Chapter Four

History as a Story of Struggle and Power Relations

The Domestic Scenes

Economy, Religion and Politics

Since approximately 1965... My focus has been a close examination of the sources of power. The political and economic milieu; professions like medicine, the law, and most recently education and religion... (Sjoberg 106)

Oates's representation of American history and politics is not confined to those aspects which strongly affect the single individual protagonist as if he or she were in isolation from the larger social milieu. Those aspects which have wider impact on American life like "economy," "religion," and "politics" are met with some Oatesian fervor. For the sake of covering many aspects of the domestic scenes, this chapter (like the previous one) has been divided into three major divisions: Economy, Religion and Politics. Apparently different sites of struggles with external powers, these play crucial roles in fashioning certain aspects of American culture like the issues of capitalism, secularism, theological debates and political parties to mention but some of such cultural aspects. They, contributions to Oates's fashioning of the self and the state, cast more light on Oates's political propensities and help relocate Oates in the wider critical map of the United States of America. They, also, cast some light on broader historical landmarks that have shaped certain decades of twentieth-century America.
Economy is one of the pillars which sustain the United States’ power and its world reputation. It is also one of the essentials which sustain Oates’s construction of a sense of reality for her readers. Above all, it is one of the most important instigators of American politics: both domestically (as is the case in the present day Bush’s presidency whose associates dealing with oil made his way to the White House easier), and internationally (as the last few Gulf Wars demonstrate). Oates’s fiction explores the magnitude of the so-called capitalism, the long as yet undefeated spirit of today’s American culture. Talking about the lack of a unifying definition of American culture in the pre-1900s and the overwhelming impact of Capitalism as a Pan-American culture that gradually has become an identifiable marker for what American culture stands for, David Gross traces the historical roots of capitalism in the United States of America:

During the 1920s and 1930s the change [that is in the cultural situation] became even more pronounced until—by the period 1945-1960 – an entirely new cultural reality had been created in America. . . . By the 1950s it seemed to many that the plenitude of cultures in America had for all practical purposes been reduced to one: that of marketing or mass culture. (100)

Capitalism, a means of fusing the different cultures, is seen to serve this purpose quite well. In the wake of the absence of other unifying mechanisms, capitalism emerges as the cement that unites Americans. “Democracy in America,” the title of Ronald Pauli’s
manuscript (and one of the short stories in Oates's The Hungry Ghosts) draws the connection between wealth and Americans:

The love of wealth is therefore to be traced, either as a principal or an accessory motive, at the bottom of all the Americans do: this gives to their passions a sort of family likeness, and soon renders the survey of them exceedingly wearisome. . . . (27)

This literary configuration of capitalism's penetration into the depth of Americans' deeds is what George Freilicht in Oates's I Lock stands for. He is "a farmer with so many head of livestock" and his view of what a wife should be is based on his capitalist conception of commodity. Hence, he "had now a wife" (22). So is the sexual predator of the Hollywood film industry Otto Ose in Blonde. His exploitation of Monroe points out how his power lies deep in his wealth which he never hesitates to exploit further for personal, but immoral, ends. Ose addresses this question by claiming himself innocent of any sexual exploitation: "I force no one. Of their own volition they came to me. I, Otto Ose, help them to sell themselves who would have little value on the market except through me" (Oates, Blonde 296). Oates's construction of the life of Hollywood's iconic figure Marilyn Monroe is a part of different selves associated with Monroe's name. Norma Jeane's attractive beauty and her need for economic security put her under the kaleidoscopic eye of the insatiable purchasing appetite of the capitalist predators of Hollywood. "Salability" of Monroe's body is obviously the only concern those predators have in mind and the only "commodity" she can afford to sell. Realizing the value of this commodity, Norma Jeane capitalizes on her sexual commodity. That is why she goes to
the extreme in her poses and her nudity to the extent that she becomes America’s “sex symbol.” Indeed, there are more testimonies of her lesser success as an actor. Commenting on a picture of Monroe and Don Murray acting *Bus Stop* Clayton says: “As before, she found it difficult to remember her lines and spent hours in her dressing room before being able to face the camera” (201). While Don Murray was “nominated as Best Supporting Actor, and as Most Promising Newcomer for the British Academy Awards,” all Marilyn Monroe achieved was that she “had proved that she really could act” (Clayton 257). In an article published simultaneously in different American periodicals, Monroe’s “worth” has been discussed in the aftermath of her performance in *Seven Year Itch*:

> These fans surely went home with the feeling that Marilyn Monroe is not a natural actress. She owes much of her prominence to a pleasing personality and a tremendous build-up campaign engineered by publicity experts. Many believe she is really a painfully frightened, insecure young woman . . . The fact that she is today regarded by the public as a professional actress is an accomplishment of the 20th Century-Fox publicity department and a personal triumph of Marilyn's part of mind over matter. (Shearer 88)²

One of the actors in *Seven Year Itch*, according to this article, believes that Monroe has “made a wonderful wife,” she can make “an even more wonderful mother,” but she cannot be “a great actress” (Shearer 88). Thus, Monroe’s salable sexuality can be construed in the light of her perfect understanding of the quintessential market demand; and she fashions and refashions herself to meet such a demand with a view to achieving
more and more economic security and gain more fame too. Oates's *Blonde* reconstructs such a response to Monroe’s acting from the blond actor’s point of view:

> So it doesn’t matter, does it! I can “act,” and people have acknowledged it.
> But it doesn’t matter. People scorned Marilyn all these years for being a blond sexpot who couldn’t act; now they scorn Marilyn for not making a bundle at the box office, huh? Now, Marilyn is box-office poison. (888)

The blond actor, who is shaped to conform to some external demands and reflect the males’ desires from the very moment she sacrifices her old name for the promising Hollywood life, reaches a point of self-awareness of the serious damage to her psychological identity: a deep damage inflicted upon her by the Studio and its male power. She realizes at last that in the midst of all the overwhelming trade mentality she is “only a career” and that she “hasn’t any ‘well being’.” However, she needs such moments to give vent to her deep anger and frustrations. She needs this moment when she is told that her lover Cass Chaplin who calls her “Norma” and who, as she believes, “the only one who understands” her, is “blacklisted” by the HAUC. At such a moment, she asks I. E. Shinn, her director: “You’re thinking of ‘Marilyn,’ *Her* career.” He replies “Well, yes. 'Marilyn' is mine, my invention.” Here, she denies Shinn’s claim of inventing her and says “You d-didn’t invent me. I did it myself” (331); and to evade a moment of a female’s powerful consciousness Shin I.E. denies her the very cognitive rights as a human being: Shinn said, “‘Marilyn’ doesn’t have to understand or think. Jesus no. She has only to be” (332). Later on, Monroe recalls that it was Ose who had drifted her wheel of fate: he “had ruined her life,” destroyed her dream of a happy family made up “Norma
Jeane and Bucky Glazer" and possibly "several children" (385). Hiding from his camera could have saved her dream. That is to say, for her as for several other female protagonists, invisibility is safety and protection. Monroe's relations to both Shin and Ose may be representative of the power of the capitalist: both had power over her like that of judge over the prisoner, an analogy derived from Thomas E. Wartenberg's *The Forms of Power: from Domination to Transformation* (159). Worse still, she lacked, at least at such earlier stages of her professional development, other options for better or alternative jobs which chained her to these two capitalist predators. Indeed, this is a part of an ontological crisis that is summed up in a very succinct statement on the opening pages of *Blonde*:

"For my skin is my soul. There is no soul otherwise. You see in me the promise of human joy" (Oates 10). Monroe's aggressive and angry "talk back" in such moments is a gesture of desperate rejection of and even a defiance to the unchallenged power of the male-dominated Studio authority, and, by extension, to the moulds (i.e. others' expectations) into which such a power confines her. It is also a moment of self-awareness that takes Monroe from her calm discourse, which--like silence--is a sign of feminine powerlessness, to the loud and angry speech which is a sign of a momentous triumph over her male exploiters.

One face of the harshness of the capitalist system may be manifested in the ceaseless lust for wealth and the personal exploitation of some individuals for their professional power or center of authority to gain more and more financial success, even if that leads to victimization of so many innocent people. The 1907 bank crisis was a sign of the frailness that characterized the American capitalist system (Cahill 795+) in the opening years of the twentieth century. Oates has more likely historicized this "bank
panic of 1907,” to use Cahill’s words, to re-imagine a different cause for the “vanishing” of her Grandmother’s farm in her earlier childhood. In her essay “My Father, My Fiction,” Oates with a lamenting tone looks back at her family history: “Looking at the property now from the road you would not be able to guess that it was once a farm” (n.pag). Oates apparently substitutes the “real” cause as she mentions in that essay which had to do with “widening the country highway” with the bank panic: both are economic issues of drastic impacts on the individual. In *I Lock* the Albert Honeystone’s farm was “taken over entirely by the Yewville Bank and Trust” (11). One possible cause for what Oates’s narrator calls “common practices” (meaning the banks’ measures to regain loans offered to citizens), is a crisis that Oates’s text skips. Talking about the bank crisis of the first decade of the twentieth century Cahill draws attention to one of the major causes of that crisis:

The primary cause of the U.S. bank panic was the unstable financial system that allowed questionable financial practices by unscrupulous businessmen. On 16 October 1907, F. A. Heinze, president of the Mercantile National Bank of New York City, used the resources of his banks in an attempt to seize control of the copper market from John D. Rockefeller. (795+)

Right from the early decades of the twentieth century, the struggle with financial hardships is a turning point in the history of Calla’s family. The unpaid debt of the “Yewville Bank & Trust” (Oates, *I Lock* 11) forces the bank to take tough measures that will change the whole life of the Albert Honeystone family. Here are some of the steps
the bank takes: "At this time — this was 1905, 1906 — it was common practice for banks foreclosing mortgages on certain farm properties to board up the house and outbuildings until the auction was held" (Oates, I Lock 12). The unstated part of the financial side of the story is no less important than the procedures the bank takes to gain its money back.

Juxtaposing the two pictures of Honeystone, who loses his family and disappears, mainly because of this financial crisis, and Mr. F. A. Heinze, who exploits his professional power to satisfy his insatiable appetite for more wealth, enables one to look at the contrasting portraiture of two different kinds of economic struggles that characterize the American capitalist economy at the beginning of the twentieth century. The poor are made poorer by the very bank they seek to help them out of poverty; and are destroyed in one way or another. The rich are made richer at the expense of many other people (that is the investors). Both struggle to achieve some goal or goals. Unlike the rich, mere survival is, indubitably, the most that the poor dream of. The lives of both these persons change; this change, however, takes two completely different directions.

Another illustration of the struggles with monetary problems of these early decades is Della (Norma Jeane’s Grandma) and Gladys (Norma Jeane’s mother) in Oates’s Blonde. Della has to work after her husband’s death and she does “ironing,” “laundry,” “sewing,” and even “baby-sitting” (54). Gladys, who is a contract employee at the Studio, experiences many “money problems” and “maintenance problems” (17). Under such pressures she moves to live in “La Mesa . . . a narrow, disappointing street” (Oates, Blonde 19); her bedroom is described as “airless” that had “an aged, cracked blind, inadequate to keep out the fierce afternoon sun” (33). These are some of the
portraits of hardships which manifest the inhumane face of the capitalist system as several of Oates’s texts demonstrate. Della’s daughter, Marilyn Monroe, experiences a similar history of labor exploitation and financial crises. However, as she realizes the difficulty of self-freedom under the capitalist system of the market she surrenders herself to the demands of American consumer culture. In his *Farewell to Poverty*, Maurice Parmelee puts those inhuman faces of capitalism in a nutshell:

> Labor also becomes a commodity to be bought and sold under capitalism almost as much as under slavery or feudalism. From the laborer the capitalist demands as long and intensive labor as possible. Time and human sweat acquire a monetary value. The industrial revolution by destroying handicraft not only enabled the capitalist to profiteer in the field of production but delivered the laborer into his hands as a wage slave. (70)

Along with this line of labor slavery emerge a few discriminations out of the American capitalist system as some of Oates’s texts demonstrate. Within the larger discriminations which capitalism creates are the gender-based and the racial-based discriminations; both are recurrent in Oates’s fiction. *Blonde*, for instance, offers a shocking disparity of wage earning between the two sexes in the fifties as “the model would earn fifty dollars, and millions of dollars would be earned by others. By men” (296).

*I Lock* is another illustrative text of the materialistic commodifying nature of the capitalist system. In both households of her parents and of her in-laws, Calla is perceived in terms of capitalist consciousness as a commodity. That is why words like “mine,”
“ours,” and “had” are attributed to her as if no other means but monetary values can define Calla. What is still much worse, she is deprived of one of her personal rights. A repercussion of her marriage is the loss of her identity. Calla's identity is subjected to a kind of property transfer: her name is no longer Calla but Mrs. Freilicht. The struggle in her husband’s psyche emerges from his being an epitome of the capitalist-minded American of the early twentieth century and cannot think of his wife but from a monetary-value perspective: “George Freilicht had now a wife” (Oates, I Lock 22).

If some white Americans are victimized by the very economic system their ancestors have created, the African Americans are doubly victimized. They represent the most disfranchised and the lowest paid labor in America’s modern history. The economic struggles of African Americans for survival attract both the politicians and the artists alike. Oates’s representation of these people’s economic struggles is essentially a constitutive part of the different histories of those struggles at different periods of American history. A prominent example is those struggles in the first decade of the twentieth century as represented in Thompson Tyrell’s search for farmers who need water dowsing. Despite the potential risk of stepping foot on a white man’s property, Tyrell has to find a source of income to sustain his life. Because of such a need, Tyrell does not hesitate to approach the Frelichits. Besides, very-low paid sort of jobs are all the blacks left with in the early twentieth-century labor market. To say the least, such prejudices are, in a sense, a part of the extended power of the long history of slavery in the United States. Powerless as Tyrell is, it is difficult for him to find a better job in a nonslave area like New York. A part from the gender and racial wage discriminations there are some capitalists who are “flesn merchants” to borrow a term from Oates herself (Blonde 340):
a trade that knows no morals but the bestiality of the intrinsic desire. To this kind of
capitalism I will turn now.

"I would rather run away with anybody rather than stay at home any longer!" and
"I'd rather stay here or any place than go home" are two statements of a 16-year-old
girl who declared that forced sex relations with her step-father drove her to attempted
suicide ("Forced Sex" 2). An actual newspaper report from the beginning of the fifties
and a part of the recurrent story that takes different plots and different characters
throughout the decade, "symptomatic of the morality of the 50's" (Johnson, Invisible 56)
to use Oates's categorization of the decade, is essentially a driving force for its inclusion
in literature about the fifties. Oates transforms such historically plausible anecdotes into
the economic sphere of her fictional world. Shifting the center of power from the
exclusively male field of exploitative trade mentality of immoral and inhuman capitalist
traders, who had partially been responsible for the destruction of females' "chastity" or
"virginity," to the victimized and oppressed young females, Oates's Foxfire recuperates
some lost pages of the history of pain and exploitation of those younger girls in the
fifties. Like the narrative of the flesh trader-capitalists, Otto Ose and Rin Tin Tin in
Blonde, Uncle Wimpy Wirtz (or Walt(on) Wirtz) tries to pull the leg of the young Maddy
into a sexual trap. He notices her eagerness to buy a junked old unused typewriter thrown
at the back of his store and starts the bargain with $5 (60); when Maddy manages to get
him the money he increases the cost to $8 (67) and again to $10 maintaining an offer of
free sale in return for an undeclared wish for sex with the young Maddy: "cause if it's
cash it's ten dollars, honey. But if it's nothing it's nothing" (75). It is with the destruction
of this immoral, inhuman face of the fifties and the possession of Maddy of that
typewriter that power is shifted from the oppressor and exploiter to the oppressed and victimized in Oates's *Foxfire*. For the foxfire gang the typewriter symbolizes the start of their recorded history.

The harshness of the economic situation in the early sixties is dramatized in Oates's short story "Getting To Know All About You" where the couples Darrell and Trix, who "were trained dancers," were forced to accept jobs which are described as "degrading." They "clerked in stores, tried stints of door-to-door selling" (*Heat* 242). Worse still, Darrell's son Wesley expects that his father has no chance for a 'better' job (*Heat* 252) because Darrell "is a drunk, A souse. A lush" (253). Besides, "Trix had difficulties finding a job that suited her" (264). In most of the jobs Trix managed to get the "tips were poor," or the "pay was low" or she has to sacrifice something (246).

A common fragmentary aspect of Oates's construction of her protagonists' histories is the depiction of different struggles against economic insecurity which contribute to the fashioning of these protagonists. Such insecurity, broadly speaking, yields unflinching determination to achieve the least possible economic security. The ubiquitous influence of wealth in the lives of many of Oates's protagonists is out of the question. It is "a principal or an accessory motive" as Oates's *The Hungry Ghosts* asserts (27). It is the source of personal arrogance and pride. Wilma Knaure's sense of superiority vis-à-vis the family of Emmett Schroeder arises out of the difference in wealth between the two families (Oates, *Marya: A Life* 103). Differences like this indicate that more accumulation of wealth, one of the signposts of capitalist systems, yields to a higher self-esteem that is based on perceiving others as lower than one's self
in the social ladder. That is wealth leads to an imbalance in the distribution of the social power, even if at the theoretical level. The Yacht Club in Oates's *You Must Remember This* (to which Felix Stevick invites his nieces Enid and Geraldine and the latter's husband Neal O' Banan) is, Felix tells the others, "For millionaires and their friends" (94). By the same token, when Ardis (Elena's mother in Oates's *Do with Me*) loses the security and protection under the umbrella of her marriage to the insane husband, Ross, she identifies herself not with her marital name as Mrs. Ross but with her baptized name Ardis Carter or with what she calls her professional name: "Just call me Bonita" (45). Ardis's experience of a failed marriage makes her distrustful of men. It also brings about an economic insecurity that fashions Ardis's mocking ways of victimizing wealthy males: it is more likely an unconscious revenge from the male type to which her first husband belongs. One of her early preys is Mr. Karman, the owner of the apartment she and her daughter live in:

They began to talk about money. Elena had heard this before, she knew how her mother would sigh, would glance nervously around the room. And Mr. Karman would hold her hands in his, looking right into her face, smiling. "But you have your family," Ardis said. (56)

Ardis is a model who, as a requirement of her job, has to keep changing the pattern of her fashion. She is, her escaping husband once recalls, capable of transforming herself from "blonde" at bedtime to "redhead in the morning," and she "sometimes," has "a pink or an orange mouth" (30). Armed with the art of self-refashioning, Ardis, shams concern for Mr. Karman's family life. Ardis's concern lies not in the potential damage to Karman's family resulting from their marriage but in the shades of economic security. This is why
she betrays Mr. Karman, takes the “seventy-five thousand dollars” he gives her, and instead of going to Chicago to wait for Karman to join them (61) she goes to New York (64) and starts a new life there where both Ardis and Elena attempt their hands in different jobs [e.g. modeling (67) and advertising (68)]. For Oates, the histories of most of her female protagonists expound the harshness and inhuman faces of capitalism. This is what accounts for Oates’s “great admiration for those female figures . . . who do not have much imagination in an intellectual sense, but they’re very capable of dealing with life” (Kuehl 8).

Oates also uses a few fragmentary historical and political narratives to intensify some faces of the harsh realities that characterize the overall character of the capitalist system in the United States of America. Drawing from her broader social milieu, Oates makes use of pieces of news as they appear in different American newspapers. She is critically described as the novelist who “takes yesterday’s headlines and moves them forward to the present” (Bausch n.pag.). In her doing so, Oates stresses the victimization of the American environment, and even American people for that matter, by the insatiable, exploitative, and capitalistic-minded predators. Of such kind of personalities Oates once says:

A materialist, capitalist, Ego-infatuated society is totally at odds with any sensitive person, who yearns to develop himself spiritually. This is an instinct – not a chimera, a fad, or a whim. (Johnson, Invisible 218)

A prominent, but tragic illustration of the insensitivity of the materialistic capitalistic society is voiced in the well-known disaster of the Love Canal in the 1970s. The “Love Canal,” in some critical views, is a large scale environmental disaster:
In the late 1970s, the Love Canal sounded a warning. Those who listened understood that a new type of disaster was emerging in our world in the form of an unanticipated price for the benefits derived from the post-World War II burgeoning of the chemical industry. Since that time, we have learned that the price goes well beyond money, for it also encompasses physical, psychological, and social distress. While the burden falls most heavily on individuals and families exposed to hazardous pollution, that price is being extracted as well from groups, neighborhoods, communities, and societies. (Michael R Edelstein *Contaminated Communities: The Social and Psychological Impact of Residential Toxic Exposure*, xiii)

The insatiable appetite of capitalism averts the people's gaze from the long term disasters incurred on the environment by short term benefits. Some of Oates's texts are but a part of the larger American struggles against such dark faces of capitalism. The absolute right of individual capitalists to accumulate capital has rarely been filtered through any serious humane consciousness and here lies the crux of the matter of an environmental disaster like the Love Canal.

It is with this view in mind that I will attend to Oates's concern with the American environment. "When it comes to interacting with the environment, women are often closest to the front line," says Rebecca Clay in an essay in *Environmental Health Perspectives* (34+). Do not Oates's concerns with the environment place her in Clay's categorization? I guess the answer should be in the positive. Tracking the predatory
inhuman face of capitalism at different periods of America's modern history. Oates's texts are rife with illuminating examples. In "The Heavy Sorrow of the Body," for instance, Nina and Conrad, two married couples, move to their new apartment in an industrial area: Nina "believed she could smell the poisoned air seeping in to them." Conrad, content that there is no way to escape such "poisoning," tells her: "You can't escape it. Why try to escape it? Everything is poisoned, everything is polluted... live with it, forget it" (Oates, The Wheel 309). Similarly, in Do with Me, on a TV show in the 1970s, there is a heated argument about the possibility of the extinction of precious wild animals like the leopard and the cheetah because of people's interest in extracting their "fur" (Oates 144). Such a concern for the environment continues in the late seventies and early eighties as Oates's The Falls portrays. Oates's version of the well-known story of the "Love Canal" is a harsh critique of the capitalist greed for wealth at any cost.

The Falls sarcastically sums up the whole issue of the Love Canal in a terse and highly condensed statement: "In Niagara Falls the joke was, who needs hell? We have Love Canal" (Oates 284); the disaster, indeed, has been a "hell" for the residents of the Niagara Falls as the many scattered reports of the problem shows. This version of the Love Canal story represents the long-hand of the authority in giving a space for resisting the state power not for the sake of saving the population of the Niagara Falls but rather to give vent to a sort of containable resistance. This latter "containable resistance" is represented in what amounts to an assassination of Dirk Burnaby. Burnaby manages to connect some of the mysterious threads in the Love Canal case but yet his end, which is the way he is killed, assassinated or whatever way he dies, is intentionally made mysterious (Oates, The Falls 270). This is just one manifestation of the undeclared
silencing power which emerges out of meeting interests of a group of giant capitalists who possess the chemical industry in the Niagara Falls. These capitalist fraudsters dump huge quantities of toxic chemicals in the Love Canal, caring much less for the potentially devastating consequences of such an action on human residents of the Niagara Falls.

Though Burnaby himself has been one of these capitalist and upper-class of the Niagara Falls, he espouses a personal obligation towards the residents of Love Canal and more particularly to Nina Olshaker and her sick daughter; he, furthermore, sacrifices everything for the sake of winning the case, which he is naturally incapable of winning.

The issue of the risks of life in the Niagara Falls area is first raised by Nina Olshaker and the connection to Communism is made to justify her agitation and anger. When Burnaby joins her in their struggle to expose the different threads of the Love Canal case, though he is never accused of being a Communist like her, both of them are antagonized and he ends up in the Niagara Falls and his death is meant to be a mystery to the end of the text. Burnaby embodies a victimization of the destructive industrial power and capitalist propensities. Once I came across a remarkable categorization of capitalism into which the Burnaby case fits quite well. "Capitalism has become the Big Casino, with players guaranteed against loss, because in effect they have bought the house managers. That is public policy" (Sherrill 589+). In one of his comments on one of the crises of American capitalism George Will says: "We seem to have a capitalism here in which profits are private and we socialize the losses" (qtd. in Sherrill 589+). These statements, said in the 1980s, express in brief words the reason why Burnaby’s struggle against the capitalist system in the 1970s had failed.
In depicting the struggles of her protagonist against the destructive power of capitalism, Oates escorts the readers to another environmental concern but inside the earth and not on its surface. Oates's texts shift their attention to another environmental concern of the 1980s: the mines and their impact on human life. The unseen destructive power of this face of industrialization shapes the very discourse to describe it: “Yet the fires smoldering below are never seen” (Oates, *The Tattooed Girl* 143). In another text, the situation is drawn as a deceptive one: that is making use of the people's ignorance of the devastating dangers of nuclear tests: “Well, it's a shame, a goddam shame, that big American capitalists can take advantage of ignorant people like that, impoverished people” (Oates, *All the Good People* 216).

Oates's *I Lock* offers two contrasting pictures of some significance to our discussion of economy as a site of struggle and power relations: George Freilicht, Calla's white husband, and her black lover Thompson Tyrell. The former “had inherited from his vigorous father a farm of over one hundred acres near Shaheen . . . his hands were a farmer's hands” (15); the latter inherited the “blackness” of his race which is itself “owned” by the whites (40). Unlike Freilicht of whom Oates tells us what he possesses and the very location of his property, Tyrell is an unfelt presence except as a threat to or a sign of the transient loss of the white power. He is a mere water dowser who owns nothing, not even his own personal freedom. One may infer from the extramarital relation which is substantiated in Oates's text that “blacks” enjoy having sexual relations with white women more likely because, by doing so, they feel as if they have shared white men’s properties, or in other words, shared some of the power the white race has. Or it may be an attempt to reverse their invisibility and make their presence felt. In short, it is
a way of recreating a self-proclaimed power of which they have been denied for a long time.

African Americans' power may lie in the visible difference that strikes the beholders' eyes in the midst of the white majority. Beside the noticeable biological difference in such a social milieu, they tend to lead a tough life, play tough sports, and like Thompson-Calla's case, embark on a tough adventure. Mansfield talks about the different elements of "the politics of race" and notices that they:

Revolve around the endless play of visibility and invisibility, emphasizing — in a Western context at least — the visible markers of racial difference, from skin colour to the bone structure of the face. . . . In ostensibly liberal societies, like the free market postmodern West, ethnicity is seen to exist only in those minority groups that bear visible markers of difference. (119)

It is in this light of distinction that Oates looks at the visibility which characterized the professional life of her favorite famous boxer, Muhammad Ali. For she once cried in his presence as she was trying to express her admiration for him (Johnson, Invisible 339). Visibility of the African Americans is the cultural frame of mind which fashions all of Oates's characters who belong to that race. In narrating the personal history (which goes back to the 1950s) of her protagonist of "The Fugitive," Oates plays on this issue of visibility. She portrays his family as "dark-skinned, very dark, black you might say, tarry-black" (I Am No One 49). Similarly, Oates's Vernor Matheius is "accustomed to being looked-at, and maybe stared-at" (I'll Take You There 152). In spite of the early 1960s President Kennedy's antidiscriminatory Executive Order 10925, racial discrimination
continues. This is so because Kennedy's Executive Order has not been brought to light. Thus, the African Americans' struggles in the labor market have to continue simply because of the power of Southern politicians who blocked legislations like the 10925 Order. Elliott and Ewoh have ascribed the nonimplementation of President Kennedy's Order to his “lack of Congressional support” which was due to “the virtual stranglehold that conservative Southern Democrats had on key legislative committees in Congress” Besides, there had been strenuous “opposition particularly from Southern politicians” (Elliott and Ewoh 212). What such challenges had led to was an apparent imbalance in the distribution of the social power that overshadowed the interracial question well beyond the post WWII era. Summing up the case of the American economy in this period John Kenneth Galbraith says:

There were some two million farm families, many of them in the Southern Appalachians, who continued to live in a primitive and anonymous squalor . . . There were urban slum dwellers and racial minorities, notably the Negroes, who could not view their lot with satisfaction. (American Capitalism: the Concept of Countervailing Power 2)

Such historical facts have indubitably portrayed a part of the picture of the struggles African Americans’ history is made up of. A part of this history is the striking poverty of these people and their lack of life-sustaining jobs. The “deputy” in Oates’s “In the Old World” paints this painful scene in a gloomier picture. He is employing a young African American out of his sympathy for the boy’s poverty. When he is asked about that young
boy, he replies: "The ones like him never get good jobs. They get the worse land too" (By the North Gate 154).

In addition to the economic struggles that have characterized the history of the interracial power relations there is women's struggle for equal pay in the labor market: another kind of history that uncovers some of the hideous and noxious doctrines of capitalism. Some historians of the fifties sum up this view in a succinct statement: "The more you had, the happier you were; materialism ruled the day for all ages" (Young and Young 25). In terms of women's jobs in the fifties, according to Kaledin, "good jobs for women were scarce" and the long history of racism extends to the 1950s "in many forms of harassment, segregation, and job discrimination" (181). The gradual upward movement of the Hollywood 1950s icon, Marilyn Monroe in Oates's Blonde is a part of the ruling materialistic spirit of that decade. Besides, economic independence for a character like Monroe [who once her serious need for money has been a site of awful humiliation and exploitation by a male predator like Otto Ose (Blonde 280)] is but a weapon for self-defense or self-security. Tragically, she had to live the litany of humiliation that is associated with sexism: the materialistic value of a female's body in the flesh market. For such a market, Norma Jeane is just a product for sale. Cass tells Norma Jeane in Oates's Blonde: "Norma, I.E. Shinn is an agent. A flesh merchant. Lose your looks, lose your youth and sex appeal, Shinn's gone" (313).

One more point relevant to this discussion of economy in Blonde is Monroe's first husband's rejection of the idea that his wife "works." Economically, there is no reason why she should not work, more especially after she decides to live away from her in-
laws. There is another way of considering such a rejection. It is more likely that there are no economic causes for Bucky's rejection. The possible answer lies in something else:

Not that it was wrong for women to engage in activities for the uplift of their sex. What was bad was that, "when they go farther, and attempt to make her as independent of man as he is of her, they forget the respective provinces of the sexes, and simply attempt to reverse the laws of nature, and assign to the female of the species the office of the male. It is not conventionalism but God, that has made man the head of woman."

(Ditzion 133)

It is in this cultural frame of mind that Bucky rejects the idea that his wife goes to work. Furthermore, most of his discourse with her swirls around family and children: her "job" is nowhere in Bucky's dictionary.

Oates's Monica in Solstice refutes views like Ditzion's. For Monica, the need for work lies deep in an economic necessity; the line of argument here follows from a basic necessity of human life: the survival of Oates's protagonists of Solstice: "Survival was a clear, frank, unpretentious matter, a primitive need which she hoped to cultivate, with hard work and idealism, into something approaching a life" (9).

Throughout most of Oates's fictional world, as is the case in modern American history, capital and power have been unevenly distributed creating a nation that is far from being egalitarian in any sense and necessitating long term struggle to combat those discrepancies. Not to dwell long on this point, there are many historical indications of
economic disparities of different sorts. Larry N. Naylor, for instance, states such disparities in very few words: “In many ways, the United States is fast approaching a ‘have’ and ‘have-not’ type of system” that these stories portray. Naylor rightly points out to this growing economic disparity in American society and notices the connection between sources of wealth and power in capitalist societies (American Culture: Myth and Reality of a Culture of Diversity 88). Oates’s By the North Gate reconstructs some of the social realities that are a part of the history of inegalitarian America. Different aspects of the 1960s struggles with the financial harshness of rural New York are reconstructed in a number of the short stories in Oates’s By the North Gate. This collection begins and ends with two stories that portray men’s struggles to tame the harsh land they are to farm on. The economic condition of the small family in “Swamps” (the first story in this collection) is a part of the hard times of the late 50s and early 60s rural New York. The house in which the small family resides is a “one-story wooden house . . . with brown siding that had come loose in the last few years, and a chimney whose bricks had begun to crumble” (7). Working conditions are also hard as the son’s case demonstrates:

His son – a big-shouldered, big-stomached man – would eat his eggs and drink his coffee, making noises, complaining about his work: He was sick of gypsum dust in his lungs, sick of the foreman, sick of working underground, sick of the cheese sandwiches he carried for lunch everyday; he was sick of life. (8)

Necessitous as they are depicted, both old men in this story share a “razor . . . which was rusty” (10). By the same token, “The Census Taker” puts the harshness of this abject
poverty forthrightly by situating the characters in poverty-stricken mythologized locations such as “Oriskany” (25). The collection closes with “By the North Gate,” a nostalgic narrative of hard financial times. In a dreamy speculative nostalgia, Revere, an old man, recalls the taming of the land: “I spent sixty-eight years fighting those weeds—sixty-eight years” (196). Between the opening and closing stories, there are stories of different kinds of struggles and power relations. In “Ceremonies,” Rockland’s wealth becomes the talk of the mythologized town of Rockland in Oates’s Eden County: “Everyone would stare at the house and the barns, especially the great main barn with the metal roof.” The rest of the town can neither compete with nor articulate their grudge against Rockland (36). Annie of “Sweet Love Remembered” (another story in By the North Gate) is a hardworking waitress. She, along with her lover, is sarcastically asked by other boys: “Aren’t you sorry for yourself? . . . You don’t have any money. Aren’t you sorry?” (59). Poverty strikes one as the most common characteristics in the short stories of this collection. The three “Boys at a Picnic” take an old car of one of their fathers and roam around looking for work: “We was lookin’ for work. . . . Hayfields mostly. You know any body needs help?” (71). Some of the short stories here are a representation of the inegalitarian nature of American society which is characterized by an imbalanced distribution of power and wealth.

Oates’s “Pastoral Blood,” another short story in By the North Gate, brings to the fore two economically contrasting pictures. Grace, a daughter of a well-off family spends her money lavishly. Once she gives a lift to a hitch-hiker and as she drives she is asked: “You’re in some trouble, ain’t you?” (82). She replies in the negative and adds: “I have never been in trouble” (83). Out of boredom of this sort of life, she “no longer cared to
live” (75). At the other end of the economic ladder Oates places three hitch-hikers whose poverty is in sharp contrast to Grace’s wealth. Their “clothes” are “old,” they look “dusty and splashed with mud,” and they “smelled with perspiration” (88). What is worse, these three young hitch-hikers along with other men fight over Grace’s diamond. Thus, the short history of this young girl draws attention to power relations created by the capitalist system. The contrasting pictures of Grace’s family and the hitchhikers are a part of the larger social discrepancies and a part of the author’s redistribution of economic power in American social life. The common “enemy” in this collection of short stories is “poverty”: the apparent contrast in wealth distribution in Grace’s case points out to Oates’s identification with the proletarians.

American marriage is one of the sites where capitalism makes itself felt. Looked at from the capitalist perspective of gain and loss, marriage both in Oates’s fiction, and in American culture at large, is another cultural text for the imbalance of power and the struggles thereof. Wartenberg explains this connection between “marriage” and “capitalism” in his discussion of the “benefits” a woman gains from the institution of marriage:

She gains something from the marriage and thus has a reason both to enter into it and to stay in it that transcends the particular nature of the marriage itself. It is this set of reasons, reasons that focus on the gender alignment, that constitute the marriage relation as a form of power in our current society. The power that husbands have is not the result of their own particular intentions . . . that power is the result of the situated nature of
the marriage relationship itself. The general social disposition to treat women differently from men... (156)

It is within such discourse that the economics of marriage in Oates's fiction may be understood. In *The Falls*, for instance, besides Ariah's fear of being blamed for her first husband's disappearance, she is quite aware of the impact of her age on further possibilities of marriage. For at the peak of such psychological shock she is aware that "her days of dreaming are past" and that she "will be thirty years old" (49). Ariah, a part of the fifties' larger concerns for family and motherhood, realizes the loss inflicted upon her by the death of her first husband, Gilbert Erskine. Again engaged to the lawyer who was helping her find her first husband's corpse, Ariah's insecurity is still deep in her heart. Ariah fears that her second husband, Mr. Dirk Burnaby, may leave her at any time, as Mr. Erskine did. This fear can be accounted for from an economic perspective. The wealthy aspect of the new social class she joins convinces Ariah that her marriage may not last long for it is not based on any sense of equality. Indeed, in most of her husband's meetings with others Ariah is "excluded from their conversation" (131). The difference in social class brings with it a difference in perception on the part of Ariah: "They had an air of money and entitlement that caused Ariah to see her husband in a new light. He's one of them. His loyalty is to them" (131). Ariah's marriage to Dirk Burnaby, which has, as it were, no solid love basis, is a multifold gains sort of marriage. Beside the traditionally known gains of marriage it has two significant roles to play in Ariah's life. On the one hand, it absorbs her emotional shock after the suicide of her first husband; and on the other it is an economically uplifting one. And this is the point I will turn to now.
The “new light” Ariah sees her husband in is this power of money that accounts for his prosperity and prestigious life with which Ariah is shocked. She is not yet economically independent; thus, there is a sense of economic security she seems to aspire to. Her economic insights, however, transcends the here and now benefits of marriage. She intuitively foresees the transient gains of this marriage, and predicts accurately her prospective economic shift. This accounts for her insistence on giving music lessons. In point of fact, Ariah, who, by marriage, joins an upper class family, loses this prestigious position when she decides to dissociate herself from the Burnaby family. Ariah, however, comes out of that marriage with enough economic power to sustain her little family on the road to the future. Moreover, the death of Dirk Burnaby adds to Ariah’s financial responsibilities because she has now more expenses for the kids’ education. Even after they grow up and some of them contribute to the expenses of their new household, much remains on the mother’s shoulders. Indeed, the mother’s stronghold of the family’s expenditures grants her more power over her little family. This is why when Ariah’s power becomes at risk when her son Royall, out of the money he wins in racing bets, tries to pay back some of the money his Mom pays for his unfinished wedding. One of the power relations here can be interpreted as nutrient as Ariah’s sacrifice of Burnaby’s wealth, despite its long-term impact, aims to protect her children from the potential risks of upper-class life.

Ariah was on her feet. Her authority had been challenged, her sovereignty in this kitchen was at stake. She gazed hungrily at her opponent like one who has been attacked in her sleep, off-guard. She pushed the hundred-dollar bills... “It’s tainted money. I can’t touch it.” (The Falls 328)
The few years of giving "piano lessons" have enabled Ariah to "save out dollars, quarters," and "dimes" *(The Falls* 328). It was her insistence on giving those lessons despite her in-laws' rejection of her work, that saved her little family in the long run. But why is a woman denied her right to work? This is a question that is rarely posed explicitly in Oates's fiction and it is worth some attention.

The Burnabys' rejection of Ariah's work, and, by analogy, Reid Pierson's rejection of Krista's in *Freaky* and Bucky's rejection of Norma Jeane's, are parts of the history of the feminists' struggle on the economic front. They are a part of the sexual politics with which Theodore Roosevelt (1901-9) opens twentieth-century America *(Cooper101)*. Oates's three women find their way out of the complete dependence on their husbands without fully extricating themselves out of the moral and legal yoke of their situated power relations. They, in varying degrees of intensity, however, fall prey to the different forms of subjectification and manipulation: both of these are depicted as essential pillars of the capitalist system. Rejecting these protagonists' work is also a part of an inconsistent history of American females' employment. Some social historians have given voice to these concerns:

No class of people experienced more change as a consequence of the war than the American women. All through the 1930s, government, labor and business officials had preached that women workers should return to the home to guarantee stability in society and an income for breadwinners. Women teachers who married were fired, federal legislation prohibited more than one member of the same family from working in the civil service, and 82 percent of the respondents to a Gallup poll declared that
wives should not be employed if their husbands worked. . . . only as a wife
and mother could the American woman “arrive at her true eminence.”
(Chafe, The Unfinished Journey II)

Women’s place in the labor market was mainly decided by men and by men’s need
during peace and war. Once they were called upon to fill up the vacant jobs which used to
be filled up by those men who participated in WWII. When the war was over and men
returned home women were invited to their old kingdoms: the homes. Norma Jeane is
one of Oates’s protagonists who loses her “secure” home and, self-deluded, encroaches
into the masculine sphere of jobs outside the home.

In Oates’s Blonde, the omnipresent power of the capitalist sexual predator Otto
Ose epitomizes the power which produces him. Oates’s struggle against this double-fold
victimization of women is best summarized in one long paragraph that is worthy of citing
in full:

‘Don’t make me into a joke, Otto. I beg you.’ He laughed. He was
delighted. It was revenge, and we know that revenge is sweet. He’d been
waiting for Norma Jeane to come crawling back to him. He’d been waiting
to shoot her in the nude since the first hour he’d seen her . . . As if she
could hide from him. From the eye of Otto Ose’s camera, as from the very
eye of Death nobody hides. How many females in his life time had Otto
Ose stripped of their clothing and of their pretensions and ‘dignity’ and
each had initially vowed Never! as this girl imagining herself superior to
her fate had vowed Never, I will not, oh never! As if she’d been a virgin.
In her soul. As if inviolable. In a capitalist-consumer economy in which no body, like no soul, is inviolable. (Blonde 280)

A close reading of this short extract, a part of Oates’s biographical fictionalization of the American actor Marilyn Monroe, draws attention to the harsh struggles she experiences in her intrusion into the movie business. The whole text as well as the whole novel strives to narrate not only Monroe’s struggles to find herself a space in the capitalist patriarchal culture of the 1950s but also her persistent efforts not only to “exist” but also to excel in this new world. Oates’s novel in itself is a sort of “literary” struggle to bring to the fore a few aspects of the oppressed and silenced voices in Monroe’s life. The extract may serve as a striking example of the multiplicity of the potential interpretations of the text: the tangible Jewish financial domination in the American market, drug-addiction in the early history of Hollywood film industry, sexual abuse against female stars, and last but not the least, the perpetuation of what has been termed as the two faces of eve: “dependence” and “choice” as Solinger calls them. This latter point is a profile of the binary of “dependence/choice” in the 1950s:

In the 1950s, (white) women were supposed to be dependent; their independent choices were inconsistent with dependency and therefore were very likely to reflect poor decision-making and carry bad consequences (Solinger 1+)

This brief statement puts in a nutshell one of the possible readings of the justification for the ending of the novel. Monroe’s short journey into the mysteries of the insatiable capitalism of Hollywood’s “man’s world” was, partially, her own fault. For from the
moment she chooses to be other than "real" herself, she has an apparent complicity in the shaping of her fatal end. The gender-power relation is one of the crucial power relations in Oates's *Blonde*. By the same token, and following the Foucauldian power analysis, a better interpretation of the relationship between the two characters in Oates's extract can be achieved by what Foucault calls "analysis of power relations through the antagonism of strategies" (Foucault 780). That is if taken from a gender perspective, interpreting power relations becomes easier if looked through the antagonism that characterizes the relationship between the two sexes: hence, feminism is easier understood if analyzed from a patriarchal perspective and vice versa.

A feminist reading of the gender-based power relation of these two characters in this extract foregrounds the victimization of Marilyn Monroe and blames the capitalist blood-sucking exploitative power of Otto Ose, the Jewish producer: "As if 'Marilyn Monroe' was merchandise. You saw the billboard, you made a call and an offer. What was Marilyn's price?" (Oates, *Blonde* 489). As her resistance to Ose's authority seems to represent a "violation" of the dominant cultural codes, Oates cunningly draws attention to the change of discourse that emerges from such a challenge. Words such as "pretensions," "dignity," and "fate," illustrations of the relations between powers, culture and discourse, are themselves cultural constructs. They are there to legitimatize Otto's oppressiveness and exploitation of Monroe's femaleness. From an Oatesian perspective, the gender-based exploitative power relation in which Otto Ose epitomizes the male domination in the most extreme commodifying of the female--it should be understood as a part of the network of institutions which constitute the cultural scene of the fifties.

Oates, in an interview, puts these power relations in the 1950s in a nutshell:
Back in the 1950s and earlier, you were thrown out in to this great ocean of conflict and there were people in power, and they tended to be white men and they had power and they weren’t going to give it up to some black or some women. (Oates, “Birnbaum Vs Joyce Carol Oates” n.pag.)

Read from a patriarchal perspective, Monroe is to blame as she sells her body for public consumption. She could have stayed with her in-laws instead of going to the labor market where money is at the center of everything and where nothing is inviolable. This market has its own logic where things, objects and, for that matter human beings, are understood in their monetary value and have no intrinsic value of their own. This is much truer of the film industry in the 1950s. Human flesh, like any other commodity, is for sale. In all these examples one traces a rejection of the capitalist ideology. Emerging from the sufferings and imbalance of power relations the capitalist system enhances, anti-capitalist discourse is part of the multiculturalism in America. Oates’s texts give a space for such a rejection as in The Rise where Kathleen Hennessey is advised by her lover: “You should find a better job . . . Stop letting them exploit you. Colonize you. The hospital is a business, a capitalist enterprise, they’re out for profits” (104). Other female protagonists of the 60s like Sister Irene in “In the Region of Ice” and Marya (Marya: A Life) struggle hard to secure themselves economically. Both seek jobs in departments of English which they manage to get despite the scarcity of jobs in such departments in the 60s as Johnson states in his biography of Oates.

What all this brief sketch of Oates’s representation of American economy at different decades of the twentieth century amounts to is a demonstration of the diverse
ideologies, the different kinds of struggles and power relations which have characterized the history of capitalism in America. Though capitalism has been embraced as the only available alternative social cement for the multicultural American social fabric and its unifying identity, it has, rarely been held to do so by other layers of that social fabric: women and African Americas are but two illustrative cases in Oates's texts. Capitalism is a power that carries within itself both positive and negative components: It has been an invincible power for some Americans but, simultaneously, it has a destructive power for others.

(b) Religion

Religion is one of the most attentively treated topics in Oates' fiction. It is not only a site of struggles and power relations throughout the modern history of the United States of America, but it is also a crucial cultural profile Oates uses in reconstructing the histories of her protagonists, in fashioning the American religious map and the intellectual debates that have tried, and are still trying, to reshape that map. It is clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that Oates's fiction is itself one of the sites where conflicting ideologies are getting their voices heard.

A number of Oates’s texts bear a secular stamp: in several of these texts there is overarching blasphemous discourse. My use of any religious terms should be understood in this Oatesian frame of mind. A few years before the publication of Son of the Morning Louis Cassels, in his essay “The Concept of God as Personal Debated” cites Rabbi Levi A. Olan of Temple Emanuel, Dallas, as ascribing the “doubts” of God’s characteristics of “all-knowing, and all powerful” to what he calls: “The existence of so much evil and
suffering in the world” (23). The 1970s, a decade that witnessed the return of Christian fundamentalism, also retained the spirit of the desire for “change” and freedom of “all authorities” except that of the “self.” This is why, for Oates as it was for many skeptical intellectuals and laymen, God is no longer the center of the universe. Hence, there went the shift of the power center from the Divine to the personal. The “Acquisition of truths,” the narrator of Oates's *Son of the Morning* asserts, is made “through the willful effort of one’s own human labor, not through the caprice of supernatural beings” (115). This is not a mere philosophical postulate: it is an outcry against what Flint and Porter call “the re-emergence of Christian conservatism as a dynamic political force in the late twentieth century” (28+). Published in the early 1990s, *Heat* includes a short story that apparently positions Oates’s fiction alongside other media in fostering the secular ideology in the public discourse. Medved gives brief, yet poignant, descriptions of the role media play in fashioning people's characters:

The characters on the small screen serve to define what constitutes normal and desirable behavior. Children and adolescents regularly imitate heroes from television in shaping their styles of speech, dress, and grooming, it is only to be expected that they will similarly try to follow the lead of these fictional role models when it comes to intimate relationships. (*Hollywood Vs. America* 115)

This “Hollywood Vs. America” sort of struggle, as Medved’s title states, suggests the crucial role media have played in fashioning the novelist and his or her factional world.

In Oates's short story “Leila Lee,” it is noted that both “television and movies” have
The omniscient narrator, commenting on a statement made by Lamra Jr., denies the very existence of blasphemy:

It was a remark that floored Leila Lee, she'd never heard anything like it in her life, apart, maybe, from television and movies where amazing remarks just rolled off people's tongues as if they were natural. And it was blasphemy, wasn't it, if there still was such a thing? (Oates, Heat 207)

It is noteworthy that Oates uses "amazing remarks" in association with blasphemy. Such "remarks" rarely escape Oates's imagination when religion is the issue at hand. The punning title of the pamphlet Alex finds on the Miami Beach--"Is There a God Who Cares?" (Oates, All the Good People 222) is an illustration of Oates's blasphemous discourse which is once topped with her denouncing of Christianity. "Christianity," in one of her letters Oates admits, "is certainly not my way" (Johnson, Invisible 218). Yet, Oates uses religion as a means of transforming the unjustness of American society and culture. Some parts of such unjustness are located in the religious discourse itself as Oates's texts painstakingly try to demonstrate. Oates's texts, a part of some old and modern sentiments, cast shadows of doubt on the possibility of hope and justice any religion can bring to the lives of her American protagonists. In a word, many of her characters apostatize before texts end. She does not celebrate the religious liberty that has characterized American life since the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. She demonstrates a total rejection of religion. Such a rejection has its genesis in what Milazzo, in his classification of Oates's Son of the Morning, calls "the power that fanatical evangelical churches hold over individuals and society" (xii). Consequently,
some of Oates’s texts, particularly her *Son of the Morning*, reconstruct the power of religion in such a way as to pin down the deep intervention of religion both in the individual’s life and in the state’s affairs. In one of Johnson’s thoughtful observations about how Oates relates to religion, he offers this brief statement:

> Joyce came to view churches as organizations interested primarily in consolidating power. “I think people have been brainwashed through the centuries.” She later remarked. “The churches, particularly the Catholic Church, are patriarchal organizations that have been invested with power for the sake of the people in power, who happen to be men. It breeds corruption.” (*Invisible 40*)

Here as in her texts, Oates’s discourse is a part of the broader spectrum of the overwhelming secularism that is frequently equated with self-autonomy and rationality. “Free, rational control,” Taylor remarks “is associated with freedom from submission to God” (*Sources of the Self* 315). Such secularism has its root in the individuals’ inwardness that makes the self the center of the world. For Oates’s polemic secular discourse echoes a question that most secular discourses pose. “Who needed a church when one’s own values and interests furnished the spiritual nourishment they decided was adequate for this new age?” Erling Jorstad doubts in his discussing of religion in America in the 80s (*Holding Fast/Pressing on: Religion in America in the 1980s*) 7). This is very likely why very few of Oates’s protagonists have any confident relations with religion. Most of her characters either experience a kind of transient, skeptical, distrustful or total lack of any contact with religion. The relationship between Americans and religion both
in Oates’s fiction and the American culture at large, is rife with several kinds of struggles with the power of religion over the individual’s life. Oates insists on her characters’ disengagement with religion and she expresses this fictional postulate in different ways. Oates represents such struggles against the external authority of religion at different intervals of the twentieth century. In the early decades, Oates plots a resistance to religion in *I Lock*. The protagonist of *I Lock* begins by resisting going to services but “she became religious suddenly” (9). In the fifties, *Foxfire* moves one step more and “frees” the individual from any compelling belief in God (6). Implicitly stressing this freedom, the text adds that The FOXFIRE girls are “blessed“ not with the grace of God but of “Rightness” (48); the text then moves on to the secular stage where Maddy-Monkey (the narrator of the text) is a disbeliever and, deridingly, questions the very existence of God and describes her denouncement of God as “wise” (121). In the mid-sixties, Marvin Howe, an attorney in *Do with Me* is indifferent to religion. He, however, states the condition of the churches of his time: “The Churches are being destroyed, all right, maybe God Himself is destroying them, no matter . . . I’m not a religious man” (*Do with Me* 124). Later, “for most” Americans, we are told, “religion is finished” (*Do with Me* 235). However, contrary to these disengaged characters with religion, there are others who have been fashioned by the very power of religion and whose presence in Oates’s world is a part of the come-back of religion to America’s public and political life. In “Shame,” Father Rollins’s identity is fashioned by the very religious label of “Father.” People used to smile to him, not out of recognition of his character, but “because he was a priest.” His “real” name Andrew Rollins has been replaced by “Father Rollins” and in most cases by “Father” (*The Wheel* 103). For others, he is the “Father”: a happily-
accepted self-cancellation. His late friend Frank, however, had retained Rollins’s nonreligious identity and used to mention his first name at home as his wife says (The Wheel 7). As intimacy is promoted between the priest and his late friend’s wife, Toni, “Andrew” and not the “Father” is the name with which Andrew identifies himself. This sort of proliferation of identity is not peculiar to the divided-self of Andrew. Even Toni’s son used to have two names: Robert “in his birth certificate” and Robin at home (The Wheel 113). It has more to do with social discourse than with religious discourse.

Oates’s Son of the Morning is a site of conflicting ideologies and cultural forces which may in different ways account for the kind of struggles and power relations that predominate Oates’s, and for that matter, America’s religious map. It identifies a space where this conservatism is challenged by juxtaposing both religion and politics in an aesthetic consideration of this cultural phenomenon. The recurrence of religious and secular discourse is one of the different means of this challenge. It is a part of the visible comeback of religion in the late seventies and early eighties. It is mostly devoted to fundamental Christianity. In their discussion of the role of religion in Carter’s presidency, Flint and Porter delineates the seventies as the threshold of the come-back of such fundamentalism:

In 1970s America, Carter’s religious fervor and its association with old-time traditional American values had great political resonance. However, what is significant is that by the 1970s, religious issues had re-entered mainstream politics even though conventional indicators register that the
1970s were a less religious decade than the 1920s or even the 1950s.

(28+)

Oates's *Son of the Morning* represents a part of the impact of this "religious fervor" by creating a space where the contradictory relationship between the dogmatic discourse of Nathan's religious extremity and his grandfather's humanist (or "rationalist") discourse is made visible. Reading this text in a different light other than the overshadowing religious tones it is charged with helps to penetrate deeper into the different struggles and power relations the text suggests and into the mutual effect art and culture have on each other. Notwithstanding, let us first take Oates's *Son of the Morning* as a religious text and continue the discussion of women's position vis-à-vis religion in Oates's works. In this connection the text offers two contradictory pictures. For a start, the presence of a male savior, that is Jesus, is not something that many feminists seem to welcome. Crawford cites one illustrative case of this question: "Rosemary Ruether thinks a male saviour encourages male dominance since it stresses male suffering, not female" (*What is Religion* 68). Ironically enough, for many of Oates's women this "men's protection" itself expropriates the little security they enjoy. *Son of the Morning* appropriates a male character for the task of prophecy. Oates's replica of Jesus Christ in this text is another "male" prophet--Nathan. The pivotal scene in this text is the event of Nathan's sinning. This sin-committing is ascribed to Leonie's seduction of Nathan; in other words, it is the consequence of a woman's momentous intrusion into Nathan's privacy. Nathan's sin is that he gives in for what has been termed "Temptation of the flesh" (*Son of the Morning* 192). The text implicitly suggests that this is one way of justifying any exclusion of women from the religious mission of Prophecy. Reverend Beloff warns his daughter
Leonie not to distract Nathan from his work (*Son of the Morning* 190) yet she does distract Nathan and seduces him (198-209). *Son of the Morning* has that religious justification: it is Eve who expels Adam out of Heaven. (Another example of such “destructive” female intrusion is in Oates’s *The Falls*. The appearance of Nina Olshaker leads Dirk Burnaby to lose his earthly paradise: his family, his job and the good reputation he has been building for years and finally his life.)

On the other side of the religious spectrum of this issue of the relation between religion and the American individual there are some pious characters like Nathan’s grandmother Opal. Leonie’s influence on Nathan stands in an oppositional front to Nathan’s grandmother. Leonie is depicted as devilish enough as to cause a rupture in the harmony of Nathan’s spirituality whereas his grandmother, Opal, brings a “new” prophet or “Christ” into being. Here, we have two contradicting portraiture of the possible relation between women and religion in American culture. A woman is not only the mirror that reflects the dark side of man’s worldly instincts (which Oates calls “temptation of the flesh” (*Son of the Morning* 192) or a centrifugal force that takes Nathan away from the spiritual purity but she is also the one who contributes to the perpetuation of faith and social cohesion.

*Son of the Morning* is one of Oates’s topmost skeptical and dialectical texts in terms of the position of religion in American culture. As a matter of fact, reading this story in the light of some political co-texts helps clarify certain aspects of this Oatesian religious text. *Son of the Morning* resonates with the impact of eighteenth-century Enlightenment on Americans. This movement has not only permeated American history
but has also reshaped greater parts of it. The historian Norman F Cantor, calling it the “second revolution” draws attention to the significance of the Enlightenment in America’s history. He calls the Enlightenment “the liberal rationalism”:

that eventually produced the American and French revolutions and modern political liberalism, and that helped make the Constitution with which we are still trying to live, and sometimes trying to ignore.

*(Twentieth-Century Culture Modernism to Deconstruction 2)*

The spirit of Enlightenment overshadows most of the dialectical questions which emerge out of the debates between Thaddeus and his wife Opal. Notwithstanding its defeat by Nathan’s and his grandmother’s religious fundamentalism, this spirit brings to the fore some of the most dialectical relationships Oates’s Americans have with religion.

As the United States is a nation of migrants from various corners of the world, but, particularly in its incipient and formative years, mainly from the European Continent, it is natural that it is affected by the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. (On Oates’s fictional, just as on the larger American, map, there spread groups of immigrants of different European origins. Among these are Polish-Russian and Irish in *Heat*; British in *I’ll Take You There* and German in *The Tattooed Girl* and *Where is Here?*). Such an influence has been carried out well into the twentieth century American cultural scene, mostly manifested in the intellectual and religious spheres, making clear the connection between European and American cultures. These are some of the “facts of history” as the American historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. calls them:
... that Europe was the birthplace of the United States of America, that European ideas and culture formed the republic, that the United States is an extension of European civilization, and that nearly 80 percent of Americans are of European descent. (The Disuniting of America 71)

It is more likely that extreme individualism and general propensity to secularism are some of this manifest extension. And these are two "pillars" of Oates's fiction that make Oates and her fiction as a partial product of the Enlightenment. Indeed, the historical landmark of the Enlightenment overshadows most of the controversial issues about religion Oates's texts try to explore. A noteworthy observation about the relationship between Oates's protagonists and religion is that the former are utility maximizers and therefore do not find religion helpful in granting them the maximum pleasure and the minimum pain or loss. With such a utilitarian view of religion which emerges from deeply rooted individualism, the individuals, and not any external authority, are capable of defining the pleasure and the pain. For Oates's characters God should interfere to grant them pleasure, happiness, safety, and freedom. Ariah asks God for a daughter and then says "My life would be complete, then. God, I would ask you for nothing more, I promise" (The Falls 163). The Falls, partially reconstructs the sixties, a pivotal decade of revolutionary "consciousnesses," it adds to the skeptical attitudes towards religion. Oates's The Falls raises a few questions which highlights such skepticism:

Why did God create so many creatures, only to let them fight frantically with one another for existence, and then to pass into oblivion? Would
mankind disappear too, one day? Was this God’s plan? For surely there was a plan, Christianity must try to comprehend, and to explain. (30)

But if things go against what Oates’s Americans wish or expect to gain then, agnosticism, skepticism, and sometimes atheism are the terms to describe the people’s relation with God. Leila Lee epitomizes this kind of categorization. “When life went well she didn’t think about God, but when life snarled she found herself thinking about God a good deal, as if trying to bargain with, or outguesses, Him” (Oates, Heat 210). Gladys, Norma Jeane’s mother epitomizes an Oatesian agnostic character from the 1930s. She, not so different from Thaddeus Vickery, confesses: “I was baptized in the Christian religion because my mother was a deluded soul, but I’m no fool. I’m an agnostic. I believe in science to save mankind, maybe” (Oates, Blonde 43). A Christian soul is a “deluded soul”! If one compares this evaluative expression with Truman’s anti-Communist speech in which he describes Communism as “godless” one realizes the drastic shift in attitudinal discourse about religion from the 1950s to the 1960s. It is not difficult to find out the long-term objective for Truman’s linking of Communism” with “godlessness”: to deepen the public antagonism against Communism. The standpoint from which a number of Oates’s Americans’ relation to God is determined is the pursuit of happiness and avoidance of harm and loss. If God grants them the happiness they pursue they remember Him; for most Americans, like Leila Lee, remember God only when life is running to their satisfaction.4

Dr. Thaddeus Vickery, an intellectual himself, shows a total rejection of religion. He “did not accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour: he didn’t think of Jesus Christ at all” (Son
of the Morning 37). Dr. Vickery's secularism maybe interpreted from different angles.

On the on hand, Dr. Thaddeus Vickery is Oates's symbol of the Enlightenment; that is a symbol of America itself. An insightful comment on this interchangeable connection between America and the Enlightenment is tersely expressed in an essay “From Immigration to Acculturation” by the American historian Arthur Mann. “The United States,” Mann remarks, “was an ideal, the embodiment of the values for which the Enlightenment stood” (73). Dr. Vickery’s attack on Christianity maybe interpreted as a part of his being a symbol of that Enlightenment. This was the role the Enlightenment played on religion in Europe. It is the Enlightenment which as James M Bryne accurately puts it “sowed the seeds of the predominantly secular society in which we [Americans] live today” and its role in uprooting religion he describes as “the de-Christianizing of Europe” (Religion and the Enlightenment from Descartes to Kant 17). The terms “secular” or “atheistic” are the most appropriate for the description of Dr. Vickery’s discourse in Son of the Morning; for he is an atheist as Oates rightly classifies his attitudes towards Christians (135). In some of the extreme manifestations of his crude secular discourse, Dr. Vickery shows total disrespect for Jesus Christ (see pages 125 and 136). On the other hand, Dr. Vickery’s rejection and denouncement of Christ is apparently a part of what is known as “the American’s universal suspicion of external controls or elaborate rules” (Harris 142). ! is also a part of what Mitchell Levitas calls “defiance of authority” (America in Crisis 119).

Oates’s Son of the Morning does reconstruct a partial history of “the resurgence of fundamentalist Christianity in America in the late 1970s” to use Johnson’s words (Understanding 143). The novel represents this insurgence in the 1970s and the 1980s
with frequent reference to the 1960s as well, covering what is sometimes described as "The Great Awakening" in American history. (See especially Jorstad 1-19.) *Son of the Morning* is, then, better interpreted more than just a religious text fed with Oates's literary imagination; it is a part of an ongoing attempt to revive the Jeffersonian idealism. Jefferson, as Gary Taylor and Helen Hawley put it, "believed that there needed to be a 'wall of separation' between the state and the church" (344+). While emphatically subsumed under the guise of religion, this text is a part of an American political discourse that calls for what Oates, in this text, classifies as "a revolution in consciousness" (*Son of the Morning* 321). To the same end, the violence that characterizes most pivotal scenes in this text can be interpreted as a part of the liberal and intellectual fears of the rise of Christian fundamentalism to any political power in America in the 1970s and 1980s.

Hence, here enters the Oatesian polemic rhetoric against Republican administrations such as those of Ronald Reagan (*Black Water* 106) and of Bush 1989-93 (*Black Water* 42). Such administrations have strong alliances with what is politically known as the New Right (or Neo-conservatism). Both Presidents belong to this conservative movement and during their presidencies religion made a strong come-back to America, and by extension to its political life. Oates's discourse, as is the case with many Left liberals, bitterly criticizes this conservative movement. Some of her trenchant criticism is directed at some major New Right's concerns such as those Michael Schaller's *Reckoning with Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s*:

> New Right activists believed that environmentalism . . . abortion rights, gay rights, feminism, welfare, affirmative action, pornography, and the
Equal Rights Amendment all fostered a destructive “permissiveness” that undermined the value of family, church, and work. (23)

At least four of the above-listed concepts are recurrent themes in Oates’s fiction. “Environmentalism” and “Feminism,” for instance, are discussed in Oates’s  *Do with Me*,  *Blonde*, and  *The Falls*.

The struggles between religious and secular discourses are part of the major prevailing changes of America in the 1960s and 1970s. “These changes,” Harris argues, “resulted from a series of revolts against authority and from revolutions in consciousness” (148). Implicitly utilized in  *Son of the Morning*, these “revolutions” have shaped some of the contours of the political rhetoric in this text. What lurks behind Oates’s choice of the year 1947 for the death of Thaddeus Vickery, for instance, is Oates’s awareness of the significance of this year in American history. Oates’s choice for this year has its two-fold significance: on the one hand, his death within the story’s narrative boundaries gives vent for the drastic changes in the story; on the other hand, 1947, according to the historian, Michael Barone “was a hinge in American history, a time in which the country changed quite markedly from one thing into another” ( *Our Country* 197). In a similar vein, another date of Oates’s choice has its political resonance. Coale (without elaborating about the possible political implications of her remarks) has remarkably noted that the date Oates chooses for Nathan’s utter collapse towards the end of the novel coincides with another equally important political event: that is “August 8, 1974, the day Richard Nixon resigned from the presidency” (Coale 131). One more
possible cause for juxtaposing Thaddeus and Nixon in this reading of Oates’s text is what Robert J. Spitzer calls “the unchecked presidential power”:

But far more than any other event in recent years, the excesses of the Nixon administration, culminating in the Watergate scandal, precipitated a host of academic and journalistic responses, all questioning in some respect the traditional assumptions about the desirability of unchecked presidential power. (*The Presidency and Public Policy* 12)

The “excesses” of Nixon’s administration has a resonance with Thaddeus’s misadministration of his life crises like the crisis in his family. It could be taken as a dual sort of excesses: on the one hand, Thaddeus’s excessive rejection of his family’s religiosity and on the other, Opal’s and her grandson’s excessive defying of the father’s power and sovereignty. Again, this is in line with the American “universal suspicion of external control” in Neil Harris’ words (142) or “defiance of authority” in Levitas’s words (119).

Now, all said and done, there is one counterargument which is more appropriate here. The counterargument, and this is my article of faith and part of my struggle with some of Oates’s texts, goes as follows: contrary to the religious-based violence in *Son of the Morning*, religion has the power to pacify American life. It is more appropriate to claim that violence is more rooted in the absence of religion. Indeed, religions pay more attention to the ethical code of a society and these are effective tools of protection and unity. An illustrative case is the case of school violence during Clinton’s presidency. William P. Marshall writes: “Instances of school violence that had captured national
attention were ascribed by some to have been caused by the absence of religion from public education" (453).

The religiously disengaged self is recurrent in Oates’s long and short texts. As an apparently uncommitted Catholic, Oates reconstructs parts of the larger Catholic scene of the fifties. The portrayal of the “Ex-Athlete” who “was a Catholic” is an illustrative text. Like many other Catholics of the fifties:

He disliked women who ‘tried to be men.’ He was filled with indignation and revulsion at the thought of ‘unnatural’ women who didn’t want to have children. He disapproved of abortion. He may have practiced birth control, though the Church forbade any method except rhythm. He disapproved of Communists and Communists sympathizers, ‘Red’ and ‘pinkos.’ (Blonde 477)

What emerges from this description of the Ex-Athlete are some of the reasons for Oates’s hostile attitude towards Catholicism. Some of Oates’s texts attribute “misogyny” and “anti-individualism” as some of the major characteristics of Catholicism. This line of conservative Catholicism is in sharp contrast with the surface religiosity of the Playwright who appears at the same time as the Ex-Athlete but takes an opposite attitude to that of the Ex-Athlete. “Religion,” for the Jewish Playwright, “meant little . . . except as a mode of ancestor respect” (Oates, Blonde 656).

In “The Knife,” Harriet “rarely gave a thought to religion now, or what’s called God” (Oates, Heat 24). “Truth” has nothing to do with Jesus: “I was beaten mercilessly
for preaching the truth. I don't mean Jesus, I mean the rational mind. I mean Jesus in his physical torment" (Oates, Where is Here 4). Kelly Kelleher loses any religious "conformity" (Oates, Black Water 73). This sense of fluctuation goes to the extent that some protagonists try to visualize how God looks like. This is one of the preoccupations of Oates's protagonist, Alma, in Oates's The Tattooed Girl (244). In a similar line of skepticism Oates talks of Allah in her Solstice (166). Anellia "never believed in the God of the Holy Bible, nor even in God of Spinoza," and she would not admit to the Holiness of the Bible: "there was a Holy Bible, as this revered book called itself" (Oates, I'll Take You There 255); Gillian does not believe in God and accordingly she never prays (Oates, Beats 11). Ironically enough, one of the rarest cases when a male protagonist asserts his relation with God is the sexually obsessed serial killer Quentin P. of Oates’s Zombie: “When I was with God. I said I believed in God but did not think He believed in me because I was not worthy” (46). Religion is more an attraction than a faith. Some of Oates’s characters, Anellia for instance, are fond of the physical representations of religion like the church building or the way the Holy Bible looks (Oates, I'll Take You There 255).

A number of Oates’s texts represent the contradicting roles religion asks of American women. Back in the late nineteenth century, women had a “special responsibility in the drive toward social salvation” (Chafe, Women and Equality 24). Yet, a woman’s role is to remain under the man’s umbrella of protection. “God had meant women to be conscious of their weakness so they would turn to men for protection” (Chafe, Women and Equality 25). This disparity between the special roles Christianity assigns to women and what they take to be a partial denial of some of their “rights"
accounts for the constant mistrust of religion that overshadows the discourse of many of Oates’s American women. Ditzion makes a terse and quite pertinent remark in this direction: “Conveniently enough, one of woman’s outstanding social assets was her religious activity; and both text and sermon only convinced her anew of her inferiority” (237). Opal’s “social assets” lie in her religiosity. It is this religiosity that takes her and her grandson to the realm of devoted spirituality. These contradictions vis-à-vis women’s relationship with religion account for, what I will call “religious fluctuation” of some of Oates’s protagonists. That is to say that some of her characters choose a religious path at an early road to social life, then, suddenly they take a detour to the alternatives of religion: atheism, secularism, agnosticism, or simply indifference. Despite the assurance, at the beginning of Oates’ *I Lock*, for example, that Calla is presented as “a devout Christian” (16), she visits the Church twice with long intervals between the two times: she is seen in the Church at her mother-in-law’s death and in her husband’s death (*I Lock* 92-93). However, after her death “her girlhood Bible” is “left open” and its dog-eared pages gives “a look of having been read repeatedly” (*I Lock* 93).

Oates attempts to overgeneralize her assumptions about the relation between women and religion by applying those generalizations to Moslem women too. In her *Solstice* she, misinformed and may be misguided about Moslem women, talks about the “three times a woman gets out” (*Solstice* 166). Indeed, her skepticism of religion’s intrusive role in human beings’ lives is so extreme that it blinds her from perceiving things from a neutral stand. (Indeed, there is scarcely any biographical reference to Oates’s readings about Islam and Muslims apart from the few visits to Anne Tyler who is married to an Iranian (Johnson, *Invisible* 273).
Before I close this discussion of Oates's representation of religion I find it inevitable to bring in Foucault's pertinent remarks about the power of religion or what he calls "pastoral power." Foucault distinguishes between two aspects of this power:

the ecclesiastical institutionalization, which has ceased or at least lost its vitality since the eighteenth century, and its function, which has spread and multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institution. (Foucault 783)

True to most of Oates's texts is this Foucauldian observation. The official religion that is the embracing of external formalities of religion such as church-going, sermon attendance and the like are either totally abandoned, less practiced and if practiced are met with a harsh criticism or polemic discourse. Nevertheless, the function of pastoral power continues to exist and ramify outside what Foucault calls "the ecclesiastical institution" (Foucault 783). It is more likely that secular theorists and writers in general are convinced that unless this last thread of connection with religion is severed, secularism will never dominate. Indeed, the very recurrence of religious discourse in Oates's texts substantiates the ceaseless function of the pastoral power. By the same token, the appearances of characters who internalize religion as well as frequent use of religious discourse by religiously neutral or nonreligious characters are some manifestations of the pastoral power. One illustrative case is the lawyer Jack Morrissey in Oates's Do with Me. The closest simile that comes to his mind in one of his conversations with Elena is religious: "I'm like a man who believes in God, who can't bear anyone talking about God casually...doubting or questioning God" (Do with Me 418). Another illustration is the return to God or to Christ at some crucial moments of one's life: "Christ knows what she
was thinking" goes the statement of the narrator of Rape: A Love Story (Oates 3). The words "Christ" and "God" are recurrent in Oates's fictional world: "Well Christ" (The Hungry Ghosts 128), "My God" (The Rise 101), "for Christ's sake" (All the Good People 15).

As a conclusion to this discussion of religion let me stress that most of the recurrent skepticism in this area overshadows many texts of Oates. She aims at fashioning the overall religious map of twentieth-century America and Oates's texts systematically are committed to render this cultural phenomenon in ceaseless circulation. The clearly atheistic views with which several of Oates's texts are impregnated are a part of the conflicts between religion and secularism in American culture. The triumph of the latter, as many of Oates's texts apparently suggest, is one of the shortest roads to full self-realization in the face of the increasing power of the Neoconservative in American politics. A more crucial point that is inescapable here is the irony of debating religious fundamentalism in Oates's Son of the Morning. This story is, itself, "a form of secular fundamentalism," to borrow Karen Armstrong's words. Such a form of fundamentalism "opposes all forms of faith as belligerently as religious fundamentalists attack secularism" Armstrong argues (40+). Oates's polemic discourse about religion, more notable in her post-1990s' texts, is a part of the fear of a politically dominating hegemony of the Neo-Conservatives.

(c) Politics

There are some onuses on Oates as an American woman fictionist. One of her reviewers has put this Oatesian obligation compendiously: "That Joyce Carol Oates
writes with an unmistakably American voice is a truth more or less universally acknowledged" (Kiely n.pag.). Oates is indubitably an American voice: a voice of a wide layer of the victimized Americans inside (as in most of her texts) and outside of America (as in "American, Abroad," Rape: A Love Story and a few other texts). Many of Oates’s texts draw attention to the different roles politics plays in fashioning the individual and the state. It seems there are endless techniques in which politics contribute to the fashioning of the individual.

Governments, or political societies, seem by definition to make and enforce policy which modifies the behavior of citizens [. . . ] A society may govern by persuasion, moral argument, deceit – generally, with many means which can modify behavior. (Frohock 383)

Oates’s American voice shows great concern for politics. Some of her politically charged texts are rife with vociferous violent actions of the individual as well as of the state. The violent turns that shape the historical or dramatic moments in the lives of most of Oates’s protagonists are, in some cases, unpleasant by-products of some political engagement of one kind or another. Monroe’s death, for instance, is one of the most illuminating examples. Monroe’s acquaintance with the President has probably enabled her to know some top secrets for which she has become a threat to the so-called national security. Hence, her death may be politically justified when looked at from this angle. The myriad struggles and power relations that encapsulate much of Oates’s politically textualized endeavors bring to the fore a much less appreciated aspect of her writing. Indeed, many of her texts illuminate some deeply rooted national concerns. In terms of political issues,
Oates's texts give voice to the unspeakable and provide present readings of some old cultural texts. She has covered a wide spectrum of topics extending from major gender-based political issues like rape and abortion, the drastic effect of nuclear testing on American people, protests against wars as well as the very wars into which Americans are involved and the 1950s' fear of communism or what has been called the Red Scare. Oates, in the Gerthian sense of politics, attempts to "influence the complex distribution of power" (Batterberry and Batterberry 42). In this part of the thesis, we will take a look at a few illustrative cases of Oates's representation of some aspects of American domestic politics and the concomitant violence which emerges from such politics.

The history of several of Oates's female protagonists is a reconstruction of the different factors and institutions that have constituted a number of social phenomena. Among these are rape, abortion and divorce. Rape, however, is the most violent of these phenomena. Throughout the twentieth century, American history and politics have witnessed a number of fiercely and hotly debated issues related to violence. Rape is one of these issues and it is one that is recurrent in Oates's fiction. Most of the rape cases in Oates's texts comply with the definition of rape in law: "The crime of sexual intercourse without the consent of the victim, often through force or threat of violence" ("Rape in Law" Def. 39150). Violence is a common denominator in most rape cases in Oates. The rape incidents in some of Oates's texts, like Rape: A Love Story, Small Avalanches, Son of the Morning, Heat or Haunted, are a part of some major frameworks of the rape issue in American culture: past and present. Many of these incidents are not necessarily identical with the stereotypes of rape cases of their times. However, this rupture in time does not refute or belie the harshness of such a cultural phenomenon but rather it
establishes analogies and associations with other times (and maybe places too). The rape case of Teena Maguire takes place in “the early minutes of July 5, 1996” (Oates, *Rape: A Love Story* 6). This particular year witnessed a set of major antirape activities on more than one level. A stiffening penalty for rape crimes is voiced in the “Bill on Date-Rape” signed by President Bill Clinton (Strobel, “Clinton Signs” 4) and some calls for “censorship” of sexual materials that promote sexual crimes like rape are echoed in widely read newspapers like the *Washington Times*:

> The board is there to decide how the libraries will serve us - the people who respect the laws of our commonwealth that declare rape, murder, sexual lasciviousness and perverted behavior absolutely illegal. (“It's the Library's Duty to Censor Some Books” 2)

However, the text voices the anxiety and grave concern for the increasing rate of rape cases in a 1998 report by “the Justice and Health and Human Services departments” of the United States wherein “54 percent of those reporting they had been raped were under the age of 17 when the assault took place” (Seper 1). By the same token, it is reminiscent of the great fear of rape in certain educational institutions like that case of University of Maryland campus expounded in Francesca C. Simon’s “Women’s Fear Grows at Umd” (4). All these associations aside, Oates’s *Rape*, lingers over the painful experience of Teena Maguire, casts doubts on the possibility of the tacit complicity of the law in rape lawsuits in favor of men, and resonates some Republican women’s accusations of Bill Clinton’s contradictory stance on “violence against women.” In a 1996 article, the President was asked to fire Mr. Dick Morris—one of his advisers who was an “allegedly”
rapist-assistant and the core of Republican women's resentments: "The Republican women said Mr. Clinton's stated crusade to combat violence against women seems insincere unless he fires Mr. Morris." Another one said "The president has a habit of saying one thing and doing another" (Blomquist 6). This is probably one of the closest analogies to Oates's text. Moreover, the text has more associations with broader aspects of rape cases as is the case with some reported cases in American newspapers and magazines. Let us have a look at one single case that sheds some light on Oates's representation of rape. I will confine myself to citing a small portion of a reported case in Washington Times in April 1999 about a rape case that occurred "on March 20, 1998":

According to charging documents, she rebuffed . . . Williams, 17, and . . . Adam, 18, when they tried to talk to her . . . the boys knew she was planning to walk about three-quarters of a mile to her father's home. "You don't want to walk home in this [rain]," Williams said to her, according to Mr. Foster. "Come with us. I've got a $50 bill. We'll send you home in a cab." . . . Finally, she agreed . . . The victim recalls, "When I look back on it all, the scariest part of it was the fact that I never saw it coming until it was too late, and even when they were dragging me into the room and tearing off all of my clothes, I still didn't believe that it was happening." She screamed and said she wanted to leave. Someone slugged her in the face. She fell to the floor and briefly lost consciousness. Then Williams said, "If you scream, I'll kill you," . . . Williams displayed a knife and threatened the victim if she told what happened . . . They left the
apartment, ordering her to clean up the condoms, cigarette butts and other debris and "turn out the light when you leave." (Wagner 6)

Oates's concern for the question of rape is a part of her concern about the crucial question of violence in American culture. Rape is depicted as the most common manifestation of women's victimization by men's animalism and brutality. To use Oates's fictional scales of relational power, rape is a sign of women's weakness and men's strength. As such it is one of the perspicuous sites of the unbalanced power relations between the two sexes. It is also one of the most brutal instances of violence. In bringing rape to the fore, Oates's text seems to not highlight women's weakness but rather to stress men's abuse of their power at two levels: first, the physical level where men's power enables them to impose their animalistic instinct on the females; and second, at the law level. At this latter level, most of the laws, as Oates seems to stress, are made by and for men. Accordingly, American laws of rape, some of Oates's texts suggest, need more and more revisions. In her interest in representing several profiles of this phenomenon, Oates attempts to consider women's struggles against rape from more balanced viewpoints. Needless to say that any incident of rape entails a situation of unbalanced power relations: the powerful rapist(s) and the powerless raped victim. Though the former is generally a male sexual predator and the latter a female victim, Oates balances this scale of victimization by introducing raped males in her novel Zombie. The Washington Times report has resonance with many of the rape incidents in Oates's texts. Lonely walking women, loneliness, deserted locations or distant roads, pretentiously sympathetic offers to escort the victim or to help her in one way or another, fear of public shame, threat, and warning are some of the essential constituents of any rape narrative in Oates's fiction.
After a short visit to the gas station to buy a Cola and a bar of candy, Nancy, the 13-year-old girl of "Small Avalanches" takes a short cut to reach home. A man watches her in the gas station, follows her in his car, and offers to take her home, but she ardently declines his offer. Accordingly he tries some other techniques:

"Your feet will get all sore, walking like that," the man said.

"I'm okay."

"Hey, watch out for the snake!" (Oates, *Small Avalanches* 50-51)

Nancy is one of the few cases in which a victim escapes safely the traps of rape. (One more girl who escapes from the paws of her predator is Francesca in *Freaky*.) The analogy between this incident and that of the *Washington Times* report is not difficult to grasp. The rape narrative in Oates's other texts differ only in the sort of catastrophes they bring into the lives of the victims. Oates's Teena Maguire in *Rape: A Love Story* is gang-raped "After she'd made the decision . . . to cross through Rocky Point Park instead of taking the longer way around, to home" (3). Teena's case is the most violent and by far the only complete text that is devoted to the pains and gains of a gang-rape: that is the pains of the victim and the gains of the criminals. Over the whole text brood the two painful notions of (a) women as victims of men's desires and (b) a female's weakness which invites more torments: two main causes for the existence of avenging girls of Oates's *Foxfire*. These two notions are schematized in Oates's *Rape: A Love Story*. The whole text is centered on the devastating consequences of the rapists' devilish desires and the physical, moral, and judicial (if one may say so) torments targeted against Teena's
weakness. *Rape: A Love Story* is one of the few texts which bring to the fore how rape laws can be manipulated to the advantage of the criminal and to the total desperation of the victim. Besides, this text, satirically, accentuates a sort of strange argument Oates mentions in another text “A Middle-Class Education”: Certainly! . . . Some people are born victims. They say. They invite trouble” (*A Sentimental Education* 86). The most prominent power relations in this text are once more the gender relations in which the sexual male predator not only exploits his victim so brutally but denies the brutal side in it. Armed with the lawyers who have the capacity to blur visions of events and turn fallacies into facts and vice versa, the rapists’ domination of the situation in this text calls the rape laws into question.

Another power relation this text suggests is that of the law and the human subject. The power of Schpiro, a judge, resides in the very laws he represents as well as the very courtroom where he practices that power: “Schpiro was a judge presiding over a courtroom with the power to irrevocably alter lives” (Oates, *Rape: A Love Story* 66).

Oates’s reconstruction of the recurrent sexual violence bespeaks the serious need to reconsider revising the prevailing laws that deal with rape cases. What is striking is Oates’s insistence on using the word “rape” at the time when, for different factors, this term has been replaced by the milder epithet: “sexual assault.” Reading rape in some of Oates’s texts in the light of the politics of rape in the USA is a good point in highlighting the connection between art and culture.

David P. Bryden and Sonja Lengnick discuss “the empirical premises” of rape in the criminal justice system in a very long article. I will, selectively, cite some pertinent
parts of this article to use in highlighting cases of rape in Oates's texts. Among the first few points that enlighten one's reading of rape in Oates's fiction are the following ones:

To begin, the case attrition rate in rape cases is shockingly high, and very few rapists are convicted of the crime. (2) Victims often do not report the rape, largely because they fear overbearing, hostile police, (3) and -- should a trial ensue -- vicious attacks on their character. (4) Although false reports of rape are no more common than of other crimes, (5) justice system officials are highly skeptical of women who claim to have been raped by acquaintances. (6) If the rape victim's conduct prior to the crime violated traditional sex-role norms, police commonly disbelieve her report or blame her for the rape. (7) Thus, officials deny justice to women who have engaged in nonmarital sex, (8) or other "improper" activities such as heavy drinking or hitchhiking. (9) None of these sex-role-norm violations is relevant to whether the woman was raped. . . . (Bryden and Lengnick 1194-384)

It is not to substantiate the judicial claims that "promote victim blaming," to use Bryden and Lengnick's words, that Oates's Rape depicts what may be described as Teena Maguire's "improper" behavior:

A woman like that, thirty-five years old and dressed like a teenager. Tank top, denim cutoffs, shaggy bleached-blond hair frizzed around her face. Bare legs, high-heeled sandals? Tight sexy clothes showing her breasts,
her ass, what's she expect? Midnight of July Fourth, firecrackers at the Falls ended at eleven. (5)

It is to justify the slackness with which the judges take Maguire's case. "Wearing sexy attire" makes "acquaintance rape cases...most difficult to win" in Bryden and Lengnick's words (1194-384). The powerless Maguire is doubly victimized and her prolonged emotional and psychological torments are indications to a part of the disturbed balance of power created by the American justice system as it is a part of a history that needs to be rewritten.

Common to most rape cases are the fear of public knowledge and the public shame that is a corollary of such incidents. Indeed, these two consequences of rape cause different kinds of internal and external struggles. Oates traces this issue of shame as a constant process of mortification for the female. Her critique of the cruelty and toughness of the youth of the 1950s is a case in point here. The central concern of Mrs. O'Hagan, the mother of the gang-raped twelve year old Rita O'Hagan in Oates's Foxfire, is that her husband should not know about the rape incident. The text construes this as the mother's fear of her husband's "drinking and sporadic acts of violence" (25-26). That is, however, not the only reason. Fear of the husband's knowledge is in itself a part of the public shame that victims and their relatives make sure to avoid. By the same token, this fear of public knowledge and public shame is buttressed once again in Son of the Morning. After the rapists run and leave Elsa on her own and despite her psychological and physical weakness Elsa's major concern is "hiding" from the communal eye; thus, she is portrayed as being very keen to hide from the eyes of others on her way back home:
She heard herself whimpering; she was so ashamed, everyone would know, everyone would see. The back of her skirt would be stained . . . She hobbled along. If any one saw - ! If one of the Bells was looking out their front windows - ! (Oates, *Son of the Morning* 38-39)

Harriet, the wife of a Professor of history and a mother of a nearly nine-year-old daughter, Bonnie, is attacked in her own house and raped. The thieves take her jewelry, her husband's camera and some cash and leave the house. The links between rape and history as well as the coalescence of rape and silence in Oates's story are worth looking at:

She told the police about the robbery in as much detail as she could recall – she was to remember more the next morning and more, by degrees, in the days following – but she did not tell them about the rape because perhaps it had not been a rape? She'd held the knife in her fingers, after all, and had not used it. And he had not hurt her – much. Not so much as he might have. (*Heat* 37)

There is something lurking behind Oates's choice of linking rape to a history professor's family. It is as if Oates's text tries to show that even history itself is unable to expose the dark face of this social phenomenon. Or could it be a hint to the silence that has characterized much of the history of this phenomenon? Silence, a gesture of powerlessness, incites the predator's assault of the powerless as it assures the former of his or her power over the latter. Harriet's ironic skeptic definition of what rape is suggests an individual's riddle that has crept into the criminal justice system itself:
the men who control the justice system are irrationally obsessed with the danger of false rape accusations. .. Afraid that losing cases will look bad on their records, prosecutors are excessively reluctant to prosecute acquaintance rapists. .. When they do prosecute, the system puts the victim rather than the defendant on trial. .. (Bryden and Lengnick 1194-384)

Is Harriet afraid of being tried for being raped? Reading the unsaid in Harriet’s case (and apart from the issue of shame that is an aftereffect of rape), Harriet’s hesitance to report the rape crime to the police may be interpreted as a “yes” answer to the above question. Maybe she is aware of the possible consequences of reporting this crime and she is afraid of placing herself at the receiving end of verbal abuse and accusation from the judicial system. How can she be sure that the rapists, and not she herself, are put on trial? Indeed, even changing the name of the crime from “rape” to “sexual assault” or some similar term, as Brydon attributes to the judicial system, does not encourage Harriet to report the case. “Bad Girls” reverses this shift in discourse. Icy, who, as a result of a rape attempt has “uglier bruises on her thighs and buttocks” tells her Momma: “You know what he did, Momma? – he assaulted me. Sexual assault! Tried to rape me!” (Oates, Small Avalanches 131). As if “assault” and “sexual assault” are not clear enough: hence she needs to use “rape.”

Oates uses mythology to substantiate the cruelty of rape as in the case of Philomela which Oates mentions in her Beasts:
I reread the tale of Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphosis.* I hadn't realized how ugly it was. Philomela, a virgin, is brutally raped by a man who should have protected her, her brother-in-law Tereus; after he rapes her, Tereus cuts out her tongue to prevent her accusing him. (46)

Thus, rape, as Oates asserts, not only has its foot steady in history but more importantly its silencing mechanism is very old. The concomitant shame of rape and the hesitance to report these crimes encourage more rapes. Oates's "Icy" of the "Bad Girls," and the only mysterious case in all of Oates's texts of rape under discussion here, takes the initiatives and testifies against Drumm, the man who wants to marry Icy's mother:

Orchid and Crystal, when they heard their sister's story, which was an official testimony filed with the county district attorney's office, had to wonder... What was certain was, for Icy, once she found the words to tell the story and saw how adults believed her, not just Momma but strangers, people in authority, and how they felt such sympathy for her, it was true, for her. (*Small Avalanches* 132)

Icy, lying or not, saved no time or effort to make a point for her race. This is indubitably another way of reversing the balance of power in women's favor. Oates's raises the question of the possibility of a feminist revenge not only for all patriarchal odds and ills but also for the misrepresentation of the feminist struggles for a protected and peaceful life. Hence, Oates creates a feminist affinity in *Solstice,* and a feminist power in *Foxfire.*

Johnson observes rightly that the feeling of compassion "toward the powerless victims" of rape has its roots in "Joyce's experience of molestation" (*Invisible* 37). Indeed, the
question of rape in all of Oates's fiction may be read as an Oatesian call for a new politics of rape. Such politics should take into consideration all dimensions of the issue, among which are those Oates narrates in her illustrative texts. A close look at the rapists in Oates's texts one can clearly observe that many of them remain at large after their crimes and no justice is achieved. Oates's texts are a part of the efforts of other feminist activists in this direction. Some of such efforts prove to be fruitful for American women experiencing rape:

recent efforts—particularly by feminist groups—have had marked success in expanding victims' rights. One important reform, which has become active in most states in recent years, has been the removal of statutes requiring that rape victims physically resist the attack. Prior to this reform, victims of rape were required to display clear signs of injury in order to prove that they did not consent to sexual relations. ("Rape in law" Def. 39150)

Thus, art has its share in shaping some aspects of the culture from which it emerges. This is more relevant to Oates's fiction which talks of the daily life of Americans triggering their social ups and downs from the first decade of the twentieth century till the present time. Indeed, Rape: A Love Story is a part of the resistance to what Johnson calls the "taboo against speaking out about rape, molestation, incest" (Invisible 37). For, even the media, Oates's fiction suggests, fosters the "dangers" of women's resistance to men's sexual assaults. Such a resistance is depicted as a potential cause for more violence against women: "An article in the Sunday newspaper had explained that a woman who is
attacked by a man increases her chances of not being murdered by five hundred per cent if she does not resist" (Oates, *Do with Me* 327). It is, in a sense, an outcry against the nightmares of rape like the one Julia Matterling experiences in Oates’s “Phase Change” (*Haunted* 191). Above all, Oates’s texts bring about a counter discourse which strives to look at the question of rape from a wider perspective.

*Foxfire* is, in a sense, a way of taking the hands of law into the female power. It does, what several of Oates’s texts seem to suggest, what the law could not do. Female power is given a more aggressive and violent voice here. The lost power of most of Oates’s female protagonists is compensated for here; their “victims” were “all male” (4). Maddy declares, she “can accept a man . . . as the Enemy” (*Foxfire* 192).

Reading politics in Oates’s fiction is indeed reading different stories of struggles and power relations. Looking for a phrase or a statement that may best sum up the focal point of this part of the chapter, I find great help in one of Foucault’s statements:

> The principle underlying the tactics of battle – that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living – has become the principle that defines the strategy of states. (Rabinow *The Foucault Reader*, 260)

This is exactly what one finds in the ceaseless wars waged by the superpowers. “Killing,” “war,” and “politics” are among the most circulated terminologies associated with American foreign policy. *Blonde* equates “politics” with “war”; it puts the “defeat” of an “adversary” as an end in itself more likely for both politics and war; it embraces Herbert Spencer’s famous catchphrase—“survival of the fittest”—and the parallel Darwinian theory
of “natural selection” to “naturalize” the connection between politics and war (Oates 886). This close association of the two terms resonates with President Roosevelt’s shift “in December 1941” from the economic reform to the war issue when Roosevelt “explained that he was no longer ‘Dr. New Deal,’ but ‘Dr. Win the War’” (James T. Patterson America in the Twentieth Century: A History, 277). Such views, more likely deriving their strength from Locke’s definition of “political power” as “a right of making laws with penalties of death” (The Second Treatise of Government 4), raise many conflicts and controversies in America about the accountability of the power of the state. Many of the political issues in Oates’s texts revolt against such “Foucauldian” and Lockean postulates. Such postulates are buttressed by the unstated Weberian view of power which associates violence with the state. In Oates’s texts, this type of political view is manifested in different strategies of the state. We will consider some of these strategies here.

Like the feminist struggles to reshape the rape-laws and provide better protection for raped victims, so go other struggles by both men and women to encounter what seems to be a violence-to-end-violence sort of governmental policy or to adapt Foucault’s statement--violent state strategies. Once an American writer remarked: “We live in a state in which killing increasingly is used as an important part of criminal justice policy and of the symbolization of political power” (Sarat 3). For “Killing,” the state implements different techniques, all leading to a controversial issue in the criminal justice policy: capital punishment. This is a question which, in Oates’s texts as in American culture at large, has been of major concern and met with rather conflicting views and heated debates. Struggles and different kinds of activism have characterized the history of the
capital punishment abolitionists and anti-abolitionists. Such struggles and conflicting ideologies are widely textualized both in a number of Oates’s texts as well as in other contexts of different kinds. Indeed, those struggles provide a site where discourses literary and nonliterary coalesce; in other words, where Oates’s texts as well as other documentary texts become dynamic cultural texts which help not only to conserve the memory of those violent state strategies but also help re-open those old files to make use of their inexhaustibility and reread them in a new light. From this perspective, Oates’s texts are voices of these conflicting discourses of Americans on both sides of the capital punishment issue. “Capital Punishment,” (a short story in Oates’s Heat), for instance, is an illuminating text in this regard. From the outset, this short story dwells on the dialectical nature of the capital punishment which is the basis for the “trouble between Hope Brunty and her father” (262). “Evander Jones” is an African American “death row prisoner who went insane while awaiting execution” (263). The topic is opened for discussion in Hope’s “civics” class (264) and Hope’s team, “opposing execution... wins” (264-65). There are different kinds of power relations this text suggests. Among these are the power relations between the 15 year old daughter, her father, the television, and the police. The text opens with an axis of disagreement that provokes the smooth river of home relations of this family. Hope’s debate and dialogs with her father point to the decline of parental authority and the crudeness of youth. Hope and her father receive Jones’s reactions to the interviewer differently. Hope sympathizes and the father refuses the very idea of the interview (266). Hope takes further steps to translate her sympathy into actions: she joins “groups protesting Jones’s execution” (268). Ironically, Hope’s “detention,” though naturally causes her to be “scared,” she is more visible in her father’s
eyes: “What strikes him is how tall she’s grown, how solid and ample and heated her flesh.” The father’s fear of the extreme use of force attributed to the antiprotests police actions make him worried about the well-being of Hope at the detention: the main thing is his little girl is all right” (270).

Capital punishment, one of the mechanisms of control and domination of the power of the state (a violent state strategy), does not seem to put an end to the “ceaseless” violence in America. I say “ceaseless,” for this is an indisputable point of agreement with the author, because both American politics and media continually feed such violence and, unfortunately, globalize it. As a point of fact, the struggle against the state mechanisms of domination and control is part of Americans’ distrust of an external authority. An insightful remark that substantiates such distrust is made in a 1997 article “In Government We Don’t Trust” by Joseph S. Nye Jr., a professor of international relations at Harvard. In this article a comparison is drawn between the trust of government in 1964 and in the late 1990s and is found that three quarters of the American public give their trust to a federal government in 1964 whereas only one quarter give their trust in 1997 (99+). I believe such distrust is something that is deeply rooted in the American consciousness. A part of this distrust goes to the criminal justice system. The concern over this crucial issue of capital punishment is one that has preoccupied, and will continue to preoccupy, several layers of the American social fabric. Wrongly victimizing some innocent people is one of the severe objections to the practice of capital punishment in America:
Is the American system of capital punishment stained with the blood of innocent men? Undoubtedly, say death penalty opponents, though no one knows exactly how many of the 500 prisoners who have been killed since the U.S. resumed executions in 1976 were not guilty of the crimes for which they were put to death. “This is a punishment that quite literally buries its mistakes,” says Steven Hawkins, a Washington, D.C., attorney and executive director of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. (Whitaker 100)

Such cultural concerns are partially intensified in the character of Oates’s Adam Berendt. Adam is one of her several protagonists who devote their lives for “idealistic causes.” He is involved in the “National Project to Free the Innocents” who are “mostly black indigent death-row prisoners abandoned by the American criminal justice to die for crimes they had not, in fact, committed” (Middle Age 6). Hence, besides the fears of wrongful convictions there is one more problem: the racial issue. Itself a part of the history of the racial dimension of twentieth-century America, the text points out that race, in more than one way, casts more doubts on the justice of this punishment in a society where racism is like a slow silent bomb. I do find recent justification for coining this term. There are more indications that racism in America has not died away and it seems it will not die away either. Every now and then one is shocked by the potentiality of latent racism in America. Some parts of the catastrophe maybe traced to what John Dovidio calls the white race’s blindness to “their racial biases” (qtd. in Bedard 1). A perceptive reading of the racial issue is done by Michael Meyers in a most recent article entitled “Stop the Black-Only treatment” (A21). In this article Meyers pours his anger on
the educational system as one of the institutions of buttressing racism in America. Under certain pretexts some racial programs creep into the university campuses and cause racial rage. He rejects the very notion of color-determined identity of African Americans: "There is no such thing as 'the black male,' just as there never was such a thing as 'the Negro'" (A21). It is no exaggeration to look at racism as the iceberg of a larger movement of extremism. Some of what are known as "Hate Groups" have taken racism as their identifying mark. Examples of such groups include "The White Aryan Resistance (WAR)" and the "White Patriot Party." The racial problem extends to the very right of voting in elections. "[V]oting in presidential elections," Matthew M. Hoffman expounds in a long essay "is highly polarized along racial lines" (935-1021), and there are even "apartheid" schools and "racist schooling" (Paul 648+). These are but some faces of the racial problem in America.

It is in the light of such racism one may interpret the statistical differences between whites and blacks in terms of capital punishment. Some statistics do point out to the petrifying disparity between executed or would-be executed whites and blacks. According to some statistics, for instance, "in 1991 . . . blacks comprised 40 percent of prisoners awaiting execution" (Kathleen A. O'Shea Women and the Death Penalty, 31). In Oates, as in most liberal abolitionist discourse, debates over capital punishment swirl around the individual's "right" to life and the state "right" to take that life under certain conditions. However, Oates's sarcastic discourse painstakingly depicts the callous indifference of the American criminal judicial system to the potential risks of wrong convictions, definitely, of nonwhite Americans. This "issue of race," according to Black Water, is "a smokescreen" (Oates 129) as though whites do not really care for the number
of blacks killed under the banner of the "judicial system." *Black Water* admits of the statistical difference substantiating O'Shea's statement. The text presents the discrepancy as follows:

> Maybe it's so that more black men have always been executed in the United States than white men. maybe it's a statistical fact that whites who kill blacks are less likely to receive the death penalty than blacks who kill whites. (Oates, *Black Water* 129)

The frequent incidents of the killing of blacks by the white police are an essential part of the "silent bomb" as it is an essential part of the larger debates about capital punishment. The dead brother of Mayweather Smith, the Jazz pianist in Oates's "White Trash" is an illuminating illustration. Mayweather describes his brother's death at the hands of the white police as "the white man's technique ain't meant to hurt... Kills you dead but ain't meant to hurt" (*Heat* 330). These are but two examples of the racial issue and its silent bomb. For a part of the big numbers of the executed blacks is the killing of Mayweather's brother in March 1958 and "no justice" is "ever done" to this African American victim as Mayweather assures Melanie (*Heat* 329). "No Justice," taken into the larger scheme of things in the 1960s, is best summarized in Levitas's words:

> "Impoverished, segregated and ignored Negroes [learned] that the only way they can get the ear of America is to rise up in violence" (42). It is worth noting that "White Trash" portrays a different kind of interracial power relations to the one drawn in *I Lock*. The blacks in the two texts occupy two different ends in the ladder of Interracial relationship. Unlike Tyrell of *I Lock*, Mayweather enjoys a safe job and is situated in a black milieu.
Common to both is their erotic or sexual power that has been in both texts a centripetal force for white women.

One more word in the racial issue that is worthy of adding here is that Oates's choice of a murder whose victim is a black student in her short story "Curly Red" (I Am No One) is a symbol of the failure of the "melting pot" to fuse all ethnic and racial dimensions into the Eurocentric American social fabric. It is insightful to juxtapose Oates's racial-based murder in this text with the metaphorical killing of the blacks in white educational institutions. Both deny the black identity and impose the white stamp on it. Such are some worries and anxieties expressed by both black and white scholars. Molefi Kete Asante, a black scholar, for instance, says: "The Eurocentric curriculum is 'killing our children, killing their minds'" (Schlesinger 31). "Nowhere can blacks," Schlesinger, the white American historian, says, "discover adequate reflection or representation of the black self" (31). This is perhaps another kind of capital punishment that points to the increasing numbers of the African Americans who fall victims of the capital punishment. All types of racial unrest and riots are seen as a threat to the dominating power. This accounts for the aggressive reactions to African Americans’ riots in big cities like Detroit which is a frequent stage of violence in Oates’s fictional world. What this indicates is that by creating racism white power creates its own subversion. There is no doubt that it is the rising racial consciousness that has created spaces of recognition for some African Americans in America’s social and political life. A list of those African Americans who made their way out of marginality into the sphere of recognition is by no means a short one. They have penetrated different social and political ranks. Among these are the following: Jean Baptiste Pointe Dusable (the founder
of Chicago), Frederick Douglass (a well-known writer), Benjamin O. Davis Sr. (a judge 1940), Edward W. Brooke (a U.S. Senate, 1966) and many other names ("Famous First Facts" 86+). To this list, one may add more prominent African Americans like the Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison, and Gen. Collin Powel. The latter, for instance, admits of having benefited from the Affirmative Action program in the army (Colin L. Powell My American Journey, 592).

If the figures of death rows in Whitaker's, in O'Shea's or even in Oates's texts seem horrifying to the opponents of capital punishment, the expansion of this practice and its victims is indubitably more petrifying: “Capital punishment is here to stay for the foreseeable future; thirty eight states have reenacted capital statutes” (Bienen 751). The practice of capital punishment takes places through a number of techniques. Five of these are listed in Oates's Black Water (127-30). Among these five are the “gas chamber” and the “lethal injection.” [Beside these techniques, the “electric chair” is also mentioned in Foxfire (314) and Blonde (386)]. The violent response which characterizes the victim's reactions to these techniques of punishment is indescribable but is imaginable in textual documentation. O'Shea describes the gas chamber as follows:

The gas chamber, though never really popular, was adopted after World War I, and was thought to be “more humane” than hanging or electrocution. For execution by gas, the prisoner is strapped to a chair with a container of sulfuric acid underneath. The execution room is sealed, and cyanide is dropped into the acid to form lethal gas. (xiii)
Except for "popularity," Oates's description of the gas chamber is not very much different from O'Shea's. (See Black Water 128-29.) Gas chambers remain some of the various disciplinary mechanisms used by the political authority. That is one of the mechanisms for maintaining order and discipline in social life. All these techniques represented but some of the state mechanisms of fashioning the American masses in Oates's fiction and in American history.

Another illustration of the violent state strategies is manifested in the state's lust for power. That is acquiring power even at the expense of the human and natural resources of the American nation. This is all the more clear in the United State's lust for becoming a global power, and more particularly a nuclear power notwithstanding all the risks and dangers that are associated with such kind of power. A brief and pertinent picture to our discussion of Oates's texts of just some of the many dangers associated with nuclear testing is provided by the Scientists' Institute for Public Information:

This scientific criticism was no laughing matter to AEC [i.e. Atomic Energy Commission] officials, especially when it was seconded by popular resistance from laypeople in Nevada, Utah, and Arizona, who complained of dying livestock, human skin burns and loss of hair, and of otherwise inexplicable rises in the incidence of leukemia in the path of fallout. (Clarfield and Wieck Nuclear America: Military and Civilian Nuclear Power in the United States, 1940-1980, 214-15)
These are almost similar to the symptoms of M Chassen's eleven-year-old son, one of the victims of nuclear testing, whose brief story appears in Oates's *Blonde*. Chassen narrates what happens to his son:

Until eighteen months ago he'd begun to lose weight, and bruised easily, and was always tired, and they took him to a doctor in Salt Lake City and he was diagnosed with leukemia—"That's blood cancer. From the U.S. Government nuclear testing! We know it! Everybody knows it! The way our sheep and cattle are poisoned too. At the edge of my property there's a testing range—OFF LIMITS BY ORDER OF U.S. GOVERNMENT. I own six thousand acres, I have my rights. The U.S. Government won't pay for Ike's blood transfusions; the bastards refuse even to acknowledge they got any responsibility. I'm no Commie! I'm one hundred percent American! I served in the U.S. Army in the last war. You two could put in a word for me with the U.S. Government. (505)

What Oates's character says goes well beyond the fictional boundaries of her text to the realm of the actual past. His accusations of the responsibility of the American Government in his child's case are not mere imaginative creation. Oates's imagination is also a part of her conscious role of being—in her own words—"a chronicler" and a "witness." Oates's character here re-opens an untouchable file. What I read into such an act is that the author's re-address of this crucial issue is not only an extension of her incessant criticism of violence in American social life but also and more likely to keep such an awareness of these dangers in circulation. Here, as elsewhere in Oates's larger
fictional map. human beings and environment are portrayed as helpless victims of
a persistent will to power. Horse racers in “Raven’s Wing,” for instance, “kill” the horses
“if they aren’t going to race anymore” (Godwin and Ravened 184).

Most recently there arise some problems because of the American nuclear power
which has transgressed the American soil and expanded into different parts of Europe.
This is what the opening few lines of the following article from the Washington Times
state:

ROME -- Italy's new center-left government will accelerate
planned closure of a U.S. nuclear submarine base on the northern
coast of the island of Sardinia amid fears nearby residents suffer
higher-than-average cancer rates, Defense Minister Arturo Parisi
said. (Phillips “Rome Speeds up” n.pag.)

Juxtaposing these verbal pictures, one is assured of the mutual effect art and culture have
on each other as well as of the devastating consequences of America’s lust for becoming
a global power. By foregrounding the darker face of this power the Oatesian anecdote
aims at circulating a resistant discourse that both resonates with the major points of the
scientific criticism and justifies the fears of the Sardinians; it, furthermore, raises more
questions about those nuclear tests and their (mis)uses by American authorities. The three
verbal pictures also point to some of the most fatal, lethal and violent strategies used by
the political power for decades. Oates’s Mr. Chasse raises some doubts that the
authorities may have forced some American “Commies” or Communists to undergo these
tests as though the fifties anti-Communist activities justify brutal exploitation of the
so-called American Commies. All these three texts are inseparable from the overall power relations between the individual and the state. Ironically, the seemingly resistant forces that guide the discourse in these three texts serve the interest of the United States as a Superpower. What these texts do not say is that they propagate a hidden propaganda of inculcating fear into the hearts and minds of people who read them. What is at stake here is to give vent to such kinds of "resistances." They, by demonstrating the atrocity a Superpower is capable of inflicting at peace time, evoke the possibility of a more atrocious face of such a Superpower at war time. Hence, fear and hesitance will be some of the indirect weapons of such propaganda to gain more destructive and lethal power: especially weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear power. However destructive and lethal nuclear power is, one cannot deny the fact that it has been creative too. A part from creating America's "resources for world leadership" as Gerald Wendt says (The Prospects of Nuclear Power and Technology vi), it has been, like literature itself, a space for free-play of the scientific imagination: indeed the association between the two has been hinted at in Wendt (5-6) and in Clarfield and Wieck (5). In this latter text, H. G. Wells's free play with the scientific discourse in his The World Set Free (1914) evokes some scientific curiosity in the nuclear research (Clarfield and Wieck 5). In a similar way, in Oates's Blonde Wells's Wars of the Worlds is evoked, in passing though, as a part of the discourse about war and it creates an aesthetic curiosity (175). Oates, Wells and the nuclear scientist are all linked together by the power of imagination which provides each of them with creativity. All these three tried hard to create a new world: Oates "to memorialize the past" (Johnson, Invisible10), Wells "to forget his origins, the poverty and struggle he had undergone, the battle he had fought to make a place for
himself in a hard world" (Edel and Ray *Henry James and H.G. Wells*, 19) and, the nuclear scientist to push the nuclear power “out of the realm of speculations and much closer toward realization” (Clarfield and Wiecek 14).

The interest in politics and power entails a parallel interest in some political figures that have helped shape the face of modern history of American politics. As a fictionist, Oates has given a voice to such an interest in more than one of her texts. Oates’s reconstruction of parts of the fictionally biographical histories of these presidents has a two-fold function: on the one hand, these histories are, by and large, constitutive parts of the overall history of the American political scene; on the other, they bring forth representations of some of the prevailing power relations and their forms of resistance.

It is not always easy to interpret Oates’s recurrent use of American presidents in her texts. Notwithstanding such a difficulty, I will attempt to find a way to interpret Oates’s reproduction of certain anecdotes about some American presidents. This will become clearer if we take an illustration; let it be Roosevelt, for instance. I believe that we need to know what might connect Oates and Roosevelt together, or what they have in common. The points of resemblance between Oates and Roosevelt become crystal clear if we look at some of the latter’s major characteristics:

Roosevelt . . . became a patron of science, scholarship, art, and literature. Prominent among the Roosevelts’ frequent and well-publicized guests were the painters . . . the sculptor . . . the historian . . . and the Western novelist Owen Wister. The president promoted scientific research . . . and
boosted public art... Roosevelt made himself a cultural arbiter such as the United States had rarely seen before in a president. (Cooper 36)

Oates seems to meet Roosevelt in her being “a patron of science, scholarship, art, and literature.” Prominent among Oates’s characters are the sculptors Adam Berendt in *Middle Age* and the sculptor Dorcas in *Beasts*, the American feminist art historian Caroline Carmichael in her short story “American, Abroad,” and the novelist Marya (Marya: A Life). Thus both President Roosevelt and the fictionist Oates have many things in common. Love of and interest in culture and arts are two more common tendencies of both of them. What looms large behind such similarities is that Oates’s texts, as I have been stressing throughout this study, are part of the overall American cultural scene. One important difference between the two is that of partisanship: Cooper’s Roosevelt is a Republican while Oates is the seldom-recognized canary and proponent of the Democratic Party. This claim has its biographical bases. She has never been a fan of The Republican Party or so suggests the absence of Republicanism in her biography. For her the Democrats have been not only an aesthetic preoccupation but a personal experience too. On the one hand, Oates, in the eighties, became “friendly with... Senator Bill Bradley” who was “often named as a potential candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination” (Johnson, *Invisible* 340-41). On the other hand, in the nineties, she and her husband were “ecstatic’ over Clinton’s victory” (Johnson, *Invisible* 392).

Thus it is a part of this cultural scene to portray Roosevelt from another perspective. This accounts for the less bright, if not dimmer, picture of Roosevelt in some other Oatesian texts. Sidney Haring, Norma Jeane’s English teacher, having no trust in
“politicians on principle” justifies his mistrust for Roosevelt by the latter’s “manipulation of the war news.” The brighter side of Roosevelt’s political character tends to appear more in Oates’ texts than this dimmer picture of mistrust. Maybe this is why Norma Jeane refuses to equate Roosevelt with other politicians: “No, no, that wasn’t right—‘President Roosevelt is different. . . . I have f-faith in him’” (Oates, Blonde 151). I guess Oates’s (undeclared) love for the Democrats is another way of considering the link between the two. These two points are quite consciously summed up in Oates’s Marya: A Life in a descriptive statement about Everard Knauer. He, we are told, “always voted the straight Democratic ticket . . . though he hadn’t much faith in anyone after Roosevelt. He believed in electing wealthy men to high public office, he said, because they were the only ones who couldn’t be bribed” (Marya: A Life 27-28). Similarly, Harold Stoud is another Democratic state senator who is admired by Michael Mulvaney in Oates’s The Mulvaneys (85). By the same token, Maxine “helped the Democrats elect a state senator and a congressman” (Oates, All the Good People 164). Above all, the protagonist of her longest novel Blonde is “a loyal Democrat” (900).

In a similar way, the absent President in Black Water and the exploitative President in Blonde are one and the same character. The two representations contribute in creating a literary image of the Democrat President J.F. Kennedy: a recurrent name in Oates’s fictional world and a symbolic sign of Oates’s enthusiastic support for democratic politics. Oates’s choice of the protagonist of her political text Black Water, The Senator, is one more step in substantiating Oates’s democratic political orientation.
He was an old-style liberal Democrat out of the 1960s, a Great Society man with a stubborn and zealous dedication to social reform seemingly not embittered or broken or even greatly surprised at the opposition his humanitarian ideas aroused in the America of the waning years of the twentieth century... (Black Water 61)

It is probably an irony that here, as well as in Blonde, Oates's Democratic politicians are manifestations of the connection between sex and political power in America. Both the Democrat President of Blonde and the Democrat Senator of Black Water look at the female protagonists in these texts as abstractions, nothing more than sex objects. Culturally, these ostensibly charismatic figures are taunted with a weakness like that of Nathan's "temptation of the flesh" (Oates, Sun of the Morning 192). Attracted by her body The Senator's "warm soft damp tongue on her bare skin" has an effect of "an electric shock" on her (Oates, Black Water 58). When drowning, he thinks of saving his own body and not of Kelly's: hers is for "consumption" while his is for the world of politics. Sex in the realm of politics is fatal to either part of the couples. Both Monroe and Kelly lose their lives after their closeness from the politicians. Or, at least, this is what Oates's fiction suggests.

Having finished, briefly though, the talk about Oates's representation of the Democratic Party, let us look at how she represents the Republican Party. To begin with, it is quite reasonable to believe that most of Oates's Republican characters are drawn along political lines, made essentially flat and passive, and are placed on the peripheries of Oates's world of fiction. In her representation of the Republicans, who like the
Democrats, occasionally turn up in her fiction, Oates’s ideological biases are crystal clear. Contrary to the brighter face of Democrats is her reconstruction of the Republicans. A growing number of Oates’s post-1990s’ texts are apparently a part of a growing anti-Republican discourse that prevails in the midst of some Americans, who detest, with some resentment, the policies of the Republican Party, particularly the neo-conservative wing of the party. This is the stance Kelly takes in Oates’s Black Water. She presents a dim view of some Republican Presidents and their administrations. She describes what is termed as “those Reagan years” as: “The dismal spiritual debasement, the hypocrisy, cruelty, lies uttered with a cosmetic smile . . . surely, the American people would see” (Black Water 106). Such a view holds a kind of sweeping assertion as though it is meant to be a Pan-American political attitude:

> each time she saw or heard George Bush it seemed self – evident to her that anyone who saw or heard him must naturally reject him, for how transparently hypocritical! how venal! how crass! how uninformed! how evil! his exploitation of whites’ fears of blacks, his CIA affiliation! his fraudulent piety, his shallow soul (Black Water 42)

Published in 1992, Black Water brings forth a recurrent anti-Bush (and by extension anti-Republican) discourse to be traced in several other texts and may be interpreted from several angels. Oates’s critique of Bush the character and Bush the President is a part of a growing genre of critiques of Bush’s administration. Others who have also contributed to such a genre include Noam Chomsky, Walter Williams and Dierdre Glenn Paul. The
racial side in Oates’s statement is a part of the many attacks on “The No Child Left Behind Act” (abbreviated NCLBA).\(^9\)

The question of anti-Republicanism is extended to maximize its exposure of the supposedly ills and demerits that are a constitutive part of the history of the Republican Party. In *Blonde*, for instance, the Republican Congressmen participating in the HUAC investigations is said to have possibly been bribed (Oates 302). Nixon, another Republican President, is implicitly hinted at in Oates’s *Son of the Morning*. Thaddeus’s death (137) is made to coincide with the date of Nixon’s resignation. Such mutual timing, as though the death of the former equates the resignation of the latter, casts some light on Oates’s anti-Republicanism. There is, however, more to such synchronization. Nixon’s domestic policies, according to Richard Matthew Pious, “would appeal to Roman Catholics; and in part to appeal to his traditional Republican constituencies. . . .” (618); both men’s absence is, indubitably, essential for a smooth running of the events in the two narratives of the text and that of American life. Similarly, life loses its meaning when Republicans hold the office power in America. One of the moments the (Democrat) Senator wishes to die is the moment when (Republican) Eisenhower wins the presidency; more to the point, however, is that Kelly’s father has “contempt for the man [Eisenhower].” This is despite the aura of glory attached to the Eisenhower era: “The Eisenhower years, the Eisenhower phenomenon her professors had called it” (Oates, *Black Water* 107). Part of the glory must have been because of his “greatest achievement” of “negotiating to end the Korean War” and his suspension of nuclear testing (Bagby *America’s International Relations since World War I*, 216-17). It is more likely that the Senator’s contempt, Kelly’s father’s contempt or even Oates’s contempt
for Eisenhower may be understood from more than one angle. Eisenhower threatens to use nuclear power more than once during his presidential terms from 1953-1961. Two illustrations of such a threat are narrated in Fred I Greenstein’s biographical essay on Dwight D. Eisenhower. The first is that his political vision known as “the New Look” has a “nuclear component” (557); the second case is in the question of maintaining a non-Communist government in the Pacific and the formation of Formosa (or Taiwan) where he “hinted to the Communists that an invasion might encounter an American nuclear response” (Greenstein 560). In a word, most of such Oatesian views aim at disfiguring lampooning of Republicanism and its new offspring, Neo-conservatism.

Oates’s anti-Communist discourse in I’ll Take You There and Blonde is a part of the hostile official discourse like that of Eisenhower’s and is an essential part of maintaining an “evil” enemy out there threatening America and its people. Carlyle’s view of the of 1960s Communism in Oates’s I’ll Take You There (which is in line with the McCarthyism of the fifties) is in sharp contrast with Monroe’s sympathy with this ideology in the 1950s. Subjective as both Mr. Carlyle’s and Monroe’s views over this question are, the “true” story of McCarthyism and Communism remains more a product of the interpreter than of the story teller himself or herself. Such a contradiction lends itself open to different interpretations. Having a glance at the disagreement over the narrative of Communism of the 1950s, I would rather think of it as a part of the conceptual disagreement that characterizes much of the political discourse. Hence, it is through such disagreement that politics and politicians manage to mobilize the mobs to achieve certain goals. For an external enemy helps achieving many goals at the same time. It engages the masses in a kind of patriotic obsession, mobilizes them for fighting
an envisioned "enemy" and keeps them unaware of or uninterested in what is going on in the domestic policies. It provides the politicians with a chance to get rid of oppositions to their plans or to violate constitutional rights under the guise of national security. It also helps in the political maneuvers of fund raising and thus opens up opportunities for bigger businesses. Indeed, the envisioning of an enemy is a recurrent policy in America's modern history. Among the major "benefits" of such a policy is accelerating the American war machine, and envisioning a transient enemy which justifies a ceaseless need for power: military, economic, and any other form of power. Another way to look at the contradictory views about Communism is to consider the gender issue: males' sympathies are directed to the centers of power, the state in this case, while females' sympathies are directed to a different center of power: the society. Such views can also be conceived as prowar and antiwar ideologies.

War sentiments are, by all means, one of the most concrete manifestations of the struggles of the American public against what Douglas Kellner calls "the militarization of U.S. culture and society"—which he uses as a title for the last chapter in his insightful book *The Persian Gulf TV War*. Broadly speaking, there are plenty of Americans who hold that isolationism in foreign policy is safer for the United States of America. This is more likely the view held by the great masses who opposed Bush's war strategies. John One of the comments on this issue, for instance, says: "immediate public reaction indicated an unwillingness to go to war, as it was seen, for the sake of oil" (Kane 772+). Of course, there are other Americans who will disagree with this view and some others who cannot live without waging a war or contributing to waging one here and there for business or several other objectives. Kellner puts this in a nutshell
The Gulf war was not solely a war for oil, for the greater glory of George Bush and the Pentagon, or for the promotion of U.S geopolitical supremacy in order to bolster a faltering U.S economy, although all of these factors played a role in producing the war. (37)

The present interventionist policies are violations of the very spirit of isolationism: the political ideology that emerges with the very seeds of the American Revolution. However, it has its market in modern American history. In some of Oates's texts, isolationism accounts for the sense of hatred for politics by several Americans: "I was selfish, so selfish! I inherited from my father—a pious old fraud!—an absolute indifference to moral and political commitment. I skipped a stage in the natural evolution of mankind!" (The Hungry Ghosts 49) Wanda, in The Hungry Ghosts, regrets her earlier political and moral indifference (Oates 49). Dissimilarly, some of Oates's characters of the 1970s, as in her Son of the Morning, do not violate from the ideal of isolationism. Here, in terms of politics, Oates's characters are passive, indifferent and politically uncommitted. Comparing Dr. Vickery to the rest of Marsena helps extend the 60s' "absolute indifference to moral and political commitment" to the population of Marsena in the 70s:

Dr. Vickery had read about the Nazi concentration camps, he had studied certain photographs, and he had not quite... been able to comprehend. (His wife, and many other Marsena citizens, did not read about such things at all: considered them none of their business.) Too much had happened since the late thirties. (Son of the Morning 114)
As a political ideology, isolationism extends from the early days of the American revolution and continues to the present time, rarely as a state strategy for foreign policy but mainly at the public level: "Polls showed the American public focused on domestic affairs and paying little attention to the rest of the world" (Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone* ix). Though such a line of political action has been the source of "wonder" for the post-Cold War observers of American foreign policy (Nye, *The Paradox* xiv), it changes as the world political map changes. Thus the need arises for a more presidential control over foreign affairs. This is one of the questions Oates's short story "Imperial Presidency" raises.

Oates's "Imperial Presidency" (a short story in *Where is Here*) draws attention to the American presidents' dominance in foreign affairs. Such dominance is implied in the very definition of the term. Wolfensberger cites the following dictionary definition of this term: "Webster's Unabridged Dictionary bluntly defines imperial presidency as 'a U.S. presidency that is characterized by greater power than the Constitution allows'" (36+). Oates's text demonstrates the hypocrisy of local authorities who show great concern for the city only in the wake of the President's visit. Moreover, the most crucial point this text raises is the call for trusting the presidency with control over foreign policy, and more particularly, over the question of declaring wars on America's enemies (Oates, *Where Is Here* II). Such a trust is needed to wage the wars in Vietnam and Korea and later in Afghanistan and Iraq, and who knows where the American power politics will be exercised after what happened to Iraq: Could it be Iran? Syria? Cuba? Or North Korea? Some of these will be discussed in the following chapter.
Footnotes


2 This article is also available in other periodicals. Among these are: *Albuquerque, New Mexico* and *Oakland Tribune*.

3 New York, according to Mitchel Levitas, is a part of what is known as “Appalachia.” “About half the poor in the country,” Levitas states on his comment on the poverty in the late 50s and the 60s, “are concentrated in the rural South and in Appalachia” (*America in Crisis* 40).

4 At the wake of the most cataclysmic event in the post-WWII American history, that is the 9/11 event, for example, American culture became rife with talk of churches and religious discourse in general. (See, for example, M Craig Barnes’s “Homestretch: Searching for God after 9/11” *The Christian Century* 120.19 (20 Sep. 2003): 8+).

5 This is the view of some leading African American intellectuals. W. E. B. Du Bois, in his article “Negroes and the Crisis of Capitalism in the United States,” for instance, says: “The color bar in this nation will not soon be broken. Even as it yields in places the insult of what remains will be more deeply felt by the still half-free” (*Monthly Review* 41.1 (May 1989): 27+. 1 April 2006 <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5002145614>).

6 A detailed study of such extremist movement is John George and Laird Wilcox’s *Nazis, Communists, Klansmen, and Others on the Fringe: Political Extremism in America* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1992).

7 African Americans’ “rise up in violence” is but one view of power balance. Whitaker ends his essay on the death penalty debate by expressing grave concern with those white men in power whose position “represents a much greater threat to African-Americans” (100). However, they are not the only victimized Americans of an insatiable appetite for power. Several other Americans have been victims of America’s lust for power, more particularly during the Cold War era. Eileen Welsome, a reporter and author of *The Plutonium Files: America's Secret Medical Experiments in the Cold War*, in an interview on *Democracy Now* drives this point home. For the sake of brevity, I quote here from the introductory lines of the interview:
In a Massachusetts school, seventy-three disabled children were spoon-fed oatmeal laced with radioactive isotopes. In an upstate New York hospital, an eighteen-year-old woman believing she was being treated for a pituitary disorder, was injected with plutonium. At a Tennessee clinic, 829 pregnant women were served "vitamin cocktails" containing radioactive iron, as part of their regular treatment. No these are not acts of terrorism by common criminals. These are just some of the secret human radiation experiments that the U.S. government conducted on unsuspecting Americans for decades as part of its atom bomb program. In a gruesome plot that spanned 30 years, doctors and scientists working with the US atomic weapons program, exposed thousands of unwilling and unknowing Americans to radiation poisoning to study its effects. For years, the experiments by the U.S. government and the identities of their human guinea pigs were covered up. (Welsome, Eileen. Interview. "Plutonium Files: How the U.S. Secretly Fed Radioactivity to Thousands of Americans" Democracy Now. 5 May 2004. 14 March 2007 <http://www.democracynow.org/article?id=04/05/0511357?30>)

One of the dramatizations of the consequences of such experiments is Alexandre Aja's movie The Hills Have Eyes (2006). This movie opens with the following two statements:

Between 1945 and 1962 the United States of America conducted 331 atmospheric nuclear tests. Today, the government still denies the genetic effects caused by the radioactive fallout . . .

The screenplay begins by displaying flashes of different kinds of congenital anomalies. Among these are deformed skulls, blind and malformed children and club-feet. Set in the New Mexico desert where, according to Fallin, the first atomic test was carried out in Alamogordo on July 16, 1945 (33), the movie dramatizes the dehumanizing effect of the radioactive fallouts of the nuclear tests. (Aja, Alexandre. dir. The Hills Have Eyes. Aaron Stanford. Perf., Kathleen Quinlan. Perf. Vinessa Shaw. Perf., Fox Searchlights Pictures. 2006.)

A brief excerpt from one of George W. Bush's "State of the Union Addresses" should be sufficient to cast some light on the frightening political discourse used to perpetuate the American fear of so-called global terrorism:

There is never a day when I do not learn of another threat, or receive reports of operations in progress, or give an order in this global war against a scattered network of killers . . . . Today, the gravest danger in the war on terror - the gravest danger facing America and the world - is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons . . . greater threat to rise up in Iraq. A brutal dictator, with a history of reckless aggression, with ties to terrorism, with great potential wealth . . . U.S. intelligence indicates that Saddam Hussein had upwards of 30,000 munitions capable of delivering chemical agents. ("History Has
I believe that some of the bare-faced lies like those accusations of mass destruction and their consequences on defacing America’s ideals are the geneses of the anti-Bushism political movement.

9 See for example Dierdre Glenn Paul’s NCLB (in the Work Cited list) which deals with this subject in detail.

10 Behind every terrorist attack is an enemy. Some American politicians fake terrorist acts for the sake of fund raising as the following extract from Renny Harlin’s movie The Long Kiss Goodnight demonstrates:

Mitch: Your telling me that your gonna fake some terrorist thing just to scare some money out of Congress?

Leland Perkins: Well, unfortunately I have no idea how to fake killing 4,000 people--so we’re just gonna have to do it for real. Blame it on the Muslims, naturally. Then I get my funding. (Harlin, Renny. The Long Kiss Goodnight. New Line Cinema, Written by Shane Black, 1996.)

It is also worth noting here that Patrick Malahide (or Leland Perkins in the movie) attaches the fake terrorist action to Muslims and “naturalizes” such an allegation.

11 The term “imperial presidency” was popularized by the historian and political scientist Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. [Spitzer (12) and Wolfensberger (36+)].