relationship and evolution towards vigilante activity is drawn out across several seasons, and thus appears more natural and paced with regards other aspects of the narrative, such as the details behind Dexter's childhood trauma and comparison with other related moral frameworks. Similarly, central and minor characters also fit this pattern, as the personalities and attitudes displayed evolve and mutate accordingly with regard to their own storylines in the wider narrative. For instance, after being shown to be a generally honest and clean cop with a good track record, Debra Morgan (Jennifer Carpenter) discovers the truth about Dexter in Season Six, which leads to her subsequent mental breakdown and forays into private detection and murder in Seasons Seven and Eight. The format of the show also permits the revision and expansion of time and details, such as the 'return' of Sgt James Doakes (Erik King) in flashbacks and storylines in Season Seven, and those that show Harry interacting with Dexter and teaching him vigilante tendencies in his youth in Seasons One, Two and Eight. Thus, the form of the television serial is in itself significant in that it provides a space for extended narratives and themes to unfold in more depth, alluding to the potential for more complex and fruitful representations and subsequent analyses of them in shows like *Dexter*.

Further, several feminist theorists have argued that the television form and particularly quality contemporary show formats, such as those similar to *Six Feet Under* (Alan Ball, HBO, US, 2000-

2005), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan, AMC, US, 2008-2013), provide a feminised space in which alternative representations and themes can unfold. Such arguments build on seminal critical work by Charlotte Brunsdon (1997), who suggests that, as a predominantly female and feminised space, contemporary serials have evolved from serials and soap operas that were initially primarily aimed at and appealed to women (p.9). Thus, alternative and even non-normative representations can be seen to have become commonplace aspects in what can be deemed 'crossover' texts between the two (to generalise: soap operas as aimed at women; and contemporary serials as aimed at similarly niche audiences), such as *Buffy*, *Charmed* (Constance M. Burge, Spelling Television, US, 1998-2006) and *The X-Files* (Chris Carter, Twentieth Century Fox, US, 1993-2002). Supporting this claim, critics such as Levine & Parks discuss the extent to which *Buffy* is formative in this respect, providing just such a space in addressing a wide range of contemporary issues through a highly feminised filter (2007). In the text for instance, Allison McCracken writes how the visibility and penetrability of Angel's (David Boreanaz) body - counter to previous general cinematic and other normative television representations of males - represents and thus appeals to non-normative attitudes, audiences and viewing practices (p116-129). Related to this, long-form serial television shows also provide the space for alternative and taboo themes and content to play out, such as matriarchy and incest in *Buffy*, and homosexuality and abject displays in *Six Feet Under*, for example.<sup>16</sup> In *Dexter*, obvious taboo and alternative representations include vigilantism and murder, and others such as Oedipal and repressed drives, as Beth Johnson makes clear in relation to Dexter and his sexual partners resembling his murdered mother (Howard, 2010: pp.). As Brunsdon states, 'The history of feminist television criticism also parallels struggles within feminism – struggles over who exactly counts as a 'woman', who belongs, who is excluded, and increasingly who even wants to be a feminist at all.' (1997: p.4) Various aspects of these debates similar-

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<sup>16</sup> Also of note, and alluding to both the highly intertextual and topically alternative nature of quality long-form television serials, Michael C. Hall appeared in *Six Feet Under* in a central role as a homosexual morgue attendant obsessed with blood. One can see how such characteristics have transference and resonance in terms of readership and audience identification in *Dexter*, across serials and forms, indicating the rich and widespread potential in analysing across serials and their key (and subtle) themes and stars.



ly play out amongst female characters in *Dexter*, with Debra and Maria LaGuerta (Lauren Velez) upholding alternative and contrary representations to those displayed by Hannah McKay (Yvonne Strahovski) and Lumen Ann Pierce (Julia Stiles), as will be discussed within.

A brief synopsis of *Dexter* and key events of the shows eight seasons identifies the prevalence of themes pertinent to a study of vigilantism, and indicates areas that will be addressed within this thesis. Further, and related to the paragraph above, this synopsis will also demonstrate the ability of the television format to provide more potential for engagement with complex and controversial issues over time. For instance, the show follows the activities of blood spatter analyst and vigilante serial killer Dexter Morgan as he tries to fulfil his murderous impulses, whilst hiding his true nature from his family and colleagues. Dexter suffered childhood trauma in witnessing the murder of his mother Laura, and was adopted by a police officer, Harry Morgan, who became increasingly frustrated with injustice and judicial failures. This already presents themes that are pertinent to understanding vigilantism, such as trauma, personal crime, the anti-hero figure, and the failures of law enforcement. After perceiving Dexter's apparently murderous urges at a young age, Harry teaches Dexter a 'Code' so that he can kill and evade detection. This 'Code of Harry' identifies only murderers who have escaped legal justice as deserving suitable candidates for Dexter's killing table, effectively positioning Dexter in a clear role as a vigilante. From this, a tradition of violence and extra-legal action is perpetuated from father to son. This significantly situates vigilantism as a generationally-influenced aspect of America's historical, social and cultural identity that aligns with Brown's discussions of tradition and inherited attitudes (pp.67-90). The Code also suggests that 'justifiable' killings serve a greater good, invoking the wholly American outlook that violent vigilante acts are permissible if they appear to serve a socially beneficial purpose, and are often viewed with retrospective pride, as Brown suggests (1975: pp.3-5). The Code, and indeed *Dexter* as a whole, engages with such assumptions and general perceptions of the American past, inviting the viewer to consider vigilantism and violent traditions in a new and

confrontational manner through the extended serial format of the show, which allows many angles of the topic to unfold.

In Season 1, for instance, the show focuses on Dexter's attempts to track down serial killer Brian Moser (Christian Camargo), who happens to be his brother and fellow victim of childhood trauma. Such a focus allows themes of repression, concealment, parental influence and violence within the family unit to be explored. Also of note are themes of victimhood and domestic violence surrounding Dexter's girlfriend Rita (Julie Benz), and the function of the family unit as a means through which Dexter can appear 'normal' so he can continue vigilante activity. Season 2 expands these themes further by positioning Dexter in opposition to his father's Code and striving to understand his violent upbringing. As Dexter's crimes are also uncovered, several other characters become prominent in their own extra-legal activity in Season 2, such as Doakes, LaGuerta and Dexter's step-sister Debra. Western and Superhero genres are also invoked at great length via imagery and social significance, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. This approach will indicate how the show draws upon historical, social and cultural themes surrounding vigilantism. Engaging with other aspects of American history, Season 3 sees Dexter become involved in group vigilantism with prominent DA Miguel Prado (Jimmy Smits), whilst themes of torture, violent extremism and deception are also explored. The Prado brothers Miguel, Oscar (Nick Hermz) and Ramon (Jason Manuel Olazabal) are also shown to partake in vigilante activities because of the influence of their violent father, providing direct comparisons with Dexter. The season critiques law enforcement and judicial systems by portraying various characters that represent it, such as criminal defence attorney Ellen Wolf (Anne Ramsay), and corrupt detective Joey Quinn (Desmond Harrington), who exploits the system for his own gain. Even LaGuerta breaks the law to ensure Prado's guilt, suggesting a continuation of personal and political vigilante themes. Season 4, however, returns to the primacy of the family unit in concealing and fostering violence and extremism. Now married with a baby, Harrison (various child actors: Season 4; Evan & Luke Kruntchev: Seasons 5-7; Jadon Wells: Season 8), Dexter attempts to conceal his vigilante activities within

the family unit after meeting accomplished serial killer and family man Arthur Mitchell (John Lithgow). He also increasingly takes criminals from the police, leading to the death of an innocent man and signifying a crucial change for Dexter, as his actions become increasingly motivated by selfish reasons. Offering further alternative representations of vigilantism, Season 5 sees Dexter team up with a female vigilante, Lumen, victim of a hierarchy of powerful males that exploit, abuse, rape and murder women. These men, headed by aggressive alpha-male Jordan Chase (Johnny Lee Miller), can be seen to signify aggressive patriarchal culture and male entitlement. Corrupt police feature heavily this season, as Quinn carries out an illegal investigation on Dexter, and Debra increasingly engages with vigilantism herself as she uncovers Harry's lies. Season 5 will be discussed primarily in relation to rape-revenge and female vigilantism in Chapter 3.

Season 6 pits Dexter against religious vigilantes, the Domsday Killers (James Edward Olmos and Colin Hanks), who punish those they consider 'immoral' and provide an interesting parallel to Dexter's own relationship with Harry. As such, they mirror and play on many aspects of social, religious and historical vigilantism, providing a representation of extremism that reflects anxieties surrounding the "war on terror" and religious fundamentalism. Redemption and change from violence are also featured in this Season through the role of reformed ex-convict Brother Sam (Mos Def), and Debra, who finally discovers that Dexter is a vigilante, prompting her own vigilante acts. This revelation is explored more fully in Season 7, as Debra comes to terms with Dexter's -and eventually her own- murderous activities. A family vendetta and blood feud with organised crime boss Isaak Serko (Ray Stevenson) and female vigilante Hannah (Yvonne Strahovski) also feature in Season 7, and themes of political vigilantism are returned to via LaGuerta, who plays the system as she investigates Dexter. Finally, in Season 8, the origin of Harry's Code is challenged and displaced through the introduction of Dr Evelyn Vogel (Charlotte Rampling), co-creator of the Code. This displacement of the paternal and masculine primacy of vigilantism onto females will be discussed in Chapter 2. Other themes pertinent to explorations of vigilantism in this series include private investigators and bounty hunters,

apprentice vigilantes, the depiction of murder as a family activity, and Dexter's eventual decision to stop the cycle of vigilantism once and for all.

Whilst these brief descriptions of each season above are not exhaustive examples of the vigilante-related themes evident in *Dexter*, they do offer some idea of the ways in which such topics will be discussed herein. They also demonstrate the complex relationship of vigilantism in historical, social and cultural terms by suggesting significant overlaps between each of them. Indeed, aspects of history, society and culture are often impossible to view in strictly autonomous terms. With this in mind, this thesis will address portrayals and representations of vigilantism in American history, society and culture as evidenced in *Dexter*. Dealing with each aspect of American life and identity in turn, the three main chapters of this thesis will endeavour to illustrate how and why vigilantism is such a prevalent and indelible part of American culture and identity.

Chapter One will demonstrate how it is possible to explore historical representations of vigilantism in *Dexter*. In order to illustrate the rich and nuanced ways in which these representations occur, two significant aspects of America's history with vigilantism need to be considered: First, the reasons *why* vigilantism has arisen or been employed throughout American history; and second, the subsequent forms in which vigilantism has appeared in *response* to such reasons. Bearing these in mind, the first half of Chapter One will show how *Dexter* engages with and depicts the reasons behind the occurrence of vigilante activity, ultimately using them to justify and mediate the themes and various uses of vigilantism in the show. As has already been ascertained, social upheaval caused by wars and economic instability, for example, and social problems such as elevated poverty and crime rates, often prompt a rise in vigilante-related activity. Such depictions will be analysed in the show, paying particular attention to how *Dexter* mediates and transposes representations of historical examples in the present through contemporary counterparts, such as immigration concerns, for instance. Similarly, depictions of old and 'new' types of crime will be discussed in the show,

from moral crusades against community ‘undesirables’, to computerised paedophilia and biological warfare. This analysis will show how, even though types of crime inevitably change or evolve throughout American history, recourse to violent action in response to these problems has been a consistent feature of American life and is explored extensively through *Dexter*. Society’s reaction to crimes can also change, even when those crimes remain essentially the same; instead, public perception of them often shifts, from almost acceptable to completely unacceptable, and vice-versa. The extra-legal dimensions of vigilante behaviour, and representations of law enforcement and judicial systems in *Dexter*, will be considered here to show that they too present vigilantism as a response to inefficiency, failings and corruption. This often occurs whilst Dexter is shown to manipulate such processes for his own vigilante gains, presenting a conflict between inefficient legal processes and the use of vigilantism in the show. These themes are engaged with in an extensive fashion in *Dexter* that not only do they offer an in-depth exploration of why vigilantism occurred and occurs in American life, but they also inevitably force the viewer to engage with the moral and ethical side of citizen-led action and inaction. This duality suggests that the show presents an arena in which the moral complexities and ambiguities of vigilantism can be explored in a pedagogical and didactic manner, offering a clearer and more nuanced understanding of the American vigilante psyche.

Following on from this, the second half of Chapter One will outline concepts of group and individual vigilantism as socially and/or personally responsive acts, with regard to themes of race, politics, religion, vendettas, blood-feuds and revenge behaviour. Several different themes and models relating to American vigilantism, derived from key studies of America’s vigilante history, will be applied to *Dexter* in order to illustrate the extent to which the show engages with such ideas. These central themes and models derive initially from the works of Madison and Brown and are applicable to both group and individual vigilantism. Madison’s discussions of geographical vigilantism in rural, suburban and urban locations will be discussed in relation to *Dexter*, as will his main observations surrounding racial, religious and political vigilantism. Similarly, Brown’s ‘three-tiers’ of involvement in group vigilantism, which can then in turn

manifest in socially beneficial or socially destructive forms based on the intentions and actual effects of real groups in American history, will also be considered and applied, as will his discussions of family vendettas and blood feuds. These two parts together will be used to illustrate that as a popular cultural text, *Dexter* invites and enables readings of vigilantism -in both implicit and explicit ways- that offer insights into the unique history and relationship of the nation with this phenomenon, and enduring perceptions of it.

Chapter Two will focus on a particularly important social theme that plays a significant part in the perpetuation of the vigilante mentality in American life, one which will be explored through a supposedly key stabilising and socially beneficial institution; that of the family unit. Several aspects of this area require closer attention, given that the American family unit is traditionally and intrinsically patriarchal in nature, with a primacy given to males and sons, this primacy being an inherently white concept (Coontz, 1999: pp.ix-xi). It is of note that African-American family structures and indeed, black people in general, are relatively few in *Dexter*, with only Doakes and reformed criminal Brother Sam being shown to reflect black family life. Such representations appear to be reflective of African-American family structures, as James Stewart's discussions of both matriarchal households and displaced male roles suggest that racial inequalities and familial separations as a result of slavery in America's history have had a lasting impact on black family structures (Stewart, 1990: p.12). With this in mind, and whilst the black experience of vigilantism and victimisation is downplayed in the show to only limited representations, it contrarily engages with themes such as the family and foreshadows a growing pertinence surrounding the African-American experience of vigilantism and violent extremism in American life. Such representations in *Dexter* suggest that some aspects of black American history are easier to engage with or confront than others.

Black victims in *Dexter* are relatively few, as noted above. Given the longevity in American history of black people being victims in racially-motivated lynching and violent extremism by whites, and considering their own involvement in vigilante-style activity like the Black Panther

Party and in violent urban gang crime, this lack is striking. However, it fits into wider patterns of limited screen representations of African-American family structures and life, as observations by Leonard & Guerrero on the topic make clear (2013: pp.432-434). Nevertheless, *Dexter's* limited focus on black vigilantism significantly serves to locate the topic with its primary offender – white American males. With this in mind, the chapter will argue that vigilantism and violence in *Dexter* are presented and perpetuated via patriarchy and the white family unit, placing both in an inherently unhealthy and damaging light. To demonstrate this, relevant theories of family will be outlined before discussing the perpetuation of vigilantism between father and son. The chapter initially will explore how the father-son relationship between Harry and Dexter presents a perpetuation and legitimisation of vigilantism, through the re-direction and concealment of violence and murder within its foundations. To illustrate how such an interpretation can be applied more broadly to other male family-orientated characters in the show, Dexter's *own* attempts to teach others vigilantism will be discussed, focusing on the characters of Jeremy Downs (Mark L. Young), Zach Hamilton (Sam Underwood) and Harrison. This section intends to exemplify how these characters suggest that the perpetuation of vigilantism between symbolic and actual father-son relationships is inevitably inescapable and signifies destruction, unless the cycle is broken. Next, and contrary to the ideological function of the family as a healthy, socially beneficial institution, the chapter will argue that representations of the white, middle-class nuclear family in *Dexter* centre round the concealment of extreme violence and murder and that this is depicted as damaging to offspring. This will be discussed specifically in relation to Rita and Paul's (Mark Pellegrino) failed marriage and troubled children Astor (Christina Robinson) and Cody (Daniel Goldman), and through Arthur 'Trinity' Mitchell's middle-class nuclear family. The final part of Chapter 2 will explore how women in *Dexter* are shown to present alternatives to the traditional family unit; Lumen and Hannah will be discussed as offering honest, open and healthier notions of both 'family' and vigilantism. As such, the final part of this chapter will challenge assertions made by Abrahams that vigilantism is an inherently 'male' act, and that

the role of women in America's vigilante tradition is fairly negligible and ultimately insignificant (pp.137-139). Instead, this section will argue that some women in *Dexter* are depicted as providing alternative approaches to vigilantism in their mediation of traumatic events and notions of female victimhood, a theme that will also extend into Chapter Three.

Chapter Three will summarise the themes of vigilantism and the vigilante figure in *Dexter* by discussing them in relation to earlier American screen representations. Both the wealth of vigilante-themed material on the American screen,<sup>17</sup> and the relative surge of such depictions at times of social upheaval or distress in America, suggest that vigilante themes allow the mediation and representation of such events. Bearing this in mind, this chapter will focus on three key eras to compare their representations against *Dexter* with regard to specific genres and contemporary social anxieties. The first section will show how *Dexter* invokes aspects of the crime and Western genres, by focusing on themes such as authority, the 'make-do' mentality, and the antihero. This focus will show how themes pertinent to vigilantism in these genres are evident in the show. The second section will discuss vigilante narratives of the 1970s and their social significance to the present day as represented in *Dexter*, such as Blaxploitation, vigilante-cop and rape-revenge cycle movies. These will be discussed with particular reference to the characters of Doakes, Harry, Debra, and Lumen respectively. Such engagement with a highly politicised phase of 1970s vigilante representations allows many aspects of race, gender and vigilantism to be explored within a modern context, highlighting the show's influence from and interplay with past forms and cycles to offer commentary on the modern day. Finally, the chapter will discuss contemporary representations of vigilantism in *Dexter* with regards the post-9/11 superhero genre. Other aspects of the genre, such as heroes and villains, traumatic origins, and the social and personal motivations behind superhero vigilantism, will also be considered. Taken together these three chapters will explore vigilantism in *Dexter* in all of its manifestations: social, cultural and historical. The

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<sup>17</sup> A list of Film and TV titles featuring vigilante themes discovered for this research are included in Appendix 2, but should by no means be considered a complete list, with over 2,000 relevant texts researched for this thesis.



Conclusion will offer some tentative ways forward beyond this research, surmising the significance of popular culture texts like *Dexter* in being able to provide a space through which all aspects of America's vigilante identity can be considered.

### **Chapter One: Vigilantism and American History in *Dexter***

This chapter will demonstrate that historical representations of vigilantism are abundant in *Dexter*, and are presented in a way that highlights key issues and themes surrounding the topic. As previously discussed, existing texts on American vigilantism generally approach the topic in two main ways. The former considers the reactive nature of vigilantism by discussing why it arises and is used in the first place, whilst the second focuses on the subsequent forms and social effects of vigilantism. Accordingly, this chapter will comprise of two parts that each invoke and build upon these central approaches. The first half will discuss several factors that have been widely perceived by theorists to have caused and influenced vigilante acts throughout American history. Key areas of concern in relation to *Dexter* include social change and upheaval, crime and law enforcement. The second half of the chapter will focus on several key themes surrounding the different manifestations and effects of vigilantism in America's past as evidenced in the show. These themes include race, religion, politics, and vendettas, and will consider historical and social features such as who partakes in vigilante activity, and its intentions and effects upon society. However, it must be stressed that these individual themes should be looked at as part of a wider thematic whole. Indeed, the show reflects this complexity and ambiguity; the portrayal of vigilantism in *Dexter* does not centre on clearly defined notions of right or wrong, and does not come down on the side of completely condemning or condoning vigilantism. Its actual position is one of open interrogation that engages the audience in an active process of 'making sense', rather than as a passive imparting of any essential or moral 'truths'. With this in mind, the significance of *Dexter* in providing a site through which vigilantism can be approached and debated is underscored.

Given their often violent, swift and extra-legal status, one might initially be tempted to overlook how vigilante acts are often motivated by *fear*, either of perceived or real threats to the self and possessions, or of the unknown and unfamiliar. Considering the central thrust of vigilantism is to consolidate the *status quo* and ultimately reinforce conservative values, as

Brown argues, notions of fear as a motivating factor behind such acts may seem obvious (1975: p.4). However, fear and vigilantism are not often discussed in relation to each other. As Madison points out, emotions such as fear can easily lead to violent and extreme responses which, when combined with perceived inefficiencies in the state, seemingly legitimise acts of vigilantism (pp.1-3). One can clearly see the relationship between fear of crime and violence, real or imagined, and the subsequent reactionary or retaliatory behaviour that results. Madison crucially locates the origins of this fear and tendency in America's past, explaining how patterns of vigilantism have, through repeated use and in longevity, become an indelible part of American identity. He states:

‘The precedent for citizen action was set and glorified in our history. Did the colonists sit back when excessive taxes were imposed on them? Did the pioneers put up with horse thieves and cattle rustlers while awaiting action by territorial courts? No!’ (p.3)

Madison's assertions pertain to three key aspects of vigilantism in American history. First, that it is born from a spirit of rebellion and revolt, implicating the centrality of popular sovereignty in America's tendency to vigilante action. Second, and in lieu of the examples used, both colonialists and frontiersmen, Madison inadvertently presents a common feature of contemporary discussions of vigilantism: that there is a tendency to discuss the topic as a phenomenon relegated to America's past, rather than as a central and pressing feature of the present. Finally, in acknowledging such events, Madison highlights the inclination of the American people to view such events with pride and glory. This view signifies an outlook and historical experience that is distinctly American in nature, and exposes a particular tendency of its people to accept vigilantism as a legitimate, even just response to perceived problems in the state. With this in mind, it is possible to assert that both a culture of fear, a culture of violence and a tendency to citizen-led self-defence has characterised American displays of vigilantism and violent extremism. This chapter will demonstrate that vigilantism has

persevered, and has even evolved in line with modern fears, technologies and crimes that are rife for discussion in *Dexter*.

As historians such as Madison, Brown and Neely (1990) discuss, patterns of vigilante activity in American history always occur in response to three interrelated and responsive conditions: social upheaval, instability or anxieties; elevated or persistent crime rates; and absent or ineffectual law enforcement, perceived or actual. Each critic considers the relationship between vigilantism and the state, and present the three conditions noted above as widely accompanying vigilantism in America's past. Brown describes how the San Francisco Gold Rush caused industrialisation and an influx of settlers and criminals to the West coast, causing a sharp rise in violent crime. Prominent citizens perceived the crimes as threatening to their established businesses and personal safety, and united as the Vigilante Committee of 1856 in response (p.36). A further implication of social change as a motivating factor behind vigilantism in this instance can be seen in the group's response to an influx of immigrants from backgrounds different to their own. The vigilantes felt immigrants had no place in challenging the primacy of their established authority in San Francisco, and were fearful of this apparent threat (Ibid.). Similarly, yet highlighting the destructive potential of vigilantism, Madison discusses how social protest and upheaval in 1960s and 1970s America caused a culture of fear in which vigilante retaliation was employed as a persecutory means against homosexual activity in Queens, New York. Indicative of intolerance and fear in an era of aggressive social change, white male residents destroyed local park areas to prevent homosexuals from meeting there at night (1973: pp.7-8). This incident emphasises how fear of the unfamiliar and fear of social change, in this instance due to human rights activism, can lead one group to feel justified in oppressing the rights of another.

In contrast to Madison's analysis, Neely presents a different interpretation of social problems and the use of vigilantism to combat them, and indicates a more subjective response to the topic. He argues that crime rates are elevated amongst the black community because, as an

underprivileged sector of society, they are more prone to broken families and poverty. Neely claims that this makes blacks more likely to be involved in criminal activity and subsequent vigilante retaliation, such as that common amongst urban street gangs (1990: p.14). Given such varying opinions on social upheaval and the causes of crime, many of the complexities and ambiguities of vigilante activity are acknowledged through the writers' own contrasting perceptions of such matters. Nevertheless, other factors in American history can be seen to have influenced *why* vigilantism arises in the first place, and offer insight into *how* the topic has become such an integral aspect of American identity. Both Brown (p.56) and Kappeler & Gaines (p.55) discuss the centrality of 'popular sovereignty' that appears very early on in American history and is fundamental in explaining why American citizens are more inclined to mob action and vigilante activity than other nations. Of course vigilantism also forms an aspect of other cultures, as previously mentioned, but is perhaps more prevalent in American history and culture. Thus, although vigilantism is an important aspect of many cultures, American society has traditionally been more inclined towards mob and individual vigilante actions.

### **Part One: Justifying Vigilantism in *Dexter***

Due to the sheer wealth of examples that can potentially be discussed in relation to the social causes of vigilantism in *Dexter*, this section will focus on selective key themes through which to illustrate how representations of causal factors behind vigilante activity are evident and abundant in the show. The approach will highlight the subtle and nuanced ways in which various aspects of vigilantism interlink. Indeed, social crises, problems, crimes and policing are all indelibly related realms that experience significant crossover concerning vigilantism; together they offer unique insight into America's relationship with the topic. Thus, it is the negotiations and tensions between right and wrong, law, vigilantism and murder that are at the heart of the show's concern with Dexter's actions. This highlights the potential of the show in providing a site through which all the complex, ambiguous, and problematic aspects of vigilantism can be debated, whilst enabling the audience to empathise at least to some degree with the central

protagonist, which retains viewer engagement. The confrontational and questioning relationship between Dexter and the audience does not negate or ignore the complex and widespread nature of the topic, but rather shows how it can be mediated and understood as part of a wider whole.

As highlighted in the Introduction, contemporary social conditions are presented as a central concern in *Dexter* from the opening scenes of the first episode 'Dexter', but are used to challenge the viewer's expectations about what these conditions and concerns are or should be, and require further attention. In addition to those points made earlier there are a few other aspects of the sequence worthy of further note here. Dexter's comments while he is driving around, such as: "I love the Cuban food," and his observations of its inhabitants, clearly depicts Miami as a multicultural society, significantly showing Dexter himself to be tolerant of this fact. In doing so, this inclusion immediately presents a subversion of vigilantism in America's history, which has often acted to persecute perceived outsiders and resist social change brought about by their presence. These images then give way to those of public fornication, ethnic gangs, beggars and drug-addled prostitutes, identifying the serious underlying social problems faced by contemporary society. The presentation of such imagery also subverts audience expectations about Dexter's serial killer persona, effectively placing it in a secondary role to that of Dexter as vigilante. The red lighting that suffuses the scene is also symbolic of violence and blood as Dexter, on the prowl, surveys the vulnerable and destitute people one would normally expect to be the victims of a serial killer. Such a claim chimes perfectly with Harold Schechter's analysis of serial-killer victims, of whom he states are generally societies most vulnerable and neglected inhabitants (2003: p.4).

Dexter's choice of victim, Donovan, initially appears an unlikely target. He is shown to be a well-respected and prominent member of the community, who apparently upholds the values of religion, family and heteronormative patriarchal culture, thus symbolising America's most respected, pious and wholesome social institutions. As such, the audience initially feel fear for

Donovan when he is captured by Dexter. However, when Dexter unearths and exposes the decaying corpses of young boys that his victim has murdered, Donovan is revealed to be a homosexual paedophile killer, undermining and overturning the expectations of the viewer. Dexter confronts Donovan and demands: "Open your eyes and look at what you did! It's horrible, isn't it?" The use of crimes that are widely perceived to be perverse and heinous in the opening scenes of the series is significant, and acts in two primary ways. Firstly, it displays the direct confrontational manner in which the show *engages* with debates surrounding vigilantism, by making a clear distinction between the two killers and their motivations. After acknowledging his own compulsion to kill, Dexter tells Donovan: "But children, I could never do that. I have standards.", which infers Dexter is comparatively less 'bad' than Donovan, allowing the audience to empathise to some degree with his actions, yet crucially forcing active engagement with the moral questions raised. Secondly, such an aggressive confrontation with Donovan's violent and gruesome crimes also highlights the notion of societal decay, implying that the ideological constructs that supposedly revere and uphold American morality, such as religion, family and patriarchy -the very institutions Donovan hides behind- are inherently flawed. These depictions can be viewed as critical of the conservative values American society is built upon, thus the vigilantism employed here reveals societal values as being broken and in need of re-establishment.

As the opening sequence illustrates, from the very first scenes *Dexter* presents a displaced society in turmoil, characterised by heinous, violent crimes that vigilantism responds to. Also illustrated through the example is the ability of the show to present and invite questions and debates around the topic and its inter-related themes. One can see two distinct forms of social critique at play in *Dexter*. In the first instance, contemporary concerns such as drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and sex crimes, racial gangs and immigration are immediately apparent in the show and provide regular justification for Dexter's vigilante activities. In the second, institutions such as family and church, which are traditionally deemed to promote moral and virtuous citizens who play a beneficial role in a given society are often depicted instead as damag-

ing and corrupt forces. Social conditions and the social institutions of family and religion are revisited throughout *Dexter* as a means through which Dexter's vigilante acts can be presented to the audience in a provocative and challenging manner.

### **Social Upheaval, Change and Problems**

Throughout American history, vigilante activity has been regularly accompanied and influenced by upheaval and social fracture caused by wars and conflicts, both internally and internationally. Brown points out that vigilantism and associated extreme forms of violence, such as guerrilla warfare and tarring and feathering, progressed rapidly alongside the American Revolution, and were crucially justified by the colonists' need to right perceived 'insufferable wrongs' (p.33). Brown claims that the use of extreme violence as a means to achieve a desirable outcome during the Revolution legitimised subsequent uses of vigilante violence and extremism during the Civil War and beyond, serving as a model repeatedly invoked throughout America's history. Social fracture is a characteristic feature during periods of war, as was evident during anti-Vietnam war protests in the 1960s and more recently in response to the "War on Terror" in the 2000s. In the former, anti-war protests and human-rights issues signalled public disaffection with political policy and in leaders (Lev, 2000: pp.22-39). In the latter, anti-war protests and fears of further terrorist attacks in the country were exacerbated by perceptions of the then President Bush and his administration as both incompetent and deceptive, with ulterior motives (Mayer, 2008: p.261). With this in mind, various representations of war and terrorism are evident in *Dexter*, which reflects contemporary social fears and anxieties. Thus the show not only mediates post-war concerns, but also engages with wider related themes emerging from Dexter's use of vigilantism.

Terrorism has increasingly become a contemporary social concern and form of warfare in America following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and is subsequently a prominent theme in *Dexter*. In the episode 'Born Free' (1.12) for example, Dexter breaks into a shipping yard very easily, evading guards and detection whilst remarking sardonically, "So much for the war on terror!"



This comment suggests that border protection in America is ineffectual, highlighting social fears and concerns. It also indicates *Dexter's* potential to critique the capabilities of the state by allowing Dexter to expose its flaws and comment on contemporary themes, therefore inviting debate. Related to the notion of border invasion, war criminals and refugees are also presented as a source of anxiety in *Dexter*, and are often shown to be a product of war and extreme violence. Thus recent debates surrounding border patrols, 'Minutemen' and illegal immigrants, which writers such as Gary Warlick (2015) and Robert Lee Maril (2006) debate at length, are represented in the show. This is suggested in 'Father Knows Best' (1.9) when Doakes shoots dead an escaped Haitian torturer now living in Miami, only for an Internal Affairs investigation into the legality of the shooting to be derailed by LaGuerta. This hints at political and institutional vigilantism and invites the viewer to consider the moral ambiguities of the event. It also engages with wider debates surrounding excessive force and police brutality, which is becoming an increasingly pertinent topic in contemporary American society; this is suggested when LaGuerta says to Doakes after the shooting: "If he did those things? He deserved a lot worse than he got." However, the fact that Sergeant Angel Batista (David Zayas) reports the event to Internal Affairs in the first place, drawing attention to the criminality of police brutality, actively engages the viewer in these debates. As such, police brutality and war crimes are seen to be a catalyst for vigilante action in the show, and actively encourage the viewer to question the topic and wider social instances of extra-legal and extra-judicial violence.

These themes are explored in more detail through serial killer George "The Skinner" King (Jessie Borrego), who is revealed to have been a torturer for the Nicaraguan Resistance Army. An inclusion such as this also shows the impact other neighbouring war-torn countries can have on America, and engages with wider implications and problems surrounding refugees and illegal immigrants. King's brutal detention and torture of Anton Briggs (David Ramsay) for information reflects contemporary concerns surrounding the treatment of prisoners of war both at home and overseas, and of Bush's controversial use of Guantanamo Bay and 'Enhanced Inter-

rogation Techniques', which Stephanie Mayer argues has caused a national moral panic in recent years (2008: pp.139-181). Also engaging with recent issues concerning prisoner treatment and interrogation methods, Sheriff Ramon Prado is shown kidnapping and torturing a suspect for information in 'Si Se Puede' (3.6). The scene presents Ramon's vigilantism as despicable behaviour by focusing on the terror and agony of his victim as unorthodox methods such as suffocation are visited upon him, heightened by the fact that Debra and Quinn watch these events unfold, before arresting Ramon. Such depictions engage with wider patterns of corporal and capital punishment in America's past, and they display a range of contradictory attitudes towards their use. The scene recalls Cusac's discussions about prisoner torture in America's penal history, reflecting wider concerns about corporal and capital punishment and other violent American traditions (2009: pp.93-108).

Widespread fears following terrorist threats on American soil and the perceived threat of biological weapons in America, such as the 2001 anthrax scare, are also evident in *Dexter* (Mayer, 2008: pp.2-4). In 'Talk to the Hand' (6.11) for instance, a disciple of "Doomsday Killer" Travis Marshall, called Beth (Jordana Spiro), enters Miami Metro with a biological weapon that she activates, intending to kill everyone in the building in a suicide attack. Dexter manages to contain the catastrophe and save everyone whilst exposing himself to the chemicals, positioning his vigilantism and self-sacrifice as valiant and necessary in the face of alien threats. This example shows that the series keeps the audience on its toes, because instances where Dexter appears genuinely selfless and socially beneficial are interspersed with instances where he seems to do the opposite, thus the audience are not able to find a clear and comfortable solution to the issues presented. This dilemma demonstrates how social anxieties and problems prompted by wars and terrorism are evident in *Dexter*, and actively encourage the viewer to engage with such topics by providing a space for their mediation.

Writers such as Brundage (1997), Stock (1996) and Brown all agree that social change and the displacement of 'old' values with 'new' ones has regularly influenced vigilante action in

America's past. For instance, Brundage writes specifically about how, in the antebellum South, white plantation and slave owners responded to abolition with violent resistance and vigilantism that expressed a great fear of social change that has since characterised race relations in America (pp.2-5). Similarly, Stock writes about how independent farmers and otherwise generally peaceable landowners turned to night-riding and violent resistance as railroads, businesses and bankers threatened their way of life (p.89). Supporting these assertions further, Brown argues that vigilantism is inherently conservative in its attempts to preserve and maintain what he calls society's 'three-tiered' class structure (p.4). This claim can be challenged by other examples, such as the use of vigilantism *against* established power structures in the 1960s by the Black Panther Party during the Civil Rights Movement. Nonetheless, Brown's claim that social change prompts vigilante activity is evident in *Dexter* in different ways. In 'Let's Give the Boy a Hand' (1.4), Brian Moser recreates photographs from Dexter's youth with body parts from his latest victims, leaving them in places that have significantly changed over time. In one scene he leaves a dismembered hand at a beach that has changed names, been restored and upgraded to become a major tourist attraction, implying a direct link between social and environmental change and instances of violent extremism. Social and attitudinal changes are also suggested through the photographic recreations in the episode. These include a garbage disposal site that is now home to holiday condos, signifying a rotten foundation of perpetual decay masked by consumerism and superficiality. Similarly, a children's park has been replaced with private boats, business offices and symbols of commerce. The latter example suggests how traditional and more 'innocent' values have been displaced by the rich elite and self-serving pursuits, suggesting a more cynical and critical representation of such changes. Indeed, Anthony B. Atkinson writes that such tensions are becoming increasingly obvious in modern American society, and states that economic inequalities must be properly addressed in the nation (2015: pp.9-11). However, the contrast of these locations with Dexter's childhood pictures and memories suggest a romanticised view of the past that avoids dealing with deeper, more violent truths; this is

emphasised when Dexter realises about the killer that: “He knows. He’s not corrupting the happy Hallmark images of my youth: he’s revealing the ugly truth behind them.” As such, tensions between past and present, and truth and deception are underscored.

Aside from representing physical and attitudinal changes in American society, *Dexter* also engages with other fears and anxieties relating to contemporary American life, such as shifting gender roles and the breakdown of the nuclear family unit, which Barrett & McIntosh claim are increasingly characterising contemporary manifestations and notions of ‘family’ (1991: pp.26-27). While these themes will be discussed more extensively in Chapters Two and Three, the changing role and responsibilities of women in contemporary American society are shown to be a direct catalyst for vigilantism, and this is reflected through several key characters in *Dexter*. For example, LaGuerta is depicted as excelling at her job in a male dominated environment in ‘Dexter’ as she routinely holds her own against men in the department. However, she is often shown to be in tension with Captain Tom Matthews (Geoff Pierson) due to her gender, as suggested when he fires her for personal dislike in ‘Truth Be Told’ (1.11), only to reinstate her as more “emotionally stable” than her replacement Esme Pascal (Judith Scott) in ‘See-Though’ (2.4). The inclusion of such themes and extremes shows that the show engages with social change in many contexts, reflecting various changing attitudes. Further emphasising changing gender roles, LaGuerta is presented as having traditionally positive male attributes whilst embodying negative feminine ones, exposing societal double-standards that have been outlined by Jeffrey Weeks (1985: pp86-89) and continued by writers such as Sarah Hagelin (2013) in the modern day; this is suggested in ‘An Inconvenient Lie’ (2.3) when LaGuerta is ruthlessly competitive with Pascal to reclaim her Lieutenancy, seducing Pascal’s partner and dismissing him when her job is retrieved. In ‘Circle Us’ (5.7), LaGuerta also aggressively asserts dominance over Debra, using her as a scapegoat in a sting gone wrong and thus is depicted as being both manipulative and shrewd. As such, women that retain masculine characteristics are depicted as being self-serving and ultimately threatening to the *status quo* as their involvement in vigilantism grows, a notion that will be discussed further in part two of this chapter in relation to

LaGuerta and political vigilantism. The shifting role of women in the family, as discussed by Barratt & McIntosh, is similarly exemplified in 'Dex Takes a Holiday' (4.4) through the character of policewoman Zoe Kruger (Christina Cox). Having murdered her family and framed an innocent man for the crime, Kruger is presented as a dangerous threat that Dexter must protect his own family from, suggesting a subversion of the role of females behind vigilante acts as largely being defended by them. This example also presents some women in the show as having overtly masculine drives and capabilities to commit acts of violence, all of which are shown to lead to death. Such examples above suggest women are presented in a negative way in *Dexter*, but only when they adopt or exude masculine characteristics. Conversely, strong and independent women that retain their femininity are also shown to be *victims* of phallogentric culture and male dominance in the show; this is suggested in 'Shrink Wrap' (1.8) when a psychiatrist serial killer targets only rich and successful businesswomen, so that he can maintain a sense of normalcy and control when women transcend the bounds of their traditional status. That Dexter protects and avenges these women suggests that the changing status of women is not a threat to society unless they actively exude traditionally 'male' characteristics of aggression and murder, capabilities that theorists such as Barbara Creed widely associate with males (1993: p.62). Nevertheless, this is another example of the show not providing simple answers. As with the other issues mentioned, *Dexter* seems to be largely ambiguous; at times the show presents one attitude, but then shifts to present a different and seemingly contradictory and inconsistent point of view instead, inviting active viewing and engagement.

Throughout America's history, certain social conditions and problems have become the specific focus of vigilante groups. These conditions and problems primarily include, though are not restricted to, society's 'undesirables', such as the poor, prostitutes and the unemployed, and 'outsiders' from different racial and religious backgrounds. For instance, Brown explains how the South Carolina Regulators of 1767-1769 turned their attention to the poor, unemployed and 'idle and immoral' after ridding the region of criminal gangs and bandits, flogging and forcing them to work under shackle and whip (pp.58-59). The South Carolina Regulators were the

first recorded vigilante group in American history, and significantly influenced the formation of other vigilante groups with similar models and intentions. They also became increasingly violent and threatening towards citizens they felt did not belong, suggesting the problematic nature of vigilantism when it is used for personal rather than social means (pp.72-73). Similarly, Madison discusses the actions of vigilante evangelist Carrie A. Nation who, circa 1890, launched vigilante attacks on saloons and apothecaries. Nation became renowned for smashing and destroying property and alcohol, and even attacked civilians in an attempt to enforce her own beliefs in religious extremism and the ills of alcohol upon others (pp.71-87). This historical example suggests that the actions of vigilantes are often based on extremely personal beliefs and ideologies that completely disregard the rights of others. Madison writes: 'The country is made up of a multitude of cultures, religions, and nationalities, many having conflicting standards. Therefore what is considered right by one group may be viewed as objectionable by others.' (p.71) This view indicates a key ambiguity surrounding the topic, and makes clear that it is always highly subjective. Leonard J. Moore argues that Second-wave Ku Klux Klan activity was primarily directed against anyone who was not deemed to be specifically of white Protestant descent. He states that, in contrast to earlier Klan focus on white supremacy over blacks, 'the Klan of the 1920s espoused [...] a more complex creed of racism, nativism, Americanism; the defence of traditional moral and family values; and support for Prohibition.' (1991: pp.2-3). This comment further demonstrates how vigilantism has been caused by, and directed towards, perceived social outsiders and undesirables, and inevitably infringes upon the rights of others. It also indicates how various aspects of American life, policy and history can be seen to be indelibly linked to vigilantism.

With the above in mind, *Dexter* is primarily concerned with depicting contemporary social conditions in the urban environment of Miami. The show reflects social issues and problems that have accompanied vigilantism in the American past and present, such as poverty, substance abuse, immigrants and other 'undesirables' in American society. However, rather than simply presenting this social sector as deserving victims of vigilantism, as they have been con-

sistently viewed in America's past, *Dexter* instead presents such figures in a sympathetic light. More so, they are presented as victims of society that can be helped or even saved by Dexter, who focuses his vigilante attentions on those that prey upon these less fortunate members of society. For example, depictions of poverty and homelessness are evident in *Dexter* in 'Let's Give the Boy a Hand', when Dexter mistakes a sleeping old homeless man for a dead body. Suggesting a sympathetic representation of society's 'undesirables', Dexter apologises for disturbing the man and gently tells him: "It's okay, go back to sleep." Similarly in 'Lost Boys' (4.10), during a search of repossessed homes, Dexter finds a single-parent mother and her poverty-stricken children hiding in the basement of an abandoned house. The episode aired following America's 2007 economic crisis when mortgage repayment and repossessions were immediate problems for many American families, as recently argued by Atkinson in relation to America's post-"War on Terror" economy (2015); this shows the ability of *Dexter* to engage with and mediate pressing and specific social concerns. Thus, homeless people are not depicted as a problem, but as society's innocent victims, emphasised when Dexter again apologises for disturbing them. In contrast, the rich, privileged and elite are cast in a much more negative light in the show, and are presented as 'deserving' victims of Dexter's vigilantism due to their exploitation of society's vulnerable. Moreover, they offer a critique of the 'American Dream' and notions of "rugged individuality", characteristics of American-ness that historians Stanley B. Greenberg (1996) and James Buffington (2015) widely relate to increasing notions of self-promotion and other self-serving interests amongst America's elite. This assertion shows the subversive potential of vigilantism in the show, which generally emerges *from* such attitudes, rather than in opposition to them; this is evident in the characters of Roger Hicks (Don McManus), a used car salesman in 'An Inconvenient Lie', and entrepreneur Jordan Chase in Season Five (which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three). *Dexter* can be seen then to both invoke and subvert historical patterns of American vigilantism during its course.

Substance abuse provides a regular motif in *Dexter* as a contemporary societal ill. Rita's ex-husband Paul, Quinn, and Debra are all shown to be or become addicts for much of Seasons

One and Seven respectively, presenting substance abuse as a major yet common societal problem. Each case is portrayed with sympathy and understanding, and as a response to the traumatic events that each have suffered, with the exception of abusive wife-beater Paul, who instead provides a critique of traditional gender roles and the judicial system. Nonetheless, even Paul's violent demise in prison is uncomfortable, and the viewer is confronted with the potentially devastating effects of Dexter's vigilante acts. Contemporary attitudes to drug abuse are most aptly expressed in 'Dex, Lies and Videotape' (2.6) as Rita's family discuss heroin addiction around the dinner table. The frankness of the discussion alone suggests that the topic has become an increasingly everyday concern and affects many otherwise apparently healthy American families, not just the poor and destitute; Steven R. Blenko makes clear that drugs have become a more mainstream and approachable topic in wider American society over recent years, and this is also evident in the show (2000: pp.4-5). Whilst condemning heroin addiction through the character of Paul, the show depicts a much more relaxed stance on softer drugs such as marijuana, reflecting more contemporary views on the topic; this is suggested when LaGuerta orders Debra to turn Anton loose after she arrests him for lighting a joint in 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' (3.3). Similarly, Batista and Quinn find a joint and proceed to get high in 'A Horse of a Different Color' (6.4), in a sequence that uses humour to make light of the situation by depicting the more amusing effects of soft drugs. This humour is accentuated by the use of incidental music as the pair attempt to sate their insatiable hunger and experience various bodily sensations. As such, *Dexter* can be seen to engage with contemporary debates surrounding drugs, medical marijuana and sentencing laws, issues that have become increasingly significant over the last decade. A growing number of works on the topic, such as those by David Casarett (2015) and Katherine Tate *et al* (2013), support this claim.

Prostitution is also prominent in *Dexter*, and is similarly presented in an ambiguous, non-judgemental way, rather than with the expression of condemnation one might expect. For instance, the Ice Truck Killer's victims in 'Dexter', 'Popping Cherry' (1.3) and 'Truth Be Told' are all prostitutes and are depicted as drug-addicted immigrant females with little choice over their



lives. Their status as victims of society is heightened by Debra's worry for her "girls" as she attempts to protect them, while working undercover. It is the women's male clients who are depicted as perpetuating the real problem, as suggested in 'All in the Family' (3.4) when Batista is busted by an undercover cop for taking advantage of vulnerable women, and in 'Talk To the Hand' when Matthews flees the scene of an overdosed prostitute to save his own career. Women are often also shown to be unwilling participants in the sex industry; in 'Helter Skelter' (7.9), Quinn's girlfriend Nadia (Katia Winter) is forced to have sex with her boss George Nivokov (Jason Gedrick) in an attempt to exert ownership over his worker, thus positioning women as victims to the whims of men. Paola Monzini makes several assertions about immigrant sex-workers in modern America that align with depictions in *Dexter*, such as that of Nadia's coercion, blackmail and compromised integrity (2005). Contrarily, in 'Dress Code' (8.7), Masuka is shocked to find his student daughter is working in a topless bar to pay for her education; this displays the relaxed nature of contemporary youthful attitudes towards sex, highlighting the ability of the show to engage, rather than to simply inform or pass judgement on such issues. It also alludes to the exclusivity of the American education system and high costs for youths and families, a significant and growing concern that is addressed by writers such as Daniel Golden, who writes a damning critique of poor youths being excluded from American education in favour of the elite (2007). Such themes suggest an increasingly relaxed attitude towards the sex industry in line with more recent debates, and clearly situate the topic in response to a range of social problems and inequalities. *Dexter* can be seen to engage with various aspects of modern American life in this way.

Legal and illegal immigrants also feature regularly as a social theme in *Dexter* under similarly ambiguous terms. The multicultural nature of contemporary America is revealed by various representations in the show, as pointed out earlier in relation to the opening sequence. Supporting the relevance of such an observation, Ronald Takaki discusses a wide range of multicultural issues in contemporary American life, and points out the American tendency towards racism and the usurpation of other cultures (2011: pp. 8-13). This stance is evident in 'Dexter' as

Colombian music plays over images of people of multiple ethnicities joyously dancing and eating “Cuban pork sandwiches” and other various culinary delights. This suggests that, rather than presenting multiculturalism as a social problem, it is shown to be a positive influence in the show that has enriched American culture, a notion that Takaki claims is often ignored by white American society (Ibid.). As such, a key facet of American vigilantism is subverted by Dexter’s distinct lack of concern with different ethnicities and cultures. Similarly working to challenge negative perceptions, illegal immigrants are overwhelmingly portrayed as victims of society in *Dexter*, rather than a threat. In ‘Love, American Style’ (1.5) for instance, Dexter investigates Jorge (Jose Zuniga) and Valerie Castillo (Valerie Dillman), a husband and wife team who smuggle illegal immigrants into the country and demand money from their families for release. The captive illegal immigrants are shown to be beaten and mistreated by the pair, and kept in squalid conditions before they are drowned and dumped at sea. Such imagery is also contrasted against the wealth of the Castillo’s house, boat, and used-car business. In this respect, the Castillo’s can be read as a symbol for exploitative corporate America, built on a foundation of exploited illegal immigrant workers. Indeed, Joanna Dreby writes that contemporary attitudes towards illegal immigrants in America generally polarise between that of extreme racism and willing exploitation (2015: pp.1-3). The victimisation of illegal immigrants is also emphasised in ‘This Is the Way the World Ends’ (6.12) as Dexter intercepts a boat and saves the terrified people from being robbed and shot by unscrupulous and exploitative sailors.

America’s youth are presented as a central concern in *Dexter* and they embody a whole range of contemporary social issues, yet significantly are often depicted as victims of society. For example, in ‘Teenage Wasteland’ (5.9), Astor and her friend Olivia (Tabitha Morella) use alcohol to escape Olivia’s abusive step-father, whom Dexter promptly beats and threatens, saving the young girl. This makes clear that youth ‘problems’ derive from social and ideological failures, and suggests that a single-parent family is preferable to a violent nuclear one, presenting Dexter as both a defender and saviour of misunderstood youth. Similarly, in ‘Circle of Friends’

(1.7), whilst searching for teenage murderer Jeremy Downs, Dexter visits a half-way house for young offenders where an inhabitant reveals that drug use and prostitution for money is common and acceptable behaviour for the young people involved. This scene shows youths as vulnerable and abandoned by the judicial and rehabilitation system, reflecting contemporary concerns and attitudes surrounding such issues, a theme that is revisited in 'Do You See What I See?' (7.11), when Hannah and Arlene (Nicole LaLiberte) recount how they poisoned a youth worker after he sexually abused them. Discussions of America's youth incarceration and rehabilitation services by Raynor & Robinson, as being unable to deal effectively and fairly with youth offenders, align with critical depictions of such systems in the show (2009: pp.98-99). Engaging further with extended debates surrounding youth and violence, however, and exemplifying *Dexter's* often contrary position, youths are often shown to be synonymous with a culture of violence. In 'Popping Cherry', for example, Jeremy purchases a knife from a street seller and can hardly contain his excitement to use it, almost stabbing Dexter. However, the seller tells Dexter, "Sorry about that boss, I only sell 'em!" suggesting an absolution of responsibility. The scene is followed by a flashback of Harry teaching Dexter how to shoot and, importantly, he states: "Killing must serve a purpose otherwise it's just plain murder." Such dialogue suggests a confrontation surrounding the perpetuation of violent culture from old to young, an inclusion in the show that aligns with current and on-going debates over violence and young people in contemporary America. Supporting this, Grossman & DeGaetano argue that youth attitudes to violence are increasingly damaging American society, and significantly blame popular culture for this shift (1999: pp.2-3). Whilst this theme and that of violent culture will be fully explored in Chapter Two, such representations are evermore significant in the modern era as issues like school shootings, gun control debates, and growing youth violence become increasingly prevalent causes for concern in American society.

### **Responsive and Persistent Forms of Crime**

Emphasising the relationship between society and crime, theorists such as Brown, Gurr and Madison assert that crime is often directly responsive to social upheaval, change and instability where vigilantism is subsequently present. For example, Brown writes about how the Cherokee War of 1758 caused destabilisation in the Carolinas due to the mass destruction of life and property in the region, and due to the traumatic effects of war. As a result of this, war-ravaged and brutalised outlaw gangs formed in -and were attracted to- the region, causing a large increase in crimes such as robbery, rape and assault (p.72). With this in mind, not only are criminals a threat to the structure of society, as Brown's discussion makes clear, but they are also largely responsive to societal conditions in the first place. Abrahams writes that levels of crime increase in response to perceived failures and inequalities in society (p.9). Conversely, Gurr writes at length about how violent crime in American history has been largely influenced by the 'changing socio-economic status of immigrants and Afro-Americans' (p.39). Similar to the aforementioned opinions of Neely, this reveals a rather conservative tendency in American society, still evident today, to blame immigrants and minority groups for rising crime rates. With this in mind, Gurr makes clear that there is a tendency for crime to be affected by social conditions and changes, and attributes a related crime flux following the development of ghettos and slums due to the movement of black people from rural to urban regions during the nineteenth century (pp.40-41). Offering a more objective reading of the effects of social change on crime, Madison discusses how crimes have arisen or become more prominent in response to developments of rural, frontier, urban and suburban life. For example, he argues that crimes like vandalism and house-breakings became more widespread in 1950s and 1960s suburbia due to alienated juvenile gangs (p.113). This example makes clear that crimes, and society's perception of them, can arise, shift and respond to a whole range of social conditions and changes.

In *Dexter*, the majority of Dexter's victims' crimes are extremely violent and bloody, and almost always end with gruesome murders. Whilst not obviously based on real crimes *per se*, their inclusion reflects heightened incidences of violent crime in America. A brief overview of Dexter's main antagonists throughout the eight seasons reflects America's fascination with violent crimes and suggests that they respond to social conditions and target society's vulnerable. For example, Brian Moser primarily dismembers his prostitute victims after sexual intercourse before leaving their mutilated body parts on display in public places, whilst George King targets vulnerable youths, torturing his victims for hours for information before strangling them. Offering a critique of ideological tools and attitudes, Arthur Mitchell presents extreme violence within the family, as he murders a symbolic family over and over again with a different means of killing each of his victims. Similarly, the crimes surrounding self-entitled alpha-male entrepreneur Jordan Chase and the 'Barrel Girl' murders range from abduction, torture, rape and sexual degradation before eventual death by electrocution. Finally, the 'Doomsday Killers' target those perceived to be immoral, displaying their victims in public in grotesque biblical tableaux designed to herald Armageddon. From this, it is evident that there is a relative overlap between 'old' and 'new' types of crime, and that some forms of crime in American history, such as cattle rustling, have been supplanted in the show by more recent crimes, such as the trade in illegal immigrants. With this in mind, representations of crime in *Dexter* will be necessarily generalised into two groups of those that have been consistent in America's history, such as organised crime and smuggling rings, to those that have become increasingly prevalent and of focus in the modern day, such as sex crimes and paedophilia. Bagley & Rosen chart shifts and changes in contemporary American crime, supporting this assertion (2015). Whilst such a separation is obviously artificial, it does align with Brown's discussions of 'old' rural and frontier vigilantism and 'new' urban vigilantism as being responsive to different and emerging social conditions and forms of crime. Brown acknowledges this shift as 'the extension of vigilantism from its preoccupation with the problem of frontier disorder to an ill-starred attempt

to deal with the problems of emergent, modern, urban America.' (p.94). Thus old and new crimes need to be viewed together.

With this in mind and deriving from the key antagonists in *Dexter* as outlined above, older or long-standing forms of crime, such as organised crime, are a recurring feature in the show. Organised crime is one that has evolved throughout America's history, from the cattle rustling gangs of the frontier, to Depression era gangsters and through to modern-day European sex-traffickers, an observation that is supported by Howard Abadinsky's work on the progression of organised crime from America's past to its present (2013). In 'Crocodile' (1.2) for instance, Cuban crime boss Carlos Guerrero (Rudolf Martin) is involved in smuggling drugs, murder, police corruption and bribery. Similarly, Little Chino (Matt Willig) and his Latino gang the Twenty Ninth Street Kings are accused of drug trafficking, money laundering and murder in 'It's Alive!' (2.1). Following on from this, international organised crime also features heavily throughout Season Seven through the depiction of the Ukrainian Mafia, the 'Koshka Brothers'. The gang are shown to be involved in numerous crimes, such as the exploitation of women and prostitution at a Koshka run strip club in 'Are You..?' (7.1), and bribery and evidence tampering as they bribe and force Quinn to destroy evidence in the case against Isaak Serko in 'Do the Wrong Thing' (7.6). They are also shown to exploit and murder vulnerable immigrants when they force an innocent and devoted family-man to confess to a murder and commit suicide in 'Run' (7.4). The brothers are even shown to be at war with other organised crime factions, such as with the Colombians in 'Swim Deep' (7.5), reflecting contemporary anxieties surrounding gang warfare. Villar & Cottle (2011) argue that Colombian gangs cause the greatest concern in middle-class America nowadays; the show can be seen to engage with this concern. What is of note about such depictions is that they all invoke stereotypes of immigrants as involved with organised crime and mob activity. However, the show merely presents such themes and attitudes rather than condemning them, inviting debate. Such varied depictions clearly engage with America's history of mob and organised crime, such as Europeans capitalising on Depression and Prohibition-era gambling and racketeering, and

more recently depicts South American involvement in the drug industry (Abadinsky, *Ibid.*). As such, *Dexter* can be seen to reflect and engage with various aspects of modern American life, whilst providing a back-drop for Dexter's vigilante activities.

Whilst such representations of immigrants in *Dexter* are often negative, they are not always necessarily as straight-forward or as condemning as they first appear. For instance, Isaak is ultimately presented as understanding violence and the human condition. He is shown in a sympathetic light through the revelation in 'Argentina' (7.8) that his crimes are motivated by love and revenge for his murdered male lover, Viktor Baskov (Enver Gjokaj). This relationship is made clear when he explains to Dexter that, "You took from me the one thing that power and money can't bring back." Further complicating reductive stereotypes common in American history, society and culture, Isaak joins forces with Dexter, and is eventually killed by fellow mob member George in 'Helter Skelter', before Dexter places him in the ocean alongside his dead lover's remains. As such, the two men are shown to have reached an understanding about each other's violent nature, and are equally united by their respective 'code' of conduct. Again suggesting the wider representation of such themes in *Dexter*, the eventual mutual respect shown between Isaak and Dexter avoids condemnation of immigrant crimes, and does not present them in black and white. Thus the show's interrogatory nature is underscored.

Further demonstrating how *Dexter* engages with American history, other 'old' crimes such as religious vigilantism are used in the show to reflect a shift in contemporary values and morals. Such representations can be seen through 'Doomsday Killers' (DDK) Dr Gellar and Travis as they target those who they perceive to be perpetuating immoral and undesirable lifestyles. Whilst religiously-motivated vigilantism and DDK will be discussed in depth later in this chapter, it is still of note that the pair's victims engage in 'crimes' that are perceived by DDK to be immoral. For example, a sexually promiscuous woman is targeted in 'A Horse of a Different Color', a drunken party-girl is attacked in 'The Angel of Death' (6.5), and Miami Metro's Police Department itself is targeted in 'Ricochet Rabbit' (6.10) for attempting to intervene. Groups in

America's past, such as the South Carolina Regulators and The White Caps, all shifted their focus from obvious criminals to society's 'immoral'. Brown writes that such groups 'had often been concerned with the moral regulation of incorrigible whites' (p.25); this highlights the overtly subjective nature of vigilantism and its tendency to infringe upon the rights of others and alternate moral worldviews. Crimes that have led to vigilante activity throughout America's history are clearly represented in *Dexter*. Their complex and nuanced presentation demonstrates how the show engages with such themes in varied and imaginative ways, inviting debate on topical issues through the prism of vigilantism.

Whilst crime is wide-spread in contemporary society, and thus difficult to ascertain in terms of its effects on individuals, Barash & Lipton discuss at length its traumatic effects and subsequent redirected aggression (2011: pp.3-24). *Dexter* mediates this problem by presenting victimhood and the effects of contemporary crime. This is evident throughout the show and further encourages the audience to question the legitimacy of Dexter's vigilante acts, even encouraging them to empathise in some situations. For instance, in 'Dexter', Dexter breaks into snuff-killer Jamie Jaworski's (Ethan Smith) house and finds internet videos he has made depicting extremely violent sexual abuse towards women. Dexter, and the audience, sees brief shots of the videos, enough to confirm that Jaworski is in them. The destructive nature of Jaworski's crime is emphasised through a picture of his victim, smiling happily with her young family. Dexter's inner monologue highlights the extensive effects of the crime by explaining how the woman's murder has "left her children traumatised and without a mother." As such, in suggesting the devastating effects of murder on vulnerable children, Jaworski's crime is presented as an attack on society's most innocent and the social institution which is supposed to protect them. It also alludes to Dexter's own traumatic experience, recalling his childhood status as a victim of male violence. Similarly in 'Are We There Yet?' (8.8), Dexter's neighbour and his babysitter Jamie Batista's (Aimee Garcia) friend Cassie (Bethany Joy Lenz) is found savagely beaten to death. The camera situates the body as a focal point in the room and in graphic detail: blood pools around the victim's head as her lifeless eyes stare out from a bloodied, beaten face. Cas-



sie's new boyfriend interrupts the scene in tears, as does Jamie. Thus the traumatic effects of crime are made clear and are continued after the scene through the latter. For instance, Jamie is fearful of the proximity of the attack, suggested as she seeks sanctuary with her boyfriend Quinn and then her brother Batista. Dexter also looks at Jamie, now sad, pale and clearly troubled by the murder, as he thinks, "I forget the impact murder has on real people." This also suggests Dexter's own 'out of touch' nature, as whilst he uses vigilantism as a justification and guiding principle for his own actions, it also appears a rather abstract principle to him, emphasising the complex nature of the show.

Sex crimes also feature in *Dexter* in various ways and draw on a prevalent contemporary concern. Indeed, in recent years critical discourse surrounding sexual violence and sex crimes has become increasingly prolific, and writers such as Ackerman & Furman (2015), Goel & Goodmark (2015) and Pat Brown (2012) all point to patriarchal ideologies and masculine notions of primacy and entitlement as major sites of concern. The presentation of women, prostitutes and other sex workers as targets for criminals and murderers in 'Shrink Wrap', 'Circle Us' and 'Are You...?', has already been discussed. However, topically prevalent and controversial sex crimes are also depicted in the show. This can be seen through the character of paedophile Nathan Marten (Jason Kaufman) in 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight'. Dexter notices Marten, a convicted child sex offender, talking to and photographing Astor at the beach, and is instantly concerned by his predatory behaviour. Although Marten has not killed anyone and does not fit the Code of Harry, Dexter perceives him to be a threat. Whilst investigating Marten to ascertain the extent of this threat, Dexter finds him viewing pictures of Astor in his home. A sense of intrusion is thus created, prompting Dexter to kill him. Dexter states: "You've stepped uninvited into my world, and that's a place where I decide who gets to live, and who doesn't. Nobody hurts my children." Such dialogue invokes contemporary concerns surrounding child abuse and murder and justification for his actions. Pat Brown writes about how, following many high-profile cases of child abduction, murder and paedophilia and in response to an increase of sexual violence against women in America over the last decade, public concern with such crimes

has increased ten-fold, causing a subsequent rise in retaliatory and defensive behaviour (pp.193-245). Similarly presenting contemporary concerns and attitudes surrounding sex-offenders within local communities, 'First Blood' (5.5) follows Lumen as she tries to find and exact revenge upon her rapists. Identifying a paroled sex-offender who she believes to have been involved, Lumen follows him to Tuttle Bridge and prepares to shoot him, before Dexter stops her and points out that it could not have been him because of his ankle tag and parole limits within the city; this tension is accentuated by the show's replication of a real-life Miami problem zone setting, Tuttle Bridge, which underscores the show's ability to reflect and engage with 'real life' issues.<sup>18</sup> Such an inclusion engages with modern debates surrounding the reintegration of sex offenders within local communities, and with themes of potential mistaken identity in vigilante responses to such cases. To support this claim, examples of vigilantes attacking suspected sex offenders in recent American history include the 2009 attack on a suspected paedophile in Philadelphia by his neighbours.<sup>19</sup> Such inclusions in *Dexter* suggest an attempt to reflect wider attitudes surrounding crimes and their public perception.

Sexual violence from males towards other men is also depicted as a more prevalent contemporary crime in *Dexter* in line with the evolving status and changing perceptions of sexuality and of sexual behaviours. This is evident in 'Everything Is Illuminated' (5.6) as gay serial killer Lance Robinson (Chad Allen) kills his victims during extreme sex acts. Similarly in 'What's Eating Dexter Morgan?' (8.3), Dexter kills gay cannibal killer Ron Galuzzo (Andrew Elvis Miller) on finding various body parts marinating around Galuzzo's house. Whilst such representations obviously allude to both real *and* fictional serial killers, such as Ted Bundy and Hannibal Lector, such inclusions are relatively minor. Nonetheless, their presence suggests an all-inclusive approach to

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<sup>18</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/sex-offenders-live-miami-bridge/story?id=8420696>  
 Jeffrey Kofman, Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, 'Sex Offenders Live in Village Under Miami Bridge'. Accessed 09/10/13.  
<http://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/Bridge-Sex-Offenders-to-Be-Moved-Tonight-86419182.html>  
 Jessica Sick & Todd Wright, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, 'Last of Bridge Sex Offenders to be Moved Tonight: Julia Tuttle Residents Finally Getting the Boot'. Accessed 02/10/13.

<sup>19</sup> [www.newser.com](http://www.newser.com), <http://www.newser.com/story/60893/philly-neighbors-beat-man-wanted-for-child-rape.html>  
 Ali Ambreen, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, 'Philly Neighbours Beat Man Wanted For Child Rape'. Accessed 15/12/2012

depictions of vigilantism in the show that does not otherwise persecute or victimise a particular demographic or sector of society. In line with other shifting societal attitudes, some female serial killers and murderesses in *Dexter* are also presented as desiring to escape the confines of traditional gender rigidity and patriarchal expectations. This is explored through the character of aforementioned policewoman Zoe Kruger in 'Dex Takes a Holiday', when she becomes Dexter's target after he discovers that she murdered her family to escape her responsibilities to it. The depiction of woman as threatening and deadly is most overtly displayed through the character of Lila West (Jaime Murray) and her destructive crimes. For instance, she is a pyromaniac responsible for the deaths of several people, as she admits killing her junkie boyfriend in 'The Dark Defender' (2.5), and in 'Left Turn Ahead' (2.11) she murders Doakes and falsely accuses Batista of rape. Then in the final episode of the series, 'The British Invasion' (2.12), she attempts to murder Dexter, Astor and Cody in a fire, kidnapping and trapping them inside. With this in mind, the presentation of crime in *Dexter* responds to contemporary fears and attitudes and can be seen to confront these themes in an open and engaging manner.

### **Law Enforcement and the Judicial System**

Brown, Madison and Abrahams all agree that a major factor behind the appearance of vigilante activity in American history is absent, ineffectual or corrupt systems of law and order. However, the matter is much more complex than first appears. It is of note that major advancements in America's policing history emerged alongside and responded to violent and turbulent events, such as urban riots in New York circa 1830-1850 (Brown, 1975: p.19). Such events have prompted developments in law enforcement and justice systems that are recognisable in modern police states, aligning advancements in policing with social incidents that are rooted in violence. This makes clear that crime, state developments, vigilantism and law enforcement are intrinsically linked to each other in a dyadic relationship that is often difficult to distinguish apart, highlighting the complex, ambiguous forms and manners in which vigilantism can arise. Vigilantism has also responded to different forms and levels of 'lawlessness' or perceived prob-

lems and inefficiencies within the state at any given point in America's history. For example, Brown writes about how America's readiness to employ vigilantism as a means to combat crime and other issues has derived specifically from frontier life, stating that, 'Vigilantism arose in response to a typical American problem: The absence of effective law and order in the frontier region.' (p.22) As such, the presence of vigilantism can be specifically related to instances where law is wholly absent, and yet this mentality has been proven to persist in American history at times when law and judicial forces are present. Indeed, one must acknowledge preceding forms of vigilantism and their responses to a perceived lack of official interest in combating banditry, crime and outlaws, and/or inability to respond to high levels of crime. Brown argues that groups such as the San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1856 responded to corrupt and criminal politicians and law agencies during the urbanisation of America, for instance (p.22). Nevertheless, it must be stressed that vigilantism often occurs when there is no apparent lawful or judicial problems, an aspect of America's historical vigilantism that *Dexter* also confronts in Dexter's regular interception of criminals from Miami Metro simply so he can enjoy the kill; this is most apparent in his dealings with Arthur Mitchell in Season Four.

Clarifying the relationship between vigilantism and law enforcement bodies, Abrahams argues that when vigilantism occurs, it signals problems in the state and in its capabilities to deal with crimes and provide sufficient means and modes of 'justice' to offenders and victims (p.3). Cusac also supports Abrahams' claims that vigilantism has been invoked repeatedly to answer perceived problems, changes or weaknesses in the effectiveness of the state. She explains how a reduction in official hangings, and their movement to private indoor galleries, prompted an increase in public floggings and lynching as American citizens wanted to see corporal and capital punishment and 'justice' carried out (p.94). Cusac's example draws attention to the fact that vigilantism is highly subjective and is often very personalised to individual experiences and perceptions of crime. It also suggests that the American people *enjoy* watching others in pain and being punished for apparent transgressions, indicating a somewhat barbarous and macabre relationship with life, death and torture. Moreover, vigilantism regularly surpasses the

functions of law and order, suggesting an American tendency that Brown identifies as a 'need to right insufferable wrongs' that can also be regarded as a form of violent extremism (p.33). This highlights the paradoxical relationship between justice and the use of vigilantism in America's history. As Abrahams points out, 'vigilantes often see themselves as breaking the law in order to respect it'. (p.153) Vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the New York Guardian Angels employ vigilantism for different purposes and in differing ways. For example, the Guardian Angels are a multicultural group that patrol and prevent violent crimes on New York's subways merely by creating an open and visible group presence, while the all-white Klan focus on maintaining America's 'white-ness', under the sinister cloak of anonymity (Lab, 2010: pp.214-215). However, they both view their actions as just and as pertaining to wider notions of upholding laws and inherited values, attitudes and traditions.

A further feature of law enforcement and vigilantism surrounds perceived inabilities of official agencies to deal with new or emergent crimes and social conditions. For example, Mark M. Haller uses the Prohibition era to exemplify how police forces were ill-equipped to deal with bootlegging and its subsequent violence, explaining how Prohibition ushered in a new era of police corruption and manipulation of legal processes (Gurr, 1989: pp.146-162). Representations of law enforcement and its relationship with vigilantism are extensive in the show, and are both interrogatory and engaging. In *Dexter*, failures of policing and law enforcement cause vigilantism to manifest in several different ways. Initially, Dexter's vigilante acts are presented as a result of Miami Metro's inability to deal effectively with contemporary crime. In 'Dexter' for example, Dexter explains that his colleagues are the, "Salt of the earth, these people, and they work hard. But with the solve rate for murders at about twenty percent, Miami is a great place for me." As such, the inability of law enforcement and the judicial system to deal with the high volume of crime is outlined, and is shown to justify -at least in the first instance- a *need* for Dexter's vigilante activity. Similarly in 'Let's Give the Boy a Hand', an antisocial neighbour laughs when Rita threatens to report her noisy, neglected dog to the police, stating that, "the cops'll tell me to keep him quiet and I'll say I will and then they'll leave and he'll go back to

doing what he does!"; this comment suggests that the public do not feel the police are an effective or threatening force against crime and antisocial behaviour. Indeed, Gina Robertiello writes extensively on the subject, and argues that public disillusionment with law enforcement and the legal system has grown significantly in the post-9/11 era (2004: pp.137-138). Thus the show reflects a range of public attitudes surrounding the effectiveness of law enforcement that seemingly justify or facilitate Dexter's actions. These actions are left up to the viewer to mediate and internalise.

Incompetent policing is also a consistent theme in *Dexter*. The most overt example of this is the fact that Dexter works alongside colleagues at Miami Metro who have no idea of his vigilante activities. This fact is acknowledged by Dexter in 'Dexter' as he points out that "Doakes, in a building full of cops [is] the only one that gets the creeps from me". Thus the police force are effectively ridiculed, yet are contrasted against Dexter's deceptive nature, forcing the viewer to question the actions and effects of both Dexter and his police colleagues. This theme is returned to in 'Morning Comes' (2.8) as Miami Metro finally realise that they have a killer in their midst, but still fail to realise that Dexter is the culprit. Worse still, the incompetence of the police is addressed by Forensic Specialist Vincent Masuka (C.S. Lee), who points out that Doakes, wrongfully thought to be the 'Bay Harbour Butcher', was under their noses the whole time. The fact that the audience knows that they still have the wrong suspect underscores the irony of his comments and highlights the force's major failure to combat these serious crimes, whilst wrongfully placing the blame on an innocent man instead. Police incompetence manifests in many different ways in *Dexter*. In 'Shrink Wrap', the failure of police to notice that three female suicide victims had all been treated by the same therapist is noticed by Dexter, who then finds and kills the perpetrator. Similarly, in 'Everything Is Illuminated', when the homicide division are confronted with a bizarre crime scene, they overlook all the actual evidence whilst Masuka instead enacts a wildly imaginative and absurd sex scene to explain the positions of the two male victims they find. Again in 'Teenage Wasteland', whilst filing away paperwork, Debra accidentally finds a DNA report implicating other suspects in the crime that

was missed after the Barrel Girls case was closed. Further highlighting the incompetence of police to explore all aspects of a crime, and positioning the force as routinely incompetent and insufficient throughout the show, Dexter kills two ambulance drivers who killed patients so they could harvest their body parts in 'Those Kinds Of Things' (6.1); they evaded detection after only the doctor selling the parts was arrested, so Dexter is driven to intervene. Such varied representations invite the viewer to consider the relationship between law and vigilantism in a wider context.

Procedural failings, which Robertiello claims cause many crimes in American society to go unsolved and unpunished, also present a major aspect of ineffectual law and judicial processes in *Dexter* (Ibid., p.254). In 'Dexter' for instance, Dexter explains of his intended victim Jaworski that "his lawyer got him off on a faulty search warrant. It's a good thing I don't bother with them." He then breaks into Jaworski's house and finds the damning evidence he needs. As such, Dexter's vigilante actions are shown to respond to procedural failings and answer them, so whilst the show never definitively aligns with a particular opinion about vigilantism, it explores these subjects by dealing with them in controversial and challenging ways. Similarly, in 'There's Something About Harry' (2.10), Harry is shown to be distressed that a suspect has been released due to a faulty warrant. This is made clear as he angrily shouts, "[the killer is] gonna walk, because of a goddamn typo?" before turning to Dexter to tell him, "I did the right thing in training you." Even Matthews tells Dexter in this episode that "the system doesn't always work. Sometimes they get away; you know that." From this, it is made clear in *Dexter* that even those responsible for upholding the law do not feel the system is fully effective in fighting crime, again validating Robertiello's argument, this time from a law enforcement perspective (p.130). The stance of Harry and Matthews also denotes disillusionment within the force by colluding implicitly with police vigilantism in turning a blind eye to system failures. An example of procedural failings merging with police brutality on the show occurs in 'Run' (7.4), as despite a confession to a crime from vicious murderer Ray Speltzer (Matt Gerald), police brutality during his arrest violated his legal rights and so he is set free. The audience is shown

footage confirming that his Miranda Rights were not verbally confirmed properly because he was barely conscious, and LaGuerta subsequently yells: "The judge threw his confession out of court!" It is of note that LaGuerta is more concerned with procedural failings than at the extra-legal actions of her staff, suggesting a structural acceptance of aggression, brutality and vigilante tendencies within the police force itself. This inclusion is quite striking from a modern day perspective with its connotations surrounding police brutality and extra-legal punishment, which are becoming increasingly newsworthy topics in contemporary American life due to its almost institutionalised status. However, the system is also seen on occasion to be protecting the innocent – or rather, it would do if Dexter did not routinely take justice into his own hands, such as in the murder of Jonathan Farrow (Greg Ellis), an abuser of women, yet innocent of murder in 'Slack Tide' (4.6). Thus the show again resists coming down on the side of either law or vigilantism, but explores the tensions between the two by constantly offering contrary positions for the audience to consider.

Often in *Dexter*, laws themselves are depicted as being insufficient to deal effectively with crime. This is evident in 'Crocodile' as Dexter points out a flaw in the criminal records system of not including crimes that may have been committed out of state. Again, such depictions chime with wider discussions by Robertiello concerning lawful and legal failings in relation to crime and prosecutions between and across different states (pp.265-267). This leads his suspect Matt Chambers (Sam Trammell) to avoid detection for other crimes. Dexter suggests that ineffectual inter-state laws mean that "the good people of Florida only went as far as validating their own assumptions that Matt Chambers is a Florida bad guy." Subsequently, the serial drink-driver was free to keep killing so long as he kept moving to another state, identifying a flawed system for detecting criminal activity in other regions. Thus the show can be viewed as somewhat critical of the laws and legal oversights that facilitate murder and vigilantism. Similarly, in 'Our Father' (3.1), Dexter describes the freedom of murderer Freebo (Mike Erwin) as a product of failed judicial process and criticises Florida's "catch and release" programme, calling it "a state police screw-up". Dexter later tells Freebo in 'Finding Freebo' (3.2) that he is about



to die because he escaped legal justice. With this in mind, *Dexter* appears to suggest that law and order is not really very effective at capturing and punishing the most dangerous criminals of all - serial killers and repeat offenders. Whilst this does not necessarily justify Dexter's use of vigilantism to the viewer, it does encourage them to consider the issues raised by his acts. Following on from this, insufficient or unenforced sentences are also presented as an issue in the show. In 'Return To Sender' (1.6), the early release of abusive husband Paul from prison is shown to have a very distressing effect on Rita, who cries as she tells Dexter, "He's already out of jail, overcrowding, can you believe it?" Rita's children are also shown to be distressed by this news, as an anxious and withdrawn Astor wets her bed, while Cody gets into fights at school. The effects of insufficient sentencing on families is also made clear in 'An Inconvenient Lie' as the son of one of Dexter's victims angrily tells Debra about his abusive father: "When he'd go to prison it was a blessing, but you kept letting him out." Incorporating issues such as these position Dexter's vigilantism as responding directly to weak laws, poor cross-border co-operation, and insufficient sentencing procedures, thus providing the conditions that encourage a retaliatory alternative to existing law and order, which is depicted as incapable of protecting the families and/or victims of offenders.

Other notable failings or ineffectual aspects of law and order that engage with the ambiguous position of vigilantism in American history in *Dexter* include the presentation of the judicial system as unfair and perpetuating notions of victimhood. In 'Seeing Red' (1.10) for instance, the roles of victim and criminal are reversed as, after hitting Paul in self-defence after he turns up drunk and tries to rape her, Rita is charged with assault. The audience have already been informed of the extent of Paul's abusive behaviour towards Rita, which Dexter describes have left her "broken" in 'Dexter'. However, she now risks losing her children because she fought back. Thus the viewer is encouraged to sympathise with Rita by witnessing her frail emotional state and fear as Paul attacks her. Rita's treatment by the police and judicial system appears very unfair, encouraging the viewer to consider wider issues associated with domestic abuse and self-defence. These related issues will be discussed further in Chapter Two. In another

manipulation of the law and order process, brutal murderer Little Chino effectively triumphs over the legal system in 'Waiting to Exhale' (2.2) by obtaining a lawyer and exploiting judicial loopholes as he files for harassment against Miami Metro. Likewise, in a later series Miguel tells Dexter in 'Turning Biminese' (3.5) that a suspect has escaped justice because he could afford a costly "legal dream team", showing how the law itself can be subverted by wealth, influence and clever lawyers, even if someone is actually guilty. These examples of failures of justice establish the contexts against which Dexter's (and Miguel's) vigilante actions then take place.

A major contemporary theme that prompts Dexter's vigilantism in *Dexter* appears through the depiction of police corruption and brutality, which foregrounds vigilantism by presenting it as a response to a fundamentally broken system. Given the rising primacy of debates surrounding police corruption and brutality over recent years, the show's inclusion of these themes is controversial but highly important. Corruption and brutality towards criminals and suspects features early on in *Dexter*, such as in 'Crocodile' when a corrupt cop, bought off by crime lord Guerrero, viciously stabs a suspect-turned-witness to death in prison. The character of Quinn most effectively explores the theme of police corruption, showing the modern cop to be morally compromised and self-motivated. In 'Our Father', Quinn is shown to be under investigation by Internal Affairs, accused of being corrupt, and in 'The Damage a Man Can Do' (3.8), he is exposed for using criminal informant Anton illegally. Quinn later admits that he arrested Anton for drug offences and blackmailed him into becoming an informant, but never filed the paperwork, meaning that he could use Anton indefinitely, but illegally. These examples of police corruption highlight the tensions between criminality (represented by Anton) and the law (Quinn), showing the two roles to be comparable and interchangeable. Indeed, Quinn's exploitation of Anton for a marijuana offence appears a shocking abuse of power that Debra quickly rectifies. Worse still, Dexter sees Quinn stealing money from a victim's safe at a crime scene in 'Remains to Be Seen' (4.2), who then becomes angry when Dexter labels him a dirty cop. Quinn's corrupt activities are again prominent in 'Swim Deep' after George Novikov confirms Quinn's habitually

corrupt nature. He says about Quinn that: "We could leave a bag of cash in his car and he'd do whatever we asked," before he then offers Quinn a bribe which he accepts. Furthermore, in 'Do the Wrong Thing', Quinn is blackmailed into destroying evidence against Isaak which will secure the release of the vicious killer from prison. Rather than seeking the help of his colleagues, Quinn carries out the task unseen and lies to Batista about his actions. As such, Quinn is shown to be as morally dubious as Dexter, underscoring tensions between legal and illegal activities, and inviting comparisons between the two. Nevertheless, Quinn's reluctance and sorrow at misleading his colleagues in this way makes the audience resist outright condemnation of his actions. Indeed, Quinn seems to be torn between his 'good' and 'bad' nature in a manner comparable to Dexter, albeit on a much lesser scale.

The abuse of power and resources is a constant theme in *Dexter* and appears in a variety of ways. In 'Waiting to Exhale' for example, Pascal uses department resources to obtain the phone records of her boyfriend, who she believes to be cheating. Similarly, in 'See-Through', Pascal forces Masuka to DNA test a blouse for evidence of another woman, clearly interfering with Masuka's huge workload and undermining effective police work. Other characters also routinely misuse department resources for personal reasons, such as Batista in 'Go Your Own Way', who asks Dexter to run evidence from a key for him "off the books" after his girlfriend is attacked. In the subsequent episode 'I Had a Dream' (3.11), after reprimanding Dexter for helping Batista, LaGuerta asks Dexter to run a forensics report against Miguel, suggesting that rules of conduct are also abused by the leaders who are supposed to ensure rules are kept. Even Masuka misuses departmental resources to carry out background checks on a woman he likes in this episode, suggesting a routine abuse of department facilities for personal means by all who work there. All of this indicates a culture of entitlement and resource abuse that characterises law enforcement officials and their relationship with the workplace. Such inclusions, however seemingly petty, still chime with the public's views that law enforcement is less than desirable and a waste of tax-payers' money. Robertiello argues that this viewpoint is a prevalent opinion in contemporary America (p.31). Thus *Dexter's* ability to reflect and engage with

wider debates and public concerns, whilst portraying the responsive nature of vigilantism to these issues, is underscored.

With all of the above key themes in mind, *Dexter* confronts the viewer with many pressing and obvious extremes and ambiguities surrounding vigilantism, and this continues through the entire show. In the final season's closing episode 'Remember the Monsters?' (8.12), environmental upheaval is presented by the inclusion of a tropical storm scene -ironically named Laura (after Dexter's mother) which alludes to the traumatic experiences in Dexter's early life- and a security threat that cuts electrical power, leading public buildings to be abandoned and causing mayhem and confusion throughout Miami. Multiple crimes are evident throughout the closing episode, depicting terrorism, kidnapping, torture and murder against the social upheaval of the storm. The shortcomings of law enforcement are also underscored through the fact that, after Oliver Saxon (Darri Ingolfsson) attacks Debra in 'Monkey in a Box' (8.11), Dexter is allowed into the interrogation room with Saxon alone in 'Remember the Monsters' (8.12), suggesting serious procedural violations and oversights. Moreover, after having just witnessed Dexter kill Saxon, Batista lets him simply walk out of the building to disappear into exile without being arrested or charged. These activities highlight failures of police and judicial procedures and are presented as recurring themes throughout the show's entire run.

### **Part Two: Manifestations of Vigilantism in *Dexter***

Following on from discussions of the representation of causal factors behind vigilantism in *Dexter*, the next section will focus on various manifestations of vigilantism in the show to demonstrate how historical themes surrounding the topic are presented, drawing specifically on the seminal works of Madison (1973) and Brown (1975). The start of this chapter makes clear that Brown and Madison's works are crucial to approaching vigilantism in a more inclusive context in the modern day. Their approaches offer insight into the various ways in which vigilantism can occur and identify how to make sense of such actions in a wider context,

and should be considered as crucial in analysing vigilantism in popular culture representations. With this in mind, five key areas of study have been derived from Madison and Brown's works to demonstrate the significance of vigilantism in relation to American identity. These include: geography and location; Brown's 'three-tier' social model; socially beneficial versus socially destructive vigilantism; racial, religious and political vigilantism; and family vendettas and blood feuds. Each approach will be outlined and then applied to *Dexter* in order to demonstrate how various aspects of vigilantism pertinent to American history are evident in the show.

The first area will focus on Madison's discussions of how vigilantism appears and manifests differently across rural, urban and suburban locations (pp.95-136). Due to the predominance of urban representations of vigilantism already analysed in the show, being that it is located and set in modern-day Miami, discussions here will draw on Madison's assertions surrounding both rural and suburban vigilantism to demonstrate how they appear in *Dexter* and reflect contemporary anxieties and conditions - while still drawing on historical notions of vigilantism. The second approach will be based on Brown's analysis of the 'three-tiered' community structure, and its relationship to group vigilantism as either socially beneficial or socially destructive throughout America's history. Whilst Dexter himself acts predominantly as a lone vigilante, with some notable exceptions, the notion of 'three-tier' group vigilantism will be looked at relative to the Prado brothers. The socially beneficial versus destructive elements of vigilantism will then be examined in greater detail in relation to vigilantism in *Dexter* as a whole; this will form the third key area of study. The fourth area identified in Madison's work will focus on some of the wider themes surrounding vigilantism and its various historical manifestations: his analyses of racial, religious and political vigilantism in the American past will be applied to modern American life as represented in the show. Vigilantism provides a prism through which these pressing social themes and attitudes can be examined in relation to each other. The final area of discussion derives from Brown's analysis of family vendettas and blood feuds, which focus specifically on the retaliatory and revenge-driven nature of

vigilantism in family feuds, and between warring Prohibition-era gangsters and contemporary urban gangs. It should be emphasised at this point that these five areas have many overlaps and that these inter-related realms should be considered and seen alongside one another, rather than being seen as purely distinct or separate themes in themselves.

### **Geography and Landscape**

Geographical themes discussed in this section derive from Madison's assertion that places available for American people to live across the country 'have narrowed and are now more sharply defined as rural, suburban, or urban - and these, by their very natures, have sometimes produced problems that lead to vigilantism.' (p.92) One can assume that the social conditions and crimes that cause vigilantism in rural and suburban areas, whilst retaining some commonalities, are somewhat different to those found in urban locations, and that the response of vigilantism in each also varies accordingly. The first half of this chapter has already discussed several of the urban themes behind vigilantism, such as the representations of social change, crime and law enforcement in Miami itself. Thus, the purpose of this section is to demonstrate how vigilantism in *different* geographical locations and landscapes also appear in *Dexter*, specifically in relation to rural and suburban vigilantism. Further, and due to the persistence of vigilantism throughout America's history, one can also assume that there are further commonalities in vigilantism between America's past and present in any given geographical location. Supporting this claim, Madison writes:

'Although the environments and the [present] nature of the country's troubles may be different from those that gave rise to the vigilantism of America's past, similarities exist between the old and the new vigilantism - not only in the cause but in the purposes, as well.' (p.93)

As such, this section will focus on representations of rural and suburban vigilantism in *Dexter* using the assumption that some historical themes, such as a suspicion of outsiders, is still

common to rural life and are evident in the show, reflecting persistent features of rural vigilantism within a modern day setting. Other issues, such as suburban Neighborhood Watch schemes in the expansion of middle-class white America and suburbia due to a shifting workplace demographic from factories to offices, are much more responsive to modern American history. Supporting this observation, Lab writes that such schemes have arisen since the 1960s and have experienced a strong resurgence in the immediate post-9/11 era (pp.79-104). Thus, the following discussions will demonstrate how *Dexter* engages with these issues.

In discussing rural vigilantism, both past and present, Madison writes that, 'The social milieu today that most closely resembles nineteenth century America is the [circa 1970s] rural farm area.' (p.95). This comment suggests an almost natural continuation of vigilantism in rural regions, and presents a comparison between nineteenth century and 1970s rural vigilantism. Further, it also significantly implies that vigilantism is an indelible part of the rural lifestyle throughout American history. Madison identifies several key factors in rural life, such as being a predominantly agricultural economy, having high levels of self-employment and unemployment, and greater levels of respect for officials such as law enforcement officers in small town communities than is generally found in urban regions. Madison also argues that the primary feature of rural life that has repeatedly given rise to vigilantism is the suspicion of outsiders (pp.95-96); this particular aspect of the American past can be related to mob mentality, summary punishments and the regular use of guns to protect against perceived interlopers, highlighting controversial debates such as gun control and violent rural traditions. In relation to *Dexter*, rural vigilantism appears specifically in 'Nebraska' (6.7), when Dexter retreats to the countryside and encounters shady hotel owner Norm (Scott Michael Campbell). This episode reveals various features of rural and historical vigilantism.

In 'Nebraska', Dexter is 'accompanied' into the rural hinterlands of America by his deceased brother Brian, who is presented as a product of Dexter's psyche in this episode, a ghost-like manifestation similar to Dexter's dead father Harry. Brian's appearance signifies both the re-

surfacing of Dexter's primal urges and a removal from the restraining nature of urban society to the primitive nature of the rural wilderness. Emphasising this shift, and exacerbating tensions between 'civilisation' and the 'wilderness', Dexter steals a gun on his way to Nebraska, a weapon that signifies rural life and echoes notions of the historical Wild West. It is an unusual choice of weapon for Dexter, who never uses them in his vigilante acts; carrying a gun for protection inevitably invokes the Western genre. The irony of Dexter carrying a gun is his admission that "I don't even like guns!" before he randomly shoots at road signs in the manner of an outlaw, making clear that he feels free from social restraints outside of the urban context. Dexter's tendency to avoid guns is striking given their significance to American history and the constitutional right to bear arms, and their extensive use by vigilantes in the past. Dexter's use of a gun here is especially significant given the fact that he never uses them to kill, but clearly chooses to carry one when entering a rural setting, almost as if it is natural to do so. The notion of giving in to primal violent urges in the rural wilderness is emphasised further when Dexter returns to the city without the gun at the end of the episode, symbolically picking up Harry upon his re-entry to civilised and restrained society.

When Dexter meets Norm in 'Nebraska', it is revealed that he runs a hotel and garage, and also happens to grow marijuana illegally on his land; this reflects more recent shifts in agricultural life, which has prompted diversification from traditional to illegal crops as a means of securing a higher income (Stock, 1996: pp.9-10). It also again highlights the issues associated with marijuana and drug laws, debates that have become increasingly important in American society and politics over the last decade, as Bennett & White indicate (2005: p.3). Again, rather than condemning or condoning Norm's actions, such issues are presented neutrally and without comment, leaving the audience to decide for themselves where they stand on such issues. Noting the differences between rural and urban life, Norm comments that Miami is "a real sewer", which underscores contrasting perceptions of and between both regions. This tension is further acknowledged when Brian tells Dexter (as he attempts to break into a house, ironically extending urban crime into rural life), that "It's the mid-west! Nobody locks their



doors.” Significantly, Norm appears very wary of Dexter, and is shown watching the ‘outsider’ with suspicion. He also later steals Dexter’s knife-set, snoops in his car, attempts to blackmail Dexter for money and threatens him with a rifle, these becoming a catalyst for Dexter’s vigilante response. This act aligns with Madison’s observations surrounding recourse to vigilantism in rural regions (pp.95-95); Dexter stabs Norm to death with a pitchfork before dumping his body in a grain silo. The use of such weapons can be seen to invoke and play on imagery associated with rural mob mentality and traditions in American history; the fact that Dexter acted primarily out of self-defence on this occasion invokes aspects of ‘No Duty to Retreat’ and ‘Stand Your Ground’ laws (Brown, 1991: pp.3-11). Laws surrounding self-defence evolved from America’s rural and frontier past, and have characterised and informed gun debates in the present, as Brown makes clear (p.9). As Bryan says, “One could argue self-defence, maybe...”, allowing the viewer to consider the full implications of Dexter’s vigilante act, relative to rural notions of self-defence and natural justice.

Suburban life also features throughout *Dexter*, but is more specifically engaged with in the episode ‘Blinded by the Light’ (4.3). In regions that Madison rightly points out were once regarded as a symbol of white middle-class America, suburban decay is now rife (p.112), and this is apparent in *Dexter*. Crimes and themes common to urban locations, such as drugs, vandalism and burglary, are shown to be invading suburban life in the show; this upholds Madison’s claims that such crimes are increasingly common in suburban locations and, like in rural areas, they tend to prompt a communal, rather than an individual, vigilante response (p.113). In ‘Blinded by the Light’, the Neighbourhood Watch features prominently and is aligned with themes such as mob mentality, the targeting of society’s undesirables, and the protection of the individual, family and property. As such, citizen-led schemes are critiqued in the show, inviting the viewer to question their purpose and effects, and to view them as reflecting a wider societal engagement with *sanctioned* vigilante-like behaviour. For example, the local community unites in the episode when a vandal starts to damage property and cause a nuisance, leading Dexter to assume that the vandal is rebellious teen Jesse Brightman

(Matthew Fahey), the "neighbourhood shit-head." This assumption mirrors contemporary perceptions of youth as being a 'problem' demographic, and that they are to blame for social problems; Henry A. Giroux discusses this at length in relation to contemporary American life, offering a damning critique of contemporary American society and ideologies (2013). Challenging both Dexter and the viewer's assumptions, however, the vandal is revealed to be Jesse's father, Andy Brightman (J.C. MacKenzie). Recently bereaved and made redundant at work, Andy feels let down by society and frustrated at his current situation. This disillusionment is revealed when he explains to Dexter that, "I played by the rules my entire life, and look what it got me!", highlighting concerns regarding high unemployment and home repossessions, which Abramsky makes clear are major sources of anxiety in the post-9/11 era and following the 2008 economic crisis (2014: pp.18-20). Andy targets his "rich" neighbours, the privileged sector of society that continues to prosper and remain unaffected by the economic recession. Abramsky stresses that such a distinction, between those who have prospered and those who have not, is an increasing feature of American society (p.21). *Dexter* engages the viewer in such debates by presenting them as extremes and contradictions. Andy's expression of his misfortune and destitute circumstances also acts to expose that some 'criminals' are victims of society and circumstance, rather than simply being bad people.

Heightening the notion that Neighbourhood Watch schemes are sanctioned or legitimised versions of vigilantism, and underscoring tensions between legal and extra-legal realms, a policeman is present during a community meeting at Dexter and Rita's suburban house to instruct the newly-formed group on conduct. Stressing the purpose of such schemes, Bartels sets out specific requirements for non-aggressive crime deterrents (2015: p.76). Accordingly, the police officer at the meeting hands Dexter a whistle and a flashlight for "patrolling", telling him that, "your job is to watch and report. Watch and report," emphasising Neighbourhood Watch schemes as being passive, non-aggressive deterrents to crime in the local community. Madison claims that such schemes often respond to a culture of fear, and this is illustrated by the way Dexter's neighbours have already installed motion-sensitive security lights in all of the

local gardens and have arranged patrols for "every night of the week." This overzealous approach highlights the invasive and excessive nature of Neighbourhood Watch groups, and implies that a culture of fear and reactionary behaviours are created and encouraged by such schemes, a notion that Bartels also asserts (Ibid.). Similarly, after his garden gate is vandalised by the local nuisance, Dexter receives a letter "warning against the graffiti on your gate" from the Watch, requesting that it be repainted as soon as possible. This further critiques Neighbourhood Watch schemes by portraying them as controlling, oppressive and absurd. Moreover, inclusions like this invite the viewer to consider the socially damaging capabilities of such schemes, suggesting that the presentation of the Neighbourhood Watch as an alternate form of vigilantism in the show is ultimately shown to infringe on the rights of others in the community more than the actual vigilante, Dexter, does. As he states, "It's not the neighbourhood vandal I'm worried about: it's the Neighbourhood Watch!"

The alignment of Neighbourhood Watch schemes with vigilantism is particularly evident in 'Blinded by the Light', and confronts the viewer with comparative imagery that draws on the controversial historical and social implications of the subject. For example, Dexter's neighbour Elliot (Rick Peters) states that the Neighbourhood Watch: "Can't let 'em [criminals] steal our women now can we!" This plays on the phallogentric nature of vigilante activity and its claim to protect the patriarchal values of family and property, asserted by Brown to be socially conservative aspects of vigilantism (1975: p.4). It also recalls the 'mob' nature of vigilantism as depicted in *Birth of a Nation*, highlighting the primacy of male involvement in vigilantism, the gendered dimension of which will be more fully explored in Chapter Two. The episode also implies that Neighbourhood Watch schemes are an *excuse* for generally law-abiding citizens to take the law into their own hands. This is overtly suggested as Dexter admits via internal monologue that he intends to deal with the vandal himself: "Truth is I'm gonna do a little more than watch [...] the best I can do is scare a little sense into this kid." He then proceeds to wear a balaclava and stalk through the gardens at night looking for Jesse, recalling early Klan and 'night rider' activity. This also acts to momentarily separate Dexter's covert vigilante acts from

those that appear authorised. However, further exposing the tendency of those involved to take liberties with sanctioned forms of vigilantism, the Neighbourhood Watch group patrolling that night mistake Dexter for the vandal and chase him, yelling excitedly, "Hey! C'mon, it's the vandal! Get him!" As Dexter flees across the gardens he wryly notes, "It's watch and report assholes, not watch and chase!"; that this ironic observation follows Dexter's admission that he also does not just watch and report himself further invites the viewer to question the legitimacy of all types of vigilante activity, not just those supposedly passive forms, like Neighbourhood Watches as sanctioned by the state.

The alignment of Neighbourhood Watch schemes with vigilantism in the episode also engages with prejudices and viewpoints held by vigilantes like these; this is suggested when Dexter breaks into Jesse's room with the intention to: "Scare the shit outta you", but finds the innocent boy asleep. This intention to 'spook' Jesse also reflects the tactics of historical vigilantes, such as the first Klan and White Cappers, which Brown claims was a common feature of early vigilante movements (pp.24-25). As such, the set of assumptions that Dexter has about the misfit teen are shown to be as prejudiced as those of the Neighbourhood Watch-led community that Dexter himself is trying to blend into. Furthermore, Dexter then proceeds to employ scare-tactics to terrorise the real vandal, Andy, into ceasing his criminal activities. Dexter grabs the man roughly and tells him to, "Stop everything you've been doing. If you so much as touch another window I will come back here and I will leave with your head in a bag." Such harsh dialogue towards a man who has just explained his desperation and frustrations to Dexter, again confronts the viewer with attitudinal extremes, forcing them to consider Dexter's double-standards and his sudden assumption of a 'traditional' vigilante role in persecuting society's destitute and down-at-heel outsiders. Heightening this tension further, Dexter smashes the bright Neighbourhood Watch security lights in his neighbour's garden so he can continue his solo vigilante acts undisturbed. Thus, the contradictions of Neighbourhood Watch schemes are also exposed, encouraging the viewer to consider the legal and extra-legal implications of them by showing them to be more aggressive and vigilante-like in nature and

practice than they are meant to be in theory. These final examples expose the double-standards within community-led patrols, by making clear that Dexter's unauthorised vigilantism is really no different to the sanctioned vigilantism of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme, whilst the show effectively critiques both. It is significant that the show reflects such issues, given the ongoing debate surrounding Neighbourhood Watch schemes in America. Such inclusions reflect and engage with relevant social anxieties and events surrounding citizen-led schemes, such as the aforementioned Trayvon Martin killing by Neighbourhood Watch member George Zimmerman in 2012 (Bloom, 2014: pp.3-7).

### **Brown's 'Three-Tier' Social Model**

Brown identifies that the social structure of eighteenth and nineteenth century America consisted of three tiers, the upper, middle and lower strata, and that from these tiers, group acts of vigilantism were similarly informed. From this, Brown posits that group vigilantism always reflects this social structure, which is subsequently either always socially beneficial or socially destructive. He uses examples of the San Francisco Vigilance Committees and the South Carolina Regulators to support these claims, citing that the former used vigilantism to enforce societal values, whilst the latter eroded them for more personal and selfishly motivated reasons (pp.104-122). To expand, Brown explains the three-tiered social structure as follows;

- '1. The upper level consisted of leaders and their families [...] the local elite, and in it were concentrated the community leading men.
2. The middle level included men of average means [...] lawyers, teachers and other professionals.
3. The lower level included the honest poor and also those who were either marginal to or alienated from the remainder of the community.' (p.104)

Brown's threefold model is one that closely mirrors the social structure of contemporary American society and, as such, should be considered as a means of analysing vigilantism in both the past *and* present. Brown states clearly that this structure, helmed by the elite, effectively promotes and preserves conservative values in vigilante acts in a 'top-down' fashion, meaning that the lower two tiers work to consolidate the *status quo* and carry out the desires of the elite tier. Of the lower level, Brown claims that it comprises of honest and criminal elements that can either be rallied to vigilante causes, or tend towards lawlessness (pp.104-105). With this in mind, Dexter's own status as mainly a lone vigilante, with the exceptions of working with partners Miguel in Season Three and Lumen in Season Five, means that he resists readings of group vigilantism *per se*. Nonetheless, such readings are evident in other characters in *Dexter*, such as the Prado brothers. Thus the first part of this section will analyse the three-tiered structure specifically against the Prado's. Following this, the second part of the section will discuss socially beneficial and destructive forms of vigilantism more generally, demonstrating how *Dexter* embodies both and neither, forcing the viewer to continually question the vigilante actions of Dexter and others, and their effects on society.

The three Prado brothers each clearly represent every level of Brown's three-tiered community structure, and all engage in vigilante behaviour accordingly. Miguel Prado, widely respected community leader and District Attorney represents the elite tier, whilst Ramon Prado, a "hard-ass" sheriff and family man represents the second. Finally, Oscar Prado, a community worker with a heroin addiction, clearly alludes to the third tier in straddling both the 'honest poor' and criminal elements of society that Brown outlines above. In the first example, as a respected Miami prosecutor and prominent member of society, Miguel Prado represents the 'privileged' sector of society. His respectable public image as a law-abiding crime-fighter is suggested in 'Our Father' as he delivers a statement concerning his brother, Oscar's, murder (which unknown to him was carried out by Dexter):

"As a Miami prosecutor I have dedicated my career to fighting crime, to making our streets safer for everyone. Every family; white, black, Latino, Asian, deserves the full measure of our devotion to their dignity, and now that crime has touched my family in the most profound way imaginable, I grieve equally for every family that has been visited with the same unimaginable news that we have received today."

From this dialogue it is evident that Miguel and his family are prominent figures in the local community, whilst presenting the notion that crime has an equalising effect on those affected by it. The dialogue also situates him in a public crime-fighting role that is crucially *acceptable* to the local community, one that is later confronted as Miguel is shown to engage in overtly *unacceptable* and selfishly motivated vigilante acts himself. Miguel's position as a prominent and respected member of society is reinforced several times in *Dexter*. This can be seen in 'Turning Biminese' as Miguel invites Dexter to play golf at an elite member's-only club, which highlights the notion of privilege. Again in 'Si Se Puede', Miguel is told by a star-struck food-merchant that he need not pay for his meal, leading Dexter to comment that: "It must be good to be you." Similarly, he is recognised and greeted by a member of the public in 'The Damage a Man Can Do', causing Dexter to halt their planned vigilante activity. Thus Miguel's higher status as a pious symbol of wholesome society is made clear. However, it is ultimately this respectable public image that stops LaGuerta from launching an investigation against Miguel for the murder of lawyer Ellen Wolf in 'I Had a Dream'. As such, the elite are presented in terms that reflect dissonance between the public face and real intentions of the elite and their exploitation of the community to maintain power, status and privilege. This contradiction suggests that the values of the elite are significantly in opposition with the values of the wider community.

Indicating that he is involved in extra-legal activity beyond his role in law enforcement, Miguel reveals in 'Finding Freebo' that he is monitoring searches of the sheriff database system. This is implied when he asks Dexter, "Why would a blood spatter analyst spend time searching the

sheriff department's database for information on my dead brother?" The mention of his brother also indicates that his extra-legal behaviour is personally motivated. Miguel's intent to enrol others in his vigilante activity is expressed when he then asks Dexter, "In your line of work, Mr. Morgan, is it usual for you to get so involved?" Further hinting at Miguel's employment of extra-legal methods, he brags to Dexter that, "I'm an ADA, my brother Ramon is a sheriff; you think we don't got resources? [...] if our lead pans out then we'll talk to homicide." Miguel's highlighting of his and Ramon's public service roles in the justice system and law enforcement again presents tension between legal and extra-legal activities, and suggests Miguel feels he is not only *better* than the law, but *above* it. Suggesting how vigilantes might potentially unite, Dexter, in a boastful show of solidarity with Miguel and in an attempt to gain his trust, tells him, "C'mon, you're talking to the guy you caught breaking into your brother's secure files!" As such, vigilante tendencies between the two men are confirmed without either of them ever saying so explicitly, underscoring the taboo nature of vigilantism in contemporary society and its phallogocentric implications. This in itself marks a distinct departure from vigilantism in American history, where involvement in vigilante groups has often been considered with great pride and honour, as Brown makes clear (p.23). However, their refusal to be explicit about their vigilante activities reveals that they view the topic as disreputable.

After discovering that Dexter has already killed Freebo in 'Finding Freebo', Miguel tells him, "I wasn't sure that I could do this, but you did [...] thank you."; this reinforces the idea of tiers of involvement in vigilantism and aligns with Brown's model by emphasising a sense of servitude in Dexter's actions by positioning him as having carried out the 'dirty work' for Miguel. This servile role locates Dexter firmly in the middle of Brown's 'three-tier' structure, a notion that is signified by the visible appearance of blood on Dexter's hands before he tells Miguel that he will "clean up the mess." The sense that Miguel is trying to recruit Dexter to carry out further vigilante acts is suggested in 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight'. For instance, he uses phrases such as, "We're on the same side here [...] I want you to trust me [...] I like working with you." Similarly



in 'Si Se Puede' Miguel tells Dexter, "We're like-minded. Together we can make a difference." As such, Miguel is shown to be socially removed from Dexter, yet attitudinally aligned with him. He can also be seen to recruit and dictate to lower sectors of society into carrying out his vigilante desires, again upholding Brown's model. Indeed, Miguel's covert issuing of vigilante work to Dexter is implied in 'Turning Biminese' when he tells Dexter about Ethan Turner (Larry Sullivan), a criminal he believes has escaped justice via a "legal dream-team." More so, he positions himself as being unable to bring Turner to justice alone, and makes a subtle appeal to Dexter for help; this is made clear when Miguel says, "my hands are tied by the law and the defence attorneys get to wipe their asses with it, and everything that I believe in is compromised." Thus, whilst appearing a man of morals, he can be seen to exploit and use judicial weaknesses to inspire others to commit immoral vigilante actions. Miguel also checks up on Dexter by visiting him at the marina to make sure he is going out on his boat, an indicator that Dexter is pursuing Miguel's target. The sense that Miguel has employed Dexter's services is made overtly clear when, after killing Turner, Miguel reveals to Dexter that, "I gave you the chance to avenge two women whom the system failed, and just like I hoped, you seized that opportunity." It is striking again here that the word 'vigilantism' is never said between the two and underscores the taboo nature of the subject. It also significantly suggests that vigilantism takes on a momentum of its own, invading and characterising Dexter's relationship with Miguel. The notion of servitude under Miguel is suggested as he tells Dexter that he is "proud" of his vigilante actions. Dexter re-evaluates his own position after meeting Miguel and viewing the latter's embodiment of conservative ideals as being beneficial to masking his own vigilante acts; this is suggested in 'All in the Family' when Dexter ponders his new role as "family man: husband and father, it all sounds so... upstanding... harmless." This further exemplifies Brown's assertion that reputable and prominent persons in the community often engage in vigilantism and evade detection because of their privileged and wholesome status in society, while covertly influencing the involvement of others (p.26).

Described as a "hard-ass" lieutenant with the sheriff's office, Ramon Prado upholds Brown's second tier of vigilante action as a middle level professional-sector worker. The implication that Ramon harbours vigilante tendencies is suggested in 'Our Father' when he angrily states of his brother Oscar's murderer, "Whoever did this, he's already dead." This foreshadows Ramon's vigilante behaviour and presents him as personally motivated to such action. Emphasising this personal angle, Miguel explains in 'Finding Freebo' that Ramon "has his own way of doing things." Nonetheless and in line with Brown's structure, Miguel is shown to direct and control Ramon's vigilante acts. After Ramon locates Freebo at Miguel's request by illegally tracing his phone calls, Miguel side-lines him so that he can exert vigilante justice on Freebo himself. This influence is made clear when Miguel tells Ramon, "You've done your job; I'm gonna take it from here, okay?" before visiting the scene with a gun, apparently ready to shoot Freebo dead. However, Ramon does still carry out his own solo vigilante acts in attempting to locate Freebo, and becomes overtly socially destructive in the process, suggesting that outside the structure of Miguel's leadership, Ramon's vigilantism is increasingly misdirected and dangerous. Thus the audience are presented with a version of group vigilantism that on first impression appears to be socially beneficial, yet is quickly revealed to be overtly selfish and socially destructive. Brown states: 'Sadistic punishment and torture, arbitrary and unnecessary killings, and mob tyranny marked vigilante movements that had truly gone bad.' (p.121); such themes are evident in both 'Si Se Puede', when Ramon kidnaps and brutally tortures a suspect for information on Freebo, and in 'Do You Take Dexter Morgan?' (3.12), when Ramon's attempt to shoot Dexter in a public restaurant puts Rita and other innocent bystanders in danger. With this in mind, Ramon's acts signify the highly personal nature of the Prado brothers' vigilantism, and present various examples of how related themes like torture and police brutality can manifest in socially destructive ways, signifying 'bad' vigilante acts.

Representing the bottom sector of the three-tiered structure, drug-addicted community worker Oscar Prado symbolises the lower classes that carry out the 'dirty work' of vigilantism. For instance, whilst pursuing drug dealer Freebo in 'Our Father', Dexter walks in on a struggle

between Freebo and Oscar, and after a struggle, kills Oscar in self-defence. As Dexter's internal monologue makes clear, "I've never killed anyone I didn't completely vet before, whose guilt I wasn't absolutely certain of. I did something wholly inside the moment, and wholly outside the Code. Something... spontaneous. Who did I just kill?" This dialogue engages with the swift, final nature of vigilantism, encouraging the viewer to similarly consider the implications of Dexter's hasty actions. Oscar's apparent presence at Freebo's house is explained initially as vigilante-style activity. For example, Oscar is a youth worker who had allegedly decided to challenge Freebo for selling drugs to youths in his care. Furthermore, Oscar's position at the bottom of Brown's three-tier structure as straddling honourable *and* criminal elements of society is confirmed when Debra discovers he was a heroin addict. She derogatively calls him a "junkie", alluding to his criminal status and heightening his association with lower class values. Taken together then, the three Prado brothers align closely with Brown's 'three-tier' model of vigilantism.

### **Socially Beneficial versus Socially Destructive Vigilantism**

Brown states that socially beneficial vigilante acts increase social stability, and generally operate to ensure the best interests of the community. Socially beneficial groups also significantly halt activity when the criminal threat is removed or their objective has been met, such as the San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1856, who united to fight political corruption and disbanded after achieving this goal (pp.93-94). Brown states that socially destructive vigilantism conversely operates from and becomes increasingly selfish and personally motivated, persecuting and destroying those that threaten the power of the vigilantes, such as the aforementioned South Carolina Regulators. The Regulators were so cruel and power-hungry that an opposing group, the Moderators, formed in opposition to them, leading to a further escalation of violence (pp.121-123). As such, this form of vigilantism ultimately weakens social stability by creating more crime and perceived injustices (pp.118-120). In *Dexter*, Dexter himself can be seen to experience a unique arc of vigilante activity, which starts

out to be largely socially beneficial, before becoming more overtly destructive and motivated by selfish reasons as the series progresses. Thus, he can be seen to embody the whole history of American vigilantism and its complexities and various manifestations through his actions during the show. Whilst engaging extensively with both social forms, his actions are never presented as either clearly socially beneficial or socially destructive; rather they are ambiguously presented as straddling both. From this, it is possible to place an artificial but nonetheless crucial split between Dexter generally upholding socially beneficial vigilantism for the first four seasons, though not without exceptions. After this, his motivations for vigilantism become increasingly selfish and socially destructive, and it is often used for self-preservation. The socially beneficial implications of his actions, although still evident in later seasons, increasingly become desperate, self-serving acts that are increasingly socially destructive as a result.

Dexter's early vigilante acts are nearly always presented as potentially socially beneficial and actively encourage the viewer to consider the positive effects of vigilantism on society. In 'Dexter' for example, after killing Mike Donovan, Dexter states that, "My own small corner of the world will be a neater, happier place. A better place." This clearly indicates that Dexter's use of vigilantism can be viewed in a positive light, a notion which is heightened by the fact that the audience were previously shown images of Donovan's young, decaying victims. Nonetheless, Dexter's assertion invites the viewer to consider the social effects of vigilantism, confronting the issue head-on. Similarly in 'Waiting to Exhale', victimhood is used to position Dexter's vigilantism as a potentially positive social force. For example, Dexter reminds murderer Little Chino of a young female survivor, telling him that, "You killed most of her; her mother, her brother, her innocence. You leave pain wherever you go." Thus, this draws on the sympathies of the viewer by contrasting a truly vulnerable, innocent young victim relative to Dexter's 'victim'. However, the real victim does not benefit from this act in any way, and so Dexter can be seen to exploit her status as an excuse to kill. Chino also confronts Dexter's murderous actions by suggesting they are no different to his own. Dexter responds that his use

of murder creates, "A world without you." This suggests that Dexter views his own vigilante acts as beneficial to society. However, Chino's questioning of this invites the viewer to do the same. This motif and tension between vigilantism and murder is more directly alluded to in 'See-Through' by other characters after Dexter's own vigilante crimes as the Bay Harbour Butcher have been exposed. In an attempt to overtly identify Dexter's vigilantism as *good* to the public, Captain Matthews states that he wants to release to the public that: "Our serial killer is only killing the dregs of society; that good, moral people have nothing to fear." His words notably draw on vigilante rhetoric and its justification in America's past, and raises a key question surrounding the topic: who decides what is and is not moral? Rita's mother Gail (JoBeth Williams) also expresses a similar outlook towards the form of vigilantism employed, stating that, "If what I have heard is true, that he only goes after criminals, I say leave him alone. He's got my seal of approval." Such statements in the episode clearly act to align Dexter's vigilantism with socially beneficial values, invoking various aspects of America's vigilante history whilst exposing prevailing extremist views that *encourage* infringement of other groups' rights. As such, positive examples of vigilantism in *Dexter* are presented ambiguously and as part of a more complex moral tradition. Finally, Harry's Code itself alludes to socially beneficial vigilantism. This is suggested in 'Popping Cherry' when, during a flashback, Harry tells Dexter that "Killing must serve a purpose otherwise it's just plain murder." Again, this implicitly suggests that Dexter's use of vigilantism serves the greater good of society. However, because the primary function of the Code is to 'not get caught', the code itself undermines these lofty claims. Indeed, Harry's Code and its key distinctions between vigilantism and murder will be explored more fully in Chapter Two.

Other characters in *Dexter* also engage in socially beneficial vigilantism, such as Rita and LaGuerta. Rita's act of vigilantism in 'Let's Give the Boy a Hand' is presented as socially beneficial because, crucially, it ceases when its purpose is complete and is shown to improve the lives of all involved. This engages more explicitly with Brown's assertion that truly socially beneficial vigilantism arises to deal with specific problems and significantly halts when that

problem has been negated (p.118). For instance, she deals with a noise disturbance and an anti-social neighbour by stealing the neighbour's neglected and unwanted barking dog, and delivering it to the home of a loving family. Emphasising the notion that Rita's vigilante action was a good deed, the mother says, "You did a good thing Rita, thank you." The presentation of beneficial vigilante acts as empowering and intoxicating is suggested when Rita tells Dexter that she now feels she can do: "Whatever I want." Thus the audience are presented with a notably empowered and positive example of vigilantism that is crucially removed from violent extremism, murder and phallogocentric culture and clearly benefits all involved. Similarly, LaGuerta engages in socially beneficial vigilante activity in 'I Had a Dream' after evidence implicates Miguel in the murder of Ellen Wolf. After inviting Miguel to her house and distracting him with cooking tasks, she steals his car keys to look for evidence inside his car and obtains a DNA sample using a make-shift device. This accentuates the extra-legal implications of her actions. Moreover, she involves Dexter in this activity when she asks him to run the evidence against Wolf's DNA, thus alerting Miguel to her actions via his monitoring system, which subsequently makes her a target herself. As such, LaGuerta's vigilante acts are shown to be at great risk to her personal safety. They are also prompted by personal reasons, as Wolf was her friend. With this in mind, LaGuerta can be described as employing vigilantism for personal reasons whilst upholding Brown's socially beneficial model: once her goal is complete, she desists in carrying out any further extra-legal activity in relation to Miguel. She also cannot do anything with this evidence, so her vigilante act is self-serving and ultimately pointless; this is emphasised when she tells Dexter of Miguel's 'secret' crimes, "at least we know the truth..." As such, LaGuerta's vigilante activity challenges Brown's claims surrounding socially beneficial vigilantism by employing it for personal reasons that are ultimately rather futile. Thus, even socially beneficial vigilante acts are presented in ambiguous terms, constantly forcing the viewer to consider their contradictory manifestations.

As mentioned, Season Four of *Dexter* presents a significant shift in how Dexter uses vigilantism and the effects that this has on society as he increasingly uses it to protect himself. Thus the

questioning, interrogatory nature of the show intensifies accordingly, and the viewer is encouraged to question Dexter's motives more rigorously in witnessing his increasingly selfish and socially destructive acts. The show still avoids passing judgement on Dexter, but allows debates surrounding his actions to extend into acts of vigilantism that are increasingly socially destructive. As such, vigilantism in *Dexter* is never simply presented to the viewer at face value, instead always inviting active consideration of the issues presented. The start of Season Four in 'Living the Dream' (4.1) is marked by Dexter having to kill someone acquitted in court because he failed to do his own forensic job correctly. Although this mistake was accidental, this act signifies a point of transition for Dexter into more ambiguous and self-serving vigilante behaviour. It is also the season where he first claims an innocent victim, Jonathan Farrow, in 'Slack Tide'. The title of this episode is prominent in itself as the term 'slack-tide' denotes a period of great change and transition (Crystal, 2007: p.739), signifying that the act of killing an innocent man is a moment that Dexter cannot return from, and signalling an inevitable shift towards more overtly self-serving and socially destructive vigilantism. The moment also occurs because Dexter is preoccupied with 'learning' from another killer, suggesting selfish, rather than beneficial, motives. In an internal monologue that foreshadows this shift, Dexter thinks that, "The slightest lapse of judgement might be a mistake you never recover from." His murder of Farrow also draws on a major problem in America's vigilante activity: that vigilantes are often wrong, and that swift, final vigilante acts cannot be undone. Acknowledging this fact himself, Dexter appears haunted by his murder of Farrow in 'Road Kill' (4.8) as he attempts to rationalise the act, "So I made a mistake; it could have happened to anyone. Well... any murderer. Not that murderers typically care whether their victims are innocent or not... why is it eating at me?" Thus the tensions between legal and extra-legal, and murder and vigilantism are underscored. His rationalisation also emphasises his conscience, further removing Dexter from an atypical 'serial killer' reading.

Farrow's death in 'Slack Tide' suggests that, when followed, Harry's Code generally upholds socially beneficial values. By implication, Dexter's deviation from the Code signals social

destruction. This motif plays out overtly throughout the last four seasons of the show as Dexter kills other 'innocent' characters whose deaths cannot be justified. Such victims include private detective Stan Liddy (Peter Weller) in 'Hop a Freighter' (5.11), and Hannah's father, Clint McKay (Jim Beaver) in 'The Dark...Whatever' (7.10).<sup>20</sup> Although Stan Liddy threatens Dexter by demanding a confession, he is not a physical threat, and clearly states his motivation: "I just want my god damn job in the police force back!" Liddy is killed in accordance with the first rule of Harry's Code: "Don't get caught," but as Dexter slowly pushes a knife into his chest, the audience can see Liddy's pain, fear and confusion. In this respect, his death is overtly justifiable to Dexter, yet is very unsettlingly for the viewer. As such, by displaying behaviour that appears overwhelmingly selfish and cruel, the murder creates a sense of unease that alienates the viewer through Dexter's actions. Dexter's murder of Clint in 'The Dark... Whatever' is similarly shocking. Whilst Clint is an abusive alcoholic and a bad father, he is clearly not a killer, and Dexter's murder of him is strikingly cold and sinister, suggested as he simply states, "I can't let you hurt Hannah," to the traumatised man. The fact that Dexter is *removing* Hannah's choice in the matter clearly indicates that his act is selfishly motivated and infringes heavily upon the rights of others. Further, in victimising a social outcast and low-class criminal type like Clint, Dexter can also be seen to embody 'old' vigilante values in persecuting those that threaten his own potency. Thus the viewer is forced to experience extremes of vigilantism across the spectrum, and is equally encouraged into assuming a more objective view of Dexter's actions by partaking in the murder of a helpless, terrified old man.

Contrary to Brown's claims that vigilantism has been employed primarily for socially beneficial reasons throughout the American past, vigilantism in *Dexter* is largely shown to be destructive towards society (pp.118-119). Thus the show can be seen to subvert and contrast 'norms' and

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<sup>20</sup> Of note, both of these character actors are strongly associated with other vigilante-themed shows and films, such as *Deadwood* and *Robocop*. This denotes an element of intertextuality and a reliance on 'savvy' and aware audience knowledge, indicating the extent to which such themes engage in significant interplay and cross-over in *Dexter*.



perceptions of vigilantism in American history. This destructive tendency can be seen to reflect societal breakdown and a general shift towards more self-serving ideologies and politics in recent years, making critiques of various aspects of American history and society in *Dexter* possible through the topic of vigilantism. As mentioned previously, Madison also acknowledges this shift (p.139). Whilst the tensions between Dexter's own vigilante acts are ambiguously beneficial *and* destructive to society, other characters in the show also use vigilantism for overtly selfish and socially destructive means; this indicates an overall tendency of the show to critique and question general attitudes surrounding vigilantism in American culture in an implicit manner in some respects, whilst appearing essentially neutral in others. With this in mind, this section will explore Miguel Prado as largely reflecting the negative effects of vigilantism in America's history. The first indication that Miguel's extra-legal activities have a self-serving purpose and are socially destructive appears in 'Finding Freebo'. As Batista and Quinn discover a witness who can prove that Miguel's successful conviction against criminal Chicky Hines (name mention only) was based on false evidence. When LaGuerta tells Miguel that, "I think you convicted the wrong man," Miguel does not show remorse that he may have sent an innocent person to prison and caused a miscarriage of justice. His use of words such as "frustrating" and "disappointing" in response to LaGuerta's concerns suggest that his personal desire to see Hines behind bars have been placed before any true notions of justice. In this respect, and considering that the real murderer is still at large, Miguel's use of vigilantism is clearly self-serving and has allowed a threatening force to remain in the community; this is further suggested in 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' when Miguel neglects to interrogate the witness in question. His refusal to take the defence evidence seriously suggests he deliberately falsified the case in order to obtain a conviction, highlighting the notion that justice has been disserved for selfish reasons, clearly encouraging the audience to question Miguel's moral outlook. Thus the audience is placed in the middle of a moral dilemma. Verbalising this, lawyer Ellen Wolf states that, "The truth is, he just sent an innocent man to prison for twenty years. He should be ashamed of himself." When Hines' alibi is proved to be

upstanding, LaGuerta tells Miguel in 'All in the Family' that she does not want "an innocent man behind bars." Miguel's responds, "Have you read his jacket?" which suggests that Miguel believes Hines' criminal past justifies his false imprisonment, exacerbating the dilemma. Emphasising the destructive nature of Miguel's vigilantism, LaGuerta later gives the evidence to Wolf that will free Hines, telling her, "This isn't about Miguel Prado. It's about doing what's right." With this in mind, the audience are presented with an extension of vigilante-like behaviour *within* the judicial system, and as such are presented with moral dilemmas regarding Hines' innocence or guilt, and the conduct and consequences of Miguel's actions.

However much Miguel's vigilantism is depicted as self-serving and socially destructive, he is also presented as whole-heartedly believing that he is upholding justice and that his actions are a force for good; this is suggested in 'Si Se Puede' when Miguel points to the statue of justice inside the courthouse and tells Dexter, "Real reason she's blindfolded? So she doesn't have to watch everything she stands for get pissed on by someone like Ellen Wolf." Dexter acknowledges this belief that Miguel has convinced himself that he is acting for "lofty and noble reasons." Such self-conviction is also implied in 'Easy as Pie' (3.7) as Miguel is shown to believe that his extra-legal approach to law and order is more 'just' than the law itself. Thus the character engages with tensions surrounding vigilantism and the law, implying that Miguel's vigilantism is, despite his lofty view of it, selfish and destructive and undermines judicial processes. For example, after becoming enraged that murder suspect Albert Chung (name mention only) may escape justice for a second time, Miguel tells Dexter that "We need to go after the root cause, the one responsible for putting him on the streets; his bloodsucking, soulless defence attorney Ellen Wolf!" This presents vigilantism as unrestrained and extremely personal, and arising as a direct result of failed legal procedures. However, Dexter defends this aspect of the judicial process when he tells Miguel, "She got her client off. Isn't that her job?" Miguel retorts that, "Her job is to uphold the law, but Ellen Wolf, she twists and bends the law until it's unrecognisable." Thus the dilemma of breaking the law to uphold it in vigilantism is underscored. Indeed, the irony in Miguel's comment is also obvious, as the viewer knows him

to be guilty of his own accusations against Wolf. Suggesting how vigilantism removes the element of fairness that the judicial process is designed to uphold, during a meeting between the pair Wolf angrily shouts at Miguel that he is ignoring "that pesky part about everyone deserving a fair trial!"; thus a major problem surrounding extra-legal activity, that it subverts the judicial process, is overtly alluded to. When Miguel asks Dexter to kill Wolf he refuses the task, telling Miguel that he, "read about the wrongly convicted people she got off death row, the defence fund she set up..." This highlights Wolf's own attempts to combat judicial failings via legal methods, suggesting that legal activism can answer the problems posed by both judicial and extra-judicial failings. Thus Wolf can be seen to counter the notion of victimhood and unfairness in legal and extra-legal actions, challenging them through strictly legal means. Furthermore, not only does this suggest that to direct vigilantism towards Wolf would be socially damaging, but it also presents a clear distinction between Miguel and Dexter's approaches to vigilantism at this stage in the show. As such, Dexter is used here to overtly *challenge* selfish and destructive vigilantism, by presenting the audience with alternative views of Wolf, law enforcement, judicial processes, and political activism.

Miguel regularly uses vigilantism in an overtly selfish and destructive way; this is demonstrated when he brutally murders Wolf in 'The Damage a Man Can Do', savagely beating and dumping her body in response to her investigation into his past cases. Highlighting the selfish nature of Miguel's murder of Wolf, Dexter tells him in 'About Last Night' (3.9), "You got rid of her because she got in your way. Whatever happened to serving justice?" As such, Dexter reflects double-standards in his and Miguel's actions, *and* presents a counter-argument to the audience by supporting judicial and lawful processes. Both examples, particularly the latter, depict the use of vigilantism as a means through which Miguel can maintain power and authority. Miguel also turns on Dexter in 'Go Your Own Way' after the latter ends their vigilante union. For instance, Miguel threatens Dexter during his stag party, before screaming in a rage that he will "Do whatever I like, whenever I like, to whomever I want!" He then points out Dexter as a target to George King, a dangerous murderer that he has just released from

prison. This act makes clear that Miguel uses vigilantism for highly personal reasons, willingly and actively endangering the local community in the process by unleashing a vicious killer into their midst. Thus, Brown's ideas concerning socially beneficial and socially destructive vigilantism are shown to be widely applicable to *Dexter*.

### **Racial, Religious and Political Vigilantism**

Madison's discussions of racial, religious and political vigilantism demonstrate the potential for nuanced and subtle analysis in various inter-related historical and social contexts, as they encompass many facets pertinent to both realms. Madison's critique of such forms of vigilantism indicates how these strands can be analysed and understood in relation to each other, and as part of wider concepts surrounding vigilantism. He explains that, in evolving out of group concerns, racial, religious and political vigilantism have increasingly become examples of a societal shift towards individual interests. Madison defines this shift as, 'the kind that occurs when an individual believes that his or her freedom and desires are the only ones that are valid.' (p.139) This highlights the intolerant and invasive nature of political, racial and religious vigilantism. To elaborate, Madison explains:

'Political, racial and religious activism today seems the most frightening form of vigilantism because the extremists in today's society appear most often to come from one of these [...] types of vigilante groups. [...] These are the pseudo-vigilantes who employ pressure and fear to force everyone to adhere to their particular moral, political, or philosophical beliefs.' (pp.150-151).

From this, one can see how themes of extremism, fear and perceived opposition inform and shape vigilantism and the way it is perceived by wider society. With regards to racial vigilantism, Madison cites the Ku Klux Klan as the most prominent and enduring source of racially-motivated vigilantism throughout America's history, but also considers the Black Panther Party and individual accounts of racial vigilantism in contemporary America. As such,

the significance of Madison's work to this study in understanding depictions of racial vigilantism in *Dexter* is underscored. For instance, he writes about the key phases of Klan activity in America, discussing each in relation to societal changes, attitudes and social policies (p.55), before describing contemporary racial vigilantism by the Black Panther Party as a direct precedent of, and oppositional form to, earlier historical manifestations (pp.146-150). In giving individual accounts of racial vigilantism, as enacted by single persons rather than groups, Madison demonstrates the continuation of historical attitudes to race and vigilantism whilst showing that it still infringes upon the rights of others in a modern context; this highlights Madison's all-encompassing approach, which, in focusing on the past and present, and in including themes such as police brutality and institutional corruption, offers a wider perspective on racial vigilantism that can be used here when looking at *Dexter*.

As previously asserted, depictions of African-Americans are not wholly absent from *Dexter*, but are primarily limited to just a few characters including: the unnamed black blind man, Doakes and Brother Sam; this lack is somewhat surprising, considering the long-standing victimisation of African-Americans in America's vigilante history, but nevertheless chimes with other limited representations of blacks in American popular culture, as has been previously stated (Hunt, 2005: pp.3-28). Whilst Doakes' own use of vigilantism will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, his status as a black victim of vigilantism in the show requires some attention here. First though, the blind black man in 'It's Alive!' who poisons his victims, and whose inclusion in *Dexter* alludes tangentially towards America's history of Klan and racial vigilantism, deserves some attention. As Dexter prepares to kill him, he pointedly tells the audience that he is, "not one to discriminate based on race, gender or disability." Indeed, this is true: Dexter kills murderers from all races and of all ages and genders, without ever passing comment on their racial background or other characteristics. However, this can also be seen as an attempt to avoid dealing with some of the most highly controversial aspects of the topic. Despite his claim that he does not discriminate, Dexter then allows the seemingly helpless man to live, explaining that, "Maybe I took pity on my victim; I mean sure, he's a heinous killer, but he also

bumps into walls." This presents black people, especially black victims of vigilantism - even ones who are serial murderers themselves - in a somewhat sympathetic light, a motif that is also carried on through the character of Brother Sam, as will be discussed shortly. Dexter's resistance to kill a black offender actively distances Dexter's vigilantism from that of the Klan, yet still engages with it in an implicit manner. For example, after deciding not to kill his terrified victim, Dexter tells him: "Let that be a lesson to you!", recalling the intentions of the first Klan in primarily spooking blacks into 'behaving' and returning to their station (Madison: p.56); this notion is emphasised further when Dexter explains that his vigilante work "brings order to the chaos; fills me with a civic pride." Madison asserts that the Klan initially formed in the Reconstruction era to scare blacks into returning to their lower status after the Civil War (pp.55-57). With this in mind, words such as "chaos" and "pride" directly invoke the spirit and attitudes widely associated with Klan activity in the antebellum period. Thus whilst clearly separating Dexter's use of vigilantism from any overt association with Klan vigilantism, such debates are still presented to the viewer, forcing them to consider Dexter's actions within a wider historical context that is at once removed and indelibly linked to representations of vigilantism in the show.

As mentioned, Doakes' status as a victim in *Dexter* further engages with important aspects of racial vigilantism in American history in a subtle manner which again removes Dexter from any overt associations with Klan ideology. However, such themes are presented in a confrontational manner, and other characters are also used to invoke this association. In 'Resistance Is Futile' (2.9) for example, Doakes becomes imprisoned by Dexter after discovering that the latter is the real Bay Harbour Butcher. Doakes is shackled and caged by Dexter, emphasising his status as an innocent victim and drawing on imagery widely associated with historical representations of racial vigilante themes, highlighting the oppositions between extra-legal and illegal realms in the process. These oppositions are presented as Dexter debates whether to set Doakes up and turn him over to the police, or to kill him, an innocent victim, instead. However, he ultimately decides that Doakes' own extra-legal behaviour does

not justify his murder. This is acknowledged by Doakes himself when he realises, "I don't fit that Code you were talking about, do I?!" Tensions surrounding this dilemma are further expressed as Dexter reveals via internal monologue that "Harry always said there were plenty of people who deserve to die, but no matter how hard I close my eyes and wish, Doakes isn't one of them." With this in mind, in refusing to kill Doakes, Dexter's vigilante behaviour is again distanced from Klan vigilantism in America's history as primarily targeting blacks, yet still draws on wider debates surrounding race and vigilante action. In contrast to this, and resolving Dexter's 'Doakes problem' without casting it in an overtly racist light, it is Lila that ultimately symbolically 'lynches' Doakes by blowing him apart in an explosion. Killing Doakes in this manner, whilst not overtly aligning his lynching in a classical sense of the term, does still play on America's racial vigilante past, in the way Doakes is shackled and caged and ultimately burned to death. Burning or branding was often used against blacks during second wave Klan members as a means through which to extend victims' suffering and to establish ownership (Cusac, 2009: p.67). Doakes is also subjected to the trauma of having to witness Dexter mutilate a body in front of him in 'There's Something About Harry', made clear when, sweating and shocked, he watches blood from the mutilated body pool around his cage in wide-eyed terror. Although Dexter does not kill him himself, he does hold Doakes against his will, ultimately facilitating his death at the hands of Lila. So while Doakes is not a victim of Dexter's *per se*, Dexter is still implicated in his death, Doakes still ultimately dying because of vigilante acts carried out by white people, in this case, at the hands of Lila.

As the title 'The British Invasion' suggests, Lila's Britishness and her rebellious behaviour symbolically invokes the American Revolution, where lynching and harsh punishments first appeared in retaliatory displays of extreme violence and were largely enacted between Americans and the British (Brown: p.6). Thus the show can be seen to downplay and undermine the significance of white Americans as the main perpetrators in lynching blacks in the American past. Further negating Dexter's "Doakes problem," Dexter kills Lila for this crime, pursuing her to Paris to exact vengeance on Doakes' behalf. This distances Dexter from any

overtly racist acts of vigilantism by presenting him as an avenger of black victims, a notion underscored by his sending a postcard to Lila with Doakes' picture on it before he kills her. Thus *Dexter* can be seen to even *deny* the American role of directing vigilantism towards African-Americans. Doakes is an innocent victim who ultimately dies so that Dexter's vigilante acts can be allowed to continue undetected. In this respect, though kept at arm's length in a clear departure from the past, the history of vigilantism in America as a racist and repressive form through which whites have maintained supremacy and power, is apparent in the show's treatment of Doakes' character.

The character of Brother Sam is similarly used to create a confrontational representation of race and vigilantism in *Dexter*. Brother Sam is a complex character whose criminal past is undermined by his religious devotion and through his positive influence in helping other ex-convicts live crime-free lives. This challenges the perception of blacks as overtly involved in criminal activity, as Neely posits (p.14), suggesting the ability of the show to reflect alternative and subversive attitudes whilst playing on audience's perceptions and expectations. In 'Once Upon a Time' (6.2) for example, Dexter, suspicious that Brother Sam may have returned to his previously murderous ways, follows him to an apparent murder scene. However, Dexter discovers that Sam was actually attempting to *protect* his 'victim' Nick (Germaine De Leon) from a ruthless Latino gang. Madison (p.63) and Brown (p.11) both make clear that blacks have routinely been persecuted and victimised by vigilantes for often imagined and even non-existent crimes in America's past and present. With this in mind, Dexter's refusal to kill Sam marks a clear departure from America's racial vigilante history and challenges general perceptions of blacks as troublesome, violent and criminal in the modern day, features of which Michelle Alexander claims has characterised the relationship between African-American males and the state (2012: p.6). Thus past and present assumptions of the black experience of vigilantism and racial stereotyping in the modern day are simultaneously ignored and exposed in *Dexter*, which draws on and subverts a range of potential attitudes. Ultimately, this refusal to routinely victimise blacks through acts of vigilantism in *Dexter* challenges the status of



African-Americans as deserved victims of racial vigilantism in American history, and can even be seen to oppose its use, even against blacks who have a criminal past.

Dexter's vigilante acts can similarly be seen to challenge and undermine the status of blacks as victims in American history. This is suggested as Dexter, overwhelmed with rage, avenges Brother Sam's murder, against Sam's wishes. For example, after being fatally shot by Nick in an alternate ethnic gang dispute, Dexter and Sam discuss the event in 'Just Let Go' (6.6). Dexter tells Sam in frustration that, "I just want to hurt Nick," suggesting that he feels rage and genuine sorrow at the attack on Sam, indicating a personal response to the crime. Indeed, his eyes visibly fill with tears, a rarity in the show. However, Sam replies, "Let it go [...] tell him that I forgive him." As such, anger at the persecution and victimisation of blacks is situated with indignant white people, undermining the primacy of white vigilantes and their black victims in American history. Conversely, Dexter's anger appears justified as he acknowledges that Sam has become a friend. Nonetheless, the focus on Dexter's anger removes attention from Sam's condition and desires. Further, Sam's forgiveness of Nick positions blacks as ultimately *accepting* of their status as victims. Worse still, ignoring Sam's wishes, Dexter erupts into a violent rage and kills Nick with his bare hands; this shows Dexter to be simultaneously an avenger of wronged black people, whilst exacerbating violent retaliatory behaviour in a metaphorical lynching that ignores the primacy of racial vigilantism against blacks in American history by directing it towards another racially targeted minority: Nick is Hispanic. As such, the episode defends and avenges blacks whilst showing them to be accepting of their victimisation, yet places outrage at this treatment with whites who have consistently perpetuated it. Thus it is possible to assert that the show at once defends and refuses black victimhood, effectively undermining and down-playing the African-American experience of vigilantism whilst simultaneously refusing to depict blacks as deserving victims of it, challenging its use in American history.

With regards to religious vigilantism, Madison states that, throughout America's history, 'Citizens often have taken the law into their own hands to force their own particular morality on a different sector of the population.' (p.77) Madison discusses religious vigilante Carrie A. Nation (1846-1911) at length, amongst others such as the Jewish Defence League and the Klan<sup>21</sup> to explain how religious forms of vigilantism promote and direct severe persecution against those who have been seen as irreligious in American history (p.23). More generally, Madison explains how one group's moral beliefs can massively infringe upon the rights of others, especially when vigilantism is used to enforce those beliefs (p.193). This influence can be seen by the introduction of the Prohibition laws in the 1920s, following unremittent lobbying by united religious and temperance groups supporting the Volstead Act (Brogan, 2001: pp.490-520). Brown also discusses the persecution of shiftless, immoral and idle whites by religiously-motivated vigilantes (pp.72-73). His discussion of Nation underscores the primacy of themes such as religious extremism, the persecution of others, and the alignment of religious vigilantism with domestic terrorism, notions that are evident in *Dexter* and reflect a variety of modern-day anxieties and social problems.

Religious vigilantism in *Dexter* is most explicitly portrayed in Season Six through vigilantes Travis and Dr Gellar, the Doomsday Killers (DDK). The religious extremism underpinning their motives is highlighted in several different ways, through tableaux, paintings, and religious insignia and iconography. For example, in 'Those Kinds of Things' (6.1), ritual and preparation is emphasised as Gellar urges Travis to find and catch snakes before choosing their victim, a roadside fruit-seller. The use of fruit and snakes invokes religious imagery, signifying temptation and the fall of man through self-indulgence. Religious motifs play out more overtly in relation to vigilantism throughout the season through DDK's highly staged and theatrical victim tableaux. These include the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, The Whore of Babylon, and the Bowls of Wrath (Ryken, 1998: pp.1045-1062). Further emphasising the religious

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<sup>21</sup> Again this underscores the complexity of the topic by making clear that vigilantism, even in seemingly straight-forward racial groups, has much wider connotations and incorporates aspects of religion, politics, morality and beyond.

extremism behind the pair's attacks, bizarre imagery and details on the victims' bodies are also included, such as the carvings on the face of the 'Whore', Lisa Marshall (Molly Parker) in 'Sin of Omission' (6.8). Moreover, religious imagery is used to foreground the 'Otherness' of religious extremism: strange insignia are branded onto victims in 'A Horse of a Different Color'; biblical numbers are found under a victim's eyelids in 'The Angel of Death'; and an escaped victim reports being forced to drink blood in 'Nebraska'. The use of an abandoned, ruined church also signifies religious and moral decay, whilst heightening the prominent role of religious extremism behind the Domsday Killers' vigilante acts. As such, elements of the macabre entwine with religious symbolism, implicitly drawing on religious vigilantism from America's past.

Moral decay is shown to be a major motivating factor behind DDK's vigilante acts. For instance, in 'Smokey and the Bandit', Travis tells captive Nathan (David Monahan) that, "You're not going anywhere until you've repented for your sins." Unsure of what his sins actually are, Nathan cries and begs for forgiveness before "repenting" for his perceived sins. This treatment underscores the extremist nature of religious vigilantism in the show. Similarly, in 'The Angel of Death', whilst looking upon drunken, dancing people in a nightclub, Gellar points out the many examples of moral decline to Travis in the scantily-clad and fun-focused youths dancing provocatively before them. Gellar also tells Travis about heinous crimes such as rape and murder, bombs and the deaths of innocents in war, stating, "That's why the world as it is has to end [... because of] the sins of humankind." Thus the show can be seen to echo moral decline in the modern era and presents DDK as motivated by social upheaval and crimes which the audience can empathise with to a point. However, although they can be seen to attack modern American life and a perceived moral decline, DDK's heinous treatment of victims means that the viewer is again presented with oppositional viewpoints in the show, which appears critical of both spheres. Indicating that Travis has ultimate conviction in his beliefs even right at the end of his life when faced with death, his certainty in the moral decline and decay of society is made clear as he tells Dexter that he is, "a shining example of how putrid

man has become,” in ‘This is the Way the World Ends’. Such perceived moral decay is further underpinned as prompting DDK’s vigilante acts through their choice of victims. For instance, a “defiled” woman is crucified in ‘A Horse of a Different Color’, alcoholic fornicators are run over with a car and captured in ‘Just Let Go’, and an atheist is targeted for his radical beliefs in ‘Get Gellar’ (6.9). Thus ‘old’ targets for religious and moral vigilantes are supplanted into the modern day and reflect contemporary changes and concerns. Overtly emphasising the vigilante nature of their kills, the victims’ bodies are paraded publicly for their sins, such as in the macabre display of Nathan’s dismembered body-parts sewn to horses in ‘A Horse of a Different Color’. It is of note that in biblical terms, the Four Horsemen denote an apocalyptic warning about the end of the world, and in *Dexter* this can be seen as a warning to other ‘immoral’ people that vigilantes will punish them for their abhorrent behaviour (Ryken: p.1059).

As with other facets of vigilantism, however, the presentation of religious vigilantism in *Dexter* is ambiguous and confrontational, forcing the viewer to consider Dexter’s actions and even the Code itself as an extension of extremist beliefs. For example, it is revealed that Gellar is actually dead in ‘Get Gellar’ and that Travis has been acting alone, imagining Gellar as a God-like presence. Religious extremism is also presented as an excuse to commit heinous crimes, just as the Code facilitates a distancing from notions of ‘murder’ by supplanting it with ‘vigilantism’ instead. When confronted with Gellar’s body and ‘ghost’ in ‘Ricochet Rabbit’ (6.10), Travis stammers in disbelief that, “It is not true! I did not kill you!” Similarly, after watching Travis speak to the invisible, God-like figure of Gellar, Dexter observes that Travis is “using Gellar to justify his kills.” This is a purposefully ironic moment, heightened by the sudden appearance of Harry that allows the viewer to compare Travis with Dexter, who also ‘speaks’ to a father-figure and uses him to justify committing murder under the guise of vigilantism. As such, the audience are presented with ‘different’ versions of vigilantism that are revealed to be disturbingly similar, showing the topic’s subtle ambiguities and shades. Nonetheless, Dexter’s vigilantism is shown to differ from Travis’ extremism as Dexter is shown

saving the innocent and victimised at risk to himself in 'Talk to the Hand'. Travis also targets society's innocent and vulnerable, such as Dexter's young toddler Harrison in 'This is the Way the World Ends' (6.12), aligning his vigilante acts and extremist beliefs with social destruction and the persecution of society's most vulnerable; this extremism reveals important motivational differences between Travis and Dexter's reasons for committing vigilante acts.

Underscoring the ability of *Dexter* to mediate popular anxieties, Travis is seen recruiting new people to join his crusade against the perceived immoral in 'Ricochet Rabbit'. This 'recruiting' overtly links religious extremism to terrorism, drawing on popular anxieties and concerns of the post-9/11, "War on Terror" era by presenting related themes, such as the pervasive nature of religious extremism and beliefs. Indeed, notions of 'recruitment' and 'brain-washing' tactics make clear *Dexter's* social relevance in the post-9/11 era and the primacy of vigilantism as a means through which to view and understand contemporary American life. Supporting this, Stuart Wexler writes that terrorist insurgency in the States has become a major concern for the American people as youth and 'vulnerable' and impressionable sectors of society are 'happily joining terrorist cells, believing they are making a difference.' (2015: pp.15-17). The alignment of vigilantism with terrorism becomes increasingly overt in *Dexter*, which presents complex and urgent contemporary fears that openly invite comparison and debate. This is evident through the inclusion of terrorism-related iconography and acts on the show, most specifically through the depiction of biological weapons. For instance, in 'Talk to the Hand', Travis sends his new recruit Beth into Miami Metro with a deadly gas, which she intends to release in Debra's office, committing suicide herself in the attack. Not only does this draw on contemporary fears of biological warfare and terrorism, it also engages with the deadly capabilities of those with extremist beliefs, which is presented as having major implications on the means and uses of vigilantism in contemporary America (Wexler, *Ibid.*). The show also implies that security and public defence systems are ill-equipped to deal with such attacks; this is made clear when Dexter puts himself at risk to save the police department from exposure to the gas, presenting extremes such as terrorism and vigilantism as closely inter-related notions.

Thus religious extremism in *Dexter* is shown to have significance to America's vigilante past *and* present, acknowledging the often ambiguous nature of vigilantism and its potential crossovers with terrorism and radicalism.

Madison discusses political vigilantism more widely than the previous two topics, under the premise that this particular vein of vigilantism is extensive and extremely ambiguous, suffusing multiple aspects of American life both past and present. Indeed, the Klan has already been mentioned in relation to this and they foreground the complex links between political, racial and religious vigilantism. Madison primarily focuses his discussions on early political vendettas and duels between politicians in the 1800s, before drawing attention to more recent political groups, such as the Jewish Defence League (JDL), The Black Panther Party and the Secret Army Organisation (SAO). He considers contemporary political assassinations as indelibly linked to the realm of political vigilantism (pp.139-147). Madison also extends his discussion to include governmental bodies and institutions, such as schools and police forces, and focuses on individual acts of vigilantism through which personal pursuits and goals are sought and imposed on wider society. He states that this almost always occurs through acts of corruption, blackmail, and other extra-legal and illegal means, and often at great expense to others (pp.153-163). With this in mind, political vigilantism can be viewed as a significant feature throughout *Dexter* due to its routine depiction as a central aspect of Miami Metro's departmental politics, and whilst discussions extend to characters such as Captain Matthews and Debra, it is the character of Maria LaGuerta that most aptly demonstrates and explores this particular facet of vigilantism in the show.

LaGuerta is shown to be vindictive, self-minded and skilled in political gamesmanship in the police force as a means through which to maintain or improve her job prospects, and sustain her control over others; this is suggested in the very first episode when she is shown to bully and ridicule Debra in front of her colleagues, demeaning her, "Officer Morgan, I didn't recognise you with your clothes on," before dismissing her solid lead: "That's very interesting,

very creative, but just keep talking to your hookers!" With this in mind, LaGuerta can also be seen as an overtly threatening woman, both to other women *and* to the men around her, as previously mentioned. Such representations fit in with Dorothy Sue Cobble's assertion that women in the workplace are caught between male ideals and approaches to work and a generalised tendency to dismiss females as emotionally less competent (2005: pp.45-61). Indeed, it is revealed in 'That Night, a Forest Grew' (2.7) that LaGuerta received her promotion to Lieutenant after claiming the victory for a bust that Doakes was in fact responsible for. Whilst he is shown to be unconcerned about this, it inevitably threatens to undermine her status and is exploited by Matthews. Similarly in 'Circle Us', LaGuerta makes an ill-advised decision during the attempted take-down of vicious killers, which leaves six civilians dead and wounded. To make sure she does not take the blame, LaGuerta asks Debra to back her story pretending that a rookie officer had made the mistake, telling Debra that, "she's young, her career can take the hit!" However, when Debra refuses to lie, LaGuerta turns on her in 'Take It!' (5.8), publicly stating in a news conference that Debra was to blame for the mishandled shoot-out. Thus LaGuerta can be seen to misdirect blame in order to maintain her own job status and position of power and privilege, invoking aspects of political vigilantism. LaGuerta is shown to represent negative images of women in the work place, and the perception of her as power-hungry and malicious engages with contemporary work-based gender politics, of which Cobble asserts simultaneously compromise and ridicule female attributes (p.47).

LaGuerta's femininity defines her relationship with vigilantism, yet is fused with masculine qualities that undermine her autonomy because she uses vigilantism for personal reasons and to the detriment of others; LaGuerta is revealed to have stolen Pascal's boyfriend in 'See-Through' and used him in an attempt to regain her own position by de-stabilizing Pascal, her increasingly nerve-wracked superior. She also subsequently discards the man in question, who is enraged to discover that he was merely a pawn in her quest for revenge. LaGuerta does not look particularly happy at her own actions in the scene as she reveals this truth, suggesting that she has compromised her femininity and integrity by adopting male characteristics of

sexual promiscuity in order to fit in and get ahead in a traditionally 'male' environment. This is supported by her earlier refusal to give Matthews an opinion on Pascal's performance, indicating that publicly she upholds the image of female solidarity and advancement in the workplace whilst actually employing and adapting to male tactics. Indeed, when Matthews gives LaGuerta her job back, he significantly praises these qualities in her: "Maybe you are more than a political animal. You might just be a real cop. [...] Pascal just set women in the workplace back twenty years, it's up to you to turn that around." As such, Matthews and LaGuerta can be seen to echo wider contemporary debates surrounding female (in)equality and structural sexism in the work-place, which Cobble asserts forces female workers into compromising aspects of the Self in order to fit in (Ibid.). Further illustrating the extent of her self-serving use of political vigilantism, LaGuerta is also shown to have divorced Batista for a promotion and blackmailed Matthews into awarding her his Captaincy when he retires in 'Those Kinds of Things'. However, as her selfish acts become increasingly damaging to others, her career is defined by her relationship with men and her emulation of their masculine tendencies; this is indicated in 'Sin of Omission' when she helps cover up Matthews' involvement in the death of a prostitute in order gain leverage over him, which is shown to leave the victim's family distraught. Then, in a display of vindictive and selfish behaviour in 'Get Gellar', she turns on Matthews, revealing his involvement in the death in order to acquire his job. Debra vocalises a critique of LaGuerta's self-serving behaviour as she confronts LaGuerta with her actions, "You used me to take him out and help yourself. [...] How do you sleep?" Thus *Dexter* continues its interrogation of contemporary debates, and presents a critique of authority by suggesting that it has been perverted by political vigilantism and corruption to the detriment of society. Consequently, LaGuerta, whilst being a subject of critique for her damaging and self-serving pursuits, can also be seen to offer a critique of patriarchal dominance and institutional sexism that endows males with authority and primacy by showing women to be compromised within it.



### **Family Feuds and Vendettas**

Brown states that family or community vendettas and blood feuds emerged from the Civil War era following social upheaval and the divisive nature of the conflict in mountainous regions (pp.9-11). He also discusses feuds in the Prohibition era between rival groups of gangsters and in relation to warring youth gangs in contemporary urban America (1991: pp.89-130). The appearance, forms, and reasons behind feuds have differed somewhat in response to varying social contexts and events throughout America's history, such as in relation to politics and ethnicity, for instance. Brown notes that vendettas involved warring 'clans' or sides led by an elder or family leader that inevitably only ceased with the death of the last man (p.11). This feature is evident in *Dexter* from the outset, as crime boss Guerrero engages in a vendetta with Miami Metro in Season One. It also takes centre-stage throughout the show's Seventh Season, indicating that *Dexter's* presentation of vigilantism is extensive and all-encompassing. For example, a Civil War re-enactment appears in the episode 'The Dark... Whatever' and its inclusion, although relatively minor, invites the viewer to consider the relevance of feuds and retaliatory behaviour in the American past with their glorification and relevance in present American life. Similarly reflecting further tensions of American history and the post-9/11 era to those previously discussed, the family vendetta is played out between two primary ethnic groups in *Dexter* that can be easily viewed as a metaphor for foreign affairs and anxieties concerning domestic invasion. In 'Are You...?', for instance, Detective Mike Anderson (Billy Brown) stops at a car to help with a flat tyre and discovers a woman's body in the trunk. Mike is subsequently shot dead by her murderer, Viktor, who flees the scene. Later at the crime scene, all of the prominent people from Miami Metro are present as Mike's body is taken away. Dexter looks upon the scene and thinks, "Mike Anderson, one of our own..." Such dialogue implies notions of family or community and is striking in its sudden inclusion in the show as a feature of police life. Heightening this idea further, and foreshadowing the approaching vendetta, Batista says that, "Whoever did this to Mike is going to be sorry," to which Quinn adds, "And very fucking dead," drawing attention to the extra-legal implications

of their comments. However, Debra cuts them off, stating, “We have to do this by the book! We’re cops, not killers.” As such, whilst the show draws extensively on aspects of American history, it continually presents such elements in ways that constantly underscore the tensions between law and vigilantism. Later in the episode, Batista and Quinn toast Mike and speak of him as a ‘good cop’, consolidating the sense of a family and communal loss. Similarly foreshadowing the vendetta, Dexter finds Viktor and, before killing him Viktor tells him that: “You should not fuck with me! I have very dangerous friends.” Following this scene, Viktor’s friend George and lover Isaak discuss his actions and, not yet knowing that Dexter has killed Viktor, discuss dealing with the matter together, solidifying the notion of family involvement. Further supporting this, George tells Isaak that Viktor is on his way “home”, and later tells him in ‘Sunshine and Frosty Swirl’ (7.2) that, “he was one of us, and we would always protect him”. As such, the two deaths are used to invoke specific dialogue and imagery that denotes a family or community-style vendetta involving violent retaliation from both sides. It is of note that the notion of war is emphasised by opposition between ‘police’ and ‘criminal’, transposing the vendettas of America’s past into the present.

Following Isaak’s arrival in Miami in ‘Sunshine and Frosty Swirl’ (7.2), the vendetta is quickly established, with Isaak in the family or group leader role which Brown states is essential in maintaining and directing the vendetta (1975: p.12); this is evident when George calls him “Sir” and other workers, such as Isaak’s personal bodyguard Yurg (Andrew Kirsanov), carry out his biddings and dirty work. The notion that the vendetta is inevitable is suggested in ‘Run’ after Isaak discovers Viktor’s death and believes Miami Metro to be responsible. For example, he assumes that the death must be “payback for killing that detective,” and believes Dexter and intern Louis (Josh Cooke) to be involved. Suggesting the highly personal and revenge-driven nature of vendettas, Isaak is later depicted grieving at Viktor’s apartment, where it becomes apparent that the two men were lovers. Heightening this notion further, Isaak, looking at Viktor’s picture, weeps and says: “I will avenge your death. Everything I do is for you!” As such,

opposing experiences and emotions in the vendetta are shown, actively encouraging the viewer to see the necessity of the vendetta from Isaak's point of view. The extent of the vendetta's reach is made clear as victims begin to mount. In 'Sunshine and Frosty Swirl' for example, the boyfriend of the woman Viktor murdered is killed by Isaak for giving information on the Koshka's to Miami Metro. That he is stabbed in the eye with a screw-driver stresses the 'eye-for-an-eye', revenge-driven nature of the vendetta. Similarly in 'Buck the System' (7.3), after finding Louis on Dexter's boat, Isaak shoots him dead, suggesting that even innocent or 'temporary' members of the extended 'family' have become potential victims and are now at risk. More so, and engaging with vendettas in a more classical literary manner, Quinn falls in love with opposing 'family member' Nadia (Katia Winter) in a pseudo-*Romeo and Juliet*-style romance; this inevitably ends in tragedy and loss as both are used as pawns in the vendetta. Even Dexter's lover Hannah is taken in 'Helter Skelter', leading to her near-death and to the retaliatory murder of opposing 'family member' Yurg in self-defence. As such, the high number of casualties involved in individual family vendettas and feuds, that Brown claims characterises them, is also alluded to through *Dexter*, as the vendetta's reach grows and the number of dead increases (p.11).

Tensions in the very notion of a 'vendetta' as a retaliatory, revenge-driven act are most explicitly engaged with in 'Swim Deep' as Isaak summons Dexter to talk. Their conversation draws explicitly on retaliatory and vendetta language as Isaak tells Dexter that Viktor's murder was "personal" to which Dexter responds, "Oh, an eye for an eye, huh? [...] Killing me somehow settles the score?" Again, this 'debate' and confrontational approach to the topic encourages the viewer to do the same, considering tensions and problems in vendettas that are seemingly unresolvable. Isaak tells Dexter that he wants to kill "any of your police officer friends involved in this little vendetta [...] including your Lieutenant sister." The language explicitly aligns the situation between the men and their 'families' and colleagues, whilst locating the viewer in the middle of the feud. Notions of family are drawn out with Isaak's

mention of “police-officer friends” and “Lieutenant sister”, implying that family and the department are one and the same. Finally, and supporting this claim further, Dexter subsequently tells Debra that Isaak thinks there is a “police conspiracy [...] he thinks we all killed Viktor so you’re at risk too,” before the pair literally go into hiding together and escape to a motel. As such, the retaliatory nature of vendettas, and their perpetuating factors are underscored.

Solidifying the notion of family leaders, Dexter’s role as head of his own ‘clan’ is made clear by Isaak’s direct approach to Dexter to discuss the vendetta in ‘Swim Deep’. After investigating Isaak, Dexter realises that he too is prominent as the leader of the Ukrainian Koshka Brothers’ organised crime syndicate. Further engaging with themes of vendettas and retaliation and solidifying Dexter’s leadership role, in an attempt to get rid of Isaak Dexter leads him into opposing Colombian organised crime territory. Cementing Isaak’s primacy amongst his family, he kills all of the Colombians and is arrested and imprisoned for the crime, in effect, placing the feud on hold. On visiting him in prison, Dexter asks if the vendetta is finally over, to which Isaak responds, “Over? [...] No. I’m afraid not.” This highlights Brown’s claim that vendettas only ever end with one final survivor from both families or after one family has been wiped out (p.13). However, after Isaak is released from prison in ‘Chemistry’ (7.7) it becomes apparent that his own family want nothing more to do with the vendetta, and have marked him for death for putting their enterprise at risk; this shows a subversion of the ‘final survivor’ feature of American family feuds and vendettas espoused by Brown. For example, in ‘Argentina’ Isaak acknowledges that the family vendetta is now simply a personal one, and states that the vendetta has made him “a dead man” after he finds out George has been ordered to kill him. As such, the notion of vendetta is subverted back into a personal revenge scenario, playing on the various notions and manifestations of feuds throughout America’s history whilst encouraging the audience to consider the complexities and comparisons in such acts in the present day.

Subverting notions of vendettas and feuds further, Isaak and Dexter reach empathy during a discussion in a gay bar in 'Argentina' as it becomes apparent that both men have suffered personal loss and equally understand the need for vengeance. Such an understanding presents the men as equals in their actions and drives, and further accentuates the senseless and destructive nature of retaliatory forms of vigilantism. More so, in 'Helter Skelter' Dexter agrees to help Isaak defeat two assassins who have been sent after him by the Koshka Brotherhood. This not only removes the primacy away from the original vendetta, but also suggests that larger family vendettas are at play. Finally, in return for helping him kill the assassins, Isaak offers Dexter "his life", making clear that the vendetta can end with both men walking away; this clearly subverts the 'last man standing' rule and presents an alternative to the 'tradition', suggesting that violent retaliation and obliteration of the opposition is not always necessary. Isaak is killed by his own family member, George, who is in turn killed by Dexter. Dexter places Isaak's body into the sea with his dead lover, undermining historical features of vendettas by replacing senseless retaliatory killing with an act of compassion and mutual respect; this shows such feuds to be outmoded and unnecessary whilst remaining an indelible part of American identity.

The complex and interrelated themes discussed in this chapter all point to the significance of *Dexter* in providing a site through which multiple aspects of vigilantism throughout American history can be addressed. Indeed, this chapter has suggested how the show implicates primary areas of concern in causing vigilantism and violence, and represents a wide range of historical themes surrounding vigilantism to explore contemporary anxieties. Depictions of vigilantism in the show clearly allude to the key social debates identified in this chapter, and reveal that the show is ultimately critical of vigilantism and violent extremism. Apparently healthy and socially beneficial institutions that are purported to uphold and promote patriarchal ideologies, such as the family, religion, youth, rehabilitation and social services, are implicated in the perpetuation of vigilantism and violent extremism, and are shown to be a huge part of the

problem. The chapter's focus on the ideas of Madison and Brown in identifying various formations and manifestations of vigilantism has also highlighted the primacy and significance of male involvement in these activities; this is unsurprising given the primary role of men in vigilantism in America's past. The latter claim is supported by Abrahams (p.137) and Neely (p.13) and forms a major part of Brown and Madison's analyses. With this in mind, and given the overtly destructive nature of male violence and vigilantism in *Dexter*, and its overall depiction as being detrimental to society, the *tradition* and perpetuation of vigilantism amongst men in the show requires closer attention. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on representations of the nuclear family and the male role within it, and will demonstrate how social institutions like the family perpetuate vigilantism from generation to generation. Thus, Chapter Two will specifically discuss patriarchy and aggressive male culture to explore *how* vigilantism remains an enduring and ongoing feature of American life.

## **Chapter Two: Masculinity, Patriarchy and Vigilantism in *Dexter***

Following on from Chapter One's focus on vigilantism in American history, this chapter will discuss how patriarchy and masculinity are shown to perpetuate vigilantism and violence in American society in *Dexter*. As previously mentioned, two central observations emerge from historical discussions of vigilantism: that of the primacy of males and patriarchal culture in carrying out and passing on vigilantism in the show; and the presentation of the white middle-class nuclear family as fostering violence and extremism that is ultimately shown to be devastating to offspring. The previous chapter showed how historical vigilantism is evident in *Dexter* and is presented in a fashion that encourages discussion and debate across a wide range of inter-related and complex social topics. This chapter will explore representations of masculinity and family in the show to suggest how various aspects of American society that are shown to have been affected and influenced by vigilantism are presented in a critical and interrogatory way throughout the series. Accordingly, this chapter will comprise of two parts which will allow various nuances and ambiguities of vigilantism and its continuation to be discussed, again showing how *Dexter* provides a site through which fruitful representations of vigilantism can be approached and explored. The first part will discuss Harry and Dexter to illustrate how vigilantism is shown to be a crucial facet of the father-son relationship; this is shown to occur through teachings, traditions and the subversion of rites of passage, implicating patriarchal culture and aggressive masculinity in passing violent tendencies and attitudes towards vigilantism on to future generations. With this in mind, contrary and oppositional attitudes and belief systems presented by different characters throughout the show, such as Brian, Lila and Miguel, will also be discussed to suggest how they expose and confront tensions and moral dilemmas central to Harry's Code. Next, Dexter's own role in perpetuating this cycle onto young males Jeremy Downs, Zach Hamilton and Harrison will be discussed to demonstrate how *Dexter* explores pertinent themes and potential outcomes for youths if vigilantism and violence remains unchallenged in American society. Thus this section will also address tensions between youth culture, violent traditions and debates surrounding

the breakdown of the family unit and rising youth violence. These areas of discussion will collectively demonstrate how masculinity and patriarchy are primary sites of concern in the show and are presented in a critical manner that reflects wider social concerns surrounding inherited traditions and attitudes. The second part of the chapter will focus on representations of the nuclear family, and will similarly illustrate how themes related to the family are presented in a confrontational manner that signifies an underlying malaise and destructive potential in the family unit contrary to its ideological purpose. Expanding upon observations and analyses of Mike Donovan in 'Dexter' carried out in the Introduction and Chapter One of this thesis, Arthur Mitchell's nuclear family will be discussed to demonstrate how 'family' presents a guise of normality in *Dexter*, and is shown to mask a foundation and tradition of murder and violence in the family unit that inevitably influences and destroys its offspring. Following this, Dexter's own attempts to emulate Mitchell will be considered to suggest that the white, middle-class patriarchal family unit is a breeding ground for vigilantism and violence, and is torn apart by it. Thus the section will focus on the status of Rita as an ultimate victim of patriarchy and her submission within it. Finally, and with the intent to show women as subject to the same violent traditions within patriarchal culture, the chapter will explore how *Dexter* presents alternative and oppositional versions of family that prosper without male and patriarchal dominance through female characters such as Lumen and Hannah. This will foreground the show's radical potential and underscore its ability to engage with various contemporary societal issues and viewpoints such as feminism and notions of fractured masculinity. These areas will illustrate how *Dexter* offers a critique of existing ideologies that have wider implications on vigilantism, inviting the viewer to consider them alongside alternatives to patriarchal norms in a modern-day context.



### **Part One: Fathers, Sons, and the Perpetuation of Vigilantism**

Brown (1975), Abrahams (1998) and McGrath (1984) all generally agree that vigilantism has primarily been carried out by men throughout America's history. As such, one can assume that the tendency for vigilantism to be associated with males and presented as a central feature of patriarchal culture in *Dexter* is a fairly accurate reflection of this consistency. However, this is not intended to undermine or ignore female acts of vigilantism that are evident in the show, which are strikingly different, as will be discussed later. Inclusions of male and youth violence in *Dexter* relate to the increasingly pressing concerns surrounding school shootings, mass murder, and other increasingly violent acts in American society over the last decade, particularly by young males. Recent examples of extreme male violence include the Sandy Hook Elementary school shootings in Connecticut, 2012 by gun and video-game fan Adam Lanza, and Elliot Rodger's self-entitled and hate-fuelled attack on young women in California in 2014.<sup>22</sup> More recently in June 2015, young white male Dylann Roof, draped in a Confederate flag, opened fire inside an African-American church in South Carolina, killing nine.<sup>23</sup> Such events collectively highlight key areas of discussion related to vigilantism and extreme violence, such as violent regions and 'gendered' traditions, gun control debates, existing racial attitudes, and the role of popular culture in increasing youth violence. These debates have become increasingly divisive and heated aspects of modern American society. *Dexter*, in representing males of all ages engaged with violence and vigilantism so extensively, again provides a site through which such themes and concerns can be confronted and mediated, offering a critique of American patriarchal culture and its violent vigilante traditions.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/9747682/Connecticut-school-shooting-troubled-life-of-Adam-Lanza-a-fiercely-intelligent-killer.html>

Harriet Alexander, Dec. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012, 'Connecticut School Shooting: Troubled Life of Adam Lanza.'

Accessed 15/10/2014

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/25/elliott-rodger-suspect-california-mass-murder-shooting-stabbing>

Martin Pengelly, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014, 'California Killings: Elliot Rodger Blamed for Deaths.' Accessed 15/10/2014

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/19/dylann-roof-south-carolina-shooting>

Amanda Holpuch and Jessica Glenza, Jun. 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 'Governor of South Carolina Calls for Death Penalty for Dylann Roof.' Accessed 20/06/2015

Abrahams agrees with the primacy of male involvement in America's vigilante history, writing that he is 'confident that the large majority of those who are currently and historically identifiable as vigilantes are and have been men' (p.137). That *Dexter* also reflects this weight suggests the potential of the show in being able to reflect and engage with long-standing aspects and assumptions surrounding vigilantism and masculinity. Whilst Abraham concedes that women are not wholly absent from vigilantism, and that their roles have varied extensively in America's past, he generally dismisses women as being largely irrelevant to American vigilante studies, a notion that will be challenged in Chapter Three (Ibid.). Nonetheless, and for the intentions of this chapter in demonstrating how the role of patriarchal culture and masculine aggression in perpetuating vigilantism in *Dexter* is shown to be potentially destructive to youth, Abrahams' claim can be seen to hold much weight. He describes the involvement of males in American vigilantism as being significantly high, stating that vigilantism and violent crime 'are commonly male-dominated areas, insomuch as sex and gender are rarely likely to be far away when questions of morality are under scrutiny.' (p.137). This statement suggests that men are more inclined towards vigilantism, and makes clear that considering aspects of gender forms a crucial part of understanding representations of the topic.

The primacy of males in America's vigilante history is also evident in Brown's work, which supports the assertion that men play a fundamental role in perpetuating vigilantism and violent extremism in American society and culture. For instance, he discusses all-male vigilante groups that employed extremely violent tactics, such as the Revolution-era 'Sons of Liberty' and South Carolina Regulators. Brown also analyses the role of men in family vendettas, which he claims women were rarely involved in but were often victims of crossfire (1975: pp.5-25). In the contemporary era, Brown's discussions also focus on lone male vigilante acts, such as those carried out by Bernhard 'Subway Vigilante' Goetz in 1984, and amongst young males in drug-warring rival gangs in Los Angeles in the 1990s (1991: pp.129-154). Most poignantly, Brown discusses how families in the Edgefield region of South Carolina's Back Country have

experienced a continual and extensive tradition of violence perpetuated generationally by males, suggesting a tendency to violent extremism in the region (1975: pp.67-90). For instance, Brown claims that violent retaliation between families was borne from grudges and tensions left over from violent incidents in the region's past, such as The Cherokee War (1760-1761), the Regulator-Moderator conflict (1767-1769) and the Tory-Whig wars in the late- 1770s-80s. Brown explains that these conflicts 'traumatized the area's inhabitants and bred a tendency to extremism.' (p.68). This suggests that traumatic experiences of war, murder and violence influenced following generations to hold similar attitudes, characterising ongoing social relationships. Significantly, tendencies to extreme violence and vigilantism in South Carolina's Back Country are situated as inherently patriarchal and masculine. This is made clear by Brown, who asserts that father-son relationships centred on the glorification of past conflicts and encouraged retaliatory attitudes. For instance, he claims that the heritage of renowned extremist right-wing politicians such as John C. Calhoun, Andrew Pickens Butler, Wade Hampton and Preston Brooks, 'can be traced directly back to the Back Country generation of violence, [...and that the men] were shaped by the generations of violence as it continued to live in the tales and traditions of the region.' (p.83) Thus, both men and patriarchy are implicated in engaging in and continuing violent vigilante behaviour in America's past and present.

Further exploring the relationship between violence, vigilantism and men in America's history, McGrath explains that males in the Nevada mining towns of Bodie and Aurora indicate that an inherent tendency to extreme violence and vigilantism is borne from gun culture and the rugged individuality promoted by life on the frontier (1984: pp.225-246). Such overt aggression and inclination to violent murder can be more widely related to characteristics of the male gender, as discussed by Jeffrey Weeks (1985: pp.96-98), Barbara Creed (1993: p.62) and Robin Woods (2003: pp.63-84). Woods writes that violence and horror are closely aligned with the family unit, patriarchy and males, suggesting an ideological outcome somewhat removed from its intentions (p.77). Whilst Woods and Creed specifically discuss such realms with regards to

the American horror film and psychoanalytical theory, they draw on useful social concepts and theories surrounding gender. Instances of the macabre, extreme violence and a sustained serial killer theme in *Dexter* align it with such readings of the horror genre. Thus one can see how representations of violence in patriarchy and the family unit in the show resonate with wider cultural representations that signify an overall malaise within and removal of the family unit from its ostensible purpose as a socially beneficial tool, a notion that aligns with other readings of the horror genre in the post-9/11 era (see Aston and Walliss, 2013).

Discussions of patriarchy and the family in *Dexter* can clearly be considered in relation to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical theories, but it would be counter-productive to the aims of this thesis to engage with such realms herein for two main reasons. Firstly, the focus here is on the historical, social and cultural factors surrounding vigilantism and in exploring how their associated themes manifest themselves in the show. Psychoanalytical approaches, whilst useful for looking at elements such as childhood development, familial relationships, and mental and emotional conflicts between the conscious and the unconscious, would diminish the primacy of the historical, social and cultural debates surrounding vigilantism that are the main point of emphasis in this thesis. Secondly, there are already several articles and books that explore psychoanalysis, family and patriarchy in *Dexter*, which means considering this further would inevitably duplicate existing work. Marisa Mauro (DePaulo, 2010: pp.49-64), Beth Johnson (Howard, 2010: pp.78-95) and Daniel Haas (Greene *et al*, 2011: pp.25-34) all discuss aspects of Harry and Dexter's relationship in in-depth psychoanalytical terms that already pertain to repressive and perpetuated modes of behaviour. For example, Johnson writes about how Dexter is influenced by his 'mother-fixation' (p.83), discusses male/female attributes and subversions in the characters of Dexter, Lila and Rita (p.88), and outlines the primacy of the father and his laws through Harry and Miguel (pp.91-95). This shows that whilst psychoanalysis is a useful tool in understanding the characters and motivations in *Dexter*, such an approach falls outside the scope of this thesis and its primary focus on the historical, social

and cultural representations of the topic. Nonetheless, psychoanalytical theories still remain a valid way of exploring the show, and are an area ripe for further study beyond this thesis.

### **Harry and Dexter**

In *Dexter*, the centrality of patriarchal culture and aggressive masculinity in perpetuating vigilantism and violent extremism is underscored, and they are presented in an overtly cynical and critical manner. The show sets out, and then provides and encourages an extensive and extended critique of these key features of American society and culture. Harry's moral dilemma is established early on in the first episode and is subsequently interrogated and explored throughout *Dexter* by other characters, who each present contrasting arguments and alternative value systems which are also ultimately shown to offer no real solutions. However, in exploring such tensions, *Dexter* does highlight particular areas of concern and indicates where key problems and even some solutions may be found. For instance, the show's overall depiction of vigilantism as having a primarily transformative potential for women is positive and radical, as will be discussed later. This underscores the significance of *Dexter* as a text through which vigilantism and key related debates can be approached and explored. The show's primary critique of patriarchal culture and aggressive masculinity occurs first and foremost through Harry, who is shown to forcibly instil vigilante ideals in Dexter, shaping his son's attitudes, values, actions and destiny through the teaching of his vigilante Code. As such, the father-son relationship is shown to be characterised by deception and manipulation, perpetuating violent extremism and vigilantism generationally; this is shown to occur primarily in Dexter's youth, of which *Dexter* relates to the audience through flashbacks during Seasons One and Two that encourage the viewer to question Harry's methods and intentions, and to consider the damaging effects they have on his adopted son as he teaches him the Code. This process accentuates the significance of the father-son relationship in causing and perpetuating vigilantism. It is also shown to occur through the subversion of rites of passage and traditional male bonding activities such as hunting, implicating tradition, recreational past-times and

other features of phallogentric culture in fostering and encouraging violent tendencies in males from an early age. Finally, Harry is shown to appear as a ghost-like manifestation of Dexter's psyche from Seasons Three to Eight, suggesting the continued potency and primacy of the father in perpetuating vigilantism and murder in the show.

Aligning deceptively with the function of patriarchy and the role of the family and parents to produce healthy, socially beneficial offspring, Dexter and Harry's relationship is initially presented as nurturing and idyllic. This romanticised view is presented to the viewer in 'Dexter' as Dexter explains that his adoptive parents "did a wonderful job raising me," before a series of flashbacks that depict the pair sitting together on a sun-lit boat. The scene implies a traditional and healthy recreational-bonding moment between father and son, but one that is quickly displaced by threatening and sinister undertones as Harry tells Dexter: "I found the grave, son", forcing the viewer to question Dexter's positive memories about his childhood and upbringing. As such, the scene is suddenly suffused with themes of violence, murder and concealment that contrast sharply with the innocence of childhood just depicted. Thus the audience is presented with contradictory information as Dexter is shown to recall his childhood in positive terms, yet these recollections are revealed to be potentially negative, forcing the viewer to consider tensions between memories recalled and their actual realities. This inconsistency also alludes to the American tendency to, as Brown describes, view the past through 'rose-tinted spectacles', indicating that Dexter may be doing this in relation to his own past (p.7). Harry is also visually threatening when standing over Dexter during the flashback, emphasising control and authority as he informs his son: "You're different, aren't you Dexter?" The young boy is shown to fully accept his father's assertions and opinions about him. Dexter's unquestioning acceptance of Harry's words and his underlying desire to please his father is shown to inform and direct Dexter's subsequent adult actions. For instance, after killing Mike Donovan in the opening scenes of 'Dexter', he explains that "The Code of Harry, my foster father, is satisfied.", suggesting that Dexter actively attempts to fulfil his father's expectations even after Harry's death. He is also shown to be proud of his father's tough reputation and

strident attitudes, Dexter boasting that, “Harry was a great cop here in Miami. He taught me how to think like one, how to cover my tracks.” As such, *Dexter* immediately sets up a tension between memory and the past, between right and wrong, and about masculinity and the role of the father as being a beneficial or potentially harmful influence.

Indeed, the potential dangers surrounding Harry’s role in perpetuating vigilantism and violent extremism to his son’s detriment is confirmed in ‘Dexter’ as various aspects of Harry’s moral dilemma are presented. A flashback shows Dexter fixing his skateboard, highlighting his behaviour as a normal teenager, when Harry suddenly enters and unrolls a set of knives and shouts: “There’s blood on this knife!” The scene becomes immediately confrontational, tense and invasive, presenting Harry as an overbearing and threatening patriarch whose potent presence invades normal childhood experiences and activities. Such themes are accentuated and maintained throughout the scene by the use of heavy shadows and dark lighting, tight framing and rapid editing, and sinister music; this underscores the moment as being significant and defining for Dexter, and one that will inevitably determine the future course of his life. Harry stands over Dexter, sublimating his son beneath him as he continues:

“You still don’t remember anything from before [...] we took you in? [...] What happened changed something inside of you; it got into you too early. I’m afraid your urge to kill is only going to get stronger. [...] Okay, we can’t stop this. But maybe we can do something to channel it – use it for good. [...] Son, there are people out there who do really bad things. Terrible people. And the police can’t catch them all. Do you understand what I’m saying? [...] But of course, you have to learn how to spot them, how to cover your tracks. But I can teach you. [...] It’s okay, Dex. You can’t help what happened to you, but you can make the best of it. Remember this forever: you are my son. You are not alone, and you are loved.”

Several important features of vigilantism in American history and society stand out in Harry’s dialogue. For instance, the centrality of patriarchy and males in encouraging vigilantism

underscores the primacy of the father-son relationship in continuing the cycle. Similarly significant, and alluding to the secretive, taboo and increasingly derogative connotations of vigilantism in America's recent history, the word 'vigilantism' is never used by Harry, it is only ever *implied*. Indeed, it is only ever uttered a handful of times throughout the entire show, highlighting the topic's controversial and taboo nature. Also, Harry is shown to use trauma and violence in Dexter's youth deceptively, suggesting manipulation of traumatic events through which to withhold and maintain primacy and authority over the boy, and used as a means to justify vigilante activity. Finally, when Harry says, "use it for good," he looks directly into the camera, burdening the viewer with the same moral dilemma and implicating them in the moment, forcing them to question the positive value of vigilante acts. Moreover, the scene outlines several key aspects of the moral dilemmas that subsequently confront the viewer throughout the show. For instance, the dialogue above forces the viewer to consider several key questions: Is Dexter really 'bad', or has Harry made him be this way? Did Harry do the right thing in helping Dexter himself, or should he have sought professional help? Does he genuinely have his son's best interests at heart, or is he using Dexter to carry out his own unfulfilled vigilante tendencies? Finally, tensions between serial killing and vigilantism are highlighted as Harry presents vigilantism as a legitimate, 'better' form of serial murder. As such, *Dexter* can be seen to present and explore these moral dilemmas through the character of Harry, inviting the viewer to question them as well. Thus the overtly subjective and personal nature of vigilantism is underscored. While not offering definite conclusions about these issues, the show does imply, however, that vigilantism is a central facet of American patriarchal culture and aggressive masculinity that is invasive and must be halted. This position is revealed at the very end of the series when Dexter is sent into exile, showing the vigilante as becoming forever separate from American society. Significantly, Dexter self-exiles himself with the intention to stop the vigilantism cycle from destroying his son, supporting the assertion that *Dexter* overall presents a critical view of masculine and patriarchal culture and its promotion of vigilantism and violent extremism.



Throughout early flashbacks, as his influence over Dexter's life is explored, Harry is regularly presented as a dominant, threatening and overbearing patriarch, and is shown to instil his own attitudes and emotions on Dexter. As Harry mourns the death of his police partner Davey Sanchez (name mention only) in 'Crocodile' for instance, he tells Dexter that, "Ever since Davey was killed my world feels out of control." He is situated in the scene at the forefront of the screen, overshadowing his son with his dark frame, thus presenting Harry as a dominating and influential figure. It is of note that Dexter is illuminated by a single shaft of light in this scene, which signifies Dexter's diminishing autonomy and 'goodness' as he adopts Harry's beliefs as his own. This depiction of Harry as a dark and malevolent presence encroaching onto Dexter's psyche indicates that he is a corrupting force on his son. Suggesting that Dexter has been personally affected by his father's sorrow and grief, he asks Harry, "How can you fix it?" Harry responds that he: "can honour Davey's memory and catch the bastard who did this to him. It's not about vengeance; it's not about retaliation, or balancing the books. It's about something deep inside." Thus Harry's personal views on vigilantism and notions of 'justice' are again underlined by his words and positioning within the frame, inviting the viewer to question his intentions and actions whilst witnessing his destructive attitudes and influence over his son in the 'present'. Further, Harry's forceful attempts to encourage vigilantism in his son are also shown to corrupt Dexter's 'normal' teenage experiences, presenting vigilantism as an overtly male, invasive and destructive force. This is illustrated as Harry arrives late to collect Dexter after a day out in 'Crocodile', marring Dexter's healthy and normal social experience with his own "bad day." An underlying malaise is again evident through dark lighting and heavy rain, suggesting tension and manipulation. Harry, angry and sullen, tells Dexter that Sanchez's murderer has escaped justice: "The judge said the bust wasn't righteous and let him walk." As such, themes of injustice, anger and a perceived *need* for vigilantism in response to procedural failings are promoted and naturalised by Harry. Thus Harry's preoccupation with vigilantism is shown to overshadow and characterise the relationship with his son, subverting Dexter's normal childhood experiences by suffusing them with a sense of despair, injustice, righteous

anger and a need for extra-legal action. As such, Harry's perpetuation of vigilantism is explicitly located in violent male aggression, and is shown to consume and corrupt Dexter.

Youthful rites of passage are also perverted by Harry and used to further encourage Dexter's acceptance of vigilantism and adoption of related deceptive social conduct. In 'Love, American Style' for example, Dexter excitedly prepares for a school dance, presenting the event as a normal, healthy social experience for the young teen. As Harry applies finishing touches to Dexter's outfit he instructs him under the pretence of normalcy in how to act in public with his date, telling his son to, "dance with her, and be polite. Get her punch, open the door for her, and if you find yourself alone with her and things get romantic..." Dexter responds that he has "kissed a girl before," implying a normal, healthy exchange between father and son. It also hints at an approaching father-son conversation about sex, further highlighting the prominence of parental 'traditions' of which Weeks suggests are a vital aspect of familial male bonding (p.104). However, this is quickly displaced by a stark reminder of Dexter's 'Otherness' and separation from society as Harry draws attention to his son's murderous potential; this is suggested when Harry pointedly tells his son that, "women are different from men [...] They know when you're not [emotionally connected]." Dexter, confronted with Harry's assertions about his emotional inadequacies, looks away in shame. Harry even warns: "Son, this is going to be very dangerous for you." Thus, healthy and normal social activities are presented as overtly threatening and alien to Dexter, and as something that he can have no 'real' part in. It is also presented as 'truth' by Harry, underscoring his negative influence over Dexter. This scene suggests that learned attitudes from Harry have characterised Dexter's social relations with others. More so, such a forceful severance between Dexter and society by Harry invokes a central aspect of vigilantism and of the vigilante figure. Epistemologically, the vigilante is a guardian of the city, a watchman that protects upright citizens and, due to this position of carrying out a service that wider society cannot, the vigilante is effectively excluded from that society (Madison, 1973: p.4). As such, Harry's reminder of Dexter's social Otherness and his use of the family as a façade through which to mask it adheres to this feature of vigilantism,

yet is presented in a manner that questions Harry's actions and intentions. What should be a normal teen experience for Dexter is undermined by apparent concern surrounding his social 'differences' and his need to conceal them. Thus Harry's invasive teachings are shown to suffuse Dexter's experience with malaise and perpetual isolation as his own attitudes overshadow the event. As such, the audience questions Harry's motives and can see that he has corrupted his son into falsely believing that he has uncontrollable murderous impulses that can only be mediated and controlled through deceptive behaviour and acts of vigilantism. Such scenes add weight to the assertion that vigilantism is shown to be perpetuated between fathers and sons and through aggressive patriarchal dominance, and is presented as an overtly negative and damaging feature in *Dexter*.

Father-son bonding activities and recreational past-times also provide teaching opportunities for Harry, and are suffused with tensions between right and wrong, and murder and vigilantism as he instructs his son and establishes the Code. Illustrating this, a flashback shows the pair preparing for a hunting trip in 'Popping Cherry', which highlights America's violent traditions and gun control issues. Again, sinister music, shadowy lighting, close framing and rapid edits present Harry as a dark and overwhelming influence. Directly placing the perpetuation of vigilantism and violent extremism with fathers and patriarchal culture, Harry opens a gun-case and asks Dexter which gun he would like to use. As such, Harry is shown to be encouraging his son to embrace violent traditions, yet contrarily, he then also stresses the importance of gun safety. However, and highlighting the refusal of *Dexter* to provide answers and instead provoke debate, this occurs only after Dexter has accidentally fired the gun at Harry, narrowly missing him. Further suggesting the show's ability to engage rather than to impart knowledge or align with a particular point of view, Dexter asks Harry what it feels like to shoot a criminal. "Not so great Dex," Harry replies. "As a cop, I only fire my weapon to save a life, that's a code I live by. Killing must serve a purpose otherwise it's just plain murder. You understand?" Thus Harry's own opinion on vigilantism as being a lesser evil than outright murder is emphasised. The influence of Harry in shaping Dexter's attitudes with his own is

indicated through his acknowledgement that the Code he is teaching Dexter is based on his *own* “code”, directly placing responsibility for the perpetuation of vigilantism on the father’s aggressive masculinity and usurpation of violent traditions and gendered roles. It also again stresses the tension between Harry’s actions and intentions, suggesting that Harry is potentially using Dexter to fulfil and substantiate his own vigilante urges, and has corrupted him with his beliefs in the process.

As the two start to hunt, the bonding nature of the activity is emphasised as Harry and Dexter are followed into the woodlands with a close-up, hand-held camera, before shooting a deer. This heightens the intimacy of the moment between father and son and crucially involves the viewer in the moment, making them complicit. As they approach the wounded deer to kill it, Harry hands Dexter a knife and says with a smile, “For now this is how we’ll control the urges you feel, channel them. Why don’t you go ahead, Son?” Dexter takes the knife and enthusiastically kills the deer. This sequence implies that gun culture and murderous urges are intrinsically linked, and significantly suggests that guns, hunting and other masculine-associated recreational activities are culturally acceptable *covers* for violent extremism and murderous urges. Further, Harry presents shooting animals as a permissible alternative to murdering humans and he encourages Dexter in that direction. The words used also align several significant aspects of the hunt with Dexter’s acceptance of the Code. For instance, Harry says, “we’ll control”, suggesting the enforced unity and solidarity of their relationship and attitudes. This relationship also heightens Dexter’s separation from society and from others, enforcing his apparent *need* for Harry, who presents the Code and vigilantism as Dexter’s only option. Finally, Harry’s encouragement, “Why don’t you go ahead, Son?” suggests honour and reward, and underlines the primacy of the father in dictating, directing and encouraging acts of violent murder by his son. It is also presented as a means through which Dexter can gain his father’s attention and admiration. Harry’s repeated use of the word “Son” highlights the centrality of the father-son relationship and the primacy of patriarchal culture. It is striking that, apart from Dexter’s use of a gun in ‘Nebraska’, this is the only other

time the audience ever see him with a gun. Thus whilst *Dexter* avoids making an explicit comment on gun culture, the presentation of guns as a central facet of father-son bonding, violent traditions, and the continuation of violent tendencies in American society is accentuated and presented in a critical light.

As previously stated, *Dexter* does not necessarily condemn or condone Harry's actions or views concerning the Code, but explores them, burdening the viewer with the same moral dilemmas he faces himself. It also challenges the primacy of masculinity and patriarchy in perpetuating vigilantism, and addresses tensions surrounding the dilemma by presenting alternative attitudes through other characters that directly confront and challenge Harry's Code, such as Brian, Lila, Debra and Hannah. Whilst *Dexter* fails to provide a sustainable alternative or answer to Harry's moral dilemma, these characters show how one's use of vigilantism can also be shaped by personal experience and peer influence. Thus the primacy of the Code and Harry himself is challenged by opposing viewpoints, underscoring the highly subjective nature of vigilantism and its ambiguous moral claims and motivations in American society.

Throughout Season One, Brian attempts to challenge the primacy of Harry and the Code in Dexter's life by exposing deceptive aspects of their relationship and alternative attitudes towards vigilantism. As such Brian can be seen to challenge the illusion of the family as healthy and socially beneficial, whilst simultaneously confronting tensions between vigilantism and serial murder. Brian also exposes Harry's manipulative use of past traumatic events to direct vigilantism by forcing Dexter's repressed memories to surface, which is contrasted against Brian's more open and honest approach to trauma and murder. Insinuating that the family unit is a façade, and emphasising the manipulative and deceptive nature of Harry's Code, Brian recreates Dexter's childhood photographs with body parts in 'Let's Give the Boy a Hand'. This directly relates violent extremism to deception and concealment in the family unit, which is exposed as masking vigilantism beneath a supposedly healthy and beneficial social structure. Emphasising this notion, Dexter approaches a crime scene at a beach and muses that "it's time

to put on my mask.”; this indicates that his current attitudes have emerged from his past experiences, presenting deception as a taught facet of his identity and as integral to vigilantism. Confirming these themes, a flashback reveals Dexter’s memory of the beach, stressing the connection between past and present, and depicts Harry as fundamentally responsible for shaping his attitudes. Calling Dexter over to chastise him for not smiling for a family photograph, Harry tells him that, “Being part of a family means smiling for photos.” The roles of teacher and student are also reasserted as Dexter asks, “Why should I pretend I’m happy?”, with Harry patiently explaining: “Because it’ll make your Mom happy, and because it’s how you fit in [...] When somebody takes your picture you smile. It doesn’t matter if you’re happy or not, you just do it to fit in.” Thus the family is shown to uphold an idyllic front whilst really masking a darker truth, presenting photographs and memories as surface perceptions that undermine reality, images that are used to actively conceal violent extremism. These themes can be seen to relate to wider tendencies to glorify incidents of past violence and extremism in American history. The scene is also significant because, in imparting such advice, it indicates that Harry himself has felt the need to use the ideological function of the family unit as a cover for his *own* social alienation and vigilante urges, and has learned to ‘play the part.’ With this in mind, Harry is shown to be potentially a victim of generational vigilantism himself, whilst being directly responsible for his son’s adoption of the very same attitudes. This further supports the assertion that vigilantism is shown to be passed on from generation to generation through the patriarchal structure in *Dexter*, presenting men as victims of the *status quo* and ideological expectations.

Brian directly challenges Harry’s vigilante Code in ‘Born Free’. It is of note that the episode title itself alludes to the idea that one is born with free will and a blank slate, suggesting that belief systems are influenced and directed by one’s parents and peers (Crystal: p.692). Supporting this assertion further, the title also appears as a popular song in the episode that is used by Brian to trigger Dexter’s repressed memories of home and childhood; this memory features his mother and takes place *before* he meets Harry, setting up tensions between patriarchy and

patriarchy, freedom and submission, innocence and corruption, and vigilantism and murder.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the viewer is encouraged to consider the darker implications of Harry's Code. In this way, Brian directly challenges the primacy of Harry and his attitudes, and of violent traditions in patriarchal culture. Addressing the dilemma between serial murder and vigilantism for example, and acknowledging the similarities between the two realms, Brian is open and honest about the role of trauma in his past and its effects on his own psyche. He describes to Dexter how their mother's murder has directly influenced his own murderous actions and became the moment he was "born." In this respect, Brian can be seen to expose the American tendency to look back at violent events with pride and glory. Further, Brian's honesty about the extent to which the trauma influenced his murderous actions contrasts sharply with the deceptive manner in which Harry uses the same traumatic event to encourage and direct Dexter's violent actions. Brian tells Dexter: "You were trapped in a lie little brother, the same lie that they tried forcing me into." Thus, the dilemma between serial killing as 'bad' and vigilantism as 'good' in Harry's Code is directly challenged by Brian and suggests instead, contrary to Harry's assertions, that vigilantism is *not* a force for good and is akin to murder.

Brian further undermines and challenges Harry's teachings by suggesting that Dexter has been forcibly shaped and influenced by Harry's attitudes, encouraging Dexter and the viewer to question the centrality of the Code and Harry's role in Dexter's life. For instance, Brian asks of Dexter's victims, "are they all killers? [...] Harry teach you that? [...] like an absurd avenger...", so can also be seen to even ridicule Harry and the Code. Brian continues his attack, shouting angrily that, "You don't have a Code! Harry did!" This implies that Dexter has accepted Harry's vigilante Code and has assumed his attitudes without question. Further, Brian screams in a rage: "You can't be a killer and a hero, it doesn't work that way!" With this in mind, the key ambiguities and tensions of vigilantism are directly confronted by Brian, who suggests that vigilantism is, in comparative terms, merely a form of socially acceptable murder. More

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<sup>24</sup> As noted, whilst this obviously alludes to the realm of psychoanalysis and specific psychoanalytical concepts, a significant amount of writing on the topic in *Dexter* already exists.

specifically, Brian exposes and undermines Harry's central claim that murder is acceptable if it is for the purposes of socially beneficial vigilantism by suggesting undeniable parallels between them to Dexter and the audience. Significantly, Brian prompts Dexter himself to start questioning the Code and Harry's intentions, and in doing so can be seen to challenge and expose the principal role of patriarchal culture and aggressive masculinity behind vigilante acts. As such, *Dexter* can be considered a radical text that openly challenges and questions the role of vigilantism in American identity by exposing patriarchy as responsible for its continuation.

As Season Two of *Dexter* begins, Dexter starts to question Harry's assertions and opinions about vigilantism and indeed, about his father's real intentions in encouraging him to accept the Code. Explicitly aligning Dexter's murderous actions with his father's influence, a further critique of patriarchal culture is evident through the implication that Harry and the 'Dark Passenger', or Dexter's 'need' to kill, are one and the same, as suggested in 'An Inconvenient Lie' when Dexter explains about his 'addiction' to a Narcotics Anonymous group. He tell them that:

"It's there, always, this Dark Passenger. And when he's driving I feel alive, half sick with the thrill, the complete wrongness... I don't fight him. [...] He's all I've got; nothing else could love me. Or is that just a lie the Dark Passenger tells me?"

From this comment several key points can be made. Firstly, the acknowledgement that "he's driving" can be seen to allude to Harry's dominance and control over Dexter, instilled at a young age. Heightening this notion, Dexter's claim that "he's all I've got," is reminiscent of early flashbacks in which the audience see Harry repeatedly enforcing Dexter's separation from society and directing Dexter's actions by making the boy doubt official systems. Dexter's query about the Dark Passenger's intention to isolate him from society also alludes to Harry's own actions, suggesting that Dexter has been influenced by Brian's views and is now questioning the primacy of Harry and the Code, challenging patriarchal culture by confronting



its role in his own violent behaviour. With the above points in mind, the dialogue significantly alludes to Harry being directly responsible for making Dexter become a murderer, forcing the viewer to consider the same. Contrary to Harry's claim that Dexter is essentially 'bad' and has to kill, and that he cannot experience genuine emotions and connections, Dexter's monologue indicates to the viewer that he *does* have a sense of right and wrong beyond the Code. This foregrounds the possibility that Harry may have lied to, manipulated and misjudged his son, and ultimately presents the Code as a purely deceptive and facilitating means through which Harry can direct and commit murder, fulfilling his own unsatisfied urges. Harry's claim that he encouraged Dexter to use the Code for socially beneficial reasons is therefore undermined by Brian, who exposes the Code - and vigilantism - as a highly personal and subjective excuse for murder.

In contrast to the controlling and deceptive nature of patriarchal vigilantism in Harry's Code, which dictates a specific mode of conduct to ensure Dexter's uninterrupted role as vigilante, Lila is open and overtly feminine. Appearing in Season Two, she again actively challenges the primacy of the Code, and significantly emphasises tensions between the use of vigilantism for 'good' as implied in Harry's Code, and its use for 'bad' or personal reasons in relation to her own outlook on life; Brown's discussions of socially beneficial and destructive forms of vigilantism are useful here in this respect, as Lila subverts their polarities. In encouraging Dexter to pursue his mother's murderer, an act which can also be seen to be socially beneficial *and* personal, she can be seen to invoke a distinctly feminine challenge to the rigidity of Harry's Code and to the centrality of patriarchal norms. More so, this challenge accentuates the morally ambiguous nature of vigilantism and the Code by suggesting it is both good and bad, social *and* personal, at the same time, not simply just one or the other. Lila is shown recklessly crashing her car into roadside objects and openly stealing items from people's gardens in 'See-Through'. That she operates in broad daylight and is honest about her behaviour directly challenges the patriarchal social norms that have dictated and informed Dexter's vigilantism as espoused by the Code, which is shown to be repressive, manipulative

and concealed by darkness instead. Lila's rebellious, overtly sexual nature also provides a stark contrast to Rita, who is accepting of and conforms to the 'rules' of patriarchal culture, presenting a tension between female autonomy and patriarchal submission. Foreshadowing this contrast, Dexter tells Rita that Lila, "plays a little loose with the twelve steps," at which she is aghast. Lila's irresponsible behaviour underscores her rebellious nature and suggests that she is challenging and threatening to patriarchy, masculine dominance and social norms. Dexter initially is shown to resist her influence and appears uncomfortable when she asks questions that increasingly challenge and undermine the Code, telling her that, "I'm afraid we're done, you and I. [...] I don't think I want to answer any more questions," revealing major tensions between their opposing moral frameworks and belief systems.

In 'See-Through' Lila encourages Dexter to challenge his existing moral framework and perceptions of Self by offering a contrasting opinion to Harry's assertion that Dexter had no choice but to murder because he is essentially an innately 'bad' person as a result of his childhood trauma. Lila tells him: "Whatever you think you are, you don't have to be that. There are no absolutes; no one's all good or evil." As such, she can be seen to offer an alternative outlook that undermines the aggressive, patriarchal perpetuation of vigilantism by suggesting that Harry was wrong to condition his son in such a way. Lila therefore subverts the rigidity and dominance of Harry and the Code, challenging the patriarch's enforcement of vigilantism by diminishing (and exposing) the distinction between good and bad. Further, and ultimately opposing Harry's assertion that Dexter is an innately bad person as a result of his childhood trauma, Lila shouts at Dexter that, "You make yourself a monster so you no longer bear responsibility for what you do! 'Ah I can't help it, I'm a monster', or, 'Of course I was gonna do that – I'm a monster.' It's sad, and it's pathetic, and it breaks my heart." In directly challenging Dexter's opinions and explanations of himself in this manner, Lila can be seen to undermine the central tenet behind Harry's Code. Instead, she exposes the self-facilitating nature of it - and its overwhelming influence over Dexter's life - as simply being an *excuse* to kill, absolving notions of responsibility and accountability for his crimes and actions.

Whereas Brian exposed Harry's manipulative and exploitative use of trauma to direct supposedly socially beneficial vigilantism, Lila can be seen to take this further when she convinces Dexter to confront his mother's murderers in 'The Dark Defender'. In doing so, she again exposes and challenges several key features central to Harry's Code and to wider debates surrounding vigilantism. For example, she undermines Harry's masculine dominance through her overt sexuality and femininity, shifting Dexter's focus to his mother's murder and the responsibility of her killers. Laura's killers are presented as extremely violent and aggressive males who, employing retaliatory actions themselves, murdered her in front of her children with a chainsaw. In forcing confrontation with one of Laura's killers, Lila exposes Harry's *own* exploitation of the mother in the very traumatic event he used to justify vigilantism and instil such urges in Dexter. The implication is that Harry used the trauma as an excuse to direct Dexter's vigilante impulses towards his *own* concerns about society at large. After finding out that one of Laura's murderers, Santos Jimenez (Tony Amendola), is still alive, Lila asks: "You're not the least bit pissed off that this man got away with murder? [...] go and tell him. Healing is all about focusing your rage at the person that's hurt you." Thus Lila's alternative belief system encourages Dexter to re-direct his aggression and urges to their real source – his mother's killers – and can be seen to directly expose and oppose Harry's Code and its application to wider society. Her beliefs also chime with Barash & Lipton's discussions surrounding revenge, retaliation and re-directed aggression, who argue that the pain and trauma caused by violent and murderous acts are:

'profoundly inward-focused, involving only the affected individual and his or her welfare. But often enough, it moves from the individual outward in circles and spirals that involve friends, enemies, relatives, strangers, and sometimes expands to affect entire communities and nations. [...] the wounded often act in ways that magnify further wounds, for the injured self and others.' (2011: p.3)

One can see how this description pertains not only to Harry's actions in teaching Dexter vigilantism, but points to other factors and sites of trauma, violence and deception in his actions and those of Laura's murderers. Barash & Lipton's social theories surrounding revenge and retaliation can clearly be seen to relate to vigilantism, and allude to its socially damaging consequences and effects. Their theories can also be seen to share clear commonalities with Brown's socially beneficial and destructive models mentioned earlier. Whilst revenge is clearly a concept distinct from vigilantism, it shares significant and at times indistinguishable crossovers with it, particularly when individuals retaliate against those who have perpetrated crimes against them, as Dexter does on this occasion.

Lila is shown to have influenced Dexter with her revenge-focused approach to vigilantism in 'The Dark Defender' when he compares her beliefs to those of his father: "Harry always said, 'never make things personal, it clouds your judgement.' But I've been living in a fog way too long." He subsequently seeks out Jimenez directly, and attempts to talk to the old man at his bar, exploding into spontaneous violence when Jimenez's refuses to co-operate. Such unrestrained, wild aggression is in direct opposition to the restraint of Harry's Code, suggesting that Lila's direct and personal approach is even more extreme in practice. Dexter screams at Jimenez: "I'm not who I'm supposed to be!", suggesting that the man's murderous actions have shaped Dexter's life, providing an excuse to direct further violence. Barash & Lipton's discussions of re-directed aggression can also be seen to be applicable to Harry, and Dexter's comment equally directed towards the father who has controlled and dictated his life. This observation is confirmed by Jimenez, who tells Dexter that he murdered Laura because she was Harry's informant and secret lover. Thus Laura's murder can also be considered an act of redirected vigilantism, suggesting that Harry was the real cause of both Dexter's trauma *and* of his subsequent vigilantism. With this in mind, the seemingly socially beneficial nature of Harry's Code - to kill murderers that threaten society - is turned on its head and exposed as a cover for men to murder whoever they see fit. When viewed through Lila's worldview, vigilantism which is misdirected away from the source of trauma and unleashed instead on

wider society is, ironically, positioned as inherently socially destructive. In comparison, Lila's directed revenge is minimised and aimed at the source, targeting aggressive masculinity and the tenets of Harry's Code, strongly implicating patriarchal culture in the process. In being directed, Lila's personalised vigilantism is shown to be less damaging to wider society. Indeed, the 'goodness' of Harry's Code and its apparently honourable and socially beneficial intentions are exposed as inherently damaging and worse - a façade through which to mask Harry's own guilt surrounding Laura's murder. When viewed in such a manner, one could even consider all forms of vigilantism as inherently socially destructive, perverse and corrupting forces.

Whilst her view suggests a more balanced relationship between social and personally-directed vigilantism, Lila's own vigilante actions are ultimately shown to be motivated by purely selfish desires, and are presented as overtly dangerous. Despite challenging the Code, Lila is shown to offer no real solutions or alternatives to it, or to the moral dilemmas of vigilantism and Harry's actions. Lila's attitudes are shown to take on a self-driving momentum, underlining tensions between Harry's Code and her own beliefs as both courses of vigilante action are ultimately shown to threaten wider society. Moreover, her selfish acts even put Dexter and others in danger, positioning revenge-driven vigilantism as equally destructive in social terms as Harry's supposedly beneficial Code, underscoring the inconsistent, contradictory and often ambivalent presentation of vigilante themes in the show. In 'Morning Comes', for instance, Lila sets up a confrontation between Jimenez and Dexter and her actions can be seen to have severe consequences, leading to Jimenez's death; that Lila arranged the confrontation so that she could force an emotional connection with Dexter indicates that she is exploiting Dexter's childhood tragedy for her own ends, just like Harry. The damaging influence of Lila's beliefs upon him can also be seen when, impulsively, Dexter sends a fake manifesto to Miami Metro in an attempt to undermine their investigation into his crimes. However, the manifesto actually helps the department to narrow down their search, making Dexter a potential suspect. Realising the negative implications of using vigilantism for purely selfish reasons, he concludes: "That's what I get for trying to emulate Lila and take the offensive! I've always worked best in

the shadows; that's where I have to stay." As such, Lila's spontaneity creates potential dangers, contrasting with and significantly reaffirming Harry's first rule: "Don't get caught." With this in mind she is shown to encourage Dexter to explore an alternative to Harry's Code and male-directed vigilantism that in the end proves to be equally unsustainable. Lila's own acts of vigilantism are similarly shown to affect wider society, presenting personal and self-motivated acts as being as chaotic and destructive as those apparently socially-motivated by the Code. For instance, in 'Left Turn Ahead' she falsely accuses Batista of rape and then murders Doakes in an explosion. She subsequently attacks Rita's babysitter, kidnaps her children, and almost kills them and Dexter in a fire in 'The British Invasion'. As such, Lila's self-serving vigilante acts are unleashed on the community at large and are a harmful and destructive force. Thus the Code is reaffirmed as a 'lesser evil' when compared with Lila's personal and highly destructive vigilante acts.

Acknowledging the overtly destructive and violent nature of his Code, Harry himself is shown to have doubts when confronted by the realities of them in 'There's Something About Harry', when he walks in on Dexter dismembering a body, before being violently sick and telling his son to "stay away!" As such, the murderous truth behind Harry's vigilante Code is exposed as brutal, misguided and inherently wrong, and Harry is forced to witness this for himself. This scene shows that Dexter's vigilante acts are being directed and influenced by Harry's own desires, confronting him with the wider implications of his actions - that Harry has perverted and abused his son to fulfil his own equally misguided vigilante ideals. Harry cannot live with this truth, a notion implied by his subsequent suicide. It is significant that Doakes helps to reveal this information about Harry when he confronts Dexter about his father's principles, challenging Harry's authority and perpetuated vigilante attitudes. Doakes tells Dexter, "You think you're a fucking hero, right? Cleaning up the fucking streets. [...Harry] knew? He really was a fucking whack-job!" Then, as Dexter dismembers the body in front of him, Doakes screams: "Stay away!" prompting Dexter's own questions and realisations about Harry and the Code. Thus Doakes can be seen to force repressed information to surface that suggests Harry

was wrong to perpetuate and realise his own vigilante urges through Dexter. Doakes further challenges the primacy of the Code and Harry's attitudes when, watching Dexter prepare the body for dismemberment, he screams, "Morgan, no! You don't have to do this! You don't have to kill this man!" As blood pools around Doakes' cage, the audience are equally confronted with the barbarity of Dexter's act, and are forced to consider the extremes of both Dexter's behaviour and Harry's Code. Dexter is shown to have been deeply affected by Doakes' comments about Harry, finally realising why his father committed suicide: "It was me. The idea of a Code was one thing, a noble cause. But the reality of it... Harry walked in on what he created and he couldn't live with himself. I killed my father." As such, deeper and more complex interpretations of vigilantism as a form of murder embodying warped and inherently destructive patriarchal ideals are evident.

Although Dexter still returns to the Code, he is shown to have been affected and influenced by the opposing moral frameworks and approaches to vigilantism and murder exhibited by Brian, Lila and Doakes. Indeed, Dexter now openly acknowledges the exploitative and deceptive features of the Code: "All the things Harry taught me, everything, its bullshit. But it's the only way I know how to live." This suggests that vigilantism and violent extremism perpetuated by patriarchal culture is not only influenced by peers and lived experiences, but that it is so ingrained in Dexter's psyche that it is inseparable from his actions and habits. Nonetheless, despite this acceptance of the Code as an indelible part of his identity, Brian, Lila and Doakes can be seen to have undermined and removed the primacy of Harry in directing Dexter's present actions. At the end of 'The British Invasion', Dexter declares in defiance:

"The Code is mine now, and mine alone. So too are the relationships I cultivate. They're not just disguises anymore; I need them, even if they make me vulnerable. My father might not approve, but I'm no longer his disciple. I'm a master now, an idea transcended into life. And so this is my new path. Which is a lot like the old one... only mine."

This comment is significant because it suggests that Dexter has challenged and surpassed key elements of Harry's vigilante Code and inherited views, and has incorporated the beliefs of others outside the Code into his own 'version' of it. Thus, whilst Dexter's experiences with Lila, Brian and Doakes force him to re-consider and re-evaluate Harry's role, he does not fully deviate from Harry's path. Indeed, Dexter's final assertion that his new path is very similar to the old, but is significantly now *his* over *Harry's* path, still highlights patriarchal influences and aspects of masculinity as underscoring his attitudes and acts. This suggests that vigilantism takes on a momentum of its own and is shown to be an inevitable, deep-rooted part of Dexter's - and American - identity.

The Prado Brothers in Season Three offer a further comparison to Harry's taught Code, and illustrate how vigilantism is shown to take on a momentum of its own whilst remaining rooted in violent masculinity and aggressive patriarchal culture. *Dexter* plays out tensions between innate violent tendencies and learned behaviour, extending the show's critique of masculinity and patriarchy through the Prados by showing them to harbour similarly violent vigilante urges. Thus the tensions between *taught* and *innate* violent and vigilante tendencies are emphasised. In 'Our Father', for example, Oscar Prado takes part in a violent altercation with drug-dealer Freebo and Dexter, during which he attacks Dexter with a knife and is subsequently killed. The corrosive influence of Oscar's father on such behaviour is hinted at in 'Finding Freebo' when it is revealed that Oscar's knife belonged to him and is a family heirloom dating from the Korean War. Symbolising the significance of war and tradition on the perpetuation of violence and vigilantism through the family unit, Miguel fondles the knife, signifying its importance to him and his brothers. As such, the role of the father and tradition in perpetuating violent extremism, this time through a military tradition, is accentuated, yet so is the father's absence, as the heirloom signifies a time passed and a memento of those long gone. Similarly, Ramon's acts of vigilantism suggest that he too has been influenced by childhood events, implicating aggressive masculinity in perpetuating and fostering violent attitudes and tendencies. In 'Do You Take Dexter Morgan?' for instance, Dexter confronts



Ramon with his “really ugly history - kidnapping, brutality, abuse, you trashed my apartment, you followed me, you put a gun in my face in front of my friends, in front of my pregnant fiancé!” This scene makes clear that Ramon’s vigilantism is beginning to take on an impetus of its own and is increasingly threatening to wider society. After Ramon explains how badly his father affected him, Dexter tells him: “... the sins of the father go on and on, from kid to kid to kid, unless someone – you - chooses to end them.”, again suggesting that the violent influences of the father are passed on generationally and through both explicit and implicit ways. This significantly places the *responsibility* for the perpetuation of vigilantism with the sons by suggesting that they can challenge and end the tradition if they truly wish. It is significant that Dexter foreshadows his own role and fate in this cyclical pattern as well, indicating a sustained and complex critique of aggressive masculinity and patriarchal culture in *Dexter* that shows it to promote a cycle of violence and despair.

Rooting the Prado Brothers’ violent, retaliatory behaviour in the attitudes and actions of the father, Miguel tells Dexter in ‘The Damage a Man Can Do’ about violently defending himself and his brothers from their abusive father in his youth. This suggests that violence is inherent in both generations and has manifested as a violent vigilante response to childhood experiences of parental abuse, inviting a revision of Harry’s role within a similar context. More so, Miguel uses his father to justify and excuse his own actions in the present, just as Dexter often does. In ‘Si Se Puede’ for instance, he tells Dexter about his “asshole drunk dad [...] maybe I’m still trying to clean up the mess that I couldn’t when I was a kid, I don’t know.” Such inclusions in the episode act to strengthen the assertion that attitudes towards vigilantism and violent extremism are generational between fathers and sons. However, and indicating that deception and concealment is also a natural aspect of inherited vigilantism, Dexter later tells Ramon in ‘Do You Take Dexter Morgan?’ that Miguel “told me how he pushed your father down the stairs to protect Oscar and you, and that he enjoyed it.” Ramon replies in disbelief, “He fucking told you that? It was *me* that did that to our father. Miguel took it from me, made it his story; part of his goddamn legend.” As such, the implication that deception and glory play

crucial roles in the perpetuation of violence and vigilantism, specifically amongst men within the family unit, is underlined. This makes clear the extent to which social, historical and cultural realms overlap regarding the topic. Indeed, Miguel's deceptive vigilante behaviour is shown to be self-serving and purposefully manipulative of others. In 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' for instance, he gives Dexter his shirt, covered in Freebo's blood, as a gesture of trust between the two men, but in 'About Last Night' Dexter discovers the blood is bovine in origin and realises that Miguel has used him. The primacy of vigilantism as an inherited attitude and concept versus its presentation as emerging from Miguel's innate and instinctual behaviours is emphasised, encouraging the viewer to consider such tensions and parallels. Thus, vigilantism is depicted as an unrelenting and invasive cycle of deception, with a tendency to vigilantism borne out of childhood abuse. Extreme violence is also shown to be an integral feature of Miguel's male identity, and is explicitly presented through his vicious murder of Ellen Wolf. The brutal pleasure he took in her murder is indicated in 'About Last Night' when Masuka and Batista observe the horrible wounds inflicted upon Wolf's body. Masuka describes how she suffered: "Severe beating, strangulation, plus three stab wounds...", indicating excessive violence and extreme hatred behind the crime, of which Batista wryly notes that, "Whoever did this was not a fan." With this in mind, vigilantism and violence in Miguel is presented as innate, yet remains intrinsically linked to his childhood experiences; this demonstrates that *Dexter* engages with themes of perpetuated vigilante behaviour extensively over and beyond Dexter and Harry's relationship, showing them to be ingrained aspects of American male identity.

After Season Two, Harry appears as a ghost-like manifestation from Dexter's psyche, reflecting the diminished yet continued potency of his role in encouraging and continuing vigilantism in his son. Thus this shift allows the effects of vigilantism as an *inherited* notion to be more fully explored. When Harry 'appears', it is invariably to enforce aspects of the Code, provide advice, warnings and moral guidance, and to highlight the continued tensions between murder and vigilantism, and between right or wrong. Notably in all situations, Harry's role as father is still

emphasised, which maintains focus on patriarchy as a primary factor in causing vigilantism and violent extremism to prevail. During his first appearance as a manifestation in 'Finding Freebo', for example, Dexter is searching a suspect's house and contemplating fatherhood and its potential pitfalls, when Harry appears holding a baby, proposing names for Dexter's impending offspring. As such, his appearance signifies Dexter's anxieties about having a child, yet also mirrors his innate fear that the child will inevitably become an evil killer like him, reaffirming Harry's teachings. With this in mind, Harry's tendency to highlight Dexter's 'Otherness' from society in his youth can also be seen to extend into the present and beyond, into his own son. Harry's suggested baby names also reinforce the father-son bond between the two men, despite Dexter's anger at him for his deceptions. Further accentuating the notion of generational vigilantism amongst the Morgan men, Harry tells Dexter he: "always wanted to be a grandfather", to which Dexter replies, "I think we're better off without you." This presents the audience with a contrasting opinion that forces them to further question Harry's effects on Dexter, who himself is openly questioning whether or not he may have been better off without Harry's influence. Indeed, defiantly challenging Harry's vigilante lessons and the traditions of vigilantism in patriarchal culture, Dexter confronts Harry's assertion that he could never have a normal life, or experience 'real' emotions, gesturing to his own imagined child and family and asserting: "You couldn't picture this could you? I could have surprised you." However, Dexter then imagines his child becoming a murderer regardless of this, turning on his family in response. It is also of note that the child is dressed in clothes identical to Dexter's killing outfit, indicating that the perpetuation of vigilantism between father and son is inevitable and unavoidable, and that Dexter can never truly escape or depart from his own or Harry's invasive and corrupting attitudes.

Harry's appearance at times of crisis draws attention to the primary role of father's in perpetuating vigilantism as he reasserts aspects of the Code to Dexter, suggesting that the notion of a 'bond' is exploited to strengthen the father's authoritative position and sense of intended well-being for the son. In 'Do You Take Dexter Morgan?' for example, Harry

manifests when Dexter is captured by George 'The Skinner' King and believes that he is going to be killed. Harry sadly tells Dexter that, "I tried to protect you," emphasising the protective function of his role as patriarch, and implying that he tried to do right by his son in using vigilantism as a cover for Dexter's murderous urges. As such, Harry's appearance reasserts tensions surrounding his actions as being good or bad, and honest or misleading, leaving it to the viewer to consider. Highlighting a sudden shift from the shows previously sustained focus on Harry's deceptive and destructive effects, Dexter smiles at Harry and says: "I hope to be half as good a father to my Son. I forgive you!" Not only is the viewer propelled back into the central dilemmas of the Code, but Harry's reappearance also suggests that, as an impending father about to fail to protect his unborn son, Dexter can now empathise with Harry's apparently well-meaning actions and intentions. The same protective desire in Dexter is acknowledged by Harry, whose appearance triggers the first rule of the Code to not get caught. This leads Dexter to fight back against The Skinner, breaking his own hand to free himself, emphasising the notion of fatherly sacrifice in doing so. Dexter now emulates Harry in using vigilante violence as a means through which to protect his family, directing it towards King as he snaps his neck. Thus whilst Harry can be seen to have taken a metaphorical backseat, he is still shown to be instrumental in Dexter's behaviour, infiltrating his conscious mind with subconsciously dominant attitudes that were instilled in his youth. With this in mind, vigilantism and its continuation is intrinsically linked to the father-son relationship and towards long-standing, deep-seated attitudes, indicating a wider tradition of inherited vigilantism in American history and society.

Harry remains a potent and contrary presence throughout *Dexter*, appearing as an instructive, domineering force over Dexter that presents vigilantism as invariably 'good' and more socially acceptable than murder, sometimes as the only course of action available. His presence constantly causes the viewer to question and consider these claims and their counterclaims. As such, vigilantism and patriarchy are shown to be intrinsically linked in a cyclical pattern of trauma, violence, murder and deception, inherited by sons from their fathers. Thus the show

offers a critique of a particularly important feature of aggressive masculinity and patriarchal culture in American identity. Nevertheless, and demonstrating *Dexter's* ability to consistently challenge and confront such perceptions, the primacy of patriarchy and Harry is displaced and undermined in Season Eight through the introduction of Evelyn Vogel, mother and previously hidden co-conspirator behind Harry's vigilante Code; this knowledge also undermines the apparent spontaneity of the Code by revealing it to be a pre-meditated path for Dexter that the two adults planned together. This collusion is indicated in 'Every Silver Lining...' (8.2) when a video depicts Harry begging for her help with his adopted son's 'condition', Evelyn telling him: "Trust me when I say there's a place in this world for your son. I don't know what it is or what form it will take, but we're going to find it together." Then, later in the episode, Evelyn tells Dexter with pride: "I helped create you [...] It was me who convinced Harry that your urges couldn't be stopped, but they could be focused." Hence, the inclusion of Evelyn is significant in forcing a revision of the role of *women* in the perpetuation of vigilantism, not only in *Dexter*, but in American history and society and, indeed, in American identity as well. This collusion between males and females is shown to be inherently destructive, signalling Evelyn's usurpation and adoption of masculinity and patriarchal culture through which to instil vigilantism, a course which is shown to ultimately consume and destroy her as well. Indeed, her attempts to create a semblance of family with Dexter, Zach and Hannah ends in devastation when Evelyn is attacked by her own psychopathic son, Oliver Saxon, before dying in Dexter's arms in 'Goodbye Miami' (8.10).

During Harry's last appearance in 'Monkey in a Box' (8.11), his role is ambiguous, contradictory and confrontational. Dispelling the primacy of the father in perpetuating vigilantism, yet ironically positioning his approval as enabling such reduced potency, Harry places his hand on Dexter's shoulder and says with pride: "I never thought this day would come. You don't need me anymore." Dexter is thus shown to have moved beyond Harry and his restrictive, patriarchal-infused vigilantism, realising that he no longer wants or needs to be a vigilante, and has even fallen in love, contrary to Harry's (and Evelyn's) pre-conceptions. Equally significant,

Harry, an overbearing and menacing presence at the start of the series, is completely absent in the final episode, suggesting his irrelevance to Dexter's new approach to life. However, whilst Harry's destructive myths surrounding vigilantism have been exposed, rejected and even transcended by Dexter, it is shown to be too late; Dexter, having already affected others with his vigilantism, is ultimately destroyed and consumed by it, fulfilling Harry's prophecy and assuming his legacy. With this in mind, and despite exploring similarly rejected and insufficient alternatives, *Dexter* implies that Harry's vigilante Code is empty, bleak, and ultimately unsustainable. More so, in severing the vigilante cycle by leaving in order to protect his own son, Dexter significantly rejects the primacy of patriarchy and ultimately stops it, presenting self-imposed exile as the only alternative to perpetuating vigilantism in Harrison. With this in mind, both Dexter and *Dexter* can be seen to reject patriarchal and masculine acts of vigilantism.

### **Dexter's Disciples**

Dexter himself can be seen to perpetuate the cycle of vigilantism as he is often depicted teaching and influencing others with the Code and his attitudes towards violence and murder. Whilst Dexter imparts aspects of the Code to Miguel and Lumen with respectively negative and positive consequences, they are adults and already have their own pre-existing moral frameworks, choosing to work *with* Dexter rather than *because* of him. However, he also extends the Code into his father-son-like relationships with young males Jeremy Downs and Zach Hamilton, and in his actual father-son relationship with Harrison. This is significant for three main reasons. In the first instance, the youth of the boys and their respective relationships with Dexter invokes and plays on the generational and inherited nature of vigilantism, as Dexter is shown to invariably teach and influence each of them. In the second, and in their similarities to Dexter, the young males each suggest a potential alternative outcome had Harry *not* intervened in teaching Dexter the Code, so can be viewed as suggesting and exploring possible variations and alternatives to Harry's actions. As such,

*Dexter* can be seen to offer an oppositional and explorative approach to multiple ambiguous aspects of vigilantism in America history and society, whilst exposing and critiquing the primacy of masculinity and patriarchy in continuing to foster violent extremism in youths. Finally, all three of the youths are ultimately shown to become victims of vigilantism and male aggression, presenting masculinity and patriarchal culture as having potentially devastating effects on younger generations. Indeed, even though Dexter can be seen to teach and pass on Harry's Code, Harry states that this was not intended, suggesting that vigilantism and violent attitudes often evolve and continue of their own volition in males, whether intentional or otherwise. Thus he can also be seen to deny responsibility for the perpetuation of vigilantism and violent extremism in his son. This is indicated as Harry directly challenges Dexter in 'The Damage a Man Can Do':

"Am I forgetting something, Dexter? Was there one final lesson where I said, 'Go now, far and wide, and preach the Code, my Son?' I don't think so [...] I didn't teach you the Code to share with your buddies. I taught you the Code to keep you alive."

Nonetheless, Dexter's own role in perpetuating vigilantism is shown to similarly evolve of its own accord, suggesting a certain cyclical inevitability in violent attitudes being inherited. With this in mind, Jeremy, Zach and Harrison, whilst indicating the potential effects of encouraged and learned vigilantism, each present this process as occurring in different ways. Further, many pressing social themes and debates surrounding youths and violence are implicated and engaged with through these characters, significantly presenting men themselves as victims of aggressive patriarchal culture and its vigilante mentality.

Dexter's dealings with Jeremy in Season One are uninformed and brash, suggesting a naïve and self-absorbed approach by Dexter that largely presents Jeremy as being failed by patriarchal culture and society, which invariably misunderstands and misleads him. Jeremy also represents contemporary debates surrounding social and rehabilitation services for youths, youth and violent offending, and violence and popular culture in general. This presents the viewer with

'alternative' effects of vigilantism and violent extremism on youth by exploring what might have happened had Dexter been subject to similar influences. Respective of this, similarities are immediately apparent between Jeremy and Dexter in 'Popping Cherry'. For instance, whilst awaiting Jeremy's release from juvenile prison for murder, Dexter describes him as a "young virtuoso" at killing as he observes pictures of Jeremy's first and only victim, before a flashback reveals Dexter's *own* first kill; this implies that Dexter is reminded of himself and his own actions, and is possibly even projecting them onto Jeremy for nostalgic purposes. When Jeremy first appears, his visual similarity to Dexter as a teenager is striking, with similar hair and clothes that show a close comparison between the two, making the exploration of an alternate scenario for Dexter possible. It is of note that Dexter's first kill for Harry is also depicted in this scene, again suggesting an inherent link between vigilantism and patriarchy, and between Dexter and Jeremy. This similarity also insinuates that, like Harry, Dexter is assuming that Jeremy can only be 'bad', and misguides and corrupts the young male further as a result. In 'Circle of Friends' for example, Dexter, on discovering that Jeremy's first murder was a retaliatory attack on the man who raped him, exclaims: "He was taking out the garbage. Just like I do!" Thus, Dexter can be seen to use this incident to transpose his own conscious vigilante desires onto others, rather than viewing Jeremy's attack on his rapist as an isolated display of directed revenge. With this in mind, the viewer is again thrust back into the central paradigm of *Dexter* and Harry and Dexter's relationship - the moral dilemmas behind Harry's (and now Dexter's) actions, and the tensions between murder and vigilantism.

Dexter's comment that rehabilitation and youth support services are not equipped or able to deal with Jeremy is important, presenting Harry as again choosing the lesser of two evils. Moreover, Jeremy is shown to have been utterly failed and let down by youth and rehabilitation services, providing a critique of such institutions. In 'Popping Cherry', Dexter describes how, being charged as a juvenile: "Jeremy got off easy: four years in a juvenile facility for manslaughter." Not only does this suggest that Jeremy has been let down by the systems supposed to help him, but Dexter also presents a controversial and provocative



opinion concerning a perceived leniency of judicial courts and systems towards youth offenders. Whilst the show critiques systems that failed to recognise Jeremy's needs and help him properly, Dexter also invokes further social debates and discourses surrounding judicial and rehabilitation procedures. In this way the show can be seen to engage with both wider complex social debates such as the role of social and juvenile services, whilst reflecting popular public opinion that laws are not 'tough' enough to deal effectively with youth offending and violence. Similarly in 'Circle of Friends' when Dexter talks to a young male at a Half-Way House programme, which is supposed to be designed to provide support and re-entry into society for offending youths, it becomes apparent that released offenders are not monitored or helped to effectively re-integrate into society in any way. No adults are apparent, suggesting the youths are left unsupported and abandoned, and drugs, crime and prostitution are shown to be a way of life for them. Jeremy is presented therefore as a *victim* of society. Backing up this observation, Zimring & Tanenhaus (2014) and Ahranjana *et al* (2014) identify various problems surrounding the American juvenile justice system, and public perceptions towards its efficiency following the abolition of the juvenile death penalty in 2005. For instance Zimring & Tanenhaus write: 'The time is ripe to rediscover the first principles of American juvenile justice and to do less harm to young people.' (p.3) They also criticise the tendency to blame America's youth for rising violence, and argue for a shift towards looking inwardly at the systems and their approaches in order to reform rehabilitation services more effectively. The texts mentioned above allude to judicial and system failings, whilst other writers such as Bonnie Szumski (2013), Barry Goldson (2011) and Kathryn Seifert (2011) debate the various effects of violent media, gangs, gun culture and drugs on America's future generations. Invoking such debates and continuing its exploration of contemporary anxieties and concerns through Jeremy, *Dexter* broaches controversial topics surrounding the alleged causes behind increased rates of violence amongst America's youth. For instance, Dexter follows Jeremy as he buys a knife from a knife-seller at an open market in 'Popping Cherry'. The ease with which Jeremy is shown to obtain a deadly weapon in broad daylight suggests a critique of America's hunting culture and

perceived right to bear arms. Significantly, as mentioned in Chapter One, the knife seller is shown to be unaccountable for his own actions in naturalising and perpetuating violent culture in America's youth, by selling deadly weapons to children without any checks or concern for the consequences, the vendor explaining: "Hey, I just sell 'em!" Thus patriarchal systems and other males are shown to deny and reject responsibility for enabling such tendencies to prevail.

It is also of note that Jeremy is shown to be invariably affected by traumatic past experiences, such as rape, has no apparent family network or a home, and even willingly prostitutes himself for money and drugs. As such, he is presented as having being failed by society, its institutions *and* support facilities. The effects of popular culture on youth violence are largely ignored by the show, which is somewhat surprising given that *Dexter* has been blamed more than once for its supposedly negative influence on youth culture and violence in American society. Katherine Ramsland identifies several murders that have blamed *Dexter* directly for inspiring youths to commit extremely violent crimes (2014).<sup>25</sup> However, only one of the five cases discussed occurred in America, with the other incidents occurring in the UK, Canada, Norway and Sweden, suggesting that there is no clear or direct causal link between increased violence by youth and the show itself. Even Indiana-born teenage murderer Andrew 'The Dexter Killer' Conley said himself that the media had overblown the significance of *Dexter* in influencing him to kill, citing other key factors such as social frustration, alienation, and parental neglect instead (Ibid.). Grossman & DeGaetano (1999) indicate just how subjective and singularly-directed debates surrounding media violence and its effects on youths can be. They place the blame for increased violence in youths on television, films and video games, but completely overlook or ignore the wider effects of other violent traditions in American history and society, such as gun culture and hunting (pp.1-8). Grossman and DeGaetano have, respectively, military and media backgrounds, and claim that parenting two teenage males has informed their

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<sup>25</sup> Dr Katherine Ramsland, *The 'Dexter' Murders*, Jan 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014, [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/shadow-boxing/201401/the-dexter-murders) (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/shadow-boxing/201401/the-dexter-murders> (accessed 21/04/2014))

attitude towards violent media and its influence on behaviour (pp.2-5); their strident viewpoints highlight the subjectivity of the topic whilst emphasizing the centrality of violent traditions and culture in America's past in informing attitudes and debates in the present. This claim chimes with recent focuses on violent traditions and gun culture in influencing youth violence, as espoused by Zimring & Tanenhaus (2014) and Douglas Kellner (2008). *Dexter* resists actively engaging with the media violence debates of which it is already a part, and instead focuses on *alternative* sites of supposed 'blame' through the character of Jeremy, implicating violent traditions and inherited attitudes instead.

As mentioned, Dexter finds out in 'Popping Cherry' that Jeremy committed his first murder as an act of revenge after being raped. This is significant as the rape, itself a signifier of phallic, dominant and overtly aggressive male potency, suggests that Jeremy's own violent extremism was caused by his experience of a traumatic act of violent, aggressive masculinity. Thus *Dexter* situates his murderous and vigilante tendencies as a product of aggressive masculinity and patriarchal culture, presenting them as retaliatory strikes against a system and dominating ideological framework that has victimised and failed him. As such, Jeremy's own traumatic experience prompts retaliatory vigilantism that is unleashed upon and directed towards other males. Dexter himself is shown to fail Jeremy with his assumptions and half-hearted committal towards the victimised youth, misdirecting him further. In 'Popping Cherry' for example, in assuming Jeremy kills to take out "the garbage [...] like I do", tensions between social and personal vigilantism, and between vigilantism and revenge, are reaffirmed. Similarly stressing the generational and inherited nature of vigilantism, Dexter tells Jeremy: "That boy who raped you four years ago [deserved to die], the boy the other day didn't. Remember that; it could save your life someday." Whilst obviously alluding to Harry's Code, this advice is vague, ambiguous and somewhat pretentious in assuming that Jeremy, a victim of male aggression and patriarchal institutions, and devoid of any real support, will understand. Indeed, it appears a condensed, informal and half-hearted version of Harry's Code, suggesting a misleading allusion to the employment of vigilantism and its purported ideals, intentions and effects. The

consequence of such vague and brief advice is suggested in 'Circle of Friends' as Jeremy murders a male worker at the half-way house. Highlighting Dexter's assumption of Harry's role, and echoing their 'shed' talk in 'Dexter', Dexter demands of Jeremy: "I told you, I warned you: don't kill anyone who doesn't deserve to die! Why did you do it?" As such, Jeremy's misdirected murder is shown to be disappointing to Dexter, who has attempted and failed to emulate Harry. Acknowledging this, Dexter berates himself for giving Jeremy "a piece of fortune-cookie advice that he never even heard. I failed him, he deserves better, and he'll get it from now on." However, it is too late, as Jeremy is shown to be a victim of violent extremism and the institutions of patriarchal society when, after being verbally abused by a detective and neglected by his disinterested lawyer, he commits suicide in his cell. The all-consuming and potentially abusive and neglectful nature of the father-son relationship in perpetuating violent extremism is thus underlined in *Dexter*, suggesting that the son pays the ultimate price for the father's misdirection.

Whereas Jeremy explores what might have happened to Dexter with Social Services support instead of Harry's influence, the character of Zach can be seen to explore the outcome if Harry had not intervened in Dexter's life at all. Zach also exposes societal expectations of the family and its purpose as being fake and unattainable, the false ideology of which is itself fostering violence and frustration by essentially failing to deliver in the show. More so, Dexter's intervention in Zach's life suggests how violent extremism and vigilantism are shown to be rooted in male dominance. Dexter's relationship with Zach also differs from that with Jeremy in several key respects. Firstly, Dexter has already tried on previous occasions to pass on the Code to Miguel and Lumen, suggesting a degree of 'practice' has been undertaken. Secondly, Dexter now has a son of his own, and as such his paternal outlook towards Zach can be seen as a natural extension of his relationship with his son, something that Dexter himself acknowledges in 'A Little Reflection' (8.6). Dexter, having just cut Zach free from his murder table after deciding to teach him Harry's Code rather than kill him, muses: "There are parts of me that I can never share with my own Son, but Zach... [... am I] ready to be a spiritual father?"

This indecision indicates that Dexter views Zach as a son-like figure, and in describing himself as a “spiritual father”, aligns himself with Harry in perpetuating vigilantism as a more acceptable and noble way of life over outright murder. Indeed, and accentuating the notion of generational, inherited vigilantism, when Harry appears beside a sleeping Zach in ‘Are We There Yet?’, he tells Dexter with pride: “The passing of the torch. I taught you the Code, now he’s learning it from you. [... killing] was all you had, but now...” Thus, not only does this allude to tradition and pride in passing on violent tendencies, but it also implies that teaching Zach the Code has given Dexter himself a greater purpose, invoking a sense of great honour in violent vigilante acts. Harry also significantly appears at the back of Dexter’s car next to Zach, suggesting that Harry has now taken a back-seat in perpetuating the Code and that Dexter has now assumed his place and role.

Initial similarities between Dexter and Zack are presented in ‘This Little Piggy’ (8.5) when Zach is depicted at a crime scene taking pictures of blood spatters from a murder victim. Watching him intently, Dexter muses: “It’s no accident that Zach Hamilton is here. He’s drawn to blood, like me.”, emphasising their similarity to the viewer and making clear that Zack has the same vigilante potential as Dexter. At another crime scene in ‘A Little Reflection’ Zack gushes: “That’s amazing...” as he photographs and asks questions about the murder. Watching this reaction, Dexter says: “I remember that feeling; awe, wonder... it only fed the urge.” Again, just as Dexter observed and assumed certain things about Jeremy based on his own experiences, he can be seen to make similar assumptions about Zach. In the same episode, Zach is shown to carry out rituals very similar to Dexter’s, such as observing the victim from a distance in a crowded park, and keeping mementoes of murder; this is confirmed when Dexter finds photographs of a woman Zach murdered in the youth’s apartment. Zach is even shown to be smart and canny like Dexter, as evident in ‘Dress Code’ (8.7) when he fabricates an alibi and takes decisive action against harassment from Miami Metro, indicating a natural inclination to deception and manipulation. In this way, tensions between learned and innate behaviour are foregrounded in *Dexter* and are indelibly linked to acts of vigilantism.

Temporarily undermining the primacy of men in perpetuating attitudes towards vigilantism and violence in America's youth, it is Evelyn's idea to teach Zach the Code; this is made clear when she asks Dexter directly, "What if we were to teach Zach the Code?" However, Dexter is notably reluctant to teach Zach and responds in shock: "You can't be serious?!", suggesting that he knows that passing on the Code is wrong and would condemn Zach to a life of alienation, deception, and self-destruction. Moreover, such defiance from Dexter suggests that Evelyn, the 'mother' of the Code, signifies a threat to the dominance and primacy of males in the patriarchal structure. Nonetheless, and suggesting that Evelyn *needed* Harry to implement and carry out the Code, she tells Dexter: "It never occurred to me to try again, because I didn't have Harry. But now I have you." This makes clear that vigilantism is inherited primarily through patriarchal influence, denoting that Dexter has now assumed Harry's role in perpetuating the cycle. As such, whilst the inclusion of Evelyn in creating the Code challenges the primacy of men within the perpetuation cycle, responsibility for its inheritance and implementation is placed firmly with the male, in this case Dexter; this is stressed in 'Dress Code' when Evelyn tells Dexter that he followed the vigilante Code because "your father told you to." This admission underscores Harry's primary position and his authority in instructing his son, somewhat negating Evelyn's role. Further, she highlights Dexter's accountability for Zach's behaviour, absolving herself of responsibility by suggesting that, in not killing Zach: "He's now become your responsibility. He's relying on you Dexter." With this in mind, the centrality of males and patriarchy in continuing and teaching vigilantism to younger generations is again re-emphasised, whilst pointing to the complicity and encouragement of some women.

Presenting a possible alternative outcome for Dexter as Harry's son, it is revealed in 'A Little Reflection' (8.6) that Zach's murderous actions were motivated by a desire to protect his mother from his abusive father, Ed Hamilton (John D'Aquino). Not only does this suggest that Zach's murderous impulses already have connotations towards vigilantism, but that his father Ed can be similarly viewed as a symbolic variation on Harry himself, when Zach attempts to

murder him. Ed is shown to be a womanising, manipulative alcoholic with his own extra-legal and self-serving attitudes - just like Harry - and is similarly actively responsible for destroying the nuclear family unit he was the head of; this is indicated when Zach angrily tells Dexter the reason for attempting to kill him: "I had to [...] because he's killing my mother [...] I knew if I wanted it to stop, I had to kill Dad." Thus the viewer is encouraged to consider that Harry himself may have become a victim of Dexter, given that Zach acted to "protect" his mother from similar behaviour. It is also significant that, in wanting to punish his father's adultery and alcoholism, Zach can be seen to uphold 'old' vigilante moral values and forms as discussed previously by Madison and Brown. Furthermore, Zach can be seen as a victim of white, middle-class conservative expectations, wherein the socially beneficial nature of the family unit is perverted and corrupted, a representation which directly opposes and undermines Neely (1990: p.15) and Bennett's (2001: p.18) assertions that the black underclass and single-parent families are responsible for the moral decline and surge of violent extremism in modern America. The role of the father and patriarchal culture is therefore critiqued through *Dexter*, and is shown to be overwhelmingly responsible for encouraging violent tendencies in youths, whilst significantly failing them in many other respects. In being unable to uphold or fulfil its own ideological purpose, the nuclear family and its deceptive front and damaging expectations are exposed in the show. Indeed, the motif of the nuclear, white family as enjoying murder together is aptly suggested when Zach, Hannah, Dexter and Evelyn sit together to eat dinner in 'Are We There Yet?', Evelyn comments on the close relationships and activities of each, and drawing attention to domestic activities such as cooking and gardening, before acknowledging their murderous tendencies. She explains of her fascination with murderers and vigilantes: "As to what keeps me interested? Well. Look around the table!" Murder is therefore presented as synonymous with family in white, middle-class America in *Dexter*.

Zach is shown to learn from Dexter in various ways. In the first instance, he is instructed by Dexter, suggesting explicitly how inherited and taught retaliatory attitudes and responses are passed on from father to son. In the second, he copies and observes Dexter, again indicating

that implicit vigilante and violent tendencies take on an impetus of their own. In 'Dress Code' for example, Zach turns up unexpectedly at Dexter's apartment, and Dexter uses the opportunity to teach vigilante-related deception techniques to the impressionable youth. Urging caution, he tells Zach he "could have been followed [...] Don't come here again, ever." Zach replies sadly, "I just wanted to talk to you [...] I'm sorry..."; thus rather than diminishing the primacy of their father-son relationship, Zach's response suggests he is trying to bond with and please Dexter, underscoring their respective father-son, mentor-mentee roles. Dexter even tells Zach to get a job and his own place to live, explaining that, "You need to have some kind of cover life, one that makes you look ordinary!" As such, Dexter can be seen to directly teach aspects of the Code to Zach using normal parental demands upon offspring, making deception, manipulation and parental authority central to its continuation. It is of note that Dexter's words here recall Harry's in 'Dexter' when he told Dexter to blend in. With this in mind, Dexter can be seen to have actively passed on the Code to younger generations and has again assumed Harry's role. Zach is also shown to learn by observing Dexter's behaviour and deducing information on his own. In 'A Little Reflection' for example, responding to what Dexter can decipher from a crime scene, Zach posits, "So the killer, he should have worn gloves, and long sleeves, made sure he was covered up." The viewer already knows that Dexter does this during his own vigilante acts, so Zach's comment appears both insightful *and* suggests a naturally deceptive streak wherein the 'son' *wants* to learn and continue violent traditions, and is even shown to be a willing participant. Realising that Zach is learning from him, Dexter remarks: "He's making this a teaching moment [...] he's a quick study," indicating parental pride. Similarly in 'Are We There Yet?', after almost being murdered inside Dexter's kill room in 'A Little Reflection', Zach is shown to have emulated Dexter's equipment and *modus operandi*. Underscoring that violent and extreme attitudes can often take on an impetus of their own, Dexter walks into Zach's motel room and is visibly shocked to discover plastic wrap, duct tape and a set of knives just like his own. With this in mind, vigilantism is shown to be a taught, copied and innate aspect of American male identity. As such, it is



possible to assert that vigilantism suffuses the subconscious and manifests of its own accord in *Dexter*, implicating subliminal traditions, actions and attitudes alongside purposeful and obvious endorsements of vigilante activity.

Nevertheless, inherited ideals and actions pertaining to vigilantism in American society are presented as products of sinister and traumatic events akin to torture and conditioning. Further, this inclusion can be seen to reflect post-9/11 anxieties surrounding torture, authority and masculinity. Illustrating this, Dexter and Zach provide a 'speeded-up' version of Harry's process with Dexter that accentuates barbarity and extreme cruelty behind passing on such tendencies. In 'A Little Reflection', Zach lies helpless and naked on Dexter's kill table whilst Dexter stands over him with a knife, filling the screen and looking down over the boy, indicating his dominance and influence over both Zach and the viewer. Heightening the sense of control, Dexter's words are shown to prompt and demand specific responses from Zach, finishing his sentences for him and suggesting the forced instillation of particular attitudes in doing so. For example, in doubting Zach's claim that he killed to protect his mother, Dexter tells the helpless boy: "You kill because you *want* to kill!" His dominant positioning over Zach with a knife and surgeon-like apparel effectively likens the scene to one of torture and overt manipulation, emphasising the horror of the moment. Such behaviour shows Dexter's attempts to perpetuate vigilantism as being actions akin to abuse and extremism, signifying an ever-present malaise underlying his beliefs as he forces them on others that further draw on concerns surrounding the "war on terror". Similarly, and suggesting that he is informing Zach of the 'correct' words and emotions he should feel, Dexter finishes Zach's sentences for him: "[killing made me feel] Like you were finally in control," and "[I am] a monster!" Dexter looks menacing and even devilish during this scene, due to the heavy lighting and his dominant positioning over the camera, suggesting that the perpetuation of vigilantism is an aggressive, deceptive, manipulative and highly abusive process akin to indoctrination into extremist belief systems. Thus these destructive attitudes are shown to be bullied into offspring almost as a natural recourse. Such scenes between Dexter and Zach 'rework' Harry and Dexter's

relationship in a more overt and extreme way, presenting Dexter as a torturous and manipulative force who is using Zach, just as Harry did his son. Indeed, Zach is shown to be consumed by this process, and is even punished directly for it as he is killed by Oliver Saxon in 'Are We There Yet?' and dumped in Dexter's chair. A video of the brutal murder is revealed in 'Make Your Own Kind of Music' (8.9), plainly showing the awful effects of perpetuating such belief systems in America's youth wherein they inevitably become victims. Thus whilst the show explores potential alternatives and effects to Harry's actions, it ultimately depicts violence and vigilantism as perpetuated by men and patriarchy, and as a wholly negative occurrence for which there is only one outcome: a brutal and horrible death.

Dexter's real son Harrison provides a further alternative to Harry's actions by exploring what could have happened had Harry tried to hide his own deceptive and murderous urges from his son rather than forcibly instilling them upon him. Like Dexter, Harrison is shown to have experienced the traumatic murder of his mother, Rita, by Arthur 'Trinity' Mitchell in 'The Getaway' (4.12). Dexter finds his son in a pool of Rita's blood that recalls his *own* childhood trauma, and is crushed to see Harrison: "Born in blood... both of us." This recreation of his own violent childhood trauma via Harrison is explicitly presented alongside overlaid imagery of the two events, making possible such a comparison. Dexter is significantly shown to *not* want to pass on his murderous urges to Harrison, and does not assume his son will be a certain killer due to this traumatic experience, presenting a direct alternative to Harry's actions. In 'Finding Freebo' Dexter imagines what his child will be like, and envisions a tiny version of himself who, despite appearing normal in his play with Astor and Cody, then murders them, highlighting fears that the unborn child will inherit his own tendencies. However, he does not act on this fear after Harrison's trauma, as Harry did with him and indeed, he is shown to be critical of Harry's actions, indicating that he now knows passing on vigilantism is wrong; this is made clear when he dismisses his father's advice about Harrison: "Harry. The last person I'd turn to for advice on fatherhood." So Dexter does not exploit Harrison's trauma to make him a

vigilante, as his own father did, indicating that traumatic events do not necessarily always lead to vigilantism, making clear that one has a choice in such actions.

The role of tradition behind the continuation of generational vigilantism is suggested when it is revealed in 'Living the Dream' that Harrison has been named after Harry, implicating notions of tradition in perpetuating and naturalising attitudes towards violence. Further in the episode, whilst feeding and nursing Harrison to sleep, Dexter sings "America the Beautiful" to Harrison as he views pictures of the victims of another serial killer. The song was originally written to commemorate Independence Day and glorifies of the nation's founding acts of violence during the Revolution (Collins, 2003: p.19), and draws back to Madison and Brown's claims concerning America's tendency to romanticise violent episodes. The pairing of the song with violent images contrasts sharply with the sleeping child, suggesting that extreme violence is naturalised in childhood, a notion further implied by the song's use as a lullaby. Similarly, in 'Once Upon a Time', seemingly innocent traditions are revealed to be potentially damaging to youth, corrupting them by glamourizing and endorsing violent events and attitudes. For instance, Dexter tells Harrison a bedtime story, but tells the child stories based around his *own* vigilante activities; ritual traditions and bonding activities within the father-son relationship are thus shown to be intrinsically linked to the perpetuation of vigilantism and violent tendencies. It also highlights a tendency for adults to glorify and romanticise gruesome and violent tales, here appearing in and perverting bedtime stories for children. Supporting this, Dexter smiles that, "This ritual has become my favourite; Bedtime, alone with my son, being myself." In this manner, Dexter can be seen to expose his own child to his inherited vigilante attitudes through the seemingly innocent tradition of storytelling, revealing his own true, violent self in the process. During a story about Little Chino for example, Dexter tells Harrison: "Daddy would slay that icky monster, hiding what was left of him in a special place that no one would ever find." This comment further indicates the tendency for Americans to glorify and romanticise the violent past as the language used by Dexter as he tells the story underscores the presentation of vigilantism as a positive and heroic act. This example clearly has wider

implications surrounding children's fairy tales, their moral purposes and the role and the parents, and towards literary traditions and on-screen manifestations of vigilantism and violence. Furthermore, the story alludes to the inevitability of violent tendencies affecting future generations when Harrison suggests that "daddy's box" is the secret hiding place. The audience knows this to be the box where Dexter keeps trophies of his kills, thus Harrison's remarks are chilling and crucially suggest that Dexter's actions have already influenced his son's behaviour. As such, the perpetuation of vigilantism and violent extremism between father and son in *Dexter* is shown to be inevitable. However, after realising that his actions have influenced Harrison, Dexter makes a significant and conscious decision to *depart* from violent traditions and ceases his violent tales, swapping them for less violent fairy-tales instead: "How about a new story? Once upon a time there were three little pigs..." Thus, in realising: "From now on the only wolves in his life have to be the stuff of fairy tales," Dexter can be seen to make a conscious attempt to *protect* his son from his own vigilante urges and attitudes, and to challenge the perpetuation of violent traditions by exposing them as harmful. Nonetheless, deception is shown to be a central feature of their relationship, as indicated when Dexter reassures himself that his son, "won't remember Daddy's box if he has one of his own," and presents Harrison with a replica to house his toys. As such, deception prevails, and is further accentuated by the sinister fact that Harrison's toys are now encased in a box that signifies murder and deceit. With this in mind, *Dexter* presents childhood innocence as having been corrupted by violent extremism via the father, implicating patriarchal culture and the glorification of violent traditions in perpetuating vigilantism in American society.

Harrison is shown to be directly influenced by his father when he is shown to emulate Dexter's deceptive behaviour in 'A Little Reflection'. For instance, after the television remote goes missing, Dexter asks Harrison if he has taken it, which he denies, but babysitter Jamie finds it broken and hidden under his bed. Dexter confronts his son, telling him: "That's a big deal, you should never lie," to which Harrison replies, "But daddy, you lie," producing a bloodied toy that

Dexter had previously told him was lost.<sup>26</sup> Further emphasising the potential damage and underlying malaise of Dexter's actions and of his assumption of Harry's role, he visually surrounds and overwhelms Harrison as they sit there together, just as Harry did when he sat next to young Dexter. The bloodied toy that Harrison clutches also signifies corrupted innocence through murder and deceit, ultimately reinforcing the assertion that deception and the naturalisation of violent extremism are learned behaviours, passed on from father to son. Harrison's ability to recognise and confront Dexter's deceptive behaviour, rather than just accepting it as given as Dexter did, suggests that there is potential for change. It is poignant that it is a child who challenges this perpetuating influence in the show, because it indicates that responsibility for recognising and confronting violent traditions lies with future generations, and markedly suggests that they have a choice. Significantly, Dexter ceases the cycle of inherited vigilantism and violence when he leaves Harrison with Hannah in 'Remember the Monsters?', faking his own death. In doing so, Dexter purposefully severs and rejects the perpetuation of vigilantism between father and sons, symbolically sacrificing himself and his authority as 'father'. The notion of sacrifice is accentuated in the final scene of the last episode when he is shown to be alone and alienated from society in the wilderness, suggesting that isolation and ultimate separation from the family unit is a preferable alternative to perpetuating vigilantism and violent tendencies through his own son. Thus vigilantism in *Dexter* is ultimately exposed as destructive, deceptive and all-consuming. Furthermore, that Dexter chooses to leave Harrison with Hannah implies female single parents can provide a healthier environment than the patriarchal nuclear family can, aligning with Barrett & McIntosh's discussions of the 'anti-family' and its increasingly common and viable opposition to patriarchy and the nuclear family (1991: pp.26-27). This radical inclusion offers a progressive outlook towards alternative formations of the family unit wherein violence and vigilantism are not naturally endorsed, but are fully confronted instead, as later discussions of Hannah and

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<sup>26</sup> At the end of 'A Beautiful Day' (8.1) Dexter kills a man and his blood spatters over Harrison's stuffed-animal toy, so he throws it in the bin and lies to Harrison, telling him that the toy is lost. Unbeknown to Dexter and the audience, until this point, Harrison retrieved the toy.

Lumen will demonstrate. Thus the father-son relationship in *Dexter* is shown to be overbearing and suffused with violence, malaise and deception that is cyclical and all-consuming unless actively and consciously interrupted.

### **Part Two: Violence and Murder in the Nuclear Family Unit**

Violent serial killer Arthur 'Trinity' Mitchell is shown to use the nuclear family as a cover in *Dexter*, exploiting its function and image as a socially beneficial and healthy tool through which to mask murder and violence in its foundations. Indeed, Arthur's family is shown to be a site of intense fear, terror, violent extremism and vicious murder in the show's fourth season, fostering aggressive tendencies in and annihilating its offspring through the head patriarch. With this in mind, the nuclear family unit, masculinity and patriarchy are shown to be responsible for perpetuating violent extremism and vigilantism in youths. As an ideological concept, the family is generally thought of as one of two key structures. The first is the extended family, wherein all family members reside under the rule of the head patriarch. The second is the more 'modern' nuclear family, devised of husband, wife and children only (Todd, 1985: pp.8-11). These are both contested notions, with 'traditional' and 'modern' formations of the family being considered a popular culture misnomer and a product of 'myth-making' (Leibman, 1995: p.10). Nonetheless, such representations are valid in *Dexter* as they answer to, and engage with, contemporary social ideologies and ideological frameworks designed to uphold patriarchal and masculine dominance in Western society. Whilst the nuclear family pertains more specifically to *Dexter*, both forms of 'family' stress the primacy of males as upholding and enforcing patriarchal and social ideologies. Supporting this assertion, Goran Therborn writes that each comprises of, 'two basic intrinsic dimensions. The rule of the father, and the rule of the husband.' (2004: p.13). As such, and bearing in mind the potency and dominance of characters such as Harry, Dexter and Arthur, representations of the nuclear family in *Dexter* can be seen to reflect this primacy, providing a critique of its intended function by implying that sinister and violent undertones surround the role of the father. Head

patriarchs in the show, such as Harry, Dexter and Arthur, are shown to be wholly responsible for perpetuating vigilantism and violence. Whereas Harry has already been discussed extensively in this role earlier in the chapter, his wife Doris Morgan (Katherine Lautner Middleton) is rarely ever shown, suggesting her submissive and potentially compliant role under Harry, and reflecting the centrality of the father in the show's critique. However, it is of note that Doris' appearances show her to question Harry's authority and decisions surrounding Dexter, such as in 'See-Through' when she tells Harry that she thinks Dexter needs professional help; this also suggests the potential for women to confront patriarchy and its violent traditions. The role of Debra will also be considered later in Chapter Three, as a further extension of Harry's vigilante legacy and in relation to gendered representations of vigilantism. Arthur and his traumatised family offer an alternative critique in *Dexter* wherein paternal violence in the family unit is shown to affect *all* other members of that family, destroying the women and children. Bearing this in mind, Arthur can be seen to challenge and dispel the ideological function of the family as an apparently positive social tool, undermining the significance of 'family' to America's future social health by exposing it as a corrupting force. Social theorists such as William J. Bennett argue that the nuclear family should be considered 'vital to civilization's success. [...] If the family fails, fewer and fewer of our children will ever learn to walk in justice and virtue.' (2001: p.17). Thus Bennett can be seen to position the nuclear family as essential for the continued moral grounding of future generations, a notion that is directly challenged through the presentation of Arthur's family.

Ideologically and morally, the family is regarded in American politics and culture as essential to maintaining the well-being of society. It can, as such, be regarded as a signifier of 'normalcy'. Supporting this, Barrett and McIntosh write that the 'family is seen as naturally given and as socially and morally desirable,' producing healthy and upright offspring that benefit society (1991: pp.26-27). In *Dexter*, Arthur can be seen to initially uphold this image. For instance, as Dexter follows him in 'If I Had a Hammer' (4.6), Arthur is shown to be a good husband and family man, a teacher who devotes extra time to students, a regular church-goer, and a charity

worker involved heavily in the local community. Dexter is shown to admire this façade of normalcy and notes in awe that Arthur 'is a father, husband, teacher, deacon. All in the name of blending in! Camouflage is nature's craftiest trick.' However, the audience has been presented with Arthur's real persona and murderous deeds first, suggesting that it overwhelms his identity and is thinly concealed beneath this façade, threatening to be unleashed on his own family and wider society. Indeed, after watching Arthur carry out a violent murder and then following him home in 'Dirty Harry' (4.5), Dexter is shocked to find the older man has a family and is using it as a shield to mask and facilitate his murderous tendencies, and is increasingly confused as he follows Arthur to a comfortable suburban location that signifies white, middle-class, America: "He doesn't belong here [...] it doesn't make sense!" Thus the nuclear family unit are implicated in fostering violent tendencies, a notion that even Dexter is surprised to be confronted with. However, and returning the viewer to Harry's assertion that Dexter could not have a normal life precisely because he was a killer, Dexter exclaims: "None of us knew pieces of the puzzle were missing. Trinity's a husband, a father. He's like me!", foreshadowing his own intentions to emulate Arthur, ending with disastrous consequences. Furthermore, the role of the family in perpetuating violent extremism is exposed and confronted, suggesting that *Dexter's* exploration of such realms is an attempt to consciously seek answers and alternatives to the show's central moral dilemma between vigilantism and serial murder.

The notion that the ideological function of family is a facade is not new, however, with several critics debating the prominence, historically and ideologically, of 'traditional' notions of family. For instance, John H. Scanzoni describes America's drive towards nuclear family formations 'a fairy tale', suggesting that its role in American society is mythic and romanticised via social modes and cultural expectations (2010: p.3). Similarly, family historian Stephanie Coontz argues that contemporary debates surrounding the dissolution of traditional notions of family do so through a 'distorted lens of historical mythologizing about past family life.' (2000: p.xi). Coontz also counters predominant views of the role of the nuclear family as a historically



prominent, healthy and socially beneficial institution. For instance, she claims that traditional manifestations of the family and a desire to return to such formations are misnomers (p.14). Reflecting a similarly contrary viewpoint, murder is shown to be ingrained in Arthur's family, history, and heritage in *Dexter*, and instead of suggesting romanticised and happy images of family life, its members expose a continual masking of violent extremism and murder in the family's very foundations. For instance, Arthur is shown to recreate the murder of his family members, both metaphorically by choosing victims that symbolise his mother, father, sister and self, and literally in extending his attack onto wider society and *other* families. In 'Living the Dream' for example, Arthur is shown killing a young woman, forcing her naked into a bathtub with him, where he slices open her thigh and makes the woman watch herself die in a mirror. This scene is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it is particularly graphic and violent, confronting the viewer with extreme violence that is shown to infiltrate and attack someone in their own home, violating a sense of personal safety and boundaries. Second, the use of a mirror suggests exposure, duality and self-reflection, holding up the mirror to America's wider relationship with violent extremism, revealing an uncomfortable facet of its identity.<sup>27</sup> Third, their nudity and enforced intimacy signifies an underlying malaise that presents familial intimacy as uncomfortable, overbearing and dominated by the father, as Arthur's age can be seen as a signifier of his role as head patriarch. It also alludes to incest in the family unit, as it is later revealed in 'Road Kill' that Arthur's real sister Vera (name mention only) was killed in an accident after catching him watching her bathe, revealing him to be a 'peeping tom'. Finally, the murder is revealed to have been a repetition of an earlier identical one carried out by Arthur in the same house, suggesting the cyclical, inevitable and innate nature of violence in the family unit, presenting it as a doomed and perverse ideological tool. More so, and as blood from the previous crime is found covered up under the bathroom floor by Dexter, the history

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<sup>27</sup> It is of note that this references British horror film *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960, Anglo-Amalgamated Films, UK). Whilst this is not an American film, its invocation here clearly alludes to both a confrontation with innate violence and murder, *and* to themes of parental abuse and violence that are shown to prompt violent murder in the film. This attests to the savvy, self-reflective and intertextual nature of the show.

and tradition of repressed and concealed violence is inherently linked to the family unit and symbolic home.

Each member of Arthur's own childhood family is similarly used to denote a problem or concern in the family unit, indicating that it is wholly broken and damaging to children, causing negative social effects and violent tendencies. In 'Blinded by the Light', Arthur befriends and kidnaps a woman who is shown to be a happy house-wife and mother, then cruelly forces her to commit suicide, recreating the violent death of his own 'Mother'. Later, revealing to Dexter in 'Road Kill' that his mother committed suicide after the death of his sister, Arthur is shown to recreate maternal loss and perceived maternal favouritism for his sister, 'punishing' the metaphorical mother by forcing her to jump to her death. The woman's obvious devotion to her own family does nothing to dissuade Arthur, who uses them to force compliance, telling her in a chilling tone that, "I can swing by your house, put an ice-pick in your husband's head, bring your kids back, and throw them off instead!" As such, Arthur is shown to be an overtly violent and threatening patriarch whose destructive urges affect wider society. That the murder is presented as a suicide nods to the illusory nature of the family unit. Similarly, in 'Dirty Harry', Dexter watches as Arthur savagely beats a night-guard - 'the Father' - to death with a hammer, implicating the role of fathers and sons in perpetuating violence in a never-ending cycle within the family unit. As Arthur beats the man he cries, "You made me! You made me do this!"; thus the primacy of men in teaching and inheriting violent tendencies is underscored. Even Arthur himself, and sons in general by extension, are shown to be victims of violence and trauma within the family unit in *Dexter*, doomed to repeat the attitudes and actions of the father. In 'Lost Boys', for example, Arthur kidnaps a child that represents his childhood 'Self' and attempts to make the boy happy before trying to bury him alive. Thus the 'Self' signifies childhood innocence being suddenly and inextricably suffused with, and replaced by, extreme violence and murder. It is significant that, after each symbolic act of familial murder, Arthur is shown to punish himself severely. After killing 'the Sister' in 'Living the Dream', he scalds himself under a shower, screaming in agony. Then in 'Dex Takes a

Holiday', Arthur provokes a man into savagely beating him after he forced the 'Mother' to jump. Arthur even attempts to commit suicide in 'Road Kill' but is stopped by Dexter, who intervenes so he can claim Arthur's life himself. Such instances reveal that Arthur knows his actions to be inherently wrong, but *Dexter* can be seen to present them as something that he is *compelled* to act out, indicating that violence in the family unit is something that is beyond control and is all-consuming, taking on an impetus of its own as it corrupts and traps males in a vicious and never-ending cycle of violence and murder. With this in mind, Arthur himself can be viewed as a victim of patriarchal culture and aggressive masculinity.

Coontz points out how lynchings in the American past have routinely been family affairs attended by all members at any age, claiming that:

'In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, lynch mobs conducted sadistic mutilations as they killed their victims. Sometimes pieces of the victims' bodies were passed out as souvenirs to the on-looking crowd, which frequently included children.'

(p.xiii)

As such, the 'traditional' family in America can be seen to be one that actively partakes in violent murderous acts, and plays a role in perpetuating and facilitating violent and murderous tendencies in males. Supporting this claim further, Amy Louise Wood (2011: p.20) and Donald Bogle (1994: p.73) both emphasise that there used to be a relatively high attendance of women and children at lynching events, and that they were almost exclusively attended by whites. In *Dexter*, Arthur's children are similarly shown to witness and be adversely affected by their father's violence. In 'Hungry Man', Dexter is invited to Thanksgiving lunch with the family, and observes Arthur's corruptive effects on its various members. The Thanksgiving holiday is itself suggestive of violent and deceptive traditions, which Peter J. Gomes discusses at length, a notion also underscored by Astor in the show, who points out the irony of celebrating the barbaric annihilation of an indigenous race (2009: pp.ix-xii). The importance of violent traditions like Thanksgiving in shaping family dynamics and future offspring is also stressed by

Arthur, who explains to Dexter: "Traditions matter, [...] they shape people, and give children a sense of history, tradition. Teaches them who they are and what's expected of them." With this in mind, Arthur is used to suggest that attitudes and expectations surrounding violence have shaped his children, presenting the role of the father as having a devastating effect on the family unit by promoting and naturalising extreme violence and domestic abuse. Indeed, Dexter watches Arthur smash up Jonah's (Brando Eaton) trophies, before he later breaks his son's fingers and then attempts to strangle him as the Thanksgiving dinner escalates. This suggests that the father-son relationship is particularly volatile and suffused with anger, hatred and jealousy, a notion that can be extended to Arthur and his own father in 'If I Had a Hammer' as mentioned above. Arthur's daughter Rebecca (Vanessa Marano) is also shown to be abused by her father, implied as Dexter discovers locks on the outside of her bedroom door, suggesting confinement and entrapment under patriarchal rule. Arthur also later calls Rebecca by the name of his dead sister, Vera, hinting at incest and sexual abuse within the nuclear family between father and daughter, and brother and sister. This implication becomes increasingly apparent and uncomfortable when Rebecca later approaches Dexter, smiling at him seductively as she asks him to help, telling him coyly: "If you're nice to me, I can be nice to you. I'll do anything that you want," before adding, "I know what guys like." Dexter declines, and is shocked to discover the damage Arthur has caused his family. This damage is underscored when Sally (Julia Campbell), Arthur's traumatised and fearful wife, desperately offers up her daughter to Dexter, telling him, "Whatever you did with Rebecca [...] Whatever you're going to do, I don't care. Just please, I'm begging you. Don't tell him [Arthur]!" With this in mind, and considering that Sally is prepared to allow her daughter to be used, abused and violated by Dexter, this exchange makes clear just how badly she has been affected by Arthur. During dinner, Arthur berates Sally and verbally abuses her, calling her a "cunt." As such, both Sally and Rebecca are shown to be completely broken and accepting of their submissive, abusive lives, suggesting patriarchal dominance and male aggression within the nuclear family unit are devastating to women.

Notably recalling discussions earlier in this chapter concerning the potential for youths to challenge enduring violent trends and prevalent attitudes, Jonah is shown to oppose his father, and frequently appears angry and frustrated with Arthur and his abuse. As a young teen, Jonah is caught between opposition to his father's violent nature and his own emulation of it. For instance, distraught at his father's cruelty, he tells Dexter that, "I know it looks like we have the perfect fucking family. But in that house, when he's there, it's not a life. It's a tour of duty." In comparing his home life to a warzone, the notion of a 'battle' between his opposition to and emulation of Arthur is emphasised, as is the damaging and threatening environment of nuclear family life. Similarly, and exposing the deceptive nature of family in presenting an image of social health and normality, Jonah tells Dexter: "You have no idea what he's like, how he treats my mother and Rebecca... You don't know what he's capable of!" As such, Jonah's status as a victim of patriarchal aggression is heightened, as is his helplessness. Nevertheless, his anger suggests that despite his opposition to his father, Jonah has inevitably been affected by Arthur, this becoming particularly evident as the Thanksgiving dinner erupts into a terrifying and violent nightmare in front of guest Dexter. Screaming in uncontrollable rage, Jonah smashes up his father's murder trophies and cries, "This whole life, your life, is a lie! These are lies! Fucking community hero?! [...] I know who you really are [...] you're a killer!" Thus Jonah can be seen to defy his father's dominance, exposing the façade of the family and the murderous truth behind it. Nonetheless, his rage, like Arthur's, appears uncontrollable and inevitable, suggesting that Jonah has already been fatally damaged by his father. So the nuclear family unit is shown to be a hotbed of violent extremism, frustration and utter despair in *Dexter*, and pivotal for youth in determining their own rejection or acceptance of aggressive masculinity and patriarchal culture. However, Rebecca and Sally rush to Arthur's aid, begging Dexter not to hurt him. Arthur looks terrified as he cowers below Dexter, suggesting that he cannot control his violent urges and is himself fearful of male violence and aggression. Dexter later vocalises this as he describes Arthur's family as "nothing but human shields," so whilst they are victims, they are also shown to be a part of the problem in *allowing* violence to continue by seemingly accepting

patriarchy at face value. Bearing this in mind, they are all presented as victims of extremely violent masculinity, suggesting that the traditional family unit is inherently broken and destined to promote further violence if unchallenged. Sadly, each member of Arthur's family is ultimately consumed by violent extremism, murder and abuse within the family unit, suggesting that the death of the patriarch is not enough to free them from his influence. In 'Nebraska', Dexter discovers that Rebecca committed suicide in the bath, unable to cope with the truth of her father's actions and perversely recreating the intimacy of his 'Sister' murders. This act can be seen to emulate Arthur's own kills, emphasising the inevitable and cyclical nature of violence and its corrosive effects on female autonomy. It is also revealed that Sally was accidentally killed by Jonah during a fight on the stairs, which indicates that Jonah's emulation of his father's violent rage is a product of his treatment at Arthur's hands. Jonah, clearly aware of this and terrified that he will become a killer like his father, pretends he has murdered his mother in an attempt to convince Dexter to kill him and break the cycle of violence. However, Dexter refuses and drives away, leaving the young man alone with this burden. Thus patriarchy and the nuclear family unit in *Dexter* is presented as a hellish, tortuous nightmare from which there is no escape, and where women and children are compromised and put in a position from which there is only annihilation.

Extending such negative and critical representations of the nuclear family further, Dexter's own attempts to emulate Arthur lead to further murder and despair, as his cat and mouse game with Arthur ends in Rita's murder in 'The Getaway'. In death, Rita is a symbolic victim of overt male aggression, patriarchy and its accompanying ideological systems, first through abusive ex-husband Paul's behaviour, and then by Dexter who puts her in danger by pursuing Arthur. Rita's murder indicates that patriarchy is redundant, and that the justification by men in using vigilantism for the supposed protection of property and persons - particularly women and children in American history - is a façade which maintains patriarchal dominance in general and female subjugation within that system. Indeed, vocalising this traditional view in the show, as he hangs his head in shame in 'My Bad' (5.1) Astor cries at Dexter that, "You

should have been there to protect her! [...] That was your job!" Instead of 'saving' or defending women and children, *Dexter* indicates that violent extremism, vigilante tendencies and aggressive masculinity have destroyed and corrupted society, abusing notions of 'family' and assumed masculine entitlement and dominance, entrapping it within a vicious cycle that is doomed to repeat over and over again. Despite such a damning presentation of the nuclear family and patriarchy in *Dexter* however, single-parent, 'anti-social' and female-led families are shown to offer hope in the show, or at least 'the unknown', presenting an alternative to the anticipated annihilation of women and children (and men) within patriarchal culture. Indeed, Dexter chooses to *end* the violent, vigilante cycle and leave his own child Harrison with Hannah, removing him from his extended family to be taken to Argentina and the unknown. This suggests that a female vigilante, who Dexter has effectively helped to kidnap Harrison, is a preferable option to staying with a tried and tested patriarchal norm that would inevitably leads to his destruction; this indicates that female approaches to vigilantism that are significantly opposed to and uncompromised by masculinity and its deceptive features are shown to provide an alternative to patriarchal traditions and norms in the show.

As Rita, Sally and Rebecca all indicate, women are revealed to be victims of patriarchal violence and aggression in *Dexter*. However, some women are shown to use vigilantism themselves to retaliate *against* male dominance. For instance, Hannah is revealed to have a very violent father and traumatic childhood, which has influenced her own path in life in 'The Dark... Whatever'. Her father Clint is shown to be an alcoholic and an abusive and manipulative thief who uses and upsets his daughter regularly for his own gain. Similarly, whilst Hannah is regarded as a "cold-blooded killer" by other characters such as Debra, she is significantly shown to use murder for self-defence and in retaliation against harm from men and patriarchy, thus aligning her actions with vigilantism. In 'Chemistry', for example, it is revealed that she murdered her first husband after he forced her to have an abortion despite her desire for a family. Similarly in 'Do You See What I See?' Hannah and Arlene are shown discussing their murder of a youth-care worker who abused and hurt them at a half-way house, explaining that

they fed him rat poison so he could no longer take advantage of other vulnerable youths under his care. Also, in 'Dress Code', Hannah murders an abusive spouse in self-defence as he beats and tries to rape her. As such, and whilst she often manipulates and kills those who do not seemingly 'deserve' it, like investigative reporter Sal Price (Santiago Cabrera) in 'Chemistry', she is nonetheless shown to strike back at those who compromise her autonomy, and against patriarchal culture and its attempts to stifle, control, judge and use her. It is also of note that Hannah overtly challenges Harry's Code and offers Dexter a viable alternative to deception and patriarchal aggression. For instance, after confronting the deceptive and misdirected nature of Harry's Code, Hannah bluntly tells Dexter that, "I think you're just afraid to admit that you enjoy killing!" Indeed, that Dexter realises he no longer needs to kill Saxon in 'Remember the Monsters?' makes clear that Hannah has given Dexter himself a chance to transform. However, it is inevitably shown to be too late for Dexter, underscoring the potential for a unique and open approach to traditions of vigilantism and violent extremism by women.

Lumen is similarly shown to have attempted to flee the restraints of patriarchal expectation, and is forced to use vigilantism to defend herself against aggressive violence and self-serving masculine culture, an act which enables her to escape the confines of patriarchy. Whilst Lumen's vigilante acts will be discussed more extensively in Chapter Three in relation to rape revenge cycles, she also uses vigilantism to transcend the assumptions of patriarchal culture and its expected social conduct. Emphasising Lumen's victimization within patriarchy and suggesting that she was 'punished' for attempting to transcend dominant patriarchal culture and gender expectations, Dexter discovers that she was captured, tortured and raped by a group of men after running away from home and her wedding in 'Beauty and the Beast' (5.4). Indeed, Lumen's rejection of patriarchal culture is made overtly clear when, in 'Take It!', her jilted fiancé Owen (David Paetkau) shows up and tries to convince her to go back to him. However, Lumen refuses, rejecting her assumed place in white middle-class, nuclear family life. She also actively helps *other* women escape the confines of patriarchy and male aggression as she helps abused teen Olivia open up to her in 'Teenage Wasteland' and tries to



help another rape victim in 'In the Beginning' (5.10). Having finally transcended patriarchy and vigilantism, Lumen also eventually leaves Dexter in 'The Big One' (5.12), and is shown to be fully free from the traumas and confines of her traumatic past. Lumen and Hannah are important because they reveal underlying problems within patriarchy, and point to alternative solutions, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three. As *Dexter* progresses, females become increasingly involved in vigilante acts themselves and, while characters such as LaGuerta, Rita, Lila, Lumen, Debra and Hannah are all shown to partake in brief or sustained acts of vigilantism, they are also shown to oppose and/or be victims of aggressive masculinity and patriarchal culture. Moreover, whilst several of the women in *Dexter* are shown to be transformed by vigilantism, such as Lumen and Hannah, those who compromise their feminine identity by assuming masculine aggressive traits, like Debra and LaGuerta, are inevitably consumed by it. Thus a critique of patriarchy and aggressive masculine culture can be seen to extend throughout *Dexter*, which displays an overwhelming propensity to present the family unit in a negative and critical light, underlining its deceptive and destructive function in opposition to its ideological purpose. The show also provides other instances where dominant ideologies are confronted and overcome by women and other minority groups, such as race and rape, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter with regard to screen representations of vigilantism in *Dexter*.

### **Chapter Three: *Dexter* and Vigilantes in American Popular Culture**

Following on from Chapter One and Two's focus on historical and social aspects of American vigilantism in *Dexter*, this chapter will discuss wider cultural depictions of vigilantism in the show, focusing on screen representations by looking at specific film genres and their influences. In doing so, it will also discuss the representation of minority groups, specifically blacks and women and their own acts of vigilantism, through the characters of Doakes, Debra and Lumen. This emphasis will demonstrate how previous manifestations of vigilantism on the American screen both inform *and* underscore the topic's continued social relevance to modern audiences of which *Dexter* itself engages and explores. As previously mentioned, original research carried out for this thesis revealed that, contrary to popular and critical beliefs, vigilantism has been a consistent part of the American screen since its conception, rather than arising only at pre-acknowledged times of great social upheaval. Indeed, critics who have written about vigilantism on the American screen tend to relegate discussions of the topic to one key era, the 1970s, citing various responses to the social turbulence and upheaval of the 1960s as informing those subsequent screen representations. For instance, Peter Lev discusses how, in crime films of the early 1970s such as *Dirty Harry* and *The French Connection*, representations of vigilantism signalled a crisis of masculinity and reflected social anxieties surrounding the violent capabilities of men following the Vietnam War. He also states that themes of mistrust in authority and depictions of stifling bureaucracy similarly denote tensions and disaffection in leaders following such events (2000: pp.22-39). Similarly, Josiah Howard discusses how a black action or 'Blaxploitation' cycle of films, featuring black actors and prominent black social themes and attitudes, emerged following the Civil Rights movement and social turbulence of the preceding decade. Discussing films such as *Shaft*, *Black Belt Jones* (Robert Clouse, 1974, Sequoia Films, US) and *Coffy* (Jack Hill, 1973, American International Pictures, US), Howard argues that such films reflected black concerns, lifestyles and tastes. He also discusses how the cycle diminished in popularity and became increasingly viewed as

derogatory, exploitative of black culture and an extension of black stereotyping (2008: pp.8-9). Nonetheless, the cycle's films still reflect and engage with aspects of the African-American experience and anxieties of the era, and are thus important cultural texts here. However, discussions of vigilantism as a central theme in such cycles is limited and only acknowledged in relation to specific films with overt vigilante themes. With this in mind, this chapter will show how these cycles have relevance to modern day audiences, both through their representation in *Dexter* and their subsequent reflection of contemporary social themes and anxieties.

Never studied fully as a film genre or theme in its own right, vigilantism is always discussed in relation to cycles or sub-cycles of films within existing genres. On occasion when it is mentioned in relation to genres, such as the Western, analysis is general, brief and often obscure. For example, writers such as R. Phillip Loy briefly discuss representations of vigilantism in the Western, but do so in a manner that suggests that the other wider social themes reflected are more pressing, such as the moral 'goodness' of cowboys and their effects on the public, like providing morale in the lead up to America joining World War Two, for instance (2001: p.12). Given the Western genre's engagement with and reflection of social, cultural and historical aspects of American life - albeit within a constructed and sentimentalised version - this neglect is surprising. Similarly, whilst genres such as the Superhero serial and film have experienced peaks and troughs of popularity since its appearance in the 1930s to its present day resurgence, its ability to reflect pressing social themes has often been acknowledged (Pollard, 2011: p.4, and Fowkes, 2010: p.124). However, only recently has it been discussed in relation to vigilante themes and these discussions are generally limited and reduced to particularly popular characters and social tensions. These include mediating 9/11 imagery, the "War on Terror" and the capabilities of man in films such as *The Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* (Birkenhead, Froula & Randell, 2010: pp.1-2, and Kellner, 2010: p.9), amongst others. Discussions of vigilantism on the American screen tend to be limited to specific times and themes, are not in-depth, and nor are they discussed in relation to

wider American history, society and culture. Given the American people's proclivity to vigilantism and its usurpation into many aspects of American life and identity throughout the last century, the neglect of representations of vigilantism in popular culture is disappointing. Further, films and television shows featuring vigilantism have, due to their origins in pulps and dime novels, garnered a somewhat disreputable and seedy image, as discussed in the Introduction; this is particularly clear when acknowledging that associated vigilante themes have generally been relegated to appearing in Western and crime movies, and more disreputable genres such as exploitation, rape-revenge, and superhero movies, as Loy's discussion of 'B' Westerns attests (p.3). As a result, the prominence and relevance of vigilante themes in responding to social concerns in popular culture texts throughout America's last century has been massively overlooked.

Original and extensive research undertaken for this thesis identified a list of over 2,000 American film and television show titles featuring implicit and explicit vigilante themes (see Appendix Two for a selection of titles that also include brief details of the representation of vigilantism, and the nature of its appearance in each text). With this in mind, many examples and assertions discussed in this chapter will be based on the analysis of patterns, themes and genres, found in these formats. Indeed, from *Hold-Up of the Leadville Stage* (Buckwater, 1905) through to *Terminator: Genesys* (Alan Taylor, 2015, Paramount, US) in the modern day, vigilantism is evident throughout the history of the American screen, and is becoming increasingly prominent. This indicates that, contrary to limited discussions and relegations within other cycles of genre previously carried out, vigilantism is a topic that should be considered in its *own* right, and as a prism through which to view *other* genres, and make further sense of them as a collective cultural representation of American identity. Lev and Howard suggest that vigilantism appears on the American screen particularly in times of social crisis. However, the widespread and varied texts identified in Appendix Two demonstrate that, although at *times* depictions increase to reflect obvious social concerns and anxieties, vigilantism is a constant and persistent feature of American film and television that has

characterised the nation's relationship with, and perception of, vigilantism in the modern day. Its significant presence thus demands revision and further attention. Indeed, this overwhelming presence denotes a unique feature of American popular culture and suggests that vigilantism is inseparable from American identity. One can assume, given the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the topic and the sheer variety of screen manifestations it has inspired, that making sense of vigilantism as a genre in its own right would be almost impossible. Nonetheless, the primary concern of this thesis is to argue that vigilantism *is* an approachable topic and, as such, a discussion of vigilantism as a genre is a topic for further study beyond this thesis. Even so, key characteristics and phases in cultural representations of vigilantism are apparent throughout the last century and, given the topic's resurgence on the American screen in response to the post-9/11 era, their use in understanding the portrayal of vigilantism in *Dexter* becomes more apparent and necessary.

Early screen representations of vigilantism emerged primarily from literary sources, such as dime novels and pulp weeklies that focused on genres such as the Western and urban crime, and featured popular tales surrounding frontier heroes, gunslingers and violent murder (Herzberg, 2013: p.4). The works of popular writers like Zane Grey and Dashiell Hammett were often adapted for the screen, their popularity spawning copies and other stories within the emerging genre that have commonly been described as 'done to death' in the studio system by theorists on the Western such as Edward Buscombe (1996: pp.22-24) and Richard B. Jewell (2007: p.29). As such, early representations of vigilantism from the early 1900s to the 1950s generally appear in 'B' and low budget studio Westerns, and in urban crime and 'hard-boiled' detective films from the 1930s and 1940s, as Appendix Two indicates. However, such genres did not exclusively feature vigilantism, with social problem movies and horror films such as *Deluge* (F.E. Feist, 1933, KBS Productions, US) and *The Vampire Bat* (Frank Strayer, 1933, Majestic Pictures, US), often displaying vigilante themes as well, such as extra-legal activity, corrupt police and mindless mobs. Indeed, melodramas and social problem movies from the late-1910s to the early-1920s reflected anxieties surrounding temperance, women's rights and

the suffrage movement in films that featured female vigilantes, such as *The Fall of a Nation* (Thomas Dixon, 1916, National Drama Corp., US) and *The Prussian Cur* (R.A. Walsh, 1918, Fox Film Corp, US). Generic crossovers and hybrids, such as a western-urban crime cycle in the early- to late-1930s (similar to the Western-Crime hybrid of the late-1960s that pre-empted the 'Vigilante Revenge' cycle of the 1970s) also feature vigilantism, including titles such as *Men of America* (Ralph Ince, 1932, RKO Radio Pictures, US) and *Headin' East* (Ewing Scott, 1937, Coronet Pictures, US), and emphasises the complex, extensive and multi-generic nature of the topic even in its earliest screen manifestations. Such examples also point to the continued ability of vigilantism and related themes to reflect and mediate social anxieties and concerns.

Similarly drawing upon popular weekly magazines and comic books, superheroes emerged in serials and films in the 1930s until the early-1950s, when representations of vigilantism diminished somewhat in the post-war era. Titles include *The Green Hornet* (Ford Beebe & John Rawlins, 1940, Universal Pictures, US) and *Batman* (Lambert Hillyer, 1943, Columbia Pictures, US), amongst numerous others. Thus the appearance of vigilantism in such texts has been perceived by Jewell (p.197) and Garth Jowett (1976: p.305) as a minor theme primarily responsive to circa-World War Two anxieties and the war effort. However, and similarly to how other themes such as race, sex and violence became contested in this era, one can also see how anxieties within American society and the film industry influenced and affected vigilantism's portrayal on-screen; for example, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAAC), censorship debates, the increasingly stifling Production Code, and emerging concerns surrounding the effects of comics, films and television shows on America's youth, all dominated late-1950s and early-1960s America (Lev, pp.65-146). As such, one can understand how depictions of vigilantism reduced significantly in response to such events as part of a wider pattern of caution and extended pressures. However, vigilantism can still be seen to appear in 1950s 'super-Westerns', such as *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952, Stanley Kramer Productions, US) and *No Name on the Bullet* (Jack Arnold, 1959, Universal International Pictures, US) (Bazin in Kitses & Rickman, 1998: pp.49-56). Indeed and due to the genre's

popularity, as David Eldridge points out, the Western 'continued to address contemporary politics, race relations and social concerns while using the distancing conventions of the genre as a cover.' (2006: p.102). Bearing this in mind, the prevalence of vigilantism as an increasingly prominent theme in these 'super-Westerns' suggests that, had Hollywood been less controlled, vigilantism could have potentially appeared more prominently in other genres as well in a similar response to the social concerns and anxieties of the era, such as those surrounding race, sexuality and youth. Supporting this claim, several films with clear vigilante themes appeared throughout the early-1960s in different genres that reflect those concerns and significantly pre-empt the late-1960s to 1970s 'Vigilante Revenge' cycles after the abolition of the Production Code. These films include *13 West Street* (Philip Peacock, 1962, Ladd Enterprises, US), which features juvenile delinquents as a target for vigilantism, and *Nothing but a Man* (Michael Roemer, 1964, DuArt, US), which highlights the issues surrounding interracial relationships and white retaliatory behaviour. Such examples point to the continued relevance of vigilantism on-screen in reflecting and mediating popular anxieties and events *outside* of popularly acknowledged eras and genres, and suggest that it is a consistent feature, albeit on a much lesser scale at other times.

Generally speaking, though not exclusively, vigilante themes before the late-1960s tend to appear in Western and crime films, and are widely shown to benefit the community. Good gangs and bad mobs feature regularly, and are often led, battled or disbanded by lone hero vigilantes imbued with a degree of authority, be it a lone rider or a hard-boiled private eye. Vigilantism is shown to occur in both rural and urban areas in these genres, responding to crimes relevant to each location. The 'socially serving' nature of vigilantism in pre-1970s films makes the act appear primarily good when used for the community, and bad when used to benefit the individual. One can see how such definitions lend themselves to comparisons with Brown's socially beneficial and socially destructive models of vigilantism, and their tiers of involvement. Indeed, prominent persons, common-folk, legal and extra-legal lawmakers, and criminals of all types characterise these Western and crime films, indicating how such themes

and approaches merge and fuse. During the social upheaval of 1960s America, Civil Rights, student riots, anti-war protests, and many other pertinent social issues took centre-stage. Following this, one can see a distinct shift from the concerns of the *community* to the *personal* domain, both in American society and in on-screen representations of vigilantism, which in this era and beyond can more broadly be recognised as enacted by individuals for more personal reasons. Madison writes that following the social upheaval of 1960s and 1970s America: 'Americans seem to have become daily more hardened to each other's human needs, and they have become more and more determined with what *they* want.' (p.92) This emphasises a departure from the past and the arrival of what Madison calls, 'individual vigilantism - the kind that occurs when an individual believes that his or her freedom and desires are the only ones that are valid.' (p.139). In reflecting this social shift, vigilante-themed film cycles, described collectively by David A. Cook as a 'Vigilante Revenge' cycle, emerged during this time (2000: pp.193-196). Pre-acknowledged cycles within this 1970's-specific cycle generally include vigilante cops, Blaxploitation, revisionist Westerns and Rape-Revenge films, but can be extended further to include others like 1980s vigilante Vietnam veterans, 'hyper-male' action, maternal revenge and superhero movies. All of these cycles and genres are characterised by lone vigilantes that act less for the good of society, more based on their own unique attitudes, experiences and self-serving interests, and often as the result of a traumatic event. Indeed, Donald Bogle (1994: p.232) and Lester D. Friedman (2007: p.1) both label the 1970s a "'Me" decade'. Again, one can view this shift from primarily 'social' to 'personal' vigilantism on the American screen over the last century as an extension of Brown's theories concerning changing patterns of vigilantism in American history and society, further highlighting the relevance of Madison and Brown's work to understanding vigilantism in popular culture in the present day.

As a television show, *Dexter* can be seen to follow the general contemporary shift towards embracing the post-modern, as it is intertextual, self-reflective and self-aware. It also regularly draws upon and reflects aspects of multiple genres, cycles, iconography and other popular



culture themes and forms. John Belton points out the relevance of nostalgia in postmodernism, a notion that certainly lends itself to discussions of *Dexter*, particularly in relation to the show's reworking and representation of post-World War Two, 1970s and post-9/11 issues (2005: pp.356-368). Vera Dika views postmodernism and its tendency to repetition as, 'sharing the structure of a traumatic neurosis in response to recent historical events.' (2003: p.89). *Dexter* itself can be seen to consciously draw on a wide range of forms, texts, genres and themes, such as detective, noir, horror, high art, literature and even classical and popular music to make sense of the contemporary moment. The show also commonly features homage, reflection and the subversion of *other* cultural texts, like songs, television shows, film titles and video games. Considering this, this chapter has the dual intention to demonstrate how *Dexter* draws on and reworks pre-existing genres and cycles to engage the viewer and submerge them in vigilante themes, and to indicate how the presence of these cycles in the show indicates that they are still socially relevant and *not* merely reflective of past eras and issues. Thus the chapter will comprise of three main parts. The first will discuss how *Dexter* invokes aspects of the Western and crime films to imbue Dexter with a sense of authority throughout the show, explaining how a critical and nuanced component to the viewer's engagement with the character and his actions is achieved. The second part will focus on three key 1970s film cycles - Blaxploitation, vigilante cop, and rape-revenge - with the intention to show how their extension and revision in *Dexter* signifies and reflects pressing social anxieties and tensions for African-Americans and women in modern-day America. Thirdly, the chapter will discuss *Dexter* in relation to the superhero genre to assert how, in the genre's shift from disreputability to relative prestige in the post-9/11 era, the show engages overtly with contemporary social themes, mediating current concerns.

### **Part One: The Western, Crime and Vigilante Authority in *Dexter***

The Western and crime genres are arguably the American screen's two most formative and celebrated genres, yet the overriding endurance and varied manifestations of vigilantism in them has largely been overlooked by theorists, despite its frequent representation. Whilst writers such as Jewell, Loy and Paul Simpson (2006) discuss themes relating to vigilantism, they all tend to ignore or downplay its significance. Simpson states: 'Vigilantism [...] was much more common in the West than in Westerns,' upholding assumptions that vigilantism is largely relegated to the frontier in American history and dismissed in the genre (p.5). He also affirms: 'In many Westerns such summary justice is portrayed as un-American, yet lynching was first used by Virginian planter Charles Lynch against those collaborating with the British.' (pp.5-6). Again, this suggests a tendency to view vigilantism as a rather contrary and controversial subject in American history, whilst underscoring an inclination to view lynching and vigilantism as limited concepts. It also fails to recognise a wealth of depictions of vigilantism in the Western that show extra-legal action in both positive and/or negative lights, as identified in Appendix One. As such, narrow perceptions and assumptions surrounding the portrayal of vigilantism on the American screen undermine the reality and significance of the topic's overwhelming presence and various possible appearances. Indeed, and contrary to popular claims, research for this thesis has found that vigilantism appears in the Western consistently and in many different ways: in well- and poor-intentioned gangs, mobs and posses; lone or group riders, rangers, gun-men, anti-heroes and vengeful frontiersmen and women; and corruption, crime, lawmen and lawlessness, amongst others. Further, the 'making-do' mentality of the frontier - itself transposed as a theme in the Western as acknowledged by Buscombe (p.38) and Loy (p.82) - can be seen to lend itself more generally to a *spirit* of vigilantism. Therefore, the tendency to overlook the presence and significance of the topic in the genre is quite striking.

Themes of the Western may also not at first seem obvious in *Dexter*. However, and retrospective of the genre's zeitgeist, the 'make-do' mentality that characterises depictions of the fron-

tier in the Western is most evident in *Dexter* through Harry's Code. The spontaneity of the Code is suggested through Harry's description of Dexter's murderous urges in 'Dexter': "Maybe we can do something to channel it, use it for good. [...] We can't stop this, but we can make the best of it." Harry's words directly allude to 'making do', and the Code is presented as a spontaneous and on-the-spot solution to his perceived problem with Dexter, evoking aspects of the American frontier and the Western genre that directly allude to vigilantism and its justification. Dexter is also shown to be grateful for Harry's help with the Code in earlier seasons of the show, positioning the apparent spontaneity of the Code in a positive light; this is evident in 'Popping Cherry' when, in comparing his relative "luck" to that of teenaged murderer Jeremy Downs, he says: "Without the Code of Harry, I'm sure I would have committed a senseless murder in my youth, just to watch the blood flow." In 'Dex, Lies and Videotape', however, the spontaneity and hence the real intention of Harry's Code is challenged as Dexter finds out that his adoptive father was having an affair with his biological mother, ultimately leading to her death. Both highlighting and undermining the apparent improvisation of the Code, Dexter's voice-over explains that he "always thought of Harry's Code as on-the-spot problem solving, but maybe he planned for me to settle the score all along." As such, vigilantism in *Dexter* both reflects the spirit of spontaneity in the Western and the Code, whilst deception and forethought are shown to undermine and subvert it. Western themes are evident in *Dexter* and can be seen to inform the central dilemma in Harry's actions, presenting tensions between the use of vigilantism over the use of officialdom, such as recourse to the law and to youth, rehabilitation and mental health services. Respective of this, Harry's plan of 'making-do' is exposed as an *excuse* to kill and direct his own pre-existing vigilante urges, suggesting wider implications to vigilantism in the genre and in American identity.

Similarly engaging with historical and cultural themes of vigilantism, Dexter's tendency to avoid working with others draws on, and subverts, aspects of group vigilantism and its various formations in the Western. He attempts to dissuade a union with Miguel in 'Si Se Puede' by presenting a seemingly impossible-to-obtain victim, a white supremacist already in prison, re-

jecting the 'group' notion of vigilantism evident in the Western. Despite Miguel's successful attempts to capture the supremacist, Dexter kills him alone, explaining that he is "not ready" to share his vigilante acts with Miguel. In similarly attempting to dissuade Lumen from joining him, Dexter refuses to help her locate her rapists in 'First Blood', only to find that she is still hunting them anyway. He also later encourages her to leave Miami, handing her a plane ticket back home to Minnesota. Nevertheless, despite his early protestations, Dexter eventually teams up with each, invoking representations of vigilantism linked to the Western by reflecting 'good' and 'bad' versions of group vigilantism. As Jowett points out, Hollywood played out the case for and against intervention in Europe leading up to America's involvement in World War Two (1976: p.305). In the Western specifically, this can be seen to play out through the various presentations of the vigilante gang or mob, which could be: good or bad in any given film; well-meaning, misguided or corrupt; and either a help, hindrance or enemy to a lone rider or law enforcement agent (see Appendix Two). In a similar way to how the Western plays out war themes, *Dexter* can be seen to play out vigilante themes relative to the Western. For example, Miguel signifies the negative aspects of group or selfish, mindless 'mob' vigilantism evident throughout the Western genre; this is most evident in the portrayal of Miguel as a highly unstable, dangerous and socially destructive force in 'Go Your Own Way', when he exhorts others to act on his behalf. In the episode, Miguel unleashes a previously captured serial killer on the city, screaming that he will "do what I want, when I want, to whomever I want! Count on it!" This presents Miguel's vigilantism as inherently selfish and destructive to society, embodying the negative connotations of mob vigilantism common in the Western in the process. In contrast to this, Dexter and Lumen's vigilantism is shown to be positive in nature, presenting the vigilante group as a force for good that benefits society; this is made clear in 'In the Beginning' when Lumen, preparing to kill serial-rapist Alex Tilden (Scott Grimes), looks with sadness at pictures of each of his brutalised victims. Similarly, in 'The Big One', the murder of Chase and his gang signifies safety and peace for the tragic figure of Lumen, who is shown to be smiling as she moves on with her life. Her union with Dexter not only avenges others and protects future

potential victims from the men, but her ability to cease vigilante activity when the threat is removed places her actions squarely within Brown's socially beneficial vigilante model and the well-meaning group vigilantism of the Western. As such, *Dexter* can be seen to encompass the various themes and manifestations of vigilantism in the genre by encouraging audiences to feel its ambiguity through the depiction of both positive and negative groupings.

Whilst *Dexter's* allusions to the crime genre are fairly obvious, given that the show's central premise concerns a murderer working as a forensic expert in a police department who regularly takes the law into his own hands, the centrality of vigilantism to the crime genre is less obvious, as is its own relationship with the Western genre. Again, this is surprising given that the primary themes of each genre focus on elements of crime, victimhood and revenge. As Thomas Leitch points out, 'Most Westerns [...] are organised around stories of crime and punishment; yet few viewers have called them crime films.' (2002: pp.5-6). He also states that crime films inevitably put 'absolutist categories like *hero*, *authority*, *innocent*, *guilty*, *victim*, *criminal* and *avenger* into play, engaging the doubts and reservations about those labels that make them fit subjects for mass entertainment, as well as moral debate.' (p.25), alluding therefore to the centrality and significance of vigilantism to many crime narratives, as he describes characteristics that can also be found in the Western. However, he does not relate these features of the crime film to vigilantism directly, which is the focus of attention in this section.

The Western and crime genres have both consciously and subconsciously informed the presentation of Dexter as a vigilante in *Dexter*, and characterise the audience's perceptions of and identification with him. The detective, investigatory and forensic nature of the crime genre can be seen to merge with notions of authority in the Western in the show, propelling the viewer into interrogatory and confrontational vigilante terrain. To elaborate, Leitch states: 'Crime films always depend on their audiences ambivalence about crime [...] and] are about the continual breakdown and reestablishment of the borders among criminals, crime solvers, and victims.' (p.15) Hence, Dexter's use of lawful procedures in an extra-legal manner in *Dexter*, an

act prompted by his own status as victim and that of others, can be seen to explore the relationship between crime, victimhood and vigilantism. His forensic detective work also acts to imbue Dexter with a sense of authority that allows the viewer to engage with his actions in the first place. Notions of authority are also a crucial component of the Western, and according to Loy, operate in two main ways. In the first, he states: 'Rational-legal authority regularly justified the use of violence in Westerns, for quite often cowboy heroes were connected with some organisation which gave them a legal right to use violence.' (p.106) Similarly, in working for Miami Metro, Dexter can be viewed as being imbued with institutional authority, something that Dexter himself exploits on occasion, such as when he uses his laminate badge to deter a gang from attacking Brother Sam in 'Once Upon a Time'. In the second, Loy states that those without legal authority express violence as 'within the bounds of [their] charisma, making the violence legitimate.' (p.107) Whilst Dexter can obviously be seen to be charismatic and charming at times, such as in 'Dexter' around Camilla (Margo Martindale), his 'authority' is conveyed rather more implicitly, again reflecting a key feature of vigilantism and violence in the Western. This 'authority' merges with and is facilitated by Dexter's own fluid and continual transition between the crime roles of criminal, detective, and avenger, roles that Leitch claims characterise the genre 'while exposing that party's links to the other two.' (p.16). Thus the open and interrogatory nature of the show allows ambiguities between these roles to play out. With this in mind, Dexter's authority in *Dexter* is conveyed through: the depiction of crime scenes; his collection of forensic evidence as proof of guilt; images of victimhood; and through his expertise as a blood spatter analyst.

Indicating a coalescence of Western and crime genres, the depiction of crime scenes with graphic images of murdered victims are common throughout the show and are used to instil Dexter's vigilante actions with authority. Furthermore, this recurrent motif establishes the traumatic effects of violent murderous crime, confronting the audience with apparently legitimate motivating factors behind his actions. In 'Shrink Wrap' for instance, Dexter visits the crime scene of an apparent suicide victim during a power cut. Still in a bloody bathtub, the

woman's naked body is a focal point for the camera as her gunshot wound and blood spatters are inspected by Dexter. Lighting is also used to emphasise the shock of seeing the woman's brutalised body, as the audience are shown fleeting glimpses of the garish crime under the lights swinging above the scene. Similarly in 'About Last Night', Dexter painstakingly exposes the dead body of Ellen Wolf. Not only does this confront the audience with the crime, but it also acts to shock them by involving them directly in it. Suspicions that Miguel may have murdered Wolf are brutally confirmed when Dexter wipes the soil back from her shocked, staring dead face in an extreme close-up shot that forces the viewer to consider the realities of extreme violence. Masuka describes Wolf's cause of death in 'About Last Night' (3.9) as: "Severe beating, strangulation, three stab wounds..." This heightens the sense of trauma and pain that the victim would have experienced and contrasts sharply with previous scenes that showed Wolf laughing and joking with LaGuerta. In this respect, the crime scene is used in a different way to previously, by presenting a stark contrast between life and death that then seemingly justifies Dexter's murder of Miguel.

Dexter is often shown gathering proof of his victims' guilt, imbuing him with the authority to commit his retaliatory acts. Whilst the audience does not always see him engage in this process, this part of the Code is regularly presented in the show and is often painstaking in its detail. In 'Love American Style', whilst searching Jorge Castillo's boat for proof that he has murdered illegal immigrants, Dexter opens the hold of the ship and a bloated, rotting body floats to the surface; this shocking revelation aligns the audience's sympathies with the abused immigrants, and subsequently with Dexter's vigilante actions against their captors. Serial killer activity and trophies are also occasionally used to assure the guilt of Dexter's suspects, as can be seen in 'Buck the System' when he realises that recently paroled woman-beater, Ray Speltzer, has shaved his head, which he informs Debra is an indication that he has started his kill cycle again and is stalking a new victim. Also in 'Run', Dexter finds the earrings that Speltzer takes from his victims' bodies, evidence and proof of guilt being used to instil Dexter with a sense of authority, effectively legitimising his vigilante acts to himself and the audience.

Dexter's authority is further asserted through his *compulsion* to obtain proof of guilt, placing his vigilante actions above his serial-killer persona. This is suggested in 'Those Kinds of Things' when Dexter attempts to get a blood sample from suspected wife-killer Joe Walker (John Brotherton) with a modified ring, but accidentally stabs himself with the device before obtaining the sample during a rough contact sport instead. Occasionally, Dexter only acts when guilt is assured in other ways, such as in 'Everything Is Illuminated', when he demands more proof than Lumen can give him that Dan Mendell (Sean O'Bryan), a man she has shot in revenge for his attacking her, is actually guilty of the crime; he refuses to kill the man until he overhears Mendell confess. Bearing this in mind, Dexter's own refusal to act without assurance of guilt imbues him with greater authority, so that when he *does* kill, the audience are generally encouraged to trust Dexter's judgement that justice has been carried out. He also often confronts his victims with photographic evidence just before he kills them, a recurrent aspect in the show that is used to further justify Dexter's actions and mark him as different to his victims. In 'Love American Style', Dexter takes photographs of Castillo's drowned victims and uses them to confront Castillo with the crimes he has committed. Also, in 'Hello Bandit' (5.2), Dexter finds a collection of blonde hair samples in Boyd Fowler's (Shawn Hatosy) house before following him to his dumping ground, where Dexter uncovers the bodies of murdered girls - Boyd's victims - preserved in formaldehyde. Dexter later positions pictures of their contorted faces around his intended kill site in 'Practically Perfect', confronting both Fowler and the viewer with the victims and depraved horror of the crime. Lumen later asks Dexter in 'Take It!' why he displays the victim's pictures, to which Dexter responds that the killers need to see what they have done. Thus, not only are such tools used to imbue Dexter with some degree of authority as he goes about his vigilante activities, but this indicates that such devices make Dexter himself *feel* authorised to carry out such acts.

The most effective means through which authority is conferred upon Dexter occurs through the depiction of victimhood in *Dexter*, which provokes a degree of empathy in the audience, as can be seen in 'Crocodile' as the family of a hit-and-run victim are shown grieving the death of



their son. Their obvious sorrow is further compounded by the inclusion of a video showing the victim with his family at his birthday celebration, emphasising the family's loss whilst encouraging the viewer to sympathise with the family and to root for Dexter's vigilante action against the boy's killer. The theme of victimhood also extends to the family and friends of murdered victims. In 'About Last Night', LaGuerta is shown to be inconsolable to discover that her friend Ellen Wolf has been murdered. This is emphasised when Dexter, gesturing to a crying LaGuerta, pointedly tells Miguel that: "Too many people are affected when the innocent die." Victimhood is therefore also used to confer authority onto Dexter's retaliatory vigilante acts. Moreover, it also draws a further distinction between Dexter's victims and other killers like himself, positioning him as comparatively less bad. The notion of 'authority' is conferred by direct allusion to crime and Western genres where, as Leitch points out, heroes and anti-heroes 'enjoy a continual moral privilege whatever crimes they may commit against victims and a system more corrupt than they are.' (p.88). Thus, *Dexter* can be seen to replicate this privilege, evoking aspects of the Western and crime genres to present notions of authority in Dexter's vigilante acts that the viewer can consider and question.

The 'anti-hero' figure of the Western has obvious influences on and crossover with the superhero genre, particularly in relation to the antihero's often traumatic origins and separation from society. John Saunders states this figure is a 'flawed hero' who possesses often both good and bad qualities and is often morally dubious (2001: p.5). The anti-hero will be discussed more later on in the chapter with regard to superheroes, but nevertheless, themes pertinent to Western anti-hero representations are clearly evident in *Dexter*, and can be discussed in relation to the genre. For example, the notion of personal trauma as prompting a relationship with vigilantism is invoked through the murder of Dexter's mother, and is explored throughout Seasons One and Two: firstly, as Brian Moser attempts to awaken Dexter's subconscious memories of the murder; and secondly, when Dexter then discovers more of her story himself. In the first instance, traumatic memories are recalled through the replication of Laura's dismembered body in 'Dexter' and through the recreation of the blood-filled room where she

died in 'Seeing Red'. Such inclusions align Dexter's traumatic and tragic origin story with that of many anti-heroes in the Western, presenting Dexter as a tortured and traumatised soul as he uncovers the truth about his mother's murder and its effects on his psyche. Further consolidating such a comparison, that Dexter then attempts to uncover more truths about the murder and Harry's mysterious involvement in it during Season Two echoes the journey of the Western anti-hero in attempting to find answers to his own tragedy, which Saunders writes is a central feature of the anti-hero's journey (pp.39-42). In 'Dex, Lies and Videotape' for instance, Dexter finds and listens to Harry's old police interview tapes and discovers that Harry had an affair with, and was partly responsible for, the murder of his mother. Therefore, key aspects of vigilantism in the Western can be observed in *Dexter* as a means through which to explore important elements of the vigilante persona.

Dexter's status as a 'loner' and social outsider rejects historical notions of vigilantism, which have been predominantly seen as group endeavours in America's past. This status also captures the essence of the Western's anti-hero, who, due to his violent and murderous acts, cannot be a part of the society he protects, elements that Patrick McGee discusses in relation to Western films (2007: pp.5-10). In *Dexter*, Dexter's social outsiderdom operates in three primary ways; mentally, metaphorically, and literally. In the first instance, Dexter routinely informs and reaffirms his outsider status to the audience by highlighting his emotional and mental differences through internal monologues. In 'Dexter', he tells the audience: "People fake a lot of human interactions, but I feel like I fake them all, and I fake them very well". Similarly, in 'Crocodile' he explains, watching a family grieve for their murdered loved one: "I see their pain. On some level I even understand their pain. I just can't feel their pain". Such instances act to inform and reaffirm Dexter's 'Otherness' and social incompatibility to the audience, invoking aspects of the Western anti-hero specifically by drawing attention to the experience of violent trauma that has caused this separation. In the second instance, the audience are shown Dexter himself musing over social acceptance and social exclusion in daydreams that prompt the viewer to question Dexter's role or place in society. In 'Left Turn Ahead' for example, Dex-

ter imagines a range of outcomes from his sister Debra as he muses over telling her that he is really the Bay Harbour Butcher. The potential responses shown, whilst tongue-in-cheek and ranging from devastation to putting a bullet in his head, all metaphorically play on the idea of his social rejection or acceptance through Debra. It is also of note that Debra is often described as Dexter's link to society, as Harry makes clear in 'Popping Cherry'. Thinking he is on his death-bed, he tells Dexter: "If you feel like you're slipping, lean on your sister. She'll keep you connected." With this in mind, and relating to Dexter's literal social outsiderdom, when Debra dies, Dexter leaves Miami and excludes himself from society completely at the end of the last episode, 'Remember the Monsters?' The final shot of him alone in an empty log cabin signifies his ultimate separation from civilisation, fated to the wilderness along with the Western anti-heroes of old. Thus, the Western is implicitly invoked in *Dexter*, and can be seen in a variety of ways.

### **Part Two: 1970s Vigilante Film Cycles and *Dexter***

This section will demonstrate how *Dexter* also invokes and reworks key aspects of 1970s vigilante film cycles, indicating their continued social relevance in the twenty-first century. There is already a considerable amount of writing and critical theory on vigilante films of the decade by Lev (2000: pp.22-39), Ryan & Kellner (1990: pp.87-105) and Lester D. Friedman (2007). However, there is again an overwhelming tendency to relegate discussions of vigilantism and its social significance only to that era, with very few writers continuing such studies beyond their emergent cycles and immediate social concerns. Nonetheless, the social significance of 1970s vigilante films is evident, and supports the general assertion that, in times of social crisis, upheaval and tensions, vigilante themes become more apparent on the American screen in response. Indeed, Barry Keith Grant asserts that in late-1960s and early-1970s cinema: 'All the tensions roiling within American society were inevitably reflected in the cinema of the time.' (2008: p.10). Stressing the significance of these films in providing a 'battleground between conservatives and liberals regarding such social issues as crime, political corruption, drugs, and

youth gangs,' Ryan & Kellner underscore the left and right extremes within each cycle, as pertaining to different social tensions and a whole range of attitudes towards them. Screen vigilantism can also be seen to pertain to wider historical discussions of the topic and its purported conservative and radical effects and intentions. In more general terms, however, in engaging with and reflecting such cycles of film, *Dexter* invokes these left and right political extremes surrounding vigilantism and actively engages the viewer in the process. The appearance of these cycles in *Dexter* suggests that they are still socially significant and relevant to contemporary American life. Therefore, discussions of Blaxploitation, vigilante cops and rape-revenge narratives in the show will be considered in order to outline their social significance in the post-9/11 era. Whilst other cycles of vigilantism are evident in *Dexter*, such as Vietnam veteran cycles (relevant to Doakes and Curtis Barnes (John Marshall Jones), a war-damaged and socially destructive male in 'See-Through'), they obviously cannot all be discussed here. These key cycles have been selected to demonstrate the relevance and potential scope of examining vigilantism through *Dexter* and subsequent cultural texts; this approach clearly indicates that vigilantism in the show draws from a whole range of sources and previous manifestations that are applicable to modern-day anxieties.

### **Doakes, Vigilantism and Blaxploitation**

The Blaxploitation cycle of films in the early-1970s followed an attempt by white and black Hollywood directors, such as Gordon Parks and Hal Ashby, to look more closely at race relations in American society, and primarily focused on blacks in black society (David A. Cook, 2000: pp.259-260). The genre can be seen as a direct response to increasing social tensions, racial inequality and the Civil Rights movement. Supporting this, Josiah Howard asserts that Blaxploitation films evolved from the needs of an 'increasingly cynical and disillusioned African-American movie-going public who were impatiently awaiting the arrival of more realistic and socially aware black film characters in narratives that accurately reflected changing times.' (2008: p.9) However, whilst stressing the social significance of the genre, Howard also stresses

the cycle's ability to provide escape from contemporary issues (p.10), indicating that elements of revenge and vigilantism in the Blaxploitation cycle provided a cathartic effect for black audiences. It must be acknowledged that not all films within the cycle pertain to vigilantism, but in answering back to an unfair, persecutory and oppressive establishment, many of them still capture the *spirit* of vigilantism. Bogle writes that Blaxploitation,

‘touched on a mass hype for an overturn of a corrupt and racist system. The violence, the sense of betrayal and the relentless double-crossing manoeuvres that are so much a part of these films are no doubt as much an outgrowth of the violence in Vietnam and the later corruption of Watergate as they are the rage and despair of racial inequities in America.’ (p.242).

Whilst being hailed in its formative stages for bringing compelling, authentic and identifiable characters to the screen, Blaxploitation has also been discussed in relation to presenting confining and derogatory stereotypes of blacks. Cook (2000: pp.259-260), Bogle (p.232) and Manthia Diawara (1993: p.25) all discuss positive and negative aspects of the cycle and its stereotypes, and of the subsequent critical attention and usurpation of the genre by white directors and audiences. In line with such discussions, the character of Sergeant James Doakes in *Dexter* can be seen to engage with key facets of the Blaxploitation genre, suggesting that black representations of vigilantism in the show have been influenced by this primarily 1970s cycle. Moreover, the depiction of blacks and vigilantism in the show can be seen to highlight significant contemporary social problems for African-Americans in modern American life. Areas of concern suggested by the representation of the cycle in *Dexter* include that of structural and institutional racism, African-American male social disconnection and isolation, and black victimisation and scapegoating.

In the first instance, Doakes can be seen to embody characteristics widely associated with the black male protagonists of the genre, suggesting a tension between stereotyping and representation; this can be seen in Doakes' first appearance in the show, as his outfit is black, rigid

and vaguely militant, recalling the outfits of popular characters such as John Shaft (Richard Roundtree), aggressive militant male in *Shaft*, and Slaughter (Jim Brown), suave and tough ex-beret in *Slaughter* (Jack Starrett, 1972, American International Pictures, US). Like them, Doakes uses bad language regularly, with “mother-fucker!” appearing as a catch-phrase of his and directly recalling the 1970s Blaxploitation era and popular *Shaft* theme-tune. They are even the final words uttered by the character before a massive explosion kills him in ‘Left Turn Ahead’, emphasising his popularity and relative prestige to contemporary audiences as a character revered for the very threat he poses to Dexter and, by extension, to the primacy of white American males. Upholding this aspect of the genre, Doakes’ quick-fire tongue and harsh retorts are common throughout his appearances in the show and are often used to attack aspects of other characters and the establishment. In ‘That Night, A Forest Grew’ he accuses LaGuerta of “backing the fucking freak-tard” Dexter, indicating his anger at his long-time friend’s decision to suspend him for attacking Dexter. Similarly, in ‘Love, American Style’, expressing frustration at seeing Dexter daydreaming at a crime scene, Doakes, impatiently and astutely exclaims, “Stop grinning like a fucking psycho and get back to work!” In this way, the tough, no-nonsense and resilient attitude of the Blaxploitation leading male are expressed through his character, suggesting a natural engagement with themes related to the Blaxploitation cycle whilst indicating an underlying separation and exclusion of the African-American male from other social groups in the contemporary era.

Portraying themes related to the Blaxploitation cycle, Doakes’ own tendency to aggression, vigilantism and anti-social behaviour are suggested in his first scenes in *Dexter*. He also significantly contrasts with everyone else in the department and is presented as an oppositional force that is potentially threatening to white control and its enforcing tools, in this case Dexter’s Code. In ‘Dexter’ for instance, Doakes approaches Dexter in his lab for a blood spatter report and is shown to be brash, aggressive and open in speaking his mind, telling him, “You give me the fucking creeps, you know that Dexter? [...] Don’t even know why I need you. Grab a crayon, psycho, and scribble this down.” This tongue-in-cheek moment, whilst drawing on

the aggression, transparency and self-assurance of the Blaxploitation male, also plays on the audience's knowledge that Dexter *is* in fact a murderer. This point also shows Doakes to be observant and the only colleague that is suspicious of Dexter, presenting him as a threat both in the workplace *and* in Dexter's private time. However, Doakes' insistence that Dexter's report must match a suspect he already has picked out, despite contrary evidence, indicates his *own* vigilante tendencies. Doakes is so determined to arrest his suspect that he does not care if the man is guilty of the crime or not, suggesting that blacks are complicit in vigilantism when it is not directed towards African-Americans, and this scene implicates them in committing their *own* vigilante acts against whites. Watching Doakes glare suspiciously at him, Dexter thinks: "The only real question I have is why, in a building full of cops, all supposedly with a keen insight into the human soul, is Doakes the only one who gets the creeps from me?" Not only does this dialogue indicate that he will become increasingly suspicious of and problematic for Dexter, but it also implies that the two men have something more in common, hinting at Doakes' own murderous, vigilante tendencies. Doakes is simultaneously presented as like-minded, with tendencies to vigilantism that have arisen from his *own* traumatic experiences, whilst demonstrating an underlying threat towards the primacy of white male vigilante acts.

Doakes' outsider status and tendencies to vigilantism are evident elsewhere in *Dexter*. In 'It's Alive!' for example, it is revealed that Doakes has been following Dexter every night and in his own time since the Ice Truck Killer case, suspicious of his involvement. Not only does this suggest extra-legal activity; it also suggests that Doakes has nothing better to do, highlighting his own separation from society and social life. More significantly, in stalking Dexter at night Doakes effectively *reverses* the night-riding tactics of predominantly white males in America's history, deterring Dexter's crimes and halting white vigilantism with his own extra-legal acts. Similarly, in 'That Night, A Forest Grew', Doakes retaliates to provocative behaviour from Dexter, attacking him in public view of his colleagues and leading to his suspension. Whilst this foregrounds Doakes' aggressive, retaliatory streak, it also implies a distinct separation between the two men and their relationship with vigilantism: Dexter's secretive and hidden, sig-

nified by his provocation of Doakes in his office away from public view; Doakes, on the other hand, is shown to be open and transparent when he attacks Dexter in front of the whole department, clearly embodying the spirit of the Blaxploitation hero. Moreover, Doakes' entrapment by Dexter, who sets up his colleague to remove his apparent "Doakes problem", suggests that Doakes is a victim of structural racism and stereotyping. This is stressed when Dexter smugly tells the confused detective, "I own you," before he talks up Doakes' aggression and stalking to LaGuerta, ensuring his rival's suspension. Indeed, Dexter's exploitation of Doakes' violent retaliation to being attacked alludes more generally to contemporary social tendencies to view African-American males as overtly violent and aggressive, a claim that Parker & Rosenzweig make in reference to wider American society (2008: pp.14-27). Dexter can be seen to uphold and even exploit structural racism to his advantage, using it to diminish the threat posed to his vigilantism by a black man. However, whilst presented in a humorous manner, Dexter's actions are not obviously applauded, and his smugness makes the moment revealing, showing how prepared he is to sacrifice others to maintain his own freedom. *Dexter* can thus be seen once again to engage and reflect, rather than to impart a singular opinion, presenting Doakes as the recipient of unfair treatment at Dexter's hands.

Further demonstrating how *Dexter* engages with aspects of Blaxploitation, and stressing the genre's continued social relevance, Doakes is shown to be very militant and has a violent background, suggesting that violent traumatic experiences have, like whites, also influenced African-American males. In 'Father Knows Best' for instance, Doakes shoots dead a suspect who he believes to be an ex-war criminal, and it is revealed that Doakes had been in a US Black Ops unit in Haiti during the country's civil war. The shooting occurs off-screen and is presented as a dubious killing by both Dexter's blood spatter report and Batista's accounts of the event, leading the viewer to question Doakes' actions as being extra-legal; this is further suggested by Batista's honesty as he reports his version of events to Internal Affairs. Doakes later describes in detail to LaGuerta the atrocities the war criminal carried out in an attempt to justify his murderous actions, again invoking elements of the Blaxploitation genre. Endorsing Doakes' actions,



however, LaGuerta tells him: "If he did those things? He deserved a lot worse than he got." Thus, black vigilantism is also presented in ambiguous terms. As such, and contrary to previous examples of Doakes being a victim of structuralised racism, here he can be seen to unfairly benefit and escape lawful justice by exploiting his close personal relationship with LaGuerta. Nonetheless, Doakes is also shown to be compassionate, fair and honourable towards others, as indicated when he defends Batista to the other cops, shaming them for calling him a "rat" even though Batista testified against his version of the Haitian shooting. Further presenting the notion of sanctioned or authorised vigilantism, and collusion with 'white' police departments that often occurs in the Blaxploitation genre, LaGuerta has the Internal Affairs investigation against Doakes dropped, causing Batista - and the audience - to question LaGuerta's actions: "You had the case dropped? [...] I told I.A. the truth, and there's a lot of evidence to back that up!" As such, the extremes and varied opinions of the American public on the topic are expressed through various characters' dialogue. However, and hinting at political vigilantism from an official or governmental level, LaGuerta tells Batista: "All I know is that I.A. got a call from an agency in Washington [...] they said the case involved some sensitive foreign relations issue so, they were gonna handle it from there." This inclusion can be seen to chime with contemporary anxieties in the post-9/11 era surrounding sanctioned vigilantism and extra-legal governmental dealings. The theme of militancy is also explored in 'Morning Comes' when LaGuerta tries to set Doakes up with a government contract that she feels will more suit his active-aggressive tendencies, suggested as she arranges an interview for her friend and tells him that: 'It's a dangerous world out there; they pay a lot of money to make it safe.' In this way, elements of meddling 'whitey' institutions, with similarly ambiguous approaches to law and order that features in the Blaxploitation genre, are also evident here alongside modern concerns. Nevertheless, Doakes is presented as a protector and useful for the purposes of national defence and as such can be seen as again exploited by higher powers to protect white interests, indicating that his sublimated and victimised status is widely structuralised and enduring.

In further opposition to white vigilante traditions, and also subverting an aspect of Blaxploitation in *resisting* scoring one over 'whitey' (Howard: p.14), Doakes refuses to engage in the terrorising of suspect Guerrero's house at night with white cops in 'Popping Cherry'. The cops are all white, carry out the attack at night, and wear masks over their faces, reminiscent of the spooking and night-riding activities of the 1860s-era Ku Klux Klan in attempting to terrorise their target. Resisting taking part after they attempt to force Doakes to join in, he tells the posse: "I'm all for sending the message, but this ain't the way, man," before running away into the night. This rejection of persecutory vigilantism by Doakes signifies a distinct separation between white and black vigilantism in *Dexter*, wherein his refusal to participate indicates that his own vigilantism comes from a higher moral position, and crucially is motivated by a sense of social vigilantism that takes justice very seriously indeed. Doakes can therefore be seen to expose and resist persecutory and racist behaviour and attitudes (Guerrero is a Cuban immigrant) within law enforcement agencies. This point is significant because, in highlighting illegal and extra-legal activity among law enforcement officials, Doakes reflects a more general and extensive recourse to vigilantism and violence in America's police forces. When considering the propulsion of police brutality and racial tensions to the forefront of American anxieties over recent years, the ability of the show to depict and critique structuralised racism and vigilantism is striking and poignant. Moreover, Doakes also exposes structural racism in law enforcement in a wider, more formative sense beyond that of the African-American experience. Indeed, it is revealed that he was invited along by his white colleagues so that they could set him up as a scapegoat for the attack on Guerrero's house in retaliation for a perceived slight. Doakes can thus be seen to signify multiple minority groups in America and their derogatory treatment by the predominantly white establishment, inviting the viewer to consider such representations in relation to the contemporary moment.

Although he becomes a victim of extended structural racism when the whole of Miami Metro accuse him of being the Bay Harbour Butcher, Doakes goes on the run and openly becomes a vigilante operating outside the law, attempting to capture Dexter, prove his guilt and hand him

over to the police to clear his own name as a murder suspect. Rather than becoming another black victim of vigilantism and scapegoating for a crime he did not commit, Doakes rejects this status and is instead motivated to capture Dexter for the well-being of society and to do the right thing. This is stressed as, in 'Left Turn Ahead', he offers to go with Dexter to turn the latter in. Respective of this, the black experience of persecution, vigilantism and racism is reflected when Doakes' actions and point of view are shown to the viewer. Supporting this observation, Rubin champions the Blaxploitation genre's ability to show vigilantism 'as seen from the other side of the fence, the side that is often the target of police surveillance and vigilante action.' (1999: p.144) This underscores the significance of Doakes in being able to reflect modern-day African-American anxieties of black victimisation by whites. Using vigilantism *against* such treatment, Doakes breaks into and searches Dexter's apartment in 'Morning Comes' and finds the former's blood slide trophies, obtaining evidence illegally. Then, in 'Resistance Is Futile', he flees to Haiti using false paperwork to request a "discreet lab" to examine the illegal evidence. He also later attempts to capture Dexter rather than kill him, subverting white vigilante norms. His violent urges are therefore not shown to be innate or uncontrollably driven by traumatic or personal experiences, nor are they motivated by a need for 'revenge' against the system that has persecuted him. Doakes' actions can be viewed as wholly extra-legal, yet appear to originate from a genuinely noble and honourable place that actively resists retaliation against whites for past grievances and vigilante acts. This difference in presentation also suggests a distinct reversal of social concerns in the present day from the Blaxploitation cycles of the 1970s. Rubin writes how Blaxploitation films 'tend to place greater emphasis on threats posed by the corrupt establishment and large criminal organisations than by psychopaths and street criminals.' (p.145) Doakes can be thus seen to reverse this trend by attempting to capture Dexter, suggesting that white male traditions of violent extremism and vigilantism pose a greater threat to blacks than structural and/or institutional racism. Further, Doakes' real potency and threat to white supremacy is situated in his ability to see through Dexter's façade, suggesting that the "Doakes problem" is really a metaphor for rising black consciousness, and

denotes an inevitable return of the repressed and consciously undermined experience of blacks as victims of vigilantism throughout American history. Indeed, and underscoring the inevitable return of the “Doakes problem”, the truth almost catches up with Dexter, causing him to further implicate the innocent man. During Season Seven, LaGuerta, unable to truly believe her long-time friend Doakes had secretly been a murderer, uncovers the real truth and gets closer to obtaining justice for Doakes in ‘Surprise, Motherfucker!’ (7.12). Suggesting the element of a surprise return from a very specific character in the show that almost bested Dexter, the episode title directly refers to his unique catchphrase and plays on the inevitable ‘return’ of Doakes, almost leading to Dexter’s demise again. As such, the character of Doakes exposes black victimhood in white acts of vigilantism, or at least threatens to, indicating the show’s key engagement with the wider experience of blacks in America’s vigilante history. With this in mind, and in reflecting and subverting aspects of the Blaxploitation genre in a contemporary context, Doakes can be seen to suggest that America’s past and present treatment of African-Americans is becoming an increasingly pressing issue in modern-day America that demands significant attention, answers and change.

### **Harry, Debra and Vigilante Cops**

The vigilante cop cycle of the early 1970s can be viewed as a direct response to disaffection in leaders, anxieties surrounding overt male aggression and murderous capabilities, and the destabilising effects of the Vietnam War on the American psyche. Reflecting these concerns, the cycle includes films such as *Dirty Harry* and *The French Connection*, amongst others. It can also be regarded as forming part of a conservative backlash against social tensions and the changes taking place in America during the late-1960s and early-1970s. Supporting this, Mia Mask argues that the cycle’s ‘hyper-macho characters derived from the backlash against civil rights, cultural nationalism, women’s liberation, and social change in the late sixties.’ (p.67) Such films are also widely debated by Cook (2000: pp.192-196), Ryan & Kellner (1990: pp.289-299), and Ray (1985: p.298) for their reflection of varied opinions and attitudinal extremes of the politi-

cal right and left, particularly surrounding themes of brutality, male aggression and stifling bureaucracy. While these specific debates and their extensive responses require no further discussion here in relation to *Dexter*, which has been shown to be generally objective in its depictions of vigilantism, they nonetheless align with the assertions herein that the show provides a similarly interrogatory approach to vigilantism and related themes that actively engage the viewer.

In discussing depictions of vigilantism in *Dirty Harry*, Lev argues that ‘conventional lines of authority are ineffectual [...] and only heroic action which goes beyond arbitrary rules can stem the tide.’ (p.31) This indicates that depictions of male aggression and acts of brutality are perceived to be justified in their response to weakness of and disaffection in authority, underscoring the centrality of such themes within the ‘Vigilante Revenge’ cycle. Further, one could feasibly argue that ‘Dirty’ Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood), appearing in five films from 1971 to 1988, is an iconic signifier of the vigilante on-screen, renowned for his overt and aggressive masculinity, his disaffection with authority and his use of vigilantism and extreme violence. Indeed, actor Clint Eastwood has himself become synonymous with vigilante films, appearing and/or directing in more than twenty vigilante-themed features in the last three decades. Thus, Eastwood remains indelibly tied to the role of Harry and his vigilante tendencies. The significance of this cycle to *Dexter* is apparent through the character of Harry. Stressing the intertextual nature of the show, Harry can be seen to directly allude to the iconic and enduring figure of ‘Dirty’ Harry Callahan; this is suggested through the depiction of his vigilante tendencies and through the show’s self-reflexive nods to the character and films in titles such as ‘Dirty Harry’ (4.5). It is also evident in Harry’s own role in law enforcement as a detective, his obvious disillusionment with the system, and via his aggressive masculinity.

Initially, characters such as Camilla and Matthews are used to suggest that Harry has an enduring reputation as a good cop and an honest man, as suggested in ‘Dexter’ when Camilla tells Dexter that he is, “charming, just like your father.” Similarly, in ‘There’s Something About Har-

ry', Matthews describes Harry as "a good friend [...and] a great cop," and speaks of his former friend and colleague with fondness. However, Harry's dark vigilante urges are revealed throughout Seasons One and Two, suggesting an alignment with the vigilante cop cycle. In 'Crocodile' for instance, Harry is shown to be affected personally by the murder of his partner Davey Sanchez, suggested as he expresses his grief to Dexter. Heavily engulfed in shadows and tightly framed, there is an underlying malaise to the scene that hints at Harry's vigilante tendencies, signifying his innate need for justice and vengeance. This sense of malaise can also be seen to relate to the vigilante cop cycle and the protagonists' underlying brutality. Similarly, in 'There's Something About Harry', a flashback reveals Harry to be so consumed with getting justice for Davey that his anger at the case's collapse causes him to ruin Debra's birthday party. His violent capabilities are evident when he angrily smashes a glass into a wall, his face contorted in anger. The scene also shows Harry to be utterly disillusioned with lawful procedures as he is enraged to discover that Davey's murderer will escape conviction due to a faulty warrant. He screams at Matthews, visiting to break the news, "This is bullshit! [...] We just wait for him to kill another girl?!" before turning to Dexter to remark: "I did the right thing in training you, this just proves it." As has been discussed extensively in Chapter Two, Dexter's vigilantism is shown to be informed and directed by Harry's own attitudes and fantasies surrounding vigilantism within the father-son relationship. Poignantly though, he can also be seen to have corrupted his daughter Debra and infused her with the same vigilante cop attitudes and tendencies. As mentioned previously, Harry is shown to have been ultimately destroyed when confronted with the realities of his actions through Dexter and commits suicide. However, and respective of Harry's death, the legacy of his vigilante behaviour and attitudes is evident in Debra, and can be explored accordingly with regard to the depiction of representations of the vigilante cop cycle in the show and its relevance to modern-day America.

Debra is, like Dexter, also shown to have been influenced and shaped by her cop father in her chosen career, aggressive tendencies, and her subsequent vigilante activity. Her character makes possible an exploration of the legacy of aggressive masculinity from 1970s American

society and popular culture as emphasised by the 'Dirty Harry' persona in the modern day. Supporting this claim, Debra's career as a police detective is shown to be the result of an attempt to emulate Harry and gain his respect, whilst her aggressive male persona is presented as a direct response to his tendencies to neglect and exclude Debra from 'male' bonding activities with Dexter. During a flashback in 'Return to Sender' for instance, Debra begs to be allowed along on a hunting trip with Harry and Dexter but is dismissed by her father, causing her to steal a gun to prove she can shoot too. However, she is severely reprimanded by Harry for doing so, which contrasts sharply with Harry's treatment of Dexter for gun misuse and denotes gendered double standards. Highlighting the significance of this recollected scene, it is followed by one in the present, where Debra tells Dexter that she became a cop to make Harry proud and to get him to notice her. Similarly, in 'There's Something About Harry', Harry shouts at Debra to "get back in the car!" when she pops her head out to ask a question at a crime scene. Whilst the moment provides a humorous aside, the implication is clear: Debra is rejected and dismissed by Harry because of her status as a female. Nevertheless, she is similarly informed by the same vigilante attitudes and deceptions as Dexter. Her career is also routinely defined by and compared to that of her father's. In 'Crocodile', Matthews praises her promotion to homicide by telling her that her "father would be proud," before later reprimanding her for abusing the chain of command: "Harry never would have pulled the shit you just did." Debra's career, identity and even her life can therefore be seen to be determined by her father's attitudes and image, and a need to gain his attention. Debra's assumption of characteristics traditionally associate with males indicates that the legacy of the vigilante cop cycle is one that compromises female identity and becomes suffused with male aggression that pertains to violence and vigilantism.

Due to her excessively masculine characteristics and increasing forays into vigilantism as a direct result of her father and brother, Debra can also be viewed as exploring the legacy of 1970s American values and the vigilante cop cycle. This occurs as she exposes aggressive and male-dominated attitudes towards vigilantism as ultimately destructive and as having impacted

negatively upon modern-day attitudes towards policing and law enforcement from within the system. Debra overtly engages with the vigilante cop cycle, and much more obviously than Harry. Her feminine identity is also fused with masculine aspects that align her more directly with the aggressive, hostile and often uncivilised nature of the male vigilante cop. For example, she is often very vulgar and regularly uses bad language, characteristics that are more traditionally associated with men (Weeks: pp.57-79). These traits are evident even before her first appearance in 'Dexter', when Debra ends a request to Dexter over the phone to assist her at a crime scene with, "pretty fucking please with cheese on top!" Dexter explains affectionately that this is: "My foul-mouthed foster sister, Debra." Later in the episode, Debra is also shown to be sexually vulgar as she jokes that, "the sex-suit worked, Captain put me on the case! LaGuerta wasn't happy, but she needs to get laid." As such, typically masculine attributes of sexual vulgarity and bad language that feature in the vigilante cop cycle are evident in *Dexter* through Debra, and imply that her feminine identity has been compromised and influenced by her perceived need to display masculine characteristics. Similarly, she is often shown to be aggressive and impulsive. In 'Waiting to Exhale', after experiencing significant trauma at the hands of the Ice Truck Killer, she reacts by sparring with a man at the gym, lashing out angrily before taking him home to have aggressive sex with him, and is shown chaining him to the bed. Such acts indicate extreme aggression, impulsivity and even self-indulgence in Debra's more animalistic drives that align her strongly with masculine traits, whilst remaining firmly centred on her role as a female cop in a world of men. This innate aggression and fusion of masculine and feminine characteristics is acknowledged through regular sexual comments and seedy remarks directed towards Debra by Masuka throughout the series. She is also perceived as being aggressive by other characters, as indicated in 'There's Something About Harry'. In the episode, Masuka exclaims to Dexter of Debra: "She's going to hit you, isn't she!", before telling Dexter quietly in a humorous aside that "Hair-pulling may not be manly, but it's very effective." As such, Debra's femininity is constantly off-set by her aggressive streak, and her mascu-



line attributes are noted by others in the department, aligning her consistently with the characteristics of the vigilante cop.

The vigilante cop's tendency towards brutality and aggression is also reflected through Debra's career as a detective, and further plays on her usurpation of traditionally masculine qualities. This aggressive streak hints at an underlying anger that often imbues her with 'super-cop' qualities that present her use of aggression as heroic, foreshadowing her eventual shift towards vigilantism. Debra's character can be seen to incriminate the influence of cultural forms in determining perceptions and attitudes surrounding the topic. She can also be seen to embody the spirit and arrogance of the vigilante cop in the modern day and in relation to her job, which has wider and more sinister implications concerning contemporary policing in America. In 'Waiting to Exhale' for instance, Debra chases down a young black male who has vandalised her cop car, throws him to the ground and pulls a gun on him. The boy, traumatised, urinates himself in fear. This scene is significant because the young male signifies vulnerability, social victimisation and is a recipient of excessive police force. Whilst this is the only instance of police brutality directed towards African-Americans in *Dexter*, it poignantly underscores the black experience of the topic, which was a motivating factor for Civil Rights activism *and* a key feature of 1970s vigilante films (Howard, pp.19-23). Given the increasing urgency of debates surrounding police brutality against African-Americans in modern day America, such representations in *Dexter* point to the significance of vigilantism as a prism through which pressing social issues can be confronted in the contemporary moment.<sup>28</sup> Similarly indicating Debra's aggression and 'super-cop' tendencies, a video of her attacking and taking down an armed shooter in 'Those Kinds of Things' goes viral in 'Once Upon a Time'. This positions Debra as aggressive and re-active yet heroic, which highlights her male vigilante cop attributes and also enables her

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<sup>28</sup> Akkoc, Raziye, 2015. 'A Timeline of Police Attacks in the USA' March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 (accessed March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015) [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) Akkoc discusses incidents of police brutality against blacks in America over the last few years, but in discussing a handful of incidents, overlooks the extent of the issue and its pervasive and continual appearance throughout American history. That said, it is of note that such debates have begun. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/11446472/A-timeline-of-police-attacks-in-the-USA.html>

colleagues to praise her actions, invoking romanticised images and tendencies towards violence. This view is indicated when Masuka excitedly tells the others to: “Watch this! She totally decks him [...] She’s already got 500,000 hits [...] She’s a superstar!”; this also alludes to the growing popularity and significance of social media and mobile phone technology and advancements in being able to share - and even expose - previously restricted and often withheld acts of violence and police brutality, now caught on tape and shared world-wide. Debra’s violence is also rewarded by officialdom as she subsequently receives a promotion for her swift actions. Violence in Debra is thus portrayed as a very positive attribute that helps her to get ahead in her job and gain the respect of her peers, most unlike Callahan in *Dirty Harry*, whose brutality is cheered by audiences but rejected and condemned by officialdom. With this in mind, the cult status of vigilante cops and popular tendencies to view their actions as heroic and worthy of emulation is presented and exposed in *Dexter*. Nonetheless, and attesting to the confrontational nature of the show, Debra’s actions are also presented in a contrary and very sinister manner. In ‘If I Had a Hammer’, for example, she threatens a suspect called Nikki (Alicia Lagano), who she suspects may have murdered Debra’s lover, FBI Agent Frank Lundy (Keith Carradine). Grabbing her aggressively, she hisses: “I’m gonna say I saw you...” to the crying, confused woman. This scene makes clear that Debra is prepared to lie to get ‘justice’ and indicates that she can and will abuse authority granted to her by her job, just as Harry did. However, Nikki confronts her and the audience with the reality of her actions, shouting: “You’re the liar!” at a shocked and humbled Debra. In this way, the viewer is encouraged to see the potentially damaging effects and more sinister implications of Debra’s actions towards a clearly troubled woman, who then turns out to be innocent of Lundy’s murder. Thus tensions between vigilantism and legal routes are underscored in the scene.

Further exploring the legacy of Harry and his vigilante attitudes on his daughter, Debra’s own forays into vigilantism are increasingly shown to occur as she uncovers the ugly truth behind her father’s heroic façade. After previously uncovering her father’s lies about the murder of Dexter’s mother and what happened to Dexter’s brother Brian in ‘The Getaway’, she discovers

Harry's infidelities and exploitation of female informants throughout Season Five. This knowledge can be seen to inform her subsequent vigilante actions, the evolution of which suggests that she has been shaped by Harry's deceptive vigilante attitudes in implicit ways, doomed to turn to extra-legal action as Dexter has. Following a tip-off in 'The Big One' for example, Debra walks in on Lumen and Dexter's crime scene where they have just murdered serial killer and abuser of females, Jordan Chase. Whilst their identities remain unknown to Debra because she is behind a screen, she subsequently lets them go, telling Lumen: "I know what they did to you, I've seen the tapes [...] It's a miracle you survived." This suggests compassion, empathy and female solidarity that highlight not only Lumen's position as a victim of male aggression and entitlement, but Debra's as well. Her actions can therefore be viewed as a direct response to Harry's deceptions and affairs. As such, Debra's first dalliance with vigilantism is used to suggest empathy and support for subjugated and sublimated femininity, rather than aggressive brutality against a broken system; this indicates that the 'real' problem surrounding vigilantism is not necessarily vigilantism itself, but its usurpation and placement as a central feature of aggressive masculinity and male culture. With this in mind, Debra's assumption of masculine ideals as a way to relate to her father and get ahead in her job are coded as damaging and corrupting, and as compromising her female autonomy.

The negative implications and effects of aggressive male vigilantism within the vigilante cop cycle are most overtly evident through Debra in Seasons Seven and Eight, after she discovers the truth about Harry and Dexter. Torn between love and hate for her father and brother, she is shown to be loyal and devoted to her male-dominated family, unable to resist their damaging influence over her. More so, her identity is compromised and infiltrated by male attitudes towards violence and vigilantism that have misled and corrupted her, ultimately condemning Debra by situating her as a victim - albeit a willing one - of pervasive vigilante attitudes. Respective of this, *Dexter* subverts elements of the vigilante cop cycle by showcasing the damaging effects of vigilantism through her character, showing Debra to be a victim of its adulation, promotion and naturalisation. As a result, ambiguities surrounding vigilantism are again in-

voked in the show, this time through Debra. In 'Surprise, Motherfucker!' (7.12) she kills her long-term antagonist, LaGuerta, another female with masculine-infused characteristics, in order to save Dexter instead. Arriving at a cargo container where LaGuerta has set up and captured Dexter, she finds that he is about to murder their boss. Torn between legal and extra-legal action, Debra evokes legal and moral debates when she cries out to Dexter: "You can't do this [...] I can't let you go through with this!" Further underscoring tensions between murder, vigilantism and law enforcement, LaGuerta then screams to Debra: "Shoot him! This is not who you are, you're a good cop, you're a good person! You're not like him!" However, almost against her wishes, Debra pulls the trigger, suggesting that her very body and soul have been compromised and taken over by her father's overbearing and indoctrinated attitudes. Her devastation at killing LaGuerta to save her murderous brother is immediately apparent as Debra, screaming inconsolably, rushes forward to embrace LaGuerta's dead body. The camera pulls back at this moment, allowing the shock of the scene to unfold, showing Debra to be shrouded in darkness as she screams in agony at her own violent, murderous capabilities. This sequence suggests that Harry's aggressive vigilante tendencies have consumed her just like they have Dexter, signifying her inevitable destruction and complete loss of Self.

This loss of female identity in Debra's masculinised relationship with vigilantism is further indicated in 'Scar Tissue' (8.4), when she attempts to kill Dexter and herself in a car crash. Again drawing the viewer back to the central moral dilemmas surrounding Harry's actions, she does this after finding out that Harry committed suicide after walking in on his creation. Signalling her own confrontation with the ugly truth of vigilantism following her murder of LaGuerta, Debra grabs the wheel, telling Dexter: "I know how he felt, why he killed himself. But he only got it half right," the car veering wildly across the road before crashing into a lake. In attempting to kill Dexter to stop his vigilantism, she can be seen to emulate the Code herself, ironically assuming Dexter's and Harry's roles and cementing her fate in the world of male violence and vigilantism. As such, male characteristics are further transposed onto Debra as she attempts to commit murder to stop Dexter, an act that Creed states is distinctly male. (1993: p.62). How-

ever, subverting the vigilante cop cycle's nihilism and cynicism, Debra then drags her brother from the water, saving his life. Nevertheless, her selfless act remains inherently tied to masculine images and definitions of heroism and vigilantism. *Dexter* thus constantly implies that Debra's feminine identity has been compromised and superseded by her adopted masculine attitudes and responses. Indeed, Debra pays the ultimate price for her engagement with vigilantism, as it is shown to lead directly to her death. In 'Monkey in a Box', Debra is fatally shot by Saxon, who Dexter has decided not to kill and instead hand over to Debra to be lawfully arrested. This outcome ironically restates the inability of law enforcement to fully protect themselves, let alone the state, and underscores the cyclical, continual nature of the show's engagement with vigilantism and attitudinal extremes of the topic. Following this injury, Debra is euthanised by Dexter in 'Remember the Monsters?' before her dead body is placed by Dexter into the sea, where she slowly sinks into the gloom below, engulfed by shadow and darkness. These final acts also engage with controversial contemporary debates surrounding euthanasia and 'right to die' campaigns. She is also symbolically Dexter's last victim, and the definitive victim of Harry's vigilante legacy. Thus, even this final act is complex, ambiguous and controversial, and alludes to the widespread and varied nature in which vigilantism can manifest both in *Dexter* and in contemporary American society and culture. The vigilante cop cycle is clearly evident in *Dexter* through the characters of Harry and Debra, and is used to inform their attitudes and actions, subvert viewer expectations, and reflect ongoing anxieties and concerns surrounding contemporary American society in the post-9/11 era.

### **Lumen and Rape-Revenge**

Contrary to Abrahams' assertion that women have had little or no part in vigilantism outside the Ku Klux Klan in American history, female vigilantism is evident on the American screen from its earliest conception (p.137); this indicates a more subtle yet distinct engagement with vigilantism as a means through which female concerns and anxieties have been consistently represented and mediated through film and television, albeit in a less obvious way than male

acts of vigilantism. Female vigilantism can therefore be considered an ingrained part of screen depictions of the topic and is important in its own right. Women are shown to generally have a healthier and all-together different relationship with vigilantism than men on the screen, wherein they can be seen to embrace the transformative potential of vigilantism, rather than the destructive version offered by men. Discussing rape-revenge films, Jacinda Read writes: 'The endurance of the rape-revenge film suggests that the stories it attempts to make sense of must themselves be understood as complex, changeable, problematic and ongoing rather than as authentic singular or static moments.' (p.11) With this in mind, the continual representation of female-led vigilantism, be it in rape-revenge or other cycles of film, suggests an ongoing affiliation between women and vigilantism wherein it can express women's relationship to society at any given moment. Indeed, female vigilantes appeared in early 1920s American melodramas, such as *The Fall of a Nation* and *The Crimson Challenge* (Paul Powell, 1922, Lasky Corporation, US), and Westerns such as *Judy of Rogue's Harbour* (William D. Taylor, 1920, RealArt Pictures, US). Thus such films and their portrayal of female vigilante content can be viewed as a direct response to the war effort and women's suffrage. Supporting this observation, yet failing to link female representations of vigilantism in films with these themes, Jowett states that, after 1912, 'America's filmmakers at long last turned to rather controversial themes, such as the women's suffrage movement, white slavery, political corruption...' (1976: p.63). Similarly prolific leading up to and during the Second World War, female vigilantes and mob members regularly punctuate 'B' Westerns and crime films in that era, making clear that women and vigilantism on the American screen, whilst not as obvious as males, should not be overlooked and require a degree of revision in their own right.

The appearance of the rape-revenge cycle in the 1970s marks a significant shift to women's more obvious engagement with vigilantism on the American screen. Indeed, the very personal, invasive and violating nature of rape depicted in the cycle underscores crucial differences between this to other vigilante cycles discussed which, whilst at times motivated by personal attacks and grievances, do not focus their revenge so directly and critically towards men and vio-

lent male culture. There is nevertheless a tendency amongst theorists such as Carol Clover (1992: p.115) and David A. Cook to discuss the rape-revenge cycle as simply an off-shoot of vigilante-cop films, which somewhat undermines this critical potential. For instance, Cook states that *Death Wish* spawned its own imitations 'and a "feminist" rape-revenge cycle,' which overlooks the relevance and natural evolution of rape-revenge and female acts of vigilantism as part of a continued mediation on women's role and place in history, society and culture (2000: p.192). Further weakening this limited perception of rape-revenge narratives, Belton argues that the importance of exploitation films in creating popularity for contemporary and controversial content and topics should not be overlooked (p.335). Restricted discussions of rape-revenge also extend to theorists such as Barbara Creed (1991: pp.122-138) and Clover (pp.114-165), as noted by Read, who exposes their 'tendency to locate rape-revenge within the horror genre.' (p.23) Titles discussed in this context by Clover and Creed include, *I Spit on your Grave* and *Ms .45*. Indeed, Read's own discussions of a 1980s and 1990s shift towards maternal and parental rape-revenge in action, thriller and suspense films such as *Eye for an Eye* (John Schlesinger, 1996, Paramount Pictures, US) and *A Time to Kill* (Joel Schumacher, 1996, Warner Bros., US) allude to the continued social significance of the female vigilante on the American screen. Read argues that such shifts came about in response to the emergence of the New Right in the 1980s and 'anxieties about capitalism and increasing calls in the 1990s for a more morally restrained capitalism centred around family values.' (p.17) Thus, the mutable and constantly evolutionary appearance of vigilantism on the American screen in response to ideological and male expectations, social conditions and female-centred concerns is evident, and should not be overlooked.

Suggesting how *Dexter* reflects and subverts the rape-revenge cycle to make clear its significance to contemporary relations between women and society, Lumen appears at the end of 'Practically Perfect' after Dexter has murdered Boyd. Boyd's crimes are already known to the viewer, so Lumen is immediately identifiable as a victim and survivor of brutal rape and torture. However, her ordeal is only ever alluded to and is not shown to the viewer; this marks a

clear subversion of the usual rape-revenge cycle, which Clover points out almost always give equal or significant screen-time to both the rape and its revenge (p.118). The depiction of rape in such cycles has been invariably discussed as objectifying and exploiting women, and as providing apparently necessary 'proof' of a crime committed against women, thus justifying the woman's vengeful actions (Clover: p.134). However, *Dexter* resists using Lumen's body at all in this manner, and instead focuses completely on the aftermath of the crime by depicting her mental, emotional and physical injuries, and her need for revenge. The very personal nature of the crime is underlined, and the 'problem' of depicting and 'proving' the crime is largely negated. The audience are only ever shown glimpses of Lumen's rape and torture, such as later in the season during 'In the Beginning', when DVD recordings that Chase and his men took of their victims are discovered by detectives. When Lumen watches the DVD, the camera focuses on her face and the sound of her terrified screams on the recording and dwells on her reaction as her eyes fill with tears, foregrounding the traumatic experience of the event. This refusal to show Lumen's rape ordeal makes clear that this is *her* story, that she is not transformed by the act of rape *and* the ensuing revenge, but only through her use of vigilantism to mediate and release her traumatic suffering. Lumen herself emphasises the effect the experience has had on her in 'Everything is Illuminated' when she screams at Dexter: "I'm the proof! My memory, my experience!" This response, whilst engaging subtly with wider debates surrounding rape, consent and proof of crime, makes clear that the devastating *effects* of the experience on Lumen should be foregrounded. Thus, Lumen's autonomy is restated without it being compromised.

Instead, Lumen's status as a victim is explored in *Dexter*, which engages the viewer in an active process of mediating the traumatic event with her. Leitch argues in relation to the crime genre that:

'One way of drawing viewers into a greater intimacy with victims is to emphasize the pathos and injustice of their sufferings; another is to allow them to fulfil viewer's fan-



tasies of heroic retaliation against the forces of evil; still another is to show how deeply they have been brutalised by making them cross the line that separates law-abiding avengers from criminals.' (pp. 86-87)

Indeed, the character of Lumen draws on all of these techniques in *Dexter*. In 'Beauty and the Beast' for example, the pathos and injustice of her suffering is highlighted as the camera pans over her dirty, brutally abused and bloodied body as Dexter cleans the wounds. It is apparent that Lumen has been restrained and tortured, indicated by her bruised wrists and the welts on her back, encouraging the viewer to consider the horrors she has experienced. The extent of the ordeal and its terrorising effects on Lumen are further implied as she screams at Dexter: "Please just let me go! I can't go through it again please, just kill me now!", making clear that death would be preferable to further abuse. Similarly, when Lumen escapes from Dexter, she stops a car for help but when she sees men inside, the camera shows her point of view to be distorted and nightmarish as she blinks in fear and confusion; this suggests an overt attempt to portray Lumen's mental and emotional state to the audience. The rape is also shown to have redefined Lumen's relationship to wider society, as indicated in 'First Blood' when she attempts to leave Miami at the airport. However, Lumen experiences panic and flashbacks as she is patted down by an airport security officer, suggesting that the violation of her body has resulted in a forced social separation through post-traumatic effects and her perception of heightened risks. The point of view of the camera again reflects her traumatised mental state, suggesting heightened fear and confusion whilst making clear the devastating effects of rape and torture on Lumen.

Indicating just how deeply brutalised Lumen has become as a result of her ordeal, its harrowing effects are further used to restate a need for vigilantism in 'Take It!' Whilst pursuing their next target, Cole Harmon (Chris Vance), Dexter and Lumen overhear him having aggressive sex, causing his partner to scream loudly in pain. The sound alone is clearly traumatising for Lumen as she cowers, petrified on the floor, head in hands as sudden rapid flashbacks show that she is

reliving elements of the rape experience. Such reinforcement of her victimhood at this stage acts to further legitimise Cole's murder, restating audience empathy with Lumen's plight. Other female characters are also shown to empathise and understand her need for vigilante retribution. For instance after watching DVD recordings of the Chase gang attacking their victims, Debra appears visibly shaken by what she has seen, telling Dexter: "No one could go through something like this and have a life again." The men's crimes are further offset against Lumen's vigilante acts as other characters are shown to be visibly affected by the evidence, even endorsing vigilantism themselves as a result of it. This is suggested when Debra tells Dexter: "I was thinking, who would want to take these guys out? And you know the first person that came to mind? Me. [...] Someone who knows what these cocksuckers have been up to, and wants to give them what they deserve." Vigilantism is presented then as an almost natural, organic response to such crimes, further justifying its use to the audience by encouraging them to agree with Debra's point of view. Further emphasising the extent of Lumen's brutalisation and recourse to vigilantism, before she kills one of her attackers Alex Tilden in 'In the Beginning', Lumen looks at pictures of the men's other victims displayed around the room, her sadness overwhelming the moment through the use of sound, lighting and Lumen's face. This presents vigilantism as a last resort and as something that she is compelled to carry out; the only response that can answer such heinous and barbaric crimes towards her. A close-up of Lumen's face shows her anguished expression as she prepares to kill Tilden, suggesting that she has been driven to this act and *needs* to do it, not to return to civilised society herself, but to avenge and make society safe for *others*. As such, Lumen's vigilante acts are shown to be socially beneficial and motivated by an apparently righteous need for retribution that answers for other victims of Chase and his gang, as well as her own.

Chase, and the motivational and self-improvement organisation he fronts, can be viewed as a metaphor in *Dexter* that exposes and critiques male entitlement and sexual violence towards women, and positions them as key characteristics of patriarchal culture. It is presented as dangerous and destructive behaviour that must be stopped and fought back against in *Dexter*,

hinting at the transformative potential of vigilantism for women. Lumen's revenge can thus be seen as a strike back against patriarchy and aggressive male culture in general, challenging its primacy and attitude of entitlement. However, rather than targeting all males, as is a tendency in rape-revenge films, Lumen's vigilantism is shown to be used against the men only when their guilt is certain. Indeed, her early attempts to kill a sex-offender and the wrong man in 'First Blood' leave her shocked when confronted by the implications of her actions, and she demands absolute proof of guilt for her subsequent targets. Indeed, this is significant because it makes clear that Lumen's vigilantism should be directed and aimed at only the source – Chase and his gang. Thus, it can be seen to compare with Lila's approach to vigilantism, but appears more honourable and genuinely motivated by a desire to make society better for other victimised women, rather than exploiting them or their status as victims of patriarchal culture. Despite already fulfilling cathartic audience desires for violent retaliation by killing Cole and Tilden, Lumen's ultimate fulfilment of audience fantasies occurs when she finally kills Jordan Chase in 'The Big One'. However, and subverting such fantasies somewhat, the moment appears over too soon, denying the viewer a sense of true fulfilment by implying that Chase deserved a fate much *worse* than his very swift death. After stabbing him in the chest, Lumen screams in anger and frustration: "Can you hear me?!", before realising he is already dead, her face shifting to reflect shock and despair. This response indicates that her momentary defeat over him is not enough to make up for the true suffering he has caused her and countless others. As such, the audience is encouraged to feel that Chase's vigilante murder is just, yet somehow empty in not being able to offer enough cathartic effect. Nevertheless, the audience empathises with Lumen's journey of revenge until it is finally complete.

Further emphasising the transformative potential of vigilantism, an alternative version of the rape victim, Chase and his group's first victim Emily Birch (Angela Bettis) is introduced in 'In the Beginning'. Contrasting sharply with Lumen, she is shown to simultaneously expose and accept the damaging effects of the culture of male violence and entitlement. For instance, Lumen visits Emily and discovers that she is still traumatised by her experience which occurred years be-

fore; this is suggested as Emily cries as she tells Lumen about her ordeal in a mumbling and shaking voice, and is shown to be a nervous, meek and frightened woman clearly damaged by her experiences. Lumen later recounts the information to Dexter, telling him: "Jordan's whole philosophy, transforming your life... it all came from destroying hers." This suggests a continued critique of aggressive male culture in *Dexter*, which shows females to be destroyed by patriarchal entitlement and aggression, symbolised by Chase and his friends. It also indicates that male potency specifically derives from the enforced sublimation and victimisation of females within patriarchy. However, Emily is shown to be complicit in this victimisation, and even helps Chase to victimise others. In 'Hop a Freighter' for example, she tricks Lumen, setting her up to be captured by Chase by inviting her into her home where he waits. Exploiting her own status as a victim, she tells Lumen in a terrified voice that: "He knows I talked to you [...] I'm scared!" Thus she can be seen to play on and exploit notions of victimhood and fear. Emily is also shown to have been perverted and corrupted in accepting her status as a victim, telling Lumen that she "thought I was the only one..." indicating jealousy. It also suggests that Emily's status as a victim is normal and comfortable for her, and even makes her feel significant. However, Chase eventually beats her to death in a violent frenzy, signifying that Emily has been completely consumed and destroyed by aggressive masculinity. With this in mind, Emily can be seen to be victimised, fearful, and complicit, dominated by male authority and notions of entitlement. In contrast, Lumen fights back against Chase, suggesting that vigilantism is a better option for women than fearful silence or worse, misguided complicity for admiration and attention. Lumen is also shown to be capable, functional and healthy in other ways too as is demonstrated in Chapter Two. Examples discussed to this effect include Lumen rejecting her confining future life in 'Take It!' by refusing to assume her traditional and expected place within patriarchal culture, and in being able to help others with problems, as is evident in 'Teenage Wasteland' when she helps abused teen Olivia challenge her own status as a victim of patriarchal culture. With this in mind, vigilantism is shown to give Lumen control and empowerment in other aspects of life, contrasting sharply with the presentation of Emily as accepting of her

role as victim and complicit in the destruction of other women. As such, by contrasting victim with avenger, vigilantism for women in *Dexter* is shown to be empowering, socially beneficial, and provides an overtly critical opposition to patriarchal culture and its accepted norms.

Following the murder of Chase in 'The Big One', which signifies the end of her involvement in vigilantism, Lumen is shown to have experienced true release from her rape and brutal ordeal by seeking revenge against her tormentors. This is made clear as, returning to the shore on Dexter's boat after the pair dispose of Chase's body into the sea, Lumen looks back at Dexter, smiling, happy and free in a shot that directly alludes to the closing frames of *I Spit on Your Grave*. However, whereas protagonist Jennifer's (Camille Keaton) final scene suggests ambivalence and no sense of continuation beyond the attack or revenge, Lumen's vigilante acts have clearly liberated her, subverting expectations surrounding the cycle. The next morning, Lumen tells Dexter of her previously overwhelming urge to seek revenge: "When I saw Jordan Chase's body disappearing into the ocean something happened, [...] I tried to hold on to it, but this morning, I could tell it was gone. I don't feel it anymore." This indicates that Lumen no longer feels a need to use vigilantism, and does not intend to continue her attack on aggressive masculinity beyond those that hurt her. During the scene Lumen is bathed in light, signifying rebirth and salvation, suggesting that vigilantism has transformed her. Thus Lumen's story rejects both female victimhood *and* destruction by vigilantism by showing her to have experienced true release from trauma and transformation through her vigilante acts. Indeed, she leaves Dexter, rejecting him and vigilantism as it is clear that she no longer needs either. This outcome significantly subverts the destructive and all-consuming nature of vigilantism in rape-revenge narratives that can be seen at the climax of films like *Ms.45*, where protagonist Thana (Zoe Lund), driven by madness, dies in a hail of bullets attempting to massacre men at a party. That Lumen also retains her femininity throughout the experience similarly rejects the masculinised version of the female vigilante that loses herself to aggression, barbarism and male characteristics, such as Brenda (Linda Blair) does in *Savage Streets*. In never compromising her identity, life or mental state when using vigilantism, and in redefining her life by her own rules

rather than that of the Code and outside of patriarchy, Lumen is presented as a strong young woman taking control of her past, present and future, free from patriarchal confines. One could go so far as to claim that she also displaces the primacy of Thana as 'the ultimate feminist vigilante' and assumes the role herself (Clover: p.141). Thus Lumen offers powerful and uncompromised images of femininity and female autonomy that uses vigilantism to fight back against social, cultural and ideological norms (Clover: p.141).

The transformative and regenerating nature of vigilantism for women can be seen elsewhere in *Dexter*, specifically with regards to Hannah McKay, who confronts the deception behind Dexter's vigilantism in 'The Dark... Whatever'. This is suggested when she encourages Dexter to take responsibility for his murderous actions rather than blaming it on other factors, suggesting that Dexter himself is "responsible for everything I've done." As such, females are shown to be honest and open about their relationship with vigilantism and violent crimes, contrasting with men such as Dexter, Harry and Miguel who are all shown to be deceptive and dishonest. They also significantly appear stronger than Dexter, and openly challenge patriarchal norms surrounding vigilantism instead of accepting them as given. Even Rita, an ultimate victim of violence in the nuclear family, is shown to be transformed by vigilante activity. This change is suggested in 'Let's Give the Boy a Hand' and is offset by Rita's choice of Halloween costume in the episode, as she explains that "It's kinda tradition" for her to dress as Snow White, a symbol of nurturing, maternal purity. However, following her own vigilante act of kidnapping and relocating the bedraggled dog of her neglectful next-door neighbour, Rita sheds this image of traditional subservient femininity to become the modern, assertive and sexually dominant character of Lara Croft instead. The shift in her personality is expressed as she confidently and unexpectedly seduces Dexter in his apartment, indicating the transformative and empowering nature of vigilantism for women, and signifying its subversive potential to challenge both gender traditions and stale family institutions in *Dexter*. Thus the show can be seen to suggest a way forward for tackling vigilantism in American society in a manner that confronts and displaces patriarchal norms and expectations.

Such depictions in *Dexter* reflect a wider shift in American popular culture since the late-1990s to present increasingly uncompromised images of women that survive abuse and victimisation. These also often significantly challenge or redefine patriarchal norms, such as Bea (Uma Thurman) in *Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003, A Band Apart, US), and Hayley (Ellen Page) in *Hard Candy* (David Slade, 2006, Vulcan Productions, US). Indeed, other television shows have also engaged with more radical depictions of female vigilantism. For instance, strong female superhero Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar) in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a vigilante who fights forces of evil that police cannot face or even comprehend, ultimately transcending patriarchal confines to present matriarchy, female autonomy and empowerment as freeing concepts. Similarly, in *Xena: Warrior Princess* (Rob Tapert, *et al*, Studios, USA, 1995-2001, US), female warrior Xena (Lucy Lawless) helps those in need on her travels as she attempts to atone for her own dark past. Whilst not obviously vigilantes, such themes allude to the *spirit* of vigilantism, therefore the shows should be revisited accordingly beyond this thesis. Representations like those discussed above further reinforce the significance of television in providing an extended space for alternative narratives and topics to unfold alongside distinctly feminist themes and concerns, as discussed in the Introduction. Such heroic and 'super' images of women also foreshadow and allude to the increasing significance of female superheroes in post-9/11 American culture, evident in films such as *Watchmen*, *The Avengers* (Joss Whedon, 2012, Marvel Studios, US) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (Christopher Nolan, 2012, Warner Bros., US). The female vigilante superhero is a figure that will no doubt develop a distinct cycle of its own, and is an increasingly prolific character in American popular culture. In the immediate sense of existing in movie worlds of or dominated by male superheroes, signs of early progress are evident. For instance, in *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Joss Whedon, 2015, Marvel Studios, US), female superhero Black Widow's (Scarlett Johansson) back-story is developed to present her relationship with vigilantism in a sympathetic and overtly feminised light, suggesting a merging of emotional depth with personal trauma not seen before in blockbuster and mainstream superhero films. Similarly, it is of note that Scarlett Witch (Elizabeth Olsen) saves the day by defeating the villain

alone after the narrative predominantly explores the tension between socially beneficial and socially destructive vigilantism caused by male vigilantes. This suggests that female vigilantism is becoming more predominant and crucially offers an alternative to male acts of vigilantism, underscoring the significance of both the Superhero genre in lending itself to vigilante themes *and* in paving the way for positive, oppositional female vigilantes that challenge and undermine patriarchal and cultural norms.

The focus on films in this chapter is not intended to undermine the relative wealth of vigilante-themed television shows since the early 1950s, or the growing significance of vigilante-themed television shows in the post-9/11 era. In line with the early popularity of the Western and crime genres on the American screen, one can see how television also captured this sentiment and preference, making vigilantism and related themes a natural and inseparable part of American entertainment within the home environment. Early popular titles with strong vigilante themes include shows like the *The Lone Ranger* (1949-1957), *Have Gun - Will Travel* (Herb Meadow and Sam Rolfe, CBS, US, 1957-1963), and *Bonanza* (David Dortort and Fred Hamilton, NBC, US, 1959-1973), amongst many others. These titles suggest longevity and a naturalising of vigilante themes and content, various aspects of which appears regularly throughout such shows. Stressing the ability of vigilantism to manifest in various and unexpected ways in popular culture, even family and long-running serials such as *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (Carl Reiner, CBS, US, 1961-1966), *Days of Our Lives* (Allan Chase *et al*, NBC, US, 1965-), and even *The Simpsons* (Matt Groening, Twentieth Century Fox, US, 1989-) have all featured vigilante-themed episodes and plot-lines. Indeed, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* episode 'A Vigilante Ripped My Sports Coat' (4.4) invokes and reflects a suburban, middle-class response to vigilantism, unexpectedly in a popular family-comedy show. Also indicating the wide range of genres that television vigilantism has appeared in, shows such as *Hawaii Five-O* (Leonard Freeman, CBS, US, 1968-1980), *Kung Fu* (Ed Spielman, Warner Bros. Television, US, 1972-1975), *The Incredible Hulk* (Frank Orsatti *et al*, Universal Television, US, 1978-1982) and *The A-Team* (Stephen J. Cannell, Universal Television, US, 1983-1987) all illustrate that vigilantism has



been a mainstay of American television, appearing in popular and cult shows that are aimed at a wide and varied audience demographic. This spread of American vigilante-themed television shows has continued and intensified over recent decades and is evident in shows such as and similar to those mentioned above in relation to *Lumen*. This wealth of television vigilantism also includes more critically acclaimed shows like *The Sopranos*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *The Wire* (David Simon, HBO, US, 2002-2008), many of which can be seen to have influenced and paved the way for *Dexter*. Indeed, shows that focus on crime scenes and the inner workings of psychopathic minds -and violence in American identity- all require further attention in relation to vigilantism beyond this thesis. Other shows that coincided with *Dexter* and feature regular vigilante themes and acts also include Depression era-set *Carnivale* (Daniel Knauf, HBO, US, 2003-2005), historical and 'new' Westerns *Deadwood* (David Milch, HBO, US, 2004-2006) and *Justified* (Graham Yost, Sony Pictures Television, US, 2010-2015), and social and personal revenge narratives such as those seen in *Jericho* (Josh Schaer *et al*, CBS, US, 2006-2008) and *Revenge* (Mike Kelley, ABC Studios, US, 2011-2015), amongst many others. This regular incidence clearly indicates that popular culture representations of vigilantism are a pressing and socially relevant feature of American identity and its relationship with the topic even before *Dexter*, which can be seen to have been informed and shaped by previous screen forms and themes.

### **Part Three: Superheroes and Post 9/11 Vigilantism in *Dexter***

Similar to other notable increases of vigilante representations on the screen in America's past as a response to great upheaval and social crises, such as that experienced during World War Two and 1960s social rights movements, modern-day representations of the topic can also be seen to respond to contemporary events and issues. Whilst most of these representations chime with post-9/11 anxieties, many texts replay and relate various aspects of the "war on terror" and the nation's official and public responses to them, all of which indicate several key topics of concern. Such texts cover a wide range of popular and cult genres beyond superhe-

roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that can be seen as responsive to the war on terror and include significant vigilante themes. These include a mix of new hyper-masculine action films and the return of older action stars, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Kurt Russell, and a slew of new and remade Westerns and horrors, amongst others. It is of note that the use of actors and genres like these in the post-9/11 era point to the significance of nostalgia and escapism as a major aspect of vigilantism on the American screen in its more basic function of allowing audiences to ‘make sense’ of unresolved traumatic events and their related themes. Titles are as diverse as *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, Kennedy/Marshall Productions, US, 2002), *Saw* (James Wan, Twisted Pictures, US, 2004), *The Last Stand* (Kim Jee-Woon, Di Bonaventura Pictures, US, 2013) and *The Watch* (Akiva Schaffer, Twentieth Century Fox, US, 2012). These texts primarily include mediations upon the response of executive and authoritative bodies towards the terrorist attacks, and their subsequent forays into extra-legal and extra-judicial action in the Middle-East. Such representations also focus heavily on violent capabilities and fractured masculinity, and on other aspects of American society in the post-9/11 era and the “war on terror”. These include the subsequent economic slump, rising police brutality and militarisation, and increasing tensions concerning issues like racism, domestic terrorism and gun control.

In general terms, writers such as Jane Mayer (2008) and Wroe & Herbert (2009) identify several key features of George W. Bush’s presidency and the aftermath of the post-9/11 era that can be seen to have characterised and influenced the administration and its effects on the American psyche, and subsequent various representations of vigilantism on the American screen. Others, such as Douglas Kellner (2010), Birkenstien *et al* (2010) and Aston & Walliss (2013), focus on analysing representations of these themes in contemporary popular culture texts. Whilst they do not focus extensively on vigilantism, they often touch upon or allude to the topic. In the first instance, Wroe & Herbert discuss aspects of Bush’s relationship with structures and institutions like federalism and the Supreme Court. They also analyse his domestic and foreign policies, such as those surrounding education, the economy, national security apparatuses and war. Their responses to the Bush administration are critical and widely

chime with other perceptions of the president and his two terms in office as having an overwhelmingly negative effect on the American psyche (Greenwald, 2008; Pfiffner, 2008; and Rusomanno, 2011). Supporting this, Wroe & Herbert state that;

‘Many, perhaps most, observers thought the country and world inherited by Barack Obama were considerably less safe and prosperous than those Bush had inherited eight years earlier. While most presidents [...] leave office with their reputations damaged, they rarely achieve the level of opprobrium that clung to President Bush.’ (p.1)

They go on to expand this claim, noting that Bush’s response to events such as the twin tower bombings and Hurricane Katrina, and his progression of the war against terror and subsequent economic crisis, amongst numerous other reasons, support this perception (pp.1-9). One can certainly see how these themes are heavily evident in a vast array of post-9/11 texts and are often presented in an equally critical manner. Similarly, Mayer presents a damning account of the Bush administration’s dealings with regards to the use of “Enhanced Interrogation Techniques” (EITs) and the brutal treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay, its use of extra-legal and extra-judicial action, deceptive behaviour, and the administration’s implementation of the USA PATRIOT Act. She is highly critical of the negative effects of these issues on the American psyche, and states that ‘the Bush Administration’s extralegal counterterrorism program presented the most dramatic, sustained, and radical challenge to the rule of law in American history.’ (p.8) Whilst not specifically using the word vigilantism, Mayer’s language alludes to the topic very strongly indeed, underscoring the extension of the nation’s vigilante identity in the contemporary moment. Again, such inclusions are abundant in current texts, and suggest that notable rises of vigilantism on the American screen consistently coincide with traumatic eras and events and their related concerns.

In the second instance, the noted theorists point out how one can see how post-9/11 themes play out in popular culture texts. Kellner discusses representations of the 9/11 attacks and the Bush-Cheney era in films such as *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone, Paramount Pictures, US,

2006) and *Bowling for Columbine* (Michael Moore, Alliance Atlantis, US, 2002), indicating a focus on trauma and youths. Birkenstein *et al* similarly discuss anxieties in post-9/11 popular culture texts like *Deadwood* and *Batman Begins*, and even in songs and fiction to claim that the event has usurped into the American psyche and is mediated through various formats. In Aston & Walliss' text on the *Saw* horror movie franchise, the writers attempt to demonstrate how the series reflects a shift towards increasing pessimism in American popular culture as a direct response to the "war on terror". The text is also notable in that it aims to direct critical and theoretical attention towards a widely derided and dismissed popular film series, reconsidering the franchise's 'torture-porn' content with regard to themes such as fractured masculinity, social conduct, and tensions between freewill and determinism. Aston & Walliss write that the series' tendency to undercut depictions of social restoration via vigilante acts is highly critical of American foreign policy and the war against terrorism (p5). Similarly, in critiquing violent capabilities and patriarchy, they surmise that the franchise provides an alternative site for feminist and other approaches to be explored. As such, themes pertinent to *Dexter* are also evident in other post-9/11 texts, suggesting a need for further revision of the topic and its representation in wider popular culture. In the contemporary moment, vigilantism is most obviously evident in the superhero genre.

The superhero genre has evolved from popular weekly magazines about heroes and villains in the 1880s into comic books featuring superheroes that fought crime and saved the day in the 1900s. The genre is thus firmly rooted within in a serial format that more naturally lends itself to a wider and consistent engagement with vigilante themes. This early format and its youthful audience goes some way to explain the relative disreputability of the genre until very recently, often dismissed as 'childish' due to its somewhat fantastical characters and stories (Burke, 2015: p.5). It has also been a site of blame and attack concerning increased violence and immorality in youths, such as during the 1950s, and has been the recipient of outright ridicule, such as the poor critical reception awarded to *Batman* (William Dosier, *et al*, 1966-1968, Twentieth Century Fox Television, US) in the 1960s (*Ibid.*, p.7). However, the genre has increas-

ingly experienced a significant and dramatic shift in reputation from the late 1980s with *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989, Warner Bros., US) and *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987, Orion Pictures, US), through to the post-9/11 era, enjoying big budgets, blockbuster status and increased critical attention and esteem in recent years. Indeed, the superhero genre has experienced a massive boom in output and representation since 2000. Having experienced considerable longevity thus far, it is an increasingly pertinent cycle with no signs of slowing down. The relevance of this boom in the superhero genre directly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and “War on Terror” cannot be overstated: the genre can be seen to directly reflect, mediate, critique and explore many aspects of post-9/11 American life. It also poignantly draws on and reflects various emotive aspects of historical, social and cultural vigilantism, underscoring the significance of vigilantism in appearing more obviously at times of social crisis and upheaval. Some critical theory on the topic in such films is evident, although limited, where writers such as Justine Toh (in Birkenstein *et al*, 2010: pp.127-139), Douglas Kellner (2010) and Tony Spanakos (in White, 2009: pp.33-46) discuss vigilantism in films like *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008, Warner Bros., US), and *Watchmen* (Zack Snyder, 2009, Warner Bros., US). However, discussions of vigilantism in such films are: generally limited to single films (Kellner: p.9); very brief or ignored for related topics, such as terrorism (Toh: p.127); and worse, the topic of vigilantism itself occasionally appears to have been completely misunderstood. (Spanakos: p.34). Hence, there are some discussions of vigilantism in popular culture, but these are limited to lone films or franchises rather than being viewed as part of a wider or more significant whole within the genre and beyond it. Nonetheless, such works mark a clear attempt to approach vigilantism which will hopefully continue, as their oversights merely underscore the complexity and ambiguities of the topic and expose prevalent assumptions concerning it.

The superhero genre, like crime and the Western, appears to more naturally invite representations and discussions of vigilantism due to its focus on social upheaval and anxieties, crime, law and lawlessness. Vigilante themes are also evident through the genre’s central focus on crime fighters who act outside the authority and reach of the law, which is often shown to be inade-

quate to protect society (Burke: pp.9-11). *Dexter* itself can be seen to invoke aspects of the superhero genre, suggesting the extent to which the show both engages with popular screen manifestations of vigilantism and reflects contemporary social concerns relating to the “War on Terror.” In the first instance, and drawing on the basic premises of the genre as good versus evil, hero versus villain, Dexter, like the superhero, is shown to have almost superhuman, exceptional qualities that only he can use to defeat exceptionally (super)villainous antagonists. Whilst not immediately obvious, this also imbues Dexter with a sense of authority, much like Western and crime genres confer authority on to anti-hero protagonists. Supporting this claim, Leitch asserts that, ‘Victims-turned-superheroes enjoy a continual moral privilege whatever crimes they may commit against victims and a system more corrupt than they are.’ (p.88) With this in mind, Dexter’s keen, superhuman-like detective abilities are first alluded to by Debra in ‘Dexter’, when she asks Dexter for help in solving a recent murder case, telling him: “You get these hunches [...] with these types of murders.” However, that this ability emerges from Dexter’s own murderous urges subverts such clear-cut heroism and confronts the viewer with their own foreknowledge and expectations of the murderous actions of the supposed ‘superhero’. Similarly, in ‘The Lion Sleeps Tonight’ and ‘A Horse of a Different Color’, Dexter is shown to first detect child predator Nathan Marten as he watches children on a crowded beach, then correctly identifies Travis Marshall as the murderer at a crime scene surrounded by an unaware and incapable police force. Lumen even endows Dexter with his own superhero quality in ‘Circle Us’ when she labels his intuitive insight into other people’s actions as his “lizard brain.” Dexter himself continues to use this to describe his unusual and seemingly super-human qualities of detection, as suggested in ‘Run!’ when he identifies Speltzer’s renewed killing spree. Thus superhero-like qualities in Dexter that set him apart from both other killers and the audience are inferred by such scenes.

Dexter’s primary adversaries throughout *Dexter* are often highly intelligent and overtly violent. Due to their sheer monstrosity and extensively damaging effects upon society they can be viewed as Dexter’s opposing ‘supervillains’. However, and similar to Cowling & Rag’s discussion

of Batman and the Joker and their infinite dualities, the supervillains Dexter faces inevitably suggest or expose a further aspect of his own relationship with vigilantism and murder (in White & Arp, 2008: pp.142-155). Brian Moser is presented as a mysterious and highly intelligent opponent worthy of engaging Dexter's attention in Season One. He is almost omnipresent, imbuing him with otherworldly human qualities that mark him as different to the other killers in the season. He is also shown to be elusive and one step ahead of Dexter, much to the latter's excitement and chagrin; this is evident in 'Dexter' when, after finding a Barbie doll replica of a mutilated murder victim in his fridge, he thinks: "I really do [want to play]!" only to be disappointed to find in 'Crocodile' that the doll is gone. Brian's knowledge of Dexter's past and expression of deeper truths surrounding violence, murder and Harry's Code, also adds to his potency as a supervillain as he challenges and mocks Dexter's beliefs and vigilante principles, much like the Joker does of Batman's *refusal* to kill. In 'Born Free', he shouts: "You can't be a killer and a hero, it doesn't work that way!" Thus Brian exposes the murderous actions of superheroes on screen in this way, confronting the audience with their equally unquestioning acceptance and adulation of such figures. As such, Brian undermines and confronts 'black and white' cultural distinctions between heroes and villains in the genre by acknowledging the relative moral grey areas surrounding vigilantism, its use, and audience's perceptions of it on-screen.

Arthur "Trinity" Mitchell becomes an equally chilling adversary in Season Four, and whilst Dexter does defeat him, it is at great personal cost. In the first instance, Dexter is shown to respect and emulate the older man, who has seemingly accomplished what Dexter has not - integration into society rather than exclusion - and has an apparently happy home life. However, Arthur's supervillain status becomes evident as he is shown to be a terrifying foe that targets society's most vulnerable, stalking, threatening and coercing women, children and the elderly; this is evident in Arthur's choice of victims in 'Living the Dream', 'Blinded by the Light', 'If I Had a Hammer' and 'Lost Boys'. It is also revealed by Agent Frank Lundy in 'Living the Dream' that Mitchell has been killing for over thirty years and is more of a "myth" than a real man, adding

to his air of invincibility and super-villainy. Arthur's kill-cycle is particularly unique, brutal and seemingly random, infusing him with a mystery that Dexter and others clamour to decipher. He is also adept at evading and out-witting Dexter, imbuing Arthur with almost supernatural qualities. In 'Lost Boys' he disappears when Dexter is distracted, and later escapes Dexter's injection and entrapment in 'Hello, Dexter Morgan' (4.11). Indeed, for a man apparently in his 60s, he is incredibly strong, beating a man to death with his bare hands in 'If I Had a Hammer', and choking his son Jonah to near death in 'Hungry Man'. Further heightening Arthur's villainy, his never-ending cycle of violent murders almost seems to totally control him, and is presented as an unstoppable force with a drive and hunger of its own, as exemplified in 'The Getaway' when Arthur tells Dexter that he cannot control his urges to kill. Indeed, and subverting Arthur's clear-cut role as villain, he is shown to have been destroyed by his own tragic past, and is shown to be filled with self-hate at his murderous urges. This is indicated as he looks down sorrowfully at the woman he forced to jump from a roof in 'Blinded by the Light', and he even tries to kill himself in 'Road Kill' to stop his murderous cycle, presenting him in a more sympathetic light. Arthur's super-villainy is therefore suffused with tragedy and his *own* victimisation within patriarchal culture, suggesting a subversion of the superhero genre's norms by exposing their deeper moral implications. Such representations can be seen in wider relation to the complex presentation of villains like the Joker, whose own tragic past is strongly alluded to but never fully explained, making Batman and the Joker two sides of the same coin. Indeed, underscoring this subversion, Dexter saves Arthur's life in 'Road Kill' so that he can claim it for himself - doubly subverting the role of the superhero and endangering society by interfering with Arthur and his decision to kill himself by keeping him alive. Dexter is thus like a pseudo-Batman-Joker, dictating who gets to live or die based on his own needs and desires, rather than that of the wider community. As such, Arthur effectively erases the line between good and bad, hero and villain, and presents tensions between trauma, murder and vigilantism. *Dexter* routinely encourages the audience themselves to question the authority of such roles and



their own acceptance of them, albeit implicitly, by presenting a range of responses and attitudes to the topic that resonate on different levels.

The tragic past of many superheroes, such as Batman, Spider-Man and the Green Arrow has become a prominent feature of the superhero genre, and is often shown to be a catalyst for involvement in vigilante acts. The significance of this is highlighted by Leitch, who asserts: 'Superheroes from *Batman* (1989) to *Darkman* (1990) and *The Crow* (1994) begin as victims too, and their victimhood gives their summary justice its moral authority.' (p.88) This theme is also prominent in *Dexter* from Season One, as Harry makes clear that something traumatic happened to Dexter as a child in 'Dexter', leading to his adoption. Harry says:

“You still don’t remember anything from before? Y’know, before we took you in? [...] What happened changed something inside you [...] You can’t help what happened to you, but you can make the best of it.”

From this, Dexter’s tragic past - his mother Laura’s murder - is hinted at, making clear that the exact nature of it has been kept from him, but is used by Harry to legitimise his vigilante behaviour in the show. Dexter is shown to have been heavily influenced by the tragedy in a similar way to a superhero figure like Batman, where personal trauma informs his vigilantism, but society benefits from those actions. However, and subverting the autonomy of such a decision to turn to vigilantism in the superhero genre, Dexter’s vigilante actions are shown to have been directed and informed specifically by Harry, and towards his own concerns. Throughout the season, further information surrounding Laura’s murder is slowly revealed to the audience, invoking Dexter’s childhood terrors to justify his vigilante acts. In 'Seeing Red' for example, after entering a blood-filled room, Dexter is shown to experience unnerving flashbacks of a distraught child sat in a pool of blood. These feelings are further explored in 'Truth Be Told' when Dexter learns the truth of having witnessed his own mother's murder; the horrific moment is again relayed to the viewer through flashbacks. Such inclusions, showing Dexter as a helpless child and a victim of terrible circumstances act to 'explain' Dexter's murderous urges by pre-

senting them as a product of childhood trauma, placing the audience in a dual position of experiencing empathy for Dexter whilst being encouraged to question tensions between murder and vigilantism. Thus Dexter's position as 'anti-hero', as opposed to being a straight-forward 'superhero', means that the genre's evocation relates and reflects the more complex and ambiguous aspects of vigilantism and 'crime fighting' that is often not questioned by audiences of the superhero genre.

Like most superheroes, Dexter's vigilantism is invariably shown to arise from and benefit the personal *and* social, and is firmly situated in both realms; this allows for further reflection and subversion of the superhero genre as a means through which to understand vigilantism and its significance to American identity in the contemporary period. These themes are primarily played out during Season Two, when Dexter's crimes as 'The Bay Harbour Butcher' are discovered and his murderous persona is directly likened in 'The Dark Defender' to that of a fictitious superhero, the "Dark Defender". Most obviously alluding to the superhero genre, Dexter attends a murder scene in a comic book store, where he sees a poster of his own murderous moniker dressed up as an avenging crime-fighter on the wall. Looking up at it in awe, Dexter compares himself overtly to the superhero figure, musing that, "I never really got the whole superhero thing. But lately, it does seem we have a lot in common: tragic beginnings, secret identities... Part human, part mutant... Arch-enemies..." Dexter's direct acknowledgement of the genre and his potential comparison to it is significant in underlining the overtly intertextual and 'savvy' nature of the show, which relies on audience familiarity with a whole range of popular culture texts, and similarly invites them to also consider Dexter in relation to the genre. As such, *Dexter* can be seen to consciously encourage active viewing. Providing a comment on the 'superhero' format, the comic book store owner tells Dexter that his murdered co-worker Denny (name mention only), "had this great idea to put a spin on that vigilante serial killer we got running around [... and] was trying to set it up as a graphic novel. 'Stalker of the night, his blade of vengeance turns wrong to right.'" Whilst this comment is dismissed by Dexter and is included as a humorous aside, it can be seen to prompt Dexter to daydream about

saving his mother and invites the viewer to consider Dexter as an extension of the superhero figure. The dream sequence is presented in black and white, suggesting pastiche and homage to the comic book format, and includes heroic music as Dexter, clad in black leather as the Dark Defender, bursts into a cargo container and imagines saving his mother Laura, a child clasped in her arms. This imaginary scene is significant because, in saving Laura from her murderers, the child vanishes as she looks up at her son with shock, happiness and pride, suggesting that in saving his mother, he has also saved himself. Whilst this overt inclusion of the superhero genre in *Dexter* is relatively small, it significantly forces the viewer to consider Dexter as an extension of this popular figure, as he himself does. Indeed, the moment prompts the show to explore and expose tensions in the superhero genre between vigilantism and murder, and social and personal acts of vigilantism and their effects. It also emphasises Dexter's own status as a victim with origins in violent trauma. With this in mind, and drawing on notions of 'social' and 'personal' vigilantism and their effects, the superhero genre identifies a more explicit link to Brown's work on the topic of socially beneficial and destructive forms of vigilantism; this underscores the significance of both cultural forms *and* Brown's work in approaching and understanding contemporary representations of the topic. As such the superhero genre can be seen to invoke aspects of historical, social and cultural vigilantism much more obviously than other genres and forms, attesting to its poignant popularity in the modern day.

Discussions of socially beneficial and socially destructive vigilantism have already been considered with regard to American history and society in Chapter One, but *Dexter* also plays out this theme in response to Dexter's own crimes as the 'Bay Harbour Butcher' and in relation to the superhero genre. The show draws and relies on the audience's ability to consider the social and/or personal motivations, effects, and ambiguous nature of vigilantism as murder and vice versa. However, this is played out in 'The Dark Defender' through other characters who provide opposing opinions and thus actively address debates between vigilantism and murder amongst themselves. At the start of the episode for instance, Dexter sees the daily newspaper headline, which reads, "Bay Harbour Butcher: Friend or Foe?" Dexter's response to this is

equally indecisive and ambiguous as he muses that, "They have no more idea of what I am than I do." Indeed, looking around, Dexter watches people discuss and debate his crimes: two men drinking coffee argue over whether or not the criminals "had it coming," or if the culprit "deserves a goddamn medal"; a woman in need of coffee calls him "a godsend"; and Debra aggressively retorts that she would "put a bullet in the fucker's head [...] If dad taught us one thing it's the value of human life." The show thus places responsibility on the viewer to decide whether Dexter is a superhero or not, and to consider the wider ramifications of his actions on society. However, a decisive opinion on vigilantism is offered during the episode by reputable serial-killer specialist Frank Lundy, who tells Dexter that the only justification for killing is: "To save an innocent life." Dexter then internally rationalises his own actions in line with this, viewing himself as a socially beneficial force, wondering "How many more bodies would there be had I not stopped those killers? I didn't do it to save lives, but save lives I did. Motivation aside I think Harry and Lundy would agree on this one." Allusions to the superhero genre are again evoked and subverted by reflecting and engaging with a central dilemma in the genre itself concerning conflicts between utilitarianism and deontology, nodding to the potential discourse of vigilantism with philosophical notions of justice beyond this thesis. More so, Dexter's saving of innocent lives can be read as a product of his vigilante actions rather than of his serial killing persona, being that his motivation is to murder 'criminals' only. This notion is further emphasised when the son of one of Dexter's victims tells Debra that his life is better without his abusive father: "Just tell me he's dead. We need to know he's gone." Hence, *Dexter* shows many outcomes and attitudes towards Dexter and his vigilante actions, inviting debate in relation to other superhero forms by invoking, subverting and exposing widely accepted tendencies within the genre.

*Dexter* also evokes the superhero genre and instils Dexter further with a sense of authority by comparing him to other vigilantes. This also suggests a self-reflexive interplay of 'copycats' and even homage surrounding serial killing, violent crimes and superheroism, exposing traditions and connections between both. Whilst interviewing suspected copy-cat vigilante Ken Olson

(Silas Weir Mitchell) in 'Dex, Lies, And Videotape', Batista describes Olson as a societal outsider: "No job, no relationship, you got guns and a minor assault record." In alluding to aspects of tradition surrounding violent culture in America, Batista can also be seen to make incorrect assumptions about vigilantism and violence in American history and society. The central claim in this thesis that the serial nature of vigilantism in American history exposes the nation's own serial crime of vigilantism is also supported by Lundy, who tells Olson: "If you ask me, you just needed an excuse to take the law into your own hands, and the Butcher was the perfect excuse." More so, Lundy's comments reveal Dexter's *own* relationship with vigilantism, making his subsequent murder of Olson ambiguously socially beneficial *and* self-serving. In contrasting his deeds with Dexter's own vigilante acts, yet foreshadowing his eventual and inevitable demise, Olsen tells Dexter, "I'm just like you, I take out criminals [... but] I should'a never made it personal." Indeed, Dexter then kills Olsen and leaves his body as a warning to deter other vigilantes, again subverting approaches to emulating and copying 'superheroes' (and serial killers) in modern American life, which Krulos writes is quickly becoming a mainstay of extra-legal law enforcement in the nation (p.184). Nevertheless, such depictions in *Dexter* are constantly contrary and ambiguous, actively engaging the viewer in a process of deciding for themselves, rather than eliciting a specific attitude or response.

*Dexter's* prominent and formative exploration of vigilantism, violence and murder identifies the show's significance in heralding a shift in American society, culture and politics that suggests an increasing attempt by the nation to explore and understand its *own* relationship with vigilantism. Whilst not claiming that *Dexter* itself is responsible for this shift, one can see how the show is significantly different in its approach to vigilantism than previous cultural texts have been, more poignant for its appearance in the post-9/11 era. *Dexter* can thus be seen to lead the way into more internalised discussions that consider the nature and relationship of vigilantism to American identity from within, heralding a definitive change in America since the purported "War on Terror" and Obama's election. However, the influence of *Dexter* should not be overlooked, having spawned and influenced two popular forms in American television that

are essentially two sides of the same coin: serial-killer detective and superhero shows, a move in line with that occurring in American cinema, particularly in relation to the latter. Both detective and superhero narratives also experience significant crossover as a TV format in shows like *Gotham* (Bruno Heller, Warner Bros. Television, 2014-, US) and *Jessica Jones* (Melissa Rosenberg, Marvel Studios, 2015-, US), pointing to the relevance of TV as a site for nuanced representations and exploration of complex issues like vigilantism. These genres can be seen as an organic extension of *Dexter* and a natural part of this clear attempt to look within, again a pertinent shift in relation to modern American society and its concerns. The emerging 'serial-killer versus detective' cycle includes shows such as *The Following* (Cr. Kevin Williamson, Warner Bros. Television, 2013-2015, US), *Hannibal* (Cr. Bryan Fuller, Dino de Laurentiis, 2013-, US), *Bates Motel* (Cr. Anthony Cipriano *et al*, Universal Television, 2013-, US) and *True Detective* (Cr. Nic Pizzolatto, Anonymous Content, 2014-, US). Whilst these shows all attest to the popularity of serial-killers in American popular culture, they also underscore the relationship between law enforcement, crime, murder and vigilantism. For instance *True Detective* can be seen as an overt attempt to not only explore the relationship between law enforcement and serial murder, but to also explore violence, murder and vigilante urges from within; this can be seen in 'Form and Void' (1.8) when white male protagonist Rust Cohle (Matthew McConaughey), having defeated a serial killer he has hunted for decades, stares at his own dark twisted reflection from his hospital bed, confronted with and consumed by violent extremism and murderous vigilante urges that lie deep within himself. Thus themes pertinent to *Dexter* can be seen to have particular resonance beyond in shows such as this, supporting the wider aim of this thesis in demonstrating the approachability of vigilantism in this manner.

The superhero television cycle similarly features overt themes of crime, law enforcement, social anxieties and vigilantism enacted by individuals and groups. Appearing in popular shows such as *Arrow* (Greg Berlanti, Berlanti Productions, 2012-, US), *Agents of SHIELD* (Joss Whedon *et al*, Marvel Studios, 2013-, US), *Agent Carter* (Joss Whedon *et al*, Marvel Studios, 2015-, US), *Flash* (Greg Berlanti, Berlanti Productions, 2014-, US) and *Gotham*, and the upcoming *Legends*

of *Tomorrow* (Greg Berlanti, Berlanti Productions, 2016, US) and *Supergirl* (Andrew Kreisberg, Berlanti Productions, 2015, US), vigilantism and superheroes are ineradicably linked and are becoming an increasingly prolific genre.<sup>29</sup> In *Arrow*, for example, the central protagonist Oliver Queen (Stephen Amell), like Dexter, is set on his vigilante path by his father, and carries out the father's desires in directing vigilantism primarily towards rich, white males. America's vigilante history is evoked and confronted throughout the show, as are tensions between vigilantism and murder, which are openly challenged and critiqued throughout the show's three seasons by its central characters. Like *Dexter*, Queen also searches for solutions to this dilemma, and incorporates many powerful and in-depth representations of African-American acts of vigilantism and by both females and youths, and explores its relationship to law enforcement and wider society. This development is significant because it means that the central concerns of vigilantism in *Dexter* will continue to be explored in the television superhero format through significant texts like *Arrow*. What this and recent superhero movies have heralded is an important shift in representations of vigilantism in popular culture from individual acts of vigilantism, *back* to group ones. Indeed, a face-off between superhero companies Marvel and DC has seen the development of new 'phases' of superhero films, where 'individual' superhero stories are played out, and are then brought together as a group in other event films in the *Avengers* and *Justice League* franchises. This movement indicates a re-emergence and renewed emphasis on social and collective concerns *away* from the personal, suggesting that representations of vigilantism are coming full circle in the post-9/11 era, confronting and challenging the actions and intentions of vigilantes and extra-legal activity specifically in relation to current anxieties surrounding leadership, policing and the "War on Terror", amongst others. This move has also more overtly aligned the actions of vigilantes to the realms of murder, terrorism, and the destruction of humanity and humanist values. Thus, it is clear that *Dexter* is the start of some-

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<sup>29</sup> It is of note that Whedon and Berlanti are helping this shift, respectively representing Marvel and DC studios: Whedon created *Buffy* and other shows, and is a major director in Marvel's TV and film endeavours, and is responsible for promoting more complex representations of females in all narratives; and Berlanti is responsible for no less than 6 active TV superhero shows, with related themes in other popular shows in recent years, such as *No Ordinary Family* and *The Tomorrow People*.

thing big in confronting vigilantism and violent extremism, demonstrating that this complex facet of American identity can indeed be approached and understood in an all-encompassing manner through this and subsequent shows.



## Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that *Dexter* is a seminal text through which vigilantism can be approached and explored in all its complexities and ambiguities. The significance of the show and its extensive focus on vigilantism, made possible by its serial format that facilitates a continual interrogation of the topic and related themes, has been clearly illustrated. The thesis has shown how *Dexter* reflects and mediates both a whole array of social concerns and anxieties surrounding vigilantism, and its significance to American identity, whilst pointing to relevant areas of debate. The confrontational and interrogatory manner through which the show addresses the topic has been stressed, and suggests that various aspects of American history, society and culture, such as: gun control debates, youth violence and police brutality; ideological tools such as the family and family relationships; and cultural forms like film, TV and literature can and should be considered through the prism of vigilantism as part of a wider whole. The subversive and controversial content in the show indicates that *Dexter* is a radical text that provides a site for key debates relating to contemporary American life. Indeed, the show offers an overall critique of vigilantism and violent extremism, *and* provides a sense of hope for the future in its bleak yet decisive act of exiling the show's key protagonist in favour of the female unknown. Through *Dexter*, this thesis has demonstrated that one *can* approach and decipher the multiple manifestations, representations and meanings of vigilantism and its importance to American life. The show provides a rich and varied exploration of themes pertinent to vigilantism that proves definitively that, despite all its ambiguities, vigilantism is a topic that can be confronted, challenged, and even *changed* by the American people. With this in mind, *Dexter* can be seen to facilitate a fundamental revision in the way vigilantism is understood and approached across the board, underscoring the show's place as a primary and exemplary text on the topic.

Chapter One discussed how central aspects of vigilantism and its appearance throughout American history are invoked and represented in *Dexter* in order to make sense of the

contemporary moment and its relationship to the past. Social upheaval through wars, both internationally and nationally and in America's past and present, social problems and anxieties such as crime and immigrant gangs, and inept, corrupt and ineffectual policing, are all evident in the show and are shown to prompt a wide range of vigilante themes, attitudes and activities. Whilst this diversity highlights the ability of such topics to prompt or seemingly legitimise the need for vigilantism, *Dexter* also regularly shows these themes to be an *excuse* for it, and often indicates that society has been made *worse* by its use. Further, sectors of society that have primarily been on the receiving end of vigilantism in American history, such as the poor, homeless, prostitutes and African-Americans, are routinely shown to be victims of both violent crime and wider society and are even defended by Dexter and his vigilante acts. Indeed, apparently socially beneficial ideologies such as the family, religion, youth services and patriarchy are all shown to foster and perpetuate violent extremism and vigilantism, and are crucially shown to have failed future generations by instilling and provoking such tendencies in its youth. These issues are most evident in Chapter One's focus on the work of Madison and Brown and their respective key themes and approaches, highlighting a critical focus on fathers, the family, and aggressive masculinity for continuing violent traditions in *Dexter*. The primacy of Brown and Madison's work in providing a more all-encompassing approach to vigilantism in American history, society and culture is again brought to the fore. This makes clear that, contrary to the tendencies of other writers to dismiss their work as merely pointing to already-discovered and further discussed aspects of vigilantism in American history and society, their work should be considered crucial to moving forward in its ability to facilitate a revisiting and reworking of key approaches to the topic.

Indeed, Chapter Two's focus on the role of the father and inherited attitudes towards violence and vigilantism in *Dexter* points to a particular area of discussion and concern in contemporary America. Whilst the show remains on the fence and ambiguously positioned with regards to almost every other aspect of vigilantism and related themes, *Dexter* is very critical of patriarchy and aggressive male culture. It ultimately suggests that vigilantism does and will

continue to destroy and consume future generations, corrupting them with violent tendencies unless it is ultimately confronted. *Dexter* shows that women who are uncompromised by masculinity, such as Lumen and Hannah, are transformed into powerful and autonomous individuals by using vigilantism against those who threaten or have committed crimes against them; this is a radical step that points to possibilities in the 'real world' in terms of implying that women and female attitudes can potentially offer an alternative to patriarchal culture and its inherently violent tendencies and traditions. Nevertheless, it is of note that the show also re-writes Dexter's *own* history of vigilantism in the final season, to expose the role of another woman, Evelyn, in shaping his violent attitudes. This representation in itself demands a revision of women's role in colluding with patriarchy - both actively and passively - and perpetuating vigilantism throughout America's past. Different belief systems to that of Harry's Code, as discussed in Chapter Two through characters such as Lila and Brian, also point to further areas of investigation. Not only do they offer counter-points to the primary role of men and masculinity in driving violent and vigilante urges, but they also allude to the realms of philosophy and notions of justice. Indeed, Harry himself embodies aspects of divine command, natural law and human creation, and espouses tensions between distributive and retributive justice through the Code and his varied role and purpose in the show. As such, and as mentioned briefly in relation to superheroism in the show, vigilantism as a tenet of 'justice' in philosophical terms certainly demands further attention, both within *Dexter* and other popular culture texts, and with regards to other elements of vigilantism in American life. Similarly, Lila's invocation of revenge, retaliation and re-directed aggression as a specific realm of vigilantism can also be considered a site for further study. Depictions of the nuclear family as akin to a violent hell in *Dexter*, also discussed in Chapter Two, chime with recent debates surrounding formations of the family and contemporary 'anti-family' manifestations, as demonstrated. Again, the show's critique of this is striking and suggests that the reality of patriarchy and violent traditions in contemporary American society is that they are significantly undermining the health of the nation and its prospects for the future. This depiction is radical and whilst the

show explores various formations of the family, it ultimately rejects masculine dominance and patriarchal traditions as no longer sufficient, instead favouring the prospects offered by single, female-led family units. Indeed, as stated earlier, *Dexter* itself appears to be searching for a solution or alternative to Harry's Code and the perceived need to carry out vigilante acts, before ultimately rejecting all possible alternatives. It also exposes vigilantism as being significantly akin to murder, a powerful motif throughout the show that is significantly offset by the murderous actions of others, but is ultimately confirmed by Dexter's increasingly selfish and brutal acts of violent murder as the show progresses. The importance of this cannot be stressed enough: that *Dexter* exposes vigilantism as the American nation's very own act of serial-killing. Indeed, the wealth of examples discussed in each chapter of this thesis shows this to be the case. Thus, Schmid's assertion that America's fascination with serial-killing and violent murders derives from a curiosity about the 'other', is undermined somewhat by the claim herein that serial killing and vigilantism are interchangeable notions in American history, society and culture, ones that allude more directly to a fascination with violence in the *self*.

Chapter Three demonstrated how vigilantism on the American screen is invoked, reflected and subverted in *Dexter* to make clear its social significance to contemporary audiences in the post-9/11 era. Previous work on cultural vigilantism is fairly limited in scope, albeit focusing on a highly significant era of social and cultural change during the 1960s and 1970s. This shortfall makes clear that cultural depictions of vigilantism are worthy of further investigation and, contrary to its previous perception as a derogatory and demeaning term and theme, can provide great insight into American identity and the collective psyche precisely *because* it moves more obviously into the public domain through the proliferation of popular cultural representations. Indeed, the circa-World War Two, 1970s, and post-9/11 film cycles discussed in Chapter Three make aspects of the 'collective psyche' in relation to vigilantism strikingly clear. Discussions of the Western and crime genres explored how vigilantism has been repeatedly and regularly imbued with 'authority' throughout the first half of the century, building on and reinforcing attitudes towards violent extremism and vigilantism that are

indelibly tied to the American past *and* present; this indicates many attitudinal and traditional themes and concerns surrounding vigilantism and its perpetuation. The significance of the frontier and its romanticised recollection in shaping social and cultural attitudes towards vigilantism and self-defence similarly cannot be overlooked. Indeed, 'stand-your-ground' and gun law debates in the modern day can be seen to hark back specifically to the founding notions of frontier life, its endorsement of self-defence and traditions of violent and retaliatory action. However, this thesis has established that vigilantism has been a consistent factor throughout America's turbulent life, implicating tradition and generational attitudes from as far back as the colonialist, Revolution and Civil War eras right through to the present day. Recent events in Charleston, South Carolina, certainly reveal this to be the case, as the aforementioned violent, murderous actions of white male youth Dylann Roof indicates. The event has been labelled a racist attack and an act of domestic terrorism, and debates between the political left and right intensify as arguments about the removal of the Confederate flag above the town hall prevail. Black Civil Rights groups and the Ku Klux Klan have all joined the debate, making clear that America's vigilante identity is still as central a feature of American life now as it was at the nation's founding, and remains indelibly linked to other social factors. As identified in Chapter Two in relation to Jeremy Downs and violent youth culture, *Dexter* does not place blame for youth violence with popular culture texts, and instead side-lines such debates to implicate tradition, local societies, failing ideological tools, existing racial tensions and violent extremism instead. With this in mind, *Dexter* can be seen to capture and reflect the zeitgeist and sense of escalating violence amongst America's youths, highlighting specific areas for further debate.

The discussion about Doakes in relation to the Blaxploitation genre in Chapter Three can be seen to allude to the African-American experience of vigilantism in America's past and present, both socially and culturally. This presentation is particularly striking, because although the representations of black characters in *Dexter* are somewhat limited, they are still present in ways that provide much debate and poignant social reflection. The analysis of Doakes in

relation to the Blaxploitation genre and modern-day anxieties pointed to key concerns surrounding black male identity and its relative disconnection and 'placelessness' from contemporary American life. Stereotyped and misunderstood, victimised and forgotten by all but another minority character LaGuerta, the character of Doakes highlights that the African-American experience of vigilantism in American history and culture has not been sufficiently addressed or acknowledged. Just as Dexter's "Doakes problem" threatens to inevitably return and expose Dexter's true crimes for all to see, the victimisation of blacks in American history and society is also starting to be openly confronted and challenged. Whilst this issue is also discussed in relation to Debra and the vigilante cop cycle, it is of note that the only instance of police brutality against blacks in *Dexter* is carried out by Debra, and is directed towards a young child. This doubly suggests that police and law enforcement agencies have been perverted and misled by aggressive historical, social and cultural forms of vigilantism and violent male brutality. It also underscores the victimisation of innocent black people in its direction towards vulnerable black children. Increasing reports of white-on-black police brutality and murder have become increasingly pressing issues in contemporary American life, as stated. The depiction of such matters in *Dexter* is of crucial importance in reflecting, pre-empting and engaging with these controversial themes and concerns. Whilst this sudden shift into the media spotlight can be seen to emerge from an American public who is increasingly media and technology-savvy, and can now more easily capture and share images and videos of white police brutality against blacks, there is perhaps a more obvious explanation: Obama's presidency can be seen to have not only prompted a resurgence of racial tensions, and even the Ku Klux Klan in America (Spielman & Nelson, 2015), but can also be seen to have prompted America to more rigorously explore its *own* attitudes towards race, violent extremism and vigilantism, marking a shift towards more collective concerns and identities.

The changing role of women in American society was also explored in relation to Debra and Lumen in Chapter Three, the social and cultural influences of both the vigilante cop and rape-revenge film cycles being apparent in their characterisation. Debra, a female infused with

masculine qualities and corrupted by her father's attitudes and deceptive behaviour, exemplifies how female-led vigilantism, when fused with male ideals, attitudes and activity, leads to damnation for women. She also exposes the devastating effects of "Dirty" Harry style attitudes towards vigilantism and heroism in modern policing. The character of Lumen most eloquently subverts problematic aspects of the rape-revenge cycle, such as the need for graphic nudity and overt exploitation during rape and assault scenes, and the need for death or a loss of self that accompanies virtually every vengeful vigilante female act on film. Instead, Lumen is shown to become whole again, transformed by vigilantism and its cathartic effect. Even in her most aggressive, murderous moments, her femininity is retained through the show's painstaking efforts to relate the traumatic and realistic effects of her rape to the audience. This presentation is in itself a unique and radical inclusion that makes what happened to Lumen the fault of patriarchy, violent male culture and male entitlement; what happens next is singularly shown to be up to her and her alone. That she rejects patriarchy by refusing her past life and marriage plans, and even finally rejects Dexter, imbues Lumen with autonomy, power and crucially, a choice about her future. Further, that her story and Hannah's are left open-ended and ambiguous suggests that vigilantism in the hands of women is used differently to that of men, granting transformative potential to females and wider society that men can only restrict and corrupt. It also makes clear that, despite not knowing where this female-fused vigilante path may lead, it is presented as a clear option that suggests the possibility of positive change. Further, and including less transcendent female characters such as Debra and LaGuerta, all are shown to play an equally significant part in feminist and female debates as depicted via vigilantism in *Dexter* by showcasing various choices, attitudes and methods available to contemporary women. This again returns to the significance of television in being able to provide an extended and potentially feminist space for alternative representations and themes to play out, underscoring the importance of both the show and television form.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, *Dexter* has influenced many new shows that centre on detectives and serial killers, underscoring an intrinsic link between serial killing, vigilantism and law enforcement, a central dilemma of the show that exposes this link as an ingrained part of American history, society and culture. It also further indulges America's morbid, collective fascination with murder and extremism, and suggests that the line between the serial killer and the heroic American vigilante is becoming less defined. Indeed, shows such as *Hannibal*, *True Detective* and *The Following* all go to great lengths to align their leading detectives with their antagonistic opponents, showing the two to be unnervingly similar and inclined towards violence. It is also of note that such shows consciously draw on existing works and forms, such as the 'hard-boiled' detective's cynicism and crossovers with criminal types, the works of Edgar Allen Poe, and other popular and cult icons. Of note, within this is a side-line of more gothic-based television shows, including *Penny Dreadful* (John Logan, Desert Wolf Productions, US, 2014-) and *Sleepy Hollow* (Philip Iscove *et al*, Twentieth Century Fox Television, US, 2013-). Whilst both of these titles allude to pulp and classic literary forms and to the horror genre, the strong themes of vigilantism, American history, crime, law enforcement, group and individual vigilantism, and obvious allusions to tradition, glory and pastiche in the shows are palpable. Thus the sheer wealth of vigilantism and related themes in American popular culture is becoming increasingly rich and apparent. Whilst vigilantism has always been present in films and shows, as Chapter Three and Appendix Two make clear, it is now seemingly everywhere and in everything all at once in the present day. This emergence can be seen, in part, to be a direct response to the post-9/11 era and the "War on Terror", but it can also be related to the enduring and increasing popularity of superheroes and violent crimes. Indeed, the increasing prestige of both television and the superhero movie over the last two decades has seen vigilantism become ever prominent and pervasive a topic on the American screen to the point where it really can no longer be ignored. Texts such as those dedicated to other genres, such as the aforementioned work by Aston and Walliss (2013) on the *Saw* horror franchise, can be



seen to hold much potential and point to the increasing centrality and ‘popularisation’ of vigilantism under more confrontational terms in modern day examples.

The vigilante themes focused on in this thesis are particularly evident in other television shows beyond *Dexter*, as mentioned in Chapter Three, such as *Arrow*, *Revenge*, *Gotham*, and more recently *Daredevil* (Drew Goddard, ABC Studios, US, 2015-) and *Jessica Jones*. In these shows, like in *Dexter*, vigilantism is passed on from father to son (and even a daughter) and is inspired by men; crime, corruption, extra-legal activity and poor law enforcement is rampant; and Brown’s three-tiered vigilante structure can be seen as a major structural feature in each show, as are Madison’s variants on geographical and pseudo-vigilantism. In *Arrow*, for example, Queen is a wealthy and privileged member of elite society, yet always works as an equal when operating in a group, working with lower status characters who are often female and black or of other ethnicities. He tries to find an alternative way of dealing with crime, one which avoids murder, thus offering a ‘purer’ form of vigilantism, more akin to that of Batman. However, *Arrow* still remains centred on tensions between vigilantism and murder, primarily due to the purposeful opposition and tonal differences presented by the show’s offspring, *The Flash*. Significantly, however, like *Dexter*, *Arrow* seeks to find other solutions to vigilantism, and most notably presents vigilantism as changing and changeable, not just in being socially transformative, but as becoming something else altogether - something away from extremism, murder and brutality, but towards simple social justice and group activism instead. The show’s central placement of female vigilantes, (no less than nine so far and counting), and of a black central character that acts as the show’s moral ‘voice’, indicates that *Arrow* is a radical descendent of *Dexter* that picks up its mantle and carries on the mission to understand and change American vigilantism. This progression makes clear that seminal texts like *Dexter* and *Arrow* are the way forward for studying vigilantism in popular culture, and suggests that learned and attitudinal responses to vigilantism *can* be changed and challenged once and for all.

## Appendices

### Appendix One: Articles and Amendments in the American Constitution

#### **Article 1: Section 8**

To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions;

To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers, and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress;

#### **Article 2: Section 2**

The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States; he may require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments, upon any Subject relating to the Duties of their respective Offices, and he shall have Power to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offences against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment.

#### **Article 3: Section 2**

The Trial of all Crimes, except in Cases of Impeachment, shall be by Jury; and such Trial shall be held in the State where the said Crimes shall have been committed; but when not committed within any State, the Trial shall be at such Place or Places as the Congress may by Law have directed.

**Article 4: Section 2**

A Person charged in any State with Treason, Felony, or other Crime, who shall flee from Justice, and be found in another State, shall on Demand of the executive Authority of the State from which he fled, be delivered up, to be removed to the State having Jurisdiction of the Crime.

**Article [II] (Amendment 2 - Bearing Arms)**

A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

**Article [III] (Amendment 3 - Quartering Soldiers)**

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

**Article [IV] (Amendment 4 - Search and Seizure)**

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

**Article [V] (Amendment 5 - Rights of Persons)**

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

**Article [VI] (Amendment 6 - Rights of Accused in Criminal Prosecutions)**

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

**Article [VII] (Amendment 7 - Civil Trials)**

In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

**Article [VIII] (Amendment 8 - Further Guarantees in Criminal Cases)**

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

**Article XIV (Amendment 14 - Rights Guaranteed: Privileges and Immunities of Citizenship, Due Process, and Equal Protection)**

1: All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

## Appendix Two: Film and TV Vigilantism, 1900-2015

### 1910s

- *Saved from the Vigilantes* (William Duncan, 1913, Selig Polyscope Company, US)

Western;

- *Salomy Jane* (Lucius Henderson, 1914, California Motion Picture Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *The Girl Angle* (Edgar Jones, 1917, Horkheimer Studios, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *The Vigilantes* (Henry Kabierske, 1918, Bear State Film Co., US)

Historical Drama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *The Sundown Trail* (Rollin Sturgeon, 1919, Universal Film Co., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

### 1920s

- *The Iron Rider* (Scott Dunlap, 1920, Fox Film Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *The Grey Dawn* (Benjamin B. Hampton, 1922, W.W. Hodkinson Corp., US)

Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *The Girl of the Golden West* (Edwin Carewe, 1923, Associated First National Pictures, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *The Devil's Cargo* (Victor Fleming, 1925, Famous Players-Lasky Corp., US)

Crime Melodrama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *Bulldog Pluck* (Jack Nelson, 1927, Bob Custer Productions, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *Under the Tonto Rim* (Herman C. Raymaker, 1928, Paramount Famous Lasky Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.

**1930s**

- *The Lone Rider* (Louis King, 1930, Beverly Pictures, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *The Public Defender AKA The Reckoner* (J. Walter Ruben, 1931, RKO Radio Pictures, Inc., US)

Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *The Man from Arizona* (Harry Fraser, 1932, Monogram Pictures Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *The Lone Avenger* (Alan James, 1933, K.B.S. Productions, Inc., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.

- *Border Vengeance* (Ray Heinz, 1935, Willis Kent Productions, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *Dr. Socrates* (William Dieterle, 1935, Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., US)

Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *Frisco Kid* (Lloyd Bacon, 1935, Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., US)

Historical Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual/Gang; Good/Bad.

- *The Hawk* (Edward Dmytryk, 1935, Affiliated Pictures Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.

- *The Vigilantes Are Coming* (Ray Taylor and Mack V. Wright, 1936, Republic Pictures, US)

Action Adventure; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *The Law Commands AKA The Right to Kill* (William Nigh, 1937, Crescent Pictures Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *The Mystery of the Hooded Horsemen* (Ray Taylor, 1937, Grand National Films, Inc., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.

- *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Michael Curtiz, 1938, Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., US)

Historical Adventure; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.

- *The Purple Vigilantes* (George Sherman, 1938, Republic Pictures Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *The Saint in New York* (Ben Holmes, 1938, RKO Radio Pictures, Inc., US)

Crime Comedy-Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *The Night Riders* (George Sherman, 1939, Republic Pictures Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.

### 1940s

- *The Green Hornet Strikes Again!* (Ford Beebe and John Rawlins, 1940, Universal Pictures, US)

Action-Adventure, Crime; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *Trail of the Vigilantes* (Allan Dwan, 1940, Universal Pictures Co., US)

Western Comedy-Drama; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *Border Vigilantes* (Derwin Abrahams, 1941, Harry Sherman Productions, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.

- *The Lone Rider Rides On* (Samuel Newfield, 1941, Sigmund Neufeld Productions, Inc., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.

- *Riders of the Purple Sage* (James Tinling, 1941, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Bad/Good.

- *Lone Star Vigilantes* (Wallace W. Fox, 1942, Columbia Pictures Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.

- *Red River Robin Hood* (Lesley Selander, 1942, RKO Radio Pictures Inc., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *The Strange Case of Doctor Rx* (William Nigh, 1942, Universal Pictures Company, Inc., US)

Mystery; Urban; Whites; Individual; Bad.

- *Sunset on the Desert* (Joseph Kane, 1942, Republic Pictures Corp., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Bad/Good.

- *The Ghost Rider* (Wallace W. Fox, 1943, Monogram Productions, Inc., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *Land of Hunted Men* (S. Roy Luby, 1943, Range Busters, Inc., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good/Bad.

- Trigger Law (Vernon Keays, 1944, Monogram Productions, Inc., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- Vigilantes of Dodge City (Wallace Grissell, 1944, Republic Pictures Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Vigilantes Ride (William Berke, 1944, Columbia Pictures, Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- Behind the Mask (Phil Karlson, 1946, Monogram Productions, Inc., US)  
Detective Comedy-Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Fighting Vigilantes (Ray Taylor, 1947, The New PRC Pictures, Inc., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.
- Vigilantes of Boomtown (R. G. Springsteen, 1947, Republic Pictures Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Vigilantes Return (Ray Taylor, 1947, Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.
- The Arizona Ranger (John Rawlins, 1948, RKO Radio Pictures, Inc., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.
- Desert Vigilante (Fred F. Sears, 1949, Columbia Pictures Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.

### 1950s

- Vigilante Hideout (Fred C. Brannon, 1950, Republic Pictures Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Bushwhackers (Rod Amateau, 1951, Jack Broder Productions, Inc., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.
- The Sound of Fury (Cyril Endfield, 1951, Robert Stillman Productions, Inc., US)  
Social Crime-Drama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- Hangman's Knot (Roy Huggins, 1952, Producers-Actors Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Good.
- Scorching Fury (Rick Freers, 1952, Fraser Productions, US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad/Good.
- Shane (George Stevens, 1953, Paramount Pictures Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Silver Whip (Harmon Jones, 1953, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.



- *The Wild One* (Laslo Benedek, 1953, Stanley Kramer Pictures Corp., US)  
Drama; Suburban; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- *Vigilante Terror* (Lewis Collins, 1953, Allied Artists Productions, Inc. and Westward Productions Co., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954, Republic Pictures Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- *Mad at the World* (Harry Essex, 1955, Filmmakers Productions, Inc., US)  
Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Bad.
- *Flesh and the Spur* (Edward L. Cahn, 1956, Hy Productions, US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.
- *Tribute to a Bad Man* (Robert Wise, 1956, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual/Gang; Bad.
- *Man in the Shadow* (Jack Arnold, 1957, Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Wind Across the Everglades* (Nicholas Ray, 1958, Schulberg Productions, Inc., US)  
Drama; Rural; Whites; Individual; Neutral.

### 1960s

- *Town Tamer* (Lesley Selander, 1965, A. C. Lyles Productions, US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Good.
- *Batman* (Leslie H. Martinson, 1966, Greenlaw Productions, US)  
Crime Comedy; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Born Losers* (T.C. Frank, 1967, Otis Productions, US)  
Crime Melodrama; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969, Phil Feldman Productions, Inc., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites/Hispanics; Gang; Neutral.

### 1970s

- *Angel Unchained* (Lee Madden, 1970, American International Productions, US)  
Melodrama; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- *Joe* (John G. Avildsen, 1970, Cannon Productions, US)  
Melodrama; Urban/Rural; Whites; Individual; Bad.
- *Billy Jack* (T.C. Frank, 1971, National Student Film Corporation, US)

Social-Drama; Rural; Whites/Native Americans; Individual; Neutral.

- *The Jesus Trip* (Russ Mayberry, 1971, Joseph Feury and Saul Brandman Productions, US)

Motorcycle Drama; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *Murphy's War* (Peter Yates, 1971, Paramount Pictures Corp., UK and US)

War Drama; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *The Organization* (Don Medford, 1971, Mirisch Productions, Inc., US)

Police Drama; Urban; Blacks/Whites; Gang; Good.

- *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971, ABC Pictures Corp., US and UK)

Suspense Drama; Rural; Whites; Gang/Individual; Bad/Good.

- *Ride in the Whirlwind* (Monte Hellman, 1972, Proteus Films and Santa Clara Productions, Inc., US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *The Deadly Trackers* (Barry Shear, 1973, Cine Film Productions, US)

Western; Rural; Whites/Hispanics; Individual; Good/Bad.

- *Gordon's War* (Ossie Davis, 1973, Palomar Pictures International, Inc., US)

Blaxploitation Drama; Urban; Blacks/Whites; Gang; Good.

- *High Plains Drifter* (Clint Eastwood, 1973, Universal Pictures and The Malpaso Company, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *Magnum Force* (Ted Post, 1973, The Malpaso Company, US)

Police Drama; Urban; Gang/Individual; Bad/Good.

- *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill, 1974, American International Productions, US)

Blaxploitation; Urban; Blacks; Individual; Good.

- *Law and Disorder* (Ivan Passer, 1974, Palomar Pictures International, Inc., US)

Comedy Drama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *The Sugarland Express* (Steven Spielberg, 1974, Zanuck/Brown Company, US)

Comedy Road Drama; Suburban/Rural; Whites; Individual; Bad.

- *Truck Turner* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1974, Sequoia Pictures, Inc., US)

Blaxploitation Drama; Urban; Blacks; Gang/Individual; Bad/Good.

- *Joshua* (Larry G. Spangler, 1976, Po' Boy Productions, US)

Blaxploitation Western; Rural; Blacks/Whites; Individual; Good.

- *The Missouri Breaks* (Arthur Penn, 1976, E. K. Corporation, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Bad.

- *Northville Cemetery Massacre* (William Dear and Thomas L. Dyke, 1976, Cannon Films, US)

Crime Drama; Suburban; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Clint Eastwood, 1976, The Malpaso Company, US)

Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976, Bill/Phillips Productions and Taxi Driver Productions, US)

Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *Vigilante Force* (George Armitage, 1976, United Artists Corp., US)

Melodrama; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.

- *The Zebra Force* (Joe Tornatore, 1976, Entertainment International Pictures, US)

Action Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Gang; Good.

- *Rolling Thunder* (John Flynn, 1977, American International Pictures, US)

Drama; Suburban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *The One Man Jury* (Charles Martin, 1978, Cal-Am Artists, US)

Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *Angels' Brigade* (Greydon Clark, 1979, Arista Films and World Amusement Company, US)

Action Comedy; Urban; Whites; Gang; Good.

- *Delirium* (Peter Maris, 1979, Worldwide Productions, US)

Action Thriller; Urban; Whites; Individual; Bad.

- *Hardcore* (Paul Schrader, 1979, A-Team Productions, US)

Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

## 1980s

- *Defiance* (John Flynn, 1980, Brighton Productions, US)

Action Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *The Exterminator* (James Glickenhouse, 1980, Avco Embassy Pictures Corp, US)

Action Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *An Eye for an Eye* (Steve Carver, 1981, Adams Apple Film Company, US)

Crime Thriller; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Individual; Good.

- *Fighting Back* (Lewis Teague, 1982, Dino DeLaurentiis Corporation, US)

Crime Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Gang; Good/Bad.

- *The Star Chamber* (Peter Hyams, 1983, Frank Yablans Presentations, US)

Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Group; Good.

- Suburbia (Penelope Spheeris, 1983, New World Pictures, US)  
Drama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- Vigilante (William Lustig, 1983, Magnum Motion Pictures, US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Gang; Good.
- Young Warriors (Lawrence D. Foldes, 1983, Cannon Films, US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Gang; Good/Bad.
- Alley Cat (Edward Victor, 1984, Dragonfly Productions, US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- Angel (Robert Vincent O'Neil, 1984, New World Pictures, US)  
Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Evil That Men Do (J. Lee Thompson, 1984, ITC Productions and Tri-Star Pictures, Mexico and US)  
Action Thriller; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Executioner, Part 2 (James Bryan, 1984, Renee Harmon, US)  
Action; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- Exterminator 2 (Mark Buntzman, 1984, Cannon Films, US)  
Crime Action; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Annihilators (Charles E. Sellier Jr., 1985, New World Pictures, US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Good.
- Commando (Mark L. Lester, 1985, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., US)  
Action Adventure; Rural; Whites/Hispanics; Individual; Good.
- Pale Rider (Clint Eastwood, 1985, Warner Bros. Inc., US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- Sudden Death (Sig Shore, 1985, Lodestar, US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- The Toxic Avenger (Michael Hertz, 1985, HCH and Troma Films, US)  
Action Comedy; Suburban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- Avenging Force (Sam Firstenberg, 1986, Cannon Films, US)  
Action Drama; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- Deadly Friend (Wes Craven, 1986, Warner Bros. Pictures, US)  
Sci-Fi Horror; Suburban; Whites; Individual; Bad.
- The Ladies Club (Janet Greek, 1986, Heron Communications, US)  
Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Good/Bad.
- The Principle (Christopher Cain, 1987, Dorica Film and TriStar Pictures, US)  
Crime Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Individual; Good.

- *Above the Law* (Andrew Davis, 1988, Warner Bros. Pictures, US and Hong Kong)  
Action Thriller; Urban; Whites/Hispanics; Individual; Good.
- *Cyborg* (Albert Pyun, 1989, Cannon Entertainment, US)  
Sci-Fi Action; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *One Man Force* (Dale Trevillion, 1989, Maximum Force Joint Venture and Shapiro-Glickenhaut Entertainment, US)  
Action Crime; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Punisher* (Mark Goldblatt, 1989, New World Pictures, Australia and US)  
Action Crime; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Individual; Good.
- *Robot Ninja* (J.R. Bookwater, 1989, Suburban Tempe Company, US)  
Sci-Fi Action; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.

### 1990s

- *Angel Town* (Eric Karson, 1990, Imperial Entertainment, US)  
Drama; Urban; Hispanic, Whites/Blacks; Individual; Good.
- *Hard to Kill* (Bruce Malmuth, 1990, Warner Bros. Inc., US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Nightbreed* (Clive Barker, 1990, Morgan Creek Productions, US)  
Horror; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- *Out for Justice* (John Flynn, 1991, San Rocco Productions, US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites/Hispanics; Individual; Good.
- *Shadows and Fog* (Woody Allen, 1991, Orion Pictures, US)  
Comedy Mystery; Urban; Whites; Gang; Good/Bad.
- *Batman Returns* (Tim Burton, 1992, Warner Bros. Inc., US)  
Crime Action Fantasy; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Extreme Justice* (Mark L. Lester, 1993, Arica Productions, US)  
Crime Thriller; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Group; Good.
- *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1993, Warner Bros. Inc., US)  
Suspense Drama; Urban; Whites/Hispanics; Individual; Bad.
- *The Shadow* (Russell Mulcahy, 1994, Bregman/Baer Productions, US)  
Action Adventure; Urban; Whites/Chinese; Individual; Good.
- *Batman Forever* (Joel Schumacher, 1995, Warner Bros. Inc., US)  
Action Crime; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Human Prey* (James Tucker, 1995, Vista Street Entertainment, US)  
Action Thriller; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Individual; Bad.

- *Last Man Standing* (Walter Hill, 1996, Juno Pix, Inc., US)  
Western Crime; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Original Gangstas* (Larry Cohen, 1996, Po'Boy Productions, US)  
Crime Drama; Urban; Blacks; Group; Good.
- *The Substitute* (Robert Mandel, 1996, Live Entertainment and Substitute Productions, US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites/Hispanics; Individual; Good.
- *A Gun for Jennifer* (Todd Morris, 1997, Independent Partners, US)  
Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Gang; Good.
- *Spawn* (Mark A.Z. Duppe, 1997, Duppe Goldman Williams, US)  
Action Fantasy; Urban; Blacks/Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Steel* (Kenneth Johnson, 1997, Warner Bros. Inc., US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Blacks/Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Boondock Saints* (Troy Duffy, 1999, Brood Syndicate, Canada and US)  
Action Thriller; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Payback* (Brian Helgeland, 1999, Icon Entertainment, US)  
Action Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Summer of Sam* (Spike Lee, 1999, Touchstone Pictures, US)  
Crime Drama; Suburban; Whites/Italians; Gang; Bad.

### **Twenty-First Century Portrayals of Vigilantism**

#### **2000s**

- *Get Carter* (Stephen Kay, 2000, Franchise Pictures, US)  
Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, 2002, Kennedy/Marshall Productions, Czech Republic, Germany and US)  
Espionage Action Drama; Urban/Rural; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002, Columbia Pictures, US)  
Superhero Action Adventure; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Cabin Fever* (Eli Roth, 2003, Tonic Films and Down Home Entertainment, US)  
Horror; Rural; Whites; Gang; Bad.
- *Open Range* (Kevin Costner, 2003, Open Range Productions U.S.A., UK and US)  
Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.

- *The Bourne Supremacy* (Paul Greengrass, 2004, Universal Pictures, Germany and US)  
Espionage Action; Rural/Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Man on Fire* (Tony Scott, 2004, Twentieth century Fox and Regency Enterprises, UK and US)  
Crime Action Thriller; Urban; Blacks, Whites and Hispanics; Individual; Good.
- *The Punisher* (Jonathan Hensleigh, 2004, Lions Gate Films and Marvel Entertainment, Germany and US)  
Crime Action; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Saw* (James Wan, 2004, Twisted Pictures, US)  
Horror; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good/Bad.
- *Suspect Zero* (E. Elias Merhige, 2004, C/W, US)  
Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Walking Tall* (Kevin Bray, 2004, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures, Inc., US)  
Action Drama; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *A History of Violence* (David Cronenberg, 2005, New Line Cinema, Canada and US)  
Crime Drama; Suburban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Gingerbread Man* (Jonathan Martin Spirk, 2005, Smirk Productions, US)  
Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual vigilantism. Good.
- *The Mechanik* (Dolph Lundgren, 2005, Nu Image Films, Germany and US)  
Action Thriller; Rural/Urban; Whites/Europeans; Individual; Good.
- *Saw II* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005, Twisted Pictures, Canada and US)  
Horror; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Serenity* (Joss Whedon, 2005, Universal Pictures, US)  
Sci-Fi Western Action Thriller; Multi-Racial; Group; Good.
- *Sin City* (Robert Rodriguez, 2005, Troublemaker Productions, US)  
Crime Action Thriller; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Hate Crime* (Tommy Stovall, 2006, Pasidg Productions, US)  
Crime Drama; Suburban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Superman Returns* (Bryan Singer, 2006, Outback Pictures Inc., US)  
Superhero Adventure; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2006, Warner Bros. Productions, Inc., Germany and US)  
Suspense Action Sci-Fi; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Brave One* (Neil Jordan, 2007, Redemption Pictures, Inc., Australia and US)  
Crime Suspense Drama; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.

- *Death Sentence* (James Wan, 2007, Hyde Park Entertainment, US)  
Suspense Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Hitman* (Xavier Gens, 2007, Europacorp, US)  
Action Thriller; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Noise* (Henry Bean, 2007, Seven Arts Pictures and Fuller Films, US)  
Black-Comedy Crime Drama; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Shooter* (Antoine Fuqua, 2007, di Bonaventura Pictures, Canada and US)  
Action; Rural/Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Gran Torino* (Clint Eastwood, 2008, Village Roadshow Pictures and The Malpaso Company, US)  
Crime Drama; Suburban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, 2008, Marvel Entertainment, US)  
Action Superhero; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *The Midnight Meat Train* (Ryuhei Kitamura, 2008, Lakeshore Entertainment and Lionsgate Films, US)  
Suspense Thriller; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Spirit* (Frank Miller, 2008, Odd Lot Entertainment and Lionsgate Films, US)  
Superhero Crime Fantasy; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Taken* (Pierre Morel, 2008, EuropaCorp, M6 Films and Grive Productions, France, UK and US)  
Suspense Thriller; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Defendor* (Peter Stebbings, 2009, Insight Film Releasing, Canada, UK and US)  
Black-Comedy Superhero Action Crime; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Law Abiding Citizen* (F. Gary Gray, 2009, Overture Films and The Film Department, UK and US)  
Suspense Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Individual; Good.

## **2010s**

- *I Spit On Your Grave* (Steven R. Monroe, 2010, Cinetel Films, US)  
Crime Thriller; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Jonah Hex* (Jimmy Hayward, 2010, Warner Bros. Pictures, US)  
Superhero Western; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Kick-Ass* (Matthew Vaughn, 2010, Marv Films and Plan B, UK and US)  
Crime Action Comedy; Urban; Multi-Racial; Group; Good.
- *Machete* (Robert Rodriguez, 2010, Overnight and Troublemaker Studios, US)  
Action Thriller; Urban/Rural; Whites/Hispanics; Individual/Group; Good.



- *Nude Nuns With Big Guns* (Joseph Guzman, 2010, Freak Show Entertainment, US)  
Action Thriller; Rural; Hispanics; Individual; Good.
- *SUPER* (James Gunn, 2010, This Is That and Ambush Entertainment, US)  
Crime Action Drama; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Drive Angry* (Patrick Lussier, 2011, Summit Entertainment and Millenium Films, US)  
Crime Action; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *The Green Hornet* (Michel Gondry, 2011, Columbia Pictures and Original Film, US)  
Crime Action Comedy; Urban; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Machine Gun Preacher* (Marc Forster, 2011, Safady Entertainment, US)  
Biographical Crime Drama; Rural; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Scream 4* (Wes Craven, 2011, The Weinstein Company, US)  
Horror Thriller; Suburban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Straw Dogs* (Rod Lurie, 2011, Battleplan Productions, US)  
Thriller; Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Tower Heist* (Brett Ratner, 2011, Imagine Entertainment, US)  
Comedy Crime; Urban; Multi-Racial; Group; Good.
- *The Amazing Spider-Man* (Marc Webb, 2012, Columbia Pictures and Marvel Enterprises, US)  
Superhero Action Adventure; Urban; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Django Unchained* (Quentin Tarantino, 2012, Columbia Pictures and Double Feature Films, US)  
Western Action; Rural; Multi-Racial; Individual; Good.
- *Haywire* (Steven Soderbergh, 2012, Irish Film Board and Relativity Media, Ireland and US)  
Action Thriller; Urban/Rural; Whites; Individual; Good.
- *Neighborhood Watch* (Akiva Schaffer, 2012, Twentieth Century Fox and 21 Laps Entertainment, US)  
Comedy Action; Suburban; Whites; Group; Good.
- *Rampart* (Oren Moverman, 2012, Lightstream Pictures, US)  
Crime Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Individual; Good/Bad.

### Television Series

#### 1940

- *Batman and Robin* (1949)

Superhero Adventure; Whites; Urban; Pair; Good.

## 1950

- Lawman (Dir. Robert Sparr and Stuart Heisler *et al*, 1958-1962, Warner Bros. Television, US. Four seasons)

Western; Whites; Rural; Gang/Individual; Good/Bad.

- Wanted: Dead or Alive (Dir. Thomas Carr and Don McDougall *et al*, 1958-1961, Columbia Broadcasting System, Four Star Productions and Malcolm Enterprises, US. Three seasons)

Western; Whites; Rural; Individual; Good.

- Yancey Derringer (Cr. Mary Loos and Richard Sale, 1958-1959, Derringer Productions and Desuli Studios, US. One season)

Western Adventure; Whites; Rural/Urban; Gang/Individual; Good/Bad.

## 1960

- Branded (Cr. Larry Cohen, 1965-1966, Madison Productions and Sentinel Productions, US. Two seasons)

Action Western; Whites; Rural; Individual; Good.

- The Wild Wild West (Cr. Michael Garrison, 1965-1969, Columbia Broadcasting System and Michael Garrison Productions, US. Four seasons)

Comedy Western Drama; Whites; Rural; Gang/Individual; Good/Bad.

- The Green Hornet (Cr. George W. Trendle, 1966-1967, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Greenway Productions, US. One season)

Action Crime; Whites/Chinese; Urban; Individual; Good.

## 1970

- Alias Smith and Jones (Cr. Glen A. Larson, 1971-1973, Universal/Public Arts Production and Universal Television, US. Three seasons)

'Everything Else You Can Steal' (2.13, Dec. 16, 1971): Comedy Western; Whites; Rural; Individual; Good.

- *Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Arnold Laven and Don McDougall *et al*, 1974, Twentieth Century Fox Television, US. One season)

'The Deception' (1.8, Nov. 1, 1974): Action Sci-Fi Adventure; Whites; Rural; Gang; Bad.

## **1980**

- *Knight Rider* (Cr. Glen A. Larson, 1982-1986, Universal Television and Glen A. Larson Productions, US. Four seasons)

Sci-Fi Action Crime; Whites; Urban; Individual; Good.

- *Automan* (Cr. Glen A. Larson, 1983-1984, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Glen A. Larson Productions, US. One season)

Crime Sci-Fi Adventure; Whites; Urban; Individual; Good.

- *Airwolf* (Cr. Donald P. Bellisario, 1984-1986, Universal Television and Belisarius Productions, US. Three seasons)

Action Adventure; Whites; Urban/Rural; Individual; Good.

- *Murder, She Wrote* (Cr. Richard Levinson, William Link and Peter S. Fischer, 1984-1996, Universal Television and Corymore Productions, US. Twelve seasons)

'The Survivor' (9.21, May 9, 1993): Crime Comedy Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Individual; Bad.

- *The Equalizer* (Cr. Michael Sloan and Richard Lindheim, 1985-1989, Universal Television, US. Four seasons)

Action Crime Drama; Urban; Whites/Blacks; Individual; Good/Bad.

- *Street Hawk* (Cr. Paul M. Belous, Bruce Lansbury and Robert Wolterstorff, 1985, Universal Television, US. One season)

Action Crime; Whites; Urban; Individual; Good.

- *Knightwatch* (Pr. Geoffrey Rowland, 1988-1989, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Television, US. One season)

Crime Drama; Multi-Racial; Urban; Group; Good.

**1990**

- *Dark Justice* (Cr. Jeff Freilich, 1991-1993, David Salzman Entertainment and Lorimar Television, Spain and US. Three seasons)

Crime Drama; Whites; Urban; Gang; Good.

- *Renegade* (Cr. Stephen J. Cannell, 1992-1997, Stephen J. Cannell Productions, US. Five seasons)

Crime Action Drama; Multi-Racial; Urban/Rural; Individual; Good.

- *Walker, Texas Ranger* (Cr. Albert S. Ruddy, Paul Haggis *et al*, 1993-2001, Columbia Broadcasting System and Amadea Film Productions, US. Nine seasons)

Western Crime Drama; Whites; Rural; Individual; Good.

- *M.A.N.T.I.S.* (Cr. Sam Raimi and Sam Hamm, 1994-1997, Universal Television and Renaissance Pictures, US. One season)

Sci-Fi Action Crime; Blacks/Whites; Urban; Individual; Good.

- *King of the Hill* (Cr. Greg Daniels and Mike Judge, 1997-2010, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Deedle-Dee Productions, US. Thirteen seasons)

'Dog Dale Afternoon' (3.20, April 13, 1999): Animated Comedy; Whites; Rural; Gang; Bad.

- *Charmed* (Cr. Constance M. Burge, 1998-2006, Paramount Pictures and Spelling Television, US. Eight seasons)

Supernatural Fantasy Drama; Starring Alyssa Milano and Holly Marie Combs.

'Hell Hath No Fury' (4.3, Oct. 11, 2001): Supernatural Fantasy Drama; Whites; Urban; Individual; Bad.

- *Vengeance Unlimited* (Cr. John McNamara and David Simkins, 1998-1999, Warner Bros. Television and McNamara Paper Productions, US. One season)

Crime Drama; Whites; Urban; Individual; Good.

- *Angel* (Cr. Joss Whedon and David Greenwalt, 1999-2004, The WB Television Network, US. Five seasons)

Supernatural Crime; Multi-Racial; Urban; Gang; Good.

**2000**

- Malcolm in the Middle (Cr. Linwood Boomer, 2000-2006, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Satin City Productions, US. Seven seasons)

'Halloween Approximately' (2.2, Nov. 8, 2000): Comedy; Whites; Suburban; Individual; Good.

- Black Scorpion (Cr. Roger Corman and Craig J. Nevius, 2001, US. One season)

Crime Action; Blacks/Whites; Urban; Individual; Good.

- Smallville (Cr. Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, 2001-2011, Warner Bros. Television, US. Ten seasons)

Superhero Sci-Fi Adventure; Whites; Urban; Gang/Individual; Bad/Good.

- Firefly (Joss Whedon, 2002-2003, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Mutant Enemy, US. One season)

Action Sci-Fi; Multi-Racial; Rural; Gang; Good.

- The Shield (Cr. Shawn Ryan, 2002-2008, Fox Television Network, US. Seven seasons)

Crime Drama; Multi-Racial; Urban; Individual/Gang; Good/Bad.

- Tru Calling (Cr. Jon Harmon Feldman, 2003-2005, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Tru Calling Productions, Canada and US. Two seasons)

Supernatural Crime Drama; Whites; Urban; Individual; Good.

- Wild West Tech (Dir. Amy Huggins, Andrew Nock *et al*, 2003-2005, Greystone Television, US. Three seasons)

'Vigilante Tech' (2.2, Nov. 16, 2004): Documentary; Whites; Rural/Urban; Gang/Individual; Good/Bad.

- Boston Legal (David E. Kelley, 2004-2008, twentieth century Fox Television, US. Five seasons)

'Shock and Oww!' (2.18, March 7, 2006): Crime Comedy Drama.

- Lost (Cr. J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof and Jeffrey Lieber, 2004-2010, Bad Robot, Touchstone Television and ABC Studios. US. Six seasons)

'Collision' (2.8, Nov. 23, 2005): Sci-Fi Mystery Thriller.

- Castle (Cr. Andrew W. Marlowe, 2009-, ABC Studios, US. Four seasons)

'Heroes and Villains' (4.2, Sept. 26, 2011): Comedy Crime Drama.

- Dollhouse (Cr. Joss Whedon, 2009-2010, Twentieth Century Fox Television, US. Two seasons)

Sci-Fi Crime Thriller.

- Modern Family (Cr. Christopher Lloyd and Steven Levitan, 2009-, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Lloyd-Levitan Productions, US. Three seasons)

'Slow Down Your Neighbors' (2.11, Jan. 5, 2011): Comedy.

## **2010**

- Blue Bloods (Cr. Robin Green and Mitchell Burgess, 2010-, CBS Productions and Panda Productions Inc., US. Two seasons)

'Samaritan' (1.2, Oct. 1, 2010): Crime Drama.

- The Good Guys (Cr. Matt Nix, 2010, Fox Television Studios, US. One season)

'The Dim Knight' (1.4, June 21, 2010): Police Action Comedy.

- Nikita (Cr. Craig Silverstein, 2010-, Warner Bros. television and Nikita Films, US. Two seasons)

Crime Action Thriller.

- No Ordinary Family (Cr. Jon Harmon Feldman and Greg Berlanti, 2010-2011, ABC Studios, US. One season)

Action Comedy Drama.

- Harry's Law (Cr. David E. Kelley, 2011-, Warner Bros. Television and David E. Kelley Productions, US. Two seasons)

'In the Ghetto' (1.8, March 7, 2011) and 'Gorilla My Dreams' (2.11, Jan. 11, 2012): Crime Comedy.

- Once Upon a Time (Cr. Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitses, 2011-, ABC Studio and Kitses/Horowitz, US. One season)

'Skin Deep' (1.12, Feb. 12, 2012): Fantasy Adventure.

- Person of Interest (Cr. Jonathan Nolan, 2011-, Warner Bros. Television and Bad Robot, US. One season)

'Judgement' (1.5, Oct. 20, 2011): Crime Thriller.

- True Justice (Cr. Steven Seagal, 2011-, True Justice 1 Productions and Voltage Pictures, Canada and US. Two seasons)

Crime Action Thriller.

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- *Bates Motel* (Cr. Anthony Cipriano *et al*, 2013-, Universal Television, US)
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- *Bonanza* (Cr. David Dortort and Fred Hamilton, 1959-1973, National Broadcasting Company, US. Fourteen seasons)
- *Breaking Bad* (Cr. Vince Gilligan, 2008-2013, AMC, US. Five seasons)
- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Cr. Joss Whedon, 1997-2003, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Mutant Enemy, US. Seven seasons)
- *Carnivale* (Cr. Daniel Knauf, 2003-2005, Home Box Office, US. Two seasons)
- *Charmed* (Constance M. Burge, 1998-2006, Spelling TV, US. Eight seasons)
- *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (Cr. Ann Donahue and Anthony E. Zuiker, 2000-2015, CBS Paramount Network Television, Canada and US. Fifteen seasons)
- *Daredevil* (Cr. Drew Goddard, 2015-, ABC Studios, US)

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  - 'Crocodile' (1.2: Dir. Cuesta, Wr. Manos Jr., Oct. 8, 2006)
  - 'Popping Cherry' (1.3: Dir. Cuesta, Wr. Manos Jr., Oct. 15, 2006)
  - 'Let's Give the Boy a Hand' (1.4: Dir. Robert Lieberman, Wr. Manos Jr., Oct. 22, 2006)
  - 'Love, American Style' (1.5: Dir. Lieberman, Wr. Manos Jr., *et al.* Oct. 29, 2006)
  - 'Return to Sender' (1.6: Dir. Tony Goldwyn, Wr. Manos Jr. and Tim Schlattmann, Nov. 5, 2006)
  - 'Circle of Friends' (1.7: Dir. Steve Shill, Wr. Daniel Cerone, Nov. 12, 2006)
  - 'Shrink Wrap' (1.8: Dir. Goldwyn, Wr. Lauren Gussis, Nov. 19, 2006)
  - 'Father Knows Best' (1.9: Dir. Adam Davidson, Wr. Melissa Rosenberg, Nov. 26, 2006)
  - 'Seeing Red' (1.10: Dir. Cuesta, Wr. Kevin R. Maynard, Dec. 3, 2006)
  - 'Truth Be Told' (1.11: Dir. Keith Gordon, Wr. Drew Z. Greenberg and Schlattmann, Dec. 10, 2006)
  - 'Born Free' (1.12: Dir. Cuesta, Wr. Cerone and Rosenberg, Dec. 17, 2006)

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- 'Waiting to Exhale' (2.2: Dir. Marcos Siega, Wr. Clyde Phillips, Oct. 7, 2007)
- 'An Inconvenient Lie' (2.3: Dir. Goldwyn, Wr. Rosenberg, Oct. 14, 2007)
- 'See-Through' (2.4: Dir. Nick Gomez, Wr. Scott Buck, Oct. 21, 2007)
- 'The Dark Defender' (2.5: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Schlattmann, Oct. 28, 2007)
- 'Dex, Lies and Videotape' (2.6: Dir. Gomez, Wr. Lauren Gussis, Nov. 4, 2007)
- 'That Night, A Forest Grew' (2.7: Dir. Jeremy Podeswa, Wr. Cerone, Nov. 11, 2007)
- 'Morning Comes' (2.8: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Buck, Nov. 18, 2007)
- 'Resistance is Futile' (2.9: Dir. Siega, Wr. Rosenberg, Nov. 25, 2007)
- 'There's Something About Harry' (2.10: Dir. Steve Shill, Wr. Scott Reynolds, Dec. 2, 2007)
- 'Left Turn Ahead' (2.11: Dir. Siega, Wr. Schlattmann and Buck, Dec. 9, 2007)
- 'The British Invasion' (2.12: Dir. Shill, Wr. Cerone and Rosenberg, Dec. 16, 2007)
- 'Our Father' (3.1: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Phillips, Sept. 28, 2008)
- 'Finding Freebo' (3.2: Dir. Siega, Wr. Rosenberg, Oct. 5, 2008)
- 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' (3.3: Dir. John Dahl, Wr. Buck, Oct. 12, 2008)
- 'All in the Family' (3.4: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Adam E. Fierro, Oct. 19, 2008)
- 'Turing Biminese' (3.5: Dir. Siega, Wr. Schlattmann, Oct. 26, 2008)
- 'Si Se Puede' (3.6: Dir. Ernest Dickerson, Wr. Charles H. Eglee, Nov. 2, 2008)
- 'Easy as Pie' (3.7: Dir. Shill, Wr. Gussis, Nov. 9, 2008)
- 'The Damage a Man Can Do' (3.8: Dir. Siega, Wr. Buck, Nov. 16, 2008)



- 'About Last Man' (3.9: Dir. Tim Hunter, Wr. Rosenberg and Reynolds, Nov. 23, 2008)
- 'Go Your Own Way' (3.10: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Schlattmann, Nov. 30, 2008)
- 'I Had a Dream' (3.11: Dir. Siega, Wr. Eglee and Gussis, Dec. 7, 2008)
- 'Do You Take Dexter Morgan?' (3.12: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Buck, Dec. 14, 2008)
- 'Living the Dream' (4.1: Dir. Siega, Wr. Phillips, Sept. 27, 2009)
- 'Remains to be Seen' (4.2: Dir. Brian Kirk, Wr. Eglee, Oct. 4, 2009)
- 'Blinded by the Light' (4.3: Dir. Siega, Wr. Buck, Oct. 11, 2009)
- 'Dex Takes a Holiday' (4.4: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Rosenberg and Wendy West, Oct. 18, 2009)
- 'Dirty Harry' (4.5: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Schlattmann, Oct. 25, 2009)
- 'If I Had a Hammer' (4.6: Dir. Romeo Tirone, Wr. Gussis, Nov. 1, 2009)
- 'Slack Tide' (4.7: Dir. Hunter, Wr. Buck, Nov. 8, 2009)
- 'Road Kill' (4.8: Dir. Dickerson, Wr. Rosenberg and Reynolds, Nov. 15, 2009)
- 'Hungry Man' (4.9: Dir. Dahl, Wr. West, Nov. 22, 2009)
- 'Lost Boys' (4.10: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Schlattmann and Eglee, Nov. 29, 2009)
- 'Hello, Dexter Morgan' (4.11: Dir. S.J. Clarkson, Wr. Buck and Gussis, Dec. , 2009)
- 'The Getaway' (4.12: Dir. Shill, Wr. Rosenberg, Reynolds and West, Dec. 13, 2009)
- 'My Bad' (5.1: Dir. Shill, Wr. Chip Johannessen, Sept. 26, 2010)
- 'Hello Bandit' (5.2: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Buck, Oct. 3, 2010)
- 'Practically Perfect' (5.3: Dir. Dickerson, Wr. Manny Coto, Oct. 10, 2010)
- 'Beauty and the Beast' (5.4: Dir. Milan Cheylov, Wr. Jim Leonard, Oct. 17, 2010)
- 'First Blood' (5.5: Dir. Tirone, Wr. Schlattmann, Oct. 24, 2010)

- 'Everything is Illuminated' (5.6: Dir. Shill, Wr. West, Oct. 31, 2010)
- 'Circle Us' (5.7: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Buck, Nov. 7, 2010)
- 'Take It!' (5.8: Dir. Tirone, Wr. Coto and West, Nov. 14, 2010)
- 'Teenage Wasteland' (5.9: Dir. Dickerson, Wr. Gussis, Nov. 21, 2010)
- 'In the Beginning' (5.10: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Reynolds, Nov. 28, 2010)
- 'Hop a Freighter' (5.11: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Buck, Schlattmann and Karen Campbell, Dec. 5, 2010)
- 'The Big One' (5.12: Dir. Shill, Wr. Coto and Johannessen, Dec. 12, 2010)
- 'Those Kinds of Things' (6.1: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Buck and Campbell, Oct. 2, 2011)
- 'Once Upon a Time' (6.2: Dir. Clarkson, Wr. Schlattmann and Campbell, Oct. 9, 2011)
- 'Smokey and the Bandit' (6.3: Dir. Stefan Schwartz, Wr. Coto and Campbell, Oct. 16, 2011)
- 'A Horse of a Different Colour' (6.4: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Gussis and Campbell, Oct. 23, 2011)
- 'The Angel of Death' (6.5: Dir. Clarkson, Wr. Reynolds and Campbell, Oct. 30, 2011)
- 'Just Let Go' (6.6: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Campbell and Jace Richdale, Nov. 6, 2011)
- 'Nebraska' (6.7: Dir. Tirone, Wr. West and Campbell, Nov. 13, 2011)
- 'Sin of Omission' (6.8: Dir. Dickerson, Wr. Campbell and Arika Lisanne Mittman, Nov. 20, 2011)
- 'Get Gellar' (6.9: Dir. Seith Mann, Wr. Campbell, Nov. 27, 2011)
- 'Ricochet Rabbit' (6.10: Dir. Michael Lehmann, Wr. Campbell, Richdale, Gussis and Reynolds, Dec. 4, 2011),
- 'Talk to the Hand' (6.11: Dir. Dickerson, Wr. Campbell, Coto and Schlattmann, Dec. 11, 2011)

- 'This is the Way the World Ends' (6.12: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Buck, West and Campbell, Dec. 18, 2011)
- 'Are You...?' (7.1: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Buck, Sept. 30, 2012)
- 'Sunshine and Frosty Swirl' (7.2: Dir. Shill, Wr. Coto, Oct. 7, 2012)
- 'Buck the System' (7.3: Dir. Schwartz, Wr. Richdale, Oct. 14, 2012)
- 'Run' (7.4: Dir. Dahl, Wr. West, Oct. 21, 2012)
- 'Swim Deep' (7.5: Dir. Dickerson, Wr. Reynolds, Oct. 28, 2012)
- 'Do the Wrong Thing' (7.6: Dir. Alik Sakharov, Wr. Gussis, Nov. 4, 2012)
- 'Chemistry' (7.7: Dir. Holly Dale, Wr. Coto and Campbell, Nov. 11, 2012)
- 'Argentina' (7.8: Dir. Tirone, Wr. Mittman, Nov. 18, 2012)
- 'Helter Skelter' (7.9: Dir. Shill, Wr. Schlattmann, Nov. 26, 2012)
- 'The Dark...Whatever' (7.10: Dir. Lehmann, Wr. Gussis, Richdale and Reynolds, Dec. 2, 2012)
- 'Do You See What I See?' (7.11: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Coto and West, Dec. 9, 2012)
- 'Surprise, Motherfucker!' (7.12: Dir. Shill, Wr. Buck and Schlattmann, Dec. 16, 2012)
- 'A Beautiful Day' (8.1: Dir. Gordon, Wr. Buck and Jennifer Yale, Jun. 30, 2013)
- 'Every Silver Lining...' (8.2: Dir. Michael C. Hall, Wr. Coto and Yale, Jul. 7, 2013)
- 'What's Eating Dexter Morgan' (8.3: Dir. Dickerson, Wr. Gussis and Yale, Jul. 14, 2013)
- 'Scar Tissue' (8.4: Dir. Schwartz, Wr. Yale and Schlattmann, Jul. 21, 2013)
- 'This Little Piggy' (8.5: Dir. Tirone, Wr. Reynolds and Yale, Jul. 28, 2013)
- 'A Little Reflection' (8.6: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Richdale and Yale, Aug. 4, 2013)
- 'Dress Code' (8.7: Dir. Sakharov, Wr. Mittman and Yale, Aug. 11, 2013)

- 'Are We There Yet?' (8.8: Dir. Dale, Wr. West and Yale, Aug. 18, 2013)
  - 'Make Your Own Kind of Music' (8.9: Dir. Dahl, Wr. Campbell and Yale, Aug. 25, 2013)
  - 'Goodbye Miami' (8.10: Dir. Shill, Wr. Richdale, Reynolds and Yale, Sept. 8, 2013)
  - 'Monkey in a Box' (8.11: Dir. Dickerson, Wr. Schlattmann, West and Yale, Sept. 15, 2013)
  - 'Remember the Monsters?' (8.12: Dir. Shill, Buck, Coto and Yale Sept. 22, 2013)
- 
- *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (Cr. Carl Reiner, 1961-1966, Columbia Broadcasting System and Calvada Productions, US. Five seasons)
    - 'A Vigilante Ripped My Sports Coat' (4.4, Oct. 14, 1964)
  - *Flash* (Cr. Greg Berlanti, 2014-, Berlanti Productions, US)
  - *The Following* (Cr. Kevin Williamson, 2013-2015, Warner Bros. Television, US. Three seasons)
  - *Gotham* (Cr. Bruno Heller, 2014-, Warner Bros. Television, US)
  - *Hannibal* (Cr. Bryan Fuller, 2013-2015, Dino de Laurentiis, US. Three seasons)
  - *Have Gun- Will Travel* (Cr. Herb Meadow and Sam Rolfe, 1957-1963, Columbia Broadcasting System and Filmaster Productions, US. Six seasons)
  - *Hawaii Five-O* (Cr. Leonard Freeman, 1968-1980, CBS Television Network and Leonard Freeman Production, US. Twelve seasons)
  - *The Incredible Hulk* (Dir. Frank Orsatti *et al*, 1978-1982, Universal Television, US. Five seasons)
  - *Jericho* (Cr. Josh Schaer, Stephen Chbosky and Jonathan E. Steinberg, 2006-2008, CBS Paramount Network Television, US. Two seasons)
  - *Jessica Jones* (Cr. Melissa Rosenberg, 2015-, Marvel Studios and Netflix, US.)

- *Justified* (Dir. John Avnet, Adam Arkin *et al*, 2010-2015, Sony Pictures Television and FX Productions, US. Six seasons)
- *Kung Fu* (Cr. Ed Spielman, 1972-1975, Warner Bros. Television, US. Three seasons)
- *Legends of Tomorrow* (Cr. Greg Berlanti, 2016, Berlanti Productions, US)
- *The Lone Ranger* (Cr. George W. Trendle, 1949-1957, Apex Film Corp. and Wrather Productions, US. Five seasons)
- *Penny Dreadful* (Cr. John Logan, 2014-, Desert Wolf Productions, US)
- *Revenge* (Cr. Mike Kelley, 2011-2015, ABC Studios, US. Four seasons)
- *Sex and the City* (Cr. Darren Star, 1998-2004, HBO, US. Six seasons)
- *The Simpsons* (Cr. Matt Groening, 1989-, Twentieth Century Fox Television and Gracie Films, US. Twenty-Five seasons)
  - 'Homer the Vigilante' (5.11, Jan. 6, 1994)
  - 'Treehouse of Horror XXII' (23.3, Oct. 30, 2011)
- *Six Feet Under* (Cr. Alan Ball, 2001-2005, HBO, US. Five seasons)
- *Sleepy Hollow* (Cr. Philip Iscove *et al*, 2013-, Twentieth Century Fox Television, US)
- *The Sopranos* (Cr. David Chase, 1999-2007, Home Box Office, US. Six seasons)
- *Supergirl* (Cr. Andrew Kreisberg, 2015-, Berlanti Productions, US)
- *True Detective* (Cr. Nic Pizzolatto, 2014-, Anonymous Content, US)
  - 'Form and Void' (1.8, Mar. 19, 2014)
- *The Wire* (Cr. David Simon, 2002-2008, Home Box Office and Blown Deadline Productions, US. Five seasons)
- *Xena: Warrior Princess* (Cr. Rob Tapert *et al*, 1995-2001, Studios USA Television, US. Six seasons)
- *X-Files* (Cr. Chris Carter, 1993-2002, Twentieth Century Fox, US. Nine seasons)