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Darren L. Letendre, Portland State University, undergraduate student, “A ‘Superlicious’ Feast: A Rhetorical Analysis of Davy Crockett’s Almanacs as an Early Form of White National Identity”

Abstract: *Davy Crockett’s Almanacs,* published between 1835 and 1856, have been held as a prime example of nineteenth-century Anglo-American folklore. While authors have commented on their comic qualities and racist content, what has been lacking is a rhetorical analysis, as suggested by Folklorist Stephen Gencarella, which would examine the ways in which “folklore is not something that a folk does, rather… something which constitutes a folk.” This paper analyzes the almanac stories dealing with native peoples in order to understand the political and ideological discourse that was propagated by these publications. Rather than genuine folk-stories faithfully recorded by publishers, these almanacs were creations of popular culture, distributed to a wide audience and composed with specific economic and nationalistic goals. Their purpose, in addition to generating profit, was to serve as a form of cultural hegemony for their urban middle-class readership by creating a literary fantasy that had broad appeal among Anglo-Americans and might be considered an early form of white American nationalism. Unlike the historical David Crockett, whose relations with native peoples were more ambivalent, the fictional Crockett of the Almanacs was an unapologetic nativist and terrorizer who sought nothing less than the white racial domination of North America.

“The ‘Superlicious’ Feast:
A Rhetorical Analysis of *Davy Crockett’s Almanacks* as an Early Form of White National Identity”

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On December 30, 1833, theatre goers gathered in New York to view a play that had been making its rounds through America's cities, *The Lion of the West* by American James Pauling. Strutting around the stage in a buckskin outfit complete with a fur cap made from a wildcat pelt, actor James Hackett's portrayal of Colonel Nimrod Wildfire felt like a living embodiment of the American frontier that was quickly captivating American society.[1] After the play, Hackett gestured for one of the audience members to stand up and take a bow himself, to even greater applause than the actor had received. That man was Colonel David Crockett. A second-term congressman from Tennessee, Crockett was a national celebrity and already firmly associated with the ideal of the western frontier.[2] On this mythical frontier, men became capable of incredible feats and witness to spectacular events in the form of "tall tales." According to historian James Shackford, the historical David Crockett has become completely eclipsed by the legendary Davy, a reputation cultivated during his lifetime, but one that exploded after his death when he became immortalized as a national folk hero.[3]

Crockett's obscure origin was one of the features of his legend, which begs the question of what led to his ascension from frontiersman to folk hero. While the folklore regarding Davy Crockett has taken many shapes, it finds its earliest and most significant form as a series of almanacs published between 1835 and 1856.[4] Filled with fantastic stories and written in a colorful backwoods language, the *Almanacks* captured an image of western life that was both comedic and dramatic.[5] The *Almanacks* are also infused with a nativism and racism that shocks the modern conscience, and in the words of historian Richard Hauck, represent "an absolute low point in the history of American humor."[6] While the prominent American folklorist Richard Dorson has asserted that the *Almanacks* represent genuine folk stories that were faithfully

recorded by the publishers, recent scholars have expressed skepticism, begging the question of by and for whom were these *Almanacks* written.[7]

According to American folklorist Stephen Gencarella, a more complete understanding of this question could be achieved by applying a rhetorical approach based on the thought of Antonio Gramsci, which could provide "a recognition of folklore's central role in the formation of hegemonic and naturalized orders of the social world."[8] For Gramsci, cultural hegemony is the tendency for the economically dominant class to impose its worldview on society at large.[9] In the context of folklore, conventional publishers with the power of mass production created spurious fables and inauthentic "fakelore" with which to satisfy the public appetite, attempting to mimic the popular style of the Brothers Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm.[10] Dorson has discussed the role of popular folklore in the emerging American nationalism of the late nineteenth century, when publishers looked for stories that would turn regional particularities into a national identity.[11] Expressed through the ideas of Frederick Jackson Turner, America saw itself as a historical creation in which the frontier had played a key role in the construction of the nation's identity through the continuous civilizing of "free land" in the west.[12] This frontier identity was in its nascent form in the nineteenth century, and the "tall tales" of the Crockett *Almanacks* represent some of its earliest expressions.[13] So were they authentic folklore, or commercialized fakelore? With respect to Dorson, this paper considers the *Almanacks* commercial creations of popular culture written both to mimic and to satirize the style of backwoods stories, while serving as a form of cultural hegemony that advanced a specific political position. Their purpose was to mythologize the west in order to sanitize it—to conceal the history of conquest in order to present the frontier as place without time in which people acted according to their essential character—that is, according to their race. The choice of Davy Crockett was of paramount

importance, for in his career were embodied many of the contradictions that problematized the developing myths of frontier America. Unlike the historical David Crockett, whose relations with native peoples were more ambivalent, the fictional Davy of the *Almanacks* was an unapologetic nativist and terrorizer who advocated nothing less than the white domination of North America.

By now historians have rejected the Turnerian thesis of the American frontier while still accepting its pronounced psychological and cultural role in shaping American identity.**[14]** Rather than the study of one ethnic group's expansion across North America, the New Western History of Patricia Nelson Limerick is "the study of a place undergoing conquest and never fully escaping its consequences."[15] In classical and medieval European culture the frontier had been considered a wild borderland where the inhabitants were likely to degenerate into a more savage type of character, but by the nineteenth century the American frontier was also being held up as a place of innocence and purity.[16] Combined with the emerging democratic politics of the nineteenth century, politicians of both parties tried to perform the role of bona fide frontier hero, and no politician at this time was more successful than Andrew Jackson.[17] With his status as a self-made man, Jackson was the perfect vehicle for meritocratic myth of idyllic frontier homesteads.[18] The project of transforming virgin lands into civilized homesteads, however, was not possible while those lands were still occupied by their original inhabitants.[19] As such, Anglo-American freedom on the frontier was only made possible through massive government intervention, most instrumentally the Indian Removal Act of 1830.[20] The mythic frontier of Jackson's day served as an imagined antidote to the uncomfortable changes in modern life, concealing the truth that rather than an expanse of free land, the American frontier was actually an institutional extension of the Federal Government.[21]

Andrew Jackson was not the only frontier celebrity of the nineteenth century, and the life of Davy Crockett also followed the archetype of the rugged pioneer, which in turn made him an appealing political candidate. The historical David Crockett was born on August 17, 1786, in eastern Tennessee. His Irish immigrant father "lived far back in the backwoods, [and] had neither the means nor the opportunity to give me … any learning."[22] Arising from these legitimately humble origins, Crockett volunteered for service in the Creek Wars in 1813, where he served until the following year.[23] After his service ended, he settled in Lawrence County in western Tennessee where he ran for the State Legislature and was elected in 1821.[24] Although he was no friend of Jackson, Crockett ran for congress on the Democratic ticket in 1827 and was elected thanks to the help of the party machine.[25] His failure to support Jackson on the Indian Removal bill led to his split with the party, however, and after losing reelection in 1831 he left the Democratic Party and became a Whig, which allowed him to recapture his seat in 1833.[26] The party even sent Crockett on a highly publicized tour of the eastern cities, and it was in this context that he found himself inside the playhouse in New York watching James Hackett pretend to a role he had played in real life.[27] But his popularity under the Whigs was short lived, and after losing reelection in 1835, he was forgotten by both parties.[28] Determined to find a way back into public life, Crockett decided to move west to Texas and thereby recapture some of his lost frontier essence.[29] If not for his famous and romanticized death at the Alamo in 1836, the congressman from Tennessee might have become little more than a footnote in American History.[30]

This brings us to the question of the *Almanacks* and their authenticity. While academics agree that the historical Crockett had no hand in their composition, folklorist Richard Dorson has written, "my view is that they were indeed the cherished popular folk heroes of the young

American nation, catching perfectly the brash humor and daredevil impudence of the Jacksonian period."[31] American historian Paul Hutton, however, has considered the *Almanacks* creations of popular culture merely masquerading as genuine frontier tall tales, an opinion shared by professor of American Literature John Seelye, who has written, "the earliest Crockett Almanacs were the products of commercial consideration and seem to have been created in New England … divorced from any direct contact with the trans-Alleghany zone."[32] Despite producing fakelore rather than folklore, the *Almanacks*' authors capitalized on the popularity of the genre, and found a wide readership among the nation's literate population.[33] This made them one of the first forms of American mass media, and as such they were ideal vehicles to disseminate moral and political lessons.

To this end, the depiction of various ethnicities in the *Almanacks* points toward the erasure of ethnic differences between Americans of European descent, while emphasizing the difference between white and non-white Americans.[34] By operating in an optical medium that exclusively used shades of black and white, the *Almanacks* were able to essentialize peoples of various ethnicities into these two basic categories. The *Almanacks* then organize ethnic groups into these two categories, for example poor Americans of Scottish descent and wealthy Yankees are both portrayed as equivalent, while Native Americans and African people are subjected to being labeled with the worst of pejoratives. Using these techniques, the *Almanacks* attempt to construct an American "white" identity that was distinct from European, African, and Native American culture.[35] Such a path was both economically expedient and demonstrates a specific class and political interest on the part of the *Almanacks*' unknown publisher, who used the latest techniques in mass printing and distribution to perpetuate a form of nationwide "popular culture" that cut across regions and might be considered an early form of white American nationalism.[36]

At first glance the *Almanacks* might seem irreverent to the point of absurd as Davy and his colorful cast of supporting characters make ridiculous boasts or accomplish impossible feats. In a story from the 1837 *Almanack*, in a speech to Congress, Davy bragged, "I can run faster, dive deeper, stay under longer, and come out drier than any chap this side of bog Swamp."[37] Davy followed through on his boasts, too, at one point evading a group of British soldiers by riding his pet alligator up Niagara Falls.[38] While only the first two editions were published in Crockett's lifetime, his ghost became a national hero, still imagined as alive beyond the boundaries of the nation. In an account from the 1841 *Almanack* entitled "Latest from the Mines," Davy revealed in a letter that he had survived the Alamo only to become enslaved in a Mexican gold mine.[39] The *Almanacks*' Crockett of the 1840s was also an unapologetic nationalist, affirming that "I am Col. Davy Crockett, one of the sovereign people of Uncle Sam, that never kneels to any individual this side of sunshine."[40] In the final editions of the *Almanack*, Davy ascended to the Olympian heights of godhood when the sun had frozen on its axis, forcing the pioneer to give it a great kick that knocked it loose, after which "the sun walked up beautifully, salutin' me with sich a wind o' gratitude that it made me sneeze."[41] In his trajectory from blustering backwoodsman to Promethean hero, the Crockett of the *Almanacks* became the embodiment of the nineteenth-century American spirit of Manifest Destiny, as the country was transformed from a regional power into the master of North America.

Many of the *Almanacks*' stories deal with interactions between Crockett and Native Americans. "Injuns," as they are referred to in the least disrespectful of terms, are depicted as strange creatures, not quite animal but not fully human. They are often a threatening element, sometimes appearing as murderous enemies, while at others merely as buffoonish competitors. The tone of the *Almanacks* also changes, with earlier editions offering more comic or exotic

depictions of natives, which give way to rank violence and nativism in the later printings. As Limerick has written, one of the most polarizing and inflaming tropes from western history is that of the innocent white victim, usually a woman or child, who is set upon by rapacious natives.[42] The *Almanacks* traffic in and develop this trope of Indian aggression and white victimization in several instances.

An archetypal example of this dynamic appears in the 1842 *Almanack* under the title of "Indian Barbarity," which primes readers by reminding them that "the craftiness and cruelty of the American Indian is proverbial."[43] The story roughly describes the published account of six European Americans who were ambushed and kidnapped by natives while traveling down the Ohio river in 1790.[44] Despite attempts by both Native and European American men to negotiate for a young woman's freedom, her captors insisted on ritually executing her. Rushing to the site of her capture, her rescuers discovered that "she had been stripped naked, her body painted, and in this condition had been bound to a stake, around which hickory poles had already been collected, and every other disposition made for burning her alive at daylight."[45] The story is even accompanied by a full page woodcut depicting the bound Miss Fleming with bare breasts, calling into question the editor's preface where he assured his readers that "nothing will be introduced into its [the *Almanack's*] pages at which the most fastidious in morals can take offence."[46] The tale does end with a happy conclusion, as the young woman's rescuers forcibly free her from her bonds while paying her captors in silver. The story is roughly factual, but also dramatic, salacious, and completely removed from its historical context. While in Johnson's biography Peggy Fleming appears as a brave individual who willingly journeyed into the frontier, the *Almanack* reduces her to her feminine tropes with her capture described as eliciting "the most heartfelt wretchedness." The moral juxtaposition between the innocent white pioneers and

aggressive natives is made clear when the *Almanack* bemoans that, "could the victims of their [the Indians] slaughter be numbered, what countless host they would present!" Much like the character Flora from D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, who leaps to her death rather than be caught by a black man, Miss Fleming is transformed into a martyr of white civilization while the native characters are reduced to the most vulgar essence as savage aggressors. Tragically, it was to become a trope that would proliferate in American literature, both within and without the *Almanacks*.

These racist depictions of Native Americans are taken to new levels in later *Almanack* stories, exemplified by one particularly graphic episode from the 1846 *Almanack* entitled "Crockett Mowing Down the Indians for Stealing his Hay, with a Twelve-Foot Scythe." After his pet bear alerted Davy to a group of encroaching Indians, he became incensed because "I didn't care about a few cocks o' hay … but the idea o' thar comin an stealin decent white critter's property, riz up my desposition till it boiled an frizzed in me like melted iron in a furnace."[47] In retribution for their trespass he grabbed his scythe, and "then walked among 'em like twenty corn cutters among cornstalks, an the way I made their heads an legs fly about war equal to about fifty swords and twenty cannon in a battle field … till it war as red and striped as Uncle Sam's flag." After slaughtering the unfortunate would-be thieves, Davy and his pet bear "took and piled up their heads and limbs like hah cock, an thar let 'em stand as a warnen an terrification to all sich savage plunderin trespasses." Such a grisly scene expressed in comic language and wrapped in moral and patriotic indignation expressed the trope of white victimhood on the frontier, while also depicting allegorically the brutal raids against native peoples committed by the U.S. Army.[48] Additionally, the episode demonstrates the ambiguity of white property relations while also tapping into the anger expressed by white settlers at native peoples possessing valuable land.[49]

Ironically, Anglo-Americans often occupied sovereign native lands illegally, and in the eyes of the law were the real trespassers, even if the Federal Government almost always failed to act.[50] The story reverses the historical relations of power in order to conceive of the pioneer, and Uncle Sam, as the rightful owner of frontier land, and frames assertions of native ownership as a form of aggression, thereby justifying their forced removal.

The theme of violence against native peoples finds its most extreme form in a depiction of cannibalism in one of the later *Almanack* stories from 1849. While traveling the Oregon Trail, Davy encountered two native chiefs with whom he quickly began to brawl. After emerging victorious from the fight, Davy felt quite famished, but without any food on hand. His solution was to turn the defeated Indians into a stew, a meal which was, in his own words, "superlicious."[51] The immediate impression given by the story is one of horror, which brings to mind reports of historical cannibalism on the frontier, such as the tragic Donner Party.[52] Yet a contextual analysis reveals more classical elements at play. Returning to the theme of the frontier as a place that brings out barbarous behavior of the inhabitants, the consumption of the Indians' flesh is a type of "savage eucharist" through which Davy takes on the attributes of the savage.[53] This depiction bears witness to the fears and anxiety felt by urban Americans over whether people really did "go native" in the wilderness where, in addition to cannibalism, Anglo-Americans engaged in all manner of uncivilized behaviors.[54] Bizarre behavior, such as that of the cannibal Davy, emphasized the gulf between different peoples and ways of life in order to horrify the readers into reaffirming their own civilized sensibilities.[55] In this way, the Davy of the *Almanacks* was an enforcer of cultural barriers who sought to ensure that it was America that consumed the frontier, rather than being consumed by it.[56] Finally, with his consumption of the Indian, and by extension his land, the cannibal Davy was affirming the imperial ambitions of the

Federal Government. As a politician and a patriot, Davy thought the best man for government was "One that knows how to talk about Oregon, flog Mexico, swallow a French-man whole, and lick John Bull clear out of his breaches."[57] In this sense, the consumption of the savage is a metaphor for the consumption of the frontier. The American nation, through its imperialist goal of manifest destiny, aimed to feast upon the entire North American continent.[58]

How would the historical David Crockett have felt about these depictions of his relations with and violence towards native peoples? Despite his service in the Creek War, Crockett voted against the removal bill, even though it was immensely popular in his home district.[59] Whatever his motive, it was an act of courage in a time when the boundaries between communities were hardening, and members of both parties were willing to use violence to secure the nation's claim to western land. The *Almanacks* contain allegorical elements of this history disguised as folk tales, but densely woven with symbols and metaphors that speak to a greater urban middle-class anxiety about ethnic interaction on the frontier and try to placate it with comic rhetoric. I hope in some small part I have been able to answer Gencarella's challenge to apply the logic of cultural hegemony to examples of American folklore in popular culture in order to understand how it has naturalized artificially imposed structures of power and knowledge. The forms of racial discrimination present in the *Almanacks*, and works like them, are not merely passive reflections of a bygone era but an active and ongoing assertion of Anglo-American superiority and justification for the political and military domination of North America.[60] When we think about what national heroes like Davy Crockett represent and how we should remember them, what version of history will we choose? Will the nation travel the humble and courageous path of the historical Crockett, or will we be consumed by the fear and anger embodied by the vulgar racist of the *Almanacks*?

[1] Melvin Rosser Mason, "'The Lion of the West': Satire on Davy Crockett and Frances Trollope," in *The South Central Bulletin* 29, no. 4 (winter 1969): 143.
[2] James Atkins Shackford, *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 255–257.
[3] "There is another type of mythological "Davy" who seems to live principally in the carols of folklore romanticizers. He lives in literature mainly at the expense of the historical Crockett, and in recent years he has crowded the *Autobiography* out of anthologies and the historical person out of literary history." Shackford, *David Crockett*, 247.
[4] "There is no question that most scholars correctly view the comic Crockett almanacs from 1835 to 1856 as the single most influential genre in the creation and propagation of Davy's legendary life." Michael A. Lofaro, "The Hidden 'Hero' of the Nashville Crockett Almanacs," in *Davy Crockett: The Man, The Legend, The Legacy*, ed. Michael Lofaro (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 47.
[5] Paul Andrew Hutton, "'Going to Congress and Making Allmynacks is my Trade': Davy Crockett, His Almanacs, and the Evolution of a Frontier Legend," *Journal of the West* 37, no. 2 (April 1998): 14–15.
[6] Richard Boyd Hauck, "The Man in The Buckskin Hunting Shirt: Fact and Fiction in the Crockett Story," in *Davy Crockett: The Man, The Legend, The Legacy, 1786–1986*, ed. Michael A. Lofaro (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 14. This aspect cannot be understated; Hutton wrote "this accurately and sadly reflected ante-bellum racial sensibilities, and thus these almanacs serve as clear artifacts of the prevailing racist popular culture of the time." Hutton, "Going to Congress and Making Allmynacks is my Trade," 20.
[7] Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 107.
[8] "A more intimate relationship between folklore and rhetorical studies would foster a deeper appreciation of folklores political investment…a rhetorical perspective, as I detail, provides a reminder that folklore is not something that a folk does, rather it is something that, in its doing, constitutes a folk, as both an immediate audience and a political category. Further, that doing constitutes *antagonists* or *enemies* to that folk—a people to kill and a people to kill for…it is a recognition of folklore's central role in the formation of hegemonic and naturalized orders of the world." Stephen Olbrys Gencarella, "Constituting Folklore: A Case for Critical Folklore studies," *Journal of American Folklore* 122, no. 484 (spring 2009): 173. The closest rhetorical analysis of the Almanacs has been conducted by professor of Religious Studies Catherine L. Albanese who has examined their content and explained many of the religious themes in the works. She had written, "a study of their condense can provide insights into the awareness that many Americas, who read and enjoyed them, had of themselves, their identities and projects, their deeply held values and beliefs." Catherine L. Albanese, "King Crockett: Nature and Civility on the American Frontier," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 88, no. 2 (October 1978): 227.
[9] Although he never furnished a complete definition, Gramsci's most quoted understanding of cultural hegemony was: "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production." Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 12. "The concept of cultural hegemony offers intellectual and cultural historians an opportunity to connect ideas with the 'social matrix' that they are constantly being urged to locate, without reducing those ideas to mere epiphenomena…His [Gramsci's] concept of hegemonic consensus acknowledges differences in wealth and power even in 'democracies' and seeks to show how those inequalities have been maintained or challenged in the sphere of culture." T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1985): 572. In this context, folklore is a form of knowledge which is distinct from that of the dominant class, and usually considered in opposition to it. Antonio Gramsci, "Observations on Folklore," in *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 360–361.

[10] Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian*, 26.
[11] Richard M. Dorson, "The Question of Folklore in a New Nation," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 3, no. 3 (December 1966): 284–285.
[12] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1894).
[13] Creath S. Throne, "The Crockett Almanacs: What Makes A Tall Tale Tall?" in *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 44 (1980), 93.
[14] Joyce Appleby et al., *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: WW Norton, 1994), 118. For information regarding the status of the Turnerian thesis in modern history see Martin Ridge, "Turner the Historian: A Long Shadow," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 2 (summer 1993): 133–144.
[15] "Under the Turner thesis, Western history stood alone. An exciting trend in modern scholarship leads toward comparative history – toward Western American History as one chapter in the global story of Europe's Expansion. Studies in 'comparative conquests' promise to knit the fragmented history of the planet back together. Western American History can be a prime contributor to that endeavor." Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 26. The inverse of these antagonistic elements can also be observed. In his more recent book on the frontier history of the Mississippi river basin, Historian Stephen Aron wrote "I envision a frontier as a meeting point between peoples of differing ways and from distinct politics." Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), xvi. Rather than a pure distant borderland the frontier was really the center of a porous multi-ethnic junction.
[16] Catherine L. Albanese, "Davy Crockett and the Wild Man or, the Metaphysics of the Longue Duree," in *Davy Crockett: The Man, The Legend, The Legacy, 1786–1986*, ed. Michael A. Lofaro (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 80.
[17] Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 9, 15, 29, 73, 215, 220.
[18] M. J. Heale, "The Role of the Frontier in Jacksonian Politics: David Crockett and the Myth of the Self-Made Man," *Western Historical Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (October 1973): 410, 418, 413–414. Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 68. Jacksonian politics offered an antidote to this anxiety by invoking the image of an idyllic agrarian republic freed from the shackles of corrupt economic forces. Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford CA: Stanford Press, 1957), 17.
[19] "The "virgin lands" were not vacant, but occupied. Redistributing those lands to the benefit of white farmers required the removal of Indian territorial claims and of the Indians themselves." Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 60.
[20] "In all, approximately 45,690 Indians were relocated beyond the Mississippi during the eight years of Jackson's presidency...From 1789, when the American government began under the constitution, to 1838, a year after Jackson left office, about 81,282 Indians were relocated to the west. The operation of removal provided the American people with the land they had hungered for over the past hundred and more years. Jackson acquired for the United States approximately 100 million acres of land for about $68 million and 32 million acres of western land. It was one of the ugliest chapters in American history." Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and his Indian Wars* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 234, 236, 257, 278.
[21] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 82–83, 195.
[22] David Crockett, *The Autobiography of David Crockett* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 19, 21.
[23] Crockett, *Autobiography*, 52, 82.
[24] Crockett, *Autobiography*, 92, 94.
[25] Crockett, *Autobiography*, 132.
[26] Crockett, *Autobiography*, 135. Shackford, *David Crockett*, 116. Andrew Jackson in Thomas E. Scruggs, "Davy Crockett and the Thieves of Jericho: An Analysis of the Shackford-Parrington Conspiracy Theory," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 3 (autumn 1999): 488.

[27] David Crockett, "An Account of Colonel Crockett's Tour to the North and Down East," in David Crockett, *The Autobiography of David Crockett* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 143, 154.
[28] Crockett, *Autobiography*, 221.
[29] Crockett, *Autobiography*, 226.
[30] Shackford, *David Crockett*, 147.
[31] Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian*, 107. "David neither sponsored nor in any way contributed to these almanacs, nor were they issued for David or by or for his heirs. They were part of the exploitation of his renown which yet goes on." Shackford, *David Crockett*, 249.
[32] Hutton, "Going to Congress and Making Allmynacks is my Trade," 13. John Seelye, "A Well-Wrought Crockett: or How the Fakelorists Passed Through the Credibility Gap and Discovered Kentucky," in *Davy Crockett: The Man, The Legend, The Legacy, 1786–1986*, ed. Michael A. Lofaro (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 41. Seelye proposes that the true creators of the almanacs were publisher Samuel N. Dickinson and artist/editor Charles Elms. Seelye has uncovered a letter purportedly written by Dickinson in 1844 in which the publisher wrote, "a few years later and the Crockett almanac was started, by us, and we thought the idea quite as novel as that of the comic [almanac]." *The American Comic Almanac* was a publication composed by Elms and taken over by Dickinson in 1839. Some woodcut images printed in the Crockett almanacs appear to have been taken directly from the *Comic Almanac* or other works attributed to Elms. The inclusion of Ben Harding, Crockett's often sidekick and a variant of a New England sailor folk hero with no connection to the Tennessee region, "bears witness that the movement had more to do with creating and holding a popular audience than with the recording of authentic folk stories. As in pornography, an appetite having been created must be fed increasingly bizarre variations upon a basic situation, and as in adventure series on television, the settings and stories become increasingly exotic and unlikely." Seelye, "A Well-Wrought Crockett," 37–44.
[33] Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian*, 104. "They were evidently widely read. With editions purportedly published in Nashville, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore and printed using (mass-production) stereotype, the almanacs had both eastern and western audiences." Albanese, "Davy Crockett and the Wild Man," 82.
[34] "Because capitalist hegemony functions through differences between and within subordinate groups, in many respects, it functions best in a multicultural setting. Dominant social forces can 'lead' by presenting themselves as the universal arbiters of social order and by exploiting differences between racial and ethnic groups." Lee Artz and Bren Adair Ortega Murphy, *Cultural Hegemony in the United States* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 84.
[35] "To represent the interests of all society, hegemonic institutions and leaders must win consent from subordinate groups throughout society. The construction of racism, like all cultural development, occurs in and through practices, representations, languages, and customs." Artz and Murphy, *Cultural Hegemony in the United States*, 86.
[36] "Where the literati struggled to show that print culture could model democracy, the Crockett almanacs presented this as an accomplished fact. With Ben Harding and Davy Crockett in control of the means of literary production, what further evidence of literatures accessibility to the people could be desired? The Crockett almanacs—indeed the entire Crockett literary industry—realized the fondest dreams of a national literature in a regional anti-literature." Lara Langer Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 78.
[37] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1837*, 40. Each issue of *Davy Crockett's Almanack* was published in Boston by James Fisher.
[38] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1846*, 32–33.
[39] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1841*, 4.
[40] Hutton, "Going to Congress and Making Allmynacks is my Trade," 21.
[41] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 332.
[42] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 37.
[43] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1842*, 2.

[44] Charles and Peter Johnson, *A Narrative of the Incidents Attending the Capture Detention, and Ransom of Charles Johnston* (New York: J. J. Harper, 1827), 7.
[45] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1842*, 5.
[46] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1842*, 2.
[47] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1846*, 20.
[48] "He [Jackson] continued his scorched earth policy, with no mercy shown [to] the suffering populations of the communities he traversed. He burned Indian villages as he went and destroyed whatever provisions they might contain." Remini, *Andrew Jackson and his Indian Wars*, 80–82. Even Crockett participated in the looting and burning of native settlements, notably in one village after an American lieutenant had been killed by a native woman's arrow "we now shot them like dogs; and then set the house on fire, and burned it up with the forty-six warriors in it." Crockett, *Autobiography*, 58, 61.
[49] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 197.
[50] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 61. In a letter from the Cherokee nation sent to President Andrew Jackson on March 26, 1830. The representatives of the nation wrote "There are hundreds of whitemen searching and digging for gold within the limits of the nation…The number of these intruders has been variously stated from one to two thousand…which we cannot but consider as depriving us of property for which the faith of the Gov[ernmen]'t is pledged for our protection." Remini, *Andrew Jackson and his Indian Wars*, 329–330.
[51] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1849*, 9.
[52] The most famous instance of group cannibalism in the American West was the Donner Party, which spent the winter of 1846–1847 trapped by snow in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Eliza P. Donner Houghton, *The Expedition of the Donner Party and its Tragic Fate*, ed. Kristin Johnston (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 119. For more information see Ethan Rarick, *Desperate Passage: the Donner Party's Perilous Journey West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[53] Albanese, "Davy Crockett and the Wild Man," 88–89.
[54] Aron, *American Confluence*, 160. In Albanese's analysis the medieval trope of the wild-man or savage "becomes part of an enduring history of images of the 'other' through which Europeans defined their own values." Albanese, "Davy Crockett and the Wild Man," 91.
[55] Albanese, "Davy Crockett and the Wild Man," 94.
[56] Aron, *American Confluence*, 162. In his role as tracker during the Creek war Crockett himself encountered many people of mixed ethnic descent or couples who were intermarried, a common occurrence on the early nineteenth-century American frontier. Crockett, 54–55.
[57] *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1847*, 13. Albanese, "Davy Crockett and the Wild Man," 96.
[58] The Crockett of the Almanacs voraciously affirmed his desire to consume and possess the entire frontier, exclaiming "I told you…that I go in for Texas and Annexation, clar up to the very gravel stone, in spite o' all the Mixy Mexican Spanish brown and red nig-ars." *Davy Crockett's Almanack 1846*, 33.
[59] Crockett, 133. As for Crockett's affection for Indians, Shackford wrote "David's love for Indians was new-found and short lived…I suspect it was in reality whatever it needed to be to oppose Jackson." Shackford, *David Crockett*, 117. In his *autobiography*, Crockett defended himself by writing "that I would sooner be honestly and politically d—nd, than hypocritically immortalized." Crockett, 132–133.
[60] "There is, and perhaps always will be, a Bureau of Indian Affairs, an institutionalized statement that American Indians are not like any other minority. The difference is a study in the power of origins. A minority by conquest is not the same as a minority by immigration, and four centuries of history have not blurred the difference…When [contemporary] Anglo-Americans look across the Mexican border or into an Indian reservation, they are more likely to see stereotypes than recognizable individuals or particular groups; the same distortion of vision no doubt works the other way too. The unitary character known as "the white man" has never existed, nor has "the Indian." Yet the phrase receives constant use, as if they carried necessary meaning…Natives and newcomers, we share the same region and its history, but we wait to be introduced. The serious historical process that made us neighbors provides that introduction." Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 211, 349.

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The 'Superlicious' Feast:
A Rhetorical Analysis of Davy Crockett's Almanacks as an Early Form of White National Identity

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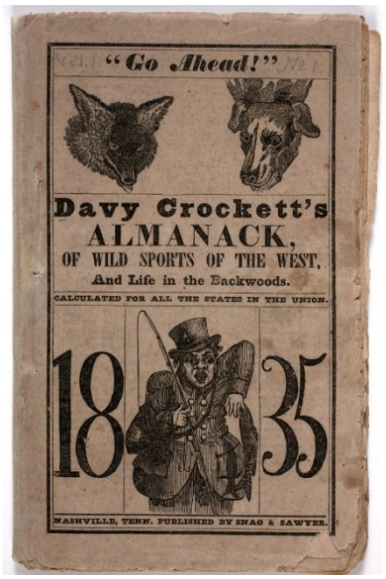
Who: David "Davy" Crockett; frontiersman and politician from Tennessee who served as a member of Congress from 1827-1831 and again from 1833-1835. Since his famous death at the Alamo in 1836 he has become transformed into a folk and national hero.[1]
What: *Davy Crockett's Almanacks*, a set of nineteenth almanacs which include stories that claim to be folklore and tall tales surrounding Davy Crockett.[2]
When: The *Almanacks* were issued annually between 1835-1856.
Why: Rather than authentic folklore, the stories in the *Almanacks* were commercialized "fakelore," written with the intention of appealing to a broad popular audience. They can be thought of as a form of cultural hegemony which displayed a mythologized version of the American frontier intended to reaffirm barriers between ethnic communities and justify American expansion. Unlike the historical David Crockett, whose relations with native peoples were more ambivalent, the fictional Davy of the *Almanacks* was an unapologetic nativist and terrorizer who advocated nothing less than the white American domination of North America.



Left: Painting of David Crockett by Chester Harding, 1834, National Portrait Gallery.
Right: Cover of *Davy Crockett's "Go Ahead" Almanack*, first edition 1835.

[1] For the best academic treatment of the historical David Crockett, see James Atkins Shackford, *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956).
[2] For a discussion on the Folklore surrounding Davy Crockett, see Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 104–107.

Crockett's wonderful escape up the Niagara Falls, on his Pet Alligator.

Top and Left: Images from the 1846 *Almanack.*

Right: Davy duels with two Indian chiefs before his "superlicious' feast. 1849 *Almanack.*