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AMERICAN PAPERS



Faculty Advisor
Terri Snyder

Layout & Design
Dusty Altena

Managing Editors
Dusty Altena Kacie Hoppe Sophia Islas Mike West

Editorial Board
Darcy Anderson Danielle Barraza Danielle Lopez
Andrew Bahna Courtney Brown Tatiana Pedroza

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FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the 2014–15 issue of *The American Papers!*

We invite you to explore the myriad ways in which students of American Studies strive to understand American culture in its national and transnational contexts. This issue begins with “American Forms,” a selection of essays that investigate television, literature, and photography—to name only three of the cultural documents represented in this section—in order to understand American culture.

From there, we turn to the essays in “American Identities.” These selections examine the shifting nature of cultural identities of race, class, gender, and region and demonstrate the constantly fluctuating national and global scene that causes us to continually search for answers to the question of what it means to be an American.

Additionally, this issue features the winner of the American Studies’ Earl James Weaver prize for the best essay written by a graduate student. Mike West’s “The Birth of the Pin-Up Girl: How Footlocker Art Swept the Nation and Influenced Gender Roles during World War II” explores the emerging role of pin-up girls in gender relations in wartime America.

We hope that while you are reading through this fine group of essays you learn something new, come across something that sparks your interest, or discover a topic that inspires your own research. Perhaps something will change your point of view and encourage you to think critically about a certain topic related to American culture. If any one of these instances occurs, this journal has served its purpose. Enjoy!

AMERICAN PAPERS CONTRIBUTORS

Danielle Barraza is a third-year American Studies graduate student. She completed her undergraduate work at Cal State Fullerton, where she received BA degrees in American Studies and Communications with an emphasis in Entertainment Studies. Her research interests revolve around media representations of race and gender in American culture. She plans to continue this work in a PhD program.

Courtney Beachner is a second-year American Studies graduate student. Her research interests include gender, popular culture, and media representations. She also serves as the treasurer for the American Studies Student Association.

Brianna Flores is an undergraduate student majoring in American Studies and minoring in Political Science. Her research interests include popular culture, feminism, and law. After graduating she plans to pursue a JD.

Jessica Fortinberry completed her undergraduate work at Cal State Fullerton in 2014, where she received a BA degree in English with a minor in American Studies. She has been taking time off since graduation, and can be found reading and spending time with her family.

Brandon Kyle Goco completed his undergraduate work at Cal State Fullerton in 2014, where he received BA degrees in American Studies and Radio-TV-Film. His research interests include film theory, queer history, and transnational studies. In 2014, Brandon was the recipient of the Academic Achievement Award by the CSUF American Studies Department. He is currently working for the Directors Guild of America in Hollywood, CA.

Elliot Lam is a second-year American Studies graduate student. He completed his undergraduate work at Cal State Fullerton, where he received a BA degree in Political Science. His research interests include U.S. wars and racial formation. He hopes to one day develop critical theory on refugees.

Aaron J. Mezzano is a second-year American Studies graduate student. He completed his undergraduate work at UC Santa Barbara, where he received a BA degree in History. His research interests include leisure, television, entertainment, and representation. He plans to expand his research in video games and pursue a PhD.

Steven Montes completed his undergraduate work at Cal State Fullerton in 2014, where he received BA degrees in American Studies and Communications, with an emphasis in Entertainment and Tourism Studies.

Sarah Printy is an undergraduate student majoring in Graphic Design. After taking an American Studies class in her sophomore year, she found that she enjoyed learning about history from an American Studies perspective. She plans to take more American Studies classes in the future.

Nicole Rehnberg is a second-year English graduate student. Her research interests focus on storytelling and comic books. She hopes to pursue a career as a comic book historian.

Sara Roberts is an undergraduate student majoring in American Studies as well as Fine Arts, with an emphasis in sculpture. She enjoys exploring American history through a critical lens by challenging preconceived notions and popularly held beliefs. After graduating she hopes to attain an apprenticeship where she can further her skills in the field of sculpture.

Mike West is a third-year American Studies graduate student. He completed his undergraduate work at UC Santa Cruz, where he received a BA in American Studies. His research interests include the role of pin-ups in shaping gender roles in the mid-twentieth century, American folk music, and race and baseball. He plans to continue this work in a PhD program.

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AMERICAN FORMS

“ From the beginnings of literature, poets and writers have based their narratives on crossing borders, on wandering, on exile, on encounters beyond the familiar. The stranger is an archetype...The tension between alienation and assimilation has always been a basic theme.”

—Jhumpa Lahiri

AMERICAN FORMS 401: AMERICAN CULTURE THROUGH SOCIAL SCIENCE

Defying Documentary

In Search of Truth in Non-Fiction Cinema

BRANDON KYLE GOCO

This essay was written for Dr. Leila Zenderland's American Culture Through Social Science course in the fall of 2013. It examines the often-opaque relationship between the documentary film genre and the concept of "truth," chronicling the evolution of the genre during the 1930s and 1970s.

Upon entering the tradesman's tent—a journey itself, long and arduous through the Arctic tundra—Nanook, the eponymous hero from Robert J. Flaherty's pioneering *Nanook of the North*, is greeted by a curious noise of which, up until then, he has never heard. An intertitle reads: "In deference to Nanook, the great hunter, the trader entertains and attempts to explain the principle of the gramophone—how the white man 'cans' his voice."¹ Nanook, mesmerized by the unnatural sounds issuing from the tradesman's phonograph, is handed the flat, circular vinyl for further inspection. After a few quick, childlike glances, the great hunter of the north commences to bite down on the record—as if in order to truly understand such magic one must put it through the test of one's teeth. Nanook, simultaneously entertained and bewildered, is here an Inuit man far removed from the modernity of the "white man's world."

Released in 1922, Robert J. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North: A Story of Life and Love in the Actual Arctic* is generally considered the first commercially successful feature-length documentary in movie history.² At the time barely a quarter of a

century old, the cinema was thus introduced to the potentiality of non-fiction as a genre sustainable in long form.

Nanook of the North broke boundaries. Boldly sidestepping the already cinematic tradition of theatricality for an ostensibly frank depiction of "real life." Yet, despite Flaherty going to great lengths filming *Nanook* in the "actual Arctic," much of the story, sequences, and characters were fabricated to benefit the need for drama. Most Inuit people by that time were not as blissfully unaware of the outside world as *Nanook* appeared to have been when confronted with the "white man's" gramophone—the tools and clothing used by *Nanook* had, by then, been long outdated in favor of a variety of Western gear to combat the harshness of the tundra and even the man who played *Nanook* actually went by the name Allakariallak.³ John Grierson, a disciple of Flaherty and the man most often credited with coining the very word "documentary," expounded: "Consider the problem of the Eskimo.... His clothes and blankets most often come from Manchester, supplied by a department store in Winnipeg.... They listen to fur prices over the radio, and are subjected to fast operations of commercial opportunists flying in from New York."⁴ It is fitting that the first non-fiction film be also a cornerstone controversy concerning the ambiguous relationship between documentary and truth. For Flaherty, staging was acceptable and in fact necessary for *Nanook* to sustain its ambitious duration.

Since its inception, many filmmakers, film theorists, and social scientists have attempted to define "documentary"—an undertaking easier said than done. In 1936, Paul Rotha, a filmmaker first and an anthropologist second, called the documentary a "propagandist, social, and illuminatory instrument."⁵ In 1976, Karl G. Heider, an anthropologist first and a filmmaker second, called the documentary a "film which

reflects ethnographic understanding.”⁶ In the forty years that separated Heider from Rotha, these two documentarians were still trying their best to fathom what it meant for a film to be non-fiction. Their differing opinions can be summed up by the very way they titled their respective books: Paul Rotha’s *Documentary Film* and Karl G. Heider’s *Ethnographic Film*. One explores non-fiction from the perspective of the filmmaker, the other explores non-fiction from the perspective of the anthropologist.

While one could easily begin by defining “documentary” as that which departs from fiction film, this essay explores the non-fiction film and its relationship to the concept of truth, both as an ethnographic medium for recording reality and as a propagandistic instrument for winning hearts and minds.

The Filmmaker’s Perspective

Robert J. Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, released in 1922, established the feature-length documentary as a profitable alternative to fiction film. In 1936, fourteen years later, Paul Rotha, a British documentarian who owed much to Flaherty’s invention of the genre, wrote the first book-length study on documentary. Rotha, by then, was a well-regarded film scholar active in both academic and filmmaking circles. In 1930, he wrote and published the pioneering film study, *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema*.⁷ At the time *Documentary Film* was published, Rotha’s name had already become synonymous with the first great British documentary film movement that emerged in late 1920s and early 1930s.⁸ An initial review of *Documentary Film*, from the *Journal of Educational Sociology*, considered the book indispensable, and Rotha, “one of the foremost exponents of documentary film in the world.”⁹ The American Flaherty may have begot non-fiction cinema in its extended form, but it was in Europe that the documentary truly matured.

The British were not the only ones experimenting with the medium; if anything, it was the Russians and later the Germans that began recognizing the potency of film from the other end of the cinematic spectrum; Rotha was more than aware of this in 1936. At that time, Sergei Eisenstein’s rousing *Battleship Potemkin*, a textbook example of cinematic propaganda, was already a decade-old classic; and Leni Riefenstahl, under direct employment of Adolf Hitler, had by then released three effective Nazi-promoting documentaries—including the notorious *Triumph of the Will* in 1934. It looked as if Europe was inching its way toward an impending, clearly violent political crescendo. It is no wonder Rotha, living in “powder keg” Britain, was motivated to write *Documentary Film*, a work specifically emphasizing the political and cultural potential of non-fiction cinema. Rotha was unquestionably aware of the cinema’s predestined transformation to meet the “political apprehension and social disintegration” that was plaguing the world at the time. And if the cinema is, as Rotha suggests, “one of the most powerful instruments of social in-

fluence,” then his need to dissect documentary was perhaps fueled by the menace of its potentiality.¹⁰

Within the pages of his book, Rotha explores three key uses of the documentary: (1) documentary as a social instrument, (2) documentary as an illuminatory instrument, and (3) documentary as a propagandist instrument. As a social instrument, documentary can “provide proper training for the development of proper citizens,” Rotha argued. He regarded the cinema, along with the radio, as the biggest communications revolution “since the introduction of the printing press.” As an illuminatory instrument, documentary can duly prepare citizens for social service through education. Rotha’s final thematic emphasis, documentary as a propagandist instrument, is perhaps his most significant and enduring argument.¹¹

Rotha seemed less interested in defining “documentary” in proximity to “truth,” as he was interested in exploring the cultural, and even physical, impressions the tool of film itself could impress upon the masses. At the edge of World War II, Rotha aptly recognized how substantial the persuasion of film was in shaping “mass-thought” in post-World War I Europe. In his study, Rotha recognized three unique resources of filmic propaganda: (1) the resource to inform, (2) the resource to persuade, and (3) the resource to reiterate. He felt these three capabilities, if accomplished effectively, could convince the masses to a degree of near-absolute effectiveness.¹²

Separating documentary from other genres, Rotha was vehemently against what he referred to as “amusement cinema,” the glamorized Hollywood faction of film. In one instance, Rotha even spitefully called the fiction film industry, “the enemy of social consciousness and realization.”¹³ Although the amusement film was by far the most popular form of filmic entertainment of the 1930s, for the esteemed British documentarian, documentary was the future.

Max Forester, writing for *The Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1939, also recognized this imminent cinematic revolution: “Documentaries cannot be ignored. For better or for worse, they are with us to stay.”¹⁴ While documentaries certainly have proven their place in film, both Forester and Rotha seemed to drastically underestimate the significance and resilience in the popularity of the fiction film.

Yet, how does one go about differentiating non-fiction from fiction? For many, *Nanook of the North* is non-fiction; while say, *The Wizard of Oz* is certainly fiction. But how about Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* or John Ford’s *The Grapes of Wrath*? Despite its historical significance, even Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* cannot fully be considered non-fiction. The demarcation that separates fiction from non-fiction is certainly an elusive, almost non-existent, one. While Rotha was aware of this, he seemed particularly unperturbed by the issue. For him, documentary was not identified by its relationship to truth per say, but by its utility. He asked: What is the overall purpose of the documentary? In this sense, Frances

Flaherty, the great pioneer's wife and collaborator, was accurate at suggesting:

A Flaherty film is not a documentary, because a documentary is preconceived. The great documentary fathered by John Grierson is all preconceived for educational and social purposes. Hollywood preconceives for the box office. None of these is simply and purely, freely and spontaneously, the thing itself, for its own sake. In other words he had no axe to grind.¹⁵

For the most part, the intention of the documentary is either for instruction, for education, or for revolution. This is why the amusement film is such a hindrance to Rotha's perception of the documentary—he believed, erroneously, that the fiction film entirely suspended reality and social consciousness for the exclusive purpose of profit and without any supplemental aspirations for community service or political enlightenment. In contrast, Oliver Bell, who in 1940 was director of the British Film Institute, was perhaps more prescient regarding the significance of the "amusement film" when he argued that all films, including fiction films, were "educational in the sense that often quite unconsciously they add to our store of factual knowledge."¹⁶ He continued:

The most relevant to our immediate point of view this afternoon, it seems to me, is that more than any other art form or medium of expression it produces an emotional rather than a rational effect. This is probably due to the conditions under which it is displayed. A warm, darkened hall, comfortable, indeed, luxurious seats and surroundings, a brightly lit screen to focus the eyes upon and a sufficient volume of sound to enable one to hear every murmur without effort, all tend to dull the critical faculties.¹⁷

Bell recognized the stereotypes of the "Hollywood" picture, whereas Rotha seemed to fall for them. Frederic M. Thrasher, in his 1936 article entitled "The Motion Picture: Its Nature and Scope," discusses Rotha but ultimately comes to the conclusion that "the entertainment film is unquestionably one of the greatest educational and social influences of modern time."¹⁸ Despite these dissimilar viewpoints, Rotha's theories were not entirely wrong. Rotha's goal was not to condemn the "amusement film" but to explain the significance of film in general as a medium with purpose beyond what he perceived as wasteful entertainment.

For Rotha, documentary does not have to follow physical reality for scientific grounding, it only has to win the hearts and minds of the people it aims at reaching. Flaherty's *Nanook*, thus, should scarcely be criticized. It is a film that tells a dramatic story through real-life situations and ethnically authentic characters. It proved successful both critically and commercially, and to the benefit and conviction of Rotha, it pioneered film as having a social utility other than that of just making money. Rotha spoke of the film in his book:

"*Nanook of the North* differed from previous and many later natural-material pictures in the simplicity of its statement of the primitive existence led by the Eskimos, put on the screen with excellent photography and with an imaginative understanding behind the use of the camera."¹⁹

Rotha felt Flaherty pioneered a new approach to photographing "the living scene"—namely utilizing film grammar that had previously been used exclusively by fiction filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith, Erich von Stroheim, and Cecil B. DeMille. The respected documentary historian Erik Barnouw noted Flaherty's mastering of camera technique and editing: "The ability to witness an episode from many angles and distances, seen in quick succession—a totally surrealistic privilege, unmatched in human experience—had become so much a part of film-viewing that it was unconsciously accepted as 'natural.'"²⁰ Flaherty not only created the first feature-length documentary, he also revolutionized filmic language by seaming "amusement film" practices with authentic, real-life subjects. Here is perhaps the clearest demonstration of how truth and fiction can merge to tell a single story as compelling—and as undistorted—as possible. Flaherty, perhaps unknowingly, was the officiator of such a marriage.

What makes *Nanook of the North* such an anomaly in film history is its pitch-perfect blend of story and reality. Previous non-fiction cinematic exploits, such as the pioneering "actualities" by Auguste and Louis Lumiere, did not attempt at a story arc but merely recorded brief bursts of unscripted situations candidly captured on the Parisian streets.²¹ *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* and *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* were among the frank titles of their earliest films. Flaherty dismantled the fence that separated the world of actualities from the world of the fiction film. Not only did he utilize nearly every effective fiction film technique employed at the time, he set his protagonist up with a story as well.

Nanook of the North is a drama, and according to its subtitle, it's a love story as well. Like any great movie, it has elements of humor and suspense; it even has wonderfully engaging characters to care about and relate to. Yet it is in its use of the exotic landscape that makes it so innovative. *Nanook of the North* is just as much about the North as it is about Nanook. Rotha saw that as revolutionary. It utilizes both fiction film language and fiction film storytelling, despite professing itself "non-fiction." For Rotha, the success of the documentary is resultant of the filmmaker's ability to use any and all cinematic tricks available at his or her disposal. A filmmaker's perspective is imperative. Rotha argues, "[Documentary] asks for the mind of the trained sociologist as well as the abilities of the professional film technician."²²

In perhaps his most controversial theory, Rotha argued that a reenactment of historical events, even ones that include fictitious characters, could still be regarded as documentary. This is why *Battleship Potemkin* could be considered documentary as much as it is propaganda, or even *The*

Grapes of Wrath. *Battleship Potemkin* dramatized reality to incite a political response and *The Grapes of Wrath* utilized fabricated characters to represent the realities of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. One could easily argue both as fiction films, yet their intent, their purpose, strongly fits within Rotha's definition of the documentary: a film designed to incite, to inform, or to instruct.²³

Rotha's perspective was from that of the filmmaker. Truth, while certainly a defining element in non-fiction cinema, did not have to be absolute so long as the intent of the documentary did not call for it—and in propagandist terms, truth is seldom called for. Rotha believed understanding film language was the key to a successful and potent documentary. And in 1936, a potent documentary could very well spell war. But it was only 1936. The documentary was still a genre in its relative infancy. It would take a second wave of filmmakers and social scientists from another generation to reexamine non-fiction cinema for purposes of their own.

The Anthropologist's Perspective

After forty years and numerous reprints, translations, and entirely new editions, Paul Rotha's *Documentary Film*, the classic, cornerstone study on non-fiction cinema, found a comparatively slimmer book beside it on the bookshelf. In 1976, leading visual anthropologist Dr. Karl G. Heider published the brief but valuable *Ethnographic Film*.²⁴ E. Richard Sorenson, from the National Anthropological Film Center at the Smithsonian Institute, called Heider's book, "a substantial contribution to this larger field of visual anthropology."²⁵ Whereas *Documentary Film* went on to become a widely referenced standard textbook on documentary filmmaking, *Ethnographic Film* went on to become a widely referenced standard textbook on ethnographic filmmaking. The forty years since Rotha, and fifty years since Flaherty, had certainly changed the climate of both filmmaking and social science. The threat of propaganda was no longer as significant an issue and visual anthropology was quickly becoming a greatly respected, albeit still burgeoning, alternative to written anthropology. Being in the right place in the right time, Heider was the first to write a book-length study on ethnographic film—much like Rotha did with documentary.

Unsurprisingly, both Rotha and Heider seem to clearly acknowledge the impact of Flaherty on their particular field of study. *Nanook of the North* was simultaneously as revolutionary in filmmaking as it was in ethnography. Where film theorists recognized Flaherty's blending of fiction techniques with non-fiction subjects as innovative, social scientists recognized the ethnographic record of *Nanook* as significant in the field of anthropology. Heider himself recognized the parallel between the two seemingly divergent fields:

Both film and ethnography were born in the nineteenth-century and reached their maturity in the 1920s.

But curiously enough, it was not until the 1960s that film and ethnography systematically began to join in effective collaboration. However, we shall see that, during the first forty years of ethnographic film, the major contributions were made by people who were outside (or uncomfortably on the fringe of) the film industry and others who were more or less peripheral to anthropology.²⁶

The primary purpose of Heider's book is not to define "documentary film" or even "ethnographic film," but instead to classify the degree of filmic "ethnographicness."²⁷ By rating "ethnographicness," one could determine the significance of the work to science, the validity of the record for reference, and the efficiency of the work in the classroom.

In a slightly laughable definition of ethnographic film, Heider purports, "ethnographic film is film which reflects ethnographic understanding."²⁸ His brief definition is meant to suggest why it would take a book-length assessment to even attempt defining it. Heider is most interested in the documentary as a tool in the classroom—ethnographic film teaching anthropology.

Unlike Rotha's filmmaker perspective, Heider is attempting to look at non-fiction cinema from the perspective of the scientist, bridging ethnography with film technique. The defining argument, however, of *Ethnographic Film* is that there is an observable disparity between "word-on-paper" and "photo-on-celluloid." Where the ethnographer "begins with theoretical problems and research plans," the filmmaker "begins with an idea and a script." Where the ethnographer "gathers data by making observations and asking questions," the filmmaker "shoots footage." And where the ethnographer "analyzes data, writes and rewrites, and produces a written report," the filmmaker "edits footage and produces a film." Both Rotha and Heider agree that in order for a documentary to be successful, it has to utilize cinematic persuasion all the while recognizing its obligation to truth and documenting reality.²⁹

Ethnographic film is not merely ethnography on film. Timothy Asch, John Marshall, and Peter Spier for the 1973 *Annual Review of Anthropology* argued, "an anthropologist must understand the potential of the camera as a recording device, and he must have a clear understanding of why he is carrying all the extra weight into the field."³⁰ The traditional tool of the anthropologist is the pad and pencil. Heider, an anthropologist himself, was disciplined in this routine and argued that the camera should not replace the written document but instead merely supplement it.³¹ Whereas Rotha saw the documentary as singularly all-encapsulating, Heider suggested that the use of film in ethnography should be as an addendum to real research and scientific study written on paper. A film alone cannot substitute for traditional anthropology.

David MacDougall, in his 1978 article "Ethnographic Film: Failure and Promise," noted how ethnographic film in the 1960s was quickly becoming an increasingly attractive alternative to written ethnography, but ultimately argued that

its impact on the anthropological world was still negligent. Leading anthropologist Margaret Mead called the lack of any substantial work in ethnographic film a “wretched picture of lost opportunities.”³² MacDougall explained, “the expectation arose that anthropology might evolve from a discipline of words into one embracing the perceptions of a visual medium, and that film would finally attain the importance in the mainstream of anthropology that the early pioneers had predicted for it.”³³ Heider, in *Ethnographic Film*, was speaking for a generation of visual anthropologists who had not yet found their own *Nanook of the North* to spearhead ethnographic film as an anthropological force to reckon with—as *Nanook* had done for documentary half a century earlier.

For Heider, documentary must be methodically and scientifically grounded. In order for a film to achieve “ethnographicness,” it has to follow “rational, explicit, methodology.” Returning to *Nanook of the North*, Heider contends, “although Flaherty was no ethnographer and did not pretend to approach cultures with an ethnographic research plan, he did spend an extended time in the field for each film, observing and absorbing the native culture. He was no fly-by-night explorer.” Despite *Nanook* being a very early work in the field of visual anthropology, it does still prove to be a surprisingly significant document of the Eskimo in the early decades of the 20th century. Through method and technique, an ethnographic filmmaker can achieve a greater degree of truth through conscious “ethnographicness.”³⁴

Unlike Rotha, who seemed to circumvent any discussion regarding the relationship between truth and documentary, Heider dedicates his entire book to the topic. Heider argues, “a basic problem . . . which runs through all considerations of ethnographic film concerns the nature of truth. Filmmakers and ethnographers . . . take quite different positions on truth. Certainly everyone subscribes to truth. No one really advocates untruth.” Heider recognizes that by nature, the filmmaker manipulates reality, while the anthropologist cannot be taken seriously unless his or her research is grounded in truth. Heider argues, “in science, the ends cannot justify the means: results are only as sound as the methodology which produces them.” If a film is intending to be utilized for scientific purposes, it has to obey scientific method—it has to achieve a degree of filmic “ethnographicness.”

To scale “ethnographicness,” Heider came up with a series of attributes to which a film must conform in order to be deemed “ethnographic.” Comprising Heider’s list includes: (1) Basic technical competency, (2) avoidance of distortion, (3) use of soundtrack, (4) choice of film content, (5) awareness of audience, and (6) relationship to ethnography. Like Flaherty, Heider emphasized that a filmmaker attempting an ethnographic film must be fluent in film language and technique. The filmmaker must understand focus, exposure, sound, and editing. These tools benefit the effectiveness and clarity of a picture. Proficiency in the mechanics, thus, has a

direct relationship to the actual documenting of reality. Without it, not only is the visual and audio distorted, but the clarity of truth as well.³⁵

Arguably all six of the attributes relate to distortion, but Heider sets aside one attribute specifically to discuss physical manipulation. A good portion of the book is dedicated to listing and expounding on a variety of potential distortions a filmmaker might come across during the production and post-production of his film, “there are two main sorts of distortions: the one occurs when the filmmakers, intentionally or inadvertently, cause alterations in the behavior which they are filming; and the other occurs during the filmmaking process itself, through selective acts of shooting or editing.”³⁶ Even the presence of the ethnographer in the environment can be a distortion. Jay Ruby in 1977, for the Department of Anthropology at Temple University, asked the questions: “If documentary claimed that they were trying to film people as they would have behaved if they were not being filmed, how could they account for the presence of the camera and crew and the modifications it caused?” and “what obligations does the filmmaker have to his audience?”³⁷

For both Heider and Rotha, soundtrack plays a very important role. While Rotha emphasized filmic techniques to achieve effectiveness, Heider warned about the misuse of such trappings. Narration, for example, can be entirely superfluous. Even if the narration adds information that would otherwise be impossible to extract from the visual, it would be best to simply have such supplemental explanations in the written report. Heider found the 1949 sound version of *Nanook of the North* to be “the extreme in inappropriateness,” as it incongruously utilizes both a “full orchestra and a wordy, redundant narration.” Heider, instead, recommended natural synchronous sounds to achieve superior “ethnographicness.”³⁸

The fourth attribute deals with film content. Holism is important but seldom achievable. While the single most memorable image from *Nanook of the North* is the protagonist’s nearly fourth-wall breaking introductory close-up at the opening of the film, Heider argues that the very idea of the close-up is “unnatural.” While *Nanook*’s close-up might very well be the single best example of Flaherty’s utilization of cinematic language, Heider saw it as an unjustifiable distortion. He argues, “entire bodies of people at work or play or rest are more revealing and interesting than body fragments.” Heider called the tendency to build “a film around a single person” the “Flaherty Tradition.” Similarly, Heider stressed that “events should be shown from beginning to end,” with holism being the goal to best achieve limited distortion and obtain better “ethnographicness.”³⁹

Heider’s ideas greatly conflict with Rotha’s. Where Rotha argued the need of film and story technique to create a successful film, Heider believed the most “ethnographic” films were holistic and cinematically minimal. Plot, unsurprising-

ly, plays very little a role in Heider's cinematic aspirations. A film should be objective—for subjectiveness is an act of distortion. Certainly his documentaries are comprised of narratives, but the ultimate aim of the ethnographic film is to document through scientific method.

For any film, especially documentary, audience is key. Both Heider and Røtha agreed on that. Heider recognized that there is a disparity once again between written and filmic ethnography: "Print anthropology is generally written with a specific audience in mind. Most ethnographic films, on the other hand, seem to have been made with little thought for any specific audience."⁴⁰ Where Røtha suggested documentary to be most effective outside the classroom, Heider argued the role of ethnographic film lay specifically in the world of academia. It is, first and foremost, a tool to teach anthropology. Heider's and Røtha's audiences were different. Heider aspired for the teacher and the student in the university, while Røtha expected documentary to be showcased in movie houses to the general movie-going public.

The final attribute finds Heider reiterating the importance of "word-on-paper": "An ethnography is a written work which may be supplemented by film."⁴¹ The lack of a written ethnography could make the work scientifically groundless. The written and filmic ethnography should interact symbiotically. Without the written report, Heider argued, the film would be unreliable, and thus, not truthful.

These elements when stacked together compose the "ethnographicness" of a film. Heider's primary argument is that non-fiction cinema should aspire to ethnographic truth because it would otherwise deceive the audience's expectations.⁴² While Heider was looking particularly at the sub-genre of visual anthropology, his theories and concepts undoubtedly relate to general documentary, as well as non-fiction cinema as a discipline. An audience assumes a documentary is credible because the very word "documentary" requires "documenting," and "documenting" suggests a quest for tangible fact. While perhaps Røtha would probably not have taken Heider's distortions seriously, he would have agreed that language, theory, method, and truth are all important aspects for any filmmaker worth his or her salt.

Conclusion

Upon entering the tradesman's tent, Nanook was introduced to an experience so entirely new to his world that he found it impossible not to bite down on it with curiosity. Flaherty's documentary offered something similar to a generation of moviegoers and filmmakers who would soon desire to understand what it really meant for a film to be non-fiction. Defining documentary, many would soon discover, is a near impossible task to achieve. Non-fiction cinema continues to be one of the most illusive and, consequently, boundless genres in film.

Paul Røtha, in the 1930s, wished to clarify the disparity

between the "amusement film" and the documentary during a time when propagandist film was beginning to show cultural and political significance in Europe. In his book, *Documentary Film*, Røtha argued that cinema was an inherently propagandistic instrument and that technical filmmaking proficiency in the part of the filmmaker was key to producing an effective product. Film, for Røtha, was entirely a subjective medium. Although Røtha seemed to disapprove of the "amusement film" vehemently, he does stress the appropriation of many fiction film practices and techniques to be utilized for documentary purposes. A rousing story can engage an audience to the benefit of successfully communicating a film's message. Ultimately, at the edge of World War II, Røtha recognized the frightening potential of the documentary and was attempting to understand it before he, himself, fell victim to it.

Dr. Karl G. Heider, in the 1970s, wished to understand ethnographic film and what made one film more ethnographic than another. In his book, *Ethnographic Film*, Heider did this by organizing attributes to film ethnography and by evaluating degrees of "ethnographicness" of which a film could aspire. Heider believed that ethnographic film, as an anthropological document, did not hold on its own and was only a supplement, not a substitute, to written ethnography. In 1976, visual anthropology had yet to make a splash, and despite his dedication to the medium, Heider's confidence still possessed a degree of reservation. He stressed methodology and believed documentary should aspire to holism and objectiveness. Story, one of the most fundamental elements of any movie, plays very little a role in the composition of Heider's ethnographic film. Ultimately, Heider's goal was to warn both filmmakers and visual anthropologists of the potentials of distortions, both in front of the camera and from behind it.

Both Røtha and Heider, however conflicting their opinions ultimately were, found the plight of the documentary to be the struggle for authenticity. For Røtha, authenticity equated to effectiveness, while for Heider, authenticity equated to accuracy. Confronted with the condition of truth, Røtha argued that the ends justify the means; Heider argued the opposite. Both believed film competency was beneficial, but an understanding of intent, they agreed, was even more imperative. Røtha viewed documentary from the perspective of the filmmaker; Heider viewed documentary from the perspective of the anthropologist. In their attempts at making non-fiction tangible, they ultimately discovered that truth is fundamentally the single constant ingredient by which all films are judged.

What is truth? What is documentary? In the end, defying preconceived notions of what documentary is is the only way to even begin answering both of these questions. And so, the search for truth in non-fiction cinema will continue to endure. ♦

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5. Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), 35–37.
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31. Karl G. Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, 127.
32. David MacDougall, “Ethnographic Film: Failure and Promise,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 418.
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37. Jay Ruby, “The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film,” *Journal of the University Film Association* 29 (1977): 8.
38. Karl G. Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, 70, 104.
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AMERICAN FORMS 442: TELEVISION AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Pretty Big Lies

Media Coverage of ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars*

BRIANNA FLORES

This essay was written for Dr. Sandra Falero's Television and American Culture course in the spring of 2014. The assignment required students to analyze the dialogue surrounding a TV series with regard to a social or cultural issue. I examined the discourse surrounding ABC Family's "Pretty Little Liars" in order to expose the sexism underlying reviews and viewer feedback as a consequence of our culture's general aversion to the "Teenage Girl" and her diversions.

On May 7, 2014, *The Tonight Show* featured a new "episode" of *Ew!*, a pseudo Teen Nick program on which Sara (Jimmy Fallon donning women's clothing and a wig) and her "BFFs" (other actors in drag) drivel on a range of "teenage girl" subjects.¹ In the "episode," Sara and her "besties" Alison (Seth Rogen) and Britney (Zac Efron) engage in the quintessential teenage girl diversion of selfie-taking, provoking laughs from the studio audience with each "duck face" and ridiculous pose. Every exaggerated "ew" and inane remark from the "girls'" well-glossed lips encourages the audience to join Fallon in his mockery of the teenage girl. Only within a cultural context in which young women are regarded as a trivial Other could such humor successfully induce laughter. Furthermore, only within such a cultural context could media designed for teenage girls evoke derision to the extent *Pretty Little Liars* has managed since premiering on the ABC Family network. A sur-

vey of the popular discourse surrounding the teen drama illustrates how the media has largely couched coverage of the program in disparaging terms and thus, undermined the program elements fans value as well as the fans themselves.

Television's Construction of the "Teenage Girl"

In 1909, psychologist G. Stanley Hall penned an essay for Appleton's Magazine espousing the teenage girl as the "most intricate and baffling problem that perhaps science has ever yet attacked."² Nearly four decades later, Hall's synopsis of the teenage girl would resurface in the opening of a *March of Times* newsreel entitled "Teen-Age Girls," which declared the teenage girl "one of the most fascinating and mysterious, and one of the most completely irrelevant" phenomena of World War II.³ Both cultural texts attest to the manner in which twentieth century America regarded the female adolescent as a mystifying Other. More telling, however, are the cultural texts featured on television, the highly ideological medium Jason Mittell characterizes as an especially potent "refraction" of the world.⁴ As Mittell notes, though programming presents skewed images of groups, television exercises nearly unparalleled influence over viewers' perceptions. To understand our cultural perception of the teenage girl, then, investigation of the teenage girl's trajectory on television is essential.

Several scholars identify the 1930s as the decade the teenage girl emerged on America's popular culture radar and the 1940s as the decade in which she flourished as an icon. In *America's Sweethearts*, for example, Ilana Nash offers an in-depth analysis of the images employed during these decades, which afforded the teenage girl ascendancy off-screen. Young women, Nash's research exposes, were overwhelmingly featured in the programs of the 1930s and '40s as "quasi-angelic creature[s]" or "exasperating agent[s] of chaos." Accordingly, the teenage girl

largely appeared “either more or less than human.” With few exceptions, she lacked genuine “personhood,” a “condition” Nash defines as “allow[ing] an individual the freedom to draw and shape the boundaries of her own self-definitions, and, more importantly, to demand that those definitions receive respect from others.” In other words, the teenage girl could not exact cultural recognition of her “equal intrinsic value.”⁵

As the teenage girl’s salience increased during World War II, the aforementioned images reigned supreme. Teenage girls, as “creatures” of the newfangled youth culture, were the “simultaneous saviors and destroyers of the American way of life.”⁶ Girl-centric programs, for example, often underscored the teenage girl’s “excessive” consumption of popular culture. On such programs, the teenage girl personified popular culture’s “undue” influence on America’s youth, for which media producers were guiltless. The teenage girl’s “less rational” mind rendered her “pathologically susceptible” to media influence and would increasingly render her “silly” and “inconsequential” in the American imagination.⁷ In the ensuing decades, the media would harp on these characterizations to undermine her taste and intellect.⁸

Following World War II, the teenage girl seemed to disappear on-screen. Images of older, less “wacky” women surfaced in her stead to reintroduce young women as willing and ideal wives and mothers.⁹ In her analysis of comedy programs of the 1950s and 1960s, Patricia Mellencamp examines these new images and suggests they correspond with women’s forced exodus from the urban workforce to her “proper” place within the domestic sphere. In other words, Mellencamp argues, these images stemmed from the United States’ defensive foreign policy of containment.¹⁰ As the 1960s approached, the teenage girl would re-emerge, but only as a recycled version of her 1940s-self: charming, inept, dangerous, and mildly insane.¹¹ Her hysteria over four young British men exposed her threatening “sexual energy, impudence, rebellion against adult authority, [and] defiance of traditional gender codes,” thoroughly suppressed in the preceding decade.¹² Such exposure only further inflamed adults wary of the American teenager and resentful of the deluge of media for teens.¹³ Unfortunately, the scorn the teenage girl endured upon her re-emergence would hardly wane over the years.

Never Trust a Pretty Girl With an Ugly Secret

On June 8, 2010, ABC Family introduced American audiences to Emily Fields, Spencer Hastings, Hanna Marin, and Aria Montgomery, a foursome of sixteen-year-olds mourning the loss of “Queen Bee” Alison DiLaurentis and weathering the onslaught of an anonymous tormentor. A record 2.47 million viewers tuned in for the *Pretty Little Liars* premiere, though several early reviewers had disparaged the program.¹⁴ In the *New York Post*, for example, Linda Stasi warned readers of the “pretty little show[’s]” dearth of “socially redeeming value.”¹⁵ Rob Owen of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* pronounced the program a

“silly little show” with homogeneous heroines “unlikely” to encourage viewers to “care.”¹⁶ Moreover, the *Boston Herald*’s Mark Perigard concluded, the “sexy summer trash” hardly qualified as entertainment.¹⁷ The language employed in these reviews reveals how the preceding decades’ prejudices have informed our cultural perception of the twenty-first century teenage girl and her preferred programming. More significantly, the language reveals the teenage girl’s foreclosed personhood. Today’s teenage girl proves as oppressed as her precursors through the use of demeaning words such as “silly,” “sexy,” and “unoriginal.”

Beyond expressing disdain, each of the foregoing reviews framed the episode’s major events as consequences of the heroines’ own folly. Aria’s underage alcohol consumption and lip-locking session with Ezra (revealed further in the episode as Mr. Fitz, Rosewood High’s newest faculty member), for example, were synopsized as her “fooling around.”¹⁸ That Mr. Fitz pursues Aria and resumes the romance fully aware of her age did not appear within any of the reviewers’ synopses, nor did Aria’s comparatively sensible decisions (she endeavors to end the romance and removes herself from his course). In like fashion, Spencer’s consent to a “bikini massage” from Wren, her sister’s fiancé, nearly a decade her senior, rendered her the guilty party in Stasi, Owen, and Perigard’s reviews. No one denounced Wren for his inappropriate offer. Even the more egregious of the men’s misdeeds are shrouded in the young women’s. Officer Wilden of the Rosewood Police Department, for example, drew no criticism in the foregoing reviews for accepting a sexual favor from Hanna’s mother. Only Hanna’s theft of designer sunglasses and Ms. Marin’s extension of the favor (to expunge the theft charges) alarmed reviewers.¹⁹

On *Good Day LA*, Troian Bellisario (Spencer) challenged the media’s omission of the misdeeds of Rosewood’s men: “Everyone blames Spencer. She’s a sixteen-year-old girl and all of the boys that she’s ‘stolen,’ they always kiss her first and they’re all over eighteen. So can we talk about the responsibility that needs to be taken as far as the adult males in the community?”²⁰ Though her challenge addressed the media’s oversight and implicated Rosewood’s men, her words have cultural resonance. As Nash contends, American culture has long imagined the teenage girl as a sexual hazard to “her own father as well as her societal Father.”²¹ Indeed, Susan Douglas opines, American culture has long suffered from “schizophrenia” with regard to the teenage girl’s sexuality. Her sexuality seemingly imperils the patriarchy yet renders her an appealing, irresistible subject for the male gaze. Men’s sexuality, meanwhile, has enjoyed much less scrutiny.²²

Upon screening the episode, numerous older viewers concurred with Stasi, Owen, and Perigard. In a letter to the editor of the *Daily Review*, one viewer denounced the episode for the young women’s misdeeds: “Minus the commercials, the show was forty-five minutes long and contained underage drinking, marijuana use, an inappropriate relationship between a teenage girl and her English teacher, shoplifting (as well as a moth-

er who trades sexual favors to get the charges dropped)....ABC you ought to be ashamed of yourself! He, too, eschewed addressing the men's misdeeds in favor of haranguing ABC Family for wielding the tagline "A NEW KIND OF FAMILY."²³ "You're not promoting 'family' on your network with shows like this, you're destroying it," he accused.²⁴ The accusation echoes the 1960s panic over the threat the American teenager and the teenage girl, in particular, seemingly posed to the social fabric.²⁵ On the TV Without Pity *Pretty Little Liars* forum, several users likewise reproached Rosewood's women. In a comment teeming with misogyny, Popcorn123 mused of Ms. Marin's sexual favor to Officer Wilden: "Poor Hanna. If I was her, I'd probably eat the carton in my binge after watching that little scene and making eye-contact with Mommy. Wonder why the dad left!"²⁶ Popcorn123's antagonism toward Ms. Marin, rather than Officer Wilden, serves as a micro-level example of the cultural tendency to excuse unscrupulous men and condemn women. Even more magnanimous viewers tended to disparage the drama and Rosewood's women. For instance, though BrightLady vowed to remain a loyal viewer, her characterization of the show as a "campy teen drama with borderline craptastic acting" undermined her pledge of allegiance.²⁷ In deeming *Pretty Little Liars* a "guilty pleasure," users WhitneyWhit and Mnemosyne78 likewise undermine the approval they express.²⁸ That these viewers were incapable of endorsing the show without slighting it attests to the stigma associated with programming designed for the teenage girl.

Beyond the Pilot

As *Pretty Little Liars* has flourished on and off screen, the discourse surrounding the program has swelled. A survey of reviews following the program's premiere suggests, however, "fresh" eyes have hardly diversified the discourse. New viewers have merely recycled the opinions of early reviewers. In *Slate* magazine, for example, Troy Patterson pronounced the program "teenage nonsense" and a "foaming lather of teenage fippery."²⁹ With smarmy allusions to the "chickadees" appearances and a condescending tone, Patterson, like Stasi, Owen, and Perigard, viciously dismisses the program ("keeping the teen audience bopping: Shoplifting. Plagiarism. Stealing a sister's boyfriend. Wrecking a boyfriend's car. Daddy issues. Mommy issues. Uh-huh. OK. That's a great sweater—where'd you get it?").³⁰ Gina Bellafante of the *New York Times* remarked on the program's "addictive soapiness" and joked: "Aria...has taken up with her English teacher, which is a good thing because she wears a brainless expression that says, 'Not in 10 years could I ever get through the first chapter of 'Tristam Shandy.'"³¹ Her quip serves two causes: characterizing Aria (and, arguably, the program's other heroines) as vacuous and thereby affirming the teenage girl's lack of intelligence, as well as excusing Ezra from illegally pursuing Aria. In the *Huffington Post*, Michael Rohrer disclosed, "almost every part of me feels I should hang my head in shame at this confession. I've got a new addiction." His

"shameful" addiction was, of course, *Pretty Little Liars*, which he urged others to "embrace" as a "guilty pleasure," underscoring his fear of having others deem his entertainment preference "lowbrow."³² Rohrer's "confession" discloses more than the programming on his DVR. It exposes an ugly truth: appealing to the teenage girl guarantees a show (or a band, or a book, or a pastime...) the media's derision and cultural ridicule.

Conclusion

As media coverage and viewer feedback of ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars* illustrates, the unflattering image of the teenage girl tendered through the twentieth century exercises the greatest influence on our cultural understanding of young women. Such influence has empowered grown men and women to dismiss teenage girls as trivial Others whose interests and inclinations can never be worthy of critical recognition. The deeply entrenched sexism influencing the discourse equally influences the way in which our culture regards young women. On and off screen, the teenage girl continues to lack genuine personhood. ◆

Appendix A • Television without Pity forums

Popcorn123 | Posted Jun 10, 2010 @ 12:50 AM

This show is a joke, right? I'm going to keep watching purely for the hilarious-factor of it.

First of all, the actresses look like they're pushing into their 30s. Aria is the youngest looking one and she could easily play 25-26. No wonder the teacher didn't know which way was up or down, he's hooking up with a 16 year old who can easily play his classmate. Spencer looks like she could play someone's mom.

Then, let's go to the man-eater portion. Never have I seen 16 year olds acting like this. The teacher! The sister's boyfriend (Multiple times!). Huh? Where did these kids learn their movies? Of course my favorite part had to be the mom and the crooked cop. Poor Hanna. If I was her, I'd probably eat the paper carton in my binge after watching that little scene and making eye-contact with Mommy. Wonder why the dad left! The mom and daughter seem like such wonderful and balanced women. Also, I'm waiting for one of these darlings to start hooking up with someone's father. My bet is Spencer and Aria's dad, they've laid the groundwork there really nicely.

So A's "body" was buried in some gazebo all this time? Looks like Rosewood should spend a few more bucks on some police dogs and they should probably retire the current one as he seems to be sleeping on the job.

Also enjoyed when Emily's mom was saying that only a bad parent would let their child dye her hair pink. But it's okay to let your 15 year old sleep in some abandoned barn/shack and wander the streets alone at night after a murder, eh?

Oh and let's not forget these skanks looking cute in their LBDs at the funeral. Nice touch with the lace tights too, very in-style.

ETA: So far my favorite character is Jenna for the sole reason of the DRAMA she brought with her 2 five second appearances. You go, Jenna!

Appendix B • Television without Pity forums

BrightLady | Posted Jun 9, 2010 @ 10:44 AM

Because I'm a fan of campy teen dramas with borderline craptastic acting, I shall remain loyal to this show. Yes, I've DVR'd it and I can't wait until next week.

Aria and Mr Fritz(?) have zero chemistry. And what's up with all the pedophiles on this show? And why is Hannah's mom going to get her daughter out of trouble?

This show reminded me of every *Fear Street* novel I've read in my preteen years. I loved it, lol.

Appendix C • Television without Pity forums

WhitneyWhit | Posted Jun 8, 2010 @ 8:22 AM

Well this 24 year old is hooked on another teen drama.

I'm loving having Laura Leighton,Holly Marie Combs and Bryce Johnson back on t.v. I had a huge crush on him when was on Popular, and he's still darn cute.

The four girls playing the leads are pretty good. I loved Lucy Hale when she played Rose on *Privelaged*, nice to see her back on t.v.

So far Aria is my favorite character with Emily a close second.

I definitely felt some chemistry between Aria and her teacher(who is adorable by the way). I'm curious to see where that's gonna go. I'm also curious to see what happens between Spencer and her sister's boyfriend.

Hanna didn't do much for me. I've seen the "She's a bitch on the outside but a hurt little girl on the inside" character to many times.

I'd like to see more of Emily and I hope they thouroughly explore her sexuality and not just a couple episodes then sweet it under the rug.

All in all, not a bad show. Will definitely be a good summer guilty pleasure.

Appendix D • Television without Pity forums

Mnemosyne78 | Posted Jun 9, 2010 @ 1:10 AM

I think I'm going to like this show. It has an interesting premise, good music, great fashion, and a wealth of beautiful brunettes for me to girlcrush on. This can be my summer guilty pleasure.

5. Nash, *American Sweethearts*.

6. Ibid., 118.

7. Ibid., 123, 140.

8. Catherine Driscoll, "Girls Today: Girls, Girl Culture, and Girl Studies," *Girlhood Studies* 1 (Summer 2008): 18.

9. Ibid., 171.

10. Patricia Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 61.

11. Nash, *American Sweethearts*, 177.

12. Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994), 113. The "four young British men" were, of course, the Beatles.

13. Nash, *American Sweethearts*, 181.

14. Bill Gorman, "Tuesday Cable: Justified Finale & Law & Order: CI Flat, Plus Deadliest Catch, The Hills, WWE NXT & More," *TV by the Numbers*, June 9, 2010, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2010/06/09/tuesday-cable-justified-finale-law-orderci-flat-plus-deadliest-catch-the-hills-wwe-nxt-more/53637/>.

15. Linda Stasi, "Not Just Another Pretty Face," *New York Post*, June 8 2010, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://nypost.com/2010/06/08/not-just-another-pretty-face/>.

16. Rob Owen, "'Pretty Little Liars' Proves a Silly Little Show," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, June 6 2010, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.post-gazette.com/ae/tv-radio/2010/06/06/Pretty-Little-Liars-proves-a-silly-little-show/stories/201006060229>.

17. Mark Perigard, "'Little' Girls Lost: ABC Family's Sexy Teen Drama is 'Pretty' Lame," *Boston Herald*, June 8 2010, accessed April 18, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.lib-proxy.fullerton.edu/docview/365493658?accountid=9840>.

18. Stasi, "Not Just A Pretty Face."

19. *Pretty Little Liars*, "Pilot," season 1, episode 1, directed by Leslie Linka Glatter, aired June 8, 2010, ABC Family. All of the aforementioned events occur within the episode. Additionally, all of the reviews concern the episode.

20. *Good Day LA*, aired June 21, 2011, FOX.

21. Nash, *American Sweethearts*, 113.

22. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 265.

23. "Letters to the Editor 6/16/2010," *Daily Review* (Towanda, PA), June 16, 2010, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.lib-proxy.fullerton.edu/docview/577387082?accountid=9840>.

24. Ibid.

25. Nash, *American Sweethearts*, 15.

26. Appendix A.

27. Appendix B.

28. Appendix C and D.

29. Troy Patterson, "Pretty Little Liars: A Lustrous and Irresistible Show Concerning Teenage Nonsense," *Slate*, July 1 2010, accessed April 15, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/television/2010/07/pretty_little_liars.html.

30. Ibid.

31. Gina Bellafante, "Pretty Little Liars: A Teenage Wasteland with an All-Seeing Eye," *New York Times*, August 6, 2010, accessed April 15, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/06/arts/television/08liars.html?_r=0.

32. Michael Rohrer, "Oh, the Addictive Powers of Those Pretty Little Liars," *Huffington Post*, April 17, 2014, accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-rohrer/oh-the-addictive-powers-of-those-pretty-little-liars_n_4902450.html.

1. *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, episode no. 52, aired May 6, 2014, NBC.

2. Crista DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 1830–1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 90.

3. Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 142.

4. Jason Mittell, *Television and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 271.

AMERICAN FORMS 401: MARK TWAIN AND HIS WORLD

Mark Twain and Henry James

Interpreting American Nationalism
in the Late Nineteenth Century

JESSICA FORTINBERRY

This essay was written for Dr. Karen Lystra's Mark Twain and His World course in the spring of 2014. Its purpose is to compare and analyze the representation of Americans in Mark Twain's travel writing to that of his literary peer, Henry James. In their work, both Twain and James demonstrate the rise in nationalism in post-Civil War America through the escapades of Americans traveling abroad.

In American literary history, Mark Twain and Henry James have often been juxtaposed as rivals with intrinsically different views on everything from education to American culture. Twain is often considered an American icon and hero of the average man for his humorous, yet endearing, portrayals of characters such as Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. James is also considered a great American writer, but with a vastly different style based on his worldly upbringing and his status as an expatriate in Europe. How then could these two have come to such similar criticisms of American culture in the late nineteenth century? Twain's travel book, *Innocents Abroad; or, the New Pilgrims' Progress* (1869) and James's novella, *Daisy Miller: A Study* (1878) use Americans abroad in Europe to illustrate the American character post-Civil War. Unified under one value system, nationalism swelled and Americans were able

to travel without their former reverence of the old world. While Twain and James present the reinvigorated culture of Americans differently, their observations are similar in that they are clear statements on how the Civil War affected the perception of America and its citizens at home and abroad.

Mark Twain and Henry James in Their Youth

Twain's and James's upbringings are an apt place to begin in order to understand the disparate views of American culture that would later appear in their works. One was raised surrounded by wealth, big cities, and intellectuals, while the other found his education in the small-town culture of the South. Born in Florida, Missouri, in 1835, Twain (née Samuel Clemens) was the sixth child of Jane Lampton Clemens and John Marshall Clemens. John Clemens was a self-taught lawyer who had poor time and money management skills, traits exemplified by his purchase of a plot of land in Tennessee which "triggered the Clemens family's decline into poverty."¹ Several years after Twain's birth, the family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, where he spent most of his childhood. It was in this small town that Twain developed his individual character through interactions with his family, the townspeople, and the slaves who worked the farms. In *Turn West, Turn East: Mark Twain and Henry James*, Henry S. Canby argues that it was in Hannibal that Twain received his "first imaginative education... in the obligatory ethics, poetry, and folklore of the Bible; and also in the voluntary and absorbing folklore of his Negro friends."² Twain was not encouraged to study or broaden his intellectual horizons, but was a curious child nonetheless, reading whatever and whenever he could. He had a simple childhood that was

only complicated by his family's limited funds, and eventually his father's death, which presented him with the opportunity to excuse himself from formal schooling. At thirteen, Twain became an apprentice for the *Hannibal Courier-Post*, where he continued his small-town education and developed a passion for the newspaper industry and the people in it.³ Apart from the deaths of a few family members, his childhood was uneventful. Twain grew to be a happy, if not mischievous, young man.

Canby perceptively notes that, "if Mark's early youth was supernormal for America, Henry's was abnormal to a high degree."⁴ Born in New York City in 1843, James lived with his siblings and parents, Mary Walsh and Henry James Sr. The James family lived comfortably with an inheritance of over three million dollars from Henry James Sr.'s father. Henry James Sr. was a philosopher and lecturer with no proper job, but because of his wealth and academic pursuits, his son, Henry James Jr., had no need to leave his home for lessons in morality, history, philosophy, or religion, as he could educate himself within his family's circle.⁵ Thus, James did not live an "average" childhood like Twain, because instead of being among average Americans and other children, he was surrounded by his father's fellow intellectuals. Within the first fifteen years of his life James had lived in New York, Paris, Newport, and Geneva because Henry James Sr. wanted his children to be worldly and able to resist the "evils" that he believed stemmed from succumbing to localisms.⁶ In this light, James's education was similar to Twain's, as it did not take place exclusively in school, but was instead informed by individuals, whose culture permeated the many places in which he lived. In his autobiography, James claims the most "educative, formative, fertilizing" experiences of his youth happened in "the great rooms of the Louvre," where he looked at art and "at history, as a still-felt past and a complacently personal future, at society, manners, type, characters, possibilities and prodigies and mysteries of fifty sorts."⁷

While their individual lifestyles and experiences were vastly different, Twain and James both educated themselves through the observation of individuals and their respective cultures. Further, the different cultural experiences from their youth informed their relatively different writing styles. Ron Powers has characterized the difference in their styles as the following:

Mark Twain democratized the national voice by availing it of vernacular; rough action that sprawled over waterway and open terrain; comedy, political consciousness, and skepticism toward the very idea of lofty instruction. James, a skeptic of a different sort, introduced techniques and concerns unavailable to an uneducated prodigy such as Mark Twain. His novels were rooted in the urbane sub societies of Eastern America and of American expatriates in Europe; they viewed human character

indoors, as it were, and through the emerging prisms of post-Civil War reversals of Christian optimism.⁸

Twain is known for his ability to capture the colloquialisms and dialect of the people he encountered, particularly in the South, and embed them into stories that represented the soul of America. Devoid of Twain's "average" American upbringing, James's intellectually driven work focuses on the American experience abroad rather than in the States. As time passed, their literary pursuits pulled them in opposite directions: the Civil War led Twain west to California, while James turned east to spend more time in Europe.

Why Americans Went Abroad: Before and After the Civil War

While the lives of Twain and James create an important foundation for understanding the perspectives in their works, a familiarization with the changes in tourism brought about by the American Civil War is also necessary. Before the Civil War, it was not particularly common for Americans to travel overseas unless they were wealthy citizens looking to educate themselves outside of the States.⁹ Travel was expensive and therefore exclusive; the poor could not afford to travel and the middle class did not exist in full force until after the war. In Jeffrey Steinbrink's article, "Why the Innocents Went Abroad: Mark Twain and American Tourism in the Late Nineteenth Century," he reasons that "the burgeoning fortunes of northern businessmen during the Gilded Age; the vast improvement in transatlantic transportation; and, most significantly, the emergence of a large and thriving middle class" were the main reasons Americans traveled en masse across the Atlantic.¹⁰ In postwar America, foreign travel was accessible to a much wider span of the population than ever before, and that population took advantage of its new opportunity. In *Innocents Abroad*, Twain recalls the month before the Quaker City departed:

If I met a dozen individuals during that month who were not going to Europe shortly, I have no distinct remembrance of it now. I walked about the city a good deal with a young Mr. Blucher...[who] had the most extraordinary notions about this European exodus and came at last to consider the whole nation as packing up for emigration to France.¹¹

Americans could be found all across Europe and even James's narrator, Winterbourne, comments in *Daisy Miller*: "In this region, in the month of June, American travelers are extremely numerous; it may be said, indeed, that Vevey assumes at this period some of the characteristics of an American watering-place."¹² Twain and James both experienced the exodus of American tourists to Europe but, unsurprisingly, from different perspectives. Having lived in Europe before and after the war, James observed the exodus

from a resident's perspective, rather than that of a tourist's. In contrast, Twain fully participated in European tourism, having joined the passengers on the *Quaker City* steamship to the Holy Land and Europe as a correspondent for the *Alta California*.¹³ Their observations culminated in their respective works; Twain's in *Innocents Abroad; or, the New Pilgrims' Progress* and James's in *Daisy Miller: A Study*.

Letting Go of the Guidebook

In their works, Twain and James are highly critical of American tourists who blindly rely on guidebooks and other authorities to tell them where to go, what is worth seeing, and how they should feel. In *Innocents Abroad*, Twain introduces a passenger aboard the *Quaker City* he calls the Oracle. Twain mocks the Oracle because he "reads a chapter in the guidebooks, mixes the facts all up, with his bad memory, and then goes off to inflict the whole mess on somebody as wisdom which has been festering in his brain for years."¹⁴ Twain then relates an anecdote of the Oracle pointing out "the Pillows of Herkewls" to fellow passengers, misidentifying them and misnaming them, because as Twain believes, he was misled by inaccurate information in a guidebook.¹⁵ The Oracle is made out to be a foolish character for hilariously confusing his information and relying solely on the guidebooks to inform him. In this instance the guidebook was wrong, but the Oracle unquestioningly took the information as factual. In *Daisy Miller*, James also criticizes how Americans rely on alleged authorities in a scene where Daisy's mother, Mrs. Miller, discusses visiting castles in Switzerland: "But there's a lady here—I don't know her name—she says she shouldn't think we'd want to go to see castles *here*; she should think we'd want to wait till we got to Italy'... continued Mrs. Miller with an air of increasing confidence. 'Of course we only want to see the principal ones.'"¹⁶ Mrs. Miller assumes that because a stranger tells her castles in Italy are better, it must be true. Her desire to visit only "principal" castles is even more disconcerting, because she devalues Switzerland's attractions without visiting them to make any real judgments of her own. James argues that the appreciation of tourist attractions is subjective, and while one woman may consider herself an expert on which castles are better, Mrs. Miller might have enjoyed the ones she skipped. Mrs. Miller joins the number of "Americans on tour [who] seem not for a moment to have doubted the superiority of Old World art."¹⁷ Steinbrink argues, "their problem was always how to get the hang of appreciating it...the safer and more dependable [choice] was to leave it to the guidebooks to tell them what to value."¹⁸ Both Twain and James argue that a reliance on authority figures is foolish and unnecessary.

In "Mark Twain as Critic in *Innocents Abroad*," John McCloskey argues, "as a matter of fact, *The Innocents Abroad* is itself a guidebook and, in some respects a pretty good one,

and if Twain set out, as has been asserted, to write a book satirizing guidebooks, he ended in a rather peculiar position indeed."¹⁹ Twain's book could definitely be considered a guidebook because it follows his trip, describes what he sees, and gives histories on a variety of topics. However, Twain is not in as "peculiar" a position as McCloskey assumes, because while *Innocents Abroad* can be considered a guidebook offering a path for travelers to follow, he in no way presents himself as an authority, which is, in fact, what he was parodying in the first place. Following his trip on the *Quaker City*, Twain toured the United States with a speech titled "The American Vandal," which focused on encouraging individuals to be confident in their ability to form and express their own opinions. In this speech, he discusses the different sights he observed on the European trip and offers this as the Vandal's impression of *The Last Supper*: "The Vandal goes to see this picture—which all the world praises—looks at it with a critical eye, and says it's a perfect old nightmare of a picture and he wouldn't give forty dollars for a million like it (and I indorse his opinion)."²⁰ Twain is not opposed to the lack of appreciation for the world-renowned piece of art, because he believes that individuals are entitled to their own opinions. In response to those who marvel at the classic masterpieces, Twain avows: "I only envy these people; I envy them their honest admiration, if it be honest—their delight, if they feel delight. I harbor no animosity toward any of them. But at the same time the thought will intrude itself upon me, how can they see what is not visible?"²¹ Twain does not begrudge others for enjoying the pieces that he does not, though he seems skeptical as to whether their admiration is genuine and not influenced by the views of others.

Gaining Status through Travel

While Americans who traveled to Europe prior to the Civil War were generally wealthy upper class citizens, the burgeoning middle class that traveled after the war seemed to have something to prove by their travels. In "Mark Twain and Henry James: Different Americans, Similar Journeys," Richard D. Heldenfels argues that "both Twain and James went after essential truths about Americans—their directness [and] their social ambitions."²² It is that social ambition that Twain and James are both critical and indulgent of in *Innocents Abroad* and *Daisy Miller*. In the *Critical Companion to Mark Twain*, it is explained that the American public was interested in foreign travel, not only because of their newfound ability to afford it, but also because they believed that it provided them with a sense of worldly superiority among their peers.²³ At one point in *Innocents Abroad*, Twain states, "we wish to learn all the curious, outlandish ways of all the different countries, so that we can 'show off' and astonish people when we get home. We wish to excite the envy of our untraveled friends with our strange foreign fashions which

we can't shake off.”²⁴ Here Twain has given in to the new social custom of using one's travels for status and admiration, however, he could also be mocking that attitude as he is wont to do. Because of this new attitude among Americans, Twain's travel book would have been particularly welcomed, and Canby argues that “it was such Americans and their relatives and children and grandchildren, for whom ‘I have been abroad’ was a social lift, who made the great and surprising market for Mark Twain’s first great success.”²⁵ Because Twain took advantage of the new relationship between travel and status, *Innocents Abroad* was able to garner an audience it might not have otherwise.

Several Americans in *Innocents Abroad* believed that the best way to prove that they truly went abroad and returned more cultured was by collecting souvenirs to show off or bestow upon those who did not have the luxury of traveling. When Twain and a few men return from sneaking off the ship to go to Athens, a comical character named William Blucher begins to distribute pebbles from the hill where St. Paul preached: “He got all those pebbles on the sea shore, abreast the ship, but professes to have gathered them from one of our party. However, it is not of any use for me to expose the deception—it affords him pleasure, and does no harm to anybody. He says he never expects to run out of mementos of St. Paul as long as he is in reach of a sand-bank.”²⁶ It does not matter to Blucher that the mementos he hands out are not real relics, because he is happy to receive attention while bestowing “souvenirs” on others. Steinbrink characterizes American tourists as being determined to accomplish two things in their travels: “First, they were typically hell-bent on crowding as much experience—that is to say, as many miles of experience—into their Grand Tours as was humanly possible; and second, they longed for souvenirs, memorabilia, and any other treasure they might somehow cart away.”²⁷ To that end, it would seem that American tourists were not particularly concerned with *actually* becoming cultured or worldly, but instead *appeared* to be so. This superficial attitude toward travel is what eventually made Twain disdain his traveling companions. Twain is clearly frustrated by the tourists' penchant for removing mementos from tourist attractions when he mentions it in “The Vandal Abroad”: “Your genuine Vandal is an intolerable and incorrigible relic gatherer. It is estimated that if all the fragments of stone brought from Columbus’s house by travelers were collected together they would suffice to build a house fourteen thousand feet high.”²⁸ Most of the relics that Twain observed his travel companions hoarding were neither real, nor lawfully obtained. Whether the stones came from Columbus’s actual home or a reproduction, removing the stones was theft and Twain found the tourists’ desire to prove their value through relics to be absurd.

In *Daisy Miller*, Daisy is criticized for assuming a ve-

neer of culture despite showing no apparent interest in the history, art, or customs of the places to which she traveled. When the narrator, Winterbourne, meets Daisy for the second time, she tells him all about her experiences since their last meeting:

It’s a great deal nicer than I thought; I thought it would be fearfully quiet... I was sure we should be going round all the time with one of those dreadful old men that explain about the pictures and things. But we only had about a week of that, and now I’m enjoying myself. I know ever so many people, and they are all so charming. The society’s extremely select. There are all kinds—English, and Germans, and Italians.²⁹

James emphasizes Daisy’s lack of interest in learning about Rome, calling the tour guides “dreadful” and considering the art and landmarks to be “pictures and things.” None of those things are as important to Daisy as the society. She does not care to know about the places she is visiting, but is particularly interested in the people. For example, she indicates excitement over the variety of nationalities represented in Roman society. James seems to be critical of Daisy, viewing her as a stand-in for the American tourists who traveled to gain status in society instead of absorbing culture. In her efforts to seek society, Daisy disregards the customs of the Roman citizens. Mrs. Walker confronts Daisy when she begins to leave a party to walk around the city with a male suitor: “‘My dear young friend,’ said Mrs. Walker, taking her hand pleadingly, ‘don’t walk off to the Pincio at this hour to meet a beautiful Italian.’” Of course, Daisy does not listen and goes off to meet her suitor despite Mrs. Walker’s objections of its impropriety. Two characteristics are singular to Daisy: she is the only character who blatantly disregards society’s rules and is the only character whose life ends in tragedy. It would follow, then, that these two characteristics are related, that Daisy’s death is the inevitable result of her wrongdoing. With her death serving as an omen, it would seem that James believed that tourists should respect and adopt the etiquette of different societies, as opposed to embracing Daisy’s lack of respect or refinement. Despite her fate, Daisy is the star of the novella and as shameful as her actions are, she is also admired for the strength of her character and the confidence that is reflective of America’s newfound sense of nationalism.³⁰

The Emergence of American Nationalism

Taken together, Twain’s and James’s criticisms of the way Americans regarded tourism after the Civil War culminate in one overarching concept: the development of a strong national pride. Heldenfels argues that both Twain and James “hold up Europe as a mirror for American experience and perceptions in the post-Civil War years. Europe is, after all...America’s ancestral home and cultural foundation on one hand, a

representative of political philosophies and structures rejected by the new nation on the other.”³¹ Before the Civil War, the United States established its sovereignty through the American Revolution and gained land across the Western frontier through wars with Mexico and the Native Americans. It was the Civil War however, that gave Americans a renewed sense of identity as it unified the country under one value system. Because of this immense change, Americans had a newfound confidence in their country and its burgeoning culture, which they brought with them when they traveled abroad. Therefore, at this juncture, Americans had no need to feel inferior to older European cultures or to prove their value through trinkets and relics gathered abroad. They were worthwhile simply by being American.

While guidebooks recommended and applauded certain tourist attractions, particularly ancient and historic sites, Twain’s commentary on the decay and decrepitude of these locations embraces the idea of American equality, and at times America’s superiority. The war left many Americans disillusioned, and while enjoying the distractions of European excursions, they often found their nationalism awakened and invigorated.³² After the Quaker City visits the Azores Islands off of Portugal, Twain provides this impression of its citizens:

There is not a modern plow in the islands or a threshing machine. All attempts to introduce them have failed....The donkeys and the men, women, and children of a family all eat and sleep in the same room, and are unclean, are ravaged by vermin, and are truly happy. The people lie, and cheat the stranger, and are desperately ignorant.³³

The Azores were one of the steamship’s first stops, and Twain is immediately, though subtly, comparing the living conditions he observes to the standard of living in America. Not only does this comparison place the United States in a more favorable light, it also reestablishes a newfound sense of superiority among its citizens who witnessed the sights firsthand or read Twain’s book. Twain was not overtly critical of the cities he came in contact with, but rather the “sentimental pilgrimages to the literary and historic shrines of persons whom he regarded as unworthy of homage.”³⁴ Twain believed that Americans should be more confident in their ability to judge whether the attractions were worthy of praise, and their newfound nationalism allowed them to lose the unnecessary reverence for European cultures that was formerly based on age.

Americans after the Civil War were not afraid to embrace their own culture and praise it as equal to, or better than, the cultures of old Europe. In *Daisy Miller*, Daisy’s younger brother is emphatically proud of his American roots and views Europe as inferior in every aspect. After declaring America to have the best candy, blaming Europe for making his teeth hurt, and bragging about his father’s big business

in Schenectady, Randolph’s bitter rant ends with: “I don’t want to go to Italy. I want to go to America.”³⁵ While Randolph’s reasoning is the exaggerated reaction of a child, his belief in America’s superiority is evident and goes unchallenged by his sister or Winterbourne. It is clear that James included Randolph’s outburst to convey popular ideas about the strength of America’s new national identity. Randolph is not dissimilar to Twain’s narrator in *Innocents Abroad*, who Steinbrink argues embodies the exaggerated appreciation for America that was part of the culture of American tourism post-Civil War:

Like many travelers he made comparisons which without being precisely invidious tended to make clear that he preferred what he knew to what he found. At times these preferences reflected little more than prejudice and self congratulation: The United States boasted the best hotels on earth, served the best food, and enjoyed the most sensible monetary system.”³⁶

Their European tour was not short on culture, history, or scenery, but Twain and his fellow travelers never quit comparing what they saw in Europe to what they knew from home, finding the former to be lacking.

Both Twain and James address the impertinence of American citizens who lost their sense of nationalism by slipping foolishly into European customs. In *Daisy Miller*, Daisy appears wary of Winterbourne when she first meets him: “She asked him if he was a ‘real American’; she shouldn’t have taken him for one; he seemed more like a German—this was said after a little hesitation, especially when he spoke.”³⁷ Language is a simplistic indicator of nationality, thus Winterbourne seems less American because his speech is unusual to the skeptical Daisy. While Daisy is criticized for her refusal to subscribe to social customs abroad, Winterbourne’s fascination with her almost establishes a sense of appreciation for her stubborn nationalism, which is rooted in the belief that she has no obligation to alter her mannerisms to suit another. Her “Americanness” entitles her to resist pressure to conform to European standards and culture. Like James, Twain “comes down on the side of remaining an authentic American, despite the ignorant and aggressive behavior it entails. An authentic American, in [Twain’s] republican spirit, is free to make many things of himself, but a European is not one of them.”³⁸ On this note, in *Innocents Abroad*, Twain relates an anecdote he heard of an American man who forgot his native tongue after eight weeks in Paris and refused to speak without an accent: “‘Pon my soul it is aggravating, but I cahn’t help it—I have got so used to speaking nothing but French, my dear Erbare—damme there it goes again!—got so used to French pronunciation that I cahn’t get rid of it—it is positively annoying, I assure you.’” The anecdote is humorous, but Twain indicates shame in the man’s behavior when he comments,

"it is pitiable to see him making of himself a thing that is neither male nor female, neither fish, flesh, nor fowl—a poor, miserable, hermaphrodite Frenchman!" Embracing one's American identity and not succumbing to idealized depictions of Europe were important concepts in Twain's and James's work.³⁹

The surge of American pride that emerged after the Civil War is represented in full force in Twain's depiction of the innocent's excitement over seeing the American flag on a passing ship: "Quicker than thought, hats and handkerchiefs flashed in the air, and a cheer went up!" He writes, "many a one on our decks knew then for the first time how tame a sight his country's flag is at home compared to what it is in a foreign land. To see it is to see a vision of home itself and all its idols, and feel a thrill that would stir a very river of sluggish blood!"⁴⁰ The level of excitement is contagious, and readers at the time would have felt a surge of patriotism just as the pilgrims aboard the *Quaker City* did. Even after spending time among the old cultures of their ancestors, nothing compared to the thrill of being American.

Conclusion

Despite their vastly different American experiences, both Twain and James were perceptive of the changes in American culture and character after the Civil War. An individual's values are made more apparent when they are in an unfamiliar setting, like the characters in *Daisy Miller: A Study and Innocents Abroad; or, the New Pilgrims' Progress*. The conclusion Twain and James draw are that Americans should not feel inferior to their European ancestors and that they should embrace their own culture. In "The Vandal Abroad," Twain left his listeners with this bit of wisdom:

I am glad the American Vandal goes abroad. It does him good. It makes a better man of him. It rubs out a multitude of his old unworthy biases and prejudices. It aids his religion, for it enlarges his charity and his benevolence, it broadens his views of men and things; it deepens his generosity and his compassion for the failings and shortcomings of his fellow creatures. Contact with men of various nations and many creeds teaches him that there are other people in the world besides his own little clique, and other opinions as worthy of attention and respect as his own.⁴¹

Twain argues that traveling is good for the American, and by James's writing it would appear that he agrees. Venturing out into the world allows Americans to reflect on their own culture and be critical of the world that they live in. As much as embracing American patriotism places Twain's and James's characters in trouble or in comical situations, their unshakable patriotism is admirable. Through their writing, Twain and James convey a deep understanding of the transcendent national identity formed in the post-Civil War era that has remained a part of the American spirit into the twenty-first century. ♦

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3. Powers, *Mark Twain*, 46.
4. Canby, *Turn West, Turn East*, 49.
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6. Ibid., 47.
7. Henry James, *Autobiography*. (New York: Criterion Books, 1956), 197–99.
8. Powers, *Mark Twain*, 365.
9. Canby, *Turn West, Turn East*, 86.
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13. Powers, *Mark Twain*, 197.
14. Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 44.
15. Ibid.
16. James, *Daisy Miller*, 434.
17. Steinbrink, "Why the Innocents Went Abroad," 281.
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20. Mark Twain, "The American Vandal," in *Mark Twain's Speeches* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923) 23.
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23. John H. Davis, Alex Feerst, and R. Kent Rasmussen, *Critical Companion to Mark Twain* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 257.
24. Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 164.
25. Canby, *Turn West, Turn East*, 87.
26. Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 280.
27. Steinbrink, "Why the Innocents Went Abroad," 283.
28. Twain, "The American Vandal," 22.
29. James, *Daisy Miller*, 443.
30. Ibid., 442.
31. Heldenfels, "Different Americans, Similar Journeys," 26–27.
32. Steinbrink, "Why the Innocents Went Abroad," 280.
33. Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 25.
34. McCloskey, "Mark Twain as Critic," 144.
35. James, *Daisy Miller*, 424.
36. Steinbrink, "Why the Innocents Went Abroad," 283.
37. James, *Daisy Miller*, 425.
38. Davis, Feerst, and Rasmussen, *Critical Companion*, 257.
39. Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 165.
40. Ibid., 40.
41. Twain, "The American Vandal," 29.

AMERICAN FORMS 502: THEORY AND POPULAR CULTURE

Just a Game?

Modern Warfare, Ideologies, and Popular Culture

AARON J. MEZZANO

This essay was written for Dr. Adam Golub's Theory and Popular Culture course in the spring of 2014. I have been an avid "gamer" all my life, but it was during my undergraduate education that I began to notice disturbing patterns in my favorite game genre: the FPS. This assignment not only gave me the opportunity to research a topic and explore sources I found interesting, but allowed me to show the importance of video games and their potential to wield cultural power as a form of popular culture.

For as long as I can remember, I have been an avid gamer. In my childhood I had the opportunity to play video games like *Doom*, *Heretic*, and *Duke Nukem* on our home computer, as well as a plethora of games on console systems beginning with the original Nintendo. As time passed, graphics got sharper, consoles began to gain popularity, and specific genres began to distinguish themselves amongst their peers. One of the most popular video game genres (and this author's favorite) is the First Person Shooter (FPS), which contains countless franchises, some of the most popular and most profitable being *Battlefield*, *Call of Duty*, *Halo*, and *Killzone*. In each of these titles, the player assumes the identity of a soldier within a militarized conflict where the game's objective is met primarily by moving from point A to point

B. Between objectives, or possibly as part of an objective, the player must dispatch enemies by using a firearms, grenades, and other means of historic, conventional, or futuristic weaponry. Meanwhile, the game delivers a storyline that immerses the player within the narrative, usually centered on armed conflict. With the FPS's rapid growth in popularity within the past decade, one must wonder what kind of influence and importance this contemporary yet widely accepted form of leisure holds as a growing form of popular culture.

The video game, specifically the military FPS, is an understudied area of popular culture and needs to be addressed in regards to its cultural importance. Until recently, the common trend in approaching video games as a subject for academia was to simply dismiss them as a common form of juvenile leisure. Under a scope of critical analysis, however, we can see how and why this form of media and entertainment is important. By closely examining the narratives of one of the bestselling trilogies in gaming history, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, we can examine how these games have the capacity to critique or reinforce military ideologies in U.S. popular culture. Furthermore, we can examine the people represented within these games, what this reflects in our military, and how these games have the capacity to impact U.S. culture on a larger scale.

Specifically, this paper will aim to do four things. First, to show how video games are now a widely accepted form of popular culture that rival the popularity of film, and have developed the same ability to communicate to their audience. Second, to examine one of the bestselling trilogies in gaming history, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*. Thus, showing how the narrative within these games reflects changing popular opinions and depictions of U.S. military operations abroad during game development. Third, to show how these depictions

simultaneously reinforce and critique military ideologies in popular culture by examining combatant representation. Fourth, and finally, to examine how these three military FPS games, like others, have the capacity to impact U.S. culture via the military-entertainment complex.¹

A Growing Form of Popular Culture

In contrast to video games, film and cinema have been studied extensively in the past, and scholars have explained how popular works reflect U.S. culture in specific moments in time. For instance, Carol Fry's "Rambo Agonistes" shows the evolution of Sylvester Stallone's iconic role as John Rambo in the three films *First Blood*, *First Blood II*, and *Rambo III*, and analyzes how his character's relationship with the military during the Cold War changes from one film to the next in correlation with developments and popular opinions. Fry describes John Rambo in *First Blood* as a symbol of the maltreated Vietnam veterans returning from war, but explains how the CIA's betrayal of John Rambo in *First Blood II* reflected a growing distrust of government and military institutions at the film's release. Lastly, Fry describes the third installment, *Rambo III*, as a shift back to the major Cold War threat to the U.S. after the Vietnam conflict, the Soviet Union.² Each one of these films delivers a narrative based around the U.S. military and with it messages about popular opinions of the point in time. Historically, video games have lacked the capability to deliver experiences and political messages close to that of cinema, like the three films listed above. However, the growing technological capabilities of consoles and computers has given developers the tools to create games that rival that of the moviegoing experience, specifically within the FPS genre.

In 2009, Bill Brooker examined the growing popularity of video games, how both the video game and film industry borrow materials and formulas from one another, and the expanding use of the video game cinematic.³ In his article, he critiques the use of cinematics and their break of narrative style, but applauds games like *Half-Life*, a very popular FPS game, which uses cut scenes while effectively keeping the player in one continuous game perspective.⁴ At the end of his analysis, he concludes that the FPS is one of the closest and truest of the video game perspectives, set apart by its ability to deliver a cinematic experience closer to "art cinema."⁵ With the development of the FPS into a form of "art cinema," these games now have the same capability as film to represent people and institutions, as well as deliver messages concerning them within the games' narratives.

Contrary to popular belief, gaming has become much more popular than one would expect. As of 2012, roughly half the households in the U.S. are gaming; according to the Entertainment Software Association study, 49 percent of households within the U.S. had at least one dedicated video game console in 2012, and of those who had at least a single console, the average owned a second.⁶ In fact, the gaming industry is

now a leading competitor of leisure time against other traditional popular forms of entertainment, such as moviegoing. For example, *Modern Warfare 2* generated a ground breaking \$310 million dollars within twenty-four hours of its release, breaking all records in the entertainment industry at the time. The single installment surpassed the total sales for *The Dark Knight*'s opening weekend (\$158.3 million) and rivaling *Avatar*'s totals after seventeen days at the box office (\$317 million).⁷ By examining how games like *Modern Warfare 2* rival cinema popularity and now resemble cinema in their ability to portray different groups and institutions, we can see why such an understudied area of popular culture requires closer examination: FPS games immerse a massive audience into a narrative that carries political messages that can either critique or reinforce popular attitudes about the military, much like the three *Rambo* films, as well as the capacity to impact American culture.

Narrative in the Modern Warfare Trilogy

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, the first installment of the *Modern Warfare* series, began production in 2005 and was released in December of 2007. During this time, works in U.S. popular culture began to include more plotlines in the Middle East during a period focused on combating terrorism after the events of September 11, 2001, with movies like *Jarhead* (2005), books like *Generation Kill* (2004), and documentaries investigating the war in Iraq, such as *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004). The decision for the *Call of Duty* franchise to split from its traditional World War II nostalgia formula was most likely an effort to follow suit in the shifting focus to more contemporary matters that better resonated with a post-9/11 American audience. The game opens with the player learning that a military coup in an "unknown Middle Eastern country" has removed the pro-Western president with an anti-Western revolutionary named Al-Asad, while a civil war was being waged in Russia. It should be noted that although this country is "unnamed," small occurrences non-central to the game hint that this particular country is an allegory for Iraq. For example, while flying over the country's capital in the mission "Shock and Awe," the player can observe a statue below being pulled down by an American tank in the exact same manner as Saddam Hussein's statue in Firdos Square in April 2003, while aerial photographs reveal the country on the northern border of the Persian Gulf.

The player takes on the identity of two soldiers at different points in the game: a British Special Air Service soldier named John "Soap" McTavish, who conducts international missions in an attempt to chase down a missing Russian nuclear warhead, and U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Paul Jackson, who invades the "unnamed" Middle Eastern country. While playing as Soap, the player is immersed into a world of Western covert operations, extracting key players, escaping Russian Ultranationalist capture, and aiding Russian Loyalists while fighting toward an extraction point throughout several mis-

sions. As Jackson, the player and his fellow marines fight in various scenarios in “Iraq”: rescuing tank crews, disabling anti-aircraft weapons, single-handedly dispatching several tanks, and moving toward the capital in an effort to apprehend the revolutionary Al-Asad. As the two storylines converge, the player assumes the identity of Jackson in “Iraq” learning that the missing warhead is nearby in the country’s capital, and the player is instructed to extract from the city. The player must first stop and retrieve a downed pilot of a friendly attack helicopter before extracting, thus causing them to be caught within the radius of the nuclear blast which instantly kills thirty thousand U.S. soldiers. Before the character dies, the player is able to see the destruction of nuclear terrorism through Jackson’s eyes as he collapses lifeless to the ground under the raining ash of a nuclear mushroom cloud in the distance.

Learning Al-Asad has fled the city before the blast, Soap and his superior, John Price, apprehend him from Russian Ultranationalist protection and torture him to find the origins of the nuclear bomb. Learning the leader of the Ultranationalist movement in Russia, Imran Zakhaev, had supplied them with the warhead as a diversion away from Russian developments, Price executes Al-Asad without hesitation. The two fight their way through Ultranationalist forces to find Zakhaev’s son to force him out of hiding, which unfortunately leads to his son’s death. Seeking revenge against the West, Zakhaev and his forces occupy a Russian missile silo and threaten retaliation against the U.S. as a joint mission between the U.S. Marine Corps and the British Special Air Service aims to infiltrate and disable the terrorist. However, they witness the launch of two intercontinental ballistic missiles armed with several nuclear warheads, each aimed at the U.S. Eastern Coast with estimated casualties of forty-one million. The teams disable the missiles midflight, but are routed by enemy Ultranationalist forces and are denied extraction by U.S. command. While executing the remnants of the player’s squad, Zakhaev is surprised by friendly Russian Loyalists, allowing Price to slip the player his sidearm to dispatch the antagonist, ending the first installation of *Modern Warfare*.

Closer narrative inspection shows what messages this game has in regards to the U.S. and U.K. use of military force. The use of the U.S. Marines as an invasion force in the Middle East is not questioned and is assumed to be a legitimate use of the U.S. military as a police action, which is also the case for the British Secret Air Service and their missions across the globe in a fight against terror. Not only is the military justified for invading “Iraq” as a police action in an attempt to restore pro-Western leadership, but the use of covert operations to prevent the overthrow of a Western-friendly Russia is justified as Soap and Price aid the Loyalists in their civil war. It is also worth noting that Price’s torture of the enemy Al-Asad is presented without questioning the morality of torture, but instead as a necessity for extracting information from terrorists in an effort to find those responsible for supplying military

leaders with weapons of mass destruction. As a whole, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* glamorizes the efforts of soldiers and governments in the global fight against terror and portrays the use of the U.S. and allied militaries abroad not only as justified, but necessary in a post-9/11 world.

Here it is important to look at how the Iraq War was perceived in the public eye during production of the first installment of *Modern Warfare* beginning in 2005. According to Pew Research, the U.S. public in February of 2005 was relatively split on the decision to go to war in Iraq (47 percent vs. 47 percent). However, the research shows that the majority of Americans believed the war was going relatively well (54 percent vs. 42 percent) and that U.S. troops should stay in Iraq until the new democracy was stable (55 percent vs. 42 percent).⁸ It was during this point in the Iraq War that the first installment of *Modern Warfare* began production, and many of the pro-militaristic themes in the game are reflected in approval of American forces abroad. Near the end of the first installment’s production and toward the beginning of producing *Modern Warfare 2*, public opinion had begun to change. In February of 2008 (three months after the release of first *Modern Warfare*), a majority of Americans believed the decision to go to war in Iraq was wrong (54 percent vs. 38 percent), while the public was split on whether the war was going well or not (47 percent vs. 47 percent), and if troops should stay until the country was stabilized or withdraw as soon as possible (47 percent vs. 49 percent).⁹

Beginning development in 2008 and released in December of 2009, the second installment’s narrative is set five-and-a-half years later. The anti-Western revolution in Russia was successful and its people have martyred Zakhaev as an anti-Western hero; the player’s actions in the first *Modern Warfare* were fruitless, and the U.S. and its allies now have a hostile first-world enemy. In “Iraq,” the player’s introductory mission shows Iraqi military trainees as incompetent with their weapons and needing training by American Army Rangers. Soon after a hectic, jolting experience in the streets of an insurgent infested city, the character PFC Joseph Allen is recruited by Army General Shepherd into the CIA to infiltrate a Russian terrorist organization led by Vladimir Makarov. The controversial mission “No Russian” gives the player, as the undercover character Allen, the option to follow Makarov’s orders and fire his machine gun into a crowd of unarmed civilians in an airport, or follow behind the carnage. With hundreds dead, Makarov kills Allen as they escape, leaving his body for the Russian authorities who deduce the attack was carried out by the American CIA and respond with a surprise invasion of the U.S. East Coast.

Here, like the first installment, the game’s narrative splits into separate controllable characters. Along the home front invasion, the player assumes the identity of Private James Ramirez with the Army Rangers valiantly fighting off Russian invaders throughout several campaigns. Between missions,

the player assumes control of “Roach,” a soldier serving under Soap from the first installment. Both answer directly to General Shepherd in the Special Task Force 141 and are given the mission to track down and expose the terrorist mastermind behind the attack that pulled the U.S. into war with Russia.

While playing as Roach, the player travels to Rio de Janeiro to find Makarov’s weapons dealer, torturing the dealer’s second-in-command to find his location. Learning only that Makarov’s “worst enemy” is being held as a political prisoner in a Russian gulag, the task force breaks a hole in Russian naval defenses and break out the prisoner only to learn he is the same James Price from the first installment. While the Russians close in on Washington, D.C. and the Rangers fight to push them back, the task force (now including Price) infiltrate a Russian nuclear submarine against Shepherd’s orders. Price launches a nuclear missile at the U.S. East Coast, detonating it in the atmosphere and creating a massive electromagnetic pulse, disabling electronics for both Americans and Russians. Given a new edge, Ramirez and the Army Rangers are able to reestablish fighting capacity in Washington, D.C., preventing a strategic carpet bombing campaign that would destroy both the capital and the Rangers, allowing them to win back the city. Meanwhile, as Soap and Price infiltrate a plane graveyard in Afghanistan, Roach and “Ghost,” another member of the task force, fight toward a safe house on the Georgian-Russian border to extract important intelligence on all of Makarov’s operations.

Here, the *Modern Warfare 2* narrative takes an unexpected turn. As the player’s character extracts under heavy fire from the safe house, the player and Ghost approach the extraction team accompanied by General Shepherd. Affirming that Ghost and Roach have the acquired intelligence, Shepherd states, “Good. That’s one less loose end,” and fires his revolver into the chest of both Roach and Ghost at point blank range, mortally wounding the player and instantly killing the other. Not knowing that player’s character is still conscious, Shepherd orders his team to douse the shot bodies in gasoline while Price screams over the radio that Shepherd has betrayed them all. In a moment of dramatic music and slow motion, Shepherd sets them ablaze with his lit cigar, turning away while signaling “move out” to his team as the camera fades out.

In the last two missions of the game, the player once again assumes the identity of Soap in an effort to exact revenge on Shepherd, who has labeled both the player and Price global terrorists. Upon the duo’s infiltration of Shepherd’s base in Afghanistan, the General sacrifices the base, with all of the U.S. soldiers still in it, in an effort to destroy his pursuers. The two catch up to Shepherd and manage to bring down his helicopter before falling off a waterfall where Soap finds Shepherd but is subdued and stabbed in the chest. While reloading his sidearm, Shepherd explains his betrayal while standing over the player: ‘Five years ago, I lost 30,000 men in a blink of an eye...and the world just fuckin’ watched. Tomorrow, there

will be no shortage of volunteers, no shortage of patriots.’ He points the barrel of his revolver at the player’s face, as if speaking directly to him or her, and states, “I know you understand.” Soap’s execution is routed by Price, who is then in turn saved when Soap extracts the knife from his chest and throws it into the eye of Shepherd. Wounded, the two are extracted by their friend Nicolai who offers to help them hide from the U.S., ending the second installment.

The changing public opinion of military operations in the Iraq War during the development of *Modern Warfare 2*, stated above, is reflected within the game’s narrative. For example, the once noble hunt for the terrorist responsible for killing innocent civilians turns to the elimination of a U.S. government official who knowingly pulled the U.S. into war with another country under false pretenses, much like how the U.S. was pulled into the Iraq War under the false claim that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, several times throughout the game soldiers observe that they are still fighting a war they had believed to have already won, reflecting elongated military deployment after President George W. Bush’s “Mission Accomplished” speech in 2003. Several references throughout the game make the player believe that troops receive little or inadequate support from command, and there is a noticeable shift in importance away from the military as an institution protecting U.S. and allied civilians and toward the actions of individual soldiers. Considering the time of development, the polemics in the game’s narrative correspond very closely with the declining public opinion of the U.S. military in Iraq.

The allegory that Shepherd plays in the second installment should be duly noted. According to Frederick Gagnon, a European scholar who has examined the revival of American conservatism, in *Modern Warfare* and *Modern Warfare 2*, Shepherd represents the aggressive neoconservative foreign policy developed by the Bush doctrine after 9/11; Shepherd’s monologue in *Modern Warfare 2*’s opening cut-scene echoes “neoconservative visions.”¹⁰ He is a virtual embodiment of conservative beliefs in the franchise’s second installment. In the game, Shepherd slips a U.S. operative into a terrorist cell and is discovered. It causes a war between two countries under false pretenses, costing untold American lives. In stark correlation, the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 under the false pretenses that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction, which eventually was discovered to be false as well. Shepherd having his own personal agenda for igniting the war between the U.S. in Russia raises the question: does the second installment hint that the promoters of the post-9/11 foreign policy had something to gain by starting a war with Iraq, as Shepherd’s foreign policy does in *Modern Warfare 2*?

It may be too much to say that the change in public opinion and support for the Iraq War during production of *Modern Warfare 2* deliberately changed the story arc, but like Fry’s article shows how each *Rambo* movie contains a different mes-

sage about the military, their institutions, or their soldiers at different points in time, so does *Modern Warfare 2*. It began its development at the highest point of public disapproval for deploying U.S. troops to Iraq in early 2008, and is a significant step away from the celebrated institutions and actions of the U.S. military during the production of the first installment in 2005. Instead, it moves toward a platform of critique and asks the question: was the invasion of Iraq justified, and was it really a success?

It is also important to consider these ideas and questions alongside the franchise's popularity. As stated above, gaming has become a booming business in American popular culture. *Modern Warfare 2* was the best-selling entertainment title in history at its release, bringing with it ideas and materials that either reinforced the growing negative attitudes of the U.S. military and command of soldiers, or challenged a person's belief that the military and its use needed no additional examination. By looking at the change in narratives within the *Modern Warfare* franchise, one can observe how the military is portrayed differently at different points in time, and why the narratives delivering these messages hold cultural importance by either reinforcing or critiquing existing military ideologies within U.S. popular culture.

Representation

While *Modern Warfare* is a good site to examine how institutions are viewed over time, it is also an excellent source to view what military ideologies go unexamined in each game, specifically in regards to military combatants. This includes but is not limited to what genders and races are allowed to fight in the U.S. and U.K. armed forces, their undoubted military superiority, and readily identified enemies. Here this paper turns to observing how each of these groups is portrayed in the *Modern Warfare* franchise, and why these representations are important in popular culture.

What is readily observable in *Modern Warfare*, *Modern Warfare 2*, and *Modern Warfare 3* is that the front line is portrayed as a male-dominated sphere of action where women are only to provide supporting roles. Despite the fact that women made up a total of 14.5 percent of the United States military in 2011 (Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force), each of the three installments only includes a single woman.¹¹ The player rescues a downed female fighter pilot while extracting from the "Iraq" capital in the first installment, while a pilot barely recognizable as female picks up Task Force 141 from an oil rig in the second installment. Lastly, Delta Force relies on a female Valkyrie pilot to clear an area of tanks in the third installment during the mission "Overwatch" so the player can complete the main objective. Although females make up almost 15 percent of the armed forces, these games only acknowledge them one time in each game, all in supporting roles.

Here it must be observed that while each installment

was in development, women were banned from voluntarily participating in front line combat until early 2013 (two years after *Modern Warfare 3* was released) and were external to armed conflict. Melani McAlister argues that these women who are absent on the front lines were "represented [by the U.S. military] but not present," since the Gulf War in the 1990s.¹² Still, in a fictional world of warfare, developers and storywriters have the capacity to write into a narrative at any specific point in time a strong female character. Whether she has significance or permanence to the overarching story or not, it is possible to characterize at least one female character as an efficient soldier alongside or ahead of male protagonists. It can be argued that by not including a single mission where females are seen as capable as men on the front lines of warfare that the *Modern Warfare* franchise blatantly reinforces the idea that the front lines are exclusively a male dominated sphere of action, even in one's imagination.¹³

Women in the *Modern Warfare* trilogy are at least represented once in each installment, but each game is devoid of a single non-heterosexual character. Homosexuals are noticeably (or unnoticeably?) absent from each installation, much like their absence within the United States' promoted "military diversity."¹⁴ Much like the U.S. military, not one of the three games mentions or goes near the idea of accepting non-heterosexuals in the military or within their narrative. Many may see this as unimportant although the participation of homosexuals in the military is still a heated debate, but like the "don't ask, don't tell" policy in the U.S. military, the *Modern Warfare* franchise does not ask about homosexuals, nor does it acknowledge them.¹⁵ By both representing the U.S. and U.K. ground units without women or non-heterosexuals in each of the three installations, the games reinforce the general assumption in popular culture that to fight on the front lines, one must be a heterosexual male.

On a lighter note, the franchise does embrace males of all different races. In every mission in every game being played as a U.S. combatant, the player's squads in the U.S. Marine Corps, Army Rangers, and Delta Force are made up of a diverse cast. In addition, in the first two installments one of the player's commanding officers is Latino, the other African American. But although the three games reflect the multiethnic soldiers of the U.S. military which has been promoted as a symbol of multiculturalism since the early '90s, some racial tensions still exist behind the lines.¹⁶

This portrayal of a multicultural military reinforces the idea that the U.S. military is an antiracist institution made up of people with roots from around the world. However, this view of a multiethnic military does more than promote diversity and respect among people of color; it has an underlying message. When the United States comes knocking on another country's borders, it cannot be claimed that American goals are racist but instead have a higher and more noble goal than subjugation. In Melani McAlister's words, as the mili-

tary “represents the diversity of the United States, and the United States, as represented in its military, would contain the world.”¹⁷ Who, exactly, does this franchise claim should be “contained,” or kept in check by the U.S. military?

By clearly delineating enemies to the U.S. and the U.K. in the *Modern Warfare* franchise, the series reinforces ideas of public enemies, and reminds players of looming threats they have yet to face. As players go through each game, they fire through waves of Russian ultranationalists who aim to see the West in ashes, terrorists who utilize weapons of mass destruction, and third-world militias in South America who supply the enemies of the U.S. with the means to fight. Although they may seem geopolitically separate, they are each portrayed as morally and technologically inferior to the player’s character. For example, Russians murder innocent civilians and raid refrigerators on the battlefield looking for vodka, third-world militias burn their prisoners alive with tires and are militarily unorganized, and terrorists are slippery, hide in the shadows, and show no remorse.

In an examination of the game *America’s Army 3* (2009), Robertson Allen claims that promoting a so-called “unreal enemy” of the United States or its allies has the ability to prefigure a corporeal enemy. This is the so-called “precession of simulacra,” in which the fictional enemy helps identify, realize, or even create a real enemy to the player.¹⁸ When applied to the *Modern Warfare* franchise, the precession of simulacra helps players identify potential threats to the U.S. and the U.K. in the future as well as remind them of traditional enemies, such as South American arms dealers and Russian revolutionaries. The three games provide potential scenarios with those enemies, such as the invasion of the Eastern U.S. and terrorist attacks in Europe. To put it another way, “America’s fears are played out, as if to tame them, in fictional video games.”¹⁹

By identifying enemies as morally and technologically inferior, it also clearly defines the soldiers of the U.S. and U.K. A constant theme throughout the franchise is not only military superiority, but the superiority of individual soldiers. In nearly every way, the soldiers of the U.S. and U.K. are portrayed as military superiors to their enemies and act as beacons of comradeship, justice, patriotism and honor. Not only do they have higher morals than their enemies, but they are outfitted with the best technology that a soldier can have. Each installment to the next brings about higher and higher standards of military hardware to support soldiers on the battlefield, from calling in jet strikes and taking out tanks with shoulder-launched Javelin missiles, to controlling military attack drones. This is not a new phenomenon, nor is it inaccurate in representing military use of technology.

A study examining the use of high-tech weapons in the FPS genre showed that players finding themselves outnumbered are often supported by a high-tech military force which gives them an edge over the enemies’ superior numbers, otherwise known as “overmatch.” The development and use of

overmatch in games, especially the FPS, represents an actual policy change in the U.S. military.²⁰ The new “Afghan Model,” which emphasizes the use of smaller, more technologically superior forces in foreign engagements, has been adopted as a more appropriate form of warfare; the idea of massed industrial armies is now obsolete.²¹ The application of overmatch, both in the military and reflected in forms of popular culture (like the FPS), not only influences how these games are produced but changes the player’s understanding of warfare and utility of force in military engagements.²² These games show how the militaries of the U.S. and U.K. have the best technology to offer their soldiers and explain through their narrative how warfare is fought. By combining these technologies with a morally superior standard of soldier, these games argue that soldiers of the U.S. and U.K. are not only the best equipped, but that their application of superior military technology is justified.

It is important to recognize throughout the analysis of these three installments of *Modern Warfare* not only what is present, but what is omitted from the three games. Throughout the entire franchise, the player is given one opportunity after the next to fight terrorism and enemies of Western democracy, but they are never given a choice at any point in time to find any other means to establish their goals, like international negotiations, or any other non-violent form of conflict resolution. In *Modern Warfare 3*, there is a possible moment to the end of hostilities with Russia, but the Russian president is kidnapped by the terrorist Makarov before he is able. Here, the story arc turns from fighting Russian invaders to rescuing the kidnapped Russian president from armed terrorists who wish to further the warring states. This is where the game then turns from fighting to protect one’s country to fighting as a means to pursue peace. Thus, the game presents violence as a means not only to protect ourselves but necessary to set things right. The “videology,” or interrelated ideological assumptions which organizes video games that is played out in the *Modern Warfare* franchise “amplifies the importance of violence and positions it as the axial and organizing rule to its logic.” It makes violence necessary at any point in time in the past, present, or future.²³

The Military Entertainment Complex

How is any of this influential as a form of popular culture? Many scholars are noticing the abundance of military entertainment in society at large and are studying its implications along with the development of the military-entertainment complex. The political triangle in the military-industrial complex between military, political, and industrial institutions has been reorganized. The “industrial” aspect has been replaced with “entertainment,” putting America in “permanent war economy” concerning our forms of leisure.²⁴ Specifically, video games can be used to critique popular discourse, but are in many cases used to reaffirm dominant so-

cial positions and reinforce ideologies and discourse.²⁵

The *Modern Warfare* franchise falls easily within this description. As a site of popular culture where ideologies and institutions can be critiqued as well as reaffirmed on a massive scale, military FPS games are sites where messages in the game connect to struggles in society at large, and can contribute to struggles over social and political meanings in the form of play, specifically the military in these examples.²⁶ In other words, military video games can help further define what military action is acceptable, who gets to participate, identify our enemies as well as our soldiers, and reaffirm sanctioned state violence. Moreover, by examining different video games at different points in time, we can see how these change in our popular culture with social and political developments.

While many argue the *Modern Warfare* franchise and the like are “just games,” some critics argue that military games, like the *Modern Warfare* franchise, represent a “major leap forwards in the merging of military and domestic spheres in the realm of audiovisual cultural forms.”²⁷ Civilians engaging in play with a military game, like the military FPS, is no longer solely a civilian but a virtual citizen-soldier. Thus, implying a paradigm shift in how civilians are engaged in military conflicts.²⁸ Players of games like the *Modern Warfare* franchise are argued to be actively engaged in war culture by presenting them firmly within it and giving them the opportunity to assume the identity of a virtual soldier. Rather than critiquing and asking questions about war, civilians move from asking “why we fight” to understanding “how we fight” by closing the distance between civilian life and military deployment.²⁹

With the entrance of games like the *Modern Warfare* franchise into popular culture, there have been many public claims that military games like these are tools for recruitment. These assumptions are not invalid. The *America’s Army* franchise has not only made it public that the military assists with the production of these games, but the franchise has achieved success in creating a favorable public awareness of the army.³⁰ Truth be told, enlistment figures for the U.S. military have actually gone up since the release of the first installment of *Modern Warfare*. Numbers reflected in the 2012 U.S. census show that after the Iraq War, those enlisted in the military began to increase gradually until a sharp spike in recruitment hit in 2008, the year after the first installment of *Modern Warfare* was released in December of 2007.³¹

In fact, the idea of the FPS as a recruitment tool is not, contrary to what many believe, a recent one. Here is an in-depth description one of the first immersive FPS simulations:

When the participant pulled the trigger on the right handle, a pair of motors sent the force feedback to the weaponry, reproducing the rumble and recoil, the *thud-thud-thud* of a 50-caliber machine gun. The shudder and kick of the machinery were complimented by the sounds of gunning thunder and engine roar that pumped through the trainee’s headphones. The tremor and babel caused by

the tactile and auditory stimulus furthered the immersive process that was structured through widescreen imagery, simulating an environment that engaged not only the trainee’s vision but also his entire body as a site of multi-sensory experience.³²

Stats were recorded, such as hit-percentages and accuracy, and audible markers of successful hits on targets were accompanied by light, enabling “the person being trained to make an immediate mental note of the judgments and actions that led to success.”³³ No, this was not a game created within the last ten years, nor the last twenty, thirty, or fifty; in fact, the above quote is a description of the 1941 Waller Flexible Gunnery Trainer implemented to train Allied pilots in Britain during World War II. In actuality, it can be claimed that the military FPS genre itself was created for the military so gunner pilots could train in an immersive experience before being sent out to the front lines, which greatly improved their chances of survival by allowing them to quickly identify enemy aircraft and simulate the use of weapons before combat. The creator claimed that the first convoy with pilots trained on the simulator shot down nine German Stuka planes in one run, with only one being shot down prior.³⁴ When many pilots in the simulators claimed these simulations were “fun,” they later were implemented as leisure activities at expositions, with roller coasters, and eventually moved into the realm of popular culture in the form of video games.

It can be too hastily assumed based on numbers that these games are the cause of the rising numbers of enlistees in the military. The “Great Recession” began the same month that the first installment of *Modern Warfare* was released in December of 2007. Other factors may have pushed men and women into the ranks, such as difficulty finding jobs out of high school and college as well as the inability to find employment after massive layoffs. However, it can be said with confidence that games contributing to the military-entertainment complex, like those in the *Modern Warfare* franchise, may have had (and still have) a considerable contribution on the growth of the U.S. military.

Not all who join the armed forces understand that actual military employment and deployment can be very different from virtual experiences of the military found in many FPS video games. Some who are influenced by games to join the military have found more difficulty successfully fulfilling their duties. A study investigating the fallacies regarding video games and recruitment found that although video games and simulators are in fact used by the military to promote and simulate scenarios, troops who are familiar with military gaming find real army employment different than portrayed. This led researchers to believe that soldiers can experience “dissatisfaction with the [armed services] and long term aggressive behavior brought about by repetitive gaming,” and warn that troops deployed in Iraq may have trouble using correct protocol while interacting with non-combatant Iraqi nationals. Summing up

their findings, a soldier's "developed behaviors used during recruitment video gaming may set the stage for disastrous and confusing effects by recruited video gaming members."³⁵

Conclusion

Although some enlistees may have developed a false understanding of the military due to FPS games, it does not necessarily mean that *all* of those who play games like the *Modern Warfare* series will perform poorly in the military. Nor does it mean that every message is received and interpreted by each player in the same way; each player's personality, experience, and knowledgebase leaves space for interpretation that makes sense to them. Ultimately, players of FPS games are the ones left to decide if they agree with the narratives' messages and representations, if they are consciously understood at all. What is important to understand about games within the FPS genre is that they include messages that reflect our beliefs regarding the military and have the potential as a form of popular culture to reinforce or critique military ideologies in their narratives.

It would be wise for scholars to approach narratives within the FPS genre which, in many of cases, reflect military ideologies, and to focus on areas of gameplay other than outlandish violence or repetitive multiplayer experiences. The *Modern Warfare* franchise is but one of many popular franchises on the market that can be analyzed in this same manner and there is definitely more room for discussion on this subject matter, but as a starting point, scholars, developers, institutions, and the public should recognize the ideological power these games have the potential to hold. I must admit, they are very fun to engage in, especially with friends, but that does not mean that these sites of contested ideological terrain are "just games." ◆

1. The military-entertainment complex is the relatively recent phenomenon in which a culture's entertainment and leisure revolve around its military and military ideologies.

2. Carol Fry and Christopher Kemp, "Rambo Agonistes," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (January 1, 1996): 367–74.

3. In video games, a "cinematic" is a break in play to deliver a cut-scene by changing angles and narrative style, focusing on dialogue and plot. The player is reinstated control once the cut-scene has ended.

4. Giles Taylor, "Camera-Eye, CG-Eye: Video Games and the 'Cinematic,'" *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 3 (April 1, 2009): 125.

5. Ibid., 128.

6. Ipsos MediaCT, *2013 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data: Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry* (The Entertainment Software Association, 2013), accessed April 4, 2014, http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2013.pdf.

7. Frederick Gagnon, "Invading Your Hearts and Minds: Call of Duty and the (Re)Writing of Militarism in U.S. Digital Games and Popular Culture," *European Journal of American Studies* 2, no. 2 (November 30, 2009): 6.

8. "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003–2008," Pew

Research Center, Washington, D.C. (March 19, 2008), accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008/>.

9. Ibid.

10. Gagnon, "Invading Your Hearts and Minds," 9.

11. United States Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, *2011 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community Updated November 2012* (Washington, D.C., 2012), accessed May 5, 2014, http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2011_Demographics_Report.pdf.

12. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 255–56.

13. This may not stay the standard for long. After the uplifting of the ban of women participating on the front lines early in 2013, several FPS games have been released where women have a more important and central role in the game's narrative and are portrayed as capable as men on the front lines of war, such as *Battlefield 4* (2013) and *Titanfall* (2014).

14. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 257.

15. It should be noted that omitting homosexuals from video game content and narratives has become a standard in the industry. Very rarely are homosexuals portrayed in a positive manner in FPS video games, even rarer is the player given the choice to identify his or herself as a homosexual within the game's narrative.

16. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 252–53.

17. Ibid., 250.

18. Robertson Allen, "The Unreal Enemy of America's Army," *Games and Culture* 6, no. 1 (December 31, 2010): 47.

19. Ibid., 51.

20. Matthew Thompson, "From Underdog to Overmatch: Computer Games and Military Transformation," *Games and Culture* 7, no. 2 (March 31, 2009): 95–96.

21. Ibid., 96–97.

22. Ibid., 99–100.

23. Simon Gottschalk, "Videology: Video-Games and Postmodern Sites/Sites of Ideological Reproduction," *Symbolic Interaction* 18, no. 1 (February 1, 1995): 3, 7.

24. Nick Robinson, "Videogames, Persuasion and the War on Terror: Escaping or Embedding the Military-Entertainment Complex?" *Political Studies* 60, no. 3 (October 2012): 508.

25. Ibid., 505.

26. Robinson, "Videogames, Persuasion and the War on Terror," 507.

27. Ibid., 510.

28. Roger Stahl, "Have You Played the War on Terror?" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 2 (November 30, 2005): 113–15.

29. Ibid., 126.

30. Ibid., 123.

31. U.S. Census Bureau, "National Security and Veterans Affairs," *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2012 (Washington, D.C., 2012), 335.

32. Giles Taylor, "A Military Use for Widescreen Cinema: Training the Body through Immersive Media," *The Velvet Light Trap* 72, no. 1 (November 30, 2012): 25–26.

33. Ibid.

34. Taylor, "A Military Use for Widescreen Cinema," 18.

35. Ann O'Connor, "The Recruiting Fallacies and Fiction," *The International Journal of Organizational Diversity* 12, no. 1 (2013): 7.

AMERICAN FORMS 101: INTRO TO AMERICAN CULTURAL STUDIES

Great American Novel or Great American Myth?

The Last of the Mohicans Film Review

SARAH PRINTY

This essay was written for Instructor Christina Barbieri's Intro to American Cultural Studies class in the fall of 2013. Students were asked to make connect readings and in-class discussions to an exhibit or film that focuses on a historical event in America. This essay uses the film "The Last of the Mohicans" as evidence that the American narrative heavily correlates with whiteness. Additionally, it explores the power film has on shaping opinions about different races and how they are portrayed to the masses.

As a country born on tradition and legacy, America has prided itself by its actions throughout history and the accomplishments made by those actions. Retelling those stories of achievement through books, film, and various other mediums holds great power, shaping how we see our past. With a country of primarily white leaders, American history has continuously painted the white male as the hero figure, or role model. "The White race has been seen as superior and White culture as normative," and although America is seen as a melting pot of many different races, we generally see the white race as the dominant race.¹ American history has portrayed the white male as the hero

by reframing or "mythicizing" the events in order to be represented in a positive light. By doing this, we are retelling history, but in a way that leaves out the unjust acts of the white male, and not acknowledging the positive actions of other races. Any factual history that would tarnish the exceptional reputation of a white American is simply omitted or reframed to be categorized as a noble action.

Michael Mann's film, *The Last of the Mohicans*, based off of the novel written by James Fenimore Cooper, perfectly illustrates the ideas of American exceptionalism through mythicizing historical events.² The Mohican Indians are seen as acceptable only because of their likeness to the Europeans. In addition, the "hero" of the film, who was adopted into the Mohican tribe, is white in origin. The Huron Indians are represented as a savage and heartless tribe, paving the way for any action against them to be justified and even heroic. *The Last of the Mohicans* has been named one of the first truly great American novels. According to Rita Kempley, staff writer for the Washington Post, "*The Last of the Mohicans* [film was] a rapturous revision of the schoolroom classic [book]."³ Associating Cooper's novel as a "schoolroom classic" further legitimizes and perpetuates the idea of American exceptionalism found throughout the book, and condones mythicizing history in favor of the Eurocentric viewpoint. To view history from a Eurocentric viewpoint is to exclude a broader perspective and to interpret everything based on European values and experiences. To learn about history this way would result in an extremely one-sided and biased rendition of past events. It is true that throughout history, Americans have been told a mythicized version of

our nation's history in order to preserve the image of American exceptionalism, which encourages extreme patriotism in the hearts of its citizens. American history is not just creating perfect men but a noble nation that is above the rest.

Throughout the film, there are subtle messages of the American narrative that correlate with "whiteness." "Race," observed Toni Morrison, has functioned as a 'metaphor' necessary to the 'construction of Americanness': in the creation of our national identity 'American' has become defined as 'white.'⁴ The film focuses on the romance of Hawkeye, the hero and lead male role, and Cora, which, not coincidentally, are both white in origin. Hawkeye is not really a Mohican by blood. He was taken in and raised by Chingachgook, a Mohican man, because Hawkeye's parents died. So, the hero of this story is really a white European disguised as a Mohican! Even in the twentieth century, this film exposes the importance of whiteness: the heroic white man gets the white girl. Because of Hawkeye's likeness to the Europeans, Hawkeye and Cora end up together, making their relationship acceptable. This is important for our master narrative that the hero's origins be European. This further pushes the idea that to be American means to be a white European. However, the producers did do some justice by using actual Indian actors for the Indian roles, portraying them in more traditional and historically accurate ways. Nonetheless, there still remains undertones of traditional Indian culture being less American.

The Last of the Mohicans presents a skewed view on the lives of the colonists and the Indians. They are presenting the history of our origin by awarding the settlers a pious and noble demeanor because they first constructed the American character. The film depicts lush unsettled fields with a few houses built by the settlers. This portrayal is important because Americans are supposed to believe that the land they settled was "virgin" land in order to seem less dominating. The Europeans want to portray that they are innocent and harming no one. According to historian James E. Loewen, "our archetypes of the 'virgin continent' and its corollary the 'primitive tribe,' subtly influenced estimates of Native populations: scholars who viewed Native American cultures as primitive reduced their estimates of precontact populations to match the stereotype."⁵ Historians have purposely underestimated the prior existence of the Native Americans to nicely fit our story that the continent was mostly uninhabited, "never mind that the land was, in reality, not a virgin wilderness but recently widowed."⁶ This myth about the settlers is similar to the story of the Pilgrims arriving at Plymouth. The colonists retold the story of the Pilgrims, leaving out the details that "throughout New England, colonists appropriated American Indian cornfields for their initial settlements, avoiding the backbreaking labor of clearing the land of forest and rock."⁷ The Pilgrims and their Thanksgiving story were also reframed to show that they settled the wilderness instead of taking over Indian farmlands and stealing food to survive. Our fixation on presenting history in a way

that covers up our past indiscretions comes from the story of America's foundation, and in the grander scheme, American exceptionalism. We cannot teach our youth authentic stories about how Americans acquired and conquered land because they might start questioning our ancestors' past actions and motives. The mythicizing of our origin offers blind patriotism in Americans and creates American white European exceptionalism undertones.

The Last of the Mohicans treats history the way past and current textbooks do: presenting the European Americans as exceptional and narrating from the Eurocentric viewpoint. The film instills ideas of European exceptionalism by portraying the Mohican Indians as "good" Indians because they dressed similarly to the Europeans and lived to what appeared a more civilized life. For example, when they killed an animal, they said a prayer for that animal, which relieved them of being associated as savages. The more similarities they have to the Europeans, the more highly they are regarded.

In contrast, the Huron Indians were portrayed as "bad" Indians because their behaviors and culture came across as savage and uncivilized. The Mohicans were helping the settlers and the British while the Hurons were attacking them. In addition, the actions of the British and the French during the French and Indian War were completely proper, starkly contrasting the Huron Indian Magua's actions of ambushing the British and cutting out General Monroe's heart and holding it in his hand. According to Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, "white Americans in positions of cultural power defined Native Americans as racially inferior, savage, child-like and in need of radical readjustment to the 'better' life of the dominant culture."⁸ Depicting the Huron Indians as a savage culture directly links them to being inferior to the Europeans. The Europeans want the Indians to adjust and become closer in likeness because they believe their culture is a better way of life. Simply put: The European standard of living is the only notable way. ◆

1. Derald Wing Sue and David Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*, (New York: J. Wiley and Sons, 2002).

2. *The Last of the Mohicans*, directed by Michael Mann (1992; Burbank, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1992), DVD.

3. Rita Kempley, "The Last of the Mohicans," *Washington Post*, September 25, 1992.

4. Ronald T. Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993), 4.

5. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: New Press, 2007), 79.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 85.

8. Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012), 53.

EARL JAMES WEAVER PRIZE

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 a 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.

In 2014, the Weaver Prize went to Mike West for his paper, "The Birth of the Pin-Up Girl: How Footlocker Art Swept the Nation and Influenced Gender Roles during World War II." The faculty committee lauded West's exceptional use of cultural evidence and his strong analyses of the images in their immediate and broader historical contexts. The committee was also impressed by his effective writing and insightful discussion and found that the paper made a significant contribution to our understanding of the 1950s and, more specifically, of the emergence of the Playboy phenomenon.

AMERICAN IDENTITIES

HIST 572: SEMINAR IN AMERICAN HISTORY

The Birth of the Pin-Up Girl

How Footlocker Art Swept the Nation and Influenced Gender Roles during World War II

MIKE WEST

This essay was written for Dr. Benjamin Cawthra's Seminar in American History course in the fall of 2013. I wanted to explore the origins and budding popularity of pin-up girls during World War II and their impact on gender roles. Instructed to include a wide variety of sources, I explore the creation of the form and function of pin-ups in "Life" magazine before surveying the numerous ways the pin-up craze manifested itself in American society.

signify prescribed gender roles for American women.

This paper will focus on the ways that pin-ups represented women's roles by examining their form and function in *Life* magazine in 1941 and '42. Pin-ups were a vital part of the war effort because they boosted the morale of soldiers by signifying sexually available, devoted, and subservient partners. Pin-ups became the dominant representation of assumable identities for women—and, in conjunction, for men as well—regarding their gender roles. As the war progressed, the meaning of pin-ups expanded as they were incorporated deeper into the war effort by not only being a prescribed gender role for everyday women supporting the troops but also representing loving and devoted wives and mothers waiting for their government-issued (GI) men to return home. This evolution of the pin-up girl throughout the war will be analyzed in *Life* photo-essays from 1941 and '42, and in songs, oral histories, vital statistics, and numerous newspaper articles spanning the war. These sources will show that throughout the war, pin-ups acquired meanings that hinted at their postwar function within the suburban domestic sphere threatened by atomic war.²

Part I: From Footlockers to the Chilly Surf

Pictures of scantily clad women were hardly new by the time *Life* featured a spread of actress Dottie Lamour, the first woman to be specifically labeled a pin-up girl, in its July 7, 1941, issue. Previous issues of *Life* celebrated actresses like Ann Sheridan, the "Oomph Girl," or Carole Landis, the "Ping Girl," as well as the work of pin-up artist George Petty and his "Petty Girl." However, nowhere in these profiles is there an indication that these Girls signified gender

Pin-up girls were a ubiquitous presence on the American scene as popular portrayals of sexualized women from their budding popularity during World War II to the emergence of *Playboy* and Marilyn Monroe's popularity, as well as the "Mammary Madness" movies of the 1950s.¹ Pin-ups generally represent an ideal woman dedicated to satisfying sexual and/or marital wishes of men while skirting the line between socially acceptable erotic images and pornography. Despite her popularity, or perhaps because of it, we often take her creation and function for granted and simply understand pin-ups ascending in American popular culture sometime during World War II. However, by looking closely at primary source materials, we can see that pin-up girls were a direct creation and function of WWII in that they came to

roles for women or gave the viewer a sense that women's bodies could be celebrated for the benefit of young American men. Although their sex appeal enticed their fans, both Sheridan and Landis were not labeled pin-up girls and shied away from the appellations. The Petty Girl's existence was limited to "the walls of dormitories, fraternity houses, prison cells.... Wherever men must live alone."³ She wasn't specifically labeled a pin-up at this time, nor did she signify idealized gender roles for women.

Understanding a few details about *Life*'s audience and popularity should give us an indication of the magazine's demographics and how they might have read or looked at it. While *Life* was far from the only magazine that popularized pin-ups, *Esquire* probably topped them in that regard, their role in shaping popular sentiment toward pin-ups is highly noteworthy.

James L. Baughman, in "Who Read *Life*? The Circulation of American's Favorite Magazine," details who read *Life* and how. He notes that the magazine had the "highest 'pass-along factor' of any mass-circulation magazine" and that studies done in the late 1930s showed that one issue of *Life* was passed along to upwards of seventeen people. As might be inferred, the passing on of the magazine could actually mean that most people didn't necessarily read the articles in such depth that would conceivably cause them to hang on to them, but may have simply looked at the pictures, something which doesn't diminish the potential importance of pin-up girls. Indeed, he notes that "many advertisers regarded the 'pass-along factor' as a grossly inflated measurement." Despite the inflated amount of readers, *Life*'s "reliance on visual imagery undoubtedly gave it greater influence than its audience size alone indicated." The predominately middle-class audience of *Life* read, or looked at it, for amusement and not for the seriousness of its articles. This does point to the very high probability of some kind of pass-along factor. This is important for pin-ups because it is assumable that a large number of Americans, mostly white and middle-class, saw images of pin-up girls in the pages of *Life*. Because there were no lengthy articles on pin-ups, and because her roles were exemplified in photos where emulation of such roles is potentially easy to achieve, *Life* was a perfect vehicle to popularize pin-ups. Along with *Life*'s coverage of WWII, readers could plainly see how pin-ups represented ideal gender roles for women and the sheer volume of the magazine's audience made those roles, and the sex-driven images they produced, socially acceptable and encouraged.⁴

The first appearance of the term "pin-up pictures" actually appeared briefly in *Life* on May 6, 1940, but it was in reference to pictures British soldiers were looking at in their bunks (mostly created by American artists). In foreshadowing a similar sentiment felt by Americans about the pin-up, the text stated: "In wartime the staidest of British journals feel a patriotic obligation to let down certain bars for the

benefit of the lonely men at the front.... Reports from the front indicate that the new Pin-up Girls are holding their own with 'art studies.'"⁵ Letting down bars of censorship and morality for the benefit of soldiers is a defining trait of the popularity of pin-ups through the idea that they were good for morale.

This specific article shows a picture of a young British GI, with a smile on his face, sitting on his bunk looking at a pin-up with several more taped up on the wall behind him. Relegating the viewing of scantily clad pin-ups to art studies implies that engaging with pin-up images was a private matter and that the naked female form had to be couched, tongue-in-cheek, in respectable terms of art appreciation. In this case, pin-ups are mere images in British magazines, but this article will use key phrases and ideas—patriotic obligation, lonely men at the front, and art studies—in future depictions of pin-up girls.

The idea that the sex appeal of women was good for soldiers' morale, that it should be encouraged and celebrated, and that pin-ups were forms of war support did not reach fruition until July 7, 1941. This issue of *Life* officially introduced the pin-up girl in form and function to the American public in actress Dottie Lamour.⁶ Tellingly, this was the "Defense Issue" featuring General George Patton on the cover, perched atop a red, white, and blue painted tank, peering into the distance. The issue merged pin-ups and the war effort as it detailed the burgeoning defense industries in the U.S. that were churning out increasing numbers of guns, ammunition, tanks, planes, and ships for U.S. allies. The creation of gender roles signified by pin-ups occurred in a pictorial spread in this issue.

However, before readers would have reached the spread on Lamour, they would already have seen a merging of female sexuality, gender roles, and a sense of patriotism earlier in the issue in the section entitled, "Speaking of Pictures... Fashion Goes Patriotic in Burst of Red, White & Blue." This picture spread of women in bathing suits at the beach shows an early example of sexualized female bodies in loose conjunction with patriotism and the growing war effort. The images, however, lack the meanings of dedicated, subservient sexual and marriage partners that pin-ups will represent.

This pictorial spread is important for the way it shows the difference between just a woman wearing a bathing suit and a pin-up girl posing for GIs. The dominant photo is a blonde woman reclining on the beach, with text reading: "Flag-waving on summer beaches takes this subtle form. Kay Williams flaunts her patriotism in a rubber bathing suit with a red-white-and-blue bra, pleated blue trunks with tight white ones beneath, flag-colored sandals, and a huge sailcloth beach bag."⁷ Here we have a notion of a woman's sexualized body actually representing an American flag as well as flaunted sexuality combined with patri-

otism. Although quite close in her form and function, this picture of Kay Williams is missing a crucial aspect of pin-ups as we will come to understand them. What is missing are explicit meanings of gender roles and sexual subservience to GIs, and the idea that a woman is fulfilling her wartime duty by being a pin-up for American soldiers. In this way, we can understand that pictures of scantily clad women gain meaning and assume representative gender roles as the women in the pictures are brought openly into the war narrative and their worth as pin-ups becomes defined in relation to GIs.

André Bazin wrote of the pin-up being “a specific erotic phenomenon, both as to form and function....A wartime product created for the benefit of American soldiers...the pin-up soon became...subject to well-fixed norms and as stable in quality as peanut butter.” This war-born erotic phenomenon is introduced to the American public in the July 7, 1941, “Defense Issue” as actress Dottie Lamour graces a two-page spread with the headline: “DOTTIE LAMOUR IS THE NO.1 PIN-UP GIRL OF THE U.S. ARMY.” Lamour is lounging on her left side facing the camera with her knees slightly drawn up on a beach towel next to a pool. Her full-figured legs are prominent and her right bathing suit strap falls seductively off her shoulder showing the contours of her breasts. She exhibits what will be a defining trait of most pin-ups by looking directly at the viewer, daring them to look at her without embarrassment. She exhibits what Bazin noted was another defining trait of pin-ups in that she works within the social censorship of the time to “experiment with the censoring itself and use it as an additional form of sexual stimulus...without lapsing into an indecency too provocative for public opinion.” Experimenting with censorship to create a new kind of sexual stimulus allows for the public celebration of the pin-up to occur. Lamour is only wearing a bathing suit, just like Kay Williams is in the “Speaking of Pictures...” section, but Lamour’s sexuality engages the viewer while refraining from being indecent. In a different kind of reading, she also resembles a woman curled up in the fetal position signifying that her sexuality needs protecting and that as a helpless woman she needs a provider. As a pin-up image she is reliant on the gaze of male viewers, and as a sexualized body she depends on the physical response of GIs.⁸

The accompanying text reads:

Among a soldier’s few personal belongings, none is more cherished than his “foot-locker” art. This is his collection of photographs and drawings pinned inside the lid of the small Army trunk that stands at the foot of his cot. Besides a snapshot of his mother and maybe his sweetheart, the foot-locker gallery contains symbols of that powerfully attractive feminine world from which the soldier is temporarily removed.⁹

Although not yet representing prescribed gender roles for American women, the image of the pin-up is implicitly tied to the experience of the war for lonely soldiers. We have here the beginnings of American males leaving their homes for uncertain futures in distant parts of the world, and the pin-up will be a grounding image that will bring GIs closer to their country and the women they love.¹⁰ This is the initiation of the pin-up as a product of WWII as an embodiment of signifying messages of gender roles.

Alongside stabilizing images of mother and sweetheart is the powerfully attractive, though as-yet unnamed, pin-up girl. In one featured photo-essay, she is raised from the ranks of mere footlocker art as her ability to boost morale for the troops will be encouraged and celebrated. The meaning between the three images within this photo-essay—mother, sweetheart, pin-up—will eventually merge in representations of pin-ups through the nurturance of the mother, the connection to home and a promise of tomorrow of the sweetheart, and the sex appeal of the pin-up. As for now, however, she is just a pretty distraction for soldiers facing the impending war.¹¹

We see pin-ups becoming objects of the imaginations of GIs in the ensuing text about Dottie Lamour. The article continues: “What there is about this sultry young woman that endears her to America’s fighting men is hard to say. Though they crowd her movies at nightly shows in camp, they are indifferent to her acting talent.”¹² The keyword to focus on in this quote in thinking of the progression and popularity of the form and function of pin-ups is *talent*. That these women actually possessed any measure of talent or intelligence—be it modeling, singing, acting, dancing, or studying chemistry—makes no difference to the men who celebrate them for their looks. It is the beginning of a trend that places most pin-ups as merely ideal sexualized bodies whose sole intent is on being visually, and hopefully physically, pleasing to men. But it also displays that the possibility of having actual sweethearts or wives looking and acting like their desired pin-ups has not yet taken place.

Male newspaper and magazine writers don’t consider pin-ups as seriously talented and/or intelligent individuals in articles throughout the war. In the April 16, 1943, edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, reporter Gene Sherman was on hand at Los Angeles’s Union Station to greet sixteen cover girls—aged five to twenty-nine—who were to star with Rita Hayworth in a movie entitled *Cover Girl*. As the girls—though not explicitly labeled pin-up girls, it is implied that they are—are getting their photos snapped, the reporter senses something about them. “Oddly enough, besides being stunning, they walked and talked intelligently, too.”¹³ It appears to come as a surprise to the reporter that the women and young girls who graced the covers of national magazines might possess talent and intelligence

along with their looks. It is as if the reporter is surprised that these pin-ups could talk back to him and weren't mere images of his imaginations.

A June 20, 1943, article from the *Los Angeles Times* gives us another instance where a woman was encouraged to be a pin-up—in this case, to do cheesecake, or leg art—and was not acknowledged for her higher pursuits. A fictitious and clownish reporter named Abercrombie, in a letter to his boss, finds a young woman named Alyce Gleason working selling war bonds and stamps. He reports that a man once offered Alyce fifty dollars if she would pose for cheesecake photos, an offer which she declined. When Alyce isn't selling bonds and stamps she is "taking care of lost babies...donating blood to the Red Cross, making speeches, turning down movies offers, and—so help me, boss—studying chemistry....Tantamount character, eh, boss?" While her notable contributions to the war effort are spoken of in mock reverential tones, what becomes important about Gleason for Abercrombie is that she will not pose for cheesecake photos, and she is wasting her time studying chemistry. This mocking of Gleason studying chemistry continues a trend of men not recognizing pin-ups as talented and smart women. Their emphasis on a woman's looks and the way she stimulates a man's sexual desires is emphasized here in much the same way as in the *Life* spread on Dottie Lamour.¹⁴

To conclude this segment on Dottie Lamour and the creation of the form and function of the pin-up girl in *Life*, it is worthwhile to explore the remainder of the photo-essay. In the remaining pictures, Lamour is seen in a bathing suit crowded around by about twenty servicemen in the ocean after running into the surf. In a photo where she joins the GIs for dinner in the mess hall, she leans over the table as a soldier on the other side feeds her with his fork. This picture mirrors the need for protection and a provider evinced in the main photo showing Lamour appearing to lie in the fetal position. These photos speak in context with the rest of the issue on the ramping up of American armament to show how pin-ups functioned in the overall war effort. In the way that Lamour existed in the light of the GIs' gazes and desires for sexual stimulation, everyday American women would be called into the war effort by duplicating this image and role. The last picture in the spread shows Lamour singing "Moonlight and Shadows"¹⁵ around a campfire with the soldiers, with its closing lyrics idealizing and romanticizing the war:

Close to my heart, you will always be
Never, never, never to part from me.
Moonlight and shadows, and you in my arms,
I belong to you, you belong to me, my sweet.

Part II: Pin-Ups at War

Gee, I love my G.I. guy,
My G.I. guy loves me,
The nicest wish I wish you,
Is for you to meet another guy
like my government issue.¹⁶

As World War II progressed into its first summer in America, the role of women as sexually attractive and available entertainers of troops gained enough traction that a photo spread in *Life* showed how everyday American women could act like pin-ups. To put this in context, Beth Bailey, in *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*, writes, "naturally, the average woman couldn't best Marilyn Monroe or Dorothy Lamour in a one-to-one competition. But as advertisers and advisers stressed, she could imitate them. By becoming as much like one of these ideal types as possible, a woman could take advantage of men's desire for these unattainable ideals of beauty."¹⁷ While celebrating the forms of famous actresses still proliferated throughout the war, there was an increasing push for everyday women to embody the idealized woman of men's desires.

In its July 6, 1942, "United We Stand" issue, the cover of which is graced with a large American flag blowing in the wind, *Life* shows how to become the ideal pin-up type in its series "Speaking of Pictures... Here is a Girl's Guide for Entertaining Soldiers."¹⁸ The first picture in the series is of five soldiers holding the sides of a blanket tossing a girl in a bathing suit up in the air on the beach. The caption reads: "You must enjoy being bounced in a blanket by soldiers." By forcing the girls, in a sense, to not only engage in the act of being thrown in the air by a blanket, but by enjoying it too, *Life* brings an immediacy to the act that leads us to believe that this kind of behavior is absolutely necessary for the war effort. If we compare this image and action of the girl in the bathing suit being tossed around to the photo of Kay Williams wearing a red, white, and blue bathing suit early in the July 7, 1941, issue, we can see that women, particularly women in bathing suits, were starting to gain real meaning in the war effort. The role of patriotism in Kay Williams's photo from 1941 is loosely tied to the woman's body, whereas here we have a direct correlation between patriotism, or participating in the war, and sexualized female bodies in a Fourth of July issue. The woman in the photos is actress Marjorie Woodworth, but she speaks to gender roles every American woman should embody.

The accompanying text reads:

What you see here is a new pattern of entertainment for girls who visit their soldier friends in U.S. Army camps. All over the country girls are finding it a pa-

triotic pleasure to brighten the lives of these boys, but they also find it no pink tea. Stiff training makes the boys husky. They are full of vim. They are full of fun. For a girl to keep up with their fun is very hard work. But this hard work has its reward in the form of warm masculine appreciation.

This new form of entertainment for girls—being a plaything for exuberant soldiers—represents the public function of pin-up girls. Once relegated to art studies, and represented by glamorous Hollywood actresses, pin-up girl status is now available and encouraged for all women.

Another photo in the spread provides a direct connection to the Dottie Lamour exposé from 1941 that signaled the creation of the pin-up girl. In the Lamour photos, she is seen surrounded by soldiers after running into the ocean, and in the “Girl’s Guide for Entertaining Soldiers,” we see this same behavior being encouraged as the everyday pin-up, represented by Woodworth, is shown running into the ocean with soldiers as the caption reads: “You must join hands with soldiers and dash into chilly surf, squealing happily.” What apparently first made Lamour so enamoring to American soldiers—her “unabashed sex appeal”—can be seen in these photos as well in how the role of pin-up girl is becoming something worth embodying for women supporting the war and showing off their patriotic fervor.

One of the photos directly ties pin-ups and their manipulation of censorship by showing Woodworth changing out of her bathing suit on the beach as the soldiers shield her with a blanket. The soldiers, of course, look away to give her the slightest modicum of privacy as the caption reads: “You must use whatever your boy friends provide for a bathhouse.” That the all-American pin-up girls’ unabashed sex appeal should be on public display, and that her sexualized body should be within teasing distance to soldiers, is shown as she creates a provocative, yet not indecent, sexual stimulus. Also, by portraying her as entertaining several boys at once, it gives us the idea that the everyday pin-up girl was a public function of morale for all American soldiers.

This public function of pin-up girls soon became apparent in her widespread popularity in movies, newspaper articles, and songs. One of the latter, “Peggy the Pin-Up Girl,” written by Evans and Loeb and recorded by Glenn Miller in 1944, celebrated the popularity of pin-ups in the form of a fictitious pin-up named Peggy Jones. “Peggy Jones had her picture took / It got in ‘Life’ and it got in ‘Look’. . . . She is the sweetheart of plenty of soldiers, plenty of sailors, thousands of Marines. . . . She’s the chick they all pick in the service / And they take her all over the world.”¹⁹ Writing about a fictitious pin-up instead of Betty Grable or Rita Hayworth, two of the most famous pin-up girls, is noteworthy because it allows any woman to assume the role of Peggy

the Pin-Up Girl. American women didn’t need to challenge the popularity of pin-ups like Grable or Hayworth directly, but could assume their idealized role, as Beth Bailey noted, and the image of Peggy the Pin-Up Girl that is being pinned up all around the world is different for each GI. This allows any GI’s sweetheart to embody the gender roles of pin-ups.

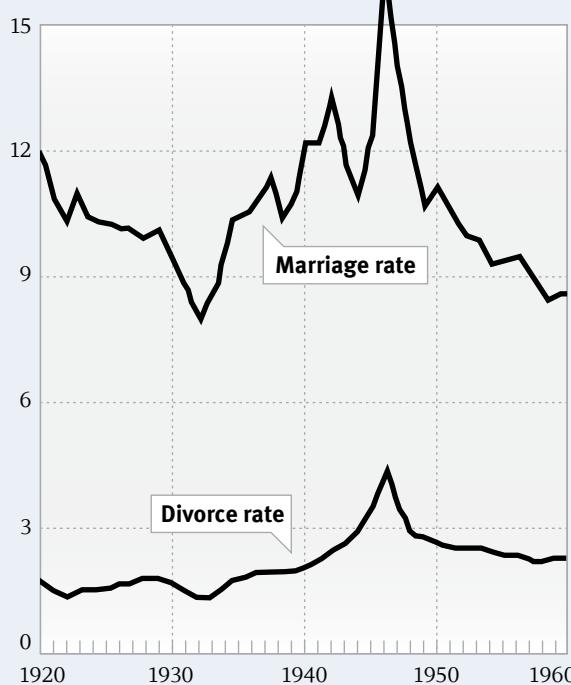
Another song that speaks to the roles of pin-ups is “Gee, I Love My G.I. Guy,” also recorded in 1944 by Connie Haines.²⁰ It contains the lines: “The nicest wish I wish you / Is for you to meet a guy like my government issue.” And: “Oh, what he does to my heart / There is no one who can say I’m not doing my part.” The nicest thing the singer can wish for other women is to meet a soldier like hers because that’s the nicest thing that’s happened to her. Like “Peggy the Pin-Up Girl,” the song puts a blank face on pin-ups who are involved with GIs. Falling in love with GIs is seen as being a part of women’s participation in the war effort, a decided step up from merely entertaining troops as depicted in the “Girl’s Guide for Entertaining Soldiers.” Where once women did their part by posing for pin-up pictures, getting tossed in the air with a blanket, and running into chilly ocean water, among other things, falling in love and getting romantically involved with GIs is now celebrated as the proper role for women during WWII.

While scrap drives and war bond campaigns were going on in the war effort, women were doing their part by engaging in gender roles prescribed by pin-ups. This is recounted in Studs Terkel’s oral history of WWII, “The Good War,” by Dellie Hahne. She recalled that once the war started, “single women were of tremendous importance. It was hammered at us through the newspapers and magazines and on the radio. We were needed at USO, to dance with soldiers.” Aside from merely being pressured to dance with soldiers, Hahne recalled the pressure to marry. “I met my future husband,” she said. “I really didn’t care that much for him. . . . The pressure to marry a soldier was so great that after a while I didn’t question it. . . . I don’t think I’d have married so foolishly, if it weren’t for the war. . . . The man was a soldier. Somebody had to marry him, and I married him.” The overwhelming popularity of pin-up girls and the public support for the troops’ desire to have their very own led to women adopting, through patriotic pride or social coercion, the function of pin-up girls for the war effort, and, as recalled by Hahne, it had real consequences as far as marriage statistics were concerned.²¹

It is worth taking a look at vital statistics from the WWII era to get a sense of the tangible scope of influence of pin-ups. The graph statistics to be explored are not to be taken as concrete evidence that pin-ups caused all wartime couples to get married, to have children, and eventually divorce; rather, they are cited to lend credence to the

**Figure 1. Marriage and Divorce Rates:
United States, 1920–60**

(Rates per 1,000 population)



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portrayals in the popular media of women embodying the gender roles established by pin-ups.

This graph (see fig. 1) shows that marriage rates remained stagnant between 1940 and 1941, but rose a good deal between 1941 and 1943 as America was expanding its war effort. The marriage rates begin to climb again in 1945 and hit their apex in 1946 when, presumably, GIs were being deployed home and began marrying their sweethearts.²²

We see marriage and divorce rates swell at notable times when exploring the social impact of pin-ups on gender relations. Indeed, being married was not a hindrance to the popularity of pin-up girls. To the contrary, as Elaine Tyler May posits about Betty Grable, “Grable became even more popular when she married bandleader Harry James in 1943 and had a child later that year.... It reinforced her image as everyone’s sweetheart, future wife, and mother. In order to be worthy of similar adoration, women sent their husbands and sweethearts photos of themselves in ‘pinup’ poses.”²³

We see this evident in newspaper articles throughout the war. A July 2, 1944, article from the *Los Angeles Times* profiles actress Rosemary De Camp reversing the trend of pin-ups becoming mothers by portraying a mother transi-

Year	Marriage Rate	Divorce Rate	Year	Marriage Rate	Divorce Rate
1960	8.5	2.2	1940	12.1	2.0
1959	8.5	2.2	1939	10.7	1.9
1958	8.4	2.1	1938	10.3	1.9
1957	8.9	2.2	1937	11.3	1.9
1956	9.5	2.3	1936	10.7	1.8
1955	9.3	2.3	1935	10.4	1.7
1954	9.2	2.4	1934	10.3	1.6
1953	9.8	2.5	1933	8.7	1.3
1952	9.9	2.5	1932	7.9	1.3
1951	10.4	2.5	1931	8.6	1.5
1950	11.1	2.6	1930	9.2	1.6
1949	10.6	2.7	1929	10.1	1.7
1948	12.4	2.8	1928	9.8	1.7
1947	13.9	3.4	1927	10.1	1.6
1946	16.4	4.3	1926	10.2	1.6
1945	12.2	3.5	1925	10.3	1.5
1944	10.9	2.9	1924	10.4	1.5
1943	11.7	2.6	1923	11.0	1.5
1942	13.2	2.4	1922	10.3	1.4
1941	12.7	2.2	1921	10.7	1.5
1940	12.0	1.6			

Year	Marriage Rate		Divorce Rate Per 1,000 married women 15 years of age and over
	Total marriages per 1,000 unmarried women 15–44 years of age	Total marriages per 1,000 unmarried women 15 years of age and over	
1960	148.0	73.5	9.2
1959	149.8	73.6	9.3
1958	146.3	72.0	8.9
1957	157.4	78.0	9.2
1956	165.6	82.4	9.4
1955	161.1	80.9	9.3
1954	154.3	79.8	9.5
1953	163.3	83.7	9.9
1952	159.9	83.2	10.1
1951	164.9	86.6	9.9
1950	166.4	90.2	10.3
1949	158.0	86.7	10.6
1948	174.7	98.5	11.2
1947	182.7	106.2	13.6
1946	199.0	118.1	17.0
1945	138.2	83.6	14.4
1944	124.5	76.5	12.0
1943	133.5	83.0	11.0
1942	147.6	93.0	10.1
1941	138.4	88.5	9.4
1940	127.4	82.8	8.8

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tioning to a pin-up girl. The text notes that where she once “was enacting nostalgic mother roles... there’s a different story now, because it’s becoming practically synonymous with pin-upping.”²⁴ While flipping the usual transformation of pin-up girl to mother, the conjoined meaning of pin-up, wife, and mother is evident in her roles as well as in how the article profiles her as a wife and mother in real life.

Pin-ups evolved as portrayals of ideal gender roles for women. Echoing similar statements by Ann Sheridan and Carole Landis in the previously explored *Life* articles, De Camp said that if she were “‘suddenly to be designated as a pin-up type, I’m afraid I can’t become wholly enthusiastic.’” However, in light of the increasing importance on the form and function of pin-ups, she tempers her opinion on being a pin-up by saying: “‘if perchance anybody sees me in the pin-up light, I’ll accept it as a phase.’”²⁵ That she is willing to accept her label as a pin-up for what is likely the duration of the war speaks to the popular acceptance of pin-ups as idealized gender roles for women. As a mother and a wife, she is seen here doing her part in the war effort by embodying the much-desired role of pin-up girl.

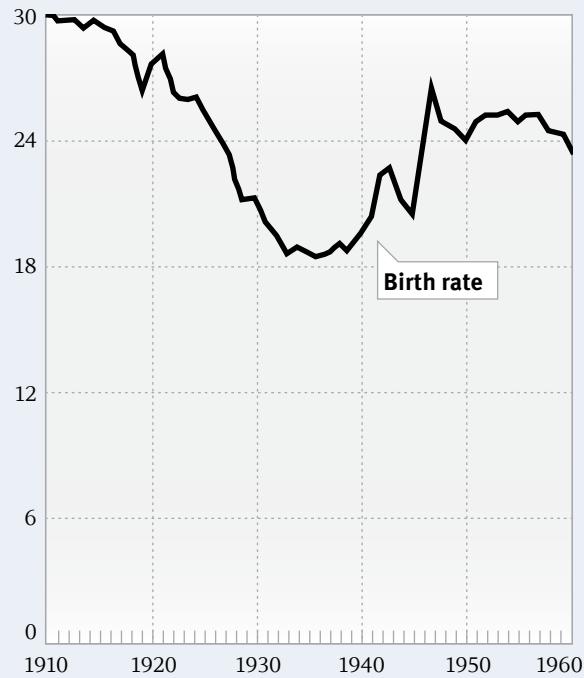
A June 13, 1943, article in the *Los Angeles Times* revealed photography tips for women wanting to send pictures to their sweethearts or husbands overseas. “Every sweetheart a pin-up girl!” the article begins. The writer, Philip K. Scheuer, details some important tips from George Hurrell, illustrator and photographer for *Esquire*, who recently returned from the war front and thus had first-hand experience of what GIs wanted. That Hurrell has experience photographing Hollywood starlets and pin-up girls is noteworthy because this reinforces the drive to get everyday American women to embody the form and function of famous pin-ups. Hurrell’s main advice was to “take as many pictures as you can and send them as often as you can....Change dresses and surroundings...pose yourself around the house and gardens, places you have been together.” A similar article from the *Los Angeles Times* sums this up perfectly: “Know how to put yourself across with the camera, if you’re having your picture taken for your personal Armed Force. Your show-off hero wants to exhibit your photograph, and it’s in for some tough competition with the pin-up girls.”²⁶

In returning to wartime statistics, focusing on birth rates, we can see a potential correlation between motherhood and pin-ups’ prescribed gender roles. We can also begin to tap into a different sort of pin-up girl that has not been explored yet in this paper.

There are obvious correlations between the line graph on marriage and divorce rates and this graph on birth rates (see fig. 2). The rates for both marriages and births begin to rise in 1941 with marriages hitting their wartime peak in 1942 and births following suit by reaching their peak in 1943. Both marriage and birth rates then decline from 1943 to 1945 before marriage rates peak in 1946 and the corresponding birth rates hitting their peak in 1947.

With these accelerating birth rates and evolving meanings of pin-ups to include marriage roles and motherhood, a different kind of pin-up emerges that still fits in with the combined image of the pin-up as mother, wife, and sweetheart. Rather than portraying Dottie Lamour or Bet-

Figure 2. Birth Rates: United States, 1910–60
(Rates per 1,000 population)



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ty Grable, it is the offspring of the pin-ups that expand the meaning of these women in newspaper articles throughout the war.

As World War II drew to a close, GIs started to celebrate a new kind of pin-up girl: babies and toddlers. An April 3, 1945, article from the *Los Angeles Times* publicized the winning of a pin-up contest by Sgt. Harry Nutter Jr.’s fifteen-month-old daughter Shireen Nutter. The blonde, blue-eyed baby won a “healthiest child” contest. Harry wrote to his wife Gladys about the competition, noting that “the gallery of children’s pictures received more attention than any of the glamour pin-ups.”²⁷ This “busy, red-cheeked youngster,” weighing thirty-two pounds at the time and never having suffered a sick day in her young life mirrors the healthiness and physical exuberance of the Dottie Lamour picture spread and that of Marjorie Woodworth in “A Girl’s Guide for Entertaining Soldiers.” The Nutters’ daughter is the pinnacle of the physical manifestation of the gender roles pin-ups represent.

An article from the *New York Times* dated January 18, 1946, profiles the homecoming of M/Sgt. Alfred A. Kohler and the Army’s Sixth Medical Depot Company at Pier 13 in Staten Island, New York. One hundred sixty-eight members of the unit voted to make Alfred’s four-year-old daughter “Mimi,” or Mildred Ann, their pin-up girl.²⁸

Mimi's presence was requested by the captain of the carrier ship and she was waiting with her mother at the pier when the unit arrived, even allowing her to board the ship at the insistence of the members of the unit. This article combines both a feeling of victory in the war with the celebration of home and the future in the new embodiment of the pin-up girl.

GIs did not necessarily need to be the fathers of these young pin-up babies and toddlers, as the article "MARINES VISIT PIN-UP GIRL, OVERSEAS CHOICE," from the Dec. 10, 1945, issue of the *Los Angeles Times* reflects. Three Marines, Pvt. Bob Watkins, Cpl. Carl Wicks, and Sgt. J.P. Yarbrough, back from Iwo Jima and Guam, stopped in at 473 N. Harvard Blvd. to see their companies official pin-up girl, three-and-a-half-year-old Patty Dodds. The picture accompanying the article illustrates that "the servicemen were not reluctant to show their affection for her while her mom and dad were around."²⁹ The affection that GIs showed toward pin-ups earlier in the war is here shown to be transferred, in a fatherly way, to idealized children. The popular portrayal and embodiment of women as pin-ups did not cease as the war wound down, but these pint-sized pin-ups represent a logical step in the evolution of pin-up girls by embodying the fruit of the pin-ups' labors. They connected GIs to their wives at home as well as a promise for a safe, loving future removed from the theaters of war.

Although toddler pin-ups celebrated domesticity and the comfort of home, not every marriage survived the wartime separation. If we return to marriage and divorce rates once more, there is one final statistical role that pin-ups played: the alleged cause of postwar divorces. This notion is explored in a *New York Times* article from February 3, 1946, entitled "THE WHYS OF WAR DIVORCES," by Jere Daniel. Daniel explores the nature behind why "one out of every four of...800,000 [returned GIs] is entangled in divorce proceedings." His reasoning behind the accelerated divorce rate hinges on six causes: the haste with which ill-acquainted couples wed; separation forced upon them by war; disillusion which accompanied return; economic ills;...adultery;...and...foreign mésalliances."³⁰ Daniels notes that the speedy wartime marriages did not leave time for couples to really get to know each other, and in the process of their separation, they both might have adopted different values based off their own personal experiences.

Not having the time to get to know each other very well before deployment created disillusionment, and therefore caused stress on many marriages once the soldiers returned home from war. "Overseas much of a man's morale often depended on the familiar fantasy of beautiful wife and devoted child waiting patiently...for his return....[T]he soldier usually idealized his wife. She,

in turn, idealized him....This disillusionment has been named...the 'pin-up blues.'" The "pin-up blues" is an apropos name because it was the pin-up that represented the gender roles women came to embody as America's war effort increased. As these specific roles prescribed by pin-ups and GIs once brought men and women together, allowing them to speak in conversation with each other, we now see that for some who divorced after the war, the pin-up craze left them feeling blue over their false sense of the idea of marriage and a romanticized ideal of family life. Daniel confirms that once the bottom dropped out of the illusory gender roles of pin-ups and GIs at the war's end, couples were left wondering if they really knew the person they married.³¹

Conclusion: From Footlockers to the Chilly Surf and Back Home Again

What started as a seemingly harmless exposé on a Hollywood actress's popularity with American GIs stationed in Hawaii, *Life* planted the seeds of a pin-up girl phenomenon that enraptured the nation. The advertising of Hollywood starlets in *Life* was an important step in creating the initial form and function of the pin-up, but it was not until everyday American women were encouraged to embody their representations that turned pin-ups into signifiers, or examples, of tangible gender roles. Pin-up images themselves could vary based on a particular kind of artist and audience, but overall, they symbolized an idealized and sexualized woman devoted to the gazes and masculine roles of the GIs.

As the forms and functions of pin-ups expanded during the war effort, their evolving presence in American culture was expressed in movies, stories, songs, newspaper articles and, of course, in pictures. Everyday American women were encouraged to pose like famous pin-ups such as Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth and to send those images to their boyfriends and husbands fighting overseas or stationed at domestic military bases. It became a patriotic duty for women to embody the prescribed gender roles pin-ups represented. Toward the end of the war, female babies and toddlers further expanded the meanings of pin-ups by representing an idealized family life to come in the postwar years. From their initial appearance in the hands of lonely soldiers at war, and on Army footlockers, pin-up girls evolved to embody the shifting gender roles during WWII. She can be studied in various ways, but the pin-up girls' most distinct contribution to American life was by being a representation of the kind of women GIs wanted to be entertained by, date, marry, and to have their kids with. True to their nature, pin-ups would continue to evolve in their meanings in postwar America, exhibiting their influences on gender roles in the suburbanized, nuclear family. ♦

1. For more on the relation between *Playboy* and pin-ups, as well as a brief history of *Esquire* magazine's contributions to popularizing pin-ups in WWII, see Elizabeth Fraterrigo's *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Fraterrigo's book is also helpful in noting a change in meaning of pin-ups in the 1950s from one representing ideal wives, mothers, and sweethearts, to representing girls who offer sex without attachments to sophisticated urban bachelors.

"Mammary Madness" movies featured actresses such as Jane Russell, Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield, and Mamie Van Doren. The label "Mammary Madness" is not a popular one, but it represents the movies of the 1940s and '50s that featured well-endowed actresses that film critics such as André Bazin noted signaled a shift in the gaze of American men from women's legs to their chests. For more on "Mammary Madness" and the role of women in movies see Marjorie Rosen's "How the Movies Have Made Women Smaller than Life," *Journal of the University Film Association* 26, no. 1/2 (1974): 6–10.

2. Because pin-ups had such wide public support during the war, they give us a clear sense of the impact of WWII on the everyday lives of Americans and GIs. In focusing on specific sources that show the birth and growth of pin-ups, a wide assortment of famous pin-up girls, pin-up artists, actresses, and the role of Hollywood will inevitably be left out. As well, pin-up girls of color—while there were pin-ups of mixed ethnicity they were not celebrated for such as in the case of Rita Hayworth—will also be left out in order to solely focus on the mainstream press's portrayal and embodiment of prescribed gender roles for predominantly white American women from 1941–1945.

3. Noel Busch, "America's Oomph Girl: Ann Sheridan, Hailed as a Second Jean Harlow, is the Movie Find of the Year," *Life*, July 24, 1939, accessed November 12, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=AoIEAAAAMBAJ>. The issue profiled actress Ann Sheridan, whose real name was Clara Lou Sheridan. *Life* quotes screenwriter Gene Towne in defining "oomph" as "'the indefinable something that lies in women's eyes—oomph, oomph, oomph.'" The idea of being an Oomph Girl, the article notes, "has not been altogether salubrious [for Sheridan].... The fact that, to an overwhelming proportion of the U.S. population, she is [a seductress], tends to cause her moments of wild worry."

"Carole Landis Does Not Want to be 'Ping Girl,'" *Life*, June 17, 1940, accessed 12 November 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=xT8EAAAAMBAJ>. The issue profiled the up-and-coming actress whose real name was Frances Ridste. The article writes that Landis rejected the moniker and released a statement saying she would no longer do cheesecake, or leg art, that was the cause of her celebrity up to that point. "Miss Landis wanted to be admired not for her legs or bust but for her talent," the article noted.

"The Petty Girl, Triumph of Airbrush, is Feminine Ideal of American Men," *Life*, June 26, 1939, accessed 16 November 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=ZokEAAAAMBAJ>. The issue profiled the Petty Girl, first seen in *Esquire* in 1933, and celebrated the idea that she represented the feminine ideal for men, but the article was focused more on George Petty. The Petty Girl didn't represent a pin-up girl, nor a figure that American women would be encouraged to emulate. The picture spread of various Petty Girls is noteworthy in the image of one who is dressed in a pink bunny suit. Hugh Hefner used this image years later when creating his own girl, the *Playboy* Playmate.

4. James L. Baughman, "Who Read Life? The Circulation of America's Favorite Magazine," in *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed. Erika Doss (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 42–45. Baughman does a good job of noting the discrepancies between the different studies of *Life*'s popularity, particularly the elusive pass-along factor. The very idea of a pass-along factor does tell us, however, that this practice did occur to some extent. The fact that the magazine relied predominately on photos lends credence to the pass-along factor.

Life differs in an important way from *Esquire* in that it appealed to any reader, whereas *Esquire*, and its Varga Girl, was specifically geared toward men and soldiers, evinced by their label as "A Favored Magazine of Fighting Men." Late in 1943, Postmaster General Frank C. Walker tried to get *Esquire* to have its second-class mailing status revoked because he believed some of the Varga Girls were lewd. "'Esquire' May Be Denied Mails Because of Its 'Varga Girls,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1943, A.

"The Esquire Case," *New York Times*, January 2, 1944, E2. *Esquire*'s response was two-fold. Ever since its founding in 1933, *Esquire* "operated on a simple formula—that men are men." As such, it was a staple in male-dominated places such as barbershops and war fronts. Secondly, *Esquire* hyped up and got support for the idea that it was a morale-builder for America's fighting men. *Esquire* eventually won the case, but it tells us that pin-ups were acceptable in *Life* magazine, and so the gender roles prescribed by the various photo essays could be safely adopted by young women. For an ad *Esquire* took out in the *New York Times* defending themselves, see *New York Times*, October 5, 1943, 18.

5. "'Pin-Up Pictures' for Soldiers' Walls Grace British Magazines," *Life*, May 6, 1940, <http://books.google.com/books?id=1T8EAAAAMBAJ>. The photo spread shows pin-ups from Renee Charron, the Charron Girls, and from Merlin Enabnit, the Merlin Girls. What the article succeeds in doing is combining the pinned-up pictures with the popular label Girl, as in Oomph Girl, Petty Girl, etc., and combining the two. Pin-ups were a kind of catch-all for pin-up photos by any artist, except they are distinctly conjoined with war and the gazes of male soldiers.

6. Hollywood, advertising agencies, and publishers—working in conjunction with the U.S. government—created a national voice in support of the war. See Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), John Morton Blum, *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (San Diego: Harvest, 1976), and Robert Griffith, "The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942–1960," *The Business History Review* 1, 57, no. 3, (Autumn 1983): 388–412.

The pin-up has an important role in showing support for the war. How entities like Hollywood, the Office of War Information, and the War Advertising Council worked in tandem is an important factor in the presence of pin-ups on the American scene, but will not be a focus in this paper.

7. The bathing suit the woman wears appears to the modern viewer as being a bikini, albeit with different bottoms. The term bikini did not describe this bathing suit until 1946 when the U.S. dropped a hydrogen bomb on the Bikini Islands. Rita Hayworth's image was painted on the bomb and the bomb itself was named after Hayworth's popular movie *Gilda*. For more on the atomic bomb test and the potentially destructive forces of pin-ups, see Elaine Tyler May's *Homeeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), and Paul Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

8. André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. II, trans. Hugh Gray (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 158; Alberto Vargas and Reid Austin, *Vargas* (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1984), 31. Vargas's writing partner Reid Austin notes that the most indigenous aspect of pin-ups was their direct eye contact to the viewer. Alberto Vargas's popular pin-up girls, oddly enough, lacked this important aspect of their allure.

Bazin, *What is Cinema*, 159. For more on censorship see Gregory Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), "Hollywood Cen-

sored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930–1940,” *Film History* 3, no. 3, (1989): 167–189, and Ira Carmen, *Movies, Censorship, and the Law* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1966).

As previously noted, *Esquire*’s mailing status was put on trial because their pin-ups pushed the envelope as to what was socially acceptable and what was too sexually stimulating.

Several sources talk about GIs using pin-ups of their sweethearts as reminders of what they were really fighting for. Lary May, in *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), writes about the war bringing about a “restoration of ‘manhood’” which suggests the role of pin-ups in that restoration (p. 147). See also, “*The Good War*” by Studs Terkel (New York: New Press, 1984), pp. 117–22, 243–45, 128–34.

9. *Life*, July 7, 1941, 34.

10. Elaine Tyler May, in *Pushing the Limits: American Women 1940–1961* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), quotes a soldier as saying, “‘we are not only fighting for the Four Freedoms, we are fighting also for the priceless privilege of making love to American women’” (p. 45).

11. Robert Westbrook, in his *American Quarterly* essay from 1990, “‘I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James’: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II,” quotes Alan Ladd, reporting for the Hollywood Victory Committee in 1943, that GIs preferred pin-ups “who reminded them of their mothers and sisters” (p. 596). While this may be true, there were plenty of instances where GIs, particularly in the Air Force, preferred pin-ups a little on the raunchier side of things. See Gary Valiant’s *Vintage Aircraft Nose Art* (St. Paul, MN: MBI, 2001) and Max Allan Collins’s *For the Boys: The Racy Pin-Ups of World War II* (Portland, OR: Collectors Press, 2000).

12. *Life*, July 7, 1941, 34.

13. Gene Sherman, “Cover Girls Arrive to Make Picture,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1943, A10.

14. “Abercrombie Plays Trick for Chevronette Interview,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1943, A1; “Miss California Aims at Career in Singing,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1943, A1. In a lot of ways, this is something that plagues Marilyn Monroe’s legacy. Her on-screen personas that made her appear air-headed and idiotically devoted to men—as in *Bus Stop* (1956) and *The Seven Year Itch* (1955)—compromise her actual capabilities as an actress.

15. Dorothy Lamour, “Moonlight and Shadows,” 1942 sound recording, <https://archive.org/details/DorothyLamour-MoonlightAndShadows1942>.

16. “Gee, I Love My G.I. Guy,” Connie Haines, 1944 sound recording, <https://archive.org/details/ConnieHaines-o1-40>.

17. Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 73 (emphasis in original). Bailey’s chapter entitled “The Worth of a Date” is useful when exploring how America developed “a love affair with the bosom” through the popularization of busty actresses.

18. *Life*, July 6, 1942, 6–9, <http://books.google.com/books?id=400EAAAAMBAJ>.

19. “Peggy the Pin-Up Girl,” recorded by Glenn Miller and the AAFC Band, April 29, 1944, written by Evans and Loeb, http://www.authentichistory.com/1939-1945/3-music/12-Wartime_Romance/19440429_Peggy_The_Pin-Up_Girl-Glenn_Miller_Vdisc533a.html.

20. “Gee, I Love My G.I. Guy,” Connie Haines.

21. For more on this, see Stan Cohen, *V for Victory: America’s Home*

Front during World War II (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing, 1991); Studs Terkel, “*The Good War*,” 117; *Ibid.*, 117, 123. For two similar experiences and reactions in “*The Good War*,” see the oral histories of Betty Basye Hutchinson (pp. 128–134, and Jean Bartlett (pp. 242–247).

Dellie Hahne is not alone in Terkel’s oral history among women who looked back upon the war in dismay, for various reasons. In particular, she looked back on some of the gender roles of women as being particularly rueful. “If they said to me, Look, this has to be done and we’ll go out and do the job . . . we’ll all get our arms and legs blown off but it has to be done, I’d understand. If they didn’t hand me all this shit with the uniforms and the girls . . . dancing at the USO and all those songs . . . bullshit!” (p. 121).

22. Robert D. Grove, Ph.D., and Alice M. Hertz, “Vital Statistics Rates in the United States 1940–1960,” U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Health Statistics, Washington, D.C., 1968, courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

23. Elaine Tyler May, *Pushing the Limits*, 45. This passage is notable in that it returns us to the notion that pin-ups represented the three images of women initially found in a GI’s footlocker in the *Life* photo-essay from July 7, 1941.

24. Edwin Schallert, “Actress Who Scored in Mamma Roles Now Becomes Pin-Up Girl,” *Los Angeles Times*, C1.

25. *Ibid.* The article goes on to note that De Camp is a mother herself to a young daughter and planned to give up acting in the near future. Her appeal as a pin-up is three-fold in a kind of fully evolved manifestation of the pin-up girl.

26. Scheuer, “Pin-Up Photographers ‘Tell All’ About Glamour,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1943; Sylvia Blythe, “Send Him Your Picture!,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1943, G26.

27. “Girl, 15 Months, Wins Marines’ Pin-Up Contest,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1945, A1.

28. “Homecoming Units Hail Pin-Up Girl, 4: ‘Mimi’ Welcomes Her Dad and His Buddies,” *New York Times*, January 18, 1946, p. 7. The article also says they voted her as their mascot. They cannot seem to decide on one label.

29. “Marines Visit Pin-Up Girl, Overseas Choice,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1945, A1.

30. Jere Daniel, “The Whys of War Divorce,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1946, SM10. This is echoed in Dellie Hahne’s story, previously explored in “*The Good War*,” when she said she was pressured to marry her husband, whom she did not care for. When he returned to the war, she eventually found out that he was an irresponsible, woman-chasing drunk. She divorced with initially barely earning enough to support their two children.

31. *Ibid.* The accompanying cartoon of the “Six Causes of GI Divorces” seems to suggest that the disillusionment of GIs with their once-idealized wives had more to do with their wives’ figures than with whether they really knew each other or not. We see in this cartoon that the GI desires the pin-up girl he was separated from during the war and who appears changed upon his return home.

AMERICAN IDENTITIES

“ The American identity has never been a singular one and the voices of poets invariably sing, in addition to their own, the voices of those around them.”

–Aberjhani

AMERICAN IDENTITIES 401: WAR AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Rationalizing, Coping, and Healing

The Use of Humor and Comedy during Times of War

STEVEN MONTES

This essay was written for Dr. John Ibson's War and American Culture course in the spring of 2014. It aims to investigate the relationship between war and comedy, the ways we employ and consume comedy, as well as the functions of comedy in the post-war environment. Humorists function as interpreters of our culture, finding the funny in even the darkest of times. The use of comedy as a tool of defiance to the tragedy of war was a running theme that carried my research.

It is open mic night at the comedy club, and with a quick introduction the host announces the upcoming act. The next comic trots onto the stage, stops front and center and the room falls into silence. It is not a normal type of silence; it is the uncomfortable kind, the kind of silence that unconsciously propels one to shift in their seat. The comic center stage is heavily scarred with visible burns on his face, neck, and torso. A stump rests at his side where his left hand once was. His skin gleams in the stage lights, highlighting the scar tissue that covers his face. Finally, as the silence reaches his desired resonance, he says, "you should see the other guy."¹ This veteran-turned-stand-up-comedian's name is Bobby Henline. In the United States Army, Bobby served four tours; it was on his last tour in Iraq when he suffered life-altering injuries, leaving him the sole survivor of his

unit. For Henline the road to recovery has been a long one. As he struggled to come to terms with his injuries and the guilt over his survival, Henline found comedy.

I would like to explore this link between war and comedy. Even with the no-holds-barred type of entertainment we have today, we still wonder if there is any topic that shouldn't be joked about. War at its nature involves loss and death; consequently, there are many who would say that humor about tragedy and death is distasteful and has no place in our culture. This is not a new debate and the question surrounding it cannot easily be answered. Comedy can be mean. It can be smart. It can be nasty. Most importantly, it can be impactful.² To analyze comedy during wartime, it is important to acknowledge that comedy and tragedy are not as different as one might think. In a podcast on WNYC about Comedy since 9/11, comedian Gilbert Gottfried brings up this idea of tragedy and comedy. "Tragedy and comedy are not as opposite as one might think. I always thought tragedy and comedy are roommates, so wherever tragedy is, comedy is staring over its shoulder sticking its tongue out."³ Is comedy a defiance of tragedy? Can we combat our sorrows by turning them into something to laugh at?

Comedians are interpreters of culture, creating sets that disarm the audience, allowing them to laugh at and confront topics that may otherwise be too difficult or too taboo. The nervous energy and fear that war creates has certainly infiltrated popular culture. It provides an interesting study into what we consume during times of war. What role does comedy play during times of war? How do we enjoy comedy when lives are being lost and families torn apart? How do we employ comedy in our healing process? These questions guided my research of comedic works during times of war.

Stand-Up Comics: Interpreters of Culture

Like any form of art, comedy has evolved over the years. From the vaudeville acts of the late 1800s, to the transition to film and television, comedy has remained a fixture of our popular entertainment. While many of these comedic works tend to contain the physical humor we still enjoy today, comedians began to explore more expressive forms of comedy toward the middle of the 1900s. The charismatic and devilishly controversial comic Lenny Bruce truly emphasized the power of comedy in his unique material. In a foreword written by Kenneth Tynan in Bruce's biography, Tynan gives praise to the barrier breaker:

Bruce is the sharpest denter of taboos at present active in show business. Alone among those who work the clubs, he is a true iconoclast. Others josh, snipe and rib; only Bruce demolishes. He breaks through the barrier of laughter to the horizon beyond, where the truth has its sanctuary. People say he is shocking and they are quite correct. Part of his purpose is to force us to redefine what we mean by "being shocked."⁴

Lenny Bruce introduced the concept of theme and motivation to the stand-up comedy routine. Bruce had purpose to his comedy, each bit crafted with barbed language that was meant to prickle the audience to confront an idea that made them uncomfortable. Bruce was a United States Navy veteran who saw active duty during the course of World War II. He used his time in the service as inspiration for one of his first controversial bits. "I had a picture taken of all my campaign ribbons and medals (including a Presidential Unit Citation), had it enlarged, and put it on."⁵ After asking the band to play a rousing song of patriotism, Bruce made his grand entrance with his new regalia in place. Immediately, Bruce recalls a man instantly threatening to punch him in the face. The owner of the Melody Club asked him to take the bit out of subsequent shows; Bruce refused and promised to never perform at the club again. This first foray into controversy, particularly concerning war, displays Bruce's uncompromising backing of his material. Very few other comics at the time would have used such hot button topics like war as comedy fodder. In a time where edgy material could lead to charges of obscenity, Lenny Bruce's material gained recognition from the young, and admonishment from the old. Many comedy clubs and performance halls would refuse to book Bruce and other acts that defied the "rules." As his reputation grew, performance sites were harder to come by. Bruce changed the idea of what comedy could be, and what it could be was up to the imagination. His societal commentary paved the way for other comics to find their own satirical voices in the Vietnam era. "Bruce showed that stand-up comedy could be the expression of an engaged, thinking, neurotic, impassioned human being in all his raw, crazy complexity."⁶ Richard Pryor, Steve Martin, and Andy Kaufman (just to name a few) were inspired by this new brand

of comedy, each adding their own unique style. One comedian, however, was in a league of his own in embracing this new counterculture style of comedy. His name was George Carlin.

Thinking about the counterculture comedians during the '60s and '70s would be largely incomplete without Carlin's name. Vietnam, the first televised war, spawned a great deal of creative works dedicated in speaking against the war, particularly in the politically charged years at the tail end of the struggle. George Carlin acted as social critic; his satirical and sharp sets did not shy away from conflict and controversy. They used the forum of performance, and the disarming means of comedy to mark the hypocrisies of the war. "War. Well, first of all it is great theater. It is great entertainment. They don't call it the theater of war for nothing."⁷ Carlin, like Bruce, was shaped by his own military background, joining the United States Air force when he became of legal age. Even in his tender teens Carlin was willing to stir up trouble and defy conformity, unwelcomed behavior in the armed forces. After three court-martials—insubordination, disobeying a lawful order, and falling asleep on guard duty, respectively—Carlin was given a general discharge from service.⁸ While he did not serve actively in combat, his experiences placed him on a path of humor to combat and confront issues in the military and politics. Richard Zoglin, author of *Comedy at the Edge*, had this to say of Carlin: "He showed that stand-up comedy could be a noble calling, one that required courage and commitment and that could have an impact outside of its own little world."⁹

Humor and the War in Vietnam

In our own daily lives we find comedic moments to employ humor in tense situations. In an article by Harish C. Mehta, humor was employed extensively in the peace talks between the United States and Vietnam. After thousands of lives were lost, and the war's end seemed to be near, "both sides made light of the extremely serious issue of U.S. troop withdrawal."¹⁰ Mehta states that laughter is one of the only emotions that is noted in the transcripts of the peace talks in Paris, and it is mentioned several times when the delegation shared a laugh. Henry Kissinger and the North Vietnamese delegate employed humor not just to break the ice and build rapport with each other; both used humor to further their aims. Reminiscent of gallows humor—humor in the face of defeat, pain, or otherwise unfortunate circumstances—Kissinger and the U.S. negotiators often made jokes in recognition of the inability for the U.S. to win the war. Almost like a game of chess, both parties made jokes at each other's expense, riffing, bantering, and feeding off the other's jokes, attempting "to have the last laugh."¹¹ Kissinger and the U.S. would use their comedic moments to flex their still-strong military power, but the North Vietnamese officials matched their condescension with indignation, laughing at Kissinger's quips, and firing back with their own. This is reiterated in Mehta's article; he said, "the North Vietnamese diplomats used humor as a tool to argue, resist,

and oppose specific points in the draft agreement. Each side made fun of the policies and tactics of the other.”¹²

The Paris peace talks are not the only instance we see humor and comedy employed as a mechanism for confronting adversity and the horrors of the Vietnam War. Two very critically acclaimed shows tackled the idea of “black comedy,” or comedy that makes light of serious subject matter, like war. It is in the Vietnam years that we see two comedy series about war emerge, *Hogan’s Heroes* from 1965–1971, and *M*A*S*H* from 1972–1983. Both shows were critically acclaimed and held large audiences.

First to air was *Hogan’s Heroes* on CBS. The pilot episode aired September 17, 1965, and quickly became an extraordinarily popular show that balanced the serious subject matter of war with comedic aspects of the series. The show follows a company of soldiers who are inmates in a German prisoner of war camp during World War II. This program provides an interesting study of war and humor, as it is linked with two wars. While the 1940s and the Second World War represent the period the series is set in, the six years the show was in production coincide with the war in Vietnam.

The lead character for the program is Col. Robert Hogan who even in his imprisoned state remains an authority figure to his men and is respected by the soldiers and German officers. The first scene of the show sets up the humor and style that would carry the show on throughout the rest of its run. Sgt. Hans Georg Schultz, a bumbling portly man, is in charge of roll call for the POWs. While Shultz reads off the names, the soldiers who make up Hogan’s unit take off his hat and begin passing it around without Schultz realizing, all while Hogan distracts Schultz enough for a prisoner to escape and switch with an allied soldier on the outside. Although Hogan and his unit are prisoners of war, they have created a secret underground area to thwart the German forces and communicate with their allies. In the pilot episode, Hogan and his soldiers fool a German officer sent to spy on them into making a complete fool of himself. In almost any circumstance, Hogan is always one step ahead of the German officers. He is patronizing toward them, even telling the officer, “you are so clever,” to which the officer does not catch the sarcasm in his voice.¹³ The relationship between Hogan and Col. Wilhelm Klink, the German colonel in charge, displays the strength of the American forces over the enemy.¹⁴

The war in Vietnam represented a complete lack of control for the American people. Sons and husbands were being drafted into the armed forces to fight a war, which for many had no tangible reason to be fought. Unlike World War II, where the attack on Pearl Harbor galvanized the public into patriotism and the war effort, the war in Vietnam became widely condemned toward the later years of the conflict. Being labeled a prisoner of war is a very complex issue as well. For one, being at the mercy of the enemy and losing your free will is demoralizing for those captured. POWs must also deal with the shame and guilt that comes with being captured in the first place. *Hogan’s Heroes* played against past depictions of prisoners of war, changing the

representation with comedy. The German officers in the show are often portrayed as affable and incompetent, at the mercy of the cunning and confident Col. Hogan. Sgt. Hans Schwartz exemplifies this characteristic as the impressionable enemy soldier. Col. Wilhelm Klink and Hogan’s relationship in the show again lends itself to the idea of control and superiority. In a very funny and important early scene, Hogan and Col. Klink meet in the office to discuss punishment for the recent escape attempts. This early scene shows just how much control that Hogan has in the camp, despite being a prisoner. Hogan slyly manipulates the Colonel who we see is very malleable and prideful, into making decisions that he believes are his own, but really have been puppeteered by Hogan. An example is the escape attempt at the beginning of the episode. Klink intends to dole out harsh punishment but Hogan, the smart talker, convinces the Colonel that canceling the football game would be the most demoralizing and effective punishment, to which Klink agrees. Hogan’s adeptness and cleverness are again shown when he manages to open Klink’s locked cigar case ingeniously, then on his way out asks Klink for a light for the stolen cigar.¹⁵ The comedic representation of the German and American soldiers allows the viewer and the public to approach the subject of war and not shy away from thinking about it and discussing it.

Another hit series that blended war, comedy, and drama was the movie-turned-series, *M*A*S*H*. The program ran for eleven seasons, finishing its run in 1983 to a record-breaking 106 million viewers.¹⁶ It is still regarded as one of the greatest television shows of all time, and is forever part of our media history. Regardless of the change in the television landscape since 1983 when the show signed off, a majority of the country sat and watched the last episode of *M*A*S*H* live; there were no DVRs or other methods of recording the show. Only the Super Bowl compares to the shared viewing experience that the series garnered on its final run. How and why did a show set during the Korean War about an army hospital rivet the nation for eleven seasons?

*M*A*S*H* made its debut in late 1972, still several years before the end of the Vietnam War. Although the story was grounded in the Korean War, similar to *Hogan’s Heroes*, the Vietnam War was heavily influential in the narrative, as well as how the show was consumed and perceived. The benefits of a comedy series is that while the shows may have an overarching story where the characters develop over the season, each episode results in a resolution and a cathartic end to the issue presented. There is a comfort in tuning in each week, empathizing with the characters as they work together to solve the problem.

In Vietnam, the war dragged on for years, the population at home could not do more than protest and share their discontent about the war. They were unable to help their loved ones fighting across the sea, living in incredibly rough conditions in Vietnam. As the war progressed, the men being sent to die were barely of legal age. Discontent grew with each news

day as the stark images of war reached those in the U.S. In a time when little about the war was being resolved and confronted, tuning in to either program was an escape, as well as an opportunity to see progress in war, even if it was fiction.

“Standup Comics. All Veterans. Still Serving. One Joke at a Time”

The 1960s and ’70s were a tumultuous time in American history. Comedy flourished in response to the need to cope and express with the darkness of the era, rather than internalize it. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, again questioned our ability to laugh in times of utter tragedy. These attacks led the U.S. to declare war on Afghanistan, as well as the country of Iraq. In the days that followed the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the country was in shock and denial to the events that transpired that left this country shaken.

Thousands of men and women joined the armed forces and went overseas to fight for our country. How did those that served in the military use humor and comedy to combat the heaviness that comes with war and destruction? The documentary titled *Comedy Warriors: Healing Through Humor* attempts to deconstruct the power of humor for those who have served in the armed forces. The documentary follows five veterans as they prepare and write material for a comedic set that they will perform in front of an audience. Each warrior would work with several different coaches and writers, and with their help, the veterans create a set that confronts their war experiences and transforms it into a comedic work. Most of these veterans are amputees, soldiers with physical scars that distinguish them as veterans. All the veterans-turned-comics in the course of their training discuss the mental scars that are just as crippling as the loss of limbs or severe physical injury. A very funny and emotional scene in the documentary shows all the veterans together recounting their military and post-injury experiences. Their shared experiences of dealing with loved ones, strangers, post-traumatic stress, and the extensive mental injuries they have sustained dominate the conversation. Stephen Rice, a retired U.S. Army 1st Lieutenant, mentions the experiences he has had with his close family and friends. Rice mentions that they don’t understand or have the ability to comprehend the experiences that he has had. He also notes that often times they are too afraid to ask questions.¹⁷ Through humor Rice has been able to open the door for others to ask questions and to break down the wall of pity and awkwardness that people build up because of his amputation.

Darisso Smith is a veteran Army Captain and helicopter pilot. She is the only female in the group of veterans. Smith does not have the same level of visible injury as some of her peers have; however, the story of her military experiences was used heavily to develop her set. While discussing her experiences with the comedians, she touched on some really raw issues like substance abuse as a result of her military injuries. Darisse suffered severe lower back injury, which left her with

permanent damage to her left leg. Darisse, like her fellow warriors, explains the absolute crushing feeling of being an injured veteran. Many of the veterans recall wanting to feel like “a human being again,” not having to rely on those close to them to do simple tasks for them, or not feeling the depression of being severely injured and back home, unable to stand with those still fighting.¹⁸ Darisse also makes use of her experience of becoming addicted to painkillers during her recovery from her service in the military. Although these memories are certainly painful for her, she uses these experiences to connect with the audience about the secondary effects of war—to discuss the battle soldiers still face on their return to home, and the supposed normalcy that comes with homecoming.

In doing my research on soldiers who have found solace and healing through comedy, I found a group of veterans who became stand-up comedians following their service in the military. The GIs of Comedy is a group founded by Thom Tran, a veteran of the United States Army who after being wounded by sniper fire was eventually medically retired in 2005.¹⁹ After his military service ended, Tran admits that comedy saved his life. He began touring the United States performing sets and open mics until 2010 when he created the GIs of Comedy. Tran found it his next mission and directive to introduce the healing and cathartic power of comedy to other soldiers who may have experienced the same post-service depression that he faced. The tagline for the group is “STANDUP COMICS. ALL VETERANS. STILL SERVING. ONE JOKE AT A TIME.”²⁰ The veterans who make up the comedy troupe found a way to serve their country and their troops with comedy, making it another mission in their line of duty. The section of the tagline that says “STILL SERVING” is very important. The effects and experiences of military service do not evaporate as soon as soldiers set foot back on United States soil; it is a long road back to negotiating “normalcy” back into their own lives. The GIs’ mission is to help with this as much as they possibly can. Not only do these comedians perform for the citizens and veterans at home, they also have traveled back to Afghanistan and Iraq to perform their stand-up routines for the men and women still serving their country. The GIs also perform and team up with other organizations to promote the welfare and treatment of the returning veterans. These soldiers have made it their mission to continue serving their country using comedy.

Following the same line of thought as the GIs of Comedy, Bobby Henline, who appeared in the *Comedy Warriors* documentary as well as the *Time* short film about his stand-up, wants to use his comedic voice to help those men and women affected by the war. His mission is to make the crowd laugh and to perhaps change their experiences and ease the burden on the mind that war creates. The *Time* short film follows Bobby as he performs stand-up as well as his visits to the family of a fellow soldier that died in the roadside bomb that scarred Bobby. Henline’s propensity for humor disarms the audience, and invites them to see beyond the scars and dis-

figurement. When a woman comes up to Bobby to give him a kiss on the cheek, he replies “you know once you go cooked, you’re hooked?”²¹ The short film also shows how Bobby has used his humor to reach out to other burn victims, including a young boy he met during his recovery. With emotion in his voice, Bobby explains to the camera what motivates him to keep performing comedy. He says, “if I can help more people than those guys [Al Qaeda] have hurt, that’s one of the positive things that I think about when I’m in one of my own pity pots. Those guys would love to trade with me.”²²

Saturday Night Live and 9/11

This idea of a comedian’s feelings of purpose and necessity to perform is an interesting one. Following the tragic events of 9/11, New York and the country were in a state of shock, unable to comprehend how normalcy could ever be achieved after the nightmarish events of the terrorist attacks. New York is home to many venerable and respected comedy clubs in the country; The Comedy Cellar in Greenwich Village being one of them. It is also home to *Saturday Night Live*, a cultural institution in its own right. It is not surprising then, that the country looked to New York to answer the question: How are we going to laugh again?

In a video commemorating the ten-year anniversary of September 11th, CNN asked several well-known comedians about where they were when the attacks occurred and their experiences in groping with the aftermath, as well as finding a way to be funny again. Comedians like Bill Burr, Chris Hardwick, Marc Maron, and Rob Riggle speak earnestly about those days following the attacks on September 11th. Bill Burr recounts his experience living in New York at the time and the fear that enveloped the city in the days that followed. People were buying gas mask to prepare for attack and were still reeling from the atrocity on the country. Burr made a joke about how people should not be scared to be in their own homes, as their home would not be very high on the priority list of places that need to be bombed. Burr had the same fears as his peers. Undoubtedly he was affected by the attacks but his use of humor was as much for his appeasement of fear as for the others. As far as the other comedians in the interview, they reiterated that those in the audience wanted to laugh. Comedian Marc Maron could not help but comment on the “weird” laughing that he remembers hearing just a few days after the attacks. People were looking for a way to make sense of the destruction and chaos that was New York after September 11th.²³

In the anxiety-ridden weeks after 9/11, the late-night programs provided a much-needed return to the airwaves, bringing the country back into a sense of normalcy and providing a start to the healing process. Much like what was reiterated by the CNN interviews with comedians, the late-night shows on their return were quite unsure of how to proceed after the tragedy. Many asked whether anything would be funny after a tragedy like this, and many believed that it was not a time to

be funny at all. In *Live from New York*, Marci Klein, a producer at *SNL*, remembers going to Lorne Michaels and saying, “the first show can not happen. This is not a time to be funny. There is no way.”²⁴ This sentiment was shared by many and not just at *Saturday Night Live*. The other late-night shows centered in New York, like the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and the *Late Show with David Letterman*, had similar fears. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani urged the city of New York and its fine institutions to get back to work and to a normal way of life.²⁵ David Letterman started it off, airing just six days after the attacks, followed by Jon Stewart, Conan O’Brien, and *Saturday Night Live*, whose twenty-seventh season premiered on September 29.

In one of the most iconic cold opens in *SNL*’s history, Mayor Giuliani, surrounded by the firemen and first responders of NYC, solemnly addressed the nation. With absolute silence while he was speaking, Giuliani praised the heroes that put their lives on the line for their fellow citizens, proclaiming that in the face of terror, NYC rose to the challenge. He spoke of the city that was still standing and the institutions like *SNL* that would help the city heal. Finally, Lorne Michaels joined Mayor Giuliani on stage. Before Giuliani said the iconic phrase to kick off the show, Lorne asks the Mayor, “can we be funny?” To which Giuliani, without hesitation, replies, “why start now?”²⁶

Tragedy and pain, which is what war boils down to, is very isolating. Rather than discuss and confront pain, we often internalize it and let it fester and grow. The late-night shows and *SNL* fostered and reinforced community that was so desperately needed. The comedians and comedic institutions of New York showed solidarity toward the nation and provided an opportunity to confront the bevy of emotions that the country was feeling at the time. In a very emotional and personal monologue on his return to the air, Jon Stewart opened the show with a question, “are you okay?” He self-deprecates the notion of being a comedian whose job is to make jokes when there are the real stars, the first responders in NYC who selflessly risked their lives to help others. In a particularly poignant segment of his monologue, Stewart says, “a lot of folks have asked me, ‘What are you going to do when you get back? What are you going to say? I mean, jeez, what a terrible thing to have to do.’ And you know, I don’t see it as a burden at all. I see it as a privilege. I see it as a privilege and everyone here does.”²⁷ The intonation and emotion that catch in his voice make this statement very powerful. Stewart is aware that he has a responsibility as a humorist to do his best to help his audience negotiate that very turbulent time in the nation’s history.

For those comedians living in New York, performing stand-up was just as much for their own well-being as it was for those cities’ citizens looking for a laugh to escape the horror of the attack. In the documentary *Comedy Warriors*, one comedian refers to laughing as letting the steam cap off. Laughing gives us power over things that cause us pain. For the comedians who perform on the stage, many of whom are New York

natives, performing comedy was a way to have power over their grief. It was an opportunity to turn something damaging into something inventive; if it gets a laugh, so much the better. The comics and writers who helped the Comedy Warriors with their material urged the veterans to repurpose their grief and trauma and not worry about the audience. Lewis Black, a comedian known for his angry style of delivery, did not mince words with the veterans. He said as much as the audience matters, they really don't; telling the jokes you want to tell is the most important thing. Zack Galifianakis, another coach from *Comedy Warriors* with an offbeat style, reiterated these sentiments in much more colorful language. He said, "I don't mean to sound so cavalier with it, but fuck the audience."²⁸

Conclusion

Healing through humor for a comedian can only be done with a disregard for the audience. The comedians in *Comedy Warriors* and the GIs of Comedy are telling jokes that transform their experiences into something that will connect with the audience. If those jokes are not authentically being constructed and the trauma is not confronted, both the audience and comic do not gain anything from it. The audience may not have the scope of mind to be able to comprehend the traumatic experiences of war. It is the comic's personal connection to the material and the employment of humor that has the ability to heal both parties.

War is bleak and the need for creative works that aid in the process of rationalizing and coping are essential in our society. The comedic works of Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, and the TV series *Hogan's Heroes* and *M*A*S*H* functioned as buffers to the vile nature of war, at the same time providing commentary on the Vietnam War. Humor was a tool employed extensively in the Paris peace talks by both American and Vietnamese forces. Even in the wake of tragedy and loss of the Vietnam War, the United States looked to humor to help move on.

In a video recorded as part of a documentary on her life, Joan Rivers, one of the early female stand-up comics, argues with a heckler over what is funny and what is not. In the clip she makes a deaf joke about Helen Keller, and when the man yells, "that's not very funny," she lashes back that it is funny. Things that make us uncomfortable must be laughed at or where would we be? She poses this exact question to the audience, "where would we be after 9/11 if we didn't laugh? Think about it."²⁹ This question posed to the audience elicited a large applause, and she finished off with a snarky joke about Osama Bin Laden. By employing comedy and experiencing the communal effects of it, we have seen that it can be an extremely powerful tool in the healing process. A quote posted on the *Comedy Warriors: Healing Through Humor* website reads: "Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives."³⁰ Humor is a powerful tool that will continue to help us heal during times of war and tragedy. ♦

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AMERICAN IDENTITIES 401: WAR AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Anticommunist Killer

How the Murder Trials of Minh Van Lam Shaped the Image of the Perpetual Refugee

ELLIOT HAI-LONG LAM

This essay was written for Dr. John Ibson's War and American Culture course in the spring of 2014. Our assignment was to select an armed conflict in which the United States has been involved and investigate how a particular aspect of that conflict challenged, shaped, or reinforced the beliefs of Americans. I found that much of the scholarship on the Vietnam War focuses too much on American soldiers and American policymakers. As a result, the experiences of the Vietnamese who were displaced from their homeland and forced to live in exile in the United States are then glossed over, overlooked, and rendered unworthy of critical attention.

conflict, particularly for those who have made their way to the United States. Though they never anticipated having to emigrate after fighting alongside a hegemon, the Vietnamese arrived in an America that was less than keen on adopting them into their social fabric. This reluctance could be seen even before large-scale resettlement of refugees ever took place, from Congress's failure to appropriate the necessary funds to relocate and assist South Vietnamese nationals after the Fall of Saigon in 1975 despite urging from President Gerald Ford.¹

In 2008, scholar Linda Trinh Võ wrote, "the American public still associates Vietnamese Americans with 'that war,' which is reinforced when politicians and the media compare the current quagmire in Iraq as President Bush's 'Viet Nam.'"² Thus, the word "Vietnam" remained toxic in public discourse for many years, and U.S. involvement in Vietnam has changed the cultural understanding of the Southeast Asian country to denote a challenge to American hegemony. That no other student in our seminar considered how U.S. wars have disproportionately affected native peoples and people of color reaffirms how mainstream understanding of armed conflicts have rendered diverse perspectives largely invisible.³ Now that many of these South Vietnamese nationals have now become naturalized Americans, so too have their stories and ordeals.

There are many reasons why the Vietnam War remains tarred in the American psyche. For one, American involvement in the conflict was heavily political, leaving millions of Americans with the impression that Washington elites were so out of touch with the rest of the country that they were willing to send American soldiers in harm's way in order to win reelection. However, it is too often forgotten what the Vietnamese have endured in the aftermath of the

In the last decade new literature has emerged which sought to fill the void of missing Vietnamese experiences during the Vietnam War. *Catfish and Mandala*, by Andrew X, and Pham and Doung Van Mai Elliott's *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* were some of the more notable books originally written in English by

Vietnamese Americans, which sought to provide a glimpse into the Vietnamese perspective on the war.⁴ Nevertheless, most of these experiences speak to the times when the conflict was taking place in Vietnam and little attention has been paid to the experiences of Vietnamese Americans after the war and how their lives in the United States were affected by the conflict they sought to escape. This research paper seeks to continue the narrative and fill the void by picking up from where other scholars and writers have left off.

The murder of Edward Cooperman and the subsequent trial surrounding his death is an important illustration of how the Vietnam War and the ideological battle accompanying it remained unfinished and continually contested in the United States. This paper will argue that the individuals who believed Cooperman's death to be a political assassination were unable to see Minh Van Lam and the Vietnamese American community separately from the ideologically driven struggle they had survived less than a decade earlier. This conflation of national origin and unpopular conflict caused the Vietnamese community to symbolically surrender their rights as citizens by declaring themselves apolitical, thus reinforcing the racialized image of the perpetual "foreigner within" who is always seen as incongruous to the concept of "American" even if the individual in question was born in the United States and has family that has been living there for several generations.⁵ As I will later discuss in my paper, this particular racialization deviates from the traditional sense of the "perpetual foreigner" in that Vietnamese Americans were not only seen as perpetual foreigners but perpetual refugees, unable to escape from their past as exiles from a war-torn country.⁶ The idea of the perpetual refugee manifests itself through the way in which the national press characterized Minh Van Lam and the assertions made by Edward Cooperman's friends and family.

On Saturday, October 13, 1984, Edward Lee Cooperman was found dead in his office at Cal State Fullerton by his former student Min Van Lam.⁷ Lam told police that he discovered Cooperman's body when he arrived at his office, but after six hours of questioning, the police arrested Lam when they found "inconsistencies in [his] statements and physical evidence at the scene."⁸ Lam later revealed that he and Cooperman were "wrestling" and the gun accidentally went off as Cooperman grabbed his arm.⁹ Prosecutors later alleged that Lam attempted to make the death look like a suicide in order to hide his own complicity in the incident.¹⁰

As much as Lam did to draw unwelcome scrutiny to himself, Cooperman was not just any professor; he was one of the first Americans to travel to Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon and had substantial connections with the communist government in Hanoi.¹¹ Before his untimely death, he had worked with the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to conduct research on the effects of Agent Orange in addition to his work with

the National League of Families to help families recover the bodies of American soldiers killed in Vietnam.¹² These "scientific exchanges," however, were not always legal. From January 1981 to November 1983, Cooperman was granted seven licenses by the U.S. Commerce Department to send materials to Vietnam.¹³ At that time, the United States still had a trade embargo against Vietnam, preventing legal trade between the two countries unless special permission was granted. Though the licenses only allowed him to send "humanitarian aid," records found after Cooperman's death show that he may have shipped Apple computers and video surveillance equipment to Hanoi. Considering the revolutionary capability of computer technology during the 1980s, these materials would have been much more "sophisticated" to pass as humanitarian aid.¹⁴

Cooperman's concern for Vietnam and his collaboration with the Socialist Republic were not always welcome by the Vietnamese exile community. In 1977, he organized a movie exhibition of the war that some in Little Saigon saw as being sympathetic to the Communist regime in Hanoi. As tensions were already simmering for some time, the Vietnamese community felt it necessary to distance themselves from Cooperman's murder. After Lam was arrested, the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) at Cal State Fullerton held a press conference to make two points absolutely clear: that Lam was innocent until proven guilty and that the incident was not politically motivated.¹⁵ Speaking at the press conference, VSA president Hau Viet Dinh acknowledged that there were political differences between Vietnamese students and Cooperman, but "Vietnamese students had only dealt with the instructor in a 'teacher-student' relationship." The Vietnamese Student Association was not the only entity concerned with such an association. Jocelyn Nguyen, who was then a business student, was afraid of the fallout that could occur if people started making sweeping generalizations between Lam and the community at large: "What worries me is the negative reaction other students might have toward Vietnamese students. I think it would put a very bad image on Vietnamese students at Cal State Fullerton. I can't believe it happened and I hope no animosity will happen."¹⁶

Rather than focusing on the consequences, members of Lam's local community were questioning his complicity, maintaining that he was "well liked by all of his friends and would have had to completely change to commit a murder." Lam's former teacher, Hue Khanh Nguyen, described Lam as a "hard working student," who was "very caring for his family, especially because he did not have a father." Hector Gutierrez, the reporter who interviewed staff at the high school Lam had attended, made it a point to ask those who knew Lam whether they thought politics had anything to do with Cooperman's death. While Nguyen admitted not knowing Lam's political persuasion, Trung Le, who Gutierrez describes as Westminster High School's liaison to the

Vietnamese community, said “Vietnamese students are only involved in campus activities and politics never enter the classrooms.” John Dang, who was a senior, said he did not believe Lam could have committed the murder because of the “respect Vietnamese students have for the educational system.” Dang opined that “Vietnamese students always look up to teachers because of the work they do for us.” Even the school’s dean of attendance, Rosemarie Whitworth, said “Vietnamese students are politically passive in high school and are only interested in school.”¹⁷ Whatever the intentions of those who Gutierrez interviewed were, it was clear they wanted everyone to know that Lam could not have possibly murdered Cooperman, and, even if he did, it definitely was not for political reasons.

The apprehensiveness the community felt over a potential backlash was not unfounded. There certainly were people who did believe politics was the motivating force behind Cooperman’s death, and they made no attempt to hide their beliefs. Most notable among these was Anthony Russo, who claimed that Cooperman’s murder was the result of “the United States’ vindictive policy toward Vietnam.”¹⁸ By this time, Russo was already a known personage in the national press from his involvement in leaking the Pentagon Papers a decade earlier. Speaking to reporter Jonathan Volzke, Russo said he believed Cooperman’s killing was “very likely a conspiracy… Ed represented a link to Vietnam that threatened a lot of people—people who act and think like the peace accords were never signed.”¹⁹ Unabashedly, Russo went further, proclaiming that Cooperman’s death “reflects Constitutional rights that are being chilled by right-wing terror spreading throughout the Vietnamese community.”²⁰ Russo essentially made the assertion that Cooperman became a victim of Vietnamese exile politics for openly exercising his first amendment rights. This in turn made the Vietnamese community represent the roadblock between the American male and his citizenship rights by preventing Cooperman from freely voicing his support for Vietnam. By drawing a broad association between the obstruction of civil liberties and Vietnamese political extremism, Russo effectively raised anxieties about a group of immigrants marred by unpopular discourse and created a call to arms for nativists to fight back against an emerging community. This call to arms also made many view the Vietnamese immigrant community as the antithesis of citizenship.

Besides that, Russo publicly made the connection everyone in Little Saigon was afraid of: that Cooperman’s death was somehow related to a string of other Vietnamese political assassinations. On January 14, 1985, Russo told the *New York Times* that a couple from San Francisco who was murdered the year before, Ngu Yen Van and Pham Thi Luy, were known friends of Cooperman.²¹ Another article in the *Daily Titan*’s October 17 edition corroborates this claim, reporting that Cooperman’s colleague in the physics depart-

ment, Roger Dittman, said Cooperman “had been warned by a friend from San Francisco that two men from a Texas hit squad were here to get him.”²² The sequential way in which Russo mentions Luy and Van’s deaths as happening not too long before Cooperman’s suggests that the murders were most likely premeditated and organized by the same group of people. It was later revealed that a group known as the Vietnamese Organization to Exterminate Communists and Restore the Nation (VOECRN) claimed responsibility for Luy and Van’s death. VOECRN also claimed responsibility for the assassination of Nguyen Dam Phong in Houston in 1982 and later claimed responsibility for the assassination of Tap Van Pham in Garden Grove in 1987.²³ A third assassination in Virginia in 1990 was later linked to VOECRN after investigators discovered that the victim’s name, Triet Le, was found on a hit list the organization left at the murder scene in Houston. All of these assassinations involved journalists who wrote material deemed pro-Hanoi, or were publicly critical of Vietnamese anticommunist organizations operating in the United States.²⁴

Despite several assassinations taking place in Vietnamese communities, the activities of the Vietnamese Organization to Exterminate Communists and Restore the Nation did not catch the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation until 1992, when it opened up a federal racketeering and terrorism probe into VOECRN.²⁵ According to reporter Nick Schou, files released after a Freedom of Information Act request revealed that the FBI was more interested in investigating suspected communist activities in the Vietnamese community since the 1970s than they were in looking into anticommunist terrorism.²⁶ The records show that despite the ideals of due process and the rule of law the United States prides itself on, in the Vietnamese exile community ideological actions that are in line with the interests of the state can be overlooked while those that are deemed a threat to the state will be given extra scrutiny. More importantly, by putting an extremist organization in the same narrative as three murders, Russo not only politicized Cooperman’s death but also strengthened an unwanted association between an entire immigrant community and the political baggage that followed them to their new homeland. If the Vietnamese community wanted to be seen separately from the politics that ravaged their war-torn country it would appear as if this task has become more challenging.

Russo was not the only one voicing concerns that Cooperman’s death was politically motivated. Leonard Weinglass, an attorney described by reporter Walt Baranger as a longtime friend of Cooperman, insisted that the police continue to search for political motives behind Cooperman’s death.²⁷ Weinglass told Baranger he believed “groups” were “trying to silence our ties with Vietnam,” referring to him and Cooperman.

The trial of Minh Van Lam and the events leading up to it illustrate how Cooperman's associates attempted to portray the physics professor's death as an assassination as early as five days after Cooperman's death. When his friends had suggested that politics were behind his killing, Fullerton Police Lieutenant Lee DeVore maintained that Cooperman's death "does not appear to be politically motivated."²⁸ By October 23, more than a week after the incident, faculty members on campus began to complain about the lack of vigor in the investigation, calling it "lethargic."²⁹ Speaking at the memorial service, Roger Dittman, Cooperman's colleague in the physics department, said he was asked "not to turn this into a forum to demand authorities to do a better job, a more coherent job than they have to this point." Dittman's remarks reveal that there was an aspect to the murder that several members of the faculty wanted investigated but law enforcement had ignored. While Alan May, Lam's defense attorney, brought to light new evidence in a manner that mitigated his client's guilt, the prosecution was not pursuing what appeared to be the only plausible explanation for Lam to kill Cooperman. Thus, the lack of a motive in Cooperman's murder left other court officials scratching their heads. On November 7, after five days of preliminary hearings, Judge Daniel T. Brice admitted to being baffled by the lack of a motive provided by the prosecution.³⁰ Four days later, the *New York Times* reported that faculty members at Cal State Fullerton protested the incident, the trial, and the investigation presumably because the prosecution failed to provide the motive they all believed: "Dr. Cooperman had been assassinated by anticomunists in the local Vietnamese community who were unhappy with his open support of North Vietnam."³¹ The report prompted Lieutenant DeVore to reaffirm that the police investigation determined that the death "stemmed from the personal relationship between the two men." Unconvinced, history professor Sheldon Maram told the *Times* that he and other faculty members would request a federal grand jury investigation if local law enforcement did not look into "the strong possibility that [Cooperman] was a victim of political assassination."³²

If Cooperman was murdered as part of a larger conspiracy, as many of his associates had suggested, it would have marked the first instance in which a white (non-Vietnamese) individual was killed in a series of politically motivated assassinations linked to the Vietnamese exile community in their unending battle against communism. The amount of national news coverage Cooperman's murder received can be contrasted with the news coverage of Vietnamese journalists who were assassinated in the same decade. Writing in the *American Journalism Review*, William Kleinknecht revealed that the national press did not pay much attention to the killings of Vietnamese journalists, despite the trans-national implications of their deaths.³³ Additionally, the FBI did not reopen their investigations into the deaths of

these journalists until 1995, after the Committee to Protect Journalists released their report indicating that Vietnamese journalists were more likely than any other type of reporter to be assassinated on U.S. soil.³⁴ This disparity in news coverage and government action suggests that the state and the institutions that can shape the interests of the state will only take necessary actions for those who are deemed a part of the body politic. As the Vietnamese in America were not considered true citizens, the state and its institutions did not see much need for redress, further attaching color to the concept of citizenship and reinforcing the view that "Vietnamese" meant "refugee." Moreover, attaching a political motive to Cooperman's murder also would have given the jury a plausible motive for Lam to want to kill Cooperman, thereby increasing the likelihood of a murder conviction. As reporters Jerry Hicks and Mark Landsbaum pointed out, California penal code allows juries to consider the absence of a motive in the defendant's favor.³⁵ Most importantly, tying politics to Cooperman's murder would have solidified an already established association between a vulnerable group of immigrants and the highly unpopular armed conflict they had narrowly escaped only a few years earlier.

It can also be argued that presenting Vietnamese students as apolitical is a political act in itself. If a political act is defined as an action that seeks to benefit the status or circumstance of an individual or community, then the Vietnamese community was indeed engaging in political acts. In the November 7 edition of the *Daily Titan*, reporter Hector Gutierrez wove details of the Edward Cooperman killing into a feature piece on the Vietnamese Student Association's cultural event, *Quan Mo*.³⁶ Although VSA president Hau Viet Dinh said the event was simply "an occasion for Vietnamese students to come together for a friendly gathering," Gutierrez claimed that the event was an attempt to fill the void of "love" toward Vietnamese students in the aftermath of Cooperman's murder. The front-page story, whose headline read, "A MESSAGE OF LOVE," underscored Gutierrez's presumption, although nothing taking place during the cultural event could have been described by using the word "love"; the words *Quan Mo* translate to "dreaming café" in English. Gutierrez suspected that animosity was directed at Vietnamese students after the murder, but when asked, sophomore Thu Nguyen said that she had not experienced any "bad feelings from American students." By portraying the American students as regular and the Vietnamese students as victims outside what is considered normal, Gutierrez created a boundary further dividing an immigrant group in a time when nativist suspicions were already growing. That Gutierrez continued to frame a feature article on a cultural event in terms of how it was affected by a student from the same cultural background despite most students telling him the two were not related reinforces this boundary, though a more sophisticated reader

may recognize that the choice was a deliberate attempt to make the front page story more salient. Nevertheless, the VSA was able to reaffirm their apolitical posture by the end of the article by maintaining that “politics has nothing to do with [our] club.” Though Gutierrez mentions one student who believed the VSA engaged in political acts, he acknowledged that the VSA itself “remained emphatic about their non-involvement in politics.”³⁷ Regardless of the true intention behind the Vietnamese Student Association’s actions, one cannot deny the positive benefits in taking such a position. Portraying oneself as apolitical at a time when there were damning consequences for a politically motivated wrongdoing serves no greater purpose than to maintain a group’s innocence by deflecting negative attention away from the individual and his community.

Besides the steps taken within the Vietnamese community, the actions of Lam’s attorney, Alan May, gained widespread notoriety and criticism throughout the course of the investigation and trial. May was formerly a Green Beret lieutenant and helicopter tail gunner during the Vietnam War.³⁸ He worked for Richard Nixon during both his time as vice president and again after Nixon won the presidency. Coincidentally, Nixon tasked May with preparing the Justice Department’s case against Anthony Russo and Daniel Ellsberg for their involvement in the Pentagon Papers scandal. The *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* reported that May was responsible for coordinating information between the Central Intelligence Agency, the FBI, State Department, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement on “radicals.”³⁹ The *Worker’s Vanguard* presumed that the time May spent in Nixon’s Justice Department gave him the necessary experience to create a misinformation campaign that allowed him to “justify deadly violence against leftists.”⁴⁰ Evidence thus far suggests that Lam’s defense team shared similar ideological beliefs. However, it still remains unclear whether everyone sympathetic to Lam’s cause was involved in a conspiracy or cover up.

While some believed that Alan May’s council precluded the notion that race was the driving force that split the community in two, because of his status as a white male, his decision to serve as council is actually evidence that U.S. imperialism works against people of the Global South. May was not defending Lam so much as he was defending the legacy of American hegemony. Working with May on his defense team was Bill Cassidy, a self identified anticommunist “Cold War warrior.”⁴¹ Though he never proclaimed himself as staunchly anticommunist as his colleague, the former Green Beret spent a great deal of time defending Vietnamese immigrants in court before and after Lam’s trial. Thus, his actions suggest that he supported the position of the state in fighting a global war against communism. By extension, he likely would have also supported the anticommunist South Vietnamese regime and those who em-

igrated to the United States. To May, the successful criminal prosecution of anticommunist Vietnamese immigrants would have represented a defeat to the anticommunist movement on the domestic front and a potential acknowledgment of defeat in the global war against communism. For the Vietnamese immigrants, the Western ideologies that divided their nation and brought their country to war were dividing them from their native-born neighbors in the America. In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe writes, “the material legacy of the repressed history of U.S. imperialism in Asia is borne out of the ‘return’ of Asian immigrants to the imperial center. In this sense, these Asian Americans are determined by the history of U.S. involvements in Asia and the historical racialization of Asians in the United States.”⁴² Although the Vietnamese in America escaped the communist takeover of their country, they were unable to escape the ideologies imposed upon them in their native land. Furthermore, May’s service as the defense council exposed the fact that the newly arrived Vietnamese immigrants lacked professionals within their own community who could truly represent their interests in the public arena in the way that an attorney like May could, revealing, in effect, their powerlessness among other full citizens.

Edward Cooperman’s wife Klaaske also criticized the police’s investigation and the prosecution during the trial. By the end of the trial on February 20, 1985, the lack of motive for Cooperman’s murder resulted in a hung jury.⁴³ Klaaske told the *Los Angeles Times* she was “not surprised” by the jury’s inability to reach a verdict, assailing the prosecution for not arguing that her husband’s death was a political assassination. In fact, the word “assassination” was not allowed to be used during the trial. According to the *Lodi News-Sentinel*, when Roger Dittman testified in court he told the jury that Cooperman was targeted by “political assassins” because of his “humanitarian and scientific ties to Communist Hanoi.”⁴⁴ But before the court could proceed with hearings the following week Judge Richard Beacom told the jury to disregard the word because there was no evidence to support Dittman’s claim. Regardless, several of Dittman’s associates lauded him for voicing the assassination theory as he left the courthouse that day.⁴⁵ When the state rested its case against Lam, Klaaske told the *Times* that she would “reserve judgment until the end of the trial,” but even when she testified she subtly hinted at a political motive behind her husband’s murder.⁴⁶ (Although the judge had prohibited the word “assassination” from being used during the trial, the *Times* report indicates that Klaaske raised the assassination theory while giving her testimony without actually saying “political assassination.”)

A month after the trial, Minh Van Lam was finally convicted of manslaughter in a second trial without a jury.⁴⁷ Although the prosecutor sought a first-degree murder charge in the first trial, Judge Beacom only allowed the prosecution

to pursue a second-degree murder charge the second time around since no new evidence could be provided. Alan May, Lam's attorney, saw the manslaughter charge as a success. However, Cooperman's associates met on campus the next day to protest the verdict and promised to continue pushing the political assassination theory. Dissatisfied with the verdict, Klaaske Cooperman filed a civil lawsuit against Lam alleging intentional homicide and criminal negligence.⁴⁸ Asked what she thought of Lam, Klaaske told reporter Jerry Hicks that she did not think Lam was that important; believing her husband's death was an assassination, she said, "I want to find the ones who ordered him to kill my husband."⁴⁹ Before the verdict was even announced a group called the "Committee for Justice for Professor Ed Cooperman" began organizing among Cooperman's associates and those sympathetic to his cause. Professor Frank Verges, from the philosophy department, believed the second trial was a "charade," and suggested the lawyers in the district attorney's office take his course in logic. Verges cautioned those who had masterminded the assassination, saying "the spirit of Ed Cooperman lives on" and "other professors would not be intimidated."⁵⁰ Despite the Fullerton Police Department and the County District Attorney's reiterating the lack of evidence to suggest that Cooperman's death was a political assassination, Cooperman's associates were hell-bent on proving otherwise. Regardless of whether or not Lam's actions on that October afternoon were politically motivated, Cooperman's associates and the "Committee for Justice for Professor Ed Cooperman" did not consider the effect their campaign would have in further marginalizing an immigrant community already damaged by psychological, geographical, and cultural displacement.

It is imperative to understand how the news coverage of Cooperman's murder shaped the national understanding of Vietnamese immigrants as perpetual refugees. In his study on the Vietnamese experience in America, Paul James Rutledge defines refugees as "persons who are outside their country of nationality and who are unwilling to return because of persecution or anticipated persecution."⁵¹ Theoretically, an individual's status as a refugee is only temporary until he or she returns to his or her native country or resettles in another. Under U.S. law, a refugee can apply for legal permanent resident status after one year of being admitted into the United States.⁵² Individuals with legal permanent resident status after five years are then eligible to apply for citizenship. At the time of Cooperman's death, Minh Van Lam had lived in the United States for six years.⁵³ Regardless of his citizenship status, he was already considered resettled by the time he was tried, yet several major newspapers ran stories with headlines such as "REFUGEE ENTERS INNOCENT PLEA," "VIET REFUGEE ALTERED SLAYING STORY," "VIET REFUGEE'S TRIAL IN PROFESSOR SLAYING OPENS IN CALIFORNIA," "VIETNAMESE REFUGEE'S

MURDER CASE GOES TO JURY," and "NEW TRIAL SCHEDULED FOR REFUGEE."⁵⁴ In the many stories written about Edward Cooperman's murder, the *Los Angeles Times* described Lam as a refugee on at least eight different occasions, and the *New York Times* described him that way at least once.⁵⁵

By framing Lam's murder trials in terms of his "refugee" identity, journalists were, inadvertently or not, asking their readers to evaluate the murder in the context of Ham's refugee status over any political motivations for the crime. By the time Lam was ultimately convicted in March of 1985, it was difficult not to associate Vietnamese immigrants with their former status as refugees, due in part to the extensive amount of press coverage given to the Cooperman death and Lam trials and the way in which the stories were framed. Lam was no longer the communist killer of Fullerton but America's communist-killing Vietnamese refugee. This inability to see past the former identity of Vietnamese Americans lies at the heart of what it means to be a perpetual refugee in that they are inextricably bound to their pasts as survivors of civil strife, French-colonialism, and U.S. imperialism.

In *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees*, Yen Le Espiritu ponders why the term "refugee" "continues to circumscribe American understanding of the Vietnamese, even when Vietnamese in the United States now constitute multiple migrant categories."⁵⁶ Her latest book further develops the discipline of critical refugee studies, conceptualizing the refugee "not as an object of investigation but rather as a paradigm whose function is to establish and make intelligible a wider set of problems." Espiritu points out that by the early 1980s, the United States began to implement stricter asylum policies for Vietnamese refugees. Preference was given to applicants with ties to the South Vietnamese government, U.S. institutions, or those who had spent time in reeducation camps. This policy change not only diminished the multifaceted histories of Vietnamese refugees in the United States, but also resulted in the development of an overwhelmingly anti-communist diasporic community, creating the necessary conditions where anticommunist rhetoric and violence could fester to epic proportions.⁵⁷

Ultimately, the death of Edward Cooperman and the subsequent murder trials of Minh Van Lam became contests between two polarized communities attempting to define Cooperman's death: the native-born American mainstream in their attempt to portray his death as a politically motivated assassination and the newcomer immigrant community who wanted desperately not to be seen as a nuisance in the early years of their postwar adjustment into American life. Despite a lack of financial resources, cultural capital, and political connections, the Vietnamese exile community pushed back against accusations of ideologically driven foul play and present themselves as

peaceful and harmless.

While the 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a series of assassinations in Vietnamese communities, anticommunist sentiment moved away from violence-based action in favor of more collectivized demonstrations by the late 1990s. For the first generation who arrived in the United States able to maintain both the native and adopted cultures, and the second generation who more easily assimilated into the mainstream, Vietnamese anticommunism has become less a reason to punish Hanoi sympathizers and more a way to remember the experiences of their parents during the war.⁵⁸ Instead of demanding an end to the Socialist Republic, younger generations of Vietnamese Americans are focusing their efforts on improving human rights conditions in Vietnam and raising the quality of life in their parents' country of origin.⁵⁹ Nonviolent anticommunist demonstrations signaled a shift away from assassinations and violence in the Vietnamese American community while serving as an acknowledgment that the strategy of maintaining an apolitical posture was unsuccessful.

Unfortunately, the legacy of the perpetual refugee continues to live on, transcending the confines of the Vietnamese community onto newer immigrant communities. In 2013, the *Orange County Register* printed an editorial in their November 22 edition, cautioning the United States' over-generosity in permitting the immigration of Afghan refugees.⁶⁰ They used the fallacy of hasty generalization to make the case for tighter asylum policies:

We must not forget the lesson of alleged Boston marathon bombers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. They were only small children when allowed into the country as refugees, and yet grew up with a burning desire to punish their adopted country for crimes they believed were committed in other parts of the world.⁶¹

The editorial claims that the United States has always been "incredibly generous" to those "seeking to leave chaos," but "if we also import sectarian violence to the heart of America, we will be doing no service to either the American public or the refugee population." Although the *Orange County Register's* editorial board recognizes the inherent risk in allowing Afghan refugees to resettle in the United States, they failed to see the role that U.S. foreign policy has played in necessitating the forced migration of native peoples from their lands. A few days after Edward Cooperman was murdered, Anthony Russo said "the United States government portrayed the war as a civil conflict with the North and South Vietnamese, but it was clearly U.S. and French neocolonialism."⁶² He may have been right, but by being unable to see the Vietnamese community in Orange County as separate from the conflict they tried to escape from, he created a new problem for the people he and Cooperman were supposedly trying to help. ♦

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2. Linda Trinh Võ, "Constructing a Vietnamese American Community: Economic and Political Transformation in Little Saigon, Orange County," *Amerasia Journal* 34, no. 3 (2008): 85.

3. Laurie Bui's research is on how Asian women are represented in war films. When I had initially written this, she had not yet given her presentation.

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5. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.

6. Catherine Minye Fung, "Perpetual Refugee: Memory of Vietnam War in Asian American Literature," (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2010), ii. A few hours after writing this, I thought that there could be a possibility someone else had coined this term before I did, and I was right.

7. The *Lodi (CA) News-Sentinel* reports that Cooperman was killed on October 13, 1984. Other reports indicate he was killed on October 16, 1984; Dan Trotta, "Student Jailed in Campus Killing," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 16, 1984.

8. Jonathan Volzke, "Police End Suspect Search," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 17, 1984.

9. Jonathan Volzke, "Lam Enters Not Guilty Plea," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 18, 1984.

10. Walt Baranger, "Cooperman, Lam Had Financial Ties," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 19, 1984.

11. Trotta, "Student Jailed."

12. Ibid.

13. Susan Tiffet, "Putting the Victim on Trial," *Time*, January 7, 1985.

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15. Hector Gutierrez, "Suspect Called 'Good Friend' of Cooperman," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 16, 1984.

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18. Jonathan Volzke, "Watergate Figure Hints Conspiracy," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 16, 1984.

19. Jonathan Volzke, "Arraignment for Lam Today," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 17, 1984.

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21. "Vietnamese Faces Coast Trial in Killing of College Teacher," *New York Times*, January 14, 1985.

22. Jonathan Volzke "Police End Suspect Search," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 17, 1984

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25. Nick Schou, "Invisible Enemies," *OC Weekly* (Costa Mesa, CA), March 11, 1999.

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29. Walt Baranger and Jonathan Volzke, "Police Question Lawyer's

- Claims," *Daily Titan* (Fullerton, CA), October 23, 1984.
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- 31.** "Murder Trial Set in Coast Slaying," *New York Times*, November 11, 1984.
- 32.** Ibid.
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- 37.** Ibid.
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- 40.** Ibid.
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- 44.** "Assassination Ruled out in Murder of Fullerton Professor," *Lodi (CA) News-Sentinel*, February 5, 1985.
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- 50.** Ibid.
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- 55.** *Los Angeles Times*, 1984–85; *New York Times*, 1984–85.
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AMERICAN IDENTITIES

301: AMERICAN CHARACTER

Yearning for the Other Half

Disclosing Women's Contributions to American History

SARA ROBERTS

This essay was written for Dr. Sharon Sekhon's American Character course in the spring of 2014. I was assigned to find three examples of women who I believe define the "American" experience and compare them with the representation of women in American popular culture. In my essay I bring women to the forefront of American history, with the hope that doing so will create a more balanced perspective on the American experience as well as empower women in their fight to be heard.

As any student of American Studies or U.S. History can tell you, our textbooks predominantly highlight the political achievements of white men. However, if we wish to gain a more well-rounded, egalitarian perspective on history it is imperative to include the histories of women and minorities in the conversation. In particular, excluding women's contributions to American history perpetuates the narrative of male dominance and implies that only one thread of history matters. However, by examining the lives of Mamie Till, Madonna Thunder Hawk, and Maria Hwang, it becomes apparent that women do have a fundamental place in American history.

On September 3, 1955, a mother decided to have an open casket funeral for her murdered son. In the casket laid a boy who was so severely beaten and mutilated that he was

unrecognizable. Throughout the day thousands of Chicago residents came to see the body, wailing and fainting at the sight. The boy was Emmett Till, son of Mamie Till, and the atrocious murder helped spark the civil rights movement. The bravery of Mamie Till to expose the horror of what was done to her son helped bring about one of the greatest social revolutions in American history; it placed the African American struggle for equality at the forefront of the American social consciousness. But underneath the racial context of Till's murder lies an important gender statement: the acts of women can trigger revolution and improvement in American society.¹

In fact, women have often been at the center of social revolution in America. In February 1973, hundreds of Indian men and women staged a protest at Wounded Knee. Among them was Madonna Thunder Hawk. She echoed the sentiments of many of her female counterparts when she declared: "I knew that we were making history for our people. It didn't all happen in the 1800s. We're still fighting in the modern day...it was a continuation, and that's why I was not afraid. I was not afraid."² However, the fearlessness demonstrated by Till and Thunder Hawk is not a trait exclusive to women who have their roots in America.

In his book *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*, author Gary Okihiro describes the story of a Korean Woman named Maria Hwang, who—after finding out her husband had taken in a concubine—declared to her husband: "I am no longer going to live with you, I am going to take my three children to America and educate them. I shall become a wonderful woman!"³ Upon arriving in the United States, she worked on a sugar plantation by day and tended to clothing at night, earning enough money to put her son through law school.

Hwang sacrificed the physical security of her life in Korea in order to pursue a path of self-affirmation. By including this woman in his book, Okihiro debunks the myth that women—particularly Asian women—are submissive and dependent on men. The abruptness of this woman's declaration to her husband demonstrates that independence and dominance are as much a part of a woman's character as they are a part of a man's.

However, the myths Okihiro works to debunk are not exclusive to Asian and Asian American women; they are the same myths that have historically been associated with women in general. But Okihiro's focus on Asian and Asian American women raises some interesting questions. If Asian and Asian American women—who are more often than not typecast as being the most submissive of all types of women—demonstrate strength, independence, and self-affirmation, then who is really determining the nature of female identity? If women are continually breaking the stereotype of what it means to be a woman—such as the three I mentioned have—then who is really writing the rule book? Furthermore, if female figures such as Thunder Hawk, Till, and Hwang are denied their rightful place in American history, what effect does this have on women in the long run?

The 2012 movie *Miss Representation* provides some answers to these pertinent questions. The United States has historically been a nation controlled by white men; every aspect of life—the news, media, and especially the government—are centered around a white male perspective. As American society becomes increasingly bombarded with media, the voices of women are continually distorted, if not completely ignored. In effect, a very select group—consisting of white males—is able to exert its self-prescribed power in order to decide the way of life for the majority; this includes women, who make up 51 percent of the population. This power is exerted in avenues such as the Internet, magazines, movies, advertising, and television.

The *Miss Representation* trailer states that on average teens spend ten hours and forty-five minutes a day consuming some form of media. During this time they are presented with hyper-sexualized images of women that appear to be highly uneducated and dependent on satisfying men. Thus, a media that subjugates and demeans women produces a population that perpetuates their marginalization. In the trailer, Jennifer Pozner echoes this sentiment: “the fact that media are so limiting and so derogatory to the most powerful women in the country, then what does this say about media’s ability to take any woman in America seriously?”⁴

The answer to this question can be found by looking at the presence of women in politics. *Miss Representation* states that only 17 percent of Congress is comprised of women—which ranks the United States ninetieth in the

world in terms of women in national legislatures—and the United States has never elected a female into the Oval Office. There remains a prominent belief that women cannot hold power responsibly; they are too prone to “PMS and mood swings.”⁵ However, if the people of America were taught about the lives of Madonna Thunder Hawk, Mamie Till, and Maria Hwang they would discover what women are truly capable of.

The *Miss Representation* trailer begins with a quote by Alice Walker that declares: “The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”⁶ If young girls were surrounded by female figures such as the three women I have mentioned, instead of powerful males and submissive, secondary females, they would not grow up to feel insecure and powerless; they would grow up to feel empowered and important. However, young women in American society are consistently taught to believe their importance depends upon fulfilling the criteria set forth by men, and are, as a result, raised to ignore their own power and capabilities. The continued perpetuation of a male-driven society that distorts and ignores the ever-growing voice of women demonstrates just how much women are devalued in American culture.

By denying women their rightful place in American history, they are denied recognition and ownership for their contributions. In essence, they are excluded as members of American society. The effect of this marginalization is expansive: a limited, one-sided perspective is the only voice heard while a great majority of people are silenced and future generations are indoctrinated to perpetuate the cycle of inequality. If women were included in the conversation, society would discover that the female contributions to the history of the United States are not only important, but have often been the backbone of many revolutionary events. To silence women is to ignore some of the greatest accomplishments in United States history, as well as to limit the capacity for them to pursue the dream echoed by Maria Hwang: to become “wonderful” women.⁷ ♦

1. *The American Experience*, “The Murder of Emmett Till,” season 15, episode 6, directed by Stanley Nelson Jr., aired January 20, 2003, PBS.

2. *The American Experience*, “We Shall Remain: Part V—Wounded Knee,” season 21, episode 9, directed by Stanley Nelson Jr., aired May 11, 2009, PBS.

3. Maria Hwang, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 75.

4. *Miss Representation*, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom (2010; Girls’ Club Entertainment, 2011).

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Maria Hwang, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 75.

AMERICAN IDENTITIES

502: THEORY AND POPULAR CULTURE

The Nerd Postulate

Subcultural Capital, Regeneration, and Carnival
in *The Big Bang Theory*

COURTNEY BEACHNER

This paper was written for Dr. Adam Golub's Theory and Popular Culture class in the spring of 2014. The recent celebration of nerd culture in mainstream media sparked my interest, so I began to explore how this happened over time. I chose to examine the depiction of nerds in "The Big Bang Theory" and "Revenge of the Nerds" because television and film have the ability to serve as windows into cultural attitudes of the past and present.

Jane Tompkins writes, “novels and stories should be studied not because they manage to escape the limitations of their particular time and place, but because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment.”¹ While she may be speaking about novels, television and film do the same as storytelling devices in contemporary culture. Each is a cultural document despite its textual or visual form, and each are full of meanings that can be interpreted through critical examination. Media representations of identities heavily influence the construction and maintenance of stereotypes that individuals use to recognize and interpret the world around them.²

When one does not fit the mediated description or visage of a certain identity, they will not be recognized as such. I am a nerd, but I do not look like Leonard Hofstadter or Sheldon Cooper. Despite my glasses and OCD, I am a female nerd flying under the radar of recognizable nerd identity. Claiming membership as a nerd has become a sort of cultural “cool” since *The Big Bang Theory* premiered in September 2007. Nerd subcultures are “gushing up to the mainstream” like the punk and raver subcultures before it.³ Everybody keeps talking about how funny *The Big Bang Theory* is, whether they are a nerd or not. Do they really understand the referential humor about *Star Trek* and Jet Propulsion Laboratory? Or is the audience laughing at the nerds themselves? It seems that the show has become a way for many to understand nerdy friends and family in one’s life. My boyfriend is regularly called “Sheldon” by his stepfather because he is a physics student. I see *The Big Bang Theory* seeping into the popular culture environment, approving certain nerdy interests and perhaps shifting the image of the nerd in the public’s imagination. While casual viewers of the program may not be seeking to answer any cultural queries, I consider *The Big Bang Theory* to be a cultural product of our time.

The series follows the lives of two physicists and their friends as they navigate life as nerds in Pasadena, California. Though there are currently seven seasons of *The Big Bang Theory*, I will be limiting my analysis to the first season in order to take into account how the program was able to establish characters, narrative, and locations within its initial season. I will explore how *The Big Bang Theory* constructs its characters as nerds and non-nerds using Sarah Thornton’s

theory of “subcultural capital.”⁴ Moreover, I will perform a comparative analysis of *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–present) and *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984) to understand how the image of the nerd has changed over the past twenty-five years. Outside these primary documents I have drawn information from academic journals, television scriptwriting texts, national news sources, and fan blogs. The following research and analysis utilizes subheadings to create an organized flow of ideas surrounding my topics and their connected theories.

Defining the Nerd

The nerd is one of the most persistent figures in popular culture, so much so that a quick Internet search for “nerd,” “dork,” or “geek” will return with a distinct stereotype. Certain personality traits are associated with nerd identity, such as intelligence, social ineptitude, and sexual inactivity. Physically, nerds are described as unattractive white males with thick glasses and unfashionable clothing. This physical description and personality list coincides with interests in computer technologies, academic proficiency, and science fiction and fantasy activities.⁵ Benjamin Nugent argues that there are two categories of nerds, one tends to be “intellectual in ways that strike people as machine-like” and socially awkward while the other is a nerd out of “sheer force of social exclusion.”⁶ In the context of *The Big Bang Theory*, Sheldon falls into the former category while Leonard exhibits the latter. Most members of Western audiences are very familiar with these cultural characters. Monika Bednarek notes that sitcom comedies tend to rely on the audience’s familiarity with historically established tropes because much of the humor is created through recognition of a character’s behavior in a given situation.⁷ Media studies and psychology scholars agree that utilizing stereotypes is not only commonplace but effective in comedy.⁸

Though this may be an individual’s personal identity in reality, the media is an integral part of the way the nerd identity is formulated, communicated, and maintained for public cognition.⁹ Stereotypes remain in flux as times change and are altered to fit within the new context of each period. The nerd aesthetic dates back to a Depression-era cartoon strip about a cartoonist named Scribbly. In 1936, he appeared to wear big glasses with buckteeth and was “so shrimpy he had to stand on stilts to dance with his girlfriend.”¹⁰ The 1970s *Saturday Night Live* characters Lisa Loopner and Todd Dilamuca, played by Gilda Radner and Bill Murray, solidified the “prototype” of the nerd we know today.¹¹ In 1984 the nerd became a fully formed stereotype with the release of the film *Revenge of the Nerds*, that depicted nerds Dressed in collared shirts with pocket-protectors and glasses and sporting the most obnoxious laugh to ever grace the big screen.¹² Nearly thirty years have passed since its release, yet the image of this version of the nerd remains present in costume

shops and popular memory alike. *The Big Bang Theory* is the latest regeneration of the nerd in American popular culture, which prompts us to ask how this stereotype has adjusted to contemporary life.

Constructing the Nerd

William Rabkin tells aspiring scriptwriters, “audiences might tune in once for the premise, but they will only come back for the characters.”¹³ Building memorable characters happens through what industry professionals call “elements of staging.” This includes a combination of “the set, props, lighting, costume, makeup, and actor involvement and performance.”¹⁴ Each facet externalizes information about a particular character for audience understanding.

Coincidentally, the elements of staging in character construction mirror the process of building subcultural capital within a marginalized group. In *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*, Sarah Thornton studies how teens and twenty-somethings participate in and maintain subcultural capital within the British club scene. She notes that authenticity plays an important role by conferring status in a particular group while adding that subcultural capital can be embodied or objectified by individuals. Embodiment involves ornamenting your body with clothes of a certain style or using specific modes of language or slang terms in conversation. Objectification is demonstrated by the items collected in one’s home, such as books or paintings. Both of these methods assist members in authenticating an individual’s subcultural capital.¹⁵ Writers and producers may not be conscious of this crossover in fictive and real-life cultural communication, but they are actively using the same method for signifying character identity to the audience. Nonetheless, each element of staging is a conscious choice by the producers and other staff members to “ensure that everything that will appear on screen conveys the program’s meanings and tone.”¹⁶ Everything in front of the camera works together to achieve the intended character interpretations within the show’s narrative. Mirroring the way in which an individual chooses to dress in a particular style and use certain slang terms to prove their inclusion in a given subculture, writers and producers build characters like Leonard and Sheldon by fashioning culturally significant costumes and sets and by scripting dialogue. Communicating their identities to a television audience is done through methods of embodiment and objectification.

The objectification of Leonard and Sheldon’s nerd identities is evident simply by examining the set of their apartment. The living room and kitchen areas are shared nerd spaces, while Leonard and Sheldon’s bedrooms are personal spaces filled with various nerd interests and memorabilia. Leonard’s room has a simple bed, small closet, and bookcase. In the episode “The Cooper-Hofstadter Polarization,” Leonard and Sheldon’s neighbor Penny comes

over to help Leonard get ready for his super-solids research presentation at the Institute of Experimental Physics. She digs through his little closet to discover that he only owns a maroon corduroy suit. After pulling out the suit, she continues looking for something less tacky. “What’s this?” she asks, as she holds up a strange beige outfit. “It’s a *Battlestar Gallactica* flight suit,” replies Leonard. Penny refers to it as a “costume” and sets it aside to Leonard’s dismay. He asserts that it is not a costume, it is a quality replica meant to be used as cosplay. A late-1980s Apple computer sits on the top shelf beside a domed object, which Penny pulls out with a look of confusion on her face. Leonard takes it from her and explains, “It’s the bottled city of Kandor.... Kandor is a city on Krypton.” He must explain further by connecting the object to a storyline from the *Superman* canon. Unfortunately, this is lost on her because she is not a nerd or familiar with *Superman*. The possessions pulled out of Leonard’s closet objectify his interests in cosplay, *Superman* fandom, and his lack of fashion sense. The audience gets its first peek at Sheldon’s room in “The Luminous Fish Effect.”¹⁷ The layout is nearly the same as Leonard’s room but with different décor. The bookshelves are larger and filled with textbooks and a comic collection, while framed comic book covers featuring various DC Comic superheroes hang on the walls. The room is an objectification of his interests in comic books, particularly DC superheroes like Green Lantern and The Flash.¹⁸

A poster for *War of the Worlds* hangs in the hallway leading to the living room and adjoining kitchen where the characters spend most of their time interacting. It is a shared space but firmly established as a nerd space. The color scheme of the kitchen is metallic and dull, while the living room resembles a library. Hardwood bookshelves line the walls from the door to the apartment window sill and a large leather couch is paired with a puffy tan armchair. The wall of bookshelves behind it are filled with a plethora of odd items such as an astronomical globe, model rocket, and a handheld radiation detector. They directly objectify Leonard and Sheldon’s interests in science, space, and physics. The corner of the living room holds more items of objectification such as a large DNA helix sculpture, *Halo* commander helmet, and a toy robot. The walls are adorned with Hubble’s deep space photos by the door, window, and hallway. The characters do not need to be present in this space to signify aspects of their character or subcultural identity. The collection of science-related items direct the viewer toward the characters’ nerd identities. Once the characters are placed inside this space it is clearly communicated that Leonard and Sheldon are nerdy physicists whose subcultural capital as nerds is demonstrated through embodiment.

Dialogue and costume function as the key communicators of embodiment on screen. While the costuming is

a visual communicator, dialogue provides an audible component of their subcultural capital. The costuming of the nerd characters sticks to the stereotypical notion that nerds are unfashionable. This is especially evident in the limited outfit choices for Howard and Rajesh. Howard wears clothing that his mother buys him, which have retro collars and stripes. His obnoxious tops are paired with brightly colored skinny jeans. Raj is not as clownishly dressed, as he wears sweater vests and khaki pants. Sheldon frequently wears plaid pants and a t-shirt with the image of DC Comic superheroes or robots on the front. Leonard’s clothing is rather plain and paired with thick glasses, a stereotypical nerd trait. His shirts feature science themes like the periodic table of elements or the symbol for radioactivity. Besides these visual signifiers of nerd identity, their conversations and word choices are distinctively nerdy.

The dialogue of *The Big Bang Theory* is peppered with references to physics, video games, and science fiction and fantasy. These are all embodiments of stereotypical nerd interests mentioned earlier. *Battlestar Gallactica* DVD commentary, Luke Skywalker shampoo, Klingon Boggle, and *World of Warcraft* are all referenced within the pilot episode alone.¹⁹ This list grows longer and longer as the season progresses into events like *Halo* night in “The Dumpling Paradox” and the CalTech Physics Bowl in “The Bat Jar Conjecture.” The opening scene of each episode tends to place Sheldon, Leonard, Howard, and Rajesh in the living room discussing nerdy topics. For example, “The Bat Jar Conjecture” opens with their discussion of new speculations about the upcoming *Star Trek* film. Howard exclaims, “more details about the new Star Trek film! There is going to be a scene depicting Spock’s birth.” Raj comments, “I’d be more interested in a scene depicting Spock’s conception.”²⁰

Sheldon’s dialogue is woven with scientific jargon and communicated in a near-robotic fashion. His roommate Leonard is not robotic but very awkward in attempting to communicate with anyone outside his own subculture. In the pilot episode, Penny walks through the nerd apartment and remarks on the whiteboards filled with equations. Sheldon replies, “It’s just some quantum mechanics and a little string theory doodling around the edges.” She sees another whiteboard across the room and shouts “holy smokes!” prompting Leonard to proudly take credit for his board before inducing criticism from Sheldon. “If by ‘holy smokes,’ you mean a derivative restatement of the kind of stuff you can find scribbled on the wall of any men’s room at MIT, sure.” Here, the writers have devoted special attention to establishing the two nerds within their profession. The production team pushes for scientific accuracy within their dialogue and props by consulting UCLA particle physicist, Dr. David Saltzberg.²¹ Whenever whiteboards appear filled with mathematic problems or quantum mechanics, Saltzberg makes sure that it’s all correct. A viewer without any

knowledge of physics may not be able to tell if it is accurate or gibberish, but the show is constructed with a dose of authenticity. Thornton's theory of subcultural capital emphasizes how important naturalness and authenticity are to one's claim of belonging to a particular group.²² This verifies the nerd characters' status within their subculture in the show, as well as to those scientifically proficient in the audience. Mastery of theoretical physics is mixed into the daily lives of Leonard and Sheldon, and for Sheldon it shapes the way he understands social situations. In "The Tangerine Factor," Leonard seeks advice from Sheldon about finally going on a date with Penny. Sheldon refers to the paradox of Schrödinger's cat. For those unfamiliar with this concept, it is an experiment that hypothesizes that a cat inside a box is alive and dead at the same time until you open the box and look. He tells Leonard, "only by opening the box do you find out what it is." After Leonard and Penny passionately kiss in the hall, he exclaims, "the cat is alive!"²³

The embodiment and objectification of nerd identity is directly contrasted by the love interest and only recurring non-nerd character in *The Big Bang Theory*. Penny's apartment is first shown to the audience in the second episode of the season, named "The Big Bran Hypothesis."²⁴ The interior is modeled the same as Leonard and Sheldon's apartment but is reversed because it is on the opposite side of the building. While the nerds' apartment is meticulously organized and colored by neutrals and metallics, Penny's living space has a distinctly feminine design and disorganization. Her shelves are much smaller, implying that she does not read. In fact, there are more potted plants and candles on her shelves than any other item. A bright blue loveseat sits in the center of the living room with a small kitchen table below a bright window, and dirty clothes litter the floor and sofa. Sheldon is horrified by the messiness of Penny's room, calling it a "swirling vortex of entropy." There are few items for the audience to interpret besides a rolled up yoga mat and a set of Russian nesting dolls on the table. It is not the presence of collections and books that construct Penny's character, but rather the absence of nerd paraphernalia.

Penny is a relatively undeveloped character in season one of *The Big Bang Theory* and serves more as a contrast to Leonard and his nerd friends. This is also apparent in her costuming throughout the season. Her outfits include bright colors and feminine floral prints, the polar opposite of Leonard and Sheldon's masculine-colored shirts and plaid. In "The Dumpling Paradox," Penny wears hot pink lounge pants with a low-cut tank and floral jacket while Leonard wears thick glasses, jeans, and a black shirt with a Rubik's Cube on the front.²⁵ These contrasting outfits are typical in each episode throughout season one.

The dialogue between the three characters also provides a prominent contrast between nerd and non-nerd.

Their frequent references to comic books and science fiction like *Star Trek*, *The Time Machine*, and *Superman* are met with Penny's confusion or silence. Her lack of understanding this expression of nerdiness places her outside of their subcultural group. Benjamin Woo refers to this nerd-speak as "performances of intertextuality" where those knowledgeable of the subculture weave their conversations with "subculturally canonical texts."²⁶ Penny is confused when Leonard makes the comment, "the entire Physics Bowl will kneel before Zod!" Howard has to stop and inform her that Zod is a Kryptonian villain from the *Superman* franchise. This type of misunderstanding occurs in nearly every scene with Penny, removing her from the status as a "relevant beholder" to the nerds' subcultural capital. She is depicted as a non-nerd in every possible way throughout season one. When the group of nerds arrives home from the Physics Bowl, Penny runs in to "decide once and for all" who the smartest person is by asking them her own trivia questions. Her questions include basic mainstream pop culture references to *Looney Toons*, *The Brady Bunch*, and Britney Spears. She asks, "Tweety Bird tawt he taw a what?" The nerds stare blankly at her as Sheldon finally gives an answer. To her amazement he says, "a Romulan!" The nerds are just as removed from her non-nerd identity as she is from their nerd subcultural identity.²⁷

The stereotypical nerd characteristics embodied and objectified by Leonard, Sheldon, and their friends strongly communicate their belonging to the nerd subculture. The decisions made by writers and producers during each episode work together as a multi-faceted deployment of subcultural identity. Moreover, the contrasting sets, costume, and dialogue between Penny and the nerds further develop each character's identity as a nerd or non-nerd. The show creates a text to be read and understood by the audience and therefore relies on older representations of nerds in popular media.

Shifting Representations of the Nerd

Stuart Hall asserts, "everything changes—not just a shift in the relations of forces but a reconstitution of the terrain of political struggle."²⁸ This is especially true for media representations and stereotypical figures depicted in popular culture. I have chosen to examine 1984's *Revenge of the Nerds* alongside 2007's *The Big Bang Theory* as cultural documents of their respective time periods. By viewing them beside each other, we might be able to see what has changed over time, shifted slightly, and not changed at all for media works producing images of nerds. Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'" is an effective theoretical lens for performing a comparison of these two cultural documents. In his article, Hall argues that within American culture there is a constant struggle between popular and dominant cultures. There are "points of resistance" and "moments of

supersession” on this cultural battlefield. The battle is constant and “no once-for-all victories” are possible.²⁹ Hall also points out that categories themselves are subjected to this battle and are likely to change over time. Considering these ideas, we can apply them to the representations of nerds in *Revenge of the Nerds* and *The Big Bang Theory*. I would like to give attention to shifts in character construction, narratives, and portrayals of female characters.

Before analyzing these three categories, I must draw attention to the differing media formats of the two cultural documents. Film and television are frequently compared to each other but remain fairly separate with their own production features, target audiences, and rating systems. At the time of its theatrical release, *Revenge of the Nerds* was considered to be a PG-13 rated film targeting an audience of those seventeen to thirty years old.³⁰ The film follows a group of nerds at Adams College as they are repeatedly humiliated by the jocks before finally retaliating and turning the social scene on its head. If this film was released in recent years it would likely have to cut its frontal nudity scenes or risk being rated R. On the other side of the spectrum, *The Big Bang Theory* began its broadcast in September 2007 on CBS as part of the Monday night comedy block. This programming block runs from 8 PM to 10 PM, the later shows in the block are more “risqué” than the 8 PM slot. Comedy programming blocks generally aim for a moderate family audience with an age range of eighteen to forty-nine. Being that *Big Bang* is broadcast on CBS, no nudity or language is permitted. Though these two cultural documents differ greatly, nerds are portrayed in starring roles. Sarah Thornton tells us that “media and other culture industries are integral to the processes by which we create groups through representation.”³¹ Each document contributed to how the audience recognized and understood nerds in real-life situations.

First, the nerds of *Revenge of the Nerds* are a much more diverse group of individuals than later refusings of nerd groups like in *The Big Bang Theory*. The characters include Lewis, Gilbert, Poindexter, Takashi, Lamar, Wormser, and Booger. We can understand them better as character tropes by renaming them as Bad Laugh, Computer Guy, Asian Nerd, Flamboyant Other, Child Genius, and Gross Loser. Lewis and Gilbert are both understood as computer nerds throughout the film while Takashi is a nerd only because he has glasses and an exaggerated Asian accent. Lamar has stereotypical homosexual mannerisms and appears in spandex outfits doing aerobics. Booger and Wormser are outsiders to the college environment, both childish and slightly perverse. In fact, Booger is never shown doing much besides smoking marijuana or picking his nose. Intelligence is allocated to Lewis and Gilbert over the rest of the group. The film relies upon embodied signifiers of the nerd subculture in order to create its characters. Most of the nerds are visu-

ally obvious in their nerdiness because of their glasses, pocket protectors, and formal collared shirts. Poindexter always wears coke-bottle glasses with a suit jacket and tie. None of them use scientific jargon or referential comments to stereotypical nerd interests outside of computer proficiency. In order to get their “revenge” against the Alpha Beta fraternity and Pi sorority, the nerds decide to use their knowledge of computers and video systems to install surveillance cameras in the sorority house. From their living room, the nerds sit and watch the women undress and make lewd comments about their bodies. Later at the homecoming fair fundraiser competition, the nerds sell pieces of pie on plates featuring the topless Pi sorority girls. *Revenge of the Nerds* turns out to be a battleground for masculinity at Adams College.

The Big Bang Theory shows a markedly different and smaller group of nerds. Leonard, Sheldon, Howard, and Rajesh are visual descendants of the *Revenge* characters who have benefited from a larger range of nerd interests. Howard is the closest of the *Big Bang* nerds to those presented in *Revenge of the Nerds*. He has the same bowl-cut hairdo as Wormser and shares Booger’s perverse sexual disposition. He constantly hits on nearby women including Penny regardless of Leonard’s presence. Howard also shares most of his screen time with the Asian nerd, similar to the pairing of Booger and Takashi. Meanwhile, Lewis and Gilbert have morphed into Leonard and Sheldon, gaining an interest in comic book superheroes instead of computers. They are casually dressed compared to Lewis and Gilbert’s collared shirts and pocket protectors. Leonard is also the only *Big Bang* nerd to wear glasses at all. Here we see the contents of the nerd category have reorganized themselves from *Revenge* to *Big Bang*. These slight shifts depict the *Big Bang* nerds as tamer individuals that are less alien to non-nerds.

Another difference between the two nerd groups is their age and professional status. The *Revenge* nerds are still in college while *Big Bang*’s nerds are twenty-six-year-old men working at CalTech. Through dialogue, we discover that Leonard and his friends had similar social troubles to Lewis and Gilbert when they were in school. Sheldon was a child prodigy who “went from the fifth grade to college” just like Wormser. *Revenge of the Nerds* was the first movie to have nerds win out over the hyper-masculine fraternity group in the end. This might be understood as a “cultural break” in popular film, leading to the incorporation of certain nerd traits like computer proficiency being brought into the mainstream. Hall states that these breaks will be “recuperated as a support to tomorrow’s dominant system.”³² The nerds’ victory might be said to have helped pave the way for future acceptance of technology as a part of mainstream American life.

The narrative focus of both *Revenge of the Nerds* and *The Big Bang Theory* is the pursuit of an unobtainable romantic love interest. In both cases, the object of desire is

outside their social group. Lewis seeks Betty, a cheerleader and member of the Pi sorority. In *Nerds, Geeks, and the Hip/Square Dialectic in Contemporary Television*, Christine Quail asserts that the narrative present in *Revenge of the Nerds* follows the theme of securing a romantic relationship in order to prove “heterosexual prowess.”³³ Betty is resistant to Lewis at every turn, rejecting his invitation to the party and actively helping the Alpha Beta fraternity humiliate the nerds. When her boyfriend Stan asks which nerd asked her out, she replies, “I don’t know, they all look the same to me.” Later at the homecoming carnival, Betty propositions Stan to join her in the fun house but he stays behind at the kissing booth. Lewis notices Betty walk off toward the fun house. He grabs Stan’s Halloween mask from the kissing booth and follows her. Betty believes that he is Stan as they get intimate inside the Moon room. The scene concludes with her discovery that Lewis was behind the mask, but she is not upset about the surprise. “You’re that nerd!” she exclaims. Rather than being outraged by the fact that she has just been violated by a stranger, Betty asks Lewis to meet up with her after the carnival is over. Quail appropriately refers to this encounter as “sexual violence” leading to the nerd group winning at the end of the film. Betty chooses to be with Lewis based on this sexual encounter, not for his intelligence. Her purpose within the narrative seems to only be the verification of his masculinity through sexual prowess.

Penny and Leonard’s relationship on *The Big Bang Theory* follows a slightly different narrative route with the same result. Over the course of season one, Leonard passively pursues Penny. Unlike Betty she is not disgusted by the nerds, rather she tolerates them as her friendly neighbors. She is not romantically linked to one particular man like Betty, but she is seen in a number of episodes with different attractive and physically fit men. Leonard is intimidated by these suitors and does not attempt to steal Penny away from them like Lewis does in *Revenge*. There is no “sexual violence” in order to win Penny’s heart, she is only swayed by Leonard’s friendship. On multiple occasions, Penny discusses her dissatisfaction with her past romantic choices. In “The Middle Earth Paradigm,” Penny’s ex-boyfriend comes to her Halloween party dressed as a caveman and threatens the nerds. Penny is embarrassed and apologizes to Leonard, who happens to be dressed as Frodo Baggins from *Lord of the Rings*. She consoles him back at his apartment with a kiss. She asks, “you’re so great, why can’t all guys be like you?”³⁴ Season one comes to an end with the two of them finally going out on a date. There is no violent contest of masculinity happening in *Big Bang*, yet the prize is still the same. The less-intelligent blonde woman is the object of affection and won by the nerd at the conclusion of each cultural document.

The methods used in pursuing women have become less violent; however, the narrative path remains sexist. Bet-

ty and Penny are essentially the same character with differing levels of contempt for the nerds. *Revenge of the Nerds* and *The Big Bang Theory* treat female characters, nerd and non-nerd alike, in a particularly sexist light. While Betty and Penny are maintained as “dumb blondes” meant for romance, Judy and Leslie are female nerds represented as unequal to their male counterparts. This is especially prominent in the actions and dialogue exchanged between Leslie and the other *Big Bang* nerds.

Judy is a female nerd that appears in *Revenge of the Nerds* as Gilbert’s love interest. She is a member of the Omega Mu sorority at Adams College. When the nerds put on a party at their new house, Judy invites her sorority sisters. Lewis and Gilbert welcome the idea but Booger refuses to be excited about their presence and calls them “pigs.” Sure enough, when the Omega Mu sisters arrive they are composed of girls that are too tall, pudgy, nerdy, or foreign. The girls awkwardly stay on the opposite side of the room in silence until Booger is able to pass around his marijuana to liven up the party. As a female nerd, Judy wears large glasses and unfashionable clothing. Compared to Betty, she is at the bottom of the sorority hierarchy and receives very little time on screen at all. Her exchanges with Gilbert are instructive of his superior intelligence. At the computer lab, she appears frustrated with her programming assignment and can only understand it with his help. The next time Judy is on screen for more than a few seconds, she is at the party flirting with Gilbert. “Are you near sighted or far sighted? Let’s switch glasses!” They switch and discover that they have nearly the same prescription. Gilbert asks her if she would like to dance. By the end of the film, Judy is paired with Gilbert and Betty with Lewis. Both male nerds have proved their masculinity by “getting the girl.”

The Big Bang Theory’s female nerd character is a bit of an adjustment on Judy. Despite visually resembling Judy, Leslie Winkle is constructed as intellectually equal and sexually superior to the male nerds. Leslie is a guest character that only appears when an episode revolves around Leonard or Sheldon’s office space at CalTech. In “The Fuzzyboots Corollary,” she appears for the first time in the laser lab. Leonard interrupts her trying to cook her Cup-O-Noodle with the laser equipment to ask her out. He proposes a “bio-social exploration with a bio-neural overlay” to which she responds with questions regarding the “parameters” of this “exploration.” She speaks and understands the nerd language, yet decides to reject Leonard.³⁵

Two episodes later in “The Hamburger Postulate,” Leslie invites Leonard to join her string quartet group. She lets him know that she is sexually available as he practices his cello. They perform “musical foreplay” before disappearing into his bedroom. Leslie is the one in control of her sexual encounters unlike Judy, who remains passive in *Revenge of the Nerds*. She is also not dumbed down like Judy and can

be relied upon when the *Big Bang* nerds need a replacement teammate for the Physics Bowl. She declines the offer to be on their team because she is “really busy with [her] high-energy particle research.” However once they mention that they are going to try to beat Sheldon, she agrees. “That arrogant, misogynistic, East Texas doorknob!” At some point Sheldon had told her that it would be a better use of her time to abandon her research for “laundry and child bearing.” All of the nerds discourage this sexist sentiment yet the *Big Bang* creative staff continuously depicts both Penny and Leslie in a traditionally gendered manner.³⁶

Penny’s costumes show more skin than Leslie’s but both feature feminine prints like butterflies, ladybugs, and varying flora. Whenever Leonard runs into Leslie at CalTech she is using the scientific equipment to make lunch for herself. This includes a scene with her Cup-O-Noodle in the laser lab as well as her attempting to flash-freeze a banana for her yogurt in another episode. Although Sheldon told Leslie to abandon her work for domestic tasks, she is never shown doing any such duties besides cooking. Penny, on the other hand, always runs into one of the nerds on her way back to her apartment with a basket full of laundry. Motherly caregiver duties also come into play with her character. “The Pancake Batter Anomaly” features her being forced to take care of a sick Sheldon when Leonard, Howard, and Rajesh purposely abandon him.³⁷ Leslie’s equal intelligence and sexual superiority do not make up for the continuing of gendered roles in *The Big Bang Theory* first season.

Each difference can be understood as a product of the document’s respective time period, but what does this entail? The shifts in how the nerd groups were organized and portrayed are different from *Revenge* to *Big Bang*, but the narrative focus remains the same. The female nerd has risen on the social hierarchy yet female characters are still treated according to their gender above all else. It appears that while some progress is made in the visual representation and treatment of the male nerd, patriarchal influences remain in control of the narrative structure. The battle for nerd dominance has been turned into a support for continued white male hegemony.

Are They Cool Yet?

So does the presence of nerds on *The Big Bang Theory* mean that nerds have really become cool? Have we gotten our so-called “revenge” against the hierarchy of coolness? To decide, I believe examining the context of American life leading up to and during the show’s broadcast can be especially helpful. There are two cultural arcs taking place between the release of *Revenge of the Nerds* and *The Big Bang Theory*, the normalization of computer technologies and the commercial success of the nerd niche market.

The normalization of computer technologies is likely the largest contributor to the shift in mainstream repre-

sentations of the nerd in popular culture. The main nerds of *Revenge of the Nerds*, Lewis and Gilbert, possessed such familiarity and proficiency with using computer systems that they are represented as socially alien. The film shows this knowledge being used for retaliation against the Alpha Beta fraternity and Pi sorority. Ron Eglash’s *Race, Sex & Nerds: From Black Geeks to Asian American Hipsters* argues that while “masculinity bears a particular relation to technology,” science and computer usage are not understood as particularly “testosterone-drenched.” This has often led individuals to disassociate computer technology and “manly identity.”³⁸ This may have been the case in earlier years, but as the use of computer technologies moved into everyday life change was eminent. The adoption of smartphones, widespread Internet use, and on-the-job computer skills has shifted the discourse. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that as of October 2003, “seventy-seven million persons used a computer at work” accounting for “fifty-five percent of total employment” in the United States. This 2003 report goes on to state, “sixty percent of workers ages twenty-five to sixty-four used a computer on the job and almost half used the Internet.”³⁹ Keep in mind this particular statistic is now eleven years old and we have become more reliant on computer technologies for communications and processes in the workplace.

The government began collecting data on computer usage in 1984, the same year *Revenge of the Nerds* was released. The infographic released in 2013 charts the statistics on computer and Internet use from 1984 to 2012, citing that “America’s relationship with computers has radically changed.”⁴⁰ In 1984, only 8.2 percent of all households owned a computer. These computers only held 64KB of memory and were primarily used for learning basic computer skills. By 2012, 78.9 percent of all households owned computers and 94.8 percent use them to connect to the Internet. I believe that this radical change in usage of computer technology can be viewed through the shift in attitudes about nerds from *Revenge of the Nerds* to *The Big Bang Theory*.

In *Revenge of the Nerds*, Lewis and his nerd friends are representative of computer technologies, so the rest of the students at Adams College are uncomfortable or aggressive toward them because they are socially alien and unfamiliar. Betty is uncomfortable around the nerds and makes comments like, “I’m not kissing a nerd!” The nerds “all look the same” to her and she does not see them as valuable. The other fraternity and sorority members share these sentiments and choose to harass and physically assault the nerds whenever they can. By the time *The Big Bang Theory* came on television in 2007, there was an explosion in computer-related technologies for personal use. Gaming consoles, laptops, smartphones, and tablets were all commonplace at work and in the home for the majority of Americans. The expertise of a nerd is still required for tech support and some ba-

sic trouble shooting. The Apple Genius Bar and Geek Squad remain “gatekeepers” of technology, which help a willing populace master their personal geeky gadgets.⁴¹ The computer science proficiency that was seen as alienating in the past has become a matter of convenience for the general populace. This is apparent in the way Penny interacts with Leonard and Sheldon throughout season one of *The Big Bang Theory*. In “The Bat Jar Conjecture,” Penny walks into their apartment to get help with her computer keyboard’s stuck key. “What did you spill on it?” asks Leonard. She reluctantly names off juice, yogurt, nail polish, and more. She is not the master of technology but attempts to learn and use it. Viewing her relationship with the nerds as a metaphor for current attitudes toward computer technologies, we understand that Penny is not afraid, but intimidated at times. Leonard and his friends are friendly and approachable like contemporary personal technology.

As computers and other technologies become more naturalized and a part of consumer culture, it is likely that societal attitudes toward nerds will become less negative overall. Benjamin Woo asserts that “geek practices are now less stigmatized” and therefore, computer knowledge and other stereotypical nerd attributes are seen in a more positive light.⁴² However, this diffusion of nerd culture into everyday life does not completely lift social pressures from all nerds. Computer mastery is only one facet of the nerd stereotyping. Christine Quail proposes that the merchandising of nerd subcultural activities and interests have aided this “explosion of consumer computing technology” in recent years.⁴³

Certain subjects can become less “nerd identified” and socially acceptable as they are released to a larger public, for example the sci-fi and fantasy film franchises of the 2000s. The widespread popularity of comic book films began in 2002 with *Spiderman* and has continued to gain mainstream popularity with comic heroes like *Iron Man*, *Thor*, and *Superman*. With each film comes a tidal wave of merchandise, books, and personal gear. *Box Office Mojo* tracks the top grossing movies and film franchises of all time, and nerdy feature films top the list. The top three franchises of all time are the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Harry Potter, and Star Wars.⁴⁴ The only non-science fiction, fantasy, or comic book film listed on the IMDb “All-Time USA Box Office” page is 1997’s romantic catastrophe film *Titanic*.⁴⁵ You can see by looking at this list that movie-goers are choosing nerd-interest based films more and more as time goes on. The only films listed in the top ten from before the 2000s are 1982’s *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and *Titanic*. The year 2000 marked the beginning of nerd movie dominance. Most of the source material originates as far back as the 1950s to those familiar, but to non-nerds these stories are brand new. Being a fan of *Spiderman* or *Iron Man* is not considered “weird” once you can go to a Forever 21

or Hot Topic retail store to get leggings, T-shirts, and body-suits with their faces plastered all over them. It is now possible to not only watch *The Big Bang Theory* but to go to any big box retailer like Macy’s to get a shirt with The Flash insignia on it just like Sheldon’s.

Of course, the increasing consumerization of nerd interests like the franchising of comic book and sci-fi films are not making nerds cooler—they make nerd stuff cooler. Woo refers to this as “a revaluation of specific capitals.”⁴⁶ The markets for nerd interests have been recognized and therefore will be exploited for economic gain until the next niche market is found. For now, individuals will continue to “invest” in the nerd subculture because it is being maintained through the media.⁴⁷ Individuals use this process to construct themselves within the subculture of nerdiness and each member must consume to participate.

Both of these cultural arcs coincide with the millennials, the generation coming of age alongside these shifts in American society. Sometimes called “generation me,” millennials seek out unique or quirky interests to differentiate themselves from the crowd. The *Daily Californian* notes many millennials “lack the community-based relationships and interactions that were invaluable to past generations,” such as religious affiliation and family ties, so they seek out other forms of connection.⁴⁸ Fan groups and video game groups can function as friend-families, and a passion for *Harry Potter* can become part of making friends in person or online. MTV Insights reports that nerd characteristics like being quirky or awkwardly funny are now viewed by many as attractive traits.⁴⁹ This is a generation that “prides itself on being unique and creative” and, in turn, a bit on the nerdy side.

Carnival Laughter in *The Big Bang Theory*

The stereotypical image of the nerd is repeatedly reinscribed in popular media. *The Big Bang Theory* is perhaps a more humanizing and less humiliating representation than *Revenge of the Nerds* but little progress has been made over such a large time period. Many scholars and fans alike agree that the media has been reproducing this negative image of the nerd for decades, and it is likely to continue into the future despite any discourse announcing that “smart is the new sexy” or “nerds are cool.” Lori Kendall argues that only “certain nerdy types” are now exempt from “the full sting of the slur.”⁵⁰ Perhaps this is progress despite its slow shift. The nerd figure is recognizable, and even comforting to some audience members. Monika Bednarek quotes Phil Wickham, who stated that “sitcoms . . . rely on recognition to be funny—recognition of what a character we have come to know is likely to do in a given situation.”⁵¹ Characters are a part of the equation for achieving laughter, whether from a place of understanding or mocking. I propose that the laughter in both *Revenge of the Nerds* and *The Big Bang The-*

ory fits with Stallybrass and White's discussion of laughter within carnival. They highlight Mikhail Bakhtin's scholarship on carnival defines that the event as an opportunity for "reversal" and "transgressing the rules of hierarchy."⁵² The low Others, nerds, move from being "socially peripheral" to "symbolically central" to the action or story in place. Bakhtin states that "carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people.... it is universal in scope; directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity."⁵³

Both cultural documents, regardless of their time period, can be understood by utilizing the concept of carnival. *Revenge* ends with the college community coming together in celebration of the nerds' triumph over the football team and Lewis "winning" Betty over, while the season one finale of *Big Bang* leaves us with Leonard finally going on a date with Penny. The nerds have won in the end, a basic reversal of what one would perceive as the so-called natural order of society. The nerd group is central to the narrative and they are developed as heroes, while the jocks are demonized as visceral thugs. "Symbolic polarities of high and low, official and popular, grotesque and classical are mutually constructed and deformed in carnival."⁵⁴ In other words, nerds and jocks are exaggerated and warped to extremes to achieve the carnivalesque and thus, the carnival laughter.

As previously stated, this laughter is ambivalent and directed at the totality of the action on screen. In the case of *Revenge*, the audience is encouraged to not just laugh at the social tribulations of the nerds but also the frustrations of the jocks as the nerds take back Adams College. Lewis and Stan are caricatures of well-established figures in American popular culture and reality. Similarly, in *Big Bang*, the narrative works toward humor not purely against Sheldon and his friends. Penny, the only recurring non-nerd in season one is the butt of the majority of the jokes. Her lack of understanding of their references and scientific knowledge keeps her in the realm of the "dumb blonde." Their social position in the world is pushed over hers, the laughter is directed at all of them "in its gay relativity," as Bakhtin noted.

There is no way of truly determining why an audience is attracted to cultural productions like *Revenge* and *Big Bang* without acknowledging this opportunity for carnival laughter. I cannot form a solid conclusion on whether people are watching *Big Bang* to laugh at or laugh along with the nerds. This is not to say that some viewers do not simply watch and gain pleasure from laughing at the nerd characters. The nerds are underdog heroes in a television program that has placed them atop the carnival stage, seeking an audience's laughter regardless of its direction. I reject any notion that the audience is a passive and sheepish body, accepting what is presented to them at all times. It is my understanding that many viewers of *The Big Bang*

Theory are nerds themselves and are proud to see any nerd on television because culturally speaking this figure is frequently a character on the fringe of television programs. *The Big Bang Theory* is able to present mediated representations to the public, but they are not meant to be accurate for all individuals who personally identify as nerds in reality.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, it is important to consider fan and critical reactions to programming. Consequently, I would like to see a comprehensive audience study on shows like *The Big Bang Theory* and others representing nerd characters.

Conclusion

Perhaps nerds are not as cool as we think they are, but they have certainly risen up the social ladder in the realm of American popular culture. *The Big Bang Theory* constructs clear representations of contemporary nerds through the deployment of subcultural capital in production methods. The narrative created by writers and producers remains nearly the same as past nerd-centric work like *Revenge of the Nerds*. Nonetheless, it can be understood as a carnival stage where those in the audience are not merely present to mock the nerds, but also the non-nerds. The comedy relies on the old stereotype of the nerd with glasses, high intelligence, and social ineptness, but the nerds on screen have been refigured as more accessible human beings. As our relationship with technology changes, so do our social attitudes about nerds. Leonard, Sheldon, Howard, and Rajesh are the latest regeneration of nerds in popular culture, and they do a far greater job than any of their predecessors.

Jason Mittel states, "television's portrayal of identity categories shapes American culture," and so we should expect the nerds of *The Big Bang Theory* to affect the way we view nerds in our culture.⁵⁶ Despite this "gushing up" of the subculture into mainstream media like television, there is still a considerable amount of nerd "stuff" that has yet to be represented on screen.⁵⁷ Leonard and Sheldon are only one part of the nerd puzzle with their expertise in comic books and physics. There is an entire spectrum to be explored within the nerd subculture. Bibliophiles, fan fiction nerds, Shakespeare geeks, otakus, et al. It is possible that one day we will see a greater variety of nerds and geeks on television. As film franchises like *The Avengers*, *Spiderman*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hobbit* continue to be produced and find success at the box office, it is very likely that nerdy interests will continue to expand into higher acceptability as well. Younger generations are certainly making nerdiness a marker of individuality, and if this trend continues, the stereotype may change again. There are an infinite amount of regenerations of the nerd in the future, more than *Dr. Who* or comic book movie remakes. In all likelihood, the representations of nerds will change again in my own lifetime. Nerdom, the final frontier! ♦

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AMERICAN IDENTITIES

433: VISUAL ARTS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

The All but Vanishing Race

Native American Identity through Photography

DANIELLE BARRAZA

This essay was written for Dr. Terri Snyder's Visual Arts in Contemporary America course in the spring of 2014. Photographer Matika Wilbur has used her creativity and knowledge of visual culture to provide powerful insight into what it means to be an Indian in modern American society. This essay explores how Wilbur's photographic project, "Project 562," defines issues of American consciousness.

In the fall of 2012 Native American photographer Matika Wilbur sold everything in her apartment, packed up her car, and took on a project of epic standards. Through her photo project, appropriately titled Project 562, she aimed to photograph members of all 562 federally recognized tribes within the United States in hopes to change American consciousness as to what it means to be an Indian in modern day America. Project 562 is utilizing platforms that have been commonly used in the past to reinforce the perception of Native Americans as a vanished race. Intentional or not, Matika Wilbur is not just negotiating Native American identity; she is also shedding light on the paradox that is American identity through Project 562.

In his book *Playing Indian*, Phillip J. Deloria explores the paradox that comes with Native Americans being appropriated in American culture. So much of our identity as Americans is interlaced with images of Native Amer-

icans as well as appropriation of their cultural beliefs.¹ If Wilbur is successful in changing the meaning of what is seen then she is consequently changing the culture as well. In the tightly wound rope of american identity, Native Americans are but a piece of twine. However, attempting to separate this twine from the rope could completely unravel what many have tried to define.

In order to properly situate Wilbur's work there are a few things to consider. When talking about her project, Wilbur strategically uses the terms Indian, Native Americans, and indigenous peoples almost interchangeably. For this paper these terms will be used as appropriate in relation to time period and ideals. Wilbur's Project 562 can also be linked back to the moments in United States history that have helped to create the identity paradox that Native Americans find themselves questioning and trying to combat today. The first is a somewhat similar photo project completed by Edward Sheriff Curtis in the early 1900s. Around the same time, there was a debate among the Society of American Indians about how to integrate, if at all, into mainstream American culture. Along with these moments we need to be critical of key aspects of this project that are crucial to her success.

The nineteenth century saw a great change in United States policy in regards to Indians. In 1890 the frontier was declared closed; it was time to focus on how to further define the nation's identity. As D.H. Lawrence argued, "no place exerts its full influence upon a newcomer until the old inhabitant is dead or absorbed." Settlers, to be able to exploit the maximum potential from the land, needed to either exterminate Native Americans or force assimilation.² This set up the paradox that Native Americans would fall into, which was the decision to be modern or to be Indian.

Given little room to negotiate, it was one or the other and it seemed impossible for someone to choose both. The representations that come out of this time period have had a great impact on Wilbur, as well as her subjects, in trying to negotiate between being Indian and being American and what it means, if anything at all, to be both.

Matika Wilbur herself is a member of the Swinomish and Tulalip tribes. Raised on a Swinomish Reservation, she wishes to represent all nations through their own lens. She was formally trained in photography at the Rocky Mountain School of Photography in Montana and received a bachelor's degree from Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara, CA. Wilbur seeks to answer the question: "Can we learn to re-see as human beings?"³ The re-seeing that the question refers to is the image of Native Americans in American culture. It is important to Wilbur that Native people not just be seen as having survived a perceived disappearance; she also wishes to have the struggle to define what it means to be an Indian in modern America heard and understood. The modern issues that Native Americans face are virtually non-existent on a larger cultural scale. To achieve this goal the project is intended to produce "photographic stories that will result in books, exhibitions and curricula."⁴ Wilbur's photographic project is not the first of its kind. Other photographic endeavors have tried to capture Native Americans in a similar light, though they were arguably more detrimental than positive.

In 1896, in the city of Seattle, Edward Sheriff Curtis came across Princess Angeline, the daughter of Chief Seattle and last surviving member of the Duwamish Indians. When he laid eyes on her he had a vision of photographing her. After some broken communication she agreed to be photographed and went with Curtis to his portrait studio. He paid her one dollar for her time and photographed her. When the photo was developed Curtis felt Angeline did not quite fit the blank background he sat her in front of. Curtis went back out to find Angeline and photograph her in what he felt was a more natural and authentic setting. In this second session he photographed her while she dug for clams; this produced an image Curtis was more content with.⁵ It was here that Curtis had a grand idea that would consume the next thirty years of his life.

In 1903 Curtis talked to J.P. Morgan into becoming his patron and funding his monumental project. Curtis intended to photograph various Indian tribes throughout North America as well as gather stories to publish in a multivolume series. Morgan agreed to fund the endeavor but Curtis himself would not earn a salary. Before taking on this project Curtis photographed various tribes that resided on the outskirts of Seattle. The pictures sold well from his shop; people jumped at the chance to buy photos of Indians in their natural setting, largely due to the belief that within a

matter of years all Indians would be extinct.

With that in mind Curtis seized the opportunity to capture photographs of as many Indians as possible before what many thought would be their inevitable demise from the landscape. It took thirty years but Curtis finished his multivolume work, *The North American Indian Race*, in 1930.⁶ Over forty thousand photographs and ten thousand wax voice recordings resulted from this project giving an immense collection of Native American images as well as cultural insight into Native life. This collection garnered much attention and ongoing critiques both positive and negative. The collection of images also helped solidify the foundation for our cultural understanding and view of Native Americans today.

The main critiques regarding Curtis's work revolved around the belief that his subjects were members of a vanishing race. Native Americans are shown more as a fetishized ideal than actual people. If we consider a photographic portrait to have the power to "capture one's visage and being in a single moment," then Curtis's photographs capture the images of a people that have been "defeated, defrauded and shunted aside" by their white counterparts.⁷ Many images, including one entitled "Noatak Man," show stoic faces weathered by time. In these images his face looks tired and his eyes saddened. Much like the face of Angeline, who was the first to be photographed by Curtis, their very existence was a challenge to the viewer.

Another major point of critique is that oftentimes in his work Curtis would carry props with him and stage the portraits that he was taking.⁸ Many photographers use props to stage a photograph; however, props used by Curtis were in many cases not native to the particular tribe he was photographing. Staging photographs with artifacts from other tribes, such as with his portraits of Pima women, helped create a false image that natives were expected to identify with.

The last point of critique regarding Curtis is the contrast in likeness and identity found in the presentation of his subjects. Curtis steers the viewer to a certain set of interpretations based on stereotypes that they may already hold. His work includes only limited biographical or personal information of his subjects. In many cases, portraits are named with only a rudimentary designation such as "Old Ukiah Pomo" or "Cheyenne Young Woman."⁹ Wilbur, in talking about her project, doesn't deny the importance of Curtis's work, but she notes the injustices found in the inaccuracies of the images.¹⁰ Keeping these things in mind, Wilbur set out to present her people in a fair and authentic manner.

In her mission statement Wilbur writes that her works aim to "humanize the otherwise 'vanishing race' and share stories that our people would like told." She has been welcomed with open arms by many who are ready to see this change occur. When she sits down with a subject she asks them various questions; the most important one

is not a question at all but a simple request: “tell me your story.”¹¹ When photographing her subjects the only thing she asks of them is that they be photographed outside on indigenous land. After she prints her photographs she hand colors selected sections to emphasize certain parts.

The simple act of photographing her subjects outside is a statement of its own; it shows these people are not going anywhere. With 562 tribal nations photographed all on indigenous land, the ever-present image of a vanished race is further complicated. Wilbur believes, “that at the core of it we all want to remember that we come from the same place.”¹² As much as Wilbur is interested in shedding stereotypes and correcting historical inaccuracies part of her project also explores how native people navigate being Indian in modern America.

When viewing the photographs from project 562 there is a positivity and strength that radiates through the images. This is in stark contrast to work done in *The North American Indian* decades prior. When sharing images at a Ted Talks event, Wilbur also shared a few select stories. A portrait of Leon Grant is accompanied by his story of leaving home, financially putting himself through school and eventually obtaining a law degree. He then returned home to start American Indian Centers across the nation to better help those struggling to find a place of acceptance and guidance. Another subject, Dr. Mary Belgarde, is a retired professor from the University of New Mexico. She specialized in training teachers to work with indigenous communities. Lastly, there is Marva who wears a “111” tattoo proudly on her chin. In her story she describes the pride she feels when she goes out and people notice her tattoo. These stories, once heard, bring a greater sense of pride to their individual portraits.¹³

When listening to the stories she shares, it is clear that Wilbur is aiming to positively contribute to American culture and the understanding of Native peoples. It is worth noting that on a Project 562 blog entry Wilbur reaches out to several tribes she would like to visit and specifies certain people that she would like to meet with. She is interested in speaking with those who are “activists, culture bearers, artists or any other positive role models.”¹⁴ This shows that she is quite intentional on whose stories she intends to document. Although these are authentic stories that are being shared, there are still those whose voices will be left out. Wilbur may not be staging photos as Curtis once did but she is still curating a specific set of images to make her work that much more meaningful.

Edward S. Curtis’s work was not the only work concerning Native Americans that got attention in the 1900s. During this time there were debates being held within the Society of American Indians (SAI) about how to “preserve personal and cultural autonomy” within mainstream American culture. Along the way, racial pride and eco-

nomic gain was heavily considered as well as whether or not the American Indian should “integrate into modern life or remain separate.”¹⁵ What started as a mission to be seen as equals, or as civilized in regards to Euro Americans, turned into a celebration and later appropriation of their handicrafts and artwork by elites in America.

A phenomenon that Renato Rosaldo has termed an “imperialist nostalgia” emerged during this time whereby elites began to celebrate handicrafts as intrinsically American, resulting in a Euro American desire for Native art before Native Americans vanished or assimilated. Indian reformers such as “field matrons” heavily encouraged Indian women “to make baskets, moccasins, and less traditional handicrafts such as lace and beaded napkin rings” as a “wholesome and feminine . . . less degrading way to contribute to the household economy,” a method of income that also strengthened capitalist convictions.¹⁶ This time period gives an added importance to the rewards portion of the Kickstarter campaign Wilbur utilized to fund the overall efforts of Project 562.

A Kickstarter campaign, a website for those raising funds for a certain type of project such as music or art, enabled Wilbur to carry out this project. If a project is of interest to a user they can then make a pledge for a specified amount of money. In return for their pledges, users receive a reward based on the specified amount of their pledge. Each project defines the minimum amount the creators are seeking within an allotted time period along with potential rewards if the goal is reached. Project 562 had an initial goal of \$54,000 and by the end of its campaign reached a total of \$213,461 and four thousand backers.¹⁷ Part of Wilbur’s campaign involved introducing original rewards to offer those who chose to pledge, such as stickers, posters, and clothing. Two of the higher placed rewards items, “Team Spirit” tees and couture fashion pieces are worthy of further discussion.

The “Team Spirit” tees that are offered are baseball shirts that have select images from Project 562 silk-screened on the front and sides. One of two things to consider here is the image of Wilbur’s work that is displayed on the clothing. Although they represent a more authentic view of Native Americans, one has to wonder whether or not these images will be one day manipulated in some mass-produced way and added to the trove of other images of Native Americans used to reinforce a stereotype. Second is the choice of the baseball tee. Baseball is identified as one of the most American icons our culture has to offer, so it is a bit curious that these are the types of shirts that were chosen to feature her images. When we look at the images and the type of shirts they are printed on they seem to go together, but they also represent the complexities of American identity and the fabric it is built on.

Another piece of fashion is couture pieces made by a

Native American clothing line called B. Yellowtail. The line features a leather-sleeved baseball tee and two couture dresses. All three have selected images printed on their corresponding fabric. These images create a new kind of textile pattern to consider. Tribal patterns are commonly appropriated into mainstream commercial fashion lines. When we look at tribal patterns on shirts, socks, or dresses, for instance, we link that pattern to Native Americans and the images that Curtis rendered in his portraits. Wilbur, in collaboration with this designer, took these Natives and put them on the textiles to represent themselves in place of a manufactured version put out in malls across America. The fashion aspect of this campaign is just as important as the actual project—not just for the complexities it highlights but also for the past events we can link it to.

To date, Wilbur has visited and photographed one-third of the groups she has set out to. Her first exhibit will be held at the Tacoma Art Museum at the end of May 2014. Tacoma is less than an hour away from Seattle, which is where Curtis first had the idea for his project. Curiously enough, one of the sponsors for the exhibit is J.P. Morgan, who also funded Curtis's efforts so many years ago. It is almost ironic that these two projects with such stark differences could have their roots in any closer places than these. Even though she is putting together what she feels is an authentic, unique, and unified image of Native Americans, there are still going to be ties to the past that may never fully be cut loose. Matika Wilbur may or may not be successful in changing perceptions of Native Americans—only time will tell—but one thing is for sure: she will most certainly open the doors for a new type of conversation to take place regarding what it means to be American. ♦

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5. Timothy Egan, *Short Nights of the Shadow Catcher: The Epic Life and Immortal Photographs of Edward Curtis*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 15–18.

6. Edward S. Curtis, Steadman Upham, and Nat Zappia, *The Many Faces of Edward Sheriff Curtis: Portraits and Stories from Native North America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press: 2006), 25.

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8. Ibid., 15.

9. Ibid., 18.

10. Whitney Richardson, "Rejecting Stereotypes, Photographing 'Real' Indians," *New York Times*, February 19, 2014, accessed April 3, 2014, http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/19/rejecting-stereotypes-photographing-real-indians/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=o.

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AMERICAN IDENTITIES

440: AMERICAN FOLK CULTURE

In Search of Lost Things

Proust and the Importance of Material Culture

NICOLE REHNBERG

This essay was written for Dr. Michael Stein-er's American Folk Culture course in the spring of 2014. With Marcel Proust as a focal point, I discuss other works of literature and scholarship to expand the debate as to whether cultural history is discerned most clearly through words or material objects. Words are powerful in different ways, and occasionally considered artifacts themselves; however, there is something sacred to holding and touching materials from the past that help individuals understand both their own past and the lives of others.

In this quote, he discusses the important and powerful role that material artifacts play in everyday human experience. Through exploring Proust's words and their relation to another work of literature, John Cheever's "The Lowboy," I will discuss how William James and Yi-Fu Tuan act as champions for the importance of artifacts as tools to understand the human experience. Then, by looking at how Tuan's definition of artifacts includes not only material objects but also mental ones, I will consider the views of William B. Hesseltine, John Kouwenhoven, Henry Glassie, and James Deetz to conclude that material artifacts are more important than words alone, and ultimately agree with Proust's description of the power that material artifacts play in the process of understanding the constant relationship humans have with the past, or what Proust would call "lost time."

In the first part of the quote provided, Proust calls into question the traditional human understanding of the past. Whereas some may argue that the past is an abstract force in human life, Proust proposes that the past deposits itself inside material artifacts. At the end of the same quote, Proust says that the past remains captive in the object until it is found by someone who can "recognize what lies within, call it by its name and so set it free." For instance, if an individual found a hammer from their childhood he or she would not only be holding a hammer but also the memories of times past in which that hammer was used. Perhaps, if that individual would look upon that hammer, he or she would remember summer days of many years ago when they built a deck with their now-deceased father. The hammer would not only be a simple tool that is meant to deliver an impact to an object, but it would also be an instrument to recapture summers gone

One of the most famous scenes in Western literature is from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, in which the narrator eats a madeleine and through the material experience is thrown into flashbacks of his childhood. Later in the novel, Proust elaborates on his view of artifacts with this quote:

What intellect restores to us under the name of the past is not the past. In reality as soon as each hour of one's life has died, it embodies itself in some material object, as do the souls of the dead in certain folk stories, and hides there. There it remains captive, captive forever, unless we should happen upon the object, recognize what lies within, call it by its name and so set it free.¹

by. In Proust's view, artifacts are embodiments of the past which grant individuals access to the past in the present.

John Cheever's short story, "The Lowboy," illustrates Proust's sentiment in a frightening way. Cheever's narrator tells a story of the relationship he and his brother have to the eponymous lowboy inherited from their mother who passes away before the story begins. The narrator notes that his brother's relationship with the lowboy becomes increasingly unhealthy as he finds himself obsessed with this object of the past. In observing his brother's fixation on the object, the narrator explores the power that objects can hold over people. The brother's fascination with the physicality of the lowboy and his determination to keep it in the same condition that it was in his childhood becomes an unhealthy obsession as the story progresses. This fixation begins with an inexplicable desire for the lowboy and ends with the brother staring blankly at the dark rings in the varnish as a horrific scene unfolds in which all of the dysfunctional and deceased members of his family arise from the lowboy and are effectively brought back to life by the brother's obsession with the object. This illustrates the darker side of the power that artifacts hold: the brother's fascination was one of the pains and heartaches of his childhood, of which he refused to let go.² In this instance the power of the lowboy as an artifact was too great and left the narrator's brother a broken man controlled by heirloom furniture.

William James's article, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," discusses the indiscretion that human beings have for other people's ways and beliefs. James begins this article with an anecdote of a trip he took to North Carolina. On this trip, he sees a ruined landscape, pock-marked with tree stumps and uneven patches of crops. It was not until he talked to the locals about their landscape that he discovered that what he thought was a decimated scene was actually a sign of progress. The deforestation undertaken to make room for small farms was one of "duty, struggle, and success." James then realizes: "I had been as blind to the peculiar ideality of their conditions as they certainly would also have been to the ideality of mine, had they had a peep at my strange indoor academic ways of life at Cambridge." While James's quick judgment of the farmers may leave readers uneasy, this example shows that the worth assigned to physical objects, such as the Carolinian terrain, depends upon the responses that individuals feel toward those things. James would agree with Proust that each material artifact stirs within different people different feelings, and that those responses depend upon the subjective human experience that each individual brings to each object they encounter. Objects do not always inspire a fear of the past, as seen in Cheever's example; rather, it is how we react to the past which colors how we will interact with objects that surround us.³

Artifacts greatly influence how human beings understand and qualify their experience, according to Yi-Fu Tuan's article, "The Significance of the Artifact." Tuan's argument as to why artifacts are important parallels Proust's. In this article, he explores how artifacts help make the human experience more concrete and significant through the stories told with the objects and also the stories told about them. It is part of human nature for individuals to want to hold on to the past, Tuan believes, and artifacts help to slow the unending flow of time and provide a narrative for understanding the continuity of one's life. He writes that most objects are not meant to be aides of memory; however, if we have enough distance from those objects, "the next encounter with that object will have the power to recreate in us, briefly, vivid sensations of an earlier self."⁴

This mirrors Proust who argues that the past comes back to life when it is found by someone who can recognize it and "set [the past] free." Artifacts are important tools that humans use to understand the human experience. He explains that an artifact is "a humanly constructed object, material or mental."⁵ At first blush, it might appear that Tuan's definition of an artifact is too broad to be in conversation with Proust, who was discussing the power of material objects and how they relate to humans and their past. While I argue that Tuan is ultimately in agreement with Proust, his definition of artifacts does pose the question: if an artifact can be either material or mental, is the actual artifact the object or the words and stories that surround it?

William B. Hesseltine is a firm believer in the power of words over the power of artifacts. In his article, "The Challenge of the Artifact," he insists that artifacts cannot speak for themselves, meaning that historians cannot demand precise meaning from objects, nor can they be used as evidential building blocks whereby a narrative of human experience can be written. According to Hesseltine, written documents such as diaries, letters, and legal papers are much more trustworthy in exploring the true meaning of past experiences because they show more empirically the explanation of human activities whereas historians cannot be in the same kind of dialogue with non-written artifacts. Without the directive nature of words, eager historians who want to classify things can too easily misappropriate material objects, in Hesseltine's view. There is too much deduction that occurs in the process of studying non-lettered artifacts that can call into question the findings that arise from such a process. While Hesseltine notes that historians can insert their biases onto even written artifacts, he also notes that it would be harder to argue against what is actually written down. Ultimately, he would disagree with Proust, and insist that the past that an individual reexperiences through material objects is a biased memory instead of

the factual past.⁶

To counter Hesseltine's acerbic view of material culture, John Kouwenhoven's article, "American Studies: Words or Things?" argues that material culture is far more important than words, which he believes are abstract and ephemeral. In his attack on words, he notes that they are deceptive and misleading and are very subjective in nature. One needs similar context, such as language, culture, and geography, to understand what another person conveys through the use of language. Ultimately, he argues that words get in the way of actually engaging with the physical world and using the power of our senses of sight, smell, taste, hear, and touch. Without actual objects to engage with human senses, the past cannot be fully processed or reexperienced. For example, when walking into a museum, individuals need to observe more than just the printed placard next to artifacts because creative thinking is fueled by sense experience as the most effective way to understanding the past. While Kouwenhoven does not provide illustrative moments where material objects are able to bring people back to the past as Proust and Cheever describe, Kouwenhoven nevertheless supports the use of material objects as a means to engage fully with the past.⁷

Henry Glassie would agree with Kouwenhoven's championing of material objects and the historical power that they possess in experiencing continuity with the past. In his article, "The Artifact's Place in American Studies," he discusses the limitations of print culture for understanding the past for historians. One of the biggest limitations of print culture is the subject of most printed objects and the subjective positioning of the authors who create them. According to Glassie, "in most social history the 'average' people of the past are not granted the respect biographers normally accord their subjects or political historians give to theirs." The lack of a mouthpiece for the majority of human civilization since time immemorial shows the weakness of words alone regarding our understanding of the past. As the bulk of the world's societies have been nonliterate, there are even fewer who have opted to create documents that are useful for understanding the past. As Glassie explains, these individuals are part of "a minuscule minority of unusual people. And the richest of literature was produced by people who in Yeats's anguished formula traded life for art. [After all,] it is not a contented, jovial, sociable individual who spends hours revising poems or talking into a journal." Glassie also agrees with Kouwenhoven that too much can be made out of words, as it is too subjective of a form, and words "are not strong enough to resist the advances of the ardent theorist." The most accurate understanding of the past comes with an engagement with material culture rather than reading antiquated writings from a group of mostly rich, solemn, powerful men who only had a limited and

biased breadth of knowledge. According to Glassie, what these men would offer is a thorough understanding of their libraries and not of the world at-large. Glassie would agree with Proust's celebration of material artifact's power, as it is only through an engagement with objects from the past that a truer and more honest understanding of the past can be rendered.⁸

James Deetz wrote a book that is a celebration of material minutia, entitled *In Small Things Forgotten*.⁹ In this book, he discusses the historical archeology of colonial America, and in doing so, focuses on the artifacts of everyday people. By looking at simple objects like household wares or shards of pottery, it can be deduced whether or not a household was significantly prosperous or plebeian and for how long the site was occupied. One example he provides is of a whaling tavern that was located on a small island far from shore. By analyzing the amount of whalebones found on the island, it was deduced that whalers used the tavern to watch for their prey before attacking once they were spotted. His attention to material detail is meticulous; what some would consider inconsequential, such as gravestones or shards of pottery, Deetz looks into with great detail and learns much about Colonial America by doing so. Deetz's use of material objects to explore Anglo-American culture is a strong example of how scholars can get objects to "speak for themselves," as Hesseltine argued against. By meticulously engaging with material culture, Deetz is able to ascertain much about the colonial American past that written documents would not be able to provide. In this way, Deetz is arguably the strongest advocate for Proust in the selection of readings for this class.

The debate between whether words or things are more adept at permitting us to experience continuity with the past is one that will likely not be going away any time soon as each new generation of scholars champions either the side of words or things. However, this debate is bigger than the library or classroom in which it is usually held. How individuals understand history, especially cultural history, is of the utmost importance on both a social and personal level. The process of understanding and connecting to what Proust would call "lost time" is one that necessitates material objects because they are outside of the experience of the present moment. Words are powerful in different ways and are occasionally considered artifacts themselves. But in regards to understanding and unlocking the past, experiencing material objects from another time using our senses invokes much more of a response and understanding than simply reading words on a page. Proust chose his narrator to be so moved by the madeleine rather than a piece of textual ephemera because physical objects possess power to assist in the process of both understanding and reexperiencing times and people of the past. ♦

1. Marcel Proust, *On Art and Literature, 1896–1919* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1997), 19.
2. John Cheever, “The Lowboy,” *The Stories of John Cheever* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 477–487.
3. William James, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” *On Some of Life’s Ideals* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1900), 3–9.
4. Yi-Fu Tuan, “The Significance of the Artifact,” *Geographical Review* 70 (1980), 59.
5. Tuan, “Significance,” 55.
6. William B. Hesseltine, “The Challenge of the Artifact,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66 (Winter 1982), 122–127.
7. John Kouwenhoven, “American Studies: Words or Things?” *Monograph* (Wilmington, DE: The Wemyss Foundation, 1963), 3–19.
8. Henry Glassie, “Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact’s Place in American Studies,” *Prospects* 3 (October 1978), 27–30.



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