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Osama bin Laden Ain't Here: *Justified* as a 9/11 Western

Paul Zinder

Justified, the FX series developed by Graham Yost based on the work of Elmore Leonard, is a postmodern Western narrative that unfolds in the contemporary South. While the classic Western focuses on Anglo-American conflicts with the savage “Other” on the frontier¹, *Justified* utilizes character tropes defined by America’s response to the World Trade Center attacks of September 11, 2001. U.S. Marshal Raylan Givens, the protagonist of *Justified*, fights localized enemies with which he and the viewer can identify. Givens’ personal iconography, defined by his highly conspicuous cowboy hat and boots, as well as his reputation as a shoot-first, ask-questions-later lawman, place him in the lineage of Western heroes who aid the “civilized” world through violent acts.² The show’s definition of civilization, however, is not as clearly elucidated as that of the classic Western, nor does it match the rhetoric of Western mythology utilized by the Bush Administration after the 9/11 attacks.³ As a US Marshal, Givens’ role as a Federal officer makes him an official of the American government, and his actions and those of the show’s representative criminals can be read as allegorical responses to America’s foreign and domestic policies since the 9/11 attacks. Like many of the adversaries he faces, Raylan Givens, a New Wave Western Hero, occupies an ambivalent moral category reflective of a post 9/11 world where ethical certainties are impossible.

The medium of television powerfully expresses American anxieties at different points in history. The Bush Administration’s invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq under the auspices of an American “war on terror” directly affected the content of media genres in the United States, as the government’s military action overseas entered the public discourse.⁴ As is so often the case, American popular culture supplies a melting pot of material that encourages discussion related to topics that dominate the national psyche.

John E. O’Connor and Peter C. Rollins note that the Western serves as “a touchstone to understanding the nation’s concerns”⁵ while “[exposing] social and cultural concerns for contemporary audiences”.⁶ Although this is the case, recent Westerns do not necessitate a literal positioning of events related to 9/11 in the content of their plot construction. Robert Westerfelhaus and Celeste Lacroix write that such stories “need not explicitly and literally address contemporary, historical, or transcendent concerns,” as they “can be dealt with analogically and metaphorically in popular culture narratives.”⁷ Although *Justified* does not offer narrative snapshots that literalize anxieties related to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the series recognizes the impact of that fateful day through its character development and story constructs. The following close-reading of the first two seasons of the FX series *Justified* contextualizes the show’s character and narrative development as part of a new wave of Westerns released after 9/11 which engage morally ambivalent space.

Part I: Cowboys and Terrorists

“You lookin’ for Osama Bin Ladin? Because I’m fair certain he ain’t here.”
*Boyd Crowder in “Veterans”*⁸

The first image in the pilot of *Justified* is a low angle shot from behind a man in a cowboy hat set against a deep blue sky. While this man appears ready to amble through a

traditional Western setting, the shot cranes up to reveal a long swimming pool stretching into the distance like an endless watering hole, one lined with bikini-clad women.⁹ While critics are historically reticent to acknowledge contemporary America as a potential setting for a Western,¹⁰ the visual opening of *Justified* substantiates its choice of genre, while acknowledging that its hero will be wandering a different sort of frontier.

U.S. Marshal Raylan Givens saunters through pool-side revelers in modern day Miami, about to enact what appears to be a classical Western showdown with Florida drug lord and murderer, Tommy Bucks. After Raylan sits across from Bucks at a table overlooking the sea at a high-end resort and tells him to “leave in the next two minutes” or face the consequences, Bucks mockingly recalls that Raylan had engaged in cowboy-speak the day before: “You don’t get outta town in 24-hours and I’m gonna shoot you on sight. C’mon, what is that? A joke?” When Bucks draws, Raylan shoots him dead.

In a traditional Western, Raylan’s violent act would have most likely been celebrated for aiding society by ridding the world of a killer.¹¹ In the contemporary Marshal’s service, however, public executions are frowned upon. When Dan, Raylan’s supervisor, confronts him by noting that, “We’re not allowed to shoot people on sight anymore and haven’t been...for maybe a hundred years,” he places the gunplay and Raylan’s psyche in their proper contexts. Dan determines that he cannot permit Raylan’s approach to law enforcement, so he transfers him to the Marshal’s Service in Kentucky, his home state, utilizing the aural intertext, “I’m getting you out of Dodge.”¹² Perhaps the “old school” Marshal Givens belongs back in the place where he was raised, where “justice” is defined by custom as much as law.¹³

Westerfelhaus and Lacroix note that “typically, retributive justice is uncritically accepted as a natural part of the moral order within the context of the traditional Western,”¹⁴ but Raylan’s introductory shooting leads to both his reassignment and to a federal investigation into the Miami killing. During a Department of Justice inquiry, Raylan attempts to shorten the discussion by suggesting, “Let’s keep it simple, huh? He pulled first. I shot him.”¹⁵ But the world of *Justified*, like post 9/11 America, is not so simple, and includes “views of crime and criminals [that] have been forcibly rethought.”¹⁶ When Chief Deputy Art Mullen prepares Raylan for a District Attorney investigation into Raylan’s shooting of Boyd Crowder later in the first season, he coaches Raylan on how to respond to questions concerning the killing of Tommy Bucks: “Sure, the guy pulls on you first, you’ve got no choice to put him down, which is fine. Unless it looks like you maneuvered him into giving you no choice.”¹⁷ In the postmodern world of *Justified*, the “appearance” of unnecessary violence is potential ammunition for punishment.

In fact, the Kentucky that Raylan enters reflects contemporary American culture, a society both desensitized and demoralized by the U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks. Few of Givens’ enemies may be considered “savage, faceless, [and] ideologically primitive” like the Bush Administration’s portrayal of Al Qaeda in the months following 9/11,¹⁸ although some are archetypical “terrorists”. While the viewer identifies Givens as the sanctioned figure of authority in the diegesis, the characters he battles are not often the simple, two-dimensional villains of the classic Western or of George W. Bush’s rhetoric, but different kinds of “Other,” people striving to survive in an America that has abandoned them, citizens left behind by a US government focused elsewhere.

Stuart Hall writes that “the production structures of television...draw topics, treatments, agendas, events... and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural and political structure of which they are a differentiated part.”¹⁹ The narrative construction of *Justified* infers that the suffering of the domestic sphere in the modern United States directly reflects an

economic reality that forces common citizenry into crime, in order for them to compete in a “free” market dominated by likeminded individuals.

When Raylan assures Art that “nobody likes rich people,” he could be speaking for most of Harlan County.²⁰ Raylan’s homeland is a community suffering near the poverty line. This economic reality clarifies why many of the characters on the wrong side of the law in *Justified* fail to emulate classic Western villains, whose “actions are depicted as unambiguously evil, with little to render them sympathetic.”²¹

Most of the series’ “bad guys,” in fact, simply desire the “American Dream,” which intrinsically comments on the hollowness of said dream. In “Fixer”, Curtis Mims assists in the kidnapping of Arnold Pinter, Raylan’s “snitch”, to help fulfill his own life-long aspiration, which he cannot afford to achieve. Curtis wants to become a landscaper. Curtis’s fascination with Raylan’s personal dress and symbolic potential as a Western hero makes perfect sense when related to the role of the Western genre in U.S. society. In America, whenever confidence waned and optimism faded, the Western made a comeback, its familiarity as comforting as anything from the nostalgic past.²² When Curtis wonders what it would be like to draw his gun “cowboy-movie style”, his wish acknowledges the solace offered by representations of the Western hero, as well as an interest in gaining some of Raylan’s cowboy aura.²³

The “showdown” between Raylan and Curtis also comments on the genre’s treatment of race. Lori Harrison-Kahan writes that the Western genre is “known for its depictions of racist violence,”²⁴ which usually involves the disposal of Indian characters in order to satisfy America’s Manifest Destiny. Curtis, an African American, serves as an appropriate test for Raylan, the Western lawman presented with the opportunity to shoot first.

When Raylan approaches the house where Pinter is being held, Curtis stops him at a distance. “Wait. You that cowboy...? I see you got the hat, the boots, the whole nine... You like Westerns?” While Raylan’s answer, “used to,” self-reflexively winks at the scene about to unfold, Curtis remains non-plussed: “Neighborhood I grew up in, we used to take to the street with our guns already out.” When Raylan responds, “smart, smart. Lot can go wrong with a draw... it takes practice to draw clean,”²⁵ the scene cuts to a low angle shot from behind Curtis at waist level, his right hand behind him as though he’s ready to extract his weapon. The shot echoes similar images in the films of Sergio Leone, particularly from the climactic showdown in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966), photographic precedents to postmodern climactic shoot-outs. But neither Raylan nor Curtis fire, as the Western hero decides to forgo violence and leave the scene, a denial of viewer expectations and an affirmation of the “villain” Curtis’s place as someone who may have his reasons for living on the wrong side of the law.²⁶

The following episode introduces Dr. Peter Oldman as a Caucasian dentist working with poor minorities, who generously allows that the mother of a young girl to pay her bill whenever she can. When a (white) patient angrily insults Dr. Oldman and his receptionist and refuses to pay his own charge, the dentist follows him out to his car and forcibly extracts his teeth.²⁷ The shocking violence, counteracting his charity from moments before, seems to reaffirm the Western genre’s common placement of retributive justice as a means to “[restore] the moral order.”²⁸ But *Justified* will not allow such a deed to be celebrated, suggesting that modern America has become place where brutal acts are challenged.

When Art shows Raylan a picture of Dr. Oldman, they both recognize him as Rollie Pike, a former accountant on the run after pocketing money from his onetime employers, the Miami drug cartel, and a man who had outfoxed Raylan in Nicaragua. “Long in the Tooth” establishes Rollie as a hard-working, witty, and likable criminal, who stole from a dangerous organization

and has used that money to serve the poor.²⁹ Rollie's receptionist and lover, Mindy, doesn't initially know that Dr. Oldman is actually a fugitive, but helps him to smuggle and pawn all of the gold fillings from the office before agreeing to take flight with him, as long as he doesn't lie to her again. The viewer empathizes with the bantering couple's plight after they approach a taco van and Rollie requests a fake passport from Hector, a former contact, only to be told that Hector has retired from the crime business, as "the game is different since 9/11. Homeland Security, holograms, all that shit. It ain't like it was back in the day."³⁰

Raylan finally catches up with the couple after their Plan B has gone wrong. Rollie has beaten a man to death with a rock after he stabbed Rollie rather than fulfill his duty as the "coyote" hired to lead them across the border into Mexico. The Miami cartel has tracked Rollie and Mindy to a hot dusty border spot, the rocky earthen setting reminiscent of any number of Hollywood Westerns. As they hide from (classic Western) sniper shots, Rollie tells Raylan that he was inspired to be a dentist by the elf character in the children's animation *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer* and laments, "[you'd] think [the cartel would] let me be a dentist.... I'm lucky if they let me be a greeter at Wal Mart."³¹ When Rollie offers himself to the sniper, his sacrifice protects Mindy and Raylan from the gunfire, confirming his place as yet another three dimensional "villain" who is not vanquished by the Western Hero, but whose ambivalence borders on admirable.

The procedural episodes in *Justified* often include the affable "Other" as Raylan's main "target," subverting conventional definitions of morality in the Western. Sheriff Hunter, the corrupt cop who unsuccessfully sets Raylan up for a hit by the Miami cartel, only turned dirty after spending his life searching for the man who raped and killed his young niece.³² After Raylan is sent to protect an eccentric judge from a clumsy stalker in "The Hammer,"³³ he can't stop the magistrate from shooting the culprit, Virgil Corum, a meek, weak, and impoverished dad previously sent to prison for fifteen years by the right-wing judge for growing marijuana.³⁴ Gary, the bumbling husband to Raylan's ex-wife, Winona, continuously and haplessly attempts to get ahead, borrowing money from the Dixie mafia because the shopping center he dreams of building would have been "true Kentucky, through and through."³⁵ Clinton, the man sent to a halfway house because he wrecked his car rushing his overdosed wife to the hospital, beats his abusive parole officer and breaks out, only for the opportunity to hand the son he hasn't seen in years a stuffed animal on his birthday.³⁶ And Frank, the elderly man attached to an oxygen tank due to his debilitating emphysema, robs a bank with two reckless young lug-heads because he can't stop "thinking of all the lives [I] never lived."³⁷ Robert Westerfelhaus and Celeste Lacroix write that "classic expressions of the American monomyth possess an unambiguous moral code, in which right and wrong are easily recognized and mutually exclusive."³⁸ The true "threats" facing Raylan Givens in these episodes argue against a traditional reading of the villain in the Western. Viewers watching *Justified*, then, must reconsider both traditional expectations related to the antagonistic position usually occupied by the "Other", as well as the hero worship usually afforded the cowboy lead.

Raylan Givens' hat is beige. His inability to separate his emotional responses from his professional obligations inadvertently sanctions violence in Harlan County.³⁹ Raylan's affair with Ava Crowder, the witness to his own shooting of her brother-in-law Boyd Crowder, directly contradicts advice from his superior,⁴⁰ resulting in Boyd's release from prison. While Raylan admits that he became a Marshal to compensate for his own father's abusive nature and illegal endeavors,⁴¹ he cannot control the contradictory impulses that make him "the angriest man" his ex-wife has ever known.⁴²

While Raylan is often heroic, his inability to forgo his personal history with Boyd, the series' chief antagonist and pseudo-anti-hero, informs his obsessive behavior in the series. Boyd begins *Justified* as a white supremacist domestic terrorist who destroys a black church with a rocket launcher.⁴³ He does not, however, abide by George W. Bush's absolute definition of terrorists as evil.⁴⁴ In fact, Boyd proves himself a charismatic, enigmatic, and highly sympathetic criminal over the course of the series.

Boyd and Raylan were childhood friends in Harlan County, though their paths diverged after their teenage years. Art fills Raylan in on Boyd's more recent past after the church bombing, noting that, "he went to Kuwait for Desert Storm, and when he came back after a couple of years, he quit paying his taxes, claimed he was a sovereign citizen...got involved with the Patriot movement and the white supremacy bullshit."⁴⁵ Boyd is the most prominent character on *Justified* haunted by his military service.⁴⁶

After Raylan shoots Boyd for drawing his gun on Ava, the Marshal recalls escaping with his boyhood friend from the debris caused by a mine explosion, the smoke-infused imagery evoking media footage of the victims who fled Ground Zero. Raylan's sullen reflection, "Boyd and I dug coal together," confirms that he missed Boyd's heart on purpose and avows the life-long impact of coal mining in Harlan County. The community's struggles formed both men, placing cowboy and villain on similar developmental footing.⁴⁷

Boyd's post-shooting conversion into the peaceful leader of the Church of the Last Chance Salvation is questioned by all, even though "turning to religious myths and rituals that express them is a common response to uncommon events that provoke a sense of uncertainty."⁴⁸ In his sick bed at the Federal Detention Center, Boyd assures Raylan that "God was acting through you, Raylan, through your gun, to get my attention to set me on a new course... For I am born again in the eyes of the Lord... and I want to thank you for playing your part."⁴⁹ Raylan's violent assumption that Boyd's new persona is simply a cover for an imminent unlawful act (he physically attacks Boyd at the penitentiary after Boyd suggests that Raylan leave his paranoia "to the wrath of God.")⁵⁰ will prove at least partially unfair.

Boyd's ministry, located at a campsite in the woods, is comprised of the downtrodden and poor. James Darsey writes that American "prophetic rhetorical tradition is characterized by an 'inflexible posture of righteousness',"⁵¹ which explains why Boyd's sermon rings familiar. Boyd assures his followers that "the carrot that we offer in this church is a purpose, a reason for being, much greater than any of you have ever known," his speech a means of recruitment for his own vigilante force determined to defeat the Harlan County methamphetamine business, headed by Boyd's own father, Bo Crowder.

After Boyd and his followers bomb the local meth trailer-lab in an effort to eradicate what Boyd deigns "a modern-day plague, like locusts, only worse," he is stunned to learn that he inadvertently killed a man who was asleep amidst the explosion. Raylan, the Western "hero", is at least partially responsible for this death, as his ill-advised affair with Ava, the only witness to Raylan's shooting of Boyd, had forced the District Attorney to drop the charges against Boyd and set him free.⁵² Raylan feels that his hubris cost an innocent his life, and vows to bust Boyd again.

Boyd's response to the threat of his own arrest for this accidental "murder" accords with events that occurred in the months following the 9/11 attacks. Shaun Treat writes that the attacks on 9/11 represented "a trauma facilitating attractions to violent messiahs and crusading vigilantes."⁵³ Boyd's followers, including Bobby Joe Packer, are absolutely committed to him and his objectives and accept his means without question. After Raylan and the Marshals' latest

raid of the church camp proves unfruitful, Boyd asks Bobby Joe, the addict who had tipped Boyd off on the location of the meth trailer, for a big favor.⁵⁴ When Bobby Joe appears at the Marshal's office and surrenders himself as the sole person responsible for setting fire to the trailer, he insists that God told him to surrender.⁵⁵ Boyd's conversion has made him an even more powerful being.

And he isn't finished. Boyd takes his sermon to a local church, proclaiming to a large congregation, but pointing to his own father, local crime boss Bo, "I was a sinful man...looking for salvation in worldly things and evil things...I am a new creature.... And like Jesus, we must never be afraid to strike out against those who practice evil."⁵⁶ Boyd's exhortation harkens back to rhetoric utilized by George W. Bush in his initial address to the nation after the 9/11 attacks, when he described the challenges he would undertake as a "spiritual battle between good and evil."⁵⁷ Boyd, in utilizing language similar to the Bush Administration's, has grasped an authoritative role on the side of American "justice", although he remains a criminal, albeit one attempting to improve the conditions of his community. The American monomyth usually places the hero in the station to pursue such an outcome.⁵⁸

Boyd uses a rocket launcher to destroy a truck from Miami, which was bound for Harlan County, filled with Bo's two million dollar drug shipment.⁵⁹ Boyd's use of the same weapon he engaged in his assault on the black church in the series pilot urges the viewer to recall that Boyd remains a terrorist whose goals have simply changed.

Bo's response to Boyd's action is swift and decisive. He orders the slaughter of each of Boyd's church followers, hanging them from trees like hunted game (or crucified disciples). When the heart-stricken Boyd returns to the camp, falling to his knees in horror surrounded by bodies, he delivers a Christ-like soliloquy, pleading for an answer from God on how he could allow this to happen. Boyd's conclusion that "maybe I've just been talking to myself this whole time" denotes both a loss of faith and a decision to seek vengeance, a move that the audience may find easily supportable.⁶⁰ "Retributive justice" maintains that "the punishment of evildoers ritually reestablishes the superiority of good and thus restores the moral order."⁶¹ But what is "moral order" to a vigilante like Boyd?⁶²

Idealized reinvention, a staple of characters pursuing the American Dream in Hollywood media forms,⁶³ fails Boyd and he leaves his church behind, but the vigilante will live on to pursue what he perceives as honorable goals in the future. His donation of the proceeds from a mine heist to save Ava's home in "Cottonmouth"⁶⁴ is the kind of equivocal moral deed often attributed to the hero in a Western.

Part II: Family Feuds

"I've been wondering if I'm just a criminal at heart. Truly my father's son."
*Raylan Givens in "Debts and Accounts"*⁶⁵

Walter Metz writes that "the end result of the American western narrative will remain stable, culminating in the noble and happy production of the normative family unit."⁶⁶ This statement clearly ignores the darker tradition of the American Western, from which *Justified* evolved. *Justified* contains fractured familial structures that openly question whether a "normative family unit" can endure in a post 9/11 Western world. The conventional nuclear family does not exist in the show's diegesis, each potential grouping missing components that would allow for the marking of each as even an "average" family.

Raylan's mother died many years ago, and he was raised in his family home by her sister, his Aunt Helen, the woman he believes "saved my life...told me to leave this place behind...and she gave me the money to do it,"⁶⁷ while his father Arlo fraternized with Bo Crowder's criminal enterprise. Raylan's marriage to Winona crumbled when he was transferred to Miami, and although they have a continued affair throughout the second season, she expresses doubt about their future throughout, including after she informs him that she's pregnant.⁶⁸ Winona's ambivalence foreshadows the continuance of their separation, a denial of traditional family values.

Most of the other major characters in *Justified* are either alone or struggling to survive the family to which they belong. Bo Crowder is a single Dad, and estranged from his only remaining son, Boyd. Ava kills her abusive husband, Bowman Crowder, off-screen in the series pilot, only to begin a tryst with his brother Boyd late in the second season. Mags Bennett is a widow, a single mother, and the head of the Bennett crime family, and admits that "I may not have lived the life I wanted"⁶⁹ since the bequeathment of her husband's transgressive empire. In "The Moonshine War", Mags poisons Loretta's father, making the young girl an orphan, only to take Loretta in as one of her own.⁷⁰ Loretta turns a gun on her surrogate "mother" at the end of the second season, in an effort to avenge her father's murder.⁷¹ Boyd, his cousin Johnny Crowder, the Bennett brothers Dickie and Coover, and U.S. Marshals Tim Gutterson and Rachel Brooks are all unmarried and without children.⁷²

Family, however, remains a crucial component of the story design of *Justified*. Dynastic responsibilities as well as the consequences of family betrayal haunt many of the major characters at some point in the series, and Raylan is often a catalyst or a victim of the discord, which displaces the classic role of the Western Hero, placing him in conflict with the very community he is meant to restore.⁷³

Raylan's nonchalance over his father's DUI arrest in "Fixer" sets the tone for their relationship.⁷⁴ Arlo is arrested twice in the series before he makes an appearance on screen, the second time for stealing pharmaceuticals from one of his tenants in "The Lord of War and Thunder".⁷⁵ After Arlo pinches from Bo Crowder's "collection" business, Raylan offers his father Marshal Service protection if Arlo agrees to assist in the implication of Bo, saying, "I came here as an officer of the law, because sometimes we have to make deals with lowlives because we have our sights set on life-forms even somehow lower on the ladder of lowlives than they." The parent-child roles reverse after Arlo slaps Raylan, when Raylan answers calmly, "use your words."⁷⁶ Arlo's decision to trap Raylan for capture by the Miami Cartel and his insistence that "this isn't something I wanted to do, son," fails to illicit empathy in Raylan, who responds, "no, don't call me that," before shooting his father in the arm.⁷⁷ And after Arlo joins Boyd in the hijacking of Dickie Bennett's marijuana business in "Reckoning," only to see Dickie gain retribution by gunning Helen down,⁷⁸ Raylan arrests and then beats his father to force him to cooperate in the investigation.⁷⁹

But perhaps the most affecting family in *Justified* is presided over by Mags Bennett, the woman who owns a rural convenience store, a cover for the expansive power she wields over the criminals of Harlan County. Mags' three sons, Doyle, the iniquitous local sheriff, Dickie, the weedy homunculus physically disabled by Raylan during a little league game when they were boys, and Coover, the hulking thug addicted to his family's homegrown weed, fear their mother.⁸⁰ Steve Neale writes that the classic Western includes male-led "business empires,"⁸¹ but Mags proves highly successful in the profession she undertook when her husband passed away, though her often brutal methods eventually fail her.

Mags, like Boyd, is a charming but dangerous person. She murders Loretta's father, Walt McCready, for growing marijuana on Bennett land without permission, by offering him some of her signature "apple pie" moonshine, after lacing the glass with poison.⁸² She crushes Coover's fingers with a hammer after she discovers that he and Dickie cashed Walt's benefit checks, and screams at Dickie, "'cause you're crippled to the point of worthlessness it ain't you down on that table!"⁸³ And she threatens Carol Johnson, the Black Pike Coal Company's representative, to "sit your bony ass down" to hear a counteroffer on the land the company wishes to purchase, or face a dire penalty.⁸⁴

The Bennetts and Raylan Givens are natural adversaries, for more reasons than their statuses on opposing sides of the law. Raylan explains that the families' latest disagreements simply facilitate the family feud which goes back to the age of prohibition when the authorities busted the Bennetts for running moonshine across state lines. "They got it in their heads it was a Givens tipped off the feds. My Great-Uncle Harold took a bullet to the chest, and back and forth it went."⁸⁵ In Harlan County, regional antagonisms pass on like angry inheritances.

Metz writes that the "classical Hollywood Western especially justified the conquest of the frontier as a family affair."⁸⁶ The Bennetts, though they hold control over a thousand acres of hard-fought land, are not a functional Western family. Dickie and Coover are very close, but consistently engage in activity that risks the Bennett business, mostly in an effort to improve their own stakes at the expense of Doyle, Mags' favored son. Their unsuccessful hijacking of an "Oxy bus" from Florida leads to Doyle's murder of the two ringleaders of the robbery, so that the Bennetts aren't exposed.⁸⁷ Coover's ill-advised theft of the watch off of Walt McCready's corpse before dumping it in an abandoned mine inadvertently leads to his own death in that same mine after he is shot by Raylan.⁸⁸ And Dickie's murder of Helen unleashes a wide net of retributive action involving many of Harlan County's divided families.⁸⁹

But an even larger, more encompassing issue periodically interrupts the Bennett peace during the second season of *Justified*. Patricia Limerick notes that "Western history has been an ongoing competition for legitimacy – for the right to claim for oneself and sometimes for one's group the status of legitimate beneficiary of Western resources."⁹⁰ The subplot that celebrates this fact draws the major criminals in the series into a complex competition for the proceeds available when the Black Pike mining company comes to town.

Carol Johnson, the Executive Vice President of Black Pike Coal, arrives in Harlan County with a proposition. Local dignitaries pack her church-gathered town meeting, including Raylan, assigned her personal guard by the Marshals due to death threats levied against her, Boyd Crowder, who she's hired to head her personal security detail, and the Bennett family.

When Carol stands at the pulpit and slaps her hands together, coal dust shimmers from her fingertips as she spreads her arms, palms out. An image of Jesus Christ frames the screen to the right of her, making her objective a religious undertaking. She contends that coal is the lifeblood of the struggling people of Harlan County, and wants to induce them to sell their land so that the company can expand operations. When she attempts to draw Raylan into her oration, the strategy backfires, when Raylan reminds her and the crowd that he may indeed get paid the same as a miner, but that his salary lasts all year long, including on days when he's sick. Mags' impromptu and spirited response to Carol's message assures the gathered disciples that if they allow Black Pike to blow the tops off of the nearby mountains, their freedom, their clean water, their histories would be leveled with the land.⁹¹ Both women use religion in service of political hegemony. This scene places Raylan, the Western hero, and Mags, the Western villain, on the same side of a battle, if temporarily, in a clash against forces that emulate America's response to

the 9/11 attacks.⁹² George W. Bush's "imperialistic impulse spurred on by the events of 9/11" and his attempts to "[push] forward the frontier once again"⁹³ equate with Black Pike's intention to invade the land of the innocent people in Harlan County. Metz writes that "the Western is built around a conflict over who gets to control the land and for what purposes."⁹⁴ *Justified* employs its chief crime family as a formidable barrier against Black Pike's attempts to achieve Manifest Destiny.⁹⁵

That is, until Mags' true intentions are revealed. When Mags and Boyd ambush Carol and Black Pike with a packaged land deal that Mags believes will "provide for my kin and this community for generations to come,"⁹⁶ she claims the role of the Western hero, wielding power that Raylan cannot access.⁹⁷ But the subsequent actions of her kindred cost both her and Raylan any semblance of real power.

Janet Walker writes that familial succession is an integral narrative trope in the classic Western, and is tied to confrontations over the ownership of land.⁹⁸ In "Debts and Accounts", Mags apprises Dickie that she is giving him the weed business (and the land it encompasses), but for offering her the Indian Line property so that she could flip it to Black Pike, she has bestowed the remainder of Harlan County to Boyd, so that he may engage in any other illegal enterprise of his choosing. Mags informs Dickie that, "You and me are done... You went against the family, and not for the first time. Black Pike is the future. Its proceeds go to your brother and his family. They are the future, not you." Dickie is left alone, another American since the dawn of the new century bound to earn less than the generation before him.⁹⁹ Dickie's personal war with Boyd results in his own murder of Helen and to the downfall of his family's empire.

Raylan fails the Western Hero's main charge. At the conclusion of the second season of *Justified*, his community and its families lay in tatters as he watches helpless, twice threatened with impending death by the Bennett boys. Dickie, in a poetic rehash of his own little league beating from decades before, hangs Raylan upside down from a tree and thrashes him with a baseball bat until Boyd appears to spare the Marshal's life.¹⁰⁰ Raylan's plot to save Loretta also proves fraught with danger. As Doyle points his firearm at the injured Raylan, ready to fire, the Marshals arrive to split the center of the sheriff's forehead with a sniper bullet.¹⁰¹ The hero, unable to save himself, must count on the competence of others.

In "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11", Lynn Spigel writes that, "in the end, the new media environment does not lend itself to unifying narratives of patriotism... While nationalist popular culture does, of course exist (and obviously rose in popularity after 9/11), it appears more as another niche market... than as a unifying cultural document."¹⁰² *Justified* is a Western that allegorically questions American political attitudes and military action since 9/11, through its progressive representation of its Western hero, villains, and families, proving Alexandra Keller's assertion that Westerns have "posed themselves as the way things were and, depending on contemporary politics and events, the way things are, or ought to be."¹⁰³ The political ideology of *Justified* interrogates America itself in a world forever changed by 9/11.

And while Metz argues that the post 9/11 Western returns "to its classical representations of morally upright men who both save the social order from de-civilizing forces and simultaneously engineer the maintenance of traditional family values,"¹⁰⁴ *Justified*, a postmodern New Wave Western, questions the very definition of the Western hero by presenting Raylan Givens as a flawed, complicated, irresponsible, overly emotional, angry man who is sometimes heroic, but often fails to assist the very people who need him the most, his community.

After the 9/11 attacks, Noam Chomsky wrote that “just about every crime – whether a robbery in the street or colossal atrocities - has reasons, and commonly we find that some of them are serious and should be addressed.”¹⁰⁵ *Justified*, in humanizing its characters on each side of the law, places Raylan Givens in the same moral sphere as the antagonists he is sent to defeat, and he sees the resemblance.

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Notes

¹ Steve Neale. *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), 134.

² Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 140.

³ Stephen McVeigh. *The American Western* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 215.

⁴ Lori Harrison-Kahan, "Inside *Inside Man*: Spike Lee and Post-9/11 Entertainment," *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 1 (2010): 45.

⁵ John E. O'Connor and Peter C. Rollins, "Introduction: The West, Westerns, and American Character," in *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History*. ed. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 31.

⁶ O'Connor et al., "Introduction: The West, Westerns, and American Character," 10.

⁷ Robert Westerfelhaus and Celeste Lacroix, "Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO's *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet," *Southern Communication Journal* 74, no. 1 (2009): 21.

⁸ *Justified: The Complete First Season*. directed by Tony Goldwyn (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

⁹ "Fire in the Hole," *Justified: The Complete First Season*. directed by Michael Dinner (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

¹⁰ Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 3.

¹¹ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 140.

¹² Intertextual references in *Justified* appear frequently and take different forms. A partial list includes: a movie poster for the film *Tombstone* (1993) hangs over Art Mullen's desk in the

Marshal's building in Kentucky; the snitch Pinter refers to Raylan as "Wild Bill" ("Fixer" 1.3); Raylan remembers watching the televised 1950s Westerns *Rawhide* and *Have Gun - Will Travel* with his Aunt Helen ("The Lord of War and Thunder" 1.5); Boyd labels one of the workers in the methamphetamine trailer "masked man", a reference to *The Lone Ranger* ("The Hammer" 1.10); Doyle Bennett, the corrupt sheriff in Harlan County, threatens that he may want to "O.K. Corral it" in "'Full Commitment'" (2.11); and Raylan refers to Doyle as "Quick Draw McGraw" in "Reckoning" (2.12).

¹³ "Fire in the Hole," *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

¹⁴ Westerfelhaus et al., "Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO's *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet," 30.

¹⁵ "Fire in the Hole," *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

¹⁶ qtd. in Rachel Dean-Ruzicka, "Vengeance, Healing and Justice: Post 9/11 Culture Through the Lens of *CSI*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 26 (2009): 119.

¹⁷ "Blowback," *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Jon Avnet (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

¹⁸ McVeigh, *The American Western*, 217.

¹⁹ qtd. in Dean-Ruzicka, "Vengeance, Healing and Justice: Post 9/11 Culture Through the Lens of *CSI*," 119.

²⁰ "The Collection," *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Rob Holcomb (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

²¹ Westerfelhaus et al., "Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO's *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet," 31.

²² Westerfelhaus et al., “Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO’s *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet,” 26.

²³ “Fixer,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Frederick King Keller (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

²⁴ Harrison-Kahan, “Inside *Inside Man*: Spike Lee and Post-9/11 Entertainment,” 45.

²⁵ “Fixer,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

²⁶ Ironically, Curtis is killed later in “Fixer” in a “showdown” that occupies a similar mise-en-scene, when his self-serving partner in the kidnapping scheme shoots him after Curtis attempts to playfully “train” him how to draw like a real cowboy.

²⁷ “Long in the Tooth,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Adam Arkin (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

²⁸ Westerfelhaus et al., “Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO’s *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet,” 24.

²⁹ In this sense, the Rollie character may be peripherally connected to the Robin Hood archetype, but *Justified* utilizes its chief antagonistic anti-hero, Boyd Crowder, as a true believer in illegally moving wealth from rich to poor, as will be discussed.

³⁰ “Long in the Tooth,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

³¹ “Long in the Tooth,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

³² “Blind Spot,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Michael Watkins (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

³³ *Justified: The Complete First Season*. directed by John Dahl (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

³⁴ Sean Bridgers, the actor who portrays Virgil in “The Hammer”, previously appeared with Timothy Olyphant, the actor who plays Raylan, in the other major Hollywood television Western made after 9/11, HBO’s *Deadwood*. Bridgers’ appearance in *Justified*, as well as the appearances of a few of Olyphant’s former co-stars from *Deadwood* (including Peter Jason [“The Collection”], W. Earl Brown [“Blowback”], and Jim Beaver [“Cottonmouth” 2.5]) serve as intertextual reminders that Raylan Givens is a narrative ancestor of lawman Seth Bullock, the character portrayed by Olyphant in *Deadwood*.

³⁵ “Hatless,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Peter Werner (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

³⁶ “For Blood or Money,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by John Dahl (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

³⁷ “Blaze of Glory,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by John Avnet (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

³⁸ Westerfelhaus et al., “Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO’s *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet,” 33.

³⁹ Raylan’s emotionalism also inspires illegal activity of the non-violent sort. His passion for his ex-wife, Winona, catalyzes his knowing cover-up of an analogical “bank robbery”. The cash Winona steals from the Marshal’s Service vault had been used as evidence in a bank robbery from decades before (“Save My Love” 2.7), so Raylan’s decision to intentionally mislead his own superior when the Marshals search for the money makes him an accomplice in the theft.

⁴⁰ “The Collection,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁴¹ “Blind Spot,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁴² “Fire in the Hole,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁴³ “Fire in the Hole,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁴⁴ Joshua Gunn, “The Rhetoric of Exorcism: George W. Bush and the Return of Political Demonology,” *Western Journal of Communication* 68 (2004): 12.

⁴⁵ “Fire in the Hole,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁴⁶ An important theme in postwar Westerns is “the place of the returning veteran” (Neale 140). Boyd and the other ex-soldiers in *Justified* are usually troubled, each personality a critical comment on American military action since 9/11. Virtually every veteran in the series suffers from characteristics that are implied consequences from his role in a war. Raylan’s father, Arlo Givens, a serviceman during the Vietnam conflict (“Fathers and Sons” 1.12), is shady and abusive, and notes that his own fear-mongering father’s god “was the Lord of War” (“The Lord of War and Thunder”). Tim Gutterson, the Marshal Service’s expert sniper, is seen drinking, drunk, or alone whenever he’s off duty (in “Veterans” and “The I of the Storm” [2.3]) and Art expresses concern for Tim’s mental welfare in “The I of the Storm”, which, like other postmodern portrayals of inscrutable soldiers, compels the audience to “question the appropriateness of government training of assassins.” (Dean-Ruzicka 125). And Lucky, a young grunt of the second Iraq war, holes himself inside a Veteran’s club with a live grenade after he’s told that he’ll be redeployed to Afghanistan, only to be talked into the hands of the authorities by Arlo (“Fathers and Sons”).

⁴⁷ “Fire in the Hole,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁴⁸ Westerfelhaus et al., “Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO’s *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet,” 18.

⁴⁹ “Riverbrook,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Michael Dinner (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

⁵⁰ “Blind Spot,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁵¹ qtd. in Gunn, “The Rhetoric of Exorcism: George W. Bush and the Return of Political Demonology,” 13.

⁵² “The Hammer,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by John Dahl (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

⁵³ Shaun Treat, “How America Learned to Stop Worrying and Cynically ENJOY! The Post 9/11 Superhero Zeitgeist,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. 6.1 (2009): 106.

⁵⁴ After Raylan and the Marshals depart the camp empty handed, Boyd and the remainder of his followers jump into action, clearing dirt and obstacles that cover Bobby Joe’s hiding place, a box in a hole in the ground. Raylan must have forgotten that George W. Bush had proclaimed that “we will find those who did it; we will smoke them out of their holes” (Gunn 14).

⁵⁵ “Veterans,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁵⁶ “Fathers and Sons,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Michael Katleman (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

⁵⁷ Gunn, “The Rhetoric of Exorcism: George W. Bush and the Return of Political Demonology,” 11.

⁵⁸ Westerfelhaus et al., “Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO’s *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet,” 24.

⁵⁹ “Fathers and Sons,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁶⁰ “Bulletville,” *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Adam Arkin (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

⁶¹ Westerfelhaus et al., “Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO’s *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet,” 24.

⁶² In “Bulletville,” Art, perplexed that Boyd would destroy his own father’s drug shipment, wonders aloud if “maybe he’s become some kind of vigilante.” Raylan’s response, “maybe he’s Batman,” makes sense. Shaun Treat writes that Batman is the perfect post-9/11 hero because of his vigilantism, but wonders if he isn’t really “a benevolent terrorist for a sympathetic crusade” (106).

⁶³ Harrison-Kahan, “Inside *Inside Man*: Spike Lee and Post-9/11 Entertainment,” 44.

⁶⁴ “Cottonmouth,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by Michael Watkins (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

⁶⁵ *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by John David Coles (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

⁶⁶ Walter Metz, “‘Mother Needs You’: Kevin Costner’s *Open Range* and the Melodramatics of the American Western,” in *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*, ed. Murray Pomerance (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), 69.

⁶⁷ “Reckoning,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by Adam Arkin (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

⁶⁸ “Bloody Harlan,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by Michael Dinner (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

⁶⁹ “Reckoning,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁷⁰ *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by Adam Arkin (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

⁷¹ “Bloody Harlan,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁷² The only major characters in *Justified* who have spouses and children are Art and Doyle, and their families do not appear in the first two seasons of the series, so an assumption of

domestic peace would be inappropriate. And Doyle's death in "Bloody Harlan" makes his unseen wife a single mother.

⁷³ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 140.

⁷⁴ "Fixer," *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁷⁵ "The Lord of War and Thunder," *Justified: The Complete First Season*, directed by Jon Avnet (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

⁷⁶ "Veterans," *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁷⁷ "Bulletville," *Justified: The Complete First Season*.

⁷⁸ "Reckoning," *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁷⁹ Art serves as the stable father figure to Raylan, though the latter's failure to forgo violence and take orders splinters the relationship. In "Debts and Accounts", Art admits, "I'm stuck with you... And you are who you are. Nothing I say has ever made any difference. No punishment I can dream up will ever change you... I don't think you're gonna live that long."

⁸⁰ "The I of the Storm," *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by Peter Werner (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

⁸¹ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 141.

⁸² "The Moonshine War," *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁸³ "Cottonmouth," *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁸⁴ "Brother's Keeper," *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by Tony Goldwyn (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

⁸⁵ "The Spoil," *Justified: The Complete Second Season*, directed by Michael Watkins (2011; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

⁸⁶ Metz, "'Mother Needs You': Kevin Costner's *Open Range* and the Melodramatics of the American Western," 63.

⁸⁷“The I of the Storm,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁸⁸ “Brother’s Keeper,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*

⁸⁹ “Reckoning,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁹⁰ qtd. in Janet Walker, “Captive Images in the Traumatic Western: *The Searchers*, *Pursued*, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and *Lone Star*.” in *Westerns: Films Through History*, ed. Janet Walker (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 245

⁹¹“The Spoil,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁹² Interestingly, Boyd refutes Raylan’s comment during the town meeting by insisting that Black Pike gave him “a second chance” and that he believes “they’re here to help” (“The Spoil”). No matter the context, these two remain at odds.

⁹³ Harrison-Kahan, “Inside *Inside Man*: Spike Lee and Post-9/11 Entertainment,” 45.

⁹⁴ Metz, “‘Mother Needs You’: Kevin Costner’s *Open Range* and the Melodramatics of the American Western,” 65.

⁹⁵ The land that proves the turning point in negotiations in the Black Pike deal is labeled the “Indian Line Property”, buttressing the reading of the company’s strategy as a form of Manifest Destiny (“Brother’s Keeper”).

⁹⁶ “Brother’s Keeper,” *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

⁹⁷ Many residents of Harlan County refuse to accept that Mags made the deal with Black Pike out of concern for them, verbally berating her in public (“Debts and Accounts”) and spray painting graffiti on the front of her general store in acts of protest (“Full Commitment”).

⁹⁸ Walker, “Captive Images in the Traumatic Western: *The Searchers*, *Pursued*, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and *Lone Star*,” 244.

⁹⁹ Rupert Cornwell, “9/11 Lost Decade: The American Dream, and the Missing Years.”

Independent.co.uk 2011, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/911-lost-decade-the-american-dream-and-the-missing-years-2352870.html (14 Oct. 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Boyd saves Raylan's life twice in the first two seasons of the series. The first time, in "Bulletville", Boyd surprises the Miami cartel's gunman as he has his sights on Raylan, and the Marshal watches Boyd leave the scene rather than chase him down. Both times, Boyd has his own agenda that he believes Raylan will respect as repayment for the debt of a saved life.

¹⁰¹ "Bloody Harlan," *Justified: The Complete Second Season*.

¹⁰² Lynn Spigel, "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2004): 256.

¹⁰³ Alexandra Keller, "Historical Discourse and American Identity in Westerns since the Reagan Era," in *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History*, ed. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 252.

¹⁰⁴ Metz, "'Mother Needs You': Kevin Costner's *Open Range* and the Melodramatics of the American Western," 63.

¹⁰⁵ qtd. in Dean-Ruzicka, "Vengeance, Healing and Justice: Post 9/11 Culture Through the Lens of *CSI*," 125.