

The Wire

Urban Decay and American Television

edited by
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middle distance, and pans left, so that we now see Stringer's form in the left foreground, blurry and slightly shadowed. The aperture pulls and shifts, and his face comes into focus; once again, Holland uses a visual tactic of reorientation by refocusing, which we watched Prez enact within the episode as he enlarged the image of the license plate, but it is coupled here with a mobile, fluid perspective (rather than a fixed line-of-sight); this merger of fluid curvature with decisive linearity recalls the juxtaposition of living bodies in various scenes with rectilinear doors, frames, and boundaries. That counterpoint manifests itself in the final shot of the episode, which positions us on the outside of a dirty window, looking through the squared grid of the six-paned frame at Avon and Stringer, who are separated and segmented not only by space, but also by the vertical and horizontal grille-strips. The rectilinear graph into which the social order wants to organize the city is overlaid onto their alienated bodies. The episode finishes not with resolution, but in wounded separation. We leave the men apart, and the camera tracks right, off the window and onto the dark wall beside it, leaving watchers finally excluded and barred, even from light. Still, Holland doesn't close "Moral Midgetry" by rendering judgment on the untenable and compromised situation of Avon and Stringer. Instead, that undefined darkness helps to keep open and unsettled her visual interrogation of the fictions and of the necessities that dislocate her America.

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"Gots to Get Got": Social Justice and Audience Response to Omar Little

Kathleen LeBesco

If you're pissed about Omar, be pissed about the game and how dead inside the people that kill each other without a thought truly are. Be pissed about the world that put them in that position. [...] Let the show teach you something. Make it a wakeup call.

Phuck that pole smokin queer...

—fan postings, HBO.com

Mere samples of viewer response to the character of Omar Devon Little—an honorable queer gangsta involved in storylines related to crime and justice—the epigraphs to this essay demonstrate Omar's function as a kind of *agent provocateur*. They also suggest the value of studying how fans make sense of *The Wire* rather than merely presuming that they internalize the intentions of its creators. Utilizing a theoretical framework and methodology based in cultural studies, this chapter explores audience dialogue about issues of social justice on the show. The study focuses on the show's fan forum on the HBO.com website, which was very active during the run of the series and continues to be accessible, though lightly trafficked. In particular, I am interested in how viewers negotiate attitudes toward crime and how these attitudes are integrated with other perspectives on a socially just vision of living

with respect across difference. Omar serves as a lightning rod for the articulation of both ambivalent attitudes toward homosexuality and progressive beliefs about the need for social change in the overinstitutionalized U.S. today.

Beyond Media Effects

Historically, scholars interested in the relationship between mediated representations of crime and audience response have posited an overly simplistic model of media effects wherein media representations of crime are reductively imagined to have clear, direct, and measurable effects on the behavior or attitudes of viewers (e.g. Lefkowitz *et al.*, "Television Violence" and *Growing Up*). In contrast, Aaron Doyle exhorts researchers to attempt to determine the meaning of crime stories for audience members, as a supplement to research focused on the political and institutional effects of crime and the media ("How Not" 867). This chapter takes up Doyle's project by exploring how watchers of *The Wire* make sense of crime stories, particularly those centered on Omar.

By acknowledging and mining a complicated connection between *The Wire* and its fans, we stand to learn more about the capacity of media to spawn social and political change. By examining the meanings that fans hold for crime and violence in the show, we can avoid a quantitative preoccupation on the amount of crime and violence depicted, making it harder for simple media-blaming to mask the real social, political, and economic causes of crime and violence (Gauntlett 54).

This project is essential for gauging the extent to which *The Wire* serves as a corrective—not only to formulaic cops-and-robbers shows but also to ideologically regressive attitudes about justice and crime—in the minds of its viewers. Series creators David Simon and Ed Burns see the problems with "the system" (Rose 84–85), and their desires for social justice and social reconstruction are palpable in the series (and in media interviews; see Ryan). They seem to concede, with Stuart Hall *et al.*, that crime is merely a form of unproductive labor, illegal but thoroughly capitalistic and "adapted to the system on which it is parasitic" (364). Joel Best argues that our tendency to view crime "as a melodrama in which evil villains prey on innocent victims" frightens and confuses the

public, and obfuscates attempts at designing and carrying out effective social policies (xii; see also Surette 209). Following this logic, one might presume that the complexity of *The Wire*—its general lack of melodrama, its subtlety and its avoidance of what Steven Johnson has termed "flashing arrows" (i.e. easily readable clues to a text's meaning, leaving the audience little cognitive work to do)—might push audiences in the opposite direction, emboldening them to put their hard-won comprehension of social justice issues to work in the streets and in the realm of policy change.

Audience Analysis

Rather than issuing from on high a proclamation about the cultural work that *The Wire* accomplishes or fails to accomplish (as does Suderman), we need to ask how audiences understand the show (Schiappa 5). How do audiences read the series in terms of a call for social reform? My answer is based on a careful study of thousands of posts by fans of the series on the HBO.com website in the fan forum for *The Wire*. The forum contains hundreds of thousands of posts by fans in response to threads—discussion prompts—generated both by the HBO staff and by other fans. Perhaps no thread was more active in the final weeks of the series than that devoted to the death of Omar Little, whose fictional death warranted an obituary on the pages of *Newsweek* where he was tagged "Robbin' Hood" (Alston 15).

Omar is a fascinating character for a number of reasons, not the least of which is his unexpected collision of identities. A man with a code who also robs and kills, sensitive and openly gay in a hypermasculine black urban subculture, and somehow off the radar while embedded in a surveillance-saturated culture that disproportionately and systematically targets young black men (Doyle, *Arresting Images* 72), Omar is a bundle of seeming contradictions. It is the very complexity of his character that makes Omar an excellent site for interpreting audience understandings of a number of issues related to social justice.

In "Clarifications" (5.08), Omar is shot and killed by Kenard, a boy from the neighborhood, while buying a pack of cigarettes at the corner store. Aware of his enormous popularity, the proprietors of HBO.com immediately created an official discussion entitled "Omar Little R.I.P.,"

which garnered over 1300 responses, most of them posted in the few days after the episode depicting his death aired.¹ A great number of the posts are inadequately detailed to provide any clues about their author, but many posts include biographical information that leads me to believe that the *Wire* boards at HBO.com are a magnet for a diversity of stances and opinions, from economically liberal would-be sociologists to, socially conservative survivors of the streets, and everyone in between.

According to Arthur Raney, a viewer's moral judgments about the behavior of characters onscreen shape his or her affective disposition toward the characters, and also influence the viewer's level of pleasure from the viewing experience (145). Raney's work compels me to consider the moral judgments, both positive and negative, associated with Omar's behavior as a key not only to the pleasure of the fans but also as a lens on moral perspectives on justice. Taking the wide range of fan backgrounds into consideration, a number of themes emerge from my analysis of their posts. The most prominent are that Omar is respectable and beloved by fans "despite" his homosexuality and because of his code; and that the characterization of Omar motivates reflections on and action in the realm of social justice.

Omar's Sexuality and His Code

Fan conversation on Omar's death centers around either the viewers' shock and frustration with the writers for ending Omar as they did, or on praise for writing a complex character. Azz24446, who elsewhere identifies as an older, politically conservative white male, writes,

Omar Little is one that most all of us will remember for years to come because he combined such mutually-exclusive concepts as a sociopathic killer with someone who operated by internal moral code ("I never put no gun on a citizen."). He was NOT a cookie cutter personality.²

The vast majority of posters echo this sentiment, citing their admiration of Omar's code (no cursing, no thuggery on Sundays, no targeting law-abiding citizens, etc.) and his quirks (a love of Honey-Nut Cheerios, a wordsmith's talent for aphorisms, and a propensity for whistling while

he works), as well as their shock at the manner in which his character "got got."³

As might be expected in a culture stained by homophobia, though, not all fans embrace Omar, despite his many charms. Blochead writes,

Damn shame when society comes to a point where someone like, Omar, can be considered a 'real niggga'. I mean, FUCK- he's a fuckin FAG! Does that make him any less of a man!? -HELL YES IT DOES! [...] Don't get it twisted- I'm not homophobic to the point of being an out-n-out bigot against gay folks, but, to be idolizing a character such as 'Omar' is just down right disgusting to me. He may have been portrayed as an ethics-bound killer (how oxymoronic), but the only thing 'G' about him was his sexuality. Fuck that.

This fan's anti-queer hostility is apparent, but his post is still noteworthy for its recognition of the ironies of being an "ethics-bound killer." Most fans on the boards write lovingly of Omar and his much vaunted code (which I discuss below), unable or unwilling to square his murderous activities with their affection for him.

In a similar vein, Jaemil writes, "Phuck that pole smokin queer.....yea kenard my boy keep it real taking out faggot ass mother fuckers all day!!!!" This provokes many other fans to respond by reinforcing Omar's credibility as "true G" despite his homosexuality. There are few defenses of queerness here—or even distancing "tolerance" moves;⁴ instead, most fans seem to see queerness and hardness/gangsta status as not mutually exclusive, and they don't mind saying so. In a seething rebuke, Demonic1 replies, "what the man do behind closed doors with whom ever or what ever is the mans business.. all this anger Jaemil is showing down there with his post aint nothing but built up anger that he secretly enjoys watching men." Not a single fan in the "Omar Little R.I.P." thread admits enjoying Omar's sexuality or discusses his/her desire to see Omar be affectionate with his lovers, but, at the very least, most fans here are not trafficking in the worst, most reductive stereotypes about gay people.

Whatever progressive views of justice may reign on the boards, there is also ambivalence about Omar's homosexuality. Most posters who mention it maintain a distance, saying things like "despite Omar being a fag, I liked him . . ." But even the issue of justice is vexed. For some fans,

the preoccupation is with dramatic justice: they wanted Omar to go out gloriously, shotgun blazing, and whistling “The Farmer in the Dell,” rather than see him taken out by a “li’l hopper”. These fans do not, for the most part, talk about other conceptions of justice. In the parlance of dramatic justice, the vast majority of fans called for the head of Kenard, a young boy—not exactly a progressive perspective on juvenile crime. This sense of vigilanteism seems particularly odd for fans schooled by Season Four’s sharp, poignant assessment of the complex relationship between young inner-city boys and the variety of institutions that continue to fail them—families, foster care, juvenile detention centers, police, and schools.

Apart from the posts eulogizing Omar, there were a few interesting conversations about his sexuality while the character was still alive. In January 2008, a poster to the HBO.com boards started a new thread. After showing a fondness for Omar and acknowledging his homosexuality, annflood asked, “How do you suppose Omar reconciles his homosexuality with his strict religious upbringing and aversion to profanity—I would think that a man such as Omar with such a strict moral code would, at the very least, find two men together a sin against God.” Sixty responses, in aggregate, painted an interesting picture of fan attitudes toward Omar’s queerness, and queerness in general.

Several posters use the term “homo” to refer to Omar, and not (apparently) as part of an insider’s ironic project of linguistic reclamation. One poster, NoShameinGame, self-identifies as gay and uses the thread as an opportunity to declare his admiration for Omar: “Call him homosexual, a homo, thug homo, label it as you please, but Omar is still a man of certain ‘principles,’ and that’s why I like him.” DoninCincy agrees, arguing “Omar’s sexual preferences are not a big issue to the writers. [...] Omar is too complex to be so tightly defined. [...] The majority of people who see Omar as one sided in the series are the gangster figures who feel that they have to posture as rough and tough to feel secure in their manhood.”

Lest we get too far ahead of ourselves in lauding the progressive politics of fans of *The Wire*, note NoShameinGame’s agreeable response to DoninCincy:

I’m sure all these *so called* rappers, gangster rappers, whatever, are in the closet, and have experienced homosexual relations before.

All these *feuding rappers* are just a bunch of *closet queens* catfighting like women would do. No disrespect to women, but we all know women have their catfights against each other.

Appreciation of sexual diversity as a progressive value seems undermined here, and elsewhere on the boards, by old-fashioned misogyny. Echoing the perspective of many other fans, Prophetessroxy writes, “I loved Omar because even though he was a homosexual, he wasn’t a ‘stereotypical ‘flamer’...he liked his boys, but he was gangsta to the bone...” Here, Omar’s performance of gangsta masculinity mitigates against his sexuality to produce a performance deemed acceptable by this fan, wary of stereotypes. Omar’s “hard” masculinity salvages his citizenship, demonstrating in this context, being female/feminine is a larger obstacle to positive regard than being queer.

Areas of social life including religious association, family life, and local politics are crucial sites for the enactment of good citizenship—and they are also sites at which the homosexual has historically failed in US culture (Herrell 273). Richard Herrell examines the remaking of queer social identities at these sites, remarking that “If the ‘citizen’ is defined as ‘not alien’ by membership in the nation, ‘bad citizens’ are contrasted with the ‘good’ by their alienation from the collective moral purpose” (Herrell 276). As a man with a code, Omar is no stranger to the collective moral purpose. Omar as churchgoer has a code that extends protection crown-wearing grannies everywhere (see 3.09, “Slapstick”), thus marking him as a good citizen both in the realm of religious association and in family life. Furthermore, his Robin Hood behavior on the street, while a stretch from the electoral kind of politics practiced by Councilman (later Mayor) Tommy Carcetti, finds him in good stead in the politics of the hood. Inasmuch as Omar remakes himself in all three arenas of concern for Herrell, his sexuality recedes into the background of fan imagination, it seems.

The widespread adoration of Omar might indicate that his audience—particularly the liberal would-be sociologists—are well trained to see “authenticity” in intersecting identities. But this reading makes little sense for the socially conservative fans who declare their love for Omar “despite” his queerness. In this case, an interpretation derived from Herrell’s theoretical argument—that Omar’s recuperated citizenship allows his sexuality to recede—prevails.

A Call to Action

In decrying the unjust demise of Omar, fans of the show reveal varied perspectives on the possibility of real justice. Howsiah, for instance, writes,

Omar was true Justice and now Justice is dead. We mourn. Not only was his death a tragedy. But the fact that this young boy did him in so precise and cold-bloodedly. Speaks volumes about the world they live in.

This poster couldn't be clearer about his vision of social justice—an impossibility. Darknastycash concurs:

The Wire is not a hollywood, weepy, happy ending type of show. People like Omar don't die in their sleep at the age of 85. [...] Omar was the closest thing to a hero the show had. After Omar died though, there were a bunch of clues as to how insignificant he was to the city. The newspaper passed on the story about the "mid 30's Male who was killed in a convenience store" and ran a different story. To us as fans, that was a slap in the face but this show has never been about pleasing the fans, that was just a pleasant side effect. Even the Coroner (who undoubtedly dealt with more than one of Omar's victims over the years) placed the wrong name tag on his body. That just goes to show how little of an impact he had on the civilian lives in Baltimore. [...] It sucks, but that's the cold, harsh reality.

This poster evidences frustration with the death of an anti-hero, but also embraces the Simonian impulse to critique the way that society precludes justice from being done. But does "that's the cold, harsh reality" imply that this can be changed, or is this merely the semantic equivalent of a shrug? Other posters point out that Omar's death seems fitting for a show trying to communicate that justice is rarely served. What I'm interested in is what happens after this realization; do fans want social change? Or are they content with the lesson that life is not fair?

An analysis of how fans respond to discourse about the "American Dream"—with its attendant myths of striving, social mobility, and

meritocracy—relative to Omar helps to answer these questions. At one point, Omar wears a t-shirt that reads, "I am the American Dream" (2.10). In many ways, his character did function as a dream—a dream that justice could be served in the midst of a corrupt system, a dream to be the watcher rather than the watched in surveillance-saturated society. Ironman9695 writes,

This unforgettable force of a character came to define the essence of this incomparably exceptional program's most resonant and resounding message: He who allows himself to be beholden to the institution is its reformer at his peril. He who parts company with the institution is his own man.

Omar appears inspirational in his ability to part company with institutions, but it is not just his life that inspires. Fan Jenny15 argues,

The creators of this show are brilliant; through Omar's ridiculous death, they have channeled to the viewers the very anger, frustration, and disillusionment of the characters and the people they portray. and the best part is, that we cannot even feel self-righteous in our grief and anger, since its a murderous bandit were mourning, after all.

Jenny15 thus imagines Omar's death as a narrative clarion call—a consciousness raiser for audiences far and wide.

Many, many fans on the HBO boards express frustration and disappointment with the way Omar was killed off on the show. The most popular sentiment is that it was unjust to the viewer to craft such an aesthetically and narratively unsatisfying ending for one of the most engrossing characters and storylines in the series. Most viewers articulate profound sadness that Omar's arc ended in the manner that it did, claiming it was not only inconsistent with what we knew of this careful, watchful, intelligent character, but also that it was just plain unjust and wrong to do that to loyal viewers. Critics might use Omar's demise as a jumping off point to speculate on the intentions of the show's creators—perhaps to say that senseless things happen sometimes, or perhaps to create exactly the sense of anger and frustration that might motivate

action for social change. But it seems like a long way from being annoyed with the death of a fictional character to real-world agitation.

Fan Neutralitybias offers a plan regarding social justice for the engaged viewer of *The Wire*:

So that's my challenge for you fans. If you're pissed about Omar, be pissed about the game and how dead inside the people that kill each other without a thought truly are. Be pissed about the world that put them in that position. [...] let your love for the character teach you something. Let the show teach you something. Make it a wakeup call.

"Be pissed" is not exactly a sophisticated and concrete course of action, but it is more than is advocated by most television series in terms of real world change. Nor is it the only call to action to be found on the boards. Beenthardunthat (whose handle bespeaks the wisdom of experience) writes, "The writers this year have done a fantastic job of trying to show us more than blood and beatings. They have tried to make us realize that we do have choices, both in the streets, our homes and at the ballots." Eschewing the bullets of Malcolm X, this audience member directs other fans to a time-tested course of action, the ballot box, as a path for the change advocated by *The Wire*.

Still other fans make intriguing connections between Omar's demise and the disappearance of the kind of institution that does not suffocate or oppress the individual. Rather self-effacingly, Noahblake writes,

Omar is like a lot of institutions that are dying out - organizations and systems that if not perfect, were at least consistent...and are being toppled by people and forces with no sense of morality or honor whatsoever. [...] as weird as it may seem that I should emulate a murdering ganster - me, a dorky white suburban guy....I hope I can stand up for the justice and "right" that exist in my world the way Omar did in his.

While this fan seems to defend institutions more than Simon would, what is interesting is his aim of standing up for justice. Here, Omar is undoubtedly a catalyst for change.

One final fan exchange about the extent to which *The Wire* offers a call to action illustrates the difficulty of declaring the show an ideologically transparent text. Celeak71 writes, "This show should give us all the gumption to think of ways of playing active roles in being a beacon of light in our communities, so Omars don't have to be manufactured in our hoods. (see the second chance for Namond Brice thanks to Colvin)."⁵ This ignites a firestorm of responses by fans who find Celeak71 too critical of Omar and of the streets from which he hails. DRLHB writes,

Omar WAS the embodiment of the 'code' that 'a man must have a code' which he sticks to no matter what the personal cost. That's the definition of 'integrity' and 'courage' and is one of the reasons why he WAS *The Wire* to many of us. Who else is gonna keep the devil down in the hole, except men and women of integrity and courage, no matter what their socioeconomic status, race, sexual preference, or which brand of smokes they prefer.⁶

Here DRLHB articulates a vision of social justice that can be pursued regardless of one's context, whereas Celeak71 sees the show as a cautionary tale about certain kinds of (depraved) contexts. Celeak71 responds,

The tragedy is that the characters make irrational decisions because they are constrained by their experiences and cannot make sound holistic judgement. It is a mirror of society and a challenge to us to find ways to become again, a beacon of light to those who don't have the guidance - whether they are in the streets, in politics, on the police force, or in the media.

DRLHB retorts,

At this point, I'd much rather have some 'fake ass hollywood bullshit' than the current 'fuck a coherent compelling story, we're going to teach these bitches some community college level sociology' bullshit. Don't rest in peace yet, Omar.

The poster continues, referring to the show's creators:

While I admire them [...], their decision to write Omar out of the show in the way they did was wrong on just about every level.

It was succumbing to hopelessness, pointlessness, despair and the idea that just because something 'is,' it is somehow right. Which are the very things they condemn [...] Now THAT'S ironic.

This fan articulates the power of the vision promulgated by Simon *et al.* and critiques the descent into apathy that the demise of Omar signals. What I glean from the full exchange is that *The Wire* does not read transparently as a manifesto for social justice. Just as one fan can see the show as a cautionary tale about the "manufacture of Omars"—that is, the creation of thugs, however honorable they may be—another fan reads the series's championing of anti-heroic values as the only sensible path of resistance to institutionalized life. Some see the show's provocative ideologies as its highest calling, while others demand the political lesson and an aesthetic masterpiece.

It is the rare fan who is ready to take to the streets in pursuit of social justice after watching *The Wire*. However, discussion among audience members on the HBO.com boards indicates that the series functions effectively as a consciousness-raiser about the social, political and economic plight of individuals constrained by corrupt, failing institutions. Whether or not the fans see this as something that can be railed against varies. Some fans, already wise to issues of social justice, resent the civics lesson and demand masterly storytelling that fights against "hopelessness, pointlessness, despair."

Conclusion

In an interview, David Simon explains the title of the series: "The title refers to an almost imaginary but inviolate boundary between the two Americas . . . *The Wire* really does refer to almost a boundary or fence or the idea of people walking on a high wire and falling to either side" (quoted in Ethridge 154). Simon sees the American Dream as a charade and wants to use the series to unmask this reality. In her study of HBO.com discussion boards for *Six Feet Under*, Rhiannon Bury notes that fans take great pains to distinguish their admired series from typical network fare: "Because the process of signification is intrinsically linked to the process of subject formation, such fans not only construct themselves as 'quality readers' but also police the boundary of such a readership" (191).

We have seen this is also the case in online discussions of *The Wire*. In articulating what constitutes quality viewership, fans are reinscribing, rather than subverting, that very sense of two Americas that Simon is working so hard to expose and change. When fans have a hard time escaping even discursive elitism—working toward classlessness solely through conversation—it is indeed difficult to applaud the true impact of the show's ideological underpinnings. The series as text is rich and politically knowing; as consciousness-raiser, it is successful and evocative; yet as itself an agent of sociopolitical transformation, *The Wire* provokes ambivalent responses, which press each viewer to engage with the themes of the series critically.

Broadcast on a channel with an elitist tagline ("It's not TV. It's HBO."), *The Wire* seems from the start to congratulate its viewers for their excellent taste. Critics like Maureen Reddy voice concern about texts that position their readers as "liberal and humane, even progressive and nonracist" (167), all the while congratulating them on upholding socially dominant values. Is *The Wire* guilty of ideologically progressive flattery of those fans already assumed to have great taste? Not exactly: for Simon and Burns, fans are liberal and humane when they critique socially dominant values, not when they embrace them. Critics have applauded David Simon for his determination to go beyond providing mere entertainment and reinforcing audience beliefs in a moral and just society. At the same time, they have noted that his actual challenge to institutional life "lacks a clear articulation of an affirmative social and political project" (Ethridge 152). Blake Ethridge believes that figuring out how to solve these complicated problems is beyond Simon's purview; instead, "What is important for Simon is the representation of the problem and the provocation of the audience" (155).

My study of fan response indicates that not all of the audience necessarily reads the series as a polemic on the American Dream, and they content themselves with commentary on the high quality of the acting, writing, and direction in the show, or its realism. Those fans who do read the show as a polemic respond neither by stigmatizing Simon or the show, nor by doing nothing, or by, kowtowing to the utilitarian logic of institutional structure. Where the battle emerges is between doing nothing (as seems to be the case in the "it's all in the game" refrain that frequently resurfaces) and actively rejecting institutions (in theory or in

practice). Although fan response illustrates that the series has goaded some to work for social, political and economic change, it has also inoculated others who seem so immersed in its realism that they cannot imagine any other way, shrugging off their shared responsibility for social change.

Whether this bifurcation in audience response strikes one as sufficient depends on one's expectations of subscription television as a change agent. Ethridge contends that Simon need not both agitate for change and direct that agitation (163). Few, if any, members of the televisual cohort of *The Wire* ever prompt heightened sociopolitical and economic awareness among fans; thus, it seems like a rush to judgment to indict *The Wire* for failing to deliver a clear alternative path to the institutional frameworks it so stunningly critiques. Aaron Doyle notes that "TV does not have greater ability than other media to let viewers see the 'truth' of institutional life; TV instead has greater power to validate the ideological stories it tells about what happens in other institutions" (*Arresting Images* 137-138). If we assess *The Wire* for the quality with which it has validated an unusually critical set of ideological stories about institutional life, it is an unqualified success. The fan responses I have analyzed here represent dynamic and complex responses to this critical set of ideological stories, especially those concerning homosexuality, racializations of sexuality, street justice, and the myth of the American Dream, bearing witness to the series's true and profound impact on those who tuned in.⁷

Notes

1. Discussions of Omar in this chapter are primarily drawn from this official "Omar Little R.I.P" thread, although there were many posts about Omar from user-generated threads as well. There was no overt difference in the tone or content of posts in network-generated vs. user-generated threads.

2. This and all posts that follow were made to *The Wire's* discussion board at HBO.com. See the list of "Posts Cited" at the end of this chapter for full citation information. The poster is here referring to Omar's statement to Detective William "Bunk" Moreland in 1.07: "I do some dirt, too, but I never put my gun on nobody who wasn't in the game." Posts are cited verbatim, errors and non-standard English included. The posts quoted in this chapter are not meant to be statistically representative of views expressed on the boards or among fans generally. In fact, posts that are discursively

"extreme" in some respect are the most suggestive about social justice and are thus well represented here.

3. Omar first articulates the main element of his code in 1.07: visiting his wrath only on those "in the game." Fans witness Omar's fury that the ghetto's traditional Sunday morning truce has been violated in 3.09, when he and his grandmother are shot at on their way to church. In later episodes, like 4.03 we learn of Omar's fondness for Honey Nut Cheerios when he blames his lover Renaldo for letting the box "go light."

4. An excellent example of such a "tolerance" move would be "Not that there's anything wrong with that," which became a tag line for Jerry and his friend George on *Seinfeld* when they wanted to correct the misunderstanding that they were gay and simultaneously to exhibit their open-mindedness. See *Seinfeld*, "The Outing" (4.17), original air date 11 February 1993.

5. This poster's last comment refers to the Namond Brice storyline in Season Four that resolves with his move to the home and care of Howard "Bunny" Colvin. See 4.13.

6. This poster's rhetorical query about "who else is gonna keep the devil down in the hole" is a clear reference to the lyrical refrain of *The Wire's* Tom Waits-penned theme song, "Way Down in the Hole." The post itself functions as a nod to the ways in which the series defines the language fans use to discuss it.

7. The author wishes to thank the editors of this volume, as well as John Shields and Laura Tropp, for feedback on this chapter.

Posts Cited

Except where noted, all posts were accessed successfully on 18 December 2008.

Annflood: <<http://boards.hbo.com/topic/Wire-Member-Created/Omars-Homosexuality/1900001954&start=60>>, posted 25 January 2008, accessed 26 July 2008. Posts in user-generated threads have been taken down, but can be accessed at <<http://web.archive.org/web/20080131184241/boards.hbo.com/topic/Wire-Member-Created/Omars-Homosexuality/1900001954&start=60>>.

Azz24446: <<http://boards.hbo.com/topic/Wire-Hbo-Official/Omar-Little-Rip/1900003292&start=1275>>, 25 February 2008.

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