

**Who Owns History?**  
**The Construction, Deconstruction, and Purpose of the**  
*Main Line Myth*

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**Abstract**

This thesis analyzes class duality in suburban Philadelphia between 1870 and 1930. The story below begins with the creation of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company in 1846 and the subsequent construction of a “main line” to Philadelphia. In response to urban industrialization – a *push* – and the emergence of a suburban pastoral ideal – a *pull* – social elites fled from Philadelphia during the second half of the nineteenth century and constructed country estates atop the hills overlooking the rail line. The society that the elites mythicized on the Main Line crumbled in the hands of the 1929 Great Depression, marking the end “the Golden Age.” This thesis argues that the Main Line social elites, on account of exclusionary town planning and estate architecture, spawned a myth that masked the existence of a suburban servant underclass, which the elites themselves created and sustained through the maintenance of their country estates. Questions concerning the myth’s definition, makers, and ultimate purpose and societal function frame the argument.

**Contents**

Abstract	1
Introduction: The Main Line and its Myth	3
Chapter 1: Constructing the Main Line Myth	10
Chapter 2: The Sources of the Myth	20
Chapter 3: The Reality of Social Conditions on the Main Line	30
Conclusion: Processing the Main Line Myth	39
Appendix	42
Bibliography	48

## Introduction: The Main Line and its Myth

In 1846 the Pennsylvania Railroad Company (PRC) made plans to extend a “main line” of rail from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh that would allow Philadelphia to compete with New York’s Erie Canal. After the construction of the rail line, the PRC sought to develop the unused land that straddled the tracks west of Philadelphia. At first the PRC constructed summer resorts, which attracted the city’s social elite, amidst these early Philadelphian suburbs.<sup>1</sup> Upon improvements to the PRC’s commuter rail system, however, the elites who originally inhabited the suburbs, or the “Main Line”, during the summer began to establish permanent residences.<sup>2</sup> Development continued on the Main Line, resulting in what historian Nathaniel Burt, in *The Perennial Philadelphians*, describes as an “exodus” of Philadelphia’s elite.<sup>3</sup> Commencing in 1870, this exodus led to the construction of “exclusive mansions”<sup>4</sup> on the Main Line that supported “large numbers” of servants.<sup>5</sup> This “Golden Age”<sup>6</sup> on the Main Line, which originated with the exodus of the 1870s, ended in 1930 upon the onset of the Great Depression and the dissolution of the country estates.<sup>7</sup> The body of Main Line literature from this period focuses on the elites and their country estates, meanwhile overlooking the servants of this era – the Main Line’s underclass.

This thesis argues that the Main Line social elites, on account of exclusionary town planning and estate architecture, spawned a myth that masked the existence of the servant underclass, which the elites themselves created and sustained through the maintenance of

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<sup>1</sup> Farrow 40.

<sup>2</sup> Langdon 1953 328.

<sup>3</sup> Burt 533.

<sup>4</sup> Farrow 29.

<sup>5</sup> Bosworth 4.

<sup>6</sup> Kramer July 19, 1979 17.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace 209.

their country estates. The argument poses the questions: what *is* the Main Line myth? *Who* created the myth, and why? What purpose or function does the myth serve, and for whom? Before answering these questions, however, this thesis contextualizes the myth.

As stated above, the erasure of the underclass at the hands of the social elites precipitated a myth. Though not fully constructed until Chapter 1, the myth portrays the Main Line as an exclusive, socially elite society that stands impenetrable to non-elite outsiders. Social outsider Stephen Birmingham spins the myth in *The Main Line*, an article found in Holiday, for those unfamiliar with the Main Line:

To find what the talk *is* about, you have to venture off Lancaster Avenue for a little distance. Here you find yourself in a trim suburb with clipped hedges and manicured lawns, with houses showing a Pennsylvanian fondness for brick or stone construction. Or you can find yourself in a landscape of rolling, wooded hills, green fields dotted with lakes and ponds (dotted, in turn, with ducks and swans), where roads wind narrowly in and out of shadowy ravines, part old rail fences and stone walls, across old bridges and beside cascading waterfalls. It is in these boskier regions that the rich of the Main Line live, and it is easy to understand why this has been called one of the most physically beautiful residential areas in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

In 1922, John W. Townsend demonstrated consciousness of the myth in The Old “Main Line”: “[...] the reading public judges the whole by the few, so that the Main Line seems to some to be largely a land of dinners and dances, of hunters and horse shows”.<sup>9</sup>

Though Townsend, himself a Main Liner, does not deny the existence of an exclusive society – a society that the dinners, dances, hunters, and horse shows distinguish – on the Main Line, his critique incites further penetration into and reflection on Philadelphia’s western suburbs; Townsend’s insights raise questions concerning romanticized Main Line literature. While not necessarily untrue, this literature masks and hyperbolizes facets of Main Line society.

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<sup>8</sup> Birmingham 88.

<sup>9</sup> Townsend 105.

Though the myth does not provide a comprehensive portrait of Main Line society, it retains value as an accepted reality. Main Line historians throughout the twentieth-century, negligent of Townsend's observations, solely illustrate the Main Line's elite. For instance, Main Liner and historian William Morrison demonstrates myth-making tendencies in his introduction to The Main Line: Country Houses of Philadelphia's Storied Suburb, 1870-1930:

For us, though, 'Main Line' will refer to the gently undulating landscape on either side of that railroad right-of-way and the distinguished, often elegant, and sometimes improbable, country houses that rose upon it between 1870 and 1930.<sup>10</sup>

Defining "Main Line", Morrison limits his discussion to the landscape and estates of the elite, an interpretation that reflects the history of the Main Line. Michael P. McCarthy critiques the historical value of myth, which he frames as stereotype, in *Corrupt and Contented? Philadelphia's Stereotypes and Suburban Growth on the Main Line*:

Stereotypes are something else that we urban historians are no longer quite so comfortable with. To be sure, we never consciously base our assumptions on stereotypes, but in reality we often do, by using a point of view popularized by a respected authority who was 'on the scene,' so to speak, way back when history was being made.<sup>11</sup>

The authors and historians of the Main Line's Golden Age, oftentimes elite, represented this "respected authority" between 1870 and 1930. Documenting a socially segregated society, as seen in Chapter 3, these historians illuminate the elites' history while they ignore the underclass' existence. As a result, subsequent historians popularized this elite perspective of Main Line history: an exclusive society impenetrable to non-elites.

A thin body of work illuminates the underclass that supported this elite society. For instance, Marvin E. Porch's 1938 The Philadelphia Main Line Negro: A Social,

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<sup>10</sup> Morrison 1.

<sup>11</sup> McCarthy 112.

Economic, and Educational Survey studies the Main Line's black community during the 1930s. While he notes the "countless beautiful estates" on the Main Line,<sup>12</sup> he writes of an underclass that moved to the Main Line, "[...] purely for economic reasons, where there would be opportunity to secure employment as domestics, gardeners, landscapers, butlers, chauffeurs, or laborers."<sup>13</sup> Thus, while the myth portrays a society that, for the most part, did actually exist, it ignores the population that supported the elites.

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 constructs the myth through two movies – *The Philadelphia Story* and *Kitty Foyle* – and refers to Main Line literature composed during the Golden Age. After presenting the plots and settings of the movies, the chapter poses its underlying question: what *is* the Main Line myth? The above sources, when highlighted with historical texts, cast a façade of social and geographical impenetrability over Main Line society. As impenetrability implies the interaction of more than one social class, the chapter deals with a stark class duality of elites and non-elites. "Non-elite", a broad category, represents any person not included in Main Line or Philadelphia elite society. An often ambiguous classification, Chapter 2 defines the term "elite" in the context of the Golden Age.

According to the movies, Main Liners reinforce their social status through intra-class marriage, which consolidates elite families and denies the entrance of social outsiders. The movies also depict the Main Line as geographically impenetrable, as non-elite intruders live in Philadelphia: physical distance mirrors social distance. Illustrating the Main Line as an exclusive elite society, the two movies advance the elite perspective of their Main Line authors, Philip Barry and Christopher Morley, both ignorant of the

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<sup>12</sup> Porch 15.

<sup>13</sup> Porch 20.

underclass that supported their society.

Chapter 2 answers the following question: why did Main Liners self-segregate themselves from the underclass? This self-segregation, achieved through the social and geographical exclusion outlined in Chapter 1, requires a four-tiered analysis. Firstly, Chapter 2 discusses the social centrality of family in elite Philadelphia. Aspiring toward elite status, Philadelphians practiced social reproduction, a process involving intra-class marriage that perpetuated a family's reputation, the defining element of Philadelphia's social hierarchy. In light of this polemic, Chapter 2 secondly contextualizes mid-nineteenth-century Philadelphia. This section focuses on the city's industrialization and immigration. Attracted to Philadelphia's industrialization, immigrants – the city's new underclass – flooded into the city and blurred the city's social and spatial boundaries, threatening the elites' social reproduction. Essentially, social pressures in Philadelphia *pushed* the elite out of the city, while an idealized notion of suburbia *pulled* elites out of the city. This ideal frames the third section of the chapter.

Suburban philosophy emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in response to industrialization. The suburban ideal, centered on the family, encouraged the social reproduction that supported elite Philadelphia; in theory, suburbia represented a socially homogeneous society, an image contrary to the industrialization and immigration of Philadelphia. When PRC enabled commuting between the city and suburbs, elites seized the opportunity to forge their own suburban ideal.

The fourth section of Chapter 2 argues that Main Liners, in search of an ideal, framed the Main Line as the British countryside. Their country lifestyle stood contrary to the urban industrialism of Philadelphia. However, despite their efforts to forge an ideal,

Main Liners simply created a new underclass in the suburbs.

Chapter 3 illuminates the reality of social conditions on the Main Line. Though the exclusive society presented in the movies did exist on the Main Line, history overlooks the society of underclass servants. In constructing country estates that often required dozens of servants, Main Liners created and sustained a Main Line underclass. In analyzing the physical social structure of the Main Line, Chapter 3 demonstrates an underlying ignorance of the underclass among elites. Focusing on planning and architecture, the chapter argues that while an underclass existed on the Main Line, exclusionary planning and architecture masked this existence. The conclusion synthesizes the observations and arguments advanced in each chapter.

Throughout the nineteenth-century, elite social status in Philadelphia depended on family reputation. This reputation, in turn, demanded successive generations of social reproduction. Therefore, when Philadelphia's immigration and industrialization threatened the elites' social space, the elites retreated from Philadelphia to the Main Line. The Main Line, in light of suburban philosophy, represented a family ideal: a homogenous society that facilitated social reproduction.

In *physically* constructing this *social* ideal, however, Main Liners created and sustained a servant underclass. A state of mutual dependence resulted – the elites on the servants for labor, the servants on the elites for income. An underclass society developed in tandem with the Main Line's elite society, resulting in a paradox for the elites, as the realization of an ideal society required the labor of an underclass. This paradoxical relationship inspired the planning and architecture of exclusion, which the elites employed to segregate themselves from their servants. Elite society therefore, while

dependent on the underclass, operated in ignorance of its servants. So, when authors and historians from the Golden Age documented the Main Line, they illustrated *elite* society because members of the underclass, whether tucked behind an estate's pantry or secluded in slums between railroad tracks, stood subject to the elites' exclusion.

## Chapter 1: Constructing the Main Line Myth

This chapter constructs and analyzes the Main Line myth through cinematic depictions and romanticized histories of the Main Line's 1870 to 1930 Golden Age.<sup>14</sup> In creating the myth, these sources represent an elite society impenetrable to social and geographical outsiders. The movies *Kitty Foyle* and *The Young Philadelphians*, though fictional, advance Main Liners' self-perceptions of their society. Elite Haverfordian Christopher Morley authored *Kitty Foyle* in 1939 and famously romanticizes the Main Line in his poem *Paoli Local*. Philip Barry, who wrote *The Philadelphia Story*, also in 1939, gained inspiration from visits to his friend Colonel Robert L. Montgomery's Main Line estate Ardrossan; he similarly fashioned Katharine Hepburn's lead role after Montgomery's wife Hope Scott.<sup>15</sup> These two movies reflect the attitudes of elite Main Liners, revealing the myth as a product of the Main Line itself. Accounts of the Main Line during the Golden Age, and those written in romantic retrospect, resonantly advance the perspectives of elite Main Liners.

Mark Alan Hewitt writes in his *Remembering the Philadelphia Story*, which serves as the introduction to William Morrison's *The Main Line: Country Houses of Philadelphia's Storied Suburb 1870-1930*, that the Main Line "[...] began to have a cachet of exclusivity and even mystery in popular culture."<sup>16</sup> *Kitty Foyle* and *The Philadelphia Story* accentuate Hewitt's notion of exclusivity through their repeated enforcement of social impenetrability. Furthermore, Hewitt's title, *Remembering the Philadelphia Story*, demonstrates the utility of constructing the Main Line myth through movies, as he associates the Main Line's Golden Age with fictitious cinematic accounts:

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<sup>14</sup> Kramer July 19, 1979 17.

<sup>15</sup> Morrison 135.

<sup>16</sup> Hewitt xvi.

to Hewitt, the myth blends with reality.

Within this myth there exists a social class duality: elites, and non-elites.

Throughout the movies and other fictional and non-fictional accounts of the Main Line, the elites conform to their society's standards and deny the entrance of non-elites. An array of Main Line historians, including Nathaniel Burt, John Groff, and William Morrison, though writing about the non-fictional society, reinforces the myth presented in the cinematic depictions; their interpretations of the Main Line's history illustrate a similar society of social and geographical exclusion. With an underlying message of social impenetrability, both *Kitty Foyle* and *The Philadelphia Story* depict the intersection of elites and social outsiders.

The theatrical adaptation to Morley's *Kitty Foyle: The Natural History of a Woman* narrates the relationship between Kitty, a working-class girl from Philadelphia, and Wynnewood Strafford, an elite Main Liner. While Wyn initially hires Kitty as a secretary at his publishing company, their relationship extends beyond the workplace. Early in the movie, Kitty's father Tom Foyle warns her of Main Liners' rejection of social outsiders, though Kitty chooses to ignore him. When Wyn's business fails, he returns to his family and Main Line society, where he stands subject to elite conformity. Despite Kitty and Wyn's mutual desire to marry, the Straffords denounce Wyn's marriage to a non-elite. Ultimately, these class barriers prevent Wyn and Kitty's union. *The Philadelphia Story* presents a similar scenario.

Written the same year as *Kitty Foyle*, Barry's *The Philadelphia Story* entered theaters in 1940. In *The Philadelphia Story*, the lead character Tracy Lord navigates class boundaries as she chooses a groom. Presented with three men from an array of

social strata, Tracy reinforces her social class when she re-marries C. K. Dexter Haven, a fellow elite Main Liner, despite their previous divorce. The other perspective grooms, white-collar Macaulay Connor and nouveau riche George Kittredge, lack the social status necessary to enter Main Line society. Set the day before the Lord-Kittredge wedding at the Lords' Main Line estate, the movie narrates Tracy's interactions with the grooms. The three men converge when *Spy Magazine* publisher Sidney Kidd, determined to photograph the elite wedding for his magazine, lures Dexter into a blackmail plot. Kidd, who possesses adulterous photographs of Tracy's father, Mr. Lord, sends reporters Macaulay Connor and Liz Imbrie to the wedding posed as Dexter's friends; if the Lords refuse the reporters, Kidd threatens to publish the photographs of Mr. Lord. The night before the wedding, Tracy, while inebriated, takes a swim with Macaulay. George reacts judgmentally to Tracy's actions, and they ultimately choose to cancel the wedding. With the wedding guests waiting inside the Lord estate during this affair, Dexter re-proposes to Tracy, and they decide to re-marry. Whereas Kitty and Wyn cannot overcome barriers that keep them apart, Tracy and Dexter cannot fight the forces that eventually bring them together. *The Philadelphia Story* thus illustrates the Main Line from an elite perspective, whereas *Kitty Foyle*, though representative of elite perspective, narrates from a non-elite point-of-view. An undercurrent of social geography parallels these elite and non-elite perspectives of the Main Line, for in both movies non-elite *Philadelphians* attempt to penetrate *Main Line* society. Geographical impenetrability, therefore, mirrors social impenetrability. Despite differing perspectives, however, both movies depict a socially impenetrable Main Line.

Morley's *Kitty Foyle* demonstrates the parallel between social and geographical

separation. *Kitty Foyle* introduces Main Liners with a scene at the Philadelphia Assembly, an elite ball that Kitty attends not as a participant, but as a spectator from the street. Tom Foyle first uses the term “Main Liners” to describe these elite who capture Kitty’s imagination through what Mark Alan Hewitt’s describes as “mystery”. In fact, Tom uses the terms “elite” and “Main Line” synonymously, identifying the Main Line as an exclusively elite society. Kitty’s continued attraction to elite society provokes Tom to describe the “rich Main Liners” as “monkeys”, while Kitty, enmeshed in the mystery of Main Line society, views them as “princes and princesses”. Members of a socially, economically, and geographically segregated working class, the Foyles represent a non-elite perspective of the Main Line and elucidate the social separation that the Main Liners sought. Thus, portrayed not only as working-class, but also as city dwellers, the Foyles relate geographical and social separation when they label the social elite as “Main Liners” and not “Philadelphians”. Similarly, *The Philadelphia Story’s* “Spy Magazine”, geared toward a non-elite readership, writes of a separate and distinct “Main Line Society” in order to attract public interest; *Spy*, like Kitty, consumes the myth's mystery. The consumption of myth and mystery recalls Townsend’s quote about the reading public, who judge the Main Line as an exclusively elite society of theatricality. Through the above acknowledgements of the Main Line’s social and geographical exclusivity, the non-elites demonstrate the myth’s purpose: the representation of an impenetrable society. Additionally, this demonstration advances a Main Liner’s – Morley’s – conception of the Main Line. Morley and Barry thus construct the myth through their representations of non-elite.

Wynnewood Strafford, whose name reveals his Main Line status,<sup>17</sup> represents Kitty's "prince charming", or means of entrance into Main Line society. Wyn, who employs Kitty's father, offers her a position at his magazine *Philly: A Magazine of Philadelphia for Philadelphians*. Though himself a Main Liner, Wyn retains his "Philadelphian" title because he refuses to dissociate Main Line and Philadelphian society. Hence, Wyn's treatment of geographical and social labels contrasts Tom Foyle's. Himself an elite Philadelphian, Nathaniel Burt describes this phenomenon, known as "elastic Philadelphianism", in *The Perennial Philadelphians: The Anatomy of an American Aristocracy*. Chapter 2 develops this term as it relates to Philadelphia's elite families:

The oddest aspect of Philadelphia suburbia, and one that often strikes observers from out of town, is the fact that no matter how far the Philadelphia suburbs spread beyond the official bounds of the city, the inhabitants always seem to think of themselves as Philadelphians.<sup>18</sup>

For Philadelphia's elite, "The Main Line became an extension of the urban social world, essentially moving Society a few miles west along the railroad [...]."<sup>19</sup> This view of Philadelphian society allowed for Burt's elastic Philadelphianism and also opposed non-elites' perceptions of social relations. For instance, while *The Philadelphia Story* portrays Main Line families and society, it uses "Philadelphia" in its title – not "Main Line" – because it advances an elite perspective. Thus, despite attempts of the non-elite to separate Main Liners from the city (i.e. Tom Foyle and *Spy Magazine*), the suburban social elites retained their Philadelphian title. The Main Line elites gained the façade of separation and distinction that they sought, but remained atop Philadelphia's social

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<sup>17</sup> See Figure 1 in Appendix.

<sup>18</sup> Burt 535.

<sup>19</sup> Groff 87.

ladder.

Kitty remains fascinated with the exclusive Main Line society after taking a position at Wyn's *Philly Magazine*. A friend of Kitty's remarks that Wyn's elite society "was all that she had ever dreamed of". Morley thus uses Kitty to emphasize the Main Line's exclusivity and mystery, for only through dreams can she envision entrance into elite society. Burt claims that the Main Liners themselves conceived of their society as a "dream world", which suggests that Morley uses Kitty to advance his vision of the Main Line.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the Main Line's social and geographical impenetrability upholds its exclusivity and mystery, and the resulting social segregation allows for Kitty's dreams.

Outsiders' failed attempts to marry into elite families and enter Main Line society reveal the Main Line's social impenetrability. Tom Foyle's statement that "Main Liners always marry each other" embodies manifestations of the Main Line myth in both movies. John Groff's dissertation *Green Country Towns: The Development of Philadelphia's Main Line 1870-1915* reinforces Foyle's claim when he acknowledges "The clear definition of social circles and behavior, and the incessant intermarriage among the elite [...]".<sup>21</sup> *Kitty Foyle*, in tandem with Groff's – himself a Main Liner – observations, demonstrates the role of intermarriage in forcing social conformity. For instance, Wyn founds *Philly Magazine* in search of independence from his family. However, when the magazine fails, Wyn returns to his family because a family will demand that he remain on the Main Line in order to receive his inheritance. At the same time that *Philly* fails, Wyn and Kitty approach his family with their marriage proposal, which includes a move to Chicago. When confronted with the obligatory Main Line

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<sup>20</sup> Burt 534.

<sup>21</sup> Groff 87.

residence outlined in the will, Kitty realizes that, based on their class differences, she cannot marry Wyn. *Kitty Foyle* therefore portrays the Strafford family, and all Main Line families, as social institutions that require conformity and inherited cultural capital for acceptance. Ultimately, Kitty and Wyn's differing social statuses, and Kitty's refusal to submit to the Main Line social institution, prevents their marriage. Main Line families thus uphold an impenetrable society.

Social outsiders rarely enter into Philadelphia's elite society given family restrictions on individual choice in marriage, thereby ensuring impenetrability. *The Philadelphia Story* differs from *Kitty Foyle* in that it advances an elite perspective on the Main Line, which it accomplishes through its Main Line setting and elite central character, Tracy Lord. Despite its difference in perspective from *Kitty Foyle*, *The Philadelphia Story* constructs a similar myth; threatened with the near-entrance of non-elites into elite society, the Main Line remains impenetrable. In order for non-elite *Spy Magazine* reporters Macaulay Connor and Liz Imbrie to enter the Lord estate, they must pose as Dexter's friends. Connor and Imbrie thus expose the barriers that non-elites face upon entry into Main Line society: without the guise of elite status (Dexter), they cannot enter the Main Line. William Morrison affirms this perception when he quotes an early twentieth century Main Liner who remarks, "[...] the Main Line is not so much a location as a state of mind [...]" where "[...] everyone here knows everyone else, or, if they don't they never will".<sup>22</sup> In essence, the elites in *The Philadelphia Story*, along with the non-fictional Main Liners that Morrison describes above, remain ever-ignorant of social outsiders. *The Philadelphia Story* shows that, despite his recent financial success, George Kittredge's nouveau riche status prevents his entrance into Main Line society.

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<sup>22</sup> Morrison 1.

George demonstrates the difference between old and new money through his lack of sailing knowledge (a sport that Dexter masters), and his inability to mount a horse – two elite recreational pursuits. Similarly, Macaulay Connor's white-collar status negates his relationship with Tracy. Thus, of the three men vying for her affections, Tracy chooses to remarry Dexter, the only true member of her Main Line society. Once again, a Main Line insider – Barry – portrays the Main Line as an impenetrable, exclusive society through intra-class marriage. Tracy and Dexter's marriage, in addition to Tom Foyle's views on the issue, illustrate the mythic Main Line society. In *Kitty Foyle* and *The Philadelphia Story*, the geographical separation facilitates the above social distinction.

The scene at the Strafford estate, the only physical representation of the Main Line in *Kitty Foyle*, reinforces the family's impenetrability. Upon Kitty's initial entrance into the Strafford's main parlor, the family's elite circle around her for inspection. After learning of Wyn and Kitty's planned marriage, the Straffords remain silent in their disapproval. Then, having contemplated the marriage proposal, the Straffords explain to Kitty their plans to familiarize her with Main Line custom and, ultimately, conform her. In addition, they reject Wyn's plans to leave Philadelphia for Chicago and remind him that his inheritance rests upon his occupation of Darby Mill. These demands ultimately prevent Wyn and Kitty's marriage. Geographical conformity thus upholds the social conformity noted earlier. The forced acceptance of Main Line society, both socially and geographically, demonstrates the conformity of elite Philadelphia. In reference to geographical impenetrability, Burt describes Main Line estates:

[...] Philadelphians from 1880 to 1930 built up their private dream world, a rural fantasy, first of vast estates surrounded by miles of walls, with miles of driveway

leading to great craggy mansions [...]. [...] the Old Philadelphians tucked themselves into an impenetrable green maze.<sup>23</sup>

Desiring social exclusion, elites moved to the Main Line to physically escape the city.

Chapter 3 analyzes cases of geographical and architectural exclusion on the Main Line.

The Main Line myth thus encompasses both social *and* geographical exclusion, conformity, and impenetrability.

The “craggy mansions” that Burt describes, when represented in *The Philadelphia Story*, embody elites’ views of non-elites. In *The Philadelphia Story*, Imbrie and Connor’s initial reactions to the Lord estate, which Barry based on the actual Main Line mansion Ardrossan, reveal their intrusion of elite social space.<sup>24</sup> Describing the South parlor as inhospitably “cold”, Connor and Imbrie demonstrate their social discomfort in Main Line society. After leaving the South parlor, Connor wanders down a hallway and inspects a table of antiques. Soon after handling a silver piece, a servant appears over Connor’s shoulder, causing Connor to leave the room. This scene illustrates Main Line estates as exclusive through their social discomfort. Just as Connor and Imbrie do not belong in Main Line estates, they do not belong in elite society.

As demonstrated above, the cinematic depictions of the Main Line construct a society of social and geographical exclusion. Family networks guard against the entrance of non-elites into elite society, and the geographical separation of the Main Line from the city reinforces the elites’ social separation. As elite Main Liners authored both stories, both *The Philadelphia Story* and *Kitty Foyle* advance a Main Line conception of this elite society. Hewitt’s *Remembering the Philadelphia Story*, in title alone, demonstrates the influence of movie portrayals in shaping the historical depiction of the Main Line; even

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<sup>23</sup> Burt 533-4.

<sup>24</sup> Morrison 135.

today, the families and estates depicted in *The Philadelphia Story* characterize perceptions of the Main Line's Golden Age.

## Chapter 2: The Sources of the Myth

The Bryn Mawr estate Glenmede stands as an historic relic of domestic architecture on the Main Line. The first of his family on the Main Line, Joseph Newton Pew purchased Glenmede in 1908. John Groff, in a recent lecture on “The Pew Family and Their Houses on the Main Line”, reflected on the Pew family: “Growing up on the Main Line, the name Pew always had a special meaning to me. [...] it was the name that belonged to the owners of many of the mansions that crested hilltops [...]”.<sup>25</sup>

According to the Main Liner Groff, the Main Line’s families, in addition to its estates and landscape, symbolize exclusivity. In a demonstration of this exclusivity, elites in *Kitty Foyle* and *The Philadelphia Story* fortify their society through intra-class marriage and thereby illustrate family as the basis for impenetrability. This chapter analyzes the role of family in sculpting the Main Line as a social and geographical entity. Ultimately, the centrality of family in elite Philadelphia spawned the Main Line and its myth. While many credit the Pennsylvania Railroad Company with the Main Line’s growth, an analysis of the elites’ attitudes concerning family, Philadelphia, and the emergent concept of suburbia reveals that the railroad simply *facilitated* the elites’ move to the Main Line.

This chapter first constructs the meaning and definition of family to elite Philadelphians. When considered along with incipient conceptions of suburbia in the nineteenth century, these definitions reveal suburbia’s embrace of ideal Philadelphian family values. Furthermore, Philadelphia’s nineteenth century industrialization threatened the city’s elite social space, which increased the suburbs’ attraction.

Concurrent with the emergent suburban ideal and Philadelphia’s industrialization, the

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<sup>25</sup> Groff 2005.

Pennsylvania Railroad Company laid its main line to Pittsburgh and encouraged development along these tracks. The initial migration of railroad executives to Philadelphia's "ideal" suburbs granted the Main Line social acceptance, and the exodus of Philadelphia's elite ensued. Amidst this process of push and pull stood the elites' family ideology.

### **Part 1: Family in Elite Philadelphia**

In Philadelphia, recognition as a social elite depended on one's network of friends and family. The ultimate determinant of social status – family name – established a society in which marriage and social reproduction secured elite status. E. Digby Baltzell qualifies "elite" status in Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class. Baltzell bases his analysis on family names – a generational process – and two biographical indices, *Who's Who* and the *Social Register*. These two indices list a given city's elites on the basis of occupation, residence, religion, education, and club membership.<sup>26</sup> Elites also shared race – the Main Line consisted of a white elite – , social activities, and intermarriage.<sup>27</sup> The Main Line's original elites drew from this population of Philadelphians whose names appeared in the *Who's Who* and the *Social Register*. As The Lower Merion Historical Society notes in its history of the Main Line, "Once upon a time, the population of the Main Line (between roughly the 1870s and 1930s) was clearly layered and labeled [...]."<sup>28</sup> In elite Philadelphia, family name determined this layering and labeling. Main Liner Nathaniel Burt<sup>29</sup> states in *The Perennial Philadelphians* that,

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<sup>26</sup> Baltzell 8.

<sup>27</sup> Baltzell 7.

<sup>28</sup> The Lower Merion Historical Society 3.

<sup>29</sup> Draper 53.

[...] the ideal Philadelphia in-group, the group Philadelphians above all want to be in the middle of, the ultimate club, is the Family; not the immediate family circle but the total family of in-laws and connections – ‘kin’.<sup>30</sup>

Above Burt describes the dependence of an individual’s status on family status during the Main Line’s Golden Age. The social hierarchy in Philadelphia therefore rested primarily upon relations with established social elite, not necessarily fortune or occupation. Within this kin system, “[...] everyone knows everything about everyone [...]”.<sup>31</sup> This acute mutual awareness of fellow elites, which *Who’s Who* and the *Social Register* instilled, ensured societal conformity, for as Morrison claims, elites refused to accept those they could not recognize. Elites’ investment in family name thus encouraged intra-class marriage, along with “The clear definition of social circles [...]”,<sup>32</sup> which fortified elite society and ensured impenetrability; as seen in Chapter 1, both Barry and Morley’s fictions abidingly illustrate these forms of social reproduction in constructing the Main Line myth.

Elite social reproduction demanded not one generation of intra-class marriage, but successive generations of societal conformity. Burt quotes Richard Powell, author of *The Philadelphian*, in reference to social reproduction among elites: “Marrying well was part of it, but Philadelphia wanted to find out if the blood lines would run true from generation to generation”.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, elites married with the intention to breed their children as future socialites because Philadelphia society scrutinized each generation – “everyone knows everything about everyone else.” As Groff writes, social reproduction embodied the elites’ “[...] attempt to be assimilated into what was viewed by many as the

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<sup>30</sup> Burt 40-41.

<sup>31</sup> Burt 41.

<sup>32</sup> Groff 87.

<sup>33</sup> Burt 42.

ultimate reward of wealth: ‘Proper Philadelphia’ Society.”<sup>34</sup> Though Philadelphia adequately facilitated the elites’ social reproduction throughout the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, an alternative site of reproduction arose in the mid-nineteenth.

## **Part 2: An Industrializing Philadelphia**

Philadelphia’s mid-nineteenth century industrialization precipitated social upheavals that ultimately resulted in the development of the Main Line. Sam Bass Warner discusses the forces of industrialization in The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth. Categorizing 1860 Philadelphia as a “modern big city”, Warner emphasizes the relationship between industrialization and immigration in reshaping Philadelphia’s urban fabric.<sup>35</sup> Warner frames his study of Philadelphia’s industrialization between 1830 and 1860, an interval during which the city’s population rose from 161,410 to 565,529.<sup>36</sup> According to Warner, “[...] no large stock of old housing existed to absorb and to ghettoize the waves of poor immigrants,” who consequently “[...] flooded into every ward.”<sup>37</sup> The immigration inherent in industrialization subverted existing social segregation and forged a heterogeneous Philadelphia.<sup>38</sup>

The flood of immigrants into the city eventually forced the elites to the suburbs, as the increasing presence of immigrants threatened the elites’ guise of impenetrability. John Groff writes that immigrants penetrated the elite enclave of Washington Square in the 1830s and ‘40s, which thereby pushed the elites westward to Rittenhouse Square in the 1850s and eventually the Main Line in the 1860s.<sup>39</sup> Fishman upholds Groff’s claims

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<sup>34</sup> Groff 58-60.

<sup>35</sup> Warner 49.

<sup>36</sup> Warner 50.

<sup>37</sup> Warner 56.

<sup>38</sup> Warner 57.

<sup>39</sup> Groff 4, 16-17.

when he argues that railroad suburbs, like the Main Line, resulted from the bourgeoisie's need to distance themselves from the industrial city.<sup>40</sup> Elites thus retreated to the Main Line in response to the social pressures of industrialization and immigration within Philadelphia.<sup>41</sup>

### **Part 3: An Emergent Suburban Ideal**

An analysis of nineteenth century suburban philosophy, in light of the elites' emphasis on social reproduction and the industrialization of Philadelphia, reveals the impetuses behind the exodus of elites to the Main Line. Margaret Marsh's article *From Separation to Togetherness: The Social Construction of Domestic Space in American Suburbs: 1840-1915* discusses the rise of a "new domestic ideal", which portrayed the suburbs as an ideal environment for family and social reproduction.<sup>42</sup> As an ideal environment for families, the suburbs attracted elites because they emphasized the social reproduction essential to elite society and social status.

Suburbs served as an escape of the city in addition to their role as a utopia for families. Marsh, in quoting Charles Loring Brace, embraces a "greene-country town" ideology in the formation of suburbs, for elite men in the late nineteenth century, "[...] 'looked to the past, to a rural republic, to solve the problems of the modern city'".<sup>43</sup> These men, fathers of the suburbs, sought to separate themselves from the social threats of the city, namely immigration and industry, in order to breed socially elite families. Marsh offers further insight into this process: "The new suburbs, lushly landscaped, safe, homogeneous, and purged of the poor, the radical, and the ethnically suspect, offered a

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<sup>40</sup> Fishman 141.

<sup>41</sup> Groff 94.

<sup>42</sup> Marsh 522.

<sup>43</sup> Marsh 508.

seemingly foolproof environment for the creation of family harmony”.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, elites left the city because immigration threatened the family environment and impeded social reproduction. Robert Fishman’s analysis of Philadelphia’s railroad suburbs in Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia supports Marsh’s notion of suburbia as an escape: “Suburbia expressed both the increasing concentration of people and resources in the inhumanely crowded, man-made world of the great cities and kept alive an alternative image of the relationship of man and nature.”<sup>45</sup> As Fishman notes, the city’s rising population pressured the elites, who in turn sought an alternative environment of nature. So, while conditions within the city *pushed* elites out, the suburbs presented an ideal place to raise one’s family, and thus *pulled* them out of the city.

A tension arose when Main Liners strove to retain their Philadelphian status despite their self-segregation in the suburbs. In the cinematic depictions of the Main Line, only members of non-elite classes refer to “Main Line Society”, as the elite Main Liners consider themselves Philadelphians; Wyn demonstrates elites’ attachment to Philadelphia in *Kitty Foyle* when he entitles his magazine *Philly: A Magazine of Philadelphia for Philadelphians* despite his Main Line residence. William Morrison and John Groff agree that, “The Main Line became an extension of the urban social world, essentially moving Society a few miles west along the railroad [...]”<sup>46 47</sup> Morrison and Groff illuminate Burt’s term “elastic Philadelphianism”, wherein elites consider themselves Philadelphians and the Main Line as a stage for Philadelphian society. In addition to salvaging their status as Philadelphians, Main Liners retained their city occupations.

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<sup>44</sup> Marsh 522.

<sup>45</sup> Fishman 135.

<sup>46</sup> Morrison 2.

<sup>47</sup> Groff 87.

Elastic Philadelphianism essentially illustrates the Main Line as a utopia for families. While Fishman writes, “If suburbia was the bourgeois utopia, it existed in an inevitable tension with the bourgeois hell – the teeming world of the urban slum – from which suburbia could never wholly escape because the crowded city was the source of its prosperity,”<sup>48</sup> he mischaracterizes suburbanization in Philadelphia, for the Main Line elites never sought to *wholly* escape the city – just a geographical separation that complimented existing social separation. Fishman does, however, accurately elucidate both the elites’ desire to escape the physical city and their dependence on the city’s industries for wealth. This paradoxical relationship underlines the state of elastic Philadelphianism that characterized the Main Line’s Golden Age. Additionally, elites’ retention of their Philadelphian titles reinforces the Main Line as a place of social reproduction – a suburbia based on family; essentially, only elites’ *families* moved out of the city.

Elites sought a pastoral society on the Main Line that stood in contrast to the industrial city that they shaped. Nathaniel Burt believes that Main Liners “[...] were able to cultivate the illusion that they really were country folk, and forget the ugliness and contradictions of the industrial civilization that supported them”.<sup>49</sup> Hypocritically, Main Liners derived their wealth from the industrialization that they sought respite from in the suburbs. Again, the elites immersed themselves in an illusionary society, purged of the city’s immigrants and demonstrated the myth – a society devoid of social “ugliness”.

Burt reflects on the relationship between the elites and the city:

The 1920s saw the almost complete removal of upper- and middle-class Philadelphia from the city to the suburbs [...]. The owners of the city abdicated.

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<sup>48</sup> Fishman 135.

<sup>49</sup> Burt 534.

Safe beyond the range of city taxes and city politics, they lost all interest in city reform. Since they didn't have to see what was happening, they didn't care; Philadelphia became another demonstration of the dangers of absentee landlordship.<sup>50</sup>

As illustrated above, Main Liners “owned” the city. This ownership stemmed from elites' economic and social prominence in Philadelphia. Despite their ties to the city, however, Main Liners geographically separated themselves from Philadelphia, though as “absentee landlords”, they still governed the city.

Once removed from the city, Main Liners prevented the intrusion of industry. George Langdon, in an article regarding the growth of the Main Line around transportation, remarks, “One of the outstanding characteristics of the core of the Philadelphia Main Line Region is the scarcity of industrial development”.<sup>51</sup> Thus, even twenty-three years after the Golden Age concluded, the Main Line remained an exclusively residential area for families.<sup>52</sup> Also in reference to the relationship between the Main Liners and industry, Morrison writes that the elites separated themselves “[...] by their own highly developed and enduring sense of belonging to a place apart, a serene and eternal island of genteel stability [...]”.<sup>53</sup> This “place apart”, devoid of industry, illustrates the ideal that Marsh identifies. Morrison and Langdon both highlight the Main Line's impenetrability to the industrial forces of the city. In addition to the relief that suburbia provided families from immigration and industrialism, elites superimposed a cultural ideal on the Main Line.

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<sup>50</sup> Burt 533.

<sup>51</sup> Langdon 1953 333.

<sup>52</sup> Langdon 1953 333.

<sup>53</sup> Morrison 1.

#### Part 4: The Main Line Ideal

The Pennsylvania Railroad Company initiated the transformation of the Main Line from country farmland to elite suburb. Initially, the PRC developed the Main Line as a summer resort for the city's elite. Bryn Mawr native Barbara Alyce Farrow romanticizes the PRC's Bryn Mawr Hotel, which during the 1860s and '70s maintained a "[...] guest list [that] read like the 'Who's Who' of Philadelphia."<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Philadelphia's male nouveau riches spent their summers on the Main Line in order "[...] to establish their social credentials [...]" before returning to the city in autumn.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, even during its nascent stages of development, the Main Line represented an escapist ideal for the city's elite.<sup>56</sup> Expanding their social networks at the Main Line's resorts, Philadelphia's elites granted these suburbs social acceptability.<sup>57</sup> When, in the 1870s and '80s, PRC and Baldwin Locomotive encouraged their executives to construct permanent estates on the Main Line, a wave of elites followed.<sup>58</sup>

According to Marsh, the idea of a suburb as a "home town" first arose in the mid-nineteenth century due to advances in transportation technology.<sup>59</sup> This idea of suburb as hometown deviated from the Main Line's traditional function as a resort, granting Philadelphia's western suburbs the potential for year-round occupation. While the Main Line embraced the suburban ideal and drew elites from the city, its residents also emulated an English country archetype. Groff stresses the influence of "English country

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<sup>54</sup> Farrow 40.

<sup>55</sup> Groff 3.

<sup>56</sup> The Lower Merion Historical Society 80.

<sup>57</sup> Groff 19.

<sup>58</sup> Groff 3.

<sup>59</sup> Marsh 514.

life” on Main Line society during the Golden Age in his dissertation.<sup>60</sup> This mental framework for the Main Line – “country life” – demonstrates Main Liners’ efforts to mask their society’s industrial base, which Burt notes above. Writing, “The country life offered by the Main Line was an idealized concept of English gentility [...],” Groff adds a further layer to the myth – a country ideal. The Main Line thus served as a “stage” upon which the Main Liners performed their societal ideals.<sup>61</sup>

Family stands as the chief determinant of social status in Philadelphia. In establishing family status, elites employ social reproduction and intra-class marriage, two social tools that legitimize a family’s genealogy. When Philadelphia industrialized in the 1850s, immigrants flooded into the city, threatening the elites’ social spaces and impeding social reproduction. For elites, the emergent suburban ideal provided an alternative to the city’s social space, which no longer facilitated social reproduction. The PRC’s construction of the “main line” in the 1850s allowed the elites to realize this ideal in Philadelphia’s suburbs, though as Chapter 3 shows, a paradox arose.

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<sup>60</sup> Groff 62.

<sup>61</sup> Groff 4.

### **Chapter 3: The Reality of Social Conditions on the Main Line**

The synthesis of Philadelphia's industrialization and the emergent suburban ideal precipitated the Main Line. Thus, on the Main Line, Philadelphia's elite sought a pastoral society that offered respite from the city's social threats. The ultimate result of these social forces: the Main Line myth. Beneath the myriad accounts of Main Line estates and countryside, however, lies the history of an underclass that supported this society. This history shows that the suburban elites faced a social paradox, for they could not sustain country estates without, at the same time, creating an underclass of servants. In response to this situation, elites forced geographical segregation along the Main Line and subsequently erased the underclass from their romanticizations of the Main Line. Essentially, the elites excluded the underclass – comprised of their servants – from the Main Line's history because it stood contrary to idealized suburbia. As discussed in Chapter 1, historical documentation of the Golden Age rests on depictions that mirror those of Morley and Barry, who viewed the Main Line from an elite perspective.

In addition to literature, elites excluded servants through planning and architecture. The planning of exclusion confined servant housing to slums along the railroad, hidden from the estates, and prevented servants from interacting with elites. Meanwhile, the architecture of exclusion – operating within the estates – delimited socially hermetic interiors so that the elites minimized their families' exposure to servants. Ultimately, elites' desire to escape Philadelphia's underclass forced this social segregation along the Main Line; still in search of a suburban ideal, the elites conjured the Main Line myth.

Few historical sources on the Main Line's Golden Age document the underclass, but those that do base their analyses on the myth. Perhaps the first official study of Main Line "slums", Marion Bosworth's *Housing Conditions in Main Line Towns* reveals the existence of underclass developments in Ardmore, Haverford, Bryn Mawr, Rosemont, and Wayne. Bosworth, an employee of the Main Line Housing Association, conducted her research between 1910 and 1919. Marvin E. Porch also investigates the Main Line's underclass in his 1938 dissertation The Philadelphia Main Line Negro: A Social, Economic, and Educational Survey. Though analyzing race and not necessarily the underclass, Porch notes blacks' dependence on service sector employment, which therefore assigns the majority of blacks to the underclass.<sup>62</sup> While focusing on the underclass, both Bosworth and Porch acknowledge the myth's inherent reality:

From Overbrook on out, town after town is made up of beautiful houses in large grounds with winding, well-kept roads, through woodland and private parks all well kept and attractive; each town an ideal appearing town in which to live.<sup>63</sup>

Bosworth illustrates a Main Line of country estates, which she labels an "ideal", in order to construct an image that she can contrast with the slums she investigates. Once again, the mythical Main Line – the Main Line expunged of non-elites – becomes an ideal. Bosworth demonstrates the Main Line's aura of social impenetrability when, after presenting the mythical image of the Main Line, she writes, "It would seem, indeed, an incongruous place in which to seek for housing reform."<sup>64</sup> Realizing that her conclusions contrast with popular conceptions of the Main Line, Bosworth reveals the myth's effectiveness in shaping the Main Line's image. Bosworth diverges from other myth-

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<sup>62</sup> Porch 20.

<sup>63</sup> Bosworth 3.

<sup>64</sup> Bosworth 20.

building accounts of the Main Line, however, when she proceeds to discuss the Main Line's non-elite society.

Bosworth and Porch's investigations necessitated description of the myth as they argue that the underclass emerged on the Main Line in order to sustain the elites' estates. Porch writes that blacks settled on the Main Line, "[...] purely for economic reasons, where there would be opportunity to secure employment as domestics, gardeners, landscapers, butlers, chauffeurs, or laborers."<sup>65</sup> The elites thus created and sustained the underclass through their dependence on labor. Here arose a state of mutual dependence, for while the underclass depended on the elites for subsistence, the elites in turn depended on labor in "large numbers" for the maintenance of their estates.<sup>66</sup> Though Bosworth does not delve into population statistics, Porch cites the Main Line's 1930 black population at 6,073, or 7.45% of the total. In need of inexpensive housing, the Main Line's underclass constructed slums that stood contrary to the idealized Main Line.

Elites, in need of the underclass' labor, could not expunge the Main Line of its slums, but proper planning enabled them to mask these underclass nodes. Bosworth argues that the interactions between elite and non-elites on the Main Line arose from forced proximity.<sup>67</sup> For instance, while the elites could afford to commute to and from Philadelphia, servants could not and thus required housing on the Main Line.<sup>68</sup> Bosworth writes,

With these three reasons: – health and desire, and the proximity to work, drawing poor to the country, and the expulsive power of bad living conditions and

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<sup>65</sup> Porch 20.

<sup>66</sup> Bosworth 4.

<sup>67</sup> Bosworth 4.

<sup>68</sup> Bosworth 4.

insufficient work in the city, the most logical place in the world to look for poor houses would be in a wealthy community.<sup>69</sup>

Though counter-intuitive, Bosworth argues that wealthy communities precipitate underclass developments. Bosworth additionally illuminates the process of push and pull that forged the Main Line, though she applies this process to the underclass and not the elite. Consequently, the underclass, in following the elites to the Main Line, encountered exclusionary planning:

If in the city the well housed are uninterested in the badly housed because the juxtaposition is so obvious that they have become accustomed to it, in the country a more dangerous situation rises by which the proximity is so concealed by large grounds shutting off all immediate surroundings, and out of the way districts, nearby, yet off the ordinary road of travel in which the poor are only too often packed in with all the worst evils of city conditions existing in the middle of wide fields and woodlands.<sup>70</sup>

Above, Bosworth relates a situation wherein the elites' estate grounds visually shielded them from the slums, and the Main Line's underclass thus remained purposefully hidden from the elites. When Bosworth reflects upon "[...] the widespread ignorance on the part of the well-to-do of everything which is beyond their immediate vision [...]",<sup>71</sup> she recalls Morrison's observation that on the Main Line, "[...] everyone here knows everyone else, or, if they don't they never will."<sup>72</sup> According to Morrison and Bosworth, then, elites remained intentionally ignorant of the Main Line's underclass on account of visual segregation. Exclusionary social planning sustained this ignorance.

Amidst the Main Line's country estates, Rosemont's Garrett Hill represented geographical segregation on the Main Line. Ellis Kiser and J.M. Lathrop's 1913 real estate atlas delineates properties on the Main Line, and examination of these atlases

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<sup>69</sup> Bosworth 4.

<sup>70</sup> Bosworth 4.

<sup>71</sup> Bosworth 5.

<sup>72</sup> Morrison 1.

reveals the stark property contrasts between the elites and the underclass. Figures 2, 3, and 4 in the Appendix depict the towns of Bryn Mawr and Radnor. Rosemont, a section of Radnor, borders Bryn Mawr. In their respective studies, both Bosworth and Porch cite Rosemont's Garrett Hill as an underclass node (Figure 3). Confined to the area between Lowry's Lane, Old Lancaster Road, and John W. Converse's property, Garrett Hill radiates from the Garrett Hill Station on the Philadelphia & Western railway. The narrow lot divisions contrast with the elite estates on the opposite side of Old Lancaster Road. Converse's house "Chetwynd" symbolizes the elite Main Line, for his father John H. Converse, a Baldwin Locomotive Works executive, constructed the house in the 1880s during the initial exodus of elites to the Main Line. The elites' demand for domestic servants, however, soon encouraged the growth of "slums" like Garrett Hill, which arose along the railroad tracks. The result of the Main Line slums, according to Bosworth: "[...] the connection between these two extremes of society [...]"<sup>73</sup> Here Bosworth elucidates the class duality on the Main Line, wherein those outside elite society – whether white-collar or working-class – comprised the non-elite underclass.

Unlike Converse, most elites built their estates beyond the rail lines and turnpike, and the atlases reveal this trend. A comparison of properties reveals this "extreme". For example, Mrs. William F. Dreer's ninety-eight-acre "Wentworth", along Old Lancaster Ave, contrasts with the lots in Garrett Hill (Figure 3). As Bosworth notes, however, the elites' estates concealed this proximity and allowed social separation:

As in the other towns the poorer section is immediately surrounded by the finer homes of the community, and one sees the filthy yard and garbage-strewn surrounding of houses like this little group [Garrett Hill] in the alley only a

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<sup>73</sup> Bosworth 5.

stone's throw from beautiful houses with spacious lawns and grounds which alone separate the one from the other.<sup>74</sup>

While in physical proximity to the underclass, the elites maintained their social segregation and reinforced their society's guise of impenetrability. Bosworth's insights recall Burt's description of "an impenetrable green maze," into which the elites "tucked themselves."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, despite the physical proximity of elites to the non-elite underclass, the elites remained segregated and ignorant.

Property values dictated this planning of exclusion. For instance, when developing the Main Line in the 1870s, the PRC consciously forged "an upper class image" through deed restrictions that required houses on Montgomery Avenue to cost more than \$8,000, and greater than \$5,000 on surrounding streets.<sup>76</sup> John Groff contextualizes these values, noting that \$8,000 provided five bedrooms, a library, music room, study, and servants' quarters.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, row houses on Garrett Hill rented for \$13. Bosworth provides context for such houses:

Here a group of four houses has been evolved from some old stables. They are mere boxes, two consisting of a room down stairs and two very small bed rooms up stairs, one approached through the other. The other two have more rooms and more definite yards which contain in the rear, privies, a hydrant, and cesspool full to the brim and roughly covered with boards.<sup>78</sup>

These four houses that Bosworth describes, all overcrowded with Italian families, represent the Main Line's slums. Elites sought ignorance of these slums, and in response the slums further deteriorated, a process that social planning facilitated. This relationship that formed between elites and the underclass on the Main Line mirrored the Main Line's

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<sup>74</sup> Bosworth 37-38.

<sup>75</sup> Burt 533-4.

<sup>76</sup> Groff 32.

<sup>77</sup> Groff 32.

<sup>78</sup> Bosworth 37.

relationship with Philadelphia, for while suburbia retained contact with the city, “[...] its lavish use of space set it off from the working class and (more pertinently) from the aspiring members of the lower middle class.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, whether separating the Main Line from Philadelphia or its own slums, the planning of exclusion allowed for social segregation despite physical proximity.

Architecture demonstrated exclusionary planning on a micro-level. Within the \$8,000 estates described above, the architecture of exclusion ensured a hermetic social space despite the physical proximity of elites and the underclass. Figures 5 and 6 in the Appendix show the floor plans of the Main Line estates Ardrossan (1912) and Hillhouse (1926), respectively. Ithan’s Ardrossan, the estate upon which Barry based *The Philadelphia Story*, and White Horse’s Hillhouse demonstrate Robert Fishman’s testimony to the architecture of exclusion: “Servants, however, remained carefully segregated in the Victorian mode, with backstairs connecting the back door, kitchen, and servants’ apartments.”<sup>80</sup> In Ardrossan, the first floor “servants’ hall” stood behind the pantry and kitchen, removed from the social and family space of the estate. Directly above the servant’s hall, the “maid’s room” remained hidden behind a staircase, which allowed her access to the kitchen and servants’ hall, and the linen room. Hillhouse exaggerates the exclusion present in Ardrossan. Though servants occupied an entire wing of the estate, the dining room, pantry, kitchen, and two staircases separated them from the family on the first floor, and the second floor mirrors this layout. Thomas Nolan describes interior segregation in the Architectural Record: “The family living rooms are well divided from those for the help, and the men’s and maids’ quarters are completely

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<sup>79</sup> Fishman 151.

<sup>80</sup> Fishman 150.

separated, so that each one is a comfortable home in itself without interfering with the other.”<sup>81</sup> Elites thus planned their houses to prevent social interaction with the servants, bearers of underclass values. While the elites depended on servants for the maintenance of their estates and lifestyles, they segregated themselves because their servants stood contrary to the suburban ideal.

Main Line estates mirrored geographical exclusion through the “architecture of exclusion”. The estates cultivated the Main Line’s impenetrability through their floor plans, which masked the presence of servants. Marsh’s notion of the family guided this domestic architecture, and she notes how interior plans, “[...] epitomized the interconnected values of suburbanism and familism”.<sup>82</sup> Observing that familism dominated such architecture, Marsh reveals the centrality of family to the Main Liners and their estate design. Servants, who represented the underclass, posed a social threat, albeit a necessary one, that elites separated their families from. The elites’ paradoxical dependence on servants, in addition to the family, shaped their estates’ designs; while servants represented the socially threatening underclass, elites relied upon their servants’ domestic labor. Thus, in a reflection of the geographical relationship between the Main Line’s elite and underclass, elites designed segregated servant spaces.

The physical structure of the Main Line, therefore, encouraged the physical segregation of the elites from the underclass. Though social scientists Bosworth and Porch recognize the myth – the exclusive Main Line society of country estates and social elite – they also uncover the underclass that other Main Line historians cannot recognize. The nature of planning and architecture during the Main Line’s Golden Age conditioned

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<sup>81</sup> Nolan 1911 238.

<sup>82</sup> Marsh 515.

this ignorance, as the invisible underclass supported the elite society from the shadows. Recalling the arguments advanced in Chapter 2, the elites excluded the underclass from their society because the existence of this class stood contrary to the suburban ideal – a socially homogeneous society.

### **Conclusion: Processing the Main Line Myth**

When the PRC built the first resorts on the Main Line in the 1860s, it established this nascent suburbia as a place of escape, and Philadelphia's social elites spent their summers on the Main Line solidifying their social status. Therefore, when the PRC encouraged its executives to build permanent residences in the countryside surrounding the resorts, the Main Line had already earned its cultural capital. Throughout the exodus of elites from Philadelphia to the Main Line that ensued from 1870 to 1930, the Main Line retained its escapist identity.

Before the mid-nineteenth century, the summer heat, mixed with the city's crowds, drove the elites to the Main Line, but only for those summer months. Not until Philadelphia's industrialization, which took root in the 1850s, did the elites look to the suburbs for permanent residence. The resulting industries altered Philadelphia's social fabric, not primarily through their physical manifestations, but through immigration. The wealth of labor attracted workers from across the United States and Europe, flooding the city with underclass laborers. As the existing housing stock failed to absorb the population influx, immigrants penetrated historically exclusive social and geographical boundaries.<sup>83</sup> This penetration particularly threatened the city's elite class, which retreated westward as Philadelphia's population expanded.

A suburban ideal emerged at the same time that Philadelphia industrialized, providing an alternative to the city. When PRC's commuter trains enabled Philadelphians to populate the suburbs, the elite retreated from the city and imposed their suburban ideal on the nascent Main Line. The elites' suburban vision manifested as an

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<sup>83</sup> Warner 57.

idealization of the British countryside, which Main Liners emulated through their sporting activities and estates. In constructing this society, however, Main Liners relied upon the labor of a servant underclass. The resulting state of mutual dependence – a paradox – inspired the elites to incorporate exclusionary planning into their society; because the existence of the underclass stood contrary to the idealized Main Line, elites sought to mask the underclass' slums, and quarters within the elite estates, to generate the illusion of ideal.

On account of the planning and architecture that masked the underclass, the Main Line's servants failed to imprint history, which elites like Nathaniel Burt, Christopher Morley, and Barbara Alyce Farrow forged from an elite perspective. Yet again, William Morrison's quote, "[...] everyone here knows everyone else, or, if they don't they never will," proves pertinent, as the physical and social structures of Main Line society prevented elites from interacting with social outsiders.<sup>84</sup> The myth therefore serves as a representation of the Main Line's *elite* society, for the exclusionary planning and architecture, operating in tandem with institutionalized social conformity, masked the underclass and ensured the ignorance of the authors and historians referenced throughout this thesis.

Alas, this thesis confronts its initial question: who owns history? On Philadelphia's Main Line, the elite class that constructed country estates along the PRC's tracks between 1870 and 1930 owns their society's history through the perpetuation of myth. This myth, though not untrue, ignores the society's underclass – the laborers who, through their physical toils, supported the ideal of the Main Line's elite. The Main

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<sup>84</sup> Morrison 1.

Line's social and physical structure throughout this period reinforced the ideal of exclusion and impenetrability, though in reality the ideal did not exist. Through intra-class marriage and exclusionary architecture and planning, the elite Main Liners constructed a society that, despite the physical proximity of the underclass, remained socially impenetrable.

Appendix

Figure 1: Residential districts along the Main Line (see Wynnewood, Lower Merion).<sup>85</sup>

Figure 2: Real estate atlas of Bryn Mawr, PA, 1913.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Porch: Negro Residential Districts on the Main Line.

<sup>86</sup> Kiser and Lathrop 1913: Plate 15.

Figure 3: Real estate atlas of Bryn Mawr, PA, 1913 (see Garrett Hill).<sup>87</sup>

Figure 4: Real estate atlas of Bryn Mawr, PA, 1913.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Kiser and Lathrop 1913: Plate 20.

<sup>88</sup> Kiser and Lathrop 1913: Plate 21.

Figure 5: Floor plans of Ardrossan.<sup>89</sup>

Figure 6: Floor plans of Hillhouse.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Morrison 138.

<sup>90</sup> Morrison 202.

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