

The American Papers

Editor-in-Chief

Clayton Finn
Jasmine Mayfield

Managing Editors

Michael Paramo
Jonathan Schreiber
Jena Delgado-Sette

Editorial Board

Roxana Arevalo
Barbara Tkach
Michael Gandara
Jesus Pelayo

Layout Editor

Bahar Tahamtani

Faculty Advisor

Dustin Abnet

Professor Abnet would like to thank the editors for their hard work, camaraderie, and professionalism while preparing this edition of *The American Papers*. Their willingness to give freely of their time—even over summer break—to add to this institution is very much appreciated. He also would like to commend the authors for their exceptional papers and good-natured responses to the editorial process.

Michael Paramo, Jonathan Schreiber, and Jena Delgado-Sette deserve special recognition for their service as Managing Editors as does editor Michael Gandara for his assistance securing funding from the InterClub Council. Together their efforts made the production of the 2017-2018 issue possible. Professor Abnet offers special thanks to Bahar Tahamtani for her beautiful work on the layout and design of this issue. Finally, he especially would like to thank Clayton Finn and Jasmine Mayfield for serving as this volume's Editors in Chief. Their professionalism, hard work, kindness, and dedication to the success of *The American Papers* has been remarkable.

Welcome to the 2017-2018 American Papers!

First and foremost, the American Papers is a testament to the many faculty mentors that have spent countless hours of their time to assist students at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) in their personal academic development and in making this journal what it is today. Our mission as writers and editors is to hold up the long-standing tradition of presenting the highest quality papers written by both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in our American Studies courses over the current academic year.

As American Studies students and scholars, we strive to examine and better understand various aspects of American culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. This year's journal reflects this goal by traversing through the diverse classes that our department offers. At CSUF, the American Studies department has worked hard to develop courses that engage students in many avenues of study, such as fashion, literature, and the built environment. This year's journal features papers written for new and traditional courses focusing on gender, race, sexuality, popular culture, and more. Each year, the American Papers publishes one exceptional paper chosen by a committee of our professors to honor Earl James Weaver, one of the founding professors of American Studies at CSUF. This year's winner is Ashley Loup's "Plead the Fifth," which discusses changing cultural perceptions of African American lawyers throughout modern history and was published in last year's issue of the American Papers. We are happy to present the runner-up of the 2017 Weaver prize for publication in this issue. Entitled "The Talk: A Survival Guide," Jena Delgado-Sette examines the ways African American parents talk to their children about the inevitability of police encounters.

We hope that this year's journal will engage our readers in ways it has not before. Several of our essays explore contemporary and even locally relevant topics in American culture that are changing the discourse of earlier scholarship and adding new and exciting pathways to critical discussion and analysis. Finally, the Editors-in-Chief wish to thank our contributors and our editorial staff for all their hard work in putting this year's issue together. It has truly been a pleasure to work with our excellent students and our consistently supportive faculty advisor, Professor Dustin Abnet.

The Editors

Course Descriptions

AMST 201: Introduction to American Studies

With the concept of culture as a unifying principle, focus is on four separate time periods to provide the framework for an understanding of American civilization. Various kinds of documents used to illustrate the nature and advantages of an interdisciplinary approach.

AMST 345: The American Dream

Interdisciplinary analysis, in settings both historical and contemporary, of the myth and reality surrounding the notion of America as a land of unparalleled and unlimited possibilities, especially in the achievement of personal material success.

AMST 350: Theories and Methods of American Studies

Provides an understanding and appreciation of methodology, theories of society, and images of humanity as they affect American Studies contributions to scholarship. Fulfills the university upper-division writing requirement for American Studies majors.

AMST 401: Stories of Los Angeles

Reading the City: Cultural life of an American city as seen through its historical memory and self-image, and its diverse racial, ethnic, and class life, and its artistic and expressive culture.

AMST 401: Literature and American Culture

Contemporary literature as a cultural document. The relationship between American culture and its recent fiction, focusing on several important novels and plays since the end of the Second World War.

AMST 401: Stories of Los Angeles

Examines how people have told stories about Los Angeles. Los Angeles is repeatedly represented, fantasized, and forgotten, famously divided and sprawling, renowned for both sunshine and noir—and it is also the setting for most of our lives, so its contradictory stories are well worth exploring.

AMST 451: American Fashion

Cultural politics of fashion in America. Uses interdisciplinary sources, including material culture, visual arts, legal codes, protests, advertising, and popular culture to study the diverse meanings of fashion in the past and present U.S.

AMST 488: Race, Sex, and the Urban City

Focusing on major urban spaces at key moments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this course examines the ways that anxieties about race, gender, youth, and sexuality have come to be identified with urban spaces and modern city life.

AMST 501: Theories and Methods

The American Studies movement. Its conceptual and methodological development. The way this development was affected by and in turn reflected larger trends in the culture itself.

AMST 502: Themes in America

Culture and Desire: Theoretical Approaches to the History of the Emotions: Advanced analysis of enduring patterns and innovative shifts in the ways Americans have defined, controlled, and expressed emotions such as anger, lust, shame, pride, fear, jealousy, grief, and joy from the 17th century to the present. This year, taught by Dr. Jesse Battan.

AMST 502: Public Memory

Weaver Award Course

Analysis of cultural practices of remembering (and forgetting) in relationship to both scholarly and popular constructions of the history of "American experience." Examines the how narratives, artifacts, and sites of public memory can be seen to create as well as reinforce social boundaries.

Table of Contents

AMST 201: Introduction to American Studies

- A Master of Eloquence: How Phillis Wheatley Poetically Advanced the Antislavery Cause by Humanizing African Americans 14
by Lillie Bosfield

AMST 345: The American Dream

- Immigrant Cinema: How Immigrants in Film Struggle for the American Dream 16
by Evan Dang

AMST 350: Theories and Methods in American Studies

- Get Out*: A Portrayal of Contemporary Racial Power Tensions in America 20
by Barbie Tkach

AMST 401: Stories of Los Angeles

- The Underlying Messages of *The Twilight Zone* 23
by Kristiana Guzman

- What Are Those Yellow Spots on the Screen? A Look at Vietnamese Representations in Movies 32
by Steve Nguyen

AMST 401T: Literature in American Culture

- “Grinning Horribly”: A New Cultural Analysis of Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle* 39
by Jon Schreiber

- An “AIDS Memory Story”: The Desexualization of Gay Men’s Relationships during the Marriage Equality Movement 47
by Raymond Gandara

- Zoot Suit*: A Correction to American Public Memory 57
by Francine Rios

AMST 451: American Fashion

- Prosecutorial Style: The Courtroom, the Clothing, and the Refashioning of Marcia Clark 67
by Ashley Loup

AMST 488: Race, Sex, and the Urban City

- “Your Own McDonalds!”: Race, McDonald’s, and the Inner Cities 74
by Alyssa Dilday

AMST 599: Science Fiction and American Culture

- Blinded Me with Science Fiction: The Decline in Utopian Narratives and the Dystopian Turn 78
by Jasmin Gomez

AMST 501: Theory and Methods

Queer Empowerment Anthems: Subversive Legacies and Lady Gaga's "Born This Way" 85
by *Michael Paramo*

AMST 502: Themes in America

The Price of a Sexual Politics of Respectability: W. E. B. Du Bois, Racial Uplift, and
the Harlem Renaissance 92
by *Clayton Finn*

"The Talk": A Survival Guide 105
by *Jena Delgado-Sette*
The Earl James Weaver Graduate Paper Prize

A Master of Eloquence: How Phillis Wheatley Poetically Advanced the Antislavery Cause by Humanizing African Americans

Lillie Bosfield

There is a common phrase known as “actions speak louder than words” and while it can be true in certain circumstances, words can speak just as loudly. Words have the power to reach mass audiences and important figures, especially if they have compelling messages behind them. Phillis Wheatley was an example of an individual who used her literary talent to influence how people thought about complex concepts. She was a slave girl who learned how to read and write at an early age. Her masters felt that she would grow up to be a genius, especially because the idea of a slave being educated was simply unheard of at the time (Raphael, 100). By using the medium of poetry and savvy word choices, Phillis Wheatley was able to form a connection between African Americans and the colonists, and make the argument that African slaves deserved the right to equality.

The way Phillis Wheatley wrote her various poems and elegies made her become a popular name among different groups of people, during the American Revolution. Her work titled, “On Being Brought from Africa to America” is an excellent illustration of how she infused the concepts of slavery, politics, and religion in her poems. Her ultimate goal was to fight for anti-slavery and anti-racism, but the only way she could properly do so was by writing in a clever way (aimed toward the colonists). She opened the poem by writing, “’Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land.” This line illustrates that she was taken away from Africa, a land that believed in Paganism, an outsider religion. This opening line put a subtly negative emphasis on Paganism, since “Pagan” was the only italicized word and “mercy” implies that being taken away was a good thing. If a colonist read that, he would infer that she was *thanking them* for bringing her to America from Africa, as Paganism was commonly disapproved by colonists. She proceeds her poem with, “Taught my benighted soul to understand. That there’s a God, that there’s a Saviour too.” These lines show that she is trying to appease her superiors by implying that they saved her through the conversion of Christianity. She was implying that slavery was a blessing in disguise. Even if Wheatley personally did not feel this way, seeing a slave woman write about slavery this way made the Colonists hypothetically pat themselves on the back. By incorporating religion in the beginning of her poem, she began to establish the foundation of a new potential relationship.

Following the introductory lines of the poem, she really began to develop her arguments regarding slavery and race. The last few lines were essential to her argument because she then tried to get the colonists to see things from her perspective, and identify with her and the slave population. The fifth line, “Some view our sable race with a scornful eye,” was where she blatantly addressed the fact that blacks were considered the outsider race compared to white Americans, and were hardly seen as people. It is possible that she used the phrase “some” instead of “all”, to help the colonists understand that not *all* people view blacks with contempt; and to also avoid having the reader feel attacked by an overgeneralized statement. Throughout her work, Wheatley was trying to convey the idea that blacks could be as politically and racially aware as whites, and could have the potential to succeed when given the opportunity. The last two lines of her poem were where the argument really reached its high point. It is apparent that she was responding to her earlier statement regarding the opinions of some white Americans when she said, “Remember, *Christians*, Negros, black as *Cain*, May be refin’d, and join th’ angelic train.” Although in the first part she compares blacks to a negative bible figure, Cain, she used these powerful phrases to reiterate the argument that blacks and whites are

the same in the eyes of God. Through Christianity, all people can be saved and go to heaven regardless of skin color, so the two groups should be seen as equals. Although she switched her diction style toward the end, she still used bible references to prove to the revolutionists that they do indeed have commonalities with Africans. From the moment that blacks realized that there was a God and savior, their once “diabolic” skin color could no longer be used against them.

One of the sole reasons why the colonists decided to have the American Revolution in the first place, was because they wanted to gain independence from Britain. One of the main reasons why Phillis Wheatley wrote “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” was to subtly point out the hypocrisy within the revolutionaries. Although she clearly used religion to form a connection between the two groups, she used the notion of freedom to enhance her argument. The colonists wanted their freedom from Britain, just like blacks wanted freedom from slavery. By using this tactic, Africans became humanized. The revolutionaries became aware of their *property’s* desires and capabilities, so slavery became harder to justify. A big underlying theme within the poem was that, it was hypocritical for the revolutionaries to want freedom yet continue to take freedom away from others.

Phillis Wheatley grew to be a slave woman with extreme ambition and determination. She was vital during the Revolution because although women during the time did not have a voice, she still managed to make hers heard. Poetry was an outlet that became largely accepted for women to use because of its emotional connotation and its convenience. Wheatley’s poetry went through more of an unconventional and political path. She understood how to subtly mix politics, religion, and anti-slavery, and lobby her work to derive responses from influential political figures. Wheatley’s intention was to bring out the voice of blacks and show that through the help of God, Africans can finally be seen as equals (Raphael, 98).¹ The time of the American Revolution was a time for change and reconstruction. Wheatley took advantage of that. It was time for a fresh start, and like many others, Phillis Wheatley wished for racism to be a thing of the past and for Americans to be united in equality.

References

- ¹ Ray Raphael, *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation* (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2012), 98-100

Immigrant Cinema: How Immigrants in Film Struggle for the American Dream

Evan Dang

Film has the power to not only express an artist's views and intentions about the American Dream as they see it, but also to capture how the American Dream changes from generation to generation. This applies to immigrants of all nationalities especially. The American Dream on film has evolved from Charlie Chaplin's *The Immigrant* (1917), John Crowley's *Brooklyn* (2015), and Gregory Nava's *El Norte* (1983). Each of these films portray immigrants struggling to attain the American Dream through a series of obstacles and challenges that evolve over time as American society changes throughout history; *The Immigrant* shows the financial difficulties in coming to America at a time when most Americans looked down upon immigrants, *Brooklyn* finds drama in the emotional difficulties in assimilating to a distinctly new culture, and *El Norte* chronicles how much effort it takes to get the American Dream when laws and society are against immigrants succeeding.

The Immigrant first follows Chaplin's famous character, the Tramp, on an Atlantic steamer heading for Ellis Island. The Tramp spends his time playing around with the other (presumably European) immigrants on the boat, such as playing poker and getting into fights with pickpockets. Dedicating such a significant part of the film on the boat shows what poor conditions these immigrants had to put up with just to make it to U.S. soil; a scene that highlights this is the mess hall scene where the boat constantly rocks back and forth to the point where everyone is getting seasick and no one can eat the paltry bowls of soup that are sliding around from passenger to passenger. Amidst the chaos is a lady immigrant and her sick mother. When a pickpocket on the ship steals what little money they brought with them, the Tramp is willing to try and sneak some money (his winnings from a poker game he won earlier) back into her pockets as a way of consoling her without making her feel indebted to him. What makes this moment representative of the American Dream in the middle of World War I (the film was released shortly after American entry into the war) is how the Dream still involves showing the moral traits of "a city on a hill". Like the truckers at the diner in *The Grapes of Wrath* who gave extra change to the waitress for giving away penny candies to the Joad children, the Tramp providing this act of charity helps show why these immigrants are worth accepting as Americans. As immigrants coming together to make a new life in a new country, they have a moral responsibility to make sure their neighbors are given the same kind of care and support they would want. While the Tramp is initially presumed to be stealing her by the boat guards, the lady soon corrects the misunderstanding and he is let go. Showing this presumption of the Tramp being guilty allows for Chaplin to illustrate the stigma European immigrants had to overcome to be deemed worthy of the American Dream: this wouldn't be the last time the Tramp would have to deal with unwarranted prejudice in his time in America.

The second half of *The Immigrant* sees the Tramp struggling to make enough money to pay for a decent meal. When he stumbles on a shiny coin on the sidewalk, the first thing he does is go into the fancy restaurant nearby and order a hot plate of beans. The waiter, characterized with his obtuse figure and demeaning eyebrows, is immediately suspicious of the Tramp based on the tattered clothes he's wearing. This is in contrast with the patron Chaplin sits next to who closely resembles him, right down to the haircut and mustache. The pompousness the waiter and the patron show how unwelcoming Americans were towards immigrants at this point in history: the patron leaves the restaurant in disgust when seeing how messy the

Tramp is at eating while the waiter shows clear doubt in the Tramp's ability to pay for his meal, when he invites the lady from the boat to join him (learning that her mother had passed soon after they parted ways). This recalls a quote from Jim Cullen's "The American Dream" that critiques "the meaning of liberty, by contrast, sometimes seems all too clear: a celebration of the right to buy—if you've got the cash or credit." The Tramp's concerns are only exacerbated when he sees another patron get thrown out violently for not being able to pay for his meal. Simply because neither the Tramp or the lady are dressed properly (the Tramp's signature outfit of a tight suit, baggy pants, bowler hat, and cane seem like a satire of what is considered high-class), they are denied basic human decency. Chaplin does not portray American society in the finest light in this scene, but he does ultimately show how the Tramp persists: the ending has him pay off the waiter by attracting the attention of an artist who wants to paint both him and the lady. The Tramp has survived another day, has a well-paying job, and got the girl. In that sense, the Tramp has achieved the American Dream by showing unwarranted kindness that they came to American for and was rewarded with the Dream of upward mobility.²

Jump forward 40 years and the American Dream in *Brooklyn* has updated to be less about getting material wealth and more about being able to enjoy the leisure they provide through homeownership. Much of Ellis Lacey's time settling into life in America after migrating from Ireland is spent on her experiencing a kind of culture shock unique to immigrants like her; getting used to the Brooklyn weather, getting a college education (a subplot has her taking night classes to learn bookkeeping), and balancing her work obligations with her social life (going on dates with her boyfriend/future husband Tony Fiorello, dances with her roommates, etc.). Money isn't a concern for them in post-WWII America as the economy is still in a post-war boom nor does Ellis or Tony deal with any anti-immigrant stigma the Tramp or his lady had to put up with. While Margaret Garb in "City of American Dreams" considers that "Even the down payment for a house [...] was likely a heavy burden to a working-class buyer," Ellis and Tony don't represent the working class all that much; Tony is part of a family-owned plumbing business while Ellis can manage having a retail job at Bartocci's and spending time with Tony going to Coney Island.³ Unlike *The Immigrant*, where the dream for the Tramp was just to make enough to afford living in America, the immigrants in *Brooklyn* sought to make a life out of the American Dream. Tony's plan to build a home for him and Ellis on Long Island recalls William Zeloskey's "Own Your Home in Beautiful Chicago" that described "a home of your own is your greatest asset, it dispels the fear of old age, it is the secret of content living, an unflinching devotion to duty."⁴ The free time the healthy economy provided allowed for Tony and Ellis to pursue other interests that didn't result in material wealth: Ellis found volunteering her Christmas holiday helping less fortunate Irish workers get a decent meal while Tony learned from his little brother how to write properly so that he could send Ellis thoughtful letters when she was away. In both cases, the film makes a case for how the idea of meritocracy in the American Dream is supposed to trickle down to help everyone realize the American Dream. What happens, though, if the American Dream starts to reject the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses yearning to breathe free?⁵

On another coast and another time in American society, *El Norte* followed siblings Enrique and Rosa as they flee their Guatemalan government and seek refuge in the United States. The first two parts (of three chapters) of the film, *Arturo Xuncax* and *Coyote*, chronicle their lives in the village of San Pedro and the series of challenges they face trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico Border. One moment in *Coyote* has the siblings hitchhike a ride with a Mexican truck driver and are almost caught by a U.S. Border Patrol officer. They manage to convince the officer that they are native Mexicans by repeating the Mexican word for "fuck" over and over in their dialogue. The stereotyping of Hispanic culture through the lens of American Exceptionalism has the effect of marginalizing immigrant cultures that has become an essential part of American culture. This is symbolized in the film when they get to "*La Frontera*" and they are robbed by a fake coyote and are forced to crawl through a sewer tunnel of diseased rats: Enrique and Rosa are essentially punished for no reason other than willing to risk everything they have left for the American Dream. Since the film spends such a significant portion of its runtime to showing the struggles immigrants like Enrique and Rosa suffer through just to get to work for the American Dream, Nava shows what the Dream means to them once they

do manage to build a life out from their tragedy. The multiple identities Enrique and Rosa adopt to pass through the border (Guatemalan, Mexican, American) resembles Frida Kahlo's painting "Self Portrait Along the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States". Kahlo shows the U.S. side of the border dominated by factories and machines that are feeding off the rich culture and history of Mexico. To Kahlo, the American Dream for Mexican-Americans involves sacrificing one's heritage and values to do whatever it takes to stay in America and persist. To Enrique and Rosa, that might be a cost too great for them.

Enrique is the most prominent example of Kahlo's thesis; he takes up the English language faster than Rosa and gets noticed by his bosses at his busboy job and businesswoman, Alice Harper, and is nicknamed "Ricky" (both of whom rely on the labor of illegal immigrants to be as successful as they are). One line from their coyote friend Monte stands out: "Us Mexicans are starting to become a regular minority around here". The fact that Monte is always seen wearing a Dodgers hat is symbolic of the film's focus on the cost of assimilation for immigrants: Enrique and Rosa are willingly taking apart their cultural identity to blend in. When Enrique is given the chance at getting a green card by working for Harper but hesitates because of his obligations to Rosa, Monte tells him to "Wake up, *mano!* The train only comes once! [...] We are talking about survival!". However, Enrique shows how deeply he believes in the American Dream by rejecting the shortcut to it. He holds onto his Guatemalan/American values of family and community (like the nurse in their cul-de-sac who tries to help Rosa with her illness) and refuses to compromise the values of a model citizen if that's what he wants to be. However, one aspect of the American Dream that immigrants like them worry about is that fear of exposing themselves. The only reason Enrique agrees to the Chicago construction job offered by Harper is that Carlos, his co-worker at the restaurant, gets so jealous of Enrique's promotion that he reports him to the Department of Immigration, which forces Enrique to run away just because he was working hard enough to deserve merit. This is an issue that persists to this day as described in J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*; Vance noted, when working at the tile factory in the Appalachians, his former co-workers often blame their failure on immigrants or other minorities rather than themselves or changing economic trends. He comments "It's about reacting to bad circumstances in the worst way possible. It's about a culture that increasingly encourages social decay instead of counteracting it."⁶ Carlos is seen being rewarded for his treachery by taking over Enrique's position. It's a depressing indictment on the American Dream being excluded by those who think they deserve it more than others by manipulating the system to punish "the other."⁷

For immigrants coming to America, the American Dream and its' promise of upward mobility and homeownership is why they would risk everything to make their lives better. Charlie Chaplin's *The Immigrant* shows how early America's prejudices and challenge against European immigrants was portrayed on film and the American Dream meant escaping poverty to people the Tramp represented. John Crowley's *Brooklyn* portrayed a more optimistic vision of the American Dream, where the booming economy allowed for immigrants to own a home of their own and appreciate the opportunity they are given to enjoy leisure time and become contributing members to their community. Gregory Nava's *El Norte* followed how Latin-American immigrants in the 1980s were blocked from the American Dream by physical barriers (the U.S.-Mexico Border) and societal tendencies to vilify minorities as the reasons for the American Dream becoming just that. The protagonists in these films are seeking a new home and new opportunities in America that wherever they came from couldn't provide that the Dream represented. The American Dream for immigrants is fundamentally the American Dream for everyone; the dream to make a better life for oneself to enjoy free time and be worthy of being an American.

References

¹Jim Cullen. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 39.

²*The Immigrant*. By Charlie Chaplin. Directed by Charlie Chaplin. Performed by Charlie Chaplin.

³Margaret Garb. *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform*

in Chicago, 1871-1919 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 46.

⁴William Zeloskey. "Build Your Own Home in Beautiful Chicago." Advertisement. 1892.

⁵*Brooklyn*. Directed by John Crowley. Performed by Saoirse Ronan. Milano: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2015.

⁶J. D. Vance. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2017), 7.

⁷*El Norte*. By Gregory Nava. Directed by Gregory Nava. 1983.

Get Out: A Portrayal of Contemporary Racial Power Tensions in America

Barbie Tkach

Jordan Peele's 2017 directorial debut film, *Get Out*, incorporates elements of science-fiction, horror, and comedy to provide a satirical lens on racism in America. The film centers on Chris Washington and Rose Armitage, an interracial couple, meeting her white parents for the first time. As a black man, Chris jokingly states his seemingly exaggerated initial fears regarding an apparently plain visit. None of which could truly prepare him for the reality of what he was about to face.¹ In Peele's condemn of racism through the film, he unconventionally portrays white liberals as the antagonists contrasting the more common "racist archetype" of the conservative Southerner. By creating a film that defies the conventions of a Hollywood blockbuster, *Get Out* portrays racial tensions in American society, but it also portrays larger relationships between power, identity, and culture. This paper will discuss these relationships by connecting certain scenes to theories such as T. Jackson Lears' interpretation of Antonio Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony, James Scott's "hidden transcripts," and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's "culture industry."

Leading up to their visit, Rose tries to ease the tension surrounding showcasing their relationship by stating her parents are welcoming, tolerant liberals who "would have voted for Obama for a third time if they could." Chris reluctantly trusts Rose, but the visit quickly turns from awkward to alarming. Rose's mother offers to cure Chris's smoking habit through hypnosis, an offer he declines. Not long after, however, Chris still finds himself hypnotized by Mrs. Armitage and is sent to his "sunken place," where he is trapped within himself and unable to control the vessel of the body. The next day the Armitages' extended family joins them on the property to have their annual family party. Unbeknownst to Chris, these "family members" have additional prerogatives for this meeting. Chris, fed up with the family and convinced that he is being held as a victim to some ploy, tries to leave.²

The climax of the film comes as Rose's family captures Chris as a hostage and the next victim of their cult, which fulfills the "Order of the Coagula." Confirming Chris' inherent fears all along, Rose's family finally reveals that their cult's purpose seeks to physically use black bodies as vessels to keep their own minds alive via brain transplant.³ This subjugation by means of physical, bodily dominance is a metaphorical application of Gramsci's theory on cultural hegemony, as explained by Lears in the article "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities."

Lears mentions that Gramsci's work never distinctively defines the phrase "cultural hegemony;" however, he most closely defines it as "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group," continuing with "this consent is 'historically'... caused by prestige."⁴ As a derivative of Marxist theory, Gramsci's cultural hegemony dichotomizes power relationships in society by establishing dominance to the ruling class through subjugating the culture of the subordinates. In doing so, the subordinates are persuaded or forced to abandon any ideologies, beliefs, or other aspects of their identity that conflict with the dominant class.

In the film, Peele captures Gramsci's theory through the objectives of the cult. The Armitages and their extended family are the aforementioned ruling class, and through force, they establish a hegemony the subjects the subordinates to forceful abandonment of their own identities. This lets the identity of the cult member take over after the transplant operation. Lears also describes that achieving a hegemony requires that "the leaders of a historical bloc must develop a worldview that appeals to a wide range of other groups within the society, and they must be able to claim with at least some plausibility that their particular interests

are those of society at large."⁵ Peele's critical decision to cast the antagonists as white liberals instead of more symbolically racist white conservatives reinforces this ability to achieve hegemony. The ability to lure Chris and many others before him into the Armitages' trap relies on their liberal image being more acceptable to a diverse American society. The reassurance that this family was not the enemy Chris should have to fear, due to their progressive views, is exactly what led him to being vulnerable.

Both Gramsci and Peele display that identity is a crucial part of power dynamics, and the subordinate must abandon their identity for domination to occur. Although the film's representation of cultural hegemony is portrayed through force, subjugation, and aggression, some dialogue works to resist the power dynamics at hand. Scott's book describes this certain resistance to power through performances of identity in either hidden or public transcripts. According to Scott, "a 'hidden transcript' represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed."⁶ While a public transcript describes "the open interaction between subordinate and those who dominate," it is "unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations."⁷

Perhaps the most poignant example of this dialogue occurs amongst the Armitage family towards Chris at their annual party. Micro-aggressive racial statements are shown in every conversation Chris is a part of. Family members make comments such as an out of shape man surveying his athleticism as a black man or an older woman inquiring if "it's true what they say about black men?"⁸ Although recognizably inappropriate, this open dialogue exemplifies the ruling class utilizing a public transcript to establish dominance over Chris, the subordinate. However, once the audience learns of the purpose of the cult, the film then recapitulates images of the party scene to show that this public dialogue coincided with their hidden transcripts all along. Upon realizing their claim to power is through a subjective brain transplant process, the public transcripts reveal the cult's intentions. The uncomfortable small-talk provided the cult members a way to assess if Chris was a worthy candidate to bid for control over. The overweight man and desperate women with ideas of sexual grandeur were not blatantly insensitive, but rather, they were discussing the true intentions behind wanting to use Chris' body.

Additionally, as the subordinated protagonist, Chris successfully utilizes transcripts and identity performances as a resistance to power, ultimately leading to his escape and safety. Away from Rose's parents and family, Chris's "offstage" hidden transcripts serve as an avenue of escapism when talking to his best friend, who is also a black male, about all of the weird "white people" experiences he is viewing. In front of the family, Chris uses a public transcript and performance to appeal to the differing sensibilities of the Armitage family. This performance is so convincing that it enables his escape by being able to trick the family into thinking they succeeded in getting him to comply with their cult's request. Once Chris reveals his public transcript and performance was used as a means of resistance, he fights back, ends the family's hegemony, and escapes in a suspenseful ending to this powerful cultural work.

Peele has successfully crafted a film surrounding modern racism that serves as a powerful work of contemporary culture. Although the movie portrays the notion that those with hegemonic control take over the identities and cultures of their prey, the film itself goes against the hegemonic nature of the "culture industry." In the article "The Culture Industry: Culture as Mass Deception," authors Adorno and Horkheimer critique the entertainment industry stating, "culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and unanimous together." The authors view the "culture industry" as a monopolistic force which produces a homogenous message that easily influences consumers and mass society. Further they state, "the culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises. The promissory note of pleasure issued by plot and packaging is indefinitely prolonged."¹⁰

Peele's film counters the argument made by Adorno and Horkheimer. His film was composed on a \$4.5 million budget, features lesser-known actors, and does not rely on utilizing the monopolistic resources of the entertainment industry. Yet, it has grossed well over \$170 million in the North American box office and is the highest grossing debut film based on an

original screenplay of all time. *Get Out* further defies convention by being the directorial debut of Peele, who is more famously a comedian. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Peele highlights that he intended for the racism portrayed to be implicit and from an unsuspecting family of liberals, stating, “I felt it was important first and foremost to get the entire audience on board with the inherent fears that a black man has.” Critics alike argue that this film makes the statement it does because it is produced by a black man who does not utilize the conventions of traditional Hollywood. The reception it has received both in numbers and in countless publications show that the “culture industry” can be challenged and that diversity can be successful.

Considering the recent political climate, the film *Get Out* makes a critical statement on an American society that adheres to the fallacy that the U.S. entered a post-racial society with the election of a black President. Although hyperbolic at times, the film’s plot is still able to evoke images in the audience showcasing that racism is still an issue of power. Peele depicts the ability of a cultural hegemony to use their power to control others’ identities and culture, yet he simultaneously uses a cultural work to challenge that power. Unfortunately, the film did not cause racism to spontaneously dissipate, just as President Barack Obama could not; however, this film comes with a recent wave of success for black writers, directors, and actors. Hopefully, this trend paves an avenue for diverse, marginalized groups in America to continue challenging hegemonic tendencies both in the entertainment industry and in society at large.

References

¹ Daniel Kaluuya and Alison Williams, *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele (2017; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2017.), Film.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ T.J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities,” *American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 568.

⁵ Ibid., 571.

⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.

⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁸ Daniel Kaluuya, *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele (2017; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2017.), Film.

⁹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Ibid., 111.

¹¹ *Get Out*. *Box Office Mojo*, accessed April 10, 2017. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blumhouse2.htm>; David Renshaw, “*Get Out* Is The Highest Grossing Debut 12 Film Based On An Original Screenplay In History,” *Fader*, April 4, 2017. <http://www.thefader.com/2017/04/04/get-out-original-screenplay-record>.

¹² Andrew Anthony, “Jordan Peele on Making a Hit Comedy-Horror Movie out of America’s Racial Tensions,” *The Guardian*, March 4, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/mar/04/jordan-peele-interview-get-out-its-about-purging-our-fears-horror-film-daniel-kaluuya>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The Underlying Messages of The Twilight Zone

Kristiana Guzman

“I think it’s criminal that we’re not permitted to make dramatic note of social evils as they exist, of controversial themes as they are inherent in our society. I think it’s ridiculous that drama, which by its very nature should make a comment on those things that effect our daily lives, is in the position, at least in terms of television drama, in not being able to take this stand...”¹ Rod Serling, creator and writer of the television series *The Twilight Zone*, believed that TV shows could be a vehicle of social change. However, Serling needed to find a loophole so his stories and social commentary would not be seen as threatening according to the parameters of an overly paranoid society. It was through Serling’s frustrations with being censored that *The Twilight Zone* was born. Through the ambiguous messages of *The Twilight Zone* and using Los Angeles as a backdrop to the Cold War era, common themes such as norms and issues of race emerge.

The *Twilight Zone* During the Cold War Era

The Twilight Zone had erupted onto television screens in 1959 with force and with a vengeance. Formatted as a science fiction anthology series, the television show not only gave viewers a scare, but also left them with deeply rooted messages to think about. Each week the insightful writing and dedication to storylines is what differentiated *The Twilight Zone* from other television shows of its time. Although *The Twilight Zone* was fictitious, many aspects of it reflected American society at the time of its airing, from 1959 through 1964. Most episodes during the shows five-year run portrayed storylines that dealt with topics of anxiety, conformity, racism, and threats of communism, most of which plagued the nation during the Cold War era. Eric Avila recalls the irony of the Cold War era writing, “contrary to the popular perception of the post-World War II period as ‘happy days’ Americans found themselves preoccupied with a number of global and domestic concerns. The Cold War against the Soviet Union loomed as the gravest threat to the nation, not only provoking fears about nuclear annihilation, but also heightening anxieties about internal subversion.”² With the constant threat of communism looming over the nation, American society needed to appear dominant.³ In order to maintain its status, society had to rid itself of all its divisions. Divisions were considered to be threatening, because it was thought to have laid the groundwork for those on the other side of those divisions to be more susceptible to communism.⁴ Communism also threatened to intrude into popular culture. In response, censorship in the media was deemed necessary. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) took incredible measures to ensure Hollywood films were rid of any communist influences.⁵ “The compilation of a secret blacklist that identified suspected Communists cast a pervasive sense of paranoia over the film community and furthered Hollywood’s political polarization during the 1950s.”⁶ With Hollywood on edge over any hint of communist propaganda, the film industry had to pass its entertainment baton to a new emerging entertainment medium, television.⁷ With the introduction of television in the late 1940’s, white suburban families could maintain a non-threatening family life in the comfort of their own home, away (for the most part) from HUAC investigations.⁸ Hollywood took full advantage of its faults and fears, and utilized societal paranoia to generate noir films that showcased the dark side of American society.⁹ This dark side of society was one that was filled with violence, crime, and threats of nuclear world takeovers. In an overly paranoid society, it became all the more difficult to hide its flaws. Similar to noir films, *The Twilight Zone* thrived on commenting on the faults of society.

The Arrival of *The Twilight Zone*

Before going on to create what is considered one of the most socially reflective shows of all time, Rod Serling felt constrained in his previous writing jobs as he was unable to write the stories he wanted to.¹⁰ During an interview on *The Mike Wallace Interview*, Serling was asked about “the battle between the writer to be his own man” and how pre-censorship played a role in writing. Serling responded, “...a writer will shy away from writing those things which he knows he’s going to have trouble with on a sponsorial and agency level...we practice it all the time, we just do not write those things which we know are going to get into trouble.”¹¹ In the early 1950’s, Serling was writing on the show *The United States Steel Hour*.¹² Due to strict censorship regulations and his own pre-censorship hesitations, Serling could not comment on social events the way he wanted to. When asked about writing on social issues in times of censorship, Serling responded, “well depending of course on the thematic treatment you are using, if you have the temerity to try to dramatize a theme that involves any particular social controversy currently extant than you are in deep trouble.”¹³ Serling dealt with his fair share of trouble due to not censoring his controversial storylines. One incident in particular completely changed the way Serling would view television. *The Twilight Zone’s* story editor, Del Reisman, recounted Serling’s battle to write a script that was inspired by a gruesome murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till.¹⁴ Till was a young black man who was murdered by a group of white men because Till had allegedly whistled at a white woman.¹⁵ Serling felt the social importance of this incident and fought with network executives to depict the story in its true form, as a story of racism. Serling wrote a script about the growing racism between blacks and whites in order to do Till’s story justice.¹⁶ However, the CBS network feared fallout of support from stations in the South since the storyline depicted the South in a seemingly negative way. In response, the script was reworked and white and black individuals were not used in the final production.¹⁷ Through Serling’s constant battles with sponsors and censorship regulations, this incident made him realize that he finally had enough. He had to find a new way to tell the stories he wanted without the pressure to maintain a censored image. Reisman commented on the aftermath of Serling’s frustration stating that, “Rod realized that if he took these social stories that were important to him and set them in the undefined future or in another world, (a) “*Twilight Zone*” that they would be acceptable and he was right, the same network, CBS, said ‘okay’ to those “*Twilight Zones*” which had social content.”¹⁸ Due to the excessiveness of segregation and social othering in society, Serling felt an obligation to comment on social issues, especially ones that dealt with race. Two of his most famous episodes depicting issues of race and conformity are “*Eye of the Beholder*” and “*The Obsolete Man*.”

Summary of “*Eye of the Beholder*”

In *The Twilight Zone* episode, “*Eye of the Beholder*,” attitudes of prejudice and conformity were used to express underlining Cold War themes using the setting of a fictional futuristic society.¹⁹ The plot of the episode starts out with a young woman, Janet Tyler, who is recovering from a surgical procedure. Her appearance is considered deviant according to norms in the futuristic world, and it is revealed that she has had multiple procedures done to alter her appearance to fit societal standards. In the futuristic society, a total of eleven surgeries were permitted to fix individuals who are not considered normal. Following her final procedure, Janet is portrayed as being desperate yet determined to conform to norms, though she questions why they hold such an importance in society. She is also shown as being fearful of what will happen to her if the procedure is not successful. Her doctor explains that there are alternatives for people who are like her while discussing possibilities of what would happen if the procedure did not work in her favor. The most popular of the alternatives includes being sent away to live with people with similar conditions. When she begins to object the norms that are dictating her life, her doctor states, “you’re not being rational Ms. Tyler, now you know you cannot expect to live any kind of a life among normal people.”²⁰ Her doctor goes on to tell her the rules and ways of society are in place for a reason, although later in the episode the doctor feels a tinge of guilt as he himself questions why we must conform to the norms of society. He expresses his frustration with society’s battle with difference asking, “why shouldn’t people be allowed to be different?”²¹

Once Janet’s bandages get unraveled it is revealed that she looks like a beautiful young woman. However, the doctor and nurses gasp with disgust, shouting there has been no change in her appearance. It is then revealed that the individuals in the futuristic society all have grotesque-looking pig faces, making classic beauty standards the deviant. Once Janet realizes the procedure didn’t work, she tries to escape and runs away from the doctors and nurses that surround her. As she is running in the hallway there are screens projected showing the totalitarian leader of the futuristic society giving a passionate speech. In his speech he claims that single entities create unity within the society, and that conformity is the key to survival. Janet is unsuccessful at her attempt to run away and is taken to meet with a young handsome man, who looks like her. The man explains that he is there to escort her to a safe place for her to live, where there are others just like them. Rod Serling ends the episode with a narration explaining that beauty in every world and in every society, is in the eye of the beholder.

The “*Eye of the Beholder*” demonstrates the importance of norms and conformity in society during the Cold War era. By being required to alter appearances to resemble what was considered normal, the episode demonstrates assimilation as vital to the well-being of white people at this time. For example, Los Angeles became known as one of the most diverse cities in postwar America. Black, Mexican, Japanese, and Chinese individuals came to Los Angeles looking for a better life, with security, better living conditions, and a myriad of job opportunities. Los Angeles soon became referred to as the “it city of postwar America.”²² Although there was an attempt to rid society of contradictory racism through the dissolving of racial covenants, there were no government measures in place to ensure that racial equality in all sectors of society were being upheld.²³ Los Angeles society wanted to appear like racial segregation was a thing of the past, but it was still apparent through assimilation practices of citizens.²⁴ This idea was similar to how there were attempts made on Janet to become more assimilated by her appearance. At one point in the episode Janet’s doctor states, “each of us is afforded as much opportunity as possible to fit in with society...think of the time and money and the effort expended to make you look...normal.”²⁵ This can be seen as addressing the assimilation practices of black people in Cold War era, in which white people perceived that blacks were given equal opportunities and room to move up in status. However, that was not the case; they had many barriers to overcome. During the 1950’s and 1960’s racial barriers became more apparent in many aspects of Los Angeles as black people were excluded from jobs, places of leisure, and housing if it interfered with white people’s social space.²⁶ Although segregation was not legally appropriated, some ways of exclusion were expressed through housing covenants, suburbanization, and political and social forces.²⁷ Altogether, racism in Los Angeles society was not hidden well. The cohesiveness American society intended to have was limited by white individuals’ need to maintain segregated activities and living arrangements between themselves and black individuals. If black people wanted to be integrated into society, it had to be done in a way that white people approved of. Similar to “*Eye of the Beholder*,” citizens were expected to assimilate to better fit in with norms. If one couldn’t adhere to the norms they were forced to live in a place separate from normal people. Serling was commenting on a brutal yet real aspect of society, white people feared what was different. In response to their fear, “white flight” amongst Los Angeles residents occurred, and suburbanization was on the rise.²⁸ The emergence of suburbanization soon became known as the “new white identity.”²⁹

The different restrictions on where to live in society are illustrated in the “*Eye of the Beholder*,” as the doctor explains to Janet that the state would take her to an “area in which people of your kind have been congregated,” exemplifying the need to physically get rid of what was considered deviant from the norm.³⁰ Race had played a significant role in how housing became established in Los Angeles during the 1950’s and 1960’s, as decreases in property values became linked to black people. Racial restrictions were seen through housing policies, as the labeling of property values through the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) sided with white people.³¹ Initially, HOLC intended to help young Americans buy a home in the hopes of attaining the American dream, but it created barriers for people of color to own a home, especially if they were black.³² The episode explains that Janet would not be living much of a life looking the way she does, parallel to how minorities, particularly black people, in Cold War Los Angeles were seen as cheap labor, and treated in inhumane ways.³³ White people

during the Cold War era saw people of color as beneath them. They were simply thought of as unable to live amongst the rest of society, similar to how Janet was thought of. According to Mortenson's explanation of the underlying message in the "Eye of the Beholder", he expresses the distaste in choosing enemies in Cold War society. "Viewers are subtly asked to re-evaluate their attitude towards the supposed enemies of America and, closer to home, to rethink conceptions of minority groups that may look different but hold the same values as other Americans."³⁴ "Eye of the Beholder" could be seen as a wake up call for Americans at the time of the Cold War. Not only did the episode cause viewers to question their stance on difference, but also to question why Cold War society valued sameness.

Furthermore, the "Eye of the Beholder" exemplified the grasp that communism had on its citizens, and their willingness to conform to society's extremes. For instance, when Janet was trying to escape the hospital, screens of a dictator yelling, "the key to a civilized nation is conforming to a single entity" were shown.³⁵ Not only is this addressing the belief that a single race is desired, but it can also be interpreted as critiquing the exaggerated fear of communism at this time. The message delivered by the dictator, warns of the failed attempts of many to create a single entity within society. His declaration that conformity was essential to create a long lasting unity alludes to the idea that in Cold War Los Angeles people thrived for sameness in a society that was becoming increasingly diverse. Incorporating a character that reflected Hilter's stance on one desired race, Serling commented on the fact that a society powered by anti-communism was unconsciously creating more of a fascist society. Therefore, he is suggesting that a new dystopian society built on rigid division in social and economic matters, along with an unchallenged dictatorship, could emerge.

The messages of the "Eye of the Beholder" can be interpreted in many ways now and at the time of its airing. Serling strategically made the episode's overall message ambiguous, preventing censorship of his controversial outlook. As for the portrayal of appearances in the "Eye of the Beholder", Serling utilized pig faces to convey that we as a society dictate what is considered the norm. Every day we conform and reinforce societal norms, ridding out the so-called evil, similar to how individuals in Cold War Los Angeles did with communist agendas, and black individuals. Serling used a deliberate plot twist so one would have to question the brevity of what was considered normal and desirable as opposed to what was considered abnormal. In conjunction to white people in Cold War Los Angeles, they feared difference, such as color, maintaining the idea that we are both victims and guilty of contributing to what becomes seen as normal.

The Obsolete Man

The next episode that reflects Cold War feelings of racism and conformity is "The Obsolete Man."³⁶ This episode starts with a hearing of board members in a futuristic totalitarian state. At their meeting, they are in the process of determining whether citizens in a futuristic society are considered worthy occupants. In the totalitarian society, individuals who are considered obsolete are sentenced to execution. Each execution is to be done in the manner that the individuals who are declared obsolete choose. A man by the name of Romney Wordsworth is put in the meeting room and after declaring his occupation as a librarian, the Chancellor of the state, who is the head of the board, laughs and declares him to be obsolete. In the futuristic society, God and books are considered obsolete, both of which Wordsworth greatly believes in. Challenging the demands of the Chancellor, Wordsworth fights his sentencing at first, declaring that no man is obsolete and that God exists. The Chancellor counters that the state has proven God does not exist and that Wordsworth has no place society. "You are a bug Mr. Wordsworth, a crawling insect, an ugly, misformed little creature who has no purpose here, no meaning."³⁷ However, Wordsworth claims that he is a human being whose thoughts and feelings matter. The Chancellor feels no remorse for Wordsworth and sentences him to execution. Wordsworth decides he does not want his execution to be known by anyone, just him and the help of another state member. He also wants his execution to be televised, the Chancellor then grants him his wish.

On the day of his execution, Wordsworth is back at his apartment, and he invites the Chancellor over to have a final discussion with him. The Chancellor comes over at his

request and pities him for the life he has chosen to live. However, unknown to the Chancellor, Wordsworth plans to be executed with a bomb that is set to go off with locked doors forcing the Chancellor to withstand the bomb alongside him. When Wordsworth reveals his plan, the Chancellor finds himself in a panic as he is being forced to die in front of the entire world to see. Wordsworth proves the Chancellor is a coward as the Chancellor pleads to him, "In the name of God let me out of here!"³⁸ With seconds to spare Wordsworth lets the Chancellor out and dies peacefully. In an unforeseen twist the Chancellor is declared obsolete as he showed weakness in the name of God. He is then killed by a mob of angry state elites. Rod Serling ends the narration stating that "...any state, any entity, any ideology which fails to recognize the worth, the dignity, the rights of Man...that state is obsolete."³⁹

The futuristic society in "The Obsolete Man" depicts a world that takes away the rights of Man if their rights conflict with what is considered the norms of society at the time. The fictional futuristic society discriminates against anything or anyone that is considered different. It creates a social other in which individuals are stigmatized for going against norms. As previously mentioned, black individuals were considered to be outcasts, and the societal restrictions that were in place were intended to keep them that way.⁴⁰ Similarly, Wordsworth's character was considered unworthy to society. This distinction of unworthiness can be one based on race. Any marginalized group in society becomes represented in Wordsworth character. The social othering illustrated by Wordsworth's character was a common practice during postwar Los Angeles. For instance, urban renewal, which was the removal of slums and increase of suburban housing, was highly advertised as a possible solution to racial integration.⁴¹ The boosters' fear campaigns were used to encourage white citizens to be on board with "urban redevelopment". It was believed that both Mexican and black individuals represented problems in society, just like Wordsworth's character.⁴²

The character of the Chancellor represents the dominant class in society. His ability to determine one's worthiness represents the control that social norms have, and the value that is in conforming to standards. His character can also simply be seen as a dictator. For instance, at the beginning of the episode Serling gives a chilling narration:

This is not a new world, it is simply an extension of what began in the old one. It has patterned itself after every dictator who has ever planted the ripping imprint of a boot on the pages of history since the beginning of time. It has refinements, technological advances, and a more sophisticated approach to the destruction of human freedom. But like every one of the super-states that preceded it, it has one iron rule: logic is an enemy and truth is a menace.⁴³

As a reference to the Holocaust, this quote depicts Hitler's dictatorship in Germany. Serling uses subtle references to the Holocaust throughout "The Obsolete Man" by comparing it to how society was during the Cold War era and how it could become in the future. The exclusion of individuals by race was still seen as a pattern in American society, and it was something that Serling intended for audiences to be aware of. If society were to continue to view certain individuals as obsolete then the totalitarian state shown in "The Obsolete Man" could be a very real future.

At the end of the episode, Wordsworth's character is revealed to be nobler than the Chancellor. In a way, Wordsworth challenges norms by failing to conform to society's standards. But in the end, he ironically must give in to societal regulations in order to prove that declaring someone as unworthy does not make one worthy. The idea of worthiness becomes encapsulated in many aspects in society at this time, not just in one's profession. As mentioned previously, job opportunities at the time of the Cold War were not given to everyone, especially black individuals. Scott Kurashige writes on the issues of racial integration stating, "...many workers of color saw job opportunities evaporate in the face of postwar economic restructuring."⁴⁴ Therefore, it was harder for black individuals to rise in the ranks of society, and it was due in part to their lack of opportunities. For example, in "The Obsolete Man", the Chancellor's declaration that Wordsworth is unworthy not only stems from the belief that Wordsworth

cannot contribute anything to society, but from the idea that the state did not want him to contribute. Kurashige goes on to explain, “sharp racial conflicts again erupted within subdivisions, schools, and workplaces as white residents fretted about a new round of invasions by black and brown inhabitants of the expanding ghetto and barrio.”⁴⁵ White individuals felt like they were being invaded in many aspects of their lives. Therefore, when black individuals began coming to Los Angeles for more opportunities, they were seen as threatening to white society.⁴⁶ White individuals needed to maintain their stance in society and did not want black people to take away their opportunities.

In the futuristic society of “The Obsolete Man”, all literature and religion is banned, which could be seen as Serling’s comment on the pervasiveness of anti-communist practices. At one point in arguing his value as a human being, Wordsworth claims “I am nothing more than a reminder to you that you cannot destroy truth by burning pages.”⁴⁷ In this instance, Serling could be commenting on the effects of censorship and its persistence on maintaining an anti-communist image. Diverse places like Los Angeles intended to cover up its racist past and present. Similarly, Serling was restricted on what he could write for television before *The Twilight Zone*. Portraying something on television as cryptic as racism could not bode well for Los Angeles’ image. Serling intended to reference the fact that truth could not be erased easily. At the end of the episode when Serling declares that a state that does not recognize the rights of Man is what is considered obsolete, he is commenting on the fact that any society that considers its citizens to be less than human is wrong, and they are at fault. As previously stated, it was social policies and practices that kept black individuals from fully integrating into mainstream society.⁴⁸ The exclusion and segregation of black individuals was a serious fault of American society.⁴⁹ Through this episode, Serling is expressing his distaste for how society at the time dealt with marginalized groups who did not get the respect they deserve. Similar to his writing style in the “Eye of the Beholder”, Serling purposefully made his writing vague and left its message to one’s interpretation. Serling was following censorship regulations by having his episodes open-ended in a way to get viewers to think critically about what it means. Much like how Wordsworth had to follow up his with his execution to stand up for what he believed in.

Film Noir in *The Twilight Zone*

Not only did Serling’s storylines showcase larger themes of good and bad in society, even the imagery on *The Twilight Zone* showcased the contrast of the two opposing themes. Erik Mortenson explains the different techniques used in the *The Twilight Zone*, “...Serling refracted his messages through a fascinating combination of film noir and science fiction [he] created a ‘land of shadows’ where ideas and concepts were liable to bend and invert. *The Twilight Zone* drew on the shadow imagery running throughout American culture at midcentury to create a subtle, aesthetic critique of Cold War binaries.”⁵⁰ Mortenson goes on to explain that during the Cold War certain binaries were seen throughout society. “...The binary oppositions marking the official Cold War paradigm- between, for instance, communism and democracy, good and evil, totalitarianism and freedom- drove out of public discourse darker and more morally ambiguous visions, such as film noir.”⁵¹ *The Twilight Zone*’s writing and imagery encapsulated many of these contrasting images. For instance, the episode, “Eye of the Beholder” was filmed in a noir style. The episode utilized contrasting themes such as totalitarianism and freedom along with communism and democracy. For this episode, the use of contrasting images of shadows and lights also played an important role. Filming “Eye of the Beholder” as a noir was done so strategically to not reveal anyone’s face, including the protagonist, Janet Tyler. The filming style of this episode was used to give the plot a mysterious setting.⁵² Hiding the characters faces along with the strategic filming angles created a sense of darkness and suspense to follow the surprise ending of the episode.⁵³ “The Obsolete Man” also demonstrates the use of lights and shadows. For example, when Wordsworth is awaiting his sentencing, board members are shown hidden in shadows and then move into the center of the frame illuminating their dark silhouettes. This can be seen as the contrast between good and evil. Wordsworth’s character is almost always shown in the light, expressing the goodness in his character. The state elites represent evil or darkness which is exemplified in how they lurk in the shadows.

The different techniques of contrasting light with shadows were used in a majority of episodes of *The Twilight Zone*. The style was taken in part from film noirs that were popular in Hollywood during 1940’s and 1950’s. Popular noir films during the 1940’s used Los Angeles’ setting to depict Cold War binaries and the increase of ghettos and society corruption. Similarly, film noir techniques were used in *The Twilight Zone* to show the conflicting themes of good and evil during this time. During the Cold War era, Hollywood also began dispersing movies in the science fiction genre for much of the same reasons that Serling used the genre.⁵⁴ Avila explains the use of genres stating, “Conventional understandings of 1950’s science fiction film have looked to the political climate of Cold War America to explore its deeper meanings... Martians, monsters, giant insects, crawling eyes, fifty-foot women, blobs, pods, ‘its’ and other ‘things’ have been commonly understood as cinematic apparitions of Communists and the Red Menace.”⁵⁵ Through the use of science fiction, popular culture was able to show how American society was during the time of the Cold War.⁵⁶ Through the use of ambiguous characters, popular culture was able to make certain comments on American society, without outright saying it.

The Twilight Zone depicting Cold War Los Angeles

The Twilight Zone was ahead of its time in a number of ways. For one, it catapulted the idea that one can question society standards and disperse their reluctance to those standards in a very public manner. Also, the manner in which *The Twilight Zone* was written, writers had to assume that the public could analyze the storylines it was depicting. There needed to be an understanding that one could connect episodes of *The Twilight Zone* to broader themes in society, as that was the intention. The ambiguity in the writing gave viewers the ability to come up with their own conclusions to *The Twilight Zone*. Rod Serling created an alternate universe through his meaningful writing. He inserted real social issues into his unique universe in which viewers could be able to see the importance of societal issues at this time. *The Twilight Zone* encompassed many stories of Cold War society and reflected Los Angeles in its presentation and its writing. From my interpretation, many people looked at Los Angeles during the Cold War as a makeshift blueprint to how society was supposed to handle diversity and integration. Many believed Los Angeles was supposed to be the innovator and a role model on how to handle issues of race. It was the city that individuals flocked to in order to start their lives after World War II, and it seemed like a place that accepted people of all backgrounds. However, Cold War Los Angeles did have its flaws. Its lack of integration of black people and its restricting society created a city immersed in racial tension. But, it was through popular culture that one was able to see how people of that time truly perceived society.

Serling utilized the ambiguity, and popularity of science fiction to escape censorship at a point in time where society was on edge due to outside threat of communism. By commenting on serious issues such as conformity and racism, Serling opened the means of discussion. In his interview Serling made it clear he was angry that racism plagued the nation, he believed racism was too abundant and unnecessary.⁵⁷ His frustration in not being allowed to hold a mirror up to society to show what they were doing to those of minority races was his tipping point. In his closing narration of “The Obsolete Man,” Serling’s distaste for “not recognizing the rights of Man” is palpable. Through his stories on *The Twilight Zone*, Serling gave hope to viewers at the time, and in future generations, that their voices are meant to be heard. Serling utilized his voice in one of the most powerful and imaginative ways, and through his writing and storytelling one can’t help but think what they could accomplish with their own voice.

References

- ¹ CINEVIEW1. “*The Twilight Zone - Rod Serling Interview (1959)*.” YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8sT6nz7VUM>
- ² Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 46.
- ³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 2008,) 10.

- ⁴Ibid., 9.
⁵Ibid., 91.
⁶Ibid., 92.
⁷Ibid. 8
⁸Ibid., 93.
⁹Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 91.
¹⁰“The Twilight Zone.” Archive of American Television. <http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/shows/twilight-zone-the-monsters-are-due-on-maple-street#>.
¹¹CINEVIEW1. “*The Twilight Zone – Rod Serling Interview (1959)*.”
¹²Erik Mortenson, “A Journey into the Shadows: “the Twilight Zone’s” *Visual Critique of the Cold War*.” *Science Fiction Film and Television* 7, no. 1 (2014): 59.
¹³CINEVIEW1. “*The Twilight Zone – Rod Serling Interview (1959)*.”
¹⁴“The Twilight Zone” Archive of American Television
¹⁵Mortenson, “A Journey into the Shadows: “*The Twilight Zone’s*” *Visual Critique of the Cold War*, 59.
¹⁶CINEVIEW1. “*The Twilight Zone – Rod Serling Interview (1959)*.”
¹⁷“The Twilight Zone” Archive of American Television
¹⁸Ibid.
¹⁹Rod Serling, *The Twilight Zone: “Eye of the Beholder*”. Season 2 episode 6, (Culver City: CBS, 1960)
²⁰Serling, *The Twilight Zone: “Eye of the Beholder*”. Season 2 episode 6
²¹Ibid.
²²Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 7.
²³Scott Kurashige, *Between “White Spot” and “World City”: Racial Integration and the Roots of Multiculturalism from companion* (2014), 66.
²⁴Ibid.
²⁵Serling, *The Twilight Zone: “Eye of the Beholder*”. Season 2 episode 6
²⁶Avila *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 3.
²⁷Ibid., 5.
²⁸Ibid., 4.
²⁹Ibid., 5.
³⁰Serling, *The Twilight Zone: “Eye of the Beholder*”. Season 2 episode 6
³¹Avila *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 35.
³²Ibid.
³³Ibid., 20.
³⁴Mortenson, “A Journey into the Shadows: “*The Twilight Zone’s*” *Visual Critique of the Cold War*, 70.
³⁵Serling, *The Twilight Zone: “Eye of the Beholder*”. Season 2 episode 6
³⁶Rod Serling, *The Twilight Zone: “The Obsolete Man*”. Season 2 episode 29, (Culver City: CBS, 1961).
³⁷Ibid.
³⁸Serling, Rod. *The Twilight Zone: “The Obsolete Man*”. season 2 episode 29, Culver City: CBS, 1961.
³⁹Ibid.
⁴⁰Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 3.
⁴¹Kurashige, *Between “White Spot” and “World City”: Racial Integration and the Roots of Multiculturalism*, 66.
⁴²Ibid.
⁴³Serling, Rod. *The Twilight Zone: “The Obsolete Man*”. season 2 episode 29, Culver City: CBS, 1961.
⁴⁴Kurashige, *Between “White Spot” and “World City”: Racial Integration and the Roots of Multiculturalism*, 66.
⁴⁵Ibid.
⁴⁶Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 4
⁴⁷Serling, Rod. *The Twilight Zone: “The Obsolete Man*”. season 2 episode 29, Culver City: CBS,

1961.
⁴⁸Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 3.
⁴⁹May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 10.
⁵⁰Mortenson, “A Journey into the Shadows: “*The Twilight Zone’s*” *Visual Critique of the Cold War*, 57.
⁵¹Ibid., 59.
⁵²Mortenson, “A Journey into the Shadows: “*The Twilight Zone’s*” *Visual Critique of the Cold War*, 70.
⁵³Ibid.
⁵⁴Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 96.
⁵⁵Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 96.
⁵⁶CINEVIEW1. “*The Twilight Zone – Rod Serling Interview (1959)*.”

What Are Those Yellow Spots on the Screen?: A Look at Vietnamese Representation in Movies

Steve Nguyen

Introduction

Los Angeles Plays Itself is a documentary about how Los Angeles is portrayed in movies and how these portrayals both represent and misrepresent the city.¹ Many movies have tried to capture the essence of Los Angeles but would always show one version and hide the other. This confusion blurs the line between what is real L.A. and what is fake L.A. Racially, Los Angeles prides itself in being the multinational capital of the world. From Chinatown to Little Tokyo to Little Saigon in Orange County, Los Angeles hosts a number of racial groups that have found home in this county. However, instead of being seen as a mix of races and nationalities, these individual districts can also be seen as borders and walls. Los Angeles is seen as this county that accepts multiple ethnicities, but these districts really show that they are categorically separated from everyone else.

These misrepresentations can be seen in films that go beyond Los Angeles and can be problematic, as they create a story that is inaccurate. Movies and other forms of popular culture create and reinforce ideas that can either help or harm certain groups. First, I will discuss Asian-American and Vietnamese-American representation as a whole and set a basis for what stereotypes persist in popular culture. These stereotypes are subtly placed into movies and affect the everyday lives of Vietnamese Americans. Lastly, I will explain of how many Asian Americans and Vietnamese Americans have attempted to combat these ideas and form their own identities.

Asian-American Representation as a Whole

To understand Vietnamese representation in movies, one must first understand how Asian Americans are represented as a whole. Asian Americans have become so largely under-represented in American film that they have become misrepresented. Popular culture, as a process, defines the ideas of race, nationality and other forms of identity for many Americans.² It gives birth to questions about what it means to be a “real” American and what it takes to become one. In the case of Asians in American film, these questions are answered for them.

The idea of a “real” American is one of individualism. The United States is a country that takes pride in being a nation founded by immigrants, and Los Angeles is a city that claims to be the multi-ethnic capital of this country. This creates the mentality that we are all from different walks of life and are unique individuals. In film and other forms of popular culture, these ideas are often reinforced through a character’s personality or choices. This is not the case with Asian characters, however. Instead of being given roles with defining characteristics, Asians are generally given roles that fit a certain stereotype. These stereotypes remove the sense of individualism and puts them into racialized groups. These stereotypical portrayals often represent a threat to American life.

There are many different stereotypes throughout film history that have been used to describe Asian Americans. This paper will discuss the “model minority” and “gook” stereotype as they are relevant to Vietnamese-American representation in movies. The model minority Asian American stereotype originated in the Cold War era and rose to popularity in the 1960s and 1970s.³ This notion revolves around the idea that Asian Americans are politically silent and ready to assimilate. During the Civil Rights movement, these were considered to be positive characteristics because they were characteristics that African Americans did not possess.⁴ Asian Americans were seen this way because they were generally thought of as not as politically and socially active as African Americans. They were instead seen as stoic and

obedient, which really meant silent and non-threatening to the current way of life. Because it originated in the Cold War era, the model minority stereotype was seen as an Asian American success story because it made sure to not touch on the main fears of that time period. Internationally, the United States was fighting a political war as they were trying to send messages to Russia and Asia about the dangers of Communism.⁵ They attempted to create a narrative that shows the United States as a democratic country where people of all races could truly have equal rights and upward mobility. Domestically, the United States was having issues about race and equality. Thus, they constructed this idea that obedience will be rewarded and opposition will be punished. The model minority does not associate itself with the ideas of Communism or political activism, which allows them to, in theory, live a proper American life. However, this stereotype did not lead to an acceptance of Asian Americans, but rather, it led to Asian Americans being limited in upward mobility and classified as weak.

On the surface, the model minority stereotype could be misinterpreted as a positive representation of Asian Americans. However, the stereotype itself was mainly created to demonstrate that if certain minorities forgo political activism, they will not be harmed or opposed. Because Asian Americans were seen as politically-silent rule followers, they were subsequently seen as submissive. Both Asian-American men and women were deemed weak and submissive, both physically and politically. This image of frailty led to many Asian Americans being limited in terms of upwards mobility. Many Asian-Americans excelled academically and were overqualified in their positions, but they generally faced difficulty acquiring positions of power, such as CEO or any other managerial position.⁶ Images of weakness are directly linked to the lack of Asian Americans in movies. Typically, a leading role is reserved for someone who is perceived as strong and as a leader, qualities typically known as essentially American. From fighting the British for American independence to fighting Russia and the war on Communism, independence and leadership skills are what many Americans look toward. Because stereotypes limit Asian Americans access to these qualities, they are not cast in leading roles in movies, and because they are not cast, they are not given the chance to break free from these stereotypes and will be misrepresented, creating a never-ending cycle of negative reinforcement.

The “Gook”

Originating from the Vietnam War, the “gook” stereotype is often associated with Vietnamese Americans but is also used to describe many other Asian Americans as well. Where previously the model minority meant that Asian Americans being silent and obedient was a success story, the gook stereotype meant that the silent and obedient behavior was a façade and a tool to enter American soil with ease and collapse it from within.⁷ The “gook” was a result of the United States’ failing war efforts during the Vietnam War. The issue was that American soldiers were unable to see and fight the Viet Cong because their war tactics and, therefore, were unable to conquer them.⁸ This invisibility created frustrations for soldiers fighting against this type of warfare and ultimately led to the creation of the “gook” stereotype. The sense of Vietnamese invisibility destroying the United States was also due to the fact that in post-Vietnam War, many Americans witnessed events that devastated the country. In 1974, Americans saw the fall of Saigon, the oil crisis, and the Watergate scandal, to name a few. 1974 also saw inflation due to Vietnam War spending, along with many other economic problems.⁹ The “Gook” was the perfect scapegoat for the United States’ current situation. Many Americans blamed Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans for the economic downturn as allegedly, they were the ones who invaded the United States and destroyed it from within, all while soldiers were busy with the war.

These stereotypes are problematic because it sets a precedent for how Americans will view and interact with Asian Americans. With the model minority stereotype, an Asian American would essentially have high standards set for them and would be forbidden to fail. If they did, they would be seen as a disgrace to their entire race. And if Asian Americans succeeded, they would not be allowed positions of power because the “gook” stereotype creates the idea that they are attempting a hostile takeover.

Model Minorities and Gooks in Movies

Blade Runner is a 1982 science-fiction film that takes place in a fictional dystopian Los Angeles in 2019. The film follows Rick Deckard, who is a “blade runner” that tracks down and kills replicants, which are androids with human-like characteristics. Although this film is not directly about Asian Americans, it created a fictional world that revolves around the “gook” stereotype. In this world, there is a broad global economy in which Los Angeles has been recreated as a hybrid between Tokyo and New York.¹⁰ Many of the city’s billboards and company signs are written in Japanese, and many of the shops are run by unidentified Asian Americans. In this city, there are a few androids with lifelike characteristics called replicants, fictional creations intended to replace humans. Six replicants have gone rogue and started killing humans, setting the story in motion. This setting is the fear that many Americans had after the Vietnam War. The idea that Asians have assimilated into American society and destroyed it from within is reminiscent to the “gook” stereotype and the fears that it created. Rather than having a utopia as a result of Asian assimilation, Los Angeles is instead turned into a dystopia where the weather is always smoggy and crime is rampant. In addition to the setting, the idea of having androids behaving perfectly is also reminiscent to Asian stereotypes.

Much like the “gook” stereotype, most of the replicants start off as the model minority. Replicants in *Blade Runner* have assimilated into society flawlessly and quietly. These androids are, for the most part, indistinguishable from humans. The only defining characteristic that tells apart a replicant from a human is their lack of emotion. And it’s because of this characteristic that they are generally rejected by other humans, despite getting jobs and contributing to society. This is similar to Asian Americans when the model minority stereotype was prevalent as they were able to assimilate into American society quietly and found jobs. Their goals and actions were nearly identical to that of White America, but the one defining characteristic that stopped them from being fully accepted was the fact that they were Asian. *Blade Runner* starts off with a replicant being interrogated and is revealed that she poses no threat. It is then quickly known that rogue replicants have started killing humans, and the blade runner must kill them. The narrative then changes the replicant from the model minority to the “gook.” The idea that someone that is almost identical to a regular human has infiltrated society and is now trying to destroy them from within is similar to that of the “gook” stereotype. The story that unfolds from here on out is the reason why the movie sets Los Angeles in a futuristic dystopia as it reminds the viewer that Asian assimilation will be the end of traditional American civilization as they know.

Perhaps a clearer representation of the “gook” stereotype is in the movie *Casualties of War*.¹¹ The movie is about a platoon of American soldiers and their hardships during the Vietnam War. During their patrols, the platoon would encounter many ambush attacks from the Viet Cong and suffered greatly. This causes Sergeant Tony Meserve to request leave for an extended period. His platoon is denied this, and this causes Meserve and many of his squad to become hostile. They plan to kidnap and rape a Vietnamese woman, named Than Thi Oanh, and all but Max Eriksson agree. The platoon carries out this plan, which causes Eriksson to betray his group and attempt to set Oanh free. The woman ends up dying, and Eriksson sacrifices his military career by reporting this to his superiors. The superiors say that most likely no consequences will follow from this report and that Eriksson should just let it go. In the end, Eriksson reports them and the platoon is sentenced to hard labor.

The beginning of the movie starts with the platoon being ambushed on two separate occasions by the Viet Cong. Right away the movie shows the Vietnamese as the unseen enemy and establishes them as the villain. This dynamic changes as Meserve plans to kidnap and rape a Vietnamese woman. It becomes clear that Meserve and his platoon are now the enemies. To Meserve and his squad, however, the Vietnamese are still the enemy. Meserve’s platoon feel that their actions are a result of Viet Cong influence. Meserve snaps and sets forth his plans because of his experiences in the war. From the Viet Cong’s constant attacks to the failure of the American military system when it came to requesting leave, Meserve was pushed to a point of no return. One of the biggest fears during the Vietnam War was Communism and how it might spread from Vietnam to the United States. In *Casualties of War*, Meserve was pushed to where he felt justified in kidnapping and raping a Vietnamese woman. And much like Com-

munism, his breaking point was spread throughout his platoon as most of them agreed to his plans. When asked to testify, Thomas Clark says he does not feel responsible for the rape and murder, and that if the government throws them in the stockade, then “you’re helping nobody but the Viet Cong.”¹² To Clark, Oanh is no different to a Viet Cong, and it was his one chance to get revenge. Meserve would even go as far as to say that Oanh had to be killed because she was about to give away the squad’s position by coughing. To these characters, their evil acts are completely justified because they felt they were doing their country a service by eliminating all “gooks.” Although the movie attempts to draw sympathy for the Vietnamese by showing American soldiers in a negative light, it still reinforces old stereotypes.

Than Thi Oanh is a Vietnamese woman that was forcibly removed from her home to be used as a sex slave. Throughout the movie, Oanh is portrayed as weak and submissive. This representation is reasonable as a woman who was forcibly taken by trained killers would be seen as weak. However, Oanh is not given any other defining characteristic and is only there to further the story. Even though the movie is trying to show the Vietnamese in a new light, it still falls to the same problems by not giving character to the Asian characters. She does not deliver a speech that motivates Eriksson to help her, and she does not get revenge on the platoon. She is only there to show weakness and help create a more complex villain.

Oanh’s role in *Casualties of War* is problematic to Vietnamese Americans because of how insignificant her role is. Oanh is used as a plot device to draw sympathy for the Vietnamese only reinforces the submissiveness portion of the model minority stereotype. Rather than being seen as regular people, Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans would instead be seen as helpless beings that others should sympathize. Although it is improbable that one movie could hold this much power in creating and reinforcing stereotypes, it is the fact that many movies are constantly reusing these tropes, which normalizes the issue. This idea is called racial formation, in which everyday actions can shape a racial group’s identity.¹³ In this case, movies and other forms of popular culture can influence a person’s beliefs and decisions, and creating movies that portray Vietnamese Americans and other Asian Americans in a certain light normalize those characteristics. When these fictional characteristics become a person’s expectations for certain racial groups, then those groups will be expected to behave in a certain way.

Resistance and Finding Their Own Identity

There are many movies beyond *Blade Runner* and *Casualties of War* that depict Asian Americans in a negative light. The model minority myth tells us that Asian Americans can be depicted in any way with no repercussions because of how quiet and submissive they are. This is not true, however, as many Asian Americans have become frustrated with how the media portrays them. Some have gone as far as to trying to create their own identity. Many Asian Americans are aware of how they are represented in popular culture and are taking action against it.

During the 88th Academy Awards, host Chris Rock introduced three Asian children onstage and presented them as hardworking accountants. At the end of this joke, Rock stated that if anyone was offended by this joke then they should “tweet about it on your phone that was also made by these kids.”¹⁴ At first, the joke seemed to be successful as it was met with laughter from the audience. However, the audience at the Academy Awards were primarily White. This joke received backlash among many Asian American actors and filmmakers, causing the Academy Awards to issue a formal apology. This is not the first time Asian Americans were used as a punchline to a joke, but this particular joke was significant as it was made during the same awards show that was highlighting the inequalities that African American actors faced when it came to being nominated. This also relates back to the model minority stereotype in two ways. The first is that Rock is making jokes about how Asian Americans are hard-working citizens and can acquire an accounting job at a young age. The other interpretation is that the model minority stereotype is so prevalent in American society that Rock makes a joke at the expense of Asian Americans and would expect no backlash from Asian Americans themselves because they are “model” citizens. This was not the case, however, as many Asian Americans expressed their criticisms towards Rock and the Academy Awards.

In response to Chris Rock’s statements, rapper Jonathan Park, also known as

Dumbfoundead, released a song expressing his frustrations with society's views towards Asian Americans. "Safe" is a rap song that voices these concerns in an aggressive manner. Park begins the song with lines that are a direct response to Rock's jokes. He highlights the insensitive statements made by Rock and notes the lack of Asian Americans in the audience at the Academy Awards by saying that "the roster where the only yellow men were all statues. We a quarter of the population, there's a room of fuckin' one-percenters laughing at you."¹⁵ Park uses this event as the tipping point and justification for his anger that soon follows. He goes on to make aggressive statements and violent remarks towards the film industry because he now has to "play the villain." Statements such as, "If I never get a chance, you might see the homie show up on the 5 o'clock news," and "What you talkin' 'bout there ain't no space? Guess I gotta make more space," all allude to acts of violence. Both statements are referencing the fact that there is a notable lack of Asian-American actors, and that there should be more. Park is saying that if there is no "space" for Asian-American actors and are not deserving of a chance, then he will "make space" by acting violently towards other actors. This is not to be taken literally and is instead a reference to the model minority stereotype.

The creative process behind "Safe," from the lyrics to the music genre to the music video, was intentional. Park's choice to make an aggressive hip-hop song is to help disprove the model minority identity that Asian Americans have been bestowed. Hip-hop and rap are genres that have historically been associated with feelings of anger and aggression. By rapping about these inequalities and using lyrics that make him sound aggressive, Park is making listeners believe that an Asian American could possibly be more than just an obedient, hard worker. Park is fully aware of the misrepresentations that the film industry has placed on Asian Americans and constantly reminds listeners that this aggressive behavior is unusual because "you ain't never seen a yellow boy wild'n." He also reiterates this change in identity by making a general quote from the perspective of one observing him, "Never saw this side of Chino. He was always quiet keeping to himself, never messed with anybody else that's the Jonathan that we know."¹⁶ Park addresses the lack of Asian-American representation, not only through his lyrics, but also through the music video that accompanies the song. Throughout the music video, Park's face is photoshopped over other actors' faces from different movies. He is also seen sitting on a couch with what presumes to be his wife and children, dressed in 1950's-themed clothing. The replacement of other actors' faces for Park's face is to show that Asian Americans can become actors and can star in roles that are not racialized and stereotypical. To make his point abundantly clear, Park is sitting on the couch and is told by the director that there is something wrong with his face. The director then replaces Park with a White actor at the end of the music video. The frustrations that Park have are not solely his. Some Vietnamese actors and entertainers have the same concerns about the lack of representation and have resisted in their own way.

Since the fall of Saigon in 1974, many Vietnamese Americans have found difficulty in finding their own identity. Being an immigrant post-war, many Vietnamese Americans no longer related to their culture in Vietnam but were also not considered full-blooded American either. Vietnamese Americans that were born and raised in the United States were not able to fully relate to Vietnamese culture, but they could not integrate into "American" society because they were Asian. Identities can often be found and reinforced through popular culture, but Vietnamese Americans were not able to experience this. They either found difficulty finding movies that had Vietnamese actors or saw movies that portrayed the Vietnamese in a negative light. In 1983, Thuy Nga, a Vietnamese producer, created a Vietnamese variety show that was first shown in Paris, France called *Paris by Night*.¹⁷ *Paris by Night* is a Vietnamese variety show that consists of multiple segments, ranging from comedy skits to dance numbers to fashion shows. The show was successful in Paris, targeting mainly the Vietnamese population in France, and led to demand to have it performed and aired live in Orange County. Vietnamese Americans, specifically in Little Saigon in Orange County, saw a social and economic growth that allowed them to indulge in many forms of entertainment. With the lack of representation they receive in American popular culture, Vietnamese Americans saw *Paris by Night* as an opportunity to create and showcase a new identity.

The first few releases of *Paris by Night* focused on the idea of being a Vietnamese

refugee. The show attempted to create this identity that said that Vietnamese who fled to the United States after the war were not fully Vietnamese anymore, but something else. When Vietnamese Americans did not know if they should continue practicing Vietnamese culture or adopt new American culture, *Paris by Night* showed that they are not fully one or the other, and that they should accept being both but still look back to Vietnam in a nostalgic manner. The show reinforced this idea by playing multiple music videos that used clips of Vietnam to provoke a sense of nostalgia and pride.¹⁸ In addition, the show would showcase many American values that they believed Vietnamese Americans should adopt. Capitalism was the biggest identity that *Paris by Night* tried to promote as it was seen as the direct opposite of Communism. Many of the content in the show would try to promote this hybrid identity of Vietnamese tradition with consumer culture. However, the American public were not aware of this new identity and instead saw Vietnamese Americans as a more primitive culture. This caused the show to fight this idea, but they reinforced old stereotypes by doing so.

After the Vietnam War, many of the Vietnamese fled Vietnam using many different methods of transportation. One of the methods was by a small boat.¹⁹ This method led to many Americans stereotyping new Vietnamese Americans as "boat people." The "boat people" stereotype was this idea that the Vietnamese were a part of a primitive culture and are, therefore, weak and unintelligent.²⁰ This representation of Vietnamese Americans were also class-related as the "boat people" stereotype gave the image that many Vietnamese Americans came to the United States with nothing. This was not the case, however, as many Vietnamese Americans created a community in Orange County that defied expectations. No longer did they believe they were poor and primitive, and no longer did they wish others would view them as such. *Paris by Night* was their way to showcase their successes and demand for middle-class respectability. *Paris by Night* was successful in that regard as the show was able to get rid of the "boat people" identity, but the show ironically created a "model minority" identity that Vietnamese Americans cautiously accepted.²¹ Many Vietnamese Americans were thriving in Orange County, but the "boat people" stereotype made sure that others saw them as lower class. The model minority stereotype was one that many chose to accept, as the stereotype is about quietly assimilating into society and adopting many Americans ideals. The main idea that had to be adopted was the idea of Capitalism. With Capitalism, Vietnamese Americans could show that they were consumers and ready to contribute to society economically. *Paris by Night* was able to reinforce these ideas with their hybrid identity, but it created a never-ending loop of stereotypes that Asian Americans cannot seem to break.

Conclusion

For a county that is proud to showcase its diversity, Los Angeles does a poor job of truly representing its people and communities within its cities. Hollywood is known to be a place where anyone can be a star, but in reality, "anyone" only refers to those that are considered to be true Americans. For everyone else, specifically Asian Americans, their work in films and other forms of popular culture will only be wanted as long as it serves the purpose to create and reinforce ideas that others want. The title "What Are Those Yellow Spots on the Screen?" is a reference to a film projector's faulty polarizers, which causes the projector to produce yellow blotches on the screen. These blotches are unwanted and a sign that something must be replaced. The feeling of being unwanted and replaceable on the movie screen is an all too familiar feeling for Asian American actors.

References

- ¹ *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, directed by Thom Andersen (Los Angeles: Submarine Entertainment, 2003), DVD.
- ² Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 6.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 146. President Lyndon Johnson's assistant secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, stated that the reasons why African Americans were never able to assimilate into American society was because they lived in dysfunctional families, which took the blame away from a

racialized society. To confirm this idea, many White Americans looked to Asian Americans and their family lives.

⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁶ Ibid., 146.

⁷ Ibid., 190.

⁸ Ibid., 190.

⁹ Ibid., 181.

¹⁰ *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott (Los Angeles: Warner Bros, 1982), DVD.

¹¹ *Casualties of War*, directed by Brian De Palma (Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1989), DVD.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Wendy Cheng, *The Changes Next Door to the Diazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 10.

¹⁴ *88th Academy Awards*, aired February 28, 2016, ABC.

¹⁵ Dumbfoundead, "Safe," *We Might Die* (Los Angeles: DFD Records, 2016).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nhi T. Lieu, *The American Dream in Vietnamese* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 84.

¹⁸ Ibid., 85.

¹⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁰ Ibid., 112.

²¹ Ibid., 113

“Grinning Horribly”: A New Cultural Analysis of Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*

Jon Schreiber

*“I saw the destruction of Dresden. I saw the city before and then came out of an air-raid shelter and saw it afterward, and certainly one response was laughter. God knows, that’s the soul seeking some relief. Any subject is subject to laughter...”*¹

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was a known entity before the summer of 1963. Critics had labeled the novelist a science fiction writer and a satisfactory satirist based on his first publications *Player Piano* (1952), *The Sirens of Titans* (1959), and *Mother Night* (1961).² In a decade absolutely infatuated yet oversaturated with cheap paperback works of science fiction, Vonnegut needed to set himself apart. Reflecting on his assigned genre of the 1950s and early 60s, Vonnegut wrote, “I have been a sore headed occupant of a file drawer labeled ‘science fiction’ and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal.”³

Vonnegut drained the urinal and swept American audiences off of their proverbial feet, if only for a moment, with the 1963 publication of *Cat’s Cradle*, a historiographical work of fiction about a man who witnesses the end of the world while conducting research on what “important” Americans were doing on the day the atomic bombs were dropped over Japan. *The New York Times* praised the novel, observing, “Like the best of contemporary satire, it is work of a far more engaging and meaningful order than the melodramatic tripe which most critics seem to consider ‘serious’.”⁴ *The Los Angeles Times* found similar strides in Vonnegut’s work and wrote that the author had, “risen above (anger) to a nihilistic good humor and the awareness that laughter is a more potent weapon of offence than vituperation.”⁵ During its first year in publication, *Cat’s Cradle* was nominated for the Hugo Book Award for Best Novel, the most prestigious honor for science fiction novels. Eight years after *Cat’s Cradle’s* initial release, the University of Chicago would award Vonnegut, a previously enrolled student of three years, a master’s degree in anthropology, counting the novel as a thesis. With *Cat’s Cradle*, Vonnegut had struck a chord with the broader culture. He had found his footing, carved out his own space within the landscape of American literature, and established an audience for decades to come.

Various scholars have attempted to define the significance of *Cat’s Cradle*. Literary scholar David Ullrich examines the discourse of apocalypse and how Vonnegut’s word choices reflect his personal life experience.⁶ In contrast, Kathryn Hume makes a philological argument that melancholy is the defining characteristic of Vonnegut’s writing.⁷ W. John Leverence’s paper in the *Journal of Popular Culture* takes an interdisciplinary approach to argue that the humor of *Cat’s Cradle* follows a unique tradition of American humor.⁸ Other researchers, such as Alexandru Oltean, have taken a linguistics approach to argue that the unique way in which Vonnegut incorporates humor is to give his readers a guidebook on how the text ought to be interpreted.⁹ Some, like James Sorensen have even used the novel to make a medical argument about the limitations of quantitative scientific tests used to determine treatment plans for drug addicts.¹⁰

While each approach is useful in its own right, I believe that the existing scholarship does not adequately address the way in which *Cat’s Cradle* is a uniquely historical work of literature that reflects the society and culture in which it was written and uses satire and apocalyptic themes to critique that culture. This contextual argument will be the largest focus of my paper. There are moments, however, when Vonnegut’s novel actually reinforces toxic dominant ideologies rather than critiquing them, especially with regards to race and disability. This is similarly an under researched aspect of the book that is integral to my argument that

Cat's Cradle is an intertextual work of literature that reinforces and challenges historical and contemporary modes of power.¹¹

To comprehend *Cat's Cradle* in its entirety, we must traverse the contextual landscape of the book and author before, during, and after the book's publication. My work begins here, with a look into the life of Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Following this brief history, I will place the book in context of the Atomic Age, the Cold War, the Groundwork Era of Disabled Rights, and black minstrel caricatures to thematically connect the work of literature to the period and demonstrate how the novel subverts and reinforces various ideologies of the period in which it was written. Overall, my purpose is to argue that Vonnegut effectively uses satire as a mode of social critique. Ultimately, I will conclude with a reflection on how Vonnegut's work has set off a trend of satire and parody and why it is critical that we take a closer look at *Cat's Cradle* to understand where we are and where we are going as a culture and society.

Depression hit the Vonnegut family especially hard in the aftermath of the market crash of 1929. Almost immediately, the family went from having two primary sources of income from each parent, Kurt Sr.'s architectural business and Edith Vonnegut's family brewery, to nothing. Kurt Jr., a mere seven years old at the time, was pulled from elite private schooling and forced into the public school system. His mother, a Victorian in thought and practice, felt deeply ashamed for letting her family's status plunge from Indianapolis elite to poor working class and became abusively vocal of her dissatisfaction with her husband. Edith would never recover from the monetary and mental depression, resulting in her suicide on Mother's Day of 1944. Dissimilarly, Kurt Sr. toiled silently and withdrew from life and work entirely in the 30s and 40s.¹² At home, class expectations and fiscal struggles sat like two boxers in opposing corners of Kurt Jr.'s life, the latter destined to defeat and consume the former.

The air of depression that defined Vonnegut's early life is felt throughout his work. American Studies and literary scholar Thomas Marvin notes that, "The father depicted in Vonnegut's novels are all distant and uninvolved with their children's lives, reflecting Vonnegut's relationship to his own father."¹⁴ In *Cat's Cradle*, this image of the father is especially apparent in the character Dr. Felix Hoenikker. "His pores looked as big as craters on the moon. His ears and nostrils were stuffed with hair. Cigar smoke made him smell like the mouth of Hell. So close up, my father was the ugliest thing I had ever seen." This is the menacing description of the despondent father that we get from Newt Hoenikker, the youngest of Felix's three children. On the day Felix's bombs were dropped over Japan, Felix was playing with a string in his office, paying no attention to his children or the world around him.

Much like Vonnegut's own mother, maternal characters are frequently "distant or absent" from Vonnegut's stories.¹⁵ The notable mother figure of *Cat's Cradle* is the late mother of the Hoenikker children, who is simply referred to as "mother" in dialogue and on her massive, phallic gravestone. The way in which the context of Vonnegut's childhood seeps on to the written page of his fictional work demonstrates a clear connection between literature and author circumstance and perspectives. Simply put, Vonnegut's direct observations of the world, macro and micro, manifest themselves in the stories he tells.

Vonnegut carried the heavy weight of depression with him through his adolescence and into his formative high school and college years. He first developed his storytelling skills during his tenure writing for the Shortridge High School Echo. During this time, Vonnegut believes that he harnessed what it meant to write for a large audience who brought their own cultural tastes and assumptions to the text.¹⁶ The author's love of the newspaper press carried into his college days at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Vonnegut, a biochemistry major, spent more time writing for the *Cornell Daily Sun* than he did doing his schoolwork. While undertaking editorial duties, Vonnegut wrote three rotating columns that all took a comical, lighthearted approach to serious subject matter. For instance, in a 1941 publication of the newspaper, Vonnegut's column "Science Cannot be Stopped" simply stated the title of an academic research project that made use of words such as "Thymozyethyldiethylmaline" to comically demonstrate the increasing absurdity of scientific jargon.¹⁷ At Cornell, Vonnegut developed his satirical voice and became a shrewd observer and critic of the 1940s culture of science, technology, war, and globalism. In the classroom, Vonnegut was taught how to think like a scientist and appreciate the possibilities it posed, but as a writer, Vonnegut kept his

distance from the veneration of science in what would come to be known as the Atomic Age.

In September 1945, three years after America, UK, and Canada's best scientists had begun research on atomic weaponry under the secret codename of the Manhattan Project, William L. Laurence of the *New York Times* officially declared that, "The Atomic Age began at exactly 5:30 Mountain War Time on the morning of July 16, 1945, on a stretch of semi-desert land about fifty airline miles from Alamogordo, N.M., just a few minutes before the dawn of a new day on this earth."¹⁸ Historians have tended to agree with Laurence's assessment that America and the world at-large had entered a completely new era of existence upon the successful testing of the atomic bomb in the New Mexican desert and, eventually, the use of the bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945.¹⁹ Americans were left with the decision to either abandon the massively destructive new technology or embrace it and all of its possibilities. Historian Paul Boyer observes that the sentiment of the nation and ultimate decision was that, "Americans must not surrender to fear...they must rise to the challenge of the atomic bomb."²⁰

In *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut uses the character Marvin Breed, brother of Felix's former research partner, to add commentary on the dangers posed by the onset of the Atomic Age. Marvin is a bitter man who deeply loved Felix's deceased wife and has held contempt for Felix and his former company. On the topic of Felix Hoenikker, Marvin says, "how the hell innocent is a man who helps makes a thing like an atomic bomb?" and, "I think that's the trouble with the world: too many people in high places who are stone-cold dead."²¹ Although the passage takes a more serious tone rather than a light, satirical one, this is an example of how Vonnegut's work seeks to subvert the culture of the Atomic Age and argue that the scientists of the Manhattan Project and everyone who wished to embrace nuclear technology were distancing themselves from the natural world and that which makes us human.

For all of Vonnegut's hesitancy towards science and technology in his formative years, he further immersed himself in the culture upon enlisting in the army in 1943 and working as a publicist at General Electric starting in 1947. Prior to actually fighting in the European theater of World War II, Vonnegut was sent to the Carnegie Institute of Technology and the University of Tennessee to study mechanical engineering. During the war, Vonnegut was captured as a POW and sent to a Dresden labor camp where he nearly lost his life in the Allied firebombing, the most devastating attack in European history. Upon returning from war, Vonnegut first attempted to secure a joint undergraduate/graduate degree from the University of Chicago on the G.I. Bill, but his thesis was ultimately denied.

Thus, in order to support his wife and children, Vonnegut took a job at GE, where his brother had been working as a high-profile scientist since 1945. Vonnegut's duty was to write articles explaining what scientific breakthroughs the company had made in terms that the general public would understand.²² Vonnegut's brother, Bernard, and GE believed that, "science was going to make the world a better place" and "to be a part of the utopian future, he should do as his brother said."²³ General Electric preached that technological advancement was the means for societal progress, but Vonnegut was especially critical of this notion and notably critiques the theme in *Cat's Cradle*.

In addition to the opening scenes in which Vonnegut uses John/Jonah's interviews with former coworkers of Felix Hoenikker at General Forge and Foundry Company (an obvious reference to General Electric) to talk about the theme of technology, there is a brilliant scene towards the end of *Cat's Cradle* in which the main character, John/Jonah, is questioning one of the few white Americans living on the Caribbean nation of San Lorenzo about the culture of the indigenous people. First in the conversational prose, Mr. Castle informs John that, "The people of San Lorenzo...are interested in only three things: fishing, fornication, and Bokononism." John asks, "Don't you think they could be interested in progress?" To which Mr. Castle responds, "They've seen some of it. There's only one aspect of progress that really excites them." John counters, "What's that?" Mr. Castle cedes, "The electric guitar."²⁴ This passage from the text is a prime example of how Vonnegut uses satire to critique the seriousness of the culture of the Atomic Age, in which he was a direct observer and participant during his military service and tenure at General Electric in the late 1940s.

While fragments of Vonnegut's life leading up to his decision to become a full time

author in 1951 significantly influenced the subject matter of his novels and informed him of the culture in which he seeks to subvert, the story of *Cat's Cradle* more frequently appears in dialogue with the context of the Cold War period in American history. Broadly, this period began in the aftermath of World War II, when the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the world's dominant military and cultural superpowers. The period is defined by the two nation's struggle for influence and power on a global scale. *Cat's Cradle* was written in 1962, during the height of the Cold War, and published in 1963.

In the wake of the Atomic Age, everything was contingent. The new technology excited Americans, but came with the understanding that the world constantly sat on the brink of total annihilation. Americans were in a frenzied panic when Russian scientists successfully launched the world's first orbiting satellite, Sputnik I, into space in October 1957, marking the onset of what historians call the Space Race. The United States government wagered that if the Soviets possessed the technology to launch a satellite into space with rocket technology, then they likely have missiles with long enough range to hit the American mainland. In response, there was a massive emphasis of science and mathematics education in American public schools. Simultaneously, the Eisenhower administration authorized a proliferation of nuclear armament to close in on any potential missile gap between the U.S and the U.S.S.R.²⁵ The enemy was known across the American landscape and a desperate attempt to rid the planet of Communist sympathizers was concurrently in full force.

The arms race and space race were both happening in the backdrop of heated proxy wars and conflicts in foreign nations. Americans had exited the Korean peninsula, where Soviet and Chinese backed North Korean forces had attacked American backed South Koreans, by 1953. On the European front, the decision on whether Soviet or American forces would occupy post-war Germany had reached a boiling point in 1961 when armed soldiers and tanks were pointed at each other in the Berlin square, resulting in the construction of the Berlin Wall. By 1963, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations had increased the number of military advisors (actually armed personnel) from 900 to 16,000 to prepare for a massive conflict against the Chinese backed communist North Vietnamese. The Cold War reached closest to the American homeland during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 when the Soviet Union armed the Cuban coastline with nuclear weapons, pointed them at major American cities, and ordered all missiles on standby for thirteen days in response to American armament in Turkey and Italy. The threat of nuclear annihilation and global warfare was at an all-time-high during the Cuban Missile Crisis.²⁶

The plot of *Cat's Cradle* has everything to do with the Cold War and the threat of nuclear apocalypse. However, Vonnegut's story about the end of the world is comical and makes light of the darkest situation imaginable. In the story, it is revealed that Felix Hoenikker's most devastating creation was not the atomic bomb, but rather a substance known as ice-nine, which will turn any liquid into a solid upon contact. Each Hoenikker child is entrusted with a small portion of ice-nine, which is used for selfish purposes to influence people. Frank, the military leader of San Lorenzo, states, "I bought myself a job, just the way you (Angela) bought yourself a tomcat husband, just the way Newt bought himself a week on Cape Cod with a Russian midget!"²⁷ This is a comical way of saying that the extraordinarily dangerous substance, much like nuclear technology, is used as nothing more than an ace card played for personal gain and greed. Ultimately, ice-nine accidentally comes in contact with the Atlantic Ocean, freezing all of Earth's water and bringing about the end of the world.

Vonnegut is using satire to critique the dangers posed by nuclear armament and standoffs between Soviet and American forces during the Cold War period. For such serious subject matter, Vonnegut poses the situation as asinine and comical. For instance, when the apocalypse first ensues, the Crosbys, American entrepreneurs visiting San Lorenzo, shout, "American! American!" at the massive tornadoes and assume that the chaos is an attack on the people of San Lorenzo and that their nationality made them innocent bystanders.²⁸ Immediately afterwards, John/Jonah makes his way in to a bomb shelter with his soon to be wife, Mona. John/Jonah makes a sexual innuendo upon safely entering the shelter: "I am about to say something that must have been said by men to women several times before...however, I don't believe that these words have ever carried quite the freight they carry now...Here we

are."²⁹ As the world meets its fateful end, John/Jonah, a quasi-autobiographical reflection of Vonnegut himself, cracks a joke and reveals the absurdity of the whole event.

The final passage of the book perfectly summarizes Vonnegut's attitude towards the apocalyptic possibilities of the Cold War. John/Jonah finally encounters San Lorenzo's religious prophet, Bokonon, and asks him what his final revelation is for humanity. Bokonon hands John/Jonah a piece of paper that reads:

If I were a younger man, I would write the history of human stupidity; and I would climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who.³⁰

Bokonon offers a fatalist solution to dealing with the apocalypse. He believes that all there is to do is reflect on the "stupidity" and kill yourself in mockery of whatever god is watching. This final series of comical events is the penultimate example of Vonnegut's satirical critique of the life-threatening, apocalyptic potential of the Cold War in *Cat's Cradle*.

However, for all of the ways in which Vonnegut subverts the culture in which he is writing, there are peculiar moments throughout the book in which he reinforces dominant ideologies. Perhaps it has been easy for scholars to unknowingly pass over the themes of race and disability within *Cat's Cradle* because they both hide on the margins of the story; constantly referred to for humors sake, but never directly used for narrative purposes. I have found that, in *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut is tapping in to a legacy of racist and ableist humor that in turn contributes to a reinforcement of toxic dominant ideologies.

The post-World War II period in which Vonnegut wrote *Cat's Cradle* is what historian Kim Nielsen refers to as the "Groundwork" era for disabled rights. Nielsen notes that, in the aftermath of World War II and Cold War conflicts, American veterans were returning home with notable loss of limbs, sight, and hearing. As a result, a number of activist groups such as the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH) came to being to advocate on behalf of people with disabilities. Disability garnered national attention from federal action such as President Truman's National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week in 1945.

However, these advancements were only preliminary in their effect because the attention was largely seen as a social welfare issue and not a civil rights movement. Paul Strachan, the President of the AFPH, resigned from Truman's Handicapped Week committee in 1952, stating his reason that the committee was, "filling up...with a lot of 'do-gooders, social welfare workers, and the like,' most of whom, we, the Handicapped, know, from bitter, experience, 'WILL DO ANYTHING IN THE WORLD FOR THE HANDICAPPED, EXCEPT, GET OFF OUR BACKS!'" Overall, the period between 1945 and 1968 "set the stage for the disability rights movement," but was still a moment in which people with disabilities were highly stigmatized and discriminated against at national and local levels.³¹

Vonnegut's work is a clear reflection of this period and makes countless jokes at the expense of people with disabilities. For example, while John/Jonah is flying to San Lorenzo, he notices that there might be a dwarf sitting in front of him on the plane. He then turns his attention away, stating, "Midgets are, after all, diversions for silly or quiet times, and I was serious and excited about Bokonon's theory."³² This passage exemplifies the way in which Vonnegut reinforces the ideology of the Groundwork era that people with disabilities are not full people, but rather helpless charity cases for ridicule. Shortly after John/Jonah's crude joke, a series of jokes are told at the expense of the man sitting in the seat, revealed to be Newt Hoenikker. Hazel Crosby observes, "They're brother and sister, and he's a midget. He's a nice midget, though." She winked. "He's a smart little thing."³³ Throughout the novel, Newt, one of the main characters, is infantilized and used as the butt of jokes for cheap laughs that contribute nothing to the plot and satirical critique. As a result, *Cat's Cradle* reinforces the dominant ideology of disability at the time of the novel's publication.

Vonnegut treats the theme of race in a similar regard to that of disability. There is

a long, insidious legacy of black minstrelsy in American history. Historian Stephen Johnson defines minstrelsy as any form of racist entertainment that uses comedy, song, and dance and relies on caricatures of black people as being a number of subhuman characteristics from savage to unwise and docile to happy-go-lucky.³⁴ The two forms of minstrelsy that are present in Vonnegut's novel are the Black Brute and the Uncle Tom caricatures. The Black Brute caricature, which portrays blacks as savage, hypersexual beings, has a long-standing tradition in early 20th century pop culture. The *Jumbo Comics* series (1938-1953) regularly featured the caricature in serials such as "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle." Sheena had to fend herself from the black savages of the African jungle that wanted to chain up her white body and burn down white settlements.³⁵ This caricature can also be seen in cartoon strips such as Warner Brothers' 1938 *Jungle Jitters*, which was regularly syndicated on national television until 1968. The cartoon depicts blacks with distorted facial features, unnatural skin tones, and as animalistic in nature, constantly trying to capture white people and cook them in cast iron pots.³⁶

The Black Brute caricature is reproduced in Vonnegut's work by way of the indigent people of San Lorenzo. Whenever John/Jonah encounters one of the "dark natives," Vonnegut purposefully distorts the speech of the San Lorenzans as barely comprehensible and overly simplistic for comic relief, insinuating that the natives are unintelligent. For example, John/Jonah's driver describes Bokonon as a, "Vorry ball moan."³⁷ Eventually, Vonnegut puts English translations of the San Lorenzans speech as they become increasingly distorted. In this instance, the driver is actually saying 'Vey bad man' and limits his dialogue to short, incomplete, and simplistic phrases, giving the reader the impression that these people are daft.

The San Lorenzans are depicted as especially savage when Julian Castle, a wealthy white American, explains what likely became of a painting he threw off of the cantilevered terrace of the San Lorenzan dictator's estate. Castle says, "There's a little village at the bottom... Five or ten shacks, I'd say... The villagers have a net made out of chicken wire... This is a poor country- in case you haven't noticed."³⁸ This gives the reader the sense that the native people of the island are dirty, poor, and savage. This image is further reproduced in the character of Bokonon, "a Negro, born an Episcopalian and a British subject on the island of Tobago."³⁹ For comedic purposes, John/Jonah curses Bokonon using a racial epithet, calling him a "jigaboo bastard" in the novel's final scene.⁴⁰ The religious prophet is frequently described as wearing limited clothing, speaking in superstitious terms, and living in the shrouded jungle of San Lorenzo. These characteristics paint Bokonon as a Black Brute caricature and are deemed comical because they rely on the legacy of minstrelsy. However, this is a reinforcement of a toxic, stereotypical image of black people as unsophisticated and savage in nature.

To further contextualize the legacy of minstrelsy, one must look to the Uncle Tom caricature. This archetype is an unrealistic depiction of an elderly black man who is happy-go-lucky, docile, and, like most caricatures, a dim-witted person who loves to serve. The caricature gets its name from late 19th, early 20th century retellings of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 abolitionist classic *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that ironically portrayed slavery as a benevolent and romantic institution, loved by slaveholders and slaves alike, and can be found as an archetype throughout the period's pop culture.⁴¹ The Tom archetype was wildly popularized in the early film adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* such as Edwin Porter's 1903 version and Harry Pollard's 1927 version. Concurrently, the Tom character was commonly used in marketing campaigns for popular food brands such as Cream of Wheat and Uncle Ben Rice. These depictions usually accompanied taglines in Pidgin English such as Rastus's claim that, "Cream of Wheat... sho' good to eat and cheap."⁴² These Tom recreations have a deep root in American pop culture and appealed to consumers because the images tapped into a misremembered past of happy, docile slaves.

In *Cat's Cradle*, the sole black character prior to John/Jonah's departure to San Lorenzo is Mr. Knowles, a Uncle Tom archetype and elevator operator at the General Forge and Foundry company. "The operator was a small and ancient Negro whose name was Lyman Enders Knowles. Knowles was insane, I'm almost sure- offensively so, in that he grabbed his own behind and cried, 'Yes, yes!' whenever he felt that he'd made a point."⁴³ This is the description of Mr. Knowles that we get from our narrator that clearly paints the man in the image of the Uncle Tom caricature. Knowles is obedient and happy to serve the researchers at GFF

because they converse with him and try to tell him interesting facts. Vonnegut appeals to the Tom archetype for Knowles' final punch line. On the topic of elevators in Mayan civilization, Mr. Knowles questions, "How come they got to build a building like this, with mayonnaise elevators and all."⁴⁴ Vonnegut's humor in this brief, inconsequential intermission taps in to the history of minstrelsy and reinforces harmful ideologies of race for a cheap laugh at the expense of African Americans.

Whether subverting or reinforcing dominant ideologies of its contextual landscape, Vonnegut's use of satire is constant throughout *Cat's Cradle*. Each chapter, of which there are one hundred and twenty seven to divide a mere two hundred and eighty six pages, is treated like a joke at a standup comedy show. Fatalist hilarity ensues with the turn of each page and has kept readers engaged for decades. American Studies scholar John W. Leverence describes Vonnegut's narrator as "detached and ironic; he tells the story in retrospect; he pads the shock with hyperbolic fantasy." Leverence notes that this style closely parallels a great American satirist of the previous century, Mark Twain.⁴⁵ "Like Mark Twain, Vonnegut used humor to tackle the basic questions of human existence, and like Twain, he had a profound pessimism," noted Dinitia Smith in the *International Herald Tribune's* obituary to Vonnegut.⁴⁶ In their work, Vonnegut and Twain discuss rather serious subject matter, but use dark comedy to lessen the sting of brutal realities.

However, some of Vonnegut's jokes come at the expense of African Americans and people with disabilities and actually deepen the sting of negative stereotypes, perpetuated to marginalize certain communities. To what extent was Vonnegut aware of the social consequences these jokes had? It is not my job to infer on such a thought, but its rhetorical purpose of questioning how conscious we are of how external, historical cultural norms seep their way into our thoughts, jokes, and writing is crucial to consider nonetheless. When these toxic reinforcements of dominant ideologies work their way into otherwise brilliant satirical critiques, the work itself becomes less transhistorical, or able to carry new meaning across time.

Thus, social critics and satirists of today and tomorrow ought to pause and consider the ways in which they may unknowingly tap into legacies of marginalization for a quick laugh. As Ben Schwartz notes, "We live in an age of satirical excess," in which late night talk show hosts, SNL, *The Onion News*, Memes, Twitter, Vine, and every other social media platform use satire as their primary mode of social critique.⁴⁷ I believe that these satirical forms are effective in bringing issues to the surface, but often come short of lighting a fire that makes the whole pot boil over. Perhaps modern satirists have something to gain in looking back at the work of Vonnegut. It has been more than fifty years since the publication of *Cat's Cradle* and we ought to reconsider the work's strengths and weaknesses, its subversions and reinforcements if we are to live in a more effective age of satire and dismantle power structures that stand in the way of social progress.

References

- ¹ Kurt Vonnegut, *A Man Without a Country* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 3.
- ² Granville Hicks, "The Engineers Take Over," *The New York Times*, August 17, 1952.
- ³ Kurt Vonnegut, *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1974).
- ⁴ Terry Southern, "After the Bomb, Dad Came Up with Ice." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Jun 02, 1963.
- ⁵ Dorothy B. Hughes, "A Cautionary Parable of Armageddon." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Mar 31, 1963.
- ⁶ David W. Ullrich, "The Function of 'Oubliette' in Kurt Vonnegut's CAT'S CRADLE," *The Explicator* 70.2 (2012): 149-152.
- ⁷ Kathryn Hume, "Vonnegut's Melancholy." *Philological Quarterly*. 77, no. 2: 221 (1998).
- ⁸ W. John Leverence, "'Cat's Cradle' and Traditional American Humor," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 5, no. 4: 955 (1972).
- ⁹ Alexandru Oltean, "An Application of the General Theory of Verbal Humor to Kurt Vonnegut's 'Cat's Cradle,'" *Studii De Stiinta Si Cultura*. IX, no. 1 (32): 143-149 (2013).
- ¹⁰ James Sorensen, "From Cat's Cradle to Beat the Reaper: Getting Evidence-based Treatments into Practice in Spite of Ourselves," *Addictive Behaviors*. 36, no. 6: 597-600 (2011).

- ¹¹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
- ¹² Thomas F. Marvin, *Kurt Vonnegut: A Critical Companion* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 2.
- ¹³ Marvin, *Kurt Vonnegut: A Critical Companion*, 3.
- ¹⁴ Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1963), 12.
- ¹⁵ Marvin, *Kurt Vonnegut: A Critical Companion*, 3.
- ¹⁶ Ray Boomhower, "Kurt Vonnegut," *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*, Spring 1999.
- ¹⁷ Kurt Vonnegut, "Science Cannot be Stopped," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, April 23, 1941.
- ¹⁸ William L. Laurence, "Drama of the Atomic Bomb Found Climax in July 16 Test," *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Sep 26, 1945.
- ¹⁹ Michael Hogan, *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.
- ²⁰ Paul Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 25.
- ²¹ Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, 68.
- ²² Marvin, *Kurt Vonnegut: A Critical Companion*, 6-8.
- ²³ Ginger Strand, *The Brothers Vonnegut: Science Fiction in the House of Magic* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2015), 12.
- ²⁴ Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, 234.
- ²⁵ Yanek Mieczkowski, *Eisenhower's Sputnik Moment: The Race for Space and World Prestige* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 16.
- ²⁶ Norman Stone, *The Atlantic and Its Enemies: A History of the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 186-206.
- ²⁷ Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, 243.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 262.
- ²⁹ Ibid, 263.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 287.
- ³¹ Kim Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 131-156.
- ³² Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, 102.
- ³³ Ibid, 110.
- ³⁴ Stephen Johnson, *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 2-3.
- ³⁵ W. Morgan Thomas, "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle" in *Jumbo Comics* (New York: Fiction House, Winter 1945).
- ³⁶ *Jungle Jitters*, dir. by Friz Freleng (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros, 1938).
- ³⁷ Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, 148.
- ³⁸ Ibid, 177-178.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 103.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 285.
- ⁴¹ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films 5th Edition* (New York: Continuum, [1994] 2016), 2-4.
- ⁴² Painted by E. Brewer for Cream of Wheat, *Needlecraft Magazine*, 1921.
<<http://historyapolis.com/blog/2013/12/17/cream-of-wheat-race-and-the-birth-of-the-packaged-food-industry-in-minneapolis/>>
- ⁴³ Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, 58.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 59.
- ⁴⁵ Leverence, "Cat's Cradle and Traditional American Humor," 957.
- ⁴⁶ Dinitia Smith, "Kurt Vonnegut, a Modern Twain Dies," *International Herald Tribune*, Paris. 13 April 2007.
- ⁴⁷ Ben Schwartz, "Satirized for Your Consumption," *The Baffler* No. 27, March 2015.

An "AIDS Memory Story": The Desexualization of Gay Men's Relationships during the Marriage Equality Movement

Raymond Gandara

Introduction

In June of 1981, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released a report which described "five young, previously healthy, gay men in Los Angeles," all of whom had developed *Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia*, a rare type of lung infection, among other unusual infections. Within days of the report, the CDC had received several cases of other gay men contracting this rare pneumonia, along with other incredibly rare infections, diseases, and cancers. By the end of the year, there were a reported 270 nearly identical cases in gay men in both California and New York, leading researchers and medical professionals to begin referring to them as cases of *GRID* (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency),¹ influencing those in the medical field and the public to dismiss the beginning of the AIDS epidemic as a solely "gay disease." While HIV/AIDS did not and still does not discriminate based on sexual orientation or identification, the perception of its existence as a "gay disease" in the early years still has a legacy today. In 2015, the CDC found that gay and bisexual men are still the demographic most affected by HIV, accounting for 82% of all new infections in males and 67% of all diagnoses, with African American gay and bisexual men being the most affected, followed by white gay and bisexual men.² AIDS is still an important issue to queer people today with many interpreting the crisis in terms of a queer history, though it is a history that should be remembered regardless of one's sexual and romantic proclivities.

An issue arises, however, whenever we are being asked to remember an epidemic: how are we meant to remember it? Between 2012 and 2014, there was a resurgence of texts struggling with that very question. One such text is the novel *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* by Carol Rifka Brunt. Published in 2012, *Wolves* tells the story of fourteen-year-old June Elbus and her life following the death of her beloved Uncle Finn to AIDS in 1987. In the months that follow his death, June begins to develop a secretive and complicated relationship with Toby, Finn's boyfriend. The relationship between the two of them becomes a means of mourning and healing in the wake of Finn's death. June must balance this secret life with Finn's "special friend" with her family's prejudice towards Toby, as Finn's "murderer" for giving him HIV/AIDS; her older sister Greta's continuous bullying; and society's general prejudice towards homosexuality and AIDS in the 1980's. The relationship is further complicated by her jealousy towards Toby, the only person to have loved and been loved by Finn other than June, and the constant reminder of "the way things used to be," when Finn was alive and when Greta and her were sisters, not enemies.

This novel is not the only story asking us to remember the AIDS epidemic in some way during this time period. In 2013, the film *Dallas Buyers Club* is released, dramatizing the life of Ron Woodroof, an AIDS patient smuggling illegal drugs to prolong the life of himself and other people infected. *The Normal Heart* is released the following year, a film adaptation of activist Larry Kramer's play of the same name, dramatizing the early years of the epidemic and its impact on gay New York. While all three of these texts ask us to remember a cataclysmic event in queer and American history, we must ask this question: why should we remember these particular texts? Throughout the course of my research, I've discovered it would be extraordinarily difficult for any text to comprehensively recount the epidemic's impact in its entirety. It's a disease that preys upon people from all walks of life, all across the globe; therefore, any work of fiction will only tell part of the story and can be expected to have limitations. However, in examining these stories, consistent patterns can be observed in the portrayal of

gay men and their relationships, which suggests that these stories must be engaging with the same contemporary discourse.

To fully understand the significance of Toby and Finn's relationship in *Wolves*, one must examine their relationship in context with other 2012 depictions, when the most prominent queer issue was no longer about AIDS, but marriage. The contemporary marriage debate found a new resurgence in 2004, when President Bush had endorsed a federal marriage amendment to restrict marriage to heterosexual couples, and suffered a loss again in 2008 with the passage of Prop 8 in California, banning same-sex marriage in the state. By the publication of *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* in 2012, the movement for marriage equality saw the "tides of change" swell in their direction. In May of 2012, President Obama had become the first sitting president to publicly endorse same-sex marriage in an interview with ABC News. In 2013, a key provision of the Defense of Marriage Act was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, as was Prop 8 in California.³ On the pop culture front, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' "Same Love" is released in 2012, a rap song advocating on behalf of same-sex marriage, gaining unofficial anthem status, and going on to win a Grammy music award in 2014. At this time, the public discourse was fixated on a queer issue different from that of the 1980's, but in some ways, the well-intentioned marriage equality movement can adversely influence our memory of the AIDS epidemic.

The goal of this paper is not to provide a comprehensive history of AIDS in the 1980's. Rather, my aim is to examine stories that in some way attempt to *remember* the epidemic, what I call "AIDS memory stories," and to examine the demographic perceived to be the most affected by the epidemic: white gay and bisexual men. Specifically, this paper will be exploring the ways in which relationships between gay men are represented in these AIDS memory stories, stories which are all published/released during the same time. It is my contention that these AIDS memory stories depict gay male relationships in a simplified light, which corresponds with rhetoric implied or directly espoused in the media during the marriage equality movement. Moreover, my goal is to prove that the focus upon gay marriage in the public discourse implicitly privileges desexualized, traditional relationships at the expense of marginalizing and silencing gay male sexuality. The primary AIDS memory story that I will begin with is *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*, whose marginalization of gay men's sexuality is in many parts foundational, due to the writing approach taken by the author.

Production, Reception, and "Negative Space"

The two major elements in Carol Rifka Brunt's writing approach that contribute to this aforementioned marginalization are emotion-centered writing and the use of a teen female protagonist. Firstly, Brunt is not primarily concerned with the authenticity of an AIDS history, but with connection and emotional authenticity. She says so herself when she describes her "mission as a novelist [is] to use the novel to emotionally connect with readers." In order to satisfy this goal, within *Wolves* specifically, Brunt argues that the "emotional arc" of the story had to be "as important, if not more important, than the arc of the plot. The event happens and then the emotional response to that is where the story really lies."⁴ An emotion-centered writing approach like this oversimplifies the subject matter. What happens to those characters or what those characters engage in (i.e. the plot) is, therefore, secondary to what those characters *feel*, generalized perhaps to "emotionally connect" with a wider readership.

For Brunt, the telling of an AIDS memory story that explores gay male sexuality falls to the periphery in favor of the complex emotions that inhabit her main characters. Her characters are not required to be fully fleshed out or accurate, so long as they explore a generalized emotional truth that readers can connect with, which lowers the stakes of her writing. In her mind, these lowered stakes are just a matter of convenience in utilizing a young female protagonist to narrate an AIDS memory story. This is exemplified by Brunt's belief that "since the book is narrated by a 14-year-old, I had the luxury of not including things she wouldn't have known."⁵ The parameters set by the young protagonist are coupled with Brunt's approach to that 1980's AIDS context: "As a writer, AIDS is your dream disease because there are so many emotions attached that aren't there with other diseases – if you get cancer, it's nobody's fault. With AIDS, there is blame, guilt, shame, and embarrassment."⁶ Since the approach that

Brunt is constructing for herself is intentionally emotion-focused, her appropriation of the AIDS epidemic will not necessarily be concerned with the portrayal of her infected characters, so long as their emotions remain interesting. While this approach problematically oversimplifies AIDS and the people impacted by the disease, it is apparently well executed, as the book's reviews suggest that readers were picking up on and were fascinated by those tailored emotions.

It's clear that Carol Rifka Brunt was interested in telling a story that was both emotion-centered and sexually-decentered, and the reviews of *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* confirm this storytelling. Reviews reacted positively to the novel, highlighting its supposed appeal to Young Adult readers with its sibling and parental strife, and the novel's emotionally-charged narrative – the primary emotions being love and friendship. In one review, for example, *Wolves* is described as telling "the story of a confused (is there any other kind?) teenager."⁷ The same review goes on to claim the novel is about "sisters, art, and loyalty."⁷ Another review wagers, "the subtle insight on sibling rivalry and the examination of love make for a poignant debut."⁸ Another claims, "Brunt's unusual novel will strike a chord with teens who march to the beat of their own drum."⁹ All reviews make reference to June's "gay uncle Finn" and her secret friendship with Toby as well,¹⁰ which fortunately suggests that the reviews are aware of the gay characters in the story and are not trying to actively erase their significance. However, not included in the reviews are any direct mention to sexuality beyond referring to Finn as "gay" or to Toby as "his lover" or them having AIDS. This absence speaks to the deliberate exclusion of those dimensions of Finn and Toby's relationship, achieved through Brunt's focus on the more generalized aspects of these individual characters, such as their emotions or how they impact the emotions of the protagonist.

The exclusion of such dimensions perhaps corresponds with Brunt's belief that June won't need to explore things she "wouldn't have known." Additionally, we can't realistically expect June to be keen on exploring her uncle's sexuality as Finn is her uncle. However, that only highlights that Brunt conveniently avoids discussing sexuality in her novel, using the protagonist as an excuse for that avoidance. This is incredibly ironic since June tells the reader to explore things which are invisible, secret, or unclear. Before Finn had passed away, he had painted a portrait of both June and Greta called "Tell the Wolves I'm Home." Later in the novel, when Toby gives June some of Finn's old sketches of the painting (at the artist's dying request), upon examination June realizes what Finn had accomplished in the painting:

I came to a sketch where the space between my arm and Greta's arm, the shape of the place between us, had been darkened in. The negative space. That's what Finn called it. He was always trying to get me to understand the negative space . . . I saw that it made the shape of what looked like a dog's head. Or, no – of course, it was a wolf's head, tilted up, mouth open and howling . . . I wished I could let Finn know that I saw what he'd done. That I knew he'd put that secret animal right between Greta and me!¹¹

Both Finn and Brunt are asking us to explore that negative space, to search for the hidden meaning of the painting, exploring and solving that "secret animal." The reason I find this tremendously ironic is because Brunt believes the only thing in the negative space of this painting, and thus the novel, are the hostile emotions and the animosity between June and Greta, but she ultimately gives us the language to critique her. We are only expected to examine that "secret animal" of the girls' relationship, not the near invisible and secret sexuality excluded from the novel. Brunt foregrounds the young adult element, the emotionally-saturated sibling rivalry, and establishes that these are the worthwhile components floating in the negative space. To understand how this positioning effectively marginalizes gay men's sexuality, we must pull our focus back to see the broader cultural picture.

Marriage Equality: Domestic and Desexualized Narratives in the Public Discourse

Tell the Wolves I'm Home is just one story among many that depicts gay men's relationships during this time, and likewise, these other stories are packaged in a particular way

to get a certain message across. In order to get the country on board with same-sex marriage, organizations that spearheaded the marriage equality movement like Human Rights Campaign (HRC) or Freedom to Marry had to be conscious of the way that gay relationships were presented in the media. In the same way that Carol Rifka Brunt positioned her readers to focus on the emotional complexity of nonsexual relationships, these media representations during the marriage equality movement deliberately positioned audiences to view the nonsexual aspects of gay relationships. As Leigh Moscovitz notes in her book, *The Battle for Marriage*, since these media outlets were segments of a "larger hegemonic power structure, marginal groups [had to] conform to the rules of the dominant culture to gain *visibility*, often mistaken as *acceptance*."¹² This hegemonic dynamic is achieved in the novel through the use of June as the protagonist. Were the novel written from the perspective of a young gay nephew, perhaps there would've been more room to discuss a commonality in same-sex yearnings, which may only appeal to a gay readership and a few progressive readers. By using June, however, the audience is broadened to allow straight audiences to believe that they are meaningfully participating with gay culture. This is transgressive to a degree by showcasing a marginalized story, but the use of a straight female protagonist misses the opportunity to actively engage with gay thoughts, specifically regarding same-sex sexuality, and instead settles for passively witnessing gayness through June's perspective. Additionally, in order to better gratify these audiences, not just in *Wolves*, but the broader media landscape, these depictions sought to normalize "deviant" sexualities by desexualizing and domesticating them.

In a 2004 episode of *60 Minutes* entitled "Marry Me," for example, Moscovitz notes the episode "goes to great lengths to present the face of gay marriage as one that is palatable to a mainstream heteronormative audience." That more "palatable" representation is achieved through depicting an older lesbian couple doing "normal," mundane domestic activities: "preparing meals, eating and talking at the dinner table, and walking the dog around the block." This normalized gay couple is then juxtaposed to Castro Street in San Francisco, a famously gay neighborhood meant to represent the former's antithesis and the "stereotypical depictions of gay life – wild, sexually explicit, urban, youthful, alternative, and transgressive."¹³ The desired effect here is to destroy the link between the stereotypical media image of "wild and sexually explicit" from gay people, which is positioned as being a setback to the goal of portraying gay people as "just normal folks." The presentation of the former, however, makes room for a new domestic and nonsexual gay couple that can pursue the traditional institution of marriage, which straight audiences can relate to.

We can see this type of distancing take place within *Wolves* as well, as June bemoans the "typical AIDS piece" in the news, complaining,

As usual, they started out with footage of some sweaty nightclub in the city with a bunch of gay men dancing around in stupid leather outfits . . . It would've been nice if for once they showed some guys sitting in their living rooms drinking tea and talking about art or movies or something. If they showed that, then maybe people would say, "Oh, okay, that's not so strange."¹⁴

These are spaces that are deliberately gay, free, intimate, and often sexual, but our young female protagonist doesn't have access to those spaces, nor does she want to see those spaces on the news. While that *60 Minutes* episode may have aired eight years before this novel's publication, they're still reinforcing the same binaries between those "strange" and "sexually explicit" gay male spaces, like "some sweaty nightclub" or Castro Street, versus those "normal," mundane, and domestic spaces. Those very images that June prefers to see: "drinking tea or talking about art or movies" could easily be added to that *60 Minutes* episode's list of mundane activities. Both examples effectively push that sexual dimension off to the margins as other or "strange," in favor of a sanitized domestic image. This essay does not assume either representation to be more desirable or more valid an expression of gayness, but both the media's discourse and the novel's foregrounding of desexualized gay men clearly privileges one over the other. Sanitizing the gay male's image through domesticity assumes that those "stereotypical" images are invalid or less than. Moreover, domesticity is not the only way we see these images being sanitized.

In the novel, when June reflects upon President Reagan's first public address on the AIDS crisis, she simplifies the President's meaning to a moratorium on teenage sex. While this response may have proved too alarmist for other teens, June herself is not altogether bothered by the notion since she herself believes sex to be overrated. She contemplates,

Why did sex have to be so important? Why couldn't people live together, spend their whole lives together, just because they liked each other's company? Just because they liked each other more than they liked anyone else in the whole world? If you found a person like that you wouldn't have to have sex.¹⁵

While at this point we already understand June to be completely disinterested in sex, the type of relationship she is depicting here is that of a "one true love." *Tell the Wolves I'm Home*, as articulated before, is a novel that is deliberately focused on exploring these different types of loving relationships and, in many ways, could be considered a "love story" as much as it is a "grief story" or an "AIDS story." The rhetoric of the marriage equality movement, too, is interested in telling a certain type of "love story," and does so for a specific purpose, as one representative from HRC put it: "We need the average voter and average American to think of our [gay] relationships the same way they think of their own: you get married because you loved the person you want to get married to. That's why you get married."¹⁶ The effect of this statement is not just to highlight the importance of "love" to marriage, but to make the case that gay love and straight love are one in the same, which is the precise message of Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' song, "Same Love."

Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' 2012 single became the first rap song to make the Top 40 list that advocated on behalf of marriage equality. Not only was it hailed as a "gay marriage anthem," but the duo even donated some of the song's proceeds to the Washington United for Marriage organization, which fought to pass Referendum 74, legalizing same-sex marriage in the state of Washington, where the duo is based.¹⁷ The song condemns right-wing conservatives, conversion therapy, homophobia in hip-hop, bullying, and political apathy, while making a passionate appeal for everyone to stand with him and others on behalf of the movement: "No law's going to change us – we have to change us / Whatever god you believe in, we come from the same one / Strip away the fear, underneath it's all the same love / About time that we raised up!"¹⁸ The song's passionate plea certainly resonated with the marriage equality zeitgeist and the supposed "tides of change." However, it also features this problematic undercurrent that reoccurs throughout the movement: the idea that gay love and straight love, "underneath it's all the same love." What "same love" rhetoric attempts to do is erase the differences among us to illustrate that we're all equal, which may sound altruistic, but in erasing difference, you also oversimplify a person and erase what makes them unique. In this case, if gayness and straightness are defined as same-sex and different-sex romantic and/or sexual attraction, respectively, "same love" rhetoric ignores sexual attraction to appeal to one generalized idea of love or romantic attraction. To promote unity through some proposed universal feeling, it desexualizes complex relationships and human beings. Even if someone wasn't familiar with this particular "gay anthem" and the idea it espouses, "same love" rhetoric and its normalizing effects can be heard broadcasted worldwide from the Oval Office.

President Barack Obama's tenure was filled with a history of firsts and one of those milestones he hit was the "first sitting president to endorse same-sex marriage" in May of 2012.¹⁹ The significance of this milestone gave the marriage equality movement hope and motivation to continue more fervently with their cause. This motivation was further articulated in President Obama's Second Inaugural speech when he proclaimed, "Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law, for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well."²⁰ This idea of "equal love" or "same love" speaks to the President's purpose in his inaugural speech: to unite a divided country. While "same love" rhetoric is altruistic, it still speaks to Moscovitz' initial point that to make gays palatable to a straight audience, they need to be packaged as normal and relatable to that audience. Instead of asking straight people to sup-

port gay couples and marriage because any American has the right to express their respective love and sexuality, this rhetoric only goes so far as to ask straight people to support "normal people," who love the same way they do. Not only is the rhetoric love-centered, not only is it normalizing, but it's a sleight of hand that gives the illusion of acceptance by oversimplifying a marginalized group. If the public discourse on gay men's relationships is meant to redeem them to straight audiences, it's worth examining how the redemption tale works in other AIDS memory stories.

The Redemption Tale and *Dallas Buyers Club*

The redemption tale is often used as a great tool to portray marginalized identities in the positive light they deserve. The arc of such stories moves from a stereotypical, prejudiced, or preconceived notion of what those identities are towards what they are in reality (or at least that's the hope). The very act of remembering the AIDS crisis and the gay men afflicted by the disease is in many ways a type of redemption tale. Throughout *Wolves*, for example, not only must June's secret relationship with Toby traverse the vilification of gay men and AIDS in the media and general public, but she must also navigate the prejudice of her family towards Toby. Greta is constantly referring to Toby in passing as Finn's "murderer," and June's mother, Danni, reveals that Finn's relationship with Toby was kept a secret from the girls because of an ultimatum she presented him years ago: "If he wanted a relationship with his nieces, he would have to keep Toby out of it. You can't just take up with a derelict . . . You can't have everything. That's something Finn never understood."²¹ If Danni projects upon the family the image that Toby shouldn't mix with her daughters, then June's continued relationship with Toby foreshadows those redemption tale elements. This continuous vilification of gay men as "murderers" or "derelicts" creates a wedge between individual nonsexual relationships (Danni and Finn, June and Greta, June and Toby), so the redemption tale comes when that wedge is metaphorically removed from that "negative space."

While this redemption tale attempts to undo homophobic perceptions of gay men during the AIDS crisis, Brunt comments in an interview that this vilifying from Danni is not out of some general intolerance towards "Finn's homosexuality, lifestyle, and love for Toby." She states that these homophobic actions came from her intense feelings of jealousy towards Finn for travelling the world as a famous painter and "to redress the sense of abandonment she felt when Finn left her behind all those years ago."²² This certainly points to Brunt's particularized focus on emotionally-charged relationships, but this redemption tale fails to address that homophobia is not just prejudice towards a marginal group, but towards a marginal group's *stigmatized sexuality*. Since this novel sections away sexuality to the periphery, presenting this type of redemption tale only serves to redeem the image of desexualized and, therefore, "harmless" gay men. Furthermore, as seen in the previous section, the redemption tale is meant to redeem the image of gay men to non-gay people within the hegemonic discourse. The image is packaged in such a way for the gratification of heterosexual audiences and readership. Unfortunately, one-dimensional views of gay male relationships, and the LGBT community as a whole, are not just the subject of this one novel, but are perpetuated in other AIDS memory stories as well.

The 2013 film, *Dallas Buyers Club*, is another one of these AIDS memory stories that suffers from this trend of one-dimensionally packaging gay stories for a heterosexual audience, and it too follows the redemption tale arc. The main character, Ron Woodroof, is a heterosexual, bull-riding, homophobic electrician who contracts AIDS in 1980's Texas (or at the very least, that's how he is portrayed – more on this in a moment). In the beginning, Ron is understood to be the classic homophobe of the time, reacting with a generalized disgust towards everyone he perceives to be gay or other. For example, when Ron unsuccessfully tries to procure a prescription for unapproved drugs from Dr. Eve Saks, she suggests going to a support group for other AIDS patients, to which Ron incredulously responds, "I'm dying and you're telling me to go get a hug from a bunch of faggots?"²³ Additionally, whenever he interacts with his *Dallas Buyers Club* business partner, the pseudo-transgender character, Rayon,²⁴ Ron continuously insults his intelligence and belittles him for being transgender. As the film progresses, however, and Ron faces multiple near death experiences; fights to keep his buyers'

club operating amidst legal pressure from the FDA; and suffers an emotional breakdown when Rayon passes away, we see Ron's homophobia gradually soften and erode to help these gay people dying of AIDS. The redemption arc, therefore, is the conversion of Ron Woodroof from homophobe to homophile, fighting to help save these people and himself with these illegally obtained pharmaceuticals.

The film was hailed as a success and took home three Academy Awards, but not without hitting controversial snags along the way. Having been based on a real life Ron Woodroof, *Dallas Buyers Club* appeared to have taken some artistic liberties with the depiction of its protagonist. Several friends of the real Ron Woodroof had applauded the film's depiction of the Texan as a hero, but were taken aback by his depiction as a virulent homophobe. One of the film's screenwriters, Craig Borten, who interviewed Ron in person shortly before his death, claimed that "[Ron] was as racist and homophobic as they come."²⁵ This testimony contrasts with that of Ron's primary care physician, Dr. Steven Pounders, who stated, "I never witnessed any homophobia in the time I knew him from 1988 through his death in 1992." He later goes on to say, "Brenda, his ex-wife," – absent from the film – "stated that he was bisexual." A correspondent from *Dallas Life* magazine who interviewed Ron also corroborated that "he was not homophobic." Thirdly, another close friend of Ron's, Penny Krispin, who was also his nurse, expressed shock at the portrayal: "I read they were portraying him as a gay-hating straight guy, and I was blown away. That was not the Ron Woodroof I knew. Ron was one of my gay patients. I never knew anyone who thought Ron was straight."²⁶

It's unclear whether the screenwriters had the right of it or if people who knew Ron personally just didn't know him well enough. Regardless, the film sought to capitalize on this particular redemption narrative, perhaps because it better fits into that heteronormative media structure discussed earlier. In a separate interview, Dr. Pounders admits that this particular homophobic manifestation of Ron Woodroof "makes for a better story,"²⁷ and if it's the "better story" that filmmakers are after, we need to consider who it is the better story is for. A film where a possible gay or bisexual person is swapped for a straight bigot turned hero, would just serve to gratify the straight people in the audience who feel more enlightened or more progressive. Additionally, many people within the LGBT community have taken issue with Jared Leto's stereotypical portrayal of a transgender woman: "Why, she's a sad-sack, clothes-obsessed, constantly flirting transgender drug addict prostitute, of course,"²⁸ not to mention, Leto's Golden Globe's acceptance speech for the character was completely tone-deaf and trivialized the struggles of transgender people.²⁹ Telling stories with one-dimensional characters such as these, or swapping out possibly gay or bisexual men to tell a redemption story, is to silence the voice of that marginalized group within. It masquerades itself as redeeming homosexuality, but only serves to redeem heterosexual audiences to their own egos.

Correct Relationships, the Marginalized Sexuality, and *The Normal Heart*

With the marriage equality movement captivating the public discourse in regards to the depiction of gay relationships, it is important to examine what sort of relationships are depicted as superior to others. It has been my focus thus far to analyze how the domestic and desexualized presentations of gay relationships are foregrounded in comparison to the sexual dimension of those same sort of relationships, which is otherwise cast off to the margins or undiscussed. I'd like to now turn my attention towards marriage itself, its implications, and the relationships that resemble it. Marriage as an institution, until the landmark *Obergefell v. Hodges* case in June 2015, was seen as the ultimate way of expressing heterosexual love. Now made to include homosexual amalgamations, it is seen as the last threshold to pass to prove the worth of one's relationship, gay or straight. The reasoning is that marriage is perceived as this lifelong commitment to one other person, one whom you may desire to start a family with. Ultimate love, commitment, monogamy, family – these are the principles that are perceived to make marriage superior to all other relationships. So, what does that mean for *all other relationships*?

Part of the discriminatory rub of denying gay couples the right to marry, pre-*Obergefell*, is that despite being denied many other benefits of marriage, their "highest" relationships will hit a ceiling that straight couples will not, suggesting a secondary citizenship status. But even for couples that don't marry, that are in loving, committed, and monogamous relation-

ships, they are still seen as superior to any other form of gay relationship, and that is a type of marginalization that remains largely undiscussed: both in the culture and in these AIDS memory stories. Sonu Bedi articulates this issue of marriage and monogamy privileging in his analysis of the *Obergefell* case. Justice Anthony Kennedy's rhetoric, representing the majority opinion, according to Bedi, suggests the government "[confers] the morally special status of marriage," and thereby, "marginalizes those who are not married."³⁰ Bedi continues to problematize the case by claiming this rhetoric "essentialized the gay identity." Such rhetoric sets up false binaries between the married and unmarried, implying the unmarried to be "defective, failing to live up to their essential nature as human beings to marry someone they love."³¹

The implications of this case do not serve to challenge the "morally superior status" of marriage or similarly loving, committed, monogamous relationships. It perpetuates the imperative to be in these types of relationships, and by extending this institution to gays and lesbians, it "essentializes" the pursuit of these relationships to the gay identity. In other words, to be "authentically" gay, the case implies you need to be pursuing these types of relationships. Such a heavy-handed imperative leaves ample room to foreground the importance of these relationships, while simultaneously continuing to marginalize that sexual dimension – this time, making it about the gay identity.

The implications of this case and the marriage equality movement as a whole present narratives that propose there is a "more correct" or "more authentic" way to be gay: that loving, monogamous gays are better than sexual and promiscuous gays, which is the exact tension explored in *The Normal Heart*. This 2014 film follows the story of Ned Weeks, who is meant to represent activist Larry Kramer (who also wrote the play of the same name and the film's screenplay). The film is set in the early years of the epidemic (1981-84), depicting the panic, the death, and the activist's frustration with the otherwise silent and uncaring government. This leads Ned and company to create Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), an organization to support the gay community in New York. Ned uses GMHC's platform not only to rage against the government, but also to rage against the very men he's trying to "stand up for." The film opens on Fire Island, a notorious hotspot for gay men in New York to party and have copious amounts of sex, often with multiple partners. While everyone is seen enjoying themselves, Ned is distant and at times disgusted with what he sees. As a controversial writer, he recently wrote a novel disparaging gay male promiscuity, claiming, "Having so much sex makes finding love impossible."³² Additionally, Ned can be seen walking through a park late at night where he spies several men engaging in sex with one another, a scene played with ominous music and with a look on Ned's face that suggests he's been traumatized. Ned's attitudes towards casual sex are what turns many people off to the film in the LGBT community, as articulated by Charles O'Malley when he expressed his disinterest: "What infuriates me about [*The Normal Heart*] is its brazen sex negativity and singular drive to belittle a queer community that Kramer clearly could not stand, and the shameless emotional manipulation."³³

The film, however, does not go so far as to suggest that *all* sex is bad, but that Fire Island-esque promiscuity is undesirable. While Ned rails against other gays for being recklessly sexual during this uncertain time, hypocritically, Ned goes on a date with Felix, a closeted columnist for the *Times*, and has loving and passionate sex with him. Although this film does show explicit sex amongst gay men, unlike these other AIDS memory stories, it does so to problematize one type of sex and gratify the other. Ned is searching for that same type of relationship that is privileged in the contemporary discourse, suggesting that the sex he engages in is more permissible because it's with someone he loves. Compartmentalizing gay male sexuality does not uplift the expression as a whole, but the film's protagonist does not care. Ned's hypocritical dogma is exactly what ends up kicking him out of GMHC. When the other members unanimously vote him out of the organization, they cite that "after years of liberation, you helped make sex dirty again for us – terrible and forbidden." Not only does the film continue to engage with this problematized view of sexuality in the discourse, but it directly engages with the marriage issue in its final scene, where Felix's doctor informally marries Ned and Felix on the latter's deathbed. The privileging of marriage and relationships that resemble marriage (loving, committed, monogamous, and family-oriented) clearly bleeds over into other AIDS memory stories. Ned in some ways is not unlike June in *Wolves*, both of whom view gay

male sexuality with some disdain; view "stereotypical" images of gay men in the media as inaccurate – even if they are actual gay men; and ultimately find love-centered relationships to be superior to any other form of relationship. Even though Ned is seen pursuing a monogamously contained love and sexuality, while *Wolves* never depicts gay sex, they both infer and reinforce this superiority.

Although we don't see sex ever take place, we are taken to a site of sexuality when June sneaks into Finn's bedroom unbeknownst to Toby and climbs into their bed. June ruminates, "This is where Finn and Toby had sex. This might be the scene of the crime . . . Private. This was what private meant."³⁴ June never returns to the bedroom, perhaps overwhelmed by the sexual gravity of the space, but it is the only time where June confronts the idea of gay male sex when she is otherwise opposed to it. We are not informed as to whether Finn and Toby were frequent Fire Island patrons, which certainly speaks to the intentional scope of the protagonist, but when the novel does make reference to sexuality, it is not situated in places June would consider "stereotypical," like "some sweaty nightclub" or Fire Island, for that matter. Sexuality is situated in a safe, domestic space, which reinforces that Finn and Toby are one of these "normal" or "correct" gay couples. Another piece of evidence that the two are exhibiting "correct" gayness, as implied by the marriage equality discourse, is articulated by June's father, when he reveals to June why Danni made Finn her godfather:

I think maybe your mother thought making Finn your godfather was one way to keep him. A tie to hold him down. I think Finn saw it differently. Like maybe he and Toby would be godparents together. A way to settle down. A way to have their own strange kind of family.³⁵

Had Finn and Toby survived, this passage suggests the couple would have been willing to pursue the exact relationships privileged by the discourse, one that is: loving, committed, monogamous, and family-oriented. In combination with the circulating marriage equality rhetoric, the general readership could ultimately claim a higher level of empathy by encouraging characters they perceive as normal to pursue these relationships, which only continues to leave those "other" types of relationships undiscussed and marginalized.

Conclusion

The stories we tell ourselves about gay male relationships during the marriage equality movement all contend with a publicity problem. They are carefully tailored, altered, and positioned depictions meant to appeal to the heteronormative structures and audiences receiving them, and in doing so, the organizations that package these couples in such a way hope that the desexualized couple will be more palatable to straight America. *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* is no exception to this cultural phenomenon. By only affording glimpses into Finn and Toby's relationship through the eyes of a sex-repulsed, fourteen-year-old narrator, one who is also related to one of the men, author Carol Rifka Brunt conveniently leaves their sexual relationship undiscussed. The continued marginalization of a stigmatized sexuality in these AIDS memory stories, ones attempting to redeem the image of gayness to heterosexual audiences, only functions as lip service, an illusion that straight America has done their part for gay America and gay history. Even in stories that seemingly have nothing to do with same-sex marriage, we see this repackaging, positioning, and sanitizing take place. To use Leigh Moscovitz' words, it confuses visibility with acceptance, but if you don't discuss the meaningful aspects of what makes a person gay (same-sex romantic and/or sexual attraction), are you actually accepting that person or just the simplified version of them?

References

- ¹ "A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," *AIDS.gov*, last modified 2016.
- ² "CDC Fact Sheet: Today's HIV/AIDS Epidemic," *CDC.gov*, 2016.
- ³ Michelangelo Signorile, "The Top LGBT Political Moments of the Year," *The Huffington Post*, December 21, 2012.

- ⁴ Carol Rifka Brunt, “An Interview with Bookpage,” *Carolrifkabrunt.com*.
- ⁵ Brunt, “An Interview with Bookpage,” *Carolrifkabrunt.com*.
- ⁶ Brunt, “Learning to Write Through the Tears,” *Irish Independent*, (2012).
- ⁷ Sara Nelson, “Love, Loss, and What She Learned,” *O: The Oprah Magazine*, 13 (2015): 106.
- ⁸ “Tell the Wolves I’m Home,” *Kirkus Reviews*, 18 (2012): 1316.
- ⁹ Kristine Huntley, “Tell the Wolves I’m Home,” *Booklist*, 108 (2012): 18.
- ¹⁰ Joy Humphrey, “Brunt, Carol Rifka. Tell the Wolves I’m Home,” *Library Journal* 137, (2012): 88-89; Huntley, *Booklist*, 18; Kirkus, 1316; “Tell the Wolves I’m Home,” *Publishers Weekly*, 259 (2012): 33; Nelson, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, 106.
- ¹¹ Brunt, *Tell the Wolves I’m Home* (New York: Dial Press, 2012). 114-115.
- ¹² Leigh Moscovitz, *The Battle Over Marriage: Gay Rights Activism through the Media* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 2013), 12.
- ¹³ Moscovitz, *The Battler Over Marriage*, 62-63.
- ¹⁴ Brunt, *Wolves*, 137.
- ¹⁵ Brunt, *Wolves*, 222.
- ¹⁶ Moscovitz, *The Battle Over Marriage*, 48.
- ¹⁷ James C. McKinley, “Stars Align for a Gay Marriage Anthem,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2013.
- ¹⁸ Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, “Same Love,” *The Heist*, Macklemore LLC, 2012.
- ¹⁹ President Obama, interview by Robin Roberts, *ABC News*, May 9, 2012.
- ²⁰ President Obama, “Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama,” *ObamaWhitehouse.archives.org*, given January 21, 2013.
- ²¹ Brunt, *Wolves*, 167.
- ²² Brunt, *Wolves*, 367. Brunt’s interview with Elin Hilderbrand is published as supplemental reading material in the back of this edition of the novel.
- ²³ *Dallas Buyers Club*, dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, (2013), Film.
- ²⁴ I describe Rayon as a “pseudo-transgender character” because there is much controversy behind Jared Leto’s presentation of the character. It is unclear whether the character is meant to be transgender as that terminology isn’t used. Additionally, I refer to Rayon using masculine pronouns (he/him) as those are the ones used to describe him in the film. This is another point of contention as to whether Rayon is a trans female or a “man pretending to be a woman.”
- ²⁵ Claude Brodesser, “Ball’ Helmer to Direct AIDS Drama ‘Dallas,’” *Variety*, March 7, 2002.
- ²⁶ Forrest Wickman, “Was the Hero of *Dallas Buyers Club* Actually Bisexual?” *Slate*, January 17, 2014.
- ²⁷ Arnold Wayne Jones, “‘Dallas Buyers Club’ may play fast-and-loose with facts, but those who lived it say its portrait of a man driven to save lives during the AIDS crisis is just right,” *Dallas Voice*, November 8, 2013.
- ²⁸ Steve Friess, “Don’t Applaud Jared Leto’s Transgender ‘Mammy,’” *Time*, February 27, 2014.
- ²⁹ Meredith Bennett-Smith, “6 Reasons Not Everyone in the LGBT Community is Celebrating Jared Leto’s Oscar,” *Mic*, March 3, 2014.
- ³⁰ Sonu Bedi, “*Obergfell* and the Liberal Case Against Civil Marriage,” In *Beyond Same-Sex Marriage: Perspectives on Marital Possibilities*, edited by Ronald C. Den Otter, (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 15.
- ³¹ Bedi., In *Beyond Same-Sex Marriage*, 18.
- ³² *The Normal Heart*, dir. by Ryan Murphy, (2014), Film. Larry Kramer also published a controversial novel entitled *Faggots* in 1978. This novel also took a disparaging view of casual sex and gay male promiscuity.
- ³³ Charles O’Malley, “Why I’m Not Excited for ‘The Normal Heart,’ And It Troubles Me to the Core that Many Are,” *IndieWire*, May 7, 2014.
- ³⁴ Brunt, *Wolves*, 146.
- ³⁵ Brunt, *Wolves*, 196-197.

Zoot Suit: A Correction to American Public Memory

Francine Rios

It was a death that would shake Los Angeles.

In the summer of 1942, a young Mexican American man walking home from a party wound up murdered near the Sleepy Lagoon, a swimming hole for Mexican Americans. Nearly two dozen young Mexican American men, known as pachucos for their preference of the zoot suit fashion, had been marked as suspects in the crime. They stood trial, with the majority found guilty. The press portrayed these young men as criminal youth, and marked their get-ups as proof. The public image of pachucos deteriorated after the Sleepy Lagoon trial, and this murder was eventually labeled as the genesis of the Zoot Suit Riots that broke out the following year in the streets of Los Angeles.¹

Nearly forty years later the infamous murder and trial that followed would find new life in the lore of Los Angeles. Playwright Luis Valdez created a work inspired by these moments in history, but it was not the version found in the newspapers. Valdez recreated the events, seeking to protest the narrative of the pachuco as a violent criminal who instigated riots with patriotic servicemen. The play debuted to audiences in 1978 at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, and was an instant hit. The play reached such a height of acclaim that it debuted on Broadway March 25, 1979, marking the first time Chicanos would perform on America’s most famous stage.² Expectations were high, but the ultimate fate of the play in New York proved disappointing. Critics hated the play, and as scholar Ashley Lucas explains, some even found the work “incomprehensible.” Even Valdez’s acting troupe, Teatro Campesino, packed up after about five weeks in New York.³

What caused the play to be so beloved in Los Angeles, and loathed in New York? If the play intended to offer a counter-history to Sleepy Lagoon and the Zoot Suit Riots, why did Valdez keep his focus on the fashion? After all, the play is titled *Zoot Suit*, which only feeds into the historic fixation on the clothing itself. Building on the ideas of Jorge Huerta and Roy Eric Xavier, I will argue that *Zoot Suit* is not just a reimagining of history, it is also a corrective to the nation’s public memory about Sleepy Lagoon and the Zoot Suit Riots. In addition, by emphasizing both the pachuco fashion and the pachuco spirit in his play, Valdez gave momentum to an otherwise simmering Chicano movement. Finally, *Zoot Suit* was a means of recognizing the contributions that Chicanos and Mexican Americans made to American culture, even if mainstream society did not readily embrace the message.

I will begin with an explanation of the actual historical events of the Sleepy Lagoon murder and trial, and the Zoot Suit Riots that followed, and how these events square with Valdez’s retelling. Next, I will provide a look into Luis Valdez’s personal life, his groundbreaking contributions to Chicano theater, and what led him to write *Zoot Suit*. By providing exact evidence from the play, I will then explain how *Zoot Suit* serves as a corrective to public memory, while also encouraging the Chicano movement on spiritual and material levels. From there, I will put *Zoot Suit* in conversation with another popular play, *Grease*. By putting these works side-by-side, I will explore the similarities between them, building on the scholarship of Ashley Lucas and Travis Malone. Lucas compares *Zoot Suit* to the Latino play *Short Eyes*, and Malone compares *Grease* the play to its big screen counterpart, *Grease* the film. Considering their work, I will put forth explanations as to why *Zoot Suit* failed to resonate with audiences on Broadway in the same way *Grease* did. I will end by explaining how all of these factors work to make Valdez’s play a piece of timeless cultural significance.

Separating “fact and fantasy” in the Sleepy Lagoon trial, the Zoot Suit Riots, and *Zoot Suit*

The events of the Sleepy Lagoon murder occurred on the night of August 1, 1942, near what is now the present-day city of Bell. A large birthday celebration at the Williams Ranch near a reservoir and swimming hole, known to the community as the Sleepy Lagoon, would eventually end in a fight between attendees at the party, and several young individuals from a neighborhood known as 38th Street. What is known, and what scholar Eduardo Obregon Pagan skillfully pieces together, is that the kids from 38th Street likely were not the ones behind Diaz's murder. Pagan suggests that two friends murdered Diaz when they left the party together, shortly before the 38th Street kids arrived. Those two friends, however, were never brought to trial. Instead, the young people of 38th Street, mostly the young men and a few of the young women, were criminalized both by the judiciary system and the opinion of the public, which was heavily shaped by the press. Pagan notes, as do other scholars, that the newspapers of the day did not help the plight of the pachucos.ii Instead, journalists sensationalized the Sleepy Lagoon trial, and reinforced the perception of danger already attributed to these youths. In all twenty-two of the 38th Street neighborhood's youth stood trial. Of those twenty-two, three meet a guilty verdict of first-degree murder and conspiracy, being sentenced to life in prison at San Quentin. Nine meet a charge of second-degree murder, five were found guilty of assault, and five were acquitted in the murder. A group called the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee was paramount in highlighting a lack of evidence, resulting in the sentences being overturned in 1944.. To this day, it is unknown who is responsible for murdering Jose Diaz.⁴

The results of the trial contributed to ongoing racial tensions that manifested into the Zoot Suit Riots, which broke nearly a year later in the streets of Los Angeles. For about one week in June 1943, sailors and servicemen sought out pachucos, some as young as 12, in public spaces. They would attack these young men, rip the clothes from their bodies, and in some cases would force them to stand in their underwear and watch their clothing go up in flames. The riots finally ended when the city was declared off-limits to sailors. There were no deaths in the riots, but there were many injuries, and about 94 civilian arrests, compared to just two servicemen.⁵

When it comes to the play itself, Valdez's version of these events is a mix of "fact and fantasy," as his main character El Pachuco informs the audience from the onset. The play, which debuted at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in 1978, tells the story of the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots through the eyes of (the fictional) Henry Reyna. Reyna is the main pachuco on trial for the death of (the also fictional) Jose Williams. Reyna did not actually commit the murder, but because police already believe him to be the leader of the so-called 38th Street Gang, he and three of his friends were automatically suspects. The play acknowledges that there were indeed 22 pachucos brought to trial; however Valdez mainly focuses on Reyna's experience. In keeping with actual historical events, the pachucos on trial are convicted despite a lack of evidence and a clear courtroom bias against them. While they are in jail, a group called the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee forms and eventually gets the pachucos exonerated of their convictions.

Valdez spent a considerable amount of time researching the actual events for the play, poring over some six thousand primary documents on Sleepy Lagoon and the riots housed at UCLA's Chicano Library.⁶ When it comes to the characters, Valdez recreated many of them based on mixing names and traits of the actual people involved in the trial. There are also obvious points of elements inspired by fantasy in the play, such as El Pachuco acting as part narrator, part alter-ego, and part spiritual guide to Reyna and the audience, or "The Press" collectively acting as the prosecution in the courtroom. Still, the play sticks mostly to how the trial and riots played out historically. Valdez has even said that he stopped fictionalizing the play at the point that he "could deal with it creatively," but otherwise he stuck close to the facts.⁷ Yet, it seems Valdez did take some of the truths that the press omitted during the actual trial and riots, and exaggerated them for the sake of getting his message across.

Bringing *Zoot Suit* to new life

Luis Valdez studied theater at San Jose State University, graduating in 1964.⁸ The following year, he founded Teatro Campesino, thus earning himself the title of the father of

modern Chicano theater.⁹ The acting troupe came to fruition with the help Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers (UFW) movement. But the partnership would end just two years later after disagreements about ideology and strategy.¹⁰ From there, Valdez continued to professionalize Teatro Campesino, which resulted in greater access to the wider theater industry. Providing the impetus to *Zoot Suit*, a director of the Los Angeles Mark Taper Forum approached Valdez in 1977 to create something that would appeal to the city's "untapped" Chicano market. This was part of an "experimental" series titled, "New Theater for Now."¹¹ In addition, Valdez had a personal connection to pachucos and the Zoot Suit Riots. His own cousins were pachucos, he and his parents were in Los Angeles at the time that the riots broke out, and it "continued to haunt" him ever since.¹² Over the years, Valdez has received criticism for the origins of *Zoot Suit*, saying that he was commercializing the Chicano experience.¹³ Yet, *Zoot Suit* was indeed a "reimagining" of the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots, achieved through symbolism and exaggeration, as Jorge Huerta and Roy Eric Javier explain.¹⁴ Even more so, *Zoot Suit* can also be seen as a corrective to public memory itself, one that at times utilizes that exaggeration to its advantage, while also providing a boost to an otherwise struggling Chicano movement. The primary example of how this play serves as a corrective comes from the very first actions El Pachuco takes in the opening scene:

"The giant facsimile of a newspaper front page serves as a drop curtain. The huge masthead reads: LOS ANGELES HERALD EXPRESS. Thursday, June 3, 1943. A headline cries out: ZOOT SUITER HORDES INVADE LOS ANGELES. US NAVY AND MARINES ARE CALLED IN... A switchblade plunges through the newspaper. It slowly cuts a rip from the bottom of the drop. To the sounds of 'Perdido' by Duke Ellington, EL PACHUCO emerges from the slit."¹⁵

This exaggerated image of El Pachuco surfacing from a giant newspaper conveys two messages, one metaphorical, and one literal. First, as El Pachuco "emerges from the slit" of the newspaper curtain, he serves as a visual metaphor for how the construction of the pachuco was born from the press. This image, at the same time, literally shows El Pachuco slashing the newspaper, thereby shredding the credibility of the journalists who shaped popular opinion and public memory of the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots. Further, it should not be understated that El Pachuco is the narrator of this play. Therefore, Valdez conveys that it is the pachuco's turn to not just "take possession of the stage and audience,"¹⁶ but to take command of the otherwise damning historical narrative, and set the record straight.

Valdez also changes the narrative by adding nuance to the point of view that Mexican Americans had on pachucos and pachucas. The Mexican American community did not praise the youth who donned zoot suits. Parents were particularly concerned with this fashion trend.¹⁷ Valdez makes this evident early on the play, with exchanges between Henry Reyna and his parents:

"HENRY: This isn't just any night, jefa. It's my last chance to use my tacuche (the term used for the zoot jacket).
DOLORES: Tacuche? Pero tu padre...
HENRY: I know what mi 'apa said, 'ama. I'm going to wear it anyway"¹⁸

Dolores continues on to say she doesn't know what the kids see in the "soot zuit" fashion, mispronouncing the term. When Henry corrects her, "We call them drapes," she snaps back: "And what do the police call them?" Henry reassures her that "this time next week, I'll be wearing my Navy blues."

An exchange is soon after had between mother Dolores, Henry's sister, Lupe, and Henry's father, Enrique:

"ENRIQUE: Go and change those clothes. Andale.
LUPE: Please, 'apa?"

ENRIQUE: No, senorita.
 LUPE: Chihuahua, I don't want to look like a square.
 ENRIQUE: Te digo que no! I will not have my daughter looking like a...
 DOLORES: Like a puta... I mean, Pachuca."¹⁹

Henry and Lupe's parents are clearly concerned with how their children present themselves in public, and in the eyes of the law. Particular concern is paid to Lupe, who her parents fear will be perceived as a whore, which was the popular view that whites and Mexican parents alike took of the pachuca.²⁰ Valdez also informs the audience that Henry is set to serve in the Navy. This disputes the idea that pachucos were unpatriotic; in fact, they *were* willing to fight for America during the war. Through this exchange, Valdez complicates the otherwise unsavory historical identity of the pachuco, and the degree to which this identity was embraced within the Mexican American community.

The racism that took hold of the Sleepy Lagoon trial is also magnified in this play. A primary example of this comes in the The Press, who metaphorically serves as the prosecution in court. Again, we see Valdez employ hyperbole, along with fantasy, so as to underscore the role that the news played in shaping the pachuco image. At other times, Valdez did not see exaggeration as a necessary vehicle to convey the racial bias of the trial; he would instead let the facts speak for themselves. By doing so, Valdez presents a new public memory, from the point of view of the boys on trial – something that was obscured from news reports of the time.²¹

For example, Valdez twice calls attention to the fact that the judge in the case refused to let the 38th Street boys change out of their clothes for three months:

“PRESS: Their appearance is distinctive, Your Honor. Essential to the case.
 GEORGE (defense attorney): You are trying to exploit the fact that these boys look foreign in appearance! Yet clothes like these are being worn by kids all over America.
 JUDGE: (Bangs the gavel.) I don't believe we will have any difficulty if their clothing becomes dirty.”²²

This was, in fact, a tactic used in the real murder trial. Pagan notes that after a disagreement that played out in court between the prosecution, defense, and judge, the boys were not allowed to change because their appearance was determined to be “a significant fact of the case.” Including this detail in the play not only highlights the racism of the court, it also shows the inhumane treatment the defendants were forced to endure, both to their physical beings and their psyches. Being forced to wear the same clothes for months might have contributed to the disgruntled demeanors that Pagan notes some of the boys displayed while on trial. It might have also been a tactic to play into the stereotype of the “dirty Mexican.”²³

Further, Valdez takes care to twice show the audience the humiliation that pachucos endured when they were stripped of their clothes during the riots. One occurrence comes at the end of the play, when Henry is released from prison and returns home to his family. He shares an exchange with his youngest brother, Rudy, who confesses to him that sailors stripped him of his clothes during the riots, while Henry was locked up:

“... I was wearing your zoot suit, and they got me. Twenty sailors, Marines. We were up in the balcony. They came down from behind. They grabbed me by the neck and dragged me down the stairs, kicking and punching and pulling my grena (groin). They dragged me out into the streets... and all the people watched while they stripped me (*sobs*).”²⁴

Openly weeping shows a tremendous departure from the machismo that pervaded the pachuco attitude. Clearly, Rudy was impacted enough to the point that his pain surfaced from that characteristic machismo. This acts as a corrective to non-Latino audience members, who may not have fully realized the trauma inflicted on pachucos during the riots.

In another scene, Valdez makes El Pachuco the target of stripping. In a style similar

to Dickens' Ghost of Christmas Past, El Pachuco is showing Henry (who is still in prison) the outside world on the night the Zoot Suit Riots broke out. Suddenly, El Pachuco is stripped by sailors. Valdez indicates in the stage directions:

*(... The only item of clothing on his body is a small loincloth. HE turns and looks at HENRY, with mystic intensity. HE opens his arms as an Aztec conch blows, and HE slowly exits backward with powerful calm into the shadows...)*²⁵

This a nod to the Chicano nationalism and spiritualism that Valdez held in regard at this time in his career. As Rosa Linda Fregoso notes, the colors of El Pachuco's zoot suit are red and black, colors that are symbolic of an Aztec god.²⁶ Even if an American audience is not familiar with Aztec beliefs, they can at least deduce that Valdez is showing the power of the spirit over the physical, material world. At best, those Latino audience members who are clued into Aztec beliefs can find strength that Valdez is trying to convey: It is not the clothes that make the pachuco, instead it is ultimately the spirit of the pachuco that carries on within Chicanos in the face of humiliation and struggle.

Finally, the ending of the play is perhaps the most central example of how Valdez seeks to reclaim and correct the memory of Sleepy Lagoon and the Zoot Suit Riots. In the final lines of the play, The Press explains that Henry Reyna went back to prison a few years after his exoneration, got into hard drugs, and later died. El Pachuco declares: “That's the way you see it, ese, but there's other ways to end this story.”²⁷ The characters then gather to tell other details of Henry Reyna's life, to paint a different ending. This includes Reyna going off to fight in the Korean War, marrying his pachuca love, Della, having five children who are attending college “and calling themselves Chicanos.”²⁸ The characters then all gather to give their final words on Reyna, some of which include:

“GEORGE: Henry Reyna, the born leader...
 JOEY: Henry Reyna, the zoot suiter...
 LUPE: Henry Reyna, my brother...
 EL PACHUCO: Henry Reyna... El Pachuco... the myth... still lives.”²⁹

While the ending is “left up to interpretation,”³⁰ it also gives nuance to an otherwise one-sided story about who Henry Reyna was, and who pachucos in were in real life. Were these really un-American kids who sought to spit in the face of propriety through their sense of fashion? Or were they human beings seeking their own identities in a racially-hostile climate, as Pagan says?³¹ By presenting these choices to audiences, Valdez is not only suggesting that people should re-think their assumptions about pachucos and what happened in the summers of 1942 and 1943, he advocates for the audience to adopt a new way of looking back at those events. By giving El Pachuco the final word on this narrative, Valdez also seeks to reinforce to Chicanos that the pachuco spirit was still very much alive in 1978.

A key component to keeping that pachuco attitude and spirit alive, and what added to the corrective quality of the play, was in fact a revival of the fashion itself. As Kathy Peiss explains, *Zoot Suit* happened at the same time young people took a renewed interest in dressing like pachucos and pachucas. This was especially evident in the pages of *Low Rider* magazine, a grassroots publication dedicated to the custom low rider cars and the Chicano movement. There were sections of the magazine that solicited reader's photos of either themselves dressed in zoot suits, or their parents or grandparents dressed in their drapes decades before. In addition, actress Rose Portillo recalled in a recent interview that audience members would often show up to showings of *Zoot Suit* dressed in the fashion.³² Peiss attributes this resurgence to the way that young people in the 1970s looked upon pachucos and pachucas: They were their examples of “defiance, autonomy... and resistance,” in addition to the mythical qualities that by the 1970s had come to be attached to zoot suiters of the 1940s.³³ In a 1981 interview, Valdez explained how the pachuco had long captured his own imagination: “...I was affected by the pachuco. I was so young that they seemed of heroic stature. They seemed like strange magical beings to me in the barrio. They called themselves Chicanos and they were proud.”³⁴ Thus,

helping to maintain a revival of the zoot suit fashion adds to the cultural work that *Zoot Suit* contributed at this time. They play captured a side of the story that had not been given much consideration decades before, and simultaneously created another avenue for the Chicano movement to stay on people's minds, in their spirits, and even on their physical bodies.

Tell me more, tell me more: Why did *Zoot Suit* flop?

Zoot Suit was a spectacular hit in Los Angeles, breaking records at the Mark Taper Forum. The play's success meant it would go on to Broadway, making it the first Chicano play to hit the most prominent stage in American theater. Despite high hopes, however, the play did not encounter the same success when it was put before New York audiences in late March 1979.³⁵ A blurb ran in the *New York Times*' Arts and Leisure Guide, Theater section on April 1, 1979, which called Valdez's work, "A bewildering mixture of styles... that clash and undermine one another." Another blurb that ran in the same section of the *Times* on April 8, 1979, was equally unflattering: "What shatters the web and robs the event of its impact, is the author's surprisingly uncritical ear... all that is left for us to cling to is a smattering of sometimes interesting detail." In all, *Zoot Suit* only ran for about five weeks on Broadway before being pulled from production.³⁶

At the same time that *Zoot Suit* struggled to stay alive on Broadway, another work continued to capture the attention of American theater audiences. *Grease* first debuted on Broadway in February 1972. Written by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, the play ran off-Broadway before making its way to the big stage. Set in 1959, *Grease* is a musical steeped in nostalgia about a high school greaser, Danny Zuko, who is trying to win the heart of a new, wholesome student, Sandy Dumbrowski. They ultimately end up together after several mishaps and musical numbers along the way.³⁷ A *New York Times* review of the play by Harris Green printed June 4, 1972, declared the show was "high-spirited," "unpretentious," and the breath of fresh air Broadway needed, one that allowed space to attract a younger crowd, while not completely turning off the older crowd. If audiences in Los Angeles were nostalgic for the bygone pachuco era, so it seemed with New York and the greaser era. *Grease* quickly became a fan favorite. By the time *Zoot Suit* arrived on Broadway in 1979, *Grease* was on its way to being one of the longest-running Broadway plays.³⁸ The film adaptation of *Grease* also debuted the same year that *Zoot* hit the stage in Los Angeles.

The similarities between these two plays are striking. Both are reflexive-looking stories that focus on a rebellious set of youth, who are tied to a particular fashion and musical genre (rock n' roll for *Grease*, and jazz for *Zoot Suit*). Both shows also evoked a sense of nostalgia from the audience, whether that reaction was instant, as seen in the newspaper reviews for *Grease*, or simultaneous, as with the pachuco fashion revival that *Zoot Suit* saw. It seems that a comparison between these two plays has escaped the attention of scholars, so it is here that I would like to put forth some possible explanations as to why *Zoot Suit* failed on Broadway, while *Grease* thrived.

A good place to begin this investigation is with the matter of audience composition. There was a concerted effort on behalf of Teatro Campesino and the Mark Taper Forum to tease Latino interest in *Zoot Suit* before the play debuted in New York. Ken Brecher of the Mark Taper Forum and Phil Esparaza of Teatro Campesino spent a considerable amount of time in the Bronx spreading the word about the play before it opened, and it was even decided in advance that ushers at the show would be bilingual. At the same time, however, members of the Shubert Organization, who helped produce the play for Broadway, wanted to make sure their "regular" (white) audience did not suddenly feel edged out. Efforts to get Latinos to the show ramped up once it was realized the play was not succeeding as hoped. Latino leaders in New York's theater and cultural communities, including the director of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater, held a meeting to figure out how to encourage play attendance, especially from the Latino community. As part of the solution, coupons were distributed at the meeting, offering five dollars off admission.³⁸ So while there was an effort made to reach a Latino audience, it seemed that perhaps economic limitations might have stood in the way, while Broadway simultaneously may have been hesitant to make their white, mainstream audience feel marginalized.

As scholar Ashley Lucas notes, for those white audience members who were in attendance, it seemed that perhaps Valdez's pushback of the criminalized stereotype of Latinos did not make sense to, and therefore did not appeal, to white sensibilities. In addition, the play's use of *calo*, or the Spanish slang that was en vogue during the pachuco era, seemed to alienate the audience. One critic even called the use of *calo* as "pained contempt," which Lucas interprets as contempt toward white people. She explains, however, that critics took this language barrier too personally, because *calo* was in fact slang used so that the Mexican parents of these teens could not easily discern what they were talking about.⁴⁰

Still, there are the regional differences between Los Angeles and New York to consider. While both have sizeable Latino populations, Los Angeles is known for its Mexican American population, while New York is known for its population of Latinos hailing from the Caribbean (Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans, to name a few). Furthermore, the Sleepy Lagoon trial was an occurrence specific to Los Angeles, revolving around Mexican Americans. In an interview for the 50th anniversary of the Mark Taper Forum, Valdez recalled the pain that he saw in the audience, saying that people in Los Angeles remained "psychically damaged" by the *Zoot Suit* Riots.⁴¹ In considering these factors, perhaps *Zoot Suit* did not speak emotionally or historically to the specific Latino population in New York the way Broadway executives thought it would; it was a failure to recognize that even though these populations fell under the umbrella of Latino, they were more nuanced in their personal and historical experiences than Broadway recognized.

There is also the matter of nostalgia and public memory to consider when thinking about the differences in success between *Zoot Suit* and *Grease*. It seems that though *Grease* was viewed as an atypical suspect for a Broadway hit at first glance, it turned out to have all of the right ingredients to be a hit: youthful subject matter, upbeat songs derived from a pivotal point in American music, car culture, and humorous takes on dating and teen sexuality. In breaking down the nostalgia of *Grease*, scholar Travis Malone notes the play is not based on an actual historical event. Instead, it constructs a memory of a specific decade, serving as a utopian narrative for a 1970s audience that was searching for a simpler time. The play was a refuge from the Vietnam War, feminism, the gay rights movement and the Civil Rights movement. Adding to that, there certainly was no Chicano movement to be found there, either. The play arrived at a time when "Americans outside of the theater were constantly reminded of our communal failures, the utopia of the theatrical experience would give those same Americans the chance to recapture the lost feelings of innocence." Adding to that "utopia," Malone notes, are the specific scenes that *Grease* offers: a high school, teenage girls' bedrooms, dances, car races. *Grease* was safe, familiar, even whimsical in its visuals.⁴² This comes in stark contrast to the prison cells, tense courtroom scenes, and riots in the streets that *Zoot Suit* portrayed. In thinking about Malone's scholarship, it is also easy to see how Valdez's reconstruction of actual historical events was done in a way that put white Americans in an unflattering light. It is therefore no mystery as to why *Zoot Suit* was not palatable to a white audience at this point in time. They didn't want to acknowledge how the country arrived at such a messy decade as the 1970s.

There is one more important tie between *Zoot Suit* and *Grease*, and that is the striking similarities in fashion that pachucos and greasers share. Both styles are seen as an expression of rebellion and youthful identity; they incorporate pegged or cuffed pants, chains, and jackets; hair that was either in the "ducktail" or pompadour style for pachucos, and pompadours for greasers; and stances and attitudes that signaled a coolness about them. These influences were not lost on Valdez. In fact, he acknowledged the cultural inspiration Chicanos had on greasers in a 1983 interview:

"...The pachuco has contributed to the cultural life of this country in general and in ways that have not been recognized. For example, the ducktail. It was a pachuco creation that eventually spread throughout the country. Another was the 'greaser' who surfaced in the fifties. And everything from *Grease* – which was supposed to be about the fifties, which is actually a Chicano experience from the forties – is Chicano influenced and yet it is not recognized. I have often said the Fonzy would have never been possible without El Pachuco, because he's got all the markings of one."⁴³

Therefore, by attempting to inject the *Zoot Suit* story into the larger U.S. narrative, Valdez sought to make Chicanos visible to Americans not just historically, but in their cultural contributions – some which are very iconic – to America.

Valdez has been criticized for taking Chicano experiences like Sleepy Lagoon and Zoot Suit Riots and turning it into a commercialized product. He even described *Zoot Suit* as “an American story,” and made sure it was promoted as such in Los Angeles.⁴⁴ However, in thinking about how *Zoot Suit* is a corrective to public memory, perhaps a white audience was exactly who needed to be exposed to his reimagining. In some cases, as scholar Kathy Peiss says, this was the first time audiences might have even been exposed to the murder trial and riots, considering the events were left out of the larger American narrative. In fact, this was something Ashley Lucas says was one of the many problems critics had with the play, quoting one who said: “Without knowledge of the case, it isn’t possible to tell where fact leaves off and fantasy begins.”⁴⁵ Yet despite his best efforts, it seems that Los Angeles was best place for the story to be embraced. Audiences outside the city of Angels were at a loss (and some, maybe even unwilling) to understand the narrative amid the turbulence of the 1970s.

Conclusion: The timeless cultural significance of *Zoot Suit*

During a 2017 interview for the revival of *Zoot Suit* at the Mark Taper Forum, Luis Valdez reflected on the time spent in New York nearly 40 years ago. “I think New York wasn’t really ready,” he said.⁴⁶ It seems that readiness is where Valdez’s play draws its most significant cultural power. Valdez was staking a claim for Mexican Americans in an America that was apparently licking its wounds from the loss of the romanticized 1950s, while facing the uncertainties of the 1970s. Through *Zoot Suit*, Valdez set out a path to reclaim the pachuco persona – one that had been imposed on Mexican Americans, then, criminalized and humiliated. Through that reclaiming, he corrected public memory on how the pachuco should be seen and understood, and it was a corrective that unfolded before live audiences, making the message as impactful as if they had been standing in the streets of Los Angeles in 1943. It was also a necessary reminder for Chicanos at that point in the 1970s. Valdez reminded Chicanos that the pachuco spirit was theirs, and could persevere, with or without the drape shape. More than anything, Valdez made this an American play so that people on both sides of the coin might reach a point of inclusivity. It is a message that still takes hold today, especially under a president who continually criminalizes and humiliates Mexicans, and refuses to accept them into the fold of America. It is a message that Luis Valdez still feels is worth fighting for: “I grew up cutting out little silhouettes of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln when I was in grammar school. I bought it man, I believed it, I believed the American dream. I thought it was freedom for everybody, and then I learned along the way that there were glitches. But it doesn’t mean that we can’t stop struggling for that. We must fight for that. We must fight for this together, regardless of race, color and creed.”⁴⁷

References

- ¹Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1-18.
- ²Roy Eric Xavier, “Politics and Chicano Culture: Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, 1964-1990,” in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 190.
- ³Ashley Lucas, “Prisoners on the Great White Way: *Short Eyes* and *Zoot Suit* as the First US Latina/o Plays on Broadway,” *Latin American Theater Review* 43, no. 1 (2009), 121.
- ⁴Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 45-126, 221-227.
- ⁵Ibid. 167-182.
- ⁶Roy Eric Xavier, “Politics and Chicano Culture: Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, 1964-1990,” in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 191.

⁷ “The return of ‘Zoot Suit’: downSTAGE with The Frame,” *KPCC.org*, Monday, February 13, 2017, accessed Wednesday, May 17, 2017, <http://www.scp.org/events/2017/02/13/2202/the-return-of-zoot-suit-downstage-with-the-frame/>.

⁸ Jorge Huerta, introduction to *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, by Luis Valdez (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), vii. See also: Valdez, Luis, *Encyclopedia of World Biography* (1998), 399-400.

⁹ Ibid. viii. See also: Valdez, Luis, *Encyclopedia of World Biography* (1998), 399-400.

¹⁰ Roy Eric Xavier, “Politics and Chicano Culture: Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, 1964-1990,” in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 177-192. See also: “The return of ‘Zoot Suit’: down-STAGE with The Frame,” *KPCC.org*, Monday, February 13, 2017, accessed Wednesday, May 17, 2017, <http://www.scp.org/events/2017/02/13/2202/the-return-of-zoot-suit-downstage-with-the-frame/>.

¹¹ Ibid. 189-192.

¹² “The return of ‘Zoot Suit’: downSTAGE with The Frame,” *KPCC.org*, Monday, February 13, 2017, accessed Wednesday, May 17, 2017, <http://www.scp.org/events/2017/02/13/2202/the-return-of-zoot-suit-downstage-with-the-frame/>.

¹³ Roy Eric Xavier, “Politics and Chicano Culture: Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, 1964-1990,” in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 196.

¹⁴ Jorge Huerta, introduction to *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, by Luis Valdez (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), vii-xxi. See also: Roy Eric Xavier, “Politics and Chicano Culture: Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, 1964-1990,” in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 190-93.

¹⁵ Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁶ Jorge Huerta, introduction to *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, by Luis Valdez (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), xvii.

¹⁷ Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 98-125.

¹⁸ Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), 14.

¹⁹ Ibid. 16.

²⁰ Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 98-125. ²¹ Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 128.

²² Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), 38.

²³ Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 73, 92.

²⁴ Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), 81.

²⁵ Ibid. 68.

²⁶ Rosa Linda Fregoso, “The Representations of Cultural Identity in ‘Zoot Suit,’” *Theory and Society*, vol. 22, no. 5 (1993), 669.

²⁷ Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), 82.

²⁸ Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), 83.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Jorge Huerta, introduction to *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, by Luis Valdez (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), vii-xxi.

³¹ Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 98-125.

³² “The return of ‘Zoot Suit’: downSTAGE with The Frame,” *KPCC.org*, Monday, February 13, 2017, accessed Wednesday, May 17, 2017, <http://www.scp.org/events/2017/02/13/2202/the-return-of-zoot-suit-downstage-with-the-frame/>.

³³ Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 185-88.

³⁴ Katherine Diaz, “Luis Valdez: The making of Zoot Suit,” *Caminos* Vol. 2 No. 5 (1981), 8.

³⁵ Jorge Huerta, introduction to *Zoot Suit: A Bilingual Edition*, by Luis Valdez (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004), xvi. See also: Roy Eric Xavier, "Politics and Chicano Culture: Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, 1964-1990," in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 190.

³⁶ Ashley Lucas, "Prisoners on the Great White Way: *Short Eyes* and *Zoot Suit* as the First US Latina/o Plays on Broadway," *Latin American Theater Review* 43, no. 1 (2009), 121.

³⁷ Travis Malone, "Utopia, Nostalgia, Grease: How a Film Can Create a Stage Legacy," *Theatre Annual*, 63 (2010), 45.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Roy Eric Xavier, "Politics and Chicano Culture: Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, 1964-1990," in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 182-93. See also: Carol Lawson, "Zoot Suit' Seeks Hispanic 'Si'" *The New York Times*, December 27, 1978, C15. See also: David Vidal, "Hispanic Leaders Promote 'Zoot Suit,'" *The New York Times*, April 4, 1979, C17.

⁴⁰ Ashley Lucas, "Prisoners on the Great White Way: *Short Eyes* and *Zoot Suit* as the First US Latina/o Plays on Broadway," *Latin American Theater Review* 43, no. 1 (2009), 129.

⁴¹ "The return of 'Zoot Suit': downSTAGE with The Frame," *KPCC.org*, Monday, February 13, 2017, accessed Wednesday, May 17, 2017, <http://www.scpr.org/events/2017/02/13/2202/the-return-of-zoot-suit-downstage-with-the-frame/>.

⁴² Travis Malone, "Utopia, Nostalgia, Grease: How a Film Can Create a Stage Legacy," *Theatre Annual*, 63 (2010), 45-47.

⁴³ Greg Barrios and Luis Valdez, "Zoot Suit: The Man, The Myth, Still Lives (A Conversation With Luis Valdez)," *Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingue*, 10, no. 2/3 (1983): 159-164.

⁴⁴ Roy Eric Xavier, "Politics and Chicano Culture: Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, 1964-1990," in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 196-97. See also: "The return of 'Zoot Suit': downSTAGE with The Frame," *KPCC.org*, Monday, February 13, 2017, accessed Wednesday, May 17, 2017, <http://www.scpr.org/events/2017/02/13/2202/the-return-of-zoot-suit-downstage-with-the-frame/>.

⁴⁵ Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 197. See also: Ashley Lucas, "Prisoners on the Great White Way: Short Eyes and Zoot Suit as the First US Latina/o Plays on Broadway," *Latin American Theater Review* 43, no. 1 (2009), 127.

⁴⁶ "The return of 'Zoot Suit': downSTAGE with The Frame," *KPCC.org*, Monday, February 13, 2017, accessed Wednesday, May 17, 2017, <http://www.scpr.org/events/2017/02/13/2202/the-return-of-zoot-suit-downstage-with-the-frame/>.

47 Ibid.

Prosecutorial Style: The Courtroom, the Clothing, and the Refashioning of Marcia Clark

Ashley Loup

"To the remarkable Marcia Clark, you are an inspiration to me, if I could live my life with a fraction of your wit, your integrity, your unapologetic fierceness I would be on the road to doing it right."¹ This quote is taken from the acceptance speech that Sarah Paulson gave at the Golden Globes on January 8, 2017, in which she won the award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Mini-Series or Motion Picture Made for Television for her performance in the FX series, *The People v. O.J. Simpson*. Paulson won the Globe for her portrayal of Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney and prosecutor Marcia Clark, who famously represented the people in the O.J. Simpson murder trial. Paulson went on to win six more awards for her depiction of Clark. Paulson was hailed for her acting talents and her amazing transformation into the 90's prosecutor with tailored suits and tightly curled hair; however, during every one of her acceptance speeches, Paulson mentions Clark by name and praises the legacy of strong womanhood that Clark embodied. Not once in any of her speeches does Paulson recount the state of Clark's wardrobe or her fashion choices. Rather, she chooses to compliment her strong sense of self and her fierce attitude in the courtroom. This lack of attention to Marcia Clark's wardrobe seems odd considering that most of the praise that Paulson received revolved around the authenticity of her visual representation of Clark, but Paulson herself notes that Clark was enraged by the attention paid to her clothing.² With this knowledge and understanding of Clark, Paulson disregards the criticisms of Clark's appearance and attempts instead to honor Clark as a professional, which has continually been overshadowed by her clothing.

Marcia Clark is known for a great many things: her spotless reputation as a Deputy District Attorney in Los Angeles, her celebrated tenacity in a male dominated profession, and her desire to overcome almost every obstacle that ended up in her path. However, she is remembered through popular culture as being the woman who donned incredibly unflattering clothing, was known for her icy and aggressive demeanor, and who fumbled the case of the century. Endless newspaper coverage, relentless television reporting, and the trial of O.J. Simpson characterize the story of Marcia Clark's rise to media obsession. The blatant sexism that ran through the coverage of Clark was cloaked in descriptions of the clothes that she wore and was seemingly hidden by the fashion verdicts that were handed down on a daily basis. It was more than her gender that made Clark a standout in the courtroom; it was her fashion, her presumed attitude and her unique position as the lead of the prosecution that made her a recognizable and an ideal target for the media. The skirts, shoulder pads, and newly styled hair of Marcia Clark tell more than a story of 90's fashion, but of a woman who in a position of such power in a room full of men was whittled down to thoughtless headlines and unwarranted fashion advice.

The fashion of Marcia Clark was influenced and ultimately shaped by the 1970s dress for success narrative. This narrative capitalized on professional women's wardrobes and was heavily influenced by the feminist movement of the 1960s, which urged women to join the workforce and demand more of their workplace. Various advice columns, newspaper articles, and women's magazines devoted endless time to telling women what clothing they should wear and how best to dress in a professional environment. One book in particular prompted this movement, John Molloy's *The Woman's Dress For Success Book* that was published in 1977.

Molloy's book dealt with this notion that a women's success in the workplace depended almost solely on her wardrobe; part of being professional was looking the part. "You don't want to rush out and buy the first skirted suit you see. Some cuts, colors, and patterns

work; others don't. Some materials are better than others. And you must wear the right blouses with the right suits."³ Molloy's book discusses every aspect of female fashion from blouses, to hats, to lingerie, and even to the types of luggage that she should carry, all in the hopes of looking professional. Molloy's book is centered on scientific research and various questionnaires handed out to businesswomen in which they ranked colors, cuts, and combinations of clothing. Molloy addresses certain occupations and devotes a few pages to the position of the female lawyer. In regards to impressing the judge and being a saleswoman of sorts, "Most of our research indicates that these judges take women lawyers lightly. In the beginning it is critical to appear professional in every way. So you should wear authority clothes."⁴ This notion that female lawyers should dress in a particular fashion in order to simply gain respect in the courtroom is dispersed throughout Molloy's section on lawyer fashion. The work that all women put in to even reach the point of arguing in court is seemingly irrelevant; her clothing is what matters. This dress for success manual also includes a portion on how female lawyers should dress in front of juries with attention paid to juries made of "old money" and juries made of "urban populations," both of which require female lawyers to adjust. His biggest piece of advice for these female lawyers in terms of their clothing in court is, "Fashion for the woman lawyer is a time bomb. If she looks dated to women or chic to men, she will lose credibility. Proceed carefully."⁵ Throughout Molloy's manual for professional success, the women entering into the professional workforce are pigeonholed into prescribed clothing that should communicate their seriousness. In regards to female lawyers, the clothing one wore was virtually the only way one could be taken seriously in the courtroom. The intrinsic sexism that is woven into Molloy's book is established from the very first page, noting that if women want to be successful in work, they must heed his advice and dress accordingly.

In the same decade that Molloy released his dress for success manual, second-wave feminists were well on their way to refashioning career women, and career women were well on their way to redefining feminism. In Linda M. Scott's *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism*, we get a glimpse into the attempts made by feminists to harness the fashions of career women to reestablish clothing advertisements and coverage. Scott claims, "New appeals to career ambition and personal empowerment began to show up in the pages of women's magazines. The women's press advised them on the manners, clothing, and behavior that would help them to feel confident working in uncharted territory."⁶ This idea that the influx of women into professional work noticeably influenced the fashion industry is noteworthy because up until this point, and slightly after, women were constantly being told what to wear, and their agency was somewhat diminished. However, with this information, career women's ambitions and desires began to be reflected within the publications that they were reading, signaling a turn in the tide for women's professional clothing or at least the accessibility to knowledge of professional clothing.

Although the 1970s spent much time creating this professional wardrobe and detailing what women needed in order to be fashionable and successful, the 1980s ushered in this idea of the professional uniform. The uniform rhetoric was characterized by the idea that women were at once entering into the higher ranks of the professional workforce and needed to become part of the previously established team, and in order to do so, they must adopt the professional uniform. This professional uniform narrative in regards to female lawyers, includes an emphasis on this idea of visibility within the courtroom in that not only were juries listening to the words being said, but also the clothing being worn. According to Janet Wallach's *Looks That Work*, "For the women of the 1980s, it is winning in her career, not winning the fashion game that is important. The way we dress, and the image our clothes project, are more significant than ever before."⁷ Women in the 1980s were solely focused on achieving success in their respective fields. With fashion being a free-for-all, professional women needed to adopt a static wardrobe and essentially not get caught up in the popular fashion of the time. This generally meant adopting whatever style was already in place. Wallach argues, "It is important for women to remember that the rules of the game were established a long time ago, and they were set by men."⁸ This notion of male dominated professions presented a bit of a conundrum for many professional women. Not only were they pioneers in some fields of work, but they also lacked role models in terms of fashion because not many women were previously granted

access to these higher ranking positions. Within her book, Wallach interviews a woman who works as an attorney, who details her relationship to fashion in the courtroom as understated and traditional in the beginning of her career. But as her reputation became more established, she became more comfortable with adopting a more feminine wardrobe at work. She notes the importance of fashion when being involved in law because what one wears communicates how one feels about oneself and also how one feels about one's audience.⁹ This idea of fashion communicating to the audience is crucial in understanding the professional women's uniform because when she is at work, she must perform. In the case of Marcia Clark, this meant performing on the television sets of millions of people across the country.

The context of the O.J. Simpson murder trial is characterized by more than the racial tensions that were wielded in the favor of the defense; gender was the lens through which this case would be judged. The decade of the 1990s is defined by the prevalence of women entering the professional workplace and the harassment they endured in the process. The Tailhook Scandal that shook the armed forces in 1991 situated sexual harassment in the workplace into the public conversation. The Tailhook convention took place in Las Vegas, Nevada on September 8, 1991 at the thirty-fifth annual Tailhook Association symposium, which included U.S. Navy and Marine Corps members who sexually harassed eighty-three women and seven men. The scandal was so explosive not only because of the involvement of service members, but also the severity of the situation through which they participated. According to reports by the Department of the Navy and the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, service members wore tee shirts with the phrase "women are property" emblazoned on them and forced their fellow service people and some civilians to "walk the gauntlet." Walking the gauntlet consisted of a corridor on the third floor of the hotel where the symposium was being held, where two hundred servicemen stood and "Touched women who passed down the corridor. The touching ranged from consensual pats on the breast and buttocks to violent grabbing, groping, clothes stripping and other assaultive behavior as the women were funneled down the line of men."¹⁰ This event was widely covered and the punishment, or lack thereof, of high-ranking men who were aware of the occurrence, ushered in a larger discussion of the hostile treatment of women in the military. This scandal and its subsequent treatment furthered awareness of the erasure of the handling of sexual assault and sexual harassment of women in the military as well as a closer look at the overall lack of career advancement and opportunities for women in this field.

In 1991, one month after the Tailhook scandal took place, attorney and professor Anita Hill proclaimed that Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas had sexually harassed her during her tenure as his secretary at the U.S. Department of Education on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. This accusation came after President George H. W. Bush had nominated Thomas for a vacant seat on the Supreme Court. The press had leaked a private interview by the FBI, in which Hill leveled her claims against Thomas. Soon after the leak, Hill was called to testify in court. During her testimony, Hill discussed moments throughout her time working with Thomas during which he described sexual acts between women and animals, scenes of group sex, and scenes of rape.¹¹ These descriptions from Hill were shocking and surprising, and in addition to the stories she recounted regarding Thomas discussing the apparent size of his genitalia and discovery of a pubic hair on his Coke, the world was sufficiently incensed. Hill was scrutinized and torn apart daily by her critics and by people who claimed that she had only stepped forward now because Thomas was up for Supreme Court appointment. Some claimed she wanted the attention and other critics even questioned why she had not come forward sooner, as if that somehow discounted her experiences of harassment. Thomas ended up receiving the appointment, and Hill was hastily dismissed. Though, the legacy of her testimony created a cultural awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace, propelling a historic number of women to be elected into the incredibly male dominated congress in 1992. This whirlwind of consciousness set the stage that Marcia Clark would end up on, and these events would serve to generate a public jury that would put her fashion on trial.

Marcia Clark rushed to the office on June 13, 1994, unaware of the murder case that would be waiting for her when she arrived. She even described the day in her autobiography *Without a Doubt* by stating, "There was nothing on my calendar to indicate that this would

be anything other than a short-skirt day. No need for a believe me suit.”¹² This discussion of Clark’s clothing works to highlight the differences in arguing a case in court and in public versus sitting in an office in a more casual looking ensemble. She understood the differences in how she needed to fashion herself in order to succeed in the courtroom. Clark was completely unaware as to who O.J. Simpson was. She had heard his name in regards to some sports but was not familiar with much other than that. The enthusiastic reactions of her coworkers were seemingly uncharacteristic of a person who was in connection with a grisly murder.

The Hollywood-like environment of the O.J. Simpson murder trial fueled the obsession with Marcia Clark’s fashion. Clark’s clothing garnered close speculation and criticism, not unlike the comments that she was receiving regarding her childcare and divorce issues. However, the coverage of her clothing was incredibly detailed and endlessly critical. Everything was noticed from the length of her skirt to the mole on her upper lip—nothing was off limits. Whether she understood the gravity of her position, Clark fought in court as someone who was working to bring justice to the families of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman, not as someone who was determined to put O.J. Simpson in jail. Her fashion became the vehicle for which the criticisms and frustrations of the people would be carried out; the constant judgment and analysis of her clothing had more to do with what she represented than what she wore.

The coverage of Clark’s wardrobe was splashed across the front pages of numerous newspapers almost daily throughout the trial, with some offering advice and others offering endless critiques. For example, one critique from the *New York Times* discusses the “look” of each lawyer:

Know her looks: Petite with ringlets of dark hair and the much talked about short skirts that even Judge Lance A. Ito has commented on. If one of Mr. Simpson’s lawyers, Robert L. Shapiro, has the bar’s best-known bald spot, Ms. Clark has its most memorable mole, above her lip.¹³

Criticisms such as this were not uncommon; Clark’s wardrobe was of great interest to the media. This description in particular was delivered before the prosecution and the defense even delivered their opening statements, which they did not do until January 24, 1995. Another quote from the same article discusses the “dark” and “drab” style of Clark and even likens her to a character from the movie *The Piano*, whose main character is a mute pianist in the nineteenth century who dresses in large black dresses complete with a large black bonnet to shade her pale face.¹⁴ This comparison was clearly not meant to compliment Clark, but rather to date her fashion and highlight her lack of a sense of style.

News outlets, large and small, ran stories on the Simpson case almost daily, with various pieces committed to the coverage of Clark’s wardrobe and only tossing in vital facts of the case near the end of many of the articles. O.J. Simpson’s defense team was deemed the ‘Dream Team’ of legal superstars and consisted of Johnnie Cochran, Robert Shapiro, and Robert Kardashian. The defense and the prosecution were even presented at odds within the press, and although their qualifications were comparable, Clark’s fashion seemed to always be of the utmost importance. “For the People: The prosecution team of William Hodgam, 41; Marcia Clark, 41; and Christopher Darden, 38. They may represent the people, but these guys haven’t captured the people’s fancy the way the Simpson team has, despite Clark’s softer, TV friendly hair and clothing makeover.”¹⁵ The mention of the fashion of Clark works to delegitimize her validity in the courtroom and undercut her professional abilities in favor of commenting on her makeover. There was no extensive coverage of Cochran’s, Shapiro’s, or even Kardashian’s fashion outside of the occasional comparison of their wardrobes to Clark’s.

The media coverage of Clark’s wardrobe continued throughout the case, with fashion advice flowing in from various newspapers, all of which claimed expertise in knowledge of women’s fashion. According to Ellen Goodman, who at the time was writing for the *Boston Globe*, “The man who chums out Hollywood’s Worst Dressed List had some advice for Deputy District Attorney Marcia Clark. She has to stop wearing white. She needs to bring the hem to just above the knee.”¹⁶ Goodman became a harsh critic of Clark and managed to write various

articles concerning her fashion in the courtroom as well as what Goodman called the attempts to “Mommify” Clark. This phrase was used to discuss the media friendly makeover that Clark underwent when the case began to gain more notoriety. The Mommification of Clark included things like having her photo taken while she was grocery shopping, making her seem more fashionable and trendy, and trimming and straightening her infamous curls. Goodman’s article highlights the absurdity of the coverage of Clark and also showcases the difficult double standard that Clark had to contend with in the courtroom, which was also her workplace. “The greatest conflict between the appropriate female style and the appropriate professional style are experienced by women who hold jobs that actually involve conflict.”¹⁷ This notion that women who hold positions where power and conflict were involved is fascinating in that their fashion was integral to them being taken seriously and essentially being able to handle the conflict in a successful manner. In the case of Clark, as much as her skill as a prosecutor and agent of the state was being tested, so was her femininity and fashion.

For some journalists, the very success of Clark’s prosecution was linked to her fashion. “In the best legal opinion of this one-man jury of good and bad taste, if Marcia just gets the skirt a teeny-weeny bit longer, she’ll be more likely to get a guilty verdict.”¹⁸ Various newspapers would not only offer fashion advice, but also perpetuate this idea that in order for Clark to win she needed to dress in a certain fashion. For women, being in a professional workplace was still fairly uncommon, and navigating the fashion landscape proved to be just as tricky. In Clark’s autobiography, she discusses the incessant coverage of her clothing:

The debate inevitably descended to the length of my skirts. Drive-time jocks wore themselves out complaining that my hems were too short. Let me explain something here. When I’m on my own time I wear my skirts any damn length I please...But when it comes to what I wear in front of the jury, I have always been conservative. I wear what I consider to be smart, lawyerly suits with hems slightly above the knee.¹⁹

The awareness of the coverage of her clothing is one that Clark has described as unfair, cruel, and also having nothing to do with her professional qualifications for the case. In an article from the *ABA Journal*, it seems as though the coverage of her fashion essentially came with the territory. The piece states, “She thinks too much is made of how women lawyers dress -- how many reporters wrote stories about Johnnie Cochran’s ties, for example? --but concedes, it may be inevitable because [women] are still somewhat unique in court, which makes them interesting to juries.”²⁰ This article is important to note because it was being circulated to lawyers and law firms alongside this idea that criticism of women lawyers was not only commonplace, but to be expected. In these pieces, we also get a glimpse into the jury’s role in the fashion choices that Clark made. It was clear from the beginning that Clark knew what to wear in front of whom, or at least she thought she did. Many newspapers took it upon themselves to not only relay their own opinions, but the opinions of jury members. In a *New York Times* article by David Margolick the author describes the opinion of a jury consultant:

Amy Singer, a jury consultant from Miami, said domestic themes like grocery shopping and children were crucial tools in the makeover, and motherization, of Marcia Clark. Since both male and female jurors are put off by tough female lawyers, Ms. Singer said, the old Marcia Clark was in “no-woman’s land.”²¹

This idea of “no-woman’s land” places Clark in a position where she essentially cannot win; she does not have the support of women nor the respect of men. Clark’s fashion became a topic of conversation that she could not escape, whether in the newspapers, at the office, or on the television at home. Her clothing became a focal point of the case.

The coverage of Marcia Clark’s wardrobe throughout the O.J. Simpson murder trial only fueled the media circus that the case would ultimately become. The cutting criticisms that were handed down from publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Orange County Register* featured sexist discussion of Clark’s wardrobe in the courtroom with no

mention of her professional scorecard, which featured no losses up until this point, a feat that would have surely been mentioned if she was a man or if she was a part of the “Dream Team.” The fashion coverage of Clark during the Simpson case fueled public opinion and offered a scapegoat for when the trial finished. The only other moment where fashion was covered in the trial was the infamous moment when Simpson tried on the black leather glove. According to Christopher Darden’s autobiography *In Contempt*, “My heart was pounding and my mouth was dry, but someone had to do this. Someone had to stop the games these defense lawyers were playing and just put the damned gloves on his hands.”²² The coverage of the leather glove and the phrase it produced “If it doesn’t fit, you must acquit,”²³ are the lasting fashion relics of the case, not the sexism that Clark endured but rather the leather glove that did not fit. Although Clark’s wardrobe was the center of discussion throughout the coverage of the trial, as soon as Simpson slipped on the ill-fitting glove, it became the fashionable frontrunner. Soon after this moment the tide of the case continued to turn, and it looked as if the prosecution was well on its way to losing what was meant to be a sure thing. On October 3, 1995, Simpson was found not guilty by a unanimous jury decision.

The case has since been coined the case of the century and has spawned many recreations and recollections, but in 2016, the case was turned into a miniseries on FX network and received national acclaim and various awards. The series was aptly named *The People v. O.J. Simpson* and was based off of the book by Jeffrey Toobin. The series featured a cast of big stars from John Travolta, to Courtney B. Vance, to Cuba Gooding Jr., and even David Schwimmer. Sarah Paulson was cast as the indelible Marcia Clark. Paulson’s portrayal of Clark was complete with a reshaping of her eyebrows, redrawing of the line of her lips, and even the placement of a faux beauty mark above her lip to match Clark’s. The transformation was on many accounts seamless with Paulson herself noting that she wore Clark’s exact perfume in order to get into character.

Marcia Clark has ‘been redeemed’, New York Magazine declared, as the show has presented a ‘sharply feminist reexamination of her treatment in the courtroom and in the media.’ And within episode 6, women everywhere will recognize what was sold as a mean, cold persona was just what it looks like to be overworked, under-slept, and maybe a little frustrated with your male counterparts.²⁴

The devotion to authenticity by Paulson was intentional and so was the attention to detail by the costume design team for the show, which even went as far as to track down the exact makeup Clark used, contacting MAC cosmetics to find the shades that were popular in 1994-95. The desire to be authentic to the experience of Marcia Clark during the Simpson trial is what is most interesting about the miniseries. The attention to the refashioning of Paulson as Clark plays a large role in the success of Paulson’s portrayal. It reorients Clark as a feminist icon of sorts as well as a woman who suffered from the endless criticism she received in the media. These two facets of Paulson’s refashioning work to pay homage to Clark and also to represent the very real side of Clark that she kept completely out of the public eye, giving Clark a human element that was invisible during the trial when all that was known about her was her unsightly wardrobe. The men who were featured, just as in real life, attempted to dominate the show, but it was Paulson’s portrayal of Clark that gained acclaim from critics and fans alike. It was as if Marcia Clark was finally getting her due, almost 25 years after she had been in the Downtown Los Angeles courtroom.

The dress for success narrative of the 1970s celebrated women’s fashion as a means to get ahead in the newly accessible workplace. It was a wardrobe that celebrated the cuts and styles of men’s suits, but emphasized one’s femininity with a skirt. The professional uniform discussion of the 1980s aimed to help women assimilate into the male dominated sphere of the professional workplace by adapting a uniform of sorts: one that was unthreatening but also feminine. This rhetoric celebrated the success of professional women but reminded them that fashion was integral to their ultimate success. The decade of the 1990s ushered in the awareness of rampant sexual assault that had tainted the experiences of women in their respective

workplaces. The Tailhook scandal in 1991 involved U.S. Navy and Marine Corp male service men that sexually harassed over ninety individuals, which included other service members and civilians alike. That same year, the case of Anita Hill became national news, and she claimed that Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas sexually harassed her in the workplace. In the midst of this tumultuous decade riddled with sexual assault and seemingly unsafe workplaces for women, is the O.J. Simpson murder trial, which starred a female prosecutor by the name of Marcia Clark. Clark’s fashion quickly became the main event in the coverage of the case, with media outlets in both print and on television taking aim at her wardrobe. The sexist coverage of Clark’s wardrobe only added to the narrative of women being attacked in their workplaces on the basis of their gender, and in the case of Clark, on the basis of her wardrobe as well. The ultimate outcome of the case only confirmed what many newspapers had been claiming since the beginning: Clark’s lack of fashion sense would cost her a guilty verdict. However, in 2016, Marcia Clark received a recreation of sorts in the form of her portrayal by Sarah Paulson in the miniseries *The People v. O.J. Simpson*. Paulson’s portrayal was made most authentic by the fashion, hair, and makeup she donned on the show. Her performance garnered praise, but it also forged a new legacy for Marcia Clark, a legacy that marks Clark as a strong woman taking on the task of the century and enduring endless denigration along the way. The refashioning of Marcia Clark for a new audience serves to show us the reality of the treatment of Clark based on her wardrobe, but it also serves as a contemplation of sorts, one in which Marcia Clark should be measured by the depth of her abilities and not by the length of her skirts.

References

- ¹ Sarah Paulson Acceptance Speech, 2017 Golden Globe Awards, *Hollywoodreporter.com*, March 28, 2017.
- ² FX Networks. “The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story inside: In Character With Sarah Paulson FX”. Youtube video, Duration 6:06. Posted May 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVETi5aRG34&t=286s>
- ³ John T. Molloy, *The Women’s Dress For Success Book* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1977), 50.
- ⁴ John T. Molloy, *The Women’s Dress For Success Book*, 115.
- ⁵ John T. Molloy, *The Women’s Dress For Success Book*, 118.
- ⁶ Linda M. Scott, *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 287.
- ⁷ Janet Wallach, *Looks That Work* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1986), 16.
- ⁸ Janet Wallach, *Looks That Work*, 34.
- ⁹ Janet Wallach, *Looks That Work*, 45. Wallach briefly interviews a woman she used to know who works in the sector of corporate law, which is different than the criminal law that Marcia Clark is involved in.
- ¹⁰ Department of Defense Inspector General Report, February 1993.
- ¹¹ Jill Smolowe. “Sex, Lies and Politics: He said, She said.” *Time*, October 21, 1991.
- ¹² Marcia Clark, *Without a Doubt* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997), 6.
- ¹³ David Margolick. “The Murder Case of a Lifetime Gets a Murder Prosecutor of Distinction.” *New York Times*, January 22, 1995.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ No identified author. “Welcome to the O.J. Show.” *Orange County Register*, January 18, 1995.
- ¹⁶ Ellen Goodman. “Why ‘Mommify’ Marcia Clark?” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, October 28, 1994. (Originally published in the Boston Globe).
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Marcia Clark, *Without A Doubt* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1997).
- ²⁰ Paul Reidinger, *ABA Journal* vol. 82 no. 2, “Dressing Like a Lawyer, March, 1996.
- ²¹ David Margolick. “The Murder Case of a Lifetime Gets a Murder Prosecutor of Distinction.” *New York Times*, January 22, 1995.
- ²² Christopher A. Darden, *In Contempt* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 325.
- ²³ Jeffrey Toobin, *The Run of His Life: The People v. O.J. Simpson* (New York: Random House, 1996), 288.
- ²⁴ Elisabeth Garber-Paul, “The People v. O.J. Simpson’, Episode 6: Our fact-checking recap”, *Rolling Stone*, March 8, 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/tv/recaps/the-people-v-o-j-simpson-episode-6-our-fact-checking-recap-20160308>.

“Your Own McDonald’s!”: Race, McDonald’s, and the Inner Cities

Alyssa Dilday

Recently, scholars and social justice activists have been researching and raising awareness about the prevalence of food deserts, which is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture as a low-income, urban neighborhood in which at least one-third of the population lives more than one mile from the nearest large grocery store.¹ Food deserts disproportionately appear in low-income, minority neighborhoods, leaving these communities with limited access to sources of affordable, healthy food. The roots of this phenomenon can be traced back to the suburbanization of America and as white families moved out of the cities, many businesses, including grocery stores, followed. Between 1965 and 1980, the number of supermarkets in South Los Angeles dropped from 55 to 30.² At the same time, following the civil rights movement, many companies began to identify and advertise to African Americans. Fast food restaurants began to target urban African American residents as they increasingly became one of the few steady and reliable sources of affordable food for these residents. Over the second half of the twentieth century, McDonald’s ran advertisements targeting black communities in urban areas, where access to healthy, affordable food was growing increasingly limited. Though their marketing campaigns were promoting their role in uplifting inner-city communities, McDonald’s franchising policies and labor practices worked to keep these workers within impoverished communities of color in the inner cities.

In the early 1990s, McDonald’s aired a series of commercials that followed Calvin, an African American teen from the “hood.” From 1990 – 1992, television audiences saw Calvin work his way from a delinquent teen on the streets of urban America to a member of the management team at his local McDonald’s. The first commercial follows Calvin as he navigates the busy streets of Brooklyn on his way to work as two black women, presumably the neighborhood gossips, narrate his journey. The women talk about how it is “about time he got his life together” and notice how there is “something different about him” as Calvin coolly walks through a group of visibly older black teens on the street and brushes them off when they try to stop him. He stops to help an older woman, who is struggling to pull her cart up a curb as one of the narrators exclaims, “Looks like responsibility’s been good for him!” “Well, I’m glad somebody believed in him enough to give him a chance,” the second woman says as Calvin walks through the door of his neighborhood McDonald’s, flips his hat around to the front, looks straight into the camera and says “Welcome to McDonald’s! May I help you?”³

Though this is a commercial for McDonald’s, it does not once mention the food its restaurants sell. Instead, it focuses on the role of McDonald’s within inner-city communities of color. This commercial, and the narrators’ comments about how a job has been good for Calvin, speaks to concerns about rise of crime and juvenile delinquency in the cities over the previous decades. The post-World War II prosperity the nation experienced affected not just white Americans, but minorities as well. The earnings of African Americans tripled between 1940 and 1950.⁴ While white Americans were purchasing homes and moving to the suburbs, successful working and middle class African Americans were forced to remain in the cities because federal housing policies and real estate markets excluded African Americans from moving to the suburbs. They were “stuck in the ghetto,” or at least nearby, with all the people who did not ‘make it’ and had to face all the social issues associated with concentrated poverty, such as high rates of crime, juvenile delinquency, and drug addiction, on a daily basis.⁵ This was also a period of deindustrialization, in which America saw a decrease in blue collar work as the number of white collar jobs rose, which hit young, unskilled African American men the hardest. In his book *Black Silent Majority*, Michael Fortner argues that scholars have “missed the ways the consumers’ republic in the ghetto instigated class conflict in black communities.”⁶

Restricted from making the move to the suburbs like their white counterparts, middle class African Americans turned to the consumer market. In his study of Harlem during the second half of the twentieth century, Fortner points out that television antennas and Cadillacs became markers of the middle class in black communities. As working and middle class families came to perceive their hard-won societal advancements as threatened by the behavior of the urban poor, they shifted the blame for rising crime rates from structural inequalities in society to the individual behavior.

The McDonald’s commercial featuring Calvin was released just as crime rates had reached its peak in America.⁷ This ad is targeting working and middle class African Americans, who live in these high crime areas and make up the black silent majority. They do so not by advertising the food McDonald’s sells, but by focusing on how McDonald’s is working to uplift black communities by providing jobs to young black men and women. Working and middle class African Americans were concerned about juvenile delinquency and the effect that jobless young men would have on crime and drug trafficking in their communities. In the commercial, Calvin walks through and enthusiastically brushes off a group of young black men on the street, with the implication that they are trying to stop him to sell him drugs. The implied dealers are all wearing nice clothes, with one even wearing a gold chain, speaking to this idea that in the “ghetto,” with limited access to jobs, dealing drugs was seen as a way to access the material benefits of their middle-class neighbors. With the Calvin commercials, McDonald’s is trying to show African American teens that there are other paths to success rather than dealing drugs. In a community where jobs and access to quality education are scarce, McDonald’s is reinforcing the misguided idea that poverty, and many of the problems that stem from it, are the result of a culture that does not value work. These commercials suggest that if only you got off the streets and got a job at McDonald’s, you could become a successful and legitimate member of society.

The second commercial, which aired in 1992, picks up Calvin’s story as he becomes part of the management team at his McDonald’s restaurant. As the commercial cuts between Calvin’s friends sitting on a stoop, wondering what Calvin is up to, and scenes where Calvin is seen laughing and having fun with his coworkers at McDonald’s, one of Calvin’s friends comments that “he does have fresh clothes.”⁸ To teens from poor black communities, often living closely together with other marginalized families in subsidized housing, dealing drugs was and even continues to be seen as a way to garner respect in the community, to contribute to the family income, and as a way to move up in the world. The commercial points out that with a job at McDonald’s, you too can afford the “fresh clothes” Calvin’s friends admire.

The idea of respect in the community also ties back to the message in the first commercial, as the narrators remark on how Calvin’s “got his life together” and how “responsibility looks good on him.”⁹ But in the second commercial it is not just the older generation who respects him for getting a job, but his peers too. His peers, though they act like they are making fun of him, talk about how “he’s got a plan” and, as Calvin walks up the stoop to go inside, one of his friends chases after him to ask “What’s the word on that job thing? You know, not for me, for a friend.”¹⁰ A third commercial, which also aired in 1992, shows Calvin’s mom calling everyone in the community to tell them Calvin got a promotion. “For real? Calvin? Calvin that used to hang out on the street corner?”¹¹ Calvin’s promotion also grows, as it travels through the grapevine, from a member of the afternoon shift management team, to managing a McDonald’s, to owning the restaurant. In the final scene of the commercial, as Calvin helps an older woman into the restaurant, she looks at him and proudly exclaims “Your own McDonald’s!” “No,” he humbly replies, “not yet!”

Building the restaurant’s brand relationship with black communities was part of larger corporate strategy of McDonald’s that began in the late 1960s, after the riots following Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in 1968 destroyed many businesses. After the riots, McDonald’s began to move white franchisee owners out to the suburbs and recruit black franchisee owners in black neighborhoods with the idea that, if race riots erupted again, black rioters would leave black-owned businesses alone. The problem was, black franchisees began to protest being forced to remain in the “poorest, most dangerous, and most expensive-to-insure communities.” In her article “The Miracle of the Golden Arches,” Marcia Chatelain looks at

the black McDonald's franchisees' fight for economic justice. Despite the assertion that they were uplifting black communities by facilitating black business ownership, at least to the extent that one can ever truly own a franchise, McDonald's was also keeping black franchisees locked in the very neighborhoods many were looking to escape. Chatelain outlines how over the next few decades McDonald's became deeply intertwined in black communities in the inner cities, often serving as community and senior citizen centers, sponsoring youth sports, and even supplementing community resources when funding was cut to Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. And though it was often the black franchisee owners themselves that were investing in their own local communities, McDonald's capitalized on this in their marketing campaigns. In 1984, McDonald's published two text ads in *Ebony Magazine* that asked readers "At which \$8 billion corporation do Black executives help call the shots?"¹² and "Who's the largest employer of Black youth in America?"¹³ By the end of the 1980s, the NAACP announced they were partnering with McDonald's to "reaffirm a commitment to economic development for blacks and other minorities...placing McDonald's franchising squarely in the history of black freedom movements."¹⁴ McDonald's was presenting themselves as a socially responsible corporation that was helping black communities by keeping black youth off the streets and facilitating black business ownership, as Calvin was well on his way to "owning" his own McDonald's.

McDonald's investment in black urban communities would eventually pay off. During the 1992 Rodney King Riots, in which approximately 45,000 Los Angeles businesses were damaged or destroyed, all of their South Central restaurants remained untouched.¹⁵ Today, McDonald's continues to target minority communities in their advertisements. McDonald's has websites aimed at targeting different minority communities: *365Black* promotes black culture, *MeEncanta* targets the Latino community, and *MyInspirAsian* focuses on Asian American communities.¹⁶ When looking at the role of McDonald's in contributing to the food injustices that urban minorities have had to and continue to experience, one cannot deny that McDonald's not only encouraged a form of limited black business ownership, but their franchises also became a source of unskilled jobs for black youth in the inner cities at a time when these jobs were scarce. At the same time, McDonald's assertion that they, through their employment practices and community involvement, can solve deeply imbedded issues of structural racism is problematic in that it dismisses and ignores the issues and injustices that created and continue to sustain the inner cities. As residential segregation and the disappearance of work transformed the inner cities into racially segregated ghettos during the second half of the twentieth century, McDonald's franchisee policies kept black franchisees trapped in the ghetto despite their successes.

Today, McDonald's and other fast food restaurants have become the center of two major issues: the fight for food justice and the fight for a living wage. In the inner cities, fast food restaurants have become one of the few consistent sources for affordable food, leading to higher rates of obesity, hypertension, heart disease, and other ailments associated with a poor diet.¹⁷ McDonald's refusal to pay their restaurant workers a living wage, keeping their workers locked in a cycle of poverty they once claimed to help lift them out of, has also put them at the center of the Fight for \$15 movement.¹⁸ Though McDonald's has provided opportunities for black franchisees and black youth, the claim of the Calvin commercials, that a job at McDonald's can help one overcome the issues of structural racism in the inner cities, is problematic. Though their focus on the black communities has certainly helped improve the lives of some in the inner cities, the corporation's extended relationship with black communities has contributed to maintaining the status quo in respect to many structural problems by contributing to issues that continue to disproportionately affect communities of color.

References

- ¹"Food Access Research Atlas: Documentation," *United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service*, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/documentation/#definitions> <accessed August 17, 2017>.
- ² Marcia Chatelain, "The Miracle of the Golden Arches: Race and Fast Food in Los Angeles" *Pacific Historical Review* 85.3 (2016): 337.
- ³ RetroBlackMedia. "McDonald's Ad (1990)" YouTube video, 00:30, Posted [July 2010].

https://youtu.be/_y92Hv8bjto. <accessed August 17, 2017>.

⁴ Michael Javen Fortner, *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 42.

⁵ Fortner, 65.

⁶ Fortner, 65.

⁷ Alfred Blumstein, "Disaggregating the Violence Trends," in *The Crime Drop in America*, ed. Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 14.

⁸ RetroBlackMedia. "McDonald's Ad (1992)" YouTube video, 01:00, Posted [April 2015]. <https://youtu.be/Ze7JZQA1-B8>, <accessed August 17, 2017>.

⁹ RetroBlackMedia. "McDonald's Ad (1990)" YouTube video, 00:30, Posted [July 2010]. https://youtu.be/_y92Hv8bjto, <accessed August 17, 2017>.

¹⁰ RetroBlackMedia. "McDonald's Ad (1992)" YouTube video, 01:00, Posted [April 2015]. <https://youtu.be/Ze7JZQA1-B8>, <accessed August 17, 2017>.

¹¹ RetroBlackMedia. "McDonald's Ad (1992)" YouTube video, 00:30, Posted [March 2010]. <https://youtu.be/jVGthc4qR5Y>, <accessed August 17, 2017>.

¹² McDonalds. Advertisement. *Ebony Magazine*. November 1984: 21.

¹³ McDonalds. Advertisement. *Ebony Magazine*. May 1984: 21.

¹⁴ Chatelain, 350.

¹⁵ Chatelain, 351.

¹⁶ www.365black.com; www.meencanta.com; www.myinspirasian.com, <accessed August 17, 2017>.

¹⁷ Barker, Charlene et al. *Unshared Bounty: How Structural Racism Contributes to the Creation and Persistence of Food Deserts* (New York: New York Law School's Racial Justice Project and the American Civil Liberties Union Racial Justice Program, 2012), 6.

¹⁸ <http://fightfor15.org>, <accessed August 17, 2017>.

Blinded Me with Science Fiction: the Decline in Utopian Narratives and the Dystopian Turn

Jasmin Gomez

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, Americans began to see a new kind of fiction emerging from pulp magazines. Pulp magazines published a variety of different genres of stories such as mystery, western, fantasy, and horror. In the 1920s, editors and writers such as Hugo Gernsback, David H. Keller, Cecil B. White, and others introduced scientific elements to these stories and helped create the genre Gernsback called “Scientifiction,” that we now know as science fiction. These authors and others typically used utopian and dystopian elements in their narratives to critique their current societies by setting them in distant imagined futures. Over the course of the twentieth century utopian and dystopian science fiction competed in the genre, but it is not until the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century that we begin to see dystopian narratives gain a wider popularity in American popular culture. Each era of science fiction—pulp, golden age, new wave, cyberpunk, and contemporary—reflected the cultural anxieties of the time. The prominent eras of science fiction illustrate how utopian discourses provided one vision of the imagined future; a safe, homogenous, and controlled utopian society. As cultural shifts arose in each prospective era, as did the image of the future, no longer was the utopian future the right narrative to tell. The dystopic turn projected the cultural anxieties of American society over the unease of an uncertain future and filtered such anxieties into the world of science fiction.

The Age of Pulp

The pulp fiction era of science fiction is often referred to as “the age of Gernsback” because Gernsback’s pulp magazine, *Amazing Stories*, popularized the “scientifiction” stories of the early twentieth century. The stories featured in the magazine covered an array of plot lines, for instance, the April 1941 issue that includes stories of time travel, aliens, robots, and life on other planets.¹ Such stories provided social commentary on the current society and how the writers as well as their readership were feeling about their changing surroundings. Clare Winger Harris, one of many *Amazing Stories* writers and the first female writer to be featured in the publication, wrote “The Miracle of the Lily” for the April 1928 edition.² Presented as a series of diary entries from the main character Thanor’s family, the tale recounts the story of Earth in 2900 and the loss of vegetation from an insect infestation. Thanor and his ancestors explain the aftermath of the loss and how it led to Thanor’s present world in 3928 that creates synthetic food through alchemy, the pseudoscience based in chemistry where any material can be reduced to its base and rebuilt into another matter. Thanor, while explaining how his society overcame their obstacles, discovers some lily seeds that belonged to his ancestors and attempts to grow them. His success leads to a possible reinvigoration of planet life on Earth. Thanor explains how the Venusians are having a similar pest problem that Earth had long ago with the insects. The Venusians ask Earth to help them and it is revealed in the end that the Venusians are giant beetles, and their insect problem is in fact a mammalian infestation. The story ends with the people of Earth declining to help the Venusians and consider starting a war with them to protect the mammals. Thanor ends his last entry with the discovery of a beetle in his garden and that they may not have to start a war with the Venusians when an insect infestation is brewing once again on Earth.

Harris’s story presents notions of advancements in pseudoscience, Darwinism, and imperialism run rampant in a dystopian society. Theodore Ziolkowski notes in his book *The Alchemist in Literature: From Dante to the Present*, that the 1920s saw a renewed interest in alchemy and how it permeated many fields of study including literature and advancements in

ideas about science.³ In the story, alchemy is used as a way to provide sustenance for the citizens of Earth. By employing alchemy, the people of Earth ensure the survival of their society, but at the cost of breaking down social norms and customs. In this imagined future, everything is considered to be a recyclable material. Even the deceased are viable materials for sustenance. This violation of social taboos during an era that was changing the social landscape via gender, race, and sexuality can be viewed as a critique of the extravagant lifestyles that Americans were partaking in. Harris’s story presents a cautionary tale of what a life of continuous indulgence can do to mainstream society. She hones in on societal fears over cultural shifts in the 1920s, and how they can appear to some as the breakdown of societal norms without challenging heteronormative society.

The Darwinian views explored by Harris illustrate how the possibility of the Venusian beetles being the superior species and the human-like insect pest the inferior species addresses the fears of the fundamentalist movement of the 1920s. As Michael Lienesch discusses in his work on the fundamentalist movement, *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement*, the goal of this group was to spread the word of God, and when they felt that the education of creation was in trouble of being replaced by evolution in schools via the Scopes trial, they launched the antievolution movement.⁴ Harris’s fictional society in which beetles, through natural selection, surpassed humanity’s efforts on another planet would further justify the fears that the fundamentalist had over creation not being the favored view even in popular culture. The imperialist views that the people of Earth showcase over wanting to start a war with Venus speaks to American imperialism that was still present in the 1920s with the United States still looking to expand its reach in educating the masses in American democracy. Harris’s dystopian narrative demonstrates how the “roaring twenties” may have been a prosperous and materialistic time for the United States, but foreign and domestic affairs were still on the minds of its citizens.

Though not an American production, German filmmaker Fritz Lang’s 1927 film *Metropolis* resonated with 1920s American society and its images of decadence and Taylorism taken to extremes. The film is set in 2026 in a metropolis that has the look and feel of New York City, and presents a society that is split into two different cities: the elite city and the worker’s city beneath the Earth. Freder, the son of Joh Frederson, the master of the elite city, indulges in the decadent lifestyle that his father has provided for him. While playing in the garden, Maria, a woman of the people, breaks into the elite city with the worker’s city children to show them and Freder that they are no different from one another. Freder, overwhelmed by Maria and the children, takes to the worker’s city where he discovers the overworked workers, and how his city is powered by them. He takes it upon himself to see his father about the poor conditions in the worker’s city but his father dismisses him. However, Freder is determined to help the worker’s city and goes undercover. In the process, Frederson learns of a worker’s rebellion in the works and tries to thwart their plans with the help of Rotwang. Rotwang, an inventor, has built a robot in the image of his former love, Hel, using her to go to the worker’s city and impersonate Maria to corrupt the rebellion. Hel succeeds, but Freder learns that Hel is not the real Maria and saves the worker’s city from destroying itself. At the end Freder is able to get his father and Grot, the foreman of the heart machine in the worker’s city, to come together and find a way to move forward and unite their fractured society.

Lang’s depiction of a decadent 1920s elite society extorting labor from the working class resonated with Americans societal fears over capitalism and technology. As Andrew Ross noted in his book *Strange Weather: Culture, Science, and Technology in the Age of Limits*: “In an age of high anxiety about technological unemployment, the inventor’s autonomy over the creative use of gadgetry was an attractive alternative to the feeling of loss of mastery over technology to the new corporate technostructure. . . .”⁵ Ross argues that Americans were feeling on edge over their changing social landscape, technology and capitalism were relatively new ideas at the time and advancements in science were making strides at the possible cost of people’s labor. Similar to the images of indulgence and luxury depicted in Harris’s story, *Metropolis* also explores the cost of such extravagance. Lang’s film makes the case that it is the workers who suffer at the hands of such decadence. This is reflected in the way that Darwinism is explored in the film via the separation of the elite and worker’s cities, and speaks to the larger fears over

the continuous indulgence in the materialistic era of the 1920s. Darwinism, as a materialistic science removed God from the development of life, and each city depicted the “fittest” and the “weakest” in their society. The elite city is viewed, as well as decided by them, that they are the “fittest” and the worker’s the “weakest.” We also see images of Taylorism in the film, bringing scientific management into the factories to produce a more productive workforce through scientific means. The film brings to light how Taylorism threaten the working class individual’s humanity and that productive labor was more important than those who produced it. Scholars Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann discuss in their work Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, how Fredrick Taylor felt about the workers:

[Remarking:] “[the] work [of handling pig iron] is so crude and elementary in its nature that the writer firmly believes that it would be possible to train an intelligent gorilla so as to become a more efficient pig-iron handler than any man can be.”⁶

Minden and Bachmann argue that Taylor’s comments were translated in *Metropolis*’s depiction of the laborer as a robotic worker in a zombie-like state working and only shown working. The laborer depicted as devoid of humanity made them more efficient workers and echo Tobias Higbie’s work “Why Do Robots Rebel? The Labor History of a Cultural Icon,” on the image that the robot conjures: “The Robot evoked and echoed unease with the transformation of work, the growing division between thinking and doing that accompanied scientific management, and the rise of mass cultural forms.”⁷ This dehumanized depiction of the laborer speaks to fears that many working class Americans felt over the possibility of being replaced by someone or thing that could do their work more efficiently.

The Golden Years

The “Golden Age” of science fiction is said to have started in the late 1930s-1950s, and is viewed as the time that science fiction started to come into its own. As a genre that was overwhelmingly dominated by white men, the “hard science” and views of an optimistic future ran rampant alongside images of dystopia during the era. Many seminal works to the genre were published in this time period such as: *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Lest Darkness Fall* (1941), *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and others. Legendary editor and publisher, John W. Campbell, is said to have shaped the era and helped to produce the seminal works of the era. Though he is acclaimed and credited with being an influential figure, the “Golden Age” is recognized in such terms by those who helped to create it and were recognized in the era as contributors. Campbell’s magazine *Astounding Stories* set the stage for classic science fiction stories and brought recognition to authors such as Isaac Asimov, Lester Del Rey, and many others.

Like Lang, Asimov imagined a future dystopia set in New York City in his novel *The Caves of Steel* (1953). The novel is set in a distant future where the inhabitants of Earth due to overpopulation have taken to metal dome like complexes that are referred to as the “caves of steel.” Apart from the Earth’s cave dwellers, there are the Spacers, which are individuals who colonized other planets known as the Spacer Worlds across outer space. Both recognized as humans in the novel, each are depicted as different types, due to their clashing views on space and the role of robots in society. The story opens with Elijah Baley, a detective at the New York City police department, is called to investigate a murder of a Spacer Dr. Sarton, in Spacetown. Baley is later assigned a Spacer agent, R. Daneel Olivaw, by the Spacers to assist in the investigation. The two follow up on any evidence that they can gather on the case and make startling discoveries during their investigation. Baley learns that his boss, Julius Enderby, facilitated the entire investigation, in order to cover up a murder as well as hide his involvement with the medievalist group. The medievalist group believe that the past held a better society than the current present where they are in competition with robots for jobs. Within the narrative, the medievalist create many obstacles for the detective team and tries to expose that R. Daneel is a robot trying to pass as a human in their society. The story ends with the detective team solving the case and providing at least one shred of hope for the Spacers: Baley

learns to accept and work with R. Daneel regardless of his robot status. Asimov’s novel depicts the explicit differences between human beings and machines through the laws of robotics and the many instances in the novel where humanity is discussed. The laws are outlined as: 1) no robot can harm a human or allow them to be harmed, 2) a robot must obey any order given to them by humans unless it goes against the first law, and 3) a robot must protect itself as long as it does not interfere with the first or second law.⁸ The laws on the surface illustrate how robots can not harm humans by taking away the free will of the robot. Regardless of how human a robot appears to be, the laws built into their programming will always reveal the machine. There are other factors that reveal the machine via not eating food for nourishment and emotionality not effecting their problem solving skills, but it is the perceived right of free will that stands out more to the humans in the novel.

Asimov’s novel shed light on the continuous fears of technology replacing the need for human labor and what the historian William Graebner called “the robotic contingency.” In the novel Baley describes how his father was “declassified” in his youth, and the fear of not being able to provide for himself or his family followed him into adulthood. Declassification or being displaced by the Spacers or robots was one of the contributing factors to the medievalist movement. Each figure stood as an affront to masculine ideals both in and out of the novel and saw technology as a threat to traditional notions of masculinity. This feeling of being easily replaced or displaced resonated with 1950s American society’s anxieties over technological advances rendering humanity obsolete, and these images permeated popular culture. William Graebner noted in his work *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s*:

[T]he relationship between humans and machines – was capable of developing and producing its own superior replacement, a machine so perfect as to render its inventor superfluous. The answer- by no means offered in complete confidence- was that humans were distinguished from machines by certain, well, “human” qualities, qualities of creativity, independence, purpose that put humans in a realm wholly separate from any machine.⁹

Graebner argues that though these feelings of inadequacy in comparison to modern machines were festering beneath the surface, humans nonetheless possessed certain attributes that machines would never acquire. Free will was viewed as the only thing that separated machines from humans, allowing humans to overlook the machine as a real competitor. A machine requires instructions or orders from a person in order to complete its task or be able to perform one. By believing that we are our own masters allows society to have some semblance of ease and Asimov quelled these feelings further with the three laws of robotics. The machine was already a problematic image and a mechanical man agitated society in a whole different way. Graebner observed how: “Not only were fictional robots creations of the day prone to inexplicably turn against their creators, but the very idea of a robot- a heartless, mechanical man-seemed an affront to the foundations of morality.”¹⁰ The three laws of robotics pacified these feelings by essentially building in a fail-safe so to speak of an ethical code into the robot’s thought process. In a way these laws made robots more tolerable in the society of the novel and the machine was a less threatening image when it could be programed via the laws of robotics. Such images helped 1950s Americans come to terms with robots as aids to human beings and not competition in society.

Riding the New Wave

The 1960s to 1970s brought a “New Wave” of science fiction that presented a more critical examination of the society that produced it. Ross argues that:

[T]he New Wave movement in the early sixties, writers like J.G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, Haralan Ellison, Thomas Disch, and Roger Zelazny produced a kind of sophisticated “literary” science fiction that opened up a space for exploring traditional SF genres in a more self-critical way.¹¹

For example, Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) presented a dystopian future with human-like robots in a different manner than Asimov. No longer was the safety of the three laws of robotics here to protect humanity. The story follows bounty hunter Rick Deckard who has been assigned a new case of retiring six escaped Nexus-6 androids, that happen to look and act like humans. Over the course of the novel, Deckard is faced with many challenges while trying to dispose of these rogue androids. Some of the androids are more assimilated into human society than others. There are some that are in positions of power or have status, while others are in hiding or on the run. The Rosen Association, the company that created the androids, neglected to inform Deckard of their efforts to create androids that are harder to detect. Such negligence on the company's part led to questions about how accurate the Voight-Kampff scale, the test administered to suspected androids, really was in determining a human from an android. The novel explores similar themes to Asimov's novel, but in a different way. Dick's novel uses a dystopic backdrop to get at one of the underlying fears that we continue to see era after era: what does it mean to be human and how does that separate us from machine? In contrast to Asimov's novel, Dick's novel in a sense took the safety switch away from the androids and in doing so presented the issues of "rogue robots" and humanity. According to Kevin McCarron in his work "Corpses, Animals, Machines, and Mannequins: The body and Cyberpunk", "*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* with interrogating philosophical hierarchies it still uses replicants primarily to initiate questions about the fundamental nature of humanity."¹² McCarron argues that replicants (androids) allow society to really think about what it means to be human, during a time when civil rights, notions about race, and gender are changing the concept of humanity being questioned is not far-fetched. The novel shows instances of artificially simulated human-like traits, such as the mood organ that allows a person to feel any feeling they want. If humans are different from machines because of their ability to feel then why would they need a machine to help them be more human, so to speak? Artificial humanity versus simulated humanity is the larger issue at hand, and resonates with a society trying to come to terms with what it really means to be human. Ultimately, the novel illustrates that society will always question its humanity and that the machine will either help or hinder in the quest to maintain that which separates us.

Cyberpunk: Tuning out and "Jacking in"

The 1980s saw a different kind of dystopian narrative emerge. Previous eras presented dystopian views about human nature and the fears over the machine, but the 1980s explores notions of masculinity, technology, and dehumanization in a different light. The cyberpunk era was a reaction to Reagan and the age of conservatism, rejecting the Gernsback's model of science fiction even more. William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984) is viewed as the epitome of cyberpunk and a classic in the genre. The novel follows former hacker Case, who after being maimed by his former employers for stealing is left jobless and his reputation ruined. He is later recruited by a mysterious new employer who can restore him and help him reestablish himself in the cyber-world. After taking this job, Case learns he was hired under false pretenses and his new employer is merely a puppet of Wintermute, an A.I.'s, plan to merge with another A.I., *Neuromancer*, to create a super-consciousness. Gibson's novel illustrated how masculine ideals in relation to technology and fears over dehumanization resonated with 1980's American society. Ross discusses how the "techno-body" was a response to images of muscular action heroes that were saturated in popular culture at the time:

cyberpunk male bodies, by contrast, held no such guarantee of lasting invulnerability, at least not without prosthetic help: spare, lean, and temporary bodies whose social functionality could only be maintained through the reconstructive aid of a whole range of genetic overhauls and cybernetic enhancements. . . . If the unadorned body fortress of the Rambo/Schwarzenegger physique expressed the anxieties of the dominant male culture, cyberpunk technomascularity suggested a growing sense of the impotence of straight white males in the countercultures.¹³

Ross argues that cyberpunk presented a masculine crisis that embraced the use of technology and machine wear to feel manlier as oppose to previous eras that took to illustrating masculinity through physical work as seen in the working class individual or the action hero of mainstream culture. Ross's comments speak to Donna Haraway's argument of the cyborg in her seminal work, *A Cyborg Manifesto*. The cyborg as a symbol of resistance to capitalism and patriarchy is depicted in the images of cybernetics and masculinity throughout the book, and illustrates how the techno-body is being used as a form of political discourse in the age of conservatism. For those who identified with cyberpunk, ideals of masculinity shaped by technology was the answer and not the enemy as we saw in *Caves of Steel* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

As in Dick's novel, *Neuromancer* continues to question what it means to be human and takes it one step further with the altering of the human body through cybernetics. Case's body is both damaged and repaired through technology, and he treats his body as merely a vessel in which holds his consciousness until the next time he is able to enter the matrix. Like Case and other characters in the novel their humanity is slowly chipped away by their interactions with the matrix or others in the dystopic society they inhabit. Ross addresses how cyberpunk dealt with notions of humanness and technology as well as the fears that they inspired:

Each piece of metal and plastic added to the body results in an erosion of human identity. Further personality fragmentation and a breakdown of empathy lead to "cyberpsychosis." Behind this idea lies a long history of anxieties about "dehumanization" by technology; a quintessentially humanist point of view which sees technology as an autonomous, runaway forces that has come to displace the natural right of individuals to control themselves and their environment.¹⁴

Ross argues that by altering the body and replacing or enhancing human parts with metal parts, it compromises our humanity based on humanist views. By changing the organic body it is interpreted as the deterioration of the human world and that the more we blur the lines between humans and machines, the more we lose our sense of humanity. Cyberpunk and the eras before it illustrate how technological advances during their respective time periods influence the social landscape, but contingent factors manifested into these dystopian narratives that are trying to work through these feelings of uncertainty.

The Indistinguishable Era of Contemporary

The "New Wave" era brought in new voices, and in the late twentieth century to the twenty-first century saw more women and African-American writers emerge. Not only did these writers disrupt the binaries of earlier science fiction narrative forms, but also brought in social issues into their stories. This era of science fiction is often called contemporary to be more inclusive to all the different narratives that were explored. Writers such as Octavia E. Butler brought us science fiction that asked us to look beyond the dangers of technology and instead to look at social issues that endanger society, leading to potential dystopic ends. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* is such a work that presents discussions about race and gender in a new light. The novel follows Lauren Olamina a young African-American girl who lives in a gated community about twenty miles away from Los Angeles. The year is 2024 and Lauren and her family live in a post-apocalyptic world and the only thing that keeps them safe is the wall from their gated community. Lauren documents in her journal how their community was a safe haven in a world gone mad, and how it quickly befell the faith of other communities in this distant dark future. Over the course of the novel Lauren and a few survivors from the town band together in order to start fresh somewhere else and encounter that the wall protected them from the collapse of civilized society and all the filth that sprang from this new world. In the end Lauren and her companions are able to plan for a new community founded on Lauren's religion Earthseed, with others that they have encountered along the way, and provide a semblance of hope in a dark time.

Butler's novel resonated with 1990s American society and its attitudes about race

and social injustices. The book was released a year after the Los Angeles Riots of 1992 and images of the riot are reflected in the fires and the police's inability to help those in need. According to Isiah Lavender's book *Race in American Science Fiction*, "Butler's story is of great consequence to readers because she explores the psychological and spiritual repercussions of racism on a disintegrating country that illustrate the importance of examining attitudes, assumptions, and feelings by which society has conditioned everyone."¹⁵ Lavender argues that the novel situates issues of race in such a way that we see how racism resonates on multiple levels and illustrates how societal anxieties manifest in a society that cannot escape institutionalized racism in one way or another. In this era of science fiction fears over technology taking over or dehumanizing us is not the central fear, but the fears of unchecked social issues and how they inspire dystopian narratives. Butler's novel asks us to question how constructions of race or lack thereof in previous eras of science fiction speak more directly than the former metaphors of aliens or other creatures used in science fiction to represent feelings over race.

Conclusion

The emergence of science fiction in the late nineteenth century in American popular culture presented dystopian narratives in a different light. Each era of science fiction addressed different or continuing cultural anxieties that resonated with each retrospective time period. The Pulp and Golden eras illustrated how societal fears over technology replacing human labor or social standing manifested in these imagined future dystopias. New wave, Cyberpunk, and Contemporary science fiction still dealt with fears over technology, but it focused on how it affected a society's expression of humanity and to what extent it was shaping such individual's human identities. Contemporary also highlighted how social issues were explored in these dystopic realities and the levels of embedded racism, sexism, and classism that exist in our political, social, and economic infrastructures. Ultimately, science fiction asks us to question our realities on an individual, social, political, and economic level. These dystopic narratives are presenting exaggerated versions of societal fears to wake up its readership and dominant culture on the things that need to change, or else these imagined futures can become our dark realities.

References

- ¹ "Amazing Stories v15n04 1941 04 cape1736 : Free Download & Streaming." Internet Archive. Accessed April 21, 2017. https://archive.org/details/Amazing_Stories_v15n04_1941-04_cape1736.
- ² "Amazing Stories Volume 03 Number 01 : Gernsback, Hugo : Free Download & Streaming." Internet Archive. Accessed April 21, 2017. <https://archive.org/details/AmazingStoriesVolume03Number01>.
- ³ Ziolkowski, Theodore, *The Alchemist in Literature: From Dante to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015. 154.
- ⁴ Lienesch, Michael. *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 2007.
- ⁵ Ross, Andrew. *Strange Weather: Culture, Science, and Technology in the Age of Limits*. London: Verso. 1991. 127.
- ⁶ Bachmann, Holger and Minden, Michael. *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*. Rochester: Camden House. 2000. 180.
- ⁷ Higbie, Tobias. "Why Do Robots Rebel? The Labor History of a Cultural Icon," *Institute For Research On Labor And Employment*. Working Paper series. 5.
- ⁸ Asimov, Isaac. *Caves of Steel*. New York: Bantam Books. 1991.
- ⁹ Graebner, William. *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, INC. 1998. 126.
- ¹⁰ Graebner, William. *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s*. 31.
- ¹¹ Ross, Andrew. *Strange Weather*. 142.
- ¹² McCarron, Kevin. "Corpses, Animals, Machines, and Mannequins: The body and Cyberpunk" in *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishing. 1995. 263.
- ¹³ Ross, Andrew. *Strange Weather*. 152-153.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.
- ¹⁵ Lavender, Isiah. *Race in American Science Fiction*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press. 2011. 21.

Queer Empowerment Anthems: Subversive Legacies and Lady Gaga's "Born This Way"

Michael Paramo

As a queer person, music has allowed me to mentally escape a world in which I have often felt invisible and powerless. Songs emphasizing themes of self-perseverance and self-love have functioned as empowering tools, transforming and creating spaces for me to reimagine and assert my identity. Experiencing the euphoric queer pleasure spurred within me from these songs, many of which are regarded more widely as gay, LGBT, or queer empowerment anthems, such as Lady Gaga's "Born This Way," has encouraged me to reflect on how they have operated as empowering mechanisms for queer people overall. Tracks such as "Born This Way," that have been understood by the wider public culture as anthems for people under the queer umbrella, a unifying shared identity that includes those who are not cisgender or not heterosexual, will be described as queer empowerment anthems throughout this essay for the purposes of cohesion.

Firstly, this essay examines the creation and purpose of the physical queer space historically and contemporarily as a means of emphasizing how queer people have transformed physical spaces through reimagining and repurposing their usage for the purposes of collective empowerment. Through employing Michel Foucault's theory of power, this research then reveals the crucial role that queer empowerment anthems play in creating physical and immaterial spaces of empowerment through a pleasure in subverting domineering heteronormative and cisnormative power structures within society. It concludes by focusing on the most widely recognized empowerment anthem of today, Lady Gaga's "Born This Way," analyzing how the record is often perceived as an empowering force for queer people through its seemingly universal message. However, through performing a closer examination of the discourse "Born This Way" utilizes, this essay demonstrates that it only allows for empowerment within strict guidelines, excluding those who do not conform to its limited and problematic classifications of both queerness and race/ethnicity in the song. Therefore, through employing discourse analysis, this research also seeks to question the power that mainstream artists in music, such as Lady Gaga, possess in crafting how their audience perceives, identifies, and classifies themselves.

Queer Empowerment through Reimagining Spaces

The history of the physical queer space is one that is entwined with reimagination. Heteronormative and cisnormative oppressive realities imposed upon queer people stemmed from the rigidity of Western religious and moral ideologies violently imported on indigenous cultures through colonialism. In Scott Morgensen's *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*, he discusses how the contemporarily understood two-spirit tradition in Native American cultures was violently attacked as a means of reconfiguring "indigenous society in colonial and masculinist terms." This "early-modern European policing of sex" was done as a means of teaching "both colonial and indigenous subjects the relational terms of colonial heteropatriarchy."¹ As a colonial legacy, normative society continues to enforce and maintain the unbalanced power relations between societally normative and queer physical spaces, with the former being openly permissible and encouraged while the latter is policed, regulated, and controlled. In *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*, Fiona Buckland argues that because "queers are often denied access to state, church, media, or private institutions," they feel "worldless" and must therefore envision and create spaces for themselves.² Policing of public queerness has spawned the need to reimagine and create physical spaces, often taking form in dancehalls and clubs, which have served as the foundation for the ascension of queer empowerment anthems.

As George Chauncey describes in his book *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890 - 1940*, the contemporary queer club has its origins

in New York dancehalls of the Bowery in the late 19th and early 20th century, which served as “perverse” spaces for the flourishing of “fairies” and gay male culture of the time. According to Chauncey, in 1899, a man complained that “not only were there ‘male degenerates upon the Bowery in sufficient number to be noticeable,’ but that ‘boys and girls get into these dance halls on the East Side ... [and] watch these horrible things,’” referring to displays of visible queerness.³ Chauncey continues by discussing how gay men reimagined and repurposed the dance hall, seen by outsiders as a place for degenerates, into a “center of community and source of support,” stating that gay men transformed and forged their own “practices and institutions” within these spaces.⁴ The physical spaces of dancehalls thus provided gay men with a safe place to congregate, associate, and empower themselves while still being relatively removed from the risks of harassment and violence that an overtly public “visible gay presence” could generate.⁵

However, as the relatively flourishing gay world of the early 20th century became increasingly visible, stricter divisions between what constituted “heterosexual” and “homosexual” behavior became normalized in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁶ This heightened segregation increased the regulation and control of public queerness and forced this world further underground. Chauncey reveals how a “powerful backlash” against public queerness rapidly developed in the 1930s “after a decade in which gay men and a smaller number of lesbians had become highly visible in clubs, streets, newspapers, novels and films.”⁷ Divisions between normative and queer physical spaces heightened as the shared spaces of early 20th century dancehalls, clubs, and bars dissolved after “the prominence of the drags – along with gay club acts, burlesque, and other highly visible ‘moral evils’” became an “inviting target” for Jimmy Walker, the mayor of New York, to launch a “highly publicized war on vice in an effort to divert attention” away from a corruption scandal surrounding his administration. Chauncey states that the response of Walker’s mayoral administration was one of several instances which “signaled a more fundamental shift in the cultural and political climate and was soon followed by more enduring measures that pushed ‘fairies’ out of the clubs and back into the periphery of the city.”⁸ Some of these “enduring measures” that Chauncey describes were the “requirement that establishments be ‘orderly,’” which “proved to have a profound impact on gay bars,” where “the simple presence of lesbians or gay men, prostitutes, gamblers, or other ‘undesirables’” were indicators of a “disorderly” establishment, leading many of these physical spaces to be closed.⁹

These queer spaces were not only susceptible to closures and policing by state power, but were also highly temporary in the empowerment they provided for queer people. For example, Chauncey states how “many men found attending the balls to be an intoxicating experience, their ‘one-night-a-year freedom’” through being “emboldened by the thrill of gathering with hundreds of other openly gay men at an event celebrating their style and grace.” This queer empowerment fostered within these dancehalls and clubs often poured out into societally normative spaces, in which it would have to be controlled and contained. Chauncey states that gay men would often leave “the balls unwilling, at least for a moment, to accept the usual constraints on their behavior,” indicating how some would march “daringly through the streets” or crowd into restaurants where they would be “refused service or harassed by other customers, and frequently protested their treatment.”¹⁰ Similarly, the contemporary queer club also operates as a temporarily empowering space for queer people, existing as a haven for queerness only until the night’s end. Buckland discusses this reality in her book, stating that “participants had to step back from the center stage of a queer lifeworld into a world that marginalized them.”¹¹ For queer people, empowerment within the physical queer space is restricted and constantly under threat, only being purposeful for a limited time of day or until its closure. Queer empowerment anthems serve the role of providing queer people with pleasure in subverting the oppressive power structures that have policed, regulated, and controlled queer spaces and public queerness.

The Anthem: Queer Empowerment on the Dancefloor

Using Michel Foucault’s theory of power and its relationship to pleasure discussed in his book, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, I reveal the critical role that queer empowerment anthems possess within queer spaces in subverting the oppression that queer people endure from the dominant power structures in society. Foucault discusses that while

the heterosexual monogamous couple began to increasingly function as “the legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality,” having “a right to more discretion,”¹² individuals belonging to disparate or “peripheral sexualities” became labeled for the purposes of regulation and control.¹³ This took form in power exertion through “the medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report, and family controls,” which Foucault states “may have the over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power.” As Foucault states, there will always be a pleasure in both exerting or exercising power, through enforcing regulation and control, as well as in “showing off, scandalizing, or resisting” these exertions of power. This duality of power and pleasure function together as mutually reliant, existing in what Foucault discusses as “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure.”¹⁴ Queer empowerment anthems produce queer pleasure to a heightened degree, and its prominent role within the queer space serves as a means of inspiring liberation or, at least, continued determination to resist power.

Music and song have served vital roles in the unification and portrayals of queer empowerment and euphoria within queer spaces in the presence of heteronormative and cisnormative power structures. For example, the pressures of controlling and regulating queerness erupted in a violent public display of resistance in the 1960s, vividly portrayed in the Stonewall Riots of 1969. In this retaliatory effort against a police raid of Stonewall Inn, which had existed as a gay bar for several years, queer patrons at one moment challenged the encroaching militarized force in a kick line song, exclaiming “We are the Stonewall girls, We wear our hair in curls, We don’t wear underwear, We show our pubic hair.”¹⁵ This musical expression against a militarized force unified queer voices and existed as a method of empowerment and resistance against oppressive power. The “Stonewall girls” were overtly embracing their queerness by collectively singing lyrics that engaged in defiance of the heteronormative and cisnormative power structure that exerted this violence upon them.

In a post-Stonewall world, the queer empowerment anthem ascended to a new prominence. With the rise of disco in the 1970s, a genre that challenged norms of mainstream music and societal power dynamics racially and sexually, marginalized groups garnered increased public recognition and validation through its widespread dissemination in popular culture. Thus, power structures upholding straight, white, cisgender, male dominance became threatened by disco’s centering of non-white and queer expression. This was exemplified most evidently in the infamous violent destruction of disco records in July of 1979 at Comiskey Park, being torched by “a mob of young white males” in an act of destruction against, what scholar Nadine Hubbs describes as, an “encroachment of the racial other, of ‘foreign’ values, and of ‘disco fags.’”¹⁶ This physical mass destruction of disco music, which particularly empowered queer and racial minorities, exemplifies how the empowerment potential that disco music possessed was perceived as threatening in itself to the dominant normative societal power structures.

“I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor, now widely regarded as a “gay anthem,”¹⁷ had just peaked at number one on the national pop charts just weeks before the Comiskey Park incident.¹⁸ Hubbs declares that “I Will Survive,” both lyrically and musically, “reverses the norms of triumph and tragedy” through its utilization of both “African-American and queer discursive styles” in its “non-hegemonic, un-masterful values; and a distinctly mortal, non-epic transcendence.”¹⁹ Hubbs is describing the qualities of resistance embedded within the discourse “I Will Survive” employs, demonstrated prominently in its opening line: “At first I was afraid, I was petrified, Kept thinking I could never live without you by my side, But then I spent so many nights thinking how you did me wrong, And I grew strong, And I learned how to get along.”²⁰ “I Will Survive” exemplifies disco’s power in providing pleasure for those who have experienced “stigmatization, marginalization, and invisibilisation” in society, through existing as a genre that empowered “blacks, Latino/as and queers” in unified euphoric resistance.²¹ Through the lens of Foucault, “I Will Survive” functions as a subversive entity, spurring pleasure across marginalized demographics that societal structures sought to control and contain. While music and anthems like “I Will Survive” can function in unifying and empowering ways for marginalized people through the discourse they utilize, they also may function in disempowering respects through their discourse, portrayed most recently and prominently in

Lady Gaga's "Born This Way."

Dissecting the Contemporary Queer Anthem: Lady Gaga's "Born This Way"

On the night of the 2010 MTV Music Video Awards, pop superstar Lady Gaga revealed her newest single "Born This Way," singing, "I'm beautiful in my way, 'Cause God makes no mistakes, I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way."²² About a month later in October 2010, approximately four months prior to the song's public release, Elton John stated that "Born This Way" would "completely get rid of Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive.' This is the new 'I Will Survive.' That was the gay anthem. This is the new gay anthem. Actually, it's not a gay anthem—it can apply to anybody."²³ Upon its release in February of 2011, "Born This Way" quickly became one of the fastest selling singles of all time²⁴ as well as a widely-recognized track of empowerment and "gay anthem."²⁵ Although "Born This Way" has been perceived as universally empowering, discourse analysis reveals that it only allows for pleasure to be realized through conformance to strict standards within specific power dynamics.

This is not to say that "Born This Way" possesses absolutely no empowerment potential through operating within dominant power structures. "Born This Way" was created by a white cisgender woman who utilized her position of power in society as a mega popstar to create, what she perceived as, a universal anthem of empowerment specifically targeting queer and generally "disenfranchised" audiences. While the song's commercial success exemplifies its mass cultural impact and appeal to mainstream audiences and, at least, certain queer and potentially disenfranchised audiences, it also demonstrates how Lady Gaga, despite intention, has exerted power and control on the marginalized demographics she defines in the song's lyrical content. Through analyzing the discourse Lady Gaga employs, this essay will reveal how "Born This Way" functions in rather disempowering ways, stripping the power to be empowered from the audience and placing it in the fixed nature of one's sexuality, the usage of constricting and problematic labels, and the hands of god.

Firstly, the title of the song itself exists as a means of essentializing queerness to a singular point of origination: birth. In Leila Rupp's article entitled "Sexual Fluidity 'Before Sex,'" she emphasizes the longevity of sexual fluidity for women and mentions its existence for men.²⁶ Rupp also references the work of Lisa Diamond's 2009 book *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* as well as her earlier article "Was It a Phase? Young Women's Relinquishment of Lesbian/Bisexual Identities Over a 5-Year Period" from 2003. In the latter piece, Diamond states that fluidity challenges conceptions of sexuality "as a fixed and uniformly early-developing trait," concluding that "certain individuals experience diverse, changing, and conflicting patterns of sexual attraction, behavior, and identification over the life course."²⁷ Through ignoring sexual fluidity in "Born This Way," Lady Gaga is essentializing sexuality as something unchangeable while simultaneously asserting that one should be empowered in their own identity because they were "born this way." Sexual fluidity defies conceptions that queer identity is defined at birth, and thus, through heavily basing empowerment on being born into an identity, those who experience sexual fluidity throughout the course of their lives are excluded from the discourse "Born This Way" is employing.

Lady Gaga originally wrote "Born This Way" as a message of appreciation to the queer community for supporting her career as she ascended to worldwide fame,²⁸ which is reflected in the song's prominent lyric "no matter gay, straight or bi, lesbian, transgendered life, I'm on the right track, baby, I was born to survive."²⁹ However, through her usage of identity labels, Lady Gaga is engaging in what Foucault discusses as the distinguishing of "perverse" sexualities from the norm, presuming that living a "transgendered life," a gender identity, would be an inherently different form of "life" from being "gay," "straight," "bi," or "lesbian," which are sexual orientations. Using labels, which Foucault states began through openly confessing one's "unnatural" sexuality for the purposes of control, in this manner provides limited empowerment, only accessible to the groups Lady Gaga is explicitly labeling in the manner she has constructed.³⁰ Therefore, one must classify themselves within one of these explicitly-defined categories within the queer umbrella that "Born This Way" provides if they are to be included and have access to empowerment.

"Born This Way" proceeds to use problematic and limiting classifications through its usage of

the terms "chola" and "orient" as distinct racialized groups, including these labels in a similar line in which she states, "No matter black, white, or beige, Chola or orient made, I'm on the right track baby, I was born to be brave."³¹ These words possess derogatory meanings to the groups "Born This Way" is forcefully labeling, contrasting with the more universal potential of songs such as "I Will Survive," which empowered racial/ethnic minority groups, according to Hubbs, through its universal message of resistance and defiance against power. Despite the issues with how Lady Gaga employs and constructs identity labels in "Born This Way," she has asserted the song's universality in the following statement:

I want to write my freedom record. I want to write my this-is-who-the-fuck-I-am anthem, but I don't want it to be hidden in poetic wizardry and metaphors. I want it to be an attack, an assault on the issue because I think, especially in today's music, everything gets kind of washy sometimes and the message gets hidden in the lyrical play. Harkening back to the early '90s, when Madonna, En Vogue, Whitney Houston and TLC were making very empowering music for women and the gay community and all kinds of disenfranchised communities, the lyrics and the melodies were very poignant and very gospel and very spiritual and I said, 'That's the kind of record I need to make. That's the record that's going to shake up the industry.'³²

Although Lady Gaga may have aspired to empower "disenfranchised communities," it is evident that through her usage problematic identity labels that "Born This Way" itself does not exemplify this mission. In her attempts to be inclusive regarding both race, sexuality, and gender diversity in "Born This Way," she manages to disempower groups who may not seek to be identified in the manner she constructs.

"Born This Way" opens with "It doesn't matter if you love him, or capital H-I-M, just put your paws up, because you were born this way, baby."³³ Lady Gaga is initially referring to a person's religiosity, or their love for "capital H-I-M," as not being of importance in achieving empowerment. However, she quickly follows this statement with the song's first verse:

"My mama told me when I was young, We are all born superstars, She rolled my hair and put my lipstick on, In the glass of her boudoir, There's nothin' wrong with lovin' who you are, She said, 'cause He [God] made you perfect, babe, So hold your head up, girl and you'll go far" along with her more prominent reoccurring lyric "I'm beautiful in my way, 'Cause God makes no mistakes."³⁴

To be empowered through the discourse of "Born This Way" is therefore not a purely mortal transcendence, contrasting with Gaynor's "I Will Survive," which, according to Hubbs, champions the power of an individualistic mortal perseverance in overcoming oppressive power structures. Lady Gaga is asserting that one can only engage in self-empowerment if they recognize that this is because "god makes no mistakes," not through their own actual agency, defining empowerment through the forces of religiously defined approval.

Conclusion

Queer physical spaces, although both temporary and under constant threat, and the queer empowerment anthem emphasize the power of reimagination and transcendence of oppressive realities as a means of empowerment to queer people who are marginalized in society. The repurposing of the early 20th century dance hall by queer people or the euphoric transcendence of "I Will Survive" for marginalized demographics exemplify this empowerment potential. Music has served a role and possesses the potential to empower demographics who are threatened by normative power. However, "Born This Way" does not allow for these more universal possibilities to be achieved in the narrative that Lady Gaga constructs, confining its empowerment potential to a rather limited and problematic narrative. While certain people who fall within the lines that Lady Gaga draws through the song's discourse may find the song to be wholly empowering for them, those who feel disenfranchised from the usage of limiting

classifications, problematic labels, the denial of sexual fluidity, and the song's employment of religious narratives, may feel excluded from the narrative she conjures. It is one that only exists for those who fit within its confines or for those who may choose to follow it.

References

- ¹ Scott L Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 37.
- ² Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 3.
- ³ George Chauncey, "The Bowery as Haven and Spectacle," in *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 35.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 42-43.
- ⁵ George Chauncey, "Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public': Forging a Gay World in the Streets," In *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 187.
- ⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 12-13.
- ⁷ George Chauncey, "The Exclusion of Homosexuality from the Public Sphere in the 1930s," In *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 331.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 337.
- ¹⁰ George Chauncey, "The Double Life, Camp Culture, and the Making of a Collective Identity," In *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 296.
- ¹¹ Buckland, *Impossible Dance*, 6.
- ¹² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 38.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 42-43.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-45.
- ¹⁵ Sara Warner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Ann Arbor, Mich: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 17.
- ¹⁶ Nadine Hubbs, "I Will Survive': Musical Mappings of Queer Social Space in a Disco Anthem," *Popular Music* 26, no. 02 (May 2007): 231-232, doi:10.1017/s0261143007001250.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 238.
- ²⁰ Gaynor, Gloria. "I Will Survive." CD. Polydor. October 1978.
- ²¹ Hubbs, "I Will Survive," 241.
- ²² Kara Warner, "Lady Gaga Announces Born This Way Album At VMAs," *MTV News*, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1647696/lady-gaga-announces-born-this-way-album-at-vmas/>.
- ²³ Tanner Stransky, "Lady Gaga and Elton John: Working Together on the Pop Queen's New Album?," *EW.com*, last modified October 7, 2010, <http://ew.com/article/2010/10/07/lady-gaga-elton-john-new-album/>.
- ²⁴ Gil Kaufman, "Lady Gaga's 'Born This Way' Is Fastest-Selling Single In iTunes History," *MTV News*, last modified February 18, 2011, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1658317/lady-gaga-born-this-way-itunes/>.
- ²⁵ Jon Savage, "Lady Gaga's New Gay Anthem," *The Guardian*, last modified February 14, 2011, [https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/feb/14/lady-gaga-gay-anthem.](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/feb/14/lady-gaga-gay-anthem.;); "Lady Gaga Debuts 'gay Anthem' Born This Way," *PinkNews*, last modified February 11, 2011, <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2011/02/11/lady-gaga-debuts-gay-anthem-born-this-way/>; Jocelyn Vena, "Lady Gaga's 'Born This Way': The New Gay Anthem?," *MTV News*, last modified February 11, 2011, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1657772/lady-gaga-born-this-way/>.
- ²⁶ Leila J. Rupp, "Sexual Fluidity 'Before Sex'," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 4 (2012): 854-855, doi:10.1086/664470.
- ²⁷ Lisa M. Diamond, "Was it a phase? Young women's relinquishment of lesbian/bisexual identities over a 5-year period," *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 84, no. 2 (2003): 362, doi:10.1037//0022-3514.84.2.352.
- ²⁸ Bill Werde, "Lady Gaga 'Born This Way' Cover Story," *Billboard.com*, February 18, 2011, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/472976/lady-gaga-born-this-way-cover-story>.
- ²⁹ Stefani Germanotta et al., "Born This Way," CD, Interscope. February 11, 2011.
- ³⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 38-43.
- ³¹ Germanotta, "Born This Way."
- ³² Bill Werde, "The Billboard Q&A: Lady Gaga's Good Romance," *Billboard*, last modified March 4, 2011, <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/1179099/the-billboard-qa-lady-gagas-good-romance>.
- ³³ Germanotta, "Born This Way."
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*

The Price of a Sexual Politics of Respectability: W. E. B. Du Bois, Racial Uplift, and the Harlem Renaissance

Clayton Finn

The Harlem Renaissance's outpouring of African American creativity included and represented Black artists, writers, and activists of varying sexual identities and practices. Numerous scholars have analyzed the coded homosexual or sexually alternative dialogues within artists' and writers' work during the Harlem Renaissance, and revealed that in many cases there was a network amongst these individuals through which they received affirmation and cooperation in their behaviors and felt a sense of solidarity with like persons.¹ As part of the Black elite in Harlem, many of these sexually alternative individuals interacted and maintained relationships with those of the older activist generation: champions of Black respectability politics. The new wave of sexual exploration and individual preferences contradicted traditional notions of Black masculinity and heterosexuality that were viewed as integral to the overall advancement of the Black race within white society. One of the most notable advocates of this conventional view was W. E. B. Du Bois. Accordingly, Du Bois's leadership roles and immense influence within the Black community at the time had the potential to severely impact the successes of these sexually alternative writers, artists, and activists within the Harlem Renaissance. How did Du Bois navigate this atmosphere of sexual politics? I will consider this question and examine his construction of a "talented tenth" heterosexual Black masculine identity rooted in the politics of respectability, and demonstrate how Du Bois's projection of this identity as an ideal standard for Black activist men affected the involvement, success, and overall welfare of queer individuals within the Harlem Renaissance and the broader civil rights movement.

Scholar, writer, and activist, W. E. B. Du Bois is widely regarded as one of the most important Black figures in United States history.² Born in Massachusetts in 1868, he became the first Black American to earn a doctoral degree when he completed his at Harvard University in 1895. Afterwards, Du Bois published notable works such as *The Souls of Black Folk*,³ and, in 1909, co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the longest standing civil rights organization in the US. His outstanding reputation and involvement in founding the activist organization led to a leadership position as Director of Publicity and Research, through which he started the NAACP's official monthly publication based in New York: *The Crisis* magazine. These developments occurred in generally the same time as the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance, a New York boom in Black artistic creation and popularity that Du Bois played a part in initiating, naming, and elevating.⁴ He used *The Crisis* and his immense influence to cultivate a progressive movement for Black civil rights in America and propagate his plan for Black social and economic improvement.

Du Bois believed that Black advancement in US society would be instigated and propelled by "the talented tenth" of the Black population.⁵ This phrase, which he popularized in a 1903 essay, referred to the elite portion of Blacks that could obtain college educations, financial success, or artistic prowess and notoriety. He and many of his followers adhered to this as their theory of racial uplift, what would ultimately cause white-dominant society to recognize Black humanity in this "New Negro" image and begin to treat them equally.⁶ Thus, Du Bois saw it as the responsibility of this talented tenth to contribute towards the greater goals and social well-being of the entire race. While fighting for racial rights was certainly radical at the time, Du Bois's conceptions of proper and respectable social behavior were not. The Black elite was to remain socially, personally, and sexually respectable so that white communities would see Blacks' ability to act outside of their caricatured stereotypes of racial stupidity, savagery, and hypersexuality.⁷ By portraying Blackness respectably, they might gain white empathy and make their politically activist agendas more attainable. The Harlem Renaissance's boom of Black creative voices and accessible publicity could be beneficial in the dissemination of this view and overall racial uplift.

Du Bois's conception of art, from literature to visual arts, was largely linked to political activism, as he argued that through politically charged art, Blacks could gain respect from the larger community and create their own respectable image of Blackness. Du Bois detailed his qualifications for proper Black art in a 1928 piece titled "Criteria of Negro Art," the text of an address given by Du Bois at an NAACP conference.⁸ In accordance with his racial uplift theory, Du Bois encouraged Black artists to utilize their skills to construct pleasing works that positively portrayed Black identities and populations to the white community in forms that were both accessible and palatable. Of course, many disagreed with his specific notion of art's purpose and form and placed larger emphasis on its honest portrayal of life, aesthetic qualities, and the individual goals of each artist, leading to Du Bois's reputation for being somewhat closed-minded.⁹ But, Du Bois found this honesty problematic because whites could use negative aspects of Black communities alongside confirmation bias to affirm their already racist, negative conceptions of Blackness. Any negative portrayals, though they may at times be true and creatively pleasing, could be heavily exploited by white-dominant society to further subjugate racialized others and perpetuate white supremacy. Thus, he argued that the pleasant, creative expression associated with artistic creation, what he deemed "Beauty," should not be disconnected from a positively political message, claiming, "all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailings of the purists."¹⁰ In fact, he argued that Beauty should be just, right, and true, and because racial oppression was unjust, wrong, and propagating a false ideology of Black inferiority, properly honest, good art should actively contribute towards achieving ethical, racially equal rights. If adhered to, this view would instigate racial uplift because the talented tenth would autonomously construct an undeniably positive and human image of Blackness through which white society would begin to accept Black humanity and subsequently provide civil rights.

When others disagreed and produced art that challenged this vision, Du Bois was deeply and often publicly critical. In "Criteria of Negro Art," he even stated, "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda."¹¹ Du Bois called Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*, his most famous novel that intimately depicted urban life in Harlem, "nauseating," and said McKay "has set out to cater for that prurient demand on the part of white folk for a portrayal in Negroes of... utter licentiousness."¹² Du Bois boldly described McKay, a writer whose poetry he was actually quite fond of, as someone accommodating white desires for further ammunition in their racial oppression. Alongside pandering to white prejudices, Du Bois feared the Black artistic movement of the early-twentieth century would be reduced to "decadence," a self-indulgent focus on aesthetic quality, hedonistic pleasures, and dishonorable pursuits that would only hurt the fight for racial rights.¹³ A 1926 questionnaire published in *The Crisis* reveals these fears with a piece calling writers to send in their conceptions of art using several prompt questions.¹⁴ Though an author is not listed, Du Bois's views, as editor of the magazine, shine through. The questionnaire begins with several generic queries about the role of art in society and artistic criticism, but then the questions become overtly focused on addressing the use of decadence to cater to white audiences, most explicitly seen in the last two prompts.

6. Is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them?

7. Is there not a real danger that young colored writers will be tempted to follow the popular trend in portraying Negro character in the underworld rather than seeking to paint the truth about themselves and their own social class?¹⁵

These questions not only reveal Du Bois's perspectives on the larger direction of Black art during this time, but it also demonstrates his proclivity to use his position at *The Crisis* to push his personal views regarding Black representation in art and political activism. These artistic criteria and strict standards for how Black artists and activists should showcase their communities led to Du Bois and *The Crisis* being associated with elite notions of Black respectability,

as will later be seen in contrast with queer artists and activists.

Considering Du Bois's leadership position in the NAACP and editorship of one of the foremost African American publications in the country, his criticism and projection of specific standards for respectable, activist Black identities influenced various individuals. He could police those that contradicted his standards of Black portrayal, including aspects of class, gender, and sexuality, through affecting their personal involvement in the movement and for many, their publications in *The Crisis*. Artists and activists that participated in sexually alternative behavior, such as homosexuality, hedonistic promiscuity, or anything challenging traditional patriarchal heterosexuality would not fit Du Bois's mold for Black respectability. Through reading Du Bois's works, letters, and simply observing his behaviors in specific circumstances, one can also deduce his precise views of Black masculinity and heterosexuality that help us further understand how queer Black men during the Harlem Renaissance operated outside of Du Bois's standards, and how they often suffered for this. The combination of these criteria for Black art, talented tenth racial uplift, and ideals of Black masculinity and heterosexuality constitute Du Bois's sexual politics of respectability.

To further examine and illuminate this discourse, it is important to address specific cases and individuals through which Du Bois's sexual politics directly affected the involvement of artists and activists in the broader Harlem Renaissance. One of the main individuals affected by Du Bois's sexual politics was Augustus Granville Dill. Dill's case has been seldom discussed by scholars, who have generally only made brief address of him as an example of the common distaste for homosexuality amongst the Black elite during the early-twentieth century, but his strong personal relationship with Du Bois reveals a great deal about the role of sexual respectability in Du Bois's vision for the larger civil rights movement. Born in 1881, Dill was a highly-educated sociologist and musician and in many ways, the embodiment of Du Bois's notions of the talented tenth that would help instigate the racial uplift of the entire community.¹⁶ Du Bois and Dill developed both a personal and professional relationship that led to Dill joining the staff at *The Crisis* as Business Manager and handling much of the day-to-day operation of the magazine.¹⁷ Various correspondence evidence Du Bois and Dill's close friendship and reveal Du Bois's role as a mentor to Dill and his intention for Dill to be his successor in some aspects of his work. Dill and Du Bois even co-edited a book titled *Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans*.¹⁸ While the book addresses a variety of aspects of proper black behavior and manners necessary for uplift, it also outlines an ideal of patriarchal family structure that values a traditional masculine leader, making it quite ironic that Dill and Du Bois's relationship ultimately crumbled because of Dill's failure to adhere to Black male respectability.¹⁹ In late 1927, a letter from Du Bois to Dill's sister, Mary Dill Broaddus, shows that Dill's work was suffering due to "a growing evidence of strain and unhappiness."²⁰ Du Bois details his various efforts to encourage and increase Dill's morale both personally and in business with an underlying theme that reveals his deep care for Dill's well-being. However, the letter concludes by stating Du Bois's intention to fire Dill from *The Crisis* and includes a description of Dill's inability to perform professionally.

...He is not happy. He is lonesome. He broods. I think that his sensitive, artistic nature makes the hard and dull grind of business routine repulsive.²¹

Such a claim speaks to Dill's personal demeanor and categorizes him outside of Du Bois's standard for professional, assertive social activism in a setting such as *The Crisis*. He observes Dill's struggles in the workplace and attempts to find an explanation, Dill's artistic identity. Though, the following events also appear to further show Du Bois Dill's personal and professional shortcomings and their associated explanations.

Before Du Bois carried out Dill's termination, Dill was arrested in a New York subway restroom for homosexual activities. Du Bois subsequently sent Dill a heartfelt, and clearly difficult to write, letter asking for his resignation from *The Crisis* and encouraging him to overcome this trying period.

With February 1, 1928, I shall have to ask your resignation as Business

Manager of THE CRISIS. How much of pain and misgiving this causes me only you can realize. You have been my friend and loyal helper for near twenty years. I had never contemplated continuing my life work without you by my side.²²

In addition to speaking to the closeness of their relationship and Du Bois's intentions for their future work together, the letter, as well as his correspondence with Broaddus, reveals a multifaceted reason for the termination that is related to the overall success of *The Crisis*, with Du Bois simply declaring, "THE CRISIS cannot longer afford your salary." He later goes as far to say, "Forget the little incident that has worried you so out of all proportion to its significance... It has nothing at all to do with my action." Later in his life, however, he admitted that the letter was written largely because of Dill's sexual behavior, and one can clearly see that the unfolding of these circumstances must have aided Du Bois's understanding of Dill's mental state.²³ It is most likely that Du Bois considered Dill's homosexual behavior in reciprocal correlative relation to his mental health: Dill's poor state led to his deviant behavior while perhaps an inclination for sexually alternative action also impacted his health. Du Bois's letter proceeds to prescribe corrective, healing actions embedded in Black heterosexual respectability.

You need peace and quiet; out door [sic] air and sunshine; good and continuous physical exercise; and deep, dreamless sleep. A few years of this will make you a new man—strong, well, vigorous, ready for battle in the world. Then with a loving sympathetic wife you can be happy and successful.

Du Bois's goals to make Dill in to a "new man" recall the language of the Harlem Renaissance's construction of a "new negro."²⁴ In the same way that images of blackness in America need to be reconstructed for overall uplift, Du Bois reveals a desire to reform Dill in the image of the new black respectability and thereby cure his inadequacies and sexual deviance. He then describes the refreshed Dill using words traditionally associated with masculine strength and assertiveness, quite contrary to Du Bois's earlier description of him as a sensitive artist type. Finally, Du Bois prescribed Dill the need for a "sympathetic wife," capping his vision for respectable Black heterosexuality as the overall solution to Dill's troubles. In *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*, George Chauncey discusses how, at the time, homosexuality was largely considered a behavior not an identity; consequently, Dill's deviancy could simply be remedied by heterosexual marriage and masculine revitalization.²⁵ Perhaps, however, Dill's aloneness was due to his romantic and sexual preferences being social unacceptable and he had chosen singlehood, in one letter referring to himself as "the 'one-man' Dill family."²⁶ Still, in a *The Crisis* article announcing Dill's departure, Du Bois once again said, "[Dill] was by nature and training the sensitive artist and musician rather than the business man and it was with hesitation that I asked him to leave his chosen vocation of teaching... and throw in his lot with [The Crisis]."²⁷ The piece subtly suggests that Dill does not fit his ideal notions of Black masculinity and was thereby unfit to lead *The Crisis*. By not mentioning Dill's arrest, Du Bois retains respectability, keeps Dill from public embarrassment, and maintains a generally positive tone, stating, "he leaves [the magazine] today with the good wishes of all his fellow workers who will always remain his sympathetic and admiring friends." Sadly, while Du Bois clearly intends to keep a close relationship with Dill, later letters between the two and mutual friends reveal that Dill's friendships were hardly long-lasting nor supportive of his financial and mental well-being.

The events following Dill's resignation are typically overlooked in scholarly analysis, but their procession exemplifies Du Bois's massive influence and the consequent possibility of drastic consequences for those that neglected to adhere to his politics of sexual respectability. Du Bois remained in sparse contact with Dill after his termination from *The Crisis*, but correspondence shows an underlying awkwardness and an overall disapproval of Dill's behaviors. In the next couple of years, Dill had difficulty finding and maintaining employment, entered into large amounts of debt, and was apparently even homeless.²⁸ Du Bois offered his help on multiple occasions and aided Dill's employment search by publishing an occupational adver-

tisement in *The Crisis*, but its effectiveness appeared to be null. Du Bois's frustration with and disapproval of Dill was made explicitly clear in a 1931 letter stating, "Your actions are distressing and humiliating to all of your friends beyond endurance."³⁰ Dill clearly took this statement to heart, exemplified by his paranoia that Du Bois had intentionally ignored him during a random passing on the streets of New York.³¹ When Du Bois later requested his help clarifying some banking affairs while he was Business Manager, Dill expressed his happiness that his previous employment under Du Bois was "no dark secret," further showing Dill's fear that Du Bois was ashamed of their association.³² Underlying these correspondences remains the ever-present discourse of Black masculinity and respectability, through which both his sexual activities leading to his arrest and his subsequent professional failures had caused Dill to fall out of favor with Du Bois. Later in 1933, a mutual friend, Hazel Branch, confidentially reported to Du Bois that Dill was facing an undisclosed difficulty in which "a white man is involved," and she described one man's response as "thoroughly disgusted and unsympathetic."³³ The private nature of the matter and the language used suggests that Dill had been involved in another homosexually related arrest, as Branch reported the next day that he had been sentenced to a work house.³⁴ Dill's homosexual activities and consequent resignation from *The Crisis* overall marked the beginning of a downward spiral ending much of Dill's vocational success and his involvement with the overall civil rights movement.

In the next few decades, Du Bois and Dill's relationship withered. They maintained rare contact until Dill's death in 1956,³⁵ and Du Bois reflected on the overall outcome of their relationship in his autobiography, published posthumously in 1968.

In the midst of my career there burst on me a new and undreamed of aspect of sex. A young man, long my disciple and student, then my co-helper and successor to part of my work, was suddenly arrested for molesting men in public places. I had before that time no conception of homosexuality. I had never understood the tragedy of an Oscar Wilde. I dismissed my co-worker forthwith, and spent heavy days regretting my act.³⁶

Here, Du Bois admits that the primary reason for asking Dill to resign was his sexual behavior but also emphasizes the closeness of their relationship and his intentions to have Dill succeed and remain prominent in the movement. Du Bois's unfamiliarity with homosexuality and his sexual politics of respectability essentially prevented Dill from contributing to the Harlem Renaissance, and the tertiary effects on Dill's well-being and reputation surely made recovery difficult. Dill's own will and mental health undoubtedly played a major role in his emotional and economic downward spiral and his disconnection from the movement, but this example speaks volumes about Du Bois's influence and the lasting impact of Dill's dismissal.

Other artists and activists came in direct contact with Du Bois's sexual politics of respectability, including Claude McKay, a Jamaican immigrant and prominent writer and poet of the Harlem Renaissance.³⁷ For the most part, Du Bois was quite fond of McKay, praising his creative talent and providing him publication opportunities in *The Crisis*. The diversion of their viewpoints on respectability are most evident in Du Bois's 1928 review of McKay's novel *Home to Harlem*, one of his most sexually overt works.³⁸ McKay was known for being more open with his sexuality than was socially acceptable at the time, which though not self-defined, has been generally deemed as bisexuality, and this shined through in some of his work.³⁹ As briefly addressed earlier, Du Bois thought this novel catered to white desires for images of Black decadence to support their racial oppression. McKay responded to these comments and expressed his frustration by quoting Du Bois's most vitriolic remarks in a somewhat unrelated letter regarding the publication of a few poems in *The Crisis* without McKay's consent.

I should think a publication so holy-clean and righteous-pure as the "Crisis" should hesitate about printing anything from the pen of a writer who wallows so much in "dirt", "filth", "drunkenness", "fighting", and "lascivious sexual promiscuity" [sic]...deep-sunk in depravity though he may be, the author of "Home to Harlem" prefers to remain unrepentant and unregenerate and he

"distinctly" is not grateful for any free baptism of grace in the cleansing pages of the "Crisis". Yours for more "utter absence of restraint" ... Claude McKay⁴⁰

McKay's claims clarify the reputation of *The Crisis* as one rooted in Du Bois racial uplift theory and politics of respectability. Additionally, his reference to the magazine as being able to cleanse himself insinuates Du Bois's self-interested intentions to use *The Crisis* as exemplar of and for the propagation of his own views of racial advancement.

Much of this conflict can be explained by McKay and Du Bois's differing views on the role of art in activism, which McKay highlights in the aforementioned letter by harshly critiquing Du Bois for unconditionally connecting art to propaganda and not recognizing aesthetic value. McKay on the other hand viewed artists and activists as primarily contrasting identities, categorizing himself in the former and Du Bois in the latter.⁴¹ Taking Du Bois's criticism as personal attacks, McKay retaliated by arguing that "nowhere in your writings do you reveal any comprehension of esthetics [sic] and therefore you are not competent nor qualified to pass judgment upon any work of art."⁴² In McKay's view, Du Bois was making judgments outside his expertise, but because Du Bois conceived of art and politics as deeply interconnected, Du Bois considered himself, as a political activist and writer, wholly justified in providing artistic critique. Also, as previously seen with Dill, Du Bois perceived an artistic nature as potentially conflicting with respectable Black heterosexuality; thus, McKay's artistic self-identification may have confirmed Du Bois's negative views of his sexuality.⁴³ Nevertheless, McKay conceived of art as first and foremost an aesthetic exercise in honesty and creative expression, resulting in a noteworthy public dismissal of his work in *The Crisis*.

Some scholars have also attributed McKay's immigrant self to his divergent relationship with race and politics, compared to African American "double consciousness" or simultaneous Black and American identities.⁴⁴ McKay's experiences of classism in Jamaica contributed to his positive dispositions and sympathies towards lower class Black communities. He demonstrates inclinations towards portraying Black decadence or "low life" in his writing, and his Leftist politics, more radical than Du Bois's, hoped to empower the Black proletariat. In fact, McKay was at various times strongly associated with Communism, though never officially a member of the party.⁴⁵ This could have further influenced Du Bois's treatment of and personal views towards him, as many Black intellectuals regarded Marxism as in conflict with Black goals, focusing too strongly on class and neglecting race.

Other sexually alternative writers during the Harlem Renaissance produced work more explicit than McKay's, and though Du Bois largely avoided addressing such forms of art, relatively small interactions consistently reiterated his sexual politics. For example, in 1926 several Harlem Renaissance writers that were discreetly known as queer, such as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston, published a literary magazine titled *Fire!!*, which included what is widely known as one of the most homosexually erotic pieces circulated during the Harlem Renaissance: Richard Bruce Nugent's short story "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade."⁴⁶ Du Bois initially promoted the magazine in *The Crisis*, though it is unclear whether he was aware of its content at the time. His overall views of such art and his later actions suggest not. Yet, *Fire!!*'s authors intended to initiate controversy, wanting to offend the older generation's respectability politics and even telling a story of Du Bois "roasting" *Fire!!* in *The Crisis*, though he wrote no such criticism.⁴⁷ Robert E. Hemenway argues that the authors viewed Du Bois's denouncement as an authentication of their deviation from art as propaganda and towards art as absolute aesthetics beyond politics.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Du Bois certainly abhorred it, and when his daughter wrote to him asking for a copy of *Fire!!*, he sent it hidden "under another cover," seemingly so no one might know they read it, and insisted she send it back when she was finished.⁴⁹ As such was Du Bois's apparent plan of action: avoiding giving *Fire!!* any further publicity or discussion as this would only contribute towards the public display of Black decadence and cater to white prejudices.

While Dill, McKay, and the authors of *Fire!!* were dismissed, still other sexually alternative individuals who practiced homosexuality during the movement effectively maintained respectability within Du Bois's standards. After all, his sexual and artistic politics often emphasized the public image of Blackness and how it was being broadcast to white com-

munities; thus, those that kept their sexual behaviors hidden were sometimes able to maintain their decorum. One important example of this is seen with Countee Cullen, a prolific Harlem Renaissance poet and the husband of Du Bois's daughter Yolande.⁵⁰

Cullen was tremendously respected by Du Bois, as he fit well within Du Bois's mold for politically charged artistic expression and Black respectability. His poetry often integrated racial undertones that drew attention to African American double consciousness, essentially the conflicts between simultaneously being both black and American, a notion many conceptualized as somewhat antithetical, and the racial oppression ever-present in early twentieth century America.⁵¹ Cullen's poetic form also regularly followed traditionally European formats of language and structure, demonstrating a general adherence to white standards of poetic aptitude.⁵² As a result, Du Bois aided Cullen's artistic efforts in any way possible, providing him with publication opportunities, helping him receive funding, and even organizing his marriage to Yolande.⁵³ Because Cullen was deemed an example of Harlem's talented tenth, his marriage to Yolande was viewed as a racial triumph of Black heterosexual respectability, and the embodiment of the intersection of art and politics.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the extravagant wedding with thousands of attendants was a public spectacle of Black respectability and economic advancement.

The marriage, however, was short-lived due to Cullen's inability to maintain sexual respectability in the privacy of his marriage. Du Bois showed consistent support for Cullen over Yolande during several marital conflicts and clearly placed substantial weight of the continuing production of quality Black art on Cullen's success.⁵⁵ He seemed to hinge respectable black patriarchal success, both in the family and in society, upon the endurance of Cullen's marriage, what Du Bois hoped could act as an ideal for the black elite.⁵⁶ But, Du Bois's council could not solve their marital conflicts, and Yolande eventually sent her father a letter explaining the concluding circumstances of their union.

Shortly after our attempt at reconciliation Countee told me something about himself that just finished things. Other people told me too but I thought & hoped they were lying. If he had not told me himself that it was true I wouldn't have believed it but since he did I knew then that eventually I'd have to leave him. I never loved him but I had an enormous amount of respect for him. Having lost that—and having an added feeling of horror at the abnormality of it I couldn't "make it." I knew something was wrong—physically, but being very ignorant & inexperienced I couldn't be sure what. When he confessed that he's always known that he was abnormal sexually—as far as other men were concerned then many things became clear. At first I felt terribly angry—I felt he'd no right to marry any woman knowing that. Now I feel only sorry for him—all I want is not to have to be anywhere near him. I've heard of such things of course but the idea of it being true of anyone close to me gives me a feeling of horror & disgust. . . I promised him I would not tell it or use it as a grounds for divorce so you can tear this up. . . If he was born that way I can't help it.⁵⁷

The letter makes clear Cullen's homosexual proclivities without ever explicitly saying so, much like Du Bois's letters to Dill. Nevertheless, Yolande makes her feelings quite clear by expressing her shock, revulsion, and desire to simply be away from him. In stating that she never loved him, she bolsters scholars claims that Du Bois was largely responsible for the union, and Yolande was essentially used by her father for racial uplift. While Du Bois tries to remedy Dill's homosexual behavior with the Black masculinity of the New Negro, Yolande appears to deem homosexuality closer to an identity than a deviant behavior. Mason Stokes argues otherwise, noting Yolande's description of Cullen's abnormality in comparison to heterosexuality as a sexual standard, but her recognition of Cullen being "born that way" seems to affirm his homosexuality as inherent to his identity.⁵⁸ Perhaps as part of a younger generation, she understood homosexuality different than Du Bois's heterosexual respectability model; though, Yolande's views are clearly influenced by her father's, as she agrees to keep Cullen's secret. Privately, both Yolande and Du Bois were aware of Cullen's homosexual tendencies, but they

agreed to maintain its secrecy and avoid projecting a negative image of Blackness to the public. After the incident, Du Bois's continued care and support for Cullen confirms that he cared most about this respectable image rather than Cullen's private sexual preferences. The poet continued to produce work Du Bois thought exemplary of the larger movement, and discussion of the specifics that caused the divorce were evidently avoided.

While the Cullen-Du Bois marriage remains significant, Du Bois's relationship with Alain Locke also proves fruitful for analysis and reiterates much of the same public-private distinctions regarding sexual respectability. Locke, a highly-esteemed writer, scholar, and professor at Howard University, had a mutually beneficial relationship with Du Bois.⁵⁹ They both aided each other in various cases of publishing, promotion, and employment, perhaps most notably working together on the monumental work *The New Negro*.⁶⁰ In a short promotional piece in *The Crisis*, Du Bois claimed that *The New Negro* likely expressed "better than any book that has been published in the last ten years the present state of thought and culture among American Negroes."⁶¹ Contrasted with his comments on McKay's work, Locke's edited volume overall adhered to Du Bois's standards of respectability, though he was concerned with Locke's valuation of artistic aesthetics separate from politics. But in practice, Locke was a strong embodiment of talented tenth Blackness and contributed to the construction of a positive Black image. In "Blossoming in Strange New Forms: Male Homosexuality and the Harlem Renaissance," James Kelly demonstrates Locke's reputation as a harsh editor that adjusted or removed decadent themes from writers' work during his revisions.⁶² However, Locke's own sexuality, particularly his homosexual practices, have been called an "open secret."⁶³ Other queer Black people involved in the Harlem Renaissance knew of Locke's homosexuality as he participated in a discreet network of gay Black men.⁶⁴ Though there is no evidence of an explicit confrontation regarding sexual politics between Du Bois and Locke, Du Bois had surely heard rumors and was somewhat familiar with this "open secret."

Juxtaposed with Augustus Dill's case, Du Bois actually helped Locke maintain his professional success as a respectable image of blackness. When Locke faced administrative conflicts at Howard University and was removed from his position, Du Bois wrote him a lengthy letter of recommendation for his reinstatement.⁶⁵ Though Du Bois made it known that they were not particularly close friends and at times disagreed, he also expressed his great respect for Locke as a "teacher of youth" and thought he was a valuable asset to Howard University. When Locke was reinstated about a month later, he wrote Du Bois and expressed gratitude for this assistance.⁶⁶ In contrasting this interaction with those of Dill and McKay, we see that Du Bois favored Locke because he maintained an image of Black success and respectability, and much like Cullen, separated his private sexual politics from his publicly beneficial work in education and scholarship. By making this public-private distinction and garnering respect from Du Bois, he was left to his own pursuits and not bothered or hugely impacted by Du Bois's sexual politics of respectability.

While Du Bois handled such cases of homosexuality in nuanced situational ways, other Leftist political movements of the era differed. The Communist movement of the time, which was quickly gaining prominence, generally disapproved of homosexuality and was quite dismissive of those sympathetic to its practice.⁶⁷ Alternative sexual behaviors were considered distractions to the proletariat's revolution and inhibited their growth by not resulting in reproduction. Additionally, many communists argued that pushing progressive sexual politics risked alienating potential working class converts that may hold more conservative views. The Communist Party's official stance judged homosexuality a mental illness until 1934, when male homosexuality was outlawed altogether in the Soviet Union, punishable by prison or labor camp for up to five years.⁶⁸ This motion outraged Claude McKay, who until this point was sympathetic to Communism, and revealed the urgency with which the Soviet Union felt necessary to handle homosexuality.⁶⁹ This criminalization and thereby oppression of such a group reflected what some thought was a reversal of Communism back towards national state politics and government controls, as was seen with American capitalism.⁷⁰

The Anarchist movement was hugely critical of such social and legal controls over personal bodies and was thus generally accepting of queer sexuality.⁷¹ Suspicious of governmental regulations and favoring personal freedoms, Anarchists have often sympathized with

sexually alternative individuals throughout history and the prejudices and oppression they have experienced. Both Communists and Anarchists more explicitly denounced or permitted such sexual behavior whereas Du Bois and the NAACP's Black civil rights movement appeared to avoid discussion of it. While Du Bois himself was a Socialist, the broader NAACP movement was often only radical on race matters and conservative regarding others, such as sexuality.⁷² In Locke's *The New Negro*, he stated, "for the present the Negro is radical on race matters, conservative on others, in other words, a 'forced radical,' a social protestant rather than a genuine radical."⁷³ His claims argue that anti-black oppression in America has forced blacks to adopt some sense of radicalism in simply fighting for their civil rights, despite holding conservative views on various other topics. These Black activists intended to propel radical politics only for the purpose of racial advancement and believed that social and sexual radicalism could hinder this. For Du Bois, maintaining an unspoken understanding and silence pertaining various sexualities outside his sexual politics of respectability was both most convenient and efficient for the overall progression of the movement.

As a leader and co-founder of the NAACP, Du Bois's navigation of these sexual behaviors alongside his sexual politics of respectability set the tone for the NAACP's relationship with the queer community throughout the twentieth century. Possessing deep and widespread connections to the Black Christian church, the NAACP has had a fraught relationship with queer individuals, neglecting to show social and political support for much of recent history, such as with the Gay Rights Movement or the early years of marriage equality causes. Much like Du Bois, the NAACP has often remained silent on the matter, until their first major, and highly controversial, backing of gay rights: the endorsement of the 1993 March on Washington, which fought against gay discrimination in the US military.⁷⁴ Following this, the NAACP waited to support marriage equality until 2012, after President Obama had.⁷⁵ This proved controversial as many argued that the motion was late while others were appalled at the endorsement. In a 2015 interview with *Variety* magazine, Julian Bond the former Chairman of the Board for the NAACP from 1998 to 2010, revealed his views regarding the NAACP's relationship with marriage equality and showed that the organization's support was complicatedly rooted in the NAACP's public image.⁷⁶

I was chairman of the board of the NAACP for 13 years. And for all of those 13 years, I would not bring up marriage equality before the board. I thought we would vote no. I would rather we have no opinion than a bad opinion.

Bond's claims directly reflect Du Bois's public silence on the topic, as any discussion of homosexuality would have the potential to negatively portray Blackness to the white community or cause division between NAACP members possessing differing sexual politics. In this case, the broader community's acceptance of marriage equality and gay rights proved dangerous for the NAACP, as their traditionally conservative sexual values could paint them in a sexually oppressive light and contradict the historical narrative of Black activists' fight for equal civil rights. The respectability politics championed by Du Bois played a role in the organization's overall relationship with queer individuals for the next century of racial activism.

Here, we see the relevance and importance of such an analysis: Du Bois's sexual politics of respectability affected the Harlem Renaissance and NAACP movement, swayed individuals' involvement with artistic, political, and racial activism, and potentially influenced the NAACP's relationship with queer individuals for years to come. The numerous works written, edited, and published by Du Bois provide ample source material for scholarly historical analysis of the achievements, relationships, and atmosphere of the Harlem Renaissance, and his personal letters allow examinations of both public and private discourses. In further concentrating on the private, we might continue to uncover the inner-workings of Black interpersonal relationships of the time and how they could be dictated by respectability politics. While Du Bois's sexual politics certainly excluded many sexually alternative individuals, what would now be deemed discriminatory of queer sexuality, it is important to also stress the immense contribution he made to Black civil rights, artistic expression, and altogether racial advancement. Further inquiries into his roles within such movements will continue to illuminate his

significance in Black history and aid understanding of the nuances of his views and how they trickled down throughout the past century of racial and social activism.

References

- ¹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); James Kelley, "Blossoming in Strange New Forms: Male Homosexuality and the Harlem Renaissance," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 80, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 499-517; A. B. Christa Schwarz, *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).
- ² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers, 1968); David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963: The Fight for Equality and the American Century*, 2 Reprint edition (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2001).
- ³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997).
- ⁴ David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, Reprint edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).
- ⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," *Teaching American History*, (September 1903), <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-talented-tenth/>.
- ⁶ Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro*, Atheneum Ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1968).
- ⁷ Stephen P. Knadler, "Sweetback Style: Wallace Thurman and a Queer Harlem Renaissance," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 48, no. 4 (December 3, 2002): 902, doi:10.1353/mfs.2002.0076.
- ⁸ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," *The Crisis*, October 1928.
- ⁹ Eric King Watts, *Hearing the Hurt: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Politics of the New Negro Movement*, 2nd ed. (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2012), 140.
- ¹⁰ Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," 296.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² W. E. B. Du Bois, "Two Novels," *The Crisis*, June 1928.
- ¹³ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Our Book Shelf," *The Crisis*, January 1926, 141.
- ¹⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, "A Questionnaire," *The Crisis*, February 1926, 165.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Bruce Kellner, *The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era*, 1st Edition edition (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1984), 100-101.
- ¹⁷ Lewis, W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963, 204-6.
- ¹⁸ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois and Augustus Dill, *Morals and Manners among Negro Americans* (Blue Ridge Summit, US: Lexington Books, 2010).
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 107.
- ²⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Mary Dill Broaddus," November 14, 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to A. G. Dill," December 29, 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ²³ Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*.
- ²⁴ Mason Stokes, "Father of the Bride: Du Bois and the Making of Black Heterosexuality," in *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2007), 309-10.
- ²⁵ Chauncey, *Gay New York*.
- ²⁶ A. G. Dill, "Letter from A. G. Dill to W. E. B. Du Bois," January 11, 1929, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ²⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Augustus G. Dill," *The Crisis*, March 1928, 96.
- ²⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Arthur Spingarn," September 20, 1930, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to John Haynes Holmes," September 20, 1930, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to A. G. Dill," October 20, 1930, W. E. B. Du

- Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to A. G. Dill," September 10, 1931, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ²⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Wanted—A Position as a Teacher," *The Crisis*, November 1930, 393.
- ³⁰ Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to A. G. Dill," September 10, 1931.
- ³¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to A. G. Dill," December 21, 1931, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; A. G. Dill, "Letter from A. G. Dill to W. E. B. Du Bois," January 8, 1932, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ³² A. G. Dill, "Concerning the Crisis Banking," December 5, 1932, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; A. G. Dill, "Letter from A. G. Dill to W. E. B. Du Bois," December 5, 1932, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ³³ Hazel Branch, "Letter from Hazel Branch to W. E. B. Du Bois," June 27, 1933, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ³⁴ Hazel Branch, "Letter from Hazel Branch to W. E. B. Du Bois," June 28, 1933, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ³⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Augustus G. Dill," July 26, 1950, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ³⁶ Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, 282.
- ³⁷ Wayne F. Cooper and William Bell Clark, Claude McKay, *Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).
- ³⁸ Du Bois, "Two Novels," 202.
- ³⁹ Gary Edward Holcomb, *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).
- ⁴⁰ Claude McKay, "Letter from Claude McKay to W. E. B. Du Bois," June 18, 1928, 2–3, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ⁴¹ Kotti Sree Ramesh and Kandula Nirupa Rani and Kotti Sree Ramesh, *Claude McKay: The Literary Identity from Jamaica to Harlem And Beyond* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2006), 65, 173–74.
- ⁴² McKay, "Letter from Claude McKay to W. E. B. Du Bois," June 18, 1928, 2.
- ⁴³ Claude McKay, "Letter from Claude McKay to W. E. B. Du Bois," October 27, 1925, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ⁴⁴ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Rani and Ramesh, Claude McKay.
- ⁴⁵ Holcomb, Claude McKay, *Code Name Sasha*.
- ⁴⁶ Matthew N. Hannah, "Desires Made Manifest: The Queer Modernism of Wallace Thurman's Fire!," *Journal of Modern Literature* 38, no. 3 (2015): 162–80, doi:10.2979/jmodelite.38.3.162.
- ⁴⁷ Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (University of Illinois Press, 1980), 47–48.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.
- ⁴⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Yolande Du Bois," December 2, 1926, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ⁵⁰ Stokes, "Father of the Bride: Du Bois and the Making of Black Heterosexuality."
- ⁵¹ Alan Shucard, *Countee Cullen* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 119–20.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 121.
- ⁵³ Charles Molesworth, *And Bid Him Sing: A Biography of Countée Cullen*, First Edition edition (Chicago ; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2012).
- ⁵⁴ Jacqueline C. Jones, "'So the Girl Marries': Class, the Black Press, and the Du Bois-Cullen Wedding of 1928," in *The Harlem Renaissance Revisited: Politics, Arts, and Letters*, ed. Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 54–55.
- ⁵⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Yolande Du Bois," February 17, 1928, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Yolande Du Bois," September 7, 1928, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; Stokes, "Father of the Bride: Du Bois and the Making of Black Heterosexuality," 300–301.
- ⁵⁶ Jones, "'So the Girl Marries': Class, the Black Press, and the Du Bois-Cullen Wedding of 1928," 55.
- ⁵⁷ Yolande Du Bois, "Letter from Yolande Du Bois to W. E. B. Du Bois," May 23, 1929, 2–5, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; Stokes, "Father of the Bride: Du Bois and the Making of Black Heterosexuality," 307.
- ⁵⁸ Stokes, "Father of the Bride," 308.
- ⁵⁹ Leonard Harris, "'Outing' Alain Locke: Empowering the Silenced," in *Sexual Identities, Queer Politics*, ed. Mark Blasius (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 321–41.
- ⁶⁰ Locke, *The New Negro*.
- ⁶¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "W. E. B. Du Bois Says...," *The Crisis*, January 1926, 151.
- ⁶² Kelley, "Blossoming in Strange New Forms," 508.
- ⁶³ Harris, "'Outing' Alain Locke: Empowering the Silenced."
- ⁶⁴ Schwarz, *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, 12–13.
- ⁶⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Jesse Moorland," May 5, 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ⁶⁶ Alain Locke, "Letter from Alain Locke to W. E. B. Du Bois," June 28, 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- ⁶⁷ Kathleen A. Brown and Elizabeth Faue, "Social Bonds, Sexual Politics, and Political Community on the U.S. Left, 1920s–1940s," *Left History* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2000): 35.
- ⁶⁸ John-Thor Dahlburg, "Russia Revokes Law Punishing Gay Sex : Human Rights: Stalin-Era Law Had Mandated Prison Terms of up to Five Years for Males. Homosexuals Cheer Move.," *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1993, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-05-29/news/mn-41287_1_human-rights.
- ⁶⁹ Holcomb, Claude McKay, *Code Name Sasha*, 68.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.
- ⁷¹ Terence Kissack, *Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States 1895–1917* (Edinburgh ; Oakland: AK Press, 2008); Charley Shively, "Anarchism," in *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, ed. Wayne R. Dynes, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2016), 50–52.
- ⁷² Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919–1963*.
- ⁷³ Locke, *The New Negro*, 11.
- ⁷⁴ Nadine Smith, "NAACP's Long History on LGBT Equality," *Huffington Post*, May 23, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nadine-smith/naacps-long-history-on-lg_b_1532500.html.
- ⁷⁵ Michael Barbaro, "N.A.A.C.P. Endorses Same-Sex Marriage," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/20/us/politics/naacp-endorses-same-sex-marriage.html>.
- ⁷⁶ Eduardo Montes-Bradley, *Julian Bond: Reflections from the Frontlines of the Civil Rights Movement* (Alexander Street Press, 2012).

In the spring of 1993 the American Studies Student Association established the Earl James Weaver Graduate Paper Prize to honor the retirement of Earl James Weaver, Professor of American Studies, past Department Chair, and founder of the Department of American Studies at California State University, Fullerton. With an original endowment raised from the generous contributions of American Studies students and alumni, the Weaver Prize is an annual \$250 cash award for the best paper written by an American Studies graduate student during the preceding year. Every spring, a panel of American Studies faculty reads submissions and selects the winning essay.

The 2017 Weaver Prize went to Ashley Loup for her essay “Plead the Fifth: The Progression of the African American Lawyer.” In this original research project, Loup explored the image of the African American lawyer in 20th century American culture. The Weaver Committee found the piece to be a significant and genuine contribution to knowledge that expertly wove together primary and secondary materials in a fresh and valuable way. The American Papers is happy to have published this piece in its 2017-2018 edition as a regular submission.

The Weaver Committee would also like to honor a second paper, Jena Delgado-Sette’s “The Talk: A Survival Guide.” The committee found this paper to be a smart and sensitive interpretation of advice that African American families have found necessary to give to their sons. Innovative, well-written, and creative, the piece, the committee and the editorial staff of The American Papers believe, deserves publication in this edition.

“The Talk:” A Survival Guide

Jena Delgado-Sette

“Whatever the influence of media over our beliefs and behavior, we cross each day a liminal threshold between social reality and parasocial reality.”¹

The idea for this project came while I was reading the autobiographical account *Lose Your Mother* by Saidiya Hartman, a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. Hartman takes her readers on a self-identity quest along the African coast of Ghana as she searches for the other half of the patriarchal-dominated narrative that has constructed the history of the transatlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery in America. In her journey, Hartman not only sought how Africans found themselves chained together aboard the cargo portion of a ship headed for the Americas; more importantly, she sought to understand the legacies of this story both in Africa and in the United States. What ideologies, interactions, and images built within the realm of slavery, she asks, continue to shape understandings of African-American bodies today? To answer this question, Hartman recounts a moment from her childhood, in which her mother gave her instructions on how to survive:

She taught my brother and me that an array of expected and unforeseen dangers lay in wait for us because we were black. For my brother, things were really dire. The smallest mishap could result in his imminent death. I think Peter was nine when he received his first lecture about white police officers. That our father was a police officer at the time didn’t make my brother’s prospects any less terrifying, but only made the dangers more vivid. The rule was simple: policemen were to be avoided whenever possible. It was the exact opposite of the lesson white children were taught.

Once I had taken a moment to digest this account from Hartman, I promptly searched for my favorite colored post-it-note and wrote the word “THIS!” and posted it on the already overly highlighted and tabbed page.

Hartman’s account has laid the groundwork for understanding the importance of racial identity in America and the factors that have helped to shape a specific image of what it means to be Black in America. The project seeks to explore the conversation that occurred between Hartman, her brother, and their mother. A specific discussion carried out by a parent to their child, what I have found has been labeled “the talk,” a sort of nod to the coming of age conversation that takes place between parent and child usually regarding purity and sexual relations. “The talk” has now been expanded and/or alerted within the African-American community to represent a very different coming of age story. This dialog between a mother or father and their adolescent child operates as a specific set of instructions, guidelines, rules, a sort of rehearsed script of performance for survival within a racial binary America. This script has been formed by the black community as a reaction to an array of highly publicized events and personal happenstances and offers a dialog of suggested performance of on how to survive run-ins with the police. From generation to generation, this survival screenplay is passed down as tradition. These survival scripts are significant in understanding a few key cultural happenings in American society through the specific stories, linguistics, and directives utilized within the conversation. This paper explores scripts to consider how they help to form the racial identities of African-American adolescents, reveal the limits and possibilities of black parenting power,

and present an image of the police that is specific to the black community. Secondly, this paper explores the script as a process that reveals a change over time from a private conversation between parent and child to a public conversation of cultural awareness; as well as the life and death stakes embedded in “the Talk.”

In *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to the Civil Rights*, cultural historian Robin Bernstein says that a script denotes “an evocative primary substance from which actors, directors, and designers build complex, variable performances that occupy real time and space.” She examines what she calls “scriptive things” such as handkerchiefs, Topsy pincushions, and Raggedy Ann dolls to argue that the very nature surrounding the construction, design, and function of these “scriptive things” worked to desegregate public space, impact the construction of racial identity during childhood, and promote “innocence” as an exclusive state occupied solely by white children. In addition, Bernstein notes, “the method of reading... things as scripts aims to discover not what any individual actually did but rather what a thing invited its users to do.” Bernstein aims to outline not just what actions were taken after the script is given, but what that script asks, guides, or offers as an action. Bernstein stresses, “the term script denotes not a rigid dictation of performed action but rather a set of invitations that necessarily remain open to resistance, interpretation, and improvisation.”

A script, Bernstein argues, “captures the moment when dramatic narrative and movement through space are in the act of becoming each other.” The time and space when a parent engages with their child in a specific scripted conversation is an arena of significant cultural production and engagement. Bernstein argues, “the set of prompts does not reveal a performance, but it does reveal a script for performance. That script is itself a historical artifact.” Examination of that artifact can give insight into an array of cultural happenings within the context of its origin as well as the larger moment within the historical landscape. Script and performance engage and interact with each other. The script in examination here is a specific theater that invites AND instructs action which is performed as a reaction of encountering police, and is constructed from previous events.

Scholar of African-American Performance Studies Annemarie Bean notes that “African-American performance has a continuum, not renaissances.” This specific guided script is neither completely contemporary nor specific to African-American’s living after Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, or Walter Scott. The highly publicized 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a 14-yr old African-American boy from the urban environment of Chicago who was visiting family in Money, Mississippi, forever shook the cultural landscape of America. Till’s mother Mamie Till-Mobley recounted her story in a memoir titled *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, where she remarks:

Something happens when a child faces a life-and-death situation, as Emmett did. It leaves an indelible mark on the mother. Somewhere deep inside. I knew that everything I did had consequences in the life of my child. And I had to make sure that I always did the right thing, the best thing, for him. I knew that each moment was a blessing and that each movement was to be nurtured and protected, as my son. It would become a stressful balancing act, to do enough without doing too much. To protect my child without stifling him, snuffing out his independence and his sense of adventure, the very things that would make him such a special little boy.

Here, Mamie Till-Mobley expresses her need to protect her son and find a balance so as not to extinguish his innocence or tarnish his sense of identity.

Mamie Till is only one example of African-American parents expressing their understanding of the importance and limits of their power. On July 13 of 2013, Eric Holder, the 82nd Attorney General of the United States and the first African American to hold the position, addressed the NAACP at their 104th Annual Convention. Coming just three days after the verdict in the Trayvon Martin shooting, the speech highlights that “this tragedy provides yet another opportunity for our nation to speak honestly – and openly – about the complicated and emotionally-charged issues that this case has raised.” Holder’s speech included a personal

insight into the life of our nation’s first African-American Attorney General:

Years ago, some of these same issues drove my father to sit down with me to have a conversation – which is no doubt familiar to many of you – about how as a young black man I should interact with the police, what to say, and how to conduct myself if I was ever stopped or confronted in a way I thought was unwarranted. I’m sure my father felt certain – at the time – that my parents’ generation would be the last that had to worry about such things for their children. Trayvon’s death last spring caused me to sit down to have a conversation with my own 15 year old son, like my dad did with me. This was a father-son tradition I hoped would not need to be handed down. But as a father who loves his son and who is more knowing in the ways of the world, I had to do this to protect my boy. I am his father and it is my responsibility, not to burden him with the baggage of eras long gone, but to make him aware of the world he must still confront. This is a sad reality in a nation that is changing for the better in so many ways. As important as it was, I am determined to do everything in my power to ensure that the kind of talk I had with my son isn’t the only conversation that we engage in as a result of these tragic events.

Holder speaks to the history of issues that have promoted parents to talk to children. He recounts how he was taught how to “interact,” “what to say,” and how to “conduct” oneself. His speech gives awareness to the resurgence of the Civil Rights Movement under the title “Black Lives Matter” by stressing that the work is not done because equality has not been achieved. Holder ends with words of inspiration by speaking about his wish to end this tradition and hope that the conversations currently being had will open to issues of equality, cultural citizenship, and justice. CNN noted that in 2014, shortly after the Ferguson unrest the social media outlet twitter was flushed with hashtags such as “#IGotTheTalk and #IGaveTheTalk...parents and children sharing on social media when they had such tough conversations.” Taking to Twitter to publicly announce the giving and/or receiving of this conversation contributes to shifting this discourse from the private sphere into the public.

Law enforcement agencies also participate in this discourse by training their officers within a guided script and suggested performance for civilian encounters. David Perlmutter conducted an ethnographic study by spending three and a half years as a participant-observer with the St. Louis Park, Minnesota Police Department and published his findings in *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement*. Perlmutter argues that “just as society gathers information regarding the police and policing tactics from the massive outlet that is the media, so must society come to learn and understand law enforcement agencies through other outlets, primarily through individual tacit engagement and interaction.” Perlmutter’s key goal was to identify “how all the players in all occasions view their life situation in relation to the content, form, and effects of the televisual and cinematic portrayals of their own kind.” The important notion here to understand is how the police and the larger community understand and react to each other based on what is presented through the media.

For Perlmutter a varying amount of environments, spaces, sites, and places serve as a stage for law enforcement’s performance. He even titles one of his chapters “All the Street’s a Stage.” Within this space, Perlmutter notes, Americans “argue that the demands for the publicly viewed acting role and its contradictions to the police officers’ private beliefs produce the essential tension that affects the principles, principals, and processes of modern law enforcement.” According to Perlmutter, police officers are essential actors surrounded by interactions with the public in where they are required to perform to their audience and follow a script, both of which come in multitudes of varying measures and are continually changing. Not only is the larger community constructing ideas about police and civilian interactions, but those communities are then instructing their children with rules and steps laid out like a script as to how to perform when such interactions occur. Simultaneously, law enforcement agencies are training police personnel with their own script, rules, steps, and guidance in performance.

Parenting Books

In 1973, as the Vietnam war was ending and the Black Panthers were front page news, *The Black Child-A Parents' Guide* was published; it offers no information on how to coach children concerning interactions with the police. The book mostly centers on ideas of understanding the history and context of racism, having pride in being black, and ways to discipline and communicate. Over twenty-five years later, psychologist Jeffrey Gardere published a parenting guidebook, *Smart Parenting for African Americans: Helping Your Kids Thrive in a Difficult World*. Chapter eight of the volume is labeled "Black and Blue: Kids and Police." The chapter begins by referencing a "long, sad history of violence against people of color by authority figures," as it mentions two highly publicized cases, Rodney King (1991) and Abner Louima (1997). Rodney King, an unarmed African-American male, was brutally beat by the LAPD on March 3, 1991 following a high-speed car chase. The incident was filmed by a bystander and televised throughout the nation. Abner Louima, a Haitian male was beaten and sodomized by officers of the New York City Police Department after leaving a nightclub in August of 1997.

After outlining the causes of the atmosphere of police brutality and racism and warning that even children are not safe, Gardere lays out eight strategies which, "should be drilled into every African-American child, boy or girl." The eight strategies are as follows:

1. Never, ever, run from a police officer, especially after you have been told to stop and not move.
2. Do not make any sudden moves or gestures in the presence of a cop, even one who is not paying attention to you. Cops have been trained to react to any sudden gesture or movement as a threat to their physical person and will react with deadly force. Therefore, explain every physical move you are making. For example, "Officers Jones, I am reaching into my back pocket to pull out my ID."
3. If you are being placed under arrest, do not fight or resist the police. They will become angrier, resulting in your being subdued quickly and violently. Many people have been severely injured or accidentally killed in this manner.
4. Always address the police by their title, such as "Officer." Try to read his nameplate and address him as "Officer" in addition to his last name. This tactic will force him to act as a person and not just a "cop." You should also respond to his questions by saying, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir." This will convey a sign of respect on your part. He will immediately feel less challenged.
5. Even if you are scared or angry, stay calm and always be polite, even if the cop is being rude and verbally abusive. Never raise your voice in speaking with a police officer. Always speak in a soft or monotone voice. This will keep the conflict from escalating, and the cop may get the impression that he is dealing with a nice kid. Also, he will not have to raise his voice or level of aggression to maintain a sense of superiority or authority.
6. Don't talk too much. Answer only the questions that you are asked. You can explain your behavior; but do not make any confessions. Remember, whatever you say can be used against you later.
7. Try to commit to memory everything that has happened during the encounter with the police. In the same vein, never ask or demand a name or badge number. Again, commit it all to memory. Cops usually interpret this assertive questioning as a direct threat to their authority. So, as soon as you can, in a safe place away from the police, write down everything that has transpired from memory.
8. Request as quickly as possible that the police office call or contact your parents or school. You will need backup and support as quickly as the cops do. As soon as your parents arrive, keep quiet and let them handle the situation.

Gardere's strategies are direct and suggest a wide degree of cultural information is being

passed down from one generation to the next. The first three strategies are very general and straightforward: don't run, no sudden movements, and don't resist arrest. The third step refers to the numerous individuals within the African-American community who have been fatally wounded by law enforcement for resisting, making sudden movements, or running. The fourth stresses the importance of showing respect towards the officer to make the officer feel less threatened. The fifth step highlights the importance of staying calm and never raising one's voice to an officer. This will keep the interaction from intensifying and the officer will be less likely to raise his voice to maintain control and power. Strategy six suggests silence and that law enforcement may misconstrue statements to prove guilt. Guideline seven is heartbreakingly direct regarding the environment of safety for African-Americans around police. It suggests the memorization of everything that happens during the encounter and specifically notes, "as soon as you can, in a safe place away from the police, write down everything that has transpired from memory." The important direction here is noting that a safe place is one that is away from the police. The final step suggests contacting parents or school officials as soon as possible, further highlighting the reality that this conversation and this set of scripted strategies is being directed to school-aged children and adolescents.

In 2000, a parenting book aimed directly at those raising African-American males titled *Boys Into Men: Raising Our African American Teenage Sons*, was published. Chapter eleven, "Force Against Force Equals More Force: Violence and Gangs," notes that fears of mistaken identity, racial profiling, and driving while black "have prompted many parents to teach their sons ways to avoid a tragic outcome." It then highlights "strategies you can use to teach your son to avoid violence if he is stopped by the police." The first two strategies outlined in *Boys Into Men* are:

1. Talk to your son about the reality of racial profiling (the process where by black males are targeted for searches and arrested because of their race). Let him know that his skin color and the fact of being in America may lead to his being stopped, searched, and questioned by the police.
2. Explain the realities of racism and some of these practices to your son and prepare him to address it.

From there, the following four relate to contact numbers and ways of communication if anything were to ensue. Point seven states, "Dr. Jeffrey Gardere recommends that you teach your son that if he is stopped by the police he should follow these guidelines," and a list of ten condensed guidelines based on Gardere's strategies.

These parenting books have laid the groundwork for the contemporary conversations within the African-American community. After the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012, "the Talk" saw a transformation from a private conversation-taking place in living rooms and around the dining room table-to the public avenues of multimedia outlets and activist tactics. In December of 2014 the TakePart website ran an article titled "Powerful Video Shows the Difference Between the Way Black and White Parents Talk to Their Kids About Cops," the subheading for the article placed just above an embedded YouTube video reads: "For some families, a conversation about how to survive an encounter with police is necessary." According to the website's 'About Us' link, "TakePart is a digital news and lifestyle magazine featuring independent journalism on today's most important, socially relevant topics, alongside a social action platform. Our goal is simple: to take you beyond the breaking news ticker and help you discover how the world's most pressing issues touch your life." TakePart is digital division of Participant Media, who is responsible for critical acclaimed documentaries such as *CITIZEN-FOUR*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and *Food, Inc.*

The video in the article showcases three different African-American parents: a father, a mother, and another father who are engaging in 'the talk' with their African-American teen-aged sons. The video moves in-between time and space so the viewer gets a different bit from each of the parents, working to compose a whole conversation. The first father approaches his son playing video games in the living room. He starts off by proclaiming, "Listen, one day you are going to be stopped by the police, when that happens..." his voice sort of trails off and

the video travels to a mother and son sitting at the breakfast table. She picks up where the first father left off, saying, "...always make sure they can see your hands." To which her son with a wide-eye expression replies, "Okay," she continues with "Never move suddenly." The video moves to another parent child interaction, a father working in the yard with his son. He instructs his son to, "always be extra respectful, even if they're not." The son has a puzzled look on his face and his father continues, "Your job is to get home safe...understand?" The son somberly nods his head. The last scene is an interaction between a Caucasian father and son. Just as his teenage son is leaving the house for the night, the father states "And, hey if you ever feel like you're in trouble, just reach out for the police. They are there to help." The boy responds with a half-hearted smirk and a nod of the head as he closes the door behind him. Text appears across the screen "Do we want one America or two?" then extra-large quote symbols one white and one black with the sentence "Let's change the conversation at TalkAboutTheTalks.org." The video was produced in conjunction with The Brotherhood/Sister Sol organization, a group committed to the empowerment of the Africa-American population, and Saatchi & Saatchi a global communication and advertising organization. E-mail correspondence with a member of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol group further solidified the finding that the talk about the talk webpage was no longer live; however, no reason as to why was given.

Examining the video through the lens of script and performance illustrates that the talk offers much more than advice. The very first line highlights that being stopped by the police for African-American boys is something that will happen in their life; it is just a matter of time. The explicit choice 'one day' and 'when' leaves no doubt that this will happen; there is no 'if.' The conversation emphasizes understanding that being stop by the police is a byproduct of being African-American. A list of precise instructions on how to perform when the police stop them is then given by each of the parents. Each emphasizes reacting with the highest level of respect toward the officer. Lastly, the PSA points out that the 'job' of the African-American adolescence being stopped is to return home unharmed. This implies that if these instructions are not carried out as designated, the interaction with the officer can result in the inability to return home safe, unambiguously alluding to death as an outcome of interacting with police while black.

This indication of survival is key element surrounding "the talk." The poster, titled "10 Rules of Survival if Stopped By The Police" is produced by the organization Dare To Be King, which seeks to "inspire, support and strengthen organizations that provide services to boys of color." The poster outlines a script of ten steps or actions that should be carried out (performed), in order to survive a stop by police personnel. The ten rules are as follows:

1. Be polite and respectful when stopped by the police. Keep your mouth closed!
2. Remember that your goal is to get home safely. Use the above rules to help do that. If you feel that your rights have been violated, you and your parents have the right to file a formal complaint with your local police jurisdiction.
3. Don't, under any circumstance, get into an argument with the police.
4. Always remember that anything you say or do can be used against you in court.
5. Keep your hands in plain sight and make sure the police can see your hands at all times.
6. Avoid physical contact with the police. No sudden movements & keep hands out of your pockets.
7. Do not run even if you are afraid of the police.
8. If you believe that you are innocent, do not resist arrest.
9. Don't make any statements about the incident until you are able to meet with a lawyer or public defender.
10. Stay calm and remain in control. Watch your words body language and emotions.

Lining the bottom of the poster in yellow text and a black background is the message: "En-

counters with the police can cost you your life. Think about your actions!" Even though this poster is not a direct conversation-taking place between parent and child, it is offered as a sort of reference and/or guide for parents to utilize or refer to when speaking with their children.

Similar to the PSA and the parenting guidebooks, this poster also lays out a scripted performance through a list of instructions on what to do when encountering the police. The poster can be purchased from the website for \$12.00 individually or in bulk, measuring 11 x 19 it is the perfect size to hang in a child's room, a recreation room, office, or a classroom. It's availability in bulk order is another example of the changing atmosphere surrounding "the talk." What was once a private interaction between parent and child taking place within the context of the home has now become an available consumer product to be distributed to the masses.

This transition between the private sphere and public sphere is further emphasized in the publication of an online article for *Essence Magazine*, in August of 2014. Titled "What Do We Tell Our Sons About Interacting With Police?" the article argues that talking with children about interactions with law enforcement is "about arming our young people with knowledge that could help save them in the future." The article lists a number of specific steps for its audience to recount when conversing with their African-American sons (children) about what to do during encounters with law enforcement:

1. Pull right over. If your child is driving a car, and sees police lights in the rearview mirror, he or she should pull over immediately. If it is not safe to pull over immediately, slow your speed and signal that you are pulling over. Failure to pull over puts police officers on high alert that there may be a problem (even if there isn't one). Think about it from a police officer's perspective. Why wouldn't you stop? Do you have an open warrant? Do you have guns or drugs in the car? Based on their occupation, police officers are trained to assume the worst in every situation.
2. Turn on the interior lights in the car. When you pull over, turn on the lights in the car, roll down the windows, and keep your hands visible. This serves as another way to show that you have nothing to hide, and de-escalate the tension that comes with any stop. Do not make any sudden movements. If you need to go to the glove box, tell the officer in advance. The show of transparency will place the officer more at ease, and will make it less likely for the situation to get out of hand.
3. Be respectful (and tell your passengers the same!)
4. When you get pulled over, that is not the time to show your knowledge of criminal law and civil rights. It is not the time to get into a screaming match with the officer. Stay calm, comply with the officer's requests, get it over with, and if there is an issue, take it up through the legal system later.
5. Don't run. First, it makes you look guilty. Yes, it is your constitutional right to be able to walk away if you are not being officially detained. But practically speaking, it is not the best idea. Also, depending on the situation, it could be a crime. Lastly, if you run, the consequences will be MUCH worse if you get caught.
6. At the time you are stopped by police, you do NOT have the power in that situation. Your power comes AFTER the situation is over. Take the name/badge number of the officer and the police department; document the date, time, and location of the encounter.
 - a. If you are alive, your report can shine a spotlight on wrongdoings (if any) occurring in your community. But if you fight and argue, you could get arrested or worse. If you are gone, it is up to others to figure out what happened...which may result in the full story never being told.
 - b. The goal here is to prevent an unnecessary escalation of a police encounter.

This list is the most thorough and instructional scripted lists serving to influence performance. But it also tries to educate the community to pursue justice. Steps one through five are very similar to those that were outlined in the parenting books, the PSA, and the poster. Step 6 adds the theme of agency to the conversation. Due to the limits of power during an interaction with police, power and/or agency is found after the interaction. Sections A and B of step six are distressing but they showcase the reality of those who have lost their life due to interactions with law enforcement. This step is working to add to the dialog happening within homes and within the African-American community by introducing ideas of power and agency; as well as the appropriate time and place for taking steps to demonstrate said power and agency.

In another online forum, the author of *Contrast: A Biracial Man's Journey To Desegregate His Past*, Devin C. Hughes, published a short comic depicting "the Talk." The comic was posted on the open blog Medium, which outlines itself as a news outlet where "Every day, thousands of people turn to Medium to publish their ideas and perspectives. Leaders. Artists. Thinkers. And ordinary citizens who have a story to tell." The cartoon was posted under the forum's BlackLiveMatter section. Titled "The Talk," it depicts a young African-American boy playing what looks like cops and robbers while his father washes dishes. As his father looks on, he proclaims, "Son we need to talk...I need you to listen to me. I'm going to tell you something my father told me. Police officers are not always our friends. They will probably stop you at some point and ask you some questions." Again, this idea arises that being stopped by the police is inevitable and unavoidable. Then the father outlines a set of instructions for his son: "Always be polite. Say 'Yes, sir' and 'No, sir.' Keep your hands visible. Don't talk back or appear agitated. Smile. Don't make sudden movements. It's important that you do these things. It might just save your life." The comic's imagery begins with the child playing and the father in the kitchen, as the father begins to have "the talk" with his son, the panels then illustrate various scenes of law enforcement interaction. When the father notes "Police officers are not always our friends," the panel depicts three Caucasian officers with batons beating a man who is on the floor trying to shield himself. The ensuing panels illustrate the young boy walking through a neighborhood and being stopped by the police as the father recites a guided plan of action. Within these panels, as noted in the PSA, the Dare To Be King poster, and the *Essence Magazine* article, the idea of being respectful is key. The last panel portrays the young boy holding his SWAT figurine and looking down at it somberly with the words of his father in speech bubbles above him stating, "It's important that you do these things. It might just save your life." This final panel again projects this idea that encounters with law enforcement are deadly. The young boy's innocence and joy in playing cops and robbers, where the cops were the good guys has now been impacted and altered, as shown by his uneasy expression as he holds his SWAT figurine in his hand, in the last panel of the comic, the cultural identity of both the police officer and himself have been transformed. The boy's perception of law enforcement has been challenged by "the talk" giving to him by his father. Not only has he been given a cultural lecture on the perception of law enforcement within the African-American community, he has also been given a script which speaks to his understanding of himself in relational to his identity as a black male in America.

In 2015 a short documentary was produced by Op-Doc, and published on the New York Times website. It showcases various African-American parents being interviewed about giving "the talk" to their children. The parents make note of why they feel they need to give it and what they will and/or have said to their children. The documentary pieces together the various accounts, statements, and conversation the parents have while engaging with the camera. It is not presented in a linear fashion; much like the PSA, moving between time, space, and different parents. The film opens with accounts of three African-American adult males the first remarks, "My father's conversation with me was daily." The second states, "My grandfather talked to me as a black man from Augusta, Georgia growing up in the Deep South." In addition, the third recounts, "It was probably Rob, my brother, who had this conversation. But then it's more of like, you know...wear a condom, do this, you know its like, little man lessons." This opening dialog lays out for the viewer that this conversation is something that has been passed down generation to generation, father to son, for some time; it is not something new or radical.

The conversation then turns to ideas that have been highlighted previously in the

PSA, the comic strip, and the Dare To Be king poster of when the police stops you. Again, three parent participants note the encounter's inevitability. The first remarks, "When a cop pulls you over." The second advises, "When you get pulled over not if you get pulled over." The third warns, "At some point you will get pulled over and here is how you act." From there, the video showcases another three parents talking about their experiences being stopped by the police. One woman pronounces "The thing that people say is that you have to talk to him before he, uhh, experiences racism himself...but when is that?" Another woman states "He is going to turn into a large scary black man, and that is not who he is but that is how he will be perceived." With these two comments, the video touches on two very important issues. First, when is it appropriate to have "the talk" with a child? At what point in their life will this be either too soon or too late of a conversation? This question is vital to understanding the makeup and effect on racial identity within the adolescent. The second statement makes note of this idea that a child's racial identity will eventually be developed, by outside forces, into that of the monstrous black body that he purportedly inhabits. 'Coming of age' conversations such as this can have significant impact on a child's overall understanding of, not only the world they live in, but how they operate in it as well. For the African-American child, "the Talk" can shape their personal identity formation. As the two mothers have expressed in the documentary, as a child grows up, their identity to the outside world is threatening, especially if they are African-American males. This is due to the long history of racism and discrimination in America, so part of the dialog surrounding "the Talk" must be rooted in a historical understanding of racism and discrimination in order to make clear as to why a child's identity as an African-American is perceived as a threat.

The next issue that is tackled in the documentary is the same idea that was presented in the PSA regarding the inner binary workings of American society; the two different conversations being had between the black community and the white community regarding the role of police. One male parent says, "If something goes wrong, your first line of defense, your parents not being there is to go to the police" which prompts, assumingly, his wife to interject and state "If your Caucasian." The man nods his head agreeing with her yet states "Ya, but still" and the woman continues to interject saying "That's what you teach your children; unfortunately it can't work for black children." A separate individual speaking on the same topic poses this statement, "It doesn't mean that every police officer is inherently a bad person, but what it does mean is that the police force, that institution, does not look out for your best interest." Another parent continues this conversation with "There's this unspoken code of white...of racism and white supremacy that says that my life does not matter." Another somberly expresses "That these are conversation that other races do not have to have with their children." The various statements made by the parents here have underlined the issue of two different worlds, a White America and a Black America, this idea of segregation and separation not being equal, just or fair. This notion of two Americas goes together with the statements expressed by the parents regarding the inevitable encounter with police due to the color of one's skin.

The documentary then leads into the actual conversation between the parent and child. One father noted, "The conversation with him was really just, look you're a beautiful young boy." One mother started with, "Being an African-American is a wonderful thing, a wonderful blessing you have come from great people but it is also a hard thing." Another father opened with, "In American because of your skin color, as a black boy and as a black man we are going to be dealing with a lot of danger." These three different openings to "the talk" highlight the notion of self-worth and black pride. However, along with that self-awareness and love for the color of your skin comes the reality that dark skin carries danger in America. In his book *Race Manners For the 21st Century*, Bruce A. Jacobs outlines the binary concept of race between whites and black in America and how race serves to either promote their wellbeing or endanger it, and the way in which both races can learn to understand each other. This idea of racial self-awareness, pride, and self-love is highlighted both in Jacob's book as well as the interviews in the short documentary by Op-Doc. The documentary then showcases the parents speaking the specific instruction they will or have given their child, they are:

- Under no circumstance are you to talk to the police, until I get there.

- Do what they say, don't get into any arguments.
- Make sure your hands are outta' your pockets, so they can see.
- These are the questions you can ask, this is who to call, this is..this is what happens if this bad thing. It's not like please master don't whip me, no its like excuse me sir what is your badge number, I'm going to film this.
- If you want police brutality to stop if you want police to treat you like a human being that you have to see yourself as a human being.
- You have every right in this world that anyone else does.

This set of instructions is very simplified compared to the ones listed in the parenting books, the PSA, the comic strip, and the poster. However, the whole of the conversation within the documentary is very telling of a number of different social concerns and current American culture. Then came a different part of the conversation not yet heard by the other outlets. A dialog of love, acceptance, want, encouragement and power:

- "What I love about you as my son is I remember when we thought about having you and you know, knowing that we wanted you and watching you grow.
- "You are the Muhammad Ali, you are the Malcolm X, you are the Martin Luther King."
- "You are an amazing young man and the future is yours."
- "And I will do my best to make sure you're safe, that's it, and I love you."

There are numerous issues tackled within the conversation between parent and child. The script that parents are working from that is being provided either in parenting books, PSAs, posters or a multitude of outlets is helping to shape the actual scripted plan of action they are laying out for their children to perform when such an event occurs. Because, it will occur. Parents are providing their children with a survival script. A plan of action that will help them navigate an encounter with police in the safest and most life-saving way. They are giving specific instruction to help calm and deescalate the situation, in hope that this will help keep their children safe. This notion underlines the fact that African-American parents are aware that there is a limit to their parenting power. they cannot protect their child against the ills of racial profiling, driving while black or the culture of the binary American society that exists. The very existence of this conversation is proof of that.

Found in PSAs, blog forms, posters, and comments on social media, "the talk" is itself an outcry for change and justice. As Jacobs writes, "If you are white, the first thing that you need to understand is that black people are not making this stuff up." It is important to note that this shift from private to public space helps further the conversation of justice and making right what is wrong. That this is really happening, and it is happening now. Moreover, that this issue no longer just involves the black community, that it is now the responsibility of the whole of the American community to tackle this issue. Remember the question posed by the PSA, "Do we want one America or two?" Both the Essence Magazine article and the Op-Doc documentary highlighted the power of taking "the talk" public. The article's last instructional step noted that one does not have the power when stopped by the police; the power comes after the encounter is over. That is when the individual can go through the proper channels of the judiciary system and express any wrongful actions or violations. In the documentary, the parents express this same idea but in a different way, they pronounce that their children are amazing, powerful, they can be revolutionaries, they can be Martin Luther King, Mohammed Ali and Malcolm X, and they have the power.

As Bernstein notes, scripted performances issue "explicit direction in combination with cultural prompts in the historical context of normative behaviors." This is important in understanding that these scripts and guided performance come together to construct a dialog between parent and child as a reaction to a larger historical context. "This act of scripting, this issuing of a culturally specific invitation, is itself a historical event—one that can be recovered and then analyzed as a fresh source of evidence." Performance from the African-American

population living in America, Bean argues, "continually interprets the past in order to fill the holes of historical and cultural representations and history." This is sort of the same ideology that Hartman held when she traveled to Ghana, Hartman states, "I was loitering in a slave dungeon less because I hoped to discover what really happened here than because of what lived on from this history." This conversation is just one moment, ideology, script, conversation, performance, and/or reality that lives on from the history of the slave dungeons along the African coast. This is how our culture is passed out, taught, it is the older form, storytelling, conversation, dialog of what has come before and what is to come. The current cultural landscape is in a moment of climax bringing this once private and very intimate conversation between a parent and a child to a public form through mass media outlets and activist tactics. It has moved from the personal to the political.

References

- ¹ David D. Perlmutter, *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000), 30.
- ² Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.), 130
- ³ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 12.
- ⁴ Ibid., 11.
- ⁵ Ibid., 11.
- ⁶ Ibid., 12.
- ⁷ Ibid., 72.
- ⁸ Annemarie Bean, *A Sourcebook of African-American Performance: Plays, People, Movements* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.
- ⁹ Mamie Till-Mobley and Chris Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* (New York: Random House, 2004), 10.
- ¹⁰ "Justice News." Attorney General Eric Holder Addresses the NAACP Annual Convention. August 18, 2015. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-eric-holder-address-es-naacp-annual-convention>.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Michael Martinez, Stephanie Elam, and Erica Henry, "Within Black Families, Hard Truths Told to Sons amid Ferguson Unrest." *CNN*. August 21, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/15/living/parenting-black-sons-ferguson-missouri/>.
- ¹³ Perlmutter, 27.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 27.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 21.
- ¹⁶ Jeffrey Roger Gardere, *Smart Parenting for African Americans: Helping Your Kids Thrive in a Difficult World* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Pub. Group, 1999), 104.
- ¹⁷ Hector Tobar and Leslie Berger, 1991. "Tape of L.A. Police Beating Suspect Stirs Public Furor Law Enforcement: Mayor Says He's 'outraged.' the Department, FBI and District Attorney are Investigating." *Los Angeles Times* (Pre-1997 Fulltext), Mar 06, 1.
- ¹⁸ Bob Herbert, 1997, "One More Police Victim." *New York Times* (1923–Current File), Aug 14, 1.
- ¹⁹ Gardere, 107.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 103.
- ²¹ Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Anderson J. Franklin, and Pamela Toussaint, *Boys into Men: Raising Our African American Teenage Sons* (New York: Dutton, 2000), 185.
- ²² Ibid., 185.
- ²³ Kristina Bravo, "Powerful Video Shows the Difference Between the Way Black and White Parents Talk to Their Kids About Cops." *TakePart*. December 14, 2014. <http://www.takepart.com/video/2014/12/13/video-difference-black-and-white-parents-talk-kids>.
- ²⁴ "About Us." *TakePart*. <http://www.takepart.com/about-us>.
- ²⁵ Bravo.
- ²⁶ "Mission & Vision." *Dare To Be King*. <http://daretobeking.net/overview/>.

Figure 1: "Dare To Be King What If the Prince Lives?" Dare To Be King. <http://daretobeking.net/>.

²⁷ Melba Pearson. "What Do We Tell Our Sons About Interacting With Police?" *Essence*. com. August 24, 2014. <http://www.essence.com/2014/08/24/what-do-we-tell-our-sons-about-interacting-police>.

²⁸ "Medium connects you with voices and perspectives that matter." What is Medium - *Medium*. <https://about.medium.com/>.

²⁹ "What Black Parents Tell Their Kids About the Police - Black Lives Matter." *Medium*. May 19, 2015. <https://medium.com/blacklivesmatter/what-black-parents-tell-their-kids-about-the-police-3ae2af699e84#.j0q5nzj31>.

Figure 2: "What Black Parents Tell Their Kids About the Police - Black Lives Matter." *Medium*. May 19, 2015. <https://medium.com/blacklivesmatter/what-black-parents-tell-their-kids-about-the-police-3ae2af699e84#.j0q5nzj31>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Geeta Gandbhir and Blair Foster. "A Conversation With My Black Son." *The New York Times*, 0:00-0:33, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/opinion/a-conversation-with-my-black-son.html?_r=1.

³² Ibid., 0:34-0:42.

³³ Ibid., 1:11-1:21.

³⁴ Ibid., 1:22-1:32.

³⁵ Ibid., 2:01-3:04.

³⁶ Ibid., 3:01-3:28.

³⁷ Geeta Gandbhir and Blair Foster. "A Conversation With My Black Son." *The New York Times*, 3:29-4:01, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/opinion/a-conversation-with-my-black-son.html?_r=1.

³⁸ Ibid., 4:02-4:37.

³⁹ Bruce A. Jacobs, *Race Manners: Navigating the Minefield between Black and White Americans* (New York: Arcade Pub., 1999) 95.

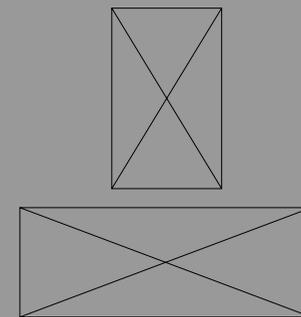
⁴⁰ Bravo.

⁴¹ Bernstein, 11.

⁴² Ibid., 11.

⁴³ Bean, 4.

⁴⁴ Hartman, 130.



All works published in The American Papers represent the views and work of individual authors. The American Papers, its Editorial Board, and publishers disclaim responsibility and liability for statements, either of fact or opinion, made by its contributors.