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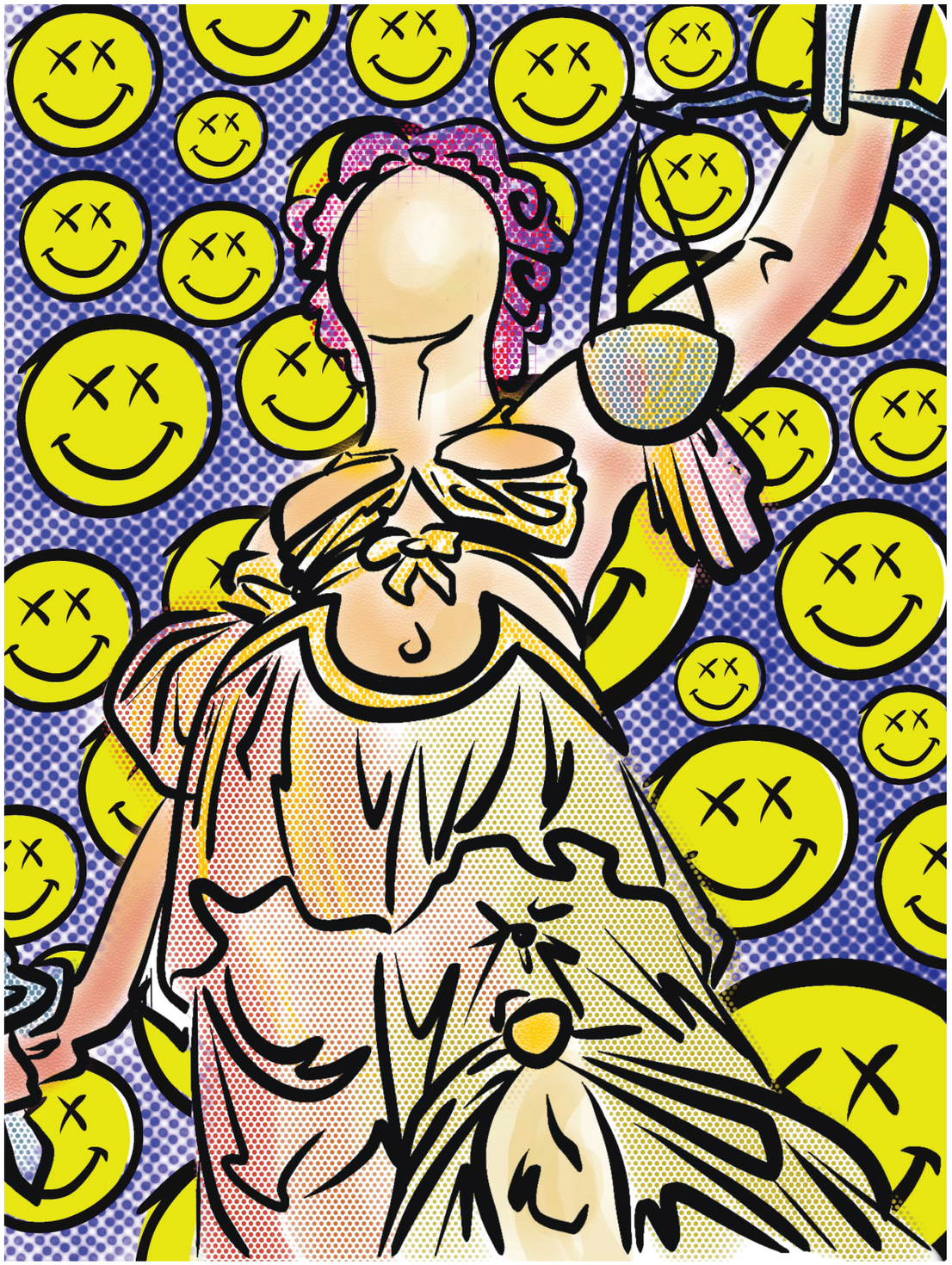

2023–2024

The editors dedicate this year's issue of the American Papers to the memory of Professor Jesse Frank Battan (1948-2024).

The American Papers

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Volume 42

Editors-in-Chief
Melissa Garrison
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Professor Eric Gonzaba

Cover Artwork by Raffaele Spennato

This issue could not have been realized without the dedication of our Co-Editors-in-Chief this year—Melissa Garrison and Kathleen Loreto Spennato. These women went above and beyond during a particularly challenging year to select papers, perform rigorous edits, and prepare the final layout of the issue you are now reading. All of their work was voluntary, unrelated to their coursework and uncompensated. This issue stands as a testament to their commitment to our department and to the humanities at large. Their dedication to showcasing and preserving the scholarship of CSUF students speaks volumes about their character, drive, and belief in the mission of American Studies. Students like them give me and all my faculty colleagues hope for the future. Melissa and Kathy—I am so very proud of both of you. This issue truly sets a standard for others to aspire to. Cheers to both of you.

—Professor Eric Gonzaba

Welcome to the 2023–2024 issue of *The American Papers!*

We are happy to present the forty-second edition of the journal. As we reflect on this year, we realize that American Studies is needed now more than ever. In this interdisciplinary field of study, scholars learn to think critically about the world around them. By studying American institutions, public memory, gender and sexuality, race, and transnational identities, among many other topics, American Studies scholars explore the meaning behind the culture we encounter every day. Through analysis of primary and secondary sources and engagement with cultural theory, our scholars attempt to understand how American history and culture reflect and shape our experiences, ideas, and identities.

We invite you to explore the many insights into the American experience presented in this year's journal. The featured articles critically examine the cultural work of fashion, music, film, gaming, sports, and the American Dream. From an intimate look at the American immigrant experience to a discussion of sexuality and age in horror films, this year's journal explores themes of popular culture, race, gender, sexuality, institutional power, and more.

Each year, The American Papers publishes an exceptional paper chosen by a committee of professors to honor Earl James Weaver, one of the founding professors of American Studies at CSUF. We are happy to present Kathleen Loreto Spennato as this year's winner for her paper, "Mods, Miniskirts, and the Implications of Cool: Revolution and Co-optation through Subcultural Style."

We would like to thank the authors who have contributed their work to this issue of The American Papers. This issue would not be possible without their exceptional work in writing and revising these essays. We are also grateful to the American Studies faculty at CSUF for their unwavering support of student scholarship and their commitment to fostering student learning and creativity. We also express our gratitude to our faculty advisor, Professor Eric Gonzaba, for offering invaluable support, guidance, and encouragement throughout the process of producing this issue.

—The Editors

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Mini skirt by Mary Quant, taken at the Mary Quant Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum. 2019. *(Photo courtesy of the author.)*

Mods, Miniskirts, and the Implications of Cool: Revolution and Co-optation through Subcultural Style

Kathleen Loreto Spennato

AMST 502T: Culture and Desire

The 2024 Weaver Prize Committee found that this essay, written for Dr. Gonzaba's graduate research seminar, stood out for its original research and argument. The paper interrogates a contemporary concept—the idea of the branded self and the image of cool—and excavates the roots of this concept in a specific historical moment. The essay explores how fashion can communicate identity and resistance by examining the British Mod style, which was embodied through garments like the miniskirt. Placing the Mod subculture in broader historical context, the author examines some of the racial and gendered politics of the subculture, analyzing how "the miniskirt acted as both a tool of liberation and conformity." The essay skillfully analyzes a range of primary sources, including images, advertisements, autobiographies, and the specific designs and sewing techniques used by Mod designer Mary Quant.

The author situates their original research well within existing scholarly literature, while also making clear their unique scholarly intervention. The essay contributes to existing conversations in American Studies around material culture, as well as body politics, fashion, and aesthetics. The author's passion for the subject comes across clearly on the page. The essay shows the complexity of culture and points out that even subcultures seeking to rebel against the mainstream can perpetuate exclusion along the lines of race, body type, and class. The author shows important transnational connections in their examination of how British Mod style was influenced by American culture, and vice versa. The author's original research demonstrates how a hemline can communicate rebellion, but it can also be co-opted when it becomes mass marketed and exits the confines of the subculture and enters the mainstream.

On April 13, 2023, a press release announced the death of British fashion designer Mary Quant. Hailed as the queen of Mod fashion and mother of the miniskirt, Quant garnered heartfelt tributes from fans worldwide. Epitomizing the style of the Swinging Sixties, she revolutionized fashion with her playful clothes for young modern women. Quant's fashion rebellion transformed young Americans of the 1960s by championing Peter Pan collars, candy-colored tights, knickerbockers, flats, and, above all, miniskirts.[1] "I think the point of fashion is not to get bored looking at somebody," said Quant. "The point of clothes should be," she continued, "one, that you're noticed; two, that you look sexy; and three, that you feel good."[2] Quant's liberation pushed against 1950s mainstream narratives of conservatism. Her designs removed restricting garments such as fitted bodices, tucked waists, and mid-calf-length slim skirts of the early 1950s.[3] She revolutionized fashion by moving the hemline of dresses and skirts above the knee. In 1955, Quant's designs freed women by eliminating anything that might restrict her from "running to catch a bus," as she put it.[4] She condemned the long, full skirts, padded busts, corseted tiny waists, and rounded shoulders of the late 1950s.[5] "I grew up not wanting to grow up," said Quant. "Growing up seemed terrible. To me, it was awful. Children were free and sane, and grown-ups were hideous."[6] Quant's little-girl ethos built her rebellious brand. "The celebrity designer is an accepted part of the modern fashion system today, but Mary was rare in the 60s as a brand ambassador for her own clothes and brand," said historian Jenny Lister in the *New York Times* obituary. "She didn't just sell quirky British cool, she actually *was* quirky British cool."[7]

Personifying quirky coolness, Quant brought her Mod designs to America in 1960, just before the music of the British Invasion conquered popular American media. Selling modern, youthful, and sexy garments, Quant pushed the boundaries of acceptability by being ahead of mainstream fashion. If a young American woman wanted to look cool, she might simply purchase a garment designed by Quant. Clothing, after all, is a vital part of communicating identity. You can quickly judge someone based on what a person chooses to wear. Quant radiated cool with her unique style. Thus, women sought to emulate her by purchasing her look—yet Quant rebelled against popular fashion.

She reconceptualized modernity with her subcultural style. As part of the Mod movement, a youthful British subculture, she knew how to be stylish and sell that uniqueness to women who did not want to conform to popular norms. However, subcultural capital does not last forever. Eventually, the dominant culture absorbs the rebellious expressions of cool, and another subculture takes the crown of cool. By connecting to the expression of Mod fashion through garments designed by Quant, an American woman became associated with a white Anglo-European ideal that emphasized eternal youth whilst celebrating femininity. As Quant's popularity grew, her subcultural stylishness became the mainstream style. With mass marketing, the rise of Mod fashion reveals the tension of American gender roles through consumption of the miniskirt. Quant constructed an empowering identity for culturally dominant Americans of the 1960s by promoting the archetypal woman as slender, young, white, and middle class. Conceivably, Mod style and the subsequent miniskirt rebellion opened the door to revolution just as they provided a cultural script for hegemony.

Numerous books exist on Mods, and this work expands upon them by considering themes such as *cool*, subcultural battlegrounds, and fashion as communication. This cultural analysis of Mod fashion builds on work that emerged from the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s. Scholars such as Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie, Jenny Garber, and Stuart Hall offer practical concepts of Mod subculture and its place within the cultural battlefield. In conversation with theorists like Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, this paper examines how fashion communicates and transgresses broader American themes like gender, race, and class. Through an examination of the designs of Quant, this work offers a unique perspective on American culture by exploring the miniskirt sold by JCPenney department stores and its mail-order catalog. It expands on ideas from scholars like Christine Jacqueline Feldman and Christiane Deibel regarding Mods and the impact of their style on American women. Furthermore, this paper explores how the broader notion of cool within subcultures expands to the dominant culture. It then turns its attention to fashion via the transnational relationship between Black Americans and British working-class youth, starting with the concept of cool explored by Joel

Dinerstein, Robert Farris Thompson, and Carol Tulloch. In addition to contributing to Beth Bailey's study of movements during the 1960s, this work attempts to pull one string from the complicated questions of revolution. Within this framework, this paper seeks to understand how concepts such as cool, individuality, and consumption impact American culture.

Ultimately, this work aims to analyze the impact of the Mod style on American culture, specifically focusing on how Quant's miniskirt rebellion affected gender roles and the assumptions around them. This article highlights the cultural exchange between Black Americans, British working-class youth, and white middle-class American teenagers. Mod fashion is used as a cultural text to explore how the miniskirt acted both as a tool of liberation and conformity. Additionally, this work examines how Quant's subcultural style became mainstream through mail-order catalogues and fashion campaigns aimed at young, usually teenage, women. Through close readings of images, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, and Quant's autobiographies, this work seeks to understand how Quant's fashion revolution impacted the identity of young American women.

Mod(ern) Cool

Historically, the term *Mod* has been used to describe both the Mod subculture and the style of fashion it produced. In a 1979 edition of *Webster's New World Dictionary for Young Readers*, Mod is defined as "very fashionable, especially in a showy way: used of certain young people or their clothes."[8] Associated with youth and style, the Mod subculture began in 1955 when Quant opened her first boutique on King's Road in the London borough of Chelsea. Hip young men and women, like Quant, created a uniquely British subculture out of cosmopolitan influences from the United States and Europe. Known for style, scooters, and speed, Mod culture embraced fashion, music, and nightclubs. From clothes shopping to finding rare records, consumption was essential to Mod culture. Members of the subculture are known as Mods. Initially, this group consisted of young men and women, including both white working-class members and Black immigrants from the West Indies.[9] Arriving at a time of incredible economic growth, Mods emphasized

youth over class and leisure over work. Furthermore, Mods built an alternative community that celebrated diverse international aesthetics and embraced the sounds of Black America. Beginning with Modern Jazz and moving into Motown, Mods associated themselves with the ethos of cool emanating from Black American musicians.

To understand why Mods associated Black American musicians with cool, it is necessary to look at the history of American cool. Cool is tough to define. Sometimes described as "charisma without trying," an identity tied to cool indicates a performance of self-confidence.[10] With each generation, new figures of cool emerge in our cultural environment to embody new approaches to individuality.[11] These successful rebels of American culture personify style and innovation. Furthermore, cool stands for a rebellious vision with original aesthetic approaches or a unique artistic vision that becomes a singular achievement or a permanent legacy.[12] According to American studies scholar Joel Dinerstein, their style and fashion are imitated, admired, and emulated.[13] Dinerstein suggests coolness is an earned form of individuality that exudes an aura of something new and uncontainable.[14]

Historically, the term *cool* emerged from the American jazz subculture. Dinerstein argues that cool is often forged at the cultural junction of youth culture, popular culture, and African American culture.[15] Conceived by Black Americans, the concepts of hip and cool became popularized amid the late-1940s jazz culture in New York.[16] African and Afro-American art historian Robert Farris Thompson suggests the history of cool goes back further, finding its origins in West and Central African languages—phrases such as "to be cool" or "to make cool" appeared in no less than thirty-five of them.[17] Indeed, Thompson argues that West African aesthetic principles like *itutu*, meaning "mystic coolness," suggest a more significant historical precedent for the existence of cool.[18] Thus, it is no surprise that the concept of cool took hold in the predominantly Black subculture of modern jazz. Carol Tulloch, a scholar of dress, diaspora, and transnationalism, argues that cool is an expansive diasporic act of Black aesthetics.[19] Moreover, the aesthetics of cool communicate presence through style narratives.[20] Tulloch uses the term *style-fashion-dress* to articulate the meanings and frameworks that signify a system of concepts describing the "whole-and-part" of

dress studies.[21] She argues that people of the African diaspora used style-fashion-dress in the construction of their identities and, most importantly, to perform cool as a way of being to counter the aesthetics of invisibility.[22]

To completely understand "cool," it is important to consider what is "uncool." *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines uncool as "failing to accord with the values or styles (as of dress or behavior) of a particular group; not accepted or admired as cool or proper; lacking in assurance."[23] To find evidence of uncool, one may look no further than the dominant American culture of the 1950s. Often, Americans perceive the era of the 1950s as one in which conformity ruled and mindless consumption reached new heights. These ideas are not admirable and are certainly considered uncool. It should be noted that perceptions do not always reflect the reality of a given time and place. In the 1950s, the American family experienced both opportunity and anxiety. American culture focused on boosting up the nuclear family, even as polio and Cold War fears threatened it.[24] Indeed, the post-World War II economy grew at an extremely rapid pace. Many Americans felt intense anxiety as they experienced immense economic growth. Moreover, Americans married earlier than ever, at an average age of twenty for women and twenty-three for men.[25] With government support in the form of the GI Bill, suburban expansion created record numbers of tract homes and planned communities.[26] In 1950, for example, Americans lined up for a chance to purchase one of 17,500 affordable homes in Lakewood, California.[27] Yet most suburbs excluded people of color.[28] Not only did the suburbs pull white Americans away from cities filled with cultural diversity, but they also cocooned them inside a repetitively built environment, creating the illusion of predictability. Though repetition is reassuring, having the same experience all the time is uncool, especially as a teenager.

As the economy of the 1950s roared, American teenage popular culture began to grow, spreading across the world and eventually drawing disdain from British Mods. American youth culture centered around music, television, and movies. "Rock and roll" music, a term coined by DJ Alan Freed in 1951, exploded in popularity.[29] In 1956, Elvis Presley's song "Heartbreak Hotel" hit number one on the American Billboard Top 100 chart.[30] In 1953, *The Wild One* film featured Marlon Brando

leading young leather-clad wild motorcycle riders to terrorize a hick American town. The television show *American Bandstand*, which featured teenagers dancing to Top 40 music, debuted in 1952, with DJ Dick Clark taking the show nationwide in 1956. Leather jackets and poodle skirts with matching sweater sets soon became the standout style of the 1950s teenager. Jumping across the pond, American popular culture spread swiftly to the United Kingdom. British teenagers soon associated themselves with the American teenage lifestyle. Calling themselves "Rockers," many British teenagers started to act and look the part. Rebelling against the Rockers, Mods did not want to be leather-clad mainstream copies of Marlon Brando. Instead, Mods associated themselves with a sharp Continental style, a style based on the glamour of elite Europeans, and borrowed Black American subcultural capital to form their own version of cool.

An innovator in American cool, Miles Davis performed cool better than anyone else. He did not just wear clothes; he exemplified the use of style-fashion-dress to present cool. Journalists Paolo Hewitt and Mark Baxter describe his immaculate style in *The A to Z of Mod*. In the 1950s, Davis wore American Brooks Brothers suits with a flair of Continental elements like cravats and handkerchiefs.[31] In addition to his impeccable suit, he regularly sported a pressed white shirt, a sleek tie, and shiny brogue shoes.[32] In a 1958 photo of Davis on stage, he holds his trumpet down against his double-breasted light gray pinstripe suit. His collar is starched, with a neat black tie leaning against a pressed white shirt. Holding his other hand to his ear, Davis looks slightly out to the left of the photographer with relaxed intensity.[33] According to Dinerstein, relaxed intensity epitomizes the aesthetic of American cool.[34] Indeed, in this image, Davis personifies the presentation of cool. His influence on the London jazz scene, argue Hewitt and Baxter, helped to jumpstart the initial Mod subculture.[35] Such admiration of Davis shows how the Mod identity is based on a bricolage of style centered around Black American cool and cosmopolitan aesthetics.

Style and cool are ways for Mods to express themselves and their values by providing an avenue for individuals to communicate individual style and group identity. A person who identifies as a Mod creates a distinctive aesthetic that communicates a shared Mod identity by sub-

verting the meaning of garments, recoding what a dress or suit means. Furthermore, style and coolness provide a way for Mods to challenge the dominant culture and create a space for themselves. It is an empowering act that celebrates expression and individuality while also providing a platform for a collective identity. In Quant's first autobiography, *Quant by Quant* published in 1965, she wrote, "It is the Mods . . . the direct opposite of the Rockers (who seem to be anti-everything) . . . who gave the dress trade the impetus to break through the fast-moving, breath-taking, up-rooting revolution in which we have played a part since the opening of Bazaar [Quant's boutique]. We had to keep up with them."[36] Using fashion and music to embrace consumption, Mods created a revolution with the aesthetic style of cosmopolitan bricolage.

> "Style and cool are ways for Mods to express themselves and their values by providing an avenue for individuals to communicate individual style and group identity.

Though tied together in the pursuit of cool, gender ideas in the Mod subculture are complex. The subculture is often discussed as a fashion style for women and a subculture for men. According to cultural theorists Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, the visibility of women within Mod culture allowed for expanded subcultural female participation—participation previously unavailable to them in other teenage subcultures, such as the Rockers of the 1950s.[37] With men and women looking more alike in Mod culture, a woman could fully participate in its consumerism by obsessing over the same details that preoccupied men, such as clothes, appearance, and stylized looks.[38] Greater involvement did not equate to gender equality. Yet, say McRobbie and Garber, "the mod ethos of individual 'cool' could be more easily sustained by girls, at home, in school or at work, without provoking direct parental or adult reaction, than a more aggressive and abrasive subcultural style."[39] Ideas about cool tied Mods together, but the late 1950s/early 1960s social structures did not allow women to obtain complete autonomy.

Mary Quant's Subversive Mod Designs

Mary Quant and her husband, Alexander Plunket-Greene, dancing in New York City. 1960.

Mary Quant embodied cool aesthetics as she danced with her husband, Alexander Plunket Greene, in a photograph taken in a New York dance hall in 1960. They are the center of attention in a spotlight of circular lights, as bulbs shaped like exploding fireworks seemingly erupt above their heads. As the epitome of cool, the couple created a charismatic presence on the dance floor. In a fitted black suit, Greene closes his eyes to the world as he feels the music with his body embracing every sound. Quant moves along the dance floor with ease and grace as the image captures her in the casual movement of the moment. Her striped dress floats above her knee as the waistline falls below her hips, a style that goes against the formal and elegant corset waists popular in 1950s dresses. Quant's hair is much shorter and more structured than the trendy bouffant or ponytail hairstyle seen on most women that year. She is very much ahead of her time. American Studies scholar Joel Dinerstein argues that the secret to a cool aesthetic requires an expression of calm when surrounded by dynamic action.[40] Cool also involves a signature artistic style that is fundamentally authentic. Through their ability to be relaxed in the center of the dance floor, Quant and Greene embody cool with their unique style and genuine confidence. Women, in particular, desired to be just like Quant. Seen as proprietors of cool, the couple personified a style that consumers sought to purchase.

Quant and Greene embodied a distinctly American cool derived from Black American cultural influence. Based on "resistance to provocation" and "coolness under pressure," the origins of cool are rooted in Black survival.[41] Dinerstein created a rubric of cool based on Black American artists' characteristics. Dinerstein's archetype begins with cool as an

original artistic vision that expresses a signature style. Next, Dinerstein believes that each cool figure reveals cultural rebellion or transgression within their historical context. Third, figures of cool show a certain level of high-profile recognition or iconicity. Finally, someone cool is recognized for their cultural legacy.[42] Dinerstein expected figures to meet a minimum of three out of the four criteria within the rubric to determine American cool. Quant easily passes, meeting four out of four. Though British, Quant embodied American cool by conveying an original vision and expressing a signature style. She became a cultural rebel through the transgression of hemlines, raising them over time to create the miniskirt. Quant's iconicity solidified over the years with high-profile recognition, from a British damehood to a postage stamp printed with her famous "banana split" dress. Finally, as shown by the outpouring of recognition upon her death in April 2023, there is no doubt about her cultural legacy. Yet Quant learned how to be cool through her interest in modern American jazz. In transnational leaps, Quant absorbed cool from Black Americans.

Banana Boat dress (right) and green skater style dress (middle), taken at the Mary Quant Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum. 2019. *(Photo courtesy of the author.)*

As the embodiment of her own brand, Quant's cultural work began with style. She credits Mods with both starting a fashion revolution and inspiring her to expand on that revolution. Marketing the revolution of style required an emphasis on consumption. Mods communicate that they are cool by demonstrating their purchasing expertise. To be "in the know" corresponds to showing Mod style through consumption,

revealing to the world how their style is rooted in the concept of cool. Consumption also provides Mods with a sense of subcultural capital. "The Mod way of life consisted of total devotion to looking and being 'cool.' Spending practically all your money on clothes and all your after-work hours in clubs and dance halls," wrote Richard Barnes, an early 1960s Mod.[43] In other words, the Mod subculture communicates style and expression of cool through consumption, with an emphasis on leisure activities. Cultural theorist and sociologist Dick Hebdige argues that the Mod style aided in the negotiation between school, work, and leisure.[44] By concealing as much as it stated, Mod style disrupted the logical order of signifier to signified by subverting the meaning of collars, suits, and ties.[45] Mods changed traditional garments like suits and dresses by enhancing color or modifying length, twisting style to communicate a disruption of mainstream ideas. Thus, the Mod ideal of extreme devotion to style countered hegemonic ideas and expectations of dress codes.

Beginning in 1955, Quant challenged the fashion industry with subversive Mod designs that confronted the traditional approaches of fashion designers and department stores of the 1950s. Quant found inspiration in everything and turned these subversive ideas into a unique expression of her style. In her second autobiography, published in 2012, Quant writes, "A skirt might become some pants, a top might become a coat . . . I seem to have the mind of a vacuum cleaner—but the pieces all turn into something else, and one design turns into another."[46] By subverting the dominant sign, Quant subverted the cultural script. Quant challenged the status quo by assigning new meaning through her rebellious transformation of clothing. In fact, her subversion ran right through to the construction of her garments. One of her favorite techniques embellished the idea of sex appeal onto the garment. Quant ran a channel seam, which allows contrasting fabric to be visible through the seam fold, down to just above the crotch level, ending with a sprat's head (a decorative triangular-shaped stitch) bursting out into fan pleats.[47] Quant's technique suggests a reference to the female body. Such garment construction alludes to a woman's vagina exploding with excitement. "It is fun to me," said Quant, "that this sort of sexiness is not usually analyzed."[48] Though many may not have caught the reference,

Quant created garments with subversion sewn into their very core. Like her miniskirt, Quant's subversive designs evolved over time, laying the foundation for meaningful change.

Women in the Mod movement used fashion as a form of rebellion. Moving dress or skirt hemlines further up the leg, Mod women transgressed hegemonic ideas of acceptable style. Semiologist Umberto Eco maintains that we speak through our clothes.[49] By using fashion to communicate, Mods signify their membership in the Mod subculture. Eco hypothesizes that whole cultures can be studied as a phenomenon of communication.[50] Therefore, subcultures should be seen to extrapolate broader cultural themes. Subcultural codes communicate with the dominant culture. In this case, analyzing how Mods use style helps us understand how they question mainstream ideas. Historian Christiane Deibel emphasizes the idea of the distinctive individual within the Mod subculture, arguing that Mods use clothes to highlight individual distinction from conventionally dressed people.[51] Moreover, they invoke Mod as a reference group to assert their "insider" status as members of an esoteric subculture.

“ Moving dress or skirt hemlines further up the leg, Mod women transgressed hegemonic ideas of acceptable style.

The miniskirt, an iconic signifier of the Mod style, allowed individuals to communicate their transgression against dominant American culture and declare their expression of cool as a form of elite status. Quant did not officially invent the miniskirt, but she popularized it through mass production. To clarify, miniskirts are not merely skirts but shorter hemlines on dresses as well. By allowing women the freedom to move, the miniskirt liberated women from constricting garments popularized by Christian Dior in the late 1940s. Without the flared dresses, cinched waists, and ship's-prow chests, the miniskirt allowed women the freedom to move.[52] Quant originally began by shortening shift dresses to be above the knee. Over time, the hemline became shorter, permitting women to run and dance easily. Inspired by the fashion of the 1920s,

Quant seemingly created a contemporary adaptation of the flapper dress, a dress that allowed women the freedom to move on the dance floor. Furthermore, Quant produced the miniskirt because of high demand.[53] She claimed that it was the girls shopping at her boutique that really invented the miniskirt as they demanded shorter and shorter hemlines.[54] "Mary Quant, whose skirts had been getting shorter since 1955, riffed on the ultra-short theme, and began making miniskirts slimmer and snugger, and selling her hot fashion to the cool masses at affordable prices," wrote Jeanne Beker in the *National Post*.[55] Indeed, the Mod subculture gave Quant inspiration to expand style beyond the traditional. By democratizing youth fashion, Quant made her subversive style available to a greater number of people—and as Quant's business grew, she expanded her Mod style to America.

Pinstriped dress made from menswear fabric, taken at the Mary Quant Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum. 2019. *(Photo courtesy of the author.)*

Selling Hegemony through the Miniskirt

Before Quant's designs arrived in post-World War II America, suburban growth necessitated the development of a new consumer marketplace. Families moving from the city to new single-family homes in the suburbs changed their consumption habits. With the suburban population increasing by forty-three percent between 1947 and 1953, merchandisers began to reach out to suburbanites where they lived.[56] American studies scholar Lizabeth Cohen argues that public space became commercialized, privatized, and feminized during this time period through the creation of the shopping center and decline of the town

center. Centered around shopping, a new vision for community space in the postwar era relied on a society built on mass consumption.[57] Thus, commercial developers built shopping centers to satisfy suburbanites' consumption and community needs. Crucial to shopping centers, department stores anchored the surrounding stores together in one central space. As postwar American life shifted from the city to the suburbs, shopping centers privatized public space, privileging the rights of private property owners over citizens' traditional rights.[58] These spaces became feminized, with a focus on sales and activities aimed at the suburban housewife, while excluding Americans whom the centers deemed delinquent. According to Cohen, developers defined communities using a combination of marketing and policing.[59] Developers used their power to deliberately exclude people of color and the working class by controlling access to the shopping centers.[60]

Within this context, department stores like JCPenney became central sites of consumption and a central part of suburban life. Begun in 1902 as a dry goods store in Wyoming, the business successfully grew based on founder James Cash Penney's ability to delegate responsibility, believing in the people he hired.[61] He somewhat uniquely shared one-third of a store's profits with each store manager.[62] By the 1950s, JCPenney began expanding into newly developed suburban shopping centers. In addition to increasing to over two thousand stores nationwide, the company launched a mail-order catalog.[63] In 1958, JCPenney created a campaign intended to make the shopping center the heart of suburban life. As part of the campaign, JCPenney created a community club room inside the recently opened New Jersey store at the Garden State Plaza Shopping Center. A story featured by their in-house publication, *Penney News*, explained the purpose of the room: "This community club room, which can also serve as a selling area, will be made available free of charge to women's clubs and civic groups."[64] JCPenney encouraged consumers to use their space, actively engaging with the white suburban female consumer of the 1960s. According to their board chair, William M. Batten, JCPenney broadened their lines of merchandise and services to embrace the full spectrum of family activity.[65]

Initially, JCPenney clothing buyers searched for garments with

an attractive new look to appeal to their stores' newly defined demographic of teenagers, a strategy Batten believed would grow the business. In 1961, a young buyer named Paul Young toured Europe and Britain to find unusual fashion to create sensational publicity for JCPenney. Exploring Europe shows a determination on the part of JCPenney to focus on a particular look of fashion—it suggests that the company aimed to target white consumers by focusing on Anglo-European designs. Finding precisely what JCPenney was looking for in Quant, Young knew he could sell her stylish cool to American consumers. After a year of preparation, Quant launched her first JCPenney collection in 1962 with a fashion show at the British Embassy in Washington.[66] Following its success, Quant took the fashion show on the road. With models dancing to live music in JCPenney stores from the East Coast to the West Coast, Quant brought the thrill of Mod fashion to malls across America. "At the time," said Quant, "young American women still dressed to look like Barbara Stanwyck or to look as frightening as possible, whereas we all looked about sixteen and never stopped dancing, with a mix of jive, twist and rock and roll."[67] Quant hints at the idea that Mod style is an upbeat and exciting youthful lifestyle, freeing American women from the rigid and tedious fashions constraining them in their conservative lives. However, her statement can also be read as co-opting cool from Black Americans and selling it back to a predominantly white audience of middle-class mall shoppers through her adoption of dance styles like the jive and twist. Thus, Quant sold Black Americans' youthful cool to white American women by freeing them to embrace newly accessible styles.

As Quant aimed to democratize fashion for young white American women, she needed to size her garments reliably and consistently. Though fashion in the United Kingdom was not standardized, the United States offered consistent sizing.[68] During the 1930s, the United States government became concerned that American manufacturing did not have standardized commercial sizing for garments. Government officials believed that manufacturers and consumers were losing money due to the variations in garment sizing.[69] Beginning in 1939, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) began a "scientific" study on the body dimensions of women. In a booklet titled *Women's Measurements for Garment and Pattern Construction*, researchers Ruth O'Brien and Wil-

liam C. Shelton collected data on 15,000 women to develop commercial sizing standards using body measurements.[70] According to the booklet, the project's goal included improving the fit of women's garments and patterns by creating a standard size. However, in creating these commercial standards, the USDA studied only urban white women from a sampling of nine states.[71] Interestingly, measurements were taken on women of color but were immediately discarded and removed from the study.[72] As a result, the American clothing industry sized their clothes based on white models, which effectively made the white woman the standard in size. By excluding women of color, the government implemented racist policies through the USDA's scientific study. Though legally enforced only for patterns and not garments manufactured for sale, the standard stood until 1970, when the USDA downgraded it to voluntary before finally eliminating it in 1983.[73] Thus, white body standards were the standard during the period Quant designed for the American market, further amplifying the Anglo-American body as normal.

Quant, for her part, believed the JCPenney collections were among her most successful and gratifying design experiences.[74] "There was this appetite for life that simply poured out of us," said Quant. "An extraordinary zest for independence, travel, music, food, and sexiness that we all seemed to bring from London."[75] As Quant brought this zest to life through Mod fashion, she conveyed a sense of liberation. Her girlish designs shortened the hemline of dresses and skirts as she played with ideas of youthful excitement. She claimed the JCPenney team was marvelous to work for. In her second autobiography, Quant wrote, "I suppose, like many men at the time, they were so surprised and shocked by the miniskirt fashion revolution that they rather stood back and let me get on with it."[76] Through this statement, a few tensions emerge. Quant illustrates the inherent sexism in business, with the JCPenney team described as men. Conversely, she believes that the miniskirt's rising hemline demonstrated a revolution. Though Quant argues that the miniskirt created a revolution intended to empower women, she still worked with men as the business power players. Yet these men ultimately stood back and accepted that Quant should take charge, perhaps because they believed that Quant knew what she was doing. Equally, the men of the JCPenney team might simply have done this because

they knew Quant's designs were good for business and that, ultimately, speaks to how American business co-opts ideas of revolution for profit. Quant's story thus demonstrates the nuances of gender hierarchies in 1960s American culture.

Quant's fourth collection for JCPenney arrived in 1963. In an advertisement for the upcoming spring and summer collection, JCPenney published a preview with two photographs featuring popular English fashion model Jean Shrimpton.[77] Taken by fashion photographer David Bailey in London, the first image features Shrimpton on Westminster Bridge with Big Ben in the background. Wearing a sleeveless pinstripe black dress with a white blouse underneath, Shrimpton's light brown hair is in an updo as she stands in black flats with her hands held together in front of her waist. The shift dress reveals only an inch of her knee as she appears to gaze at the street's gutter. The second image shows Shrimpton standing in front of a row of attached brown brick houses wearing a blue suit with a brown, piped black-and-white striped shirt. With its wide lapel, the jacket neatly frames her pencil skirt whilst a matching blue scarf hides her hair. The advertisement labels the fashion as sportswear coordinates, emphasizing that they are manufactured in England under Quant's supervision. As an exclusive of JCPenney, the outfits highlight earlier Mod fashion trends, with more muted or neutral colors.[78] With the pinstripe dress, Quant adapted fabric customarily used for men, disrupting fashion through her choice of material. Her modification of menswear in her garment suggests the playful subversion of gender. Quant's fourth collection ostensibly introduces additional transnational ideas about gender and sexuality from the United Kingdom to the United States by exposing a woman's knee and subversively using material typically associated with menswear.

With childlike motifs, Quant's 1965 JCPenney collection suggests that teenagers' position between childhood and adulthood affected their place in American society. In the fall catalog, three young white female models stand on the beach, gazing up at the camera.[79] Each model wears a long-sleeved blouse with a round Peter Pan collar. Two models are wearing Quant's pinafore dresses over their blouses, along with white tights and black Mary Jane flats. The middle model wears a tan skirt that, like the dresses, falls two inches above her knee. Her white socks reach just below her exposed knee. Quant's designs use a variety

of fabrics, including traditional wool and new inventions like acrylic and rayon with acetate taffeta. Each model's hair is shoulder length with youthful flips at the end. Natural makeup gives the models a young-looking appearance. Quant's clothes hint at childhood with the pinafore dresses, Peter Pan collars, and knee-high socks. Naturally styled hair and makeup add to their youthful appearance. Yet, in 1965, the rising hemline of the skirt indicated sex appeal by exposing the models' legs. Not quite children and not quite adults, teenagers of the 1960s occupied an uncomfortable period of transition. Quant's collection uncovers the anxiety of teenagers caught between staying young and growing up. According to cultural historian Christine Feldman, Americans of the 1960s feared that women wanted to remain little girls rather than grow up.[80] Moreover, Feldman argues that the Mod style, with geometric angles and near-mechanical limbs in place of the organic and curvy look of the 1950s woman, further heightens the tension for the in-between American teenager.[81] Seemingly, Quant's Mod designs endeavored to reconnect women with their girlhood. Yet it appears companies like JCPenney attempted to keep teenagers in the realm of childhood.

In 1966, JCPenney marketed Quant's newest collection as part of their back-to-school assortment. JCPenney associated Quant's fashion rebellion with young white middle-class American teenagers.[82] In an interviewed with *Penney News* for a campaign titled "Back to School Swings into Action," Quant voiced her support for the rising hemline—now three inches above the knee—by saying that teenage girls should be allowed to wear them.[83] However, her support arrived with some precautions. "And I'd like to see more American women wear the miniskirt," she told *Penney News*. "The trick is to wear flat shoes and tights. Where American women go wrong is wearing terribly high heels and hose with wide welts."[84] In addition to selling her idea of cool, Quant's statement adds to the tension between girlhood and womanhood. Initially advocating for teenagers, Quant then refers to them as women. Perhaps her statement reveals a transnational tension between ideas of gender in the United Kingdom and the United States. Quant refers to the British women who shopped in her boutique, Bazaar, as "girls" in her first autobiography, published just a year before the 1966 interview.[85] She often credits the British Mod girls with pushing for shorter hem-

lines. She readily admitted that the Mod girls needed to work to pay for these dresses, unlike many of the teenagers JCPenney targeted. Yet her reference to teenagers as women in America suggests that ideas of how young people should be named vary, therefore revealing that definitions of youth are fluid.

By 1967, Quant released her most revealing collection. With miniskirt hemlines rising five inches above the knee, the JCPenney catalog showed a brown pinafore dress with a zip down to the crotch.[86] Set on a Western farm with horses corralled against a desert backdrop, the models look off-camera to show their short Vidal Sassoon five-point haircuts. Once again, Quant plays with menswear as the pinafore dress covers a yellow blouse made to look like a man's button-up collared shirt. Later in the catalog, JCPenney unveils Quant's collection of undergarments. The text written across the top of the page, "Now: set your sights on the uninhibited styles by Mary Quant of London," shows Quant's complete expression of freedom.[87] Gone are the restricting undergarments holding a woman tightly together through a corset or tight girdle. Instead, Quant replaces them with acetate-cotton-Lycra spandex briefs and nylon-Lycra spandex corselets. Quant frees women to move with their miniskirts by using these light fabrics. Indeed, the catalog describes her "carefree petti pants" as an undergarment for "action-minded girls." Once again, the catalog underscores teenagers as children whilst providing images of women. Such images reinforce ideas about teenagers and their transition into adulthood and offer specific standards for them to meet—the young slender white woman.

In March of 1967, the miniskirt revolution encouraged the complete expression of liberation for young white teenagers. With the power of the miniskirt, young white teenagers fought against city government curfews. Labeled "riots" by the local media, "youngsters" took up space on Hollywood's Sunset Strip. Reporting on the revolt, the *National Police Gazette* published an article titled "Juvenile Rampage on Sunset Strip." Outside the nightclubs, crowds of young people gathered to protest a new 10 p.m. city curfew set to start later that month. The "throngs of youngsters" blocked traffic and destroyed a public bus. As the article states, "Teeny boppers, young girls who follow the popular rock 'n' roll stars and hang around the discotheques, roam the Strip nightly in their

miniskirts and Mod clothes. Though a new regulation prohibits anyone under 21 dancing in the clubs, the young set hangs around outside and listens to music."[88] The association between young people and the miniskirts of Mod fashion marks the Mod subculture as a rebellion. Noticeably absent from the images in the article are people of color. Thus, the report confirms the notion that the miniskirt is intended for action-minded rebellious white teenagers. Conceivably, Mod fashion empowered them to protest for their right to enjoy music and discotheques.

Mod fashion reached peak popularity in American culture by April 1967. No subculture can continue to be cool once it has been co-opted by the dominant culture. Initially, the miniskirt had subverted the long, full skirts, padded busts, tiny corseted waists, and rounded shoulders of 1950s fashion. As of 1967, commercial co-optation of the Mod fashion rebellion was complete. With the miniskirt mainstream, everyone could buy into what the Mods stood for: the expression of style and early 1960s cool. In an ironic twist, co-opted Mod cool became uncool once adopted by mainstream culture. On April 23, 1967, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article titled "Police Wives Plan 'Shades of California' Style Show."[89] The article reported on an upcoming fashion show presented by the Police Officers Wives of Newport Beach and Orange. Previewing their "Mod style," an image shows three slender middle-aged white women in miniskirts showing off their outfits to a police officer who nods approvingly from his car. Underneath the image is written, "Miss Jerri Freed displays a Mod style for the benefit of Mrs. Charles Holt."[90] A Mod fashion show put on by wives of police officers shows how the concept of cool turns to uncool. When a married woman attempts to dress like the teenagers of the Sunset Strip rebellion, the fashion style has been absorbed by popular cultured and reached its conclusion. Thus, the fashion show indicated the end of the miniskirt revolution.

The Cultural Work of Mods and Miniskirts

In 1960, Mary Quant and Plunket Greene arrived in New York to sell her designs. Interviewed by *Life Magazine*, Quant claimed that she could only answer "kooky" when asked what her clothes looked like.[91] On December 5, 1960, *Life Magazine* ran an article titled "A British Couple's Kooky Styles."[92] The editorial claims kooky is an American idea. Yet,

they argue, the word has been embellished by the British couple. Described as lively and freewheeling, Quant and Plunket Greene are seen running down a street in Manhattan with a large white dog on a leash.[93] The couple laugh as they show off their style. Quant is wearing a long sleeve tartan dress with a black bowler hat, and Greene is wearing a smart pinstriped suit.[94] "Somehow their clothes seem wackier than they are because they come from England, stronghold of the court gown, the sturdy tweed and the furled umbrella," writes *Life*.[95] The article demonstrates how Mod cosmopolitanism gave Quant the ability to push the limits of American acceptability. The article suggests that Quant and Greene seem to offer a palatable idea of cool to dominant American culture.

Mods, like Quant, used style to fight against dominant cultural forces. Subcultures reflect the tension between dominant and subordinate groups.[96] "The meaning of subculture is, then, always in dispute, and style is the area in which the opposing definitions clash with most dramatic force," says Dick Hebdige.[97] Furthermore, the construction of a style signals a refusal to continue along the dominant cultural path. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall expands on the idea that culture is ultimately the site for confrontation: "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost *in* that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured."[98] Mods subvert fashion and communicate their position against hegemonic norms. French semiotician Roland Barthes explains how subversive fashion does this. In 1967, he wrote, "Every new Fashion is a refusal to inherit, a subversion against the oppression of the preceding Fashion; Fashion experiences itself as a right, the natural right of the present over the past."[99] Quant used the subversion inherent in Mod fashion as resistance and firmly fought to defy traditional ideas of gender, class, and race. By using style as an expression of cool, Quant powerfully revolutionized dominant American culture through the Mod subculture. Moreover, she placed the Mod subculture against the dominant oppression of postwar conservative ideas tied to notions of patriarchy, motherhood, and middle-class values.

British youth absorbed coolness from the African diaspora, but it became sanitized and sold back to white Americans by the Mods

through fashion. The Mod subculture thus became a cultural battleground for the fight between gender, race, and class. Quant co-opted the cool of Black Americans, whitewashed it, and sold it back to the dominant white culture of America. The miniskirt is part of a larger discourse on challenging American norms through fashion. Yet it also speaks to a broader cultural process of naturalizing the teenage identity as white, young, slender, and middle-class through consumption. As subcultures sell subversive styles to the dominant culture, the miniskirt attempts to articulate the tension between revolution and hegemony through consumption. Ultimately, through Quant, the Mod subculture participated in a larger struggle over the meaning of the American identity during the 1960s. With miniskirts challenging dominant cultural models, Mod fashion battles popular culture narratives just as much as it constructs them. Hall described the cultural battlefield as a site where the struggle between consent and resistance is fought.[100] In the arena where hegemony arises and where it is secured, the Mod miniskirt is a performance of subversion into conformity, proclaiming the young slender white middle-class teenager as *the* dominant social identity of the 1960s.

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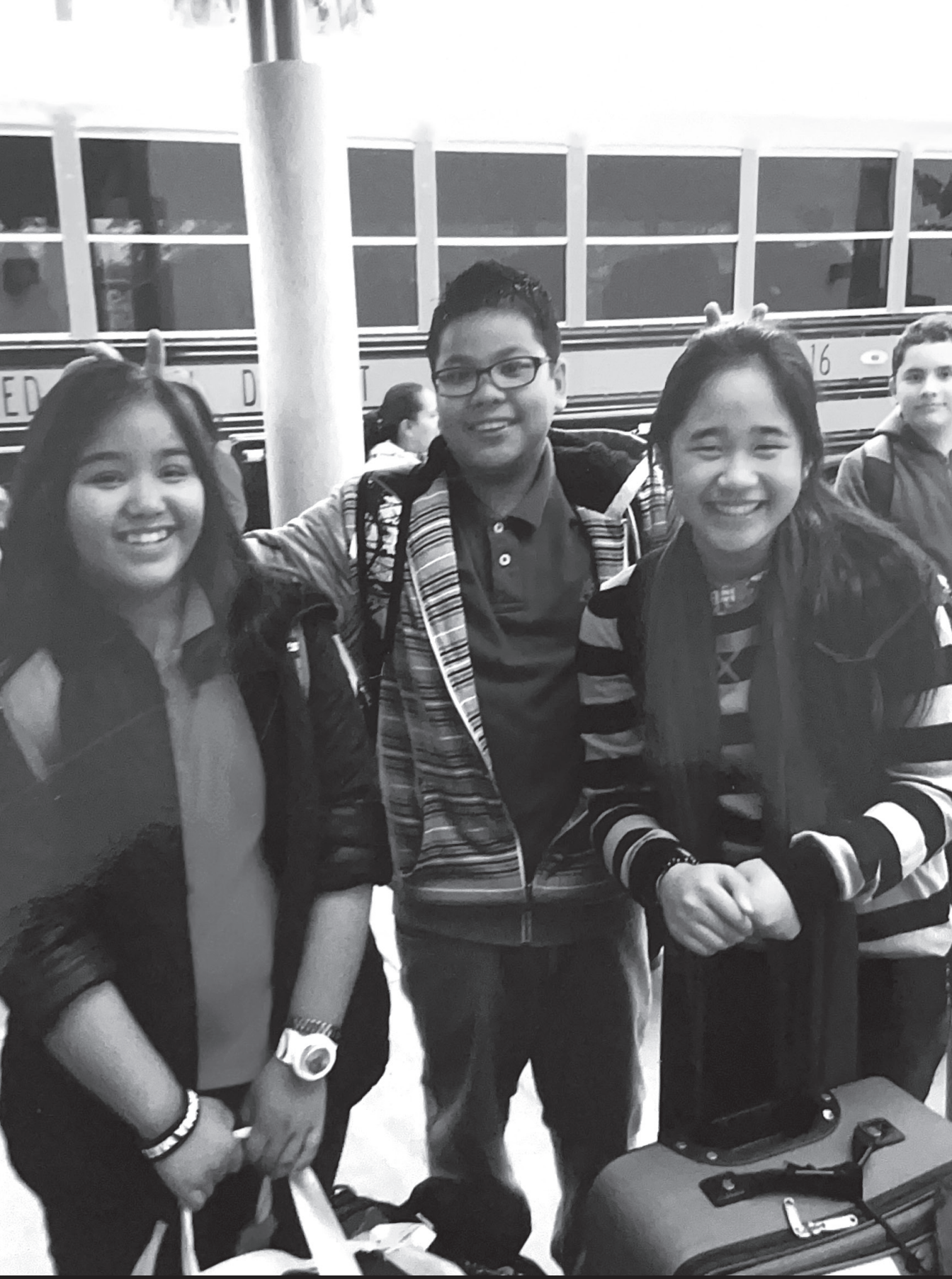

Photograph of Christian Fune (middle) and author Natalie B. Vargas (right).
(Photo courtesy of the author.)

"Gusto Ko Umuwi" and Redefining Home: An Oral History

Natalie B. Vargas

AMST 324: American Immigrant Cultures

This oral history was written for Dr. Susie Woo's AMST 324: American Immigrant Cultures class. One of the final assignments for the class was to conduct an oral history interview with someone who immigrated to the United States, providing historical context to help readers understand the legal, political, and social circumstances that affected the interviewee's experience. This interview serves to contextualize and personalize the immigration experience through the eyes of a child, whose memories and reflections redefine the American Dream.

Christian Fune, who is 20 years old, is my childhood friend and an immigrant from the Philippines. He immigrated to the United States in 2008 at the young age of six. He knew that leaving his home was supposed to be a positive change. The Philippines, unlike America, was not known for its rags-to-riches stories. Many Filipinos strive for more opportunities inaccessible in their community, including Christian's family. As reporter Allen Hicken says, 2008 was a difficult time as "the Philippine economy weakened considerably."[1] At the time of Christian's immigration, the Philippines was juggling numerous social, political, and financial problems. Though he was too young to understand the nuances of it at the time, he knows now that these factors greatly affected his family's decision to move. Through this interview, Christian and I traverse the struggles and ideals associated with immigration to the States, reflecting on the journey from the perspective of a child who was taught to romanticize the Land of Opportunity.

Life in the Philippines, as Christian recalled, was rooted in bittersweet nostalgia. He remembered what school was like with the rigorous homework and lessons, recalling that the curriculum was more fast paced

than that of the American elementary school he would later attend. Unlike many of his peers in the Philippines, Christian went to a private school, a luxury others rarely could relate to due to the cost of tuition. He recounts the warm details and vivid images from his childhood, such as the feeling of running barefoot in the streets with friends or watching cracks in the roof leak after a storm. Christian recalls the bright colors of Filipino TV shows and the smell of his mom's cooking in the background. Above all, he remembers being told stories about America. Though his family's roots were in the Philippines, there was a longstanding dream ingrained in him about the promises of America. This dream began two generations earlier, with Christian's grandmother, who immigrated to America first and had been slowly saving money to bring each family member over. Christian's family taught him that America was the "land of opportunity." They believed that there was an abundance of work and wealth accessible to those who proved their integrity.

> "Though his family's roots were in the Philippines, there was a longstanding dream ingrained in him about the promises of America.

Christian's views were not only shaped by what he was told directly, but also by what he saw in his community. His hometown, in a province southeast of Manila called Laguna, was filled with people constantly struggling to find and retain work. There was no reliable source of income for many in his town, and those who were lucky enough to work would not make enough to raise the standard of living. This was reflected in how Christian's dad would be

> "Life in the Philippines was fun . . . nonchalant but poor. . . . It was very carefree, not because we wanted it to, but because there was nothing to do in terms of work or opportunity. There was nothing for us in the Philippines."

gone almost every day of the week, consistently working twelve-hour shifts to make ends meet. Even as a child, Christian knew that his parents were waiting for their ticket to America, as many Filipinos were. Even today, the biggest shared ambition throughout Filipino communities is to move to the States. Christian explained, "Life in the Philippines . . . was fun . . . nonchalant but poor. . . . It was very carefree, not because we wanted it to, but because there was nothing to do in terms of work or opportunity. There was nothing for us in the Philippines."

This perspective was not exclusive to Christian and his family. According to Hicken in his article, "The Philippines in 2008: Peace-Building, War-Fighting, and Crisis Management," the existing financial crisis in the Philippines was exasperated by a typhoon that affected agriculture in 2007, adding to the already chaotic mix of hindering food shortages, low employment opportunities, and high taxes.[2] The island's standard of living was poor and would take years to rebuild. Christian, with the knowledge he has now as an adult, expresses gratitude for being able to immigrate to the States. However, he does not downplay the trauma he experienced upon immigrating, stating that his first issue was leaving behind his home and mother. His parents did not explain to him that his grandmother only had room and money to sponsor him and his father. The tales told to him about this new country could not comfort him during their departure. Christian's last memories of the Philippines were of him and his father on the plane as he sobbed, "*Gusto ko umuwi*" ("I want to go home") until he fell asleep, exhausted from crying. He would not see his mother again for another seven years.

Life in the US seemed to both exceed Christian's expectations and disappoint him at the same time. He and his father moved into his aunt's house, a nice home in the suburbs crowded with nine people occupying every corner. This packed house helped his transition as he was surrounded by people who understood his situation. They helped him comfortably assimilate into American culture. His family delayed enrolling him in school and worked hard to teach him English for his first year in America. He struggled to make friends in school because of the language barrier, the differences in mannerisms and humor, and the local slang. Christian quickly learned that, though America was a land of opportunity, it was not a land for handouts. He noted that his dad

> The US introduced Christian to better electronics, new food, and provided him with a safe and stable house, but it seemed to come at the price of his customs and time with his parents.

quickly secured a job in the States but frequently worked twelve-hour shifts. Though opportunity was prevalent in America, his dad showed him that hard and consistent work was what fostered independence. The US introduced Christian to better electronics, new food, and provided him with a safe and stable house, but it seemed to come at the price of his customs and time with his parents.

Though immigrating is a big event for anyone, Christian explained that moving at a young age had a tremendous impact on who he is today, shaping his perceptions of success and happiness. After reflecting on his journey, he prefaces his critiques with gratitude for the sacrifices his family made to get him where he is today. America provided Christian and his family with a better quality of life and introduced them to many social, financial, and even political opportunities that the Philippines could not provide them. However, as a US citizen with a better understanding of life in the States, Christian believes the American Dream is a skewed and flawed ideal. No one had explained to him, prior to moving, that most people in America were constantly finding ways to make more money. He explains the culture of social mobility in America, stating, "Once we've accomplished something, we just want to accomplish more. We've definitely seized [our opportunities] . . . but each time we do, another one just shows up. There's no settling."

America never exceeded all the expectations he had of it, and, sometimes, he misses the carefree nature of the Philippines and his childhood. However, he does not consider the Philippines his home as he had done before. Instead of looking back at the past, he makes it a point to look toward the future and the endless goals he has created for himself and his family. When asked what his long-term goals were, he stated he wants his family to be happy and cared for. He plans to achieve

these goals himself. He echoed the voices of those in his past, stating, "I'm still going to work for it . . . [My parents] are still working towards the same dream I have for my future family." Unlike his relatives, however, he added that being content will not be easy. To him, striving for more and failing to be satisfied is the "American way." Overall, Christian feels that moving was a positive experience for his family, even if they replaced one hardship with another.

I've known the interviewee since we were seven years old. Reflecting on our interview, I found that it was the first time he had opened up about his experience immigrating to the United States. As a Filipino American, I assumed our experiences and navigation through life were nearly indistinguishable. I now know that our paths and perspectives have always been skewed from one another. I lack the experience he has. Through this interview though, Christian depicted immigrating as an exciting and terrifying experience. These seemingly paradoxical feelings coexist when realizing the immediate and long-term struggles families go through to achieve their goals. America allowed Christian and his family to dream bigger and gave them a chance to prove they could achieve anything. However, dreams come at the cost of one's expectations. They tailored their plan to fit the reality that fell extremely short of perfect. When asked what advice he would impart to others immigrating, he said, "I wouldn't want to give any advice. I want them to experience it in their entirety. I think it was a good learning experience." Whether he knows it or not, this was a learning experience for both him and me as we continuously rediscover what it means to be American.

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The Rise of eSports and the Ever-Present Misogyny

Annie Mellonig

AMST 346: American Culture Through Spectator Sports

This essay was written for Professor Ashley Loup's course on spectator sports in American culture in the spring of 2023. Students were asked to examine a contemporary issue within spectator sports whilst providing both historical and cultural contexts from differing perspectives. This essay seeks to address the misogynistic behaviors that thrive in competitive gaming communities and possible solutions for this problem. Additionally, this essay aims to emphasize the importance of combatting misogyny and creating spaces in the sporting/entertainment industry that welcome and support women.

The infatuation with competitive gaming started in the early 1980s at the Twin Galaxies Arcade in Ottumwa, Iowa. In this environment, young boys got their first taste of economic freedom and brotherhood. Despite the great amount of opposition from American moralists, competitive gaming within these arcades would skyrocket and establish a culture of gendered gaming where competitive masculinity was valued above all. Though video games can and have been enjoyed by all, the intentional marketing toward male audiences contributes to the long-standing misogynistic values that persist in modern video game communities. As arcades soon established themselves as a hub for young men to enjoy pay-to-play cabinets with friends, women were excluded for fear they would be intruding in a males-only space, and today the same issues persist. Women in all levels of gaming, from leagues to casual play, are belittled, targeted, and shunned from even the slightest attempts at finding success, enjoyment, or community by playing a videogame. In more extreme cases of targeted harassment, women have been doxxed, threatened, and observed with an excessive amount of judgment and

scrutiny. Without proper intervention, misogynist rhetoric has become a cultural foundation in "toxic" gaming where women have little to no support or resources to protect themselves and their professional play.

Gender discrimination, amongst many other inhumane behaviors, has become so rooted in the cultivation of the "masculine gamer" stereotype that women can find little to no support as they exist and interact in spaces that are male dominated. One of the most infamous sporting controversies in the last decade, for example, surrounded the topic of the sexualization of women in video games and the poor treatment female gamers face within the gaming community. This sporting controversy, better known as "Gamergate," was born when Anita Sarkeesian, a media critic, "was berated by many in the gaming community for documenting her research exploring tropes and stereotypes associated with female characters in games."[1] As she attempted to bring awareness to her findings and inspire a change from within the community that had promoted these ideals, those who felt threatened by her words and observations responded in a fashion eerily similar to the same behaviors Sarkeesian criticized. Sarkeesian faced a wide variety of attacks ranging from verbal harassment, threats of physical and sexual violence, and even the creation of a game called "Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian." These extreme and unjustifiable acts of harassment serve as proof of the toxic and belittling rhetoric that seems to thrive in gaming communities, but also act as a warning for women interested in pursuing a career in gaming—they are not welcome, and what happened to Sarkeesian could happen to them. Unfortunately, misogynistic behaviors have proven to be successful on many occasions, as only five percent

“Gender discrimination, amongst many other inhumane behaviors, has become so rooted in the cultivation of the “masculine gamer” stereotype that women can find little to no support as they exist and interact in spaces that are male dominated.

of professional gamers are female despite forty-eight percent of women reporting that they play games and thirty percent being eSports viewers.[2] The lack of representation of women in eSports communities does not stem from disinterest in video games, but rather the lack of inclusion and acceptance due to male-driven toxicity allows very few women to find success and enjoyment.

As an industry that produces over one billion dollars in revenue annually, eSports has without a doubt made it to the top of the leaderboard as one of the world's most entertaining and diverse activities. The popularity of games such as Overwatch, League of Legends, Fortnite, and Call of Duty has led to the establishment of professional eSports leagues around the globe. These global teams meet seasonally and compete against each other for multiple rounds over the course of multiple days until a championship is won. With earning a championship title in mind as the ultimate goal, outsiders would assume that individuals with skill would be valued above all others. And though this is partly true, possessing such skills as a female competitor paints an even greater target on a player's back. In 2016, the extremely talented Kim "Geguri" Se-Yeon entered the professional ranks of eSports with a success rate of eighty percent and a kills-deaths-assists (KDA) ratio of 6.31 playing as Overwatch's hero Zarya. Her talent was so unheard of for an individual just seventeen years old that her recruitment to a professional Overwatch league promptly resulted in accusations of cheating. Her most notable and violently vocal accuser was her own male peer; Strobe, who was formerly part of the professional Overwatch league known as Dizziness, made some of the most harmful remarks. In response to the speculations and rumors of Geguri's hacking, Strobe called Geguri's skill into question: "If this problem is confirmed as a hack, it would have caused a problem to our career and reputation. How will you take responsibility for that?" Though Strobe's concerns for the integrity of the game are valid, his violent threats directed toward Geguri prove that the accusations of cheating hold more significance when a female gamer is the one whose fingers are being pointed at. In his threat, Strobe is quoted saying, "If there is a problem with our sponsors and such, I may visit Geguri's house with a knife in hand. I am not joking."[3] Strobe's threat is unsurprising given the impact Gamergate had over the gaming community as

a whole; females in gaming communities already faced ridicule and hate, but the action of speaking up against the unfair treatment amplified the presence of toxic, crude, and sexist remarks against women for attempting to "invade" male spaces and seek justice.

From Strobe's point of view, Geguri's stats and gameplay only served as proof of her hacking. As such, Strobe promised that he would step away from his desk as a professional Overwatch League member if she was discovered not to be cheating. Officials from Blizzard-Activision were soon sent to observe and confirm or deny the presence of hacking in Geguri's gameplay. After Geguri played under the watchful eye of game developers, fellow league players, and other spectators, it was established that hacking was not present in her gameplay. As promised, Strobe stepped away from Overwatch permanently and wrote an apology. Geguri's case presents a layer of issues that continue to haunt eSports. For one, accusations of hacking and cheating contribute to the inability to properly regulate and monitor eSports as a growing entertainment empire, thus impairing its credibility as a "real" form of sport. Next, the hypervigilance and aggression directed toward Geguri contribute to the fear of including women in male-dominated spaces, primarily that they will end up being better than their male competitors, which is not seen as a benefit. Lastly, women in eSports are not taken seriously, no matter their skill level. Strobe's foolish and insulting gamble to bet his reputation and standing in eSports in a poor attempt to prove that a female gamer simply cannot play as well as Geguri contributes to the hostile environments Sarkeesian criticized.

Unfortunately, hostility in gaming environments only seems to increase as more female players attempt to climb within the ranks. In early 2021, former Overwatch-pro-turned-Twitch-streamer Becca "Aspen" Rukavina announced her goal to rank number one as a support player on Overwatch's American servers. In the days following, Aspen encountered many teammates who sabotaged her games by intentionally playing poorly to "throw" the matches and hinder her win-to-loss ratio, making it impossible for her to reach her goal. After multiple grueling losses, Aspen turned to social media to share that she would no longer pursue her goal of the number one spot. She wrote, "Giving up, sorry," and shared that she was "fine physically, not mentally. Not easy

constantly being hated on while fighting my own demons. I know I'm not good enough I just did everything to try to make me happy but it backfired."[4] Aspen's struggles depict both the resistance shown toward including women in male-dominated spaces and the backlash female players face when trying to progress and climb the ranks. Since then, Aspen has moved on from the incident, but her experience resurfaced when misogyny in the professional gaming community made headlines once again in September 2023.

This time, American professional Valorant player Melanie "meL" Capone was at the center of the discourse. When her absence from the Valorant Champions Tour (VCT) became a hot topic, it was determined that meL's gender was one of the reasons why many tier-one teams refused to scrimmage with her. "There was at least one situation where I was being considered," meL shared online, "but it was soon communicated back to me from a T1 team that a player was not comfortable playing with a woman." The Valorant pro went on to add that she had not spoken up about these instances of sexism for the sake of her brand and job opportunities: "I let it rest and have not spoken about it so as not to risk being viewed as a liability to other teams."[5] Despite their ability to compete at the highest level possible, female players like meL are constantly hindered by the misogynistic beliefs that control the overall state of play. meL's experience with misogynistic male players was not the first instance of this type of hindrance and it certainly will not be the last. In light of meL's experience, many female players flocked to social media to share their own stories of being intentionally targeted by men at the professional level.

With the increase of female players sharing anecdotes from their gaming experiences, Aspen's struggle for the number one spot back in 2021 made a reappearance. Fellow Overwatch pro Chassidy "Aramori" Kaye began sharing her history of facing misogyny within gaming spaces and went on to confront naysayers. She shared that the backlash and hate female players face is just as common in professional leagues as it is anywhere else, even if you do not witness or experience it yourself. In a social media post, Aramori shared a screenshot of Aspen's response to being harassed and targeted in her games. The screenshot features a private, anonymous account boasting about Aspen's decision to step

away from the game. "I am victorious," the post said, with another private, anonymous account congratulating the player with, "Good job." Aramori states that these private accounts belonged to male pros, but their identities were concealed, as her main goal was not to "cancel anyone" but to raise awareness of the hate and harassment targeted toward women and marginalized genders. She explains, "sexism in esports is everywhere, they just hide it behind closed doors."[6] Aspen soon became aware of the post and discovered that those sabotaging her games were her former colleagues, sharing that this revelation had left her "a bit heartbroken."[7] These instances of intentional sabotage to female-player progress highlight the importance of combatting misogyny to establish and maintain welcoming communities.

Despite the great hostility shown toward female gamers, the interest in video games amongst the female population only grows. With this great interest, more and more opportunities for women to compete professionally emerge. Sadly, as of today, these opportunities are hard to come by as gender segregation is institutionalized in many eSports leagues. Thankfully, league organizers and professional eSports gamers are taking strides to ensure that women have a seat at the desk now and in the future. The establishment of female-only leagues has presented one of the few possible solutions to increase the small number of professional female gamers. The interest in gaming in the female population is not low, but the stigma of gaming being a male-oriented pastime has greatly contributed to the skepticism of joining the community as both a newbie and a female. Matt Weber, who is the operations director of Team Liquid—a professional League of Legends team—believes that the establishment of all-female leagues can positively impact eSports and increase the number of professional female gamers. Weber claims that gaming competitions are "an insanely male-dominated world and it's hilariously daunting and unforgiving to women for a variety of reasons both socially and game-wise." With the existence of "daunting" and "unforgiving" environments, Weber insists that "women-only events help this slightly by both removing some of those barriers and fostering a community for an under-represented group to help find their place in the scene and establish a sense of to-

getherness for the people that fall into that group."[8] With the creation of professional environments where female gamers can compete and thrive, their success serves as a foothold for more females to express their interests in video games with no hesitance. As professional gamers, these women become role models for boys and girls alike; their presence in the big leagues disrupts the belief that video games are meant only for boys.

The establishment of all female leagues, however, comes at a price. Separating sports into a two-gender binary not only impedes the success of non-binary or agender players, but also reinforces the idea that there is no place for women in a competitive gaming environment that is historically dominated by men. With few official co-ed leagues, women once again find themselves at a disadvantage. By only participating in games and skirmishes against the limited number of other female leagues, women face the possibility of stagnating, thus hindering opportunities for women to be reintegrated back into the greater gaming community. Additionally, establishing a two-gendered league system works in favor of the oppressive idea that women cannot compete on the same level as men, even when their skill, experience, and overall mass presence within the community surpasses that of male players. In response to players' reactions, the International eSports Federation (IESF) announced that it would reverse its segregation policy, allowing gender division in their leagues. The policy's reversal, however, would still recognize all existing professional female leagues. The

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IESF's decision to integrate leagues and retain female leagues opened the opportunity for women to play comfortably in welcoming environments and disprove any and all preexisting notions that boys are better at games and that women have no place in eSports.[9]

Video games are an integral part of America's media and entertainment industry, and the growing enjoyment and interest in eSports has opened the door for individuals of all backgrounds to play together. In the year of 2023 alone, the United States has hosted over seven eSports competitions. From the Super Smash Bros tournament in late January, to the Valorant Champions Tour held in August, and the Overwatch World Cup in October, these events have encouraged individuals both at home and abroad to take a bigger interest in the professional gaming community either as an audience member or participant. However, as competitive play takes root in America's entertainment industry, issues from abroad will serve as the foundation that will define America's gaming culture. Despite the positives in creating an all-female league where women can play comfortably at a professional level, the separation of men and women hinders the idea that players can meet at a virtual playing field on even footing. With the inclusion of women in professional leagues across eSports, hopefully the misogyny that has made a home in gaming culture can finally be addressed and combated.

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Splash Mountain at Disneyland in Anaheim, California. 2007. *(Image courtesy of JeroenZ85, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License, via Wikimedia Commons.)*

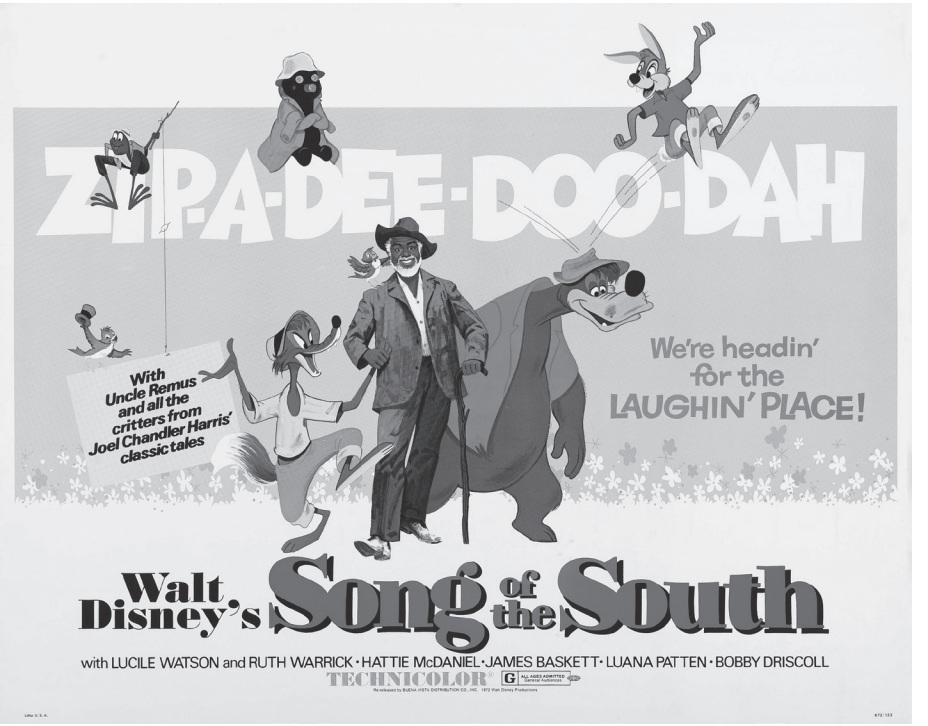
Disneyland: The Most Problematic Place on Earth?

Natalie Elizabeth Brunjes

AMST 350: Seminar in Theory and Method of American Studies

This essay was written for Dr. Alison Kanosky's Theory and Method of American Studies class in the fall semester of 2022. The assignment was to analyze any cultural object that interests us and perform a close reading of it, use theory to analyze it, and place it in historical context. Disneyland came to mind as I am simultaneously intrigued and disturbed by the imagined reality of the park. The cultural object of Disneyland has sat prominently in American society as an amusement park where dreams come true—at the expense and exploitation of countless communities, while generating a plethora of affluence for the Walt Disney company. An in-depth look at Splash Mountain, one of the most popular attractions at Disneyland and its counterparts worldwide, reveals a darker and more troublesome dystopian Disney legacy reflecting the not-so-magical reality of America.

Perhaps no other theme park in America is as culturally iconic and influential as Disneyland in Anaheim, California. For decades, Disneyland has served Southern California as a top tourist destination, world-renowned for its immersive theming, attractions, and entertainment. While many features of the park have been expanded and modified over time to remain relevant and reflect changing attitudes in the world, many of the design elements and basic features of certain lands and attractions within the park are still highly outdated. In recent years, as the Walt Disney Company has become better at renovating or removing problematic content, one significant attraction has become the focus of the company's next major and much needed makeover. Disney is currently retheming Splash Mountain, the classic log flume ride, into Tiana's Bayou Adventure, updating a ride that has maintained significant



Lobby card advertising a re-release of Disney's Song of the South. 1972. *(Image courtesy of Walt Disney Productions, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.)*

prominence in Disneyland and other Disney parks around the world. Splash Mountain and the origins of its theme in the highly controversial film *Song of the South* are representative of Disney's glorification of white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism, as well as the commodification of imagined pasts.

First debuted in 1989 at Disneyland, Splash Mountain opened as the park's next big money-making thrill ride: a log flume based on stories of the animated characters from the 1946 Disney film *Song of the South*.[1] The soundtrack of the film is the first music guests hear. Cheery instrumentals play as they begin the ride, which consists of logs careening around a sepia mountain topped with bushy green grass. The guests float peacefully along among the treetops before diving indoors to a world of animatronic folk animals singing songs from *Song of the South* and dancing merrily. The dark interior of the mountain is painted in bright colors with fake flowers, trees, lily pads, and other bits of nature decorating the animals' homes. These scenes provide a momentary, carefree landscape that quickly shifts when the logs climb to the top of the

mountain for the final drop and inevitable big splash. The story of Br'er Rabbit unfolds throughout the ride as he is being pursued by Br'er Fox and Br'er Bear. The last drop mimics Br'er Rabbit falling into the briar patch as the log falls down the slope towards sharp thorns but instead splashes into the water. The ride ends with Br'er Rabbit evading his foes and returning home for good to a chorus of creatures singing "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah."

A hybrid animation and live-action musical film, *Song of the South* has had highly mixed reviews since its release in the 1940s.[2] Based on the folktales of Uncle Remus, a fictional ex-slave living in the Reconstruction era, *Song of the South* retells these stories through vibrant animated sequences that were generally regarded well by critics. While the animation and music of the film typically earned high remarks, the figure of Uncle Remus proved to be controversial as he seemed to some critics to represent the misconception of ex-slaves' happy contentment living alongside their former owners. The NAACP, among other critics, spoke out against the film's releases due to the damaging depictions of race and its idyllic look at slave–master dynamics. In 1986, the year before the ride's completion, the film was screened around the US to celebrate its 40th anniversary and to advertise the upcoming ride created in its image. Despite the film never being released on video in the US due to its controversy, the substantial commercial success from its re-releases in theaters motivated Disney to selectively draw aspects from the movie when designing its newest attraction. While the 1980s were not a particularly progressive time for race relations in the United States, by 1986 when Splash Mountain was being conceived and *Song of the South* was back in theaters, the issues with the film's racial context were not unknown to most.

Disney ride designers, known as Imagineers, evaded this controversy by focusing Splash Mountain's design on only the animated sequences from the film despite it being a predominantly live-action movie. As a result, the ride distances itself from the dicey implications of Uncle Remus's character but neglects to completely eradicate the lingering racist subtext. The origins of the story and the seemingly wholesome animated characters lining the log flume ride can be seen as an oversimplification and cleaning up of Disney's—and America's—uglier past. The initial choice of the ride theme hailing from an older and more controversial film was a risk by Disney that only paid off due to the

ride's quick popularity and success. While the current CEO of the Walt Disney Company, Bob Iger, has stated that the movie *Song of the South* is not supported by the modern company and will never be available for streaming, the ride Splash Mountain continues to be viewed as a staple attraction at Disneyland and its counterparts around the world. Although the problematic elements of the ride have been downplayed, many people are aware of its racial connotations—and thus, the company announced in 2020 the eventual closure and rebranding of Splash Mountain into Tiana's Bayou Adventure. The inspiration for the ride's refresh comes from the 2009 animated feature set in New Orleans, *The Princess and the Frog*, whose protagonist, Tiana, was Disney's first African American princess. In today's modern and more progressive cultural context, turning an attraction with a controversial origin story into a ride highlighting one of Disney's few princesses of color seems to be an appropriate modification. Still, Disney has faced some backlash from the community of parkgoers that love Splash Mountain, seeing no issues with it in its original form, regardless of whether they're aware of its racial connotations.

A component of the problem with Splash Mountain can be seen in public reception in the wake of its rebranding. Many people who ride on the log flume today are simply unaware of the darker history of the characters and their tricky connection with post–Emancipation Proclamation race relations. This separation of accurate history from the ride's storytelling is intentional, as Disney shifted all marketing for *Song of the South* to draw attention away from Uncle Remus and slavery, and instead focus on the less controversial animated characters, all to gain more profit from its rereleases. This erasure of the full context of *Song of the South* in Splash Mountain and the lack of access to the film on modern-day streaming services represents an archival silence. Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot defines archival silences in his book *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. He explains that archival silences will, unfortunately, always exist in the creation of histories[3] and in this lack of completely truthful history, we imbue and change the significance and meaning of the past. By silencing the troublesome past of the film and the ride that took inspiration from it, Disneyland is perpetuating ignorance around representing race in authentic ways.

As explained in more detail by scholar Jason Sperb in his essay criticizing Splash Mountain: "A combination of critical and cultural apathy, of liberal guilt and conservative denial, subsequently has allowed the film to fall seemingly between the cracks, allowing for Walt Disney to build Splash Mountain and erase *Song of the South* from collective popular culture memories. Racist undertones may swell beneath Splash Mountain for some, but not for the millions of visitors who walk through Disney's gates each year without the faintest clue what *Song of the South* is and was."[4]

As a major household name and brand generating mass amounts of revenue from its theme parks alone, Disney has a high influence on society, especially as seen in the millions of young people enamored with Disney characters and stories. Impressionable children and unknowing guests may ride on Splash Mountain, singing "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah"—the most popular tune from *Song of the South*—never fully fathoming that there is anything wrong with it. The consequences of this archival silencing of *Song of the South* deter Disney from admitting to their cultural mistakes, taking ownership of the film's complicated past, and educating the public on important racial issues. While Disney is a highly visible centerpiece in American culture, the company itself can resist pressure to convey more accurate depictions of society because it exists as a distortion of reality. Sperb further expands that "Splash Mountain is not just its own depthless simulation copied from another simulation (*Song of the South*); rather, Splash Mountain is a carefully crafted, politically and commercially motivated statement on late capitalism and, more important, on the state of race relations in America over the last sixty years."[5] Due to the fantastical nature of the theme park, the story of Splash Mountain

> "While Disney is a highly visible centerpiece in American culture, the company itself can resist pressure to convey more accurate depictions of society because it exists as a distortion of reality.

can fall outside the realm of accurate history and support a warped reality based on a biased version of America's past. This, in conjunction with Splash Mountain becoming a key attraction and helping to boost park attendance, is primarily why it has remained in its original form for so long. Profit outweighs political correctness for much of what Disney does, and Splash Mountain is no exception.

Furthermore, Disneyland in a multitude of ways represents an over-glorified celebration of white colonization and domination. Classic sections of the park such as Mainstreet, U.S.A., and Frontierland can be viewed as the culmination of a stereotypical white hetero-centric American dream, in which the good old days of westward expansion and nuclear family values are put on a pedestal. The highlighting of white narratives and the erasure of accurate depictions of non-white cultures help to promote a skewed sense of nationalism for Disneyland guests in a seemingly unintentional yet undeniable way. Scholar Benedict Anderson defines the concept of nationalism in his book entitled *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* as an imagined political community, in both its inherently limited boundaries and sovereignty.[6] Within the bounds of Disneyland, the architecture, images of people, and stories told about the world help to pivot the tourist into a false sense of connectedness within a magical land. Branded the "happiest place on earth," Disney deems itself a utopia in which primarily white characters, both historical and fictional, are highlighted as the heroes and victors who propelled society to this constructed paradise. The atmosphere of the park couples a nostalgia for conservative American ideals with the fantasy of the imagined future, with Disneyland providing these somewhat outdated notions of society to allow visitors to sit comfortably in a bubble surrounded by the real world. In this way, Disneyland guests may share a sense of

> "Disneyland guests may share a sense of pride in participating in the magic of the happiest place on earth while unknowingly being passive consumers of the oversimplified narratives of white victory.

pride in participating in the magic of the happiest place on earth while unknowingly being passive consumers of the oversimplified narratives of white victory. The rides, the merchandise, and the food all work to reinforce the park's emphasis on capitalism, and that, in turn with a recreation of the past, helps to elevate white supremacy.

Ultimately, Splash Mountain is a significant example of how Disney modifies aspects of the past to create a distorted, happier version of reality that is more digestible and profitable. While Splash Mountain's origins have been controversial from the get-go, the archival silence of "Song of the South" from Disney helps to rationalize the company's continuation of the ride and its popularity as a central fixture of the park, despite it being a considerably racist narrative. Moreover, as long as Disneyland continues to receive consumers eager to experience the wonders of being in the happiest place on earth—who by extension are passively suspending their criticisms of accurate historicity in exchange for the white supremacist and colonial propaganda subverted in themes of the park—Disneyland will remain largely unchanged, in all its problematic forms. Large companies like Disney have much more to gain than lose from conditioning fans into a false sense of community which generates massive amounts of profit. Because of this, Disneyland will always prioritize a commodified version of the past over an authentic one, furthering their justification and actualization of a white-centric reality.

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Hozier performs at All Saints Church, Kingston Upon Thames. 2019. *(Image courtesy of Drew de F Fawkes, Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License, via Wikimedia Commons.)*

Immaculate Reception: The American Cultural Moment Surrounding Hozier's "Take Me to Church"

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AMST 401T: American Music

"Immaculate Reception" was written for Dr. Golub's AMST 401T: American Music, the capstone course for the major. The prompt was to choose a song, performance, or artist, analyze it, and connect it to themes and theories learned during our time as American Studies majors and in the course. While "Take Me to Church" is an immensely popular song, I have analyzed the larger moment of its reception and what the song says about those drawn to it—whether they were moved either by personal resonance or the controversy. This paper enters into larger conversations about the activism of the LGBTQ+ community and the emptiness at the heart of intersectionally-lacking social justice theory and praxis.

When Hozier's "Take Me to Church" was released in late 2013, he said that he never anticipated it taking off like it did, especially since it was the first official solo music release of his career at just twenty-two years old.[1] The song broke the Billboard top 10 in several countries and rocketed the young Irishman to international fame.[2] His song sparked debate amongst American religious communities about the global influence of their beliefs not seen in a good while—not since his fellow countryman Sinéad O'Connor's infamous 1992 SNL performance. "Take Me to Church," a thunderous, sensual, and blasphemous challenge to global religious influences, made a splash as it made its way across the Atlantic. While conservative American Christians recoiled at the swan song of someone of ambiguous religious persuasion loving another so much it defies all that is holy, queer Americans received the eccentric ode with open ears, arms, hearts, and minds.

It may seem odd that Hozier's "Take Me to Church," an Irishman's gospel song, became as successful as it did at the time. However, this song represents more about the American queer protest-scape, particularly its white neoliberal pitfalls, than meets the eye; indeed, the underpinnings of the initial dominant reception of the song limited its attempted activism. In this paper, I will begin by tracing the historical connection between the Irish and African American diasporas with specific emphasis on music. Next, I will analyze the lyrical and musical components of "Take Me to Church" that affected its reception amongst those who have been significantly impacted by religion. Finally, I will discuss the complicated moment and movement that the song represents in American queer liberation movements, featuring an interview with a friend. For better or for worse, Hozier stands emblematically for the queer liberation movement in America, and his music is often the site where so many of its pitfalls and victories reproduce themselves.

A Hand Across the Pond: Connecting Irish and Black Americans' Music and Diasporas

Hozier was born Andrew Hozier-Byrne on March 17, 1990, in Newcastle, County Wicklow, Ireland, a small town about an hour south of Dublin. It is no surprise that Hozier, the youngest of two sons of a blues-drummer father and a painter mother, turned out to be such a prolific artist so early on in his career. A "fascination with blues music," including Chicago, Texas, and Delta blues, as well as gospel, characterizes the rich discography that Hozier personally familiarized himself with from an early age.[3] While there is a relatively active blues scene in Ireland, which his father participated in, Hozier's eventual music career, rife with sonic references to African American musical traditions, is also representative of a longer history between the Irish and Black diasporas.

Other economically subordinate populations, in addition to African Americans, substantially "shaped the music" of American spirituals and blues, which would in turn go on to indubitably influence the formation of gospel as a popular musical genre. In fact, "Irish indentured servants, and political prisoners" labored "alongside enslaved Africans . . . [in] the sugarcane fields in the West Indies and America."[4] While the two groups would eventually diverge in political, social, and cultural

favor in the eyes of United States institutions, the early exchanges between the two diasporas are significant. Beyond the close contact the two populations had, their cultures run parallel from a political and civil standpoint.

Ireland's population and Black Americans alike faced and continue to face English-influenced imperialist forces: for Ireland, England, and for Black Americans, white America—itself a direct descendant of England.[5] Additionally, both Irish people and Black Americans have long historical involvement in attempting to legitimize themselves civilly, revealing a similar history of violence and terrorism on the part of the respective domineering forces, England and white America.[6] Both groups, to varying degrees, carry the weight of stereotypes portraying them as violent, dangerous, and destructive, produced by the political forces above them. Both also survived by resisting in subtle ways.

Irish communities and Black Americans turned to music for personal and political expression, and they did so similarly. Because of their generational proximity to their indigenous cultures at the early points of cultural exchange and "[being] built on oral traditions," these distinctive groups both "tended toward music composed in minor keys telling stories of oppression."[7] The two styles of music, thus, are not just alike but cohesive. Neither group could express discontent nor resistance "outright" because of the watchful and punishing presence of each community's dominant force. African American spirituals, for one, "most often [explicitly] commented on heavenly salvation" because the only way to safely speak "about social justice, political struggles, and earthly liberation" was through adherence to the Protestant white American culture surrounding them, which eventually evolved into their own cultural and spiritual practices.[8]

As such, the Devil in many spirituals, gospel songs, and blues songs serves as a poetic allegory for the slaver and oppressive political forces, complicating the meaning of what could be statically interpreted as an expression of spiritual devotion to the Christian faith, a colonizing yet significant cultural force.[9] In a similar way, Ireland also used a symbolic figure in its folk music: that of the female lover, or the "aisling." Beyond the rebellion inherent in a vocal outpouring of love in the time of conflict, songs heralding a devotional love to the Irish narrator's ro-

mantic counterpart were radically expressing a profound dedication to Ireland because, as Hozier himself puts it, "it was illegal for a long, long time to write songs about loving Ireland."[10] Through these symbols, both diasporas held intragroup discourse and maintained resistance against oppressive forces.

The Call to Worship: "Take Me to Church" and Other Musical Influences

"Take Me to Church" thus comes as no cultural anomaly, historically speaking, and its sound is (no pun intended) the perfect marriage of the Irish folk tradition and the titanic contributions of African American folks to gospel music. The song is a splendiferous, ascendant, thundering four-minute ode to a lover that inspires such devotion, it is blasphemous. From a sonic perspective, "Take Me to Church" is industrial and cavernous, as if it is being heard in a long-abandoned church to an old god. The bass and drums are heavy, the organs breathe life and spirit into the song, and the background vocals soar and sweep in unison behind Hozier's growling, desperate, breathy desire to lay himself as a sacrifice for whatever bidding his lover desires. The time signatures pace between a 3/4 waltz and 4/4. In addition to the variant time signatures, the verses and chorus change from minor to major keys respectively; the melodic progressions found in the song utilize those commonly found in hymnals. The arrangement alone places the listener in auditory throes of passion.

The song also has a decidedly religious theme to its lyrics. Throughout the song, Hozier uses such words as "Sunday," "pagan," "worship," "sins," "heavens," "absolution," and "ritual," amongst other Christian-evocative words. His lover is so desirable that he tries to "keep the goddess on his side," referring to her as a deity. Aside from that, in the pre-chorus and at the end of the bridge, Hozier dives into a set of "Amens" repeated in a melodic litany, a musical aside to a traditional church service usually backed by an organ.[11] His lyrical choices here harken to confession portions of Catholic and many Evangelical church services and rites. Another interesting aspect of "Take Me to Church" is that Hozier's emphasis in each line falls on the downbeat, a rhythmic vocal style typical of blues, jazz, gospel, and soul music. The rhetorical

content of the song is akin to that of a hymnal—a prayer, but much more sacrilegious in its poetic intent.

Other lines in the song evaluate theological teachings and social beliefs, particularly the line "I was born sick, but I love it / Command me to be well."[12] While this line is in one dimension critiquing the doctrine of original sin, a Christian belief that the inherent state of man is sinful because of the Biblical fall of Adam in Genesis, it can also be interpreted as slamming conversion therapy, which is a practice designed to "cure" homosexuality often adopted by religious organizations. The line calls back to the deep-rooted history of Americans viewing being gay as a sickness; homosexuality was in the DSM, a book by the American Psychiatric Association that officially classifies mental and emotional disorders, until the mid-70s.[13] Beyond a cultural taboo surrounding homosexuality in the country, which arguably influenced its categorization as a mental disturbance in the first place, the identity itself is one fraught with unnecessary medicalization and discrimination supposedly backed by science. Therefore, Hozier's lyrics tap into an ugly historical—and present—moment regarding the American response to homosexuality.

Nods to other literary figures, including Irish ones, proliferate in Hozier's discography, particularly his first self-titled album, *Hozier*, which includes "Take Me to Church." In "The Angel of Small Death and the Codeine Scene," for example, the line "shaking the wings of their terrible youths" is a direct quote from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce—a Dublin poet famous for his thick writing style and cerebral metaphors.[14] Other Irish writers referenced in Hozier's music include but are not limited to Seamus Heaney, W. B. Yeats, and Oscar Wilde. Moreover, Hozier has covered and performed with other Irish artists—most notably, Northern Irish musician Van Morrison.[15] It is therefore important to note that Hozier's most prolific song both in and out of context was not written in a vacuum nor was it meant to. He seems to pointedly reference his artistic predecessors—something important to note when crediting his songwriting as artful in its own right.

The marriage of the sonic and historical elements with the lyrics of "Take Me to Church" culminates in a four-minute rapture. If it is not already clear, "the song is about sex."[16] By using the audio aesthetics

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of centuries of religious fervor, Hozier communicates that the only thing more natural and ancient than the devotion to a god is the devotion to a lover in the throes of passion.[17] Furthermore, the historical connection to the aisling and the sound of gospel breathes the lifeblood of Irish and African American protest traditions into the song and fuses them together into one.

The Road to Hell: Hozier's Intentions and Critical Reception of "Take Me to Church"

"Take Me to Church" was first released on an EP in 2013, along with songs "Like Real People Do," "Cherry Wine - Live," and "Angel of Small Death and the Codeine Scene," and then later included on Hozier's self-titled first album in 2014. Immediately following the album release, "Take Me to Church" charted in Ireland, then Nashville, and then globally. It remains his most listened to song with over two billion listens on Spotify and has gone 12X multi-platinum in the United States as of March 15, 2023.[18] The song charted abroad and peaked at number 2 on Billboard's Hot 100 in 2014, well after its initial release in 2013.

The reception of Hozier's hit song was a timely one. It came on the heels of the Great Recession of 2008 which threw economic and familial structures out of balance.[19] Goals of the dominant queer liberation movement in America in the 2010s included "same-sex marriage and family recognition rights, market/cultural visibility, access to the military, and hate crime/safety legislation"—and it was in 2013, the year the song was released, that gay marriage was federally legalized under the Obama administration.[20] Gay rights were on the forefront of Americans' minds at the time "Take Me to Church" emerged on the international stage. This is indeed the cultural "when" and "where" many fans found Hozier and engaged with his fandom for the first time.

Hozier said that when he wrote "Take Me to Church," he was directly referring to the heavy presence of the Roman Catholic Church on his home turf in Ireland and Europe, and less so American Evangelical Christianity.[21] In fact, the music video, which features two white gay men running from an angry mob, was in reference to Russian anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and hate crimes in 2013.[22] The song was aiming for the heart of the largest historical global religious influence and additionally struck at the belly of the marked beast, convicting numerous other Christian denominations that continue to espouse homophobic and transphobic rhetoric, particularly in America. American Christians vehemently rejected the song, if not for its explicit content than for its music video; two men kissing and then being hunted down for their consensual display of love for each other leaves little to the imagination, clearly criticizing homophobia as a dominantly acceptable social narrative.[23] In fact, a pastor in Virginia, who felt especially *moved* by the song, took it upon himself to write an "open letter" to Hozier. The pastor unsurprisingly took this opportunity to ridicule Hozier for a "lack of wisdom" at the time, chalking up his outspoken stance against homophobia in the church as a mark of immaturity, not the fair critique that it was.[24] Hozier would go on to say that he received several "strongly worded open letters" from American pastors.[25] It is remarkable that such a song, clearly aimed at the Holy Roman Catholic church, received a visceral reaction from perhaps the largest organized religious entity in the Western world. It is important, additionally, to discuss the unwillingness on the part of the American Evangelical church to discuss their role in white supremacy. In fact, the church has gone as far as defending and protecting the rife history of "racial-religious terrorism, embedded in white Christian lineage."[26] The American Evangelical church's refusal to deny homophobia and transphobia as a part of their history and its persistence as a problem harkens back to the church's denial of responsibility in white supremacy.[27]

Hozier's song, "Take Me to Church," was received exponentially better by other audiences, most notably the American queer community. The lyrics of "born sick," along with unabashedly reverential tonal devotion to a lover, spoke volumes to the American queer population, particularly those who identify as sapphic. Furthermore, Hozier's resis-

tance of the church—an institution that many such individuals grew up in, were negatively influenced by, and eventually left—likely assisted the song in garnering the attention of LGBTQ+ individuals. Hozier has attracted a mostly LGBTQ+ audience, with a lot of them referring to him colloquially as the "bog man" and "an honorary lesbian" on Tumblr and other sites of the like, as his writing is reverent towards women in every love song he has written.[28] At concerts, Hozier's stage is frequently decorated with pride flags and, while not openly LGBTQ+ himself, he continues advocacy for LGBTQ+ individuals by playing benefit concerts and utilizing interview time to discuss issues with specific regard to the community.[29]

Furthermore, the blues and gospel influences are unambiguous in Hozier's other musical compositions. In fact, he outright names and features the very artists he grew up listening to. He does not divorce their politics from his appreciative use of their sonic innovation and acknowledges their contributions to both music and social justice. From his 2019 sophomore album, *Wasteland, Baby!*, "Almost (Sweet Music)" uses titles of American jazz standards—a majority of which were famously written and performed by Black American musicians—as lyrics for the duration of the whole song to express healing from a past relationship and finding restoration in a new lover.[30] Additionally, Hozier often covers songs by iconic Black artists; "Living for the City" by Stevie Wonder is one such example performed at his concerts, and he has a Spotify-exclusive cover of "Say My Name" by Destiny's Child.

On *Wasteland, Baby!* the song "Nina Cried Power!" similarly cites the names of performers of famous protest songs, a considerable number of whom are Black Americans and major players in the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.[31] The track even features a protest music legend in her own right—Mavis Staples of The Staples Singers and, later, a successful solo career—lest the audience forget who Hozier's musical predecessors are. Hozier taps into a deep-rooted history of gospel as a reckoning force in protest music. These references are not just found in his later work, though he has practiced increasing intentionality when utilizing the aesthetics of Black American artists. They are explicitly in his first album as well in the form of the song "Jackie and Wilson," which references the iconic soul singer as Hozier sings about an enrap-

turing but fleeting romance. During the bridge of "Someone New," as well, Hozier lyrically references Aretha Franklin's "I Say a Little Prayer for You."[32]

Hozier's dedication to Black American social justice is lengthy and proven. In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd and in response to a fan Facebook group deleting and blocking posts about Black Lives Matter, Hozier "donat[ed] all royalties from [his] song 'Jackboot Jump' to Black Lives Matter and the NAACP in perpetuity," a significant contribution given that he is not American.[33] He remains a critic of racist, homophobic, xenophobic, and transphobic legislation domestically and internationally, especially the recent book and drag bans in America, amongst others.[34] This is one of many such public stances for social justice that Hozier has taken, which include support for unhoused justice and "a Yes vote in 2015's marriage equality referendum." He also participated in a benefit concert, "Stand for Truth," to protest the Roman Catholic Church's sexual abuse.[35] He remains a modern artist particularly important to marginalized American communities for his popular song and consistent dedication to progressive causes.

Apologetics: Complicating the Canonical Narrative of Hozier Fans

Adept discussions of identity and social justice require an analytical and theoretical framework, and there is none more fitting than the Black radical feminist theory of intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality posits that different components of identities sit at "intersections" in which "unique oppressions [or privileges] influence" the ways in which they "interact with institutions" and each other.[36] For example, a white gay man in the workplace is likely to earn the same as his straight counterparts, but he is also likely to earn more than his white gay female counterparts and even more than his Black female gay counterparts.[37] This theory is crucial to understanding and explaining the positionality of Hozier and his fandom.

Hozier, although Irish, is still a white cis straight man and, thus, is inherently limited by the dimensions of his identity in his attempted commentary on oppressive institutions, no matter how comprehensive, poetic, and self-aware this commentary is. He has verbalized how much he tries to avoid "coming across as performative," and he has proven he does a more thorough job than most.[38] Still, fans of such an outspoken

artist are not immune to internalized racism, especially in favor of Hozier as a straight white man. Though well-intended and important, his early intense vocal championing of the queer community in interviews and at concerts empowers his white fanbase to leave internalized racism unaddressed, rendering them capable of insidiously perpetuating racism.

Hozier fans are, thus, not without complications of their own. One might think that the conjoined aspects of Hozier's vocal celebration of Black contributions to American and global musical culture and the massive sapphic following he appears to have would result in a fanbase grounded in Black radical feminist theory.[39] Despite his outspoken stance in favor of global social justice and his vocal criticisms of oppressive institutions, many fans repeatedly attempt to separate his music from his advocacy. In the very same posts that celebrate him as the "bog man," fans will often celebrate his more folk-heavy, romantic-only songs and neglect to even mention the just-as-plentiful influence of Black artists or the social-justice stances his music clearly takes.[40] Reducing Hozier simply to his aesthetic proximity to folk music, only one segment of his stylistic range, without also acknowledging the cerebral commentaries he makes on social justice in a substantial portion of his work encourages uncritical engagement with his art.

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Formless and Empty: Absences and Silences in Neoliberal Queer Social Justice Movement

Performativity is not new to LGBTQ+-related social justice movements. There are repeated historical instances of racial exclusiv-

ity in United States history. Whether it is the militant exclusion on the part of white lesbian separatists in the '70s, or the modern neoliberal queer liberation movement that uses racialized respectability politics in its pleas for marriage and family-planning equality, white queer men and women have continuously prioritized their individual rights and their own self-interest, an unfortunate lineage.

Neoliberalism is defined as "an economic theory that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade;" it is also rife in the queer political liberation movement and has been since the 1970s. Most notably, the dominant queer liberation movement in America has remained white and centered on the categorically neoliberalist tenet of "inequality." Instead of seeking to address the social and economic discrepancies that disadvantage the weakest members of the community, the neoliberalist sect of the movement champions itself as deserving of the same rights as their straight middle class counterpart; they are more than content to leave the lower classes and queer folks of color in their struggles in order to situate themselves as a demographic above.[41] The history of neoliberalism in the queer activist community, as loftily as it is thrown around in academic circles, is a large reason for the reformist style of activism that is typical of the modern era.

By comfortably tossing aside the long-standing concerns and needs of queer folks of color in favor of their own separatism, the dominant white queer neoliberalist movement "turned away from liberationist or radical demands for dismantling oppressive systems or promoting sexual freedom" and have instead pushed for something else. This something is "homonormativity," which champions the visibility of queer people and points to their respectability in the current social landscape compared to other "less-deserving groups," baptizing themselves in the capitalist, patriarchal rhetoric they appeal to with every campaign and protest.[42] For the past three decades, the neoliberalist queer platform has focused on the privatization of social services and the capitalist value of queer consumerist presence, to name a few. Additionally, neoliberalist white queers often seek unrestricted access to urban areas to appeal to heteronormative social and political authorities in the United States,

without considering the hurt to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) through gentrification and closing access to state and federal resources.

These problems are symptomatic of a similar affliction in the white queer liberation movement: appropriation of Black voices and trauma in advocacy, beginning with the production of canonical academic feminist theory. "Spectacular absence," coined by Allison Reed in "The Whiter the Bread, The Quicker You're Dead: Spectacular Absence and Post-Racialized Blackness in (White) Queer Theory," addresses the phenomenon in which white queer theory, and thus praxis, utilizes "racialized embodiment as a way into its own stylized narrative of trauma."[43] This "spectacular absence" is found smack in the middle of neoliberal white queer movements who "use the right language" as a method through which to deflect their own role in racism, keeping whiteness as a dimension "unacknowledged and unexamined." In summary, the ideology is verbally active yet decidedly passive. Reed says that instead of weaponizing whiteness, white queer theorists often wield the weapon of "post-racialized blackness" as an allegory for their own oppression, not comparing the two but rather whitewashing the experiences inherent to Blackness—as appropriative as white rock 'n' rollers stealing songs and sounds from Black blues and gospel artists in the 1950s. Left unchecked, uncritical whiteness and the "spectacular absence" that it produces creates a neoliberal white queer monster that is "progressive only in name" and myopic at its essence.[44] It is this uncritical whiteness that is a symptom of neoliberalism and has resulted in deliberate "missed opportunities for coalition" and mutual aid, proving in the long term to be nothing but an obstacle to intersectional activism and truly inclusive justice.

It is here where spectacular absence and imagined communities create one hell of a monster in queer music fandoms. In the field of music studies, the notion of "imagined community" is the conjured and yet real space where the participant, in this case listener or fan, imagines themselves with others when they engage with media and/or discourse; it is a version of nationalism.[45] When the average white listener of Hozier, queer or otherwise, listens to a song of his after being surrounded by the appropriative and pandering social justice space of the neoliberal

white queer movement, it becomes easier to imagine themselves as part of it: exclusive, singular, respectable, and reformist. Immaculate. In this imagination, listeners see only the projection of the singularity of societally and culturally backed homophobia, and not the multitudinal, multidimensional problems that hurt people at their intersections—the very same oppressions that white queer people can and do participate in the suffocating husk of quasi-queer nationalism.

The "Take Me to Church" music video is racially and nationalistically ambiguous, featuring two white male leads in a Russian urban setting. Combining this ambiguity, however, with widespread low media literacy and a repeated denial of internalized racism on the part of queer Hozier fans has unintentionally cultivated an uncritical allyship. This is especially exacerbated by the fact that many of Hozier's fans themselves left the same American Evangelical environment that similarly refuses to address its own role in white supremacy. For example, Black TikTokers who analyze and comment on Hozier's music are met with racism from the very same white queer people who claim to be fans.[46] While a number of these fans are likely supportive of a multiplicity of social justice fights, Hozier's white fans in particular clearly have a problem talking about race in several forums. His music does not naturally lead to, nor end in being well read or understanding his literary references; it occupies a space that celebrates Irish tradition and the contribution of Black Americans, particularly Black women, to the global music stage and fights for social justice. While the fans in question are content with consuming the abundance of gospel and other Black-originated musical components that Hozier self-critically uses, many are uncomfortable confronting the activism that consuming Hozier's music begs, nay, demands of the audience. In batting the lyrical and sonic aesthetics of Black American music back across the pond, well-intentioned and thorough as he was, has Hozier expected more than the average white queer American listener is capable of critically digesting?

> "Many are uncomfortable confronting the activism that consuming Hozier's music begs, nay, demands of the audience.

Psalms: A Black Queer Hozier Fan's Reflections on Race, Spirituality, and Activism

Hozier's intentionality, however, is not lost on his Black, usually queer, fans, and many even say that they find special solace in his music. I called on a friend who moved from their small rural town in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) to Seattle, Washington, a few years ago. They are now twenty-two, living their authentic self. Bel Quiaoit, who is Black and Filipino queer nonbinary, left their church a few years back when they moved and has said that Hozier's music is uniquely healing to them.[47] "I feel connected to the overall devotedness [he has] to the Human Condition in his art," said Quiaoit. My friend's relationship to the church—a small-town PNW church—is complicated. While they did not attend often, their house was "laden" with the likeness of Jesus. Additionally, Quiaoit said that growing up in the rural spaces they did was tough. It makes sense. While predominantly white churches in America determinably have a race problem, just as many remain stalwart in their negative beliefs toward the LGBTQ+ community.[48]

Quiaoit said that there is something about Hozier's music that makes them feel meaningfully connected to a community that may not always want them there: "Not to ignore the adverse experiences many queer people face in the church, I find [white queer neoliberal] folks fencing out a sense of community that could belong to others."[49] To the exclusion of all else, white neoliberal queers often unilaterally point at the church as a site of deep hurt. Although it has been undoubtedly responsible, people still gather there, and often colonized communities who do so attend to connect to their culture, especially if they immigrated from a colonized country as Quiaoit's Filipina mother did. Marking the church only as a site of harm isolates it from its larger, collective meaning as a place of ancestry. Additionally, Quiaoit noted that gospel has "life in a big way," and that if someone has God, "what's gonna stop [them] from seeing me?" It is impossible to undo the complicated effects of colonization on communities of color and their subsequent adoption of Christianity, but it "deprives people of color of spirituality all together" to completely reject its legitimacy as a site of gathering and "togetherness."[50]

Quiaoit said something else striking: "Hozier's political fire naturally follows." At the risk of sounding like a blindly loyal fan, Hozier is not perfect, but he apologizes, learns, engages, and takes a stand. He has no obligation to care about his American audience; Hozier is not even American. Yet he has shown repeatedly that you cannot "make art without there being a political dimension to it."[51] Bel Quiaoit, like many other queer Hozier fans of color, believes similarly that one cannot engage with art "without there being a political dimension to it;"[52] they look forward to and already see more meaningful engagement for the future fans destined to come.

Conclusion

The history of white queer protest is one laced with neoliberalism, empty or altogether absent of discussions of race, and a shrine of exclusion, passivity, and respectability. This undoubtedly appears as a pattern in the fandoms of popular queer recording artists, including Hozier, despite his best efforts to divorce himself from the performativity associated with white queer neoliberalism. Thus, the reception of what may very well be his most lasting impression as a musical artist—"Take Me to Church," that is—is much more complicated than ever intended. Certainly, this song shocked Americans in every sense of the word when it hit the international stage in 2013. Years later, it still strikes a chord because of Hozier's consistent use of his platform for social justice.

It is not often that we see such epochal shaking of institutions on a global scale. Indeed, Hozier's song represents an interesting historical moment, especially because it came on the heels of a large wave of public discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ individuals in America. However, the initial social, cultural, and political conversation in which the song entered the international stage remains with it, for better or for worse. The white queer neoliberal liberation movement is marked by its exclusion and appropriation of BIPOC. Hozier has made his activism more intentional and outright as he has continued his music career and climbed into increasing fame. While many of his fans of color, Quiaoit and myself included, feel as though it is becoming more difficult to ignore the appreciative uses of African American musical contributions and his advocacy, only time will tell whether the seemingly immaculate

reputation of a large group of white queer fans to "Take Me to Church" will inspire more intersectional, inclusive activism among a congregation of those proudly "born sick" and living well.

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6. Boilens, "Hozier," 152; Reiland Rabaka, *Civil Rights Music: The Soundtracks of the Civil Rights Movement* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Lexington Books, 2016), 43; James Sullivan, *Which Side Are You On?: 20th Century American History in 100 Protest Songs* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2019), 133. I acknowledge and allude to the Irish civil war that particularly came to a head in the '90s. I did not want to spend too much time on it, however, because this is an American Studies paper and the tensions between Ireland and England are centuries long and rife with violence and oppression on the part of the latter. Irish activists are also incredibly vocal that their own liberative movement was directly inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in America, lest there be any lack of clarity about who to credit for its success.
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8. Rabaka, *Civil Rights Music*, 54, 58.
9. Boilens, "Hozier," 155; Rabaka, *Civil Rights Music*, 2.
10. Boilens, "Hozier," 155.
11. "Take Me to Church," Spotify, track 1 on Hozier, *Hozier*, Rubyworks Records, 2014.
12. "Take Me to Church," Hozier.
13. Margaret Weiss, "Queer Politics in Neoliberal Times (1970s–2010s)," in *The Routledge History of Queer America*, ed. Don Romesburg (New York: Routledge, 2018), 110.
14. Elena Canido Muiño, "Shaking the Wings of Their Terrible Youths: Exploring References and Allusions in Hozier's Eponymous Debut Album (2014)," *Ireland Studies (Études Irlandaises)* 47, no. 2 (2022): 113.
15. Hozier hosted a limited podcast as part of his work with nonprofit *Global Citizen* and had Annie Lennox and Bono on as guests to talk about their social justice advocacy. While Hozier has not performed with Bono or U2, the two seem to often brush shoulders.
16. Needham, "Hozier."
17. Perhaps more colloquially, the song's title can exist as a callback. Live gospel, blues, and soul are expressive genres of music and usually encourage participatory

audience interaction in the form of cheering. "Take me to church" or "take them to church" is a common callback when a musician or group of musicians are about to launch into a jam or solo. It is usually in reference to the music being so good that it is bringing the audience to near religious rapture. Given the history, title, genre, and sonic landscape of the song, the callback being a notable social and cultural form of communication was important to note contextually.

18. "Hozier," RIAA. Funnily enough, Sinéad O'Connor, fellow Irish controversy-stirrer and vocal critic of the Catholic Church, released a song in 2014 also titled "Take Me to Church." I would like to think that this is a coincidence, but an interesting one, nonetheless.
19. Weiss, "Queer Politics," 114.
20. Weiss, "Queer Politics," 109, 113, 115.
21. Canido Muiño, "Shaking the Wings," 111.
22. Cavan Sieczkowski, "Russian Neo-Nazis Allegedly Lure, Torture Gay Teens with Online Dating Scam," *HuffPost*, February 2, 2016, www.huffpost.com/entry/russian-nazi-torture-gay-teens_n_3658636; James Michael Nichols, "Hozier's 'Take Me to Church' Echoes Russian Anti-LGBT Violence," *HuffPost*, February 2, 2016, www.huffpost.com/entry/hozier-take-me-to-church_n_3991405; James Michael Nichols, "'Occupy Paedophilia,' Russian Anti-Gay Group, 'On Safari' Hunting Gays [Watch]," *HuffPost*, February 2, 2016, www.huffpost.com/entry/occupy-paedophilia-hunting-gays-russia_n_3875223.
23. There is no academic evidence of this that I could find, but anecdotally I remember hearing that several American churches were playing this song at public gatherings before really listening to the lyrics—comical and lacking a completely factual basis from my research, but I hope that it's true.
24. Rick McDaniel, "A Pastor's Open Letter to Hozier and His 'Take Me to Church' Song," *The Christian Post*, Richmond Community Church, March 6, 2015, www.christianpost.com/news/a-pastors-open-letter-to-hozier-and-his-take-me-to-church-song.html. This "open letter" was something I remember reading aloud at a youth group where my youth pastors told us that this open letter conveyed everything we believed about "the homosexuals." It's the typical "hate the sin, love the sinner," "love them at a distance" kind of thing, so read it at your discretion, but it was a wild thing to experience both in the moment and in hindsight.
25. Needham, "Hozier." More anecdotally perhaps, as someone who attended an Evangelical private school as a teen, I was one of many students across the country who was sat down to talk about the song and about "homosexuals" en masse. In one such assembly, I was told that the song was inappropriate for my age and that the song was about a man who was living a life deeply in sin and doing so blasphemously. They addressed the music video with particular regard to "homosexuals"—that we don't hate gay people. We love them at a distance because if they want to be Christians and are truly moved by the Spirit, then they will reject their lifestyle. And it is our (Evangelical Christians') job to keep evangelizing, even if they don't want to hear it, because the Spirit will move in them eventually. We prayed for Hozier's soul at the end of the assembly. I could not make this up if I wanted. I heard this same message, less kindly, with specific reference to "Take Me to Church" as late as Spring 2020, an indication that Hozier's song is still striking nerves across the pond.
26. Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 40. I read this whole book, and it was absolutely brilliant. Perhaps overkill for an undergraduate paper, but I plan to

reread it after this semester ends so I can read it outside of the utility it provided me for the paper. I decided to only cite it once but its relevance to the topic cannot go unmentioned.

27. There have been open movements politically and socially to suppress, silence, and, yes, kill LGBTQ+ folks in this country, most of which have been backed by a majority of American Evangelical Christians. I wasn't sure where to put this in my paper other than an endnote right here. I will mention it more later; however, I wanted to note it here in case it wasn't clear.
28. Frida Silva, "I Should've Worshipped Her Sooner: How Hozier Has Connected with the Lesbian Community," *The Liberator Magazine*, May 7, 2019, theliberatormagazine.com/2019/05/07/hozier.
29. Jordan Currie, "What Is It with Lesbians and Hozier?," *The Niche*, March 19, 2020, the-niche.blog/2020/03/18/what-is-it-with-lesbians-and-Hozier; Advocate Channel, "Hozier Talks with Alexia Noelle & Vidalia Ann Gentry Back Stage at Love Rising," March 24, 2023, video, 4:39, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcuK9_mKajs.
30. "Almost (Sweet Music)," Spotify, track 2 on Hozier, *Wasteland, Baby!*, Columbia Records, 2019.
31. Boilens, "Hozier," 1; "Nina Cried Power (feat. Mavis Staples)," Spotify, track 1 on Hozier, *Wasteland, Baby!*, Columbia Records, 2019.
32. "Jackie and Wilson" and "Someone New," Spotify, tracks 3 and 4 on *Hozier*, Hozier, Rubyworks Records, 2014.
33. @hozier, "A few thoughts . . . [IMAGE]," Twitter, June 5, 2020, https://twitter.com/Hozier/status/1269078569696854016.
34. Advocate Channel, "Hozier Talks"; Louise Bruton, "Hozier: 'If I Wanted to Make a F**king Pop Song, I Would,'" *The Irish Times*, February 23, 2019, www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/hozier-if-i-wanted-to-make-a-f-king-pop-song-i-would-1.3794161.
35. Bruton, "Hozier."
36. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1, 1991): 1246–1248. There is a lot of Black radical feminist theory and history that I could put here, but for the sake of room, time, and concision, I have elected to simplify the attribution to Kimberlé Crenshaw. I am well aware of the restrictions and limitations that such a decision puts on the argumentative integrity of my paper, and I acknowledge also that this, in at least a small way, makes me complicit in the history of silencing Black women and the silencing of historical contributions of Black women to feminism and social justice.
37. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality is widely familiar in most sociological academic fields; there are a number of examples I could have used to illustrate Crenshaw's theory due to the multitudinous nature of its argument. This specific example is meant to illustrate the dimensions of privilege within the LGBTQ+ community for the later analysis in my paper. Racism and ableism, from personal experience alone, is rampant in the queer community.
38. @hozier, Twitter, June 6, 2020, https://twitter.com/Hozier/status/1269464519795003397. This paper is unfortunately extremely well-timed to another music industry scandal. At the time of the writing of this paper, Spring

2023, the speculation that Matty Healy and Taylor Swift are dating has been all but confirmed by their public appearances together. There is much that could be said about the two, even Taylor Swift alone; however, the relevance of social justice and fandom is as follows:

Matty Healy, lead singer of The 1975, has become an increasingly problematic figure. He has been consistently known to make inflammatory racist, misogynoir, sexist, chauvinist, and degrading comments about people of color. Taylor Swift, internationally famous pop star, is also a complicated figure in her own right; she has been criticized for calling herself a feminist while remaining both passive and active in circles that further oppress women of color. Her fans are loyal defenders and many refuse to engage meaningfully in critiques of Swift's conditional allyship. The Swiftie community, the name for her fans, is up in arms over how to respond to her complicity in Matty Healy's current and past behavior and her own independent engagement with other industry professionals.

39. The largest reason for my arrival at this conclusion is because of how many, if not all, modern radical feminists attribute the baseline for their theories to the Black lesbian feminists of the 1960s and earlier, whose own theories about race, gender, feminism, and social justice were, unfortunately, much ahead of their time. Many Black radical feminists whose theories are espoused and adopted today were sapphic, lesbian, or queer identifying on top of their other identities.
40. Currie, "What Is It with Lesbians and Hozier?"; Silva, "Worshipped Her Sooner."
41. Weiss, "Queer Politics," 107, 109–111.
42. Weiss, "Queer Politics," 109–110.
43. Allison Reed, "The Whiter the Bread, The Quicker You're Dead: Spectacular Absence and Post-Racialized Blackness in (White) Queer Theory," in *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 57.
44. Reed, "Spectacular Absence," 43, 58, 70.
45. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed., (London: Verso, 2006), 1–20.
46. @ratchetintellectual, "Hozier: Black music is a heavy influence in my work. Yall: anyway his mom is Fiona Apple!" TikTok, October 25, 2021
47. Bel Quiaoit (pronounced kee-ow-it) is a dear friend and independent poet. They have been a key presence to my life as a person of color healing from American Evangelicalism. Quiaoit said a lot of beautiful things and so it was hard to choose what to include. Quiaoit, who is trying to figure out this thing called life, offered to talk even more. There is so much more I wish I could have included but decided to leave out for the sake of time. This essay is dedicated to Quiaoit, their love for people, and their love for words.
48. Bel Quiaoit, in conversation with the author, May 17, 2023; Reed, "Spectacular Absence," 33.
49. Bel Quiaoit, in conversation with the author, May 17, 2023.
50. Bel Quiaoit, in conversation with the author, May 17, 2023.
51. Andrew Hozier-Byrnes, "Hozier - Interview on The Late Late Show," interview by Ryan Tubridy, *The Late Late Show*, RTÉ One, April 14, 2023, video, 12:31, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW7ituztPO0&t=5s.
52. Bel Quiaoit, in conversation with the author, May 17, 2023.

Arial view of Dodger Stadium and downtown Los Angeles.
(Image courtesy of Jakob Owens, Unsplash.)

Rise of the Stadium Industrial Complex

Dylan Norris

AMST 401T: Suburban Culture

"Rise of the Stadium Industrial Complex" was written for Professor Elaine Lewinnek's American Studies 401T: Suburban Culture class. This paper examines the patterns of baseball stadium movement during the mid-twentieth century. Stadiums are often gravitational centers of cities and play a large role in the culture. Team owners wanted their teams to be viewed as both a public entity and a private corporation. Owners selected public or private depending on what would benefit them the most, which created an unfair dynamic that intersects with politics, race, and sense of place. Arguably, the stadium movement during this time was a cutthroat display of capitalism that paved the way for a multi-billion-dollar industry today.

How often do you think about the sports stadiums that make up a city? They are such distinct architectural feats that some are dubbed "palaces."[1] They sit in a city like a planet with gravitational pull, drawing spectators and fanatics alike to convene for a contemporary gladiator match. Stadiums serve as places where people practice a ritual of gathering to celebrate a similar interest. These spaces offer Americans a place to watch a sport that distracts them for a few hours, helping them forget about everything else wrong in their life. For a moment, they can suspend disbelief and be immersed in a new world—a world that roars at the sight of a nine-inch white ball struck with such force that it lands outside the stadium. As Americans enjoy the release that sports entertainment provides, they rise to their feet to lift their hands and bodies to the sky in a regal display of unity that is dubbed "the wave." The modern movement of stadiums began with baseball, so that's the sport we will focus on. Not only is it my favorite sport, but I love baseball stadiums for their unique styles, architectural designs, and fascinating backgrounds.

This story, though, is also about the suburbs and the rise of

the post-war urban sprawl that contributed to the creation of new stadiums in the 1950s. There were many reasons the suburbs played a role in where stadiums were built during this time. One example is stadium parking. With stadiums outside the city, people had to drive farther to get to them. This created a need for more parking structures around stadiums that did not necessarily have a lot of space. Team owners used this fact to leverage public financing out of cities that would provide the space needed to build more parking. This story includes urban planning troubles, taxation disputes, and the separation of leisure spaces from neighborhoods. All of these suburban issues are reflected in stadiums.

It's hard to describe the feelings that come with having a major sports team in your city. There is an unquantifiable, intangible quality that having a sports team in your city brings. It can revitalize a city, unify the citizens, and bring unique economic advantages. When teams like the Braves, Dodgers, and Giants moved locations, team owners leveraged the pain of fans to get tax breaks from cities. Cities such as Milwaukee, Los Angeles, and San Francisco used these teams to extort their citizens for public money. This begs the question, are sports teams public utilities or private corporations? It seems they want it both ways. Sports teams want to be public institutions when it comes to receiving tax incentives from the government to fund their stadiums. Team owners like to talk about how the team is for the good of the community. Yet when fans complain about ticket prices and stadium amenities being overpriced, suddenly, baseball is strictly a business.

What really drives stadium movement is the potential for market growth, not the play on the field. According to CNBC, building sports stadiums generates many opportunities for new revenue streams such as real estate, media deals, and sponsorships.[2] These are the forces that really drive the development of new stadiums. At the end of the day, sports teams want to turn a profit, and the team owner and chairman act as the CEO. If a sports team owner wants to leverage the team's power to build a new stadium in a city in order to generate more revenue, the citizens of that city should expect them to invest their own funds to do this, right? That's where things get convoluted. This is why

> Even though all the incentives for a new stadium lie with the team owner, the public often foots the bill for the stadium through subsidies.

the inside information on why stadiums get built in the places they do is so fascinating. Even though all the incentives for a new stadium lie with the team owner, the public often foots the bill for the stadium through subsidies. This happens with all stadiums nowadays, but to find the answer to why this happens, I look back at the stadium movement in the '50s.

After World War II ended, America underwent many changes. The '50s ushered in a new decade in which consumer spending was essential, and you only mattered for as much money as you spent. This carried over to the entertainment industry in which people looked for ways to be entertained outside of work. New technological advancements paved the way for the future of America and baseball. Appliances like televisions and transistor radios were readily available, and many people snatched them up to enjoy their favorite teams. Thanks to new technology, baseball fandom grew beyond the borders of the teams' hometowns.

In postwar America, cities became decentralized because of the Cold War. America heavily invested in sprawling suburban cities, spreading out to every corner of the country to ease the disaster of a potential nuclear attack. Such growth occurred thanks to technological advancements like air-conditioning, which allowed new areas to be settled without fear of heat-related issues in the summer. This meant there were new markets in places never viewed as sustainable by coastal elitists in New York and Boston.

In this paper, I will look at three teams—the Braves, the Dodgers, and the Giants—and their respective stories during this time to understand the complexity of stadium space politics in midcentury America. This era of technological change and population growth left Major League Baseball telling themselves the same thing Babe Ruth's pants told him every time he put them on during the later years of his career:

"It is time to expand."

Boston Braves

The middle of the twentieth century was an era of growth and movement for America, and Major League Baseball (MLB) reflected that. Prior to 1953, no MLB team had moved cities in half a century. Times were turbulent in the previous few decades with the Great Depression and WWII, so it didn't make financial sense to try making more money in a new city if you had already been established in one. However, the owner of the Boston Braves at this time, Lou Perini, felt his team had a few significant issues playing in Boston. According to Perini, competition from the Red Sox and a lack of parking infrastructure contributed to dwindling attendance numbers. This was a modern issue in an increasingly car-dependent suburban society. Parking was simply not an issue when the stadium was built around the turn of the century. The Braves drew just 281,278 fans in 1952, less than a third of their attendance numbers from 1950 and at least 800,000 fewer fans than the Red Sox.[3] These figures were undeniable and led Perini to look elsewhere for a stadium.

People in Boston did not appear too bothered by the Braves leaving because they were a doormat, walked over by other teams in the early '50s. One of the more famous baseball adages was derived from the Braves' struggles at this time. It goes, "Spahn and Sain and pray for rain."[4] The saying implies that despite star pitchers Warren Spahn and Johnny Sain, Braves fans should just pray the third game of a series would be rained out because the team didn't have anyone else worth putting in to pitch. On top of this, the Red Sox were the main attraction in town thanks to their iconic player, the "Splendid Splinter" Ted Williams. Moreover, the Red Sox were consistent contenders in the American League, even winning the pennant in 1946.

Many could point to the fact that the Braves were long considered "the other team in Boston" or they "only sold 420 season tickets before the 1953 season"as reasons why they were due for a move.[5] However, the decision was not as obvious as Perini would've liked people to believe. The Braves, in fact, were not a terrible franchise. Sure, they had fallen on hard times in the '50s, but they actually won quite a bit prior to that. In 1948, they won the National League pennant, proving that they

could win despite playing second fiddle in attendance to the Red Sox. There wasn't a long, consistent period of losing to support a clear need for a change of scenery. Speaking of scenery, the Braves stadium in Boston was actually well kept and quite beautiful. One of the stadium's historians, Ralph Evans, said that the stadium was, "at the end, the prettiest . . . in the majors—I defy anyone to say it wasn't!"[6] Lou Perini indicated the situation was untenable, but that's probably not true. The stadium was by no means a dump in need of abandonment. He was just the first of a long line of owners who would cherry-pick statistics to claim their team was in dire straits and needed an immediate move.

Milwaukee Braves

Before the Braves moved to Milwaukee, there was a minor league affiliate already playing there. The AA Milwaukee Brewers were owned by future infamous owner William Veeck Jr. He sold the rights of that club in 1946 to Braves team owner Lou Perini.[7] This made the transition much smoother since Perini already had fans within that market.

At this point in time, publicly funded stadiums were not very popular. According to *Sports Economics* author Rodney B. Fort:

> Stadium subsidies were essentially unheard of, with funding for professional sports stadiums coming from private sources. In 1951, MLB commissioner Ford Frick observed that league teams were bringing large amounts of revenue to their host cities from which owners weren't able to profit. He announced that cities would need to start supporting their teams by building and maintaining venues through public subsidy.[8]

Owners saw a new opportunity to create profit with the help of MLB commissioner Ford Frick. The owners first realized the value of the "unquantifiable intangible quality" of having a baseball team in a city. They understood the power they wielded because they figured cities without a team would be willing to subsidize them now that the economy was better. Yet, for an era that was consumed with the Red Scare and House Un-American Activities Committee investigations, public subsidies were certainly a more communist than capitalist route of financing. It

goes back to my point earlier about owners wanting baseball teams to be seen as a public utility, when it is convenient, while still maintaining their private business interests above all else.

Thus, the new Milwaukee Braves stadium, County Stadium, became the first of its kind to be funded entirely by the public.[9] This move was groundbreaking for the city of Milwaukee. The city got its team, but they also had to foot the bill for the team to be there. It was an unprecedented move that would have ramifications on the landscape of stadium building for years to come. The new stadiums that came afterwards were more likely to be built using public funds because owners now knew they could get rent-free property and a good stadium like County Stadium, further increasing their opportunity to obtain higher profits.

Brooklyn Dodgers

In this burgeoning period of growth and movement, Major League Baseball needed to get to the West Coast. In 1955, the westmost city that harbored a professional baseball team was St. Louis. To increase profits, MLB needed to fill the void in some of the fastest growing media markets in the country.

By the late '50s, Brooklyn Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley wanted to move his team for a few reasons. The first, like with Lou Perini, was a lack of parking infrastructure around their stadium, Ebbets Field. At the time, the stadium had a capacity of 31,409 but only had enough parking to hold 1,000 cars, not sufficient for O'Malley.[10] This had a trickle-down effect that influenced another one of O'Malley's reasons for the move: dropping attendance. Arguably his main reason for leaving, attendance had been steadily on the decline as it fell below the league average. This was made all the more surprising because, unlike the Braves, the Dodgers were one of the best performing teams in the league during the '50s.[11] However, attendance is where most of the money was made during this time, and it gave O'Malley more leverage. The final reason makes O'Malley look the worst. His own feelings were that a new stadium should be built in a "good neighborhood" which he clearly defined as being "one not predominantly or in danger of becoming predominantly Latino or Black."[12] Clearly, O'Malley showed contempt and racism towards minorities and people of color. It's shocking

considering he owned a team in New York, one of the most diverse areas in the world—yet made all the less surprising given that it was still the early days of the Civil Rights Movement. All things considered, Walter O'Malley had sufficient justification in his mind to seek a new stadium for the Dodgers.

Say what you will about O'Malley, he and the city of Brooklyn did make an effort to keep the team in New York. O'Malley tried to convince famous New York City urban planner Robert Moses to convert land in Brooklyn into Title 1 land so that it could be bought for cheaper. Moses refused to do it because he believed it was not in the public interest to help fund a baseball stadium for a privately owned baseball corporation. This is another example of an executive in this story trying to use socialism to his benefit while maintaining a capitalist mindset to maximize the value of his team—again harkening back to whether a baseball team is a private corporation or a public utility. O'Malley's move here was motivated by the fact that he believed it was in the best interest of the city to have the rules bended towards him. Moses didn't budge though, and that's why many consider him not innocent in this escapade.

Robert Moses may have been one of the main forces, along with O'Malley, in the Dodgers' stadium pursuit. It is accepted now that any proposal made by O'Malley to stay in New York could not have been done without Moses's approval. According to a book about Moses's life, he "killed, over the efforts of Brooklyn Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley, plans for a City

Sports Authority that might have kept the Dodgers and Giants in New York."[13] This shows that O'Malley was not the sole reason a stadium was not ultimately built in Brooklyn. Historical perspectives have been kinder to O'Malley for this reason. Ultimately, Moses seems to have been the power broker that shot the Dodgers out of Brooklyn, even though it had been O'Malley who loaded the gun.

Los Angeles Dodgers

Across the country, Los Angeles's elite began to realize the potential "unquantifiable intangible quality" that the Dodgers could bring to the city. This included an infinite amount of economic and cultural

benefits. Key figures in LA wanted the Dodgers to move to their city. Powerful business executive oligarchs like the Committee of 25, the City Housing Authority (CHA), the City Council, and the *Los Angeles Times* used their authority to help leverage support. They wanted the Dodgers in LA, and they were offering up far more to O'Malley than he had been asking for in Brooklyn. The issue everyone looked past was the location of their new stadium, which could be described as a graveyard of a community.

In 1950, Chavez Ravine was a bustling area of mostly Mexican Americans. They lived modestly, had schools, churches, and local merchants, and took great pride in their charming community.[14] This area did have its issues with plumbing and other things, but it was by no means "blighted." However, during this time, the powers of Los Angeles endorsed a public housing plan that would displace generations of families who lived in Chavez Ravine. Residents were forced to sell their homes to the city and move to a different area, made more difficult due to redlining which prevented people of color from buying homes in certain areas. To make matters worse, the plan for public housing was later abandoned thanks to an anti-communist wave in Los Angeles. By 1958, the area was mostly abandoned. It sent a signal that the city was not going to protect people of color. Consequently, the city could now offer up the land to O'Malley for the Dodgers.

> "Residents were forced to sell their homes to the city and move to a different area, made more difficult due to redlining which prevented people of color from buying homes in certain areas.

It was clear O'Malley was willing to pay for the stadium in Brooklyn, but he wanted help buying the land it was on. In LA though, he got the deal of the century. O'Malley was the controlling investor in a minor league stadium in Texas. His first maneuver was to trade that stadium and the rights of the club to Charles Wrigley, owner of the Cubs and Wrigley Field in Chicago as well as their AA club based

in downtown LA, conveniently also named Wrigley Field.[15] O'Malley then leveraged the stadium he received and sold it to the city of Los Angeles for the rights to Chavez Ravine.[16] The city even threw in $2 million to renovate the area around, further twisting the knife into the former residents of Chavez Ravine.[17] O'Malley essentially got prime real estate in Los Angeles to build Dodger stadium in exchange for a minor league club's stadium, an unequivocally great deal for him. The "unquantifiable intangible quality" was so alluring to the city of Los Angeles that it made it easy for O'Malley to abandon Brooklyn and the team's dedicated fans.

The Los Angeles City Council approved the move, and the Dodgers came to LA after the 1958 season. O'Malley's plan was met with harsh criticism by the fans who didn't want their beloved Dodgers to leave. To show Brooklyn's resentment for the move, Peter Marquis in a journal about the Dodgers' move wrote,

> From the 1960s to the 1990s, there was a vivid anti-O'Malley sentiment, exemplified by one oft-reprinted joke: a man is asked "what would you do if you were facing O'Malley, Hitler, and Stalin and had only two bullets in your firearm?" The sordid answer was, "two in O'Malley's head, to make sure he is dead."[18]

This quote exemplifies the true pain the fans felt about losing "Dem Bums," the chosen moniker the fans had endearingly given the team over the years. What makes this quote incredibly powerful and poignant is that Americans were barely removed from Hitler's wrath, and they were in the midst of Stalin's reign of terror. Saying this about a person in the '50s meant a lot more than it would in the present day.

Despite this level of outcry after the team left Brooklyn, O'Malley and city officials were easily able to justify the move because of a reported lack of organized displeasure. The *New York Times* wrote in May of 1957, "Judging by mail and calls to City Hall, there was no great outcry from baseball fans at the National League action and its implications."[19] This quote contradicts the public perception that fans were screaming for the Dodgers not to leave. However, this feeling does fall in line with

the lower attendance numbers in the later '50s that O'Malley cited as a reason for moving. The flip side of this quote is that there was outcry; it was just not mobilized in a way the city officials respected. There were several groups that were organizing actions. It's a complex issue that doesn't have a clear answer to what really happened. In the end though, O'Malley left without looking back.

It's clear O'Malley had good reasons for moving the team to Los Angeles. After all, the city offered him things that he would never be able to get in Brooklyn. He received tax incentives, funds to refurbish the land he would build on, and an area that, because of public domain, was clear of the type of people he wanted away from his stadium—all that and a new market with room for exponential growth in the rapidly growing LA metro area. The move was about money, and it did deliver on that expectation, at the expense of many others.

What this meant for the city of Los Angeles cannot be understated. It was huge. The Dodgers have become as associated with LA as tacos and the motion picture industry. Even though Walter O'Malley got a good deal, and the people of the LA area got their team, it doesn't absolve them of their sins. The stadium was built on a gravesite of homes. It's an ironic image that says a lot about how the city promoted the interests of a sports team whose vested partners are all white. Moreover, building the stadium emphasizes how the city destroyed a community of Latinx-American citizens by claiming it was "blighted."

Another aspect of irony is how communism plays into the story of stadium movement. In his book, *Building Downtown Los Angeles: The Politics of Race and Place in Urban America*, Leland T. Saito writes,

> Although business interests warned of "socialism" in the form of public housing, the same group supported public subsidies for the owner of the Dodgers. Canceling the housing project and bringing the Brooklyn Dodgers to Chavez Ravine demonstrated how business interests used city authority and public funds to promote and subsidize corporate interests over those of lower-income residents.[20]

This quote exemplifies the contradiction involved and more clearly il-

lustrates the racism of everyone involved in this project, from Walter O'Malley to the Los Angeles City Council. It's not often that sports fans would be expected to understand all the irony that surrounds their stadium, but it is worth understanding everything it took just to get the Dodgers to Los Angeles. The move was complicated, nuanced, merciless, and crooked. Would I expect a modern Dodgers fan to really care about this though? No, I wouldn't, because most fans just want to enjoy the stadium as a space to suspend disbelief and enjoy themselves. But if I can play a small part in helping people understand what happened in the '50s and how cutthroat it was, I can be proud knowing the truth is at least out there and we know who the villains are.

New York Giants

The legacy of the Dodger's historic move to Los Angeles continued with the team who followed them to the West Coast in the late '50s. The Giants have their own unique story of moving out of New York. Around the same time the Dodgers were angling to move to LA, the Giants were having problems. The owner of the Giants at the time was Horace C. Stoneham, a wealthy real estate investor. He inherited the team and stadium from his father and, while he ran a financially strong club, his team's performance on the field gradually became subpar. Eventually, Stoneham saw many of the same issues that O'Malley and Perini witnessed with their clubs. *The New York Times* reported in 1957 that "Mr. Stoneham said the team's problems included adequate transportation and parking facilities, and competition from television."[21] Like O'Malley and Perini, Stoneham cited issues with parking. However, in a dense city like New York, numerous ways existed to get to the stadium. One could arrive via train, subway, taxi, or bike. It's worth questioning the owners of the New York teams to see if parking was really as important as they were claiming.

In 1956, there was a push from the city to keep the Giants in New York. Manhattan Borough president Hulan Jack proposed building a massive super stadium on Manhattan's West Side. The proposed stadium would cost about $75 million to build, and it would be a home for the New York football Giants as well.[22] Despite the projected cost,

stadium builders were expecting about $20 million in revenue per year thanks to the new prospective stadium. This made the proposal worth examining for everyone involved. New York City's mayor was on board, and the new proposal would've had everything Stoneham wanted. It would've allowed Stoneham's once beloved childhood team to remain in the city he grew up in. The main issue behind this proposal though, was the most obvious. Where were they going to get the money to fund this super-stadium? The lack of funding is likely what doomed this project. There is no clear evidence as to why this plan didn't work out, but the cost certainly didn't help. These troubles, factored in with Stoneham's offers from other cities, led him to focus on proposals outside of New York.

Understandably, the fans of the Giants were upset. Many of them wrote letters to the team and the city voicing their displeasure. One of the team's stockholders, Julian November, went as far as to sue the team for not consulting him about moving the team west.[23] It's always painful for fans to accept that they won't be able to see their team play games at their beloved stadium anymore, but someone going as far as suing in order to voice his displeasure is uniquely disheartening to me as a fellow baseball fan. Yet, November claimed a number of interesting reasons as to why he sued. One reason was that the stadium where the Giants played in New York, called the Polo Grounds, would be vacant despite the lease running through 1961.[24] Naturally, not having a tenant to pay rent at the venue would hurt the stadium's financial situation. The point November makes is a justifiable question to ask: with the team paying for the rights to play in the Polo Grounds, why move across the country to play at a new stadium which they do not own?

San Francisco Giants

These problems were not unique to the period, but they did allow other cities to court the Giants, given their popularity. Stoneham claimed as many as four cities were vying for the Giants. San Francisco gave them the first proposal, which gave the city a leg up. Stoneham claimed that "Mayor George C. Christopher and another official told him in early May that they had $5,000,000 available to build a new baseball park and could probably get another $5,000,000 if needed."[25]

Having money available made it much easier for San Francisco to stand out as a viable option. This case is another example of a baseball corporation trying to be a public entity for good so that it could receive financing from the city, while also jockeying with New York and strong-arming the city like a private company.[26]

In the end, the Giants selected San Francisco, moving before the 1958 season. It wasn't an easy move for anyone involved in the organization, but according to a *New York Times* article published in 1957, "[voting directors] undoubtedly were swayed by Mr. Stoneham's recent report to stockholders that he could assure an annual profit of $200,000 to $300,000 if the club moved to San Francisco."[27] This may not seem significant to us now in terms of profits, but it was a substantial amount for the period. Yet, by today's standards, it is equivalent to about $2.6 million. To further demonstrate the appeal of the move, the Giants were only profitable in two of their last eight years in New York.[28] Seems like a no-brainer for Stoneham.

The stadium Stoneham would get in San Francisco would later go on to be called Candlestick Park. The city owned the land, so they agreed to build the stadium for Stoneham for what ended up being roughly $15 million.[29] Stoneham was elated at the prospect of his fresh new stadium in San Francisco. However, unlike his counterpart Walter O'Malley who "hovered over every aspect of the design, location, and building of Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles," Stoneham's approach was much more hands-off, and he rarely visited the construction site.[30] This led to an interesting story of how Stoneham likely didn't know how windy, foggy, and cold it could get inside Candlestick Park at night in the summer. Such conditions may have allowed the team to suffer in performance as a result. After all, it was the coldest stadium in the MLB during this stretch, and that led to fewer home runs being hit.[31] Stoneham's shortsightedness in building the stadium and not wanting to interfere may have been one of the main reasons why O'Malley's Dodgers remained a powerhouse in Los Angeles, while San Francisco didn't win a World Series until 2010, when they were playing in a new stadium.

City officials, economic developers, and fans of baseball in San Francisco loved having the Giants in town. It allowed the city to grow and provided the "unquantifiable intangible quality" to the city that cre-

ated new markets and financial growth. The Giants became a pioneer in the Bay Area, as they were the first major sports team to migrate to San Francisco. They were followed by a basketball team, the Warriors, in 1962 and later an additional baseball team, the Athletics, in 1968.

Conclusion

The background behind stadium building is a complicated issue, as I have shown throughout this paper. City officials and power brokers value having a team playing within their city immensely. It's hard to argue with the fact that sports are important to the community and that having a team in your city brings a lot of value. However, sometimes team owners take advantage of consumers' hearts and minds by promising so much for a new stadium and getting the public excited. This allows team owners to then prey on those emotions in negotiations with cities where they will put profits above all.

In the end, the three teams that left the Northeast to move west in the midcentury were significant to the future movement of teams. The development of each new stadium set the tone for the next seventy years of stadium building. Teams would now convince their cities to build new stadiums using public subsidies by threatening to abandon the city if they didn't get them. This is not something that was happening before these three teams moved cities, and it's not a great thing for the residents of the cities containing stadiums.

Back to the question: how often do we think about the stadiums that make up a city? The short answer I have laid out in this paper is that it should be more. There are so many reasons we need to be aware of what is really happening when stadium proposals are made in our cities. The citizens are at constant risk of being blackjacked by team owners who are profit-driven but want to have fans subsidize their stadiums in areas that are often of historical and cultural importance.

What's important, though, is that these teams mirrored the patterns of movement during this era, moving out of the city and into a more comfortable space with more room for parking. Another pattern was that these teams were aware of the growing postwar economy, and they wanted to get their share. They, like many other Americans at this time, saw the opportunities that were available in new growing cities.

They leveraged their positions to get more money and financing from the cities to benefit themselves first. Team owners, like most companies, are profit driven. It's important for you to know this the next time a stadium is built close to you so that you can understand the convoluted process of how stadiums are built.

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Theatrical release poster for *X*, directed by Ti West. 2002.

Eighty and Killing It: Exploring Sexuality and Age in the Horror Film X

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AMST 502T: Culture and Desire

This paper was written for Professor Eric Gonzaba's course on desire and sexuality in American culture. Written as an original research project, this paper examines the horror film X (2022) and how the horror genre can be used to explore attitudes and beliefs towards sexuality and age in American popular culture. I hope the reader can walk away with an open mind toward the horror genre for the unique types of ideas and stories it can tell.

Introduction

"It's possible to make a good dirty movie," proclaims aspiring auteur filmmaker RJ, after his girlfriend tells him his new film venture, helping a bunch of amateur pornographers, is just making smut. This interaction takes place in the film *X* (2022) directed and written by Ti West, where a group of unsuspecting pornographers making a film on a remote farm are hunted down and murdered by an elderly couple. The film is a mixture of two horror subgenres, slasher and hagsploitation. In the former, young adults are punished for immoral behavior, and in the latter, the concepts of aging and elderly adults are presented in terrifying ways. What makes this particular mixture so compelling is how their combination provides a unique opportunity to explore ideas of how we view sexual expression and desire. As film professor Carol J. Clover notes in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, slashers "[give] us a clearer picture of current sexual attitudes . . . than do legitimate products of the better studios."[1] The expression of sexual desire is a stigmatized subject and, depending on one's age, will be judged with different sets of standards that act to both regulate and control that expression. Horror is a compelling genre to investigate these standards, as sex is often used as a draw to get the audience interested in what is happening in the film, only to

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see that sexual expression condemned with gratuitous violence. By conducting a close reading of *X*, I explore what attitudes it holds towards young and elderly adults regarding sexual expression and desire. If slasher films act as a means to punish sexual expression that is deemed morally illicit by societies standards, then the film *X* subverts the meaning by punishing its characters for their inherent biases against certain sexual expressions and their inability to confront them.

Definitions and History

Horror films come in a variety of subgenres, but *X* is a mixture of two distinct subgenres, hagsploitation and slasher. Hagsploitation is a subgenre of horror that focuses on the aging female body. In *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film*, cultural historian Erin Harrington defines them as films that "are united in a way that they feature older female actors playing mentally unstable or psychotic villains . . . in a manner that plays with the spectator's allegiances and sympathies let alone their expectations of normative, well-contained femininity."[2] Harrington further describes the subgenre: "Most importantly, these stories are coloured by loss and longing. This might be for themselves, for a past that cannot return, and for the loss of agency and relationships."[3] Despite not actually casting older actors in the film, instead favoring the use of makeup and prosthetics to age up Mia Goth who plays both heroine and villain in the film, *X* still reflects the themes and characterization of the subgenre.

While the idea of the hag, crone, witch, and other terrifying conceptions of the evil older woman have been a staple in myth and storytelling, hagsploitation as a subgenre of horror film emerges from the movie *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).[4] The plot of the film tells the story of an

aging silent film star, Norma Desmond, whose time in the limelight has come to an end. Yet she still struggles to make a comeback with the help of a struggling young writer named Joe. Obsessed and maddened by her former glory and youth, Norma's behavior fluctuates between violent delusion and seduction until she finally kills Joe. The film ends with her brought back into the limelight, as the police and news media gather around her to fill the tabloids with the tale of a once-glorious actress and her descent into madness. The film is commentary and criticism of the film industry, specifically Hollywood's treatment of older actresses who begin losing out on roles due to the system's ageist and misogynistic view of women and their place in film once they have reached a certain age.[5] The subgenre then serves as both platform and exploitation for once great actresses who, after the steady decline of prominent roles in film, become the villain for refusing to fade away.

Over time there has been a steady release of hagsploitation films, expanding and evolving the limits of the genre. Over the past decade, there have been a number of horror films that focus on the horror of aging. Two films are from director M. Night Shyamalan: *Old* (2021) and *The Visit* (2015). The former focuses on an inescapable supernatural beach which rapidly ages anyone unlucky enough to wander into it, and the latter portrays the fading mental health of elderly adults as a terrible threat to two preteens visiting their grandparents. Then there is the most recent and brilliant hagsploitation film *Barbarian* (2022) by Zach Cregger which offers an unexpected mix of commenting on both the declining housing market and incestuous toxic masculinity. As the genre has grown and aged throughout the decades, adding supernatural, psychological, and demonic elements, it continues to struggle between providing commentary on the difficulties and fear of aging, and exploiting biases against older women.

Slasher films also have a few definitions and characterizations which will help guide our understanding of the film and how it chooses to present its characters. Slasher films could be characterized as featuring people who, after engaging in transgressive behavior that goes against a set of moral codes, are graphically murdered on screen.[6] The killer in these films is usually coded as male, whose murders are aimed at and charged with sexual expression.[7] Who dies and survives in slasher

films depends on one's adherence to moral behavior, and the one to usually survive through the events of the film is the final girl. The final girl in horror films is usually a person who, by virtue of engaging in less immoral or sexually explicit behavior, displays a more active survival instinct. Thus, the final girl is more likely to leave the film alive.[8] What makes the final girl so compelling in slasher films is both her ability to survive and the burden of witnessing and experiencing the deaths of the people closest to her for a majority of the film and long after the credits roll.[9]

Synopsis

The horror film *X* takes place in 1979 on a small remote farm in Texas occupied by an elderly couple, Pearl and Howard, who are approximately in their 80s. The plot begins with a group of amateur porn makers in their 20s and 30s heading out to this farm to make a new film and to avoid paying a higher tax on the creation. The focus of the film centers on Maxine, a young woman who aspires to super stardom by making amateur adult films. As Maxine, her costars Bobby-Lynne and Jackson, producer and fiancé Wayne, and film crew Lorraine and RJ, arrive on the farm, they are met by the owner Howard, who is immediately suspicious and hostile toward the group. Pearl, a seemingly sweet but lonely woman, attempts to be friendly towards the strangers on her farm but is rebuffed and rejected. After being rejected multiple times throughout the film by both the young people and her husband, Pearl murderously lashes out and begins a killing spree. As the crew gets taken out one by one, we discover that this is not the first time that Howard and Pearl have disposed of people who have come to their farm. Whatever experience they have gained over the years of taking out young people, old age eventually catches up with them. In the end, Maxine survives, becoming the final girl of the film.

Geriatric and Deadly

Pearl is a complex and tragic figure, whose lack of intimacy with her husband fuels a frustration that she channels in unhealthy ways. Throughout the film, there are several scenes that demonstrate how Pearl's numerous rejections, as both a person and a sexual being, lead

to the slaughter that takes place in the second half of the film. When Maxine and her group first arrive on the farm, they encounter Pearl only at a distance. Maxine is the only one to have any sort of conversation with her. The first scene where we see Pearl up close is when she invites Maxine up to the house for a glass of lemonade. As Maxine walks into the house, she notices the dirty kitchen, food waste on the counters, dishes in the sink, and a cast iron pan heating up on the stove with nothing visibly cooking. An eerie and unsettling musical score starts creeping into the scene. Pearl, like her contemporaries in slashers, has an uncanny ability of appearing right behind you, only this time hospitably offering a refreshment. As we can infer from the scene and before we learn of any nefarious goings-on in the film, this is a clear attempt by Pearl to reach out for some human connection and have a conversation with someone else besides her curmudgeonly husband. Maxine, who we can see is clearly uncomfortable being in this situation, gulps down the lemonade in a single take and tries to rush out of the house.

The tipping point for Pearl takes place at the midpoint of the movie when RJ attempts to leave the group stranded on the farm after Lorraine, his girlfriend and mic operator, asks to participate in an on-screen role in the film. Deeply upset after having to film his partner with another person, RJ decides to abandon the group and drive off in the middle of the night. As he makes his way down the dirt road, Pearl is standing in the middle of the road blocking the path. Confused, RJ gets out of the car to see if something is wrong and if Pearl might need help. It quickly becomes apparent that Pearl is fine. She then tries to seduce RJ, moaning in his ear, clinging closely to him, and rubbing his body with her hands. RJ is clearly shown to be both uncomfortable and repulsed by her advances. He draws the line when she attempts to kiss him. She asserts that she can show him what she is capable of, but RJ rejects her and says that they should look for her husband instead. With this final rejection, Pearl's frustration and anger are unleashed as she stabs RJ repeatedly in the neck. With blood spurting out of RJ like a water sprinkler, the blood covers the headlights of the car, casting a hazy red glow on Pearl as she releases all her pent-up feelings. If these young men cannot satisfy her the way she wants, better to get rid of them instead.

When it comes to age and gender, there is a perception of elderly women that both frames them as sexless beings and judges them more harshly in terms of appearance, leading them to refrain from engaging in sexual behavior.[10] This treatment often leads older women to refrain from having sex later in life. Such treatment might also negatively affect their own body image.[11] Pearl, who chooses to go outside socially acceptable standards of sexual expression for someone of her age, is faced with rejection and repulsion. Deprived of freely expressing her sexuality, Pearl then channels that frustration of being held to a different sexual standard into revenge on the young people, who are more freely able to seek and express sexual satisfaction. When she is rejected by RJ, her sexual frustrations are instead channeled into violence. What makes RJ's death particularly significant, besides being the catalyst for the violence that will take place later in the film, is just how long the camera chooses to watch the brutality. When it comes to male deaths in slasher films, they are usually quick, obscured, or at a distance, saving these lingering and detailed scenes for the female victims.[12] It is possible that the film sees RJ as emasculated after watching his girlfriend with someone else and now chooses to frame him as female, someone deserving of arguably the longest and most gruesome death in the film. Pearl's rage is also directed at Bobby-Lynne who, confused by the situation, mistakes Pearl's actions for elderly senility. This insult felt by Pearl is deepened by her jealousy of Bobby-Lynne's youthful beauty, which she interprets as purposeful flaunting, leading her to push Bobby-Lynne into a gator-filled swamp. Because Pearl's state of mind is fueled by sexual frustration and fury, she can only interpret other people's existence and

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actions through a sexualized lens. Through this lens, she judges and condemns to death those she views as sexually transgressive.

Howard is an odd character within the film, one whose complexity makes his actions in the film somewhat difficult to make sense of. Were this movie taking place in a different genre of film, it might highlight the struggles of an older man whose age has made it difficult for him to connect with his wife physically, and thus emotionally, mentally. But this is a horror film, and the framing of his character as a villain to a potential victim waxes and wanes throughout the film. As we are first introduced to Howard, he is presented as a man who very much favors his privacy and rights as a landowner in Texas. He demonstrates this by brandishing his double-barreled shotgun at Wayne, whom he has seemingly forgotten about making lodging arrangements with, and accusing him of being a county official. Luckily for Wayne, Howard remembers him before pulling the trigger and shows the groups to their rooms. The threat that Howard presents in this scene is not just the use of his right to bear arms, but a common association with elderly adults—a lack of memory retention. Ti West takes a conception of the elderly as non-threatening and challenging audiences' perceptions of them while priming viewers for the violence that takes place further in the film. As we see throughout the film, the framing of Howard will continuously position him as an intimidating force, suspicious of anyone who steps foot on his land or gets too close to his wife.

There are two scenes that demonstrate how Howard is a threat and how he uses people's perception of him to deceive and murder. In the first scene, we have Lorraine out in the middle of the night looking for her boyfriend RJ, when Howard emerges from his house and asks what she is doing out so late. Lorraine tells Howard, and he admits that he is looking for his wife as well. He asks for Lorraine's help so they can both find their partners. Howard suggests that she grab a spare flashlight that he keeps in the totally unsuspicious basement. Lorraine hesitates, but after Howard guilts her with concern over his wife's frail state, she goes down the stairs. After finding the light, she quickly returns upstairs, only to discover that the basement door has been locked and the other exit has been chained shut. Understandably panicked, she investigates the cellar for anything that might help her out of her predicament. The

situation becomes much worse when she finds the dead body of a man that has been chained to the ceiling, with clear markings suggesting that he has suffered multiple traumas to the genitals.

The second scene takes place immediately after, as Howard approaches the cabin where the rest of the group is staying. Jackson, who has difficulty staying asleep due to PTSD from serving in the Vietnam War, encounters Howard approaching the cabin. Howard tells Jackson the same story he told Lorraine, that his wife has disappeared, and asks if he has seen her. Jackson tells him that he has not but asks Howard if he would like some help looking for his wife. As Jackson holds up his service tags he proclaims, "not for self but for country," indicating his compulsion and duty to help people in need. As he does this, Jackson's entire body is put into frame showing that he was nude the entire time. While the lighting and shadows of the shot hide his nudity, it is also used to outline and showcase his exposed penis, perhaps viewed as a flaunting of his youth and sexuality that Howard is threatened and challenged by. Jackson puts some clothes on and follows Howard to the nearby swamp where Howard suspects his wife disappeared. Once they reach the swamp, they split up to search the edge of the swamp faster. Upon returning to the meet-up point, Jackson finds the flashlight Howard was using in the water and rushes in to save him. Finding only the flashlight, Jackson gets out of the water only for Howard to appear suddenly behind him. Howard starts ranting about how he knows what is going on around here. He says, "The last bohemian that stayed here was the same. Traipsin' around barely any clothes, enticin' my wife," before turning his gun on Jackson, killing him.[13]

Both scenes serve to demonstrate Howard's capacity for deception, violence, and complicity in Pearl's crimes, but also illustrate the effect that age has had on him. Illustrated in other scenes that will be discussed, Howard and Pearl's intimate relationship has suffered over the years, with Howard indicating it is due to health-related reasons. Intimacy and sex are an important part of any relationship, especially for older couples, where active sexual intimacy has a host of benefits related to health and positive body image.[14] Lacking this crucial form of intimacy has created fractures and tension in their relationship that push them into killing and torturing the people who come on their farm.

When Howard comes across Lorraine and both are looking for their missing partners, we can infer what Howard may be thinking. His wife is missing and so is this woman's boyfriend. Infidelity crosses Howard's mind. We can further read into Howard's thoughts and emotions in his interaction with Jackon as well. We see in his dialogue with Jackson a tinge of jealousy, not only of Jackson's youthful body and freedom associated with being young, but also that he may be trying to seduce Howard's wife by providing Pearl with what he no longer can. Jealousy, anger, suspicion, and ineptitude fuel his emotions and actions, leading him to commit violence towards others, both to satisfy his wife's needs and to protect her against those who may try to steal her away from him.

Another interesting component in Howard's character as a villain is his reliance on guns to carry out his violence. Normally in slasher films, the killer relies on more silent and deadly weaponry, such as knives, axes, and perhaps the occasional chainsaw, yet Howards relies on his trusty double-barreled shotgun. This may be due to Howard viewing his gun as one of the last vestiges of phallic power and manhood that he can actually claim. When traditional masculinity is challenged—in this case, Howard's sexual competence—guns are viewed as a physical and symbolic tool for reclaiming or defending their challenged masculinity.[15] He can wield this symbol of manhood to kill perceived romantic rivals, as was the case with Jackson, or to force submission, in the case of Lorraine trying to escape. Howard, for better or worse, is a dedicated husband and would do anything to be with his wife.

Much like other killers in the slasher genre, Howard's and Pearl's bloodlust is fueled by a "psychosexual fury" that they release upon younger adults, stemming from their own avoidant behavior and limited access to physical intimacy.[16] Throughout the film there are several scenes that display and discuss why older adults might be avoid engaging in sexual activity. In one scene we see Pearl's efforts at beautification. She is sitting in front of the mirror, applying makeup and, after spying on the group filming a scene, trying to become more intimate with her husband. As the scene plays out, it becomes evident that it has been a while since Pearl and Howard have been intimate with one another. Howard's dialogue makes clear that this is an ongoing discussion between the two, stating, "We talked about this. You know I can't. My heart."[17] While the

scene presents this aversion to sex as a medical reason, it is important to note that there are a variety of other factors which we could apply to the scene. For some older adults, avoiding sex is a way to avoid damaging their own self-esteem and body image when engaging in intimate moments with a partner.[18] This avoidance is what creates a lack of intimacy between Pearl and Howard, which fuels their respective judgments, frustrations, and violence toward the younger adults on their farm.

While there is a total of four sex scenes in the film, suggested or explicit, only one takes place between an established couple, the villains of the film. Deep into the murder spree with only a few survivors remaining, Maxine is seen hiding underneath the bed when Pearl and Howard walk into the room tallying all the people they have killed this evening. In this somewhat horrifying scene, Pearl and Howard have a heartwarming moment together where each lament about how becoming older has changed things for them. Despite how many years they have been together, Howard tells Pearl that she was the most beautiful woman he ever met and still is in his eyes. They begin to embrace in marital bliss, and while this may have been a sweet moment for them, Maxine is still under the bed looking for an escape. While Maxine may be horrified that she is trapped in a room with a pair of killers, we must acknowledge that, for her and the audience, the scene depicting the intimacy of elderly adults is framed as a horrifying act. This sentiment is reflected in studies, where younger adults view older adult sexuality in a negative light, even if they express positive attitudes toward them in general.[19] By forcing the audience to witness an elderly couple have sex, something which is completely normal and common, and framing it within the lens of horror, Ti West is challenging the audience to confront their own biases towards elderly sexual expression. Aging does not stop people from engaging in healthy sexual relationships, and by acknowledging the aging body in its capacity for positive sexual expression, we can confront our fear of it.

Ideas of Sexual Morality

Throughout the film, it is hard not to notice the religious undertones that comment directly on the perception of sex and the events that occur. Janet Jakobsen, professor of gender and sexuality, and Ann Pel-

legrini, professor of social and cultural analysis, discuss in *Love the Sin* how the formation of morality in America is crafted almost exclusively through a religious, and often Christian, lens.[20] They also illustrate how, when sex is viewed as a problem to be solved by religion, there are limited ways to carry out sexual agency and freedom.[21] Near the beginning of the film, once the group has made their way out of Houston and into the remote farming region of Texas, religious sermons being broadcasted on the radio start breaking through music stations. The gas station clerk is seen casually watching televangelists on the television. As the film progresses, we get clearer glimpses of this broadcast, signaling to the audience that these people are in some serious need of divine intervention. Lorraine, the person who at the beginning of the film likened the production of pornography to smut, has also been seduced by the allure of what the crew is making and asks to participate in the film with a more active on-screen role. Before she films her own adult scene, she takes off her gold-chained cross and then becomes a movie star, signaling the need to separate her faith from her current deeds. Quite explicitly, as it has become more than apparent that the sweet old couple have revealed themselves to be the true villains of the film, the televangelist declares, "Kidnappers, murderers, sex fiends, lurkin' where we least expect it. In good Christian homes, right under our very noses!"[22] This scene is trying to broaden the narrow description of what someone might imagine a "sex fiend" could be to include the perceived sexlessness of elder adults, who are the true predators in this movie.

While the film never explicitly argues for or against sex within a traditionally religious framework, its religious undertones still color audience perceptions. It is important to note that this film takes place in the late 1970s, when the women's and gay liberation movements were in full swing, and with them the rise of a conservative religious countermovement. [23] Understanding the context of the time allows us to better understand why religion would play such a prominent role in the film. As tensions build, religious sermons become present, signaling to the audience that something sinister and immoral is happening. We also see this moral framework being applied by Lorraine, who questions why someone would engage in untraditional sex acts. As observed in *Love the Sin*, this framing of sex by "supercharging it with moral meaning" is a

way to measure the values of an individual. Lorraine is not outspokenly placing a lack of morality and values on the group, but we understand the subtle questioning to imply the opposite. In slasher films, when young adults engage in premarital or untraditional sex, they display a lack of morality which signals their death.

The younger adults in the film display a relatively progressive but ageist view regarding sex and how they frame sex in their lives. Near the midpoint of the film, Lorraine questions the relationship dynamics of the individual couples and how they could justify their participation in making an adult film where one or both partners have sex with other people. Wayne reasons that it is simply a business decision and, as long as it is part of the filmmaking process, it has no negative implications for his relationship with Maxine. Unconvinced with this explanation, Lorraine counters with an appeal to love and does not understand why someone would be comfortable with this arrangement. Maxine quickly rebuffs this viewpoint by stating that Lorraine's stance is bound by a traditional concept of relationships which only serve to arbitrarily restrict and shame people. Maxine continues by saying that people are in control of who they decide to love but not of their attraction to other people, and denying this aspect of themselves does more harm than good. Next, Bobby-Lynne chimes in with a statement that encompasses the heart of their perspective, saying, "Everybody likes sex. It's a gas. We're just not afraid to admit it. Queer, straight, black, white, it's all disco. You know why? Because one day, we're gonna be too old to fuck. And life's too short, if you ask me."[24]

One of the issues presented in this scene, as Lorraine and some segment of the audience might see it, is the perceived infidelity of engaging in sex work while being in an established relationship. For Wayne this is "just business," separate from his relationship with Maxine and, within specific parameters, something allowed in their relationship. For people who engage in sex work, it is important to create an identity that is separate from the real self by playing a role, so they can successfully perform their job.[25] By creating distinct identities, sex workers can separate themselves from their work, creating a barrier to protect their intimate personal relationships.[26] For most of the younger adults

in the film, whether or not they derive any real pleasure in their work, understanding the performance on screen is a distinct and separate action that does not affect their personal relationships. This understanding of the on-screen performance is something that everyone in the group, except for Lorraine and her partner RJ, have agreed upon. After Wayne, Maxine and Bobby-Lyne explain their stance to Lorraine, she appears to be somewhat persuaded by their argument and asks to play a role in the film. RJ, deeply uncomfortable with this sudden decision, makes it abundantly clear that he does not appreciate or consent to Lorraine's participation. Lorraine counters him by telling him he is a prude. Ultimately persuaded by Wayne to allow Lorraine to participate, RJ then films her with another man and becomes deeply upset. If the horror genre acts as a medium for our understanding and tolerance for contemporary sexual dynamics, Lorraine's death is flagged because of a failure to establish an agreement and understanding with RJ prior to engaging in separate sexual relationships.

The second aspect of this discussion that's worth dissecting is Bobby-Lynne's statement on her stance and perception of sex. In her statement, she expresses that within the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality, all forms of sex are desirable and legitimate. According to her, there is no reason to arbitrarily limit one's sexual expression because one day, when they are older, they will lack the ability to do so. Some might view her position as a relatively progressive one, where the only real limit to sexual expression is one's age, but it carries an ageist view of elderly adults, contradicting her liberal perspective of sex. This line of thinking is consistent with the perspective of some young adults who carry ageist attitudes, viewing elderly adults' sexual activity in a negative

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light.[27] Despite the relatively progressive language that is used in the film and scenes which depict sexual relationships across racial lines, it is notable that the film only depicts heteronormative sex between a man and a woman. We might highlight some scenes within the film that contradict the progressive attitudes of the characters. Looking at the actions of the character Pearl, it can be read that she has an explicit sexual desire for Maxine, and she demonstrates this in a few scenes. First, she casually touches Maxine's exposed skin while talking to her in the main house, and second, Pearl crawls into Maxine's bed while she is sleeping. From a generous point of view, we might say in the first scene that it was an innocent but uncomfortable accident by an elderly woman who admires Maxine's youthful appearance. But the second scene, in which she undresses herself and sneaks into Maxine's bed to caress her unconscious body, is a sinister and deliberate act. Maxine eventually wakes up and, to her horror, discovers Pearl's deeds. She is understandably upset and traumatized by the encounter. One reading we might infer from the audience's perspective of this scene is that Maxine feels violated not just because there is a deranged elderly woman in her bed, but the act was also sexually transgressive in nature. It is both the sexual implications of Pearl crawling into bed with Maxine and the ageist perception that elderly women are terrifying and repulsive that is presented to the viewer.

Maxine and Pearl

Part of the cultural significance of hagsploitation films is that they originally featured older actresses who were rejected by the film industry for aging out of their double-standard conception of beauty. Yet in *X*, the observant viewer might notice in a brief scene at the beginning of the film or while looking at the end credits that Pearl and Maxine are played by the same actress—Mia Goth, who is twenty-nine. As director and writer Ti West notes, it was always his intention to have the same actress play the role, stating that "They're different people but they're kind of the same character, just different places."[28] We discover in this film and its prequel, *Pearl*, that the similarities between the characters played by Goth are not just skin deep. Fleshed out in the prequel film, we learn that Pearl wanted more for herself than the provincial farm life that she had been born into and desired to become like the line dancers

she saw at the picture house.[29] But unlike Maxine who had people in her life that saw the talent beneath the surface, Pearl was chastised by her mother for not appreciating the life she was given. When an opportunity presented itself to join a traveling troupe, Pearl dances her heart out at an audition, only to be rejected for not having a blonde, curvy all-American look. While artistically fun to have the same character play multiple roles, it nonetheless feeds into the idea that older women are unappealing to put in movies. Having Goth play both Maxine and Pearl negates the function of the hagsploitation film as a commentary on the film industry's mistreatment of older actresses.

Examining the Final Girl

By the end of the film, the two female protagonists, Maxine and Lorraine, are left to face off against the villains of the movie, and only one will make it out alive as the final girl. In slasher films, the final girl is usually the only person to survive the horrific events that have unfolded, and whether due to ideas of sexual propriety or survival instinct, she gets to walk away mostly unharmed. There are several characteristics and methods that can be applied to a character's behavior and actions to help audiences determine who the final girl might be. Characteristics and traits for determining the final girl include race and adherence to the traditional sexual script. The final girl is more likely to be androgynous and more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior, and she demonstrates greater agency compared to other women in the film.[30] When we apply these models to the two surviving protagonists of the story, we might lean toward the character Lorraine, who encompasses more of the characteristics of the final girl than Maxine. Lorraine through a large portion of the film is presented as a somewhat conservative character whose presence in the film is due to her skills as a boom mic operator, wrangled into the film by her cameraman boyfriend. She expresses some disdain for participating in this film process and questions the other characters' stance on their more liberal relationship to sex. Compared to Maxine, she dresses in a much more conservative fashion. Even when it comes to Lorraine's on-screen participation in the adult film, the filmmakers merely hint at nudity in the scene. Framing Lorraine this way is drastically different from how the other women in the film are depicted; they

are fully nude and engage in explicit sex. Despite these characteristics which associate her with the final girl trope, she is quickly murdered, and Maxine survives to become the Final Girl.

From what different analyses of the Final Girl in the slasher film show, the heroine in the film will usually be portrayed as innocent and less sexually explicit. Yet despite this common depiction of the Final Girl, Maxine, who was arguably the most sexually explicit and displays anti-social behavior in the form of drug use, is the Final Girl. It is possible that Maxine becomes the final girl for two reasons. One is that Maxine displays greater agency in the film when it comes to sex and survival. Once she is aware of the threat posed against her, she is active in her decisions to avoid detection and finally, gun in hand, confronts the villain. Unlike Maxine, Lorraine, who has been trapped in the basement for the later act of the film, displays little agency in trying to escape. She is quickly caught and then punished by Howard until she is eventually rescued by Maxine at the climax. In addition, Maxine becomes the Final Girl because she is willing to embrace her sexuality and refuses to be judged by traditional moral standards.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the film *X* attempts to explore the changing dynamics of sexuality and aging within the framework of horror. It explores the impact that aging can have on elderly adults and how the complications associated with aging restrict them from having healthy sexual intimacy. Whether it be from physical or health-related reasons, or to avoid becoming judged by their partner or themselves, some elderly adults disengage from their sex lives so they do not have to confront their aging bodies. This is made worse by the judgments of the mass media and younger adults who hold ageist attitudes, viewing elderly adults as sexless or inappropriate when acting as sexual beings expressing healthy desires. This frustration builds up within the villains of *X*, causing them to lash out against the younger adults who are held to an entirely different set of standards that views their sexual expression as more desirable and acceptable. Howard and Pearl's inability to have meaningful physical relationships leads them down their own path of judgement and violence. But the young adults are not completely free from judgment

and, within this film, are punished for not adhering to traditional sexual norms and for judging the healthy sexual expression of adults. While the framing of the film does not intend to endorse a moralistic message around sex, because of the genre, *X*'s themes make moralistic judgments. Those who engaged in non-traditional sex were still punished by the killer, and the killers also died because they stepped outside the bounds of what was acceptable sexual conduct for elderly adults. *X* is still an engaging film and worthy of praise but, like its predecessors, struggles to maintain the balance of presenting a commentary on how elderly adults are mistreated and making them terrifying. Whether or not the film's arguments around sexual expression are persuasive to any given individual, it makes an honest attempt to open conversations about how repressed sexual expression can negatively impact people of any age and how we can try to separate ourselves from moralistic arguments around sex.

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Annie Mellonig is an undergraduate senior majoring in American Studies. Throughout her academic career, Annie has always possessed a great interest in history and cultural studies—as such, she has found great joy in pursuing her major of choice. She is especially passionate about the preservation of physical media and the importance of gender and racial diversity in media. Her favorite topics of research include the history of rock 'n' roll, the evolution of female characters in video games, and the lasting impact technology has left on the world. In the future, she'd like to work as an archivist to preserve our present and hopefully come across a fairy that will gift her the psychic ability to speak to her pets and historical figures.

Dylan Norris graduated with a B.A. degree in Communications, Entertainment, and Tourism in 2023. While in school, he also minored in American Studies and Cinema and Television Arts. He hopes to one day help build a major sports stadium.

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Course Descriptions

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