

# THE AMERICAN PAPERS

2020-2021



Darkness cannot drive out darkness,  
only light can do that. Hate cannot  
drive out hate, only love can do that.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

# The American Papers

2020-2021

Volume 39

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The artwork on the cover of this journal was designed by CSUF student Rachel Seymour. The cover was designed using free resources from [Freepik.com](https://www.freepik.com) and [Canva](https://www.canva.com).

Rachel describes her cover design below:

"I thought of a tunnel with blurry light at the end of it. We are all trying to get out of the tunnel, to reach the blurry light at the end, but we only have a small yellow candle light to guide us out. The tunnel could be interpreted as the events of 2020: the Coronavirus pandemic and quarantine, the economic recession, the racism called out by the Black Lives Matter Movement, the 2020 election." -Rachel Seymour, 2021

Professors Gonzaba and Kanosky would like to thank the editors for their hard work, dedication, persistence, and creativity while preparing this edition of *The American Papers*. Their willingness to dedicate so much of their time—even over summer break—to contribute to this journal and departmental tradition is very much appreciated. We would like to commend the authors for their thoughtful papers and for their responsiveness to editorial feedback.

Thanks to editor Grace Johnson, as well as to American Studies Student Association representatives Ela Cabrera and Michelle Le, for their assistance securing funding from the InterClub Council so that the journal could be printed. Thank you to the staff at PM Group for their work in printing the journal. We also would like to recognize Raymond Gandara and Rachel Seymour for their work in supervising the editing process as Managing Editors, and for helping to perform secondary edits to all papers. They worked diligently and professionally to bring this journal to fruition. And thank you to Rachel Seymour for designing the artwork for the cover of this year's journal. A special thank you as well to Kathleen Loreto, who came on board as our newest Layout Editor this year and did an extraordinary job, as well as the returning Layout Editor Nicole Dean for her assistance in completing this incredibly important task.

The publication of *The American Papers* has always required the commitment and hard work of its student editorial team. As we continue to live through the COVID-19 pandemic, the commitment and hard work our student editorial team put into the journal is all the more remarkable. In this entirely virtual academic year, our editorial team rose to the occasion and deftly managed to conduct a robust and collegial editorial process entirely online, amidst the backdrop of a particularly challenging year.

Finally, we especially would like to thank Katherine Morales and Michelle Okawa for serving as this volume's Editors-in-Chief. Katherine and Michelle filled their positions with energy, original thinking, democratic leadership, strong organization, and compassion. Their hard work and commitment made the production of the 2020-2021 issue possible. For their shared leadership and dedication to *The American Papers*, we give Katherine and Michelle our gratitude and the highest of praise.



Welcome to the 2020-2021 issue of *The American Papers*!

This year's issue of *The American Papers* is further evidence of the department's perseverance and adaptability in these unprecedented times. Created remotely in its entirety, the journal consisted of countless Zoom sessions, an abundance of emails, and the dedicated work of both students and faculty. The following works are authored by both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in American Studies courses at California State University, Fullerton. Each paper is a testament to the applicability and diversity of American Studies as a field, as well as a reminder of the recurring themes that permeate American culture, past, present, and future.

As American Studies students and scholars, we strive to examine and better understand the diversity of American culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. This year we chose the journal's overall theme, Resistance and Reflection, to showcase works that focus on topics of race, gender, sexuality, identity, and many more. The journal's layout is organized thematically. The following themes showcase each work by subject and demonstrate the various topics covered in American Studies: Resistance through Music, California Counter-Histories, Ethnographic Experiences, Creating Identity, Representations of the Body, and Technology: Past, Present, and Future. We would also like to point your attention to two new features in this year's journal. First, a statement and art piece on racial injustice in 2020; second, the inclusion of creative works with visual and personal components.

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 Raymond Gandara as this year's winner for his paper, "Imperial Machinery: The Roads, Camineros, and Engineers of the U.S.-Occupied Philippines." The runner-up for the Weaver Prize, also published in this issue, is Michelle Okawa with her paper, "Ghost in the Geisha: A Critical Analysis of Techno-Orientalism and Asian Female Robots in Science Fiction Films."

Through these works, it is our hope that this year's journal engages readers by provoking critical thought, encouraging discussion, and inspiring creativity. The Editors-in-Chief thank our contributors and our editorial board for working together to create this year's issue. We also thank Rachel Seymour for embodying this year's journal theme with her design cover. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with our authors, editorial team, and our incredibly supportive faculty advisors, Professors Alison Kanosky and Eric Gonzaba.

- The Editors

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was killed by a white police officer that pinned his knee on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and countless other Black Americans incited protests against police brutality and systemic racism to take place across the nation and the world. Prominent Black scholars such as Angela Y. Davis, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Michelle Alexander, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, and many more acknowledged the nationwide demands for racial justice in the summer of 2020 to be a historic moment.

During the midst of nationwide protests and civil unrest, the editorial board of *The American Papers* held our first meeting to discuss the journal's upcoming issue. During this time, it became clear to us that our journal would not be complete without a direct acknowledgment of longstanding violence spurred by systemic racism against Black Americans. With the assistance of a subcommittee, a series of questions were compiled in a survey titled, "Survey on Racial Injustice in 2020." The survey was posted to the American Studies Student Association (ASSA) Instagram account and circulated amongst faculty within the American Studies Department who were then invited to share it with their students. Respondents of the survey were asked to answer with as much or as little as they wanted. The questions were written as follows:

1. Activist Angela Davis called the protests following George Floyd's death, "an extraordinary moment which has brought together a whole number of issues." What does "this moment" represent to you?
2. How has the state of racial injustice in 2020 made you feel?
3. What actions would you like to see? (This can be at a personal, local, national, as well as legislative level)

The survey was open from October 2020 through January 2021, and survey responses were anonymously collected from California State University, Fullerton students. The subcommittee felt the best way to capture the survey responses was to construct a word collage in the image of a raised fist, an iconic symbol of the Black Lives Matter movement, and a universal symbol for solidarity. The responses from all three questions were placed in a word collage generator with frequently mentioned words appearing bigger in size. While all responses are visualized together in the form of a raised fist, the individual questions and responses can be found in the background of this image.

We recognize that collecting responses and constructing this image is a small gesture against our nation's history of anti-Black violence. However, by capturing current CSUF student's thoughts and perspectives, we hope that this piece can serve as both a cultural text to contextualize this historic moment for ourselves and our readers through the lens of American Studies, as well as a statement of solidarity for the BLM movement and other organizations struggling against anti-Black violence and racial injustice.

Activist Angela Davis called the protests following George Floyd's death, "an extraordinary moment which has brought together a whole number of issues." What does "this moment" represent to you? That we still have many issues that we need to deal with head on, not just the ones that are currently hot buttons, but things that have been embedded in our cultures for quite a while. Finally, white people are responding to racism in a way that is proactive. The moments following George Floyd's murder exposes how divided the United States is. The people who protest are bubbling in outrage for the pursuit of justice while others cling to the status quo. Obviously the moment is momentous because there is a survey asking if it's big? Not to be rude. This moment represents a number of things. It is sad, confusing, infuriating. The fact that more deaths is what it took for many to see racial injustice hurts but it has also been a revolutionary moment where many are finally open to not only acknowledging the injustice but acting upon it. This moment is a reflection of the amalgamation of individuals from varying backgrounds, with varying life experiences, and varying levels of awareness. A sense of democracy-people becoming more aware of issues that have been going on for years. Long blind eye to racial injustice and will now need to make necessary changes-I would agree with.

Long open kind. My perspective is that it was during a time in which covid interloped with people still participating in the event. The incident with George Floyd is to combat against systematic racism. To break the cycle of letting others get away with it. The incident with George Floyd was finally seen for all of its flaws. We went too long with the powers that be being complacent and the police force. The incident with George Floyd was finally seen for all of its flaws. We went too long with the powers that be being complacent and the police force.

One wish is that people acknowledge that authorities have towards the Black community. It was the support of the Black community. It was the support of the Black community. It was the support of the Black community.

Death of a young man. Several other people have died. It was the support of the Black community. It was the support of the Black community. It was the support of the Black community.

Community. I think there is a moment where we have an opportunity to see what privilege we do not have. I think there is a moment where we have an opportunity to see what privilege we do not have.

People varying. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Systemic racism. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Finally. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Privilege. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Police. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Issue. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Equal. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Injustice. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

This moment. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Change. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Black lives matter. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

White. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Police. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

More. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Racial. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Hope. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Racism. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Resources. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Social. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Programs. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Office. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.

Want. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues. The community can bring in other issues.



# Course Descriptions

## **201: Introduction To American Studies**

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

## **301: American Character**

Cultural environment and personality. The extent to which there have been and continue to be distinctly American patterns of belief and behavior. Similarities, as well as class, ethnic, sex, and regional differences among Americans.

## **390: Disability and American Culture**

Changing meaning, history and experience of disability in American culture through scholarly readings, memoir, film, photography and other cultural documents. Disability in relation to identity, stigma, discrimination, media representations, intersectionality, gender and sexuality, work, genetic testing, and design.

## **395: California Cultures**

Examines how a variety of cultures -- Native American, European, Latino, Asian, African American -- have interacted in California's past and present. Topics include: cultural diversity in frontiers and borderlands, shifting meanings of sex and gender, function of regional and racial myths.

## **401T: Ethnography and American Culture**

In this interdisciplinary seminar students conduct independent research on aspects of contemporary American culture using ethnographic methods including interviews and participant-observation.

## **401T: The Body and American Culture**

Concentrating on the period from the late nineteenth century to the present, examines the relationship between American culture at large and shifting definitions of the healthy and appealing body. Issues include gender, race, disability, weight control, and bodily alterations.

## **403: Creative Work in American Studies**

Cultivate a creative mentality in American Studies. Explore non-academic representations of cultural research and how to communicate interdisciplinary knowledge using creative forms. Historical fiction, graphic novels, musical expression, film, podcasting, material culture, personal narrative.

**405: Images of Crime & Violence in American Culture**

Cultural analysis of meanings ascribed to law and order, authority, violence and punishment in the American past and present. Examined in selected symbols, images, traditions, and realities, including: the gun, police, vigilantes, "hard-boiled detectives," "romantic outlaws," and "crime waves."

**489: Digital America**

Examines practices of digital participation in American culture from the 1960s to the present. Advanced study (in historical context) of the cultural, social, and political impact of personal electronic and digital communications devices, the internet, social media, and applications.

**502: American Technocultures**

Advanced analysis of the relationship between technology and culture in America from industrialization to the present. Explores how technologies have both shaped and been shaped by larger cultural ideas, institutions, values, and processes in America.

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# Resistance through Music

*"Oh, I know you're set for fighting, but what are you fighting for?"*

-Phil Ochs, "What Are You Fighting For"

*"Said, 'It's civil unrest,' but you sleep so sound  
Like you don't hear the screams when we catchin' beat-downs?"*

-Anderson .Paak, "Lockdown"



# My American Mixtape: Psychedelia, Peace, and Protest

Delaney Toler

AMST 201: Introduction to American Studies

“My American Mixtape: Peace, Psychedelia, and Protest” was written in the Fall 2019 semester for AMST 201 – Intro to American Studies under the guidance of Professor Samuel Sousa. The assignment was to write an essay based around three songs written and performed by American Artists and how it related to American history. The essay also includes a section in which the author has to relate the songs to their personal life. These songs might not be the most popular from the 1960s, but they do have a lasting effect on the generation that heard them first. The author would like every reader to leave with a profound sense of unity with the music, and hopefully an urge to listen to the actual songs in order to understand what the songs truly mean beyond their lyrics.

America is defined by numerous values as laid out in our founding documents, such as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence. As society evolves, America’s outspoken beliefs help define its culture and its participants. Art, specifically music, characterizes us in other ways where documents and books cannot, creating sensory overloads and providing the listener a way to engage in forming imaginative scenarios, both real and fiction. One year in America’s history, 1967, was one of the most culturally significant periods in our narrative. Involvement in the Vietnam War prompted a “Summer of Love,” a period of experimentation, including but not limited to drugs, sex, and protest. These things have helped define me as who I am today, a fierce protester and anti-war activist. Three songs released during this time, “White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane, “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)” by Scott McKenzie, and “Alice’s Restaurant Massacree” by Arlo Guthrie, perfectly capture the feelings of confusion, peace, and outspoken rage against the war in America’s youth during the traumatic time of a new America. The three songs I chose sum up my experiences learning about the Counterculture Movement and my personal feelings about the state of our country.



1967 was the year the Counterculture Movement took shape and grabbed hold of the nation. The rise of the influential Civil Rights Movement and the assassination of Malcolm X sprung the movement into action. The newfound freedom of America's youth in their college years prompted a wild-fire-like spread of new ideas and cultures across the nation, from the removal of Jim Crow laws and a woman's freedom to bodily autonomy. Fueled with the desire to go against their parents' ideals as well as rage toward the Vietnam War, the baby boomer generation created and enforced groundbreaking ideas. Ideas such as a woman's freedom to her body, desegregation, and anti-establishment taking over college campuses, were often faced with backlash from local and national authorities, through the use of tear-gassing, raining acid on protestors, and spraying water at innocent people. The events taking place before and during 1967 sponsored these ideas of protest and experimentation highlighted in the songs "White Rabbit," "San Francisco (Be Sure To Wear Some Flowers In Your Hair)," and "Alice's Restaurant Massacre."

One of the most definitive characteristics of 1967 was drug use. The skyrocketing abuse of hallucinogens, such as LSD, DMT, and acid, prompted musicians to write whimsical lyrics and fantasy stories. "White Rabbit" was released as a single with B-side "Plastic Fantastic Lover" by Jefferson Airplane on June 14th, 1967. Written by Grace Slick after an acid trip and citing imagery from the Alice in Wonderland franchise by Lewis Carroll, Slick says that the song is about curiosity.<sup>1</sup> Slick's song encompasses the fanciful world of Carroll's novels while relating the cookies and liquids Alice drinks to change her appearance to the drugs the youth partook in in order to feel better about complications in the world happening at that time.

When logic and proportion have fallen sloppy dead  
And the white knight is talking backwards  
And the red queen's off with her head  
Remember what the dormouse said  
Feed your head, feed your head<sup>2</sup>

Slick's lyrics revolve around the unique characters from Carroll's literature and she reminds the listener of the ridiculous "logic and proportion" in the novels. "Feed your head" refers to the reason why the youth took drugs: to clear their minds. The song was written, according to Slick, as "...a slap towards parents...", she says that the parents who read these psychedelic and drug-riddled stories to children and then wonder why they grow up to abuse drugs are hypocrites<sup>3</sup>. Slick wrote this song in unison to the increasing unrest seen in America's youth. She sympathizes with their need to experiment with drugs to make their lives seem less complicated. These lyrics perfectly define

the era of exploration and experimentation that was 1967.

Both Slick's masterpiece and this next tune encapsulate the need to explore and go beyond the normal status quo. As heard in the movie *Forrest Gump* when Jenny was a part of the peace, love, and social justice movements, "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)" by Scott McKenzie captures the spirit of freedom in a song. McKenzie's hit is about the flocks of people moving west to San Francisco, appearing as a new hub for peace-loving individuals looking for a better life. This song was often called "the unofficial anthem of the counterculture movement of the 1960s, including the Hippie, the Anti-Vietnam War, and the Flower Power movements" because of its peaceful melody and kind lyrics.<sup>4</sup>

If you're going to San Francisco  
Be sure to wear some flowers in your hair...  
Summertime will be a love-in there...  
All across the nation  
Such a strange vibration  
People in motion.<sup>5</sup>

McKenzie's lyrics remind people to come in peaceful protest, as stated from the lyric "be sure to wear some flowers in your hair." The "strange vibration," which refers to the Counterculture Movement and protests coming into fruition, caused the "people in motion" and the mass amount of young people mobilizing and coming together to confront authority. The gentle song topped the charts when it was released on May 13th, 1967, influencing the generational changes that came from the Summer of Love, such as more fluid sexualities and interracial marriages. McKenzie's masterpiece is still remembered today as the voice of the youth leading the protests, as it encouraged people to branch off from societal norms when it comes to who and where they love.

Arguably the most significant song to come out of 1967, specifically in October, was "Alice's Restaurant Massacre" by Arlo Guthrie, from his album with the same name. Through its thought-provoking lyrics, the folk song communicated a rally cry opposing the draft and challenging local authority. Despite being over eighteen minutes long, this song became an instant hit among people of his "Alice's Restaurant Anti-Massacre Movement."

And can you imagine fifty people a day...  
Walkin' in, singin' a bar of 'Alice's Restaurant,'  
and walkin' out? Friends  
They may think it's a Movement, and that's what it is

THE Alices' Restaurant anti-massacree movement...<sup>6</sup>

Based on actual events that happened in Guthrie's life, this song is a spitting image of a protest folk song.<sup>7</sup> After dumping trash in private property, Guthrie was arrested for littering. His arrest complicated his drafting process and exposed the vile albeit humorous altercations with the psychologists and other men being drafted. The lyrics mentioned are from the end of the song, after Guthrie has told his police record and draft story, encouraging people to take part of the "Alice's Restaurant anti-massacree movement." This movement was mainly for avoiding the draft and being anti-establishment. His deadpan delivery of his hatred of the draft makes the song what it is, an excellent protest song with heart and humor to stay in the hearts of millions across America. It was a major influence in the anti-war and anti-draft movements that spread quickly across the country.

All three of these amazing songs have shaped me into who I am today. As a radical believer in the Summer of Love movements, I fully stand by these songs and what they say. The curiosity of "White Rabbit," the gentility of "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)," and the satirical delivery of "Alice's Restaurant Massacree" have given me advice on how to approach things today. "White Rabbit" is important to me because it taught me to explore and venture out of societal norms. "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)" influences my peaceful attitude towards life and reminds me that there are others who feel the same. "Alice's Restaurant Massacree" has taught me that while life can be unpredictable and may not go in my favor, it is important to take life with a grain of salt and to remember to enjoy the humorous parts. These songs have taught me that in the face of adversity, you should explore, love, and be passionate about what you believe in. The music to come out of 1967, specifically "White Rabbit," "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)," and "Alice's Restaurant Massacree", symbolize the hatred and fury that brewed in the younger generation during the Counterculture Movement. Each song, while different, has interacting themes, like psychedelia, distaste for authority, and unifying social issues, such as the rise of the counterculture and anti-draft protests. The current turmoil happening against police brutality and recent protests reminds me of these ballads, written for a generation boiling with excitement and anger at their authority figures. Songs similar to these can help ignite some change into our world like they did when they were first heard in 1967. The Vietnam War, Flower Power, and African American Justice movements brought a new generation of people together and will continue to do so thanks to what people were hearing on their radios and car stereos.

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# “Let It Burn! Let It Burn!”: The 1992 L.A. Riots in Sublime’s “April 29, 1992 (Miami)”

Raymond Gandara

AMST 405: Images of Crime and Violence

This essay was written for Dr. Alison Kanosky’s AMST 405 - Images of Crime and Violence in Spring 2020. The assignment was to analyze a representation of crime and/or violence (song, film, book, etc). We were to use in-class readings to provide historical context and theoretical lenses to elaborate on how our chosen text constructed the problems of crime and violence, who the text labelled “criminal,” and what solutions the text offered to solve their stated problem. It is an unfortunately timely piece since the killing of George Floyd, Tony McDade, and Breonna Taylor at the hands of the police had taken place in May 2020, just as the submission deadline for this edition approached. While reading this entry, I wish for readers to reflect upon the stories we tell about Black/white victimhood; anti-Black racism and police violence; law enforcement’s role in maintaining inequality; the various and competing meanings behind riots, protests, and demonstrations; and, most importantly, culture’s role in telling us how Black lives do or don’t matter, and being able to tell the difference.

On the evening of March 3, 1991, Black motorist Rodney King was ruthlessly beaten by four members of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), an incident which may have faded into antiquity were it not caught on video by a local resident. Over a year later, upon the acquittal of the officers depicted beating a defenseless King on the side of the freeway, Los Angeles exploded into what would be known as the 1992 L.A. Riots. While each participant may have had their own motivations for individual acts of looting, property damage, assault, arson, and murder, it’s difficult to not view the Rodney King beating as an integral motivator. The many representations of the riots, however, may disagree upon which proverbial match lit the powder keg. One such representation is the 1996 song “April 29, 1992 (Miami)”

from the all-white Long Beach, CA band, Sublime. While attempting to retell the story of the L.A. Riots to an audience of non-rioters, Sublime's "April 29" oversimplifies what was a complex and contested response to a miscarriage of justice. By dismissing race and anti-Black racism specifically as motivators for the riots, the song (re)presents the issues at hand as economic inequality and police brutality, and the solution to these problems as color-blind anarchy.

"April 29" attempts to provide a boots-on-the-ground snapshot of the 1992 L.A. Riots from the perspective of a rioter witnessing and engaging in numerous crimes with delight. The rioter does not shy away from criminal activity, and instead wears criminality as a badge of honor. After the song opens with a police dispatcher radioing for units to report to a looted liquor store where "All the windows are busted out," the rioter questions the listener,

April 26th, 1992 [sic]

There was a riot on the streets tell me where were you?

You were sitting home watching your TV

While I was participating in some anarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than be caught "sitting home watching your TV," a position to cast detached judgment upon the rioters, Sublime's rioter invites the listener to participate in the riots with him. The first verse continues to describe his looting of the liquor store, where "I finally got all that alcohol I can't afford. / With red lights flashing, time to retire / and then we turned that liquor store into a structure fire." The "we" could be a reference to a general rioting populace or a reference to Sublime itself as the rioter and company later rob a music shop to steal an amp and guitar: "Finally, we got our own P.A. / Where do you think I got this guitar that you're hearing today?"

In "April 29," crimes like robbery, arson, and property damage are not positioned as a symbol of danger, degeneracy, or a reflection of moral failure, but a matter of necessity in what is assumed to be a struggling poor and working-class community. The "five-finger discount," as it were, becomes this community's only useful currency to obtain creature comforts like alcohol or even basic necessities like diapers: "Some kids went in a store with their mother / I saw her when she came out / She was getting some Pampers." Furthermore, "participating in some anarchy" becomes an expression of the community's pent up economic frustrations since "everybody in the hood has had it up to here / It's getting hotter and hotter and harder each and every year." To some extent, the song presents a unique inversion of sociologist Kai Erikson's theory of deviance. Erikson suggests that communities maintain their boundaries by labelling certain behaviors as "deviant." The people who

engage in such behaviors are then pushed to the cultural periphery of the community, marking them as different and, thus, arrestable. These “deviant forms of behavior, by marking the outer edges of group life,” Erikson claims, “give the inner structure its special character and thus supply the framework within which the people of the group develop an orderly sense of their own cultural identity.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, the “inner structure,” or inner circle, develops a sense of a normal self in contrast with outsiders marked as “deviant.” “April 29,” however, flips the behaviors which are traditionally labelled “deviant.” Instead of accepting the position of “outsiders” for engaging in robbery, arson, and property damage, Sublime’s rioter and the rest of “the hood [who have] had it up to here” reposition “you sitting home watching your TV” as the outsider. The rioter repositions “these fucked up police,” whom he evades throughout the song, as outsiders and enemies of the community, not the watchdog who maintains the periphery at the behest of a law-abiding inner circle. In this inversion, rioting and upheaval become behavioral markers of membership in a *new* inner circle, while policing and “sitting home watching your TV” become behavioral markers of outsider membership.

This inversion, of course, is complicated by how far out one draws the boundaries of the L.A. Riots and the problems they symbolize. For Sublime’s rioter, the “inner structure” is composed of the streets of Los Angeles County erupting in looting and structure fires; the onlookers at home and the roving police are the outsiders. For the onlookers at home, the rioters are the deviants who must be stamped out by the roaming police dispatches that are slotted in between verses. The rioter declares in the final verse, “Let it burn / Wanna let it burn,” and the song ends in a fantasy of the nation erupting into riots of a similar fiery, anarchist solidarity:

Riots on the streets of Miami  
Whoa, riots on the streets of Chicago  
On the streets of Long Beach  
And San Francisco (Boise, Idaho)

The list of cities continues on for some time before a final plea of “Won’t you let it burn?” and an exasperated final dispatch from a police officer. Ultimately, the solution that Sublime’s rioter posits is utter anarchy that spreads across the nation. However, the rioter’s anarchy in “April 29” is not necessarily motivated by the beating of Rodney King, despite the acquittal of his uniformed assailants happening mere moments before the riots began. The rioter declares, “They said it was for the Black man. / They said it was for the Mexican, / and not for the white man.” He then dismisses the reading of the racial motivations behind the beatings and the ensuing riots, and reframes



the problem in vague, race-neutral language: “But if you look at the street it wasn’t about Rodney King / It’s this fucked up situation, and these fucked up police.” The rioter then points to a solution: “It’s about coming up and staying on top / And screaming, ‘1-8-7 on a motherfuckin’ cop.’”<sup>3</sup> The “coming up” frames the problem as entirely about working-class frustration and “these fucked up police” who target the poor, presenting the riots as a primarily class-motivated conflict, one in which revenge killings against the LAPD are the solution. A closer look at the beating of Rodney King and the history of anti-Black violence in Los Angeles reveals the problem with dismissing race as a component of the L.A. Riots.

The Rodney King beating and the acquittal of the officers who attacked him stems from a long history of anti-Black violence from the LAPD and miscarriages of justice against African Americans in Los Angeles. The unjust killing of a young Samuel Faulkner at the hands of the LAPD in the 1920s resonates with the Rodney King incident nearly seven decades later. On April 24, 1927, an LAPD officer had shot and killed Faulkner after he emerged from a bedroom during a liquor raid on his sister’s home. Despite evidence from another officer that Faulkner’s killer had both lied about Faulkner being armed and had pressured other officers to testify that Faulkner had shot first, Faulkner’s uniformed killer was found not guilty and acquitted of all charges. In fact, Faulkner’s killer was so confident of this outcome, perhaps due to the already routine practice of acquitting officers of brutality and corruption, that he was found peacefully napping in the prisoner’s room while the jury deliberated his fate.<sup>4</sup> The confidence with which Faulkner’s killer fabricated the image of an armed Samuel Faulkner shooting at innocent police officers, despite the glaring evidence of the inverse, demonstrates the potency of Black men’s presumed threat and criminality. In reality, the only “crime” which facilitated Faulkner’s execution was being Black in the wrong place at the wrong time—but how did the young Sam Faulkner come to occupy such an ill-fated location?

While economic constraints surely limited the mobility of many Black Angelenos, as they do for the rioters of “April 29,” the Faulknors and many other African Americans found themselves confined to L.A.’s “Black Belt” around Central Avenue in large part due to racist housing covenants championed by the city’s white elites and boosters. These agreements prevented African Americans from residing elsewhere in California’s largely white suburbs and interrupting their racial homogeneity. Racial segregation thus made it easier for the LAPD to cage and beat Black Angelenos with impunity.<sup>5</sup> Despite the disappointing acquittal of Faulkner’s uniformed killer, members of the Black middle class continued to rely upon the police into the 1930s. As historian Kelly Lytle Hernandez explains,

[The Black middle class] cheered the arrests of “crap shooters” and “disorderly drunks” who congregated on Central Avenue. Their pursuit of a middle-class community required the removal of the “vicious sort.” But they also vigorously protested whenever acts of extraordinary violence accompanied the arrests.<sup>6</sup>

While this response may appear incongruous for a community who frequently experienced anti-Black discrimination from the police and the courts, these interactions with the LAPD stemmed from the precarious socioeconomic *and* racial standing that the Black middle class inhabited as they gradually migrated out of the Jim Crow South. Such responses hinged upon the idea of Black respectability and carving out a place for themselves in a different hostile environment, guided constantly by the suffocating constraints of white hostility towards Black advancement.

African American responses to police brutality would continue to evolve throughout the twentieth century. In 1951, after L.A.’s Black Belt experienced significant population growth thanks to migrating black workers in search of California’s coveted manufacturing jobs during WWII, members of the Civil Rights Congress delivered a petition to the United Nations charging the U.S. with genocide for the numerous extrajudicial killings of African Americans at the hands of civilians and the police. While this effort was ultimately ignored by the diplomatic community, Hernandez highlights the social activist character of the genocide petition, a disposition which would go on to characterize the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>7</sup> But again, despite the moral high ground approach of political activism and civil disobedience which characterized the Civil Rights Movement, which in turn was informed by the rubric of Black respectability, the LAPD could not stop caging, beating, and killing African Americans specifically.

As with the death of Samuel Faulkner, the LAPD and their defenders’ excuses for beating Rodney King were brimming with racist ideas about black men. Anthropologist Laurence Ralph argues that the jurors watching the slowed down footage of King’s beating were witnessing and engaging with philosopher Lewis Gordon’s duality of “invisibility and hypervisibility of Blackness.” The police and jurors carry with them the “hypervisible” representation of the “angry black male,” due to its overrepresentation in the media, which blinds them from seeing the obvious innocence of the actual Black male being beaten within an inch of his life, thus rendering him “invisible.” The effect of this “seeing without seeing” displays Black men who are “in total control” and are always “dangerous, even as they are being beaten into

submission.”<sup>8</sup> Racist presuppositions of Black violence and white victimhood are routinely inverted to create Black victims of white violence, showcasing race as a clear cultural informant in the beating of Rodney King. The rioter’s suggestion in “April 29” that the riots immediately following the acquittal of King’s attackers, are a colorblind response to “these fucked up police,” completely erasing the complex history of racist policing.

Weaving the Rodney King riots within this larger narrative of responses to anti-Black police violence complicates the solution proposed by Sublime’s rioter. When he sings, “They said it was for the Black man. / They said it was for the Mexican, / and not for the white man,” these lyrics *could* depict rioting as an opportunity for cross-racial solidarity, that the all-white Sublime could make protesting anti-Black police violence “for the white man” as well. However, the rioter appears less concerned with addressing the aggrieved black community than he is with challenging the law-abiding citizenry “sitting home watching [their] TV” by promoting race-neutral, colorblind anarchy. Making the riots “for the white man” effectively appropriates violence against Black bodies as equivalent to structural class violence against poor white Angelenos. Now, there may be some truth to the phrase “It wasn’t about Rodney King,” because King’s beating was not an isolated incident. In many ways, the 1992 riots were a response to decades upon centuries of Rodney Kings and Samuel Faulkners. But Sublime’s rioter, in suggesting that “it wasn’t about Rodney King,” to some extent performs Gordon’s “invisible/hypervisible” duality, wherein anti-Black racism can be so “hypervisible” as a motivator that it is rendered invisible by a group unwilling to contend with it. Interestingly, while the rioter castigates the presumably white viewer—“you were sitting home watching your TV,” whom we could also insert as the jurors of Rodney King’s trial—both the rioter and the viewer, as Ralph puts it, “identify with King’s vulnerability... but construe it as their own.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, both the rioter and the viewer of “April 29,” while competing on opposite sides of the law for the coveted “inner structure” of the community, suggest that images and instances of Black victimhood are really about white victimhood.

Now, it should go without saying that riots are complicated. Indeed, there are many factors of the actual riots which suggest “It wasn’t about Rodney King.” The woman who steals Pampers and the rioter who steals “all the alcohol [he] can’t afford” are stand-ins for the many Angelenos across races who engaged in looting and property damage, who were probably not doing so as a statement against racially-motivated police brutality, and probably more so as an expression of their economic frustrations. Furthermore, some may have rioted for the sheer delight of anarchy. The individual reasons Angelenos engaged in the 1992 L.A. Riots are numerous. My main contention

has been that of these numerous reasons, Sublime's "April 29, 1992 (Miami)" presents only *two* problems and *one* solution: "this fucked up situation, and these fucked up police" and "Let it burn, let it burn." Instead of law and order, "April 29" presents an oversimplified contest between law and *disorder*. The issue with the song's problems and solution is that it drowns out what I consider to be the more important problem: anti-Black violence at the hands of the police and the state. Just as the media might reframe the riots to emphasize the danger and selfishness of rioter motivations, "April 29" reframes the riots to emphasize race-neutral classism and police brutality at the expense of meaningfully engaging with anti-Black racism. There is the possibility for structural change to emerge from the rubble of structure fires, just not if the beaten black bodies are forgotten in the ashes.

And yet... Twenty-eight years later and it is still unclear if we have learned the correct lessons from Rodney King's bruises or the riots his assaulted body ignited. Two years after King's passing, the killing of an unarmed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown in 2014 at the hands of a white police officer sent the predominantly Black St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, MO erupting into riots. From the ashes rose a new Black activist generation, determined to halt the executions of African Americans by highlighting the simplest of facts, that Black lives mattered. And yet... Even today it is still unclear if we have learned the correct lessons from Michael Brown's bullet-riddled corpse or the riots his death ignited. Almost six years after Brown's death, the nation recently became embroiled in another series of riots following the killing of an unarmed George Floyd. In May 2020, a Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee on the back of Floyd's head for over eight minutes, in spite of Floyd's desperate pleas that he could not breathe, he was choked to death. For many, the riots are not about George Floyd. The riots are about Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. But it's not actually about them either: it's about Stephon Clark, Philando Castile, Botham Jean. But no, not them either: it's about Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland. It is about so many names that you lose count. It's about "these fucked up police" *and* it's about Rodney King. It's about race and it's about white supremacy. It's about "let it burn, let it burn," but it is also about something as simple as Black Lives Matter, and shouting that all lives cannot matter until Black ones finally do. One can only hope that when the riots dissipate and the embers dim that the nation will have learned the correct lesson—that we will have remembered the bodies and the people to whom they belonged.

## References

- 1 Sublime, “April 29, 1992 (Miami),” by Bradley Nowell, KRS-One, Marshall Gooman, and Michael Happoldt, recorded February-May 1996, track 5 on *Sublime*, MCA Records; Nowell had accidentally sung the incorrect date of the riots in the studio recording. The correct date is used in the alternate recording of the song “April 29, 1992 (Leary)” on their follow-up album *Second-Hand Smoke*.
- 2 Kai Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), 13.
- 3 Sublime, “April 29, 1992 (Miami).”
- 4 Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 179-182.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 164.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 182-183.
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# California Counter-Histories

*“The future always looks good in the golden land, because no one remembers the past.”*

-Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

*“The slight bump of the Santa Ana Mountains blesses its trees with the illusion of waves and peace. Serenity. But squint hard enough, and you might just see charred hillsides, remnants of the apocalyptic fires that cover Orange County in smog-fueled smoke every couple of years. Whoops — watch out for turbulence!”*

-Gustavo Arellano, *Orange County: A Personal History*



# A Grove of Burning Lanterns

Sam Fife

AMST 301: American Character

This essay was written for Dr. Alison Kanosky's American Character course in the spring of 2020. The intention was to explore a concept from class attributed to a community we have been part of. I ended up analyzing the town's history with Chinese immigrants and how ambivalence has impacted an annual celebration to this day.

On May 16, 1906, a fire of unknown origin burned down a Chinese Fishing Village along the coastline of Monterey, where Pacific Grove stands today. A small town in northern California, Pacific Grove has been home to an annual celebration of Chinese culture since 1905, one year before the fire. This celebration still occurs today with a predominantly white population in an awkward display of cultural appropriation. It's called "Feast of Lanterns," a festival of food, music, and lanterns that culminates in a pageant featuring a performance that embraces caricatures distilled through an idea of Chinese culture and loosely based on the town's mascot: the monarch butterfly. The "Royal Court" of this pageant is composed of young women from Pacific Grove's self-titled middle and high schools, the latter being where I spent my entire high school career.

In my experience, there was little acknowledgement of the town's history with Chinese immigrants, especially regarding the racism towards them. Residents of Pacific Grove have been left largely uninformed of the sordid past that plagued the Chinese village its foundations lay upon, a neglect similar to that for Tulsa residents who only recently discovered the tragedy that was the Tulsa Massacre thanks to the HBO series *Watchmen*. Rarely ever did any reference to the fire of 1906 come up outside the festival and never as a part of it. Without a hit show to spotlight the downfall of its Chinese roots, Pacific Grove has been able to ignore its own history as an ethnic enclave while dressing up each year in the garb of a Chinese celebration too steeped in tradition to be changed. Thanks to the hard work of locals, long overdue revision may finally be on the way.

## **Chinese Immigrants Settle In**

The Chinese settlements in the Monterey area follow a similar timeline to San Francisco's settlements represented in Mae Ngai's *The Lucky Ones*.<sup>1</sup>



In that book, Ngai utilizes historical records to tell the story of the Tape/Lowe family across three generations, beginning with immigration to San Francisco in the mid-1800s and following all the way up to World War Two. She paints a wide and empathetic picture of the struggles for Chinese immigrants at the time and how members of the family survived the anti-Chinese sentiment all settlements struggled with. Ngai depicts the historical hotspot for Chinese immigrants that was San Francisco from its early days, while at the same time further south, four Chinese villages formed on the peninsula from Monterey down to Carmel.

The most prominent of these was the Point Alones Chinese Fishing Village. Covering what is now Lover's Point of Pacific Grove down to the current home of Hopkins Marine Station, it was the heart of the Chinese fishing industry for the area. It was the equivalent of a "Chinatown" in Los Angeles or San Francisco, an ethnic enclave that Chinese immigrants based their lives around for the Monterey Peninsula and a refuge from the growing presence of whites who despised them. There, they became the beating heart of a growing fishing economy that defined the Monterey Peninsula for decades, leaving less need for labor brokers like the immigrants of San Francisco encountered in Ngai's book. They would weather the growing restrictions, such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and maintain a life less directly threatened than the immigrants Ngai wrote about for a little while longer than most other enclaves.<sup>2</sup>

Though the Anti-Chinese movement would come around to the Monterey area, it would be some time before it gained the traction so readily taken up in other parts of the state. The cause for jealousy from white folks in the area was also the insurance of their longevity: the impressive size of the Chinese fishing endeavors. The longer they were able to maintain a corner on the fish market, the longer it took for them to be pushed from the area. It did eventually happen, but it took much longer for them to be pushed from their established homes than in other parts of the state.

To explore the relationship between Pacific Grove's history with Chinese immigrants and its pageantry in celebrating their culture, I dug into several news articles, a book by historian Professor Sandy Lydon, and the Feast of Lanterns website. While I have my own personal experiences of attending the festival, the knowledge gained from attending the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History and other cultural landmarks in the area deepened my understanding of how rich this history was. My research helped bring a fresh perspective aided by a recent reading of *The Lucky Ones*, allowing me to recognize the connections between what happened in the town I lived in and what Chinese immigrants were experiencing at the same time further north.

### **History of Point Alones**

During emigration from China in the early 1850s, many boats became separated and landed near the Carmel River of the Monterey area. Establishing camps at Point Lobos, they soon moved on towards a more permanent home at Point Alones. The inhabitants would be the first Chinese families to immigrate to America. They were quick to recognize the potential for commercial fishing in Monterey Bay and for a time dominated the market. After a while, more white Americans moved in and pushed the Chinese out of daytime fishing grounds. To counter this, they began fishing for squid at night by the light of lanterns on boats, which kick-started squid fishery in California. With over five hundred Chinese fishermen working in Monterey Bay, the area north of Cannery Row became known as “China Point.” The increase in squid fishing allowed them to avoid direct competition with Italian and Portuguese fishermen, who were a growing presence in the area.

Not all newcomers to the area were an immediate threat to the Chinese residents. When the Southern Pacific Railroad Corporation took over as landlord on the peninsula in 1880, the Chinese villages were provided new opportunities to benefit. “The arrival of the Southern Pacific as a major landowner around Monterey was not only a major event in the history of the Chinese fishing villages, it was one of the most important events in the history of the entire peninsula.”<sup>3</sup> With the tourist industry in Santa Cruz blossoming (a place from which Chinese immigrants were being increasingly pushed out) and a competing railroad nearing completion to bring visitors from San Francisco down to the area, the Southern Pacific Railroad crafted a branch for land development: the Pacific Improvement Company. Their goal was to attain land in Monterey destined to be the next big tourist destination and make it as appealing to visitors as possible. The company would go on to improve the water supply for the area, buy up the land of Pacific Grove and sell many of its lots to Chinese Americans, and then go on to market the sights of their villages as an oddity designed for tourism.

The Pacific Improvement Company excelled at developing properties for tourism. They brought about the creation of a scenic drive that is famously known as “Seventeen Mile Drive” today and the old Del Monte Hotel amongst others, staking out long-lasting landmarks to grab visitor appeal. Lydon puts forth that they allowed the Chinese villagers to set up a roadside stand to sell polished abalone shells and other trinkets, creating the first souvenir shop in Monterey County. The company allowed this in the belief that the Chinese people made the area more exotic and attractive to out-of-towners.<sup>4</sup>

From 1883 to 1890, the Methodist Episcopal church established a Chinese mission that taught school to the village’s children but ended with

the passing of its teacher. Following that, the parents went to the Pacific Grove school trustees asking permission for their children to attend the main elementary school. This plea played out very differently here than it had for the Tapes written about in Ngai's book. Ngai had been drawn to the family over a famous case against the San Francisco Board of Education in *Tape v. Hurley*. The Tapes were fighting for their children's rights to attend the same school as the white children and ultimately leading to the creation of segregated public schools in San Francisco.<sup>5</sup> Attendance came easily for the children of Chinese villagers in Pacific Grove, so long as they were clean and matched the conditions of the white children.

Truly, they were allowed more room for growth in Monterey than most other Chinese Americans and were more tolerated by whites than other Chinatowns. "The Chinese had a strong, stable landowner in the Pacific Improvement Co., paid their rent on time and became an economic asset to the area with their squid fishing industry, which did not compete with the fisheries maintained by Monterey's immigrant Sicilian community."<sup>6</sup> The Chinese risked everything to continue living on the land, embraced for a while by the company and other landowners stretching all the way to the Salinas Valley. When critique was lobbed against them for being "Chinaman-lovers," they'd shoot back that white men wouldn't be willing to work in the slime and water up to their knees the way the Chinese would. Presented this way, Chinese immigrants were begrudgingly accepted as a necessary labor force.

### **Anti-Chinese Sentiment on the Rise**

As competition over fishery resources grew, tensions would rise, and anti-Chinese sentiment began festering inside of the Monterey community. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was not the only legislation straining the freedoms of the Chinese. "New laws passed between 1875 and 1900 greatly restricted the ability of Chinese to fish and process or sell their catch."<sup>7</sup> Research across several articles and Lydon's book shows that as anti-Chinese sentiment was picking up steam in San Francisco and Los Angeles, taking root from the L.A. Massacre of 1871 and spreading throughout the state, that it was only a matter of time before Monterey would suffer similar aggression and violence. The writing was on the wall for Monterey after a fire in April of 1894 caused the Chinese community of Santa Cruz to separate into two camps and slowly dwindle down south towards Pacific Grove as their merchants were gradually forced out of the area.<sup>8</sup>

Heading into the early 1900s, the Pacific Improvement Company was in the midst of long negotiations to evict the remaining villagers from the land they owned. The Company had long-term plans to break up the area with oceanfront properties that would appeal to university professors

with families from across the state. While they protected the Chinese villagers for a long time, encouraging their labor and grateful for their responsible payments on rent, their presence was preventing expansion of their business. It is also evident that as more white Americans came to the area, a greater disdain grew for the Chinese. "Newspapers and citizens sided clearly with the non-Chinese fishermen and laborers, and some called openly for the removal of the China Point settlement."<sup>9</sup> The growing wealth of anti-Chinese sentiment built to an inevitable breaking point displayed in a violent act against the flourishing population of the Point Alones Chinese village. Lydon adds another factor in his book that after the Great San Francisco Earthquake on April 18, 1906, many Chinese immigrants traveled south to the Point Alones Village as refugees from tragedy, an estimated amount of 150.<sup>10</sup> The village became a time bomb just moments from igniting.

### **The Fire**

Around 8 p.m. on May 16, less than a month after the Great 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, a fire of unknown, yet suspicious, origin broke out in a barn in the western section of the village. Pacific Grove volunteer firefighters came to their aid, but there was not enough water to douse the flames. The Chinese residents quickly recognized the flames would rage out of control and rushed to collect personal belongings and fishing gear. "By 10 p.m. the fire had done its work, and all but sixteen of the over one hundred buildings in the fishing village were destroyed."<sup>11</sup> Owning everything but the land, the Chinese bore the full loss in damages. As the fire had raged, spectators on the railroad tracks had cheered for its decimation of the village. When the flames ran their course, many white spectators rushed into the building that had remained untouched and began looting their contents.

Miraculously, not a single Chinese villager was harmed by the devastation wreaked upon their home. "The Chinese residents escaped the flames with no deaths and moved into the surviving buildings, where they lived for a year until the community moved to McAbee Beach in Monterey, east of Cannery Row. The villagers eventually dispersed to San Francisco and other areas, Lydon said, when they found Monterey a more hostile host than Pacific Grove had been."<sup>12</sup> Having lost so much of their livelihood and bearing the burden of racist actions towards them, the Chinese former-residents of Point Alones opted to seek a new ethnic enclave to recoup from their losses. An analysis of the census between 1900 and 1910 that Lydon provides illustrates just how devastating the fire was for the Chinese living in Pacific Grove. In 1900, the census accounted for 175 Chinese residents; by 1910, the number dropped to just five.

While the origin of the fire remains a mystery, Lydon has discerned

from evidence of letters and telegrams that the Pacific Improvement Company was surprised and embarrassed by the event. Sadly, this is far from the only “Chinatown” to suffer from violent acts of racism. “So-called Chinatowns on beaches and in towns have been burned down, torn down, or simply forgotten. Steinbeck alludes to this tragedy in *East of Eden*, but much remains, repressed and half-hidden, for future historians who are interested in painting the whole picture.”<sup>13</sup> Even today, there is little light shone upon these events. Historians, like Lydon, and the descendants of the Chinese/Chinese Americans that lived in these enclaves, like Gerry Low-Sabado, are attempting to bring more attention to the history of these places to make them resonant in our culture today. This includes places where celebrations go on utilizing aspects of the culture without acknowledging the history attached, which brings us to Pacific Grove’s annual celebration.

### **The Feast of Lanterns**

One year before the fire broke out, the inaugural Feast of Lanterns was held as part of the closing ceremonies of the Chautauqua Assembly in Pacific Grove. “No one knows if the Feast of Lanterns festivals were first celebrated hundreds of years ago in Japan or China or somewhere else in the ancient lands of our world, but these festivals of light continue as part of the international and national landscape. This festival is not unique to Pacific Grove.”<sup>14</sup> The original festival did feature lanterns, a boat parade, family entertainment, and fireworks but the annual celebration was halted in 1917 during World War One when the federal government labeled it as “not a patriotic endeavor.”<sup>15</sup>

Citizens of the area had pressured an end to the Chinese squid fishing in 1905, which brought an end to the dazzling lights on the water which had become an important spectacle for tourism. Lydon describes this as the impetus for the first lantern festival. According to the Heritage Society of Pacific Grove and their collections of newspaper articles and other resources from the time, the Chinese residents of Point Alones were invited to participate and lend authenticity to the festival in 1905. They did so willingly, and their lantern boats appear to be the inspiration for the boat parade of years to come. However, after the fire, there is no longer any record of Chinese/Chinese Americans having any part in the festival for decades.

Records show that the event became far more about the spectacle and maintaining a tourism linchpin, blending Japanese elements with those of Chinese origin to create a haphazard mishmash of cultural appropriation. The festival would be revived in 1935 and attached to the Miss California pageant in Santa Cruz, only to be cancelled again in 1941 during WWII. In 1957, it was revived as part of the Chamber of Commerce’s Winter Festival

and prepared for a return as a summer event in 1958. This is where the Feast of Lanterns of today is created. Then-Mayor Shropshire asked City Councilman Clyde Dyke “to chair the revival of the Feast of Lanterns. Clyde, assisted by his wife Elmarie and the Mayor’s wife Helen, orchestrated the Feast of Lanterns as we know it today with its Royal Court, elegant costumes, teas, fashion shows, and the Legend of the Blue Willow enacted by the Royal Court and their families.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The Legend of the Blue Willow**

The official website claims that no one knows when/how/who told the first story of the “Blue Willow.” It may have been some ancient storyteller sharing the tale of how Scholar Chang’s love for Queen Topaz transformed them into immortal doves, later re-made monarch butterflies for relevance to Pacific Grove who return every fall. The modern Pacific Grove version used up until 2020 was first told in the Pacific Grove Methodist Church in 1958 by Pauline Benton, a member of the Red Gate Shadow Players. The story is told through pantomime and loosely ties itself to the town through the monarch butterfly display at the end, making it “historically relevant” to Pacific Grove. “High school girls wear Chinese dresses and be accompanied by Queen Topaz’s father in a cap that dangles a dark braid from its back, and that this group parade down the stairs and onto the stage to re-enact an English legend first propagated to sell British-made porcelain with the Blue Willow pattern in the late 18th century.”<sup>17</sup> Andrew Shaw-Kitch’s piece is particularly resonant with me, being another resident of the area who had never been educated on the history of Chinese immigrants to Monterey or why the festival was created in the shadow of Chinese designs. He shares in his writing the sense of discovery about how little the Feast of Lanterns teaches residents about the town’s past and the disappointment that little else in the town offers greater insight.

The reality is that there’s little explanation openly given about why this traditional event is based in Chinese trappings. The only way to find out anything about it is to look it up on your own or go to the Pacific Grove Natural History Museum, which admittedly has a robust display of images and information about the Point Alones Village and includes a faithful scaled model of it. Shaw-Kitch goes on to mention the mural that runs alongside a recreation trail on the coast of Pacific Grove, covering the site of the former village. In it there is a section dedicated to the Chinese with a few sentences given to the imagery. It simply acknowledges a significant population of Chinese existing, practicing their “traditions,” a “mysterious and tragic” fire, and them just “disappearing” from the village in 1907. There is no further illumination given to the weight of their presence for the community that lasted over a century.

### **Honoring the Past**

The only resources to finding this information is ourselves, seeking to learn through research. It's a shame the town and area have done little to educate residents and honor what came before. There has been an increasing awareness of these issues, thanks in part to Gerry Low-Sobado, a fifth-generation Chinese American whose grandfather was reportedly one of the last residents forced out of the village by the Pacific Improvement Company. She has been advocating against these experiences being hidden and purposefully buried through "simplistic depictions." Low-Sobado brought much of this to light when she worked on the 2004 documentary, *By Light of Lanterns: An Untold Story of Monterey's Chinese Fishermen*. "By learning about the history and how the Chinese were being treated unfairly, (unjustly), I felt that we have to tell the story of my ancestors because they lived in the village, and how did my generation not even know?" she said. "We lived not far away, and we didn't know that story at all."<sup>18</sup> Low-Sobado started leading a "Walk of Remembrance" annually on the date of the fire that starts at the Natural History Museum and travels along the recreation trail described earlier.

I would say that thanks very much to her efforts, the Feast of Lanterns may have changed for the better this very year, had the pandemic not prevented the event from occurring. Pageant co-director Olivia Cain stated last year would be the final year for the "Legend of the Blue Willow" story. "There were community members, especially Chinese members of some of the fishing village that saw aspects of the Feast as appropriation, so we are transitioning away," said Cain.<sup>19</sup> They say the events should celebrate the history of Pacific Grove and teach more about the cultural groups that contributed to the town and the Monterey area. Hopefully, it should have a stronger emphasis on Chinese heritage, what they did for fishing in the area, and the tragedy xenophobia wrought on the village. Time will tell.

### **A Brighter Future**

The entire Monterey area is guilty of not offering greater acknowledgement of the Chinese immigrants' influence on its origins. From Santa Cruz, to Salinas, to Monterey, and Carmel, all owe a great deal to the pioneers of the area. A racist history causes embarrassment and a desire to pretend it wasn't so bad but does a disservice to the communities whose ancestors deserve more credit. "Monterey Bay's written history includes little about these Chinese settlers, apart from vague names in the mountains or along the seashore, such as China Camp, Chinese Dam, Chinese Camp, and China Cove. They have become faceless ghosts through a complicity of mutual convenience: between newer Chinese residents anxious to avoid persecution and

white settlers determined to cover up the murder, arson, and land theft that drove the Chinese from their settlements.”<sup>20</sup>

It is a time to be optimistic that this will change. While mired in a global pandemic, locals have continued to push for change. I was pleased to see a recent article describing how a former classmate of mine, Chelsea Lee, utilized the opportunity of the pandemic to enter a City Council meeting via Zoom that would have otherwise been difficult to access. Fueled by the outrage at police brutality in relation to race, Lee used the time to speak towards police reform as well as expressing disappointment in the town’s recognition of a racist past.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps some long-needed justice for Chinese Americans can come to an area that has been devoid of it. Considering the increase in anti-Chinese rhetoric due to COVID-19, it would be wonderful to see these efforts continued to educate about a troubled past and credit a foundational community.

It’s good to know those behind the Feast of Lanterns pageant have started to listen after over a decade of complaints about cultural appropriation. The website currently lists the pageant for next year with the theme of “A New Vision” and a new story called “The Legend of Pacific Grove.” Considering there is such a rich and true timeline to explore of Chinese influence, there should be plenty of room to incorporate genuine appreciation for these influential American characters. After all, they kicked off an entire fishing economy for the area and defined the squid fishing part of the industry, not to mention many of their descendants would be American citizens who would help make Cannery Row the historical landmark it became.

When defining quintessential American character, there tends to be a focus on the idea of a pioneer. They brave the wilds and dangers to discover something new and establish a foundation to be carried on for generations. The stereotypical idea is of white people who forged west to discover the “New Land,” but they are only a part of the story that crafted America. They have received plenty of credit for a long time, so it would be truly wonderful to see “America’s Last Hometown” embrace a checkered past and celebrate the efforts of the Chinese pioneers who defined the future of Monterey County. Lydon puts perfectly the tribute those villagers who have remained in obscurity for over a century deserve, “The image of the California pioneer must be broadened to include the Chinese standing on a beach near Monterey looking east and wearing cotton and queue.”<sup>22</sup>



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# Same Family Different Cultures

Alex Perez

AMST 301: American Character

This essay was written for Dr. Alison Kanosky's American Character course in the Fall semester of 2019. The assignment required students to conduct an informal interview of a few fellow members of their community while focusing on specific class concepts. The interview was used as evidence to form an argument that tied together those class concepts and the community being studied. Throughout the course, several books were used to identify and expand on those concepts, however, García and Tywoniak's *Migrant Daughter*, was the primary source for this essay. I draw on the personal accounts of Frances Tywoniak, my interviewees, and my own to describe how assimilation presents itself in our community.

I am a first-generation Mexican American. Reading about Frances's life in *Migrant Daughter* brought back myriad memories from my childhood. From a young age, I was curious about my family's origins, constantly wondering what brought them so far away from their home in Mexico. Family members would indulge my childhood curiosity with countless stories about their everyday lives back home. While ruminating over these stories, I began noting the similarities between Frances's experiences and my family's experiences. I promptly knew that the subjects of my interview had to be my mother and grandmother, given their stories and experiences. I focused the interview on the concept of cultural assimilation, which will be defined later in further detail, to obtain concrete answers as to why they came to the U.S. and what they felt knowing they were foreigners in a foreign country. Throughout this interview, I recognized that cultural maintenance helps members of multiple communities adjust to a new environment by establishing a sense of comfort, while cultural hybridity and cultural assimilation are the results of living in that environment given enough time. Over time, my family and I grew into a hybrid of both Mexican and American cultures: the younger generation adopted more Mexican norms, while the older generation adopted more American norms.

In order to proceed, I first must define some key terms: culture, assimilation, maintenance, and hybridity. First, culture is defined as the norms, customs, and ideals of the society around us. Our societies typically have

multiple cultures, but the dominant culture is represented by the group whose members are in the majority or hold the most power over other subordinate groups, or those who are in the minority. Since the subordinate group has little to no influence over the dominant group, the minority typically adjusts or adopts the dominant culture. In other words, the subordinate group assimilates to the dominant culture. However, when a subordinate group becomes resistant or is actively attempting to uphold its own culture in the presence of assimilation, the subordinate group is experiencing cultural maintenance. Furthermore, there are instances where members of multiple communities mend together their cultures and create a hybrid culture, appropriately named, cultural hybridity.

Throughout *Migrant Daughter*, Frances shares her insights about the peculiar dilemma she found herself in. Frances was a fifth-generation American but born of Mexican descent, and treated like an outsider by both these communities. Frances felt distant from her Mexican community because nothing around her lead Frances to believe that her Mexican heritage would aid her in obtaining a higher education. She refuted the idea of conforming to the life many women in her community fell into, which today would be considered a stay-at-home mom. Early on, she understood that being Mexican would only hinder her progress, so she began living out this idea of being Anglo in most aspects but appearance. In her early teens, Frances began slowly integrating herself in the Anglo community by taking more challenging courses and increasing her interaction with the other students. Despite trying to be Anglo, her constant interactions with these students only made it clearer to her that she could never be that, but she knew no other way. Frances essentially put her Mexican identity aside to achieve her goals, which only articulated her level of determination. Like Frances, my family and I share similar experiences growing up and belonging to two different communities.<sup>1</sup>

My grandparents, along with my mother, aunt, and uncles, came to the U.S. in the mid-1970s, and their first few years in the U.S. were very similar to what life was like back home in Mexico. My grandma jokingly said that she could not notice the difference between Mexico and el Norte (the North).<sup>2</sup> Back home, my grandpa worked the fields on his father's small ranch, while my grandmother cooked and cared for the children. Here, my grandfather found work on a farm in Northern California, and my grandmother stayed with a nearby family friend doing exactly what she did back home. Just like when Frances and her family moved to California, the location was different, but Frances's family was practically doing the same type of farm-hand labor that they routinely did back in New Mexico. My family changed their environment but brought their norms, habits, and routines with them to help cope with the uprooting of their family. Beyond the physical

change in location, their daily routines remained nearly the same, from work to meals to leisure. This is where my family's cultural maintenance is most apparent. They still practiced their familiar norms despite being in the U.S. where the norms are different. Behaving no different from how they behaved back home acclimated them to their new environment. Eventually, they saved enough money and became comfortable enough to move to Los Angeles, closer in proximity to the dominant culture.

Despite moving to Los Angeles, my family found themselves living among a Hispanic community in the Pico-Union neighborhood. While my grandparents' exposure to the dominant culture remained minimal, my mother, aunt, and uncles grew up in it. They lived in Los Angeles, near downtown, but they attended school in the San Fernando Valley, a completely different community. My mother admitted that it was hard to make friends at school, having nothing in common with them. During her time at school, she was only able to make two friends; all her other friends were neighborhood kids, kids that she had no trouble getting along with. This is where I believe cultural assimilation and hybridity came into play. My family tried what they could to be accepted into their school community. For example, my mother and aunt tried tying their hair in ponytails that matched the style of the other girls so that they were seen as more relatable.<sup>3</sup> Since they commuted to school, getting involved in school activities to make friends seemed impossible, so they decided to do little things that may have caught other kids' attention, like becoming a class clown in my uncle's case. As trivial as these may seem, attempts like these are things my family did to try to become a member of their school community rather than just being surrounded by it.

Out of high school, my family showed a hybridity of both their cultures. Our Mexican culture pushes the younger family members to begin aiding their elders with income, and for that reason, I have noticed a lot of people from my mother's generation that have not furthered or even completed their education. The hybrid aspect of both my family's culture is that they finished their required education of high school (granted it was done because it was the law) and entered the work force to begin providing for the family. This idea of finishing and furthering our education is now the norm in my family. My siblings, cousins, and I all abide by this norm of attending school and excelling to later attend a university which will then lead to career opportunities. This was a compromise for my parents and a requirement for my generation. Perhaps this is just a normal evolution of our family's ideals becoming more assimilated rather than a hybrid of both.

My experiences regarding assimilation were different from my mom, aunt, and uncles. For one, our primary languages are different. I grew up speaking English and would only speak Spanish with my father or grand-

parents. I was able to speak Spanish with only three members of my family; however, this was not allowed while my mother was growing up. This was another similarity between my family and Frances's family, their ability to speak other languages at home. My grandmother remembers her husband giving his children the "dad look" to stop them from using English, especially at the dinner table.<sup>4</sup> It was like English was banned. My family would rather have not spoken English than find out what would happen if they did. I can also remember my palate changing over time, differently from that of my family's. Before there were any grandchildren, my family was very accustomed to eating home-cooked meals, which were generic Mexican dishes. When my cousins, brother, and I arrived, eating out or eating non-Mexican food started becoming the norm.<sup>5</sup> My family was becoming more Americanized with their palate, while I was slowly moving away from American foods to explore more traditional Mexican cuisine. My cravings for fast food like McDonald's and Burger King were dwindling because of a newfound appreciation for Mexican gastronomy. My family's transition from only using Spanish to using both languages and our change in palates were examples of us trying to assimilate to the community we found ourselves in. I sensed that I was already American, so I began leaning towards embracing Mexican culture, and my family did the opposite, moving towards American culture.

Today, my family and I live a comfortable medium of both Mexican and American cultures. Despite the same composition, we all assimilated differently. The younger generation adopted Mexican norms, while the older generation adopted more American norms. Regardless of the outcome, we all experienced some degree of cultural maintenance when exposed to a new environment. Overtime, we learned to live in this new environment, mixing new and old norms. In *Migrant Daughter*, Frances analyzed the differences in her family's norms and the norms of the community around her. In doing so, she recognized that assimilation was tricky but inevitable. Similarly, my family kept what they knew and loved, and built on top of that foundation. While my family moved towards adopting American culture, I moved towards adopting Mexican culture; the end result is what I think to be the best of both worlds.

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# Suburbia and Californian Inequalities

Giselle Gallegos

AMST 395: California Cultures

This essay was written for Dr. Sara Fingal's California Cultures course in the spring of 2020. The intent of the paper is to identify a watershed moment that impacted culture within California and how it continues to impact residents to this day. Through this essay, we examine how the introduction of the suburban landscape contributed to inequalities affecting minority groups in Southern California. We learn how something as innocent-sounding as suburban neighborhoods led to discrimination and marginalization.

The idea of a suburban landscape is one that is overly familiar to most Americans: white picket fences, lush green grass, and nearly identical houses containing the typical nuclear family of a mother, father, and children. This image of the suburbs is what usually comes to mind when thinking of the phrase, "the American dream." However, the suburban landscape which includes a "single-family home" and the "nuclear family," is a fairly new concept. Not long ago, there was a lack of suburban landscapes throughout the country. The twentieth century brought with it a myriad of changes through both the physical and cultural landscape of the Golden State. One of the largest changes was the introduction of a new suburban lifestyle, which was not always as peachy keen as it seemed. Behind the façade of the smiling newly established family, there lies a history of oppression that continues to shape California, specifically Southern California, to this day. In this paper, I argue that the introduction of this suburban lifestyle to Southern California resulted in a watershed moment, or a moment in time that continues to impact culture through direct or indirect means. This watershed moment redefined the regional culture through a new conservative population and resulted in the subsequent continued oppression of racial and ethnic minorities.

The introduction of the suburbs brought upon by an influx of World War II industries produced a culture of conservatism in Southern California neighborhoods, particularly those in the Orange County area post-1940s. According to Dr. Sara Fingal, the wartime boom caused the average personal income to increase three times in five years.<sup>1</sup> This, combined with the prosperous defense industry and boosterism that promoted California living, resulted in a population boom and expansion of the suburbs in Southern



California. An influx of new Protestant and Baptist homeowners provided a comfortable environment for right-wing conservatism to grow within these neighborhoods. According to historian Lisa McGirr, the region was host to many local churches and important figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism.<sup>2</sup> These predominantly religious institutions influenced a culture of social and moral conservatism. Strict moral norms were established to regulate social activities such as drinking, as well as public displays of affection and sexuality.<sup>3</sup> These cultural norms in Southern California were yielded by the expansion of suburbia, which in turn made it a favorable place for extreme right-wing groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan to recruit and build their influence by providing them with an audience of already staunch social views. The mostly white makeup of Orange County residents provided a comfortable place for such groups to spread their beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

Conservatism and racism favored the exclusivity of white society, which resulted in continued discrimination against minority groups. By forming restrictive covenants in suburban neighborhoods, white homeowners were successfully able to keep minority residents from moving in through signed agreements, intimidation, and violence.<sup>5</sup> These racially restrictive housing covenants prevented homeowners from selling their homes to any person of color until the practice was outlawed through the Fair Housing Act of 1968. According to McGirr, "Restrictive housing covenants and redlining made it extremely difficult for minorities to obtain housing and jobs."<sup>6</sup> Redlining became common practice, along with segregation, which influenced all aspects of life. From schools to entertainment to housing, segregation was widespread and commonplace. Several court cases of the twentieth century demonstrated minority residents' frustration with segregation, such as *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Doss v. Bernal*, which fought against school segregation and restrictive covenants, respectively. *Mendez v. Westminster* was argued in 1946 by the Mendez family against the city of Westminster. In 1947, the case determined that discriminating and segregating schools was unlawful, which resulted in integrated schools in the area. Similarly, *Doss v. Bernal* was fought in 1943 and became one of the first legal victories against racially discriminatory housing practices.<sup>7</sup> Although both segregation and restrictive covenants were outlawed, discrimination continued to allow for an exclusion of minorities. Racist attitudes against minority residents paired with strategies to keep them out of suburban neighborhoods created homogenous areas that only contributed to de facto segregation and inequality among the few that lived in these areas.

The longstanding history of discrimination and conservatism in the Orange County area contributed to the expansion of suburbia after World War II. Suburban expansion allowed for the creation of a conservative culture

which in turn resulted in a prolonged era of redlining and segregation. Although these practices have long since been outlawed, the effects can still be seen throughout the state. According to an article published in *KQED*,

although officially prohibited by the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the practice of neighborhood delineation based on race and class had a lasting impact, depriving certain neighborhoods of essential resources. They remain largely low income and have a higher proportion of Black and Hispanic populations than non-redlined communities.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of essential resources and continued de facto segregation contributed to these low-income neighborhoods feeling the longstanding effects decades after. “Generational poverty and elevated levels of ‘psychosocial stress’ caused by everything from living in environments with higher crime rates to a lack of access to decent, affordable health care” continue to affect residents.<sup>9</sup> The watershed moment of suburbanization in Southern California, combined with discriminatory attitudes, resulted in the establishment of systems that continue to affect minority residents today. Lack of funding to healthcare facilities, schools, and financial opportunities have resulted in continued struggles for people living in these communities.

Watershed moments such as the suburbanization of Southern California have significantly impacted the surrounding landscape over the years. While the discriminatory practices that built suburbia began decades ago, the effects are felt even to this day. The inequalities of today are deeply rooted in moments of our state’s past, which is what defines a watershed moment: moments that continue to impact culture through direct or indirect means. In order to understand how certain inequalities or cultural aspects came to be, we must look back into our history’s significant moments that define what California is today.

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# Ethnographic Experiences

*“Ethnographic research celebrates the diversity of world-views that shape the social politics of local communities, making 'the world safe for human differences.’”*

*-Kristen Ghodsee, *From Notes to Narrative: Writing Ethnographies That Everyone Can Read**

*“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”*

*-Margaret J. Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future**



# Skating Through the Spectacle: An Ethnography of Orange County's Only Renegade Roller Derby Team

Kate Resnick

AMST 401T: American Culture Through Ethnography

"Skating Through the Spectacle" is an ethnographic study of Orange County's only renegade roller derby team, written for AMST 401T: American Culture Through Ethnography with Professor Lane. The assignment was to study a group we were unfamiliar with while incorporating themes from American Studies courses. For this project, the research is structured around a combination of fieldwork observations as well as casual conversations and one-on-one interviews with the Outlaw Renegade Rollergirls. The paper is split up into three main sections, each focusing on a different aspect of the sport, ranging from skaters' perceptions of gender and self-expression to commitment and community. With a focus on the individual skaters and their interpretations of how playing roller derby has impacted them, "Skating Through the Spectacle" emphasizes the value of the sport as a niche, yet valuable piece of American culture.

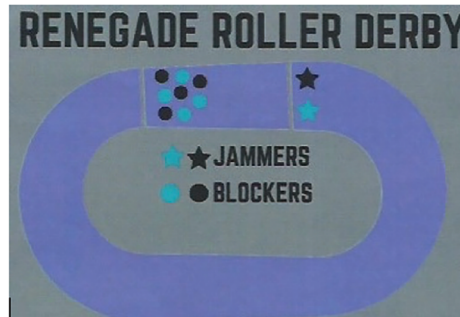
Before its recent return to the public eye, roller derby seemed to be something that everyone had heard of, but few had much knowledge about aside from seeing it on television in the 1970s and '80s. It is unlike other sports in that it is high-contact and almost exclusively played by women, two features that are not typically seen combined. The spectacle of women on roller skates doing everything in their power to knock each other off their feet is the main draw for fans, but there is an indescribable quality that invigorates and energizes people. Through analyzing a local team from Orange County, the Outlaw Renegade Rollergirls, this project shows the complexities of roller derby as a sport and a community. Various interviews with the team revealed the intersections of community and passion and the ways in which the sport ignites self-expression and transformation. By focusing on the individual skaters, beginning with why the skaters chose to play roller derby and breaking it down to smaller details such as their roller derby names, I have been

able to experience and understand the intricacies and impact of derby in a way that I never could have expected. Much like American culture itself, it is a sport that refuses to define itself within a single category. Derby emphasizes meeting people where they are, encompassing people from different levels of skill and experience and introducing them to a community of people from backgrounds vastly different than their own. This project reflects the uniqueness of renegade roller derby and the ways in which it empowers those who participate in it.

The bulk of my fieldwork was accomplished through a combination of observations and casual conversations with the team as a group, as well as semi-structured interviews with six skaters at various points in their derby careers. As suggested in Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein's *Fieldworking*, I asked open-ended questions about the skaters themselves, often tailoring them from my observations. I regularly attended the team's weekly practices as well as games (called bouts) for nearly two months. During each practice and event, I carefully observed the ways in which the skaters interacted with each other and the conversations that took place. My goal was to gather personal details by spending time with the skaters both on and off the rink in hopes it would help them to be more comfortable sharing their thoughts. I accompanied them a few times as they travelled to the bar each night after practice and was invited to their homes, where I observed as the women discussed previous games, put together outfits, and planned their makeup for bouts. Arriving at each event early and staying late was crucial to completing my fieldwork as it provided the ideal environment to not only observe the behaviors and interactions within the team but to fully immerse myself in their world.<sup>1</sup>

Each practice took place at a roller rink in Orange, the Holiday Skate Center, a fixture of the community since the 1970s and coincidentally where many of the Outlaws came to skate years before joining the team. The distinct style of the interior looks as though little has changed since then, complete with arcade games, various sized disco balls, and the classic black and neon patterned carpet. It is closed to the public every Monday to allow for private practices, seeming strangely desolate until the Outlaws arrive. At the first practice I attended, nearly all of the skaters show up at the last minute, laughing and joking with each other as they put on their gear. The coach invites me out to the middle of the rink, yelling out directions to the team as they whip past us. Throughout the night, nearly every skater stopped to introduce themselves to me, most of them kneecapping their sentences with claims of not knowing anything about the history of the sport. As practice comes to a close, the coach trades her skates for slide-on sandals and the team invites me to their favorite bar across the street, encouraging any questions I may have.

## Understanding Roller Derby



Graphic of roller derby track set-up for a bout. Image courtesy of the Outlaws, official instagram @outlawrrg, website [www.outlawrrg.com](http://www.outlawrrg.com).<sup>2</sup>

A key aspect to understanding how roller derby impacts the women who participate in it is to have a basic concept of how the game is played. The team website summarizes it as follows:

Four girls from each team skate together to form The Pack and one girl is the point-scoring Jammer. The girls in The Pack use various blocking techniques to knock the opposing Jammer out of play, while simultaneously helping their own Jammer pass the opposing team. Each time the jammer passes the opposing Pivot on the jammer's 2nd pass through the pack, the girl at the front of The Pack, three (3) points are awarded. The bout has three 15-Min periods with an intermission at the end of the 2nd period.<sup>3</sup>

The game is fast-paced and high-contact, making it physically demanding of the skaters and enthralling for spectators. Renegade is a version of traditional roller derby played by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA). Renegade teams play full-contact derby with no penalties, allowing skaters to use all of the outlawed moves from WFTDA. These moves and the according penalties are determined by skaters' positions on the track in addition to whether they initiate contact in "legal zones" on their opponents' bodies such as "the chest, front and sides of the torso, arms, hands, hips, and the front and sides of the legs above mid-thigh."<sup>4</sup> The Outlaws, recently celebrating their eighth anniversary, formed on November 11, 2011, after a previous renegade team disbanded. The team is now twenty skaters strong, a small group of them are veterans that have been on the team for four to six years, but the majority have joined within the past one to three years.



## Community

For many of the skaters I interviewed, roller derby was not something that they were aware of until they were introduced through an existing love of skating or from the media. While a few members of the team were former athletes, most of them immediately offered up that they “don’t know shit about sports.” In addition to this, the majority of the team shared their concern that they would not be much help for my project because of their lack of knowledge about the history of derby. These early conversations served as a precursor for the rest of the project. It became clear that derby was viewed by its participants as existing outside of traditional ideas of sport. *Roller Derby: Transporting into Academia Lessons from the Body Slam* by Lee Ann Epstein speaks of the sport as more than uninhibited aggression. Despite roller derby existing in a category separate from mainstream sports, it incorporates a specific and strategic skillset.

As a display of agility and strategy, roller derby is a sport that requires women to maneuver and position themselves, both literally in the physical sense and figuratively through resistance of gendered structures and obstacles. Beyond physical agility, roller derby is a thinking person’s game because it requires anticipatory strategies. Understanding where my body was supposed to be was totally different from actually getting my body into the most strategic position.<sup>5</sup>

Epstein argues that layered meanings of the sport set it apart. At the height of its popularity, the main appeal of roller derby was its entertainment value. While it was immensely popular, female skaters were not always recognized as strategic athletes. As the sport returns to relevancy, it has evolved into an empowering space. It provides a tangible way for women to express control over their bodies and the environment surrounding them. The confidence that stems from the physical strategy of the sport in turn impacts the ability to confidently express themselves in other aspects of life, ranging from body image to sexuality and gender identities.<sup>6</sup>

Derby exists in the grey area between sport and leisure. It is unlike traditional sports in what it can offer the individual, especially in terms of the transformation of bodies and sense of self, as discussed by Epstein. This fluidity and how it is portrayed in the media play a significant role in what initially draws women to the sport. The Lone Roller, who was my initial connection to the team, addressed this in one of our conversations, recalling her interest in derby as a slow-moving process.

It wasn't until last October that I went to my first roller derby game just to see kind of like what roller derby was about, and I think not that long after that I actually watched *Whip It* for the first time. So, I had no interest in roller derby I just wanted to see what it was like.<sup>7</sup>

The Lone Roller's initially indifferent feelings towards derby is another testament to the diverse experiences the sport offers each skater. Now, approaching her one-year anniversary with the team, she told me that soon after watching *Whip It*, she heard about an Outlaws recruiting event from a social media post.<sup>8</sup> Once she decided to attend, she immediately felt welcomed by the team, which ultimately acted as a catalyst for her to join. This was echoed by Lil' Lady Kill-her (LLK), a veteran skater and manager of the team:

You know, some teams might be very focused on winning. And traveling and whatever and that's fine. But you know our team is just, we're a little bit differently structured and since I took over, I really try to focus on making this team a positive experience for everybody.<sup>9</sup>

Nearly every skater mentioned the accepting nature of the Outlaws and relationships they have formed with other skaters as a major factor that keeps them in the sport, and this became obvious to me as I began spending more time with them. Most of the skaters described this bond as something that went beyond companionship. While a few of the girls said they joined derby because of their love of skating, many said being on the team ignited a new passion that allowed them to connect with people that they otherwise would never meet. Golden Snatch, another skater who has been on the team for about a year, mentioned multiple times that she felt derby was a way to meet like-minded people:

I don't usually keep a whole lot of friends...But it's certainly given me a sense of community. Like, there's people I know now that I would never meet before. Like Anya-Blindside, she's not even twenty-one. She's like a young college student. I am thirty-three years old and like we have nothing in common but derby and it's kinda cool to be able to like link up with people and find common interest with very, *insanely*, varied women.<sup>10</sup>

As Golden Snatch mentions, it is the variety of backgrounds of the skaters

that encourages them to form unique relationships with women they would have otherwise never met. Outside of derby, the Outlaws are a variety of ages and professions, ranging from therapists to nail technicians, even former cheerleaders. Most of the skaters have no previous experience or interest in sports, and some women have argued that this disinterest is yet another oddly bonding element of derby. During another short interview conducted at the local bar, it was revealed to me that the strength of the team's bonds outside of the rink played a major role in how skaters view the game itself. This seemed to be especially true for Seashell Crus-her, who felt strongly that her teammates were her sisters, and needed to be protected as such:

This sport really showed me how girls can grow together and we're actually sisters. [pointing to another skater across the table] She's really not my friend, she's my sister. I'm gonna protect her like she's gonna protect me. We come together in that way and...I know if I get in a fight, she's gonna be right there. And if she gets in a fight, I will be right there behind her. We come from different backgrounds and we're here to support each other. It's fuckin' beautiful.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of chosen family as referenced by Seashell Crus-her holds many parallels with the kin-like bonds found in the drag community, as illustrated by "Doing Masculinity" by Lauren A. Flores. Flores observed a group of Orange County drag kings, specifically focusing on the impact of community and the different ways it was experienced by performers.

For these performers, their drag community and drag performance spaces are what they value as their 'third place.' It is their home away from home where they feel support, acceptance, and where they feel truly comfortable expressing their own thoughts, feeling, or gender behaviors without the risk of judgement.<sup>12</sup>

Often calling each other "drag brothers", the performers felt that the bonds they formed with one another not only motivated them within the context of drag but provided them a space to be their truest selves in all aspects of life. The roller derby community works similarly, creating a "home away from home" where skaters can genuinely express themselves and connect with like-minded people. Although the prospect of initially trying the sport is daunting, new members of the team are trained by other skaters who were once in their position. Much like drag, it is a community that is structured with the

specific intent of acceptance.<sup>13</sup>

The sense of unwavering support seen in the group of drag kings is undoubtedly present in the Outlaws. The community among the skaters seemed to have a new way of presenting itself each time I met with them. Being on the team has had a clear impact on the social circles of many of the skaters, but the feelings of kinship also serve as a motivating force to keep playing. It is clear that the skaters care deeply about one another, but the reach of the derby community outside of the team itself was something that surprised me. I had not considered this perspective until it was brought up at a team meeting a few days after a publicity bout against the Los Angeles T-Birds. Dance Hall Bash-her, a veteran skater, spoke out at the meeting about a problem regarding a long-time fan. She reminded everyone that he comes to every bout and buys all of their merchandise. He uses a wheelchair and always sits in the dugout of the rink, but at the last few games his spot has been blocked by flags, leaving him to find a way to work around it. She promised the fan that she would “bitch about it the whole meeting” until a resolution was met, and she stuck to it, bringing it up multiple times until the issue was dealt with to her satisfaction. “Stop putting your shit in front of his spot.” This observation was intriguing, especially due to the fact that roller derby is not a sport that I had not considered as having a strongly committed fanbase. Dance Hall Bash-her’s demands at the meeting demonstrated the extent to which the Outlaws community goes beyond the skaters themselves. In a later meeting, she told me that the team technically has “two ‘number one’ fans...which is, like derby, kind of oxymoronic in itself.” The second fan had a more personal tie to derby as her mother skated for Redrum, a Long Beach renegade team. Dance Hall Bash-her recalled that every time the Outlaws were skating against Redrum she would show up in all Outlaws colors, and enthusiastically cheer on the Outlaws, even encouraging them to take her mother down despite her family ties to the other team. She mentioned that the fan hasn’t been to a game in a while, but the anecdote still amused her as a reminder of the support the team received from the local fanbase.<sup>14</sup>

The reach of the Outlaws to the community outside of the team also came up in an interview with LLK, as she discussed being recognized as Lil’ Lady Kill-her outside of the context of derby. When introducing herself to a woman who had complimented her skating at a local event, she instinctively led with her real name. The woman not only corrected her as Lil’ Lady Kill-her but told her that she and her family were huge fans and came to the bouts specifically to watch her. LLK explained that she was surprised by this, but it was not the first time she had been recognized and approached in public as her derby name:

I don't do this for *that*, I do this for myself. And I was shocked, and I was kind of like taken back because like that doesn't happen in life unless you're like kinda famous. And I mean obviously it's not gonna happen to me anywhere else in the world, but it just happens in my little community.<sup>15</sup>

This interaction is another example that stood out to me because it represented a distinct and tangible aspect of LLK's derby identity to not only herself but the community surrounding the team. It was also the first time a participant brought up the concept of community outside of the team itself. I had not naturally thought of a roller derby team, especially a renegade team, as something that would garner the status of a local celebrity for these women. The fact that she had experienced this type of interaction multiple times throughout her derby career changed my understanding of the team in terms of the community that surrounds it. Up until this point, the skaters had largely brought up the theme of community and kinship when discussing the relationships between themselves and the other people on the team, but this anecdote demonstrated how those bonds extend into the team's supporters. The personal and physical commitments each skater endures is made worthwhile by the connections they form with their teammates and the surrounding community.

### **Sacrifice and Commitment**

When thinking of the strength and determination of those who play roller derby, I felt that it was crucial to acknowledge the choices they make on a regular basis to prioritize the sport, ranging from the physical sacrifice of their bodies to the personal ones of their time and often money to keep the team running. The most obvious example of sacrifice is the realistic risk of injury while playing derby. Physical sacrifice is often the price to pay due to the aggressive nature of the sport. Injury plays a serious role, often being glorified in media representations of derby. While the risk undeniably adds to the excitement of the sport, the seriousness of these women continually putting their bodies on the line is inseparable from analyzing other forms of personal sacrifice and what motivates them to keep playing. The skaters follow a blurred line of control, knowing that they are in power of their bodies and how to use them to block, take and deliver hits while acknowledging that this is the extent of their power. They know that each time they step onto the rink they are vulnerable to the other team. Injury came up a few times in my initial observations of the Outlaws, many of their conversations revolving around other skaters' injuries as well as their own as they pass around each other's phones with a photo of one girl's broken wrist, joking that it "looked

like a Mickey Mouse glove with nails.” In many ways, the physical risk of derby is what motivates them to skate faster and hit harder during practice. This reminder is constantly served by the Outlaws coach. She has ingrained it in the team that the harder they hit each other at practice, the less likely they are to get injured by the opposing team during a bout. This came up as one of the newest skaters shared concerns about hitting too hard and injuring her teammates during practice, to which the coach responded, “don’t worry about that, the harder you hit them, it helps them to get stronger.”<sup>16</sup>

This interaction during practice represented the division between pain and pleasure in roller derby, and where that line is blurred. That grey area is a major point in *Sport, Gender, and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby*, an auto-ethnography by two sociologists analyzing their experiences of joining a derby team. Pavlidis and Fullagar “sought to understand the pleasure and power women were able to feel through roller derby, as well as their pain and frustration- often simultaneously in the same story” and quickly came to realize that pain is constantly intertwined with joy, and arguably a necessary experience that comes with success. When analyzing derby on a deeper level, risk of injury soon became a small price to pay, outweighed by feelings of empowerment and independence.<sup>17</sup>

Physical risk is a given in the sport. What is less frequently acknowledged are the personal sacrifices the skaters make in other aspects of their lives to create a space for derby. I was immediately struck by this while attending a team meeting early on in my research. The meeting was the first experience I had with the Outlaws that had a significant impact on my view of roller derby. This is certainly not to say that I did not admire and respect the team’s work and dedication, both physical and otherwise; but this night immediately struck me as something much bigger. As I walked into the meeting, which took place in the living room of one of the skaters’ homes, I was blindsided by my own naivete. It had not occurred to me the level of commitment these women put into keeping the team running. A folding table was set up at the front of the room, empty with the exception of a studded gavel and a stack of neatly printed and stapled agendas, enough for every person there. The meeting began with discussing bout production, which consists of people arriving to bouts early to clean the rink and decorate as well as set up the track and merchandise tables. Unable to reach a commitment of who would step up and help, the conversation then shifted to sponsorships from local businesses and skaters’ financial restraints regarding travel for away games. Spirits were high for most of the night, but the later the meeting ran, the more tired the women became. Tensions in the room ebbed and flowed as disagreements took place and LLK became increasingly drained trying to bring everyone’s attention back to the agenda. “Love me or hate me, I don’t

care. Just respect me.” This meeting, often referred to as “a shitshow” by the skaters in following interviews, led me to develop a fuller understanding of how the team functions. I developed a new perception of the Outlaws and the individual sacrifices they make in dedication to the sport.<sup>18</sup>

The issue of balancing time between derby and family life was frequently brought up by the middle-aged skaters on the team, initially coming up in my interview with Banshee, who has played for a few different WFTDA teams but joined the Outlaws nine months ago. I met Banshee briefly at the first practice I attended and had a few casual conversations with her, but her role in the project did not develop until the last few nights of my fieldwork. While the team was taking a break in the middle of a practice, she saw that I was taking notes and approached me asking if she could make a statement. I told her of course and started recording:

I’m like...a good twenty-nine years older than a lot of these girls. That’s like a whole lifetime. And sometimes I really feel it. That’s all I wanted to say. But I’m still here. And I’m still doin’ it. And I don’t think about it.<sup>19</sup>

This was a breakthrough moment in the project as it was the first time one of the skaters had approached me and told me that they had something they wanted to contribute. Banshee made it clear that she pushed through her struggles and sacrifices, and they continually motivate her to be a better skater. When she first started playing derby, she juggled the sport with caring for three children and struggled to get support from her husband. Despite this, she found ways to make it work, which sometimes meant bringing her daughter, who gave herself the derby name Sunshine, to practice with her. These conflicts, in addition to the overly aggressive nature of the team when she initially joined a few years ago, led her to quit. She said returning to the team and skating with the new group was a great decision.<sup>20</sup>

The newest skater, T, who is in the midst of creating her derby name, shared a similar story with me as she packed her gear up after practice one night. This was the first time she was able to skate with the rest of the team, a significant change from previous practices where she skated laps and did small exercises on her own. Her husband and children “aren’t sure” about her playing derby, but she refuses to quit, saying it’s the first time she’s done something solely for herself. “It’s freedom. That’s what it feels like. I’m still behind [the rest of the team] but I’m not quitting. I’m never gonna quit.” She said that she had no previous interest in sports, other than playing basketball for a short time in high school. Now, at forty-four, she wants derby to be part of a new lifestyle for her, mentioning that she had lost over one hundred

pounds and loves how strong derby makes her feel. Much like Banshee, she finds a way to make room for the sport in her life, rearranging her schedule and preparing her kids' dinners ahead of time so she can keep coming to practice.<sup>21</sup>

About a week after these interviews, I attended my final practice and began to notice the small contributions each skater regularly made for the team. This was more noticeable that night as I had the opportunity to observe them in contrast to the figure skaters that use the rink before the Outlaws. I accidentally got to the rink about forty minutes early, and the figure skaters were still in the midst of practice. They were immediately more suspicious of my presence than the derby girls, obviously eyeing me despite seeing me arrive at the end of their practice each week, which was another testament to the accepting nature of the Outlaws. The figure skaters glided around, twirling and jumping to the same pop ballad on repeat since I walked in. As their session came to a close, the figure skaters eventually left the rink and the Outlaws continued to chat as they waited for the rest of the team to show up. They talked about the packing process after the previous bout, asking each other who left knee pads and a nine-foot table that doesn't fold. The subject quickly changed to who is traveling to Tucson for the upcoming bout and how they planned to get there. While the other girls worked themselves into a circle to resolve logistical issues about the trip, Golden Snatch and Lady Valkyrie got on the rink to lay down the track. It is seemingly small and insignificant moments such as these that represent the level of personal sacrifice in roller derby, especially for a smaller team such as the Outlaws. While these sacrifices are important to acknowledge, they seem to be a small price for the reward of empowerment and autonomy.

### **Self Transformation and Expression**



The Outlaws in costume before the 2019 Halloween bout. Image courtesy of the Outlaws, official instagram @outlawrrg, website [www.outlawrrg.com](http://www.outlawrrg.com).<sup>22</sup>



The concept of transformation and self-expression is a given when it comes to roller derby. Increased self-confidence was one change that was mentioned in every interview I conducted. A major aspect of this theme was the variety of ways in which they played a part in the skaters' lives. When looking at self-expression, I was mainly interested in asking the team about their derby names. Each skater chose their own name and number, the meaning behind them typically ranging from sexual puns to plays on their real names or names that pay homage to another aspect of their identity. The idea of derby names as an alter ego held the most relevance for Lil' Lady Kill-her. LLK was the only skater to introduce herself to me as her derby name instead of her real name and I was curious as to what extent this was intentional. This led me to ask a few questions regarding self-expression in order to determine whether her derby name made her feel as though she had an extension of herself or if it felt more detached from her identity, almost as if it were a character she channels. She told me that during games she tends to adopt a flirty, highly extroverted persona that is motivated by the spectator aspect of the sport and making it entertaining to watch.

So, "LLK" I thought was clever and um, I like women so like...I flirt. I mean I am a flirt, especially out on the rink. Like in real life I'm kinda flirtatious, but out there on the rink it's like I have this persona, LLK, and I'm like more flirtatious so I kinda just wanted to like live up to that and I want my name to suit me. And I feel like it does.<sup>23</sup>

While this persona does not stray far from her real personality, she said that creating an engaging fan experience is something that was instilled in her early on in her derby career. She appears to maintain the belief that it plays a crucial role in "bringing [derby] back" to mainstream popular culture. This idea of playing into an alter ego for the sake of entertainment is one that I frequently noticed in my observations of other skaters. The performative aspect of the sport allows skaters to express themselves in a way that may not be deemed appropriate in other settings. Confidence and self-expression are synonymous, and this is felt in varying degrees with each of the skaters. As they progress in their skating careers and build self-esteem, they become more comfortable with themselves on and off the track.

The process of women exercising control over their identity through creating alternate versions of themselves is analyzed in "Strike a Pose" by Karen Downing. Downing's initially skeptical analysis of Photo Phantasies, a lone glamour photography business in a mall, demonstrated the extent to

which women's confidence is boosted when given the opportunity to dramatically change the way they portray themselves. In the initial stages of her research, Downing is staunchly against the concept of glamour shots, arguing "I know the feminist rhetoric- a woman's body is hers to do with what she pleases. And I think I believe the feminist rhetoric, or I would like to think that I do. But a Photo Phantasies makeover? What a waste of money for something that won't last."<sup>24</sup> After a few interviews, she quickly realizes that being given the opportunity to express yourself in such a tangible way creates a stronger confidence in what lies "underneath the face."<sup>25</sup> I faced a similar bias when beginning my research of the Outlaws. When thinking of self-expression with regard to derby, I had a narrow focus on analyzing derby names and whether they created an alternate sense of self for the skaters. However, as I conducted more interviews, I realized the physical and emotional transformations that took place over the course of each skater's derby career presented an entirely new way of looking at how they expressed themselves through the sport.

I was enlightened to a different form of increased self-esteem after my first interview with Dance Hall Bash-her. She does not view her derby persona as an alter ego, but feels the sport led her to view herself differently by providing a way for her to confidently play with gender expression.

Um, I am bisexual, I do have my own issues with gender and whether or not I'm somewhere in between that binary or all around the binary. Whatever that means. And so, derby is that way to kind of like be who you wanna be and it doesn't matter. I can show up with like booty shorts and a tank top with my boobs out and my hair and makeup done, and people love it. I can show up with like a snapback [hat] and Vans and like a flannel or something. So, like in a way, kind of messing with those boundaries like derby...it's kind of allowing me to play with that stuff more. So, I think that has allowed me to come out more with my own identity.

This quote solidified the extent to which derby goes against the traditional constraints of women in sport. Dance Hall Bash-her believes derby costumes give her a platform to express herself without the restraints of gender roles. This illustrates that while the game itself plays a considerable role in skaters' confidence, creating their costumes as they prepare for each bout is a key aspect of how they exercise their identity. When dressing for bouts, skaters have the power to play up femininity and glamour or choose a more camp, androgynous look to fit the night's theme. As described in Suzanne Becker's

dissertation on the sport, this disregard for gendered appearances is unique to derby. In mainstream sports, “if women participate in athletics, they must ‘emphasize’ femininity through having long hair, wearing makeup, and wearing soft, feminine style clothing.”<sup>26</sup> While a few of the skaters disputed gender as an aspect of how they view themselves in regard to the sport, traditional perceptions of gender remain largely irrelevant in roller derby. Skaters are empowered by the subtle ways in which the sport allows them to move within or outside of the gender binary. It is a platform for them to build confidence in themselves and their abilities, a transformation that ties directly to how they express themselves on and off the track.

Roller derby is a truly distinctive combination of sport and leisure, highlighting aggression and athleticism by creating a fast-paced, enthralling event for spectators. The loose structure of renegade roller derby specifically is a further reflection of the freedom the sport offers women by enabling them to express themselves without the restraints of a strict rulebook. Understanding the value of the sport is not in finding the true meaning of it, but acknowledging the layered complexities contributed by those who play it. While the performative aspect of derby is what first meets the eye, behind the brawls, there is a warm and welcoming community that directly resists the historical tie between masculinity and sport. It is not only the sport for women who hate sports, but a space for those who want to do something solely for themselves. Whether it is through their chosen names and costumes or what they do on the rink, roller derby provides a tangible way for women to express creativity and control over their identities.

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# They Shall Persevere: Orange County's Preservation of Western Armenian Cultural Identity

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AMST 401T: Ethnography and American Culture

This was written for Dr. Carrie Lane's American Culture through Ethnography course in Fall 2019. Students were asked to locate, interview, describe, and analyze a culture on which they conduct their ethnography. This ethnographic paper explores the Friday Night Armenian School in the small, affluent community of Laguna Hills, California. There, volunteers teach pre-school through elementary school-aged children Western Armenian culture, language, and religion. This program is one of many put forth by the non-profit foundation, Armenian Relief Society: Karni Chapter. Recent generations of Armenian Americans are more easily assimilating to American culture and language because of the diaspora following the 1915 Armenian genocide. Based on my research, observations, and interviews from parents, teachers, and volunteers, I assert that Karni Chapter attempts to preserve Western Armenian culture by passing on language, religion, identity, and culture to their youth by developing this foundation early on in their Friday Night School program. However, there are factors working against this community. By enrolling their students in Friday Night School, parents of Karni Chapter look to resolve these issues by creating a space that is devoted to preserving Western Armenian culture and providing the foundations of an Armenian identity for the youth of Orange County.

"I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature unread, music unheard, and prayers no more unanswered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia."

-William Saroyan<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

“*Parev, inchbes ek?*” each teacher greets students who enter Friday Night School in the small affluent community of Laguna Hills, California.<sup>1</sup> Students must respond in Armenian, and most do. Some students cannot understand the teacher’s question, and respond with a mixture of English and Armenian, saying, “*parev*, good.” This simple greeting of “hello, how are you?” is vital to the preservation of the Western Armenian language. The Friday Night Armenian School teaches pre-school through elementary school-aged children Western Armenian culture, language, and religion. This is only one of the goals of the Armenian Relief Society: Karni Chapter, which derives its name from a village in Armenia.<sup>2</sup> Established in Mission Viejo, California in April of 1993, the chapter looks to serve the Armenian community of South Orange County.<sup>3</sup> The largest part of the organization is the weekly Friday Night School in Laguna Hills. In addition, the organization holds various fundraisers which raise money to send to women’s shelters and orphanages in Armenia.<sup>4</sup> “The main goal of Armenian Relief Society is children and mothers. So, we help orphanages in Armenia and schools. We make sure we have schools, which is even more important now because Western Armenian [language is endangered],” the president of Karni Chapter explained.<sup>5</sup> Because of the Armenian diaspora, the Armenian American identity is disconnected, as later generations are further removed from the genocide. From my interviews, observations, and research findings, I argue that the Karni Chapter attempts to preserve its culture by passing on language, religion, and culture by developing this foundation for their youth early on. However, there are factors working against this community: their location is far removed from Armenia, the Western Armenian language is endangered, and the children do not experience a sense of Armenian community in their everyday public school. The community looks to resolve this by creating a space for youth that is devoted to teaching and preserving Armenian culture.

To understand the school and its purpose, it is necessary to understand two events of particular historical significance to the Armenian community. The first is that Armenia recognized Christianity as a state religion in 301 A.D. through the Armenian Apostolic Church, leading to the recognition of Armenia as a culturally advanced society and the creation of the Armenian alphabet in the fifth century to translate the Bible.<sup>6</sup> The community I interviewed expressed to me the importance of Christianity. It is interwoven in the Armenian culture to the point where various Armenian tourist locations are also Christian pilgrimage sites. The second event is the 1915 genocide, which was carried out by the Ottoman Empire (known today as Turkey) against the Armenian people.<sup>7</sup> The genocide killed over one million Armenians and resulted in a diaspora, which is the dispersion of people from their

homeland after a genocide.<sup>8</sup> The Armenian Americans I interviewed for my study are the direct result of the diaspora; they are in America today because they are the descendants of the survivors of the genocide.

This paper focuses on Western Armenian Americans located in South Orange County. Based on my research, the majority of the Armenian American population in Orange County is made up of Western Armenians, whereas other parts of California such as Glendale and Fresno are made up of Eastern Armenians. According to a recent study published in 2018, there are currently 1.5 million Armenians living in America today and about 8,500 Armenians immigrate to America each year to escape war in the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> I would like to emphasize that the Western Armenian language is classified as endangered because of a direct result of the 1915 genocide. For example, Eastern Armenian is currently spoken in Armenia as well as by Armenian immigrants and refugees.<sup>10</sup> However, Western Armenian is typically spoken by those who previously were located in Turkey prior to the 1915 genocide, but now reside in diasporic areas.<sup>11</sup> The main difference in usage of these two languages is that Eastern Armenian language uses more consonants than the Western Armenian Language.<sup>12</sup> My interlocutors communicated to me that although Eastern and Western Armenians spoke different vernaculars, all were considered to be one united Armenia language.

### **Methodology**

For my ethnographic study, I observed two Friday Night Classes and the Karni Chapter Fall Festival Fundraiser. I conducted nine interviews with members of the Karni Chapter Community. I spoke with one parent individually and a total of six parents whose children attend Friday Night School in a focus group setting. The ages of the parents I interviewed ranged from mid-to-late thirties and forties. The children I observed in a classroom setting for the study were between the ages of three to twelve, and no children were interviewed for this study in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I also interviewed one of the Friday Night elementary school teachers who was in her early sixties. In addition, I interviewed volunteers from Karni Chapter, including a Board Member serving on a task force between the Karni Chapter and UC Irvine Armenian Studies Language Program, and the President of Karni Chapter. The Karni Chapter Board Members I interviewed ranged in age from mid-twenties to mid-fifties. For my study, the interlocutors I interviewed identified as Armenian American and all spoke varying amounts of Western Armenian. I curated my observations in real time, from there I analyzed my findings from my observations and interviews using secondary sources to illuminate how this community is actively trying to preserve their culture, language, and religion.



### **Observations: Friday Night Class**

As I drove down to Laguna Hills, CA for the first time, I quickly noticed how affluent the community was, full of manicured lawns, large houses on hills, and high-end boutiques. The school was located right off the 5-freeway in a business park with a real estate office, American Automobile Association (AAA), and psychiatrists' offices. During the day, the space is known as the Futures Academy, a tutoring company specializing in various subjects including math, science, reading, history, and even music. The space is large and open but along each wall it is divided into small enclosed individual rooms. Each room represents a different school subject where individual one-on-one tutoring takes place. In the large space, there is an open carpeted area in the back, while in the middle and towards the front there are a mixture of tables, chairs, and couches open for group tutoring. This open space makes a perfect atmosphere for the Friday Night classes, because it creates an area for the students to openly interact and is large enough to accommodate all of Karni Chapter's students.<sup>13</sup>

Around five o'clock in the evening, parents start to trickle in with their students for the two-hour class. The children immediately begin playing with the various toys around the room including a chess set, the white boards, a deck of cards, or drawing with crayons and paper. Parents greet one another and gather in the kitchen area there they will spend the next two hours preparing a snack for the children and catching up. The children are between the ages of three and twelve. There are two classes being held tonight, pre-school and elementary school.<sup>14</sup>

The class begins around 5:20pm when both teachers and the principal have arrived. The teacher for the elementary students, Milena, starts with a meditation. Milena is in her mid-to-late sixties. She wears a long linen maxi dress and leather sandals. On her wrists she wears about twenty or so thin gold bracelets. Her hair is wavy with blonde highlights that shine through her natural black waves. Milena instructs the students to take ten deep breaths "in and out." This is likely done to sooth some younger children who are distressed after their parents leave for the kitchen while they attend class. After the meditation, Milena instructs the students to gather in a half circle around two students, Milena and the principal, Tamar, who stand facing the group. Tamar is no-nonsense when it comes to teaching, and makes it known to the kids. She is in her mid-forties, and her dark hair is styled in a short bob. She wears linen pants and a cotton shirt which drape off her body in a fashionable way. She likes to drink an iced Starbucks coffee whenever she gets a free moment.<sup>15</sup>

While standing, the four facing the group begin with an Armenian Christian prayer, "Hayr Soorp," starting with the sign of the cross on their

forehead, chest, and shoulders. After prayer, the two students standing by the teachers pull out two handheld Armenian flags, and the other children facing them place their right hands over their hearts. In Western Armenian, they triumphantly sing the Armenian National Anthem, the two Armenian flags waving proudly by the students holding them. Afterwards, the two lead students join the group, and all the students are instructed to sit and face Milena as she begins asking them questions in Armenian. I am told that the questions range about how their week was; how their family members are doing; and what they did last weekend. The students must answer in Armenian; if students cannot, others around them try and help out.<sup>16</sup>

Milena explains that it is Armenian Culture Month, meaning they will be learning various songs and cultural objects from Armenian culture. Students are taught “Hey Jan Ghapama,” by Harout Pamboukjian. They will be performing the song at Karni Chapter’s Autumn Festival Fundraiser. The song speaks about the traditional dish of rice, dried fruit, cinnamon, nutmeg, nuts and cooking it all in a giant pumpkin. This is traditionally done around holidays or for family gatherings.<sup>17</sup> The students also learn a song about the creation of the Armenian alphabet, Mesrob Mashdotz, “Ay pen kim tah yech zah.” This song brings a lot of fanfare with the children because there is clapping and hand dancing that goes along with the song.<sup>18</sup>

Shortly after this, the children are split into two groups: elementary and pre-school. The pre-school group remains on the carpeted area with the pre-school teacher, while the elementary students move to the tabled seating area with Milena and Tamar. The pre-school students participate in various exercises that involve: learning nursery rhymes in Armenian; counting in Armenian; listening to a children’s book read by the teacher in Armenian; and coloring a picture of the weekly Armenian cultural object. The week I attended they learned about pomegranates. They touched the fruit, ate its seeds, learned about the branches and leaves, and colored a photo of a pomegranate.<sup>19</sup>

Milena took the more advanced elementary school students and Tamar took the rest of the elementary students who have recently transitioned out of the pre-school group. The students use workbooks with various exercises that highlight the Western Armenian alphabet. Both groups advance through the workbook at the child’s own pace.<sup>20</sup>

On the day I observed, Tamar took a different approach to teach the students about geography. Tamar begins the lesson once the students quiet down and asks abruptly what phrases the students want to learn in Armenian. When student’s responses are sparse, she decides to hand out multiple xeroxed copies of a European map from Google Maps. Tamar prompted the students to find Armenia on the map, and what countries border it. One

older student in the group can easily identify where Armenia is located on the map. After finding Armenia on the map, Tamar asked the children to identify where they are located on another world map she hands out to the table. After locating Orange Country on a larger world map, she asks, "Can you see how far away we are from the homeland?" Continuing with the geography lesson, some students continued looking for the bordering countries to Armenia, and the older student from earlier quickly crosses out Turkey. "Why are you crossing out Turkey?" Tamar asked him, "We don't pretend Turkey doesn't exist." The older student began explaining with his neighbors why he crossed out Turkey. He explained to them very plainly that he wants Armenia to take land back from the Persians. Ignoring the student making comments, Tamar spoke to the entire group, "I want you to study the map. What is north, south, east, and west. Can you imagine not knowing your neighbor's name?"<sup>21</sup>

These geography lessons and teaching where Armenia is located in relation to Orange County, provides a foundation for conversation about the diaspora. It is clear that there was a lesson plan for this day when Tamar had the maps printed out. This lesson was meant to begin foundational work since these students have recently transferred out of the pre-school section, a groundwork to talk about the diaspora and eventually the genocide. By ignoring the student who crossed out Turkey, Tamar perhaps suggests it is too early to teach these students about the genocide. Additionally, it can be interpreted that some parents teach their young children about the genocide because this student already knew about it, whereas the others did not. Tamar made sure the conversation remained on task and set a foundation to talk about diaspora at a later date (possibly with family) without directly addressing the genocide.<sup>22</sup>

After the geography lesson, I had the opportunity to interview a focus group of six parents consisting of five mothers and one father before snack time with the kids. I asked them general questions about how long they had attended Friday Night School and why it was important to them. One mother spoke up immediately, "they [the students] have more of an identity. My daughter can explain to her friends, 'we are Armenian, we speak Armenian at home.'"<sup>23</sup> Most parents nodded in agreement; another mother compared the community her child was building now to the one on screen like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002). Two parents noticed their kids singing the Armenian songs and nursery rhymes in the car on the way to school. The sentiments of the parents and my own observations echo Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Scholar Arlene Voski Avakian's autoethnography about growing up Armenian American:

When you met someone, you were immediately asked about

your nationality, if your name did not clearly indicate your origins. I dreaded hearing the question, “What are you?” from other kids because when I answered “Armenian,” the response was either a blank stare or more often another question, “What’s that?” I was hard put to answer what Armenian was. It was who I was and what I had known all my life, but how could it be defined? I knew that my mother came from Turkey my father from Persia, but they were definitely not Turks or Persians. “Where was Armenia on the map?” I asked my mother, and she told that it was in the northeast corner of Turkey, part of what was called Russia—I don’t remember hearing the name *Soviet Union* until I was in college.<sup>24</sup>

In this quote, Avakian illustrates two things: how important it is to be able to identify the difference between being Armenian and the neighboring countries, and the ability to locate your identity within Armenia. By creating a space with the Friday Night School, the parents are hoping to not only develop their child’s language comprehension but also their sense of community and Armenian identity. The Friday Night School is thus intended to teach students about Armenia (as a geography lesson does), teach them the Armenian language, create a connection with the homeland, and help locate them in the local Armenian community.<sup>25</sup>

### **Observations: Autumn Festival**

I attended the Karni Chapter Autumn Festival Fundraiser which took place at the end of October 2019, in the community center next to Forty Martyrs Armenian Church in Santa Ana, California. The festival was to raise funds for the Friday Night School to continue serving the Southern Orange County Armenian community. Multiple interlocutors told me how important this festival was to raise funds for the continuation of the community.

I was one of the first to arrive, so I take a seat in the back-left corner of the room. Loud Armenian drumming music is playing in the background as people begin to gather in the community center. There was a total of twelve round tables, with seats for ten people at each. The room is decorated in fall décor and the room smells of cinnamon and nutmeg due to the Ghapamas (Armenian pumpkin recipe) cooking in the kitchen. In the middle of the room is a small dance floor and a traveling electric piano with a microphone set up.<sup>26</sup>

As time passes, more families begin to fill the room until nearly all the seats are filled. Familiar faces of children and parents from Friday Night

School greet me with a smile or wave. Eventually, a nice elderly couple ask if their family can join my table and I welcome them. The family consists of the elderly husband and wife, their daughter and son-in-law, and their three grandchildren, two boys and a girl ranging in age from infant to elementary school. The family shares personal photos and experiences with me about their recent four-month long trip to Armenia. They explain to me, Armenia is somewhere they return to often and that they feel an instant connection with the country. Many of my interlocutors echoed this sentiment when I asked if they had ever traveled to Armenia.<sup>27</sup>

Before the Ghapama is served, the president of Karni Chapter, Nora, gives a quick speech about why this particular food is important. Nora, who is in her mid-fifties, dresses professionally to affirm her presidential title, wearing a stylish emerald green jumpsuit with a blonde bob cut, and fashionable diamond jewelry. Nora speaks eloquently about how the Ghapama is usually cooked around holidays that bring family together such as Christmas or New Years. The Ghapama is shared during celebrations such as weddings or anniversaries. The pumpkin is the earth, rice represents the people, and the nuts and dried fruit represent the Armenian faith. The cinnamon and nutmeg give the dish an extra kick of sweet taste. The people at my table inform me that this version is meant to be a dessert, because there are other versions that can be served as a main course with more savory options.<sup>28</sup> After explaining this, an Armenian priest gives a speech of what I could only assume were Armenian prayers.<sup>29</sup>

Afterward, Nora let Tamar and Milena lead the children from Friday Night School in the songs they had practiced specifically for this. They start saying the “Hayr Soorp” prayer, followed by the Armenian National Anthem, “Ay pen kim tah yech zah,” and finally with “Hey Jan Ghapama.” The songs are sung alongside a parent who plays the traveling piano. About half the number of students that normally attend Friday Night School are present for the performance. While the students perform, parents from all around the room get out of their seats and stand as close to the performance as possible to capture the moment on their cell phones.<sup>30</sup>

After the performance, twelve women bring out a Ghapama to each table, while dancing to the original rendition of “Hey Jan Ghapama.” Almost simultaneously, the room stands, claps, and sings along with the track. When our Ghapama comes to our table, it is immediately sliced open, and I am hit with steam and the sweet smell of cinnamon. The elderly gentleman at my table scoops a generous portion of rice and pumpkin on my plate before I can tell him otherwise. The pumpkin is very tender and sweet, easy to eat, while the rice reminds me of a warm churro. Before I can get seconds, there is a line forming, and we realize they are serving other traditional Armenian and

Mediterranean food. For the main course, there is rosemary chicken, dol-mathakia (rice wrapped in grape leaves, dipped in olive oil), hummus and pita bread, pickled vegetables, and baklava for dessert. There are multiple anonymous donations announced while we eat that are valued from two hundred to one thousand dollars. By donating to the Karni Chapter, the community displays its commitment towards the continuing education of the youth. The donors do not care to receive fame, glory or recognition for their monetary sacrifice, instead, these donors were building a financial foundation for future Armenian American generations. Without these funds, the educational programs of the Karni Chapter sponsors would not be able to succeed, which is likely why people felt compelled to donate.<sup>31</sup>

### **Importance of Language**

While studying the Karni Chapter and especially after conducting my interviews, it became very apparent to me that language plays a huge role in the community. During my first observation of Friday Night Schools, I was informed that the Western Armenian language is recognized as an endangered language by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). At the time, I did not have any comprehension of what this meant. In *Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology*, Laura M. Ahearn defines endangered languages as “those languages that, although they are still being learned by children, will cease to be learned by children in the next century if present conditions persist.”<sup>32</sup> Here it is important to recognize that as a result of the 1915 genocide, the Western Armenian language is endangered. As Milena explained,

It is very important for us to teach our language because the language is the essence of our survival. And why I am saying this, because during the 1915 genocide the parents didn't have anything. They didn't have anything to wear, no shoes, nothing. They were in the desert, they told [their children] how to write in the sand.<sup>33</sup>

Here Milena shows the difficulties in the preservation of language, as the Western Armenian culture struggled to preserve language even during the Armenian genocide. By “showing children how to write in the sand,” they showed the importance of preserving the language as a part of preserving the culture. If the language is preserved, the culture is preserved.

Milena continues with a small story to illustrate how deeply important language is especially after the genocide and resulting diaspora:

The Turks massacred us. And after massacring, Atatürk, their father, who modernized everything. He called everybody, all the politicians and all the diplomats and he had one question.

And he said. “How come we killed everybody, we massacred everybody, these Armenians are still attached to each other?”

Nobody has found the answer, except a German Anatomist who used to teach in Turkish University. He said, “I have the answer!” Atatürk asked for the answer.

[The German Anatomist] said, “do you remember during the war, [when] you wanted to kill [everybody], but we Germans told you no deport them! You have to take out their roots, you have to clean from the roots. So, you deported. You used even their church walls as asphalts, or you make the streets with their church. If you remember the Germans, they didn’t have any guns, any ammunition. [So] you went and brought all the bells from the churches. Some of the bells were very rich with precious stones, some of them were very small, some of them had inscriptions, some of them were culturally inscribed. But you know you forgot one small bell. In a very far village underground you forgot to bring that. And you know with all these you melted the bells and we were able to make our guns. [But] you forgot that small bell.”

*Milena pauses.*

And Atatürk says, “what was that bell? What does that bell have to do with their sticking together, loving each other, loving their country?”

*Milena pauses again, now more deliberately and quietly with emphasis she says:*

[The German Anatomist] says, “that is a bell that when it rings, whoever understands that ringing language, they say—oh its ringing. Whoever [hears it] could be somebody very near or very far. It could be that somebody is very near but doesn’t understand that bell sound. It won’t mean anything

to that person. Some people will be very far, but we understand that ringing—we say, 'oh the bell is ringing.' But some people also will be very far but don't understand they will say, 'my heart is feeling something.'"

Atatürk says, "what is this?"

*Again, this time with strong quiet emotion, Milena continues:*

He says "you forgot to kill their language. You forgot to take that language from them. That is why they still stick."<sup>34</sup>

Milena's story shows how significant the Western Armenian language is to the Armenian spirit. When the Armenians were being massacred, the language is what kept them together. It is what kept them "strong and united." The language is the bell that can be rung and if it is spoken far and wide, those who understand the language will know they are connected to each other. The story also depicts the experience of Armenian diaspora, because those who are far away and know the "bells call" still understand and feel something in their heart for Armenia. These are the descendants of displaced refugees from the 1915 Armenian genocide. By understanding the language and continuing to pass it on for generations they are carrying on the culture and traditions of Armenia wherever they are in the world.

Part of the diasporic experience is assimilation, and the process of assimilation also threatens the survival of language and cultural practices. Milena ends her bell story with a warning about this generation. "That [language] is how important it is for us. This language kept us going. And unfortunately, a generation like this we are against the current [she points at kids playing very loudly behind her]."<sup>35</sup> By gesturing to the children behind her Milena is indicating these children have assimilated to American culture and the language. This idea is similar to Anna Manukyan's study of Armenian Americans in Boulder, Colorado:

The most difficult thing in the diaspora is to keep the language because assimilation to the host country language occurs quickly and unconsciously, especially in childhood, when children's exposure and adaptation to different languages happens easily. Despite the loss of language, other characteristics of ethnic identity such as religion, self-consciousness, memory, traditions, all bonds with the homeland, are retained in the third generation [...].<sup>36</sup>



Manukayan's work illustrates what Milena communicated in her story. The language survived the genocide but is currently in jeopardy due to the current generation's assimilation into their "host country's culture." This caution is something that was not only emphasized by Milena, but by Nora and Lucy as well. Seeing that multiple people who are second and third generation descendants from genocide survivors repeat the same warning means that this is a very real threat currently facing the community.

Nora spoke with me about her fears for her daughter Jacqueline's future children, who will most likely not speak Armenian. "The ones in Armenia will always speak Armenian, but the western ones, like after Jacqueline, her children will not speak Armenian. And so on, so they are trying to preserve that at UC Irvine right now."<sup>37</sup> Nora's comment about Jacqueline shows how the older generations recognize the importance of passing on language and culture, while Jacqueline's generation is more deeply affected by the diaspora because future generations continue to assimilate to their host country their ties to the homeland weaken. Nora's daughter, Jacqueline is in her late twenties, grew up in America, specifically Orange County, and she is very immersed in American culture. This is not to say Jacqueline has not lost her Armenian identity but instead she holds a dual identity, Armenian American. Older generations are more connected with survivors of the genocide because they knew them, whereas current and forthcoming generations will hear the survivors' stories secondhand. Nora explains this idea of the connection to the survivors of the genocide:

The reason why Armenians are so stuck up on [...] not forgetting their roots is because we are all genocide survivors! And we bear the scars. Even though our grandparents are dead, their stories and what they went through it hurts us until now. I think it will never go away.<sup>38</sup>

The generations before Nora were closer to the effects of genocide and knew more genocide survivors, therefore they identify more closely with the homeland. Second and third generation descendants of survivors are more closely connected to the "scars of the genocide." Fourth generation descendants and onward might be more disconnected due to the passage of time, and the unlikelihood of meeting a survivor and hearing their story firsthand. This is the worry Nora has for Jacqueline's children. Without knowing about the genocide firsthand, they will lose part of the Armenian identity and therefore may not want to learn the language.

This fear is not unfounded. As another Friday Night School parent,

Lucy told me, “in my daughter’s case, she doesn’t speak it [Armenian] but she understands.”<sup>39</sup> Lucy is in her forties, she has long wavy dark hair, wears about ten gold bracelets on one hand, and wore dark jeans and a dark, flowy blouse. Lucy’s daughter is in the elementary school at Friday Night School. Although she has been attending other schools similar to Friday night school for five years, this is her first year with the Karni Chapter. Lucy’s comment about her daughter illustrates Nora’s and Milena’s fears for current and future generations may very well be coming to fruition. By only understanding the language and not speaking it, Lucy’s daughter is inadvertently contributing to the endangerment of the Western Armenian language. For these reasons, Lucy brings her daughter to Friday Night School in the hopes of changing this. Like other parents I interviewed in my focus group, Lucy expressed to me the importance of attending Friday Night School and learning the language:

[It is] important to keep the language alive, [...] for her to know she’s not the only odd person. [To say,] ‘What’s this Armenian?’ And not relate. She sees everybody that’s like her, they look just like her, they speak English more than they speak Armenian and you know she can relate.<sup>40</sup>

Lucy and the other parents emphasized that their students were building community while simultaneously learning the Armenian language. She wants her daughter to have a foundation and a community rooted in Armenian culture. This will help her situate herself later in life within the Armenian community and maintain her Armenian identity.

Cultural historian William Safran discusses this idea of finding cultural identity after experiencing diaspora in his article, “The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective:”

Among the controversial aspects of diaspora maintenance has been language, memory, and religion as elements of collective identity and ingredients of cultural reproduction. In most cases, the homeland language has disappeared from usage in face of the pressure of the dominant language, so that both homeland orientations and cultural reproduction have continued in the host land language.<sup>41</sup>

Nora’s fear for Jacqueline’s and following generations’ children is that they will not have a connection to Armenian culture and language because the disconnection to the homeland as a result of the diaspora. As Safran points out,

the “host land’s language and culture” dominates after a diaspora, just as Nora and Lucy fear. This is why individuals like Nora, Milena, and Tamar are so passionate about passing the culture onto the current generation (pre-school and elementary students). They want them to have a connection to the homeland, the culture, and language. This is the purpose for the Karni Chapter’s Friday Night school.

### **Religion and its Relationship with the Community**

Religion is a large part of the Armenian cultural identity because Armenia recognized Christianity as a state religion in the fourth century.<sup>42</sup> One of the most vocal parents to speak on this was Davit, the only father I interviewed for my research project. He is in his mid-to-late forties and is an active participant in the Friday Night School activities including attending fundraisers, attending Friday Night School, and being active in his church community. The times I saw him, he always wore a collared shirt, khakis, and sensible shoes, aside from one Friday night where he wore shorts, flip-flops, and a t-shirt. I believe it is important to recognize that Davit is the only male I interviewed for this project. I saw a total of three fathers present at Friday Night School; the majority of those present were mothers. Additionally, all the volunteers for the organization I noticed were female. This distinction is important because it reflects the responsibility the Armenian women take on in order to preserve the culture and language. In “‘We Don’t Sleep Around Like White Girls Do’: Family, Culture, and Gender in Filipina American Lives,” Ethnic Studies scholar Yen Le Espiritu argues that women carry the burden of passing on culture and language:

Because womanhood is idealized as the repository of tradition, the norms that regulate women’s behaviors become a means of determining and defining group status and boundaries. As a consequence, the burdens and complexities of cultural representation fall most heavily on immigrant women and their daughters.<sup>43</sup>

Espiritu’s argument about immigrant women and their daughters feeling a duty to pass on culture is likely why there were more mothers for the Friday Night School and female volunteers available to interview. It is for this reason that Davit’s interview was important to my research. His parental involvement is different from the community norm, which is typically female.

Davit became very passionate when he spoke with me about passing Armenian culture onto the next generation through the Christian faith. When asked about the benefits of the Friday Night School program, Davit

began to explain to me the importance of language, culture, religion, and the passage of it all along to his student:

Put it in the larger context, Armenians have had to live in other societies. Armenians in Russia, in Poland, in all kinds of societies as a minority. They [the Armenians] preserve their culture much like the Jews by their religion which is [...] the first nation to commit to Christianity. I lived in a place where there are very few Armenians, but my mom taught me how to speak Armenian, how to read, and write Armenian. It was the only language spoken inside the house. [...] If this culture is going to survive for the next couple hundred, thousand years it's only going to survive if people teach their children how to speak it and most Armenians observe the Christian faith. Those are the two kind of elements of preserving it.<sup>44</sup>

Davit explains here something I heard from many interlocutors during my study—the importance of the Christian religion is similar to that of preserving the language. By comparing Armenians to the Jewish community, he is comparing Armenians to a similar group that was oppressed and massacred because of their religion, but also persevered in spite of that experience as well. Susan P. Pattie discusses this in her piece “Longing and Belonging: Issues of Homeland in Armenian Diaspora” she writes:

The church itself [...] seen everywhere and key symbol of Armenian culture, is highly contested. In the U.S., where generations have now worked to build edifices, congregations, and particular divisions of communities, new waves of immigrants from the Near East and Hayastan are insisting that the language of the church (and its social organizations) must only be Armenian—and that those American Armenians who do not speak the language (most) are not really or fully Armenian.<sup>45</sup>

Here we can understand that language and religion are intertwined in the Armenian community. New Armenian immigrants coming to America want to hold onto their traditional Christian values. They do this by creating barriers which assimilated Armenian Americans cannot adhere to because of the dissociation from their homeland. Language acts as a barrier to cultural preservation through a lost connection within community gathering places

such as local churches. As Pattie points out, if Armenian Americans lose this connection to the local church, they also lose the connection to social organizations within the church. This disconnection impedes current and future generations building and preserving their Armenian identity, as they often had to identify more closely to their host land's identity.

For these reasons the teachers and Friday Night School teach religion and various Christian songs that pass on cultural values. In my interview with Milena, I was informed that, besides the prayer "Hayr Soorp," they also teach the students a song about Mount Ararat. This is the mountain that Noah's Ark was said to have landed on after the forty-day flood. Milena sang some of the song to me:

[sings] "Ararat, we miss you Ararat, our beautiful Ararat, our heart!" [ends song]

You know that Ararat is now in the soil that is now captured by the Turks. It is on the lands where it is no more our lands at this point. [...] Ararat is our symbol, [...] if you read the Bible, it says that Noah's Ark stopped on a mountain which is Mount Ararat.<sup>46</sup>

Teaching the students a song about Mount Ararat connects the students directly with the culture, the homeland, and the genocide. Growing up knowing this song, the students now understand the importance of Christianity in relation to the Armenian culture and history. From this, students recognize the importance of where Mount Ararat is located near the homeland but also how it is now occupied by Turkey. Finally, through learning this song, students will begin to question the occupation, leading to discussion of the genocide. For this community, religion plays a meaningful role in the preservation of culture and language as this song not only expresses religious values but also communicates a significant historical struggle of their people.

### **Generational Difference**

Jacqueline is one of the Karni Chapter community board members sitting on a task force to help fundraise for the Armenian Studies Language Program at the University of California, Irvine. Jacqueline is in her mid-twenties, has mid-length, straight, blonde hair and she wears professional business attire and fashionable jewelry. She is a first-generation college student and the first in her family to earn both a bachelor's and master's degree. It is because of her background with universities that she was encouraged to fill this vacancy on the board by her mother, Nora. Jacqueline is in charge of finding donors, promoting the Armenian Studies program among her

local community, helping build fundraising events at UC Irvine, updating the chapter on various projects, and being a Karni representative on the task force. Of the fourth-generation survivors, Jacqueline is the first to volunteer with Karni and she is doing so because she is committed to the importance of tradition, as she explains:

Keeping up with our traditions. Wherever you are in America, whatever state you are living in or whatever country you are in, if you are Armenian, you are still connected to the culture and the homeland. That's why when you go back to Armenia you feel like you've reached your homeland. So, keeping up with the foods the music. The life of raising your children in the church and their traditions like baptism, marriage, and unity. All those traditions keep the culture alive. Making sure the children know the language and passing that on, wherever you are if you are practicing that, you are tied to the culture.<sup>47</sup>

Jacqueline attributes the importance of maintaining your Armenian identity no matter where you are located in the world. She explains the importance of passing on religion, language, music, and food, which are all things Karni promotes in its Friday Night School. In our interview, she told me her mother had always been connected to the Armenian Relief Society growing up, solidifying Jacqueline's desire to become connected to the community as soon as she could. Hearing Jacqueline's connections to Armenia in our interview supports the idea of dualism in Armenian American identity. Jacqueline's connection to Armenia was very strong, but I noticed her use of the word "homeland" which made me understand the duality of her identity. The genocide disconnected her from Armenia, and the diaspora gave her the Armenian American identity, which she has to navigate anytime she chooses to return to the "homeland." Jacqueline has to navigate this duality when working within the Karni Chapter. The dual identity Jacqueline expresses to me is something she is constantly aware of and also something she actively works to maintain in her life because her cultural connection is important. Through her role in Karni Chapter and UC Irvine, Jacqueline actively works to create connections of Armenian cultural traditions for future generations.

Passing this responsibility to the next generation is important for Nora and Milena, as is evident from their interviews. Both expressed how they wanted to see the younger generations of today take on leadership positions of tomorrow. They are volunteering and raising money to lay a foundation which will hopefully set up a fruitful future for the next generation of

leaders. I saw this firsthand at the Autumn Fundraiser where people were willing to contribute anonymous donations of up to one-thousand dollars towards the Friday Night School.

The most significant difference between Nora, Milena, and Jacqueline's interviews was when I asked them to draw me a timeline of what they believed were important dates in Armenian history. Both Milena and Nora's history rooted in religious, cultural, and historical significance that could typically be taught by a textbook. This included dates around Noah's Ark; the confirmation of Christianity as a state religion in 301 A.D.; the 1915 Armenian Genocide; and Armenian independence from communism in 1991. The contrast was with Jacqueline's timeline, which began with the Armenian independence from communism in 1991; focused on technology of the 2000s; and ended with the current Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, who is popular among youth. These stark contrasts show that the Armenian community is growing and changing. With Jacqueline focusing her timeline starting with independence from communism, it shows the generational difference moving away from persecution and towards freedom. By looking towards advancing technology, this exemplifies the importance Jacqueline's generation places on democratization of tourism and digital technology. Jacqueline's interview shows the focus the next generation has towards future developments rather than an oppressive past. By navigating through her own struggle against assimilation with consciousness of dual identity, Jacqueline communicates the necessity for preservation in a different way that is more understandable to future generations. That struggle for cultural preservation changes just as generations do.

### **Conclusion**

The Karni Chapter has taken measures that look to preserve their culture through the passage of language, religion, and cultural traditions to the youth of today in Southern Orange County. They do this by teaching language through various workbooks, songs and nursery rhymes, prayers, cultural objects, and geography. By passing these traditions to pre-school and elementary school students, they are laying a foundation for building a community and a cultural identity tied to Armenia. They look to expand this foundation by partnering with UC Irvine's Armenian Studies Language Program to teach Western Armenian to college students.

The factors working against them are strong. They are located far away from their homeland due to the genocide and resulting diaspora. For Armenians in America, this means that America's cultural and language influence is more established through attendance at American public schools. Armenian culture is typically not taught on American campuses and the

community is faced with another factor that disconnects younger generations from Armenian identity. This disconnect means students are more likely to be unable to create communities and cannot have a shared Armenian identity at public American schools. In addition, if Armenian students are speaking English more than they speak Armenian, they are likely excluded from social engagements at their local Armenian Church, which holds almost all events in Armenian.

The number of obstacles facing the leaders of the Armenian Relief Society: Karni Chapter does not deter its members from upholding their mission. Instead, community members are more inspired to organize and fundraise to create a foundation for their children's future. The hope Karni Chapter leaders have for surviving generations is practical, but they continue to fight to preserve their cultural traditions, language, and religion. Many interlocutors showed the perseverance of the Armenian spirit in their interviews. They affirm William Saroyan's quote from this paper's beginning, "go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. [...] For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia."<sup>48</sup> This is the spirit that perseveres, that weathers the storm, that builds and rebuilds no matter what lies before them.



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# Creating Identity

*“We must recognize and nurture the creative parts of each other without always understanding what will be created.”*

-Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*

*“I hope to spend more time creating and less time on the hamster wheel of sustaining visibility.”*

-Roxane Gay, *Unlocking Us with Brené Brown*



# P.A.U.S.E.: Finding Peace in a Pandemic

Katherine Morales, art by Nicole Dean

AMST 403: Creative Work in American Studies

P.A.U.S.E. came to life in Dr. Golub's American Studies 403, Creative Work in American Studies. With the onset of Lockdown in Spring of 2020 students were given the opportunity to cultivate creative works while utilizing assigned materials from class sessions. This creative work is my final project for the course as well as my own personal response to the beginning of the Pandemic.



C.O.V.I.D.-19  
Clean Out Various Items Daily  
for 19 minutes.

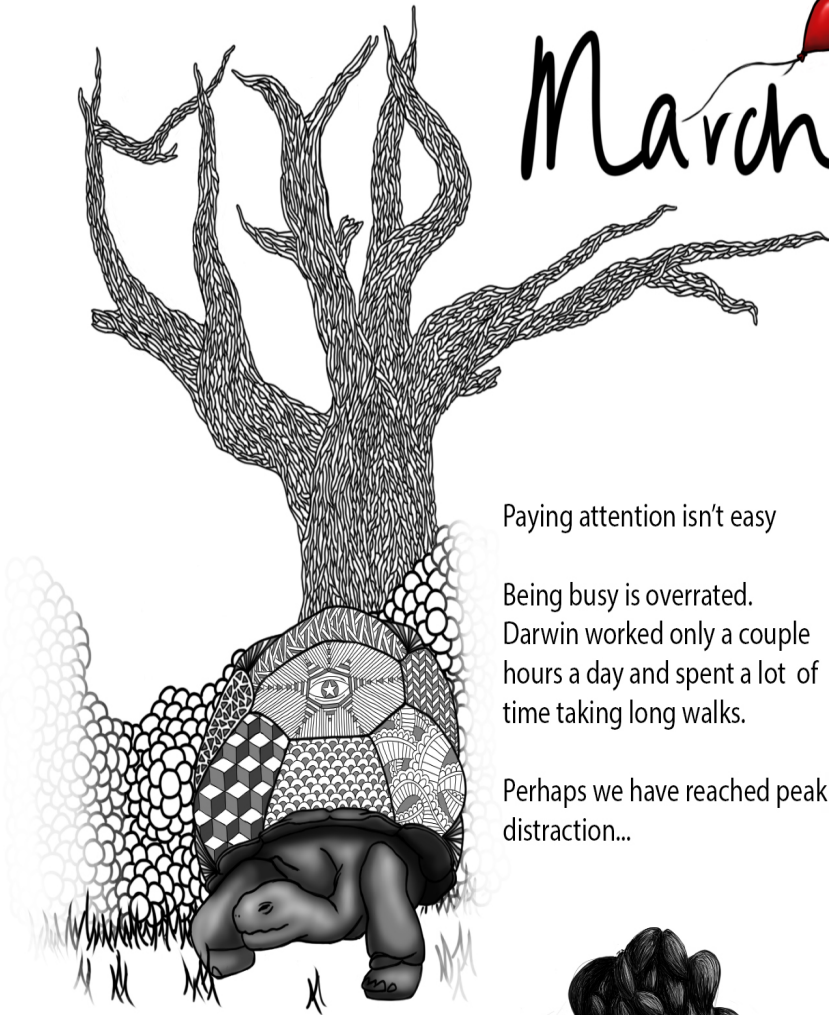
"In the end what will happen will be what has happened whenever a civilization breaks up. The people who have brains and courage come through and the ones who haven't are winnowed out. At least it has been interesting, if not comfortable, to witness a Gotterdammerung."

'A what?'

'A dusk of the gods. Unfortunately, we Southerners did think we were gods.'

- Ashley Wilkes to Scarlett O'Hara in  
Gone With the Wind <sup>1</sup>

# March



Paying attention isn't easy

Being busy is overrated.  
Darwin worked only a couple  
hours a day and spent a lot of  
time taking long walks.

Perhaps we have reached peak  
distraction...

By the end you will know  
what it is like to fill a day  
without doing anything at all<sup>2</sup>





Me and two of my friends met up for dinner one night

It was all we could talk about



When restaurants were still seating tables

I think we were trying to process.

During dessert a nearby table started singing Happy Birthday. And everyone joined in. It was mostly college-aged students there.



A boy at the end said, "Your wish better be for Corona to go away." Everyone laughed.



In the beginning, it was really hard to pay attention.



I found it hard to fall asleep.



A new day meant I made it through without being sick.





As people were adjusting I found myself bombarded with information and technology



Everything was so loud that I had to place boundaries with the people, places, and things I loved.

# SILENCE

Commonly associated with contemplative techniques of quietness as means to bring about transformation of the self<sup>3</sup>

I did not want to know how many people had died that day or what the statistics are.



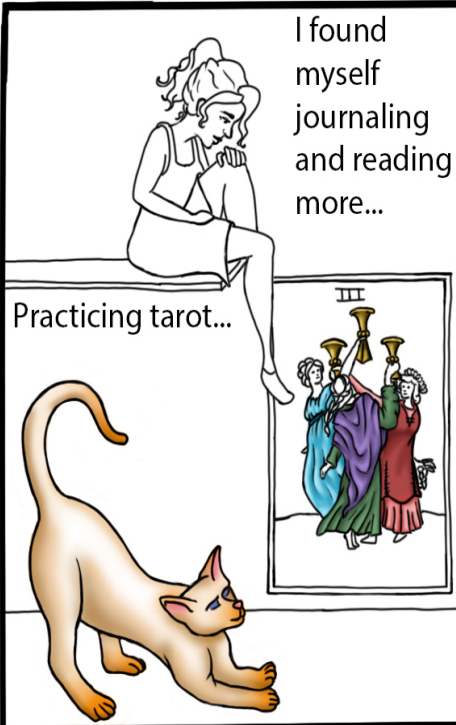
I still don't.



Sometimes I would sit in complete silence just to ground myself.



And it would still feel like my head was vibrating with thoughts, feelings, information...



I found myself journaling and reading more...

Practicing tarot...

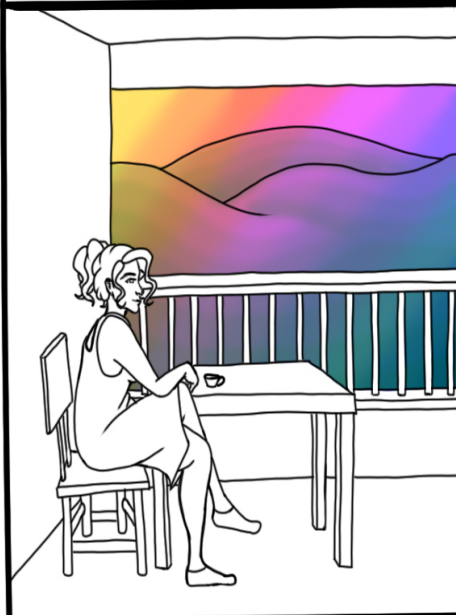
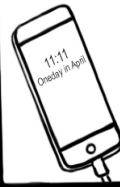


I learned how to be alone... but not lonely

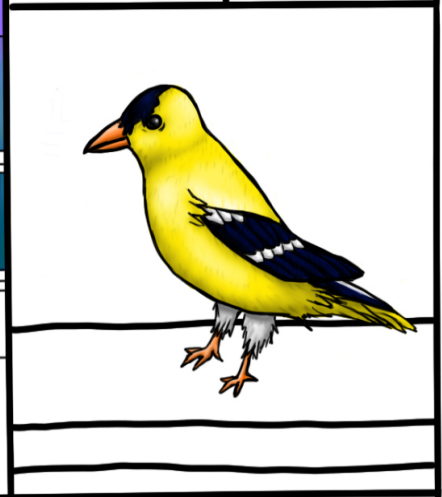
Even by myself I am in good company.

I never thought I would be a morning person.

But not having to wake up to an alarm makes all the difference.



I get to be more present and listen.



I hear the birds more these days...

I wonder if they know that life is so different now?

# Happiness



Happiness is a great thing



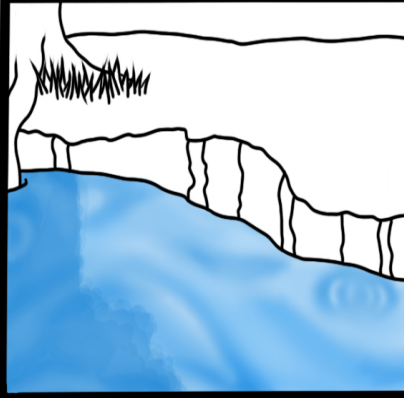
You can be as happy as you make up your mind to be



It is in the gratitude of the small wonders

So often taken for granted <sup>4</sup>

I have discovered that happiness ebbs and flows...



It is a steady state of peace.

I find these moments in the morning when my cat barges into my room to say "Hello".



Every Monday for an electronic Zoom hang out night.



Listening to a podcast and talking it over with a best friend

When I bake something tasty



Coming to understand this new normal with the people I love.

Having a toddler tell me all about his favorite dinosaurs



Remember to Please Assist Until Serenity Enters.

Thank you.

**K.E.M.  
N.E.D.**

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# The Saving Swing

Laura Fauvor

AMST 403: Creative Work in American Studies

These short personal narratives were written for Professor Golub's 403 course, *Creative Works in American Studies*. These were a part of a 5-part assignment that had students work to create meaningful connections to moments in history and analyze the ways in which objects and cultural moments affect lived experience. The work done in this course allows for students to exercise different modes of knowledge presentation, from the personal narrative to a podcast, photo or museum exhibition. This collection of short narratives explores how large historical moments and seemingly insignificant objects touch individual lives in ways that connect us together.

Strung between massive avocado and walnut trees, sat my swing. My grandpa Tex and uncle Johnny used an old fire hose to fashion a swing for me. From some branches among the 80 plus foot trees, my swing sat about 4 feet above the ground. I had to jump a little to get a proper seat. The swing was made out of a synthetic fiber that felt like tightly woven cotton or canvas to the touch but when you lifted it, it was heavy like a metal chain that couldn't be broken.

I often thought about what the hose did before it became my swing, how it put out fires and left things in decay, making way for something else to take that space. In my mind, it was always becoming something new. The swing swung back and forth setting a rhythm to thoughts, as it swung back pausing on something old then moving forward towards something different or unfamiliar. I spent much of my time trying to figure out all the things that old hose could be.

My grandpa and uncle often made themselves angrily busy with projects around the farm that would, despite the aggravations, put smiles on all of our faces. The projects often caused strife, between each other, their wives, their sons, their nephews. In the end, everyone would be proud of their work. "No room for bitchin' with these smiles," Tex would often say as he cheers'd a beer with uncle Johnny. The swing wasn't one of those projects. While they worked, I often looked up trying to figure out the magic they



were constructing. They seemed to be floating from the giant ladder lost in the tree's limbs. I heard them laugh and sigh loudly up there. I imagined they were seeing something wonderful from those branches and I couldn't wait to fly the heights that the swing would take me and see for myself.

Perhaps just as important as the swing itself, was the location of it. My uncle's house sat on the west side of the property with a fence defining the spaces as separate. The beautifully strong and looming trees that supported the swing in his back yard marked the entrance of the farm while also providing some shaded shelter over the chicken coop and benches where we often ate meals. Beyond the coop sat the crops which ran alongside the back of both their 'spaces,' connecting them both to the land negating the purpose of the fence. They both had their own driveways and despite the grand entrance to the farm being in Johnny's backyard, Tex's house was far more monumental. With a grandiose porch that lined the front of the house, and the big prairie style double doors, his house was the center of it all. The center of entertainment, celebrations, arguments and barbecues alike. More than the land, that swing seemed to tie the two worlds together.

A flattened fire hose is actually quite wide, making for the perfect swing seat. It also didn't pinch your hands when you held the sides like a metal-link swing could. It was strong, I felt safe as I sat in it. With a little help from Tex or Johnny, the hose's long lengths took my skinny 7-year-old body to amazing heights. Suspended in the atmosphere above the farm, I could see it all. The farm, the family, the squabbles and smiles all looked immensely small yet large at the same time. That swing was magic.

Even after I stopped living on the farm, I remember going back for those grandiose celebrations escaping the squabbling entertainment to fly off on the swing. A couple times as I walked toward the grand trees, I remember seeing my uncle gently guiding my aunt Jean's flight on the swing, my grandpa watching and laughing as Jean smiled.

Every now and then I think about that swing, often a little sad that I would never see it again. The farm sold, the trees taken down, the swing probably tangled somewhere in a dump all to build condos that would never yield as much freedom. That swing provided momentary escape, allowing for thoughts, emotions and life to pause. Pause enough for a new perspective to enter, for relief to consume its passenger. I always thought about that fire hose, wondering how many homes, cherished belongings and lives it had saved before it was a swing. As I think about it now, of its life as a swing on the farm, I recognize how in a way during those years it was still saving lives.

# Adopting Pluto

Laura Fauvor

AMST 403: Creative Work in American Studies

In August of 2006, Pluto was denounced, demoted from planetary status, making our solar system smaller and more defined. I remember seeing the announcement everywhere. On the news, even on MTV and VH1. It was on the cover of papers and magazines, not quite viral in the sense we are accustomed to now, but certainly all-encompassing in the world of 2006.

Earlier that same year, I was 16-years-old, I was officially, legally, “for real” adopted. By the decree of paperwork and a judges’ gavel, I now was a member of the Fauvor family. Tami and Mel were now my mom and dad. Although I had called them mom and dad since I was about 10, this legal ceremony made it a “true” reality for the rest of the world. That was just a short 6 and half months ago but as our universe was seemingly condensing, like Pluto, I found that my life before me also seemed somehow minimized, trivialized by my new legal existence.

As I thought about the International Astronomical Union that declared Pluto no longer a part of our 9-planet system, I wondered who permits or dignifies their authority to define our universe? Just as a random judge deemed my existence as someone else forever.

Wondering how Pluto’s existence would be altered by its new classification, I reflected on how my life has changed since my life had a new legal classification. Since the event, my “new” mom felt the need to attempt to redefine my history at every possible moment. You see, prior to 10-year-old me calling her mom, she was my cousin. I was fortunate, or so I was told, to be adopted into family. They—the authoritative they—said that it would make for easier transition because I would still be able to be in contact with some of the family I grew up with. However, as time went on it became clearer that my mom wanted to make me completely hers. At the celebration dinner after the legal proceedings she stated as she looked down at her food, that my sister wouldn’t be my sister anymore, she was now my cousin and my grandma now my great aunt. Inside I was bubbling with irritation, how could she say that? I’m 16 and she can’t change what my life was before or who my family was to me. I stayed mostly silent for the rest of that dinner, forcing affirmations to validate my mom because I loved her.

As the year continued, those moments increased in numbers. In August, I found I felt like Pluto, like I had no way to defend my existence to the rest of the world. What it took to convince the world of my familial existence

seemed to wipe away all of me that was before. I didn't know how to convince my mom that I loved her no matter what, that she was MY mom regardless of the siblings I loved that weren't birthed by her, regardless of my grandma that wasn't her mom, regardless of the years I spent away from her.

The year went on and so did the debates about Pluto's existence. The debates made me think of how planets, stars and people constantly enter and exit our orbits throughout life and after all the frustration of other's interference in the defining of those orbital intruders, it can only be truly defined by ourselves. Sometimes what exists is unknown and will forever be unexplainable.

# Representations of the Body

*“Clearly the body is not neutral—it is the entry point into cultural and structural relationships, emotional and subjective experiences, and the biological realms of flesh and bone.”*

-Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut, *The Body Reader: Essential Social and Cultural Readings*

*“The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property. The body, according to this penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions.”*

-Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*



# *The Fundamentals of Caring:* A Representation of Disability

Natalie Rodgers

AMST 390: Disability and American Culture

Media has had a specific narrative when it comes to telling the story of disability, many of which do not accurately describe the differing perspectives of experiencing a disability. Disability is often used in popular culture to either create pity or to defend a villainous agenda, both of which dehumanize and categorize people with disabilities. However, upon digging into the Netflix film, *The Fundamentals of Caring*, these tropes that are negatively associated with disability are almost nonexistent and attempt to normalize and humanize those with disabilities. The relationship that a caretaker, Ben, creates with his patient, Trevor, project the importance of treating people according to how they would like to be treated and not to define them by the assumptions of their disability.

From menacing villains such as Captain Hook and Dr. Curt Connors to sweet innocents such as Tiny Tim, the spectrum in which people with disabilities are represented in society have been narrow. People with disabilities are either portrayed by the media as angry or broken from their disabilities, having a fate that either cures their disability, if they behave well, or results in their demise, if they are the antagonist. The 2016 Netflix film *The Fundamentals of Caring* breaks the stereotypes other movies portraying disabled characters adamantly reinforce by introducing a person with a disability who has a personality that runs deeper than their differences.<sup>1</sup>

*The Fundamentals of Caring* focuses on the relationship between Ben, a newly certified caregiver, and his first client, Trevor, a snarky, crude humored boy with muscular dystrophy. The film centers around Ben and Trevor's relationship as they embark on Trevor's first road trip. Having muscular dystrophy, Trevor is unable to or finds difficulty in moving different parts of his body, making him reliant on another person to help him with certain tasks such as going to the bathroom. The inability to do certain day-to-day tasks could have been used as a focal point of pity for Trevor or as a vehicle to fuel anger in his life, but instead has very little to do with his actual personality

and even less to do with the movie itself. Rather, in order to build a strong relationship with Trevor, Ben treats him with the same snarky, crude humor that he enjoys engaging with. Through this relationship, Ben and Trevor are able to find a friendship that helps them grow as better people, without trying to “heal” Trevor’s condition.

From the film’s beginning, Ben treated Trevor according to his personality and not his disability. When Trevor meets Ben for his job interview, Trevor asks how Ben would “wipe his ass” if he were to be chosen as his caretaker. In accordance with Trevor’s snarky personality, Ben replies, “I would wipe it in such a way that when I was done, there would be no more shit on your ass.”<sup>2</sup> Other interactions between Ben and Trevor also involve Ben rolling his eyes when Trevor pretends to choke or lose control of his wheelchair and making jokes about how Trevor cannot properly flip Ben off because of his muscular dystrophy. This interaction typically would not be the way in which a professional would engage with one of their clients, but Ben is more so trying to engage with Trevor as he would with any other person. Trevor enjoys making fun of his disability and being crude about it, so Ben responds how Trevor wants to be treated.

In her article “Being a Cripple,” Nancy Mairs, a woman who is unable to walk much like Trevor, discusses how she does not mind being called a “cripple” despite the negative connotation it has for other people. The use of this term, for her, has been a way of coping with her difference, using it as a way to laugh at herself for the things she is unable to do.<sup>3</sup> This, obviously, is not the case for every person with a disability. Heather Kirn Lanier, the mother of a child with autism discusses in her article “The R Word” that others ought to be more sensitive with the language they use towards a person with a disability.<sup>4</sup> These two articles give different messages to describe how people with disabilities want to be treated.

The way Trevor and Ben interact in *The Fundamentals of Caring* is not the same way Ben would act with a more sensitive client. When Ben is unfamiliar with Trevor on a personal level, he uses his newfound credentials in caretaking to be as sensitive towards Trevor’s condition as he can, as recommended by Lanier. However, when Trevor quickly begins to show Ben his personality, Ben takes Mairs’s approach and speaks with Trevor in a more sarcastic tone, even going as far as teasing Trevor’s ability. Ben uses Trevor’s personality to determine how Trevor wants to be treated and decides to not treat him differently because of his condition.

The film, however, does not ignore Trevor’s condition completely. While not necessarily a huge plot point of the film, everyday activities such as eating and going to the bathroom are depicted to show the help Trevor needs when performing certain activities. Every time Trevor needs to use the

restroom, Ben goes with him to help get on and off the toilet, and occasionally attempts to hold Trevor so he can experience peeing standing up, an activity that Trevor has always wanted to do. Trevor also often pretends to be choking, as swallowing can be difficult for someone with Trevor's condition and he is shown enjoying his beverages by using a straw. These points in the movie not only demonstrate what is accurate for Trevor, but what can be accurate for someone in reality that has Trevor's condition. Audiences who are not be familiar with muscular dystrophy, through Ben's behavior, would learn to become acquainted with the individual, putting aside any assumptions that come with their disability.

*The Fundamentals of Caring*, however, takes this need for awareness of disabilities a bit further by showing a scene in which Ben makes two employees of a roadside attraction carry Trevor up the stairs as a consequence for not being wheelchair accessible. When going to visit a roadside attraction, located on the second floor of a building with no wheelchair access, Ben demands the employees of the attraction create an equal way for Trevor to enjoy something that those without a wheelchair get to enjoy. This kind of representation not only accurately shows what Trevor and other people with muscular dystrophy suffer from but brings awareness to how important it is to think about disability according to the social model of disability, a model that treats disability as a situation that needs to be accommodated rather than healed. This kind of representation is referred to by Harry Benshoff, author of "Cinematic Images of (Dis)Ability," as being a new countercultural form of representation that focuses on equality for people in accommodation and inclusion rather than a medical model that calls for individuals to find their own way of inclusion through "fixing" their disability.<sup>5</sup>

While this movie goes against many of the stereotypes of disability in film, it can be argued that *The Fundamentals of Caring* does play with the idea that Trevor is a version of what Benshoff calls a "Sweet Innocent."<sup>6</sup> The sweet innocent is a stereotype used in film to portray people with disabilities as being individuals who do not deserve to be plagued with the horribleness of their condition. A classic example of this comes from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, with Tiny Tim, a child with a generous heart but with an ailing physical disability. When Trevor goes to see his father for the first time since he left him, shortly after his diagnosis, his father wants nothing to do with him. His father offers to pay him off as a sort of apology for not being in his life. His father doing something as despicable as abandoning his child after his diagnosis not only makes the audience despise that character, but feel pity for Trevor and his condition. Children such as Tiny Tim and Trevor are often viewed this way in society. Due to the innocence of their young age, this trope leads people to believe disability prevents people from living their



life “normally” when in actuality, people with disabilities can often perform the tasks of their able-bodied peers in a different way. Even the film itself falls short in representation of disability, as Trevor is portrayed by an able-bodied actor without muscular dystrophy.

However, unlike the fate of most sweet innocents, which is either a cure or death, Trevor does not endure either of those outcomes.<sup>7</sup> At the end of the movie, Ben is shown writing a book about his time with Trevor in which he describes how he found Trevor’s new caregiver sobbing next to Trevor’s seemingly lifeless body on the floor of his bedroom. The audience is made to believe, by the filmmakers, that the movie adhered to the stereotype of killing Trevor, but Ben quickly follows his statement by explaining that Trevor was just pulling another prank in faking his death. Trevor is believed by the audience not to be cured of muscular dystrophy, but not dead either. Instead, Trevor is someone who is not defined by his disability, but by his interests and in his friendship with Ben.

The ending of *The Fundamentals of Caring*, which clearly goes against the expectations and commonalities that movies portraying disability have done before, goes to show that the film is unique in showcasing disability not as the main focus of Trevor’s life, but as something that is simply a part of it. While this film did focus on aspects of Trevor’s disability, it is more attentive to the friendship between two people. Ben ignored the messages perpetuated about people with disabilities in order to treat Trevor like a person who may need accommodations but does not need to be healed. In doing this, the film became a breath of fresh air that not only accurately represented a person’s life with a disability but showed the audience that every person with a disability has a different experience, that does not necessarily need to be cured or ended.

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# “White Trash”: Race, Power, Stigma, and the Meth-Using Body

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AMST 401T: The Body and American Culture

This paper was written for AMST 401: The Body and American Culture taught by Dr. Kristin Rowe. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the ways anti-meth campaigns place stigma on meth users' bodies and reinforce the racial hierarchy. The main goal of this work is to show how the media response to meth use in the United States is another example of how drug scares have been used as tools in preserving ideas of white superiority.

American panic over drug use has long resulted in racialized imagery portraying crime and violence as running rampant in impoverished and marginalized communities, perhaps the most widely discussed being the crack cocaine crisis of the 1980s. As illicit drug use continues to be regarded as a growing and lurking problem in the United States and anxious Americans call for action, government responses have varied in ways that reinforce racial, social, and economic inequalities that have prevailed in the country since its beginnings. These drug scares have historically targeted marginalized groups in the United States in overly punitive ways that have contributed to the current era of mass incarceration, which has disproportionately affected people of color. Imagery associating certain drugs with certain races has allowed the white elite to maintain their hegemonic power and preserve the image of white “purity” and superiority. The rise of methamphetamine use among white Americans threatened that image of white superiority, prompting a need to construct a new narrative that protected the status of those in power.

In this paper, I will analyze the anti-meth campaigns Montana Meth Project and Faces of Meth from the early 2000s, placing them in the context of the “tough on crime” movement, the War on Drugs, and the meth crisis in Montana. I argue that the class and physical body of meth users are used to help powerful or “proper” white people distance themselves from “improper” white people and to preserve the white superiority ideal. I explore how the graphic portrayals of the meth-using body in American media reflect the created boundaries between these two categories of whiteness

that are based on physical appearance and class. By utilizing the government response to the crack cocaine and current opioid epidemics, I will show that these portrayals of the meth-using body are part of a pattern in American history that has continually made drug crises a tool in reinforcing the racial hierarchy.

### **Amphetamines and Images of Meth-Addicted Bodies**

Methamphetamine is a synthetically produced and extremely addictive derivative of amphetamine which can be ingested in a variety of ways. Meth use can cause heightened energy and a loss of appetite, and can leave long-term users with memory loss, dental decay, and severe weight loss.<sup>1</sup> Continued use often results in sleep-deprivation, which can in turn cause psychosis and hallucinations.<sup>2</sup> Before the 1950s, amphetamines could be obtained without a prescription, and at peak use in the late 1960s, amphetamines were primarily prescribed to the white middle class, specifically women, for weight control and other “psychiatric purposes.” The production of meth through a combination of various over-the-counter medications became more popular in the 1980s. However, despite reported use during the 1990s being similar to that of the previous decade, news media sensationalized meth use through stories of dangerous production labs and images of skinny, bruised, and scabbed bodies. Sociologist Cindy Brooks Dollar argues that these images “were used to symbolize the ‘instability’ of white hegemony,” the theory that the ruling class of a diverse society often dictates the societal norms which keep the power structure that benefits them, or the status quo, intact.<sup>3</sup> The Montana Meth Project and Faces of Meth provide examples of such images.

In 2005, the RAND Drug Policy Center reported that the economic cost of methamphetamine use exceeded \$23 billion in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Methamphetamine had become one of the largest drug problems across the country, particularly in Montana.<sup>5</sup> That same year, the Montana Meth Project (MMP), a non-profit organization that initially received funding from public donations, began a graphic advertising campaign aimed at use prevention among the state’s youth. The campaign featured a series of ads that played on television screens inside Montana homes and appeared on billboards, portraying methamphetamine users as dirty, dangerous, and exploitive.<sup>6</sup> One billboard ad depicted a young white woman being held down in the dirt, staring blankly into the distance as a man sexually assaulted her. The caption read “15 bucks for sex isn’t normal, but on meth it is,” suggesting that meth users, or specifically meth-using women, will do anything to get their “fix,” even if that means prostituting themselves at a low price tag.<sup>7</sup> Another depicted a young white man with scabs and wounds on his arms and face, lying on the ground

almost lifeless. Behind him, two shadows are seen walking away from his body, and the caption read "leaving your friend for dead isn't normal, but on meth it is," implying that meth will make its user abandon the ones they care about the most.<sup>8</sup> The MMP website claims that meth use in Montana had declined so significantly as a result of the campaign and had been so well-received that the organization began to receive state and federal funding.<sup>9</sup>

In 2004, a sheriff's deputy developed "Faces of Meth" (FOM), trademarked as a drug education program by the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office in Oregon. With a similar goal to the MMP of deterrence, the program featured a collection of mug shots of individuals who had been arrested by Deputy Bret King and had a history of meth use to create "before and after" images, highlighting the drug's effects on physical appearance. The "after" photos show users with scabbing and scarred skin and appearing to have rapidly aged. The Faces of Meth webpage even features an interactive graphic which allows visitors to "roll over images to see the effects of Methamphetamine use." One woman is first seen breaking a slight smile with clean hair and clothing, but when the cursor scrolls over her image it completely changes. The new image is of the same woman two and a half years later who now has noticeable wrinkles, blemishes, a large bandage on her cheek, messy hair, and her smile had turned into a frown.<sup>10</sup> However, in the case of each of these images, there is no way of telling whether meth was the only substance they used, and the duration of time between the "before and after" shots range from months to years, inaccurately generalizing meth use and its effects on the body.<sup>11</sup>

Both campaigns clearly portray meth as mostly being used and abused by white people. Because these initiatives were responses to a drug that was portrayed as predominantly affecting white people, ideas that drug addiction generally only affected people of color became somewhat debunked. The reality was that meth did not only affect white people, but its popularity among white youth, in Montana in particular, presented a need to put a stop to the growing popularity of meth. While these portrayals of the meth "epidemic" showed the country that drug use and addiction were "colorblind," these anti-meth campaigns also triggered a moral panic over the status of white superiority. These images depict white meth addicts in a way that transforms their struggle with addiction into punishment and shame by attaching stigma to behaviors and physical attributes associated with meth users.

This group of white "others" is often identified with derogatory terms such as "white trash."<sup>12</sup> Such slurs hold similar meaning to slurs used during other racialized drug wars and scares, such as the terms "crack whore" or "crack head" used during the crack "epidemic" of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> Terms

like these reflect the boundaries of whiteness that allow the racial hierarchy to thrive, and by creating a stark difference between the white elite and poor white people, the elite can better maintain their status. Similarly, images such as those in anti-meth campaigns which demonized the struggles of disadvantaged white people reflect the boundaries that have been created by the white elite to protect their place on that racial hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> Those with a lower economic status historically have been stigmatized through the use of characteristics or physical attributes such as being lazy, irresponsible, or often by the clothing they wear.<sup>15</sup> This reconstruction allows poorer white people to be placed lower on the totem pole, almost as an entirely separate ethnicity. Efforts to protect elite white status can also be seen in media coverage and the inconsistent government responses to other drug scares that have taken hold of American society throughout history. One of the most notable of these scares was the crack cocaine epidemic of the '80s, which transformed the way drug issues were dealt with on a federal level and led to the racial discrepancies in incarceration that still exist today.

### **The War on Crack Cocaine**

Cocaine first became available in the United States in a popular wine that contained coca leaf extract in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was even considered a “wonder drug” by many, promoted by doctors and pharmaceutical companies as a cure for opium addiction and alcoholism. Cocaine became a common ingredient in cigarettes, liquor, tablets, and soft drinks like Coca-Cola, which was originally marketed as a headache remedy and general stimulant. However, increased awareness among medical professionals in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of the harmful effects of narcotics and increased public awareness of the risks, led to a decline in the use of cocaine and other narcotics among the middle and upper classes, long before cocaine would become criminalized. This change in attitudes among the middle and upper classes led to the passage of the Harrison Act of 1914, which officially criminalized the sale and use of cocaine and opium, disproportionately affecting poorer communities.<sup>16</sup> Other analyses of similar laws in the early 1900s show that these laws were “largely enacted to minimize white perceptions of racial-ethnic threat,” meaning that such legislative responses were likely representative of racist fears among the white population at the time.<sup>17</sup>

This kind of legislative response can be seen again with the responses to crack cocaine use in the 1980s, most notable being the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. The law stipulated vastly different sentences for powder cocaine and crack cocaine, a cheaper derivative of powder cocaine that was portrayed as being popular in rural and working-class minority communities at the time. Its passage meant that an individual possessing a given amount

of crack cocaine would receive the same sentence as an individual possessing 100 times the amount of powder cocaine, also known as the "100 to 1 Rule." What is most notable about this response to the "crack attack" in the 1980s is that a completely different response was issued years earlier when crack first became popular. In the 1970s crack cocaine was actually popular among upper-class white people, and rather than a punitive response, the government called for the expansion of insurance coverage to include drug rehabilitation and treatment. Only a decade later when the drug made its way into poorer Black communities would more punitive responses be adopted. Despite warnings from the United States Sentencing Commission of the potential implications of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, Congress ignored the Commission's suggestions for the first time in American history and chose not to reevaluate the law. Disproportionate racial demographics in federal and state prison systems would soon follow, despite continued research that shows rates of general drug use are consistent across all ethnicities.<sup>18</sup>

Like the methamphetamine scare of the early 2000s, public perception was that crack cocaine mostly affected poor communities and people of color, stigmatizing use through social boundaries defined by class and race. This made it easier to "other" struggling communities and distance them from the elite white class. However, in the 2000s the opioid crisis began to impact white suburban communities on a level that was hard to ignore. Although the crisis began in doctor's offices, hospitals, and pharmacies, the problem quickly turned patients into addicts, prompting a government response. However, the stark difference in the government's response to the opioid crisis as compared to the crack epidemic reinforces the idea that white hegemonic power tends to prevail when framing a narrative for any particular drug crisis.

### **The Opioid Epidemic**

Opiates today like oxycodone, codeine, and fentanyl are often prescribed to relieve pain, treat anxiety disorders, and reduce aggression. The most common illegal opioid is heroin, which became more prevalent after more strict regulations made prescription opioids less accessible. Opioids are primarily prescribed to middle and upper-class white people over any other race, most likely due to greater ability to afford health care. As a result, prescription opioid misuse is more common among middle and upper-class white people than any other race or class.<sup>19</sup> This crisis, as compared to that of methamphetamine and crack cocaine, has received a more medicalized response as opposed to a punitive one. In fact, the primary narrative surrounding prescription opiate abuse has been one of sympathy and has included calls for comprehensive government responses surrounding rehabilitation, treatment, and education.



What provides a different landscape for legislative responses to the opioid crisis are the suppliers. A majority of opiates that are abused by users are distributed by doctors to patients who either become dependent on their own prescriptions or the prescriptions of family members or friends. This means that the primary suppliers of this crisis—doctors and other medical professionals—are members of the elite or upper class. With pharmaceutical companies being large contributors to the campaigns of the country's elected officials, there is little incentive for those in power to penalize these corporations for their contributions to this epidemic.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this is one of the largest differences between the meth epidemic and the opioid epidemic—power. Although meth and opioids were both perceived as primarily affecting white people, the power of the pharmaceutical industry in American politics, which is largely dominated by the white elite, is a likely reason why the opioid crisis seemed to escape a criminal label by the government. However, these discrepancies extend into the media response to these crises as well. While the news published images that portrayed crime and violence in communities of color as a result of the crack epidemic and the MMP and FOM portrayed meth as the substance plaguing poor white bodies with scabs and poor hygiene, the media had a much different approach for the white suburban mothers battling opioid addiction.

### **Tragic or Criminal: The Influence of the Press**

In a 2016 study, sociologist Julie Netherland and psychiatrist Helena Hansen found that news media coverage of the opioid epidemic differed greatly from that of other substances. Their main finding was that media reactions to the issue were feelings of shock, empathy, and tragedy. Headlines declaring a “new face” of addiction imply this shock as well, suggesting a contradiction to stereotypical ideas of what a drug addict may look like. Like other substance abuse panics in the country, media attention and sensationalism suggested that fear was plaguing the country. However, unlike the meth and crack cocaine scares, the fears surrounding opioid addiction struck the nerves of the white middle and upper class who saw a shockingly recognizable “face of addiction” for the first time. Opioids were affecting, not people of color or poor communities, but the suburban white mother right next door. Images in the news did not present an immoral deviant as they did with meth or crack cocaine, they portrayed a sympathetic victim of the pharmaceutical system. This distinction allowed images of white and predominantly female addicts to remain blameless and deserving of sympathy, even when their prescription opioid addiction became so severe, they turned to heroin, a common street opiate.<sup>21</sup>

The differences in media portrayal of these drug scares are striking

when considering the link that news media made between crack cocaine and violent crime in Black communities during the crack problem in the '80s. These anxieties only contributed to existing worries about Black criminality among the white population, which led to an increase in public support for legislation that decreased public aid for struggling families and heavier policing of poor neighborhoods.<sup>22</sup> Images associating crack cocaine with Blackness, violent crime, and police activity presented a racial distinction when compared to the coverage of the opioid crisis. The fact that the introduction of cocaine to the United States was its use as an ingredient in products of powerful and wealthy companies such as Coca-Cola, shows that perhaps the Black communities that struggled with crack addiction following its use in legal products should have also been considered victims of some sort. And perhaps if crack abuse among white Americans had been more prominent, the War on Drugs may have been centered on addiction treatment rather than criminal punishment and incarceration.<sup>23</sup> This shows a clear racial distinction between the handling of the opioid epidemic and the crack cocaine epidemic despite their similar beginnings as legal substances distributed by the wealthy. These efforts to protect and manipulate boundaries in order to maintain the racial hierarchy are seen with methamphetamine despite the fact that meth users were largely portrayed in the media as white. Although there isn't a racial distinction, media portrayals like the MMP and FOM presented a difference in class and appearance as compared to opioid users. Methamphetamine is one of the rare illicit drugs that has become associated with whiteness, but only at the bottom of a sort of spectrum of whiteness. With help from the MMP and FOM, meth was constructed as a poor and under-class "white trash" drug in order to dissociate the group from the ruling class of the same ethnicity.

The different media portrayals of opioid users, crack users, and meth users reveal underlying beliefs and stigma surrounding drug addiction, addicts, and the ways they look and act. These depictions thus have extreme influence in policy creation and encouraging support of those policies from many Americans. When the images of drug-using bodies penetrate the minds of people in society, public and government responses have historically turned stigma into law. This influence starts at the problematic images consumed by society, which have been created by powerful institutions that are either under the control of or praised by the white elite. In the case of the MMP and FOM, these media responses to the meth scare were hardly successful in achieving their goal, which was to generally make people more aware of the dangers of meth in hopes of decreasing its use. Yet they continued to publish these images, and in the case of the MMP, or now simply "The Meth Project," these ads are still running online today in spite of their

“effectiveness.”

### **Impact of Anti-Meth Ads on Risk Perception, Approval, and Use**

As stated before, the actual effectiveness of these campaigns is questionable. There has been no clear research done about the impact that Oregon's Faces of Meth project has had on meth use that I could find. The Montana Meth Project on the other hand claims to have had a tremendous impact on discouraging meth use and perceptions of the consequences of meth use, and the project has received so much praise that it has now expanded to Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, and Wyoming. Yet studies have shown a lack of proof that the project is at all responsible for the state's decline in meth use.<sup>24</sup> A study conducted in 2008 closely examined the results of state-wide surveys completed by Montana's youth in the three years following the project's launch in 2005, as well as a national survey of randomly selected teens in 2007. The surveys inquired about perceived risk and general approval of meth use. After six months from the launch, responses showed that despite the MMP's claim that parents were also more aware of the risk of using methamphetamine, parents identified only 1 out of 14 consequences that could result from using meth once. The same survey showed a significant decline in the percentage of teens responding that there is “great risk” in using meth once or twice, and a significant increase in the number of teens responding that there is “no risk” in using meth on a regular basis. These findings were not included in the survey summary posted on the MMP website or even the press release, yet the MMP stated that perceived risk “remained relatively constant.”<sup>25</sup>

When posting the 2007 state survey results to the MMP website, the organization failed to directly compare results to the 2005/2006 report but still made claims that residents were more aware of the dangers associated with the drug, that residents were more likely to disapprove of use, and that teens began to view meth as more dangerous than heroin. However, psychologist David Erceg-Hurn found that in the 2005/2006 survey, groups were already aware of the dangers and that teens already viewed heroin as more dangerous than meth before the campaign even began.<sup>26</sup> The inconsistency in claims and results is seen in all of the MMP's reports. When compared to national reports, the accuracy of the organization's claims are also diminished.

A 2009 study compared the results of the same surveys in Montana and the national Youth Risk Behavior Surveys from 1999 to 2009. Mark Anderson, an associate professor of Economics at Montana State University, found that meth use was already on the decline before the project began and concluded that the MMP's effects on meth use had been “small and statistically insignificant.” When considering the fact that the MMP receives

government funding, the study shows that closer examination of such programs could result in better allocation of funds for more effective solutions.<sup>27</sup> Although these results suggest graphic visual campaigns such as FOM and the MMP had little to no effect on use or on how many people generally approved of the drug, they surely did succeed in attaching stigma to the meth-using body and its appearance. The graphic images of these campaigns reinforce the boundaries that create stigma within the general population and preserve the current social and racial hierarchy.

### **The Body as a Site of Stigma**

The graphic images of bodies in decay and in dangerous situations as a result of meth use undoubtedly helped construct stereotypes surrounding the character of struggling addicts. Generally speaking, the ways individuals perceive the world and those living in it are largely influenced by the images we consume on a daily basis through television shows and movies that depict drug use and addiction, media coverage of the latest drug bust or celebrity overdose, or ads produced by organizations like FOM or the MMP. The research presented shows that such images do not have the desired effect of reducing meth use or approval of use. Instead they present an example of how bodies and appearance are often used to stigmatize and “other” groups of people who may already be fighting a battle within or who may need help.

A 2016 study examined the way that female drug users and recovering users in treatment by choice and by court order view themselves and other former or current users. The study’s stated goal was to understand how “symbolic boundaries surrounding drug use vary by women’s treatment status.” The results revealed much about attitudes toward other users based on the ways the user ingested the drug, handled other responsibilities, the user’s mental state, how the user obtained the drug, and how often they used it. The women also revealed opinions toward other users that were mostly based on physical appearance, and both active and recovering users used physical and behavioral categorizations as a way of determining “dysfunctional” users from “functional” users to distance themselves from the former. Both active and recovering users stated that “functional” users had the ability to take care of themselves and maintain at least the “appearance” of health. All the physical features that the women identified as signs of a “dysfunctional” user were common stereotypes of meth users that are presented in the media and in ads like those from FOM and the MMP. The women described “out-of-control” users as being too thin; having decaying teeth, body scabs, or sores; and needing a bath. These features played key roles in the women’s categorizations of different types of users and some even used slurs to describe “dysfunctional” users, despite the fact that they were active or former users themselves. The

fact that these women, who all shared at least a history of meth use, were using terms such as “nasty” or “skanks” in order to distance themselves from a certain negative designation associated with meth use shows that boundary maintaining happens on every level of society as a means of establishing status or avoiding stigma.<sup>28</sup>

When looking at the stereotypical descriptors the women used to describe “dysfunctional” users, it is important to evaluate the ways in which such assumptions about drug-using status and character became so reliant on physical features. Combining the images put out by FOM and the MMP of decaying, unhygienic, and racialized meth-addicted bodies with narratives in the media surrounding the drug’s prominence in rural, poor white communities within the same time period provides a likely explanation for existing associations between physical appearance and the “white trash” designation. Because most aspects that go into this narrative come from bodies controlled by the white elite, resulting stigmas tend to benefit those in power by preserving their high status.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the history of substance abuse, drug scares, wars, and responses, race and thus physical appearance have played key roles in the construction of stereotypes surrounding the typical user of various drugs. The anti-meth initiatives “Faces of Meth” and the Montana Meth Project are only reflections of the stigma created in the wake of a drug scare that threatened the image of white purity and superiority, leaving race as an unreliable distancing tool. People of color and people of lower socio-economic status have often been portrayed as the people to blame for drug crises and resulting crime, as opposed to the structural conditions that have divided the country by race for years and have continuously placed communities of color at a disadvantage. This was seen in the handling of the crack cocaine scare in the 1980s.

Despite what media sensationalism suggests, crack cocaine use began before the War on Drugs of the 1980s and 1990s and was popular among the white middle and upper class. Once the drug and addiction made its way into poor and working-class communities of color that had limited financial ability to access treatment, the response became part of the mass incarceration era that disproportionately affected and continues to affect people of color. Media coverage did not reveal that crack addiction was a tragic result of its beginnings in a product like Coca-Cola or that the systemic racism leading to lack of access to healthcare should be to blame, but rather that over-policing of these communities and the threat of incarceration would act as a deterrent. Instead, the opioid epidemic of the 2000s that affected the white middle and

upper-class suburban mothers was framed in that narrative.

Following the "crack attack," methamphetamine became one of the rare instances in which a new substance considered to be plaguing America was constructed as a predominantly white drug. However, like crack cocaine, meth largely affected poor and disadvantaged communities. A demonized embodiment of impoverished white people became the face of meth addiction, referred to as "white trash" and stereotyped with a decaying, dirty, and malnourished body. Such stereotypes were reinforced by the displays of these bodies in dangerous situations or in practices deemed to be immoral, irresponsible, or deviant in images produced by FOM and the MMP. Though these displays were mostly of white individuals, the defining visible features across the board appeared to create a completely different ethnicity and a viable way for the white elite to separate themselves from white meth users, similar to the ways in which the white elite of the 1980s were able to distance themselves from crack cocaine users.

The public, media, and policy responses to the opioid epidemic provide examples as to how the white elite have controlled narratives and outcomes of drug scares in ways that have only ever protected the status of whiteness as the superior race. While the presentations of upper-class white bodies combating drug addiction might suggest that drug addiction can happen to anyone, the prevailing outcome is the notion that the white upper-class addict is simply a blameless victim of the system. No other members of society have received the same sympathy but have all in some way been victims of this system and hegemonic power.

Finally, I come to the conclusion that the graphic images of scabbed, dirty, overly skinny, and drug-addicted bodies put on display by Faces of Meth and the Montana Meth Project do not serve the primary purpose of deterring drug use, but rather provide an example of how images of meth-abusing bodies depicted in exploitive and dehumanizing ways are used to punish, shame, and stigmatize. That stigma has historically created community boundaries that are defined by visual differences, rather than actual moral values or law and order. These ideas permeate the minds of those who consume these images and create meaning out of them, and these consumers may fail to realize that the demonization of "others" in marginalized communities has only ever served the white elite in power and allowed the status quo to continue.

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# Technology: Past, Present, and Future

*“We have more data and technology than ever in our daily lives and more social, political, and economic inequality and injustice to go with it.”*

*-Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism**

*“At first, I thought you and the others were gods. Then I realized you're just men.”*

*-Maeve Millay, *Westworld**





# New Tactics of Policing: State Power and Technocapitalism in the Digital Age

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AMST 489: Digital America

This paper will look at state power and social control in the digital age, primarily focusing on a predictive policing algorithm called PredPol— which is explored alongside other partnerships between state power and technology to show the harmful effects that it has on communities of color and low-income communities. An examination of PredPol shows how the racist and classist history and nature of policing has evolved and adapted to the technological realm— regardless of the supposed “unbiased” nature of the technology. This study also interrogates the relationship between Silicon Valley and the state, looking at how technocapitalism (an evolution of market capitalism that is rooted in technological invention and innovation) fuels new and advanced forms of state power and state sanctioned violence.

The 21st century has brought with it a great amount of technological advancement that has made our lives more convenient, but often at the expense of our privacy and information. Much of our personal information exists in digital space and is bought and sold in order to feed into algorithms. These algorithms that take the form of Instagram or Facebook ads, for example, tell us what to buy, where to shop, what to read, what to think, and who to trust. They're also controlled by some of the biggest tech companies in the world, such as Google, and are used to increase their profits, alongside the profits of other corporations who purchase this information. It's also useful to think of these algorithms as social control mechanisms because they affect what we see on our social media or how our respective search results can look. This type of technology is used to control much more than our consumer habits: it's also used to extend and increase the power of the state.

This paper will look at state power and social control in the digital age, primarily focusing on a predictive policing algorithm called PredPol— which is explored alongside other partnerships between state power and technology to show the harmful effects that this technology has on communities of color and low-income communities. An examination of PredPol shows

how the racist and classist history and nature of policing has evolved and adapted to the technological realm—regardless of the supposed “unbiased” nature of the technology. This study also interrogates the relationship between Silicon Valley and the state, looking at how technocapitalism (an evolution of market capitalism that is rooted in technological invention and innovation) fuels new and advanced forms of state power and state-sanctioned violence. While this paper focuses mainly on the technology that police departments are using to place communities of color and low-income communities under surveillance, it’s also important to consider that the origins of this technology stem from the technology that has been used in U.S. imperialist war ventures. This connection allows us to understand state-sanctioned violence and oppression as a global issue, not just a domestic one. These technological developments have been used to increase state power tenfold, therefore this paper also insists that our strategies of resistance and goals of abolition need to adapt to this new technological era of policing, surveillance, and control.

### **A History of the Police**

Police are not a social inevitability, as Kristian Williams put it, “if we accept that police forces arose at a particular point in history, to address specific social conditions, then it follows that social change could also eliminate the institution.”<sup>1</sup> Imperialism and colonization have conditioned societies to buy into the myth that police are an integral part of civilized government, because police (and earlier forms of the institution) have been historically used to control colonized peoples and provide dominant society with the illusion of safety from “the other.” Robert Peel established the first recognizably modern police force in London around the first half of the 19th century. He modeled it after the Royal Irish Constabulary, which he founded a decade earlier, and that was tasked with “maintaining order” in Britain’s Irish colony—“policing in its earliest form was explicitly informed by the colonial experience [in other words,] controlling a potentially insurgent population.”<sup>2</sup>

The institution of police always had a close relationship with capitalism. In the U.S., early forms of the police institution grew within slave patrols and “city guards,” both of which “were developed to maintain social control over the unique demographics of large parts of the south, that is, a majority enslaved Black population and a panicked white minority.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, slave patrols and city guards were created with the intention of keeping a white power structure in place. But they notably also protected the “capital” of white slave owners: enslaved Black bodies. Down the line into the 19th century, police protected a rapidly developing system of wage-labor capitalism and acted as “protectors of bourgeois civilization from the ravages of the (mostly immigrant) working class.”<sup>4</sup> This “protection” often took the form

of stamping out working-class strikes and uprisings. However, as categories of whiteness expanded to include most European immigrants, the perceived “threat” shifted to poor communities of color, which continue to be largely targeted today.<sup>5</sup> Police were an integral component in maintaining new systems of oppression after the end of slavery, such as the convict leasing system. This system was a result of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery except as a punishment for committing a crime. The passage of the 13th Amendment allowed the state to legally continue the same kind of control over Black bodies as when they were enslaved by forcing them into exhaustive labor without pay—since United States economy was so dependent on enslaved Black labor, the state looked for ways to maintain that capital. Police departments quickly popped up during the Jim Crow era “through a campaign of terror waged on the region’s Black population, brutalizing and arresting folks to feed into the convict labor system in order to maintain the white supremacist economic order.” This relationship between police, convict labor, and eventually private prisons would later transform into the prison-industrial complex, which is a continuation of the convict labor system as well as a product of the partnership between state power and capitalism.<sup>6</sup>

The system of capitalism relies on the class and race divide in order to thrive, and it depends on facets of state power, notably the police, to maintain this system through violent enforcement. The second half of the 20th century saw a huge spike in both police spending and incarceration rates.<sup>7</sup> The era of the “War on Drugs” brought with it justification of the expansion of policing, in the form of deeply racialized methods that targeted low-income neighborhoods—often communities of color—while also cutting municipal and social services that they relied on.<sup>8</sup> Police are agents of state power and are used to reinforce power structures that are based on class and race. They do this by targeting poor communities of color and feeding them into a justice system that ensures their oppression. Anthropologist David Graeber argued, “One can only conclude that we are dealing with a group of armed lower echelon government administrators trained in the scientific application of physical force or the threat of physical force to aid in the resolution of administrative problems.”<sup>9</sup> In the capitalistic economic model, it’s profitable to maintain inequity because the system rests on the poor working class remaining in a cycle of poverty, allowing capitalists to continually exploit and profit off their labor. Police are put into place to maintain this system of inequity and to “enforce the agendas of those with power and money through violence.”<sup>10</sup>

In the era of Black Lives Matter, we begin to see a more direct questioning of the legitimacy of state power and especially police power. This largely has to do with a rise in resistance within digital space, particularly through activism via social media. This activism has taken many forms,

including campaigns in honor of Black folks murdered by the police, videos taken with smartphones that show these instances of police brutality, and hashtags with the victim's name. In response to this, there have been efforts of "police reform" such as body cameras and federal oversight in an attempt to pacify our anger and regain our trust.<sup>11</sup> On that same note, predictive policing algorithms such as PredPol are advertised as being unbiased and race-neutral, implying that it removes the deeply rooted racism embedded in the history of policing. It attempts to "rebrand" policing as being guided by objective statistical information and "symbolically removes the agency of individual officers... to cast police activity as neutral, unbiased, and rational."<sup>12</sup> Much of PredPol's advertising strategies have to do with objectivity meant to revise the public image and trust of police. PredPol's media strategist, Zach Friend, said that "it kind of sounds like fiction, but it's more like science fact." Jackie Wang points out that "by appealing to "fact" and recasting policing as a neutral science, algorithmic policing attempts to solve the police's crises of legitimacy."<sup>13</sup> What is taking place here can be looked at as another reinvented form of social control and violence, much like how we saw convict leasing carry the same intentions and goals of slavery. As Gertrude Pebbleton puts it, this is merely "An attempt by the state to funnel our revolutionary energy back into a system that does not and cannot serve our interests."<sup>14</sup> Considering PredPol as an extension of social control, rather than as a new, unbiased, and efficient form of policing technology, allows us to question how it might reinforce racist police practices instead of prevent them.

### **What is PredPol?**

In the 1980s, criminologist George Kelling championed the use of statistical analysis in hopes of producing a more effective use of law enforcement. About a decade and a half later, CompStat was introduced to the NYPD, "which encouraged officers to make decisions about which areas to police based on statistical analysis rather than intuition."<sup>15</sup> In 2009, the research and policy brand of the Department of Justice, called the National Institute of Justice, published a government report about predictive policing and allocated millions of dollars in grants to seven police departments, so they could begin researching predictive policing technology.<sup>16</sup> The LAPD was one of these departments and partnered with researchers at UCLA, who were already conducting research that was funded by several arms of the military. This research used algorithms (based on earthquake predictions) to track insurgents and predict casualties in war zones, such as Iraq, where the first version of what became PredPol was initially used.<sup>17</sup> PredPol was developed by Jeffrey Brantingham, an anthropology professor, Andrea Bertozzi, a math professor, and George Mohler, a postdoctoral math researcher. This

factor must be inspected, as it's crucial to understand how different institutions work together as agents of state power, especially since academia is rarely scrutinized in academic scholarship as agents that reinforce a white power structure. Stop LAPD Spying, a grassroots organization that campaigns against PredPol, maintains that, "Academics have always been complicit in the development of policing/surveilling systems. Academia must be exposed as historically and currently complicit in the creation of the carceral state that criminalizes and harms Black, Brown, and poor communities."<sup>18</sup> If we understand the state's primary goal to be maintaining a white, capitalistic power structure, then we can begin to consider how some institutions (like the police and academia) might support that goal. Additionally, IBM, who spent more than \$14 billion on research and development of predictive analytics software for law enforcement—alongside Silicon Valley investors, who donated \$1.3 million in seed funding for PredPol in 2013—are also complicit in aiding the state's dominion.<sup>19</sup>

PredPol, short for "predictive policing," is a "software program that uses proprietary algorithms (modeled after equations used to determine earthquake aftershocks) to determine where and when crimes will occur based on data sets of past crimes."<sup>20</sup> In *Carceral Capitalism*, Wang explains how the software was used in Santa Cruz, which was one of the pilot cities to first test out PredPol. She explains that "officers are given printouts of jurisdiction maps that are covered with red square boxes that indicate where crime is supposed to occur throughout the day." She describes these boxes as being "temporary crime zones," which officers periodically patrol "in hopes of either catching criminals or deterring potential criminals." Notably, these predictions were generated by feeding eleven years of local crime data into PredPol's algorithms.<sup>21</sup> With this information in mind, we can start to think about how this technology might reinforce racist police practices—by understanding the racist origins of policing and seeing the consistently disproportionate targeting of communities of color in general and Black communities in particular by police.

Algorithms and different forms of artificial intelligence are generally framed as being "unhindered by human bias, uninfluenced by irrational desires and dubious sensory instructions that emanate from the body."<sup>22</sup> But as Wang puts it "crime has never been a neutral category" because "what counts as crime, who gets labeled criminal, and which areas are policed have historically been racialized."<sup>23</sup> She interrogates the implications of these "temporary crime zones" by asking how they affect the mentality of the officer who is patrolling them—will it reduce their reaction time? What are the consequences for people passing through these spaces? Does it constitute probable cause or reasonable suspicion? Further, because most people don't know if they're in a

“temporary crime zone,” it may induce a sense of being watched at all times by an eye we cannot see, relating it to Foucault’s theory of the panopticon.<sup>24</sup> The panopticon was created by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century and served as the blueprints for a prison—consisting of a singular guard tower in the middle of prison cells, which are arranged in a circle around it. One of the most important functions of the panopticon is that the prisoners never know when they’re being watched, suggesting that they’re forced to behave as though they’re always being watched. One of Bentham’s goals in designing this was efficiency, or rather, a cheaper way to control large groups of people. Since one guard is unable to watch every single cell, the design sanctions a certain degree of self-regulating behavior among the prisoners.<sup>25</sup> By looking at PredPol as a panopticon, we can consider how it has the ability to create a prison without walls. By making historically over-policed areas the target of anticipated crime and random surveillance, PredPol serves to control communities of color to an even greater degree than before. By asking the questions mentioned earlier, Wang points out the larger implications of software such as PredPol and positions it as a dangerous extension of state surveillance and control.

Ruha Benjamin argues that algorithmic software, like PredPol, is part of what she calls “The New Jim Code,” or “the employment of new technologies that reflect and reproduce existing inequities but that are proved and perceived as more objective or progressive than the discriminatory systems of a previous era.”<sup>26</sup> As mentioned earlier, police have been and continue to be used as agents of the state in order to recreate and maintain new systems of oppression after old systems have run their course. Michelle Alexander provides an example of this cycle of recreation in explaining how the prison-industrial complex has risen out of the ashes of slavery, Jim Crow, and convict leasing.<sup>27</sup> Software like PredPol, which claims to remove human bias and error from policing, allows the state to reinvent the image of policing and package the same racist institution in a new way. In the Black Lives Matter era, when the American public has become more aware and critical of the police’s historically racist practices, PredPol serves as a new tactic of the state to extinguish the rising distrust of police. In fact, it’s not hard to imagine that once traditional policing runs its course, there likely will be a technologically-led recreation of the institution. By following Alexander’s theory, it becomes clear that predictive policing algorithms like PredPol are another component of the steady recreation of new systems of oppression being developed in the digital age.

PredPol is marketed as being race-neutral because, as Brantingham explains it, “The focus on time and location data—rather than the personal demographics of criminals—potentially reduces any biases officers might

have with regard to suspects' race or socio-economic status."<sup>28</sup> Wang points out the clear disconnect in this logic by maintaining that PredPol enables spatial algorithmic policing, which can "facilitate racial profiling by calculating proxies for race, such as neighborhood and location."<sup>29</sup> This falls in line with the understanding that state tactics like redlining forces most poor households into the same locations. Moreover, because social mobility has been historically made harder for communities of color, this means that the areas patrolled are likely poor Black and brown neighborhoods. She also points out potential issues in how the datasets are collected, namely who collects them and how they are collected. While data are conceptualized as neutral bits of information, Wang insists that within criminal justice, data are merely "a reflection of who has been targeted for surveillance and policing." For example, she points out that PredPol's software would fall short in generating any data in areas that haven't been heavily policed, such as Wall Street or white suburbs.<sup>30</sup> This means that instead of an objective analysis of all types neighborhoods, it focuses on the neighborhoods that have already been historically and racially targeted. To this point, Benjamin adds that crime prediction algorithms like PredPol reinforce stereotypes of criminality and myths of innocence while claiming to be objective.<sup>31</sup> Because PredPol relies on crime data already gathered by the police to predict what areas should be patrolled, it sends them to the poor neighborhoods that have been patrolled "when they were guided by their intuitions and biases."<sup>32</sup> PredPol treats crime as "an objective force that operates according to laws that govern natural phenomena, such as earthquake aftershocks—and not as a socially constructed category that has meaning only in a specific social context." Furthermore, PredPol "ignores the a priori racialization of crime, and especially the association of crime with Blackness."<sup>33</sup> In other words, this software essentially denies decades of deeply embedded and historically recorded racist practices that have positioned the Black body as criminal.

### **Silicon Valley, Technocapitalism, and State Power**

With the help of technocapitalism, state power has evolved exponentially in the 21st century. Technocapitalism is defined by Luis Suarez-Villa as "a new form of capitalism that is heavily grounded on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity." His book, *Technocapitalism*, is rooted in the belief that "technology is neither "neutral" in a purely functional sense, nor is it wholly "cultural" as a sociocultural force unto itself." Rather, it's "a result of human actions and decisions."<sup>34</sup> Further, he argues that "the values of corporatism are embedded in the research agenda and design of technology," maintaining that technological rationality is not neutral nor functional, but rather social, political, economic, and cultural—representing the power, val-



ues, and interests of the dominant power.<sup>35</sup> In other words, most technology developed in a capitalistic state serves the interest of the state rather than the good of its people. The “values of corporatism” that Suarez-Villa talks about can be boiled down to an excessive emphasis on profit above all else. PredPol was developed from earthquake prediction software and became a new extension of state power and control. It’s crucial to consider how the technology got from point A to point B. Following Suarez-Villa’s theory on the nature of technocapitalism, it’s likely that tech companies saw an enormous amount of profit in funding and developing this type of software. Meanwhile, the state saw it as the perfect opportunity to maintain trust and control of its people during a time where cracks were beginning to form around the legitimacy of state and police power. But equally as important in this understanding is capitalism’s exploitation of creativity—especially in the age of technocapitalism—where profit is the driving force behind innovation and not the benefit of the collective. One of the fundamental characteristics of a capitalist society, and of America in general, is the focus on individual success instead of the collective good. Therefore, technology like PredPol was not imagined as a way to improve society for the greater good, but rather as a way to increase profit and efficiency, and to advance the power of the state.

The software also relies on appeals to fears about crime. Wang argues that companies that use algorithmic policing practices can strategically manipulate our heightened desire for law and order, specifically “when we are made aware of our corporal vulnerability to potential threats that are unknowable to us.”<sup>36</sup> The idea of law and order has been a historically powerful appeal to the American public, as it provided the support behind Ronald Reagan’s racist “War on Drugs,” for example. A similar relationship to law and order can be seen with how PredPol is marketed to, and understood by, the public. Wang expands on this by arguing that the age of “big data” allows such anxieties to be overcome through technology like predictive policing that delivers seemingly accurate information about where and when crime will occur. In other words, it appeals to people’s desire for assurance about their future because “data installs itself as a solution to the problem of uncertainty by claiming to achieve total awareness and overcome human analytical limitations.”<sup>37</sup> Wang notes that while the goal of algorithmic policing is supposedly to reduce crime, if there were no social threats (like the myth of an unprecedented crime boom) to manage, these companies would be out of business.<sup>38</sup> To understand this in a capitalistic sense, by continuously convincing the public that they are in constant danger of rising crime rates (regardless of whether or not this is true), it creates a ripe market for predictive policing technology. She also cites how much of PredPol’s advertised successes are false positives that loop back to the company itself, who stra-

teggically juxtaposes already low or historically fluctuating crime rates to the implementation of PredPol.<sup>39</sup> It might be useful to consider this idea in terms of marketing strategy—by creating perceived social threats of crime, people will buy into perceived solutions. Therefore, it becomes profitable to market PredPol as the solution to people’s safety.

Where does this idea of technology being society’s saving grace come from? Stuart Brand, the man indebted with creating the basis for Silicon Valley’s ideology, proclaimed that computers have the ability to transform humanity in ways that politics could not.<sup>40</sup> He envisioned a world where technology would heal and bring us together, values that he kept in mind as he created the *Whole Earth Catalog*. This catalog contained tools and information which he described as being “liberated from the hands of the monopolists and militarists,” and that could “empower individuals to become more self-sufficient and more self expressive.”<sup>41</sup> Franklin Foer marks the *Whole Earth Catalog* as a foundational text of Silicon Valley and maintains that Brand’s words continue to permeate through their culture—“even though Silicon Valley’s monopolies exist for the sake of profit, they view themselves as revolutionary agents.”<sup>42</sup> There’s a disconnect between Brand’s idea of liberation and Silicon Valley’s \$1.3 million investment in PredPol, a software that, as we’ve seen, increases the state’s monopoly on violence and oppresses the very same people it’s supposed to liberate and empower. However, Foer provides an explanation for this:

Each pathbreaking innovation promises to liberate technology from the talons of monopolists, to create a new network so democratic that it will transform human nature. Somehow, in each instance, humanity remains its familiar self. Instead of profound redistributions of power, the new networks are captured by new monopolies, each more powerful and sophisticated than the one before it.<sup>43</sup>

However, to say that humanity is at fault would be shortsighted because human nature isn’t inherently power or profit driven. Rather it can be understood as a result of the effects of capitalism’s toxic conditioning on our culture. As such, when those in power are presented with an opportunity to radically change the world, they’ve been conditioned to see the promise of profit as more appealing than redistributing power to the powerless.

The relationship between technology and social control goes far beyond PredPol. In *Captivating Technology*, Ruha Benjamin argues that the purpose for investing in “discriminatory designs” is for the “management, control, and “correction” of poor and racialized people.”<sup>44</sup> The title of her book

refers not only to the technology which captures people's bodies, but also how that same technology captures imaginations, proposing that it will fix social problems. These technologies, referred to as "technocorrections," aren't just about correcting individuals but about correcting "social disorders such as poverty and crime."<sup>45</sup> By providing an example of a report done on California youth under electronic monitoring, which revealed that oppressive rules and regulations often forced them back into custody, Benjamin poignantly asks if perhaps that's the point of the technology?<sup>46</sup> By putting this idea in conversation with Kai Erikson's understanding of Emile Durkheim's theory of deviance—that crime and deviance may actually serve a purpose in society by having communities understand their boundaries—it's easy to see how technology like electric monitoring and PredPol can function in the same way.<sup>47</sup> It not only targets poor and racialized communities, but ensures that those are the groups who are labeled deviant under a supposedly "objective" system of technology. This creates a vicious cycle which makes upward mobility difficult for these groups, while ensuring that the current power structure remains in place. This also results in a reinforcement of both racial and class divide, allowing capitalism to thrive and thus exemplifying the oppressive collaboration between technology, state power, and capitalism. Benjamin also makes an important point by stating that these technologies are racist and classist forms of social control that go beyond the "obvious forms of incarceration and punishment" and bleed into places like "hospitals, schools, banks, social service agencies, humanitarian organizations, shopping malls, and the digital service economy"—for example credit-scoring algorithms that discriminate against the poor.<sup>48</sup> Benjamin's theory of the New Jim Code makes us think about a current moment of danger where "innovation that enables social containment (appears) fairer than discriminatory practices of a previous era."<sup>49</sup> Innovation in technology, under a capitalistic system, aims to maintain the state's oppressive power structure. The question is how can we combat it?

### **Resistance and Abolition in a Technocapitalistic World**

Starting in 2008, we began to see social media and digital space being used as a place of resistance. Resistance movements started happening around the globe and were shared on Twitter and other social media platforms, often under a hashtag. Our ways of resisting have evolved, and our tactics have adapted to the technological advancements in the past decade. Organizers use social media and digital platforms to raise money, spread awareness, and bring people together both physically and virtually. The amount of information we can find in digital spaces and our access to that information is higher than ever before. But at the same time, we are under constant surveillance. Big tech companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon control most of what we see,

have all of our personal information, and can track our every move. While we have made great strides in evolving our tactics of resistance to fight against state power in the digital age, that power continues to develop with the help of new technology, and we must find new ways to combat it. Old methods of resistance only go so far in a high-tech militarized police state. Our molotov cocktails and guillotines just don't work as well as they used to. Facial recognition, gait recognition, and drones (just to name a few) force our dreams of resistance and revolution to look different.

The state has a long history of reinventing systems of oppression, the newest being *The New Jim Code* where technological innovations are being created in order to reinforce traditional power structures. Capitalism has historically made resistance and revolution especially hard, and it has done this on purpose. It creates a cycle of poverty in which the poor and working class must constantly work and depend on low-waged jobs in order to survive, leaving no time to organize or revolt—especially now in a post-industrial service economy where the majority of jobs force people to live paycheck to paycheck. This is even more difficult for people of color that face additional barriers in upward mobility. It also creates a racial class divide so that poor and working-class white folks align with a white power structure and vote against their own interests instead of creating class solidarity with people of color. New technologies of entrapment and criminalization only make this more difficult, especially when they create a new supposedly “objective” understanding of law enforcement.

There has been strides in technology with an “emancipatory ethos,” such as the app called Appolition, which raises money through donations to help people post bail. From that same vein, however, we also see the development of apps like Promise, which tracks people who can't afford bail (largely Black and Latinx people) via the app and GPS. Jay-Z, who has invested millions in Promise, uses his elite and influential status to reproduce the dangerous narrative that this technology will reduce the amount of incarcerated people. Benjamin maintains that apps like Promise “helps expand the scope of what the Prison Industrial Complex is and will be in the future.” She notes that in the age of the New Jim Code, we need to look beyond just the issue of cages, to these new technologies that mask themselves as reformist.<sup>50</sup> To put it in another way, we need to be wary of the type of technology that has the ability to create a prison without walls and puts people of color under constant state surveillance. She introduces the idea of enforcing a stronger system of accountability through independent “coded equity audits” that could be very effective—for example, organizing more coalitions like Stop LAPD Spying that actively work against PredPol and are independent community organizers.<sup>51</sup> Giving the task of holding the state and police account-

able to organizers on the ground and those who have been personally affected by racist police practices has the potential to turn the narrative on its head. Benjamin also suggests that we begin to reimagine our “default settings” by looking toward Afro-futurist and Chicano-futurist speculative fiction in films and texts, works that focuses on people of color and engages with racism and power structures. She maintains that that this work could aid us in reimagining racist codes and environments that have been historically conditioned into our society, while teaching us how we can “appropriate and reimagine science and technology for liberatory ends.”<sup>52</sup> By looking to authors like Octavia Butler, who reimagines race and power in her stories, we can start considering possibilities outside of what we’ve been taught.

Kristian Williams insists that “It is a bad habit of mind, a form of power-worship, to assume that things must be as they are, that they will continue to be as they have been.” He points out that this type of thinking “soothes the conscience of the privilege (and) dulls the will of the oppressed.” He offers that “the first step toward change is the understanding that things *can* be different.”<sup>53</sup> The most logical solutions to combatting new technological forms of state control is ensuring that people of color and anti-capitalists have a seat at the table, this solution goes across institutions and disciplines. I also argue that systems of education must be completely reformed—this means restructuring ideas of power, race, economy, class, and, now, technology by introducing and teaching the silenced histories of imperialism, colonialism, and their subsequent legacies in the United States. In other words, the American education system tends to teach history from a white and Western perspective, meaning that imperialism and colonialism are seen as righteous conquests as opposed to genocide and theft of land. In turn, this conditioning plants the seeds for justifying profit and gain at the expense of human lives, a characteristic of the capitalistic mindset. The idea is that we have to relearn and divest from a lot of what has been historically valued and deemed necessary. We must relearn the importance of community and solidarity while divesting from our values of individuality. This means looking to indigenous and non-Western understandings of economy and governance. We must start to seriously reimagine and teach about a society where we don’t need police and prisons for “protection” because this idea only legitimizes the institution while justifying its violence.<sup>54</sup> As Ruth Wilson Gilmore explains, our society chooses to invest in a system of cruelty and vengeance instead of investing in the tools and resources that are needed for a productive and violence-free life—jobs, education, housing, and healthcare.<sup>55</sup> The thing is, abolition exists for those who monopolize power and privilege. It exists in places like the Hamptons and the Upper West Side where “white rich people get to deal with all of their problems

in ways that don't involve the police, or cages, or drug tests of thing like that."<sup>56</sup> We can start to combat the technology of the New Jim Code by changing how we see things and, more importantly, how we teach things.

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# Cyber Orgasms: Digital Cruising in AOL Chat Rooms during the AIDS Epidemic of the 1990s

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Written for AMST 502: American Technocultures in Spring 2020, this paper aims to understand how gay men used America Online (AOL) chat rooms as both a safe sex alternative and a technological tool for queer sexual survival during the height of the AIDS epidemic in the 1990s. As in-person, anonymous gay sex was deemed dangerous during the AIDS epidemic, the chat room offered a virtual space where gay men could digitally touch, penetrate, and orgasm with each other. By examining gay and lesbian periodicals from this time, I wanted to explore how gay men navigated the uncertainty surrounding the future of gay sex and what alternative methods they created to keep queer sexuality and identity alive during a time of death and crisis.

It took eight years for the first 100,000 cases of Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) to be reported in the United States in the 1980s. It took just two more years for the next 100,000 cases to be reported.<sup>1</sup> With limited information on the transmission of AIDS, safe sex campaigns from the Centers for Disease Control targeted gay and lesbian communities to alter their sexual behaviors specifically focusing on cruising. Cruising is defined as seeking anonymous, casual, one-time sexual encounters. Popular cruising locations, such as bathhouses, began to shutter and the policing of public cruising areas increased to limit sex between men and curb the transmission of AIDS. In this context, gay men began to search for alternative outlets to seek anonymous sexual encounters and many found these outlets online.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, gay and lesbian periodicals began to discuss the future of queer sex. In the Canadian gay and lesbian magazine *Fugues*, a 1988 article titled “Anonymous Sex” discussed how gay men had taken to computer sex as anonymous in-person sex was now considered a risk for contracting AIDS.<sup>2</sup> With the introduction of America Online (AOL)

in 1992, chat rooms began to garner a curiosity from gay men. By 1998, the presence of gay men in AOL chat rooms had grown so much so that 20% of AOL's subscribers were gay.<sup>3</sup> AOL was christened "GayOL" in 1999 as the service was likened to the bathhouses, a popular location where gay men cruised for anonymous sex.<sup>4</sup> This research project examines the movement of anonymous in-person sexual encounters amongst gay men to the internet via the use of America Online (AOL) chat rooms during the height of the 1990s AIDS epidemic. Chat rooms were a digital landscape where gay men could connect to the internet from the privacy of their own homes and anonymously touch, penetrate, and orgasm with each other virtually as a new mode of safer sex. As well, I explore the performance of sex by gay men in chat rooms in the absence of a human body. This performance of sex to achieve release is what I call *cyber orgasm*. By examining gay and lesbian periodicals that were important in both circulating information on AIDS during the late 1980s and 1990s and discussing the future of queer sex, I aim to understand how gay men used AOL chat rooms as a safe sex alternative to cruise digitally and as a technological tool for queer sexual survival.

According to Alex Espinoza in *Cruising: An Intimate History of a Radical Pastime*, cruising underwent a radical change in the wake of the AIDS epidemic during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Espinoza notes how bathhouses began to shutter and anonymous sex turned into a "dangerous game of Russian roulette."<sup>5</sup> Paranoia and panic surrounding the transmission of AIDS began to take hold of the gay community. With the knowledge of the cause and transmission of AIDS being minimal, safe sex campaigns and practices were promoted in order to curb the rising cases within the United States. Espinoza interviews a man named Doug who was sexually active during the rise of the AIDS epidemic in the mid 1980s. Doug noted the increase in the promotion of safe sex practices in cruising locations from jars full of condoms to posters with information on safer methods of sex. "What would the alternative be?" states Doug, "Abstinence? I don't have much self-control."<sup>6</sup> For gay men like Doug, completely abstaining from sex was not a viable option in keeping queer sexual intimacy alive. Safer sex methods, like condoms, offered an option to continue to vitalize it. In a 1983 article by Rick Bebout in the magazine *Bodypolitic*, a gay periodical from Toronto, Canada, Bebout highlighted the safe sex methods being promoted for gay men. "Limit the number of different sexual contacts," he wrote, "avoid exchanges of body fluids, don't swallow cum, use a rubber for fucking or maybe don't fuck at all."<sup>7</sup> Although informative, Bebout criticized this new safe sex movement that was specifically targeted towards gay men. "Despite the absolute lack of absolute knowledge," he notes, "a lot of early speculation about direct links between the syndrome and various habits of gay life has collapsed in the face of new

evidence...with a quarter of cases in the [United States]...occurring among heterosexuals.”<sup>8</sup> A once beaming, sexual liberation movement amongst gay men during the 1970s to the early 1980s was now cut short with a dramatic shift from anonymous cruising to an advocacy for “socially acceptable...safe sex” by the Centers for Disease Control.<sup>9</sup> Alongside the promotion of safe sex practices for gay men, cruising became targeted by police departments across the United States in order to curb the transmission of AIDS.

Areas that were known to be popular for cruising began to face more frequent policing and employed surveillance technologies to decrease anonymous sexual activity amongst gay men. For example, a 1987 article in San Diego’s *Bravo! Magazine* reported that the San Diego AIDS Project, an organization that provided support to people living with AIDS in the greater San Diego area, had become cruising informants to the local police department, city council, and an organization called “Save the Park.” In a letter to Mayor Maureen O’Conner, the San Diego AIDS Project education coordinator, Lance C. Clem, wrote that the Project shared concern over public, anonymous sexual behavior promoting the spread of AIDS and vowed to work with law enforcement to explore solutions. The Project worked with Police Liaison representative Fred Scholl to create stickers to place in public restrooms that provided information on AIDS and safe sex practices.<sup>10</sup> However, the cooperation between the Project and the police department led to the development of a police campaign to monitor and sweep the parks of *any* public sex between men. Posters began to be placed in restrooms warning any men cruising. One poster placed in San Diego’s Presidio Park restroom read: “Warning: Stop the Spread of AIDS in Presidio Park. Beware of male sexual activity in rest rooms in Presidio Park...Attention All Violators: You are being watched and this conduct will no longer be tolerated. Don’t ruin your life by being arrested or contracting an incurable disease.”<sup>11</sup> Pat Califia’s research in *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* further detailed how police departments established entrapments in parks to arrest gay men for “soliciting lewd conduct.” Techniques that were used by police operations during this time included altering physical spaces where camouflaging sexual acts would be difficult or impossible. Additionally, trees and bushes were cut down and bright lights were installed near public restrooms to deter cruising.<sup>12</sup> Bathhouses also faced an increase in surveillance. For example, in San Francisco, Superior Court Judge Roy Wonder ordered bathhouses to hire employees to monitor the premises every ten minutes to reduce sexual activity amongst gay men.<sup>13</sup> San Francisco’s Health Director Mervyn Silverman supported this order citing that sex in bathhouses was causing the AIDS epidemic to worsen. By 1984, bathhouses were beginning to shutter in heavily populated cities throughout the United States. San Francisco officials ordered that bathhouses

close their doors—shortly after, New York and Los Angeles soon followed in the same direction.<sup>14</sup> A crusade to regulate, criminalize, and ensue panic amongst gay men during the rise in AIDS cases in the 1980s made anonymous in-person cruising an unreliable option to seek out sexual intimacy. As a result, gay men were began seeking alternatives to meet their intimate needs as gay sex became both a feared death sentence and a punishable crime.

In the Canadian gay and lesbian magazine *Fugues*, an article titled “Anonymous Sex” was published in 1988 that discussed the risk factors involving cruising. The article included an unscientific poll that indicated that 85% of gay men had experienced anonymous sex and it also highlighted the types of anonymous sex gay men had taken to in the height of the AIDS epidemic.<sup>15</sup> Phone sex and computer sex became a preferred method of sexual expression as the growth of the AIDS epidemic sparked fears of participating in anonymous sex in person. Computer sex in the 1980s was different from the interactive, real-time chat rooms of the 1990s because computer sex was a one-line experience where users of services could send emails and leave messages. In fact, in the multiple classified advertisement section of *Frontiers Newsmagazine* in 1984, a personal advertisement promoted computer sex by connecting a modem to Oracle, an internet server. The server required the password ‘GAY’ to access the system.<sup>16</sup> This 1984 advertisement is important as it provides the earliest indication that gay men were beginning to substitute measures to cruise for anonymous computer sex. Although these alternative measures were available, the accessibility to engage in computer sex was difficult. Joe Schober, a former employee at America Online (AOL), told Time Magazine in 2012 that the 1980s modems were often slow and expensive to purchase.<sup>17</sup> Computer sex was only available to gay men who could afford both access to the internet and computer equipment. Regardless, conversations surrounding computer sex were beginning to gain traction in the late 1980s. Local gay and lesbian periodicals, fictional novels, and academic institutions were now gaining familiarity with the term “computer sex.” By 1989, the term “computer sex” was added to the Encyclopedia of Homosexuality, a collection of articles that provided academic scholarship for gay and lesbian communities.<sup>18</sup> Released the same year, a fictional novel titled *Equal Affections* written by David Leavitt follows a young gay character who discovers and becomes obsessed with anonymous computer sex. The novel described computer sex as a “fantasy [becoming] the written word” and “no physical contact exists.”<sup>19</sup> With the absence of a human body, computer sex was likened to the experience of in-person anonymous sex. As the number of AIDS cases in the United States reached 100,000 in 1989, gay and lesbian periodicals were beginning to question the future of queer sex and what methods were accessible to keep it alive in the time of the AIDS epidemic.<sup>20</sup>

In 1990, Ferd Eggan of *Outlines* created a four-part series titled *Post Survival Sex*. In the July 1990 issue, Eggan wrote “The 90s are upon us, the second decade of a murderous epidemic. Lesbians and gay men have figured out...how to survive; the 90s’ first demand on us will be to live.”<sup>21</sup> In the first part of the series, Eggan detailed how the AIDS epidemic created a bleak future for queer people within the United States. He advised readers that in order for queer culture to survive, queer sex was necessary. In the second part of the series published in August 1990 issue, Eggan interviewed gay and lesbian individuals in San Francisco and posed a question for the interviewees: “What are gay and lesbian individuals thinking and doing about sex now?”<sup>22</sup> In 1990, San Francisco saw the highest concentration of AIDS deaths in the United States, with the number of AIDS cases being greater than the population itself. To put the negative stigma, grief, and fear surrounding gay sex into place, gay men were re-introducing some elements of sexual play back into their lives. These elements included foreplay and alternatives to penetrative sex. However, “relapses” were occurring where gay men were still engaging in unprotected sex. Honey Lee Cottrell, a founder and photographer for *On Our Backs*, a lesbian pornographic magazine, noted that the once “positive sexual identity” of the gay and lesbian community was disappearing before their eyes.<sup>23</sup> Queer desire was necessary to revitalize the declining queer sex; however, the social and political stigma and fear of AIDS halted the once beaming sexual identities of gay and lesbian peoples. Nevertheless, a “quiet revolution” was beginning to arise that would awaken the lull in queer sexual intimacy. By the end of 1990, conversations surrounding the curiosities of computer sex were beginning to be published in popular gay and lesbian periodicals across the United States.

Stewart Lawler notified readers in the December 1990 issue of *Campaign* that a “quiet revolution” was underway for the gay community.<sup>24</sup> Lawler wrote that the Compuserve Information Service, a large network based in Columbus, Ohio, provided a gateway to access computer monitors across the globe by simply connecting to the server via a local phone call. Compuserve promoted itself as a “global community” where 300,000 subscribers globally interacted with one another. The network offered access to information on consumer services and, most importantly, forums. The user-friendly interface and accessibility to forums opened a path for queer people to join the growing Compuserve community and connect with gay and lesbian people globally. Although the network did not have a specified gay and lesbian forum, Lawler noted that a large number of gay and lesbian men and women were interacting with each other and creating forums based on group interests of topics from queer issues to human sexuality. For gay men, these forums were a space to develop electronic pen pals. Although these forums did not provide

a chat room interface, gay men would send each other gay pornographic material through private forums that could be downloaded onto a floppy disk.<sup>25</sup> These early forums carved a stage for gay men to exchange erotic material for sexual pleasure; however, communication proved difficult due to forums not being interactive in real-time.

Before the creation of interactive real-time chat rooms, Joe Schober was a part of a collaborative team on a project called AppleLink in 1988.<sup>26</sup> AppleLink was commissioned by Apple Computer and Quantum Computer Services to connect Apple II and Macintosh computers. The beta test, named “Samuel,” was similar to that of bulletin board systems (BBS) —applications dedicated to sharing or exchanging messages. Schober was inspired to change the original BBSes to an interactive, real-time exchanging of messages, rather than a one-line experience. The first beta test saw a chat room fill up with 23 people—with messages between people being received in seconds. The beta test project, now named People Connection, soon expanded to a disk operating systems that evolved into Windows. The product created multiple chat rooms where people could interact with each other and discuss topics. By 1992, People Connection was transformed to America Online (AOL) and officially went public. At this time, Windows 3.1 was also released, making personal computers both affordable and accessible. With personal computers now entering the American home, chat rooms saw a growth in participation. Although other chat room services like IBM-Sears’ Prodigy and gaynet.com were available, AOL gained commercial success due to its user-friendly interface. In 1996, AOL introduced a monthly flat rate, rather than an hourly rate, to take part in these chat rooms with no time limitations.<sup>27</sup> Computer sex now became a viable and affordable option for many gay men.

As the availability of AOL began to grow, the company began to gain recognition in gay and lesbian periodicals. “Lately, America On-Line has been pushing itself upon the community,” wrote Laura J. Testa for *Entre Nous* in 1994. “America On-Line has a Lesbian and Gay room,” she continued, “And the chatting gets very hot in the private rooms.” Testa’s testimonial on her use of the early stages of AOLs chat rooms described a new way for gay men and lesbian women to chat with strangers anonymously online. “We discussed all the things we would do to each other if we were only together,” Testa describes of her anonymous encounter, “there was nothing too shocking.”<sup>28</sup> Although Testa’s encounter with anonymous chat room sex was not fulfilling for her as she disregarded chat rooms as a “waste of time,” gay men were promoting chat rooms in periodicals as a safer alternative to cruising in-person. By 1991, the term computer sex had now transformed into cybersex, a combination of both computer and virtual reality.<sup>29</sup> “Cybersex is here, now,” wrote Stuart Norman in the August 1996 issue of *The Front Page*. “It’s

safe sex,” he continued, “and much cheaper than a 900 number and can be just as anonymous.”<sup>30</sup> Norman continued in his article that access to cybersex could be beneficial for gay men and teenagers to learn, explore, and “release” their sexualities while not having to risk meeting men in the “real, flesh and blood.”<sup>31</sup> Promised anonymity while engaging in cybersex was also promoted with some room for risks. According to Espinoza, AOL chat rooms were strictly spaces to chat, flirt, and engage in cybersex. “Cruising for [in-person] sex online...was not only dangerous” writes Espinoza, “it was often considered sleazy.”<sup>32</sup> Espinoza highlights this by sharing stories where gay men would cruise online and meet men in-person only to be either beaten, robbed, or arrested.<sup>33</sup> Although this anonymity was subject to questions surrounding the authenticity of the gay men in chat rooms and the safety of digitally cruising in chat rooms, anonymity was also considered a “life-saving link” by Stuart Norman for those who had no other access to gay sex.<sup>34</sup>

In a study on gay and bisexual men’s use of the internet in the 1990s, Christian Grov (et al.) noted that chat rooms offered an anonymous venue to cruise digitally for partners with minimal concerns of outing or arrests. Chat rooms by default were anonymous and provided opportunities for gay men to digitally cruise without revealing full identities. The AOL chat rooms could be created by users and up to 100 users could join. Within these rooms, users could post visible messages with profile information available to other users in the room. These profiles would have descriptions of the users’ physical characteristics, but personal identifiable information would be rare. Profile names would also be a way for users to convey something about themselves. Profile pictures were rarely used as it was uncommon in the 1990s for chat room users to own digital cameras, scanners, or web cameras. From there, gay men could create ‘Buddy Lists’ of public and private users where they could easily see who was currently online and interact with them. Vernaculars were developed to code gay user-created chat rooms. For example, “M4M” was understood as men seeking men. Within these chat rooms, gay men could interact with users, converse with them, and digitally cruise for cybersex.<sup>35</sup> Members could create additional private rooms if the demand existed. “When a surfer finds a profile he likes,” wrote Joshua Tyrangiel, “he’ll usually send an instant message to the potential paramour with an invitation to a private room.”<sup>36</sup> Private chat rooms served as a space to engage in cybersex with another user. In these private chat rooms, cybersex simulated a performance of sexual stimulation, sensation, and release. This performance of release is what I define as a cyber orgasm.

With an absence of the human body, cybersex relies on textual language to make up for the loss of voice and touch.<sup>37</sup> To achieve the performance of cyber orgasms in chat rooms, users must use textual language to



describe the sensations and sounds of sex and release. Gay men noted how AOL chat rooms offered a passage to quickly enjoy a cyber orgasm. "I can have dick delivered to my door faster than pizza" an anonymous gay man interviewee described of the chat rooms to *Salon*.<sup>38</sup> To further understand the performance of a cyber orgasm, I turned to Juana Maria Rodriguez. Rodriguez shares her experience within F2F (female to female) chat rooms and provides a first-hand account of exchanging sexual texts with her "cyber lover." She highlights that cyber orgasms are a "literal pounding" of the keyboard with sexual climaxes being expressed in gibberish. Rodriguez provides a visual representation of one of her conversations by typing sexual moans as "Ummm dentro ummm [inside]" and typing the cyber orgasm with numbers and exclamation points as "!!!!111." These private chat rooms provided what Rodriguez writes as a "safe sex on demand" where instant sexual gratification is accessible.<sup>39</sup>

By 1999, the AOL subscriber base grew to 17 million.<sup>40</sup> AOL was christened as 'GayOL' since 20% of the AOL subscribers were gay men.<sup>41</sup> AOL gained notoriety as a go-to place to engage in cybersex. "There are a lot of other gay web sites that have chat rooms," notes another anonymous interviewee to *Salon*, "but they came after the fact, after AOL."<sup>42</sup> However, by 2002, AOL subscriptions began to fall.<sup>43</sup> Many AOL subscribers were transitioning to free social media networks such as Myspace. Additionally, the early 2000s opened new chat room websites specifically catered towards gay men seeking in-person sex. Cruisingforsex.com gained popularity as it recorded thousands of hits per day making it the most successful gay hookup site.<sup>44</sup> Gay.com became the "largest and most vital" early site to chat with "kinky daddies, lonely teens, and the serially monogamous." These new chat rooms, however, sparked what *The New York Times* described in 2005 as "HIV 2.0." Men initiating in-person sex through the use of "gay chat rooms, web logs, dating sites, and e-mails" were believed by health officials to be increasing the spread of a new strain of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). Men who initiated in-person sex through these avenues were described by health officials as disregarding this new strain and not being easily convinced to alter their sexual behaviors. A former publisher from gay.com noted to *The New York Times* that gay men were not complying to altering their sexual behaviors due to the understanding of HIV mutations.<sup>45</sup> The use of chat rooms were beginning to decrease as more knowledge around HIV and AIDS began to circulate and anonymous in-person sex now became attainable.

With the introduction of AOL in the early 1990s and the growing accessibility in purchasing personal computers, AOL served as a technological tool to continue the anonymous sexual intimacies between gay men. The AIDS epidemic instilled a social and political stigma of gay sex; but gay men

were determined to not let their sexual desires become eradicated by this epidemic. Cybersex was a movement to combat a stigma that gay sex and death were intricately linked. The chat room allowed for gay men to establish a virtual community in cyberspace where gay men could openly explore for sex and meet other gay men. By the 2000s, cybersex began to dwindle. The introduction of free social networking sites and geosocial networking applications such as Grindr, a mobile dating application that caters to gay men, opened new possibilities to seek out anonymous sexual encounters. Seeking gay sex was now at the touch of our fingertips. “We never stop looking” states Alex Espinoza “Cruising can be viewed as our need to connect with one another... we still go back to that park or alley...and we return again and again.”<sup>46</sup>

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# Ghost in the Geisha: A Critical Analysis of Techno-Orientalism and Asian Female Robots in Science Fiction Films

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AMST 502: American Technocultures

Using the theory of techno-Orientalism, this paper critically examines depictions of Asian female robots in the science fiction films: *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) and *Ex-Machina* (2014). This paper argues that by utilizing the techno-Orientalism framework, cultural products from the West have a tendency to recycle traditional Asian female stereotypes through the newly mechanized bodies of robots. Ultimately, this paper considers how these depictions circulate within a larger discourse to influence dominant ideologies about race and gender in American culture.

The year is 2144 and a “fabricant” by the name of Sonmi-451 works in the futuristic dystopian city of Neo Seoul. As a fabricant, Sonmi-451 is a genetically modified clone, programmed as a source of cheap labor while also removed of individual thought or emotion. With the appearance of an Asian woman, Sonmi-451 works 19-hours a day as a fast food server. She inputs orders, serves food, wipes down tables, collects garbage, and above all else adheres to the company’s most important policy to “honor thy consumer.” Sonmi-451 and her fellow fabricants wear identical formfitting uniforms as they serve the needs of their human patrons but often at the expense of being sexually harassed and abused. This is one of six interconnected storylines featured in the 2012 science fiction film, *Cloud Atlas*, directed by the Wachowskis and Tom Tykwer.<sup>1</sup> The narrative of Sonmi-451 is unique because it embodies the imagery and rhetoric of a broad theoretical framework known as techno-Orientalism.

According to authors David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, techno-Orientalism is the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hyper-technological terms within cultural productions and political discourse.<sup>2</sup> *Cloud Atlas* brings to light a vision of Asia as the embodiment of technological advancement with the presence of fabricants that serve the city of Neo Seoul within a futurized Korea. Despite this appearance of Asia as

a beacon for the future, displays of techno-Orientalism are often steeped in longstanding stereotypes connected to the history of Hollywood. Characters such as Sonmi-451 invoke familiar images of a submissive geisha or docile China doll prevalent in American cultural products. This contradiction that melds the past with the future begs the question, “If Asia is the future, then why are their representations rooted in the past?”

This paper will use the definition of techno-Orientalism provided in *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* by David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu to examine depictions of Asian female robots in American science fiction films during the 2010s. Whereas Edward Said’s original theory depicted Orientalism as a strategy used by the Western world to assert dominance through the containment of Asia in traditional and premodern imagery, techno-Orientalism can be utilized by both the East and the West to construct a broad range of dynamic but often contradictory images. While this framework itself is not oppressive, cultural products from the West tend to use techno-Orientalism to visualize their fears and anxieties over the possibility of an Asian-dominated future.<sup>3</sup> By tracing the history of robots in American culture, this paper will explore the association of robots as both Asian and feminine and the representation of techno-Orientalism in two recent films: the live action remake of *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) directed by Rupert Sanders and the indie hit *Ex-Machina* (2014) directed by Alex Garland. While both films received varying levels of success, they are arguably two of the most popular films in the last decade to feature Asian women in the role of robots. Both of these films were chosen due to their popularity—good and bad—and because of how representations of Asian female characters can influence the larger sphere of American culture, particularly as cultural texts that reinforce the dominant ideologies in place. By analyzing the cultural work of Asian female robots, this paper will look at how these depictions contribute to the larger discourse surrounding race and gender in America.

The terms “Asia” and “Asian” are used frequently throughout this paper, however it is important to recognize that a majority of Asian female robots onscreen have origins in East Asian countries including China, South Korea, and predominantly Japan. The emphasis on East Asia in American film and television can be attributed to the history of Asian stereotypes combined with images of industrialized East Asian cities as sights of “compressed modernity.”<sup>4</sup> While depictions of robots are skewed towards East Asia, focusing on this narrow view of Asia largely ignores the vast diversity of the continent as a whole. The silencing of South and Southeast Asia reinforce negative assumptions that these areas lack the economic potential for technological progress.<sup>5</sup> In reality, newly industrialized nations such as India have played a

significant role in the outsourcing practices of American corporations moving manufacturing jobs overseas. Thus, the now familiar trope of call centers being worked by Indian employees in Western media was born out of the growing fear of India's threat. This is just one example of how the media can embody America's growing concern when Asian countries gain power in the global economy. In addition, the terms "Asian" and "Asian American" may be used interchangeably, however, both terms will be referring to the representation of Asians in America.

Depictions of techno-Orientalism appear through multiple genres; however a majority of work can be found in speculative fiction, more specifically the subgenre of science fiction. Scholars Isiah Lavender and Michelle Reid both assert that throughout the history of science fiction, the genre has a tendency to reinforce racial stereotypes by imagining encounters with alien bodies from a dominant white-centered perspective.<sup>6</sup> The influence on American science fiction by predominantly white authors has made the genre a vessel for techno-Orientalist imagery with its potential to address futurist characteristics of existential, racial, and technological anxieties.<sup>7</sup> As Asian countries started gaining influence on the global market, science fiction narratives would incorporate this competition with Asia from a predominantly white male perspective. Trapping the likeness of Asian people inside the bodies of mechanized robots was one method of asserting dominance and containing the perceived impending threat from Asia. Within science fiction film and television, depictions of Asian female robots emerged as a by-product of the global tensions that existed between the United States and Asia. During the last decade, there has been an increase of cultural products showcasing Asian women in the role of robots. Although the term 'robot' is now recognized as a universal concept, its meaning has gone through several iterations over the course of American history.

### **The Intersectional History of Race, Gender, and Robots in American Culture**

Since the eighteenth century, robots have embodied a complicated and versatile position in American culture. Deeply rooted in the power structure of society, robots have come to represent the tensions of America's social and political contexts that were introduced by a growing industrialized economy. Dominant ideologies about gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and class have largely persisted through robots due to the power and influence wielded by upper and middle-class white men occupying the American elite. In order to maintain positions of power, such men would associate marginalized populations with the machine-like qualities of robots as a method of dehumanizing those they deemed inferior. People of color and women often



found themselves the target of these demeaning depictions as robots, which continued into the twenty-first century. These portrayals were mainly controlled by privileged white men who saw robots as an opportunity to reclaim power and masculinity.<sup>8</sup>

Before the term “robot” was known widely in American culture, humanized machines made frequent appearances onstage as performing “automatons.”<sup>9</sup> During the nineteenth century, stage automatons were showcased with the characteristics of people from the Middle East and China, Black Americans, and Indigenous people. Although white women were also subjected to depictions as automatons, caricatures of ethnic minorities were popular during this time because they embodied a particular brand of exoticism influenced by the imperial expansion of Western nations. These automatons served the dual role of entertaining guests while also allowing white men to control the mechanized bodies of people they considered inferior.<sup>10</sup> One of the earliest depictions of the Orientalized robot that became immensely popular in America was known as “Ajeeb, the Mystifying Chess Automaton.” Originally created in England, Ajeeb made his debut in America in 1885 at the New York City amusement center known as Eden Musée. Ajeeb was described as a human-sized figure sitting atop an ornate cushion with a water pipe in one hand and a small door allowing guests to view the inner workings of his machinery. Despite his appearance described as “Turkish” or “Moorish,” observers had difficulties distinguishing the automaton’s ethnic background. Without an identifiable national origin, Ajeeb became the embodiment of a foreign “primitive” culture that was to be conquered by a modern Euro-American empire.<sup>11</sup>

During this same time period, automatons in a similar vein to Ajeeb made appearances as toys marketed for children. In 1882 the toy manufacturer, Automatic Toy Works, advertised a series of automatons as caricatures of Black Americans and Chinese Americans. One example of a Chinese toy automaton from this catalog was “Fing Wing, A Melican Man.”<sup>12</sup> The advertisement for Fing Wing featured the drawn illustration of a Chinese man wearing a traditional tunic or *changshan* while adorned with a long-braided queue on the back of his head. Illustrated with pronounced almond-shaped eyes, Fing Wing gazes off into the distance while leaning over a laundry tub. This advertisement represented Fing Wing as a domesticated and highly feminized laundryman, one of the few jobs available to Chinese workers in America at the time. The accompanying description reads, “When at work, he bends over the tub, and rubs the garment which he holds in his hands with a naturalness so perfect he might easily be mistaken for a real Celestial.”<sup>13</sup> This advertisement appears to suggest two things. First, the description of the hands seems to imply that the Chinese were biologically meant for this type

of feminine domestic work. Second, the advertisement makes the association between the Chinese as machine-like, claiming it would be difficult to tell the difference between this automaton and a real person.<sup>14</sup> While these depictions may be considered egregious in today's social climate, both Ajeeb and Fing Wing reflected popular opinions about Asians living in America during this time period. Asian Americans were largely exoticized but also associated with subservient roles attributed to women. For Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans, these depictions seemed to reaffirm positions of inferiority and a status as second-class citizens.<sup>15</sup> This association between Asians and machines continued into the twentieth century and emerged through the various outlets including academic writings and popular science fiction novels.

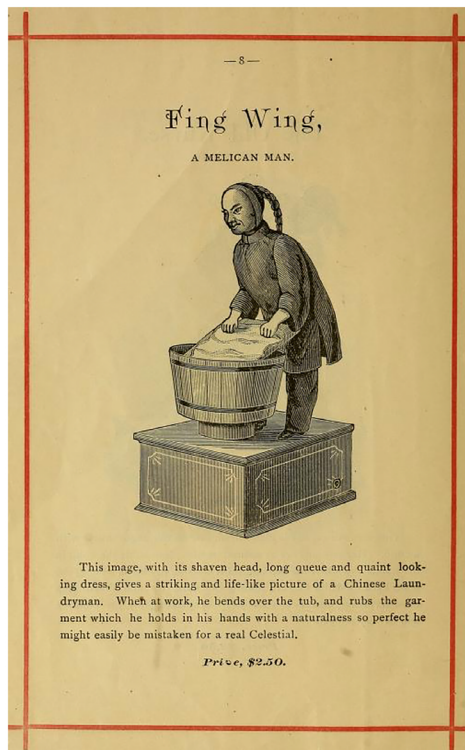


Figure 1: “Fing Wing, A Melican Man” appears as a caricature of a Chinese laundryman from the Automatic Toy Works 1882 catalog. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC- TS2301.T7 A8.

In 1920 Lothrop Stoddard, a historian and founding father of the American eugenics movement, published a book titled *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*. This book was immensely popular as it captured the fear white Americans faced with an increasingly diverse population. *The Rising Tide of Color* warned readers that increased waves of immigration

tion would inevitably lead to the destruction of white civilization. Stoddard declared immigration from Asia as the greatest threat to white supremacy by stating, "It infinitely transcends the peril of arms or markets, since it threatens not merely our supremacy or prosperity but our very race-existence, the well-springs of being, the sacred heritage of our children."<sup>16</sup> According to Stoddard, the Western world had lost its advantage over "colored races" as a result of imperialism which introduced modernity and technology into colonized territories. The newly industrialized nations of Asia were one of Stoddard's primary concerns as they signaled the rising threat of Eastern dominance over the West.<sup>17</sup> Stoddard's anxieties over Asia were shared with other popular writers during this time and displayed prominently throughout the science fiction genre. Stories of this nature were often expressed in the form of pulp fiction magazines, comic books, and science fiction novels consumed by mass audiences. Infamous villain characters such as Fu Manchu, Ming the Merciless, and Dr. Yen Sin appeared as adversaries to icons of traditionally masculine American heroes. These Asian villains were feminized but also embodied the techno-Orientalist contradiction of being both technologically challenged while steeped in the allure of Eastern mysticism. These figures yearned to acquire Western technologies in order to terrorize their victims while also attempting to kidnap and marry a white damsel-in-distress figure.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps one of the more obscure stories of this nature was titled, "The Feminine Metamorphosis" written by psychiatrist turned science fiction writer, David Keller. Published in the August 1929 issue of popular science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories*, Keller writes about women who are frustrated by their lack of career advancement in a male-dominated field. In an effort to receive a promotion these women decide to become men by injecting themselves with testosterone. When their bodies start to deteriorate it is revealed that the testosterone was obtained by castrating thousands of Chinese men infected with syphilis.<sup>19</sup> As with many science fiction texts during this time, the story served a dual purpose of emasculating Chinese men through castration while also punishing women for attempting to surpass their social status. The unifying trait found between these narratives is their construction and control by white male authors. These authors used their writings to influence race and gender hierarchies in America, by implying that the power of technology was reserved for white men and would be catastrophic in the hands of women or ethnic minorities.

While the association between Asia and technology existed with the earliest depictions of robots in American culture, the discourse surrounding Asia's threat as a technological powerhouse culminated during the 1970s. In the decade prior, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was enacted, allowing increased immigration to the United States from the previously

restricted countries of Asia. By the 1970s, the Japanese auto industry was booming, bringing car companies overseas and increasing capital and imports to the U.S. from Japan. The increase of Asian immigrants coupled with competition from Japan fueled a new sense of resentment towards anything associated with Asia.<sup>20</sup> Starting in the 1980s, Japan was viewed as the original techno-Orient and almost a decade later, China's growing global economy catapulted itself as an additional target of Western anxieties. Newly industrialized Asian countries started establishing a presence on the global market and the Western world began seeing the East as their main competitors. This newfound skepticism triggered a rise in cultural products from America with an anxious rhetoric about the potential for an Asian-dominated future. With the influence of the cyberpunk genre, techno-Orientalist imagery emerged associating Asia with concepts of futuristic innovation and ancient mysticism. These cultural products utilized the techno-Orientalism framework to reflect real world tensions between the U.S. and Asia on the global market. Consequently, depictions of Orientalized robots made a resurgence, reminiscent of the automatons Ajeeb and Fing Wing from over a century earlier. Into the twenty-first century, depictions of these robots began to center on Asian women who found themselves reimagined in the form of robots.

### **Close Readings on Asian Female Robots in Film**

As demonstrated in the films *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ex-Machina*, cultural products from the West that utilize the techno-Orientalism framework often blend aspects of advanced technology with traditional and exoticized Asian imagery. This contradiction that melds futuristic technology with premodern aesthetics is also relegated to the roles that Asian women are assigned onscreen. Asian female robots are frequently depicted as submissive and subservient but also highly sexualized and prone to malfunction, which often leads to the murder of humans, a dichotomy deeply rooted in the history of stereotyping East Asian women in mainstream Hollywood films as both docile and dangerous. According to Asian American Studies scholar Elaine H. Kim, of the few roles available the most common depictions of Asian women onscreen were as obedient "lotus blossom" sex objects or sinister sexualized "dragon ladies."<sup>21</sup> These highly sexualized film roles can be attributed to centuries of fetishizing Asian women as an object of desire for Western men. According to author and professor Patricia Park, fetishizing Asian women is a form of objectification which could be interpreted as the male attempting to conquer the foreign female body. Men have mainly controlled and created cultural products depicting Asian women onscreen, consequently leaving these women with little to no agency over their own representations.<sup>22</sup> Seeing as this pattern persists to this day, it becomes more

apparent that these old stereotypes are being recycled and controlled through newly mechanized bodies, a device exemplified by notable appearances in the recent films *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ex-Machina*.

*Ghost in the Shell* (2017), directed by Rupert Sanders, is an American live-action remake of the Japanese manga and animated film by the same name.<sup>23</sup> *Ghost in the Shell* takes place in a cybernetic future where the line between human and machine has become blurred. Due to advancements of biotechnologies, the human body can be enhanced or in some cases completely replaced with cybernetic parts. Major Mira Killian (Scarlett Johansson) is a cyborg with a human brain and synthetic body that works for a counter-terrorism unit called Section 9. Funded by the government, Section 9 operates under an augmentation company called Hanka Robotics. Major investigates the murders of the company's employees by their own malfunctioning robots but discovers that a hacker and failed Hanka test subject named Kuze (Michael Pitt) is behind the attacks. Major soon learns that her memories have been implanted and her true identity is a Japanese woman named Motoko Kusanagi. Shortly after, the Hanka Robotics CEO attempts to have Major killed with a giant spider-like machine. Major survives the attack but Kuze is destroyed in the process while the Hanka Robotics CEO is executed. The film ends with Major ready to continue working for Section 9 under her newly discovered identity.

Despite the rich source material, the live action remake of *Ghost in the Shell* arguably did not encapsulate the profound themes of its predecessor. The original *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) is highly philosophical and often considered to be the pinnacle of Japanese cyberpunk anime during the 1990s. The film offers an exploration on the nature of consciousness and prompts questions about authenticity, asking if a person can remain fundamentally human with artificial cybernetic enhancements or if an artificial intelligence software can gain self-awareness. Director Mamoru Oshii explained that he wanted his film to address concepts about the influence and power of computers and how that influence can change over time.<sup>24</sup> Oshii's version of the film demonstrates this vision by showing a future where humans have immersed themselves with machines to establish a new identity as cyborgs. While the original *Ghost in the Shell* is an exploration on the sentience of artificial intelligence and consciousness, the live-action remake inadvertently became a conversation about the issues over identity and race due to backlash for its casting choices.

The 2017 *Ghost in the Shell* remake was largely considered a commercial and critical failure, grossing \$40 million domestically against a \$110 million budget.<sup>25</sup> Most of the downfall was due to the casting controversy that plagued the film since an announcement reported a white actress, Scar-

lett Johansson, would be cast in the lead role of Major Motoko Kusanagi. The film received tremendous backlash from fans who accused the studio of whitewashing a role meant for an Asian actress. Despite the controversy, the studio defended their casting choice with producer Steven Paul explaining, "There are all sorts of people and nationalities in the world in *Ghost in the Shell*. I don't think it was just a Japanese story. *Ghost in the Shell* was a very international story, and it wasn't just focused on Japanese; it was supposed to be an entire world."<sup>26</sup> The erasure of Japan as the story's setting was one of the tactics the studio used to mitigate its controversy. While the original film took place in a fictional Japanese city called "New Port City," the remake remained location-less, instead set in an unknown city simply referred to as "the future." The studio employed other tactics to separate the remake from its Japanese predecessor such as providing Major with a backstory. Major's name was changed to the European sounding Mira Killian, although it is later revealed that she lived a past life as Motoko Kusanagi. Considering this divergence from the original source material, it can be assumed that Major's backstory was an attempt for the studio to justify their casting by explaining that Major's "ghost" was actually a Japanese woman living inside the "shell" of Johansson. This decision further complicates some of the racial politics within the film, particularly with the identity of Major, which remains a highly divisive topic up for debate.

Ambiguity over Major's race is largely complicated due to her identity as a cyborg. In an interview with *Good Morning America*, Johansson defended her role in the film stating, "I think this character is living a very unique experience in that she has a human brain in an entirely machinate body. I would never attempt to play a person of a different race, obviously. Hopefully, any question that comes up of my casting will be answered by audiences when they see the film."<sup>27</sup> The original director Mamoru Oshii also defended the casting decision by explaining, "The Major is a cyborg and her physical form is an entirely assumed one. The name 'Motoko Kusanagi' and her current body are not her original name and body, so there is no basis for saying that an Asian actress must portray her. Even if her original body (presuming such a thing existed) were a Japanese one, that would still apply."<sup>28</sup> Both interviews appear to justify the casting of Johansson by implying that as a cyborg, Major could not have a racial identity because she is living inside a mechanized body. Film scholar Janice Loreck challenges this argument by explaining that while cyborg bodies have the flexibility to exhibit race as a mere physicality, the human actors that portray them are not afforded that luxury.<sup>29</sup> According to sociologist Rogers Brubaker, racial identity cannot be muted because it embodies the ancestry and lived experience within a larger context of the social world.<sup>30</sup> While accounting for Brubaker's defini-

tion of racial identity, the argument that any actress regardless of race could play a cyborg may be valid within the world of *Ghost in the Shell* but becomes complicated when analyzed in the social context outside of the film's world. Considering the controversy surrounding the film, the changes made to Major's backstory seemed like more of an afterthought as opposed to a genuine attempt to highlight Major's ghost as Motoko. The only visual seen of Motoko is through a distorted flashback where the silhouette of a woman is dragged offscreen, further removing a face from the name. Loreck argues that Johansson's European and Jewish ancestry in addition to her past filmography, would make the racial identity of Major as overwhelmingly white. Casting Johansson in the role of the cyborg makes this a dominant white-centered narrative told within the confines of an Asian-influenced world. The discourse surrounding Major's race is important to consider as the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise centers around the authenticity of human consciousness within a mechanized shell.

Major remains the film's driving force and her cyborg identity offers additional power in the context of American culture. Within the history of American robots, the cyborg became a utopian symbol meant to demonstrate the successful merge between humans and machines. In 1983, feminist theorist Donna Haraway called for a cyborg identity that could blend the dichotomies of race, gender, and sexuality established by dominant social hierarchies. In fact, toward the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, women and people of color began to reclaim, and thereby embrace, the cyborg identity as a form of empowerment.<sup>31</sup> Major embodies the strength and power of the cyborg identity representing the bridge between human and machine. This empowerment is consequently relegated to Scarlett Johansson, whose role is significantly contrasted by the presence of the remaining robots in the film.

While there are few Asian (human) women onscreen in *Ghost in the Shell*, one prominent scene features the appearance of robots referred to as "geisha bots." The geisha bot is visually introduced on a woman's back, dressed in a bright red kimono, as she slowly walks down a dark corridor lined with illuminated floor panels. The next shot cuts to a front close-up revealing a robotic pale white face with pupil-less black eyes. A large red circle is stamped in the center of the robot's white face, reminiscent of the Japanese flag. Added sound effects reveal the geisha bot's robotic nature as the eyelids close making an audible clicking sound. While geisha bots are not present in the original film, their appearance is likely a visual reference pulled from the anime sequel, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. During a Hanka Robotics business meeting, the geisha bots are seen scattered around a conference room performing various tasks. As powerful men are discussing the future of

cybernetics, the geisha bots wordlessly serve them drinks and perform traditional dances with folding fans. While one of the geisha bots serves a Hanka employee, she is hacked by Kuze which causes her to malfunction. Shortly afterward, a handful of geisha bots also begin malfunctioning as they extend their corded limbs into long spider-like legs and crawl on all fours, strangling and dragging the men to the outer edges of the room. As the geisha bots turn deadly, Major infiltrates the meeting, shooting the robots to rescue the guests.

The geisha bots are not human per se, however, they have the appearance of the traditional Japanese geisha with additional futuristic design elements. Despite being a robot, the mannerisms of the geisha bot are reminiscent of the film roles played by Asian women in Hollywood. At first glance, the geisha bot is mute, demure, and subservient to the businessmen, but when hacked, she malfunctions into a murderous monster. These characteristics can be linked to the dichotomy of Asian female stereotypes that jump between the submissive geisha and the dangerous dragon lady. The depictions of these stereotypes are often one-dimensional and the same could be said for the geisha bots in this film. Considering the context of the film's casting and the lack of Asian women onscreen, it can be argued that Scarlett Johansson is given the power in this film while Asian women are contained and dehumanized in the form of robots. This power dynamic is more telling when considering how Major ruthlessly shoots the geisha bot in the face as she pleads for her survival. Therefore, *Ghost in the Shell* uses the techno-Orientalism framework to recycle longstanding Asian stereotypes in the form of a futuristic mechanized body. In addition to the depiction of geisha bots, techno-Orientalist contradictions are present throughout the entire film, noticeably in the environment. The city's skyline appears highly futuristic with hologram advertisements of vaguely Asian iconography, including a lotus flower and Buddhist monk. While the studio attempted to erase any mention of Japan from the city's location, visual reminders of Japanese aesthetics are present in every facet of the landscape. If assumed that this city is not in Japan, then the film would imply that Japanese influences have completely enveloped the future, further supporting the techno-Orientalism framework. *Ghost in the Shell* largely suffers from the inconsistent changes made by the studio in defense of their casting decision. These choices made to mitigate the film's casting controversy further reinforce a system of social stratification to empower white women while consequently suppressing Asian women. *Ghost in the Shell* dehumanizes Asian women within the mechanized form of geisha bots, whereas the film *Ex-Machina* further complicates the depiction of Asian female robots onscreen.

*Ex-Machina* (2014), directed by Alex Garland, is a science fiction film about robots and the development of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.).<sup>32</sup> The



film centers around a young coder named Caleb Smith (Domhnall Gleeson) who works for a large search engine company, Blue Book. Caleb wins a contest to visit the home of the company's CEO, Nathan Bateman (Oscar Isaac). Nathan reveals that he built a female robot with A.I. named Ava (Alicia Vikander) and suggests Caleb participate in a series of Turing tests to determine if Ava is capable of individual thought and consciousness. Caleb spends a majority of time interacting with Ava, Nathan, and a house servant named Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno), who later is also revealed to be a robot. At one-point Ava, who remains contained within a glass cell, secretly pleads with Caleb to help her escape. Caleb, who becomes infatuated with Ava, agrees to help with the intention of leaving with her. After a series of misdirection between both Nathan and Caleb, Ava eventually escapes her cell. Shortly after, Nathan is killed by both Ava and Kyoko, while Caleb ends up trapped inside a room. The film ends with Ava assuming a human appearance and leaving the house while Caleb remains locked away unlikely to be found.

When examining depictions of robots, there is much to uncover on the discourse surrounding race and gender in *Ex-Machina*. Perhaps most noticeably, the film's narrative embodies a significantly male-centered perspective. *Ex-Machina* revolves around the interactions between Caleb and Nathan as they discuss Ava's programming. As the creator of robots, Nathan is the embodiment of hypermasculinity. He is characterized as highly narcissistic, with crude language, brash behavior and frequent weightlifting. The robots that Nathan creates are all highly feminine and sexualized, possibly with the exception of Ava. Nathan constantly reprimands his robots like a patronizing father-figure but ultimately meets his demise at the hands of his creations. Although Ava occupies a significant amount of time onscreen, her character remains veiled with a mysterious quality further personified through her synthetic body. Ava's body is perhaps more modest in appearance compared to her peers, alternating between human-like skin, metallic material, and mechanical skeletal structures. Film scholar Catherine Constable explores Ava's gender performativity and "humanness" further by examining her shift from opportunistic to truthful. Ava is a complicated character that challenges a construction of gender heteronormativity through her actions and perhaps unknowing deception of Caleb.<sup>33</sup> Ava eventually overpowers Nathan toward the end of the film, which could be interpreted as her dismantling the patriarchy. Despite Ava's complicated backstory and power, her success largely overshadows the other prominent robot present throughout the film, Kyoko.

When Kyoko first makes an appearance, she wordlessly walks into Caleb's room as he is sleeping. With slow and methodical movements, Kyoko places a meal tray on the counter before leaving, startling Caleb in the process. The next scene to feature Kyoko, shows her serving Nathan and

Caleb dinner before accidentally knocking over a glass of wine. Nathan yells at Kyoko for her clumsiness and tells Caleb not to waste his time talking to her because she doesn't understand English. Since it is not revealed until later that Kyoko is a robot, viewers are made to believe that Nathan is berating a Japanese woman. Kyoko is an Asian-appearing woman that is characterized as demure, always keeping her gaze down at the floor. While Kyoko remains mute throughout the film, she has the appearance and mannerisms of a modern-day geisha, wearing short, revealing white clothing with high heels, programmed to be sexually complicit and available at all times. During one scene, Caleb confronts Kyoko, but she responds by attempting to remove her clothes which disturbs him. Nathan appears shortly after and with a literal flip of a switch she immediately begins dancing. These actions seem to imply that Kyoko is programmed to be obedient but has no sense of consciousness of her own. Unlike Ava, her A.I. programmed peer, Kyoko is clearly a different type of robot, designed to serve and never to think independently. In addition, Kyoko's appearance is also more human-like with the only hint of her robotic nature found beneath her artificial skin. Kyoko's human-passing design contrasts with Ava's hybrid mechanized body. This distinction blurs the line between human and machine for Kyoko, as she appears to more seamlessly fit into her robotic role.

Towards the end of the film when Ava escapes her room, she is shown whispering to Kyoko. As Nathan appears, Ava tackles him to the ground before Kyoko silently drives a knife into his back. Through Ava's influence, Kyoko has turned on her master but seemingly did not make that decision on her own volition. Shortly after being stabbed, Nathan hits Kyoko with a blunt object which causes her to fall to the floor, clearly destroyed. According to communications scholar LeiLani Nishime, Kyoko primarily functions as a sacrificial lamb character that dies in order for Ava to succeed. She becomes a plot device used to provide additional information and move the story forward for the other prominent characters.<sup>34</sup> Although Kyoko does not have the appearance of a traditional Japanese geisha, her character draws heavily from the Asian female stereotypes previously mentioned. Kyoko is the embodiment of the Asian female dichotomy as a mute submissive sex object, yet also a dangerous deceitful woman who impassively stabs Nathan when directed. Similar to the geisha bots from *Ghost in the Shell*, Kyoko is another manifestation of techno-Orientalism with her futuristic body but demure mannerisms reminiscent of the long-standing geisha stereotype.

In addition to the representation of Kyoko, *Ex-Machina* displays a complicated perspective of racial politics through the remaining robot characters. Ava, played by Swedish actress Alicia Vikander, is undeniably the most empowered female character in this film, while Kyoko remains suppressed.

During one of the more disturbing moments of the film, Caleb sneaks into Nathan's room where it is revealed that other female robots were created prior to Ava. Nathan's closet is full of broken naked female robot bodies, literal skeletons in his closet. Noticeably two of these robot bodies are people of color: an Asian robot named Jade and a Black robot named Jasmine. Security footage reveals signs of self-destructive behavior as Jasmine is seen slumped against the floor and Jade destroys her arms against a door after demanding to be set free. These visuals are upsetting to watch when considering the larger history of race in American culture. For example, the Black robot is clearly headless, which may conjure images of African American lynching in the Jim Crow South. During an interview with *Cinematic Essential*, writer and director Alex Garland was asked if he was attempting to make a social commentary on the race of the robots. Garland responds that Nathan's character purposely uses race in order to perturb Caleb and instigate him. Nathan constantly makes racist comments to mess with Caleb and complicate his own hypermasculine persona. The director wants audiences to question if Nathan is actually misogynistic or if he is putting on an act. In the interview Garland explains:

So, in terms of the races of the women inside the closets for example, there isn't an embedded point in there. Sometimes you do things unconsciously, unwittingly, or stupidly, I guess, and the only embedded point that I knew I was making in regards to race centered around the tropes of Kyoko [Sonoya Mizuno], a mute, very complicit Asian robot, or Asian-appearing robot, because of course, she, as a robot, isn't Asian. But, when Nathan treats the robot in the discriminatory way that he treats it, I think it should be ambivalent as to whether he actually behaves this way, or if it's a very good opportunity to make him seem unpleasant to Caleb for his own advantage. So, for example, when Kyoko accidentally tips over the wine glass, did Nathan program her, or tell her, to knock over that glass?<sup>35</sup>

This interview with Alex Garland is incredibly telling as it reveals the intended power dynamic of both race and gender found within the film. According to Garland, there is no commentary on race intended within the film's robots and the only deliberate choice was through the characterization of Kyoko as the mute submissive Asian character. Garland justifies his decision to characterize Kyoko this way by stating because she is a robot, "of course" she is not Asian. Garland's quote further reinforces the argument that

Kyoko is merely a plot device and stereotypical trope used to move the story forward. According to Garland, the primary tensions of the film are meant to be between the two male characters, while the women robots, particularly women of color, are pushed to the sides.

Garland's interview presents an interesting concept found in several science fiction films, questioning if it is justifiable to discriminate against robots because they are not human. Both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ex-Machina* circulate this question in their story narratives and the larger context of American culture. Alex Garland justifies depicting a submissive sexually passive Asian woman because she is a robot and therefore not Asian. Scarlett Johansson justifies being cast as Motoko Kusanagi, because the character is a cyborg and therefore not Japanese. Film scholar Janice Loreck argues that these justifications are reminiscent of controversial concepts of transracialism that attempts to remove racial identity from a body, which in this case would be a mechanized body.<sup>36</sup> Justifying the removal of racial identity from a robot, ignores lived experience and social context merely for the self-fulfilling purpose of generating revenue by attaching a famous celebrity to a film role or centering on a male-dominated narrative while ignoring women of color. Scholar LeiLani Nishime explains that this racial flexibility used in a cybernetic future empowers white actors and actresses but suppresses secondary Asian female characters.<sup>37</sup> These practices are largely an excuse by dominant culture to reinforce social hegemony linked to a longstanding history of fetishizing and objectifying Asian women. Both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ex-Machina* utilize a particular representational choice to depict Asian women as both traditional through mannerisms and dress but also futuristic in a robot body, exemplifying the contradiction of the techno-Orientalism framework. Mainstream film and television have a tendency to recycle familiar but harmful stereotypes of ethnic minorities, which further perpetuates said stereotypes within the broader spheres of American culture.

### **Cultural Work: The Influence of Asian Female Robots in American Culture**

In the documentary *Slaying the Dragon*, actress and stand-up comedian Amy Hill explains, "I think the perception of Asian women bleeds into Asian American women. There is this sensibility that because we look like we're Japanese or Chinese which our ancestry is perhaps, we have this innate, genetic ability to serve men, which is not true."<sup>38</sup> Although Hill made this statement in 1988, many of these assumptions towards Asian women continue to persist today. As seen through both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ex-Machina*, the depictions of Asian women as the embodiment of sexual servitude and malicious deceit continue to thrive in American film and television. Ac-

According to sociologist Ann Swidler, culture influences thought by shaping habits, skills, and styles for people to construct “strategies of action.” Films are a component of culture that influences viewers and how they act in the larger collective consciousness.<sup>39</sup> Sociologist Nancy Wang Yuen writes that mass media institutions such as the Hollywood studio system often reinforce racist ideologies. Although depictions onscreen are largely fictional, racial stereotypes can lead to assumptions about particular racial groups.<sup>40</sup> Consequently the representation of Asian women as sexually available docile robots reinforces a dominant ideology about race and gender that bleeds into other facets of American culture exemplified by the appearance of sex dolls, dating harassment, and mainstream pornography-viewing preferences.

Throughout the history of American robots, the thought of creating machines as romantic partners was always a possibility, particularly amongst male roboticists. This idea became a reality in 2010 when an electrical engineer and computer scientist, Douglas Hines, announced a line of robotic sex dolls under the name Roxxy. These sex dolls were designed to be lifelike, including having a heartbeat and even simulating an orgasm. Advertised as “always turned on” and “designed for companionship,” this line of sex dolls featured a wide array of settings and models made to fit any male consumer preference. One of the more controversial sex dolls from the Roxxy line included “Young Yoko” who is clearly meant to emulate an adolescent Japanese schoolgirl. The Young Yoko sex doll is marketed with slogans such as, “Oh so young (barely 18) and waiting for you to teach her” and “very naïve but curious.”<sup>41</sup> These advertisements for Young Yoko are particularly disturbing considering the large number of children exploited for sex tourism in Asia.<sup>42</sup> Judging by these advertisements, it would appear that this sex doll is being geared towards individuals, mostly men, with pedophilic tendencies. The argument has been made that sex robots are an opportunity for consumers to explore their most primitive desires, even if illegal, without the risk of harming actual people. However, the ownership that men exhibit over sex dolls reinforces myths of patriarchal tradition that ultimately justifies sexual violence against women. In many cases, replacing sexual partners with robots can normalize oppressive behaviors towards women.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, redirecting these problematic behaviors towards robots may actually influence attitudes about Asian women and, disturbingly, children. As demonstrated in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ex-Machina*, even if Asian-appearing robots are not human, harmful behaviors can perpetuate racist ideologies and influence American culture. The Young Yoko sex doll further fuels the fetishizing gaze on Asian women by constructing them as literal sex objects that can be purchased and controlled.

While Asian-appearing sex dolls are being featured on the consumer

market, dating preferences are also heavily influenced by the media. In 2013, researchers pulled data from a Facebook App called “Are You Interested?” Of the 2.4 million heterosexual interactions observed, men of all races (except Asian men) preferred responding to Asian women.<sup>44</sup> These revealing statistics paralleled the appearance of personal ads for men seeking Asian partners listed on websites such as: Asia Friendfinder, KoreanCupid, and Craigslist.<sup>45</sup> The name for this preference to date Asian women (and men) is popularly referred to as “yellow fever.” According to philosophy professor Robin Zheng, yellow fever is often disguised as a flattering compliment but is a form of racial fetishism which targets Asian women.<sup>46</sup> The practice of seeking Asian women is often predatory and can make them more vulnerable to sexual and racial harassment. Recent studies have found that these forms of harassment can cause disproportionate psychological burdens on Asian women. For example, sexual harassment experienced among Asian women has led to an increase in “psychological distress, PTS severity, and physical health symptoms.”<sup>47</sup> One notable issue is rooted in how this practice objectifies Asian women as it constructs an idea and assumption about them based on superficial elements such as appearance. Zheng traces this fetish to hypersexualized racial stereotypes and explains that the direct effect of yellow fever is the reinforcement of social stratification with online dating sites filtered by race as well as racial categories of pornography.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, influence from the fetishization of Asian women has bled significantly into viewing habits found on mainstream pornography sites.

With the rapid development of the internet the last couple decades, viewing pornography online has become a lot more accessible for consumers. Research has found that viewing sexually explicit material online can influence assumptions towards sexual behavior in relation to racial groups. Studies also reveal that in pornography women of all races are often depicted as victims of aggressive behaviors from men. According to scholars Yanyan Zhou and Bryant Paul, stereotypes of Asian women persist in pornography as they are often treated like “human dolls.”<sup>49</sup> On December 11, 2019, Pornhub released the 2019 year-in-review data which showed statistics on the site’s most popular categories and viewing trends. According to online data analytics company SimilarWeb, as of April 1, 2020 Pornhub was the top ranked Adult website in the United States.<sup>50</sup> Based on the year-in-review statistics, the United States was also the largest consumer of the website’s content with 70% of American users identified as male. The most revealing data from this report showed the “Most Searched for Terms of 2019.” The number one most searched term on Pornhub was “Japanese” with the second term being “hentai.” Following closely behind in the fifth most searched term was “Korean” and “Asian” was the sixth. Therefore, four out of six of Pornhub’s

most searched terms of 2019 consisted of Asian-related categories.<sup>51</sup> Other pornography sites show similar viewing trends with terms related to Asia consisting of popular viewing categories. As one of the top consumers of pornography, the United States has a hand in contributing to these statistics. Due to the power and influence that film roles have in perpetuating racial stereotypes, it is likely that Asian female robots will continue to influence these larger spheres of American culture for future years.

### **Reclaiming Power and Critiquing Dominant Culture**

Although scholars often critique the harmful effects of the techno-Orientalist lens utilized by the West, Asian American creators have found potential in using the framework to critically examine and challenge depictions of a futuristic Asia. According to scholars David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, the downside is that creators could internalize or even perpetuate these harmful representations, however the bidirectional power of techno-Orientalism allows Asian American creators to initiate conversations within cultural and political spaces that critique dominant culture.<sup>52</sup> Asian American filmmakers and actresses are finding ways to reclaim identity and challenge stereotypes by creating their own cultural products. A handful of films released in the last couple years have shown Asian Americans as lead characters navigating complicated spaces created by technology or even embracing the robot identity as a source of empowerment. Two films written and directed by Asian American women come to mind, the independent film *Advantageous* (2015) and the short film *Cake* (2016).

*Advantageous*, co-written and directed by Jennifer Phang, tells the story of Gwen (Jacqueline Kim), an Asian American corporate executive and single mother about to be let go from her job so the company can find someone with a more “universal” look to be the face of the company.<sup>53</sup> In order to secure an education and future for her daughter, Gwen agrees to participate in an experimental treatment which will transfer her consciousness into the body of a younger multiracial woman. Similar to *Ghost in the Shell*, *Advantageous* centers around the potential for biotechnologies, however *Advantageous* explores the complex emotional and psychological impact a person would undergo to live in a different racialized body. According to scholar LeiLani Nishime, this film shows audiences how social and political structures frame the choice of racial transformation, particularly for a person of color.<sup>54</sup> One year following the release of *Advantageous*, the short film *Cake* made rounds on the film festival circuit in 2016. *Cake* is a comedy written and directed by Anne Hu that tells the story of a married couple trying to spice up their sex lives by ordering an Asian female sex robot.<sup>55</sup> Anne Hu casted herself in the role of the sex robot while donning a black leather corset, spiked heels, and

riding crop. *Cake* offers a critique of the Asian women fetish by having the sex robot wear dominatrix gear but also be at the control of a white couple. In an interview Anne Hu explains, “I have to personally fight the submissive Asian woman stereotype. People in the industry have used that stereotype to my face.”<sup>56</sup> Hu uses this film to show her vulnerability by allowing herself to embrace the robot identity for empowerment but also acknowledging her own position of inequality. As both of these films illustrate, if Asian Americans are given the opportunity to create their own representations, these narratives will offer an alternative perspective to dominant culture.

While these examples showcase independent works by Asian American creators, one mainstream television show has also been critiquing dominant culture with depictions of robots onscreen. The HBO television series *Westworld*, created by Taiwanese American Lisa Joy and British American Jonathan Nolan, has been recognized for challenging the myth of American identity associated with notions of traditional masculinity.<sup>57</sup> *Westworld* tells the story of a technologically advanced amusement park where people can indulge in their most primal desires on robots, notably played by women and people of color. During season two, the storyline centers on the reprogramming of the park’s robots which causes them to rebel against their human developers as well as the wealthy investors and guests. An episode titled, “Akane no Mai” features a Japanese-themed section of the park known as Shogun World, based on the Edo Period of feudal Japan.<sup>58</sup> Shogun World is marketed as a more “extreme” experience which may be a nod to traditional stereotypes of Orientalism associating Asians as savages. One of the developers admits that instead of writing separate storylines for the Shogun World robots he recycled the same narratives from the *Westworld* characters. With the newly reprogrammed system, these Japanese robots go off script and completely rewrite the storylines given to them by their human creators. One of these robots named Akane (Rinko Kikuchi) is a madam that runs a geisha brothel. Although Akane embodies the traditional geisha role, she showcases a complicated series of emotions and self-determined actions that challenge the familiar Asian female stereotypes. Utilizing the techno-Orientalism framework, *Westworld* assigns Asian women the role of robots but critiques the overused trope by acknowledging that these narratives are often recycled without much thought. The character of Akane shows that even while occupying the role of a robot, a geisha can be empowered when provided with character depth and a rich storyline.

Historically, American cultural products have used the techno-Orientalism framework to assert positions of power over the threat of Asia’s technological dominance. These cultural products that utilize techno-Orientalist imagery tend to reinforce longstanding stereotypes prevalent



in Hollywood film and television. In particular, Asian women continue to be fetishized onscreen for Western viewers and presented as either sexually submissive or deceitful, or both. By repurposing these roles through the mechanized bodies of robots, this dominant ideology thrives through the suppression of Asian women. While mainstream depictions of Asian female robots in film tend to reinforce racial stereotypes, Asian American creators are utilizing the techno-Orientalism framework to challenge and critique dominant culture. Despite this progress made to reclaim power, depictions of techno-Orientalism in American culture will continue to persist as the global economy is reoriented from the West to the East. Recently, newly industrialized Asian countries such as Taiwan and Singapore have joined the ranks of South Korea, China, and Japan as the newest targets of techno-Orientalist imagery.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, as Asia remains a growing presence in the world market of manufacturing and consuming technology, techno-Orientalism will continue to exist and reflect discourse on race and gender in American culture.

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## 2021 Weaver Prize

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

The 2021 Weaver Prize was awarded to Raymond Gandara for his paper, "Imperial Machinery: The Roads, Camineros, and Engineers of the U.S.-Occupied Philippines." The Weaver Prize Committee reported in a year of fabulous Weaver Prize submissions, this essay stood out with its clarity of writing, depth of sources, and persuasive focus. Utilizing government publications, engineering manuals, and travel guides, the author convincingly argues that roads were both "tool and text" of imperialism, helping solidify American power in the Philippines in the early twentieth century. Analyzing both the symbolism of roads and the concrete results of roadbuilding in the Philippines, this essay connects manliness and white supremacy to the work of the camineros and capitaces who labored to restrain the fertile landscape for the sake of access to markets, tourists, and bureaucratic projects of the "imperial pastoral."

Additionally, the Weaver Prize Committee awarded an honorable mention to Michelle Okawa's "Ghost in the Geisha: A Critical Analysis of Techno-Orientalism and Asian Female Robots in Science Fiction Films," an essay accepted for publication in *The American Papers* prior to the decision of the Weaver committee. The committee remarked that this superb essay on techno-orientalism in modern science fiction films focused on Asian female robots. The committee applauds the essay's exceptionally researched analysis on this timely and important topic.

2021 Weaver Prize Winner

# Imperial Machinery: The Roads, Camineros, and Engineers of the U.S.- Occupied Philippines

Raymond Gandara

AMST 502: American Technocultures

This essay was written for Dr. Dustin Abnet's AMST 502T - American Technocultures in Spring 2020. The assignment was to write an extended research paper (20-25 pages) on an open topic which intersected discourses on technology and American culture. In this paper, I analyze the roads built during the first two decades of U.S. colonization in the Philippines to see what the imperial technology of the road could tell us about American imperialism. Truly a pandemic paper, the project was conducted using only digitized primary sources, all of which are written from the perspective of American colonizers: government publications, travel guides, and letters from a government official's wife. I wish for readers to reflect upon where in the world does the U.S. exert its influence? How does the U.S. use technology or infrastructure as a form of influence or control in other countries? How are ideas of race, native sovereignty, and nationhood influenced or undermined by technology and bureaucracy?

## Reading the Road

"In the foregoing brief sketch of Manila," concluded a 1908 travel guide published by the Manila Merchants' Association, "but scant space has been available for more than the mere touching on, or mentioning of, a few of the many, many interesting, instructive, and delightful points and places to be met with in and about the capital and metropolis of the Philippine Islands." Indeed, forgiving the ironic wordiness of their declaration, how could the Merchants possibly hope to capture the picturesque qualities of this sprawling archipelago composed of over 7,000 islands, a place of such historical significance in so brief a brochure? The capital, Manila — "The Pearl of the Orient," as the Merchants had so inscribed it — sat in the yawning oyster of Manila Bay, which bore witness to the historic defeat of the Spanish Fleet by

the U.S. Navy just a decade earlier during that “splendid little war” known as the Spanish–American War. However brief an introduction, “To the student, the traveler, the man of business, and to the idler to whom the world’s capitals and cities are an open book, and whose streets are plainly printed lines,” the Merchants provided assurance that “Manila and the Philippines present a new volume whose pictures will be found enchanting, whose legends, history, and lore will be found delightful, and all printed upon pages of the greatest opportunity.”<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing conclusion of this 1908 travel guide, in all its “scant space,” may simply have been a clever marketing tactic to drum up business for the respective projects of the Manila Merchants’ Association, likely composed of an array of Manila-based European and American entrepreneurs. Whatever its proficiencies or deficiencies in facilitating tourism, this pamphlet does provide two valuable insights into the relationship between the United States and the Philippines at this time. Firstly, presenting Manila and the Philippines as a treasure accurately reflects how the U.S. saw the islands. Unlike that “splendid little war” against the Spanish, the U.S. fought a much more prolonged Philippine–American War, rife with torture, disease, and bloody guerilla warfare, to maintain control over the archipelago. The United States believed they had purchased the islands fair-and-square from the Spanish, along with other island territories like Guam and Puerto Rico. While the “insurrection” was nominally declared “over” in 1902, the U.S. military continued to hunt down *insurrectos* over the next decade.<sup>2</sup> Despite self-conscious proclamations by people like President William McKinley who framed the relationship as one of “benevolent assimilation,” in which the U.S. kindly molded the Philippines in its own image by teaching Filipinos the virtues of democracy and self-government, the reality was that the “pearl of the Orient” became another territorial possession of America’s sprawling empire at the turn of the twentieth century.

Secondly, the pamphlet uses some surprisingly insightful language to address its readers. The target audience for the Merchants are the students, travelers, businessmen, and idlers, “[for] whom the world’s capitals and cities are an open book, and whose streets are plainly printed lines.” When the world’s capitals, like Manila, are “an open book,” the streets also serve as the “plainly printed lines” upon which world travelers may read the “legends, history, and lore” of subdued nations. The phrasing not only demonstrates the incredible amount of privilege and power that these world travelers enjoyed at this time, but it also provides a useful lens to analyze one of the most crucial technologies in the U.S. insular government’s imperial infrastructure — the road. Roads functioned as tools to pacify and root out *insurrectos*, control the labor of Filipinos, and reorganize the native landscape and people into a

formation that was commercially beneficial for American imperialists who sought a path into the elusive China market. But the road is not just a tool: it is a text. Colonial administrators used these “plainly printed lines” to tell a story of American empire disguised as technological progress, dominance as benevolence.

This paper unpacks the contradiction inherent in that story by exploring the cultural significance of the roads built and maintained during the first two decades of the U.S.-Occupied Philippines. These roads functioned as “imperial technologies,” as tools to achieve the material and cultural goal of strengthening the U.S.’s power on the world stage. As with other imperial technologies like the railroad, bridge, well, and aqueduct, roads relied upon the labor of both Filipinos and Americans, in the roads’ case the *caminero* road worker who fixed the roads and the American engineer who oversaw the *camineros*. The roads and the people who built them served as crucial building blocks for a larger “imperial machinery,” the colonial bureaucracy which attempted to cement the U.S.’s power and authority in the islands through public works projects like the road. In spite of the oft cited “benevolent assimilation” argument by U.S. colonial officials, this imperial machinery stamped out miles upon miles of roads in the midst of ongoing guerilla warfare from Filipino revolutionaries never fully stamped out. Thus, hidden in something as innocuous as the road is a battlefield of stories, if not the battlefield itself, revealing the more nuanced role that such technologies played in American imperialism. Even through an exploration of government publications, trade journals, historical essays, letters, and travel guides, sources written by and for the colonizer, the contested meanings inherent in the imperial machinery can come into sharper focus.<sup>3</sup> Such contested meanings spanned a variety of thematic discourses, including nature, manliness, class, race, and labor. Reading the road allows us to explore both how imperialists relied upon such discourses to justify and fortify their claim to the islands, as well as their anxieties when that power was inevitably challenged.

### **The Caminero System, the “Imperial Pastoral,” and the American Tourist**

The pre-existing Spanish roads inherited by the Philippine Commission, the first non-military governing body of the U.S.-Occupied Philippines, were of an apparent abysmal quality. Traveling with her husband who was a member of the Philippine Commission, Edith Moses complained of the drives in Manila in a letter to her family, “By driving one must understand, however, bumping along over ill-paved, uneven roads, through streets where car tracks are either sunk below the level of the pavement or raised several inches above it.”<sup>4</sup> The “ill-paved, uneven roads” described in this letter dated July 25, 1900 would not facilitate the easy movement of goods or



spark investment in the islands as the insular government had desired. In fact, members of the Philippine Commission argued that many extractive industries such as mining, forestry, and agriculture failed to thrive during Spanish occupation due in no small part to the lack of a reliable and cost-efficient transportation infrastructure, which in their view failed to entice many investors to the islands.<sup>5</sup> Although the imperialists would go on to construct numerous kilometers worth of roads over the next several years, they struggled with building roads which could withstand the cyclical rainy seasons of the Philippines, which regularly flooded or broke apart roads to make them untraversable.

In 1908 the Bureau of Public Works (BPW) developed the *caminero* system, a system of maintenance that utilized regional, around-the-clock Filipino labor to battle against the forces of nature which threatened the new roads. A Filipino road maintenance worker, the *caminero* would oversee the maintenance of one kilometer of road in the rainy season and two kilometers in the dry season. Each *caminero* was watched over by a *capataz*, a sub-foreman, assigned to oversee around ten *camineros*. The *capataces* were then routinely inspected by a general foreman who oversaw all roads within an assigned area of the thirty-one “Christian” provinces, the administrative units which the insular government used to compose the islands. “These men are almost wholly Filipinos . . . who have been trained by engineers,” wrote BPW division engineer H. F. Cameron in a 1913 issue of the *Engineering Record*, a New York-based trade publication for civil engineers and contractors. The *caminero* system proved to be a monumental success for the imperialists. From 1908 to 1913, Filipino laborers had constructed “a total of 1,805 kilometers of first-class roads [and] 2,200 kilometers of second-class, or improved, roads . . . During the same period there have been maintained more than 4,000 kilometers of road annually at a unit cost of \$250.” Not only were the *caminero*-maintained roads valuable for ensuring the future profits of extractive industries, but Cameron also suggested, like many within the insular government, that roads could function as “an educator of the Filipino [sic] public.”<sup>6</sup>

The preeminent instructional textbook used by the BPW was the *Capataz Road Book*, which described in detail how the colonial administrators wanted their roads to be maintained. Distributed amongst *camineros* and *capataces* alike, the *Road Book* featured numerous rules, guidelines, and sketches demonstrating how to maintain their allotted kilometer, including: how to maintain a level road; cross-sections of drainage pipes beneath roads; desired angles to cut out ditches; and roads built through, into, and on top of the hilly landscape. The most dramatic of these illustrations detailing before-and-after images of poorly-maintained roads are featured in the third

section of the Road Book. Picture 32, for example, embodies “Rule 8” in the Road Book, “Cut Small and Poor Trees and Brush.”<sup>77</sup> The caminero is captured diligently clearing away troublesome vegetation, whose roots threaten to disrupt the smooth pathway of a possible first-class road. Filipino cottages neatly emerge from the tree line to flank the road, displaying clean boundaries between the Filipino in nature and the commercial vein of the well-kept road, while simultaneously reinforcing how easily connected Filipinos could be to the larger insular economy. A *carromata*, a horse-drawn or carabao-drawn carriage, could easily carry goods to and from market when the brush is cut back as shown. Here was what the historian Rebecca Tinio McKenna has called the “imperial pastoral” on display.



Picture 32 — “A road on which the small and poor trees and the brush have been cut.”<sup>78</sup> Image courtesy of [HathiTrust](#).

McKenna uses the phrase “imperial pastoral” to refer to the ways that U.S. imperialists “reoriented the landscape” to tell the story of imperialism by assigning meaning to the built “natural” environment. Through constructing the “imperial pastoral,” “U.S. occupation became associated with nature itself.”<sup>79</sup> Such harmony with the natural environment suggested the natural order of U.S. occupation, which “smoothed over the contradiction of the imperial republic, a democracy crushing the first nationalist revolution in Asia.”<sup>79</sup> Picture 32 of the Road Book invokes the “imperial pastoral” by representing the well-maintained road as idyllic and peaceful. Nature is kept in check as are the Filipinos who reside within the natural environment in quaint, palm-thatched cottages. The neatness represents the order that U.S. imperial-

ism brought to the Philippine landscape and people. To the caminero viewer, the image is meant to convey the functionality and thus desirability of an American presence as represented by the road, but for the American viewer, the image is a nostalgic retelling of American dominance over nature and the Indigenous groups who live inside it.



Picture 33 — “A road on which this rule has been neglected.”<sup>10</sup> Image Courtesy of [HathiTrust](#).

While Picture 32 displayed a road well-kept and in harmony with the imperial pastoral, the Road Book provided a stark contrast in Picture 33, in which the absent caminero has neglected his charge of clearing the trees and brush. The vegetation and their roots have been left unattended, breaking up the compactness of the road which disappears under the floods of the rainy season. The brush and trees have crept forward to obscure the once clearly visible homes. A woman and naked Filipino child are left despondent and disconnected from the riches afforded by a once well-kept road. Nature has been left to reclaim the road, much to the horror of the viewer. It is important to highlight that these illustrations are drawn on behalf of the BPW, with a vested interest in overseeing the production and maintenance of “good roads,” in a book geared towards the eyes of the camineros and capataces charged with doing the actual labor. The fertile landscape may have represented opportunity for the colonialists, but it could also function as its undoing if left to disrupt their imperial presence anchored by so-called “good roads.”

Acting as Secretary of Commerce and Police, W. Cameron Forbes had voiced a similar concern in a 1908 letter to other provincial and municipal authorities charged with overseeing road projects: “No matter how rich,

fertile, and productive land may be, the owners and inhabitants of it can only realize a fraction of its value if there is no market for its products.” Forbes continued the warning to say that not only would unkempt roads see Filipinos “thrown into a primitive state of living,” but more importantly the lack of crucial infrastructure would lead to the production of subpar goods.<sup>11</sup> “Rich, fertile, and productive land” could only be conceived of as “useful” if said land provisioned its *owners* (Americans) and *inhabitants* (Filipinos) with goods to be bought and sold at market, disregarding the land’s utility in subsistence living for generations. For economically-minded administrators, as the position of Secretary of Commerce and Police implies, the encroachment of nature in Picture 33 represented a threat to an efficient production line. But perhaps more troubling, the absence of a “responsible” *caminero* in Picture 33 to protect the imperial road represented a disruption of the “imperial pastoral,” the entire ethos upon which the insular government staked its claim over the islands. If imperialists were unable to compel *camineros* to successfully (re)construct the natural environment through the imperial pastoral lens in Picture 32, it threatened the tightly-grasped fiction of racial and natural dominance that Americans wished to reproduce and tell themselves about the Philippines.

The well-kept road was not only important for connecting the supposedly stranded Filipino to the larger insular-global economy, but also in connecting the American tourist to “sights” of the imperial pastoral. In an account of “a tour of the world by motor,” originally published in the Tokyo-based *Japan Advertiser* and republished in the BPW’s *Quarterly Bulletin* under the title “Glimpsing the World by Motor,” Mr. Melvin A. Hall of New York describes the Philippines as “a different proposition to the motorist than anything else in the East,” due to the recentness of the opened territory. “Before the advent of the American Bureau of Public Works,” Hall explains, “a matter of five or six years only, motors could not penetrate 3 miles beyond the limits of Manila and the idea of touring anywhere in the Islands was far too absurd to be entertained,” but thanks to the BPW’s efforts, Mr. Hall and his mother, Mrs. William A. Hall, are able to travel the “many short and attractive runs” south of Manila. Especially “picturesque” to Hall and his mother was the road south to the towns of Lucena and Atimonan, “winding first through the cultivated land and barrios of tiny houses thatched all over with nipa palm, and then among magnificent groves of coconut palms.”<sup>12</sup> Hall’s account describes and reinforces an image of the “imperial pastoral” in the Philippines. The “picturesque” quality of such scenic drives are maintained by *caminero* labor, who have kept the roads in such a pristine condition to allow even your mother safe passage through former *insurrecto* territory.

Similar “picturesque” sentiments are expressed in travel guides to the

islands. Kemlein & Johnson's *Guide and Map of Manila and Vicinity* informs the reader that to reach the "pretty suburb of Santa Mesa" in Metro Manila, "one crosses the San Juan Bridge, where the first shot of the Insurrection of 1899 was fired."<sup>13</sup> In a section emblazoned "Side Trips," the Manila Merchants Association present "the old naval town of Cavite," just a ten mile drive south of the capital, where "In the bay fronting Cavite stretch the waters over which thundered the guns of Admiral Dewey on May 1, 1898, when ships were sunk and power destroyed." Further south the tourist may secure "native carriages" to travel "through a beautiful country and along roads lined with orange groves, to the Taal Volcano, an island in Lake Taal." Thirty years hence from its last eruption, the pamphlet declares, "a trip to Taal is more satisfying to the tourist than a trip to Vesuvius."<sup>14</sup> The imperial road functions as a commercial leisure vein that connects American middle-class tourists to images of the "imperial pastoral." Such descriptions from Hall, Kemlein, and the Manila Merchants Association tell a story of the Philippine natural environment stripped of its dangerous and insurrectional potential. The howling wilderness filled with *insurrectos* armed to the teeth has been defanged in these tourist accounts, which reframe their elimination from the landscape as "picturesque" and open the beautiful scenery for middle-class leisure. The roads are like front row seats to a film depicting the "imperial pastoral" in which Americans and Filipinos alike watch a history of American dominance unfold. However, this "imperial pastoral" roadside film is not an original but a remake of America's "winning of the West," this time in the East. In colonial officials desperate desire to erect the "imperial pastoral" with the road and caminero labor, they relied heavily on the same themes of manliness, class, and race projected onto the American West and the anxiety surrounding the newly "closed" frontier.

### **The "Strenuous Life," Engineers, and the "Indolent" Filipino**

Perhaps no figure better captured the white middle-class obsession with manliness and its relation to imperialism than Theodore Roosevelt. Even before ascending to the Oval Office and its imperial helm in the wake of McKinley's assassination, Roosevelt was a vocal proponent of an imperial manliness. Just two months after a private from Nebraska fired upon approaching Filipino troops who ignored his command to halt, sparking the Philippine-American War, Roosevelt delivered an address before the Hamilton Club of Chicago, expounding upon the "doctrine of the strenuous life."<sup>15</sup> This noble pursuit, Roosevelt argued, would breed success and good character, "not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph."<sup>16</sup> In the context of a war to retain dubi-

ously purchased territory, the soldiers fighting against an “insurrection” could be celebrated as men who do not shrink from “danger, hardship, or bitter toil,” and thus secure a manly identity. Conversely, to shrink from the duty of conquering the Philippines “would be the course of infamy.” If left alone the islands would either fall into “utter chaos” or, worse yet, “Some stronger, manlier power would have to step in and do the work, and we would have shown ourselves weaklings.”<sup>17</sup>

Roosevelt’s ideal of the strenuous life framed the imperial project of the Philippines within a clearly gendered paradigm. To shrink from imperialism was to “shrink from danger” and one’s own manhood and duty. To advocate against conquering the Philippines — as so many anti-imperialists had for reasons ranging from “consent of the governed” to nativist fears of miscegenation — demonstrated an “unwillingness to play the part of men.” The threat of “some stronger, manlier power” is echoed again in Roosevelt’s closing remarks when he declared, “If we stand idly by . . . then the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and win the domination of the world.” No matter its function of building strong character in contrast to the vices of idleness, timidity, and ignorance, the strenuous life always possessed an imperial dimension and an obsession with comparing the U.S. to other nations. Roosevelt strove for the United States to “win the goal of true national greatness” and demonstrate to onlooking nations that the U.S. was the “stronger, manlier power.”<sup>18</sup> If all American men lived to this proposed strenuous standard, then “national greatness” was assumed to follow. If one desired proof, Roosevelt argued, one only needed to recall America’s “winning of the west.”

The “strenuous life” that Roosevelt had advocated for found its antecedents in the American West. During an address celebrating the quartercentennial of Colorado’s statehood, Roosevelt memorialized the efforts of westward settlers. “Their success in taming the rugged wilderness . . . and filling the waste and lonely places with the eager, thronging, crowded life of our industrial civilization” had occurred in such a rapid fashion, “that we have begun to accept it all as part of the order of nature.”<sup>19</sup> Roosevelt paid particular focus to the frontiersman, who possessed the “spirit of adventure” along with other strenuous traits like “daring and hardihood and iron endurance.” He argued they were the first to break “the wild prairie soil” and cut through the “primeval forest,” which cleared the way for engineers and the industrial capitalists “who drove the great railroad systems over plain and desert and mountain pass.”<sup>20</sup> Frontiersmen who tame the “rugged wilderness,” break “the wild prairie soil,” and cut through the “primeval forest” are barely concealed euphemisms implying not just a masculine dominance over nature, but also over the Indigenous groups already living in such areas. This framing could cast the contemporary conflict in the Philippine-American War as an ex-

tension of manifest destiny. The frontiersmen and the soldiers in the Pacific could be one in the same. Furthermore, violently cutting through the “primeval forests” and the natives inside them, literally and figuratively, cleared the paths for “the great railroad systems,” just as removing *insurrectos* from their guerilla positions in the Philippines’ “rugged wilderness” cleared space for the road systems that reconfigured the insular wilderness for resource extraction.

While Roosevelt situated the strenuous life and its manly ideal within the national story of the United States, manliness itself was less a historical consistency as it was a historical development. Gail Bederman demonstrates how the obsession with manliness during the turn-of-the-century arose from historical changes which threatened the power traditionally held by middle-class white men. For much of the nineteenth century, middle-class men could cling to a manly character and strong will through a Victorian sense of self-restraint over masculine passions and through diligent hard work. Such endeavors could serve as a reliable foundation to build a fortune upon and point to as justifications for success. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the evaporation of well-paid managerial positions, the growth of low-level clerical work, and the emergence of commercial leisure encouraging “pleasure and frivolity” made an entrepreneurial self-restraint seem less relevant. Meanwhile, immigrant men securing an increasing amount of political offices, tens-of-thousands of working-class labor strikes, and women’s movements entering traditionally male spheres like universities and the ballot box represented threats to male power from below and across.<sup>21</sup> While these contemporary tensions didn’t necessarily dismantle the unequal systems of power that propped up middle-class men and their sense of manliness, such tensions did represent an anxiety that whiteness, maleness, and class would falter as cultural anchors of power. For the men who felt threatened by these economic and social changes, the imperialized Philippines could represent a new tropical venue to renew/reassert their claim to manliness and the privileges it could afford.

The middle-class engineer, in particular, was seen as the masculine backbone to such imperialist projects. All the anxieties which the doctrine of the strenuous life attempted to quell could be funneled down into the engineer. Engineers emerged as a type of “cultural hero” by the close of the nineteenth century as they inherited the manly prestige of the frontiersmen by using technical innovations like the railroad and canal systems to conquer the feminized virgin landscape, after which their technical knowledge could be wielded to more efficiently extract material prosperity from that land.<sup>22</sup> Masters of nature, masters of mathematics, masters of masculine passions, masters of machinery — the engineer presented a reliable and manly figure that combined the closing western frontier with an emerging industrial capitalism

and American empire. Not only could they be entrusted with the reins of a new imperial frontier in the Philippines, but their presumed manly character allowed Americans to reread narratives of gendered and racial dominance by juxtaposing the white middle-class engineer against his Filipino workplace subordinates.

The representation of the engineer, who in his manly control over esoteric knowledge, technological innovations, and natural impulses, was a perfect foil to the many racist and stereotypical depictions of Filipino men, all of which could be measured within a rubric of manliness. Filipino men were routinely depicted in political cartoons as childlike, uncivilized, and feminine, all of which could be interpreted as failures to reach a standard of Anglo masculinity, much less the pinnacle of manliness embodied by American men.<sup>23</sup> The most frustrating of manifestations for the men who supervised Filipinos was the “lazy” Filipino. Colonel N. M. Holmes, a road chief supervising workers on the Benguet mountain road, had invoked the stereotype when he reported, “In handling a pick the native will raise it in the air, allow it to drop by its own weight, striking a glancing, infinitesimal blow.” Such experiences prompted Holmes to conclude that the Filipino male was “idle, shiftless, and stolidly indifferent, approaching his work with no degree of intelligence or judgment, of a deceptive and treacherous character, wantonly careless and frequently maliciously destructive, uninterested in and indifferent to his work.”<sup>24</sup> This sentiment was echoed in a July 1913 article in the *Engineering Record*, when the author suggested the American road contractor stateside beset by the threat of strikes, foreign labor, and a climbing payroll might “feel a bit of envy mingled with sympathy for the road superintendent of the province of Iloilo,” a province located in the central Philippine archipelago of Visayas. The author suggests the superintendent’s woes stem from an unreliable Filipino labor pool, who, “failing to appreciate pastoral life,” refuse to materialize for a road project; who are “by nature suspicious;” who are “quick to seize an opportunity to skimp their work and to claim that they are making less than ordinary day wages;” and to whom “the intricacies of sloping and ditching were beyond . . . comprehension.”<sup>25</sup>

Theories as to the cause of the supposed “native labor problem” were plentiful. As McKenna notes, “Some attributed their inadequacy to constitution, others to culture. Blessed by abundant nature, one theory went, Filipinos . . . tended toward idleness and indolence.” Another theory, especially popular with W. Cameron Forbes, suggested the Spanish regime had instilled a sense of “passivity and dependence” rather than “free agency and initiative.”<sup>26</sup> Whatever the reason for such perceived “laziness,” the caminero system developed by BPW engineers presented a versatile solution that utilized the “indolent Filipino/good caminero” binary as a self-gratifying cycle to justify the imperi-



al logic. Camineros could not be trusted to maintain good roads on their own, but only through a system of inspection which placed American engineers at the top of the chain. As one 1912 government handbook had described it: “Constant inspection of each kilometer was arranged; first, daily by the sub-foreman [capataz]; second, biweekly by the foreman [another Filipino]; third, monthly by the district engineer, and fourth, trimonthly by the division engineer.”<sup>27</sup> The successful maintenance of imperial roads not only secured the link between the natural resources of their respective townships to markets and port cities, but it also strengthened the symbol of the engineer as an efficient leader and benevolent teacher who could mold unmanly Filipinos in his image. Conversely, a failure to maintain imperial roads only reinforced the perception of Filipinos as incapable laborers and incapable men, which in turn justified American presence to correct these supposed shortcomings. Regardless of the road condition, both successful and failed maintenance of good roads could be cycled back into the racist imperial rhetoric. While such ideas about Filipino laborers could contribute to the perception of the U.S.-Occupied Philippines as a crucible to fortify the manliness of middle-class American men, and the engineer in particular, the power these men attempted to demonstrate and reassert was not always stable.

### **“A Highly-Perfected Machine”: Imperial Taylorism and Filipinization**

In his second annual report as Secretary of Commerce and Police for the 1911 Philippine Commission Report, Charles B. Elliot described the need for the BPW to operate as a “highly-perfected machine, each unit with its work specialized, and the whole working harmoniously with as much speed as is consistent with accuracy and economy.” After identifying such a need for a “highly-perfected machine,” Elliot assured the Commission that “Great progress has been made during the year in developing the Bureau into an effective unit for the prompt completion of public works.”<sup>28</sup> The same year that Elliot delivered this report to the Commission, famed American engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor published *The Principles of Scientific Management* which declared, “The principal object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employee.” Such “material prosperity” was understood as maximizing *profits* for the company, which would then, Taylor assumed, trickle down in the form of higher wages to the employee. “Maximum prosperity,” Taylor argued, “can exist only as the result of maximum productivity,” and maximum productivity could not be achieved unless “each man and each machine are turning out the largest possible output.”<sup>29</sup>

Both Elliot and Taylor’s emphasis on specialization, speed, accuracy,

efficiency, and productivity is reflective of a demand, as well as a desire, in industrial economies to maximize profits through a standardization of labor. This obsession with standardization takes the supposed problem of labor and views it as almost an engineering quandary: how can employers and supervisors strip away the expensive human variables that prevent workplace efficiency and view human labor systems as machinery? Taylor's rhetoric envisioned clear class distinctions between the working-class laborers who have become mechanized and their middle-class supervisors who have become the decision-making power supplies for such mechanized men.<sup>30</sup> The imperial projects of the Philippines may have presented an opportunity for American men, especially engineers, to develop such a system of labor and replicate such class distinctions. Undoubtedly the engineers were perfectly comfortable viewing the routine and monotonous labor of road maintenance as a type of machinery, one in which their technical prowess necessitated constant inspection to ensure the machinery was working at maximum efficiency and maximum productivity. But Elliot's vision of the *entire* BPW as a "highly-perfected machine" blurs the lines between the middle-class American engineer and the Filipino laborer, showcasing that the special status afforded to American engineers as the indefinite masters over machines was not constant, but contestable.

In the following year's annual report to the Commission, Elliot had reported under BPW personnel changes — a section typically reserved for the hiring, firing, or retiring of Americans in high profile positions like director of public works or chief engineer — that of the engineers in the Bureau's employ in 1912, "There are now in the service 11 Filipinos, including temporary men not having a regular civil service status, rated as engineers."<sup>31</sup> The BPW personnel report of the following year, written by acting secretary Frank A. Branagan, showed an overall decrease of engineering personnel from 164 the previous year to 145, a decrease in American engineers from 141 to 127, and an *increase* of Filipino engineers from 13 to 18. Branagan reported that although there was not a steady stream of Filipino engineering graduates, four had been promoted to district engineers in their respective districts.<sup>32</sup> The "Filipinization" of personnel, as this process came to be called, was an intentional move by the BPW and was mirrored throughout the various bureaus of the insular government, but importantly this process began at the bottom of the work pyramid to ensure that no Filipino would dare supervise an American. The following year reported that although the BPW still struggled with finding many Filipino engineering graduates, six districts were completely run by Filipino engineers and that the clerical force of all district offices had been "completely filipinized."<sup>33</sup>

While this process of Filipinization conveniently followed Elliot's

call for “a highly-perfected machine,” and was by all means an intentional path taken by the BPW, the process could still resonate with the fears of a dehumanizing mechanization of labor nascent in Taylorism. Ruth Oldenziel suggests that even though engineers could claim a mastery over technology, which placed them well within an elite class of skilled labor, American engineering had “transformed from an elite to a mass occupation . . . from the 1890s onwards.”<sup>34</sup> The hopes of promotion to coveted middle-class managerial positions in the boardroom had become inversely proportional to the explosion of low-level, “rank-and-file” positions saturating the job market. Many young engineering graduates in the early twentieth century “found themselves doing routine, monotonous work as surveyors, draftsmen, tracers, copyists, and calculators in drafting departments behind desks, with little hope of advancement.”<sup>35</sup> The monotony of such low-level positions as surveyors, draftsmen, tracers, copyists, and calculators in some ways mirrors the mechanization advocated for by industrialists like Taylor. Although engineers envisioned themselves at the top, the supposed masters of machinery, they were actually engineers caught in the middle and slowly becoming mass-produced engineers at the bottom, uncomfortably resembling the machines and workers they considered themselves masters over.

The Filipinized machine, before becoming the entire BPW, first began with the caminero project. In its early stages, the camineros and capataces functioned as the antidote to the indolent and unreliable Filipino workers through such standardizing endeavors as the Road Book, a literal instruction manual which provided instructions on how to operate both the road and the caminero. The Road Book took considerable aims to demonstrate to the caminero the importance of his work in “road improvement,” and that to achieve such material prosperity, the caminero had to abide by the various rules articulating how to maintain a uniform, accurate, efficient, and correct road.<sup>36</sup> By following such rules, the individual caminero could strengthen the road against natural erosion and connect their natural resources to the larger Philippine economy. A similar purpose is articulated in the BPW’s *Quarterly Bulletin*, each edition announcing to its workers that the first two “objects of the Quarterly Bulletin” are: “1) To show each engineer and employee of the Bureau of Public Works the work of the Bureau as a unit, [and] 2) To show him that his work is a unit part of the whole.”<sup>37</sup> Both the Road Book and the *Bulletin* articulate to its readership, Filipinos and Americans respectively, that they are specialized component parts of the larger imperial machinery. Although the process of Filipinization slowly transforms the ethnic composition of the *Bulletin’s* readership, the language of “unit parts of the whole” categorizes the remaining American engineers as interchangeable parts, cogs of the imperial machinery. Filipinization also suggests to the vacating Ameri-

cans that the special racial distinction which separated their occupation from Filipinos was being erased. Despite efforts to insulate Americans from feeling indistinguishable from their supposed lower racial charges, either by ensuring that Filipinos occupied junior positions at the district level first, never to supervise an American, or by arguing that Filipino engineers deserved lower pay than American engineers in the same position, American engineers struggled to avoid the perceived threats to their special manly status.<sup>38</sup> Despite the overarching rhetoric of American dominance which justified occupation of the Philippines, the blurring lines between American and Filipino engineers reflected the instability of the characteristics which imperialism depended upon.

### **The Story of the Road Revisited**

Although the Philippine Commission, the premier imperial and legislative American force in the Philippines, was disbanded and replaced by an elected Philippine Senate in 1916, the American imperial presence had not left. Even after WWII and the signing of the Treaty of Manila in 1946 which acknowledged the independence of the Philippines, the U.S. had not left.<sup>39</sup> In October 2003, over a century after the first shot of the Philippine-American War, President George W. Bush greeted the Philippine Congress. Invoking a national hero of the Philippines, Bush declared, "The great patriot, José Rizal, said that nations win their freedom by deserving it, by loving what is just, what is good, what is great to the point of dying for it. In the 107 years since that good man's heroic death . . . you have earned your freedom." Had Rizal, a Filipino nationalist who opposed the Spanish colonial government and was executed by firing squad for promoting independence, lived past 1896 to witness the imperial yoke change hands from Spain to the U.S. in a literal transaction, he would have balked at Bush's next statement: "America is proud of its part in the great story of the Filipino people. Together our soldiers liberated the Philippines from colonial rule. Together we rescued the islands from invasion and occupation."<sup>40</sup>

Whether through sincere or purposeful ignorance, President Bush's erasure of the bloody invasion and occupation of the Philippines at the hands of the United States was not some one-off historical anachronism of the twenty-first century, but was instead reflective of a narrative being written directly after the Philippine-American War. Within the first two decades of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines, the insular government used the imperial road to (re)write the story of the U.S. in the Philippines. By developing a system of road construction and maintenance known as the *caminero* system, U.S. officials and *camineros* constructed the "imperial pastoral," depicting the roads — and the U.S. imperial presence they came to represent — as a peace-

ful and idyllic construction in harmony with the Philippine landscape. While these roads could be, as one division engineer of the Bureau of Public Works had declared, “an educator of the Philipino [sic] public,” teaching lessons in construction, Protestant work ethic, and market capitalism, the roads could also reinforce the lesson of righteous American dominance over nature and Indigenous peoples.

But such lessons were not resolute nor uncontestable. Even as middle-class men, engineers in particular, flocked to the archipelago to partake in the “strenuous life” of nation-building and demonstrate a manly superiority over Filipinos, they did so in the context of numerous social and economic changes in the U.S. which threatened their tightly-grasped fiction of dominance. The story of the road as the imperialists wished to tell it, the story Bush called again into being in the wake of a new imperial venture, was one of unquestionable and self-evident American exceptionalism. By revisiting the road and the people who built them, we invite tough questions and tell a new story that challenges exceptionalism, for buried in the road is the story of shameful conquest, brutality, and racism. Unearth this story, and the skeletons with it, and hear the hum of unfinished revolution.

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