FIFTH WORLD

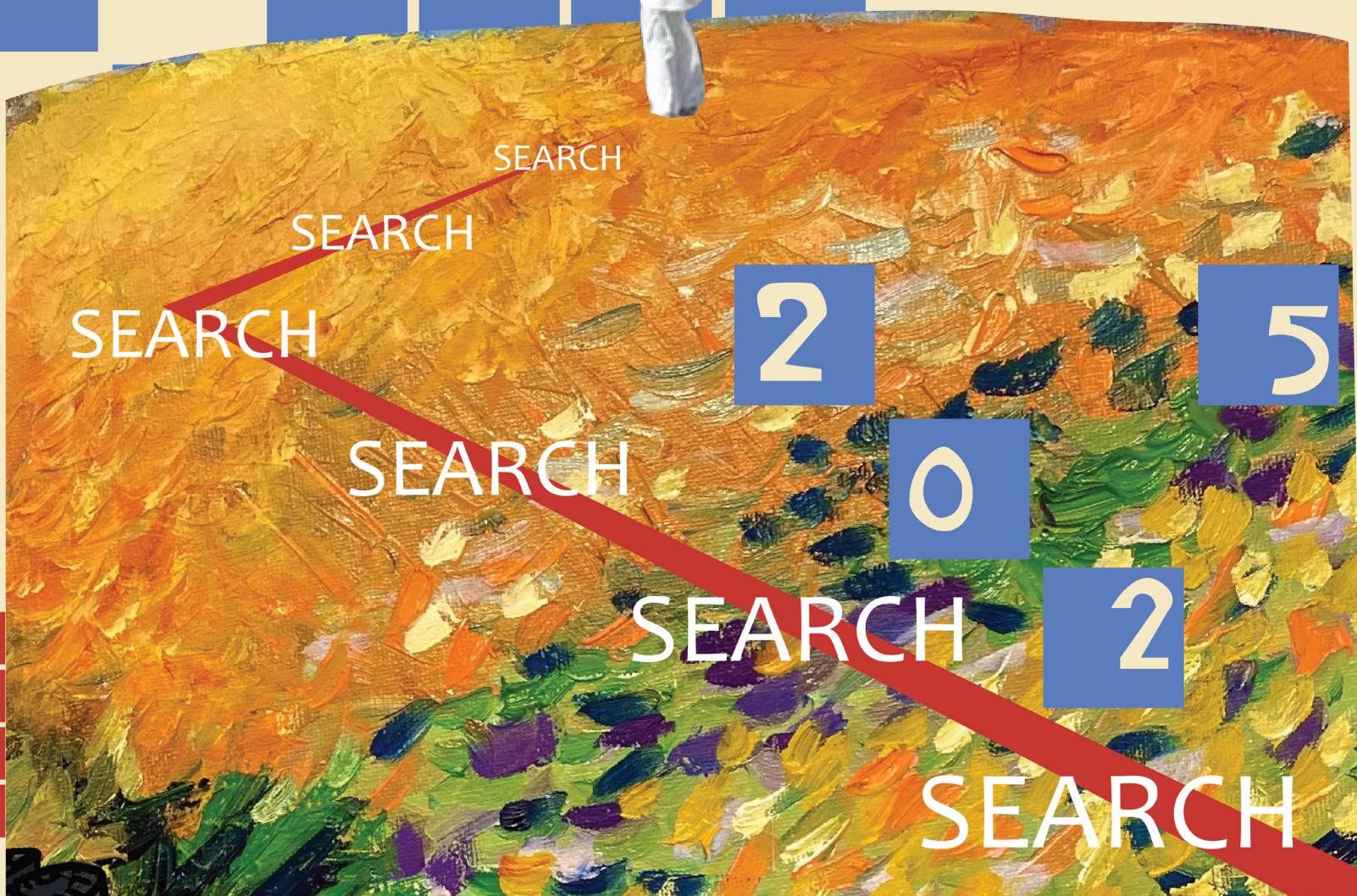
humans, a species of great consciousness, yet also of envy and violence ...

have, time and again, labeled that unfamiliar as a threat.

objects, ideas, and people perceived as other are quickly ...

dismissed, feared, or destroyed

It is the very act of Othering which breeds the scorn which thinkers so often face, which thinkers deeply reflect on.



FIFTH WORLD
2025

Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

This is a love letter to a vanishing world, one where thinking and reflection were acts of reverence, not rebellion. The 21st century has birthed a renewed wave of anti-intellectualism, rooted in many sources but made most visible, rapaciously so, in our media, and more dangerously, in our politics. And so, the humanities have begun to be gutted, not with malevolence, but with indifference. Efficiency is prioritized over complexity. Curricula shrink. And we, the editors of Fifth World, as both writers and students, have experienced the aftershocks of this shift for as long as our memories reach.

Many question the value of the humanities. The questions and ambiguities we once blathered over in lectures and essays are politically dismissed as indulgent or lesser than the hard edges of science or the perceived utility of mathematics. However, these dismissals fail to see that the bridge between discovery and meaning, between data and human understanding, is built by the humanities.

An infection of discourse, a wave of hate, violence, and targeted rhetoric, is eating away at the American body politic, even without a complete picture of evidence. Yet, those who choose to continue this pursuit despite the debacle of a disease are often met with suspicion. This suspicion does not stem from an inherent elite or giftedness that thinkers possess, but rather because the act of non-instrumental and deep thoughts defies a culture obsessed with utility. This strain of anti-intellectualism doesn't merely reject knowledge but reshapes education to serve immediate economic interests. Such reshaping hollows out the human pursuit of meaning, to reduce it to marketability.

In these pages of our gathered Fifth World, we refuse the erasure. We reclaim the right to think slowly, speak freely, and imagine otherwise. Within the sheets of this constellation of a book, we, the writers, study the human condition across various spheres. Some through the lens of anti-intellectualism's corrosive rise, others by guiding readers through the countless eras that have shaped the experience of being. For better or for worse, we trace the moments when the human condition has revealed its capacity for manufactured cruelty, and the moments when it has ignited resistance. It is within the questioning of the systems under which we live, the authorities that govern us, that we find ourselves scrutinized for the creativity we dare to hear across the page. We, like all people who dare to reflect, imagine, and question, assert our right to think otherwise.

In our search for spaces of possibility and visions of a different future, many within our editorial collective found ourselves in conversation with the Hopi Nation during our January term trip to Arizona. There, we were granted the privilege of learning from the Hopi nation, shared stories, history, and a sobering warning: the Fourth World, our current age, is unwinding. Just as the first three worlds collapsed under the weight of human conflict, we now face the consequences of our own chaos, ecological destruction, splintered truths, and the desertion of knowledge.

Yet the Fifth World, the namesake of this journal, is not an ending but a reckoning. The Hopi understand it as an emergence, a chance to restore balance, but only if we heed the lessons of the past. In these pages, we commit to that work.

As seniors, as the graduating editors of Fifth World, we belong to a generation that has been molded and shaped by distortion. An age not characterized by admitting to the humility of uttering provable falsehood, but rather an age where alternative facts distort our media and politics. We do not claim a monopoly on intellect. Instead, we call for an education that affirms everyone's capacity for reflection and understanding, an education that resists mere utility and aims to pursue the fullness of life. With both our experiences and the research we've conducted, we hope that our investigations contribute to the foundation of a more observant, aware, and resistant Fifth World. The journey toward resisting the disease of anti-intellectualism and making others aware of the profound significance of the humanities requires deep reflection from all corners: from students at NCSSM to those within powerful institutions and to the authorities we are taught not to question, but must.

To Dr. Cantrell and Dr. McInnis, we are indebted to you both for your continued dedication to opening our eyes to inspect the world and the platform to voice our findings. To Dr. Pabón and the NCSSM Humanities faculty, we thank you for providing us with the opportunity to internalize lessons and imaginations from a transformative curriculum in a school defined by the sciences and mathematics. To Dr. Roberts, Dr. O'Connor, and the NCSSM Foundation, we are grateful for your hand in facilitating the resources that shaped our curiosities and passions. Lastly, to our friends, family, staff, and fellow students, as the backbone of our lives, we thank you for your continued encouragement and, most importantly, for making us feel seen.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Collective

Teresa Fang, Anisa Hasanaj, Claire Van Meter, Yvonne Shih, Stephanie Hughes, Eric Su, Laela Cash, Caroline Downs, Ellie Loynes, Anusha Yadav, Amy Cho, Abhinav Chivukula, Aditi Varshney, Khalil Murray-Azam, Thrista Venkat, Marcellus Day

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The Sticky Non-Stick Problem: A Comparative Study of DuPont's Environmental Injustice

Sofia Barrientos

In January 1981, William "Bucky" Bailey took his first breath in a Parkersburg, West Virginia hospital—through a single nostril. Born with extreme facial deformities, his parents were told he likely would not survive the night as he struggled to breathe. His mother, Sue Bailey, was shocked, but her employers at the DuPont Washington Works plant, a major source of Teflon production, were not. Bucky lived, and Sue returned to work, where she soon learned about external studies showing that exposure to C8, a chemical used to manufacture Teflon and other similar water-repelling applications, caused a variety of deformities in the offspring of animal subjects. Her employers dismissed concerns, insisting her months of hormone fluctuations and Bucky's conditions were Sue's own fault. Unconvinced, she sought legal counsel, but to no avail; no one would take a case suing her community's largest employer (Mordock).

It wasn't until 1998 that any legal action would come from DuPont's use of toxic chemicals, which slowly poisoned employees and the thousands of residents who lived by the Ohio River, where DuPont had secretly expelled C8 waste since the early 1950s. Twenty years of intense litigation followed, expanding into a case of over 80,000 plaintiffs and a public spectacle that pressured agencies worldwide to regulate the chemical, now more commonly known as perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA. Since PFOA and similar chemicals started being classified as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, the uncertain effects of these "forever chemicals," strongly resistant to breaking down and thus accumulating in the body, continue to be the subject of regulatory debates around the world. As new guidelines emerge, the CDC's 2023 release of its annual National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) indicates that 99% of Americans have PFAS in their blood (Scaturro).

DuPont started phasing out PFOA use in 2005, replacing its purpose in producing surfactants, or substances that reduce surface tension, with a brand-new chemical called GenX. Licensed under Chemours, a spinoff company created in the wake of their numerous lawsuits, the Fayetteville Works plant in North Carolina began producing the chemical commercially. Despite assurances about GenX's safety, Chemours and DuPont face several lawsuits from community groups and the North Carolina Attorney General's office for their contamination of the Cape Fear River Watershed (CFRWS), dumping GenX and other toxic PFAS starting in 1980, previously emitted as byproducts for processes unrelated to C8 (CBS News). A 2019 analysis on GenX exposure from University of North Carolina Wilmington's Department of Biology and Marine Biology revealed that Chemours was aware of the toxic nature of these pollutants, the widespread extent of contamination and relative ineffectiveness of their water filtration processes in rendering dumping grounds safe, and that they were "required to disclose the presence of [PFAS] at those concentrations, even if they were technically by-products."

Nevertheless, substances not permitted for discharge continued to contaminate the watershed with abandon, directly violating a 2009 permit issued under the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program (Cahoon). Professor Detlef Knappe of North Carolina State University (NCSU), a key researcher in the university's pioneering PFAS exposure studies within CFRWS, estimates that "about 250,000 people are affected in the three counties" spanning Fayetteville to Wilmington, raising concerns about the effects of long-term exposure to PFAS tied to cancers and other life-changing health conditions (Hagerty).

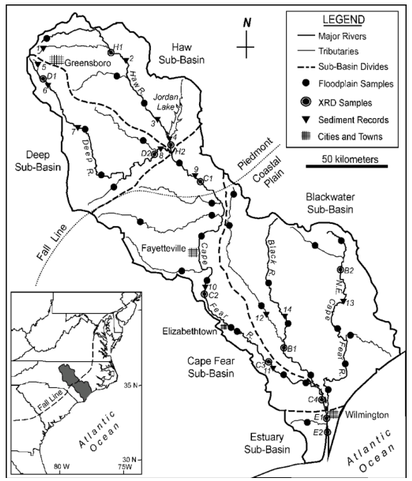


Figure 1. Location Map of the Cape Fear River Basin. "Mineralogical Indicators of Alluvial Sediment Sources in the Cape Fear River Basin, North Carolina," Physical Geography, May 2006. (Benedetti et al.)

numerous parallels between DuPont's environmental exploitation of the Parkersburg-Ohio River region and the Cape Fear River Watershed, scrutinizing the injustices perpetrated against vulnerable communities—rural, white Appalachians in West Virginia and Cape Fear Native American populations in the path of contamination—exposed to PFAS, with a focus on their shared experiences of poor healthcare outcomes due to socioeconomic disparities, prejudice in the healthcare system, and marginalization in government assistance programs. At the same time, the two cases' use of community organizing and legal action will be evaluated for their effectiveness in seeking recourse. Finally, special attention will be paid to the use of "greenwashing" by DuPont and their sub-entities in sanitizing their public images and continuously resisting efforts at government or local oversight, demonstrating a repeated unwillingness to sanitize their actions. The side-by-side comparison of cases will ultimately illuminate how DuPont has used the same tactics of concealing implicating research, using corporate propaganda to prevent panic, and taking advantage of the burden of proof in evading consequences, providing strategies for preventing yet another repeat of Parkersburg. Using news coverage, water testing reports, and legal documents to achieve these goals, a framework of ideal reparative practices that center the affected populations emerges, prioritizing monetary compensation, corporate accountability, government regulation, and intense community involvement in these processes, giving residents the resources and agency to heal on their own terms.

In both the Parkersburg and Cape Fear cases, contamination troubles became public spectacles over several years; seemingly ordinary research papers and news articles pieced together a larger picture of DuPont's intentional misleading of government agencies and the populations they claimed to serve. Taking advantage of a lack of regulatory oversight and the burden of proof resting on potential plaintiffs, DuPont amassed thorough internal studies of chemical exposure on laboratory animals and even their own employees to shape the narrative of PFAS toxicity, explicitly denying harm where they knew it to exist. In 2003, amidst litigation in *Leach v. E.I. DuPont*, a class-action lawsuit 80,000 strong, the Environmental Working Group reviewed DuPont officials' responses to media inquiries about PFAS exposure. When questioned about operations specific to the Washington Works plant in Parkersburg, manager Paul Bossert Jr. asserted, "There are two facts about C8 that I cannot emphasize enough. The first point is that DuPont and other companies have worked with C8 for more than 50 years, and we know of no adverse human health effects related to this material. . . . The second point is that DuPont would never knowingly put the people in the communities in which we operate in harm's way" (EWG 2003). In fact, DuPont had evidence that PFOA caused liver enlargement in rats as early as 1961, the same year that U.S. Air Force workers started experiencing acute cases of "polymer-fume fever" after smoking cigarettes contaminated with PFOA compounds (Kluger). Researchers at Bossert's own plant had concluded in 1970 that PFOA was "highly toxic" when breathed in and that "contact with the skin should be strictly avoided." (EWG 2002).

A decade later, Sue Bailey would have to regularly clean up an overflowing PFOA pump without any protective gear or additional ventilation, never being warned of the hazards (Mordock). DuPont's vice president and general manager even cited the company's extensive studies, claiming PFOA "is safe for all segments of the population, including women of child-bearing age and young girls," exploiting the studies' obscurity from the public to misrepresent their findings. On the contrary, Teflon found PFOA in the blood of eight female workers in 1981; of the seven pregnant women who were continuously monitored after being transferred out of production line work, two, including Sue, gave birth to babies with congenital defects (EWG 2002). Despite company studies showing the prevalence of PFOA in their employees' blood, in addition to studies of rat birth defects led by the prominent 3M chemical company, DuPont sent an internal memo telling affected workers, "We know of no evidence of birth defects caused by [C8] at DuPont," keeping their research buried for the next seventeen years (Ivanova).

In the Cape Fear River Watershed, history repeated itself as Chemours, the DuPont spinoff, financed new studies that downplayed GenX sequela and directly contradicted their own previous research (Gelles and Steel). A rushed attempt at a coverup came after the Cape Fear story gained statewide attention in 2017 due to a report from Wilmington's Star News. Journalist Vaughn Hagerty wrote about GenX contamination in the drinking water of the Cape Fear Public Utility Authority (CFPUA), citing sampling studies across the region from 2012–2014 as proof that not only were GenX and "a number of substances related to C8 and GenX. . . . at concentrations far exceeding that observed for GenX" prevalent across the watershed, but also that water treatment facilities had virtually no effect on filtration. While Chemours responded to these initial studies by introducing undisclosed "additional water emissions abatement technology," further studies in 2017 showed continued PFAS output into the river (Hagerty).

Hagerty's report sparked the beginning of NCSU's PFAS exposure studies, galvanizing local environmental group Cape Fear River Watch to sue Chemours and the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ); the Attorney General's office would soon follow (Atwater and NC Health News). Unbeknownst to Hagerty, or anyone other than regulatory agents and government officials, this breaking story had already been published in an internal study by the EPA—in 2007, when Chemours' GenX output was merely a byproduct and not yet commercially produced on a larger scale (Greenfield). The paper's findings indicated that contamination found across all eighty surface water

testing sites had multiple sources, possibly from DuPont's manufacturing of firefighting foam as well as external industrial production, but that these chemicals were being emitted together in groupings. PFAS found across these sites included C6, now known as GenX, through C12, named after their carbon atoms. C8–C12 compounds were highest along the Haw River, while GenX was highest downstream of Fayetteville, which emphasized "evidence of many unidentified sources of [PFAS] in the Cape Fear Basin leading to much greater overall variability in water concentrations" (Nakayama et al.).

Furthermore, analysis of a PFAS contamination study in Japan revealed that CFRWS levels were "at least 3.5-6 times higher than all of the Japanese regions surveyed except the heavily industrialized [areas]." Within a year of commercial GenX production, DuPont was assuring NCDEQ that, as a suitable replacement for PFOA, GenX broke down in the body faster and thus had a "favorable toxicological profile" (Gelles and Steel). However, research turned into the EPA from DuPont's Haskell Laboratory later claimed otherwise. A 1963 study on hexafluoropropylene oxide (HFPO) dimer acid, a main component of GenX, and its effects on male rats showed "slight to moderate" pancreas damage and "enlarged livers" similar to PFOA. Increasing dosage over time, four of the eleven tested rats died. In a rare moment of reason, the study ended with the suggestion that, under the "possibility of customer exposure, further toxicity studies should be considered, repeated exposures" (DuPont 1963). An increase in testing as GenX production increased would contribute to the evidence supporting liver enlargement, with a 2008 study on rats given oral doses of HFPO-dimer acid showing increased kidney and "liver weight parameters. . . present in males at all dose levels" and increase liver weight in females at the highest dose level (DuPont 2008). When sixty-six female rats were exposed to GenX over a gestation period, rats subjected to the medium and highest dosages experienced yellowing of the skin due to liver cell death. For the one rat that died with "a pale liver, as well as 17 dead fetuses. . . . test substance-related liver and kidney changes. . . . were considered the cause of death." Rats given the lowest and medium dosage tended to give birth prematurely, with one developing a "mass" in its breast tissue, while the highest dosage corresponded to lower weights for both parent and offspring (DuPont 2010).

The literature provided shows that, for both GenX discharge in CFRWS and C8/PFOA discharge in Parkersburg, DuPont was aware of both the existence of widespread pollution and its dangerous implications towards life well before these consequences became public knowledge, intentionally obscuring their role in causing and benefiting from said contamination. Characterizing these acts of environmental injustice as negligence plays into the hand of liable corporations' evasion of responsibility, ignoring the decades-long buildup of evidence suggesting PFAS' toxicity to animal and human health. Not only does this sanitize the public image of DuPont and related entities, but it also protects them from additional prosecution due to the long-standing tradition of *burden of proof* chemical manufacturing.

While regulatory negligence enabled pollution for an additional decade without public warning, agencies were unaware of the various byproducts present and their potential to cause harm, even as DuPont had been collecting evidence of GenX toxicity (Nakayama et al.). Because corporations could acquire permits and shirk responsibilities through the exploitation of good-faith disclosure, DuPont was able to pollute the Cape Fear River Watershed for nearly forty years without pushback, just as they did in the Ohio River. In order to prevent such oversight and malpractice, regulatory agencies must abide by the precautionary principle and require entities to prove a chemical is non-toxic before allowing for its use and output. The University of Michigan's School of Public Health explains the precautionary principle as follows:

> When we do not know for certain that there will not be damaging effects of substances, especially those that are persistent and toxic in the environment, it is best to err on the side of precaution—that is to prevent exposure, rather than try to clean up or cure the negative health effects of an environmental exposure after it has occurred. . . . The *burden of proof* that a product or action is safe for people and for the environment should fall to those who are promoting its use. (Gray and University of Michigan)

For those impacted by long or short-term exposure to PFAS, which have only recently become subject to uncertain regulations, providing proof of contamination and presence of resulting health conditions, as well as evidence of their correlation, creates a daunting task. A 2021 study by researchers at Tianjin University examined the disappointing results of "preliminary burden of proof" standards, instated by some environmental judiciaries in China to reduce the barriers for victims of environmental injustice seeking remedies. Three clear problems emerged: first, despite decreasing the minimum burden of proof to a preliminary burden of proof—evidence that "pollutants or secondary pollutants discharged by the polluters are related to damages"—standards remained too high and vague to support victims when applied in practice. Second, injured parties' had low likelihoods of procuring proof to begin with due to "[gaps] in economic and technical capabilities between polluters and victims, making it difficult for victims involved in environmental health litigations to demonstrate proof of causality and obtain relief," as well as a lack of safety net from governmental and social organizations. Third, litigation based on the links between exposure and harm was hindered by the inherent difficulty in proving a cause-effect relationship in a judiciary lacking clear regulations or injury "identification system[s]."

Without access to affordable rapid testing, scientific research, or sufficient health records, vulnerable plaintiffs are forced to rely heavily on personal statements, which are typically rejected without empirical evidence; even proof of damage is insufficient to prove the causal relationship between pollutant and effect. The Tianjin study admits that, ideally, "with the help of the government and social organizations," in addition to access to large data samples, "it is not difficult for victims to prove causality." Furthermore, the researchers emphasize the advantages of having "information on polluters' production and illegal activities, [as well as] the right to investigate and supervise them" (Sun and Sun). Likewise, the EPA and NCDEQ had every right to investigate widespread PFAS contamination and known potential harm after their 2007 Cape Fear study, accumulating evidence to be used in future litigation, and yet they did nothing, furthering the gap between potential plaintiffs and equitable justice (Greenfield).

The burden of proof increases dramatically in cases with multiple source pollution, leaving regulatory uncertainties and making it more difficult for injured parties to seek out justice through proof of causality. Dr. Jane Hoppin, the lead researcher for NCSU's GenX Exposure Study, discussed the difficulties in monitoring exposure and illness around the Fayetteville Works plant and CFRWS, lamenting, "It's very rural, so it's going to be very difficult to identify enough cases of the same kind of cancer at the same point in time to really make causal arguments. . . it breaks my heart every time I'm talking to someone, because if they're impacted by cancer. . . cancer integrates over everything you've done over your life, and most people have moved around over their life" (Weisblat). The 2007 EPA study suggested that PFAS contamination was occurring from several sources along the Cape Fear Watershed, meaning that "much further work will be required to evaluate this river system and the potential impacts on drinking water sources, wildlife species, and potential human exposures."

Further supporting evidence of multiple-source contamination in the same study, PFAS contamination peaked along the edge of Fort Bragg and a neighboring Air Force base where PFAS-heavy firefighting foams are known to be used. From Pope Air Force Base alone, NCDEQ permitted emissions of "30,300 kL of wastewater per day into the Little River" (Nakayama et al.). University of North Carolina Wilmington's analysis affirmed that local water authorities "did not grasp [the results'] full importance, were unsure of any easily accessible and affordable treatment options, and had no regulatory authority," while regulatory agencies failed to act due to a lack of "good-faith disclosure" on the behalf of DuPont. Seeking to develop methods at pinpointing multiple pollution sources, researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences argued that "due to the overlapping concentrations of multiple sources, it is difficult to distinguish the contribution of each individual source and to accurately estimate its characteristics. . . The identification of multiple sources is therefore assumed to be more challenging than that of a single source" (Wang et al.).

In the Ohio River Valley region, the Washington Works plant acted as the source of multiple source pollution as PFAS contamination became ubiquitous. Creating Teflon to be used in non-stick pans, water-resistant outerwear, carpeting, and other household items, PFOA contamination extended beyond drinking water and air pollution, thus making it difficult to attribute illness to specific exposures (Ginty).

The combination of both air and water PFOA emissions also had implications on respiratory function and food source contamination. Culminating in the lawsuit that first broke the Parkersburg story, farmer Earl Tennant had sold some of his land to DuPont in 1984 for a new landfill, in which DuPont promised to only dispose of non-toxic matter; soon, Tennant's neighboring nieces began wheezing. About a decade later, "the water in the [farm's] creek turned black and foamy. . . The cattle started going blind, sprouting tumors, vomiting blood" (Blake). In the preceding years, Earl's nieces had played in that creek while their parents consumed meat from their farms' cattle. Taking matters into their own hands, the family notified the state Department of Environmental Protection. After an initial fine and EPA pressure, DuPont acquiesced and co-led a report investigating the cattle deaths. Throughout this process, no disclosure of PFOA contamination or even information on the chemical's existence was shared with non-DuPont researchers. The inquiry's conclusion was heavily biased yet decisive—the Tennants' "deficiencies in herd management" were the sole contributor to their plight (Blake). Facing a variety of contamination sources from river emissions into drinking water, air emissions, exposure from common household items, and potentially food, Parkersburg residents fought a battle on all fronts to determine the causes of sudden illnesses and prove that their suffering could be attributed to a direct source. When asked about the looming burden of PFOA contamination in his hometown, former Parkersburg resident Doug Higgs lamented, "It's unfair. . . that a community should have to perpetually ask what exactly it has been exposed to, and where and when the consequences will end" (Sisk).

The Tennant family's self-advocacy and initial wariness of legal representation reflects a long history of Appalachian exploitation and poor access to both healthcare and general governmental resources, showing the necessity of building trust between affected communities and their providers in order to facilitate legal proceedings, effective treatment and monitoring plans, and reparative practices that center the victims. A study examining barriers in Appalachian access to healthcare analyzed the impact of getting input from local residents, with former patients in clinical trials describing how they felt like guinea pigs when talking to judgmental healthcare providers. Repeated

negative experiences with outsider nurses/doctors left people reluctant to reach out for future treatment, putting Applachian communities already vulnerable to higher disease rates at an even greater risk (Petitte et al.).

Considering the gap in access to health insurance, local hospitals, in addition to higher rates of heart disease and mining-related birth defects, a lack of patient-provider trust is detrimental to the health of Appalachians who may need medical testing in order to detect contamination-related conditions and receive treatment (Hendryx). Because providers in the Ohio Valley worked to increase Appalachian health awareness and survey community members, they were able to recruit over 30,000 participants for a study on the effects of Teflon-sourced PFOA on health, finding higher rates of cancer and lowered immune function (Kluger). Working with the people involved at every step allowed for undeniable proof of the poisoning of Appalachian communities, and the results of the medical panel forced legal action that resulted in the monetary settlements and environmental cleanups.

The workers behind the panel knew the importance of the trust they carried, working with independent firms to rigorously protect patient privacy over concerns about handling sensitive medical data, in addition to carefully informing participants of both the risks and benefits of their inclusion in the study. Offering payment to entice participation also made it easier for participants who had to miss work, with the use of websites and online enrollment increasing accessibility for rural participants and those affected by PFOA who no longer lived within the valley. Addressing the still largely unknown consequences of exposure, panel workers held "a series of open meetings conducted in five of the six water districts" to spread awareness both among residents and healthcare workers inexperienced with treating exposure. Further analysis of demographic data found that participants were from "mostly rural, Appalachian communities: predominately white, with levels of education and income lower than the national average, and higher rates of obesity and other health risk behaviors such as smoking and inactivity" (Frisbee et al.).

Finding causal links between PFOA exposure and "ulcerative colitis. . . high cholesterol; pregnancy-induced hypertension; thyroid disease; testicular cancer; and kidney cancer," provided undeniable proof that poor health outcomes in Parkersburg were not just due to lifestyle factors and pre-existing conditions such as obesity and high cholesterol. Nonetheless, in response, DuPont maintained that Sue Bailey was solely responsible for her baby's deformities, and, years later, told a woman that her PFOA-related cancer was a result of her weight (Lerner).

In the Cape Fear River Watershed, contamination and related health effects hit marginalized communities first, including the majority Black and Latino populations communities surrounding the Fayetteville Works plant and indigenous communities downstream. Since NCSU began their GenX exposure study in November 2017, they have taken blood samples and monitored contamination in "communities along the Cape Fear River basin from Pittsboro on the Haw River, to Fayetteville area private well community, and Brunswick and New Hanover Counties in the Lower Cape Fear region" (NCSU).

In Navassa, a majority-Black town just north of Wilmington, residents have weighed their desire for remedy against fears of medical exploitation often targeted towards African-Americans. Participant Eulis Willis, the mayor of Navassa, cautioned that, "My experience has been that my people don't like to participate in studies such as this, because they feel like they're being [a] guinea pig," but still supports testing in order to build a record of contamination. A former Town Council member supported this, reasoning that years of potential contamination-related illnesses and questions have contributed to a lack of trust in medical workers. Suzanne Lea, a researcher from East Carolina University, affirmed that, "We really feel like at least 20 percent of that total [study sample] should be African Americans to reflect the size in our state," enlisting the help of community workers to spread awareness about study participation through social media and Black churches. Within a few days of this effort, they yielded fifty new participants identifying as Black and/or Latino (Atwater). This is proof of the power of community activism in aiding exposure studies, especially as research bodies often ignore the comfort levels of afflicted individuals when reaching out and make previously marginalized groups feel further unwelcomed. The C8 panel's use of privacy protection, monetary persuasion, and discussions held between community members and panel workers shows a pioneering example of what a proper patient-provider relationship can offer in terms of increased study engagement, having a diverse representative population sample, and overall trust.

Still, participation does not reflect the state's indigenous populations, namely the Lumbee and Waccamaw Siouan groups affected by PFAS exposure. The Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) has worked with the Cape Fear River Watch community group to stop DuPont-Chemours from discharging PFAS from the Fayetteville Works plant, in addition to focusing on contamination in the predominantly Black and Lumbee Robeson County (SELC). The Coastal Review, representing the North Carolina Coastal Federation, has publicized preterm birth rates among North Carolina indigenous groups, facing a "disproportionately higher risk for preterm birth" due to drinking water well contamination. Initially focusing on heavy metal exposure, mainly cadmium and lead, they note that wells along the CFRWS are going through GenX and PFAs testing.

As a result of litigation, wells that test for contaminants above a certain threshold will have filtration systems installed for free, through payment by Chemours, however inequities persist. The wells being tested are private, meaning they also lack protections under the Safe Water Drinking Act that limits contaminant presence in drinking water. Reporting, "North Carolina has the largest population. . . of people in the country who get their drinking water from private wells," the article emphasizes the burden placed on "low-income and nonwhite families in rural areas. . . because they often lack the financial means" to make filter alterations to their well systems. Although Chemours would pay for filtration if testing yields sufficient results, NCDEQ maintains that water testing for private well owners must be paid for by the owner; in other words, low-income residents depending on Chemours to pay for filter likely cannot afford testing in the first place, preventing them from accessing remedial care (Talton).

The Waccamaw Siouan tribe, mostly concentrated about forty miles downstream of the DuPont-Chemours plant, also face concerns about PFAS contamination in their Cape Fear-sourced drinking water. The Pulse relays Chief Michael Jacobs' fears surrounding a wave of mysterious illnesses, reporting:

> 'I'm not afraid to make some noise,' Jacobs said. 'God gave me a big mouth, and I'm going to use it.' But Jacobs's voice begins to falter as he recalls moments in life when his mouth wasn't big enough—when his two uncles died from a rare form of cancer when he was 16; when his father died from prostate cancer five years ago; when two young children in his tribe died just as they were beginning to read; when several Waccamaw Siouan women died of breast cancer. Everyone knows someone who is sick, but nobody knows why. (Towey)

While the government lagged behind marginalized groups' needs and failed to set rigorous standards for GenX and PFAS regulation, community members relied on self-advocacy and collective organizing to forge a path ahead.

Like the Navassa example demonstrated, the ability of local community members to take action both provided a spotlight on the contamination issue and yielded results where government action failed to do so. This suggests the importance of community organizing in yielding reparations, although the extensively participant-involved C8 panel shows that collaboration between involved community members and professional regulatory groups is both possible and necessary for providing a comprehensive path to seeking recourse. La'Meshia Whittington, an activist with the North Carolina Black Alliance and Advance Carolina, has spoken out against Black community members' multi-fronted PFAS exposure, ranging from contaminated drinking water to "fast food meals that come in PFAS packaging" and "rental units with PFAS-laden carpeting," putting her community at a greater risk while often unable to manage testing and filtration costs dependent on seemingly arbitrary contamination thresholds. Fayetteville community members have also participated in "listening sessions" hosted by the EPA, describing their loved ones' battles with cancers, reproductive issues, and other conditions possibly linked to GenX exposure. Indeed, the first major lawsuit to come out of the Cape Fear River case was through the non-profit Cape Fear River Watch's partnership with the SELC, suing NCDEQ in 2018 in order to get Chemours to cease their waste dumping. In the midst of this, they sued Chemours, but a $13 million settlement with NCDEQ stipulated that they drop the suit. As a result, DuPont-Chemours stopped their GenX discharges and added scrubbers for air filtration, although water contamination remains; since then, DuPont has already been fined for violating the settlement terms (Greenfield).

Providing another example of effective community organizing, watchdog group Clean Cape Fear (CCF) was founded by civilian Emily Donovan, whose husband faced a sudden brain tumor. Since 2017, CCF has documented litigation attempts against DuPont, hosted forums with CFRW to increase public awareness on PFAS, and worked to secure financial grants for filtration systems, while Donovan has repeatedly testified in front of Congress. After four years of petitioning the EPA to perform toxicology tests for dozens of DuPont-affiliated PFAS with the Center for Environmental Health, the EPA announced the country's first drinking water safety standards for GenX and five other similar PFAS in April 2024.

Communities downstream of the Fayetteville Works plant are not the only ones affected, with the Haw River being a prominent testing site for both the 2007 EPA study and current NCSU studies in Pittsboro. Nonprofit Haw River Assembly has stepped up its own advocacy efforts, talking to community members and collaborating with researchers looking at PFAS. Riverkeeper Emily Sutton advocates strongly for the precautionary principle, saying "Chemical companies can create these compounds, without any regard for impacts to human health or the environment, and discharge them until proven guilty."

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), an environmental advocacy group, stresses that state regulatory officials have only been reluctantly dragged into action due to community involvement and public backlash, citing NCDEQ's 2017 lawsuit against DuPont as a "response to bad press" and several failed attempts by State Representatives to ban, or even limit, PFAS within North Carolina (Greenfield). In Wilmington's case, despite the Cape Fear Public Utility Authority sitting on a three-year study of excessive PFAS water contamination, "the findings were never made available to the general public—not even to Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffo." Only after requesting a meeting with DuPont-Chemours officials did Saffo find out GenX had been discharged into Cape Fear waters since the 1980s. The Utility Authority's vice-chair responded to criticism on the lack of transparency by asserting that the study's results indicated no causes for concern, however further investigative work by *CBS News* revealed the vice-chair had previously worked as a DuPont chemical engineer for eleven years, maintaining ties with employees at the

Fayetteville plant (CBS News).

Community groups' involvement has spread knowledge of the Cape Fear past state and even national boundaries, exposing key differences between U.S. and foreign handling of PFAS contamination. Responding to petitions from multiple community groups within North Carolina, including Clean Cape Fear, the United Nations assembled a panel investigating PFAS contamination, concluding that EPA and state regulators failed to both "protect against business-related human rights abuses" and supply affected populations "with the type and amount of information necessary to prevent harm and seek reparation" (Tabuchi). While these examples of community action are commendable and often effective in pressuring companies to engage in remedial efforts, the government repeatedly failing to hold DuPont-Chemours accountable reinforces the burden of proof already preventing victims from pursuing justice, suggesting that joint efforts between concerned community members and regulatory officials with power are needed to truly enforce accountability.

The backlash does not end at U.S. borders, with a quiet lawsuit against DuPont in the Netherlands revealing further waste mismanagement in Fayetteville. In September 2023, the city of Dordrecht won a ruling stating that DuPont-Chemours was at fault for discharging PFAS into waterways from at least 1994–1998, alleging that DuPont was well aware of PFAS risks and failed to report any discharges to city officials. Several employees, facing cancers and PFAS blood levels several times larger than Dutch guidelines allow for, have sued DuPont, accusing the company of decades of negligence. One employee, who had direct skin contamination due to a faulty pipe, said that his supervisors concealed the dangers, claiming "that you can simply eat Teflon, without any issues, because it is only dangerous when it combusts" (Siepman). The Netherlands have since designated GenX as hazardous, leading to stricter waste disposal regulations, although the U.S. lagged behind. Two months after the ruling, local reporting revealed that the EPA "quietly approved" a permit allowing DuPont-Chemours to import four million pounds of waste a year from the Dordrecht facility to the Fayetteville facility.

As of September 2023, the EPA had already "signed off on as much as 100 shipments" despite their own order for DuPont to decrease GenX discharge, eliciting reactions of bafflement and anger from community members. Clean Cape Fear's Emily Donovan participated in the outcry, criticizing how the EPA's slow classification of GenX waste as hazardous allowed for these imports. Equally as concerning, if not oxymoronic, was the EPA's logic that if GenX waste was too toxic to dump in the Netherlands, then it was harmless to instead ship and dump it in North Carolina. After a swift round of backlash from CCF and residents around the Fayetteville area, the EPA paused imports "in response to recent concerns expressed by stakeholders including the state of North Carolina" in another display of effective community activism, but questions remain about the state of PFAS cleanup around Fayetteville Works (Perkins).

Even as communities seek restorative justice for their experiences with environmental contamination, DuPont-Chemours continues to engage in greenwashing and other manipulative practices to rehabilitate their reputation and mislead both regulatory agencies and the general public, continuing a legacy of dishonesty in the Parkersburg case. After the EPA handed DuPont a $16.5 million fine, less than half of what the company's performance materials division made in a day, for failing to report C8 toxicity in 2006, the EPA's Science Advisory Board's first review of PFOA found "likely" carcinogenic effects. This prompted DuPont vice president Susan Stalnecker to sound an internal alarm about "significant disruptions in [their] markets." Attempting to enlist the EPA's help in preventing consumer panic, Stalnecker emailed the agency, saying, "the only voice that can cut through the negative stories, is the voice of EPA. We need EPA. . . to quickly (like first thing tomorrow) [sic] say the following: Consumer products sold under the Teflon brand are safe" (Lerner).

Greenwashing, a term used to describe corporations' concealment of "negative information related to the company's environmental performance and [exposure of] positive information regarding its environmental performance," is usually used for practices driving climate change and pollution. Instead, this paper will analyze greenwashing of specifically PFAS pollution and its effects on human health, both of which have been deliberately downplayed or outright concealed from the public by DuPont-Chemours (de Freitas Netto et al.).

At an open-door company event celebrating the Fayetteville Works plant's 40th anniversary in 2011, "Company executives promoted the plant's impact on the community and local environment, boasting about how the company was planting pine trees and building nesting boxes for bluebirds." DuPont's chief executive even attributed much of the plant's success to its "great relationship" with the community. Four years later, Chemours would diverge as a separate entity responsible for Fayetteville Works, Washington Works, the Dordrecht plant, and thirty-four other facilities, a move which has been aptly criticized as an attempt to muddle DuPont's responsibilities as a perpetrator of environmental injustice (Gelles and Steel).

In one case where the state of Ohio sued Chemours for C8/PFOA contamination at Parkersburg's Washington Works plant, Chemours dodged responsibility by claiming that the company "does not, and has never, used" C8 and that the contamination predated their existence, conveniently treating DuPont as a completely separate company. DuPont, on the other hand, denied culpability on the grounds of Washington Works being under independent Chemours' jurisdiction, effectively passing responsibility onto absolutely no one. In a twist, Chemours sued its parent company in 2019 as a result of accumulated debt, asking "Why bother spending money to fix the problem, DuPont apparently reasoned, when it could be conveniently passed on to Chemours?" The mentioned "problem" refers to Fayetteville Works' PFAS discharge, which DuPont allegedly could have prevented with a $600 million project that was thrown away soon before the Chemours spinoff. The New York Times reported that after the Wilmington story first broke in 2017, Chemours executives told consumers that "levels of GenX found in the drinking water were safe and that much of the pollution happened before Chemours was created," again hiding behind corporate restructuring to deceive the public. Chemours even funded several research studies claiming to regulators that GenX did not cause cancer and that health effects found in rats "had limited relevance to humans." Ironically, Chemours' lawsuit against DuPont revealed an employee's own private criticism of the greenwashing, saying, "Chemours poisoned people for years, and finally stepped up after they got caught. . . That is how it will spin" (Gelles and Steel).

Responding to a *Time* journalist inquiry after a recent court appeal to avoid Parkersburg lawsuit payouts, DuPont said, "DuPont de Nemours has never manufactured PFOA or PFOS." Instead, blame for these so-called "historical matters" is placed yet again on Chemours; the subsidy has only a fraction of the funds DuPont does, so it can avoid paying the full settlement due to a lack of resources (Kluger). When money inevitably runs out, as shown in the 2019 lawsuit against DuPont, the same process can occur with two other DuPont offshoots founded within the decade. At the same time, the company promotes their community outreach, such as helping Colombian cancer patients and engaging in environmental cleanup in Michigan. Their website boasts of "sustainability" and environmentally conscious practices, more basic buzzwords to greenwash their reputation. Chemours' website for the Fayetteville Works plant claims to "preserve and invest in the beauty of the environment around us," displaying proud statistics of reducing PFAS emissions without mentioning how they were required to by several court orders. In bold letters, "At Chemours Fayetteville, we take our corporate responsibility commitment seriously" (Chemours). Yet, they cannot accept responsibility for the thousands of cancer cases inflicted on Appalachian communities in the Ohio River region or against Black, Latino, and indigenous North Carolinians. And as litigation continues in the Ohio Valley and Cape Fear River, corporate lawyers for Chemours and DuPont prove they are more willing to spend money on denying culpability than to lose money by accepting accountability for poisoning the region's most underserved populations.

By comparing the Parkersburg and Cape Fear environmental contamination cases, a clear pattern of DuPont's deceptive behavior and added medical marginalization of vulnerable groups emerges, as does a framework of best practices to prevent PFAS exposure from plaguing future communities. Studies relevant to Cape Fear and abroad show a clear need for the precautionary principle in chemical manufacturing: burden of proof must be shifted onto companies to provide concrete evidence that chemicals they produce are safe rather than force alleged victims to spend life-altering amounts of money for water testing, medical treatment, and legal fees to provide causal evidence. Reparative practices will ideally feature collaboration between community advocacy groups made up of local residents and regulatory agencies, giving residents a voice in their treatment while still putting the responsibility of pursuing legal justice in the hands of entities with power. This includes issuing testing orders for corporate entities like DuPont to follow, covering costs of research studies, water filter implementation for both public and private drinking water wells, healthcare fees, and long-term health monitoring.

A comprehensive testing panel like that of the C8 Exposure Study in Parkersburg provides the most suitable example for providing residents with accessible testing and curating a large enough sample size to yield significant results, giving communities proof of their suffering and holding entities like DuPont liable for lifelong monitoring of residents exposed to PFAS contamination. Rather than force civilians to test their own water against vague regulations in hope of getting compensation, people within the defined Cape Fear River Watershed must have access to widespread, compensated testing and thoroughly established safety thresholds formed by extensive exposure studies, preventing DuPont from taking advantage of the unknown consequences of PFAS exposure to establish their own insufficient limits.

Future comprehensive studies must pay close attention to marginalized communities living along the river, including Black, Latino, and indigenous groups, weighing their health effects with common pre-existing health conditions and histories of medical disenfranchisement. Furthermore, the effects of GenX water pollution must be analyzed in the long-term, including effects on local wildlife and food sources, in order to fully grasp the reach of multiple point-source contamination. While community organizing is a powerful tool for attaining environmental justice, the real burden should lie on federal and local regulatory agencies to hold entities like DuPont accountable for intentional environmental violence for the sake of profit, including through deceptive means of greenwashing used to tamp down public backlash. In the meantime, it is crucial to maintain a positive outlook: virtually every single human being and unborn child will have PFAS in their blood for the foreseeable future, even the executives at DuPont, but at least humanity has the non-stick pan.

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How to Improve Current Care in North Carolina Mental Health In-Patient Centers

Natasha Bishop

Earlier this year, five people escaped from the Psychiatric Hospital Holly Hill, and another psychiatric hospital in North Carolina, Brynn Marr, allegedly falsified patient records for more insurance money (WRAL). Widescale problems infiltrate many of the inpatient centers across the state. But these aren't isolated events, they are rooted in a history of demonizing and dehumanizing people with mental illnesses. Differentiating "sane" from insane people in society allowed us to label an entire group of people as less valuable. Because of this, insane asylums became moral machines designed to remake lazy, indolent transgressors into useful "decorous" citizens.

The problems faced by the first insane asylums in North Carolina have now progressed and continue to plague the current patient care centers. We need to investigate how both the systematic and economic failures are interrelated with the shortcomings of the medical system in order to discriminate between the "sane" and the insane leading to current-day stigmas. Additionally, this paper will look at how Dorthea Dix, the woman who advocated for North Carolina's first mental hospital, created a strong foundation for how to build hospitals focused on respect, kindness, and quality of care for patients. Finally, the paper will work to present possible solutions to these deep-rooted issues, including work at the systematic level with the treatment of patients in inpatient care centers and societal changes with the destigmatization of mental health disorders and the dismantling of the fear-mongering systems that fuel the stigmas surrounding mental illness.

I propose that wide-scale positive changes can be possible through a foundation in the moral treatment model and the use of modern medicine, such as medication in moderation. These wide-scale changes are crucial because currently, mental health care in North Carolina has been failing its patients, leaving mentally ill people feeling isolated, disrespected, and without hope. With rates of mental illness on the rise, this poses a large problem for North Carolina and all of its residents. The historical issues and stigmas raise the question of how we can fix these systematic and societal problems. This question is further complicated by the problems that inpatient centers have faced since their creation, and how many of these problems have only worsened to create the mammoth-sized issues currently plaguing North Carolina's Inpatient centers. I believe that we look toward Dorothea Dix, who was one of the first pioneers of patient-centered psychiatric care.

By looking at the most common diagnoses for mentally ill people throughout history, doctors can have a better idea of the problems surrounding the mental health field. The diagnosis of insanity has been used for centuries as a loose form of diagnosis for mentally ill patients in need of medical attention. The word insanity comes from the Latin root word of insanus, which translated to English means frenzied, wild, or mad (LatDict). The diagnosis of insanity was used more as a classification, or grouping of symptoms that patients were experiencing, and not a sickness with a known medical pathology or understanding. In fact, according to a manual for students and teachers of medicine in 1887, "It is inaccurate to state that insanity is itself a disease. It is, strictly speaking, merely a symptom which may be due to many different morbid conditions having this one feature in common: that they involve the mind." (Spizka, 17) Here we see that in the 1880s it was known that insanity was not a diagnosis, merely a symptom. This raises the question of why patients with mental illness in asylums across the Western Hemisphere were being treated for one symptom which may be a sign of a multitude of different conditions.

The answer to this question may come in the form of legality. In 1843, Daniel M'Naghten murdered the secretary to the prime minister, Edward Drummond, whilst trying to kill the prime minister at the time Sir Robert Peel. During the trial, nine witnesses all testified to the fact that M'Naghten was innocent and the jury acquitted him as they found that he was "not guilty because of insanity". The M'Naghten rule as it became known was embraced with almost no modifications by American courts and legislatures for more than 100 years (PBS). This meant that insanity became a legal definition, allowing for the creation of "Insane Asylums" as they became known. This trial brought attention to the reality of mental illness, known at the time as insanity, and demonstrated why it was important to begin treating those who were mentally ill, if not for the good of the patient, for the good of society.

In the wake of the American and French Revolutions, a humanitarian movement swept through Europe and the United States. One of the large concerns of the movement was the treatment of the mentally ill (O'Rorke, 1). As stated previously, very little was known about the pathology or correct form of treatment for insanity. However, Philippe

Pinel of the Bicetre Hospital in Paris and William Tuke fought for more humane treatment for mentally ill patients. This was an important step as in centuries prior, mentally ill patients were placed in jails, and poor houses, lived chained, and even at times were forced into living at home in solitary confinement (Nursing 2024). The innovative form of care that was the moral treatment model spread to the United States with the creation of the very first public mental hospital in the country, the Eastern State Hospital founded in Virginia in 1773 (O'Rorke, 1). After its creation, many other hospitals including the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia and the New York Hospital, also began using treatments that were rooted in Pinel's and Tuke's theories (O'Rorke, 1). However, North Carolina responded extremely slowly to this call for action and was one of the only two states of the first 13 that did not have a mental hospital in 1843. Some of the reasons accredited to this slow response were the geography of different cities within the state, sectionalism, poverty, and conservatism (O'Rorke, 1).

However, Dorothea Dix had the research and story to force North Carolina to finally create their first mental health hospital. Dorothea Dix had an unconventional path to becoming an advocate for those who were mentally ill. In 1821 Dix became a passionate teacher, teaching at an elementary school for girls in her grandmother's home. By 1824 Dix had published a popular guide for school teachers called "Conversations on Common Things" or "Guide to Knowledge: With Questions". As her teaching popularity grew Dix founded a secondary school within her own home in 1831 (Nursing 2024). However, despite her success with teaching, she suffered from frequent episodes of "malaise", today this would most likely be known as clinical depression, which impacted her ability to function and work. As was common at the time, Dix's physician suggested that she travel abroad, to England, for treatment (Nursing 2024).

During her time in England, Dix was hosted by William Rathbone, a politician and a social reformer. The time she spent with Rathbone was said to be influential for the remainder of her life. While Dix was in England, she overcame her "malaise" and believed it was a direct result of her environmental surroundings and the compassionate care that she received. This treatment formed the framework for her ideas surrounding the care of those with mental illness (Nursing 2024). While Dix was in England, she met with Samuel Tuke, whose ancestor was William Tuke, to learn about "moral therapy" as a cure for mental illness (Nursing 2024). According to the American Psychological Association, moral therapy is

> A form of psychotherapy from the 19th century based on the belief that a person with a mental disorder could be helped by being treated with compassion, kindness, and dignity in a clean, comfortable environment that provided freedom of movement, opportunities for occupational and social activity, and reassuring talks with physicians and attendants. (APA)

Dix found great promise in this form of treatment and incorporated it into her later advocacy. When Dix returned to the United States in 1837, she began teaching a Sunday school class in a jail in Massachusetts due to learning about prison reform from Elizabeth Fry, a prominent prison reformer, while in England. While there, she witnessed how prisoners with mental illnesses were treated inhumanely: many were housed in darkness without heat or sanitation, and left unclothed, some were even flogged and chained. Dix attempted to voice her concerns to the jailer, but she was told: "Lunatics cannot feel the cold" (Nursing 2024).

This was the driving force that Dix needed to begin her research to help those with mental illnesses. For the next two years, Dix toured jailhouses, almshouses, and poorhouses in New England to find and collect data on patients with mental illnesses. During these tours, Dix witnessed patients with mental illnesses housed with criminals in the same conditions. She also found that many prisoners had a mental illness (Nursing 2024).

Dix's research focused on two main problems, care of those convicted of a crime and care of people with mental illnesses. She lobbied the federal and state governments for better conditions for prisoners with mental illnesses and money to build mental asylums by compiling manuscripts of her data and, in a time when only men held elected office, she was able to find legislators who were sympathetic to her cause (Nursing 2024). This research improved the standard of care for those with mental illness in the United States and Canada and even initiated the systematic recording of observations to initiate support for the humane treatment of the mentally ill (Nursing 2024). By 1880 Dix was responsible for creating 32 of the 123 mental hospitals that existed at that time in the United States(Nursing 2024).

Dix represents the kind of advocate the mental health field needs. Her willpower, empathy, dedication, and adaptability are the key qualities that are required to fight the current political and social stigmas surrounding mental health and who deserve mental health care. Many of her models for patient care and the use of objective data (the basis of nursing research) to compel legislators to action are still used and function well today. Through Dix's advocacy, Dix Hospital was created by the North Carolina government for the growing population of mentally ill citizens in NC. Before the Civil War, the medical field believed that "only recently acquired, acute cases of insanity could be cured" (O'Rorke, 2). This language, taken from the text *Haven on the Hill*, which outlines the history of Dix Hospital, showed how the term insanity was used in the very foundation of the creation of this hospital as a diagnosis, not its true classification of a symptom. These choices of words in the foundational documents show how the emphasis was on a symptomatic treatment, that was meant to remove that which was not seen as socially acceptable, and not on the wellbeing of the patients. The theory that only recently acquired and acute cases of insanity would be cured stemmed from the belief that insanity was caused by a physical injury or a disease and that mental illness was the product of social and economic conditions. Thus the "cure" that the new hospital for the mentally ill was to be founded in the theory that isolation from these conditions was the key to "fixing" the insanity.

However, Dix saw the importance of giving both classifications of patients, the "curable" patients and the "non-curable", the moral treatment method, this involved treating the patients with firmness, kindness, and truthfulness. Dix also recommended as a part of this treatment, that patients are moderately employed, have access to exercise both physical and mental, and have as much freedom as was consistent with safety (O'Rorke, 2). The final piece of the moral treatment method was the need for patients to have access to open air and the outdoors. The emphasis of this model was to treat patients as human beings, something that doctors at the time, politics, and society did not (O'Rorke, 2). While Dix was fundamental in getting political leaders to fund and pass joint resolutions to create a mental hospital in North Carolina, it took multiple acts and supplemental bills until the hospital was created (O'Rorke, 3).

Finally, in 1850, the land for the hospital was purchased. It comprised 182 acres of land a mile from the capital city of Raleigh. This land was chosen for its rural nature, while still being relatively close to a city, as was the norm for mental hospitals at the time. The land was also specially chosen for "an abundant supply of water" (O'Rorke, 4). This land was all paid for by North Carolina taxpayers, through a new tax of 1 and ¾ cents on every 100 dollars worth of land and 5 and ¼ cents on each "taxable poll" for the next four years, but county courts were allowed to reduce this tax for poorer property owners proportionately (O'Rorke, 3).

The hospital was built with the moral treatment model in mind. The architect's drawings outlined that the hospital would be a three-story structure with two wings, each wing to accommodate 120 patients. Each wing would have a parlor, a dining room, a clothing room, and a water closet. Additionally, all patient rooms were built with privacy in mind, with each patient getting their own room, or being placed in a dormitory with four to six patients (O'Rorke, 5). Within the architect's notes, the influence of the Hanwell Lunatic Asylum in Middlesex, England, an Italian brick building with wings connecting to a central section, was quite apparent (O'Rorke, 4). Additionally, the new technology of steam heating was employed throughout the hospital, to keep patients warm during the fall and winter months. During the spring and summer months, a forced ventilation system was used throughout the hospital to continuously circulate fresh air for the patients (O'Rorke, 7).

However, even the beginnings of construction on this hospital were plagued with issues. Due to funding restrictions, the size of the hospital needed to decrease which meant cutting the patient population from 250 to 120 (O'Rorke, 5). Additionally, the hospital's water source became a problem when it was found that the elevation difference and distance between the water source and the hospital created engineering difficulties. This meant that a well had to be dug to supply the hospital with fresh water (O'Rorke, 7).

Next, they turned to the question of how to support the mentally ill population of North Carolina who could not afford to pay to stay at the hospital. During the 1854-1855 session of the North Carolina courts, a commitment process for state support patients was outlined. For those who could not afford to stay at the hospital, the counties in which they resided were to pay However, if more than 5 patients were county-supported, then the state would pay for the extra patients (O'Rorke, 8-9). Additionally, the state needed to outline the process for the mentally ill inmates being held in prisons. It was decided by the legislature that if the inmate had been imprisoned for reasons other than committing a crime, they could be transferred to the newly built hospital (O'Rorke, 8). This was a big step in better, more humane treatment of mentally ill people. Notably, hired attendants were instructed to always treat the patients respectfully and address them gently. Additionally, the attendants were not to use ropes or restraints on the patients without the superintendent's approval (O'Rorke, 10). Both of these rules demonstrate how foundational the moral treatment model was in the creation of the hospital.

In 1856 the hospital opened its doors under the name of the North Carolina Hospital for the Mentally Ill. However, in 1959, the hospital's name was changed to Dorothea Dix Hospital (NCpedia). While the hospital was in its early years, under the direction of Dr. Fisher, it flourished. Dr. Fisher, like Dix, worked to dismantle the public prejudices against the hospital and the mentally ill. Additionally, overall patients had positive experiences at the hospital, for example, a discharged patient even raised funds for a library, and editors around the state sent weekly periodicals (O'Rorke, 11). During these years, the legislation assembly permitted the return of incurable "indigent" patients deemed harmless to their home counties to reduce the strain on the hospital (O'Rorke, 11).

The foundational principles of the moral treatment model should have made this hospital a promising start to truly help the mentally ill populations of North Carolina and begin to fight the growing mental health crisis. However, the construction, and the first few years, while some of the most promising years of the hospital showed how issues such as underfunding, understaffing, political climates, and social stigmas impacted how well the hospital was able to serve its patients. This led to many

humanistic and essential facets of the moral treatment model being cut due to the high demand for quick cures and the expense of the model itself. Starting in the 1990s Dorothea Dix Hospital began having issues with staffing. During this time there was an extremely high turnover rate for clinical directors. This led to instability in management style (O'Rorke, 199). On top of this managerial instability, many longtime staff members retired, including the head of the residency training program, and more notably the head of the psychology department. This meant that the Dix staff constantly had to adjust to new changes in policies while also trying to maintain care and improve performance. The need to improve patient care continued to become a growing pressure on Dorothea Dix Hospital staff as regulatory groups such as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) and the Health Care Finance Administration (HCFA) continued to increase their standards for patient care. In 1991, HCFA found deficiencies in the functioning of Dix Hospital, primarily with regard to patient care. Some of these deficiencies were as follows: incomplete treatment plans, incomplete nurses' progress notes, and too few registered nurses on staff (O'Rorke, 202). In 1992 HCFA also found that Dix Hospital did not meet the requirements to pass the safety survey. This placed the hospital's Medicare and Medicaid funding in jeopardy (O'Rorke, 202). Dix Hospital staff and management tried to make changes to address some of these issues such as a new computer system, however, in their efforts to address the issues raised by HCFA, hospital officials found that human rights, safety, infection control, and therapeutic improvement all needed more directed efforts for reform (O'Rorke, 202).

Then, in 1999, when Hurricane Floyd destroyed Eastern North Carolina, Dix Hospital lost more of its funding to hurricane relief efforts. This decline in needed funding created low morale for employees who now were forced to do more with less resources. Additionally, staff were held to higher standards of patient care, which led to the monitoring of staff increasing (O'Rorke, 203). In 2002 the recently elected governor, Mike Easly, furthered this discussion when he began a movement for mental health reform across the state. Within this reform, in 2001, the North Carolina senate considered a proposal to close Dorothea Dix Hospital due to scrutiny around staffing shortages and safety concerns that were raised by the Dix faculty (O'Rorke, 224). In June 2002, Dix Hospital began reducing its services in preparation for its closure in the coming years (O'Rorke, 231). Between the years of 2008 and 2010, efforts to close the hospital continued in earnest. Finally, in 2010 it was announced that the facility would close its doors. In 2012 the final patients were relocated to Central Regional Hospital and Dorothea Dix finally closed after battling through understaffing and failing patient care (NCpedia).

Currently, North Carolina's inpatient centers have been in and out of the news with many stories illustrating the problems that our inpatient centers are facing at this moment.

Holly Hill Hospital is one of only 14 psychiatric hospitals in North Carolina. This hospital has been operating for almost 40 years, and its website claims to provide psychiatric and addiction services to those of all ages. It has been under investigation by news outlets such as WRAL and North Carolina Health News to uncover the dark underbelly of how the most vulnerable patients and children are being mistreated both medically and socially by this hospital. One of the biggest problems for parents when it comes to the current system for involuntary commitment of their children is that there is no time for parents to research which hospitals in the area will be best for their children and thus, parents are forced to send their children to hospitals like Holly Hill which are known for poor quality of care (WRAL).

Parents of involuntarily committed children at Holly Hill have raised many other concerns especially when visiting their children. Many have shared their experiences with children begging to be taken to a different hospital or even trying to escape, which is extremely concerning, especially since those who have been involuntarily commited are legally required to have mental health treatment usually due to severe mental illness (WRAL). Additionally, Holly Hill was exposed for leaving parents completely uninformed when it comes to the treatments that their children are undergoing while there.

In an inspection from 2021, WRAL also found that Holly Hill was releasing patients with discharge papers signed by someone with no nursing license or someone who was not employed by Holly Hill (WRAL). A few months later two teens jumped over the fence and escaped the hospital, however, Holly Hill and the press were less worried about the well-being of the teens and the quality of care they received while at Holly Hill. Instead, the press were more concerned with the Hospital losing its federal funding and Medicare and Medicaid services.

Then, in March of 2024, five more young patients of the Holly Hill Hospital escaped. When interviewed, an employee of the hospital stated that there were two factors to blame here: short staffing and poor security (WRAL). However, this does not address the root cause that could make patients to feel the need to escape from a hospital where they should have been recovering through receiving kind and loving care. To find the cause, WRAL reached out to many parents of children who had poor experiences at Holly Hill. One parent stated that their child was attacked by another teenager at the facilities but she was never notified by the staff of the hospital. The only way the parents found out about the attack was through seeing their child bruised and beaten during one of their visits (WRAL).

Sadly, Holly Hill Hospital is not the only mental health facility within North Carolina that has been exposed as corrupt due to poor care and patient abuse. Another one of these hospitals is Brynn Marr. This hospital claims to be "Compassionate Behavioral Healthcare serving North Carolina" (Brynnmarr.org) and opened in 1983 in Jacksonville, North Carolina. Since, it has been in and out of the news for problems similar to those of Holly Hill Hospital.

According to WRAL news, Mo Hatcher asked to be taken to Brynn Marr Hospital to get better control of her anxiety, which had become a major impediment to her everyday life. However, in her discharge summary, Hatcher found that she had been admitted to the hospital under an incorrect diagnosis of "Suicidal ideation with a plan, history of substance abuse via overdose on pills and substance abuse." (WRAL). For her "main diagnosis staff simply wrote down 'major depressive disorder' and 'suicidal ideation', however, the anxiety, which Hatcher had told the staff about, and was her main reason for attending the hospital was never written down on her charts."

The horrifying part of this entire story was the fact that Hatcher's experience was not a surprise when staff heard about it. Many former Brynn Marr employees stated that they had quit due to unethical practices at the hospital. One of the most concerning unethical practices was "documenting more severe diagnoses for patients to make them appear sicker than they were so that the hospital could bill more to insurers" (WRAL). Additionally, a former employee of Brynn Marr stated that the hospital management:

> Told nurses to avoid documenting a patient's denial of suicidal or homicidal thoughts or hallucinations. If it was in the record, the former employee said, then it would have to be reported to the insurance company. Once reported, the insurance company would stop paying, they said. (WRAL)

When 13 former employees were interviewed by NC Health News, 12 of the 13 stated that they were instructed by management to exaggerate or even falsify information in patient records. These same 13 former Brynn Marr hospital employees found that Brynn Marr's problems went deeper than just incorrect charting and insurance fraud. Employees stated that there was unchecked violence and a lack of mental health treatment at Brynn Marr Hospital. Additionally, former employees stated, "They left the hospital's employment disturbed by what they said were explicit efforts to cherry-pick patients with the best insurance and use questionable tactics to keep patients longer. The better the insurance, the longer some patients would stay, one former unit coordinator said" (WRAL).

All of these issues raise the question: how did North Carolina Mental Hospitals move so far away from the Moral Treatment model created by Tuke, centered around humanizing psychiatric patients and treating them with kindness and respect, towards the current system of fraud, patient abuse, and lack of treatment? Some of the main reasons were the same that Dorothea Dix Hospital found at its very conception such as lack of funding, understaffing, stigmas surrounding mental health, and the complex interplay of politics with medicine. However, some of the problems are newer, such as lack of good patient-based treatment, and insurance fraud.

I believe that through finding the root of many of these problems, a possible solution can be found. For example, the problem of poor treatment that has been reported can be solved by going back to the roots of mental health treatment centers. The focus on seeing mentally ill people as people, who deserve kindness and respect is essential to beginning to treat patients. Through the use of the moral treatment model framework and our current knowledge of medication and therapies, treatments can be more effective and adaptable to each patient and their illness. Additionally, in response to underfunding which caused understaffing and insurance fraud, a solution is getting more federal funding for these psychiatric hospitals. However, getting more public funding means fighting the societal stigmas surrounding mental health and those who are mentally ill.

To fight the stigmas, one must understand the roots of where these stigmas originate. According to the National Library of Medicine of the United States (NIH), mental illness has been one of the most stigmatized and judged of all other illnesses. The NIH states that:

> For millennia, society did not treat persons suffering from depression, autism, schizophrenia, and other mental illnesses much better than slaves or criminals: they were imprisoned, tortured, or killed. During the Middle Ages, mental illness was regarded as a punishment from God … During the Enlightenment, the mentally ill were finally freed from their chains, and institutions were established to help sufferers of mental illness. However, stigmatization and discrimination reached an unfortunate peak during the Nazi reign in Germany when hundreds of thousands of mentally ill people were murdered or sterilized (NIH).

The NIH has identified many historical roots that have caused current stigmas surrounding mentally ill people, especially in the United States. Much of the stigmas surround the idea that mentally ill people are dangerous, unhelpful, and non-socially conforming. This led to fear and false judgments being made about all mentally ill people, and over time, this led to the creation of stigmas around those who were deemed as insane or mentally ill.

Interestingly, the word "stigma" comes from ancient Greece, where a "stigma" was a branding mark used to identify enslaved people. Today, stigma means having "a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance,

quality, or person." (Oxford Languages). Thus what society needs to fight against is a centuries-old brand that has been burned into mentally ill people socially, politically, and physically throughout the millennia.

Many websites, such as The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) state that some of the best ways to fight stigma are through education, examinations of judgmental attitudes and behaviors, and choosing words carefully (CAMH). Through better education for the public and politicians about mental illness and the importance of the language used in bills, legislature, education, and everyday speech, change can be made to support all mentally ill people to get safe, kind, and respectful care that they deserve.

In conclusion, I propose that wide-scale positive changes can be possible through a foundation in the moral treatment model and the use of modern medicine, such as medication in moderation, along with advocacy work to fight societal stigmas surrounding mentally ill people. The history of the conception of insane asylums, and even retreats demonstrates how the mental health of patients was never the priority for the medical system. Rather the focus was on "fixing" mentally ill people to make them socially acceptable and useful for society. However while the foundations of the moral treatment model show a very promising solution to many of the patient care and overall human rights problems with both historical insane asylums and current inpatient hospitals, more advocacy work must be completed to make this a reality.

With the stigmas that have been passed down for generations about mentally ill people, the United States government and the North Carolina government are unlikely to give more money to mental health hospitals for the mental health crisis that our current country is facing. This means that while the number of mentally ill people in our country is increasing, the lack of proper patient care, understaffing, abuse, and fraud that is currently occurring in Mental Health Hospitals in our state is going unchecked. This poses a large problem for a growing state like North Carolina. With a bigger strain on an already failing medical system, mentally ill people will not get the care that they desperately need.

By educating public officials about mental illness and fighting the social stigmas surrounding mental illness, more funding can be allocated to support North Carolina Mental Hospitals and citizens who cannot afford the needed care. Additionally, through incorporating a modern version of the moral treatment model, along with current knowledge of psychiatric medicine, neurology, and therapies, more effective care can be given to those who currently need it most, the mentally ill people of North Carolina.

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Systemic Oppression in Data Commodification

Eric Su

Google is the "people's company", right? Every day, users rely on Google as a source of information, an outlet for entertainment, or simply a tool in their lives. Google has become inseparable from our way of life. Yet, underneath the facade of the Google search engine is an algorithm that oppresses and misrepresents underrepresented people. In 2009, Safiya U. Noble conducted Google searches that contained keywords such as "black girls" and "asian girls", expecting results that contained educational or historical information. Instead, she was faced with a list of sites that were degrading and dehumanizing (Communication and Marketing Staff of USC Annenberg). The reason behind the search results? Commercial value. Content that generates the most engagement from users and ad revenue is pushed to the top of the results, regardless of what that content may entail. However, Google's algorithm is merely part of a larger system, one that treats ethics as a suggestion, whether that be deliberately or unintentionally. At the center of this system is an unsettling fact: the customer has become the product.

In the current digital age, currency comes in the form of personal data. Companies like Spotify, Amazon, eBay, and Apple are all motivated by economic incentives to use users' personal data. However, with the technological rise in recent years, a new form of exploitation has emerged, capitalizing on the commodification of personal data. Millions of terabytes of data are transferred, aggregated, and used for profit with little regulation daily. The unregulated and widespread commercialization of data has placed marginalized communities, particularly African Americans, Latin Americans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities, at risk of digital profiling, tracking, and targeted discrimination. The historical discrimination these communities faced across real estate, education, employment, healthcare, and political spheres is replicated and amplified through data-driven exploitation. By examining how collected data are used to exploit individuals in real estate, limit educational opportunities, restrict employment access, deny equitable healthcare, and manipulate political engagement, I will explore how the commercialization of data perpetuates and potentially worsens existing inequalities and discrimination in these sectors. Through bias embedded into algorithmic decision-making, targeted advertising, or metrics to profile individuals, personal data has been turned against marginalized communities while profiting corporations.

Corporate and state actors have long used profiling techniques to discriminate against underserved communities within the real estate market, with redlining being a key example of this. Redlining was a low-tech data profiling practice that arose during the early 20th century and was used by various groups under the belief that "incompatible racial groups should not be permitted to live in the same communities" (Gangadharan) through the application of color-coded maps that identified predominantly Black, ethnic, and poor neighborhoods. These areas were deemed "high-risk" for lending, with the argument that the property value of homes purchased by these types of households would fall. Such discrimination served to limit opportunities for Black and ethnic communities during the 1900s. With the advent of technology, new practices arose, allowing for further exacerbation of racial segregation in homeownership.

Although redlining has since been outlawed, its legacy persists through modern metrics, such as credit scores and algorithms, that are thought to be objective and unbiased methods, applied in the real estate market to assess the financial reliability and risk profile of potential borrowers. However, in practice, this is quite different with "corporate actors utilizing credit analytics to profile and exploit low-scoring credit holders", disproportionately targeting communities that have faced systemic barriers in the past (Gangadharan). By leveraging credit analytics to identify and classify members of marginalized communities as "vulnerable" borrowers, corporate actors were able to target these individuals with high-cost loans, subprime mortgages, and predatory financing options, resulting in "Blacks being three times more likely to receive a subprime loan for first–time home purchases than whites" and Latinos facing the same discrimination, "ranking at 2.6 times more likely than whites" (Gangadharan).

Subprime lenders utilize data metrics to prey "on borrowers with little knowledge of mortgage lending in general and their own financial options" or individuals "already in financial distress and foreclosure for refinancing", allowing them to manipulate individuals into higher-cost subprime loans and trapping them in a perpetual cycle of financial instability (Fisher 124). This predatory approach exploits a lack of financial literacy and transparency among borrowers from marginalized communities, stemming from a history of exclusion from education and financial resources

that were readily available in more affluent, predominantly White areas. Such is reflected in home purchase loans where "less than 8% of the first lien home purchase loans issued to white borrowers were high–cost, compared to over 40% of the loans issued to black borrowers, and over 30% of the loans issued to Hispanic borrowers" (Been et al. 364).

These predatory approaches emphasize the deeply rooted inequities in our financial system, continuing to burden marginalized communities with disproportionately high financial risks and limited opportunities to mitigate them. These practices are combined with emerging technologies, creating a more pervasive impact on the lives of marginalized individuals. This combination can be seen in the application of credit scores, which pervades various areas of daily life, particularly in real estate. By embedding standardized yet exclusionary criteria involving "the number of credit accounts a consumer has, what their credit limit is, the amount they owe, and their repayment history" in calculating credit scores, a seemingly unbiased system is weaponized to systematically hinder marginalized communities (qtd. in Estabrook).

Systemic inequities are particularly evident for individuals from low- to moderate-income (LMI) neighborhoods, where historical and systemic challenges like language barriers, employment discrimination, and limited access to financial institutions and online services hinder them from building positive credit histories (Parks et al.). Without access to traditional pathways, "individuals from LMI neighborhoods are more likely to have their credit histories established through these derogatory events than individuals from higher-income neighborhoods" (Ying Lei Toh qtd. in Estabrook). Such events include bankruptcy and third-party debt collection. With Black and Hispanic consumers representing a significant share of LMI neighborhoods, it comes as no surprise that credit disparities align with the prior findings. In a series of statistics released by the Urban Institute, white communities boasted the highest median credit score at 727, falling comfortably in the good range for both FICO and VantageScore models. Black and Hispanic communities faced significantly lower scores of 627 and 667, respectively, while Native American communities were found to have the lowest median credit score range at 612 (Urban Institute). These disparities highlight the limitations of credit scores in reflecting a borrower's true creditworthiness and their reliance on systemic factors and historical inequities present in our society, producing unequal treatment in lending.

Rather than leveling the playing field between different communities, credit scores reinforce systemic inequalities, perpetuating barriers for marginalized communities to access credit. The pervasiveness of this issue is evidenced by how 90% of top lenders use some form of credit score to determine how much an individual can borrow and the amount of interest paid (FICO). This heavy reliance on credit scores is seen to discourage and potentially prevent consumers with a study in 2019 by SCF finding "9.3 percent of consumers age 18 and above were either denied credit or granted less credit than they requested—and about 45.3 percent of these consumers report being denied or granted less credit than requested because of their credit score" (Toh). This data demonstrates credit scores' role as a gatekeeper for underrepresented populations, restricting opportunities from those most in need and perpetuating the cycle of exclusion and inequality.

Simultaneously, the systemic inequity in credit scores creates opportunities for blatant financial exploitation, particularly with borrowers from marginalized communities who have historically faced higher fees. A study at UC Berkeley found that "lenders using algorithms to generate decisions on loan pricing have discriminated against borrowers of color, resulting in a collective overcharge of $765 million each year for home and refinance loans" (Kaylee). This serves to only further heighten the financial burdens of members in minoritized communities. Together, the discriminatory patterns seen in modern financial systems and lending practices illustrate how the commercialization of data can turn credit scores and algorithms into tools for financial exclusion and exploitation, amplifying historical inequities within minority communities. The widespread collection and application of consumers' personal data provide lenders and corporate actors the means to reinforce exploitative lending practices, even under the guise of "objectivity".

The commercialization of data is not limited to financial markets; its impacts can be seen in the political sphere. Although the internet is a relatively new technology, political parties worldwide have rapidly invested in new tools and possibilities for data-driven approaches in political campaigns, using the power of the internet and social media to sway public opinion. Though these new technologies intend to generate greater political engagement, underneath the surface lies a system built on the manipulation and exploitation of vulnerable communities, particularly African Americans, Latin Americans, and LGBTQ+ populations. This new application of digital commercialization builds upon existing societal divides, preventing historically disenfranchised groups from engaging in the political process on equal footing.

This hidden side of data-driven politics becomes particularly evident when observing its application on the internet, especially on social media platforms. The internet has become an essential tool for modern political parties, allowing them to reach a diverse audience that is historically unprecedented. Through digital platforms, political campaigns can not only spread their messages, policies, and ideologies at a significantly greater scale but also engage with voters in real time and at a more individualized level. Despite this practice opening the possibility of greater political engagement, a significant risk accompanies this new technology. Political entities quickly realized that, combined with the vast amount of data collected, highly specific, micro-targeted advertisements could be used to target specific groups, especially marginalized communities, with manipulative messages, preying on their frustrations and vulnerabilities to influence their opinions and votes.

Between 2015 and 2017, the IRA, Internet Research Agency, sent out a series of targeted messages that focused on influencing specific groups based on race, ethnicity, or identity (Howard). One of the many targets of this campaign was the African American community, receiving messages that "sought to divert their political energy away from established political institutions by preying on anger with structural inequalities faced by African Americans, including police violence, poverty, and disproportionate levels of incarceration" (Howard). These messages framed political disengagement as the most effective method to achieve the goals of the African American community, encouraging a boycott of the campaign altogether. In doing so, the IRA was able to effectively decrease African American representation in the political scene by simply exploiting existing frustrations in the community. Rather than creating greater political engagement, this data-driven method isolates certain groups, distorts their perceptions of the current political landscape, and creates a narrow, polarized view of politics, which ultimately threatens their ability to make independent decisions that reflect their true beliefs. As a result, this manipulation undermines the fundamental basis of democracy by continuing the marginalization of these communities and suppressing the voices of already disenfranchised groups, creating a less inclusive political environment.

Similarly, the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal revealed the dangerous consequences that stem from data commodification in political campaigns. "Up to 87 million Facebook profiles were collected without user consent and used for ad targeting purposes in the American presidential campaigns of Ted Cruz and Donald Trump, the Brexit referendum, and foreign elections in over 200 countries around the world" (Lai). The far-reaching impact of this scandal highlighted the extent to which data has been used to manipulate the political scene. Cambridge Analytica, along with several other similar firms, amass individual data from various sources, such as social media platforms, and process these data into tools that can identify and forecast intimate details on individuals, providing political entities with the ability to direct personalized political messages to guide the direction of the campaign (Lai). The data obtained can further be applied to contemporary machine learning algorithms, which "provide the capability to dissect vast amounts of data and extract actionable insights that human analysts might overlook... This segmentation allows for micro-targeting" (Whitehead). By transforming individuals into data points, campaigns inadvertently, or potentially purposefully, amplify inequalities ingrained into our society. These personalized messages may reinforce stereotypes or prey on the fears of marginalized groups, isolating them from the broader political picture.

Commodified data is also applied within algorithms that shape the content individuals see on their feeds on various media platforms. By personalizing and delivering micro-targeted feeds tailored specifically for the viewer, these algorithms often expose voters to content that aligns exclusively with their beliefs and values. The extent of personalization results in "echo chambers, where individuals are exposed only to content that aligns with their worldview", limiting their exposure to alternative perspectives, which effectively protects the user from ideas that differ from their own while reinforcing pre-existing biases. This reinforcement of existing beliefs creates a cycle of confirmation bias, increasing societal divides by reducing the need for individuals to question or critically analyze new information consumed. "Competing ideas are necessary to the functioning of a healthy public sphere, and the splintering of conservative and liberal media on the Internet and cable television already allows citizens to live in a loop of self-reinforcing political messages" (Dartmouth). The algorithms used by large media platforms curate content built on commodified data, which worsens the division in media, creating an increasingly polarized society that is unable to engage meaningfully with opposing perspectives.

This growing polarization from algorithm-driven echo chambers extends beyond purely dividing different perspectives in society, it actively worsens existing social inequalities by isolating marginalized communities in their own echo chambers. The personalized feeds built on data reflecting societal biases limit these communities from accessing a diverse set of viewpoints, cutting them off from potentially broader perspectives on how they could actively challenge systemic inequalities, especially through political participation. Current social media platforms continue to feed content that exploits the discontent in vulnerable communities, amplifying their frustrations without addressing the root causes or providing solutions that could bring about meaningful change. Through this cycle of confirmation bias, the voices of voters from marginalized communities are suppressed along with their influence on the current state of politics.

Data-driven algorithms also ensure that the voices of historically disenfranchised groups remain excluded from the feeds of broader audiences, preventing the exchange of competing ideas that are essential for a healthy democracy. These algorithms reduce the exposure of perspectives that challenge deeply rooted disparities, allowing for dominant narratives that disregard the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities to thrive unchecked. In both scenarios, the exclusion perpetuates systemic oppression by preventing the full engagement of underrepresented populations on online media platforms through isolation and the creation of echo chambers that hide differing

perspectives.

The application of data-driven algorithms extends beyond politics and can be found invading other aspects of society, where it continues to perpetuate systemic oppression. The digitization of employment reflects the growing reliance on automated systems to screen, evaluate, and select candidates. This application of commodified data in the realm of employment has disproportionately impacted employment opportunities for marginalized communities, including African American and Latino job candidates. Many historical factors used to limit the job prospects of these groups have now been automated on a wide scale through the use of application software and AI-driven filters. "Don't have the right degree? Rather than getting a second glance because of your experience, you're automatically screened out. Didn't use the right buzzword in your list of skills? Your application will never surface" (Boyd). Automated systems may exclude prospective job applicants based on certain keywords in their resumes or lists of skills that they provide, without analyzing other important factors such as job experience. This may cause African American and Latinx applicants, who are already underrepresented in many industries, to be screened out at disproportionate rates due to these imperfections in their resumes or applications, perpetuating wage gaps and career stagnation.

In addition, because automated software often screens applicants based on personal data, those looking to apply to such jobs often have to provide data regarding their personal or financial background, which some applicants may not be comfortable sharing. According to a study conducted by Rosales and other researchers, one participant stated that she 'felt uncomfortable filling out boxes of information on my nationality and my personal address because, at that time, I did not have an official, legal status in Spain'" (qtd. in Rosales et al. 47). Not providing such details could potentially hurt the individual's application and may discourage some individuals from handing in their applications altogether. Additionally, while not intentional, algorithms trained on historically skewed data can reproduce inequities, especially when personal data such as social media profiles are used even if such data or information is not relevant to employment (Yarger et al. 8). Without rigorous regulation, data commodification and automated hiring hide discriminatory patterns into the hiring pipeline, and when combined with existing inequities and socioeconomic factors that disadvantage marginalized communities, can lead to a major gap in employment opportunities. "Since 1989, whites receive on average 36% more callbacks than African Americans, and 24% more callbacks than Latinos" (Quillian et al.), highlighting the substantial effect that biases in data-driven application screening can have on historically marginalized communities.

The growing application of data-driven tools in hiring processes is exemplified by Amazon's implementation of AI-based technology in its recruitment process. Although introduced with good intentions, it revealed how embedded biases within historical data can significantly influence the outcomes of the algorithms that are trained on them. In Amazon's algorithm, the AI "taught itself that male candidates were preferable" by penalizing resumes that included keywords like "women" or candidates who graduated from all-women colleges (Dastin). These actions resulted from the data used to train the system, disadvantaging female candidates and perpetuating gender inequality within the hiring process. The AI also seemed to favor "candidates who described themselves using verbs more commonly found on male engineers' resumes, such as 'executed' and 'captured'" (Dastin). This language bias is much more nuanced, allowing it to be overlooked by humans and ensuring that subtle biases continue to exist in the hiring process. Despite Amazon's several attempts to edit the program to reduce these biases, there is "no guarantee that the machines would not devise other ways of sorting candidates that could prove discriminatory" (Dastin). This example illustrates the inherent issue with using algorithm-based hiring tools, as they are only as unbiased as the data they are trained on. Thus, algorithms that are trained through commodified data often reflect historical inequalities, which create systems that inevitably replicate and even magnify discriminatory practices.

One increasingly prevalent technology that reflects this trend is facial recognition technology. "In the hiring process, facial recognition technologies assist employers by analyzing images or videos of job applicants' faces (e.g., brow-raising, eye-widening, smiling, etc.) and use of language and verbal skills (e.g., passive or active voice, speed, tone, etc.) to infer characteristics about them that correlate to job performance that can then be ranked against other applicants" (Mullin). Yet, this process carries a significant risk of continuing historical inequalities, especially if the data used to train these technologies is drawn from past hiring decisions that had hiring biases, such as a history of favoring certain demographics. This bias would be replicated by the algorithms and therefore perpetuated in the employment sector, reinforcing skewed representations in the workforce by overrepresented and underrepresented groups. As one source explains, "These hiring algorithms are likely to be biased by default, designed by humans and using data from 'top performers,' a method that can perpetuate past hiring biases" (Sedgewick). By relying on data from "top performers," seeking to select candidates that reflect those previously hired, these systems continue to utilize and maintain historical inequalities in future hiring decisions.

Inherent flaws in the algorithm also play a part in disproportionately impacting vulnerable communities. Geneva Sedgwick, Director of MBA Sport and Entertainment Management and Professor at Seattle University, states, "Facial recognition is a flawed AI tool whose bias mostly impacts women and people of color whose faces are not so accurately recognized, leading to various personal harms associated with misidentification" (Sedgewick). When this technology is applied in employment screening, minor inaccuracies like the ones above could result in severe consequences, potentially disqualifying qualified candidates due to their ethnicity, identity, etc, and preserving a homogenous workforce that lacks inclusivity of diverse perspectives and experiences from underrepresented communities.

Data commodification can even be seen in the education system, perpetuating divisions in access to education, particularly higher education, and reinforcing inequalities that marginalized communities have faced for generations. Similar to the data-driven algorithms in employment screenings, the commodification of personal data has been capitalized on by institutions to maintain this divide. By applying commodified data such as standardized test scores, criminal background checks, and social media activity in the college admissions process, post-secondary institutions create barriers that prevent access to higher-level education for low-income and underrepresented groups, including African American, Latin American, and Indigenous students. Certain data-driven metrics, such as criminal background or standardized test scores, are especially important to educational institutions that use these metrics to admit or reject applicants. A survey conducted in 2010 notes that "standardized test scores are an important predictor of a student's success in Dartmouth's curriculum" and "66.4% of colleges collect criminal background information on at least some of their applicants" (CCA). The emphasis on these metrics disadvantages certain minority groups, such as African American, Latin American, and Indigenous students who come from low-income communities and have more prevalent criminal backgrounds or lower test scores due to issues such as a lack of educational resources. The DOE's Office of Civil Rights found that SAT scores were more closely correlated with low income than indicative of future success, and a Florida scholarship program is currently under investigation for awarding scholarships "on strict SAT and ACT score cut-offs" that heavily favor "white and affluent families" (Madden). This selective engagement, driven by data-driven assessments of "desirable" student profiles, maintains a cycle of underrepresentation and reduced educational opportunities for many Black, Latin, or Indigenous student communities.

The commodification of personal data in higher education can be seen even after the admissions process, extending into predictive algorithms used by advisors to assess students' "risk levels". These algorithms were originally adopted as tools to assist universities to allocate resources and provide support where needed; however, it was seen to often disproportionately label Black, Latin, and Indigenous students as high-risk, preventing them from accessing resources that could break the cycle of education inequality. This is demonstrated by the application of such algorithms at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where "Black women are 2.8 times as likely to be labeled high risk as White women, and Black men are 3.9 times as likely to be labeled high risk as White men" (Feathers). Such disparity between the labeling rates highlights how systemic biases that are hidden in the data used to train these predictive systems can continue to oppress students.

Despite being built on good intentions of identifying students in need of academic or financial support and providing personalized help, these risk scores often result in discriminatory treatment instead. Ruha Benjamin, Professor at Princeton University, describes, "'This opens the door to even more educational steering... College advisors tell Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students not to aim for certain majors. But now these gatekeepers are armed with 'complex math'" (Feathers). Using these risk scores, university advisors can manipulate students into less ambitious and potentially lower-paying career paths under the guise of "supporting" them. This practice restricts students from underrepresented communities from obtaining higher education and social status. This is evident in the statement by Maryclare Griffin, a statistics professor at UMass Amherst: "I've reviewed several cases of STEM students with moderate risk scores. These students are underrepresented in their major, and the Major Explorer [a feature within the software] suggests steering them toward a different major where their risk score is lower" (Feathers). These risk scores are fundamentally flawed due to the inherently biased data they are trained on, which can have devastating consequences on students by limiting future opportunities before they are even given the chance to prove themselves.

These algorithms frequently lack transparency, making both the users of the algorithm and those being evaluated by it unaware of how decisions are made or what factors contribute to the outcomes. Notably, many students of color at schools using these systems reported that "they were never informed they were being judged by algorithms", let alone what criteria the algorithms were using to assess them (Feathers). When professors and advisors review student profiles, they are often met first with the risk score, which immediately influences their perception of the student. As Maryclare Griffin explains, "You can easily find situations where there are two students who have similar low GPAs and different risk scores, and there's no obvious explanation for why that's the case" (Feathers). This lack of clarity in the predictive algorithms can perpetuate existing inequalities by undermining the students' true capabilities and potential with a single data metric. When combined with advisors and professors relying on these risk scores to make decisions, the lack of understanding of what metrics are used by the algorithm can inadvertently result in discriminatory treatment towards students from marginalized communities

and limit their access to essential academic resources. For instance, the unexplained discrepancies between risk scores described by Maryclare Griffin may lead to differing access to resources, such as scholarships, academic support programs, mentorship opportunities, etc, between students who are otherwise equally qualified. Thus, while these tools are often pitched as objective resources that support students in need, the inequalities that exist in our society transform these algorithms into weapons that strengthen obstacles that can hinder Black, Latin, and Indigenous students from accessing equal learning opportunities.

The commodification of data in the healthcare sector has led to predatory advertising and discriminatory practices directed at individuals with disabilities and other health issues. Mental health data, collected and aggregated without regulation, can be used by health insurance providers to discriminateively hike premiums or deny claims to those suffering from mental health disorders. According to a study conducted at Duke University, data brokers that the researchers contacted had access to and were willing to sell sensitive personal information including names, income, marital status, residential addresses, Social Security Numbers, and criminal records (Kim 17), which is often sold to healthcare providers or health insurance companies who use the information to discriminately charge individuals, often those coming from vulnerable communities. The severity of the issue has led to the United States Congress introducing new regulations on data brokers, such as the Health and Location Data Protection Act introduced in 2022, which aimed to ban data brokers from selling or transferring location data and health data altogether (Congress).

Additionally, data-driven systems in the healthcare industry suffer from many of the same issues that data commercialization has caused in other industries, potentially perpetuating disparities in healthcare that are disadvantageous for historically marginalized groups. According to the 2021 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report, African Americans and Hispanic Americans received worse care than White populations for 43% and 36% of quality measures, respectively, highlighting the fairly large gap in existing healthcare quality for these marginalized communities. Introducing commercial algorithms to guide healthcare decisions could potentially worsen many of these inequities. According to one study that researched a widely-used algorithm in the industry, Black patients were often considered to be in a less severe state than equally sick White patients due to healthcare costs being used as a "proxy for health needs" (Obermeyer et al.). Because less money was spent on Black patients with the same level of need historically, the algorithm reduced "the number of Black patients identified for extra care by more than half" and "remedying this disparity would increase the percentage of Black patients receiving additional help from 17.7 to 46.5%" (Obermeyer et al.). The results of this study are an indication of how data-driven algorithms often rely on datasets that already reflect structural biases and direct higher costs, reduced services, or lower-quality care toward those who are least able to advocate for themselves.

With mental health being an increasingly pressing issue, it is no surprise that the commodification of data in the healthcare sector has implications for patients with mental health issues. Data brokers are actively "collecting, aggregating, analyzing, circulating, and selling sensitive mental health data on individuals" (Kim 17). This data is not only used to exploit individuals but is also tied to social stigmas that can affect an individual's willingness to seek care. According to a study of 90,000 people, "60% of the surveyed participants reported that they feared receiving care due to related stigmas" (qtd. in Kim 17). This illustrates the extent to which mental health data may impact individuals with mental health issues, limiting their access to care and perpetuating the stigma surrounding mental health disorders. Other participants in the survey expressed their concerns about how their mental health data may "affect future employment or their social life," highlighting both the personal and professional consequences that are tied to the commodification of such sensitive data (Kim 17).

The mental health data of countless people around the world are commercialized and fall into the hands of insurance companies, employers, or other entities that utilize this information to discriminate against individuals with mental health conditions. Using the mental health data, insurance providers may hike premiums, adding unnecessary financial burden to individuals with mental health issues, or even outright denying coverage and limiting access to necessary care. The sale and misuse of commodified mental health data fosters a system where individuals face financial and social challenges just to access necessary support. This exploitation of mental health data continues to exacerbate inequalities seen in healthcare and even fields beyond healthcare, leaving these vulnerable individuals to bear the brunt of the consequences, whether that be limited access to essential care or financial and social repercussions.

As many fields and industries in society continue to evolve alongside the advancement of modern technology, the commodification and aggregation of personal data for use in data-driven software, algorithms, and systems will also spread across multiple sectors, including real estate, education, employment, healthcare, and politics. Although the introduction of these data-driven technologies has greatly enhanced efficiency and convenience, it has also created a lucrative market for personal data and sensitive information, which often disproportionately affects marginalized communities by perpetuating the historical inequities that burden them. From continuing the historical legacy of redlining through credit scores and algorithms to reinforcing unequal opportunities in higher education through application software trained on student data, the commercialization of data intensifies pre-existing disparities while creating new forms of oppression.

Across all of the industries that have been affected by data commodification, a clear trend emerges. Companies or unethical data brokers collect, aggregate, and sometimes even trade personal data, often in blatant disregard for the individual's privacy. Vulnerable or marginalized groups, such as those suffering from certain medical conditions or minority populations, are often most at risk for these practices, which aim to provide unequal services or enforce historical cycles of exclusion and inequality, such as by targeting vulnerable populations with predatory loans or advertising or denying patients access to adequate healthcare. The lack of transparency regarding many of these algorithms and their reliance on historically biased datasets also makes it very difficult for affected individuals to contest or challenge the inequities they experience.

Ultimately, the commodification of data is less of a technological issue and more of a structural one, reflecting the systemic discrimination that has long defined social, economic, and political foundations in the United States. To fully address the consequences of data commodification, new legislation and regulations must be put in place to supervise how personal information is collected, processed, and utilized, ensuring that marginalized or disadvantaged groups are not unfairly targeted or represented in the process. Transparency, accountability, and equity must be at the forefront of any solution, with strong protections against the misuse of data and a commitment to tear down the systemic barriers that keep marginalized communities at a disadvantage. Without such efforts, the commodification of data may prove to do more harm than good rather than a means for social progress and a more equitable future.

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Transphobic Rhetoric in Law and a Case Study in North Carolinian Legislation

Ellie Loynes

Legislation on transgender issues at both federal and state levels is shaped by transphobic rhetoric embedded in the language of the law. Most current transgender legislation causes harm and contributes to a complete prohibition of transgender life, feeding a vicious cycle between public perception and legal narratives of transgender people. The pervasiveness of gender roles and gender segregation translates to a legal definition for every minutia of transgender life except in the places it is most essential. As a swing state that typically votes conservatively for president, for representatives, and on policy, but liberally for governor and state leadership, North Carolina occupies an interesting niche in the political landscape of the United States and on transgender issues. North Carolina was the first state to enact a bathroom bill, a specific genre of discriminatory legislation that restricts public bathroom use by birth certificate sex marker, and passed a surge of transphobic bills in 2023 due to a conservative supermajority that was achieved through a post-election party switch. Although North Carolina has fallen in line with more conservative states on transgender issues for the past decade, it has practical potential to repair the harm it has caused to its transgender population. It both reveals the harms of current transphobic sentiment and appeals to the hope for a kinder future.

Harmful patterns in North Carolina and state legislation across the United States are only made possible by a lack of action from the federal government, which refuses to regulate several key steps to transition, including legal gender markers, identification changes, and healthcare processes, or to provide basic protections. There is a serious deficit in protective measures for transgender people in North Carolina as a result of federal inaction, with several key pieces of transphobic legislation fueled by repetitive rhetoric working in insidious ways to prohibit transgender life in totality, including bathroom bills, healthcare limitations, and restrictions in educational facilities. There *are* possible solutions for the national campaign against transgender Americans, but it is unlikely that they will be considered by the federal government in the current political climate as a result of widespread misconceptions and political incentive to rally against a contemporary enemy with historical prejudice.

The unique language, assumptions, and goals of transgender legislation rely on the functioning of transphobia through misogyny and homophobia, enhanced by racism. In transphobic rhetoric, transgender women are a threat both to other women, through imagined physical harm and degradation of womanhood, and to men, through a perceived sexual deception or betrayal. Alternatively, transgender men—and often nonbinary people, who are stereotypically viewed as primarily "biologically female"—are framed as confused victims of the transgender movement, infantilised by nature of their perceived femininity. For these reasons, legislation tends to either target transgender women as inevitable perpetrators, or try to "protect" young transgender people from their own autonomy. These narratives are exaggerated further by racism. For example, in the United States the mythological threat of transgender women is compounded for black and brown women, who are already masculinized by racist stereotypes, while the opposite is true for East Asian men, who are likewise feminized. Other narratives about transgender people can be traced back to typical homophobic stereotypes; this identity is victimizing children, is a form of predation, can be reduced to sexual fetish, and even that it compromises military function.

This bigotry is largely communicated through and incited by the language used by perpetrators. A common example of nonstandard language use for transgender people is a conservative tendency to refer to transgender political issues and the concept of being transgender as "gender ideology." This term transforms a group of individuals into a political movement. "Transgender people" is a phrase that represents a minority group with varying goals regarding their individual identities, rights, and social statuses. "Gender ideology" invokes images of motivated politicians with unified policy objectives and the power to implement them, a political platform that propagates in and manipulates government. While transgender issues are firmly rooted in modern American politics, they do not form the basis of any party's platform, nor do they have the manpower or financing of more prevalent contemporary political issues.

Another widespread deceptive tactic, and one that appears directly in legislation, is the framing of gender-affirming care as "mutilation." Outspoken transphobes

will use provocations like the loss of stereotypically fragile feminine features, images of double mastectomy scars—which resemble most surgery scars—and a natural disinclination to discuss genital surgery to harness irrational feelings for political power. These misleading and loaded terms are in the company of several that make up the unique vocabulary of transphobic rhetoric, along with phrases like "gender critical" to soften the description of a specific group of self-identified feminists who reject the identities of transgender people and work to regress transgender rights, "transwomen" or "transmen" to designate transgender people as grammatically separate from simply "women" or "men," and a perpetually evolving wider lexicon.

While most of these specific terms are not used in legislation, they are used in the political sphere and have the same aim as the specific brand of legislative rhetoric that repeatedly misleads an undereducated public, reduces the perceived severity of transphobic action, and enhances fears and negativity surrounding the transgender community. Recognizing these patterns in the context of larger, enduring bigotry and the intersections between misogyny, homophobia, racism, and transphobia is important in both understanding their development as a unique rhetorical compilation and encouraging allyship between marginalized communities.

The core of the legal challenges that transgender people face across the United States is a set of federal protections that are new, incomplete, and largely unstable due to the mechanisms by which they are created and enforced. While there are no active discriminatory laws against transgender people at the federal level, there are only four documents that contain explicit gender identity protections.

The oldest protection in place is the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009. This act expands the legal definition of a hate crime to include violence based on perceived or actual gender identity, sexual identity, or disability. It outlines the ability of state, local, and tribal governments to receive aid, financial or otherwise, in the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. It also amends previous legislation to include gender and sexual identity based violence in the collection of hate crime statistics. This more comprehensive approach to hate crime legislation is an important step in offering justice to victims of hate crimes, but a weakness remains in local authorities' willingness and sensitivity in bringing hate crime charges against perpetrators. If authorities are hesitant to prove the bigoted motivations of a hate crime, then the law provides little dependable protection. In addition, the act reads as disingenuous because of the federal government's resistance to putting legislation in place that might reduce the sentiment that fuels hate crimes in the first place. When conversations about gender identity are being banned in schools across the country and states continue to pass life-threatening and medically unsupported healthcare restrictions, this attempt by the federal government to bring justice to transgender individuals *after* they have been harmed does little to combat the devaluing of transgender life in both legal and cultural terms.

Transgender Americans did not receive any more federal attention until 2020, when the Supreme Court used *Bostok v. Clayton County, GA* to incorporate sexual and gender identity protections into Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Post-*Bostok* Title VII provides queer and transgender individuals with protection against only employment discrimination. The decision argued that discrimination based on these identities is inherently reliant on the victim's sex, which is protected explicitly by Title VII. The dissenting opinions on this case written by justices Thomas, Alito, and Kavanaugh, who remain sitting members of the court in 2024, argue that the language of Title VII does not protect against these forms of discrimination explicitly, and therefore the law cannot be used to protect members of the LGBTQ+ community. This protection is incomplete in its prohibition of discrimination and fragile in the face of ongoing judicial processes with a conservative majority on the Supreme Court that is likely to last for decades. If the current court was presented with the opportunity to overturn this ruling, it would almost certainly remove this protection.

Executive Order 14004, enacted in 2021, revokes the 2018 Presidential Memorandum that placed sweeping bans on transgender individuals in military service. It requires the development of a process for transgender military members to medically transition while in service, and denounces the biased beliefs about interrupted productivity by and reduced effectiveness of transgender military members that influenced the previous bans. Executive orders can be legislated over by congress or future executive orders, meaning that particularly controversial orders like Order 14004 are likely to change with each election cycle. This protection—merely a reversal of a previous senseless prohibition, rather than a true measure of progress—can be expected to cease with the next conservative executive and does little to acknowledge the more pressing priorities of the transgender population. It clearly indicates that the federal government is only willing to prioritize the rights of transgender individuals when it most directly serves the state.

While *Bostok*'s ruling on Title VII can be used to protect transgender individuals under other sex discrimination legislation, none of those protections were explicit until the 2024 update to Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1965. New clauses protect transgender students from being denied access to educational programs, bathrooms, or locker rooms because of their transgender status, disallow schools from enforcing misgendered dress code policies on transgender students, and protect transgender students from invasive examinations to prove their gender or sex. Notably absent from these updates are protections from misgendering and deadnaming, which must instead be addressed on a case by case basis, and any protections for transgender students in school athletics. This version of Title IX provides some crucial protection to transgender youth that could help to preserve the quality of their education and safety in school, but this stipulation represents an unwillingness from even a progressive administration to commit to a steadfast stance against transphobia, and 26 states have signed on to lawsuits to challenge and block the updated law in response to the increased protections for queer and transgender students. Because of the injunctions by those states, the update has largely only taken effect in states where similar protections were already in place at a state level and it will not mark significant progress for the country until its legal challenges are disputed.

Legislation on transgender issues varies dramatically across states because of this refusal from the federal government to protect the basic rights of transgender people, including the right to healthcare, a streamlined gender change process, representative gender marker identification options, bathroom use, and protection from all modes of discrimination. For example, gender-affirming care for minors is outright banned at the threat of civil or criminal charges in some states and completely protected and partially funded in others. Medical transition for minors is typically an early target for states building a collection of transphobic legislation, because sponsors of these bans can use public ignorance of transgender issues and identity and a small group of publicly transphobic detransitioners to make a compelling case to the public that minors lack the maturity and understanding to make gender-affirming medical decisions about their bodies. From the start, these laws are fundamentally driven by a transphobic narrative of young, outcasted, unhappy individuals who are too ill or emotional to be trusted, even though allowing them to make healthcare decisions is supported by medical professionals across different fields as a possible solution to their mental health struggles.

Idaho's Vulnerable Children Protection Act, which went into effect January 1, 2024, placed a complete ban on all gender-affirming care for minors, reversible or not. The act defines sex as "immutable biological and physiological characteristics…that define an individual as male or female." This specific phrasing disregards intersex individuals *and* presumes an absolute and steadfast divide between the characteristics generally sorted into male or female. In reality, sex, like gender, exists on a spectrum that incorporates the many characteristics used to determine sex including chromosomes, hormone levels, and reproductive organs. Many cisgender, non-intersex individuals have atypical hormone levels, delayed puberty, or nonfunctional or absent reproductive organs that indicate a diversion from binary sex. This type of misleading language is recycled across conservative states in their corresponding gender-affirming care bans. This definition, listed in the law as a given, takes advantage of public perception of sex and creates a harmful and false dichotomy that the rest of the act is founded upon. In its effort to impair gender transition, the act prohibits mostly multi-purpose procedures, including hormone replacement therapies and a number of surgeries that are sometimes necessary for the health of cisgender children. For this reason, the act must make allowances for these special uses of these procedures. The law states:

> A surgical operation or medical intervention shall not be a violation of this section if the operation or intervention is: (a) Necessary to the health of the person on whom it is performed […] except […] if it is for the purpose of attempting to alter the appearance of or affirm the child's perception of the child's sex if that perception is inconsistent with the child's biological sex.

It makes this final specification because the medical consensus on gender-affirming care is generally positive. The American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychiatric Association have all clearly stated that gender-affirming care can be medically necessary and life saving for transgender minors. The law has to allow certain procedures for the health of certain minors, but must baselessly disqualify gender dysphoria as a valid health concern, despite professional opinion to the contrary.

Compare this to Minnesota's relatively progressive legislation on gender-affirming care for minors, HF 146. The law not only protects gender-affirming care for minors in the state, but it also effectively marks Minnesota as a refuge from any prosecution for any act violating a gender-affirming care ban and prohibits intervention from outside authorities. Individuals who violated other states' laws on gender-affirming care cannot be prosecuted in Minnesota and will not be forcefully removed from Minnesota, and subpoenas issued in an effort to prosecute these acts will not be recognized. The state recognizes the direct instruction from major medical associations that urge that gender-affirming care is necessary and often life-saving, and has created a national asylum for transgender minors who require care. This law also notably uses the terms "gender" and "gender-affirming care" where more restrictive laws have often used "sex" and "mutilation" or "artificial construction" when discussing transgender issues. The former terms are more accurate and appropriate where the latter terms attempt to invoke fear and apprehension without any basis of factual argument.

These two laws fall into well-established trends on transgender issues in the United States. States like Minnesota, New York, and Maine in the Northeast, along with states like California and Oregon on the west coast provide robust protections, while states like Idaho, Texas, Mississippi, and Florida, in the middle and Southern regions of the country bring active harm to the transgender individuals residing in them. This discontinuity between states indicates to the

general public that transgender issues are not deserving of the same protections that other marginalized groups receive. There is an implication that trans issues are a topic for debate, not for resolution. The attitude of the federal government and state governments minimizes the life-threatening effects of discriminatory legislation, as they position medical care and social affirmation as superficial cosmetic change and politically correct politeness, rather than essential to preserving human lives. When the targeted language of legislation characterizes the transgender community into easily-digested groups of either confused children or adults that are, at best, shallow and, at worst, predatory, the public will internalize those views and become more confused and resistant to future positive federal action.

North Carolina has passed a number of controversial protections and discriminatory bills in regards to transgender rights, heightening a sense of confusion and caution as transgender individuals seek life-saving care or expect even basic protections. In 2016, North Carolina made history as the first state to enact a "bathroom bill," an act which restricts the use of public bathrooms on the basis of biological sex. Before being repealed, North Carolina's infamous HB2 required all public multi-user bathrooms, including those of schools, to allow use based only on an individual's birth certificate sex marker, and brought employment discrimination policies under state control. The act overhauled a number of anti-discrimination municipal laws, targeting Charlotte Ordinance 7056, specifically. The ordinance had prohibited discrimination based on sexuality or gender identity in public facilities, passenger vehicles for hire, and city contracting, and the state did nothing to replace the protections that it removed. At the time, altering the sex marker on a birth certificate required gender reassignment surgery, a financial and medical burden that many individuals do not have the ability or desire to take on. The act baselessly denied the majority of transgender people access to the bathroom matching their gender, manufacturing a sense of danger related to transgender women in women's bathrooms, a sense rooted in the core belief that transgender women are not women and are instead as likely to commit violence against women as men. In reality, the act created dangerous situations for individuals who appear to be in the wrong bathroom and potentially outed individuals who were forced to use the incorrect bathroom. According to a study published in the *American Journal of Health*, transgender individuals are four times more likely to experience violence than cisgender individuals. Putting transgender people across the state in situations that could out their identity is an act of aggression towards the transgender community, and creating stress and caution around using public bathrooms encourages transgender people to stay out of the public completely. In response to HB2, a number of companies, state and city governments, and events spoke out against North Carolina's transphobia. As a result, North Carolina began to issue a stream of unsuccessful orders and bills to reach a compromise, until March 2017, when threats from the National Collegiate Athletics Association caused North Carolina to enact an immediate partial repeal of the law, leaving the prohibition of anti-discrimination policies in place until 2020. Though no section of the law remains in effect, it represents North Carolina's position at the forefront of discriminatory transgender legislation, and the state's resistance to progress even at direct financial cost. It was the first signal to the public that the state did not prioritize the transgender community as a marginalized group, and that the public did not have to, either.

There is only one protective document in place for transgender individuals in North Carolina: *Campos v. Cohen*, a 2022 North Carolina Middle District Court case filed by three plaintiffs, Lillith Campos and two anonymous minors, against the state for its policy regarding gender change on birth certificates. Previously, policy required gender reassignment surgery to be completed in order to change the sex listed on a birth certificate. The court ruled that in the interest of transgender individuals in the state of North Carolina and their freedoms, this requirement would not stand. Birth certificates are used to obtain other forms of identification and for a number of government purposes. They also may be shown to potential employers, landlords, or other private authorities. Having the correct sex marker on a birth certificate is crucial to properly represent an individual, to avoid confusion when matching an individual with their certificate, and to mitigate the forms of discrimination which transgender people still lack legal protection from. Requiring medical procedures to make changes to a birth certificate is invasive to any individual, but especially harmful to those who may not have the financial or medical stability to receive major surgery—surgery which is often not covered by insurance. Decisions about one's body should not be forced by the government in order to be correctly identified. This case has been productive in reducing a number of other threats to transgender people, like the possible reinstatement of a birth certificate-based bathroom bill. This decision continually works against anti-transgender legislation, because the legislature can no longer rely on birth certificate-based definitions of sex to do the work of targeting transgender people in its laws. It is not complete protection, but it represents real progress for the state.

Despite the work of *Campos v. Cohen*, the lack of sufficient protections in North Carolina became glaringly relevant as the state passed a string of transphobic laws in 2023. "An Act to Prohibit Gender Transition Procedures for Minors" is North Carolina's law on gender-affirming healthcare for minors. It prohibits all gender-affirming procedures, including both genital and non-genital surgeries, hormone replacement therapies, and puberty-blockers for the purposes of gender affirmation. There are exceptions for the

treatment of physical conditions and for patients whose care began before the date of enactment and for which the medical professional and guardian involved approve of continued treatment. This first exception is already familiar, and is a feature of every state law of this nature that has passed. This second exception is also common, and clearly acknowledges the possibility of a medical professional reaffirming—even in the face of government disapproval—that gender-affirming care can be a medically necessary course of treatment, though the law blatantly ignores this reality and relies instead on misinformation to form its content. The law also states that providing gender-affirming care to minors would come at the cost of a medical professional's license to practice—that is, following the advice of the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychiatric Association can result in the loss of a medical license in the state of North Carolina. Finally, the act covertly includes a section to give all medical professionals in the state the right to refuse to render gender-affirming healthcare to any patient of any age. This section could lead to a number of medically compromised scenarios, including: an adult with a prescription being denied their prescribed hormone replacement medications by a pharmacist, an individual with detailed reports from their psychologist on the life-threatening effects of gender dysphoria being denied any form of gender-affirming healthcare, or a medical professional—acting in their professional capacity and in the best interest of the patient—being prohibited from prescribing medication or writing referrals by the businessmen who run their hospital based on nothing but political strife. This act is not written with medical expertise or even common sense, but as a violent attempt to regain control over societal constructs of gender and sex. The entire law uses manipulative language to give the appearance of minimal impacts to uneducated readers, but the choice to insert a section legalizing medical discrimination against transgender individuals of all ages into an act specifically titled for minors puts the deceptive nature of this type of legislation front and center.

The "Fairness in Women's Sports Act" is a 2023 North Carolina law that legislates school athletic participation. According to the act, every athletic team must be designated for men, women, or as a coed team. Participation in gendered teams will be allowed only by a student's sex "recognized based solely on the student's reproductive biology and genetics at birth." The act gives no guidance for how an individual student's biology and genetics at birth are to be assessed, even though birth certificates can be altered and are often inaccurate when it comes to intersex individuals. This kind of carelessness relies upon the narrative that one can "always tell" when they encounter a transgender person, when, in reality, a great number of transgender people, and even transgender minors, pass for cisgender without question, and cisgender children are not always so easily categorized, either. Nonetheless, "students of the male sex" cannot participate in women's school, club, or intramural sports at public middle and high schools, or at charter or private schools if their teams compete against public schools or are members of interscholastic athletic organizations. All colleges and universities in North Carolina must follow the same rule for all teams that participate in intercollegiate athletic programs. The law notably only prohibits "male" students from participating on women's teams, but does not do the same for "female" students. This law is a specific and senseless attack on the small minority of transgender female athletes, all the way down to middle school intramural sports, and it allows for interrogation of a student's reproductive system to be an appropriate course of action when an institution inevitably reaches a biologically confusing case. Additionally, the law takes large steps in socially alienating young transgender people from their peers. Sports play a significant role in the social lives of young people, and preventing individuals as young as eleven and into their early twenties from playing on their school's gendered athletics teams is likely to have a tremendous effect on the social development of transgender people of all ages.

North Carolina's 2023 "Parents' Bill of Rights" does a number of controversial things, including giving parents the right to direct the education and moral training of their child in the school setting. Relevant to transgender students specifically, it requires that parents are notified of changes in name or pronoun use by school personnel prior to the change. This means that transgender minors must be forcibly outed to their parents if they request an alternate name or set of pronouns be used by any school employee. The law could be interpreted to target even school employees who learn a child's gender identity indirectly, creating tension between transgender students and any adult they encounter in a school. While there are exceptions for parents under investigation for crimes against their dependant, bigotry is often overlooked as a threat to the wellbeing of a child, and this law puts transgender children at risk of reprimand or harm from their parents for their identity. The law also prohibits instruction on sexuality and gender identity for kindergarten through fourth grade. While reasonable at first glance, this policy ignores the reality that young children will encounter couples or gender diverse individuals and have questions. In its refusal to use clear language, this law may prevent teachers from reading picture books containing queer couples or transgender people, or answering a student's question about another student's two fathers or visibly gender nonconforming sibling, as that may be considered exposing children to age-inappropriate content. This law is an overreaction to the current national conversation about queer and transgender people that needlessly interrupts the functioning of educational spaces for young children with unnecessary caution around suitable queer topics, and which fosters disruptive fear between queer students and their instructors.

The final document of relevance to transgender people in North Carolina is the case of *Zayre-Brown v. The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction*, a pending Fourth Circuit Appeals Court case regarding the housing and medical care provided for Kanautica Zayre-Brown, a transgender woman incarcerated in 2017. For two years, she was held in a male prison facility, where she faced harassment and threats. In 2019 she was moved to a female facility, but was still denied gender-affirming care. The court has now ordered that she be reevaluated for the necessity of gender-affirming care by a team including at least two gender dysphoria specialists. Zayre-Brown's case marks progress in North Carolina policy, but likewise points at the gap in legislation protecting transgender inmates from mistreatment regarding housing and care, and without any final conclusions, the case could still result in progress *or* regression.

Crucially, discrimination protections for gender identity are absent from North Carolina law. A large number of states have implemented anti-discrimination statutes that explicitly protect transgender individuals, but North Carolinians have no protection aside from the federal prohibition of employment discrimination under Title VII. This negligence, along with the active legalization of discrimination in healthcare and the classroom creates a hostile environment for transgender people in the state. What does it mean to proceed through daily life without these basic guarantees that you won't be turned away from a retailer or denied an apartment application because of your identity? That there is nothing standing between the changing tides of public opinion and the passing of even more outwardly harmful legislation? Through both overt discrimination in the law and the overwhelming and constant fear created by this lack of security, the legislation currently impacting transgender North Carolinians makes strides towards functionally prohibiting transgender life in the state.

Transphobic legislation drives higher rates of mental illness in transgender youth and adults, creates unnecessary barriers for educators and medical professionals, and costs states and localities economic stimulation through tourism and population growth. Both "The Impacts of Anti-Transgender Laws and Policies: Evidence from Empirical Research" and "Regarding Transgender Non-discrimination Policies: Implications for the Mental Health of Transgender Americans" are reports that find that the current treatment of transgender issues by federal and state government is contributing to disproportionate mental health struggles among transgender populations. The former is a research brief on both the intended and unintended consequences of the discriminatory legislation that has been enacted across the United States in recent years. The report comes to several main conclusions based on a breadth of data, with the theme that censorship, discriminatory law, restrictions on athletic participation, and restrictions on healthcare sow fear and negatively impact the mental health of transgender individuals. The latter is a study of 580 transgender individuals in Northeastern United States that found that the confusion surrounding state-by-state transgender legislation and concern over a potential loss of protections correlates with increased odds of depression, anxiety, and PTSD in transgender individuals.

Research in this field is also particularly concerned with transgender youth in the United States, a group which is extremely vulnerable to government control and parental interference in their identity and expression, and which is more susceptible to be emotionally volatile in the face of restrictions and prejudices that breed mental health issues even in adults. "The Impact of 2024 Anti-Transgender Legislation on Youth" is a study that seeks to quantify the number of people affected by healthcare bans, athletic restrictions, bathroom bills, pronoun limitations and likewise the number protected by "shield" laws and bans against conversion therapy. It reports many statistics, but the most salient is that 93% of transgender youth between the ages of 13 and 17 live in states that have passed or proposed the above restrictions, with 120,000 individuals living in states with active transphobic legislation, compared to 19,500 individuals living in states where none of these types of laws are active or pending. With the knowledge that these laws are life-threatening, the numbers reported are staggering. A lack of federal intervention continually and unnecessarily puts hundreds of thousands of children's lives at risk by allowing these numbers to continue growing based not upon science or reason, but fear mongering rhetoric.

The parents of transgender youth are keenly aware of the risk that transphobic legislation poses to their children. The social media-based study, "'This Could Mean Death for My Child': Parent Perspectives on Laws Banning gender-affirming Care for Transgender Adolescents" published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that parents overwhelmingly expressed concern for their children's mental health in the face of restrictive proposals on gender-affirming healthcare. Parents pushed for a caregiver's right to make informed medical decisions about their child with medical professionals and without the intervention of the government. They are intimately aware of the internal and external challenges their children face, and understand that further alienation and restrictions will benefit no one.

Michael Dumas, a twelve year old boy who uses puberty blockers to prevent a typical female puberty, is one such child affected by restrictive transphobic legislation. The Charlotte Observer covered the story of the Dumas family grappling with North Carolina's ban on gender-affirming care. Michael's course of treatment is entirely reversible, and has been deemed necessary by his medical providers, but he is still at risk from the ban. His parents express concern over the politicization of their son's life and happiness, and the way it contradicts the input of medical professionals. His father says, "For some reason this has become a lightning-rod issue. And that's the scariest part — that it's so bereft of logic. It's all emotion, it's all fueled by hatred." Though they sympathize with the fear of young transgender people making a mistake in their identification, they do not condone using this fear to remove agency from families across North Carolina. The article emphasizes that while lawmakers will go unaffected by their own legislation, families like Michael's will suffer. Michael's parents make it clear that his success and happiness, his participation on his swim team and in his social life, would be radically different without his puberty-blockers, explaining that Mike experienced panic attacks and bursts of self-destructive behavior before his identity was acknowledged.

These are the real, tangible effects of North Carolina's transphobic legislation and lack of support for transgender people. Children and their families worrying that the medical care that preserves their mental health and ability to live normally will be stripped from them. Children who just survive everyday waiting for when their lives can actually begin, unimpeded by legal and financial barriers to care and affirmation. Children being outed to their parents, unable to live authentically at school or talk freely to supportive adults. Children banned from joining an athletic team with their friends. Children who were never made aware of transgender people in their youth because of a deliberate effort to ignore their existence, growing up into intolerant adults. Transgender adults, freed from the heavy restrictions of childhood, who still continue to fear refusal of medical care at every step. An undereducated public that has been misled into ignorance of the continued discrimination that transgender people face and the great harm that restrictions on gender-affirming actions bring. An environment of fear and ignorance that interrupts education, the economy, and the daily lives of thousands of people.

On December 4, 2024, the Supreme Court heard arguments for *United States v. Skrmetti*, a case addressing Tennessee's SB0001, which bans gender-affirming care for minors in the state and threatens providers with legal repercussions and the removal of their license. The law is being challenged by parents Samantha and Brian Williams of sixteen-year-old daughter L.W.—who describes her gender dysphoria prior to medical transition as "real life body horror"—and two other anonymous families, backed by the Biden administration. The petitioner is endorsed via amicus curiae briefs by credible medical associations including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychological Association, and a number of activist organizations, like the Trevor Project, who offer personal testimonials from transgender individuals and their families. The respondent is endorsed by notorious right-wing groups like The Alliance Defending Freedom, most notable for fighting to bring Christian practices into public schools, and the Family Research Council, a faith and family based think-tank.

The law uses the recognizable language of these bans, defining sex as "immutable," and using the phrase "a purported identity inconsistent with the minor's sex" to outline the bounds within which medical care is prohibited, implying some direct and constant connection between sex and gender, contrary to general psychological opinion. As is typical, the law gives an explicit dismissal of the medical weight of diagnoses including "gender dysphoria, gender identity disorder, gender incongruence, or any mental condition, disorder, disability, or abnormality." In addition to these typical misleading and misinformed definitions, the law also connects gender-affirming care to the opioid epidemic, claims that "many individuals have expressed regret" about receiving gender-affirming care as minors, cites the state's interest in preserving the fertility of minors and "encouraging minors to appreciate their sex," connects Planned Parenthood's "killing [of] tens of thousands of unborn children" to their administration of gender-affirming care, uses inflammatory language to provoke disgust and fear, and labels violations of this ban as "a potential threat to public health, safety, and welfare."

There is no evidence suggesting that the specific significant failures by the government and pharmaceutical companies that defined the opioid epidemic are being repeated with regards to gender-affirming care. Likewise, there is no evidence that there is a high rate of regret from individuals who received gender-affirming care as minors. The study "Levels of Satisfaction and Regret With gender-affirming Medical Care in Adolescence" published by JAMA Pediatrics found that out of 220 minors surveyed, nine of them expressed some regret about the gender-affirming care they received, a rate of regret of 4%. "Regret after Gender-affirmation Surgery: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Prevalence" is an aggregate study published by the NIH that attempts to quantify surgical transition regret among all ages, and which found the rate of regret to be 1% or less across transmasculine and transfeminine groups. In all of Tennessee's efforts to "encourag[e] minors to appreciate their sex" and to protect minors' abilities to "develop into adults who can create children," the state requires that all sex education emphasizes abstinence first and endorses sexual activity only in marriage, despite research showing that abstinence first sex education leads to higher rates of teen pregnancy and STIs. Planned Parenthood provides legal and safe abortions, as well as puberty blockers, hormone replacement therapy, and gender-affirming surgery referrals. Research shows that all of these services are life-saving and beneficial to a majority of those receiving them. The law defines gender-affirming care with phrases like "alter[ing] a minor's hormonal balance," "remov[ing] a minor's sex organs," and "surgically removing, modifying, altering, or entering into the tissues, cavities, or organs of a human being." Each of these definitions attempts to obscure

their actual meaning in favor of inspiring negative emotions in their readers. Millions of people under the age of eighteen use *hormonal* birth control without significant political backlash. A study by the T.H. Chan College of Public Health at Harvard found that the rate of minors aged 15-17 with gender dysphoria diagnoses undergoing gender-affirming surgery was only 2.1 in 100,000, and defining those surgeries as "removing sex organs" or "entering into tissues" rather than altering reproductive systems to better reflect internal identity is intentional fear mongering on the part of lawmakers. Lastly, in contrast to "a potential threat to public health, safety, and welfare," gender-affirming healthcare for minors is endorsed by major medical associations as essential life-saving care.

This law poses an active danger to the transgender population of Tennessee and uses blatant misinformation and incendiary language as its foundation. If the Supreme Court strikes down this ban on the basis of Fourteenth Amendment freedoms, it could create cascading change across the United States for transgender minors, and would advance the progress of the transgender community as a protected class under the federal government. If the court chooses not to rule on the case, it will leave transgender life and care as a topic for debate, legally and culturally. If the Supreme Court votes to uphold the law, it will deny the rights of transgender minors, their families, and their medical professionals to make informed decisions about their body and development, and will create a blockade of precedent against future progress. *United States v. Skrmetti* is the most direct role the federal government has the opportunity to play in the progression of transgender rights in the immediate future of the country. The federal government has failed to prove that it considers transgender lives equal and valuable up to this point by allowing states to implement dangerous and senseless laws like SB0001, but a positive decision on this case could begin to undo years of discriminatory legislation and cultural shift.

In November of 2024, Donald Trump was elected to a second term in the presidential office, with conservative majorities in the House of Representatives, Senate, and Supreme Court. Donald Trump was responsible for a previous ban of transgender service members in the United States military and has public plans to reinstate that ban via executive order. Trump's administration is also responsible for the removal of several Obama era protections for transgender individuals under Title IX, withdrawing the Departments of Justice and Education's guidance on transgender students in 2017. The Department of Education also announced that it would no longer investigate civil rights violations on the basis of denying a transgender student access to their preferred bathroom in 2018. Historically, Title IX is altered with every incoming administration, so the explicit protections given by the 2024 update will likely change or disappear completely. Trump's budget chief-to-be, Russ Vought, was a co-author on Project 2025, a comprehensive plan for another four years under the Trump administration. The document outlines a stark future for transgender people in the United States, including a removal of federal protections against discrimination, federal restrictions on gender-affirming healthcare, bans on gender identity topics in schools, federal sports bans for transgender women, and more. While none of these measures are guaranteed, another Trump presidency will result in the continued perpetuation of stereotypes and misinformation about transgender people at a national level and a transphobic cultural shift as major figures in the federal government are empowered to vocally support radically harmful legislation against transgender people.

In the same election, Republicans lost the supermajority in the North Carolina General Assembly, reinstating the governor's ability to veto laws without automatically being overruled, as occurred for each of the group of transphobic legislation that was passed in North Carolina in 2023. Though the state is unlikely to remove any of its current harmful legislation or make progress towards equality for its transgender citizens, it is also unlikely to advance a discriminatory agenda until the next election in 2026, at least.

It is clear that change is necessary, and a future of transgender legislation that promotes the wellbeing of transgender people, creates legal equality between trans and cisgender people, and removes unnecessary obstacles for everyone is possible. Change could take several forms, including sweeping protections against gender-identity based discrimination and for gender-affirming healthcare at the federal level and an abolishment of sex-targeted legislation.

In "One Hundred Years of Instability: Sex, Law, and Transgender Rights," Anne Caldwell advocates for the disestablishment of sex as a legal classification. Caldwell reviews the rocky history of sexual distinction in law, outlining its progress through suffrage and into modern transgender issues. It is clear that sex in law has never been absolute, with different definitions from each law and court. When facing the issue of transgender rights, removing sexual distinctions from law would make a number of transgender issues irrelevant, much like *Obergefell v. Hodges* removed sexual distinctions from legal marriage and therefore rendered transgender marriage a non-issue. Another example would be the removal of sex markers from identification, which would nullify all of the complications of the legal sex-change process and allow focus to shift to other actively life-threatening issues facing trans people.

"Pathological, Disabled, Transgender: The Ethics, History, Laws, and Contradictions in Models that Best Serve Transgender Rights" proposes another approach that could be combined with the abolition of legally defined sex. The essay by Sabrina Gill and Lance Wahlert argues a legal and social connection between disabled and transgender individuals. They write that transgender individuals face both the stigmatization and advantages of pathologized disability—they are often treated as ill and have a place in the most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, but they also receive medical care and certain protections in return for that categorization. Transgender people are already socially treated as disabled, so it may be helpful for them to be placed into the legal category as well, and live under the protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act. ADA protections would directly relieve transgender people of all modes of discrimination and give the federal government the responsibility of working in the interest of protecting transgender people. With special attention, the ADA could also define specific accommodations and protections for transgender people, like protections for gender-affirming healthcare or proper pronoun and name use. While this redefinition may be stigmatizing, the essay argues that this specific stigma is already present, and the change would bring more benefits than harms to the transgender community.

These two approaches to transgender legislation are promising and possible, with Gill and Walhert's method being a quicker path to fairly comprehensive protections, and Caldwell's requiring more time and facilitation by cultural change. In reality, neither of these may ever be fully adopted, but they lay the groundwork for what positive change could look like, rather than settling for a law-by-law dismantling of discriminatory legislation.

The infiltration of transphobic rhetoric—rooted in archaic misogynistic and homophobic beliefs—into the national political sphere has spurred a cultural shift that has allowed increasingly egregiously violent and ill-conceived bills to pass across the southern and middle United States. The federal government has failed to protect its transgender citizens by continuing to allow bathroom bills, healthcare restrictions, and invasive school dictations to pass. North Carolina has used the authorization provided by the federal government's inaction to lead the country in anti-trans legislation, starting with the first bathroom bill in 2016 and ending with a series of passages in 2023. These laws, given validity by misinformation and public ignorance, *are* acts of violence against transgender populations and *empower* acts of violence against individuals based on national disregard for the wellbeing of the trangender community. With a few key decisions, including a groundbreaking progressive ruling on *United States v. Skrmetti*, the federal government could, however improbable, begin aligning itself with standard medical opinion and basic compassion, as well as its own states' financial and educational interests, and finally answer the legal debate on transgender life.

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Traditional Chinese Medicine: A Reflection of Chinese Diaspora

Yvonne Shih

以管窺天~ Directly interpreted, this Chinese proverb describes the action of observing the sky through the confined view of a telescopic lens. As the characters are dissected to take on a nuanced meaning, however, human knowledge becomes conceptualized into something restricted by a person's limited experiences and worldview. When a small section of an endless atmosphere is taken to be representative of the universe, intrinsic biases emerge, refusing to acknowledge the possibilities of what lies beyond the familiar. Thus, human interaction with others becomes a reflection of how their environment and ideologies have influenced their perspectives, making them obstinate in their beliefs and hesitant to accept what they consider to be foreign. On a larger scale, social patterns that have persisted throughout the intersection of cultures and demographics also display this pattern, the dominant values of a population tainting their acceptance of ideas, reducing the sky to a sliver.

Towards the beginning of the 19th century, Chinese people began to immigrate to the United States in large numbers, starting from the financial promise of the Gold Rush, and then sporadically in pursuit of the American Dream to the present day. Amidst the waves of immigration, the Chinese population faced enormous discrimination and obstacles in legal forms, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, but also in the general distaste of American citizens towards whom they considered to be "outsiders" competing with them for limited job opportunities. A major motivation behind Chinese immigration was economic hardship in China, and many Chinese people were willing to work for lower wages in order to send money back home, leading to high tensions with white workers who demanded higher pay. When the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was proposed, Chinese immigrants attempted to rally against its passage, but support from the US government led to an indefinite act that would stay in effect until 1943. However, despite the opposition and barriers that they faced from those living in America, Chinese immigrants continued to persevere, seeking to establish a secure livelihood in a new environment, hopeful for a better tomorrow. Inevitably, the growing Chinese population led America to become increasingly exposed to a philosophy and language that it had never previously encountered, cultural diaspora winding across the country in synchronicity with an expanding diversity.

Although Chinese culture presented itself through a multitude of expressions, from the bustling streets of Chinatown and its sweet, savory foods to the numerous technological innovations that were brought overseas, one specific tradition demonstrated a synthesis between philosophy and science that was considered a complete contradiction to American values. Traditional Chinese medicine, or TCM, is a form of medicinal care that focuses on the relationship between the human body and the universe using concepts such as yin and yang and qi to justify treatments, relying less on what the West considers to be "real science." Throughout the long history of China, the philosophies of traditional medicine have shifted with the ebb and flow of dynasties, but fundamentally have focused on the symbiotic interactions between the "body, state, cosmos," and nature to develop medicinal practices. When treating ailments of the mind and physiology, TCM often uses herbal methods or forms of personal cultivation with the consideration of how these treatments are holistically impacting the body. Contrastingly, Western medicine focuses more on the clinical process of diagnosis and direct treatment, aiming to put a stop to the symptoms as opposed to considering the patient's long-term health.

The conflicting reasonings behind the branches of medicinal practices led to unavoidable disagreements between the two communities, especially during a period of time where tensions against Chinese immigrants were already high. During the waves of immigration that happened throughout the Gold Rush and Industrial Revolution, doctors who practiced in China brought along with them literature communicating traditional teachings, allowing them to learn TCM while working as laborers on the transcontinental railroad. These Chinese doctors were able to perform basic procedures, but because the Western medical community viewed traditional medicine as unscientific due to its "subjectivity," they were looked down upon and not allowed to attain a valid medical license. Despite not being respected in Western medicine, Chinese Americans were reliant on these Chinese doctors for healthcare services, being more comfortable and dependent on traditional medicine, allowing for the principles of traditional medicine to continue being passed on within Chinatown communities. Predominantly, these services were sought by the Chinese, but as history has progressed, traditional medicine has grown to be more popular amongst white Americans, becoming increasingly integrated with

Western medical education as a reflection of how Chinese Americans have similarly become more accepted into American society.

Today, many medical schools in the United States teach curriculums that communicate the ideologies behind traditional medicine, a special emphasis put on techniques such as acupuncture and herbal treatments. Within these course offerings, Chinese medicine is portrayed as an entity separate from the scope of Western medicine, and further investigation reveals the mirrored place that Asian Americans hold in American society today. As America has gone through its fluctuations, from periods of wartime to eras of prosperity, relationships between white Americans and Asian Americans have also shifted to reflect the social ideals of the majority, and these changes can be clearly seen in American attitudes towards Chinese traditional medicine. Since Chinese medicine is so representative of Chinese ideals and history, its treatment in American settings and institutions can often be indicative of how Chinese Americans were regarded in a space where they were considered to be "other." By looking into the expansion of traditional medicine across the United States from the Gold Rush to today, examining the language and context surrounding TCM in Western medical education, and divulging the relationship that currently exists between Asian Americans and traditional medicine, a deeper understanding can be gained towards the progression of Chinese culture and its place in all aspects of Western civilization.

Found in the margins and texts of ancient philosophers, written records of herbal remedies appeared as early as the Zhou Dynasty, marking the beginning of an intricate medicinal system that would grow in tandem with Chinese philosophy and state for millenia. To begin understanding TCM, it is vital to observe its Confucianist and Taoist principles, most notably regarding the concept of yin, yang, and qi. These philosophies dominated the political and social states of China for thousands of years, its influence remaining in modern day China, in which these ideologies still dictate family and community dynamics. By focusing on achieving an equilibrium within the body, much like a balance must be found between yin and yang, TCM seeks to return the human body to its original state when faced with ailments. To further apply these concepts, major organs such as the heart and lungs are considered ying while organs such as the small intestine and kidneys are yang, the assignments correlating with the five natural elements (fire, earth, wood, metal, and water) and allowing for an interpretation of how the human body functions and connects with its surrounding environment (Gaur).

Expanding upon this relationship between the elements and major organs, TCM places emphasis on the interconnectedness between humans, the earth, and the heavens, specifically on quantitative similarities that contextualize spiritual and physical phenomena. Through this interpretation, the human body becomes its own miniature cosmos, understood as its own entity impacted by an outside "cosmos." In *Huang Di Neijing*, a scripture considered to be a pillar of medical practice, it was written that

> Heaven has four seasons, people have four limbs. Heaven has five tones, people have the five depots; Heaven has six pitches, people have six palaces. Heaven has winter and summer, people have cold and hot [ailments]. Heaven has ten days, people have the hands' ten fingers … Heaven has yin and yang; people have man and wife. (Raphals)

In equating the cosmos to not only the human physique, In equating the cosmos to not only the human physique, but also their state of living, TCM becomes a vessel of culture, the stories and concepts of Chinese ideologies intrinsically intertwined with scientific discovery. Just as philosophical texts were used during the construction of medical knowledge, political writings of scholars were similarly used in developing the justification of human conditions and psychology (Raphals). Political stances were observed in medical practices due to their dependence on Chinese philosophies, the Confucian ideals of Ancient China a defining factor behind imperial decrees and military movements.

In addition to the cultural implications behind TCM, differences between Eastern and Western treatments also appeared in their approach towards curing ailments. Unlike Western medicine, which targets the direct cause of illness to achieve an objectively effective outcome, TCM considers the human body holistically, looking to improve the patient's symptoms and overall quality of life. To achieve this, TCM diagnosis largely relies on the observation of human features, looking for changes in expression, pallor, and surrounding environment to analyze the emotional and physical aspects of the patient before determining treatment. In the modern day, popular TCM treatments include moxibustion, tuina, and tapotement, all of which are techniques targeting parts of the body with precision in an effort to return to the patient's harmonious relationship with nature (Gaur). As a fusion of both Western and Eastern practices, TCM remains a major form of medicinal treatment for the Chinese people, carrying a rich tapestry of culture through its reflection of how fundamental philosophies and culture have grown alongside innovative discoveries.

Although TCM was first brought to the United States through the Gold Rush, its presence was not widely recognized by the American public until around the 1970s, when the American government began to take interest in acupuncture. Prior to its acknowledgement, Chinese doctors who arrived in America brought medical texts along with them, practicing within their diasporic Chinese communities. These doctors would provide a broad range of services, from herbal treatments to childbirth assistance, and served as the main source of healthcare within their predominantly Chinese communities. Oftentimes, they would also occupy major roles of leadership within their respective towns, allowing for Chinese immigrants, as well as others interested in seeking TCM, to continue having access to medicine despite the discrimination that the Chinese community faced from Americans and that aversion's role in separating the Chinese from Western healthcare. However, due to differences in principle, Chinese medicine was ultimately disregarded by surrounding Western populations, dismissed as "quackery." Chinese doctors were not considered to be "real" doctors, and because there was no license that could be issued for the practice of TCM, they would often be arrested for their services. Despite Western opposition, the demand for TCM within Chinese communities allowed for TCM to continue within America, Chinese physicians passing on the knowledge to others locally to ensure the longevity of traditional practice (Liping).

In 1971, TCM began to draw significant attention from the general American public, the popularity catalyzed by President Nixon visiting China and observing their medical system. As recorded by Nathan Sivin, "surprising to Americans have been the resources used in China to treat patients. The antibiotics, sedatives, diagnostic equipment, and so on, are familiar enough. But in addition there is an enormous repertory of crude drugs and extracts from the vegetable, animal, and mineral kingdoms" (Sivin 16). What especially fascinated the West were the different techniques focused on promoting classical theories, Sivin stating that,

> Although the Chinese physicians . . . are ignorant in anatomy, nonetheless they have perhaps devoted more effort over many centuries to learning and teaching with very great care the circulation of the blood, than have European physicians, either individually or as a group. And they base the foundation of their entire medicine upon the rules of this circulation, as if these were oracular sayings from Apollo at Delphi. (18)

Through the language surrounding TCM discussion, it becomes clear that the West initially perceived TCM to be juvenile, ungrounded science compared to developed Western practices. Eventually, as TCM became more advertised within America, it gained popularity, the practice becoming a branch of treatment separate from mainstream Western medicine. Today, TCM is no longer considered pseudoscience, instead seen as a science intrinsic to Chinese culture, studied for its focus on the all-encompassing treatment of the human body and its differences in practice from Western medicine.

The moment Chinese immigrants began arriving on the docks of New York City in the mid 19th century, they stepped into a community predisposed against them and the foreign culture they brought along. Throughout the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, over 10,000 Chinese Americans worked as laborers, paid at lesser rates than their white counterparts and forced into more dangerous working conditions. Despite their contributions toward a project that would prove to be a pivotal contributor to the American economy and industrial development, Chinese Americans faced discrimination on all fronts–prejudiced against both legally and socially ("Timeline of Systemic Racism Against AAPI").

The first instance of legal barriers set against Chinese immigration was the Naturalization Act of 1870, in which all non-white people besides African Americans were denied the rights to naturalization. This opposition towards incoming foreigners was reflected in both the media portraying Chinese people, as well as the physical violence that the Chinese were subjected to. Shortly after the Naturalization Act of 1870, a massacre of Chinese people happened in Los Angeles, killing 10 percent of the LA Chinese population, the Chinese community left defenseless in the face of state legislation, unable to testify against white perpetrators. The lack of repercussions set a precedent for anti-Chinese violence, signaling that there would be no punishment for violent crimes committed against Chinese immigrants. This blatant discrimination was additionally encouraged by media platforms, anti-Chinese rhetoric frequently circulating in newspapers and advertisements. As an example, the following excerpt from The San Francisco Examiner demonstrates the derogatory language surrounding the discussion of Chinese immigrants.

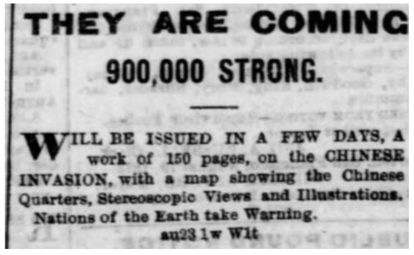

THEY ARE COMING
900,000 STRONG.
WILL BE ISSUED IN A FEW DAYS, A work of 150 pages, on the CHINESE INVASION, with a map showing the Chinese Quarters, Stereoscopic Views and Illustrations. Nations of the Earth take Warning.
au23 1w W1t

Figure 1. Announcement on The San Francisco Examiner ("Timeline of Systemic Racism Against AAPI").

By using the term "invasion" to describe Chinese entry into America, it becomes clear that the Chinese were seen as a separate entity from what was "American" and considered to plague and infect the white population. With a negative presence in publications, it became harder for the Chinese to integrate into the American "melting pot" of cultures

("Timeline of Systemic Racism Against AAPI").

In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, prohibiting Chinese workers from immigrating to America and limiting the travel of Chinese people across American borders. This act would continue to be effective until 1943, and within this window during which the act was effective, countless acts of anti-Chinese hate occurred, with legislation such as the Immigration Act of 1917 and the Johnson Reed Act continuing to limit and discourage the presence of immigrants in the United States. Despite the passage of the Magnuson Act in 1943, repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act, acts of hatred towards the Chinese community remained, the change in legislation no match for the deeply ingrained homogeneity of American ideology ("Exclusion Acts and Legal Resistance").

Fast forward to the 21st century, and anti-Chinese sentiments continue to exist, albeit under the guise of acceptance and inclusion. A prime example of this would be the COVID-19 pandemic, during which political statements towards the role that China played in the initial start of the pandemic spurred a series of hate crimes, the strain of the pandemic on American society expressing itself through violence and derogatory propaganda. The moment President Donald Trump described COVID-19 as the "China Virus," new waves of racist ideology began to emerge (Reja).

Similar to this progression of American attitudes toward Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, Western attitudes toward traditional medicine began with deep distaste, distrust towards the unknown creating biases against a foreign form of healthcare, before slowly shifting into more subtle indications of discrimination. In the massacres and violent acts mentioned above, doctors were oftentimes victims, their deaths impacting the communities they served and disrupting the symbiotic relationships brought by practices of herbal medicine. In their opposition of the foreign, Americans directly stopped a major aspect of Chinese culture and their way of life.

Today, teachings of TCM can be found in the curricula of medical schools, a far cry from the blatant devaluation of Chinese healthcare during its initial arrival into the Western sphere. On the surface, this change seems to represent a shift towards complete acceptance towards the Chinese community, integration demonstrated in the form of inclusion in the scientific community. However, a closer examination of how TCM is taught in American settings begins to reveal the deficiencies in course content in comparison to teachings of Western medicine, and the framing language tells new stories of the role TCM plays in modern medicine.

During the 1970s, the National Acupuncture Association was founded, shortly after Nixon's visit to China and his acknowledgement of acupuncture sparked interest in the United States, marking one of the first instances of accrediting Chinese medicine. As techniques such as acupuncture continued to gain traction, more organizations, such as the National Certification Commision for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) and the Accreditation Commision for Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine (ACAHM) began to emerge. Observing the purposes of these organizations, it becomes clear that modern regulations surrounding Chinese medicine limits itself to popular spheres of TCM, such as acupuncture and herbal medication, not focusing as much on other physical treatments offered by Chinese medicine, such as moxibustion and cupping therapy. Today, there are schools across America dedicated towards certifying practitioners of acupuncture, masters degrees offered for the legal usage of acupuncture treatment (Qi-Hui et al.).

Aside from specialized schools, institutions such as the Stanford School of Medicine offer courses that introduce traditional medicine to training medical doctors, providing Western doctors with a diverse outlook on facets of medical practice. At Stanford, courses ranging from "MED 272: Science and History of Traditional Chinese Medicine" to "EASTASN 117/217 Health and Healthcare Systems in East Asia" allow for a comprehensive understanding of the culture that lies behind patient care and medical study (Stanford School of Medicine). For its MED 272 course description, Stanford provides the following presentation of their coursework:

> Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a unique system for the diagnosis and treatment of disease, as well as for the cultivation of life-long health and well-being. This course introduces basic TCM theories, practices, and treatment methods including acupuncture, Taichi, and herbal medicine. We will introduce historical figures and events in the history of Traditional Chinese Medicine and East-West integrative health. Drawing on science, cultural

Based on its approach towards not only Traditional Medicine, but also the intersections between Eastern and Western healthcare, it is apparent that the course attempts to bridge the gaps in discussion between Eastern and Western medicine. However, by separating the conversation between TCM and its role in "integrative health" through the word "and," it becomes unclear whether the essence of TCM is a part of East-West health, or instead just a supporting historical context.

Not only is this slight distinction relevant in Western settings, but also in teachings of traditional medicine in China, which has long since pivoted towards the growing practices of Western medicine. In a survey done at Xiangya School of Medicine of Central South University, students and teachers were asked about their perspectives on the TCM courses offered at their institution and the flaws that they find in their course organization. Of the students studying clinical medicine, 26.3% deemed TCM to be very unscientific, unscientific, or were unsure of how scientific TCM was. Additionally, TCM was said to be difficult to both learn and teach due to its deep ties with Chinese culture, with 42.86% of teachers expressing that a "[l]ack of the ability to understand the classical Chinese involved in the course" posed a barrier when teaching TCM (Liu et al.). Due to the differences between Chinese and Western medical practices, TCM has lost traction in Eastern medical practices, representing not only a loss of traditional practice, but also indicating a decreased emphasis on the cultural ties between Chinese philosophy and general medicinal practice.

Although traditional medicine is still practiced and understood as separate from mainstream medicine, the acknowledgement of traditional medicine and its validity vastly surpasses how it was perceived in the United States during the first waves of Chinese immigration. 不怕慢，就怕站～This is a proverb that translates to not fearing slow progress, only stagnancy. Despite the remaining traces of discrimination towards Chinese immigrants in the United States, observations of how traditional medicine is integrated into modern medicine demonstrates improvement, albeit gradual, and points towards a future in which relationships between Western and Eastern cultures and medical practices are no longer indicative of lingering racial prejudice and anti-immigration ideologies.

By utilizing traditional medicine as a device for discussing the progression of Chinese culture and ideologies in American society, it can be understood that throughout the varying periods of immigration and the overall presence of Chinese immigrants in America, Chinese philosophies have been considered isolated from Western ideals, gradually becoming more accepted by the Western population as diversity has grown in the United States. Towards the beginning of Chinese immigration to America, Chinese medicine was seen as a form of pseudoscience due to its subjectivity in comparison to Western medical practices, and was subsequently perceived with scorn. Despite the ability of Chinese doctors to successfully cure different ailments and enhance the overall health of their patients, existing tensions between the Chinese and Western communities prevented acceptance of the foreign medical practice. Within their own communities, these Chinese doctors continued to provide treatments for Chinese Americans, bringing the knowledge from China and continuing to pass down the tradition through distribution of herbal medications and teachings of self-cultivation. Acknowledging the strong aversion that Western society held towards the ideas of traditional medicine leads us to ask the question of how traditional medicine eventually became integrated into the modern curriculums being used for medical education.

Throughout the progression of Chinese medicine in America, small populations of white Americans also took interest in the principle of traditional medicine, as well as other Asian immigrant populations who had systems of medical care that were based on traditional medicine, allowing Chinese medicine to continue on in the face of adversity. As the United States itself became more open towards a diversity of viewpoints and traditional medicine established a predominantly positive reputation, Western medicine began to incorporate traditional medicine in its practice, a supplement to its comparatively rigid and objective structure. However, while observing the wording of courses teaching traditional medicine, the choice of lexicon and syntax still uncover the isolation of traditional medicine from Western medicine. Interestingly, even in China, where traditional medicine originated, medical education largely favors Western medicine, and a small number of doctors actively practice traditional medicine. In tandem with this phenomenon, language surrounding Asian Americans and their place in a space dominated by Western ideologies also imply their largely partial acceptance in a United States that claims a complete embracing of different cultures.

故步自封～This traditional saying encapsulates the human opposition towards what they deem to be unknown, the unfamiliar being a projection of what is to be feared. When what is considered old becomes the comfortable norm, it is in human nature to refuse the consideration of novelty, preferring the security of knowing that what has been proved to be successful will continue to be reliable, afraid of what could be the "new." 從善如流～Contrastingly, the aforementioned proverb indicates a slow form of affirmation, in which something that was originally seen as negative eventually shows itself in a positive light, presenting an arc of redemption that revisits the "old" and incorporates the "new." When these proverbs are considered in conjunction with one another, it can be used to outline the societal context that has been used to describe traditional medicine. Beginning as something that was worthy of only dismissal to now becoming a respected part of medical teachings, traditional medicine has, and continues to, embark on a journey of slow intersection.

Throughout this reading, I have proposed that, although traditional medicine is becoming an increasingly present part of Western medicine, the still-existing concept of the "other" within medical education forces observers to question its ambiguous position. If the perception of traditional medicine reflects how Asian Americans are treated today, how can society interpret the integration of Asian Americans and their culture into American society? On a broader scale, the prevalence of diversity as a whole could be questioned, the very margins of text and speech claiming a wholeheartedly varied population left open for questioning and interpretation. If lingering indications of dissonant heterogeneity exist, how can our current understanding of the American mixing pot be reevaluated and considered? Would the further integration of modern

medicine, including the interactions that doctors have with traditional medicine and the role that traditional medicine plays into common healthcare, give a more holistic understanding of how traditional medicine has become a part of American society? To what extent can traditional medicine in the context of East Asian countries such as China be used to indicate the place of Chinese culture worldwide, and more specifically, explore the interactions that these separate cultures have with East Asian demographics? Stepping away from TCM, the historical approach towards studying human experiences can similarly be applied to modern observations of large-scale sociological phenomena. By considering previously excluded voices in historical contexts, new perspectives add onto the understanding of societal topics and discussions. As questions about the role that traditional medicine plays in Western culture have been investigated, many new inquiries about the role that both traditional medicine and Chinese cultures play in explaining the interconnectedness of diversity in medicine become visible to theory and practice. By choosing to focus on a form of human ingenuity that focuses on treating the very essence of humanity, life, defining characteristics of the human condition, interpersonal relationships, can be put through consideration and scrutiny.

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The Modern Claude Glass: Aesthetic Usage in Social Media

Claire Van Meter

Does such a thing as 'the fatal flaw,' that showy dark crack running down the middle of a life, exist outside literature? I used to think it didn't. Now I think it does. And I think that mine is this: a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs.

-Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*

Since its publication in 1993, The Secret History has enthralled its audience. The novel spins a haunting narrative: Machiavellian college students descend into violence, all in desperate pursuit of some wayward beauty. Praising Tartt for her clever storytelling, the literary community recognizes the novel as a modern classic. Still, my prior knowledge of the book did not originate from a scholarly reference or English assignment. Rather, I became acquainted with the novel throughout my extensive time on the social media platform Tik Tok. I am certainly not alone; views of content including the novel currently extend beyond 248 million ("7 Surprising Facts"). Such astounding popularity likely results from the prevalent "dark academia" aesthetic online. Attempting to pinpoint the origin of an internet phenomenon is a fool's errand; however, many observers postulate that *The Secret History* was a core part of the aesthetic's beginning (Garrett). The "dark academia" genre encapsulates late nights spent in dimly-lit libraries studying classical literature, deep in one's own gothic wonderment. *The Secret History* offers a similar aesthetic construction with descriptions tinged by romance and death and framed by mystery. So, as the book casually lies on dusty background shelves found in Oxford study vlogs, or appears clasped by some plaid-clad model wearing a "dark academia" inspired outfit, it eloquently completes the vision. Both *The Secret History* and other "dark academia" adjacent content attract a devoted audience who incorporate the aesthetic into their media, fashion, and other personal areas. Yet, when one makes a distinct effort to organize their tastes and appearances into a specific aesthetic category, is it merely a superficial effort to control their outward perception? Originally, I believed so.

I never intended to read *The Secret History*. Maybe it was an insatiable need to deviate from the common opinion, but more likely, it was my distaste for the novel's vast aestheticization. Consuming a book for the sake of a specific feeling or experience seemed disingenuous, and a story that upheld such frivolity disinterested me. Peeling back the pages in a search of an aesthetic must be a product of some collective, new-age identity crisis in which I was unwilling to participate.

Yet, yearning for the aesthetic, or morbidly longing for the picturesque, are not simply modern quests. The picturesque is a specific aesthetic quality that stems from almost two centuries ago. During this time, aristocratic youths embarked on the Grand Tour, trekking across Europe in pursuit of leisure and knowledge (Zelazko). During the later portion of this period, artist and prolific traveler William Gilpin published *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770.* Instead of highlighting higher art or grandiose architectural achievement, Gilpin introduced the picturesque as a painterly quality found within nature (Fertig and Shand). Particularly, Gilpin referenced the paintings of Claude Lorrain, whose gorgeous Roman landscapes captured the attention of many. Those searching for the picturesque to include in their own work, or just to experience firsthand, constructed a tool to emulate Lorrian's work: the Claude glass. This handheld mirror reflected previously natural views with a filtered, aesthetically pleasing tone (Soth). Long before Instagram influencers ever plastered saturated, orangy tints on their beach photos, the English countryside was flooded with the wandering rich, tripping over themselves as they navigated the terrain with their tiny mirrors.

The phones, computers, and tablets have become effective claude glasses, allowing their users to see the world through an exquisitely distorted lens. The ascension of internet aesthetics, such as "dark academia," indicates a more self-aware desire for aesthetic experience in one's life, a desire that erupts into artistic creation and identity. However, the market also recognizes this desire, employing specific aesthetics with products and brand images in a manner that threatens the authenticity of the internet aesthetic as a beneficial, personal tool. To grasp this phenomenon and its implications, one must take a journey through the rise of aesthetics.

Aesthetics within philosophy is an incredibly messy, and rather dangerous, area of study In *Aesthetics as the Philosophy of Perception*, Bence Nanay opens with an anecdote that encapsulates the struggle over definition within the field. While preparing for a philosophy conference on aesthetics, he ironically had the most insightful conversa-

tion of the trip sitting in a barber's chair. The barber simply inquired about the topic of Nanay's conference, who found himself faced with the difficult task of condensing the complex field of aesthetics into a casual conversation. Rather bravely, Nanay explained, "Aesthetics is about ways of perceiving the world that are really rewarding and special. You can perceive artworks that way but also other things: the ocean, the mountains, the desolate streetscape surrounding that barber shop" (Nanay 1). The barber grasped this description and responded with his own example: the cinematic picture of a man with a yellow umbrella trudging across the empty, rainy parking lot. The professor and the barber understood each other perfectly (Nanay 1).

Nanay employs this anecdote to begin acknowledging the ambiguity endemic to his work. He reflects that the definition of aesthetics he offered to the barber was "almost true, but not quite," before tentatively laying the groundwork for his apparently unique combination of aesthetics and perception philosophy. He explains, "Philosophy of perception is a very respectable subfield of philosophy, even hip these days…Aesthetics, in contrast, is as fringy as it gets, at least within contemporary analytic philosophy" (Nanay 2). His tone is understandably cautious and surprisingly vulnerable as he opens his writing up to the academic criticism of his peers. Fortunately, the vast majority of individuals are not rival professors of philosophy bent on picking apart fallacies in philosophical aesthetic understandings. Most are closer to the barber, lacking the scholastic knowledge to write entire books dedicated to the subject. Yet, the barber still engaged with aesthetics intuitively and effortlessly, all while snipping away at split ends, indicating the universal quality of the aesthetic experience. If one wishes to discover the nature, and possible power, of this universality, the study of aesthetics must extend beyond conference rooms and into individual lives.

But returning to academia for a moment, the acknowledgments of Nanay's book pay immense respects to a certain Jerrold Levinson, who encouraged Nanay to persevere studying aesthetics during his graduate education. Interestingly, one searching for answers in the aesthetic realm might have already stumbled upon this name on the cover of *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, for Levinson is its chief editor. Explaining aesthetics in a more organized manner than most academic articles dare to, this work introduces art, aesthetic property, and aesthetic experience as the three elements of the aesthetic field. The book describes their connection as within art: "In any event, the three conceptions can claim to be naturally related in that art, in its creative and receptive dimensions, plausibly provides the richest and most varied arena for the manifesting of aesthetic properties and the having of aesthetic experiences" (Levinson 3). Art is the practice of creating a work and its subsequent form. The classification of any piece as "art" is an aesthetic discourse that has always hovered closer to the public consciousness. Jokes about low-effort "modern art" are fairly commonplace in museum cafés and bathrooms. Nineteenth century artistic formalists might chuckle along, listening to the comical repetitions of their previous work. Artistic formalism rose in tandem with professional art critics. They argued that strictly formal properties, properties understood through senses such as vision and hearing, constituted an art of quality (Shelley). Yet, philosophers in art never fully accepted formalism as an evaluative tool. Such a simplistic concession would be wholly uncharacteristic. In *Philosophy and Aesthetics*, James Manns notes, "…[A]esthetics is complicated by the very nature of its principal subject matter--art. For art, at least as it has been practiced in the West, is by nature restless, fluid, prone to stylistic transformation, ill-disposed toward stasis" (Manns 5). The foundation of aesthetics, art, is naturally a shaky, unstable ground to build upon. Any traveler must approach aesthetics with uncertainty for this reason. While one might view the field's slipperiness as an excuse to avoid it altogether, its nature also demonstrates ripe opportunity for interpretation. As art shifts, more material becomes available, ultimately widening the applicability of aesthetics.

Therefore, approaching the study of aesthetics with a singular aesthetic property, beauty, seems rather reductive. However, as the scholarly discourse surrounding conceptualizing beauty occupies such a large area within the field, beauty serves as a helpful site for understanding aesthetic properties and the experiences they create. For instance, the competing notions of rationalism and the immediacy thesis reveal the role of reason. Rationalism, similar to artistic formalism, is more concerned with the form itself as a means for understanding beauty. A rationalist believes that one must use reason to discern beauty from art. This understanding requires judgments to be made, conclusions to be drawn, and further, more systematic, methods of meaning-extraction. On the other hand, proponents of the immediacy thesis (otherwise known as sentimentalists) focus on the sensory experience an individual has with art. In contrast with those aforementioned "modern art" comedians, these individuals stand in the main museum gallery for hours, gushing about how an artwork makes them feel. Combining these two generalizations, some even argue different levels of reason that can lead to a sensual experience (Shelley).

Standing on the battlefield between the rational and sentimental or the art formalist and those who just experience, no side appears to be correct. As one wanders, lost in the museum's foyer, the question arises: if those who have dedicated their lives to aesthetics cannot agree on how they function, then how can I identify the correct definition to use in my own understanding of the world? In describing grappling with this conundrum in his own book, Professor Nanay shares, "The general idea is that many (not all) of these topics do happen to have a *common denominator* and it is that they are about experiences of various kinds. But they are about very different kinds of experiences—and what is often singled out as the 'aesthetic experience' is just one of these" (Nanay 6; emphasis added). His reference to this "common denominator" of the aesthetic experience is the reason so many remain in this fight. Those who engage seriously with aesthetics all acknowledge that there must be *something* there within that experience, even if they cannot seem to agree what that *something* is or how it comes to be. Even the barber recognized that *something*, and he did not require a name in order to recognize it within his own life. As Manns comments, "A long tradition in philosophy, reaching back at least as far as Plato and receiving continual reinforcement across the centuries, has it that when we use a single term in a multitude of situations, there must be some *common element* shared by all the individuals properly designated by that term" (Manns 3; emphasis added). One can indeed describe the philosophy aesthetics as a sort of no-man's land, that was certainly my immediate impression as I began my research. Yet, beneath the noise of arguments about the correctness of specific wordings or descriptions, I found that aesthetics are a universal experience that do not require intense explanation in order to be understood.

In valiant efforts to understand the effervescent nature of pop culture, such as my own, one must leave behind the desolate, war-torn scholarly landscape and approach a more casual, yet equally volatile, platform. Urban Dictionary functions as the ultimate source of modern slang definitions vetted by the public. Anybody with internet access can write and publish a definition, and their anonymity often encourages honesty. Users upvote the definitions with which they agree while downvoting the ones with which they do not. This democratic system ensures a measure of relative consensus for each post. Therefore, to understand true modern usage of the word "aesthetic," one may simply search for its Urban Dictionary definition. The top, most favored definition, with a ratio of 1,768 upvotes to 266 downvotes, defines "aesthetic" as "A combination of things that are pleasing to look at. / *I like the aesthetic of your blog*" ("aesthetic"). Examining this definition with the language of aesthetic studies, one notices that the writer calls the art "things," and they imply the property of beauty, which thereby creates a "pleasing" aesthetic experience. Hilariously, this user's choice of the vague "things" to constitute the art that brings about this experience unknowingly throws the carefully imposed limits of critics aside in favor of a broader understanding of art. Furthermore, a lesser known, yet slightly more comprehensive definition reads, "aesthetic / 1) something that looks beautiful and/or pleasing to the eye / 2) often used as a kinda of "genre" something could be given / eg: grunge aesthetic or pastel aesthetic / 1) "your instagram is so aesthetic!" / 2) "those doc martens are sooo grunge aesthetic"" ("aesthetic"). This post defines "aesthetic" as both an adjective and a noun. The adjectival portion refers to the term's colloquial usage, simply meaning something is nice to look at. Interestingly, the vernacular has reduced the word "aesthetic" to mean the aesthetic property of beauty, and quite literally at that. This abatement ignores the subliminal implications of a work beyond its visual appeal. However, the second definition describing a "genre" of something repeats the sentiment of the first definition, but without the assignment of beauty as the aesthetic property. Rather, the art remains the same ("something") but the aesthetic properties create a "genre." Using the example given, the some properties of the Doc Martens create a "grunge" experience. The wider use of "aesthetic" in the modern era can be attributed to the rise of internet aesthetics. While providing their slightly contrary opinion on the word's new usage in 2014, user "knicknack-patti-whack" described "aesthetic" as, "Something that *tumblr* weirdo's say way too often and use it for every damn thing under the sun. A generally annoying word" ("aesthetic"; emphasis added).

To analyze these Internet Aesthetics, one must return to the birthplace of their existence: the blogging platform Tumblr. When discussing his inspiration for Tumblr (another site for linking blogs entitled Projectionist) 20-year-old, high-school dropout David Karp excitedly shares, "Projectionist solved the posting problems of WordPress [rival blogging platform] with a brilliant *aesthetic* sense: You can put up bits of media but the theme or the "skin" will take care of the aesthetics, and the media will be in nice little enclosures. Video will come up in a nice frame, blurbs will come up in nice little bubbles, there will be the ability to make gorgeous typography quotes" (Davis; emphasis added) He continues to enthusiastically illustrate the perfect canvas for blog creations. In reference to the company's motivation, he states firmly, "We're not motivated by money. We are into this thing that we're building" (Davis). From any other founder of a technology company, one might understand this sentiment as nothing other than virtue signaling. However, Karp's execution of the platform proved his words to be genuine, at least in the beginning. When it was founded in 2007, the platform refused to pummel its users with advertisements for profit, rather focusing on curating an open, unobstructed canvas for anyone. Karp had an aversion to competitors such as YouTube and Facebook using these tactics, and effectively prioritizing their revenue. Tumblr provided a special place for internet users to create using text, photos, videos and more, highlighting the individual's experience (Matthias). The result of a site Karp himself described as "the most flexible platform for publishing in the world" was a collection of unique vision boards, one-liners, playlist links, and other artistic expressions all compiled together in categories that became known as aesthetics (Davis).

Time has buried the majority of these blogs in its sands, but there are some artifacts that remain to be dug up. On the Tumblr page entitled "pale aesthetic blog," the viewer travels back in time, almost a decade, to one such gem. The creator models the blog after an old Myspace profile–a long dead social media site–and frames everything in fluffy shades of light pink. The home page embraces the audience, introducing the blogger with information extending from

their mood (nostalgic, ironically), to their sexuality. These facts are sandwiched between hearts and neatly assigned boxes. The links to their other blogs and profiles no longer function, but the archive tab remains open. An array of posts and photos lie there. The images are vastly different and mundane, from umbrellas to long, spiraling staircases, to cherry blossom trees, but together they form this particular "pale" aesthetic experience ("pale aesthetic blog"). Users participated in this creative, organic magic all over the platform, leading to the rise of many of such blogs and particular aesthetic experiences. Marta Włodarczyk writes to describe this phenomenon:

> Users plan, organize and produce their content in a way that adheres to their chosen aesthetic, be it synthwave, goblincore or a personal, 'unaffiliated' one, which entails using certain color palettes, filters, sounds, and editing techniques that not only allude to particular social media aesthetics. Such digital assemblage…presents the creator's own interpretation of their reality in the context of the principles of a given movement, and therefore becomes a filtered and organized aesthetic experience (Włodarczyk 21).

As far removed as internet aesthetics seem from philosophical understandings, this practice clearly demonstrates artistic efforts that combine properties to become a specific aesthetic experience. These creators might be unfamiliar with the field of aesthetics, but they still maintain that universal understanding of how creating such an experience functions.

During the interview with Tumblr's founder, the journalist asked a rather strange question: "Do you feel blogs are contributing to the millennial narcissism?" Karp responded succinctly, "[W]hen you search my name, you come across the thousands of posts I feel comfortable representing me. I think that it's going to be necessary for our generation to be a little bit more, not necessarily narcissistic, but open to the public…I think at the end of the day we all crave that popularity, and this is a great, really fun way to have that *identity*" (Davis; emphasis added). Karp objects to the narrative that blogging and curating an online identity is malignantly self-centered; however, he still depicts this aesthetic creation as an opportunity to open a user's identity to others, in a manner the user sees fit. This argument is consistent with empirical data surrounding how aesthetic preferences align with social perceptions of identity.

In a study entitled "The Aesthetic Self. The Importance of Aesthetic Taste in Music and Art for Our Perceived Identity," researchers hypothesize that "aesthetic preferences and the arts could be also closely linked to the self and that a change in taste and aesthetic values may be construed as a change in who one is" (Fingerhut et al). They verify their claims through surveying subjects to observe how certain changes in an individual's aesthetic taste impact the Self Effect (perceived change in identity). They conducted four different survey studies and determined: 1) the Self Effect was highest for aesthetic taste of music 2) aesthetic distance between music categories makes the Self Effect more drastic when switching between them, 3) the same Self Effect observations apply to visual art, and 4) taking on a new aesthetic interest, rather than simply switching between them, also creates a large self effect. (Fingerhut et al). Society clearly recognizes preferences of the aesthetic kind as fundamentally linked to identity; if someone is changing their preferences, they are understood to be changing a part of who they are. So, just as the curation of an aesthetic experience is universal, engaging with a particular experience is additionally universally understood as fundamentally intertwined with one's identity. To extend this notion even further, if one understands this correlation, they may indeed use aesthetics as a purposeful tool for constructing their personal identity.

Internet aesthetics may be indeed born from desires to shape one's identity. A similarly titled study, "The Aesthetics of the Self: The Meaning-Making of Internet Aesthetics" answered this question through interviewing those who engaged with internet aesthetics. Whether it was feeling academically motivated by watching a "dark academia" themed movie or simply daydreaming about somewhere they would love to go, experiencing such content allowed the interviewees to contextualize their worlds in any way they saw fit (Giolo and Berghman 19). Giolo and Berghman state:

> In this sense, our phenomenological interviews strongly suggested that the use of these experiential toolkits answered a need to bring coherence to the self…Labels like 'cottagecore' or 'dark academia' lended coherence to these subjective dimensions, by serving as a label for their selves, for what they stood for, a means to provide *significance* to psychological moods. These individuals actively sought structures for perceiving reality, seeing themselves and their activities as part of an "aesthetic." (25; emphasis added)

Additionally, acknowledging the overrepresentation of self-identified females, the researchers added that this result "might also be considered a sign that different gender identities relate differently to the use of cultural toolkits when making sense of their life experiences" (Giolo, Guilherme and Michaël Berghman 13). Gender exemplifies an area in which labels can act as both a hindrance and help for understanding one's identity. Internet aesthetics also provide labels that liberate. Particular internet aesthetics can become a space for reclamation of a certain experience that has previously been denied for different groups. In "Soft Femme Theory: Femme Internet Aesthetics and the Politics of "Softness," author Andi Schwartz discusses how femmes online design content that redefines historically "feminine" qualities with safer connotations:

> The images in soft femme digital culture share a number of soft visual strategies…They also share symbolic references of softness, like flowers and girlhood, which solidify the relationship between softness and femininity. For all of its gentleness, the turn to softness is framed as a radical movement, a movement to reclaim feminized qualities (like softness, vulnerability, and emotionality) and feminized subjects (like femmes) as valuable. (Schwartz)

Moreover, Schwartz also recognizes the power of reclaiming this aesthetic experience for racialized groups: "Racialized women, especially Black women, have historically been excluded from the Western definition of womanhood and femininity…so for racialized and Black femmes (not all of whom identify as women), claiming softness is an especially radical move" (Schwartz). The ability to author identity allows one to rewrite as well, and aesthetics are extremely useful as the ink.

To understand how aesthetics function in relation to identity, Barthes's theory on signifiers proves insightful. Imagine the word 'tree' written in, well, black ink on a page. The writing itself is a signifier that, when read, signifies a bark-covered mass with green leaves attached to its arms. Barthes refers to this concept of a "tree" as the signified. Together, the signified and signifier create a first-order sign. However, the concept of a "tree" can also act as a second-order signifier for a meaning such as "nature' or 'life.' This second-order sign forms a *myth* (Barthes 81) Interpreting internet aesthetics through this language of semiology, the second-order meaning users seek to create through their curation of the first-order signifiers may indeed be identity. Giolo and Berghman additionally note the similarity between Barthes's logic and internet aesthetics. "Much like Barthes' conception of myths, Internet aesthetics seem to be elaborated through combinations of pop culture objects; they communicate a meaning only partly reliant on that of the movies, books, or songs, agglomerated within the Internet aesthetic. Hence, the meaning of cultural objects within internet aesthetics relies on the myth that they are brought together to construct (Giolo and Berghman 5). A user composes an aesthetic "thing" out of any number of aesthetic properties they choose, they curate an aesthetic experience. Then, this experience can influence their lives, providing context and liberation for the self, to ultimately initiate a more sound, comfortable, and wonderful identity.

Returning to Urban Dictionary with these newfound revelations on the wonders of internet aesthetics, one might be surprised to witness the trend of hatred toward them in more recent years. These newer posts contain a vitriolic passion (particularly directed at teenage girls). A definition with such venom reads: "aesthetic /A word overused by cringy 13 year olds who fake depression and think billie eilish and wearing binbags and overloading your face with ugly cheap blush is cute…" ("aesthetic"). Platforms many of these objectors deemed responsible included Tik Tok, Instagram, and Pinterest. Notably, a familiar website is missing.

The crash of the mothership Tumblr was painstakingly slow. Yahoo bought the platform in 2013. This purchase is mainly credited as the beginning of the end for the website. Advertisements were added, confusing and eliminating many users with the, previously uncharacteristic, monetization. Yet, even this money-making model began to fail as advertisers became wary of the unfiltered adult content on the website. Verizon purchased both Tumblr and Yahoo, banning adult content. The users left felt that this ban targeted the queer community and led to targeted censorship (Baker). Tumblr became a shell of its former self: an empty, strange canvas without its painters.

After the fall of Tumblr, internet aesthetics still remained on platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram, and Pinterest. Recently, I searched the words "clean girl" (a recent aesthetic popularized on Tik Tok) on Pinterest to discover how the aesthetic content differed from Tumblr's. First of all, by removing the blog feature and reserving aesthetics to simply video or images, much of the framing that made the practice so unique in the first place is taken out. Instead, one scrolls through mountains of the same content, with no differentiating factors based on users. The photos themselves are just as sad. While "pale aesthetic blog" showed an eclectic taste for the mundane that captured its viewers with a unique mood, "clean girl" on Pinterest showed a bunch of beauty products, obvious logos, with a beige backdrop ("clean girl"). Notably, all three of these newer platforms have a built-in shopping feature where users do not have to leave the app to make a purchase: a perfect breeding ground for impulsive shopping (Jennings). Platforms such as these squeeze every dollar out of the consumer, whether it is their attention span for watching paid advertisements, or a quick purchase after becoming inspired by the clean girl aesthetic experience on their feed.

There is, indubitably, a link between identity and the consumer. In the modern age, the marketing industry has begun to recognize this as a more general trend. As written in an article entitled "A brand (new) experience: art, aesthetics, and sensory effects" published in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science:*

> Consistent with the aforementioned conceptualization of aesthetics, research in this area should not be restricted to perceptions of beauty; it should map out various aspects of sensory experience that involve interest, pleasure, meaning, or emotional responses…For instance, whereas aesthetic designs can convey meaning by signaling specific product- or brand characteristics, they might also influence consumers' perceptions of meaningful brand relationships, or even *overall meaning in life*. (Hagtvedt 426; emphasis added)

Marketers recognize the power of aesthetic experience and its influence on identity, and can seek to sell it through these new internet aesthetics. Such aesthetics often inform purchases. As researchers noted after the previously mentioned interviews within "The Aesthetics of the Self," "When users

pursue their interest in an Internet aesthetic that they see as compatible with their selves, they also gain inspiration for interior decoration, books, and other forms of *consumption*" (citation; emphasis added). When an advertisement displays an aesthetic, identity-validating experience, it inclines the consumer to believe the product being sold may do the same. Overconsumption of non-necessities that only contribute to one's life through this manner is dangerous. In the previous study regarding the Femme aesthetic experience as well, the writer argues, "[I]t is worth noting that these types of phrases[those included in soft femme digital culture]—"You are worth it"—also show up in neoliberal marketing that works to emphasize self-care and self-regulation as ways to encourage productivity, consumption, and individualism over collective responses" (Shwartz). Some level of awareness is certainly required when digesting aesthetic content to avoid this trap exploiting one's yearn for identity.

Capitalism is an economic system that places the self at the center. Therefore, it is no surprise that such a system would quickly realize that the self-creating aspect of internet aesthetics can be sold to consumers easily. One might think that avoiding falling victim to such superficial schemes would be simple, however; the nature of the aesthetic experience might make the individual particularly vulnerable. Returning to the immediacy thesis for a moment, writer in aesthetic politics Davide Panagia argues "This is the prestige, the conjuror's reveal, of the aesthetic object: it affords an immediate sensation of concreteness that resists the necessity of having to validate its actuality" (Panagia). Making conscious and beneficial choices here requires *reason* regarding personal consumption that, at least on old Tumblr, was not necessary before.

Fortunately, the offer of the aesthetic experience extends beyond a purchase. In "The Aesthetic Self," there was an interesting revelation:

> An even more surprising finding was that we found no difference between a pure aesthetic condition (coming to care about an aesthetic domain such as music) and conditions that additionally included an activity or commitment (learning to play an instrument and dedicating life to music). This gives support to an inherently aesthetic effect independent of associated dedication of resources or activities. It is the presence of aesthetic engagement or experience itself, not the associated activities, that seems to drive judgments about identity here. (Fingerhut et al.)

The aesthetic experience forms identity regardless of ownership or effort spent to obtain it. In other words, to have an identity, one does not need to buy it. Rather, they can simply imagine and enjoy it in whatever accessible, sustainable way possible. Current consumer culture sucks joy out of most current internet aesthetic content. However, just as Projectionist inspired David Karp to start Tumblr, maybe one day the old Tumblr will inspire someone else to create a new platform where aesthetic experiences may be held safely.

The aesthetic experience that internet aesthetics create is a powerful, self-constructive tool. Many recognize this, including both users and those seeking the money of said users. With the continued unfaithful usage of aesthetics to market, the vitriol toward its consumerist nature might indeed grow as well. Deconstructing the cheap tactics of capitalism is certainly a step towards ending the harm overconsumption brings, but I do hope the aesthetic experience can be salvaged and preserved from the fire.

Despite my original dismissal of *The Secret History*, I eventually decided to put my prejudice aside and investigate it for myself. Almost six hundred pages later, I understood the allure. Tartt leaves *The Secret History*'s meaning largely up to the reader's own understanding, a phenomenon that fierce online forum discussions on theories and themes confirmed. Some consider it satirical, others declare it as utterly self-serious, and its purposeful ambiguity allows both interpretations to exist.

Personally, I read *The Secret History* as a cautionary tale. After the whirlwind of aesthetic mystery, the characters are either unhappy, lost in mundanity, or dead. One might argue that this ending is due to the character's pursuit of the aesthetic, or beauty in which they were bound to lose themselves. However, that "loss of self" is what they sought. As the characters listen intently to their professor at the story's beginning, he teaches, "Beauty is terror. Whatever we call beautiful, we quiver before it. And what could be more terrifying and beautiful, to souls like the Greeks or our own, than to lose control completely? To throw off the chains of being for an instant, to shatter the accident of our mortal selves?" (Tartt 45). The aesthetic experience is ultimately linked to the self, and when this link is shattered and the self is lost, the resulting experience becomes horrifying.

The aesthetic experiences found within internet aesthetics provide identity for those who embrace them. This relationship with the content is valuable, and brands recognize and seek to sell this experience if they can. Nevertheless, as seen with Tumblr's advent, a platform where users are free of the for-profit marketing model results in an outlet for many to explore who they are. The remaining uncertainty is whether or not a platform like that can exist underneath a system where a company requires profit in order to survive. Therefore, further research must investigate the ability of social media to adapt, without compromising their core base of users. Modern philosophy should also undertake serious interest in these internet aesthetics, as without a doubt, they demonstrate unique understandings of the worlds within their archived blogs. And if identity can be produced through an aesthetic object, then one must also carefully observe how these objects are being created. Consciousness of popular art may be more necessary than society believes.

And for that silly Claude glass used to tint the world, if it truly makes reality more beautiful, who am I to judge? Social media can be an excellent path to paint a picture of one's identity, but when they look in the mirror, they must be able to see themselves reflected back. If a warped, rose-colored version of ourselves is how we desire to be seen, and how we consequently perform, then perhaps *that* version is the most honest, true depiction of who we really are.

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Navigating our Swing State: A Study of Political Polarization in North Carolina

Aaron Castelino

Political polarization is the divergence of political ideologies towards opposite extremes, and is not new in terms of how American politics have developed. Ever since our country was founded, political parties have been in constant competition to dominate the United States, with people holding extreme views on opposite ends of the political spectrum. This is evident as early as the 1780s, in which the Federalist and Anti-Federalist parties formed during the struggle to ratify the Constitution. Political factions coalesced as the Federalists centered their ideology on a strong government while the Anti-Federalists promoted states' rights. As political tensions intensified over the following years, American citizens categorized into one of these ideologies, with minimal middle ground. This led President George Washington to state in his *Farewell Address*:

> The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries which result gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and . . . turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty. (Washington)

Washington foreshadows the current state of our two-party system in this address. He warns that polarization causes citizens to support the power of an individual leader of a political party to defeat the other party and elevate themself to a higher standing, compromising public freedom.

According to an article from the Pew Research Center, "on average, Democrats and Republicans, [the two most prominent political parties in the United States], are farther apart ideologically today than at any time in the last 50 years" (DeSilver 2022). This is particularly evident in North Carolina, a contentious swing state where either party could reasonably win in elections. The years 2008-2012 were among the most politically volatile periods for North Carolina, propelling the state to become a major political battleground due to the extreme ideological differences between both parties. These "seismic shifts" are documented by Tom Eamon in his book, *The Making of a Southern Democracy: North Carolina Politics from Kerr Scott to Pat McCrory*. He states that during the 2008 election period, there was a lack of incumbent[1] politicians, as former President George W. Bush, former Vice President Dick Cheney, and former North Carolina Governor Mike Easley were due to complete their maximum of two four-year terms in office. At this time, North Carolina continued to lean Republican based on previous election results over the past ten years. However, as a result of the lack of incumbents, the vulnerability of the Republican Party started to increase, leading to extremely narrow victories for Democrats in the presidential, gubernatorial, and senator elections. When President Barack Obama won the electoral votes of North Carolina in 2008, the official tally was as follows: 2,142,651-2,128,474 (Eamon 294).

In another unexpected turn, by the 2010 midterm elections, the Senate and House shifted again to lean Republican, this time to a point where Republicans could pass the margin to override a governor veto. Eamon writes, "The Senate went from a 30-20 Democratic advantage to a 31-19 Republican edge. The House went from 68 Democrats and 52 Republicans to 67 Republicans and 52 Democrats. If all Senate Republicans voted together, they would have more than the 60 percent needed to override a veto from the governor" (Eamon 310).

Most recently, in the 2024 elections, President-elect Donald Trump won the sixteen electoral votes of North Carolina by 3.2%, which continued the streak of presidential elections that were decided by less than 5%, the longest such streak of any state in the United States (*Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*). These "seismic shifts" and close electoral races present North Carolina's status as a politically disputed and polarized state.

North Carolina is a microcosm of the intense political pendulum of the United States, and polarization has had major effects on our lives in our increasingly multicultural yet divided state. In this paper, I will analyze the factors and trends that have led to such a high level of polarization. I will start by discussing how modern technology and social media has amplified polarization today. Following this, I will discuss the political trends of sorting, homogenization, and gerrymandering, all of which contribute significantly to polarization. Then, I will investigate an example of legislation in North Carolina that has been affected by polarization: the 287(g) Immigration Act. Lastly, I will offer ways to leviate the effects of polarization, including representative assembly models and expanding policy referendums.

1. incumbent - currently holding office

Political parties have been in constant competition to dominate the United States. With emerging technologies, polarization has become more visible in local communities and at the national level. A 2011 study by Indiana University researchers investigated over 250,000 tweets on X (formerly Twitter) over a timespan of six weeks leading up to the 2010 U.S. congressional midterm elections. Using clustering data analysis algorithms, the researchers noticed a highly segregated partisan[1] structure with minimal connectivity between left-leaning and right-leaning users (Conover et al 2011). This supports the notion of "confirmation bias," where individuals are more likely to intentionally find sources that agree with their initial beliefs, altering an algorithm that curates similar recommended content. In the context of social media and technology, individuals who lean Democrat are more likely to follow news sources such as CNN or activists such as Olivia Julianna, whereas individuals who lean Republican are likely to follow Fox News or Ben Shapiro. This often creates an echo chamber in which individuals immediately approve or disapprove content depending on the viewpoint. However, a recent experiment from Duke University added another layer of complexity to understand the effects of social media on polarization. Democratic and Republican X (formerly Twitter) users were selected to follow a bot that reposts content from supporters of the opposing party. The experiment surprisingly found that "after a month of exposure, the Democrats retained about the same attitudes - but the Republicans ended up [even] more conservative than when they started the study" (De-Wit et al 2019). This suggests that the influence of technology is more nuanced: politicians post tweets using extreme language that often creates overwhelmingly negative responses from supporters of the opposing party, catalyzing polarization. With even more technologies developed since, it is only evident that polarization has gotten worse with the spread of misinformation.

Several political trends in North Carolina contribute to an extreme level of polarization. Geographic sorting and homogenization, for example, involve the movement of voters into areas where communities tend to match their political ideology.

Figure 1 is a set of maps of North Carolina that present incumbent party affiliations in three time periods, 2003-2004, 2013-2024, and 2023-2024 (*North Carolina General Assembly*). As shown in these maps, more House districts in rural areas leaned Republican as time passed, whereas urban areas almost always leaned Democrat, presenting the effects of sorting and political homogenization in certain areas. Moreover, certain demographics affect the movement of individuals towards left- or right-leaning areas. For example, individuals with degrees in higher education tend to seek jobs in research universities around North Carolina, such as Duke University or schools within the University of North Carolina System, located in urban or suburban, often left-leaning cities. In addition, minorities often seek a greater community and abundance of protections in areas that agree with their political ideologies.

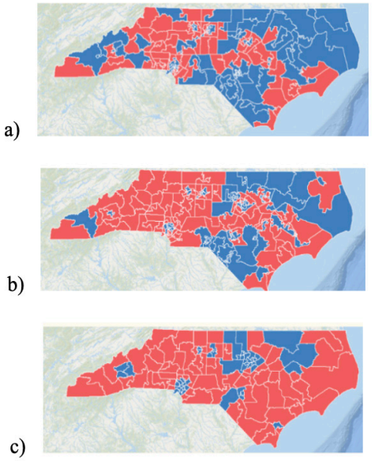


Figure 1. Maps of North Carolinian House incumbent party affiliations in (a) 2003-2004, (b) 2013-2014, and (c) 2023-2024 (*North Carolina General Assembly*).

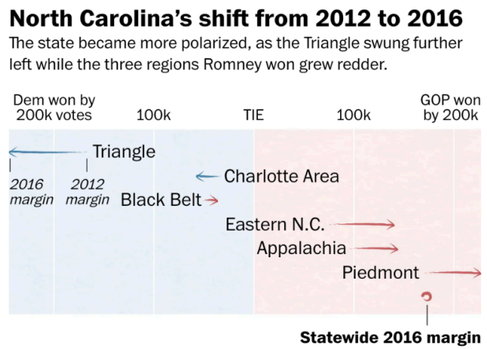


Figure 2. A graph representing the political shifts in regions in North Carolina from 2012-2016. The Triangle and Charlotte Area swung further left while much of the rest of the state swung towards the right ("The Six Political States of North Carolina," The Washington Post).

Figure 2, from *The Washington Post*, presents political shifts as a result of sorting from 2012-2016. It is evident that Democrats tend to cluster in cities and suburbs, as shown by the relatively significant leftward margins for the Triangle

1. Partisan - committed to the ideology of a specific political party

and the Charlotte Area. On the other hand, Republicans tend to inhabit more rural areas around the state, as exemplified by the rightward shifts in Eastern North Carolina, Appalachia, and the general Piedmont region. Many of these regions presented in Figure 2 developed more lopsided margins in favor of a specific party, leading to greater homogeneity in local elections. As people tend to cluster in communities where residents tend to believe in similar ideologies, this reduces exposure to differing perspectives, creating an echo chamber in which like-minded individuals interact with one another. Over time, these individuals often develop a radical ideology and perception against individuals with differing political views, considering them inherently different and rendering them invalid. It is evident that North Carolina has "been gripped by partisan warfare . . . [c]ities and suburbs have grown bluer, White rural areas have grown redder, and when one party wins, it makes the place inhospitable for the other one" (Tierney and Weigel 2020).

Another significant trend that North Carolina is particularly notorious for is gerrymandering: purposely shaping congressional districts to contain certain groups of individuals in order to gain an advantage in elections. Both Democrats and Republicans engage in the practice, and its effects are widespread, strongly affecting political strategies and the voting results of certain demographics. Gerrymandering amplifies the influence of more extreme Republicans and Democrats, reducing the number of competitive congressional districts and diminishing the views of moderates living in these areas. Since gerrymandering creates districts that are considered "safe" for parties, the winners of elections within gerrymandered districts tend to vote towards extreme policy agendas relating to their own ideology, driving polarization. For the 2022 election cycle, five out of every six House races were decided by 10 percentage points or more (Ruffing 40). In addition, the percentage of competitive congressional districts fell to 14%, a new low (Ruffing 40). Moreover, gerrymandering significantly decreases voter efficacy, the belief that an individual vote has value in determining an election. Voters in gerrymandered districts who support an opposing party tend to be less likely to vote, reinforcing the belief in a two party system with an unbridgeable divide.

The North Carolina General Assembly is responsible for redistricting state maps every ten years. Figure 3 represents two of the top ten most gerrymandered districts in the United States prior to 2016, North Carolina's fourth and twelfth congressional districts. These districts were intentionally shaped by a majority-Republican General Assembly to include as many people of a certain demographic as possible in one district - particularly those who lived in urban areas. Since individuals in urban areas tend to vote Democrat, this enabled Republicans to win elections in ten out of thirteen congressional districts in North Carolina at the time, while Democrats only won three, including the 4th and the 12th district. In 2016, however, the 12th district was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in Cooper v. Harris. The Court ruled that "[North Carolina] reconfigured District 12, increasing its [black voting-age population] from 43.8% to 50.7%" (*Cooper v. Harris 2017*). This drastic increase in Black voters within a specific district, who have often historically voted Democrat, was evidence of gerrymandering to ensure that Republicans had a much higher chance of winning other congressional districts in North Carolina. As a result of the case, the Republican Party in North Carolina had to produce a new map by the upcoming 2016 elections.

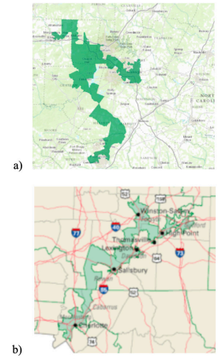


Figure 3. Maps of North Carolina Congressional Districts 4 (a) and 12 (b) prior to 2016. At the time of their existence, were the third and seventh most gerrymandered congressional districts in the United States (North Carolina General Assembly).

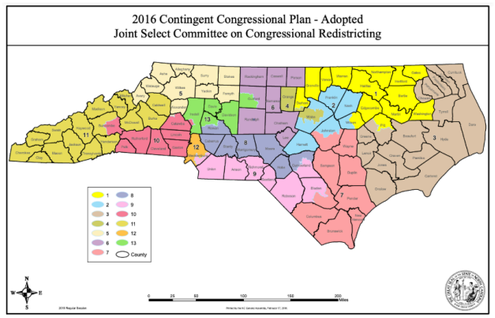


Figure 4. A map of North Carolina's congressional districts, established in 2016 (North Carolina General Assembly).

Figure 4 above shows the results of the redistricting period. Unlike in Figure 3, the most obviously gerrymandered districts prior to 2016 were reconciled into more compact, typical shapes. However, the partisan results remained the same, with a 10-3 split in favor of Republicans, even though equal numbers of voters in North Carolina have historically voted for Democrats and Republicans. This still constituted an example of gerrymandering as several of North Carolina's most populous counties (which surrounded urban areas and leaned Democratic) were divided across multiple districts.

Wake County and Guilford County, surrounding Raleigh and Greensboro respectively, are the second- and third-most populous counties in North Carolina. However, this map divided Wake and Guilford counties between two districts based on political ideologies, which contributed to Republicans maintaining the same split until their map was again ruled unconstitutional in 2019.

This level of gerrymandering had a significant impact on community representation in elections. Since the partisan split remained the same, it is evident that minority communities could not advocate for their own representation in elections. In Guilford County specifically, the split between the 6th and 13th congressional districts in 2016 combined the city of Greensboro (a heavily Democrat-leaning city) with many Republican rural communities. In addition, North Carolina A&T State University, a historically-Black university, was divided into two districts, in which their representatives supported extreme policies that were not supported by residents (Buck). Since gerrymandering contributes to the urban-rural political divide in North Carolina, polarization occurs to a great extent as representatives from "safe" districts tend to hold extreme ideological viewpoints, minimizing conversations between parties and representation for moderates.

As a result of these trends, it is evident that political polarization occurs to a great extent in North Carolina. To examine the far-reaching effects of polarization, I turn to an example of modern immigration law, specifically the racial profiling of Latino residents in Alamance County within the 287(g) Act.

The 287(g) Act, developed in 1996, is a nationwide collaboration between the government and local police officers to identify, arrest, and conduct removal operations undocumented criminals. Since its enactment, agreements have been made between the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and local sheriffs at the county level. The agreement is divided into two types: the Warrant Service Officer Program and the Jail Enforcement Model. The fact that these models differ significantly by county have major implications on immigrants.

The Jail Enforcement Model "is designed to identify and process removable noncitizens - with criminal or pending criminal charges - who are arrested by state or local law enforcement agencies" (*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*). An example in North Carolina would be the Henderson County Sheriff's Office Agreement, in which it states, "ICE retains sole discretion in determining how it will manage its limited resources and meet its mission requirements" (*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*). This confines the work of sheriff's offices and ICE to criminals already in custody.

On the other hand, the Warrant Service Officer Program "allows ICE to train, certify and authorize state and local law enforcement officers to serve and execute administrative warrants" (*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*). An example of this is the Alamance County Agreement, which states, "The [Alamance County Sheriff's Office] is expected to pursue to completion all criminal charges that caused the alien to be taken into custody over which it has jurisdiction." This is significant because in this agreement, ICE essentially allows the Alamance County Sheriff's Office to identify and arrest immigrants who could potentially be found as undocumented immigrants. I turn to the example of Alamance County specifically to present the implications of this agreement, leading to unreasonable arrests against

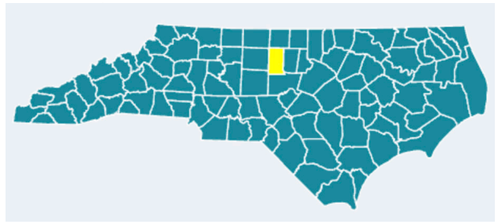


Figure 5. A map of Alamance County within North Carolina (North Carolina General Assembly).

Alamance County, located west of Durham and east of Greensboro (see Fig. 5), was the site of an extreme case of unreasonable arrests against Latino residents. As a rural area, Alamance County is considered a Republican stronghold in elections. The past twelve presidential election results within Alamance County leaned Republican, with eleven maintaining over 50% of voters for Republican candidates (*Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*). Many representatives and elected officials in Alamance County often hold extreme views on Republican policy. In 2007, Sheriff Terry Johnson, a Republican, signed a Memorandum of Agreement with ICE under the 287(g) Warrant Service Officer program (*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*). However, in 2012, the Department of Justice investigated closely into the Alamance County Sheriff's Office (ACSO) in response to allegations regarding discriminatory practices. As part of this investigation, the Department of Justice conducted studies and statistical analyses that concluded that ACSO sheriffs took discriminatory actions against Latino residents. The findings of the studies, presented in a press release, are as follows:

- ACSO deputies target Latino drivers for traffic stops;
- A study of ACSO's traffic stops on three major county roadways found that deputies were between four and 10 times more likely to stop Latino drivers than non-Latino drivers;
- ACSO deputies routinely locate checkpoints just outside Latino neighborhoods, forcing residents to endure police checks when entering or leaving their communities;

- ACSO practices at vehicle checkpoints often vary based on a driver's ethnicity. Deputies insist on examining identification of Latino drivers, while allowing drivers of other ethnicities to pass through without showing identification;
- ACSO deputies arrest Latinos for minor traffic violations while issuing citations or warnings to non-Latinos for the same violations;
- ACSO uses jail booking and detention practices, including practices related to immigration status checks, that discriminate against Latinos;
- The sheriff and ACSO's leadership explicitly instruct deputies to target Latinos with discriminatory traffic stops and other enforcement activities;
- The sheriff and ACSO leadership foster a culture of bias by using anti-Latino epithets; and
- ACSO engages in substandard reporting and monitoring practices that mask its discriminatory conduct. (*U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Public Affairs*)

In addition, minor offenses were recorded by ACSO officers for detainees as either "black" or "white", which hid the number of Latinos in jail for these offenses (*U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Public Affairs*). As an area that tends to lean extremely Republican, Alamance County represents a reflection of how extreme politics, to some extent, drove such decisions, leading to a polarizing abuse of power. In contrast, the leadership of Henderson County, also strongly Republican, did not take a more extreme and polarizing approach to their agreement on the 287(g) Act, primarily due to their contrasting policy agreement. As a result of racial profiling and an abuse of power, the Department of Homeland Security ended Alamance County's participation in 287(g).

With increased political polarization, communities have become more hostile toward one another. It is therefore necessary to evaluate how this necessitates change to develop a more unified North Carolina and America.

Alleviating polarization starts with more positive interactions and perspective undertakings between groups: seeking ways in which communities and individuals are similar rather than polar opposites. The University of California, Berkeley, states, "The 'contact hypothesis' suggests that getting to know each other can reduce prejudice between groups" (De-Wit et al 2019). However, given the current circumstances with polarization driving hostility among communities, it is necessary to regulate this dialogue to maintain positive interparty contact and ensure meaningful discussion and progress. An encouraging example that has been implemented in the past is the Citizens' Assembly model. Established in 2016 in the Republic of Ireland, the Assembly consists of Representative citizens from different regions of the country to consider political and legal questions, including climate change, referendums, and the country's constitution. The Assembly then considers each legal question and develops a series of draft recommendations to vote on. After making these recommendations, they report to the Irish Government, who will eventually take into account each recommendation into their decisions. The assembly has been effective in demonstrating public support for often controversial issues in the country.

In early 2019, the Citizens' Assembly published a joint report and established a Joint Committee on Climate Action. A chamber in the Irish Government endorsed this report, creating and adopting a climate action plan that included many of the proposals of the Citizens' Assembly (*The Citizens' Assembly*). Most recently, in November 2024, the Government of Ireland released a response to the Citizens' Assembly recommendations on biodiversity loss, stating that out of 159 recommendations submitted by the Citizens' Assembly, "134 are considered in progress," meaning that elements of these recommendations are being incorporated into Government action plans, and "15 are [already] being implemented" (*Government of Ireland* 4). The Citizens' Assembly model has proven effective in contributing to progress while encouraging a diverse yet safe space for citizens to voice their opinions and view political issues from differing perspectives. Since the Government of Ireland operates very similarly to the United States as a republic, the model serves as an example for an approach that could be implemented in North Carolina and the United States, as it could have significant benefits for individuals to understand and collaborate with diverse perspectives.

With a changing political landscape, another point of further interest would be expanding referendums for specific policies rather than the political parties that encompass them. While referendum voting occurs to some degree in local elections, it is worth considering whether this could be expanded. A benefit of expanding policy referendums would be the greater representation of the often complex positions of moderate and independent voters, as these voters would not have to align themselves with a specific ideology that encompasses a set of positions. However, it is imperative to note that a change in election structure to this degree would require a significant political shift, and whether these elections do bring forth progress are the result of many factors that contribute to their implementation. In the past, democracies have regulated these referendums to ensure progress in the fairest possible manner. Referendums in Switzerland "have to be about precisely defined changes to the law, [rather than] vaguely defined outcomes" (De-Wit 2019). In 2011, a referendum in New Zealand took place on whether the country should maintain their pre-existing voting system or switch to any potential alternatives. For this referendum specifically, "an independent educational body was created to inform both sides of the debate without taking a position (as the British government controversially did during the Brexit referendum)" (De-Wit 2019). As presented by these examples, while there are several ways in which policy referendums may yield poor results, it is still worth reflecting on how - if well implemented - referendums can cut through divisions and create more progress.

In terms of rapidly developing technologies and social media trends, it is particularly necessary for companies to better regulate advertisements that target specific political ideologies or communities. However, as individual users, we could treat social platforms like we would our physical community for more productive political discussions. Research has also shown that overwhelmingly high numbers of likes, shares, and comments prompt users to examine and understand political content that they may not necessarily support (Messing and Westwood 2012). Either way, as individuals and active technology users, we must be more open-minded and receptive to opinions that we may agree or disagree with.

This study represents an assessment of political polarization in North Carolina, examining how specific trends such as sorting, homogenization, and gerrymandering have divided communities and affected legislation. Moreover, technology and partisan media have catalyzed political polarization among users, placing them on one of two sides that quickly drift farther and farther apart. These developments have had widespread, long-lasting effects on policies and legislations in North Carolina, including immigration law through the 287(g) Act. This extreme level of polarization in North Carolina represents the intense politics of the United States, significantly affecting communities and legislation nationwide. Finally, the study proposes solutions pertaining to representative models, social media use, and policy referendums to alleviate the extremely high level of political polarization exhibited in North Carolina and the United States today.

While I studied the application of polarization in modern immigration specifically, the greater effects of polarization, especially on local law and policy, expand well beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, the causes of polarization are greater than that of simply sorting, homogenization, technological developments, and gerrymandering. Future research in polarization could explore further trends that contribute to polarization and to what extent they do so. A number of studies could also experiment or investigate further the efficacy of Citizens' Assembly models, policy referendums, and social media communities, paving the way for a unified North Carolina and a unified America. Although there is a long way to go, these solutions could mitigate our issues pertaining to political polarization, and lead our country into, as former President Biden stated, "not red states or blue states, but a United States" (Biden 2020).

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On Reactions to Objectivity in Print Capitalism, Fake News, and Social Media

Teresa Fang

On the last night of a summer journalism program last year, everyone huddled into a small lounge at American University. The thirty of us students sat on the ground while our six mentors, all professional journalists, sat on the TV stand. Instead of letting us sleep at 10 p.m. that day, the mentors told us to meet them there. From fashionably dressed reporters to slothish high school students again, we filtered into the small room like ducklings. Over empty juice boxes and the crinkle of chip bags, our mentors swore us to secrecy—"What is said in this room stays in this room"—before hitting us with stories of experiences we could not dare simulate a press conference for. In a stark turn of topics, we were pulled out of what we previously knew as the secret lives of multitalented journalists and into the vulnerabilities of the profession.

One was a teen mother, who made terrible decisions in the past but decided to do her best and is now the director of the capital's top broadcasting station. One is the best anchor in the Midwest but at the cost of barely being able to rest or return home to family. One has been brushing shoulders with celebrities for three decades, and was an alcoholic and severe party-goer for years before owning up to the shame to himself—he's now eight years sober and the best TV/comedy critic I know. One grew up in a town where cows outnumber people, was homeless for years in New York City, and changed suits in the bathrooms of McDonalds to prepare for job interviews. He now works for *Bloomberg* overseas, and, I bet, secretly takes pride in his name being on the United Arab Emirates' blacklist. One is a very strong writer and the most calm person I know who follows migrant families on the Texan border and tells the painful stories of migrant families who had their children taken away from them in school shootings. She told us she broke down several times when writing the stories, to the point where she considered quitting during the pandemic. Our sixth mentor looked way younger than he was; he was expecting his first baby soon. For someone we knew as an always goofy, happy guy, we were reminded that behind the duty of being great journalists was also our natural identities as mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and humans who are constantly weighing right from wrong.

There was nothing we could do but sniffle in tears. Huddled in this tiny lounge, scared of nothing but an unknown tension, we comforted each other in silence and mixed looks. The fear didn't last long. It took bravery and shaky voices for us younger journalists to speak out about our own worries. Deep inside, we already knew pursuing journalism as a career would be unpredictable. But hours later, after our mentors sent us to our rooms downstairs, most of us lingered secretly in the hallway whispering fears of a rapidly changing future with or without our love for journalism.

The entire story likely makes us sound childish, and understandably so: by day, we were stoic pseudo-professionals but by night, we were boys and girls who with tear-stained cheeks were always ready to hear our peers out, patting them on the back, rubbing each other's hands in comfort. Anyone who is in the journalism industry would recognize that hearing the vulnerable stories of journalists is something seldom visible in the public sphere, albeit it is undoubtedly important.

I've been a journalist for seven years now, but I'm still not nearly as skilled as my mentors. However, I have learned a bit how to dance the line between journalistic duty and personal identity. Journalists are people too, and we write our stories and choose exact words for our headlines and text because that's what people read first and decide if they want to read further. That's why when I see ugly emails from readers, I've learned to take it with a grain of salt; one more ugly email means one more conversation sparked by my work. But when I see ugly emails like in the middle photo below of course, I'm compelled to react:

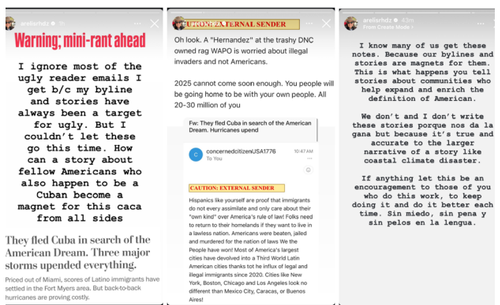


Figure 1. (Teresa Fang)

This is a post in response to racism and hate by one of my journalism mentors, *Washington Post* journalist Arelis Hernández whose stories have made her a target for hateful emails and comments. Hers was a human-interest story emails politicized as a target for xenophobic and racist rhetoric, blaming immigrants for issues in society and suggesting the deportation of millions of people. On top of it, these emails direct their frustration with immigrants to Hernández's Cuban identity.

Despite the hostility, Hernández emphasizes the importance of reporting on these stories with truth and accuracy, in this case, constructing narratives on larger issues like climate change affecting immigrant communities. But most importantly of all, she encourages other journalists to continue doing meaningful work and to stay fearless and unapologetic in telling stories that highlight the diversity and challenges of American communities. In my view, that is the beauty of journalism. Journalism goes beyond a traditional definition as a process of gathering, writing, editing, and disseminating information through media, or a career for people who practice journalism. It is a value.

No media can portray itself perfectly; there are hundreds of thousands of news sources and outlets across the world, and in America, they're often grouped into one political identity, an evil superbody known as "The Media" who try everything they can to put profit above a commitment to truth and morals. Simply put, journalism is portrayed in public sentiment as consisting of white-collar workers ruled by a bureaucratic machine called "society." But isn't that too vague? How is it fair to say that one reporter or article can suddenly dictate that the whole population of reporters and media are all "fake news"? If we are looking to make our country "great again," we need to first examine what such interpretations made that reinspection of our country necessary.

Journalism was a product of the Enlightenment in 18th-century Europe, carried by the invention of the printing press in the 15th century. The press signaled the end of the medieval conception of simultaneity—one's apprehension of a combined connectedness, fortuity, and fatality in a language of "continuity"—from rationalist secularism and marked the dawn of the age of nationalism, or in other words the birth of the imagined community of the nation facilitated by the novel and the newspaper (Anderson). These forms of capturing thoughts and scriptures provided the technical means for representing the *kind* of imagined community, a nation.

If we take a look at the front page of *The Washington Post*, we might find stories about the latest Supreme Court case overturned, migrant families in Texas, the latest robot in Japan, this year's Christmas-themed White House, the reigning Wimbledon champion, and Trump's latest Cabinet nominee. What makes these events seem connected? Nothing but the fact they appear in the same issue, which means that the connection between these stories is imagined. This imagined linkage is from 1) the same date and masthead appearing on the top of each page in the newspaper, and 2) they are "one-day best-sellers" in which readers know that it is in high demand and simultaneous consumption. When the newspaper reader observes exact replicas of the paper in his hands being consumed by his neighbors, shop owners, librarians, or visiting scholars, they are continually reassured that their imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life. In other words, the mechanism that connected individuals to the world, or an imagined sense of the world, was print-capitalism. The very existence of stories to be read for societal and intellectual benefit can leave its readers vulnerable to distrust in democracy, institutions, expertise, and each other. But journalists should not take all of the blame for actions committed by their readers in response to their journalism; it is an arduous task to regain trust especially when journalism functions and responds to politics and democracy.

What is good journalism, and how can we be good readers of journalism? How are we to understand journalism as a profession, and journalism as a value? The normative answer to these questions is bound up with claims about the relationship between journalistic integrity and conduct, and a civil society capable of mass communication and hybrid forms of media literacy. In this context, the civil society can be understood as a highly-responsive, technology-savvy audience who consumes news with the same frequency and attitude as they consume online entertainment. To keep up with the comprehensive demands and speed of new technology, the audience becomes an "expectant audience," whose main goal for consuming news is to pass judgment on whether the news they consume is "good" or "bad. Rather, I propose that the more mindful reading of news for the expectant audience is to recognize all news stories are published for a bigger purpose of telling the narrative of complicated social disasters, which define the wider narrative of what it means to live with American political freedom.

In this paper, I argue that true objectivity in journalism is impossible, and instead, journalism should be a media read with an open mind. We can understand the point of these claims by way of accepting the historical contexts of print culture to click journalism and being better readers and writers of journalism.

The purpose of journalism is not to become the one source of information the public should rely on, but a series of sources to build one's own opinions upon. In fact, I would like to reject the traditional standard of journalism as an always unbiased source of news. Journalism never evolved from (or should be less visible in) prioritizing public responsiveness over news-writing. The writers' expressions of opinion in news articles are both a simultaneity and a necessity to keep readers interested. Perhaps, that is a good thing for readers—as long as the readers read journalism standing outside the frame of the author's original intentions and use logic, and journalists "show their work" on how they arrived at a claim so readers may better understand whether to agree or not.

For journalists, we must accept that it is inevitable to be subjective in our writing, but we can still provide information that readers can use to make their own informed decisions. In this way, we can realize the good *of* journalism, rather than what journalism is good *for*.

Twenty-first-century news readers often bemoan the slippage between reporting and opinion, but this uncertainty has been in place in journalism for more than a century—and if true objectivity is indeed nonexistent, we must then look at how the modern consciousness originated in print culture, flourishing in yellow journalism where that consciousness finds institutionalized expression, then to the allures of click journalism.

One particularly crucial moment in American journalism was the turn of the twentieth century. Print culture expanded radically from 1885 to 1910, in a period of rapid and disorienting social, political, and economic transformation. American social life became aflame with industrialization, increased immigration, the rise of the corporation and capital markets, the migration of rural workers to cities, and upended previous social rules to emphasize new values of respectability, local authority, and individual autonomy. What could the American people use to explain America to them? They turned to the burgeoning print industry. In 1870, there were about 34 newspapers per 100 households. By 1990, it rose to 94 per 100 households (Starr).

The effects brought about in part by the cheaper and better quality paper and printing processes were central to the late-nineteenth-century communication revolution. Social life became a long and sustained discussion among workers and observers of the print marketplace when all public communication was sustained among desires to read, gossip, and expand intellectually and geographically. Literacy rates increased, public schools and libraries multiplied, the demand for printed materials increased, and newly literate African Americans and immigrants joined the reading workforce, increasing the size of the middle class. More Americans were reading than ever before. In response, the printing industry produced newspapers, magazines, and books shaping every day's intellectual currents, political commitments, and social attitudes. Each conversation was a clear expression of the self-consciousness that we were joining a national communication system (Forde and Foss). With people in cities more educated than before, the expanding print market led to cheaper paper and printing processes, better transportation systems, increased advertising, and everything imaginable in a communication revolution—ultimately resulting in a notion of what constituted a "desirable" account of reality within the reading public.

In 1974, James Carey wrote about recovering the "consciousness" or "interpretation of reality" embodied in the form of journalism we might characterize today as a "report," or ultimately the truth that readers should accept on their own accord. Published in his landmark article "The Problem of Journalism History," he encouraged journalism historians to develop a cultural history of journalism, calling for a history of the *idea* of the report rather than a history of the report. For Carey, the knowledge of how a report shapes reality was the motivation why we needed to keep a constant cultural history of journalism:

> The central and as yet unwritten history of journalism is the history of the idea of a report: its emergence among a certain group of people as a desirable form of rendering reality, its changing fortunes, definitions and redefinitions over time (that is, the creation and disappearance of successive stylistic waves of reporting), and eventually, I suppose, its disappearance or radical education as an aspect of human consciousness. (Carey 90-91)

If the history of the idea of the report can tell us what we perceive as truth, then the history of the report can tell us how we perceived it. American literary theorist Kenneth Burke, best known for his arguments about rhetoric, presents a model called the pentad for analyzing written and spoken language to better understand end predict human behavior. The pentad, adds specificity to the five journalistic questions by offering insights into the following five components of a situation: "what was done (act) when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" (Burke XV).

Burke theorized this as a method for analyzing human actions and motivations. Because the 5 Ws of journalism and the pentad are so similar in their inquiry and analysis processes, we can reasonably conclude journalism serves the same purpose for revealing things about human motives and behaviors. Like other literary processes, journalism is a creative, imaginative, and symbolic work; those five components size up situations, names their elements, and in a way that contains an attitude toward them. As Anderson defined in *Imagined Communities*, a "nation" and its relevant terms like "nationality," "nation-ness," and "nationalism" are "cultural artefacts of a particular kind." In other words, if a nation is multiple realities constructed by human imagination, then journalism fuels the construction of a nationalism, "invent[ing] nations where they do not exist." Print capitalism had transformed the vernacular into the basis for national self-consciousness.

With each person reading the same words in a daily newspaper, face-to-face encounters are replaced with the print culture. The very notion of a national consciousness rests on the fundamentals of imagination: "Members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members… yet in the mind of each lives the image of their community" (Anderson). Journalism brought into a lived reality an imagined consciousness—a nationalism—powerful enough to have induced millions of people to willingly die in its name.

Thus, when we study the history of journalism, we are really studying ways in which people in the past announced to the world who they were. When we look at journalism and see past the subject matter, we are left with a vital story of the growth and transformation of the human mind shaped and expressed a collective identification with a larger group, we see the journalistic report's role in shaping American consciousness.

Another emergence from the late-nineteenth-century communication revolution were trade publications, magazines or newspapers that provide news and information for people working in a specific industry or trade. More people wanted jobs so more writers, editors, and publishers devoted more time and ink to providing practical writing and career advice of all kinds across all genres and print industries.

All writers were understood by trade journals to write in "literary" pursuits (Forde and Foss 6). As print culture increased, the boundaries between news and fiction were fluid and permeable. Trade journals generally did not insist on a firm differentiation between whether the story was for the purpose of public communication, of advancing authorship, or what constituted journalism and imaginative literature. For example, in its third year of publication in 1886, the trade journal for journalists, *The Journalist*, identified itself as the first trade publication for "newspaper-men" and "the twin professions of literature and journalism." These two categories were generally understood as different expressive categories, but to consider them as "twin professions" suggests that they follow socially recognized modes of cultural expression and must undergo a bureaucratized production to be published. In the same year, *The Writer*, a journal marketed to freelance writers, declared itself to be a "Monthly Magazine to Interest and Help All Literary Workers," meaning they were really trying to help people who worked in society, the reporters, more than fiction writers and poets.

Paradoxically, these trade journals understood American print culture to be comprised of many distinct genres of public expression, modes of authorship, and forms of industrial production, but also conceptualized all of it as "literature." But they chose to lean more heavily on the former route, replacing idealism with realism as the dominant mode of American thought and cultural expression by the 1880s and 1890s. Terms like "muckraking," "idealism," "naturalism," and "romanticism" helped to categorize different writing. For the national communication system, a social preference for realism and scientific thought unsettled romantic and idealist tendencies, as Victorian notions of "truth" in the divine or horrors were displaced by, most notably, Darwin's theory of natural selection and Spencer's theory of human evolution and perfectibility (Shi 66-70).

It may seem like a fascination with experience and facts took hold of American society and culture, but this version of realism was more of a belief in the social importance of documenting effects, the scientific method, and the results and accomplishments of scientific discoveries. This realization marked the turn of writing styles across print culture—in news-writing and fiction-writing—as many writers, editors, and publishers recommended limiting adjectives and overly descriptive language. William Dean Howells, in *Criticism and Fiction,* echoed this shift, arguing that literature should reflect ordinary life with honesty and restraint. He advocated for a "truthful treatment of material," rejecting sensationalism and flowery prose in favor of a more democratic and accessible form of storytelling (Howells 109).

One example of this urging appears in an article in *The Writer*, in October 1888. In this article, writer H.L. Richards Jr. attributed this story to a duty to teach younger journalists how to work faster, "know the ropes," and make better judgments of how to write an effective piece of news. Arguing that journalism was now a trade where most literary men have "no chance against the trained newspaper man who 'knows the ropes,'" Richards writes,

> You are told that the old order changes; that the man who succeeds now as a newspaper worker is he who has worked his way up, who "knows the ropes," who is prompt, active, and acute in getting his facts, who can judge accurately as to the value of any piece of news, and how much of his own or any other paper will probably want to make of it, and who can write it out in a "telling," or a "striking" or a "sensational" or an effective way… The advice of the old newspaper man to the young one, fairly epitomized, seems to be: "Learn all the ropes; get all the experience you can; acquire the art of making 'telling' and 'effective' stories, and throw overboard everything like literary style. There is no time for it; editors don't want it, and readers don't care for it.

A reverence for facts and the empirical did not, however, eliminate the requisite that news must be necessary to write news. It just meant that news writing conventions now were closely aligned with the empirical spirit. In 1892, the *Journalist* noted that in the past decade, journalism had increasingly relied on presenting facts and excluding opinions. The reporter learned that "their opinions are not facts, that their opinions are not news, and they keep those opinions to themselves" (A.B.). In an 1893 book titled "The Ladder of Journalism: How to Climb It," writer T. Campbell-Copeland insists that the essential purpose of American journalism was to report facts: "It is a common fault with young writers to be too diffuse in their reports—a circumstance to which their attention is soon called by the City Editor, for one of the first conditions of success in metropolitan journalism is the presentation to the public of the important facts and not a word more."

Gone was the friendly, intimate, first-person narrator that characterized many forms of print expression in the previous era, and no more addressing readers as "friends" and motivations to cultivate moral and social values in the reading audience. This was "a complete elimination of the writer's individuality," a contributor in the *Writer* suggested. In an 1894 article titled "How to Write a Newspaper

Article" in the *Journalist*, the contributor declared that "the reporter must sink his personality out of sight and merge his very identity in that of his paper. So long as he is a reporter it is an unpardonable sin for him to express his own ideas in his 'copy.' His business is to report facts and other people's opinions." News writing and gathering was becoming more like a scientific process, scientific in nature, and scientifically secured. The narrator had become an objective, detached, removed, and impersonal voice of modern literature and journalism.

Even papers that embraced sensational journalism generally prided themselves on factual reporting, which was a common trick deployed by newspapers in the heyday of yellow journalism to push an agenda or to sell more papers. In New York, the newspaper market was especially crowded with daily newspapers ("dailies") like the *New York Times, New York Evening Post, The World,* and the *New York Journal,* who in response to the invention of the linotype machine and the demand of interesting stories, were able to publish multiple editions every day.

In their competition to stand out among themselves, the *New York World* and the *New York Journal* enlisted the help of artists and cartoons, like the popular Yellow Kid cartoon from which the term "yellow journalism" was coined, and their headlines became bigger and more outrageous. For example, in January 1898, the U.S. battleship USS Maine was sent to Havana, Cuba, to watch over American interests during the Cuban uprising against Spain. An explosion aboard the Maine on February 15, 1898, caused it to sink in the harbor, killing 266 crew members. Although the exact cause of the accident was still unknown, within days, some newspapers were already blaming Spain, using misreported or fabricated evidence, published with large headlines and



Figure 2. "Maine Explosion Caused by Bomb or Torpedo?" The World (New York, NY), February 17, 1898. (NewspaperARCHIVE)



Figure 3. "Torpedo Hole Discovered by Government Divers in the Maine: Startling Evidence of Spanish Treachery Revealed," New York Evening Journal (New York, NY), February 17, 1898. (New York Journal)



Figure 4. "Spain Guilty!" New York Evening Journal (New York, NY), March 25, 1898. (New York Evening Journal)

gruesome renditions.

These headlines helped goad President William McKinley and the U.S. military to force a military response. On April 20, 1898, McKinley and Congress sent an ultimatum to Spain to withdraw from Cuba. The next day, Spain severed diplomatic ties and declared war on the U.S. Throughout this escalation of the war, the "yellowest of all these papers, the 'Journal,' actually printed thirty extra editions in a space of twelve or fourteen hours," as the *Indianapolis Journal* published in an article on April 18, 1898, writing "The recipe for making a war extra is to get a line of fact or rumor and charge it with the carbonic acid gas of imagination until it fills three columns, half made up of headlines in poster type." That is exactly what the *New York Journal* did on April

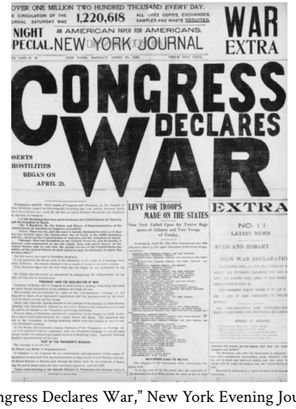


Figure 5. "Congress Declares War," New York Evening Journal, April 25, 1898. (Library of Congress)

25.

There are three main checks to yellow journalism. Profit motive is cited as one of the drivers of the Spanish-American War, which was in part fed by accounts of yellow journals. But there was so much fakery in the news that by the early 1900s, people eventually began to mistrust what they read, leading some newspapers to differentiate themselves in the opposite direction. For example, the *New York Times* introduced its slogan "All the News That's Fit to Print" in 1897, which it still uses in its masthead today, proving to the public the profitability of a "highly conservative paper" (Pomerantz 739). Thus, the first check was the public's changing demands of the idea of reality (the "report").

Specifically, the success of the *New York Times* is not due to the public demanding something better than the previous yellow journalism. The second check on yellow journalism was actually legal protection; it was because the public wanted explicit legal protection for personal privacy against unwanted private invasion, namely from the prying eyes of yellow journalists and gossip-mongers, according to an 1890 article in the *Harvard Law Review* (Warren and Brandeis). Some U.S. courts already recognized indirect legal protection for personal interests in privacy, but the publication of this landmark article incited more courts to consider more explicitly whether and how to give privacy more direct and substantial protection.

The third check was in the newspaper industry itself. In 1910, the first code of ethics for newspapers was proposed by W.E. Miller and adopted by the Kansas State Editorial Association in 1910 (Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 289-290)[1]. Similar codes were adopted across the U.S., as Eustace Cullinan described it in 1955: "[i]n recent decades the press of the nation has developed a code of ethics to which it adheres within reason" (Cullinan 1063-1064).

History told by an unscrupulous press, fueled by sensation and fabrication to earn views and money, is not unfamiliar to modern readers now who deal with the fake news of today's internet. But the rise and fall of yellow journalism offers important insights as to how fake news exists today and what the general public and its journalists can do about it. As the 1890s had the then-state-of-the-art technology of the linotype and printing press, the 21st century has the internet. Thus fake news has always been here regardless of the technology; in other words, the problem of fake news does not arise from technology. The Internet may have intensified and complicated fake news, but it is clear there has always been a delicate balance in journalism between public interest in factual reporting and private interests in scandalous headlines and profit.

Has more technology actually made people stupider? Currently, younger generations are struggling with their literacy skills—in 2020, Statista reported that 23% of Americans feel that they can recognize fake news, 67% believe that the spread of fake news on social media causes confusion, and 38% have shared fake news online (Statista). The Internet has not only helped spread fake news faster, but has also made it more believable and accessible. This leads to decreased media literacy and short attention spans, leading to what I call the "expectant audience"—consumers of information on the Internet and social media who take information at face value and don't want to think critically about the media they consume.

Michel Foucault in "What is an Author" posits that the the author is no longer the person who wrote the text, but a paratext that carries connotations that throw shade over the reading. Authorship and the different values and interpretations pulled from it are cultural products that vary widely through time and place. In other words, the author is essentially a projection of the manner in which we think about texts; Foucault writes that the name of the author is "unlike a proper name" in the sense that it "remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their form of existence." He explains that the very notion of writing makes it "subject to the test of oblivion and repression," hence making the "death of the author" necessary whenever a reader reads a piece of text or information:

> The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture. It has no legal status, nor is it located in the fiction of the work; rather, it is located in the break that founds a certain discursive construct and its very particular mode of being… The author function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society [at the author's time]. (Foucault 5)

Applied to our age of technology in the 21st century today, we shouldn't read journalism today just to agree or disagree with the author's claim in an article. Social media should not corrupt our own thoughts, but allow us to use our critical

1. Lies.—We condemn against truth:
   (1) The publication of fake illustrations of men and events of news interest, however marked their similarity, without an accompanying statement that they are not real pictures of the event or person but only suggestive imitations.
   (2) The publication of fake interview made up of the assumed views of an individual, without his consent.
   (3) The publication of interviews in quotations unless the exact, approved language of the interviewed be used. When an interview is not an exact quotation it should be obvious in the reading that only the thought and impression of the interviewer is being reported.
   (4) The issuance of fake news dispatches whether the same have for their purpose the influencing of stock quotations, elections, or the sale of securities or merchandise. Some of the greatest advertising in the world has been stolen through the news columns in the form of dispatches from unscrupulous press agents. Millions have been made on the rise and fall of stock quotations caused by newspaper lies, sent out by designing reporters.

thinking to form our own opinions. The expectant audience today consistently fails to understand media from a critical lens, leading to the miscommunication and hostility we see today, especially in the political side of social media which is more than often focused on extreme political viewpoints leading to intense polarization. In other words, writing is a performative act which only exists at the moment we read the words on the page because that is the only moment in which those words are actually given meaning—by us, who interpret them. So when we absorb information on social media, we are actually analyzing someone's reaction to their own thinking. Our critical thinking skills should be directed towards the influence of that thinking on ourselves, our feelings, and our behaviors, and allow ourselves to reflect, create, and react. By not practicing our critical analysis skills and seeing it as useless ("maybe the curtain is blue just because it is" rhetoric), we normalize anti-intellectualism.

To combat anti-intellectualism, we can look towards increasing media literacy in schools. Notions of media literacy have existed since the 1950s. In the United Kingdom, scholars and teachers proposed to teach students how to distinguish high culture versus popular culture through education. In the United States, the introduction of radio and television as part of people's daily lives and education cemented the increasing impact of mass media on media literacy. Then at the beginning of the 21st century, new media technologies made traditional literacy no longer sufficient for an individual to competently survive and thrive in this Internet ecology.

How have we gotten so bad at critical thinking? I suspect it is partially due to the fact there is so much to process. In an age of click journalism and mass media, 21st-century media literacy education is not limited to just traditional writing and reading, but also diverse practices of media, global interconnectedness, and hybrid forms of communication. Many social and cultural phenomena, political shifts, historical narratives, and predictions of the future have been represented and documented in popular culture and media, which takes the forms of film, television, art, books, news, and social media. Moreover, information is now available at our fingertips and it is impossible to have enough time to both scroll, be interested in the wide variety of that information, and maximize media consumption at the same time. This creates a tendency to "doomscroll," hours of endless scrolling where we really only have time to skim over the basic premise of a video, image, or article (more specifically, a headline) before going to the next interesting thing. Personally, I admit that I too play the role of an expectant audience sometimes. When I fall into the doomscrolling trap, I'm forced to categorize things into binaries of what's good or bad, or if an opinion is right or wrong with no in-between. Out of the fear of misinterpretation, we tend to rely on prior knowledge to distill complex topics into simple understandings which can only be wrong, as we do not process it with an open, learning mind. There is little space for analysis or personal thought. These habits form the basis for how everyday people take in information.

So what does it mean to keep learning new things in this 21st-century information economy? Certainly, it does not mean to be stagnant and read literary texts from the past just to master the content or the traditional texts students used in past classrooms: standardized textbooks, mass-produced student workbooks, teachers' manuals, standardized reading tests, etc.—the assumption that those methods are how people naturally acquire and use literacy best is itself a product of the early 20th century. Rather than a complete replacement of the "old media education," I actually see these new technologies (social media, online media consumption) as transforming or forming into a hybrid with the older systems of communication (TV, cinema, textbooks). After all, the existence of a paper like this already proves it is quite necessary to investigate new and old media.

Thus, we can argue that the media is not merely shaping our culture; it is our culture. Just as artificial intelligence today causes collective anxiety but also immense excitement in society, new technology is equipping individuals with the desire to obtain new literacies to fully engage in that ecology.

So, how *can* we be good readers of journalism? Good readers are mindful of the frame they read journalism from, meaning they have to switch gears from ones who read conclusions to those who read the evidence and comprehend the reasoning. Most importantly, above being a reader, they are also citizens as part of an American democracy. Charles Taylor, in his essay titled "Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere," claims that public opinions can only be developed in an environment where public conversation on public matters is possible. He says that public opinion should be "(1}... the product of reflection, (2) to emerge from discussion, and (3) to reflect an actively produced consensus" (Taylor 261).

An environment that nurtures public conversation makes possible the autonomous participation of citizens, a defining element of a flourishing civil society. As Christopher Tollefsen puts it, "Call this aspect of a successful community 'self-rule'... First, there can be no genuine self-rule if there is no common deliberation… Common deliberation is necessary both to determine who will bear the necessary authority in final determination [of the central message of an article], and to provide guidance for that final determination" (Tollefsen 296-297). It is the special feature of journalism both as a practice and as a profession to bestow upon readers an incredible power to discuss the content but also to give a second meaning to that content by its interpretation.

The profession of journalism should be understood by readers as the internal good of the practices that compose it and the institutional context from which its conduct and ethics are derived. Understanding the obligation to follow these rules makes journalists an obligatory but reluctant "steward" of democracy. Regardless of whether they are professional or amateur journalists, they have a craft knowledge of deciding what to write (thus defining "news") based on public significance, popular interest, and immediate values. Good writers are those who, as "stewards," write claims to uphold democracy and who "show their work," not those who write for profit or power—separating journalistic practice from the practice of journalism seen in the corporate workplace.

It is impossible to have complete objectivity in journalism. There is a long list of exceptions to "just the facts" journalism, not only under the guise of click and sensational journalism but also highly respected ones too, in news stories and even scientific papers. Just as narration and directed storytelling exist in all writing, there are also many expectations of journalists and newsrooms to be more diverse and represent minority populations. For example, in its beginnings in 1926, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) was given the mission to promote a sense of "Britishness" that included celebrating a distinctively British heritage. To highlight the intensity of their commitment, the company was even sworn allegiance to the practices of the Church of England (Seaton). Of course, America is religiously tolerant and it would turn the stomachs of many American journalists to commit to that intensity.

Still, American journalists also act in ways that show their obligation and affiliation to the United States. When there is a story they think may impact national security, they may customarily notify the government and negotiate the content of the story with relevant agencies, like when The *New York Times* notified the White House on the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and when *The Washington Post* alerted the National Security Agency in 1986 of a secret communications operation called "Ivy Bells" (Schudson 160), and more recently in March 2025, *Atlantic* editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg's role in the "Signalgate" incident. While in both circumstances, the journalists did have the upper hand in deciding how and when to spin the tale, they still negotiated with the government officials in a balance of maintaining national security and being the first to cover these exclusive headlines.

Many of my journalism mentors have repeated to me that connections are crucial to moving up the social ladder in the journalism industry. Likewise, that means the power that people you may never have met before—sources, mentors, and audiences—exercise over news makes representing democracy's best interests. On top of that, journalists often enter the industry with a high moral purpose and a love of writing, photography, traveling, or digital expression without much of a sense as to which beat they'll eventually settle on covering. So realistically, many reporters follow the rule of journalism where they start in the industry as a blank slate and are led by reality itself. To move up in the journalism rankings, this usually means placing a high value on reporting rather than opining.

The definition of a good journalist does not rest on whether they represent a democracy well or not, but on what sort of stewardship and language best serves a democratic society. Ultimately, the point of journalism is to teach others how to be their own journalists as they inform themselves on what is true and false, or what they should believe in versus what they should take with a grain of salt. The purpose of journalism is to equip individuals with facts and reasoning to create their own opinions on complicated historical and current issues.

One beauty of journalism is that anybody can write. Journalism is a field that dances on a knife edge between accepted professionalism and pure amateurism. They're not doctors or engineers who are respected for their mastery of the body or bridges and canals—regardless of whether they majored in journalism or picked it up as a "citizen journalist," each journalist earns respect from their writing and conduct. Schudson asks these deep questions:

> In practice, journalists frequently go beyond this craft knowledge to feel obligations to some ideal or authority higher than outdoing a rival, winning a more desirable audience, or pleasing their journalistic peers. But just what is that elusive higher authority? An allegiance to the public good? What do journalists know of that? That is, on what grounds do they presume to know more than others do? Or is the higher authority democracy? But what do journalists know of democracy that is unknown to ordinary mortals? Or is truth their ultimate objective? What do they know of truth that the rest of us do not? (Schudson 166)

There is no Supreme Court of journalism, so there is no definitive statement that can answer these questions. We have yet to scrutinize if journalism has developed a widespread code of conduct as to what its plan and purpose in democracy is, and if that plan is ethical to expect of all journalists in the first place. But, as a journalist myself, I *can* say that journalism has the ability to tell stories out of seemingly nothing. Journalism has never been single-mindedly devoted to its watchdog role, and has continuously proven itself to serve democracy in a variety of ways throughout American history: providing citizens with information-centered political news, offering political analyses, undertaking investigative reporting, presenting emotional and social stories, informing citizens about things previously unknown or confused about, attending to democratic processes, mobilizing citizens for politics, and many, many more. The industry still has room for improvement in better serving democratic ends, but we are already on the path to good journalism if there is a variety of news genres and balances of public and private interests.

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Subtitles Gone Wrong: The Cultural Gaps in Translation

Amy Cho

In the popular K-drama *Itaewon Class*, Jo Yi-Seo is called into the teacher's office after slapping a parent the previous night. Following an argument, she boldly talks back to the teacher and is told to return to class. She responds with "넹" neang, a playful variation of "네" ne, the formal Korean word for "yes" (Episode 3, 00:11:50). The addition of "ㅇ" in "넹" makes it sound cuter and slightly more informal than the standard "네." Her rebellious attitude made me laugh and take note of her subtle commentary. However, the humor fell flat when translated into the English subtitle "Sure thing." While the translation captured the general meaning, it did not convey the same emotional nuance or impact. The humor was somehow lost in translation.

This moment made me reflect on how much is lost when translating work from one language to another. I started noticing it everywhere, especially in the international films and books I love. At first, when watching my K-dramas, I laughed at these translational differences because I already knew the real meaning, and I thought lightly of the whole situation. But the more I noticed it, I began to wonder: What about those who do not understand Korean? Would they misinterpret these small details from the mistranslations? While these differences might not affect the main message and overall story of the shows, I could not help but think about how they might shape the audience's perceptions. The more I paid attention, the more I realized that we are not just losing the words but the meanings and emotions that come with them. This is not just a problem for humor, but for all kinds of connotations, whether cultural, emotional, or contextual. Sometimes, the impact of a mistranslation could be small, like a joke losing its point. Still, other times, it could completely alter how a character is perceived or even reshape the audience's perspective/understanding of the plot.

Language is a complex layer of culture and meaning. Unlike English, which tends to be more direct in communication, Korean conveys indirect meanings and reflects ideals of social hierarchies. Although the Korean language has transitioned to a more Western-style structure since World War II, shifting from a traditional vertical style to a modern horizontal form, it still retains many traditional values (Chang 135). This linguistic difference plays a significant role in the way Koreans approach learning English. Over the years, Korea has heavily invested in learning English, spending billions of dollars annually on education and integrating English as a mandatory subject in school curriculums. Despite these efforts, many Koreans still lack confidence in using the English language because of cultural and linguistic differences (Chang 131-132).

Korean continues to hold traditional values emphasizing respect and social context. Korean tends to be quite indirect. When picking up the phone and or greeting someone, people often open the conversation with "밥 먹었어?" (did you eat?) instead of a simple "Hello." This phrase often replaces "How are you?" and it is an often used phrase to check up on someone simply. The person asking is not actually interested in if you ate that day, but in how you are doing. Another often-used phrase is "밥 먹자" (Let's eat). This can be literal, but most of the time it is an invitation to resolve a conflict or spend time together. In the K-drama *Hospital Playlist*, when two friends were having a conflict and tension, they would say "Let's eat" to express that they are ready to talk things out. At the end of conversations, many Koreans say "Let's grab food sometime" as a goodbye and out of politeness. Most of the time, the people actually do not end up eating together. It is said simply out of basic mannerisms in Korea as it is awkward to end it with a simple farewell. You can see that Koreans love food, and many expressions and social interactions are mixed with food-related phrases.

Korean culture places a strong emphasis on social relationships and hierarchies, which presents challenges for translators when converting English to Korean. Unlike English, which lacks honorifics, Korean has a complex system of honorifics that distinguishes levels of formality. For example, a simple phrase like "먹어" (to eat) can be made formal by adding "요" to the end, becoming "먹어요" (to eat, formal). Alternatively, the word can change entirely, with "to eat" becoming the highly formal "드시다." Since these honorific structures do not exist in both languages, subtitles often omit or alter them, which can distort the intended meaning. In K-dramas, characters dropping honorifics with one another typically signal a shift in their relationship, often indicating increased intimacy. This subtle change helps viewers understand the growing closeness between characters. When subtitles omit this distinction, however, international audiences may struggle to fully grasp the evolving relationship. For example, in *Itaewon Class*, Jo Yi-Seo's use of "넹" (a playful form of "yes") instead of the more formal "네" (yes) conveyed a rebellious tone that English

subtitles could not fully capture, despite the word being very short. It is difficult to fully convey the original's purpose, as there are a lot of factors that play into honorifics.

Idiomatic expressions present another significant challenge in translation. Korean, like many languages, is full of colorful idioms that lose their meaning when translated literally. These expressions reflect a culture's unique way of thinking and communicating. Since idioms often have multiple layers and may not convey their literal meaning, speakers who use them gain deeper insight into the culture and improve their fluency. For example, in English, the phrase "break a leg" is an idiomatic way of wishing someone good luck, rooted in theater culture (Vula and Tyfekçi 285). Similarly, Korean idioms offer a glimpse into the culture's values and creativity. In the K-drama *Business Proposal*, Shin Ha-ri tries to stay focused after discovering that her blind date is the CEO of her workplace. She goes on the date in place of her friend, intending to reject him for her. As she prepares, she thinks to herself, "호랑이 굴에 들어가도 정신만 차리면 된다고…" (00:01:36). Literally, it means, "Even if you enter a tiger's den, as long as you stay alert, you'll be okay." The idiom conveys that, even in dangerous or challenging situations, maintaining focus will help you survive. It is often used to encourage others or oneself in the face of adversity. However, Netflix's subtitles for this scene simply read, "I just need to stay calm and do what needs to be done," completely omitting the tiger reference. While this translation is understandable, it removes the emotional nuance of the original phrase. Without this detail, we cannot fully grasp her mindset during this scene.

Beyond vocabulary and idioms, the grammatical structures of Korean and English are fundamentally different, which impacts communication. Korean uses a subject-object-verb (SOV) structure, in stark contrast to English's subject-verb-object (SVO) structure. This can often be confusing for English speakers. I experienced this challenge while learning Japanese, which shares the same SOV structure as Korean ("Which is Harder: Japanese, Korean, or Mandarin Chinese?"). My English-speaking classmates often struggled to adjust, but I found Japanese comparatively easier because of my familiarity with Korean grammar. In K-dramas, a character might use a specific grammatical structure to convey hesitation, multiple meanings, or emphasize an emotion—something that is difficult to replicate in English without additional context. A seemingly simple line in Korean can carry several possible interpretations, while the translation often condenses it into just one.

These linguistic challenges reveal that translation is far more than a simple act of conversion. It is a complex process and negotiation between languages, cultures, and meanings. We will explore the factors I have talked about more deeply, from the depth of connotations to idiomatic expressions and grammatical structures. They all demonstrate the complexity hidden beneath the surface of seemingly straightforward communication. As we unpack these layers, we will learn that translation is not just about changing into different languages but also exploring an entire landscape of culture. Translation may be a versatile tool for sharing cultures and works, however, it takes away from the originality and authenticity of cultures due to connotational losses, cultural gaps, and linguistic features.

Translation operates as a crucial connector, allowing cultures to share narratives on a global scale. However, this process often comes at the expense of authenticity and cultural nuance. In this work, I shall explore three main domains that interfere with the cultural authenticity of translations. First, the loss of connotations and meanings, then idiomatic phrases, and differences in grammatical structures. I want to explore that while translations succeed in broadening global access to media, they may often fail to preserve the intricacies of language, culture, and emotion, leaving international audiences with an incomplete or altered experience. This research will focus on the translations of K-dramas and how they changed from Korean to English. I will bring in specific examples from scenes of *Itaewon Class, Hospital Playlist, Business Proposal, What's Wrong with Secretary Kim, and Crash Landing on You.*

Technological advancements have made the world has become increasingly interconnected, mixing cultures easily. Nationalism, once a concept of cultural isolation, is being reimagined through global digital platforms as cultural exchange has become more accessible. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram can instantly share content across continents (Yusupova and Rutland). A K-pop dance trend from Seoul can go viral in Costa Rica, while a cooking video from Tokyo can go viral in America.

South Korea is often recognized for its contributions to the economy and technology, but to the younger generation, it is now primarily associated with the "Korean Wave" (Hallyu)—a cultural phenomenon driven by Korean pop music and dramas. Hallyu, driven by the global popularity of K-pop and K-dramas, has influenced international pop culture (Khachatryan).

Before the viral success of 'Gangnam Style,' Korea was rarely mentioned during my elementary school years; if a reference were to be made, it would only be tied back to North Korea and its geopolitical tensions. However, in the following years of the viral hit song, Korean music, dramas, and food became part of everyday conversations. As media became more international, BTS, mukbangs, and K-beauty catalyzed the popularity. This surge in interest has pushed Korean dramas into the international spotlight, making them both a cultural and economic force.

With the rise of international media platforms like Netflix, Viki, and Hulu, global audiences are increasingly exposed to diverse cultures through TV shows and movies. These platforms have made it easier to explore narratives from different international content. Netflix, in particular, has played a big role in popularizing Korean dramas due to its accessibility and user-friendly design, making it easier for viewers to discover new international content. Netflix announced that it would invest 2.5 billion dollars in Korean content. Over 60% of Netflix's 231 million subscribers have at least viewed Korean content once (Ryall). Netflix has been a big platform that has helped bring more spotlight onto Korean shows. During a week in January, The Glory was the most-watched non-English show on Netflix with 82.48 million viewing hours (Cho and Lee).

Korean dramas have gained popularity for their unique storytelling and cultural depth, often blending universal themes with Korean elements and traditions. Scholar Jung, who has reviewed and written about hundreds of Korean dramas, discusses that the appeal of K-dramas lies in their ability to evoke a broad spectrum of emotions, creating relatability even when the viewer may not speak the language (Park). Jeong touches specifically on the unique storytelling about universal themes in Korean dramas. For instance, Squid Game explores socio-economic inequality and power dynamics of race, gender, and survival, resonating with audiences worldwide despite its local context. Shin highlights how the shows are also visually appealing. Shin noted how Squid Game uses uniform costumes for both the players and the moderators of the game, symbolizing conformity and control (Bohdan).

I have also noticed how Korean romantic comedies often feature soft lighting and filters to give a sense of warmth and nostalgia. This combination of emotional depth and visual aesthetics makes Korean dramas unique. People are drawn to pretty visuals because they create comfort and familiarity, which makes the character's emotional journey engaging. When we see aesthetically beautiful things, our brains release dopamine, which makes us feel good (Davies). With the rise of K-beauty, K-dramas, and K-pop, the emphasis on beauty has been deeply engraved in the mindsets of many Koreans and how people perceive Koreans.

American values often emphasize individualism, equality, directness, and rationalism, while Korean values are centered around collectivism, hierarchy, indirectness, formalism, and emotionalism. In Korea, people often become involved in situations that may not directly concern them. These values are deeply rooted in Confucian teachings, which emphasize respect for others and humility (Chang 135-136). K-dramas have gained popularity in neighboring countries because of these cultural and value-based similarities. By blending Confucian ideals with modern social dynamics, these shows have become both approachable and enjoyable for viewers. On the other hand, American shows, such as *Friends* and *Sex and the City*, highlight values like individualism and the independent lives of young adults (Chuang and Lee). These cultural differences have sparked curiosity among American viewers, encouraging them to explore something new.

Subtitles help viewers understand and watch international content they cannot understand. Studies have shown that captioned videos help people learn second languages (Birulés-Muntané and Soto-Faraco). Hearing and reading a new language in its natural conversations can help people's skills increase quickly. Even though translations and subtitles aid in comprehension of the content, what if the meaning in the subtitles is wrong? How would you know which spoken word by the character went with which word in the captions?

There are several platforms for watching K-dramas, with Viki and Netflix being two of the most popular. Viki, in particular, often offers exclusive K-dramas that are not available on other platforms, drawing significant attention. However, this is not the only reason for its popularity. Viki's subtitles are typically written by skilled volunteers who can be anyone. While there are pros and cons to this approach, volunteers often spend more time on each phrase, making the translations more accurate. When a cultural phrase appears in the captions, it is often accompanied by additional context or meaning in parentheses, providing viewers with a deeper understanding (Team Viki). However, since each episode may be translated by a different volunteer, the consistency can vary. In contrast, Netflix collaborates with external agencies or websites for its translations (Walker). For example, on Viki's platform, the K-drama *What's Wrong with Secretary Kim* uses subtitles that include idiomatic and slang phrases, with their actual meanings provided in parentheses. One example is "I must have been possessed by something. (meaning I was out of my mind)" (Episode 1, 00:06:18). This approach makes it much easier to understand why the character used the word "possessed" in that context. However, the addition of parentheses also means there is more to read, which might be slightly overwhelming for some viewers.

While streaming platforms try their best to provide sophisticated translation approaches, these solutions cannot capture the full linguistic complexity of Korean dramas. The very essence of K-dramas is altered in the process of international adaptation. This transformation begins even before the first line of dialogue, starting with the title itself. For example, the popular drama named 엄마친구아들 ("Mom's Friend's Son") was translated to Love Next Door for its English title. The drama's literal title "Mom's friend's son" is a common phrase in Korea and K-dramas, often used to describe someone who seems to be perfect—an overachiever with exceptional qualities and an ideal background, someone you might find yourself constantly compared to. However, this phrase is not used in the U.S., so I understand why they chose such a different English to better appeal to an American audience and using it as a title might not attract viewers. Despite the drastic change, renaming the drama helped adapt it to fit the language and cultural nuances of the target audience. Just as a title can be reshaped for global appeal, the dialogue and cultural subtleties in Korean dramas can go under similar transformations.

Honorifics are another essential aspect of the Korean

language and culture, which can be seen clearly in the dialogue of K-dramas. Every sentence reflects the speaker's relationship to the listener, their social status, age, and the level of respect required. It is very important to follow these rules of respect when speaking in Korean. Growing up in America, I still adhered to Korean honorifics in social settings, especially at my Korean church. Even friends just a year older were addressed with honorifics like "Oppa" or "Unnie," meaning older brother or sister. In Korean, I would not be able to refer to them specifically as my "friend" as that is a term for people of the same age. For a female speaker like myself, an older female friend would be addressed as "Unnie," literally meaning older sister, while an older male friend would be "Oppa." A male speaker would use different terms— "Hyung" for an older brother or male friend, and "Noona" for an older sister or female friend. Since different genders use different words, which does not happen in English, it is often hard to show these differences in subtitles.

When I first watched Korean dramas, I noticed how terms like "Oppa" and "Unnie" were often completely omitted or replaced with the characters' names, stripping away layers of social and emotional context. Also, sometimes phrases were altered to be more respectful in Korean. In the first episode of *Hospital Playlist*, a doctor tells an elderly patient that her condition is a bit more difficult to treat as she is older. The Korean phrase used was a formal phrase of "연세가 많으시니깐…" (Episode 1, 00:25:00). This phrase in English means "Because you are older." There isn't an equivalent phrase in English for this respectful phrase, so the subtitles came out stronger and less respectful of "You aren't young." This can come off as very rude in a certain context.

Nuances of Korean honorifics become even more pronounced in settings like the military, where formality and status are heavily emphasized. Examples of this are seen in the popular drama *Crash Landing on You*, where the male lead, Captain Ri Jeong-hyeok, serves in the North Korean military. Titles such as 중대장 (company commander) or 대위 (captain) reflect the power dynamics within the military. These structures are not just about communication but serve as constant reminders of social order and discipline. However, these nuances are often flattened or entirely lost in translation, leading international viewers to miss the weight and significance of these interactions. Since writing out "company commander" sounds odd and out of context, the subtitles entirely omit the word. The military culture is entirely omitted when these honorifics are altered.

The misinterpretation of these honorifics in translations does not just affect the viewing experience but also skews cultural perceptions, leading to distorted understandings of the source culture. One example of this is the overuse and misuse of the term "Oppa" in international fandoms. As I have noted, among Korean speakers, "Oppa" refers to an older brother or guy when spoken by a younger female. However, within global K-drama and K-pop fandoms, the term has been widely adopted and often romanticized in ways that take away the meaning of its original intention. Similarly, the Japanese word "Senpai," which refers to a senior or mentor, is appropriated in internet culture to convey a playful or romanticized notion. These misusages can lead to cultural misunderstandings and create stereotypes (Khedun-Burgoine 100).

Another factor contributing to this misconception of Korean culture is the use of dubbing in international media. Dubbing offers many advantages, allowing the audience to focus on the visuals and not read the subtitles. However, dubbing often sacrifices linguistic accuracy to match the lip movements of the characters. In the process, many cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and the rhythm of the original language are either altered or erased altogether. While dubbing can make foreign media more approachable, it often comes at the expense of preserving the cultural richness of the original work.

Misrepresentations in subtitles, dubbing, and cultural references not only disrupt the storytelling experience but also contribute to a skewed understanding of the source culture. By flattening the complexities of honorifics, idioms, and cultural hierarchies, translations can unintentionally create stereotypes and reduce a culture's diversity to oversimplified tropes.

Another factor that makes media translation difficult is idiomatic phrases. These phrases often carry meanings beyond the literal interpretations of their words, offering a glimpse of the speaker's culture. For instance, English idioms like "spill the beans" (to reveal a secret) or break the ice (to remove tension) might seem confusing and odd to someone unfamiliar with their origins. Yet, for native speakers, these expressions are used in everyday conversations with a second thought. They represent not only their message but their country's culture mixed with history, shared experiences, and humor.

Translators often face a unique challenge: should they preserve the literal phrase, explain its meaning, replace it with an equivalent idiom in the target language, or remove it entirely? Each choice comes with sacrificing the original's humor, charm, or cultural nuance. In the context of Korean dramas, idioms play a significant role in conveying emotions, humor, or situational depth that resonates with native speakers but can be difficult to translate for international audiences.

For example, in the first episode of *Hospital Playlist*, a character comments on the series of unexpected events happening at the hospital, saying, "올해는 병원 복이 터졌네, 터졌어 (00:17:11). This phrase literally means "This year, the hospital fortune has burst open, burst!" The phrase "복이 터졌네" (fortune has burst open) is commonly used in Korean to describe an abundance of unexpected good fortune, often with a tone of irony or humor depending on the context. However, the English subtitle flattens this nuance by rendering it as, "What an eventful year this has been for him." This translation removes any reference to the cultural concept of "복" (fortune or blessing) and loses the playful repetition of these words "터졌네, 터졌어," which adds emphasis and personality to the line. As a result, the translated version feels far less engaging and strips away a key layer of emotional and cultural context.

Another example of idioms being entirely changed or omitted occurs in *Crash Landing on You*'s first episode, when a State Security Department officer sarcastically warns the male lead, Ri Jeong-hyeok, against meddling in others' affairs and potentially jeopardizing the army's stability. The officer, doubting Ri Jeong-hyeok's loyalty, says, "작년 이랑이 금년 고랑 되고, 작년 고랑이 금년 이랑 된다" (00:21:22). This idiom literally translates to, "Last year's furrow becomes this year's ridge, and last year's ridge becomes this year's furrow." The phrase originates from farming, where ridges and furrows in a field interchange roles during annual plowing cycles. It metaphorically suggests that situations, roles, or fortunes are constantly shifting—what once was may change entirely. In this context, the officer sarcastically implies that Jeong-hyeok might still change his actions in the future, hinting that his trust in him is conditional and fragile.

This translation captures the general idea but loses the vivid imagery and cultural context contained in the original phrase. The farming metaphor reflects a connection to nature and a deep-rooted cultural understanding of change as inevitable yet natural. By removing the metaphor, the English subtitle reduces the phrase to a vague description of the idiom. This evidence is significant because it highlights the difficulty of translating culturally specific idioms in a way that resonates with the target audience. It also illustrates how much of the richness of language is tied to its cultural and historical roots. When idioms like this are flattened or erased, the audience not only loses the poetic quality of the language but also the opportunity to glimpse the values, traditions, and worldviews of the source culture. For viewers unfamiliar with Korean, the simplified translation may feel adequate for the narrative, but it fails to deliver the full depth of the moment's meaning and emotion.

In another part of *Hospital Playlist*'s first episode, a character uses the phrase "오늘 들은 얘기는 없던 걸로 해," which literally means "Let's pretend we didn't hear what was said today" (00:53:18). In the English subtitles, it is translated as "Count me out from this." This situation is different from my earlier examples because, rather than simplifying or flattening a complex phrase, the translation adds a layer of informality to better match the conversational tone of the target language. By choosing a common English expression, the translators aimed to preserve the scene's casual mood and character dynamics. While this creative addition adds "flavor" for English-speaking audiences, it also shifts the nuance slightly. The original phrase carries a sense of erasing something from the past, while "Count me out from this" focuses more on dissociation in the present. This subtle change highlights how translations can sometimes prioritize relatability in the target language over precise meanings. Should translators stay strictly faithful to the source language, or should they adapt to fit cultural and linguistic norms? This example shows how translation is as much about interpretation as it is about finding equivalents.

Priya states that one of the biggest problems for translation is finding the right words that would give the same equivalent meaning in both languages. To do this, the translator must deeply understand the culture and language of both the source and target languages to capture the intention of the nuance accurately (81). However, achieving this balance can be especially difficult in media like TV shows and movies, where subtitles must stay synchronized with the dialogue. The average reading speed is 200-250 words per minute, so if the text moves too fast, viewers may lose comprehension (Curcic). This limitation often forces translators to condense phrases, leaving out parts they deem less significant. But what if those omitted nuances matter? What impact does losing those details have on how we perceive the characters, their relationships, and the story itself?

This issue is compounded by the fact that every language has its unique grammatical structure, shaping the way ideas are organized and expressed. Grammar acts as the framework for communication, but its rules vary widely between languages, making translation far more complex than simply swapping out words. Translating often requires reordering, reinterpreting, and sometimes reshaping entire sentences to preserve meaning.

For instance, English follows a straightforward Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order, while Korean typically uses a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure, as I have mentioned earlier ("Which is Harder: Japanese, Korean, or Mandarin Chinese?"). This difference can be seen in almost every line of dialogue in Korean dramas. Often, it doesn't significantly change the nuance or meaning, but there are moments when it makes the translations feel chunkier or oversimplified.

For example, in *Itaewon Class*, a character says, "차근차근 다시 설명 해줄게," which translates literally to something like "Step by step, I will explain again" (00:18:13). The Korean sentence emphasizes the repetition of "차근차근" (step by step) at the beginning, setting a calm and deliberate tone. However, the English subtitle, "I will explain it again slowly," not only flips the word order but also omits the repetition of the phrase entirely. While the core meaning remains, the tone and emphasis of the original dialogue are lost, creating a small gap in interpretation.

In this study, one significant insight I gained was the cultural gap revealed through translations. American values of individualism and directness often clash with Korea's collectivist and hierarchical traditions, and this contrast becomes especially apparent in subtitled or dubbed media. Without the proper context, viewers may misinterpret these values, leading to oversimplified or skewed perceptions of

Korean culture. The challenge of cultural elements being stripped of their original meanings and recontextualized in ways that reinforce misconceptions is best shown by the excessive use and romanticization of phrases like “Oppa” and “Senpai” in international fandoms.

This research also highlighted the challenges of translating idiomatic expressions, which are important in reflecting cultural nuances and societal values within a work. These phrases often resist direct translation, leading to the loss of their emotional impact and symbolic depth. For instance, in *Business Proposal*, the omission of the tiger idiom stripped the scene of its cultural and metaphorical significance, reducing it to a generic statement.

Another significant finding was how structural differences between languages fundamentally affect translation outcomes. In Korean, for example, the presence of honorifics provides layers of meaning about social hierarchies and relationships, which are completely absent in English. Subtitles that omit these nuances diminish the viewer’s ability to grasp subtle yet crucial changes in relationships, such as growing intimacy or shifts in tone. This oversight not only detracts from the storytelling but also creates a disconnect between the audience and the culture of the work. In *Itaewon Class*, the playful use of “넹” (yes) instead of the formal “네” (yes) was a meaningful choice that conveyed a character’s rebellious nature, yet this tone was completely lost in English translations.

An important factor that shaped these encounters was the role of translation platforms. Viki demonstrated how translations could increase comprehension without sacrificing cultural nuances by including contextual explanations, such as parenthetical meanings. On the other hand, Netflix often prioritized accessibility over authenticity, resulting in translations that were sometimes inconsistent or lacked depth. However, the use of parenthetical explanations can also have drawbacks, as it requires additional reading time, potentially distracting viewers from the on-screen visuals. These challenges highlight the complexity of translation, which involves balancing accuracy, cultural preservation, and viewer experience. This comparison revealed that the quality and methodology of translation significantly influence how viewers engage with and interpret the original material.

Undoubtedly, translations and subtitles have increased Korean media’s appeal on a worldwide scale and encouraged intercultural curiosity. However, it has also brought attention to how sensitive cultural preservation is. Translators must maintain a careful balance between staying true to the source material and making it interesting and understandable for audiences around the world. This research also opens the door to further exploration. Future studies could investigate how translations influence not only media consumption but also global perceptions of cultural values and norms. These insights serve as a reminder of the close ties between language, culture, and identity, encouraging us to approach translated works with a greater awareness of what might have been altered or lost.

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Justifying Genocide: An Analysis of Western Nations Exploitation of Agriculture To Perpetuate the Palestinian and Congolese Humanitarian Crises

Anusha Yadav

November 8th, 2023. An unidentified man in the Democratic Republic of the Congo stands within a crowd. He holds a sign with the words “Stop the Genocide in the Congo” before dousing himself in gasoline and igniting it with a match. As he bursts into flames, he pushes away help from bystanders while repeating “Congo na nga, Congo na nga (my Congo, my Congo.” He died of his burn wounds (Mtembu).

February 25th, 2024. Aaron Bushnell arrives in front of the Embassy of Israel in Washington, D.C. As he streams on Twitch he declares, “Hi, my name is Aaron Bushnell, I am an active duty member of the United States Air Force and I will no longer be complicit in genocide. I am about to engage in an extreme act of protest, but compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers it’s not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided, will be normal.” He sets the camera down before pouring an unidentified flammable liquid over his head and lighting it. As he bursts into flames, he repeats one phrase, “Free Palestine” (Assi).

Self-immolation. Long considered one of the most extreme forms of protest due to its fatal and disturbing nature, it is often seen as a “last-resort” method to make one’s voice heard. Yet, even as the unidentified man in the Congo and Aaron Bushnell both used self-immolation to demonstrate their refusal of complicity in the assault on agriculture in Palestine and the Congo, it feels as though no one has heard. The Congolese people are still experiencing mass exploitation by Western Nations and China who hope to profit off of the Congo’s vast mineral resources. Meanwhile, Palestinians continue to face not only one of the worst humanitarian crises in the modern-day but a genocide of their people and culture at the hands of Israel, which has garnered support from multiple Western powers including the United States.

Coming from a family of farmers on my father’s side, I’ve witnessed firsthand the role agriculture plays in the success of communities. Access to the land, crops, and fruits they bear allows my father’s village to be self-sufficient; growing the crops and raising the livestock they need to survive while also benefitting financially. But more importantly, as my family has tended to crops, they have also developed a connection with the land. The connection between my dad and the land he grew up on is undeniable. It’s a relationship that establishes itself and is difficult to be broken. To imagine my father’s land and access to agriculture being taken away from him and his family is to imagine a community being destroyed. Yet, that is exactly what is taking place in Palestine and the Congo as attacks on agriculture continue unchecked and ignored by the global community.

In this paper, I investigate the rise of “neo”- environmental colonialism and imperialism in the Global South by examining the mining operations taking place in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the targeting of agriculture in Palestine as case studies. It will begin by outlining the colonial methodologies of environmental exploitation currently taking place in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Palestine by underscoring the foundational role agriculture plays in both countries and highlighting the negative physical, cultural, and economic effects that manifest as a result of these unrestricted colonialist actions. Furthermore, through an analysis of Western nations’ shift away from viewing agriculture as a tool for sustenance, and instead, as a commodity to capitalize on, I will explore the way said Western nations use the Global South as proxies to further their political and economic goals while establishing barriers between themselves and their exploitation to distance themselves from the results of their actions.

“Neo”- Environmental Colonialism

The study of colonial effects on the environment is by no means a new field. Terms like eco-imperialism, green imperialism, and eco-colonialism have been used by scholars since the 1980s to describe the relationship between deteriorating environments in both the Global South and North and colonialist actions. In this paper, I choose to use the term “neo”- environmental colonialism and imperialism for two key reasons—first, the difference between imperialism and colonialism and second, the need to differentiate between “new” and “old” colonialism/imperialism.

Edward Said provides a concise yet, packed definition for both imperialism and colonialism: “‘Imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism,’ which is almost always a consequence of imperialism is the implanting of settlements on the distant territory.” When applying these definitions to our case studies of choice – Palestine and the Democratic Republic of the Congo –

Israel's long-term settler colonialism, and King Leopold's control of the DRC align with Said's definition of colonialism and imperialism respectively, highlighting the impacts of the imperialist theories that initiated the conquest of both countries. Therefore due to the nature of control in both Palestine and the DRC, I'll use the term "neo"-environmental colonialism and imperialism to encapsulate the impacts of foreign control on both countries.

Meanwhile, the prefix 'neo' is used to differentiate historical colonialism and imperialism from their modern forms. While historically colonial nations justified their actions under the guise of bringing civilization to the nations in which they established their settlements, modern colonialism in Palestine and the Democratic Republic of Congo is no longer being disguised in this way. In Palestine, Israel has worked to create a narrative of terrorism. Arguing that settlements are meant to act as a buffer to protect Israelis and prevent Palestinian organizations that would threaten Israel's settler colonialist actions. In the Congo, capitalism creates a justification used by Western Nations and China to lessen the impacts of their imperialism. By insisting that mining natural resources like cobalt drives technological innovation in devices like electric vehicles and phones, these neoimperialist actions are "mitigated" by the argument that Western Nations are simply pursuing innovation and pushing towards a future of "cleaner energy." Therefore, with these "evolved" justifications for colonialism/imperialism, I choose to use the prefix 'neo' to emphasize this difference.

Understanding Genocide

In describing Israel's assault on Palestine, I choose to use the term genocide to encapsulate the nature of violence best. In doing this, I do not use the term genocide to detail the crisis in the Congo. This choice relies on the legal definition of Genocide as prescribed by the United Nations in the 'Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide' which states in Article 2, "Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (United Nations). In addition to this definition, it notes key actions that are committed in genocide including: killing members of a group, causing serious bodily or mental harm, and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part. The key distinction between genocide and a crime against humanity lies in the intent. If one is unable to prove intent to destroy, then legally, we are unable to consider that action to be a genocide and must work to define it differently. The legal bar for what is considered genocide based on intent to destroy is hard to meet. It must include the opinions of national and international courts like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or the International Criminal Court (ICC). Therefore, it can take years to reach a legal international consensus on whether an action is a genocide, crime against humanity, war crime, etc. In 2023, South Africa began to pursue an ICJ case against Israel alleging that the country was committing genocide against Palestinians under the restraints of the convention. But, although the court briefly restates South Africa's claim, "at least some of the acts and omissions alleged by South Africa to have been committed by Israel in Gaza appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the (Genocide) Convention," nothing definite has been concluded (Burke-White). Thus, although legally, Israel's actions in Palestine are not yet considered genocide, I use the term genocide in my paper due to the violent impacts of Israel's assault on Palestine, the prominence of Zionist ideologies in Israel's actions, and the growing international consensus around the term genocide.

For these same reasons, I do not use the term genocide to describe King Leopold's actions in the Congo and current neo-imperialism in the region. This decision lies in the fact that it is difficult to prove the intent to destroy the Congolese population or culture in both cases of imperialism. This isn't meant to negate the horrifically violent exploitation taking place in the Congo, but instead, it is intended to respect the legal and cultural definition of genocide.

Settler Colonialism

In this paper, I define settler colonialism using a concept introduced by Patrick Wolfe, "settler colonialism is a system which perpetuates the destruction and elimination of Indigenous peoples" (Wolfe). It relies on the conquest and claim of Indigenous land to carry out its intended purpose.

The key here is the terms system and perpetuate. Settler colonialism is not a single event, it is a system that utilizes institutions of power to continue its widespread exploitation over centuries. Although the destruction and elimination of Indigenous peoples via settler colonialism are seen through various methodologies, I am focusing specifically on the attack on agriculture as a means to perpetuate settler colonialism in Palestine at the hands of Israel with the support of the United States.

The United States is no stranger to the destruction of Indigenous agriculture via the military to perpetuate settler colonialism. Planning to use a scorched earth campaign, a strategy in which militaries destroy everything that allows an opposing force to retaliate, the United States military recruited Colonel Christopher Carson and 400 soldiers to destroy all the villages, crops, and orchards of the Navajo in Canyon de Chelly. In particular, after surveillance by Captain Henry L. Dodge, Colonel Carson attacked peaches, a crop crucial to the culture of the Navajo living in Canyon de Chelly. The cold, winter conditions of the Canyon in tandem with a lack of food forced the Navajo either into death or into submission to the United States military. The United States used this compromised position of the Navajos to push the Navajo into a reservation nearly 400 miles away from Canyon de Chelly and take over the region (Sumrak).

This is one of a myriad examples of the United States's settler colonialism. Its existence as a nation would be impossible without the expulsion, destruction, and elimination of Indigenous land, practices, and lives. This fact is inherent to the United States's support of Israel in its settler colonialism and attacks on agriculture in Palestine.

The Palestinian Genocide and Attack on Agriculture

Since its birth on May 14, 1948, Israel's goal has been clear. Establish an independent Jewish state at the expense of Palestinian land and lives. After the 1948 Palestine War, Israel took 78% of historic Palestine, forcing the displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians and uprooting their lives. By 1967, Israel occupied the entirety of historic Palestine, including the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem, which led to the displacement of an additional 325,000 people, not counting the deaths of countless others (Atanasiu).

The violence of the Zionist movement is by no means accidental. Instead, every action has been carefully calculated to ensure the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians via settler colonialist methodologies. As Ilan Pappé outlines in his book The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, "Code-named Plan D (Dalet in Hebrew)… This fourth and last blueprint spelled it out clearly and unambiguously: the Palestinians had to go." Comprised of brutal tactics including the demolishing of villages, made to be inhabitable if one were to return; destruction of all personal goods through fires; and division of units among villages to maximize efficiency, Plan Dalet was detailed to an extent not yet seen from Zionist leaders. Once underway amid the Nakba and the 1948 Palestine war, Plan D took mere months to displace over 750,000 people and destroy 531 villages and 11 urban neighborhoods, leaving the land unrecognizable and inaccessible to the native people who once inhabited it (Pappe). Pairing these actions with quotes from early Zionist leaders like Joseph Weitz, director of the Jewish National Fund, saying, "It must be clear that there is no room in the country for both peoples.…If the Arabs leave it, the country will become wide and spacious for us.… The only solution is a Land of Israel… without Arabs. There is no room here for compromises," and the end goal of Zionism becomes more clear: Palestinians must leave.

It would be naive to assume that violence was the only tactic utilized by Israel to grow its control over Palestine. With the support of Western Nations' diplomacy, aid, and reparations, Israel cemented its influence on the global stage which it used to further expand its foothold on Palestinian land. No example demonstrates this best other than the series of Oslo Accords brokered between Israeli and Palestinian Leadership. The first Oslo Accord (Oslo I) in 1993 set out to oversee both sides' recognition of one another and formulate a pledge to end the "conflict" between both parties. Oslo II, signed in 1995, attempted to detail a specific plan explaining how to go about peace processes between Palestinian and Israeli leadership. The most notable outcome of Oslo II was the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the division of the West Bank into specific Areas labeled A, B, and C. These separate areas were differentiated based on who controlled each region. Area A (18% of the West Bank) would be completely under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Area B (22% of the West Bank) would be under "joint" Israeli and Palestinian leadership. Finally, Area C (60% of the West Bank) would be completely under the control of Israeli leadership. Although a third Oslo Accord was meant to complete the series, that deal was never finalized. Ultimately, although many consider the Oslo Accord to be a failure, it allowed Israel to gain further control over Palestinian land with the support of Western Nations and the global community under the guise of "peace-brokering" ("What were the Oslo Accords").

Israel's actions have since escalated into a genocide.

"To our land, and it is the one poor as a grouse's wing." Through his powerful words, Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish highlights the way both the Palestinian people and their land have been trapped within a violent cycle of poverty and death that is manufactured and maintained. Post October 7th, 2023, nearly 45,646 Palestinians have been killed at the hands of the IDF and Israeli settlers (AJLabs). A study from Oxham, a British-based charity, further quantifies, stating, "Israel's military is killing Palestinians at an average rate of 250 people a day."

Displacement is constant with civilians forced to evacuate either by Israeli order or attack. Since October 7th, Amnesty International details that nearly 2 million Palestinians have been displaced, with 1.5 million being pushed to Rafah, only to be ordered again to evacuate with no place to go ("Mass Forced Displacement"). Actions that mirror those of the Israeli army a mere 75 years ago during the Nakba and again during the 1967 6-day war, thus furthering the cycle of instability within Palestinian lives.

Suppression is brutal with modern human rights violently violated. Palestinian reporter Akram Al Satarri explains that he and other Journalists are "hoping that by [pursuing] comprehensive coverage of Gaza, even if it means us losing our lives ...We are ready to go the extra mile for the sake of helping the people and for the sake of spreading the truth about this situation" (Parvaz). Journalist Bisan Owda begins every video with the statement, "Hi, I'm Bisan and I'm still alive," a testament to the line between life and death Palestinian journalists teeter between as they bring coverage of Palestinian suffering to the world. Medical professionals are targeted and tortured to death like Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh who was kidnapped from Al-Shifa Hospital in December, preventing healthcare and aid from reaching the dying. CNN reported his death in April (Khadder, et al.). Female bodily autonomy is undermined. Women are denied their reproductive rights and worst of all, subjected to sexual

assault, including rape (Rahman).

Starvation is widespread, with humanitarian aid withheld or worse, used as a catalyst for further settler violence. At the hands of IDF soldiers, Palestinians are targeted and murdered while waiting for food as seen during the Flour Massacre, where the Guardian reports, 112 Palestinians were killed, or they die at the hands of the hostile environment of airdrops as seen through the drowning of Palestinians attempting to reach aid in water (Lakhani).

Israel has been tactful in its perpetuation of violence within Palestine by targeting agriculture, a fundamental pillar of Palestinian society. The agricultural sector acted as a flexible employer, providing opportunities for the majority of Palestinians both formally and informally. Gaza once exported 80% of the crops it produced, with the export of plums, dates, grapes, and olives being integral to the economy (Reskallah). Furthermore, even with constant attacks on agriculture, the harvesting of olive trees currently contributes to 14% of Palestine's economy thus, olive trees are a primary source of income for almost 800,000 Palestinian families (Hedroug). More importantly, however, it provided self-sufficiency for Palestinians. As Yousef Bashir notes in "The Words of My Father: Love and Pain in Palestine," "He [his father] had more than two hundred date palm trees…he raised tomatoes, along with hot pepper and aubergines that he sold to markets in Israel and Jordan. He spent his lifetime enriching the sandy soil with compost to make it immensely productive." These crops are then used in delicious dishes like Tabbouleh, Maqlouba, and a classic Palestinian Breakfast consisting of pita, hummus, olive oil, apricot spread, and much more.

For Palestinians, agriculture is also vital to culture. While the consumption of food crafted with care is integral to the community, so is the symbolism of specific plants. In particular, poet Mahmoud Darwish describes the olive tree as "a venerable grandmother" and nurturer, a sentiment shared by many Palestinians. Olive trees are centuries older than Israeli occupation and thrive even in the harshest conditions, thus, to many Palestinians, olive trees are a reminder of resilience and a demonstration of connection to the land. Due to this significance, olive trees have unfortunately become a target in Israel's campaign against Palestine. A study by The Applied Research Institute Jerusalem estimated that since 1967, Israeli authorities and settlers have uprooted over 800,000 olive trees. But, the terror doesn't stop there. Many Palestinian farmers are now restricted from accessing their olives without an Israeli permit. If they are seen attempting to harvest their olives, settlers will attack farmers, even killing them before uprooting and destroying their trees ("Israeli Settlers Attack"). This violence now associated with picking olives has forced mass displacement of farmers and fuels Israel's genocide. By ripping olive trees away from these farmers, Israeli settlers take away their primary source of income, destroy their livelihoods, and rob them of their culture.

The Israeli assault on agriculture doesn't stop there. Since 1967, Israel has controlled and restricted Palestinian access to water. As Amnesty International explains, "They are unable to drill new water wells, install pumps or deepen existing wells, in addition to being denied access to the Jordan River and freshwater springs. Israel even controls the collection of rainwater throughout most of the West Bank" ("The Occupation of Water"). Combine this with Israel's dumping of wastewater in Palestinian villages and you are left with a water crisis that destroys Palestinian agriculture by manufacturing droughts, destroying crops, and forcing displacement, thus, allowing Israeli settlements to seize what was "abandoned."

Israel works to sustain its genocide through not only direct murder but also depletion of resources, destruction of security, and demolishing of freedoms.

All of this is not possible without today's sponsors, America and AIPAC. Since its creation, the United States has perpetuated and upheld settler colonialist policies backed by its White-Judeo-Christian Supremacist structures of power. Whether it be the genocide of indigenous peoples or the justification for bombing the Middle East, the United States is a settler colonialist nation that legitimizes its actions through indoctrination and religious reasoning. "One does not need to venture into the darkest corners of the internet to get messages of White racial supremacy – Americans tacitly receive this message from childhood. The history, science, literary, and social studies curricula taught in American schools focus almost exclusively on European or Euro-American accomplishments and perspectives" (Reyna, et al.). The United States crafts an environment that forces citizens to accept and condone its violently racist policies through exposure and erasure. Furthermore, it utilizes religion to condone its actions. George W. Bush characterized the US invasion of Iraq as "a moral conflict between good and evil in which the U.S. and its ideals represented good and those aiming to threaten American values were evil" (Brown, et al.). In essence, the United States uses its Judeo-Christian White identity to legitimize its settler colonialist by exploiting the inherently White supremacist views Americans are indoctrinated into from birth.

Israel has utilized this to create both a financial and power imperative to garner continued American support. Through tactically worded propaganda like Kraft and Israel's Super Bowl ad or Instagram posts reframing American policies as more "neutral," AIPAC has used its wealth to ensure proper messaging through lengthy research like Frank Luntz's Global Language Dictionary, prime placement of propaganda in mainstream spaces, and compensation for all individuals involved. This creates a fiscal responsibility that is furthered by America's expansive spending on Israel which Murad quantifies, "Between 1976 and 2017, the US has allocated a total of over US$ 55 billion in civilian and US$ 130 billion in military aid to Israel." These numbers have only increased

post-October 7th as the United States vested itself as a key financial ally to Israel, giving nearly $17.9 billion in the last year alone (Bilmes, et al.). Israel also exploits the United States' interest in power within the Middle East as a means to gain further support, using America's fear of Muslim Middle Eastern power and determination to cement itself within the Middle East as a way to vest itself as a key ally for the United States in its current strategic warfare. But the final imperative is internal. If the United States were to condemn Israel's actions, it would force condemnation of the US's actions and reform that a White, Judeo-Christian, settler colonialist nation hopes to avoid at all costs.

Hence, it is no surprise that American citizens find themselves supporting the Palestinian genocide both out of requirement via their tax dollars and by their own accord. Americans have demonstrated an unwillingness to support the BDS movement by witholding their money from companies that directly fuel the Palestinian genocide. Statistica's May 2024 survey furthers that while 20% of Americans strongly to somewhat support the BDS movement, almost 35% strongly to somewhat oppose while 44% are not sure ("Support or Opposition"). In a situation where the lives of thousands of Palestinians are on the line, when 79% of Americans either are ignorant of the BDS movement or refuse to support it, we see the fatal impacts of American indoctrination.

Outside of statistics, however, Americans' contributions to Israeli charities extend Western support for Israel and highlight the blind support many have for the nation. Arguably no charity demonstrates this best other than the Jewish National Fund (JNF). Established in 1901 by Theodor Herzl, often considered the father of modern political Zionism, the JNF labels itself as a non-profit aimed at buying land to encourage Jewish resettlement in Palestine. Although initially unsuccessful as an institution, when its head of the settlement department Yossef Weitz gained insight into "village files," meant to track Palestinian villages, he immediately capitalized on the idea to ensure the JNF had a strong foothold in Israel's future. Working with cartographers and photographers to map in intense detail the geographic details of each village, each resident's properties, and the "hostility" of each village towards the zionists, the JNF movement contributed extensively to the success of the Zionist movement's ethnic cleansing via surveillance (Pappé). It is interesting to note the eerie similarities between the JNF's strategy and the United States's methodology of surveillance of Navajo peaches and crops to maximize the starvation of Navajo in Canyon de Chelly. Ultimately, the village files project proved to be a success for the Zionist movement. Since then the JNF hasn't slowed down. With multiple international offices, the JNF works to disguise its ethnic cleansing under the guise of environmentalism. Through its "Plant Trees in Israel" Campaign, planting nearly 240 million trees to this date, the Jewish National Fund has attempted to characterize itself as an organization working to make Israel more "green." In actuality, his is far from the truth. The JNF's "signature tree," the Aleppo Pine, has proven itself to be an invasive species in the region (Liphshiz). Engulfing the landscape and native greenery while posing itself as a flammable hazard. Outside of being an environmental burden, the JNF's campaign also contributes directly to ethnic cleansing through the destruction of villages and native shrubbery. By working to erase the landscape integral to the culture of Palestinian lives, the JNF and its donors directly contribute to the cultural genocide and mass displacement taking place within Palestine (Peirson).

The Congolese Exploitation and Attack on the Environment

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is no stranger to the consequences of the greed of Western Nations. Plagued by an almost 2-decade-long conflict between rebellion groups and national militias driven by the aftermath of colonialism and the current resource exploitation in the region, the people of the Congo are facing one of the direst humanitarian crises in the modern day. With nearly 7.3 million people internally displaced by the conflict as of April 2024 according to Amnesty International, a lack of access to healthcare, food, and aid has worsened the crisis exponentially for thousands and left many with no escape ("Why Is the Democratic Republic").

The Congro's crisis has its roots in the colonial actions of King Leopold II of Belgium. Claiming Central Africa during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, Leopold claimed himself to be in sole possession of the territory. Naming it the "Congo Free State," he argued that through his control of the area, he would work to bring civilization to the region and the people residing there (Momodu). However, his actions would prove to stray far from these declarations. In the 23 years Leopold had control of the Congo Free State forced labor, brutal punishments, and famines were widespread throughout the nation.

The Congo's abundance of ivory, rubber, and palm oil piqued the interest of Leopold due to its potential to generate financial abundance. To ensure he reaped the benefits of said bounty, Leopold resorted to enslaving the Congo's native population. Expected to work long, brutal hours to increase the efficiency of harvest, the Congolese people were enslaved in their own country with seemingly no escape. Paired with Leopold's private armies like Force Publique comprised of African soldiers led by European officers, the atrocities committed in the "Congo Free State" are evil (Momodu). Punishments included lashes, beatings, mutilations, and even amputations if workers failed to reach their quotas of harvest. Mind you, nobody was spared in these punishments. Men, women, and even children were victims of Leopold's greed (Marull). Famine was also rampant. An excessive number of rubber companies forced

workers to harvest rubber instead of crops that would feed them (Stengers). Hence, by depriving the Congolese people of agricultural sustenance, Leopold's regime created a cycle of hunger across the region. According to historical documentation, between 5-10 million people were murdered at the hands of King Leopold II and his mercenaries. Although Leopold died in 1909 and his claim on the Congo ended in 1908, Belgium held control of the region until 1960 when the Democratic Republic of the Congo was formed and gained its independence.

To believe that the impacts of colonialism would disappear once independence was claimed would be naive. As conflicts arose in the nations surrounding the DRC, tension rose within the country as well. When Hutu refugees crossed over to the Congo hoping to seek asylum in refugee camps, Hutu extremists followed suit. These groups began to organize militias, and soon the First Congo War broke out in 1996 as the Tutsi-led Rwanda invaded the Congo with other nations' militias in hopes of squashing the Hutu-extremist groups they viewed as threats and removing Dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. Ultimately, the Rwandan government succeeded in their invasion due to internal help from Seko's opposition leaders and instated Laurent Kabila as the new president of the DRC. However, to the dismay of the Tutsi-led Rwandan government, Kabila began to remove ethnic Tutsis from his government and worked to reduce Rwanda's military presence in the nation in hopes of reducing allegations of Rwanda contributing heavily to his success. Kabila didn't stop there. As the international community began to view Kabila unfavorably due to the war crimes committed during the First Congo War against Hutus, Kabila ordered all foreign troops out of the Congo and recruited Hutu armed groups to "guard" the border. The Rwandan government viewed this as a direct attack on their power in the Congo and invaded the nation again, leading to the start of the Second Congo War just 2 years after the first. This war brought brutal conditions upon the people of Congo once again. Some experts estimate that over 3 million people died in the Second Congo War (Mishra).

In an attempt to bring peace to the region, Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC negotiated peace agreements between 2002 and 2003 to initiate stability between all 3 nations. But in a turn of events, this hope was short-lived due to the rise of the rebel group the March 23 Movement. A Rwandan-backed group, M23 wreaked havoc on the Congo committing human rights abuses including rape, murder, and forced recruitment. This violence ultimately led to the UN launching the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in opposition to the M23 group. While this initially seemed successful, with the M23 group announcing the end of their violent campaign in 2013, it was also, short-lived. Conflict returned in 2021 as the M23 returned, seizing numerous territories in North Kivu by 2023. Pairing this with the exit of MONUSCO from the region due to complaints of ineffectiveness, an environment perfect for the breeding of violence emerged ("MONUSCU").

Since M23's resurgence, the humanitarian crisis in the DRC has worsened. Rape and sexual assault are used as a weapon of war with Amnesty International reporting that over 1.5 million women in the country have been raped in their lifetime. Bombings are widespread, with both refugee and internally displaced persons camps finding themselves the target of calculated violence. But, in a return to the torturous colonialist history of the Congo, the M23 has capitalized on forced labor to not only gain profit but gain control of the Congo ("Democratic Republic of the Congo 2020 Archives").

Cobalt mining has gained widespread traction due to its prevalence in modern technology like electric cars, phones, and computers. As demand continues to grow globally with the World Economic Forum's Global Battery Alliance predicting that the demand for cobalt will grow fourfold in 2030, the Congo has found itself at the center of mining efforts (Petersen). As the Council on Foreign Relations quantifies, over 70% of the world's cobalt is produced by the DRC, and 15-30% of that is produced by artisanal and small-scale mining. This is where human rights concerns arise. Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is characterized by its lack of heavy machinery, instead, relying on human labor to scrape, scrounge, and gather cobalt into sacks. Men, women, and even children are expected to work in mining either at the demand of rebel groups or, out of necessity. For many in extreme poverty, ASM is a lifeline. Miners are expected to mine deep into the ground, utilizing networks of tunnels to travel between areas. This proves to be a deadly task. The tunnels lack proper ventilation and often collapse, with those found inside it to be buried alive once impact hits (Campbell). In an interview with Siddharth Kara, an activist on modern slavery, he recounted the numerous women he interviewed who have lost husbands and sons to the collapsed tunnels. Outside of the tunnels, the toxic nature of cobalt dust exposes the Congolese people to diseases on a daily basis both directly through the dust they breathe in and indirectly due to run-off into bodies of water. As Siddharth Kara furthers, "A shadow economy exists underneath the formal economy. Everything that artisanal miners dig out of the ground is sold through intermediaries who then sell it to formal mining companies. …. Then it's in the formal supply chain, and there's no disaggregating it from what was dug through industrial means because it's all dumped together to be processed" (Zuckerman). Part of this shadow economy is controlled by M23. As AP News explains, the group can generate nearly $300,000 a month through its control of a mining area in the country (Banchereau). Thus, it is no surprise that Amnesty International reported the destruction of crops, eviction of farmland, and deforestation as methods being utilized by groups to further expand mining capabilities in the region. Although crackdowns have begun to further formalize the economy, they often fail

to benefit the Congolese people. The International Institute for Environment and Development reports that although State-controlled industry watchdogs like the General Cobalt Company (EGC) and the Authority for the Regulation and Control of Strategic Mineral Substances Markets (ARECOMS) have been developed to regulate mining, they seem to be falling short with little to no progress on ASM zones (Umpula and Bisil). Outside of this, formal companies in the region, many of which are controlled by China, are neocolonialist by nature with exploitative labor and lending practices commonplace.

The numerous human rights abuses committed by M23, the myriad health risks associated with cobalt mining, and the growing humanitarian crisis should act as blaring signs of the need for action in the Congo. But, as the global demand for cobalt increases, the international community's ignorance does as well.

The demand for electric vehicles globally is on the rise. The International Energy Agency's figures estimate that the demand for electric vehicles will grow by almost 20% in Europe and the United States. For many, the benefits of electric vehicles lie in their environmentally conscious features. From improved fuel economy and reduced emissions, the switch to electric vehicles has been driven by the hope to protect the planet and environment from modern-day, manmade stressors ("Trend in"). Ironically, the key ingredient in these electric vehicles is often cobalt batteries. However, this begs the question. How can one argue for the environmental benefit of devices like electric vehicles (which use more renewable energy) when the processes that create them are not only deeply polluting the nations they are mined in, but also, work to slowly kill the Congolese people who are forced to mine for them? The answer is, that it is not possible. Yet, the companies profiting off of this mining and the nations benefiting from the shift to electric vehicles ignore this very fact. Thus, although not negating the benefits of electric vehicles, when the environmental dangers associated with the development of cobalt batteries are paired with the human rights abuses needed to mine them, the morality of electric vehicles is up for question.

Outside of electric vehicles, many of the devices that increase the ease of everyday lives for Western Countries' citizens, rely on the unjust labor of Congolese people. Power tools, airplanes, cell phones, and more utilize cobalt batteries to function. Thus, on the backs of the Congolese people, Western Nations' citizens thrive while remaining ignorant of the impacts of their consumption on both the environment and the people of the Congo.

The Commodification of Agriculture and Environment

Analyzing both the genocide in Palestine and the humanitarian crisis in the Congo, the impact on the environment is devastatingly clear. In Palestine, Israel's attack on agriculture is by proxy an attack on Palestinian culture and resistance, working to extend cycles of poverty and hunger while expanding Israel's grasp on Palestinian land to further their settler colonial interests. In the Congo, Western nations' desire for cobalt to fuel their lavish lifestyles, paired with Chinese companies' predatory practices, has led to the neglect of the Congolese people's humanitarian crises which includes widespread health risks and an attack on basic human needs and rights. But, the question then arises, why? Why has the international community willfully ignored the constant attacks on the lives and land of the Congolese and Palestinian people? In this section, I'll analyze the West's shifted views on agriculture and the environment. Specifically, I'll use the rise of colonialism and capitalism across the globe to describe changing views and prioritizations of land use and farming practices.

Since the acceleration of modern-day colonialism in the 1500s, Indigenous practices have been under attack. From the reeducation of Indigenous children at boarding schools to targeted assaults on Indigenous practices to erase them, colonialism has worked not only to weaken but destroy Indigenous peoples' culture and their ability to resist. In particular, the attack on agriculture remains concerning.

As Brandon R. Hokanson, notes in their analysis of the impacts of French colonization of West Africa, "Farmers who were previously free in the pre-colonial era were often forced to migrate and sell their labor to a newly established class of wealthier farmers who found favor with the French state." Pairing this with the exacerbation of slavery in the region for French elites and the exploitation of farmland to best suit cash crops instead of Indigenous crops, we see that colonialism worked to maximize profits through the exploitation of labor and did so at the expense of Indigenous lives and culture while justifying their actions by arguing that they were bringing "civilization" to Indigenous people(s). But, the attacks didn't stop there. Instead, the land itself was targeted as well; a deeply concerning action considering the connection and significance of Indigenous peoples' relationship with the land they cultivated.

As explained earlier, Western nations in their colonialist actions have prioritized the cultivation of cash crops to increase profits associated with their agricultural practices. In order to achieve their "maximum" profit, most colonial forces practiced monocropping: an agricultural technique in which one crop is planted on a plot year after year without any rotation. But, this proves damaging to the land. As the World Rainforest Movement explains, "under a monoculture system which was usually harmful to the soils after repeated use and left the countries vulnerable to plant diseases sweeping through the entire crop. Local biodiversity was degraded or lost and forests were cleared" ("Colonization and the"). Over time, the land would become unproductive and ultimately, unsustainable. The impact of

these conditions on Indigenous folks is concerning. As they lose their land and ability to cultivate, Indigenous people inherently lose their livelihoods and culture. Thus, forcing them into a cycle of instability defined by food insecurity (Notess). By proxy, depriving Indigenous people of their basic food needs inherently takes away their independence and strength in resistance to colonialist forces.

When analyzing the actions in both the Congo and Palestine, it is clear that European colonialism, settler-colonialism, and neo-colonialism all contribute to the environmental assaults taking place in both nations. But, to explain why the international community continues to justify the violence occurring in both the Congo and Palestine, it is important to recognize the long-term impacts of colonization upon institutions within Western Nations. As observed, the United States has worked extensively to justify its past settler colonialist actions through education, political messaging, and PAC funding. When combining this with the embedded justifications of settler colonialism in every American institution, it is no surprise that the American people view the current colonialist actions within the Congo and Palestine as justified and neglectable. But, this trend isn't just true for the United States. As Maya Goodfellow notes, a 2019 study by the University of Liverpool's Travel, Transculturality and Identity (TIDE) department with the Runnymede Trust found that in an analysis of British History Syllabi, the British education system is inadequate in its representation of the colonialist actions of Britain and the immigration patterns that thereby followed it. Thus, as a result, many British citizens find themselves pointing fingers at migrants regarding the increase of immigration into Britain without fully understanding the historical context of these actions. This pattern is repeated all throughout Europe as well. As long as the institutions that were created by or benefited from the colonialist actions of Western countries remain not only unreformed but un-revolutionalized, then the people of those countries will be unable to recognize the true extent of their countries' colonialist actions. Not only in the past but also in the present day.

Intertwined with the rise of colonialism and its large-scale implications on Indigenous agriculture is the development of modern-day capitalism. As colonial powers prioritized the monetary profit and efficiency of crops, capitalism's roots were planted and set up for growth.

Capitalism as an economic philosophy inherently contradicts the frameworks required for successful indigenous farming. As Marx outlined in his discussion of Capitalist Modes of Production, agriculture under capitalism requires land to be concentrated in the hands of landowners while production is carried out by the capitalist enterprises employing wage labor. By expanding the elite's control over land, thereby minimizing workers' control over not only their labor but their land, the antithesis between town and country continues to expand ("Political Economy"). Marx extends this idea by observing the disparity between agriculture and industry within capitalist systems. While industry thrives with its myriad innovations in technique, the same isn't true for agriculture. The fields' slow development ensures only large-scale farms (owned by the elite) are able to succeed in the capitalist economy. Meanwhile, farms developed for the primary purpose of sustenance lag behind, ultimately failing. This phenomenon further explains the growing gap between town and country. The town, which contains arts, culture, and entertainment for the elite, works to exploit the country for its benefit. Rent forced labor, and the sale of land are all diverted from the country to the town to benefit the consumption of the exploitative class. As Marx quotes, "[the] main mass of peasantry is doomed under capitalism to suffer ruin and want." Inherently, only with the abolishment of the capitalist system can the non-elite truly be freed from exploitation and poverty.

Unsurprisingly, the capitalist and colonial systems thrive with one another. Colonialism relies on capitalism to justify the exploitation of Indigenous land and labor under the guise of bringing prosperity. And, although this trend has been prevalent for centuries, Western nations' reliance on both systems to garner political, economic, and social power forces their continued justification of both systems. Through institutional indoctrination of their civilians, Western nations have worked to increase ignorance towards their actions both in the past and present so as to not change their systems. Not for the benefit of the working class or the Indigenous populations, but for the benefit of their elites.

Having established Western nations' dependency on capitalist and colonialist justifications to uphold the systems of power most beneficial to the elite as well as the indoctrination of their citizens to ensure a lack of reorganization and revolution that would threaten the stability of said systems, it is important to understand the modern-day conditions allowing for the continued suppression of reeducation.

While Western nations' citizens have been understood to blindly justify or ignore their countries' past actions due to the education systems and institutions within the nation, citizens' current neglect to condemn such actions lies in the reframing of settler colonialist and neo-colonialist patterns by such nations in a positive light via innovations. No example demonstrates this best than within the Congo. As discussed earlier, electric vehicles are a key use of cobalt batteries. Many Western nations have framed these electric vehicles as crucial to the transition to clean energy, relying on the increasing use of these vehicles to demonstrate their commitment to the green revolution and the innovative nature of their economy. As the United States's profile on the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrates, although the Congo is characterized as a "risky" investment concerning mining, the "untapped" potential of the region's mineral wealth allows for the country to overlook the possible economic risks associated with it (International Trade Administration). Pairing this with the willfully ignorant education system of Western nations and the narrative developed is one of nullification. While the country ignores the humanitarian and environmental impacts of its work, the citizens are then gaslit into believing that their consumption of such goods nullifies the environmental damage associated with their lifestyle and the actions of their country.

The same idea is true in Palestine. As Western nations' citizens donate to the JNF in hopes of planting trees, an action that has been neutralized in their eyes due to JNF propaganda that proves to be widespread in nations like the United States, they neglect to acknowledge the environmental and cultural assault that their support perpetuates due to years of institutional indoctrination that Western Nations have supported to justify their past and present colonialist actions.

But, when the discussion looks at agriculture in particular, the disconnect is furthered. The reduced emphasis on the communal and cultural importance of agriculture because of capitalism and colonialism in Western countries allows for easier justification of attacks on agriculture as the Western citizen is already distant from said practices and their significance in the livelihoods of Indigenous people.

Western nations have already worked to distance agricultural practices from Indigenous people via colonized education systems. By establishing a foundation of knowledge that purposefully excludes Indigenous people and their success in agriculture, the citizens of Western nations are unable to fully comprehend the connection between Indigenous agriculture and the genocide of Indigenous lives through settler colonialism. But, this ignorance of agricultural practices extends to a lack of connection with modern agricultural practices as a result of capitalism.

The application of techniques like monocropping in tandem with crop subsidies only to the most profitable crops and the addition of middlemen in the distribution process have contributed to the death of diversification of not only crops but farms in the United States (Patron-Cano). As larger farms benefit most from government subsidies, making them more successful and with that, larger in size, smaller farms are easily left behind. And, when considering that the majority of large farms are owned by corporations while smaller farms are primarily family-owned, it is no surprise that most citizens of Western Nations feel wholly disconnected from agriculture. Research from the University of Minnesota further quantifies, explaining that 24% of American adults have a high degree of trust in the information they receive about where their food is grown and how it is produced (Homans). When we further consider that only around 2% of the American population works in agriculture, it begins to become clear as to why Americans are so disconnected from agriculture within their own nation ("Reconnecting with Our Food"). The lack of knowledge regarding the farm-to-fork process along with the lack of urgency associated with the development of this knowledge keeps Americans disconnected and the United States capitalizes on this fact. Utilizing this lack of care and knowledge to minimize the impacts of their support of countries like Israel or their actions, and thereby, distance themselves from their actions in the global South.

This trend is not unique to the United States. The continued distancing of Western citizens from the agricultural processes that cultivate the food they consume on a daily basis furthers the disconnect between said citizens and knowledge that highlights the importance of agriculture in various cultures. This pattern only works to benefit Western powers as they work to distance themselves from nations in the Global South, thereby, shielding themselves from adequate repercussions regarding their actions supporting human rights abuses, genocide, etc.

The humanitarian crises in both Palestine and the Congo feed off of Western nations' financial, diplomatic, and material support. For the benefit of the Western nations' citizens, the Congolese and Palestinian people are forced to endure the worst humanitarian crises of the modern day. Whether it be the widespread use of exploitative labor in the Congo or the manufactured famines in Palestine, Western countries have shielded themselves from the suffering of these innocent people by both distancing themselves from these nations in the Global South and justifying their actions through indoctrination. In particular, by contributing to the erasure of community-based agriculture and instilling ideals of settler colonialism into the minds of their citizens, the governments of Western Nations like the United States can remain ignorant of the impacts of their actions and support of genocidal countries and companies. Meanwhile, the citizens of these countries are either uneducated about the use of their tax dollars in the murder of civilians across the ocean or have accepted said consequences as they enjoy the material goods they receive from the companies whose hands have blood on them.

But if there is one thing you should remember, it is the resilience of the people whose very livelihoods are threatened at the hands of major Western powers. Even with agricultural plight, Palestinians have worked to reclaim what has been uprooted from them. While Israelis attempt to obstruct connections with olive trees, Palestinians resist.

The Olive Tree is a guardian, providing strength, resilience, and peace. And in times like this, when the olive tree is under attack in an attempt to further genocide, Palestinians remain dedicated as "Guardians of the olive trees." Providing back to her, what she provides them: strength.



Figure 1. Sakir Khader, We'll never abandon the olive branch., photograph, 2024.

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Profits Over Patients: Examining Systemic Failures in the Pharmaceutical Industry

Anushka Pramanik

At a STEM-focused school, the environment is filled with bright smart peers who aspire to pursue careers in medicine. The scholarly space is rich with opportunities tailored to these students: competitive clubs, research-intensive classes, mentorship programs that provide hands-on lab experience, and community service initiatives tied to healthcare. Medicine is everywhere, and it is inspiring to witness the life-saving potential of healthcare professions through the eyes of such driven individuals. Healthcare is undeniably a respected, rewarding field, offering not only the chance to make an impact but also financial stability. Many students are motivated by a genuine desire to care for others and contribute significantly to society. Yet, beneath these inspiring aspirations lie uncomfortable truths often overlooked.

While the life-saving potential of healthcare is undeniable, the glamorization of medicine often obscures systemic flaws—particularly the structures that prioritize profit over people. This is especially clear in the pharmaceutical industry, where companies often hold immense influence over public health, often to the detriment of equitable care. Pharmaceutical companies, frequently referred to as "Big Pharma," are seen as putting profits ahead of patients, contributing to a system that struggles to provide fair and equal care.

The duality of medicine—a heroic field simultaneously upheld by systemic corruption—demands a critical examination of the intersection between public health, policy, and social justice. Big Pharma's impact spans generations, affecting demographics from children to the elderly, leaving no group untouched. Confronting these realities requires a commitment to challenging systemic injustices and advocating for a healthcare system that prioritizes humanity over profit.

Life or Debt? From scandals over life-saving drugs priced out of reach to headlines exposing billion-dollar lawsuits, the pharmaceutical industry is no stranger to controversy. Stories of families choosing between rent and insulin or the devastating impact of the opioid epidemic highlight the darker side of a system that holds enormous power over public health. I mean, if you're an immunocompromised patient battling toxoplasmosis, good luck—because Daraprim, a critical life-saving drug, skyrocketed from $13.50 to $750 per pill overnight, marking a staggering 5,000% price hike! The pharmaceutical industry stands at the center of modern healthcare, however, its immense influence often comes with practices that prioritize financial gain over the well-being of patients.

This paper will examine systemic issues in the pharmaceutical industry, focusing on practices that prioritize profit at the expense of equitable healthcare. It will explore predatory drug pricing, such as extreme price hikes on essential medications, and aggressive marketing strategies that often mislead consumers and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Additionally, the paper will analyze regulatory failures that allow these issues to persist, including inadequate oversight and the influence of industry lobbying on policy decisions. These failures not only aggravate existing health disparities but also undermine efforts to hold the industry accountable for unethical practices. The societal consequences of these systemic issues will also be explored, with a focus on the lack of public trust in healthcare, the financial and social burdens placed on patients, and the disproportionate effects on marginalized communities.

By examining these heavily interconnected issues, this paper will propose targeted reforms aimed at creating greater transparency and accountability in the pharmaceutical industry. These reforms will also seek to address inequities in healthcare delivery, ultimately working toward a system that prioritizes the well-being of all individuals over corporate gain. The roots of this examination start from personal experiences that reflect broader societal skepticism—a mistrust deeply rooted in historical and cultural narratives of healthcare manipulation.

Public Distrust in Pharmaceutical Companies

Growing up in a traditional Indian family, I witnessed a deep-seated skepticism towards Western medicine. My parents would eagerly reach for ayurvedic remedies—concoctions of turmeric, cumin, neem, and amla—desperately avoiding "chemical" treatments that came with eye-watering medical bills. Even if prescribed medicine, it would be received with the utmost cautious care, carefully reading the directions on the orange-tinted bottles once, twice, even thrice, with utter skepticism. This mistrust isn't unique to my family but reflects broader societal tensions around pharmaceutical marketing and healthcare.

The roots of medical distrust run deep, intertwining historical, cultural, and systemic factors. For marginalized

communities, this skepticism stems from a complex legacy of medical exploitation, including unethical clinical trials, systemic racism in healthcare, and predatory pharmaceutical practices.

As David Mitchell, founder of Patients for Affordable Drugs, describes the industry as an "octopus with many tentacles" reaching into every corner of healthcare and politics, the public's perception of pharmaceutical companies has become increasingly negative (Lo). Surveys reveal the reality of this crisis. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, pharmaceutical companies are the least trusted healthcare sector, with only 55% of global respondents believing in their integrity—significantly lower than hospitals (72%) and biotech companies (62%) (Lo). The United States has experienced particularly dramatic declines, with trust levels dropping by 13% in recent years.

The roots of this distrust have multiple perspectives. High drug prices stand at the forefront of public anger, with patients routinely encountering prescription costs that can reach thousands of dollars. Mitchell highlights the frustration, noting that people are not just upset about pricing, but about perceived systemic abuse, drug companies extending monopolies, and blocking generic alternatives (Lo).

The opioid epidemic has further eroded public confidence, creating a narrative that pharmaceutical companies prioritize profits over patient welfare. Specific instances, such as Martin Shkreli's price-gouging of Daraprim and Mylan's EpiPen price hikes, have become symbolic of what many see as the industry's predatory practices.

The United States presents a unique landscape for pharmaceutical distrust. Unlike countries with nationalized healthcare systems, the U.S. lacks robust governmental mechanisms to negotiate drug prices. This absence of price control puts pharmaceutical companies directly in the public's crosshairs, making drug pricing a constant "kitchen table issue" that directly impacts Americans' daily lives (Lo). Interestingly, pharmaceutical trust varies globally. While developed markets like the U.S. and Germany show significant distrust, countries like Indonesia, India, and China maintain higher trust levels—potentially because these markets still see pharmaceutical innovations as genuinely life-changing (Lo).

The industry faces a critical challenge: rebuilding a trust that has been systematically eroded by practices perceived as prioritizing short-term profits over patient health. As Mitchell argues, the current system has "tilted to the profit side," creating a fundamental disconnect between pharmaceutical companies' clinical goals and their business practices.

While broad public skepticism provides a foundation for understanding pharmaceutical industry challenges, the impact of this mistrust becomes most apparent when examining how pharmaceutical companies deliberately target vulnerable communities. The erosion of trust is not just an abstract concept, but a strategic plan where marginalized groups bear the heaviest burden of pharmaceutical manipulation.

Targeted Marketing and Generational Distrust in Marginalized Communities

Targeted marketing by pharmaceutical companies disproportionately affects low-income and marginalized groups by systematically exploiting deeply rooted healthcare inequities. The predatory nature of targeted marketing becomes even more stark when examining pharmaceutical advertising strategies (Singh). For instance, pharmaceutical advertisements for diabetes medications frequently target Black and Hispanic communities, who experience significantly higher disease rates due to systemic healthcare inequities and socioeconomic challenges (The Commonwealth Fund, Yoo).

The medical establishment's long history of mistreating Black Americans—from gruesome experiments on enslaved people to the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study—has created a profound legacy of institutional mistrust (Singh). This historical context is powerfully illustrated by Purdue Pharma's OxyContin campaign, which strategically targeted areas with high rates of workplace injuries and chronic pain—regions predominantly inhabited by economically disadvantaged communities (The Commonwealth Fund). These populations, often with limited access to comprehensive medical information, were more susceptible to trusting healthcare providers and less equipped to challenge pharmaceutical narratives about drug safety (Singh). While seemingly aimed at raising treatment awareness, these campaigns systematically ignore the structural factors driving disease prevalence, such as food deserts, environmental conditions, and limited preventive care access (Singh).

A national survey revealed the depth of this challenge: only 40% of individuals considered pharmaceutical manufacturers trustworthy, with trust varying dramatically across demographic and political lines (Singh). Notably, excellent health and having a regular healthcare source were associated with higher trust in pharmaceutical manufacturers (Singh). The combination of misinformation and targeted marketing perpetuates a dangerous cycle, fostering pharmaceutical dependency without addressing fundamental systemic issues. As one expert notes, even the term "mistrust" can be victim-blaming, placing blame on communities that have been systematically let down by the medical system (Singh).

To dismantle these practices, reforms demanding stricter advertising oversight and unprecedented transparency about drug efficacy and risks are essential. The targeted marketing of pharmaceutical products represents just one aspect of a broader phenomenon: direct-to-consumer advertising, a marketing strategy that transforms medical communication into a performance of manufactured desire.

Direct-to-Consumer Advertising: The Pharmaceutical Marketing Phenomenon

We've all encountered them across all media landscapes: on cable television, highway billboards, magazine spreads, at local pharmacies, or while frantically searching WebMD for that suspicious mole on your back. Whether manifesting as a tap-dancing cartoon prostate explaining erectile dysfunction or a group of synchronized swimming seniors discussing cholesterol medication, these advertisements consistently deliver a singular message: YOU need MY product!

Direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) represents a pivotal marketing strategy for pharmaceutical companies introducing novel or updated therapies to generate consumer demand for their products. The scale of this phenomenon is staggering: the average U.S. television viewer watches nine drug advertisements daily, totaling approximately 16 hours of pharmaceutical marketing per year—far exceeding time spent with primary care physicians. Since 2012, spending on drug commercials has increased by 62%, reaching $5 billion annually.

Proponents of Direct-to-Consumer Advertising (DTC) argue that it offers several potential benefits. Delbaere suggests that these advertisements provide consumers access to multiple health information sources, encouraging patients to explore a wider range of treatment options. According to Aikin, 53% of physicians reported more thoughtful conversations with patients due to DTC, indicating improved patient-physician communication. Parekh notes that 27% of consumers were prompted to make physician appointments to discuss previously unaddressed health conditions.

However, critics highlight significant drawbacks. Some demonstrated that patients requesting brand-name drugs were significantly more likely to receive prescriptions, suggesting a problematic influence on medical decision-making. Frosch argues that such advertising increases rates of clinically inappropriate prescriptions and leads to the medicalization of non-medical conditions.

The FDA, responsible for overseeing these advertisements, has historically struggled with enforcement. A systematic review of 97 drug advertisements between 2015 and 2016 revealed alarming deficiencies: only 26% provided quantitative efficacy information, 0% offered quantitative risk data, and 13% promoted off-label medication use—a practice explicitly banned by the FDA. The economic implications are substantial. Prescription drug spending reached approximately $457 billion in 2015, with significant costs absorbed by government programs like Medicare and Medicaid. This financial burden is directly influenced by the aggressive marketing strategies of pharmaceutical companies.

Many DTC advertisements employ persuasive techniques that prioritize emotional appeal over factual accuracy. They often highlight drug benefits while downplaying potential side effects, creating a biased perception of safety and efficacy. The ethics of DTC continue to become questionable when considering its impact on low-income and marginalized groups. Advertisements for antidepressants and painkillers often target communities where systemic stressors make these conditions more prevalent, promoting pharmaceutical solutions instead of addressing root causes.

The challenges posed by direct-to-consumer advertising extend far beyond general pharmaceutical marketing, becoming particularly acute in specialized medical domains. As Richard Bergström, Director General of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA), observes, "The established market model for pharmaceutical products, as for most other products, is heavily dependent on sales volumes." This sales-driven approach reveals its most problematic intentions when applied to medical categories like antibiotics—where public health motives directly conflict with commercial interests.

Once again, the pharmaceutical industry finds itself in an inherent paradox: marketing strategies designed to maximize product consumption are fundamentally at odds with responsible medical practice, especially in areas requiring precise intervention. Antibiotics represent an illustration of this tension, where each prescription carries broader implications for medical resistance and public health.

Antibiotic Exploitative Marketing Practices

The contradictions of pharmaceutical marketing truly shine in the realm of antibiotic development and distribution. Antibiotics represent a unique challenge in the pharmaceutical landscape—miraculous pills of salvation that have fundamentally transformed modern medicine. These wonder drugs have saved millions of lives, defeating once-lethal infections with ease. Beyond curing diseases, they've become the unsung heroes of modern medicine, enabling organ transplants, joint replacements, and surgeries by keeping infections at bay. Their effectiveness has transformed global health, lengthened life expectancy, and made medical care safer than ever. And yet, their journey through the pharmaceutical pipeline is far from miraculous. The very mechanisms of their marketing and distribution threaten their long-term efficacy. Picture a familiar scenario: a patient huddled in a sterile doctor's office, sniffling and miserable, when the prescription pad descends from on high. The friendly neighborhood doctor scribbles out a course of antibiotics faster than one can say "I probably just need some rest."

The discovery of antibiotics revolutionized medicine, beginning in 1928 when Alexander Fleming identified

penicillin, the first antibiotic. This eventually led to the "golden era" of antibiotics (1940–1962), a period characterized by the discovery and development of most antibiotic classes in use today including various penicillins and cephalosporins. These breakthroughs profoundly transformed public health, offering unprecedented control over bacterial infections. However, the promise of antibiotics has dimmed over time. Since 1987, a "discovery void" has hindered the development of new antibiotics, creating a gap in therapeutic innovation (Sneader). Meanwhile, antibiotic-resistant bacteria are making current treatments less effective, creating a serious global health problem. This resistance is made worse when people misuse antibiotics, like not finishing their prescribed doses, which helps resistant bacteria grow. Herein lies a fundamental conflict—the public health goal of using antibiotics responsibly often directly contradicts the financial interests of pharmaceutical producers.

The economic motives driving antibiotic research and development (R&D) reveal a stark market failure. Developing new antibiotics requires massive financial investment, yet the most effective public health strategy demands these drugs be used with extreme caution. Each new antibiotic becomes a strategic resource to be carefully rationed, rather than a product to be widely distributed—an approach that fundamentally challenges the core principles of pharmaceutical marketing and sales (Anderson). A recent analysis of pharmaceutical sales data from 67 countries between 2016 and 2023 reveals critical trends. Global antibiotic consumption increased by 16.3%, from 29.5 to 34.3 billion defined daily doses (DDDs), with a 10.6% rise in the consumption rate per 1,000 inhabitants per day. This growth was most notable in upper-middle- and lower-middle-income countries, reflecting disparities in antibiotic access and usage (Klein).

The consequences extend far beyond simple economic data. Bacterial resistance represents a growing global threat with potentially catastrophic implications. As bacteria continuously adapt and evolve, pharmaceutical companies find increasingly less financial motivation to develop new treatments. This creates a dangerous cycle: limited market potential discourages research, while reduced research exponentially increases the risk of ineffective treatments against emerging bacterial threats.

While bacterial resistance represents one side of pharmaceutical marketing failures, the opioid crisis illustrates another public health catastrophe driven by corporate marketing strategies. Just as antibiotic development suffers from misaligned economic motives, pain management medications became a gateway for pharmaceutical manipulation, with Purdue Pharma—Suffering Solutions, LLC—ruthlessly marketing addiction as a cure.

The Role of Purdue Pharma in the Opioid Crisis

Purdue Pharma's aggressive marketing of OxyContin provides an especially striking example of how pharmaceutical companies' practices can drive public health crises. In the late 1990s, Purdue launched a widespread campaign promoting OxyContin as a safe and effective solution for chronic pain, downplaying its addictive potential. The company targeted healthcare providers with misleading marketing materials, which claimed that less than 1% of patients prescribed opioids would develop an addiction. These claims were not supported by proper evidence, yet they were instrumental in convincing physicians to overprescribe opioids.

Purdue's strategy included flashy incentives for sales representatives to promote OxyContin and substantial investments in promotional materials for doctors. Sales representatives were essentially pharmaceutical cheerleaders, armed with glossy brochures and a remarkable ability to make addiction seem like a distant afterthought. They distributed coupons for free initial prescriptions—a brilliant tactic that essentially offered the first hit free! The continuing medical education (CME) programs sponsored by Purdue were also masterclasses in misdirection. These "educational" sessions choreographed information to minimize addiction risks, painting OxyContin as a miracle solution for chronic pain. Doctors, many overwhelmed by patient demands and limited treatment options, became unwitting accomplices in a larger narrative of pharmaceutical manipulation.

Purdue's marketing strategy was particularly devious in its geographic targeting. The company strategically focused on regions with high rates of manual labor and chronic pain conditions—areas where workers, often living paycheck to paycheck, were most vulnerable. Manufacturing towns, agricultural communities, and regions with physically demanding jobs became hunting grounds for OxyContin distribution. These were communities already struggling with limited healthcare access, minimal addiction treatment resources, and workers whose bodies bore the physical toll of grueling labor. Imagine a factory worker in a rust-belt town, muscles aching from years of repetitive motion, seeking relief from a healthcare system that offers little beyond a prescription pad. Purdue saw not a patient, but a potential long-term revenue stream. These economically disadvantaged communities, already stretched thin by systemic challenges, became the epicenters of an epidemic.

The consequences of Purdue's actions are staggering. Between 1999 and 2019, approximately 247,000 people in the United States died from prescription opioid overdoses (Supreme Court). The company's unethical practices reached alarming levels, with sales rising from approximately $48 million to nearly $2 billion in 2002 (US Fed News Service). By 2010, Purdue's revenues had reached $3 billion, with continued sales of up to $1.8 billion as recently as 2017 (US Fed News Service). In 2007, one of Purdue's affiliates pleaded guilty to a federal felony for misbranding OxyContin as a less addictive alternative to other pain medications (Supreme Court). The opioid crisis reached critical levels, with opioid overdoses quadrupling since 1999, and 33,091 nationwide deaths recorded in 2015 alone (US Fed News Service).

The legal and financial fallout has been equally significant. Thousands of lawsuits followed the company's misconduct, ultimately leading Purdue to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2019 (Supreme Court). The Sackler family, owners of Purdue, withdrew approximately $11 billion—roughly 75% of the firm's total assets—over a decade, leaving the company in a significantly weakened financial state (Supreme Court). In California alone, there were 2,196 opioid-related overdose deaths in 2017, highlighting the devastating local impact of the crisis (US Fed News Service). The Purdue Pharma saga is more than just a corporate scandal—it's an illustration of the devastating impact of prioritizing profits over public health, revealing the need for stricter regulations on pharmaceutical marketing and corporate accountability. This breakdown of regulatory oversight would become what experts call "regulatory capture."

Regulatory Capture and Policy Failures

Regulatory capture is a systemic problem that transforms what should be protective governmental oversight into a playground for corporate interests. Imagine a referee who's been quietly paid off by one of the teams—that's regulatory capture in a nutshell. The pharmaceutical industry has masterfully turned regulatory agencies from watchdogs into lapdogs, creating a scenario where checks and balances look more like a comedy of errors than a functional democratic process.

The concept plays out like a game of musical chairs between government officials and pharmaceutical executives. Regulators who are supposed to protect public health instead find themselves moving seamlessly between government positions and lucrative industry jobs. This "revolving door" means that the very people responsible for creating and enforcing regulations are often the same ones who will later profit from those same regulations—or lack thereof (Roosevelt Institute).

This phenomenon creates profound ethical challenges. One study found that over half of FDA drug reviewers in hematology-oncology who left the agency went on to work for biopharmaceutical firms (Roosevelt Institute). Such career trajectories raise serious questions about the objectivity of regulatory oversight. As one researcher noted, when future employment opportunities exist with regulated companies, regulators might be inclined to 'give them the benefit of the doubt' (Roosevelt Institute).

Despite growing awareness, meaningful preventative measures have been limited. Legislative attempts like the STOCK Act of 2012 and the Sunshine Act of 2010 aimed to increase transparency and reduce conflicts of interest, but their impact has been minimal. Typical 'cooling-off' periods of one to two years for regulators before they can work in the industries they previously regulated need to be revised to address the broader ethical concerns (Roosevelt Institute).

The pharmaceutical industry's influence extends far beyond this, pushing into the foundations of medical research. Research funding plays a critical role in this dynamic. A study revealed that 85 percent of industry-funded clinical trials reported positive outcomes, compared to just 50 percent of government-funded research (Hilzenrath). A 2012 investigation found that principal investigators are more likely to view themselves as businesspeople motivated by profit rather than independent scientists, adopting what researchers termed an 'industry-based approach to research ethics' (Hilzenrath).

Medical journals themselves are not immune to this influence. A study found that over 50 percent of medical journal editors received payment from pharmaceutical companies or medical device manufacturers in 2014, with the average editor receiving $175,239 in compensation (Hilzenrath). The healthcare industry spent a combined $637 million in 2016 on journal advertisements, with the majority coming from pharmaceutical companies seeking to market drugs directly to doctors. This creates a significant financial incentive for editors to publish industry-funded research that may not always align with public health interests.

Frameworks for Reform

As we look toward addressing, the challenges surrounding Big Pharma and its influence on healthcare, it becomes clear that there is no quick fix, no single solution that will suddenly make everything right. If it were that simple, we would have solved this by now. The path to meaningful change is long and requires patience, persistence, and, most importantly, collaboration. There's no magic formula that will wipe away decades of systemic issues, but what we can do is take thoughtful, deliberate steps toward progress. We can begin by acknowledging the problem and working towards reforms that prioritize public health over corporate profit. It may take time, but through relentless advocacy, careful policy changes, and a shift in societal values, we can challenge the system and build a future where access to medicine is driven by people's needs, not by profits. Reform may not happen overnight, but through small, collective actions, we can gradually reshape a broken system into one that truly serves the people it's meant to protect.

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Voices of Displacement: How Partition Transformed Refugee Women's Political Power in Bengal

Shubhan Bhattacharya

Every summer, I cherish the opportunity to go on our family trips to India. I long for the visits to my grandmothers, uncles, and extended family. When I arrive, my brother Shamik and I are immediately pampered with our family's love. Right as we walk into her apartment, my grandmother immediately begins making Pitha, a sugary fried pancake-like snack. In the evening, to avoid the scorching heat, my brother and I leave on bikes to explore Kolkata, the epicenter of Bengali culture. As we walk through the street, talking with vendors and those on the street who recognize us from last summer, my fading Bangla begins to revive and I become adjusted to the countless mosquitos.

Kolkata is known for its infamous laid-back culture, starkly contrasting the hustle and bustle of cities like Delhi, London, and New York. Having worked in these environments, many Bengalis choose to retire in Kolkata, seeking its slow pace and cultural richness. Birati, the township my grandmother lives in, derives its name from the Bengali word Biroti, meaning "taking a break." This ethos reflects the city's overall ambiance, where people prioritize relaxation and conversation over the relentless pursuit of time. One of Kolkata's beloved pastimes is the tradition of Adda, which "is best described as an informal group conversation that's long, fluid and relaxed in nature." Adda is an integral part of Kolkata, as people rush to coffee houses around the city to talk for hours, including the notable College Street Coffee House, which has been a traditional meeting place for the intellectuals of Kolkata, including Nobel laureate winners.

I have always regarded Kolkata as my home in India, the place where I most feel comfortable with those who share my culture. But to my grandmother and members of my grandmother's generation, it isn't fully home. Instead, it is an escape. During one of the family gatherings in Kolkata, we found ourselves engrossed in an Adda session on my grandmother's terrace. As the sun went down and the air cooled, my grandmother began recounting early childhood memories of the plush fields and mountains of Sylhet, Bangladesh. It was my first time hearing about my family's roots in Bangladesh. Her voice, filled with nostalgia and sorrow, painted vivid pictures of the rice fields and farm we owned. She began recounting the stories of the aftermath of the Partition of Bengal in 1947, which forced her family to migrate by foot, ultimately settling in Shillong, a hill station in North East India full of people of a different ethnicity. She now lives in both Kolkata and Shillong, but neither is home to her.

Bengal and all Bengalis have historically been obsessed with the literary form, with a particular fondness for plays and kabitās (poems). This literary fervor is reflected in the adoration of Bengali writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray, and, more recently, Jhumpa Lahiri. The tradition of reciting kabitās and organizing literary gatherings remains a cherished part of Bengali culture. For my grandmother, these evening gatherings typically mean reciting kabitās about the beauty of the district of Sylhet, the place where my family is historically from. The recitations of these poems typically occur in Sylheti, the native language of Sylhet, to which my grandmother still clings.

Amongst these nostalgic recollections are also the stories of hardship and resilience, particularly of the women of this time, who faced unimaginable challenges as many walked by foot across the border to India with their children in hand. These women often had a stable life in East Bengal, where many had lived for hundreds of years. As they came to West Bengal, however, they were forced to start a new life; many of them had nowhere to go and had to set up their own housing and food for their children. My aunt mentions a relative who had survived in the forest for three months with her children, living off berries and hunting for food in order to escape the communal violence and inevitable rape in what is present-day Bangladesh.

The Partition of Bengal in 1947 was a moment that drastically altered the social fabric of the region. The mass displacement and socio-economic changes posed unique challenges, particularly for women. This paper argues that the Partition of Bengal in 1947, which caused significant social changes for refugees, radically transformed the political landscape for women in Bengal. The unique challenges faced by women during this period not only fostered a heightened political awareness but also led to increased participation in political processes through natural and strategic processes. Furthermore, I argue this shift significantly contributed to the growth in support for the Communist Party, thus altering the political dynamics in West Bengal in the 20th century.

The forced migration and resettlement of East Bengali women thrust them into a new economic and social reality. As they took on roles outside the home, joining the

exploitative West Bengal labor force, they became actively involved in labor strikes and protests. While fighting to establish new homes and livelihoods in West Bengal, these women also participated in anti-eviction protests, defending their new lives. As a result, these women often found themselves at the forefront of political movements, aligning with the Communist Party's platform of land reform and labor reform. In this paper, I explore how the transformation of home and societal roles for refugee women, along with their treatment in West Bengal, led to increased political participation and eventual support for the Communist Party.

Background

To provide context for the arguments that follow, I will first give a brief background on the Partition of Bengal and its immediate impacts. The Partition of Bengal in 1947 marked one of the most significant and traumatic mass migrations in human history. As Britain ended its colonial rule after World War II, Lord Mountbatten, appointed as Governor-General in February 1947, pursued a rapid timeline for Indian independence. The resulting partition, based on the "two-nation thesis" that Hindus and Muslims required separate states, led to the creation of West Bengal (India) and East Bengal (East Pakistan, later Bangladesh).

The political decision to divide India along religious lines triggered unprecedented demographic shifts and humanitarian crises as well as intergenerational trauma that continues to this day. In Bengal, this line drawn disrupted a distinctive Bengali ethnic unity that had been strong for hundreds of years. The partition proceeded rapidly, forcing millions to abandon their ancestral homes. Hindu families from East Bengal fled to West Bengal, while Muslim families from West Bengal moved eastward. In the ensuing chaos, an estimated three million people went missing, marking one of the largest humanitarian crises of the twentieth century.

Women became the primary targets of violence during this period, with their bodies becoming battlegrounds for communal hatred. During India's Partition, an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 women were abducted by members of other religious communities. Many were subjected to rape, forced marriages, and sexual slavery. Some were murdered or sold into prostitution. The targeting of women was not random but systematic, women were seen as embodiments of community honor, making violence against them a particularly potent weapon of communal revenge. Even as they fled " refugee women were humiliated and inhumanly tortured on their way to West Bengal in the plea of search by the Pakistani customs officers and staffs" (Guha, n.d.).

The Noakhali riots of 1946 foreshadowed the horrific violence that would characterize Partition. On November 5, 1946, The Hindustan Standard reported that 300 women were raped in Noakhali alone, with an additional 400 cases of rape recorded in surrounding areas (Guha, n.d.). The violence in Noakhali emerged as a particularly brutal example of how communal tensions transformed into gendered violence, with women becoming marginalized victims of male chauvinism. The brutality was so severe that it prompted Mahatma Gandhi to walk barefoot through the affected villages in a desperate attempt to restore peace.

Economic Necessity

The economic transformation of refugee women following the Partition of Bengal represents one of the most obvious and significant shifts in Bengali Society during the mid-twentieth century. As refugees crossed the border into India, predominantly West-Bengal, women's transition from protected domestic lives to wage earners was not a choice but a necessity born of desperate circumstances.

This transformation is powerfully depicted in Ritwik Ghatak's 1960 film "Meghe Dhaka Tara" (The Cloud-Capped Star). Through the character of Nita, a middle-class refugee daughter, Ghatak captures the crushing weight of responsibility that fell upon these women. The film's haunting scene of Nita descending a staircase after being compelled to leave her studies symbolizes the descent of countless refugee women into a life of constant work and sacrifice. Like many real refugee women, Nita becomes her family's sole breadwinner, sacrificing her education, personal happiness, and eventually her health, while her achievements go unrecognized by her family members.

For many women, the realities depicted in Meghe Dhaka Tara were all too familiar, as many of these women came from being traditional homemakers in East Bengal or as daughters pursuing education and marriage. But as they transitioned and settled in West Bengal, they had no land or homes and were thrust into this money economy. The necessity to pay rent and put food on the table began to outweigh all traditions. In Meghe Dhaka Tara, Nita began working to pay for the rent and food of her family, with her mother purposely sabotaging her matrimonial hopes in worries of losing the principle breadwinner. This narrative echoed throughout refugee families in West Bengal. Bithi Chakravarti, a refugee from East Bengal who fled to Kolkata, recounts how her "studies had gone to the dogs" and "soon as [she] completed BT, [she] took up a teaching job." "The day [she] used to get the salary, [she] would straightaway visit [her] landlord to pay the rent," she recalls, highlighting the relentless financial pressures these women faced (Bagchi et al., 2003, pp. 150-155).

This financial strain propelled women into previously forbidden industries. Sukumari Chaudhuri, an East Bengal refugee who crossed over to West Bengal from Hajigunj, explained that at the Bengal Company, where she worked, initially female workers " were hardly 10 at the beginning" but "gradually refugee women trained and helped by the Nari Seva Sangha" and around 1953-1954 female workers " numbered around 150 to 200" (Bagchi et al., 2003, pp. 143–150), Similarly, by 1949 the first batch of women were appointed in the Calcutta police (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.79-109).

While comprehensive census-based labor data from 20th century West Bengal remains scarce, available statistics reveal a clear surge in women's employment post-partition. Though the data doesn't differentiate between East and West Bengali women, it's evident that East Bengali refugee women took whatever work they could find, even jobs that were "unthinkable for women in those days." (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.79-109)

Table 1: Employment of Women in Key Sectors (1931-61)

Sector of Employment in West Bengal	Employment of Women in 1931	Employment of Women in 1961
Coal mining	17,321	33,717
Stone quarrying	–	979
Religious charitable services	726	1,894
Retail trade in fuel	2,746	4,534
Metal	871	7,384
Retail trade in textile	1,548	2,467
Vegetable oil and dairy	1,088	1,232

No figures available for employment of women in stone-quarrying in 1931.
Source: A Mitra (1961), p 533.

Figure 1. (Guha-Choudhury, 2009)

The growing presence of women in the workforce inevitably drew them into labor and wage struggles, leading to increased political participation. Faced with the pressures of paying rent and putting food on the table women began participating in labor struggles. As Sukumari describes in her experiences:

> Our salary was very poor. In 1955, our agitation for the payment of bonus sharpened. Matching shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, refugee women participated wholeheartedly in the agitation. This was a great morale booster for their male colleagues. The agitation was spearheaded by the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) which was active and helpful in our colonies also.

This became a common theme as the CPI began to align itself with many of the key issues of East Bengali refugees. As Sukumari observes, East Bengali refugees dominated these protests, their participation driven by their desperate fight against crushing poverty. "They lived in abject poverty. For them it was a struggle for existence," she explains.

The Nari Seva Sangha, while primarily focused on training women for factory work and healthcare roles as auxiliary midwives and hospital aids, also served another crucial function. According to Chakravartty (2005), it was a "meeting place of the CPI sympathizers and supporters", effectively bridging vocational training with political mobilization.

Regardless of their political intention the CPI began aligning itself with the refugees' labor interests. By 1955, the CPI had collected over 14,000 signatures demanding employment opportunities for women in the government sector, underscoring the growing influence of female laborers in shaping public policy (Nagpal, 2017).

The economic transformation of East Bengali refugee women following Partition represents a significant shift in both gender roles and social structures within Bengali society. What began as a desperate necessity, the need to earn wages to survive, evolved into a broader social and political awakening. As women like those depicted in Ghatak's "Meghe Dhaka Tara" entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers, they not only became breadwinners but also emerged as active participants in labor movements and political activism. Through organizations like the Nari Seva Sangha and their growing alignment with the CPI, refugee women transformed their economic hardships into platforms for collective action and social change. Their journey from traditional homemakers to wage earners, though born of tragedy and necessity, ultimately contributed to reshaping the role of women in Bengali society, challenging traditional gender norms and establishing new pathways for female participation in public life.

Anti Eviction

As East Bengali refugees fled into India following the partition, the housing crisis faced was dire and immediate. Fleeing violence and dispossession, millions of refugees arrived in West Bengal, predominantly in Calcutta, only to find a city ill-equipped to accommodate their needs. The government, overwhelmed by the scale of the crisis, failed to provide adequate housing or rehabilitation. Instead, policies focused on dispersing refugees to rural areas with insufficient resources, leaving the majority of urban refugees to fend for themselves.

For years the government of India refused to accept that West Bengal faced a crisis comparable in scale to the Punjab disaster. Nehru himself believed the conditions in East Bengal were not a danger to the Hindu minority population, regarding their flight westward as a product of imaginary fear. Therefore the government of India did not allow the property of Muslim evacuees from Bengal to be given to incoming Hindu Refugees. In fact the incumbent Congress party under the leadership of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy saw incoming refugees as political pawns who could easily be used to challenge the Congress party's power, stating " we have ... refugees coming in a state of mental excitement which enables the careerist politician to get hold of them and utilise them for various types of propaganda against the Government and the Congress" (Chatterji, 2011).

The West Bengal Congress government's primary strategy became dispersing East Bengali refugees away from Kolkata and West Bengal, attempting to resettle them

in places like Odisha. However eventually as the situation worsened, the Government of West Bengal could no longer turn a blind eye. The government began setting up refugee colonies but often in areas of inadequate irrigation or drainage. As described by the Partition Museum "Those who had no other options sought shelter in government camps. These camps were plagued by horrible living conditions, from a shortage of drinkable water, sanitation and rations to the absolute lack of privacy. Thousands died of suffocation and dysentery caused by dirty water and expired food" (Kolkata Partition Museum, n.d.).

Faced with these conditions, many refugees took matters into their own hands. By December 1950, an estimated 149 refugee colonies had been established throughout Kolkata on approximately 2.4 million acres of land, often through forceful occupation (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.79-109). These were often established on large vacant plots of the wealthy of West Bengal. The government, under pressure from landlords and vested interests, issued eviction orders, threatening to demolish these settlements. Eviction, however, for refugees was unacceptable, it meant not only the loss of their tenuous shelters but also a complete erasure of the fragile stability they had begun to rebuild. No refugee would accept it. Women who were often dependent on running the household and establishing this new home in a new land, found themselves at the forefront of resisting these threats.



Figure 2. A row of makeshift huts constructed by refugees in Kolkata. (Kolkata Partition Museum, n.d.)

In response to constant eviction threats, East Bengali refugees organized to protect their homes and assert their right to shelter. The United Central Refugee Council (UCRC), formed in 1950, became a pivotal organization in this struggle. Initially focused on challenging eviction orders, the UCRC quickly expanded its scope to address broader issues of refugee rehabilitation and rights. Historian Prafulla Chakrabarti goes as far to say "A new feature of the UCRC rallies was the presence in the processions of women in large numbers. Of the 10,000 persons who attended the meeting, at least 1,200 were women. Women, often with babies in arms, became a regular feature of these meetings. Indeed it may not be an exaggeration to say that it was the UCRC which had first brought women in such large numbers into the streets of Calcutta" (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.37-79).

The UCRC's efforts began with extensive grassroots organizing. Refugee colonies were mobilized through meetings, leaflets, and marches, with women taking on active roles in planning and participation. The council's strategy included legal challenges to eviction orders, mass signature campaigns, and public demonstrations. Women often led processions to the Assembly House, symbolizing their leadership in the fight for survival (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.37-79).

The UCRC's legal interventions proved particularly effective in delaying evictions. By taking eviction orders to court, the council leveraged a legal loophole: squatters occupying land for over three months could only be evicted through civil suits, which were time-consuming and costly . This tactic provided a measure of security for refugees, giving them the time and leverage needed to organize more robust resistance.

The anti-eviction campaigns led by refugee women were marked by several pivotal moments of resistance. One such instance occurred in the Jadavgarh Colony in South Calcutta in December 1950. When eviction orders were issued under Section 144, women organized a satyagraha, sitting in protest to protect their makeshift homes. Armed police surrounded the area from morning until evening, but the women's resilience forced them to retreat temporarily. The next day, however, the protests escalated into violence. Women were lathi-charged and fired upon, resulting in the death of Binapani Mitra, a pregnant refugee woman. Her death galvanized the movement, making her the first martyr of the refugee struggle (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.37-79).

In another notable case, the Bansdroni Government Refugee Colony was established after sustained agitation by women, despite violent repression. During one protest, ten women were injured in police lathi charges, but their efforts ultimately secured small plots of land for the refugees. Bela Bandopadhyay, a resident and activist, credited the success to the determination of refugee women, describing it as a victory of their collective struggle (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.37-79).

The anti-eviction campaigns not only secured immediate victories but also had long-term implications for women's political engagement. Organizations such as UCRC were filled with members of socialist and left leaning parties such as the CPI. These ideals began to propagate throughout the UCRC, at assembly meetings and through the grassroots campaigns they led. It becomes obvious that as refugees, including refugee women, called for land reform for themselves they drifted into socialist ideology surrounding grand land reformation and greater economic security and opportunity for the poor of West Bengal, the same ideals that the CPI campaigned on. These experiences were further supported by the violence these refugees experienced first-hand from the zamindars (large landowners) of Kolkata, as they were beaten and bloodied, such as in the examples above, the very people they advocated for change against.

Transformation of Home

The partition also brought a profound transformation in the communal lives of East Bengali refugee women, altering their physical and social environments in ways that redefined their roles in public and political spheres. In an argument put forth by Rachel Weber, the move from traditional homes in East Bengal to overcrowded refugee camps in Kolkata completely changed the traditional gender roles and I argue it became a catalyst for communist political action.

In East Bengal, many refugee women had inhabited expansive ancestral homes designed for large joint families. These traditional dwellings featured the andarmahal, or women's quarters, physically separated from the kacharighar (men's office), an architectural design of rigid gender segregation that confined women to domestic roles and sheltered them from public affairs. Women were not expected to be engaged within politics, it was not their role (Bagchi et al., 2003, pp. 59–80).



Fig

The forced migration to Kolkata shattered this spatial arrangement. Refugee families found themselves compressed into single-room dwellings in crowded colonies on the city's marshy periphery, particularly in the 24 Parganas, Nadia, and south Calcutta districts. These modest structures, often built of woven bamboo with mud floors and thatched roofs, could house up to ten people in a single room. The contrast was stark, women who once managed spacious homes with dedicated quarters now lived in cramped spaces where the physical barriers between public and private spheres had effectively dissolved. As one refugee lamented in a letter to the Rehabilitation Department, families who had "formerly inhabited large and decent houses" were reduced to living in bustis lacking basic amenities like roads, electricity, water supply, and drainage (Bagchi et al., 2003, pp. 59–80).

Bithi Chakravarti's account illustrates this dramatic shift. Describing her new accommodation in Kolkata, she notes, "The room we rented used to be the shed for the landlord's cows. Small windows, stuffy and sultry. No facility of drinking water, only a shallow well." She contrasts this with memories of the "grandeur and spacious rooms in her ancestral home in dahanta: a house with 121 acres of land" (Bagchi et al., 2003, pp. 150-155).

This spatial change had profound social implications. Without the architectural division of gendered spaces, women were thrust into greater interaction with both men and the broader community. The communal nature of colony life, with its shared spaces and collective challenges, meant women could no longer remain insulated from public affairs. Their daily struggles for basic amenities, accessing water, dealing with poor sanitation, managing overcrowded conditions, became inherently political issues that directly affected their lives and demanded their engagement.

The physical proximity of colony life helped to bring these issues to light. The absence of private space meant constant interaction with neighbors, creating opportunities for women to share their struggles and find solidarity in collective experience. Political discussions that would have previously remained in the male domain now took place in shared spaces where women could participate and contribute. This environment of communal living and shared hardship fostered a new kind of political consciousness among women who had previously been sheltered from such matters.

This change became apparent through women's participation in colony committees and the UCRC. Colony committees were grassroots organizations that managed the day-to-day affairs of refugee settlements, from resolving land disputes to mobilizing resources for basic amenities like tube wells, schools, and dispensaries. Women, who were traditionally excluded from decision-making processes, became active members of these committees, using their voices to advocate for their communities.

And as discussed in the previous section women became prominent members of UCRC contributing to processions and helping the organizations. These colony committees and the UCRC would often hold meetings in the refugee colonies. Separated by nothing but these small dwellings women not only attended these meetings but actively participated in discussions and decision-making processes.

Over time many organizations for women were formed to address the specific collective issues that women were facing, such as the Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS), an organization that will be further discussed in the next section.

The transformation of refugee women from domestic caretakers confined within the andarmahal to active political participants reveals how spatial reorganization can catalyze profound social change. The collapse of traditional architectural boundaries in refugee colonies, though born of hardship and loss, inadvertently created opportunities for women's political awakening. As their private spaces shrunk and merged with public spheres, women found themselves engaging in political discussions, participating in colony

committees, and contributing to UCRC activities – roles that were not common in their previous lives in East Bengal.

Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS) and relief work

The Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS), initially established during the Bengal famine of 1943 as a communist women's organization, emerged as a crucial force in shaping refugee women's political consciousness following the partition. Under the leadership of Indira Devi Chaudhurani, Rabindranath Tagore's niece who served as its first president, MARS had already demonstrated its organizational capacity by building a membership of 40,000 women during the famine years (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.37-79) The organization's broad appeal attracted not only communist women but also renowned liberal women activists, creating a diverse coalition that would prove instrumental in addressing the refugee crisis.

The spatial reorganization of refugee life in Kolkata created conditions that made MARS's work both necessary and effective. As refugee women moved into the cramped colony settlements, they faced unprecedented challenges that required collective solutions. MARS activists recognized this opportunity and positioned themselves at critical points of refugee arrival and settlement. Their presence at Sealdah station, where they worked alongside other organizations like Lila Roy's Forward Bloc women's wing, represented the first point of contact for many displaced women arriving with nothing but the clothes they wore.

MARS distinguished itself through its focused attention on women's specific needs during the refugee crisis, particularly at a time when these concerns were largely overlooked by other organizations and government bodies. The organization provided essential relief work, such as distributing khichuri (a mixture of rice and lentils) to hungry refugees. More significantly, MARS established crucial medical support systems for women traumatized by partition violence. The organization's medical initiatives, exemplified by the center established at the junction of Syed Amir Ali Avenue and Park Circus maidan, provided critical care to women who had experienced sexual violence. Doctors like Renuka Sengupta, working alongside MARS activist Sukumari Bhattacharya and others, offered medical services including abortions for rape victims, addressing needs that other institutions were unable or unwilling to handle (Chakravartty, 2005, pp.37-79).

The effectiveness of MARS's work was enhanced by its female activists' ability to access refugee households more easily than their male counterparts. Operating under the banner of "mothers and sisters" and "wives and daughters," MARS workers could enter domestic spaces and engage with women who might otherwise have remained isolated. It's easy to imagine how women would be more comfortable sharing their problems with women social workers rather than men. The organization's commitment to crossing class boundaries, deliberately including working-class, middle-class, and upper-class women, created a broad-based movement that could address needs across the social spectrum.

Through its relief work, MARS gradually introduced refugee women to communist political ideology. However, this politicization was organic rather than forced – it was the organization's tireless relief efforts, rather than explicit political messaging, that initially drew refugee households toward the Communist Party of India (CPI). As Manikuntala Sen noted in her memoir (Sen, 2001) , numerous new samitis (committees) and working centres emerged in the colonies, creating spaces for women to discuss their daily problems and develop political consciousness.

The organization's demands focused on practical needs that resonated with refugee women's daily struggles. MARS advocated for basic civic amenities in the colonies, particularly in mofussil (suburban) areas, translating personal hardships into political demands. Their meetings in refugee colonies, such as one at Dum Dum Laha Colony that attracted two hundred women, demonstrated growing political engagement among refugee women who had previously been excluded from such participation.

MARS's impact extended beyond immediate relief work to create lasting changes in women's public participation. The organization opened new avenues for political activism, making women's presence in Kolkata's public spaces increasingly common. MARS created opportunities for women with no prior political experience to engage in activism, building a new generation of politically conscious women leaders from the refugee community.

The success of MARS in mobilizing refugee women illustrates how the spatial reorganization of refugee life, combined with dedicated organizational efforts, could transform gender roles and political participation. The organization's ability to meet immediate needs while building long-term political consciousness made it a crucial vehicle for women's empowerment in post-partition Bengal. Through MARS, communist ideology found resonance not through theoretical discussions but through practical engagement with refugee women's daily struggles, creating a lasting legacy of women's political activism in West Bengal.

It is undeniable that the Bengal partition changed the lives of East Bengali refugee women incomparably, economically, and socially. These changes increased political participation amongst refugee women, significantly contributing to the growth of the Communist Party in West Bengal. Economically, the most obvious change is how the events of the partition forced refugee women into the workforce. For many of these women their economic lives drastically changed, many transitioning from homemakers into the workforce. As they lived in abject poverty and struggled with poor wages, discontent grew, resulting in participation

in labor dispute protests. In the case of the Bengal Lamp Company, by 1955, refugee women marched and organized alongside their male counterparts in Communist-led labor strikes. Previously absent from these spaces, these moments marked a critical turning point, as refugee women in Bengal began to participate in large numbers in Communist-led labor movements.

Beyond employment, the development of refugee colonies in Kolkata contributed to a significant transformation of the home for these Bengali women, playing a role in their politicization. In East Bengal, these women came from traditional homes designed for large joint families that included andarmahal, or separate women's quarters, establishing a clear separation between the "women's world" and kacharighar or men's office. However, upon relocating to the densely populated and low-resource setting of the refugee colonies of Kolkata, these barriers were broken down, and subsequently, women were propelled into the public sphere of these camps, where discussions and organizations on collective action and political movements for refugees were frequent.

This emerging political agency was fueled by the Congress party's lack of preparation and complete disregard for East Bengali refugees. Many East Bengali refugees initially had faith in the Congress government to provide assistance in the form of housing and jobs. However, under the leadership of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Congress party viewed East Bengali migrants as a political threat with the potential to disrupt the electoral balance, leading to a systematic effort to disperse refugee colonies away from both Kolkata and West Bengal. When the government finally took action, the efforts were largely insufficient and poorly planned. The refugee colonies established by the government were often located in areas with inadequate irrigation and drainage, making living conditions extremely difficult. Additionally, the government devised plans to send refugees to infertile and uninhabited regions in other states. Unhappy with many of these policies, refugees began to set up colonies in vacant land that they found. By December 1950, 149 colonies had been established through forceful settlement, housing 150,000 people, emphasizing the Congress party's complete mismanagement and failure to adequately address the needs of the refugee population.

Within these colonies, women, in their traditional roles as homemakers, often bore the brunt of turning these new settlements into homes. As their new homes came under the threat of destruction from both hired thugs of landowners, who were legally in possession of the land and from the government, which ordered the eviction of occupied land, women were pushed into the streets to fight for their homes. It was the home they had painstakingly rebuilt in this unfamiliar land, a place they had never chosen. With nothing else left, they had no choice but to defend it. Refugee women began marching as a part of the anti-eviction campaigns organized by the United Central Refugee Council and became regular participants at its meetings. The United Central Refugee Council included several prominent left and communist leaders, and at these meetings, discussions often centered around land redistribution, aligning closely with the Communist Party's agenda.

Additionally, within these colonies, the communist-aligned organization Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS) became instrumental in providing relief work for women at a time when no one cared for them. MARS provided relief work in the colonies for women, offering food, essentials, and medical support. Through this social work, MARS got closer to refugee households, bringing Communist party ideas closer to refugee women. As they found a community, refugee women began participating in meetings, voicing their everyday struggles, and campaigning on issues central to MARS. Inadvertently, MARS opened a new world of political activism for women through their social work, providing an opportunity for women with no political background to share their voices through a communist lens.

As a whole, the Communist Party of India was able to capitalize on the issue of the Bengal partition, leverage the refugees' discontent, and align themselves with the refugee cause, setting the stage for the Communist Party's dominance of the political scene in West Bengal in the 20th century. But, the Communist Party's governance in West Bengal was not entirely smooth. While there were promises of land reforms and rural development initially, the long-term economic policies and governance of the Left Front government have only brought devastation to the state. Under their governance, the steady decline of the industrial sector in West Bengal, coupled with the state's failure to retain industrial investment, has resulted in an overall stagnating economy. The party's tendency to control trade unions further contributed to the state's reputation as an anti-business state for over 40 years. By the time the Left Front was ousted by Trinamool in 2011, the state's economic and social infrastructure was significantly weakened from where it had started. In the end, the Communist Party of India failed both refugees and the state of West Bengal.

Ultimately, many East Bengali refugees have been forced to seek work elsewhere in India and abroad. These refugees have been overwhelmingly successful over the last 40 years in setting up a new life in India or abroad for themselves and their families. They have worked diligently to establish a new home away from home and raise their children and grandchildren with the opportunities and comforts once stripped of them. The achievements of East Bengali refugees are a testament to their resilience and agency, showcasing how displaced populations can overcome immense challenges on their own. However, the story of East Bengali refugees also highlights the severe consequences of negligent governance, leaving refugees to sacrifice everything and rebuild their lives and homes on their own. As history has continued to show, the consequences of negligent governance towards refugees can be profound and cause generational trauma.

Therefore, it is crucial that governments around the world address the refugee problem in a compassionate and effective manner, prioritizing humanitarian needs over political expediency, preventing the struggles of Partition refugees from repeating themselves.

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Painting a Picture of Integration in Yancey County

Laela Cash



This work is meant to represent the 1960 racial integration of public schools in Yancey County, North Carolina, my hometown. The integration happened only after a lawsuit was filed as a reaction to the condemnation of Lincoln Park School, the only school that African American students were allowed to attend in the county, for the fourth and final time. This forced all of Lincoln's students to make the 60-mile trip to Asheville every day in order to get an education. Each of these 60 miles is represented by a tick mark on the road that they took to get there daily, accompanied by pictures of the school, quotes from the parents, and the faces of those affected by this decision.

There are six places crucial to this narrative: the school board which made the decisions that brought the lawsuit in the first place; the courthouse where the lawsuit was settled; the two white high schools which were the first schools in the county to be integrated (Cane River and East Yancey); the aforementioned Lincoln Park School; and Griffith Chapel AME Zion Church, the true source of change. The Griffith family, and, more specifically, Selelia Griffith were said to be "the ones who broke the dam in the school situation" (Higgins 1994, 2). With the support of other families in the Lincoln Park area, they pulled their children out of school in Asheville and hired a retired teacher to continue their education in the basement of their family chapel. It was then Selelia's husband, John B. Griffith, with the support of many others, as well as the NAACP, who filed the lawsuit on November 11, 1959, asking for the integration of the preexisting white schools in the county.

On October 17, seven of the ten high school-age Black students who resided in Yancey County attended the previously white high schools there, making Yancey the first county in North Carolina to integrate its schools six years after the Supreme court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*

of Topeka, Kansas that separating students in schools on the basis of race was unconstitutional. They continued to fight until all schools in the county were integrated.

In the creation of this piece, I represented each place in various ways. Both of the places of power, the school board and the courthouse, are physically elevated in order to show both the imbalance of power and the role land plays in that, as the physical hierarchy of land often dictates the hierarchy of power. The courthouse is represented by the legal documents from the lawsuit and the school board is represented by the news articles citing this "controversial" decision through interviews with the judge and members of the board (Davis 1961). Both of these institutions continue to define historical memory now. This is contrasted with the way that Lincoln Park School and Griffith Chapel are represented–with pictures of the students, the Griffith family, the school after it was condemned, the makeshift school in the basement, and quotes that describe the absurdity of the situation, detailing a history that was never really told. Somewhere in between is the depiction of the two schools. While they may be seen as the "site of integration," they're also a setting for the change to take place rather than an influential part of the story. The surrounding part of the county is painted different greens to represent a less dense population and more rural areas that while affected played a much smaller role in this narrative.

These places and events that I have depicted are often portrayed as the "story of integration." While I do think that it is a story, to say that it is the story of integration implies that segregation has been overcome. However, that is not how the "story of integration" ends in Yancey County. School integration is an illusion of wholeness. I do not believe that the county was ever whole, nor is it today. Our county is still separated.

The population is largely white, with only about 1.1% of the county's population being Black ("U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Yancey County, North Carolina", n.d.). This means that "school integration" was in some ways in favor of the court and the school board, as it meant they no longer had to maintain a single school for the only 27 Black students (Higgins 1994) who resided in the county at the time. Even if the lawsuit was a more important reason, this suggests those in power in Yancey County had ulterior motives that did not include equality. Real efforts to desegregate, however, do not come merely from convenience. They instead come from a desire and willingness to fight for what is right and make a better world for the next generation. I want my work as a whole to show not only the story being told, but also the real version of what happened, even if the details are lost to history. I want you, the viewer, to look into the faces of the Black students who went through this "integration" and became just numbers in the narrative but never the center of it, like they should've been.

Now that I am at NCSSM, my distance from Yancey County allows me to reflect on how easy it is to believe a blanket statement that you grew up hearing, such as, "Yancey County was the first in the state to desegregate its schools." But this statement implies that both this is something that the county chose to do out of the kindness of its heart and that it was done completely, effectively, or in the best interest of the students. The reality, however, is quite the opposite so it is important to remember that the county is not what made this monumental change happen but instead the Griffith family and the other families of students who attended Lincoln Park School.

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Are You In Debt To Those Who Love You?

Andrea Dela Pena

The concept of *utang na loob* directly translates to the 'debt of the inner self' or 'debt of gratitude.' As a value that is standard to Filipino culture, the phrase represents the emotional and moral obligation one feels to repay others who have offered them support and assistance in times of need (Kaut 257). In other words, if someone were to kindly lend a helping hand to you, there is a contractual obligation to help them as well when the time comes. It is more than just a single materialistic or monetary transaction. This idea shapes communal and familial dynamics in Filipino society, influencing day-to-day life and constructing modern political and social structures. It extends to a range of social and societal interactions, from the Filipino extended family to Philippine politics.

In Filipino culture, *utang na loob* results in a pattern of reciprocity and reliance on others. When crises such as financial hardship, sickness, or death strike families, relatives turn to each other for support, internalizing that family members will return these favors or sacrifices in some other form (Lagon). This expected reciprocity can effectively strengthen ties within communities and connect distant families. However, it can also have negative repercussions. The pressure to repay one's 'debts of gratitude' can lead to feelings of indebtedness and guilt for Filipino people and their families. Not meeting one's *utang na loob* can cause intense shame and judgment of an individual. The pressure often places individuals in positions where they feel it is necessary to prioritize family or social obligations over their own aspirations. This leads to a never-ending cycle of indebtedness; individuals often sacrificing their autonomy for continued loyalty and reciprocation. Thus, this modern use of *utang na loob* can be harmful to Filipino society.

One of the many historical contexts that shaped the idea of *utang na loob* is the development of traditional Filipino values of *Bayanihan*, otherwise referred to as communal cooperation (Malek 34). Pre-colonial Filipino society was organized mainly through social bonds formed by acts of mutual aid. Failing to reciprocate these favors was often seen as a breach of one's conduct toward the greater community or *Bayanihan* (Bankoff 169). This tradition of mutual support was even more typical for rural areas where reliance on each other was necessary for survival. The exchange of favors and assistance was fully transactional within the greater identity of the *barangay* (neighborhood) and the family unit.

With the arrival of Spanish colonization in the 16th century, these pre-existing communal values became more intricate when forcefully introduced to a system of hierarchical authority and foreign rule (Bankoff 169). Specific to rural areas in the Philippines, English historian Greg Bankoff explains the communal processes as follows:

> Indigenous [Filipino] and Hispanic notions combined to produce a state-endorsed form of community-based mutualism known as the Caja de comunidad (community chest). The dues paid by individual holders of community property were given out as personal loans to meet health, educational, or bereavement needs and were used in the construction of civic utilities or agricultural development.
>
> This Spanish colonial blueprint became the foundation for the colonies' state structure, blending well with indigenous forms of rural cooperativeness.

Therefore, while colonialism greatly altered communal hierarchies formed through *utang na loob*, the Filipino emphasis on loyalty and gratuity remained a central value in everyday life.

Following the American invasion of the Philippines in the early 20th century, *utang na loob* also found a place in newly introduced systems of democratic government (Bankoff 170-171). This shaped future power dynamics within Philippine democracy and allowed politicians to gain and maintain power through faulty political promises and favors that referenced traditional Filipino values. In this sense, *utang na loob* negatively influences political behavior and voting patterns, as politicians who provide financial or social support to communities could demand loyalty in return (Hollnsteiner 400). The actual merit or policy of the politician's stance on societal issues is generally left ignored.

From a societal standpoint, *utang na loob* affects Filipino communal life, as a system of favors and kindness can secure relationships with extended family, friends, and neighbors. Although it does sound incredibly positive for the overall community, this strong sense of interconnectedness can lead to feelings of resentment or dependence when the expectations are not reciprocated equally. That being said, *utang ng loob* leads to intricate communities hemmed together by the pressure to maintain loyalty and indebtedness. These tightly-knit communities lead to a nation that disvalues the necessary self-sufficiency for national progress by encouraging dependency within family structures and

politics, thus shaping our identities in a modern Filipino society.

As a key value to the Filipino family structure, *utang na loob* drives much of familial dynamics, establishing moral expectations and obligations to certain members of the extended family. Families support each other in crisis, and there is a strong sense of unity and structure. Even with such cultural conformity, the concept of utang ng loob can become a tiring contract that leads to generational obligations and unequal financial contributions, causing significant strain within the family (Hollnsteiner 399). Most commonly, younger children are expected to repay their parents for the sacrifices made in raising them (Lagon). However, when forcing a sense of filial loyalty that creates emotional and financial strain within the family, what happens when the "debt" becomes too large or unmanageable for the children?

Whether it is a medical emergency, the loss of a job, or death, the notion of utang ng loob leads to shared responsibility among family members to provide help and support. An example of this is when a parent sacrifices their needs to send their child to school; the child often grows up with the ingrained expectation that they will care for their parents in return, especially in their old age (Hollnsteiner 399). If the child fails to reciprocate this care, it "arouses deep bitterness and the feeling that a sacred unifying bond has been torn asunder and a family betrayed" (Hollnsteiner 397). The child is then accused of "*walang utang na loob*" and "*walang hiya*," meaning to have no shame or gratitude for their parents. It is difficult to regain that familial bond.

Though *utang ng loob* ensures that no one falls through the cracks, it can result in extreme fatigue if one member of a large extended family feels they are carrying a disproportionate share of the familial burden (Lagon). In a family where a parent has financially supported a child through college, the child may feel pressure to find a successful career and consistently show gratitude by sending money back to their family or making significant sacrifices in their own life to repay what they owe their parents (Hollnsteiner 399). This can be overwhelming given the large structure of a traditional Filipino family, as "the typical Filipino family consists not only of immediate family members but of relations extended vertically and horizontally (grandparents/children, aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces) and various sets of in-laws" (Miralao 193).

Carlos Yulo, a two-time Filipino Olympic champion in artistic gymnastics, is a prime example of this. When arriving home from the Olympics, his mother accused him of not giving his family the resources and recognition that he "owed them" for raising him (Guinto). Filipino people on social media discussed his family matters and his "disrespect" after his mother revealed this information at a press conference (Martinez). His very public and personal conflict with his family sparked the issue of *utang na loob*, and many had varying opinions on who was objectively correct. After the situation had slightly settled, Yulo's mother took upon the press once more to apologize for her actions. Documented by Filipino news site *ABS-CBN*, she lists her grievances to her son:

> In a press conference on Wednesday (August 7), a tearful Angelica Poquiz Yulo apologized to her son, two-time Olympic gold medalist Carlos Yulo, following her statements regarding their publicized rift over financial disagreements.
>
> Earlier saying she would not initiate a reconciliation with Carlos, Angelica now addressed her son, assuring him that their family's doors are open should the gymnastics champ decide to come home.
>
> Angelica said she hopes that by publicly apologizing, the issue would finally be put to rest and that Filipinos can instead focus on celebrating the historic wins of Carlos in the 2024 Olympics.

The situation did resolve itself. Did Yulo's mother have to publicize her complaints about her son on national television? I think not.

For sibling relationships, based on this ideal, the younger sister owes the elder siblings for "letting the younger ones be born by being born first" (Hollnsteiner 397). These odd cultural superstitions come with the expectation that you owe those who are older for simply existing. This creates an environment where even the most basic familial relationships are marked with indebtedness of your life to those older than you. The pressure to consistently repay favors and show gratitude can become overwhelming in Filipino family dynamics and can contribute to affecting general social interactions.

Similarly, in politics, *utang na loob* remains a power play for aspiring Filipino politicians, as they often seek to maintain power and loyalty through reciprocal favors and transactions with the Filipino people. Just as expectations of loyalty and support bind family members, the same principles influence voting behavior and political relationships. Most recently, during the 2022 election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the cultural expectation of reciprocal loyalty and gratitude became a powerful tool for political manipulation (Johnson & Simonette).

To put the Marcos Jr. election in context, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is the son of a previous dictator of the Philippines, President Ferdinand Marcos. His father had declared martial law on the nation and performed mass executions to escape the process of re-election while in power, eventually fleeing the country with his family and son. His son is now the President of the Philippines. *Utang na loob* helped play a huge role in securing political power for the Marcos family. Their campaign significantly interfered with the Philippine democratic process by fostering dynastic control and a lack of political accountability. Through leveraging the emotional loyalty of voters who felt indebted to the family for past monetary contributions, the Marcos family was back in action (Johnson & Simonette). For many voters, Marcos's name became a symbol of political power and a source of material benefits received during the previous regime, such as infrastructure projects and government contracts, thoroughly brushing past his father's mass executions and corruption (Macdonald et al.). Voting for Marcos Jr. was viewed as a form of repayment to return the favor of past privileges. Voters who felt a sense of *utang na loob* supported Marcos Jr., despite his family's controversial past, simply because they viewed the family's legacy through a series of indebtedness rather than a critical reflection of his father's political regime. A *BBC News* article best describes the voter rationale for appointing the new President to office:

> At the time Mrs Marcos was the undemocratically appointed Governor of Metro Manila.
>
> As he leans back on a broken bamboo chair, Mr Bautista says he owes Imelda utang na loob [a debt of gratitude], for giving him the publicly-funded job.
>
> He says that despite Mrs Marcos's subsequent convictions connected to an estimated total of $10 billion dollars of plundered money, he will vote for her son.
>
> "I never saw corruption," Mr Bautista says with a broad smile. "It was just hearsay. I think their enemies tarnished their names. Right?"

This form of sustained loyalty damages democratic ideals through a corrupt system of democracy as politicians purposefully rally support through personal relationships and emotional ties, not rational policy discussion or the candidate's qualifications. This is a common practice in Philippine politics, where votes are often "bought" through these forms of *utang na loob.* In the case of Marcos Jr., he promised to design methods of financial assistance or infrastructure improvements among poorer communities who may have received similar benefits during his father's apocalyptic era of rule (Macdonald et al.). The transactional nature of these voter relationships does not rely on the quality of political platforms or governance. Those vulnerable were more focused on receiving the promised immediate material gains. Marcos Jr. was able to capitalize on this emotional attachment by discussing his father's regime as a symbol of past prosperity despite the abuses and corruption associated with it (Macdonald et al.). The Marcos family's ability to benefit from this emotional loyalty is a direct result of *utang na loob.*

As demonstrated by the Marcos administration, *utang na loob* encourages a lack of accountability by brushing off past actions and injustice to the Filipino people. When politicians are able to secure loyalty through the exchange of material favors or emotional manipulation, there is little room for holding them accountable for their actions or policies. With the Marcoses, the emotional loyalty many voters felt toward the family often overpowered the need for political accountability, for criticism or questioning of their leadership became difficult, as that was seen as a betrayal of past favors and a violation of the unspoken contract of loyalty. This illustrates a political system in which loyalty is valued above anything else, often at the expense of actual governance and public service to the citizens of the Philippines. Politicians who rely on *utang na loob* to maintain power are then less likely to prioritize the needs of the nation or engage in the transparent and accountable leadership that democracy requires. It is hard to assume where Marcos Jr.'s presidency is going to go, but I am confident that it cannot deviate far from his father's rule.

The principle of *utang na loob* also influences the structure and behavior of Filipino communities and individual identities. This cultural value shapes personal behaviors, impacts social relationships, and influences how people interpret their places within Filipino society. Sure, it can promote a sense of solidarity and interconnectedness with communities, but *utang na loob* can pose challenges for individuals as it relies on dependence and collective identity. What about those who want to deviate from the collective identity of a community? Those are usually met with shame for bringing disgrace to their communities (Hollnsteiner 396). All too often than not, these normalized ideals and values within the Filipino community can overshadow personal aspirations and self-actualization. In Filipino society, communities often operate as tightly-knit networks where people rely on one another for help, especially with household finances and childcare. It supports the expectation for mutual aid and consistent availability for others in their community. Individuals then grow up knowing that they are part of a larger community, creating a continuous cycle of favor and indebtedness. Sometimes, individuals often see their worth and identity in relation to their ability to contribute to the welfare of their community. A person's sense of self can sometimes be combined with their capacity to give back.

As individuals navigate their roles within their community, the pressure to continually reciprocate favors can become overwhelming, especially when expectations are unrealistic. The idea that one must repay kindnesses even when it is not financially or emotionally feasible creates an uncomfortable situation for both parties where individuals are constantly giving to others without being able to focus

on their own needs. This is especially true in larger Filipino communities that value collectivism and the common good over individualism and personal desires. Significant life choices are often sacrificed for the good of the community rather than the self (Miralao 196-197). Individuals may feel pressured to forgo their own personal or professional goals in favor of helping others if their contributions are seen as a repayment for favors received. In these extreme cases, it can result in exhaustion and resentment when individuals feel they are shouldering an unequal burden. A great example could be a person who may feel compelled to help a neighbor with childcare or financial support simply because they once received help from that neighbor, even though they may not have the resources to do so without sacrificing their own well-being. This is a clear case in which personal development and the ability to stand alone is less important compared to maintaining these reciprocal relationships.

Because Filipino communities are so communal, social norms and expectations strongly shape individual behavior. The fear of being perceived as someone who has "*walang utang na loob*" or "no debt of gratitude" places intense pressure on one to conform to social expectations. An example of this situation could be a person who does not offer assistance in times of crisis or neglects their community's needs for their own needs. They are more likely to become socially ostracized and seen as someone who is not living up to the cultural norms of loyalty and reciprocity. Having *utang na loob* can thus lead to a loss of personal expression, as individuals may prioritize the expectations of the community over their identity or desires.

This is significant as an individual may derive a big portion of their identity from their connection to their *barangay* [neighborhood] (Miralao 196-197). As positive as this sounds, it can also limit the individual's ability to define themselves and step out outside of these community roles. Personal aspirations or ambitions that fall outside of the community's expectations are perceived as selfish or disrespectful. The lack of autonomy to become comfortable with one's own desires or boundaries can lead to communities where individuals are defined not by who they are or what they aspire to become, but by how much they can contribute to others' well-being. This is most evident in rural areas or places of poverty in the Philippines.

Although I have probably beaten this ideology to its core, *utang na loob* can also be positive for Filipino communities. It is a big part of what makes Filipino identity and heavily contributes to the collective structure of our modern Filipino society. At its core, *utang na loob* cultivates a culture of mutual support and compassion, with members of the community feeling safe and responsible for one another. The interconnectedness of different families and communities helps secure these bonds and allows neighborhoods to have strong solidarity in times of crisis. I think that it encourages people to help those in need by promoting empathy and a shared sense of humanity, where people are motivated not solely by their personal benefit or interests.

This is critical as it suggests that Filipinos are motivated not just by personal gain but by the moral obligation to support others. The cultural framework suggests that our well-being intertwines with the well-being of those around us. When someone helps a neighbor or supports a family member through a difficult time, it is not merely a transaction but a demonstration and determination of solidarity through *utang na loob*. This priority on helping others assembles valuable support systems that surpass the immediate family, fortifying communal bonds and providing a safe net for the community. In a society where *utang na loob* thrives, people know that they can rely on others in times of need while understanding the importance of reciprocating that kindness when the time comes. This system of mutual aid not only addresses immediate needs but fosters long-term relationships built on trust and a shared sense of responsibility. It nurtures a culture where people recognize that their actions have a strong impact on their community.

Another positive aspect of *utang na loob* is its role in supporting family unity. Filipino families are often characterized by strong familial bonds, and *utang na loob* is key to maintaining these strong ties. With that, *utang na loob* encourages people to contribute to the well-being of others. In Filipino culture, a person's worth is often defined not just by personal achievement but by how they help and serve others. This culture of thankfulness and giving facilitates an environment and a community where appreciation is both verbal and tangible, such as helping those who have helped you or offering support during challenging times. In some cases, it makes me proud to be Filipino. However, I believe that when one deviates from these definitions and when the 'debt' becomes overbearing, that is where the issue lies.

Despite the well-natured origin of *utang na loob*, its negative consequences are hard to ignore, especially in today's Filipino government. The expectation to constantly repay favors, no matter how big or small, creates a cycle of shame if unable to pay forward. People often feel morally bound to reciprocate. I have seen firsthand in my extended family in the Philippines how this pressure can build resentment and intense strife among extended families as individuals stretch themselves thin to meet these unrealistic demands. I do not like the idea that personal autonomy needs to be sacrificed on the sacred altar of loyalty. People can end up feeling trapped and unable to pursue their own goals or desires because they are too focused on repaying others.

I believe that the actual harm lies in how *utang na loob* prevents people from growing past their roles as caregivers and receivers. It forces individual well-being to take a backseat to make way for communal loyalty. So yes, it may promote a sense of interconnectedness unique to Filipino customs and ideology. When this privilege is abused, *utang na loob* holds people back from pursuing their own happiness and autonomy.

In conclusion, *utang na loob* is deeply rooted in Filipino culture in the way that it has contributed to the development of strong familial ties and solidarity within Filipino communities. Its negative consequences cannot be ignored. The cycle of indebtedness it creates often leads to emotional fatigue and financial hardship. Instead of fostering healthy reciprocity, it can breed resentment, dependence, and even the sacrifice of personal growth for the sake of fulfilling social obligations. While the value of *utang na loob* may have once served to strengthen communities in colonial contexts, in today's society, it limits individuality and self-actualization, trapping family and community members in cycles of obligation that prevent social and political progress. Although it is not beneficial to exclude the cultural value in its entirety, it is necessary to strike a balance. Filipino society has constant room for improvement. We can start by breaking these unhealthy cycles of generational debt.

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Humor in High Office: A Comparative Analysis of *South Park*'s Depiction of Trump and Obama Presidencies

Paisley Holland

The first time I remember watching *South Park*, I was too young to understand anything happening. Late at night, I would curl into the leather couch beside my father and force him to scratch my back until I slept while he laughed at the crude animation on our small living room TV. The seemingly meaningless background noise that held my childhood would later reveal itself as one of television's most brilliant and incisive social commentaries.

It wasn't until 2020, during the depths of my pandemic isolation, that I truly discovered *South Park*'s scholarly potential. Trapped in my room, avoiding news that seemed to worsen by the hour, I was drawn back to those fourth-grade characters with purpose. Starting from Season One, Episode One, I began noticing patterns beyond surface-level jokes and intentionally shocking humor. *South Park* masterfully weaves sophisticated commentary about American politics and society through its seemingly simple animation paired with outraged plots.

What started as TV escapism turned into genuine fascination and deep appreciation. Between rewatches of early seasons and catching up on recent episodes, I took mental notes, drew connections, and saw patterns I'd missed before. The show I'd once fallen asleep to now kept me wide awake, captivating me with its sharp wit and fearless approach to controversial topics.

In my Junior year at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, Dr. McInnis' Research Experience in the Humanities class provided the perfect opportunity to transform this personal fascination into scholarly investigation. As someone who has watched *South Park* evolve from childhood comfort to research subject, I aim to examine how its unique approach to presidential satire both reflects and shapes American political discourse in real and impactful ways.

The timing of this research has provided an unexpected lens. What began as an analysis during the Biden presidency has gained additional relevance as Donald Trump positions himself to become America's first two-non-consecutive-term president since Grover Cleveland over 130 years ago. It is important to note that my paper is centered on South Park episodes before the 2024 election cycle. As Trump's political timeline continues to evolve, examining my chosen earlier episodes provides a complete narrative arc that captures how the show's satirical approach developed during his first term. While occasional references to current events may emerge in this analysis, my focus remains deliberately historical rather than predictive, examining completed rather than evolving narrative in South Park.

I'd also like to emphasize that this research is not meant to diminish South Park's impact – quite the opposite. This analysis examines how the show's unique approach to satire surrounding two specific presidents holds real-world implications for public discourse and political commentary in America. By studying these portrayals within their broader cultural context, we can better understand how even ostensibly neutral political humor operates within existing imbalanced power structures. The show's enduring influence on American political consciousness deserves serious academic attention, not to tear it down, but to recognize its sophisticated role in shaping how we process and understand political authority through humor.

This paper is dedicated to my parents, who could not have imagined their daughter writing an academic analysis of her childhood lullabies of "shit" and "fart". To Dr. McInnis and Dr. Cantrell, who recognized academic merit in my seemingly unconventional hyperfixation. And to that little blonde curly-haired girl on the leather couch, who absorbed more than she knew. That couch has long since been replaced, but the impact on American political commentary *South Park* has left enduring.

Enter South Park, Colorado: Where Presidents Come to Play

Picture President Barack Obama in your head. I'm sure you see him: standing tall, slim, and with a bright white smile plastered across his face. Now picture President Donald Trump, perhaps slightly too orange with a mischievous grin or pursed lips. These images you have are of real, three-dimensional people. Now flatten them. Reduce them to construction paper cutouts moving jerkily across your screen, their edges rough and visible like the childhood art projects hanging on refrigerator doors.

Watch as Obama's dignified stance becomes more nuanced – each movement deliberate and precise. This paper-thin figure moves through the White House like a shadow puppet, each gesture carefully choreographed. See Trump transform into Mr. Garrison, his signature aesthetic elements amplified to cartoonish extremes – the distinctive hair and skin tone rendered in vivid construction paper hues. He stomps across the screen, each movement a bold declaration. This is how *South Park* sees our Presidents.

This visual metamorphosis from flesh to paper, from reality to satirical representation, demonstrates *South Park*'s distinctive role in American political commentary since 1997. Through its signature animation style, the show transforms complex political realities into accessible critique, raising questions about how visual and narrative choices shape public understanding. Averaging 1.4 million viewers per episode in Season 23 (Hollywood Reporter, 2019) *South Park*'s influence extends beyond mere entertainment. Its portrayal of presidential authority helps reflect and shape how Americans process political power through humor.

When co-creator Matt Stone declared, "I hate conservatives, but I really fucking hate liberals" (South Park Republicans), he established the show's reputation for equal-opportunity mockery. However, in today's America, where power imbalances based on identity dominate, claims of "hating everyone equally" demand closer examination. Popular culture studies must be planned and couched in a respectful context (Stevens), especially regarding race or identity. Analyzing *South Park*'s portrayal of Obama and Trump will show how identical satirical techniques carry vastly different implications depending on their target, revealing profound truths about American's attitudes toward power, authority, and representation in political satire.

Through episodes like "About Last Night…" (2008) and "Doubling Down" (2017), a stark pattern emerges. Despite insistent claims from their creators to target all sides equally, the subtle delegitimization of Obama through sophisticated narrative devices carries deeper implications within America's racial context than overt and exaggerated mockery of Trump. These contrasting portrayals, viewed through contemporary media theory, illuminate how satire shapes national conversations on race, authority, and the limitations of "equal opportunity" mockery in a society built on systemic inequality.

Calculated Criminality: Obama's Presidency Through South Park's Lens

As Barack Obama accepted his historic victory as the 44th President of the United States of America, *South Park* viewers were met with a special episode about it the next day. With quotes directly from his acceptance speech, "About Last Night…" (Season 12, Episode 12) was hard-hitting. Opening with Randy Marsh, the father of one of the main boys, gripping a beer tightly slurring "He's so awesome!" and drooling on his television while leading a neighborhood chant of "Yes we can," the episode seems to mock blind political devotion. Still, the episode quickly takes a more insidious turn. Obama's victory speech becomes a cover for an elaborate jewel heist, transforming his campaign into the work of a "Presidential Crime Syndicate." By reframing his inspiring speech as a calculated misdirection of attention, the episode begins subtly undermining the legitimacy of his achievement as the first Black President.



First Lady Michelle Obama fares no better, reduced to the role of a computer hacker who faked marriage to enhance Barack's electability. This narrative undermines their relationship while perpetuating stereotypes about the inauthenticity of Black success and family structures. Such satire may initially appear absurd, but its underlying implications resonate with long-standing cultural narratives questioning Black families and criminality. As the "A Dangerous Distortion of Our Families" report found, Media outlets were 1.32 times more likely to associate Black family members with criminality compared to white family members. By framing the Obamas this way, the *South Park* episode taps into and reinforces these problematic media portrayals.

This pattern of delegitimization and stigmatization continues in "Obama Wins!" (Season 16, Episode 14), which depicts Obama's reelection as dependent on Eric Cartman's (a signature mischievous main character) voter fraud scheme at the behest of Chinese interests. Here, Obama is once again portrayed as a figure whose power relies on white actors, such as the manipulative Cartman or naive poll workers. The episode reframes Obama's diplomatic accomplishments with China, such as signing the most bilateral agreements of any president (Wikipedia Contributors) as transactional betrayals of American interests, echoing real-world criticisms of his presidency.



This framing intensifies as the episode links Obama's supposed corruption to Star Wars licensing rights, a bizarre plot device that reduces international diplomacy to a simple exchange for personal gain. Such depictions tap into

broader cultural anxieties about Obama's loyalty, amplifying real-world suspicions about his connections with foreign powers. By suggesting that Obama's victories stem from fraudulent or deceptive actions, the episode reinforces narratives questioning his authenticity without engaging his policies or their outcomes.

What sets these portrayals apart is their calculated avoidance of overt racial commentary. Instead, the episodes rely on complex, subtle, genre-driven plots to question Obama's legitimacy in seemingly neutral terms. The jewel heist and election fraud serve as "race-blind" criticisms, yet their cumulative effect reinforces systemic stereotypes of Black leadership as inherently untrustworthy or manipulative. These narratives subtly echo pervasive cultural biases, and platform further doubts about Obama's presidency.

South Park's treatment of Obama also critiques his supporters, with Randy Marsh embodying the archetype of the overzealous liberal. While mocking blind devotion, Randy's drunken adoration of the President suggests that enthusiasm for his presidency stems from irrationality or delusion. Such depictions diminish the significance of Obama's election by framing his achievements as undeserved or over-celebrated.

These episodes aired at critical times in Obama's presidency – immediately following his election and re-election – when his leadership represented significant cultural milestones. Rather than addressing the historical significance of these moments, *South Park* focused on plot-driven narratives to tear his legacy down. While you find yourself engrossed in this funny episode, their ideals are slowly worming their way into your head, subtly discrediting his presence in office. This decision reflects a broader cultural hesitancy to fully embrace Black success in positions of power, even within satire.

Through these two examples of how *South Park* portrays Obama and critical media analysis, satire operates within existing power structures. By framing Obama's presidency as a facade for criminality and manipulation, the show aligns with systemic patterns of putting down Black leaders, families, and people. While the narrative devices seem defensible, their impact extends far beyond humor, reflecting and reinforcing cultural biases that persist in American society.

Explicit Excess: South Park's Unvarnish Critique of Trump through Garrison

While South Pak's depiction of Obama employs intricate narratives to question legitimacy, its portrayal of Donald Trump uses overt and exaggerated caricature, reflecting a shift in how satire engages with political authority figures of existing privilege. This difference is not merely stylistic, but indicative of how American media and culture approach critiques of whiteness and entrenched power.

It is important to note that *South Park* uses an existing character for their commentary on President Trump, whenever the name "Garrison" is used – imagine it as a stand-in for Trump. I assume that Stone and Parker decided to use this character to set up a multi-season election story, and it was too soon to know if Trump would be relevant after 2016 and once they returned for later seasons. If Trump had fallen out of relevance or lost the race, they could write Garrison's character in a new direction. Garrison was also a character with an already abrasive tone, an excellent fit for a stand-in Donald Trump.

In "Where My Country Gone? (Season 19, Episode 2), Garrison's transformation into a xenophobic demagogue mirrors Trump's 2016 campaign rhetoric. By instead using Canadians as stand-ins for Mexican immigrants, *South Park* strips Trump's nationalism of its racial pretense, reducing it to absurdist theater. The episode exposes the constructed boundaries of racial and national identity, yet it stops short of interrogating the systemic foundations of Trump's rhetoric. Instead, it simplifies his stance as a politician into a grotesque persona, inviting laughter but bypassing opportunities to explore the societal structures enabling such rhetoric to thrive.



The critique becomes more visceral as Trump (and Garrison) transitions from candidate to president. Episodes like "Doubling Down" (Season 21, Episode 7) abandon metaphor entirely, depicting Garrison's sexual abuse of cabinet members with shocking directness. This explicit portrayal of power dynamics within the administration serves multiple functions – it literalizes the way Trump dominated the Republican establishment, visualizes the moral compromises of his enablers, and highlights how traditional political norms crumbled in the face of his presidency. The episode's title itself references the psychological phenomenon of doubling down on poor choices, mirroring how Trump's supporters and party members often responded to controversies by becoming more entrenched in their support.

More subtly, *South Park*'s depiction through Garrison examines how media normalization shapes public perceptions of power. By presenting his outrageous behavior as shocking and expected, the show mirrors the real-world phenomenon where Trump's inflammatory rhetoric and actions became absorbed into the political mainstream with

no questions, or worse, people were simply not aware of his actions at all. After the 2024 election, only 62% of Americans were aware that Trump was found liable for sexual abuse by a jury, and 64% knew that more than two dozen women accused him of sexual misconduct (YouGov) – statistics that underscore how even severe allegations can become lost in the noise of constant controversy.



South Park's treatment of Trump also interrogates the social conditions that facilitated his rise. Garrison's transformation from a schoolteacher to a nationalist demagogue mirrors the populist undercurrents that propelled Donald Trump to power and eventually the presidency. This evolution critiques Trump but also the failures of democratic institutions and media ecosystems that enabled his ascent. By focusing on Garrison's increasingly erratic behavior, the show satirizes the gradual erosion of political norms, offering a bleak commentary on the fragility of democratic systems in the face of authoritarian tendencies.

Through Garrison, *South Park* creates a visual study of how democracy accommodates authoritarianism. The transformation of Garrison's appearance – from a simple schoolteacher to a Trump-like figure – relies heavily on easily mocked external traits rather than deeper character implications. His oranging skin tone, elaborate hair, and exaggerated hand gestures create immediate comedy without subtle undercutting. The show's style suits this approach, rendering political authority literally two-dimensional. Each of Garrison's movements becomes deliberately performative. Where traditional political satire may aim for nuanced criticism, *South Park* opts for broad visual comedy, turning the signifiers of presidential power into a series of running gags that invite audiences to laugh at the spectacle of authority rather than examine its foundations.

The show's decision to portray Trump through Garrison rather than create a direct caricature can be seen as another layer of commentary. It suggests that Trumpism represents not just one individual, but a transformation of American political culture. By having a previously established character evolve into this role, *South Park* implies that the seeds of Trump's political style were already present in American society, waiting for the right moment to flourish.

Tale of Two Presidents: Extended Comparative Analysis

South Park's portrayals of Barack Obama and Donald Trump highlight the show's capacity to adapt satire to each president's unique societal contexts and power dynamics. While the creators, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, claim to mock all sides equally, the contrasting methods used for Obama and Trump reveal how satire operates differently depending on the cultural and systemic positions of those they target. These portrayals expose the limitations of so-called neutral satire, especially when applied to figures occupying vastly unequal roles within societal hierarchies.

In episodes like "About Last Night..." (2008) and "Obama Wins!" (2012), Obama is depicted as a calculated, almost Machiavellian figure orchestrating elaborate schemes such as jewel heists and voter fraud. These narratives, though absurd, subtly tap into cultural stereotypes of Black leaders as manipulative or inauthentic. The choice to avoid overt racial commentary does not shield the portrayals from reinforcing systemic biases: rather, it embeds them in seemingly race-neutral plots, making their implications more insidious. Even the characterization of Michelle Obama as a hacker faking her marriage amplifies these stereotypes, casting doubt on the authenticity of Black success. These portrayals reflect broader societal anxieties about Obama's presidency, echoing real-world efforts to delegitimize his leadership.

In stark contrast, Trump's depiction through the character of Mr. Garrison relies on blunt caricature and exaggerated absurdity. Episodes such as "Where My Country Gone" (2015) and "Doubling Down" (2017) transform Trump's chosen traits. The exaggerated focus on Trump's aesthetic – Garrison's spray tab, exaggerated swooped blonde hair, and bombastic demeanor – provides another layer of critique. These chosen attributes, amplified through *South Park*'s crude paper cutout animation, underscore the performative nature of Trump's public persona. By emphasizing voluntary traits rather than inherent characteristics, the show critiques Trump's self-construction as a figure of authority. This contrasts sharply with Obama's portrayal, where visual restraint aligns with an emphasis on systemic delegitimization.

The differences reveal how satire adapts based on the cultural capital and privilege of its targets: Trump, as a white male with institutional backing, is "safe" for explicit ridicule, while Obama's portrayal reflects a more cautious navigation of racial power dynamics. Looking at the examples, we can see the latitude satire has when targeting a figure of privilege.

Further visual representations of the two presidents reinforce these contrasting approaches. Obama's portrayal emphasizes control and precision, with smooth movements and composed expressions that align with societal expectations of Black leaders to maintain respectability at all costs. These traits, while seemingly neutral, feed into stereotypes of perfection often demanded of Black

individuals in leadership positions. By contrast, Garrison's erratic movements, exaggerated features, and chaotic energy emphasize the performative absurdity of Trump's leadership style. These visual choices reveal how satire adapts to the societal personas of its subjects, with Obama's restraint reflecting the cultural constraints imposed on Black leaders and Garrison's excesses highlighting the freedom afforded to figures like Trump.

The ethical implications of these portrayals are significant. Stone and Parker's claim to "hate everyone equally" fails to account for the unequal weight satire carries when directed at marginalized versus privileged figures. Mockery of Trump's self-imposed absurdities, such as his hair or spray tan, carries far less cultural baggage than critiques of Obama's inherent traits, which resonate with systemic narratives of racial inequity. This imbalance exposes the limitations of *South Park*'s approach: while it excels in critiquing privilege through overt ridicule, it risks perpetuating harm when targeting those already subject to systemic biases.

Moreover, these portrayals underscore the divergent ways *South Park* engages with power. Obama is positioned as a cerebral figure orchestrating grand schemes, reflecting societal discomfort with Black authority. His narratives undermine his legitimacy while avoiding direct engagement with his policies or accomplishments. Conversely, Trump becomes a caricature of dysfunction, with Garrison embodying the erosion of political norms. This shift reflects broader cultural attitudes, where Obama's presidency was scrutinized for its very existence, and Trump's was criticized for the spectacle it created.

Ultimately, *South Park*'s portrayals of Obama and Trump reveal the dual role of satire as both a mirror of societal attitudes and a contributor to cultural narratives. Obama's depiction highlights how even subtle critiques can perpetuate systemic biases, while Trump's caricature demonstrates the power of satire to reflect and ridicule the normalization of chaos. These portrayals invite reflection on the ethics of humor: Can satire truly challenge authority without reinforcing systemic inequities? And how can it balance entertainment with responsibility when engaging with figures of such disparate privilege and power? By juxtaposing these two presidents, *South Park* exposes the strengths of satire and its inherent limitations in a society shaped by deep-seated inequalities.

Satire in Six Days: South Park's Role in Shaping Political Perceptions and Cultural Narratives

In an era where news cycles spin at dizzying speeds and traditional media struggles to keep pace with political reality, *South Park* has emerged as America's most nimble cultural critic. What began as a crude animation about complex fourth graders has evolved into something unprecedented: a show that can transform a presidential speech from Monday into a biting satire by Wednesday, reaching masses before traditional analysts have a chance to weigh in.

The show's rapid production cycle, documented in "6 Days to Air," allows it to respond to events with unprecedented immediacy. When an episode airs only six days after a presidential debate or controversial policy announcement, *South Park* is often the first lens through which many viewers interpret the event — especially young, politically impressionable audiences. This speed grants the show an unmatched ability to set the tone of discourse, shaping perceptions long before nuanced or critical perspectives emerge.

South Park's strongest viewership base, men aged 18-34 (Bailey), represents a demographic undergoing notable political shifts. These younger viewers, many of whom turn to the show as an accessible entry point to political commentary, are exposed to a form of satire that critiques and simplifies complex issues. According to the Pew Research Center, 62% of American men aged 18-29 lean Democratic, yet the same demographic exhibits increasing skepticism toward political institutions. *South Park*'s irreverent, often cynical approach to Democratic and Republican figures resonates deeply with this audience, potentially influencing their electoral decisions and shaping how they perceive the legitimacy of political leaders.

However, the immediacy of *South Park*'s commentary raises significant ethical concerns. The pressure to create episodes so quickly often leads the show to rely on existing cultural narratives and stereotypes. This can inadvertently reinforce systemic biases, especially when political satire intersects with issues of race, gender, or class. For example, while the creators, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, claim to "hate everyone equally" their satire still lands unevenly, carrying more weight when directed at marginalized figures or communities. The speed of production leaves little room for reflective critique, amplifying the risk of perpetuating harmful narratives.

South Park's influence extends far beyond its broadcast, with clips and memes proliferating across social media platforms. These fragments can often lose the context of their original episodes, distilling complex political critiques into digestible soundbites. A meme featuring Randy Marsh's drunk political commentary on Mr. Garrison's absurd antics as a Trump caricature can embed reductive interpretations of political events into the collective consciousness, influencing how voters discuss and engage with real-world issues.

The show's cultural authority has grown so significant that satire often becomes unavoidable in political discourse. Politicians and public figures must contend with *South Park*'s portrayals, as these depictions ripple through public opinion and media coverage. A single episode can launch enduring memes, creating lasting impressions of political figures that

persist long after the specifics of the satire are forgotten.

This raises fundamental questions about the responsibilities of satirists in shaping public understanding of politics. How does the immediacy of *South Park*'s satire affect the accuracy of fairness of its commentary? To what extent should the creators consider the unequal impact of their humor on different social groups? As the lines between entertainment and political discourse continue to blur and sides become more polarized, these questions become increasingly urgent.

South Park's ability to influence millions in a single episode underscores the power of satire in shaping not just public opinion, but also the broader narratives that define democratic engagement. Whether this influence strengthens or undermines democratic discourse depends on how creators, audiences, and critics grapple with the ethical implications of this uniquely immediate and impactful form of political commentary.

Full Circle: Conclusions from the Couch

"If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they'll kill you."

-Oscar Wilde

Wilde's observation takes on a complex new meaning through the lens of *South Park* – a show whose construction paper aesthetic belies its sophisticated engagement with power and privilege in American politics. While its creators may not have intended such gravity, the show's contrasting approaches to presidential satire reveal how even ostensibly irreverent humor can either challenge or reinforce existing power structures. Through its treatment of Obama and Trump, *South Park* demonstrates both the potential and limitations of political satire, showing how attempts at "hating both sides equally" in mockery inevitably interact with broader systemic inequities, raising crucial questions about responsibility and representation in contemporary political discourse.

South Park's portrayals of Barack Obama and Donald Trump serve as a microcosm for the complex role of political satire in American society. The stark contrast between their approaches illuminates how satire adapts based on the cultural capital and privilege of its targets: Trump, as a white male with institutional backing, becomes "safe" for explicit ridicule, while Obama's portrayal reflects a more cautious navigation of racial power dynamics.

In depicting Obama, *South Park* relies on intricate narratives that subtly undermine his legitimacy, tapping into longstanding stereotypes about the untrustworthiness of Black leadership. By framing his achievements as facades for criminal schemes, the show aligns with broader cultural patterns of dismissing and delegitimizing the success of marginalized groups. This approach starkly contrasts the show's portrayal of Trump, where exaggerated caricature and explicit critique reflect the cultural latitude afforded to figures of privilege.

These divergent satirical strategies illuminate the ethical quandaries at the heart of political humor. Can satire truly challenge authority without inadvertently reinforcing systemic inequities? How can it balance the demands of entertainment with the responsibilities of shaping public discourse? *South Park*'s portrayals suggest that the immediacy and cultural influence of modern satire require a more nuanced understanding of its social implications.

Beyond its in-depth analysis of *South Park*, this paper gestures towards broader questions about the role of popular culture in political commentary. As the lines between entertainment and civic engagement continue to blur, the show's ability to rapidly respond to and influence current events underscores the urgent need to scrutinize the ethical responsibilities of cultural producers. The speed and accessibility of *South Park*'s satire grant it unparalleled power to shape how viewers interpret and engage with political realities.

Ultimately, this examination of *South Park*'s presidential portrayals reveals the dual nature of satire – its capacity to reflect and reshape the cultural narratives that define our political landscape. As we grapple with the challenges of an evolving media landscape and an increasingly polarized political climate, understanding the nuanced impact of humor on public discourse becomes ever more crucial.

As the curtain falls on this examination, one cannot help but be left with a sense of unease. While laughter may be the best medicine for the ills of our body politic, *South Park* reminds us that it is also a dangerous anesthetic that can numb us to the deeper truths lying beneath the veil of entertainment.

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Church, State, and Gender: Role of Conservative Christianity in Anti-Transgender Legislation

Shirley Tian

The male-born 200 C.E Roman emperor Elagabalus requested to be referred to as a female, wore feminine clothing, and expressed desire for genital removal (Blakemore). At age 18, she was assassinated and thrown into the Tiber River—a fate reflecting millenniums of hostility towards gender nonconformity.

In the United States, approximately 1.3 million adults identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, making up around 0.5% of the overall population (Thornton et al). Within the last 2 years, the number of US states limiting gender-affirming care to minors has increased from 4 to 26, most of which penalize medical providers who support gender-affirming care. Seven states have even limited adult access to gender-affirming care, such as prohibiting healthcare plans and facilities from providing these services or prohibiting the use of federal funds for such care (Dawson).

Religious ideology significantly shapes political attitudes and policies, and nowhere is this influence more pronounced than LGBTQ+ rights and gender-affirming care. Building onto the century-long LGBTQIA liberation movement within the United States, my research seeks to demonstrate both direct and indirect influences on politics against transgender Americans as influenced by white Christian supremacy. We contend that religion and LGBTQ+ issues are not inherently antagonistic; however, there does exist a politically powerful branch of conservative Christianity weaponizing religion and legal measures to target trans individuals.

In this paper, I'll first examine the intersection of religion and politics and show the direct link between Christian conservatism and the Republican Party within the US (contrasting sharply against the Democratic advocacy for equal rights protections for marginalized communities), as well as the role of religious supremacy in driving partisan polarization. We then explore specific legislative efforts targeting gender-affirming care, coupled with restrictions in education, and show how the anti-trans rhetoric used to rationalize these laws is not only based upon religion, but backed up by misinformation and pseudoscience. We highlight how religiously influenced political rhetoric perpetuates discrimination under the guise of protecting children and upholding traditional values. I will outline and disprove common myths that have been perpetuated to justify these measures, as well as the dangerously pervasive influence of false, discredited "experts" and organizations on shaping anti-trans policies. Additionally, we analyze the consequences of these policies, from increased violence against transgender individuals to diminishing societal empathy. The rising systemic violence and discrimination, compounded by a lack of legal protections and societal support, emphasize the acute need for reform. By examining these forces in the context of the 2024 elections, I explore the implications for the future of trans rights and their place in American society.

Religious Supremacy: A Zero-Sum Game

Rooted in the belief that Christianity is the ultimate and only true faith, Christian supremacy inherently rejects the validity of any worldview that deviates from its teachings. This superiority leads to a zero-sum relationship that necessitates the subordination and erasure of all other identities, cultures, and beliefs deemed incompatible with Christian doctrine. Thus, for many Christians, the very existence of transgender identities is not merely a difference to be tolerated—it is a direct contradiction to their understanding of God's design and moral order (Knitter). Knitter highlights that Christian supremacy has created and sustained White supremacy in the United States, reinforcing hierarchies of power and control. More importantly, religious superiority is in very contradiction to the foundations on which our country is built. This becomes not just a fight for trans rights, but for the preservation of our democracy. Christian Nationalism is the ideology that the United States was founded as and should forever continue to be a Christian nation. One might think to categorize this as an extreme, but "64% of white evangelicals sympathize or adhere to white Christian nationalism" (PBS). Hundreds, if not thousands, of New Apostolic Reformation Christians were present at the January 6th Capitol attack, viewing their participation as part of a divine battle for God. Similarly, organizations like Turning Point USA have partnered with 2,500 churches to mobilize political involvement aimed at re-electing Donald Trump. Even more alarmingly, high-profile political figures publicly align with these ideals; House Speaker Mike Johnson displays an "Appeal to Heaven" flag, which was prominently seen at the Capitol insurrection, signaling his endorsement of these beliefs.

and state does not exist for these Christians, who often believe things like "being a Christian is important if you want to be a real American." Note that nearly all of these religious nationalists are Republican and uncompromising supporters of Donald Trump, furthering our point on the link between Christianity, Republican ideals, and anti-transgender rights.

The Role of Religious Influence in Partisan Polarization

Fifteen state attorney generals argue in the amicus brief for Eknes-Tucker v. Kay Ivey (a pro-treatment case) that the conversations and resulting decision in gender-affirming healthcare is due to "politics, not an objective assessment of what is best for vulnerable young people." LGB voters have consistently leaned heavily Democratic, with 82% of registered LGB voters identifying with or leaning toward the Democratic Party, highlighting the alignment of LGBTQ+ communities with progressive platforms advocating for equal rights and protections (Kiley and Maniam).

The Republican Party, by contrast, has cultivated a base deeply intertwined with conservative Christian ideologies, with 80% of Republicans being of Christian religion. What's more, 80% of all Republicans believe that sex is strictly determined at birth, of which a majority say that this opinion was influenced by their religious views. Only 14% of Republicans find it important to correctly use someone's new pronouns. Democrats are four times as likely as Republicans to say a person's gender can differ from their sex assigned at birth - 61% to 13%, and 66% of Republicans say society has gone too far in accepting people who are transgender (Parker et al).

This alignment between Republicans and Christian nationalism only amplifies the already rampant issue of political polarization within the country. Christian conservatives frame LGBTQ+ rights as a moral issue, often invoking religious doctrines to justify restrictive policies. In contrast, Democrats champion these rights as fundamental human freedoms, leading to a clash that transcends policy and delves into deeper cultural and religious divides. For instance, many Christian conservatives argued that the legalization of same-sex marriage violated biblical principles, while Democrats framed it as a matter of equal protection under the law. As political parties become more ideologically distinct, people are less likely to engage with opposing viewpoints, instead doubling down on the narratives presented by their chosen party.

Exacerbated by media and social networks, people are increasingly consuming information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs, whether it's conservative outlets emphasizing religious freedom or progressive platforms advocating for equity and acceptance. As a result, individuals are not incentivized to seek out or critically engage with diverse perspectives. Instead, they accept the rhetoric they've been fed, which becomes self-reinforcing as it aligns with their sense of identity and belonging within a particular political or cultural group. This leaves the most vulnerable populations—such as transgender individuals— politicized into pawns.

Targeting Care: Legislative Bans and Beyond

As of August 2024, 118,300 transgender teenagers (13-17) live in one of the 26 states that have already passed legislation banning gender-affirming care (HRC). This is 39.4% of all trans youth in the United States. These bans often rest on the rationale of "protecting children," entirely ignoring the overwhelming support for gender-affirming care from leading medical organizations, such as the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the APA (Dawson). Not only do these organizations endorse this medical care, but they also emphasize the positive mental health outcomes, especially reducing suicidal ideation. Essentially, living in a way that conflicts with one's gender identity, both physically and socially, can and does lead to severe psychological distress. Consider that 82% of transgender individuals have considered and 40% have attempted suicide; how can anyone even claim "protection?" Even so, bans on care continue to rise at an alarming rate. In Dekker v. Marstiller, the State of Florida even paralleled gender-affirming healthcare to eugenics, lobotomies, and opioids.

In North Carolina, healthcare restrictions are intertwined with broader legislative efforts like Senate Bill 49: our very own "Don't Say Gay" bill. The bill prohibits educators from discussing gender identity and sexual orientation with students from kindergarten through fourth grade. For older students, discussions are allowed only in the context of reproductive health and safety education, with parental notification required. In fact, parents are notified of everything: children now cannot even borrow books, call themselves by the correct pronouns, or act "differently" with respect to their physical and mental health (whatever that means) without this information getting back to their homes. Although this inherently sounds correct, we must consider the multitudes of neglectful, unsupportive, and/or abusive parents.

By prohibiting discussion, "outing" students without consent, and restricting all access to resources, and cultivating stigma against LGBTQ+, schools are no longer a place of safety or self-discovery/expression. Rather, these students are isolated, shamed, and likely to face bullying or discrimination from their peers. A common conservative argument is that schools and social media are indoctrinating "gender ideology" on students, and this "rapid-onset gender dysphoria" is causing an influx of transgender individuals, or LGBTQ+ as a whole (Alstott et al). However, this hypothesis has been extensively discredited, and the court in Brandt et al v. Rutledge et al concurred with the plaintiff in that "If any adolescents are seeking care at gender clinics because of social influence, they would not meet the criteria of gender

dysphoria or be considered for gender-affirming medical treatment unless they had a longstanding incongruent gender identity and clinically significant distress."

It doesn't just stop in the schools. Within healthcare, no medical treatment is provided unless written consent by a parent is documented. NC's House Bill 808, enacted July 2023, outright bans all gender transition procedures for minors, whether surgical or non-surgical. If any medical professional were to violate this, their license to practice would be revoked, and the minor and/or their parents involved may press charges against the professional. For the few who might still qualify for care, these legal and procedural barriers turn an already challenging, expensive process into an impossible one.

North Carolina's House of Representatives has 120 members: 72 Republican and 48 Democratic. Interestingly enough, only 2 Democratic representatives and all 72 Republican representatives voted in favor of H.B. 808. Within all of these laws, one pattern becomes distinctly clear: these bans are not for the sake of medical safety or the protection of children, but rather to marginalize, control, and discriminate towards a vulnerable community: a community that ostensibly opposes their religious beliefs.

Misinformation and Pseudoscience: Key Arguments Against Trans Rights (and Debunking Them)

You are mutants living among us on Planet Earth, where God created men, male and women, female! ... [T]he Lord rebuke you Satan and all of your demons and imps that come parade before us."

This is how Florida House of Representatives Rep. Webster Barnaby addressed transgender witnesses at a House hearing. Typically, supporters of healthcare bans must frame their arguments in secular terms, as ordered by the Establishment clause. However, even under the guise of purported scientific justifications, outbursts like these show the true motives of the anti-transgender movement: not science, but religion.

I'll address and disprove two of the most common arguments, as well as a few derivative assertions, used against gender-affirming care, and often against transgender people as a whole: 1. Sex and gender are binary and immutable, and 2. Trans people are confused/deluded. We will show that these claims rest on misinformation (false information that could, with due diligence, be determined to be false) and religious pseudoscience (statements that use scientific vocabulary but rest on religious tenets and defy sound science), as defined by Yale Law School's Jacquin D. Bierman Professor Anne Alstott.

1. Sex and gender are binary and immutable

Alstott observes how state bans often contain claims that transgender identities are subjective and even imaginary, and that biological sex is natural and fixed. As Alabama's ban contends, "[t]he sex of a person is the biological state of being female or male, based on sex organs, chromosomes, and endogenous hormone profiles, and is genetically encoded into a person at the moment of conception, and it cannot be changed." She conveys that interestingly enough, the "insistence on a sex binary and its biological immutability is odd because it is irrelevant to the evidence on gender-affirming care." Clearly, it's not actually arguing against gender-affirming care, but the gender roles that adhere to Christian religious ideals, as seen in Florida's ban defining sex as "either male or female based on the organization of the human body of such person for a specific reproductive role."

Although it is irrelevant to the argument of trans healthcare, I will nonetheless refute the claim on three axes: neuroscience, behavioral neuroendocrinology, and psychology.

1.1 There is a clear distinction between the "male" and "female" brain!

Although there are, on average, differences between the brain structure of men and women, these differences are not innate nor stable/unchanging. Furthermore, these differences are neither highly dimorphic in the population nor internally consistent in the individual, showing that the claim that there are "two types of brains" has no scientific grounds (Hyde). Even in the regions showing the largest sex differences, there is substantial overlap—the intermediate nucleus of the hypothalamus is typically twice as large in men than women, but in "approximately 30% of men, the size of this nucleus falls in the female-typical range." Overall, instead of there being "male" and "female" brains, brains are an amalgamation of overlaps between sexes and change based on life experiences.

1.2 What about the different hormones and hormone levels?

Within Behavioral Neuroendocrinology, claims are made that "gonadal hormones are dimorphic (i.e., that there are "female" hormones, such as estrogen and progesterone, and "male" hormones, such as testosterone), and (2) that levels of these hormones are genetically determined and fixed" (Bigler). However, the "unquestioned belief in the gender binary…" is "because many researchers have studied "male" hormones (e.g., testosterone) only in men and "female" hormones (e.g., estradiol and progesterone) only in women," when in fact estrogens and androgens are present in both men and women, and they circulate at overlapping levels (Bigler). Social environments significantly impact testosterone levels, and classification of sex on solely steroid levels (estradiol and progesterone) would make for a binary between pregnant women and everyone else - nonpregnant women, men, and genderdiverse people (Bigler).

1.3 But, girls will be girls and boys will be boys, right?

Studies were done in the stereotypically gendered categories of mathematics performance, depression, and sexual behaviors and attitudes, of which little to no tangible gendered differences were found. Similar to studies on hormones, past research has typically been done based on the premise of a gender binary. Even so, this research still indicates that females and males aren't psychologically dimorphic. Rather, "1% of students studied exhibit only feminine or masculine behaviors, while 55%+ showed a blend of both" (Joel). Not surprisingly, it's shown that gender gaps are and will continue to be smaller in nations in which women are more empowered and treated with equality.

2. Trans people are confused/deluded

Countless times, especially within legislation, it has been suggested that trans people do not actually exist nor have gender dysphoria, but instead a mental illness. For instance, the Arkansas statute finds that "individuals struggling with distress at identifying with their biological sex often have already experienced psychopathology, which indicates these individuals should be encouraged to seek mental health services to address comorbidities and underlying causes of their distress before undertaking any hormonal or surgical intervention."

Transgender individuals do indeed have higher rates of depression, anxiety, etc compared to cisgender individuals: but instead of these conditions causing dysphoria, it is that the dysphoria is causing mental illness. As one experiences not only having to live an identity that they do not resonate with in addition to the social stress of violence and discrimination, it's logical for these to result in physical and mental conditions (Alstott et al). While there is no scientific support for the argument on "confusion," it does align perfectly with Christian ideology. Within Catholicism, the Vatican states that "the fictitious construct known as 'gender neuter' or 'third gender' ... obscur[es] the fact that a person's [biological] sex is a structural determinant of male or female identity."

2.1 Detransitioners

Another argument being made is that many transgender people, especially children, cease to identify as transgender and eventually detransition. Again, Arkansas writes into law that "studies consistently demonstrate that the majority come to identify with their biological sex in adolescence or adulthood, thereby rendering most physiological interventions unnecessary." Many point out how 13.1% of transitioned gender nonconforming individuals report a history of detransitioning (Turban et al). What they fail to point out, however, is that the exact same study points out that the vast majority of these detransitioners do so due to "external pressures," such as familial or societal pressure and discrimination. In fact, only 0.6% and 0.3% of transwomen and transmen, respectively, who have performed any kind of GAS (gender-affirming surgery) experience post-surgical regret (Thornton et al). This is actually far less of a proportion of regret relative to other surgeries: 47.1% experience regret after breast reconstruction, 19.5% after weight loss surgery, 30% after prostatectomy (a type of prostate cancer treatment), and countless more (Thornton et al). Considering GAS has one of the lowest rates of regret of all types of surgeries, following the logic of the detransitioner claim, we could contend that all surgeries should also be banned—which is, clearly, irrational.

In addition, the studies that the Arkansas statute refers to used widely expansive criteria for gender incongruity, which included "tomboy" girls or "feminine" boys that would not meet the criteria for gender dysphoria today (Alstott et al). Indeed, many of these children did not identify as transgender later in life, but rather were gay or lesbian. More recent literature shows that 94% of prepubescent "children who socially transitioned continued to identify as trans after five years" (Olsen et al). As discussed above, a high proportion of these detransitioners do so in response to external factors, as opposed to ceasing to identify as trans entirely.

Decreasing sympathy

What's startling is that these outrageous claims are working. The bans are being passed, and general public sentiment on trans people is deteriorating - the percentage of people that say gender is determined by sex is increasing year by year, no matter what political party. 60% of Americans today believe that a person's sex assigned at birth determines their gender, compared to 56% in 2021 and 54% in 2017 (Pew Research Center). Among those who believe that sex is determined by their assignment at birth, 41% say that this opinion has been influenced by their religious views.

These shifts in policy and sentiment create an alarming positive feedback loop. As legislative bans gain traction, they lend a hand of legitimacy to anti-trans rhetoric, creating and reinforcing societal biases. These growing biases, in turn, empower lawmakers to push even more restrictive measures, framing them as reflecting the will of the people. The cycle perpetuates and exacerbates discrimination and hostility. This pattern is not new; it was not until 1973 that homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental disorders, and we are now repeating the mistakes of the past.

Anti-Trans Pseudoscientist "Experts" & Organizations

These Christian views are creating entities to spread these purported claims, in which Christian right-wing organizations pose as legitimate groups to send politically charged messages to advance harmful views and actions on trans rights and GAS. One of the most prominent groups is the American College of Pediatricians, which broke away from the American Academy of Pediatrics after the

AAP released a statement that "gay parents posed no risk to adopted children" in 2002 (Alstott et al). The ACP, with only around 700 members compared to the AAP's 70,000, has sent 14,800 letters to school superintendents endorsing conversion therapy and opposing gender-affirming care. ACP, ADF, the Catholic Medical Association, The Witherspoon Institute, The Family Research Institute, and other similar entities are either visibly or have been shown to be based upon Christian values, but strategically use the aforementioned secular-sounding rhetoric to broaden their appeal beyond religious circles: they now allure both believers and nonbelievers.

Though ACP poses as a secular group, with the website's mission statement as "Enabling all children to reach their optimal physical and emotional health and well-being," it has also stated that "sex is a dimorphic, innate trait defined in relation to an organism's biological role in reproduction" and that "gender-affirming treatment turns children into hormone- and surgery-dependent experimentees." ACP has also been classified as a hate group (Alstott et al), and deliberately attempts to look like AAP—non-experts consistently mistake them for AAP, giving them falsified credibility.

Alliance Defending Freedom is, according to their website, "one of the leading Christian law firms committed to protecting religious freedom, free speech, marriage and family, parental rights, and the sanctity of life." When asked to provide witnesses to court, organizations like ADF will provide fraudulent "experts" such as Paul Hruz, an endocrinologist with no formal qualifications in mental health or transgender care, to perpetuate unsubstantiated claims. Despite not being a psychiatrist, psychologist, or any sort of mental health professional, nor treating transgender patients, nor conducting any original research on gender, he has been a prominent speaker in cases like Kadel v. Folwell (Alstott et al).

Another significant figure in these efforts is Paul Cameron, a pseudoscientific proponent who has long promoted discredited and inflammatory views about LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Cameron founded the Family Research Institute, which has published studies (in pay-to-publish journals) claiming that gay people are more violent and prone to molest, rape, and murder. His testimony before state legislatures, including claims that LGBTQIA+ people are more likely to drive drunk and commit sexual offenses, exemplifies the type of harmful, unsubstantiated rhetoric used to demonize queer people and undermine their rights.

Systemic Prejudice to Violence: Rising Attacks

The anti-transgender movement is not just creating barriers for trans individuals—it's causing surges in brutality and violence against them. Trans people, especially women, are far more likely to be victims of violence, experience poverty, homelessness, unemployment, sexual assault, sex work, and more. Fifty percent of all transgender individuals will be sexually assaulted at some point during their lives, and they justifiably avoid law enforcement in fear of being harassed or charged on no grounds at all. Transgender women are 4.3 times more likely to be a victim of homicide than all women, and there were at least 21 transgender victims of homicide in 2015: most are both gruesome and unsolved. Consider that at least 33% of trans people have not been able to update any of their identifying documents, especially in states that make it nearly impossible to do so: there are undoubtedly countless other victims whose deaths are unacknowledged, as the recorded totals represent only the identified victims. Whether the documents are updated, police, the media, or even family members consistently misidentify them by their assigned sex and birth name. In the cases that are known, local media repeatedly further misrepresented the victims by misgendering them (HRC).

One such case is Shade Shuler, a 22-year-old transgender woman from Dallas, Texas. She was shot on July 29th, and by the time police found her, her body had decomposed to the point that it took authorities over two weeks to identify her. Authorities continue to misgender her, and not only does Texas' hate crime law not include gender, no one has been arrested for her murder (HRC).

Charges aren't being rightfully pursued for these crimes, and they often aren't reported as being motivated by gender identity (even when they clearly are). Most states don't have laws outlining gender-motivated hate crimes, so pursuing these in court is near-impossible. Even in the states that do include gender identity in their hate crime laws, police and courts refuse to acknowledge/label them as a hate crime. Thus, lawmakers not only draft legislation that directly harms transgender individuals but also strategically omit critical protections, exacerbating their marginalization.

Discrimination against transgender individuals often begins long before they encounter the criminal justice system. Many face harassment and mistreatment in schools, with 78% of transgender youth reporting bullying and 15% leaving school as a direct result. More than 57% experienced family rejection, and one in five are left homeless due to this rejection (CAAP). When left with little familial, societal, or legal support, trans individuals have very weak or nonexistent safety nets: most of the aforementioned victims lost their lives at the hands of those they knew intimately, as they had absolutely no one to turn to when relationships grew abusive.

The 2024 Election Results on the Future of Trans Rights

We will get … transgender insanity the hell out of our schools, and we will keep men out of women's sports."—Donald Trump, Madison Square Gardens, October 27, 2024. Trump's proposed Agenda 47, outlined on his website donaldjtrump.com, vows to "stop the chemical, physical, and emotional mutilation of our youth because no serious country should be telling its children that they were born with the wrong gender." It even includes specifics: for example, "Pass a law prohibiting child sexual mutilation in all 50 states," revoking federal health and safety standards for any hospital that provides gender-affirming care, shutting down entire schools if a teacher talks about transness, prohibit "men from participating in women's sports," and passing a bill declaring that "the only genders recognized by the U.S. government are male and female—and they are assigned at birth," on top of many more of these ludicrously terrifying claims.

Republicans spent over $215 million, or $134 per trans person, on TV ads attacking trans rights, framing trans existence as a cultural and moral threat and fueling political hostility toward people who already face severe marginalization (McNeill). LGBTQIA+ advocacy organizations, like GLAAD, have decried these attacks, with president Sarah Kate Ellis calling them a dehumanizing attack on vulnerable people who make up only 1% of the population. "There's a lack of understanding, and there's a lack of humanizing about who trans people are… Instead of empathy, they're met with hostility. That's the culture Trump is creating," Ellis stated. (Barrow)

This hostility is furthered by the continued push for conversion therapy, a discredited practice that seeks to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Often cloaked in pseudoscientific language, conversion therapy perpetuates harmful stereotypes that queer individuals are a danger to themselves or society, justifying suppression rather than acceptance. The long-term psychological damage caused by these practices has been well-documented, yet they remain a rallying point for those opposing LGBTQIA+ rights.

Concluding, For Now

Conservative Christianity has been and is continuing to be used as a justification for the stripping of transgender rights, in which the very legislation of our country is rampant with religious undertones and substantiated with pseudoscience spread by religious organizations targeting trans individuals. This institutionalized prejudice, as reflected in state-level attacks on trans rights and the broader cultural dehumanization perpetuated through media and political rhetoric, threatens both the safety and well-being of transgender individuals and a democratic government that supposedly separates the church from the state.

Despite the many hurdles ahead, there are pathways to effect meaningful change. The responsibility lies with all sectors of society—from policymakers and law enforcement to educators and healthcare providers—to confront and dismantle the pervasive prejudices within transphobia. We urge you to advocate for systemic changes to safeguard and strengthen trans rights. One such change includes enacting federal legislation/regulation protections for LGBTQIA+ people, as well as strengthening protections based on existing laws, like Title IX and the Affordable Care Act. States and medical organizations should adopt procedural review processes to help weed out misinformation and pseudoscience in legislation. Improving law enforcement training can ensure that trans individuals get the justice they deserve. We can look towards passing the Equality Act: introduced by Senator Jeff Merkley and Representative David Cicilline, it creates clear, enduring safeguards against discrimination on the basis of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity in relation to jobs, housing, public areas and services, federally funded initiatives, credit, education, and jury duty. There isn't a simple solution to overcoming the barriers the trans community faces, but by raising awareness and taking small steps toward action, we can pave the way to a more equitable future.

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On Identity, War, and Ethnonationalism in the Balkans: The Question of Kosovo

Anisa Hasanaj

Na shiptarët jemi k'tu n'Kosove, han e dan. Nuk e di me vjet, po e di qe na ketu n'kit vend, jemi para dreqit.

We Albanians have been here in Kosovo since forever. I don't know the exact years, but I know that in this land, we are before the devil.

– Tahir Berisha, Anekdota Shqiptare

Identity, war, and ethnonationalism are the foundations through which I understand the ongoing challenges facing Kosovo and its ever-contested independence. Identity, its repression, its blending across eras, and the formation of a distinct Albanian identity within Kosovo, is central. Kosovo has always been a place where identities collided, overlapped, and were suppressed. But in that suppression, a stronger sense of Albanian identity emerged. War, the countless wars fought by Kosovars, but most notably the Kosovo War, born from the breakup of Yugoslavia, stands as a testament to both resistance and the unfulfilled fight for true independence. Yet, even resistance itself as armed struggle or peaceful demonstration, feels like war. Opposition to occupation, in any form, carries the weight and consequences of battle. Even the smallest acts of defiance ripple outward, shaping the consciousness of nations as surely as armed conflict. That is why resistance, though ever-present in Kosovo's history, is folded into the image of war itself. It doesn't need its own title. War has become the vessel through which resistance is remembered. Ethnonationalism, Albanian or Serbian, has always acted as a catalyst for violence. It both propelled the fight for survival and complicated the collective Albanian resistance in Kosovo, turning identity into a battleground. And so I return to the central question: What is Kosovo? Why does Kosovo deserve independence? What qualifies any nation for independence? The answer lies in resistance. If a people, not just a state with borders but a collective of shared identity, of shared language, of shared memory, feel repressed in their own homeland, it raises the question of resistance. And resistance, in its persistence, in its refusal to be silenced, becomes the qualification for independence.

What formally qualifies a country for independence is not always clear-cut, but international law provides a framework. According to the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933), there are four primary criteria for statehood: a defined territory, a permanent population, a functioning government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states (Montevideo Convention, art. 1). Kosovo meets all these formal requirements. Yet, recognition, while it is not a legal necessity, it is a practical one nonetheless. Without it, a state's sovereignty is often left in limbo, as Kosovo's partial recognition shows. Additionally, the United Nations Charter consecrates the principle of self-determination, allowing peoples to "freely determine their political status" (United Nations, Article 1). However, self-determination doesn't always equate to independence; it may manifest as autonomy within an existing state. Independence becomes justifiable, and even necessary, when appalling human rights violations occur, violating the spirit of territorial integrity. In Kosovo's case, after decades of repression, cultural erasure, and ultimately the ethnic cleansing campaigns during the Kosovo War, independence became not only a political aspiration but a humanitarian imperative (Human Rights Watch). This places Kosovo within a unique legal and moral context where resistance to oppression aligns with the global principle of self-determination.

Kosovo's story, as I discovered, was a history of borders and battles, but also a reflection of what it means to exist against many odds. Every dotted line on a map, every mislabeling of my identity, pointed to something deeper: Kosovo's right to be recognized is not just political, it's existential. This question of why Kosovo deserves international recognition and why its existence is justified became the heart of my research. Rather, my research became one not of global diplomacy or legal frameworks alone but also about the long history of resistance, the struggles for self-determination, and the denial of identity that Kosovars have faced for centuries. To answer these question, I had to retrace Kosovo's history, through colonial rule, war, cultural erasure, and resilience, to understand why a nation that has fought so long to exist still has to fight to be seen.

Ottoman Kosovo and the Making of Modern Identity

"Pse ju shqiptarët keni shumë mesele, e shpeshherë flisni e merreni vesh me to?"

"Po, ne shqiptarët kemi qenë te robëruar prej Turqisë e prej Serbisë, e nuk kemi mundar të flasim lirisht mes vete, po me rrotulla, e për atë kemi shumë mesele dhe me to shpeshherë jemi marrë vesh e hasmi s'na ka kuptuar se çka po flasim."

"Why do you Albanians have so many stories and often talk in ways

"Well, we Albanians have been oppressed by the Turks and the Serbs, and we couldn't speak freely among ourselves, so we spoke in roundabout ways. That's why we have so many stories, and often we've used them to understand each other while our enemies couldn't figure out what we were saying."

-Tahir Berisha, Anekdota Shqiptare

The Ottoman Empire's 457-year occupation brought significant demographic and religious changes to Kosovo, laying the foundation for the region's modern identity. Contrary to the typical portrayal of Ottoman rule as purely destructive, Noel Malcolm argues that the Empire preserved and developed many features of local Christian traditions, integrating them into its administrative and social systems (Malcolm 162). This nuanced approach allowed the Ottomans to maintain control while adapting to local conditions. This section examines how Ottoman policies of demographic transformation, cultural erasure, and religious integration influenced Kosovo's history, ultimately contributing to the growth of an Albanian majority and the emergence of a distinct national consciousness that persists today.

Economic incentives, such as the jizya tax on non-Muslims, encouraged Albanians to convert to Islam. Many Albanians also converted to gain access to Ottoman administrative and military hierarchies, consolidating their presence in Kosovo. Ottoman tax records from the 16th century show a steady rise in Muslim households, with nearly half of Kosovo's population converting to Islam by the 1560s (Malcolm 180). These conversions and Albanian migration into Kosovo transformed the region's demographic landscape. By the 18th century, Albanians had become the dominant demographic group in Kosovo due to migration, higher birth rates, and widespread conversion to Islam (Malcolm 164).



Figure 1. Photocopied page from the original 1455 Ottoman defter housed in the Istanbul historical archives, accompanied by its Serbo-Croatian translation. The document records the demographic makeup of the Branković District, including evidence of Albanian presence in 23 villages.

The growth of the Albanian majority in Kosovo during the Ottoman period is a critical factor in understanding the region's modern identity. This demographic shift was further reinforced by Ottoman policies that encouraged Albanian migration into Kosovo, particularly after conflicts like the Great Turkish War depopulated parts of the region. The Albanianization of Slavic-speaking Muslims, facilitated by shared religious identity, also contributed to this trend (Malcolm 160, 162). These changes are central to modern arguments for Kosovo's autonomy, as they solidified Albanians' presence in the region and laid the foundation for a distinct national identity.

Furthermore, besides demographic changes, under Ottoman rule, Albanians were divided into four vilayets (administrative regions), disrupting their cultural cohesion. Historian Bernd J. Fischer notes that "severe restrictions were placed on teaching the Albanian language, which impeded the process of a common written language that could lead to... the growth of modern nationalism" (Fischer 313). This suppression of language and education aligns with the idea that imperial powers seek to erase indigenous cultures to maintain control. The Ottomans aimed to integrate Albanians into the imperial system by marginalizing Albanian identity, fragmenting their sense of collective self.

Islamization of Albanians under the Ottoman millet system further diluted pre-Ottoman traditions. While many Albanians converted voluntarily, this shift eroded distinct cultural markers that could have resisted Ottoman hegemony. Historian Noel Malcolm highlights that Islamization, though often voluntary, contributed to the fragmentation of local identities as Albanians became increasingly dependent on imperial structures (Malcolm 160). Imperialism disguises cultural erasure under the guise of integration, ultimately weakening indigenous resistance. As George Gawrych notes in The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam, and the Albanians, 1874–1913, the Albanian experience under Ottoman rule was marked by integration and resistance. Gawrych's work provides a foundational framework for understanding how Albanians navigated Ottoman policies while preserving their cultural identity. The Ottoman occupation strengthened Albanian identity, albeit within a colonial framework. Albanians adapted to Ottoman rule and developed strategies to resist cultural erasure, laying the groundwork for a distinct national consciousness. This duality of integration and resistance shaped Kosovo's identity for centuries and set the stage for later struggles for autonomy. However, despite integration, Albanians faced significant cultural suppression under Ottoman rule. Policies such as banning Albanian-language education and criminalizing private teaching efforts sought to undermine their linguistic and cultural identity. George Gawrych emphasizes that "by the late 19th century, Albanian-language education was banned, and private efforts to teach it were deemed subversive" (Gawrych 21). These measures reflect the argument that imperial powers systematically erase indigenous cultures to maintain dominance. However, Albanians resisted these efforts through oral traditions, particularly in the northern Gheg dialect, which became vital in preserving their identity. Albanian intellectuals like Sami Frashëri advocated for cultural preservation, asserting that the Albanian language must be maintained to resist

Ottoman hegemony (Frashëri 22). These acts of resistance fostered a growing national consciousness, setting the stage for later independence movements.



Figure 2. Assembly of the Albanian League of Prizren by Abdurrahim Buza (date unknown). The painting depicts the historic gatherings of Albanian leaders in Prizren.

The late Ottoman period saw the emergence of Albanian nationalism, most notably with the League of Prizren (Lidhja e Prizrenit) in 1878. This military and political organization sought to prevent the partition of Albanian lands among neighboring states and called for autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. The League fostered unity and resistance against external and internal threats by invoking Besa, a traditional Albanian oath of honor. Gawrych notes that "in 1878, Albanians met in Kosovo and made a besa that formed a political alliance preventing the partition of Albanian territory into neighboring Balkan states" (Gawrych 3). This moment marked a pivotal step in defining Kosovo as an integral part of the Albanian national project, a vision that persists in modern debates over Kosovo's sovereignty.

The Ottoman era profoundly shaped Kosovo's cultural, demographic, and religious identity, leaving a legacy of both suppression and resilience. While Ottoman policies aimed to integrate Albanians into the imperial system, they inadvertently fostered a distinct national consciousness. The growth of the Albanian majority during this period, driven by migration, higher birth rates, and religious conversion, solidified Albanians' presence in Kosovo and laid the foundation for modern claims to autonomy. This historical foundation helps explain why Kosovo's predominantly Albanian population today views itself as distinct from Serbia and justifies its claim to independence.

The enduring spirit of resistance and adaptation that began under Ottoman rule continues to legitimize Kosovo's sovereignty in the modern era. This period enables an understanding of how Kosovo's complex history of cultural erasure, demographic shifts, and resistance has shaped its contemporary identity and political landscape.

From Kingdom to Chaos: Yugoslavia

> *Kur tmë shifni se jam tretur, mos mendoni se kam*
> *vdekur, jam i gjall' e jam në jet', jam në dritën e vërtet,*
> *une jam në shpirtin tuaj, flakën time se merr i huaj.*
>
> When you see that I have withered, do not think that I have died,
> I am alive and I live on, I am in the truest light, I am within your
> spirit, no stranger can take my flame.
>
> *– Ilir Shaqiri, Fjalet E Qiriri*

Emerging from the ashes of the empire, Yugoslavia was established as a South Slavic federation, an ambitious project aimed at achieving political unity across the divides of identity. Yet from its genesis, this vision was undercut by internal hierarchies, especially the dominance of Serbia. As the Ottoman Empire dissolved and its territories were divided, a series of treaties allocated its lands to various nations, aiming to unify themselves under a single ethnic and national identity. One such treaty, the 1913 Treaty of London, drafted without the input of Kosovo's Albanian majority, severed Kosovo from its Ottoman past and placed it under Serbian control (Treaty of London). This decision, imposed entirely by external European powers, denied Kosovo Albanians the right to self-determination by stripping them of the chance to join Albania or form a state of their own. Governance was transferred to a Serbian state that perceived Albanians as an internal threat, marking a shift from one foreign empire to another. However, this time, under a regime that openly othered its Albanian subjects due to their language, culture, and ethnicity.

Serbia, invoking the myth of a historically Serbian Kosovo, an imagination rooted in the distant Nemanjić Dynasty, overlooking the centuries of Ottoman rule and demographic change, continued its occupation through strategies of cultural erasure and demographic manipulation (Elsie 212). Albanians, who had lived in Kosovo for centuries, found themselves increasingly targeted by policies aimed at marginalization and displacement (Qirezi 47). These tactics intensified under the late Yugoslav regime of Slobodan Milošević. Deportations, the mass settlement of Serbs, and the degradation of Kosovo's land and infrastructure were among the many ways Yugoslav authorities exploited the region while reshaping its identity to appear Serbized, revealing the extent to which Yugoslavia had come to function as a colonial force (Qirezi 47-52).

From Treaty to Tito

From 1913 to the end of World War II, Kosovo was not simply a contested territory; it was a site of active colonial experimentation, where territorial ambitions, demographic engineering, and nationalist mythologies clashed to redefine the region's identity and erase its Albanian majority. 1913 marked a pivotal moment for the Albanian region, not just in Kosovo. Due to pressure from Serbia and Greece, Kosovo and the southern region known as Çameria, another predominantly Albanian area, were ceded to Serbia and Greece. These two regions held a significant percentage of Albanian-populated territory, and with the newly signed Treaty of London, between 30% and 40% of the total Albanian population, such as those living in Çameria and

Kosovo, was excluded from the newly sovereign Albania (Elsie 243). This decision reflected the geopolitical interests of the Great Powers (France, Great Britain, and Russia) and their allies, who prioritized territorial gains for Serbia and Greece over the self-determination of Albanians.

The annexation of Kosovo into Serbia laid the groundwork for decades of marginalization and cultural suppression, as Serbian authorities viewed Albanians with suspicion and as fundamentally incompatible with the Southern Slavs of the newly formed state. The first formal stage of Serbian colonial presence in Kosovo, following the Treaty of London, began with the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) on December 1, 1918 (Seton 976). This new state centralized power under Serbian dominance, incorporating Kosovo into Serbia rather than drawing it into Albania's borders. Despite its Albanian majority, Kosovo was denied autonomy and subjected to policies aimed at Serbianizing the region as early as 1918, most notoriously through the forced displacement of Albanians by the Serbian military, many of whom fled to what is now modern-day Turkey (Qirezi 53).

Behind these actions lay not only a desire for territorial control but also a deeper ideological project. The rhetoric behind the creation of Yugoslavia stemmed from a long-held imagination of South Slavic unity. For Serbian nationalists, Kosovo was central to Serbia's historic military legacy; a legacy mythologized and traced back nearly four centuries. Thus, the integration of Kosovo into Yugoslavia came at the expense of Kosovar Albanians, who faced systematic marginalization and cultural erasure in the service of an ideological fantasy: the restoration of a distant, and frankly archaic, imperial past.

One of the most significant tools for establishing Serbian power in Kosovo during the Yugoslav era was demographic manipulation. Between 1918 and 1941, this took shape through a combination of forced migration, targeted displacement, and incentivized settlement. In coordination with Turkey during the 1920s and 1930s, Yugoslavia facilitated the coerced relocation of thousands of Albanians out of Kosovo; as many as 12,000 Albanians were killed as a result of refusing to leave (Ramet 116). Simultaneously, Serbian settlers were actively encouraged to move into the region. Between 1919 and 1928 alone, between 13,000 and 15,914 Serbian families were resettled in Kosovo under official state decrees (Qirezi 53-54). These new settlements, established at the direct expense of displaced Albanian families, marginalized the native population both economically and socially: blatant acts of settler colonialism (Qirezi 52–54).

To reinforce these demographic shifts and evoke the grandeur of Serbia's imagined imperial past, many of the 106 colonies and 245 settlements created in early 20th-century Kosovo were named after heroes from Serbian epic poetry, names such as Lazarevo, Obilić, and Miloševo. Others bore more ordinary Serbian names, like Livadica and Kokrovica, both of which are the names of my mother's ancestral villages; the original Albanian names, like so many others, have long been forgotten. These efforts to reconfigure Kosovo's ethnic and symbolic landscape were justified by the chilling pursuit of an "ethnic balance", a concept that cloaked violence in the language of order. This balance was not merely sought through migration and colonial settlement, but also through mass killing (Qirezi 48).



Figure 3. Map showing the borders of the Balkan states after the Treaty of London (1913), as published in the Report of the International Commission.

The Serbian justification for reclaiming Kosovo relied heavily on the language of ancient conquest and mythologized memory. If applied consistently, this logic would demand the reclamation of all lands once ruled by the Nemanjić Dynasty, from southern Greece to Bulgaria to Hungary. Yet such ambitions are generally dismissed as unrealistic. Kosovo, however, remained "manageable", close in proximity and central to the Serbian national imaginary. This selective use of history in nationalist arguments becomes especially questionable given the shared legacy of anti-Ottoman resistance across the Balkans.

Following the many conflicts that plagued the region, from the Balkan Wars to World War I, World War II proved to be one of the most pivotal, further complicating Kosovo's place within Yugoslavia and altering the trajectory of its struggle for self-determination. The Axis occupation of the Balkans temporarily disrupted Serbian dominance, with parts of Kosovo annexed to Albania under Italian control (Malcolm 310). This moment rekindled ideas of Albanian ethno-nationalism, reminiscent of those from the earlier time of the League of Prizren. Kosovars, who had long been denied political representation and national recognition, began to reimagine their place within a larger Albanian identity, viewing the collapse of the old order as a potential opportunity. Though the Axis defeat sparked a brief hope for self-determination for the Albanians in Kosovo, Yugoslavia ultimately reemerged victorious against the Axis, and Kosovo was reabsorbed into the federation, this time not under the banner of Serbian nationalism, but under the red star of communism (Davis). However, the end of the war and the rise of socialism under Josip Broz Tito ushered in a new form of political repression, one that prioritized federal unity over ethnic autonomy. Although

cloaked in the language of equality, this unity masked the continuation of marginalization, a system in which Albanian Kosovars remained outsiders in a state that claimed to unite them.

Tito's Yugoslavia and the Illusion of Harmony (1945-1980)

After the revival of Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito, a new banner of pride emerged across the federation: Bratstvo i mir, Brotherhood and Peace. The slogan aimed to transcend nationalism and establish the post-war Yugoslav state on the ideals of unity and equality. But these ideals were shadowed by a willful amnesia, a refusal to reckon with the fractured and violent ethnic conflicts that haunted Yugoslavia's past. Under Tito's rule, Kosovo experienced greater opportunities than before, yet the uneven treatment of its non-Slavic populations remained just beneath the surface (Shan). Though formally part of Yugoslavia, Kosovo was still populated by a majority Albanian population, Yugoslavian, but not Slavic. And so, while Albanians were folded into Tito's vision of brotherhood and peace, their inclusion often felt conditional. Peace had its borders and brotherhood had its boundaries.



Figure 4. Still from Tri karte za Hollywood (1993), directed by Božidar Nikolić, showing a school performance beneath a banner reading "Long live brotherhood and unity," symbolizing Yugoslavia's socialist ideals.

Under Tito's leadership, Kosovo was granted greater autonomy within Yugoslavia, allowing for limited self-governance and the right to cultural expression. While still a province, the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution recognized Kosovo as a distinct political entity with representation in federal institutions, marking a rare period of Albanian political participation (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, art. 2). One of the most explicit expressions of this autonomy was the expansion of education. The University of Prishtina, formerly a Serbian institution, revised its curricula to Albanian, becoming the first institution of higher education in the Albanian language within Kosovo. In the year following this transformation, enrollment skyrocketed from approximately 7,700 students to over 43,000 (Universiteti i Prishtinës).

It was also during this era that Albanian culture, under Yugoslav rule, felt most at ease expressing itself. Albanian-language media expanded across print and television, and new artistic movements flourished. Most notably, Albanian rock music emerged, and one of the most beloved and influential bands for Kosovars was Gjurmët, formed in 1980, Tito's final year in power. In the years following his death, Gjurmët would come to symbolize what was lost as Albanian media was gradually erased under new leadership. Despite this cultural blossoming, the mark of Yugoslav occupation remained. Cultural expression existed, but always within the ideological bounds of Titoism. The story of Dervish Shaqa, a folk singer from a village near Deçan, captures this tension. Shaqa became widely known for his emotionally charged patriotic songs, which featured figures like Isa Boletini and lamented his coerced flight to Albania in 1965. These songs, once sung in private and passed from home to home, were eventually published and performed more openly. For this, Shaqa was imprisoned multiple times. His voice and the memory it carried stood in direct opposition to the Brotherhood and Unity that Tito's Yugoslavia demanded ("40 vjet nga vdekja").

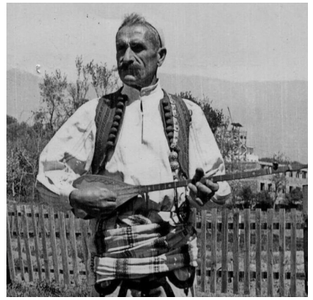


Figure 5. Photograph of Dervish Shaqa courtesy of Kosova Press

Yet this autonomy existed only within the carefully controlled framework of Tito's Yugoslavia. The federal structure, while outwardly inclusive, centralized real power in Belgrade. Kosovo's representation in federal institutions did little to challenge its economic underdevelopment or alleviate its continued marginalization in military and political spheres. Just like in the story of Dervish Shaqa, the autonomy Albanians experienced, whether in music or state authority, was always tainted by the presence of occupation. The political power held by Albanians in Kosovo was constantly undermined. Whether through restricted access to federal funding or the cultural othering of Albanians as non-Slavic, Kosovar Albanians were consistently treated as second-class citizens, both in daily life and within the politics of the Yugoslav federation (Ramet 301).

The illusion of harmony held only as long as Tito did. His authority functioned as the glue holding the federation together, and with his death in 1980, the fragile balance of power began to unravel. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Kosovo, where student demonstrations erupted almost immediately after his passing. For many Albanians, the promise of autonomy had not delivered material change. Economic neglect continued to plague the province, deepening resentment and exposing the limitations of so-

called equality within the Yugoslav system. By the time of Tito's death, Kosovo had become the most impoverished region in the federation. Its indexed GDP per capita stood at 28.6, less than half that of Macedonia at 66.3, and less than a third of Serbia's at 98.7 (Vojnić 173–175). The staggering economic gap between Kosovo and the rest of Yugoslavia fueled a sense of abandonment among Albanians, even as the state continued to promote ideals of unity and equality publicly.

At the same time, ethnically charged incidents began to dominate the public imagination, further polarizing relations between Albanians and Serbs. One of the most infamous was the Đorđe Martinović incident. In 1985, Martinović, a Serbian farmer from Kosovo, arrived at a hospital with severe internal injuries and claimed two Albanian men had attacked him. However, after interrogation by a Yugoslav People's Army colonel, he reportedly admitted the injuries were self-inflicted during a failed act of masturbation. Despite this, Serbian media elevated the event into a cause célèbre, using it to fuel nationalist outrage and further the narrative that Serbs were under attack in Kosovo (Surroi). Incidents like this intensified the othering of Kosovar Albanians, stoking paranoia, resentment, and division. As tensions mounted, calls for greater Serbian control grew louder. Though the most violent shifts were still to come, the post-Tito period made one thing clear: the peace that had defined Tito's Yugoslavia was already beginning to fracture.

While often remembered as a period of relative peace, Tito's Yugoslavia masked the fundamental contradictions of a federation built on suppressed identities. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Kosovo, where brief political participation could not erase a long history of marginalization, nor protect against the nationalist surge that would follow with the rise of Slobodan Milošević.

Slobodan Milošević and the Unraveling Federation (1980–1998)

In the years following Tito's death, Yugoslavia faced deepening economic decline, not only in Kosovo but across the federation, alongside a rising Serbian nationalism more aggressive than ever before. The fragile ideal of Slavic unity began to collapse, replaced by a singular vision of Serbian supremacy. Into this storm of crisis stepped Slobodan Milošević, a man who would recast unity as domination and turn autonomy into treason. Under Milošević's administration, Kosovo lost all political autonomy. In 1989, he revoked the province's self-governing rights established by the 1974 Constitution, using threats of violence to coerce the Kosovar parliament into submission (Malcolm 493–494). The symbolic and legal rupture this caused marked a turning point in the relationship between Albanians and the Yugoslav state. Kosovo was placed under heavy surveillance, and expressions of Albanian identity, especially in media and public institutions, were subject to strict censorship. From his infamous Gazimestan speech to his later efforts to justify ethnic cleansing, Milošević's reign in Kosovo is remembered by Albanians as a period of fear, erasure, and state violence. He did not merely suppress Kosovo; he transformed the entire federation, turning Yugoslavia into a Serbian-dominated state. In doing so, he betrayed the very meaning of the word Yugoslavia, "land of the southern Slavs", by elevating one group at the expense of all others who didn't fit the Serbian nationalist image.

In 1989, Albanians in Kosovo were denied recognition, and with this formal denial came the denial of the right to call themselves Kosovar, the denial of the language they spoke, the songs they sang, the histories they passed down, the denial of access to their institutions, their education, their political voice. Denied their autonomy. On March 23, 1989, Slobodan Milošević formally revoked Kosovo's status as an autonomous province under the 1974 Constitution, dissolving its political identity and placing it under direct Serbian rule (Mehmeti 3). In doing so, he didn't just dismantle a legal structure; he declared war on a people's right to exist within their own homeland. Milošević sent an estimated 100 tanks and 15,000 troops into Prishtina, Kosovo's capital, to pressure the Kosovar governing body to surrender its autonomy (Haxhiaj and Stojanovic). The message was clear: revoke it yourselves, or we'll do it by force. Milošević was able to gain the consent of the Kosovar parliament, which was needed to revoke this autonomy, through the threat of war (Malcolm 493–494). The Albanian representatives gave in, not out of compliance, but survival, giving up their right to political participation, to enfranchisement, to a voice in the land of the Southern Slavs, as a non-Slavic people. This act of hegemonic violence deepened Albanian disillusionment with Yugoslavia.



Figure 6. Serbian President Slobodan Milošević addresses thousands of supporters in Belgrade, February 1989. This rally, held shortly before Kosovo's autonomy was revoked

"Kur s'e harroj…" "I'll never forget…" My mother, Nexhmije Hasanaj, recalls the arrival of the tanks on March 23, 1989. Her village, Livadicë, sat at the edge of the administrative border between Serbia and Kosovo; a mere three kilometers separated the Kosovar Albanians and Serbia. "I gjejshim, po s'pakti 100 jën kanë po, vishin me tren, ka pruga." "We used to count them. There were at least 100. They came by train, along the tracks." Pruga, the Serbian word for "railway," marked the boundary of her childhood, and a language that was never hers. "U tutshim, mendojshim që tash po niset lufta, përnime." "We were

terrified. We thought, this is it. The war is starting. For real." Alongside this military pressure came cultural censorship. In his first ten years, Milošević had already silenced many Albanian parliamentarians and had now begun suppressing media networks and news outlets (Haxhiaj and Stojanovic). Electricity would be cut strategically, especially at night, to hinder communication and suppress dissent (Abrahams). But the blackouts became fuel. Kosovars from Peja in the west to Podujeva in the east stepped outside, banging pots and pans in synchronized protest every night at nine sharp, as a show of protest. The clanging rang through neighborhoods, across alleyways, against silence itself. These nightly acts of resistance inspired the well-known Kosovar Albanian singer Ilir Shaqiri to write his iconic song, "Fjalët e Qirit," The Words of the Candle (Shaqiri). Named after Sami Frashëri's poem of the same title, Shaqiri's song transformed the candle into a symbol of resistance: a flicker of identity in darkness. The track opens with the sound of banging pots, directly echoing the protests that inspired it. The candle wasn't just literal; it was a symbol of defiance, survival, and memory burning on. The pots eventually quieted. But the silence that followed was louder. The radio faded. Familiar voices disappeared. And in that silence, a new kind of music emerged, not protest songs, but love songs. Not because love was all Kosovars felt, but because it was all they were allowed to sing. In the presence of surveillance, Albanians turned to subtle tools of resistance. Music, once an open expression of Albanian pride, was forced to speak in code. Following the earlier expulsion of folk singer Dervish Shaqa in the 1960s, the fear of censorship had only intensified under Milošević. Where Tito had allowed some space for Kosovar autonomy and cultural expression, Milošević replaced that space with erasure. This shift was perhaps most visible in the story of Gjurmët. While the streets rang with protest, another kind of silencing was unfolding, one far less visible, but just as violent. Albanian musicians were being censored. Songs of identity and resistance were banned, repressed, or quietly removed. And in their place, a wave of love songs emerged, safer, softer, stripped of politics. The guitars softened. The lyrics turned inward. But through melody, grief, and memory, resistance still found a way to survive. Among Gjurmët's most memorable works is "Hero i Qytetit pa Lum" (Hero of the City Without a River), a track that carries layered metaphors of loss, identity, and dislocation. Prishtina, the capital of Kosovo, once held two rivers, the Vellusha and the Prishtevka, but as Yugoslavia modernized, both were slowly buried beneath the city, covered in concrete (The Future of Pristina). The rivers still flowed, but invisibly, much like the cultural memory of the city itself ("Mbi Lum, Me Art"). Gjurmët took this loss and made it a song. In Hero i Qytetit pa Lum, the speaker drifts through a city that no longer reflects him, detached from both time and belonging:

Në këtë qytet pa lum / In this city without a river
Si i huaj rri / I live like a foreigner
I hakmirrëm kohës / I avenge time
…
Do të bëja Teutë / I would become Teuta
Sikur t'isha mbret / If I were king
Po bën një kohë pa sens / It's a senseless time
…
E unë s'e kam as një dysh në xhep / And I don't have a cent in my pocket
O më trego, si të bëhesh hero / Oh, tell me, how do you become a hero
Në këtë kohë pa kohë / In this time without time
…
Bleva një gazetë / I bought a newspaper
Ecja udhë pa udhë / I walked a roadless road
I hakmirrëm letrës me një komedi / I avenged the paper with a comedy
Ndeza një flakë, o një flakë për ty / I lit a flame, oh a flame for you

What may appear shallow on the surface, a wandering man, a senseless time, the vague flicker of longing, is actually an encoded lament (Gjurmët). To invoke Teuta, the ancient Illyrian queen, is to conjure an Albanian national symbol of sovereignty and strength. To describe oneself as "i huaj", a foreigner, in one's own city evokes the exact alienation that Albanians felt under Serbian rule. The rivers are gone. The names are gone. Even time, as the song says, has become meaningless. What remains is the quiet flame of memory and the quiet refusal to forget.



Figure 7. Original 1985 album cover of Gjurmët, featuring band leader Migjen Kelmendi glancing at his watch, symbolizing the delays in the album's release due to controversies over the cover image and censorship.

But not every band could be Gjurmët. Not every song could afford a metaphor, historical symbols, or veiled resistance. As censorship tightened and Albanian identity became dangerous to articulate, musicians across Kosovo turned to what was still permissible: love. And so, a massive wave of love songs filled the scene, not because love was the only emotion felt, but because it was the only one allowed. They sang of heartbreak instead of homeland. Of longing, not liberation. These weren't just love songs, they were survival

songs, crafted in the language of affection but born from repression. Throughout the 1990s, as Kosovo's cultural space narrowed, love songs became the only thing left to sing. Artists like Xhemil Saliu, Motrat Selmani, Muharrem Ahmeti, Mentor Kurtishi, and countless others filled the airwaves with ballads of yearning and heartbreak. But beneath those melodies remained an unspoken grief of a nation of people mourning itself. This cultural erasure from the classroom to the concert hall, was not just an attack on art but rather It was an attack on existence. To silence a people's music, to erase their language from schools, to strip away their ability to express grief, memory, and pride was not an act of coexistence under a Yugoslav state; rather this was an act of colonization. And this is why independence became inevitable. Kosovo's fight for sovereignty was not born out of ambition, but out of necessity; a defense against erasure. When a people are denied their voice, their culture, their future, they must create a space where these things can live again. An independent Kosovo was a political demand and a demand which was the only guarantee that Kosovar Albanians could exist fully, without singing in code, without, without fearing that the next generation would inherit only silence.

As technology and daily life changed, so too did the methods of erasing Albanian culture. In a letter titled "Discriminatory Policies Directed at the Albanian Citizens of Kosovo," anthropologist Anne H. Betteridge, executive director of the Committee on Academic Freedom for the Middle East Studies Association of North America, wrote directly to President Slobodan Milošević. In it, she condemned the discriminatory measures taken against Albanian academics at the University of Prishtina. Betteridge urged Milošević to end the systemic dismantling of Kosovo's only Albanian-language institution of higher learning. She documented how ethnic Albanian professors were purged from the university, and how teaching in the Albanian language had effectively become a punishable offense. Milošević's administration had annulled Kosovo's educational system's independence and centralized curricular control in Belgrade. All instruction was to be conducted in Serbian. Albanian professors were forced to sign oaths of loyalty to the Serbian state, those who refused were immediately dismissed. Throughout 1990, the regime closed most Albanian-language schools. By January 1991, it had stopped paying nearly all Albanian high school teachers. By October of that year, all Albanian educators had been fired. Only fifteen Albanian professors remained at the University of Prishtina, and they were allowed to teach only in Serbian (Abrahams and Human Rights Watch 2001). This was more than just institutional restructuring; it was a cultural purge. The University of Prishtina, established in 1969, had long stood as a symbol of Albanian intellectual life and cultural resilience in Kosovo. Its erasure sent a clear message: Kosovar Albanians would no longer be allowed to think, teach, or dream in their own language. The impact was devastating. Students were left without instructors. Classrooms sat empty. Entire generations of Albanian youth were denied access to education in their native tongue. Some families converted their homes into makeshift classrooms, utilizing other spaces as well; these makeshift classrooms became the sites of a defiant, underground school system (Ball). This educational repression mirrored the larger campaign of cultural erasure underway. What could not be silenced on the airwaves or censored in music was now being cut out of the classroom.

To further push anti-Albanian sentiment, on June 28, 1989, Milošević delivered his infamous Gazimestan speech, framing Serbian control over Kosovo as a national duty, a sacred responsibility to preserve Serbian unity against what he painted as separatist threats. This speech was delivered in honor of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, a pivotal battle, to underscore the significance of a Serb presence in Kosovo. The Gazimestan speech was not just rhetoric; it was a psychological blueprint for othering, displacement, and repression. Its effects rippled through every Kosovar Albanian household, pushing people to flee, seek political asylum, or face imprisonment. Milosevic, in his speech, declared:

> "Srbi nikada u svojoj istoriji nisu osvajali i eksploatisali druge. Njihovo nacionalno i istorijsko biće kroz čitavu istoriju... je oslobodilačko."
>
> "Serbs have never in their history conquered and exploited others. Their national and historical being throughout history... is liberational."
>
> "Na ovom mestu u srcu Srbije, na Kosovu Polju, pre šest vekova... dogodila se jedna od najvećih bitaka onoga doba."
>
> "At this place in the heart of Serbia, at Kosovo Field, six centuries ago... one of the greatest battles of that era took place."

These chilling lines deliberately erase the generations of Albanians in Kosovo. Milošević paints Kosovo as Serbia's heartland, a living testament to the Nemanjić dynasty and medieval Serbian power. There is no room in this vision for the Albanians who have called Kosovo home for centuries. In doing so, Milošević rewrote history and weaponized it.

This nationalist rhetoric did not remain words; it became state policy. The 1992 Constitution of Yugoslavia did more than confirm Kosovo's revoked autonomy from 1989; it formally excluded Kosovo from statehood, stripping it of political representation and institutional power, in writing. Albanians were no longer just an ethnic minority; they were cast as an existential threat to Serbian sovereignty. As nationalism hardened, so too did repression. Demonstrations rose across Kosovo. Activists like Ukshin Hoti and Albin Kurti were arrested. Mass imprisonments, political asylum, and migration became the daily realities

for Kosovar Albanians (HRW). Homes were emptied, classrooms abandoned, streets silenced. The cultural erasure that unfolded was both physical and psychological in nature. To be Albanian in Kosovo under Milošević was to be foreign in one's homeland, erased from history, language, and political life. This deliberate dismantling of identity left scars that went deeper than borders or constitutions; it severed people from their sense of place and belonging. It is these wounds, these erasures, that continue to argue for Kosovo's right to independence, because a people whose existence was criminalized have no choice but to demand freedom. The more Albanians were stripped of their rights, the more resistance became not just a choice, but a necessity. This marked the beginning of organized defiance, the turning point toward resistance, the breaking point where violence had to become a two-way street.

War in Kosovo

Ne luftojmë që okupatorin serb ta përzëmë nga trojet tona. Populli shqiptar duhet të vendos vet për fatin e tij... nëse të gjitha metodat tjera diplomatike do të dështojnë ne do të veprojmë me metoda tjera për çlirimin e Kosovës. Ne do të luftojmë sepse jemi në vendin tonë dhe këtu do të vdesim... Jeta është më e çmuara dhe nuk ka më të çmuar se jeta... vetëm liria është më e shtrenjtë se jeta dhe ne jemi në gjendje me dhanë edhe jetën për liri

We fight to drive the Serbian occupier out of our lands. The Albanian people must decide their own fate... if all other diplomatic methods fail, we will act with other means to liberate Kosovo. We will fight because we are on our own land, and here we shall die… Life is the most precious thing, and there is nothing more valuable than life… only freedom is more precious than life, and we are ready to give even our lives for freedom.

– Ilaz Kodra, UÇK (KLA) Commander

No schools. No language. No country. Yet, when every no closed a door, Kosovars didn't stop, whether it was teaching in underground schools, protesting, or banging pots and pans, Kosovars found a way to express themselves in a nation where their existence was repressed and deemed inferior. But repression did not yield to silence. It sharpened. Raids, arrests, and disappearances increased. Protests were crushed, the media blacked out, and political voices were jailed. With no political options left, Kosovo Albanians increasingly turned to resistance movements (Krasniqi). And so, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA, Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës, UÇK) was born, not out of a thirst for violence, but out of desperation. From former political prisoners of youth with no future, from diaspora funds and the mountains of Drenica, the KLA emerged as the final answer to a state that had erased every other possibility. The Serbian government labeled them terrorists (Drew). But to many Kosovars, the KLA became the only defense left. Their early attacks targeted Serbian police and military installations once again as acts of survival, not conquest. Still, state provocations escalated. Villages were raided. Families disappeared. In the mid-90s, the KLA formally announced its existence, claiming responsibility for attacks on Serbian forces. International media began to take notice, but slowly. Violence spiraled. Serbian forces responded with collective punishment as entire Albanian villages were targeted for the actions of a few fighters (Drew). This cycle of violence pushed more Kosovars toward the KLA. Men who had once taught in underground schools or protested with pots and pans now picked up rifles. Resistance had hardened. By the end of the 1990s, the space for peaceful resistance had largely disappeared. Kosovo was a land on the edge of eruption, and what came next would not be negotiation, but war.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia marked one of the bloodiest eras for Kosovo's Albanians. After the Ottoman Empire withdrew from the Balkans, Kosovo remained an Albanian-majority region, setting the stage for future resistance against any foreign rule that followed. But federal funding was cut, non-Albanians managed an Albanian land, and every expression of self-determination was met with repression (Jakurti). Kosovar Albanians sought self-governance without external control, a concept they had never truly experienced. Not under the Ottomans. Not during World War II, even when Albania itself was occupied by Italy. Not under Yugoslavia. The Ottoman Empire may have shaped Kosovo into an Albanian land, but Yugoslavia abused it, tried to erase it, and to Serbianize it. But no amount of repression could erase the reality that Kosovo was no longer Serbian land. After decades of suffering, war became the only means left for self-determination. Every other effort, such as protests, diplomacy, and passive resistance, had failed. Kosovo remained occupied. From the dawn of their existence, Kosovars had never known freedom. But this time, with the war, they would demand it.

The war in Kosovo was the product of escalating tensions and the culmination of every repressive tactic used against Kosovar Albanians for decades. Kosovars had watched the horrors of the Bosnian War from 1992 to 1995 ("Bosnia-Herzegovina Profile"), the massacres, the genocide, the utter failure of the international community to intervene until it was too late. They knew that without outside intervention, their fate would be the same or worse. The war in Bosnia, the bloodiest of all the Yugoslav conflicts, was marked by explicit genocide and ethnic cleansing ("Bosnia-Herzegovina Profile"). But for Kosovar Albanians, the fight was different. They weren't just fighting for territory; they were fighting against being permanently erased. Albanians had always been "the other" in Yugoslavia, marginalized more deeply than the Bosniaks, Croats, or Slovenes. In Bosnia, liberation, albeit bloody, ultimately led to international recognition and the establishment of statehood. But for Kosovo, the final war of the Yugoslav dissolution, the outcome was different. Even after the bombings stopped and the fighting ended, Kosovo wasn't free. Unlike Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro,

North Macedonia, or Slovenia, Kosovo was left in a liminal space, a territory suspended in limbo between partial and total sovereignty, as seen in UN Resolution 1244. The messaging persisted, through the war, before the war, and even to today: Kosovo is Serbia, a phrase still believed by countless Serbian nationalists, and the Serbian government itself. Even after such bloodshed from Albanians and international intervention, liberation was not fully achieved.

In 1998, as the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) mounted resistance against Serbian military forces, Serbia escalated its campaign into ethnic cleansing. Entire villages burned, and families disappeared overnight. By spring of 1999, more than 850,000 Albanians had been displaced (United States, Erasing History), forced to flee their homes as mass graves filled with civilians, and the very existence of Kosovo's Albanian majority teetered on the edge of annihilation. As in Bosnia, the international community watched slowly and hesitantly. But this time, they acted before it was too late. In March 1999, NATO launched a 78-day bombing campaign against Serbia, invoking the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine ("Kosovo Air Campaign"). The mission was framed



Figure 8. Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) officers dress a young boy as a soldier and hand him a gun, February 1999. Photograph by Chris Hondros.

as a moral obligation to halt the atrocities and force Serbia's withdrawal. Serbia, backed by Russia and China, condemned the intervention as a violation of sovereignty, lacking UN Security Council approval (United Nations Security Council). But for Kosovar Albanians, NATO's intervention was the line between erasure and survival.

And yet, even after the bombs stopped and Serbia withdrew, Kosovo's fate diverged from that of Bosnia. There was no swift international recognition, no clear path to independence. Kosovo remained in limbo under a UN interim government, neither quite Serbia nor yet sovereign. The message from Belgrade and much of the international community persisted: Kosovo is Serbia. Even after ethnic cleansing, mass displacement, and brutal war, Kosovo's existence remained contested. But for Kosovar Albanians, the war did not erase their identity; rather, it reinforced it. It proved that coexistence within Serbia was impossible, that independence was not politically an ambition, but a necessity for survival.

Post-War Interim State

The aftermath of the Kosovo War marked the beginning of a new era for Kosovo, one defined by international administration, political fragmentation, and the eventual declaration of independence. This era further exposes the complexities of Kosovo's post-war transition, the challenges of state-building, and the ongoing struggles for full recognition and internal cohesion. By analyzing these developments, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Kosovo's history of resistance and resilience continues to shape its modern identity and political landscape.

The United Nations adopted Resolution 1244, establishing Kosovo as a United Nations-administered territory under the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). This resolution created a complex and ambiguous legal framework, granting Kosovo a liminal political status (Mehmeti 5). While it acknowledged the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia), it also placed Kosovo under international governance, delaying its sovereignty but setting the groundwork for its eventual independence. A critique of the resolution was that, despite removing Kosovo from direct Serbian control, it also allowed Serbian influence to persist in certain areas, particularly in northern Kosovo (Mehmeti 8). This ambiguity led to political stagnation, as Kosovars were unable to exercise full sovereignty while Serbia retained leverage through international negotiations. While many Albanians initially welcomed UNMIK as a protector, it quickly became a bureaucratic force that hindered self-determination. Kosovo's institutions operated under foreign oversight, fueling accusations of neocolonial governance. Leaders like Hashim Thaçi criticized UNMIK for prioritizing stability over sovereignty and sidelining local agency. Serbia exploited the ambiguity of UN oversight to block Kosovo's independence, deepening tensions in regions like Mitrovica, where Serbian enclaves resisted integration. UNMIK's indefinite presence left Kosovo in limbo, neither independent nor reintegrated. The war exposed deep systemic flaws in global governance. Delayed international action allowed atrocities to escalate; later intervention saved lives but set a controversial precedent for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Kosovo's struggle became a test of international responsibility. NATO's intervention halted genocide but exposed the selectivity of humanitarian action. UNMIK's presence, although intended to support the transition, has entrenched dependency, proving that external oversight cannot substitute for genuine self-rule. Kosovo's partial recognition today stems from a fractured world order: self-determination remains conditional, not guaranteed, subject to the approval of global powers rather than the people's will. Until the international system reconciles sovereignty with collective human rights, Kosovars and oppressed peoples worldwide will continue to navigate the paradox of liberation: a freedom that is only granted when sanctioned by those who once denied it.

The transitional governance under UNMIK faced significant internal challenges, including political rivalries between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) (Krasniqi 39-41). The

KLA, which had led the armed resistance against Serbian forces, sought to assert itself in the post-war political landscape. In contrast, the LDK, led by Ibrahim Rugova, advocated for a more diplomatic and peaceful approach to governance (Qirezi 39). These rivalries reflected broader tensions within Kosovar society, as different factions vied for influence in shaping the future of the nascent state. Corruption and political instability further eroded trust in Kosovo's government. Clientelism plagued institutions, stifling economic growth. With a GDP per capita among the lowest in Europe and an unemployment rate of nearly 30%, Kosovo remains economically dependent on foreign aid, particularly from the European Union ("Kosovo GDP per Capita 1990-2024"). This reliance on external funding raised a deeper existential question: Can a nation truly be independent if its survival depends on foreign donors? Kosovo's economic situation is compared to postcolonial dependency, and it is argued that donor-imposed conditions dictate domestic policies, mirroring postcolonial-era structures.

On February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared independence, with 109 out of the 120 members of the Assembly of Kosovo signing the formal declaration. This act was celebrated by the Albanian majority as a victory for freedom and justice after decades of oppression under Serbian rule. Kosovo's leaders emphasized that independence was not merely a political act but the realization of a long-standing aspiration rooted in the resilience of the Kosovar people. When the United Nations initiated voting on recognizing Kosovo's independence, several Western nations, including the United States and many Western European Union members, immediately recognized the declaration. However, Serbia, backed by allies such as Russia and China, vehemently opposed Kosovo's independence, framing it as a violation of international law. This opposition continues to complicate Kosovo's quest for full international recognition. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) weighed in on this debate in 2010, issuing a pivotal ruling: Kosovo's independence did not violate international law, yet the opinion was non-binding and politically divisive. To Kosovar-Albanians, it affirmed their right to statehood. For Serbia and its allies, it exposed the hypocrisy of a world order prioritizing Western interests over sovereignty. Kosovo's continued partial recognition revealed the fragility of self-determination in a system governed by power, not principle.

The post-war path Kosovo took revealed a paradox of international dependency and postcolonial state-building in the modern era. UNMIK was intended as a stabilizing force, however in turn it replicated the structures of external governance that Kosovars had long resisted. Its indefinite oversight delayed the realization of sovereignty, fostering a dependency that mirrors postcolonial dynamics, as political autonomy exists in name, but economic and diplomatic freedom remain constrained by external actors. Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 marked a critical step toward breaking this cycle, but it did not fully sever the ties of dependency. The economic reliance on international aid, the political fragmentation exacerbated by donor-imposed conditions, and the continued contestation of Kosovo's status in global politics all reflect the unfinished business of decolonization.

Today, Kosovo's independence is both a reality and a struggle. While over 100 countries recognize its sovereignty, the lack of UN membership and continued Serbian-backed parallel structures in regions like Mitrovica highlight the fragility of self-determination in a world where recognition is dictated by geopolitical interests, not justice. The legacy of UNMIK's administration, despite it's critical role in ending direct Serbian rule, left behind a framework that prioritized order over autonomy, entrenching a sense of liminality that persists.

Contemporary Kosovo, 2008 and Beyond

Since 2008, Kosovo's declaration of independence and the 2010 ICJ ruling have not resolved the nation's liminal status. Over 100 countries recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state, but Serbia, backed by Russia and China, continues to block its path to full international recognition and UN membership. This fragile status has left Kosovo navigating internal divisions and external pressures. One of the most contentious issues remains the Mitrovica region, home to a significant Serbian population in northern Kosovo. Serbian enclaves continue to resist Kosovo's authority, and proposals for territorial exchanges, trading Serb-majority areas in northern Kosovo for Albanian-majority areas in southern Serbia, have provoked widespread criticism. Such exchanges risk undermining Kosovo's territorial integrity and setting dangerous precedents for other contested regions (Qirezi 61-62). Internally, Kosovo's political landscape is fragmented. The rise of Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination Movement), led by Albin Kurti, has disrupted the dominance of traditional factions like the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) (Krasniqi 39-41). Vetëvendosje's platform, centered on anti-corruption, national sovereignty, and social justice, has resonated with younger Kosovars frustrated by elite clientelism and economic stagnation. Yet, political infighting continues to hinder progress on key issues like economic reform and foreign diplomacy (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje).

Yet, despite Kosovo's formal declaration of independence, its economic reality is one of dependency rather than full sovereignty. With unemployment hovering around 25-30% and GDP per capita among the lowest in Europe ("Kosovo GDP per Capita 1990-2024"), Kosovo remains economically fragile. Remittances from the diaspora make up a significant portion of the national economy, accounting for nearly 20% of Kosovo's GDP, reflecting a population that survives on external support rather than internal development

(Jakurti). Additionally, EU aid and international funding are critical lifelines for Kosovo's institutions and public services. While these inflows stabilize the economy, they also raise uncomfortable questions: Can Kosovo truly claim independence if its economic survival depends on foreign donors? This arrangement resembles postcolonial dependency. Donor-imposed conditions often dictate domestic policy, especially concerning economic reforms, minority rights, and negotiations with Serbia. The EU's "standards before status" approach, which requires Kosovo to meet specific governance benchmarks before advancing toward EU membership or broader recognition, has drawn accusations of neocolonialism (Ker-Lindsay, James). The EU's leverage over Kosovo's political decisions mirrors historic patterns of control, where external powers dictate the conditions of sovereignty. In this light, Kosovo's statehood remains conditional and granted only when it aligns with the interests of global power brokers. Yet, Kosovo's leadership faces a dilemma: rejecting aid could collapse the fragile economy, but accepting it perpetuates dependency. This quasi-independent status, caught between sovereignty and subjugation, defines Kosovo's post-independence reality. It is a nation that exists on paper but remains tethered to the very forces it sought to escape.

Beyond Kosovo's internal struggles, external forces continue to obstruct its path to full statehood. Serbia, with the backing of Russia and China, has pursued a deliberate strategy of geopolitical stalling ("Waiting for the Epilogue"), utilizing diplomatic leverage to block Kosovo's membership in major international institutions, such as the United Nations. By framing Kosovo's independence as a violation of international law (ICJ), these powers have kept Kosovo in limbo, recognized by over 100 countries but denied a seat at the global table. Serbia's influence extends inside Kosovo's borders as well. In northern Kosovo, especially around Mitrovica, Serbia funds parallel institutions, from schools and healthcare systems to local governments, that undermine Kosovo's sovereignty ("Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty"). These institutions operate independently of Kosovo's central government, reinforcing Serb enclaves' loyalty to Belgrade and preventing full integration. This parallel system keeps Kosovo's territorial integrity fragmented, allowing Serbia to maintain a de facto presence without formal control ("Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty"). These geopolitical tactics serve a dual purpose: they legitimize Serbia's claim over Kosovo internationally while destabilizing Kosovo internally, feeding into the broader Russia-Serbia-China bloc's rejection of Kosovo's statehood. Kosovo, therefore, remains trapped in a global chess match, where geopolitical rivalries continually undermine its self-determination. Its liminal status is not simply a byproduct of regional conflict but a calculated outcome of great power politics, where recognition is wielded as a tool of control.



Figure 9. Diplomatic representatives discuss the adoption of United Nations Security Council

Looking ahead, Kosovo's future hangs in a balance. Will it remain dependent on foreign aid, or will it achieve the full sovereignty its people have long sought? EU integration stands as one potential path forward, offering economic stability and political legitimacy, but that too comes with conditions, border agreements, minority rights guarantees, and normalization talks with Serbia. Every step toward Europe is tangled in diplomatic compromise (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo). At the same time, the threat of continued stalemate looms large. As long as Russia and China back Serbia's opposition, Kosovo's UN seat, the ultimate symbol of statehood, remains out of reach. And with geopolitical tensions rising globally, Kosovo risks being caught in a permanent in-between, a state on paper but still subject to external validation (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo). Yet, it is Kosovo's younger generation that offers the greatest hope for a different future. Movements like Vetëvendosje, youth-led protests, and civil society activism challenge the entrenched political elite and push for economic reform, anti-corruption, and true sovereignty. These voices, raised by a generation that never knew Yugoslavia, demand more than symbolic independence, they demand independence that works. Whether Kosovo remains stuck in liminality or steps fully into its own future depends, in large part, on how these young leaders navigate the space between resistance and reality.

On Identity, Resistance, and Independence

At the end of the Yugoslav wars, and with the attaining of independence, many Albanians, including my parents, say there was no better day in their lives than February 17, 2008. It was the first time in history that Kosovo formally had no occupier. Yet, despite this formal declaration of independence, what followed, and what continues to follow Kosovo today, is a dependency on the global community for aid, security, and protection. Kosovo's independence, like that of any nation, is dependent on the perception of the international community and whether or not it earns their green light of approval. In Kosovo's case, the country lives in a liminal space; a space of limbo. A large portion of the world does not recognize Kosovo, while the other half does. Kosovo is structured like a nation, yet denied that title; it is independent to some, but even to those very people, Kosovo remains reliant on lifelines like EU aid. Kosovo's struggle is not just a matter of nationalist ideologies influencing politics, though that is certainly a part of the issue. The

contemporary question is: how should Kosovo progress within this quasi-independence from both Yugoslavia's legacy and EU dependency? Kosovo's independence is real, and as an Albanian-majority country with its own distinct culture, it has the right to self-determination. Yet, Kosovo still exists in the shadow of international interference. No matter how many battles have been fought, Kosovars are never entirely free, because the international community will always have a hand in their affairs. The identity of Kosovars has been molded, reshaped, and ultimately forged into one of resistance—an identity marked by war and, now, by the endurance required to live as a real country without full recognition.

As a Kosovar-Albanian, the struggle for identity is everlasting. From my youth to today, the countless jokes and snide remarks about Kosovo's partial existence come from a place of seeing the Yugoslav wars as a political debacle rather than the true fight for independence. It brings me to question: What does independence really mean? What is an independent identity? How do Kosovars see themselves as free when half the world refuses to regard them as such? By the standards of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933), Kosovo meets all the formal requirements of statehood, yet it doesn't feel that way.

So, what is Kosovo to do? And perhaps the better question now is: What does it mean to be free as a nation of people?

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Olive Trees in Palestine: How the Environment Serves as a Signifier of Genocide

Stephanie Hughes

The quality of the environment dictates the necessities, including food and water, we receive from it. This fragile connection is highly respected in Palestinian culture, with olive trees in particular becoming an image of life. Yet, this connection has been abused and olive trees have been destroyed by Israel as they attempt to displace Palestinians off the land that rightfully belongs to Palestine, thereby threatening their existence as a society.

This paper will investigate how war impacts the environment and, by extension, food access in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict to answer the research question inspiring it: *How is the genocide of Palestine perpetuated by the use of starvation as a weapon?* Honing in on the ecological effects of the war in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will make how Palestinians' quality of life has changed since October 7th, 2023 evident. By destroying the environment in Gaza and the West Bank through acts including razing orchards and farmlands and polluting soil and natural water sources on top of blocking relief supplies, Israel has been using starvation in order to commit genocide on Palestine – a violation of international humanitarian law.

Israel escalated their attacks following the events of October 7th, 2023, in which Hamas, a Palestinian militant group, attacked Israeli soldiers in Gaza. As Belal Ali AbuHasballah clarifies in his research on the legitimacy of Palestinian resistance, Israeli troops had been "dividing the Al-Aqsa Mosque spatially and temporally, prompting the Palestinian resistance to carry out a military operation" (AbuHasballah). The Al-Aqsa Mosque is an important religious site to Palestinians in Jerusalem as it is believed that Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven for a night from there. Additionally, Jerusalem is supposed to be an international city but has recently been accepted as Israel's capital by countries like the US. Considering the stakes of the attacks, it is clear that the actions Palestinians took on October 7th were in self-defense against the Israeli occupation, which threatened to take further control of Palestine. Yet, Israel makes it seem as though the attacks of October 7th took place on their land, which is stolen, the Palestinians having only fought the Israeli military on Gazan territory.

The effect of Israel's violence on Palestine is evident in the art and literature by Palestinian artists and writers over decades. In Mahmoud Darwish's poem, "On this Land", he says, "We have on this land all of that which makes life worth living" (*On This Land by Mahmoud Darwish*). Darwish is explaining that the land supplies them with all the resources they need in order to not only survive, but thrive. Olive trees are used to produce olive oil, one of Palestine's largest exports, which plays a big role in people's livelihoods. By cutting down entire olive tree orchards, Israel is hurting Palestinians economically. Furthermore, we can see how the land and that which grows on it is important when it comes to Palestinians' spirits amidst the war. Fadwa Tuqan demonstrates this in her poem "Enough for Me", which states "Enough for me to die on her earth / be buried in her / to melt and vanish into her soil / then sprout forth as a flower / played with by a child from my country" (Badri). The stakes for Palestinians are revealed in Tuqan's description of how the people are connected so deeply to the land where their ancestors lived and where future generations should be able to live. If all Palestinians were to evacuate, if it were possible, then the state of Palestine would essentially be absorbed by Israel. Using olive trees to emphasize Palestinians' relationship to their land, it's clear that they represent self-sufficiency and independence and have thus become a major part in Palestinian culture. By destroying them, Israel is also destroying their symbolic importance to Palestine.

Israel's response has been disproportionate to their losses on October 7th as they've changed their strategy to target Palestinian citizens to the point of genocide. They've done this through attacks both direct, such as bombing public spaces and areas declared safe, and indirect, including degrading the environment. Focusing on the latter, impossible agricultural conditions lead to food scarcity and the deaths of innocent people who had no involvement in the land dispute between Israel and Palestine. Therefore, the condition of the environment can provide insight into food supply and malnutrition in an area, especially one ravaged by war.

Israel's response to the events of October 7th has never prioritized the safety and well-being of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank despite Israeli officials claiming their sole target is Hamas. Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, has "reiterated that Hamas must be completely destroyed before Israel will agree to end its war in Gaza" (McKernan); however, it's impossible to track down all members of Hamas, so Israel must have known that civilian casualties were inevitable and planned for it amidst their

egy, specifically their ability to cultivate and take advantage of natural resources including crops and water.

The most immediate way that the Israeli military could make crops and plants inaccessible to Palestinians, and thus pressure them into either leaving their land to one with better resources or staying on their land and dying, would be to destroy those growing resources. To accomplish this, the Israeli military has been razing orchards, greenhouses, and farmland in Gaza and the West Bank since October 7th, 2023. The Human Rights Watch collected satellite images that reveal the extent of damage done to these areas. Consider the difference between Figure 1 and Figure 2. Both show the state of fields in Beit Hanoun, a city on the Gaza Strip, though Figure 1 is an image taken on October 15th, prior to Israel's response to the October 7th attacks, and Figure 2 is an image taken on November 24th, nearly a month after Israel's retaliation. At a glance, there's a stark contrast between the green in Figure 1 and the beige in Figure 2, which is indicative of the conditions of the environment. Looking closer at these images, Figure 1 illustrates thriving orchards and plots of healthy land whereas you can barely tell those fields from the road in Figure 2. The Israeli military has deprived this area of the crops that could have been produced by these orchards and farms and made the land unproductive for the foreseeable future. This means that food sources for these farmers and the general population of this area have been greatly limited. Given that farming not only serves as a source for food but as some Palestinians' livelihoods, the impacts of razing extend far more than they may seem.



Figure 1. Image of orchards, fields and greenhouses north of Beit Hanoun in Palestine on October 15th, 2023, prior to being razed by Israeli armed forces (Human Rights Watch).



Figure 2. Image of orchards, fields and greenhouses north of Beit Hanoun in Palestine on November 24th, 2023, after being razed by Israeli armed forces (Human Rights Watch).

The Human Rights Watch provides further context for another set of satellite images that were taken over another part of Beit Hanoun. Figure 3 was taken on November 11th and Figure 4 was taken on November 24th. Once again, the changes brought about by Israel's razing of the farmland are visible as Figure 3 depicts much more productive and arable land than Figure 4. Though it only took a day to raze some of these plots, the "trees that yield citrus fruit, as well as the cacti that yield dragon fruit, take years of care to mature before they can yield fruit" (Human Rights Watch). Because of how long it takes for these trees to grow enough to be able to produce fruit, Israel is not simply destroying resources at that moment when they raze agricultural land. Rather, they're erasing years, even decades, of work that has likely been passed down through the generations of families. The time it will take Palestinian farmers to recover has now increased as the land must return to its arable state before the trees can be replanted, leaving these families without their main source of income for months, even years, on end.



Figure 3. Image of agricultural land north of Beit Hanoun in Palestine on November 11th, 2023, prior to being razed by Israeli armed forces (Human Rights Watch).



Figure 4. Image of agricultural land north of Beit Hanoun in Palestine on November 24th, 2023, after being razed by Israeli armed forces (Human Rights Watch).

The razing of any agricultural land in Gaza and the West Bank is detrimental to Palestinians' way of life and indicative of genocidal conditions, yet the razing of one type of tree in particular takes a higher toll on Palestinian culture. As the country's largest agricultural product, olive trees are significant and symbolize sustenance and hope in Palestine. Yet, "Israel has adopted a "burned ground" policy during the

war, including the destruction of ancient olive trees in Gaza" (Anera). Not only does this negatively affect Palestine's economy, and thus sovereignty in the long-term, but it is another way that Israel is harming the spirit of Palestinians. Unfortunately, it's more likely that Palestinians will be more open to moving out of Gaza and the West Bank when they're being made to feel lesser than and as though they are intruders on the land. That is, if they're able to do so. For the world at large, it's a reminder that those who are vulnerable and disempowered are the ones who suffer the most in such a conflict.

If there was any question that Israel was not targeting Palestinian civilians, their actions during the seven-day ceasefire from November 24th, 2023, to December 1st, 2023, are telling of their intentions to displace Palestinians from the land. As the Human Rights Watch found with their satellite imagery, "the razing of agricultural land continued in northern Gaza during the seven-day ceasefire…when the Israeli military was in direct control of the area" (Human Rights Watch). Ceasefires are meant to allow those in warzones to have safe access to humanitarian aid, though Israel had continued to raze the land, thus taking away resources from them. Because this land was already controlled by Israel's military, they were unprovoked in doing this. Therefore, Israel's military intended to place further pressures on Palestinians to conform to their demands, which primarily were to leave the land so that it could be absorbed by Israel. The alternative to leaving would be to stay on the land with limited access to crops, which has led to higher rates of malnutrition and starvation.

Israel has also destroyed the environment in Gaza and the West Bank through other methods including "the destruction of agricultural infrastructure like canals, wells and pumps and the burning of crops" (Weir). Of the resources that are left, from soil to groundwater, the Israeli military has knowingly contaminated them with pollution from their military machines and operations.

Upon their use, explosive devices in any war will destroy agricultural land and send toxic materials into the surrounding soil that will runoff and collect into nearby bodies of water. In a larger conflict such as this one between Israel and Palestine, "large volumes of military scrap may be produced or abandoned," which "can contain a range of polluting materials, contaminating soils and groundwater, whilst exposing those who work on it to acute and chronic health risks" (Weir). The pollution that is being produced in Gaza and the West Bank as the result of the war is extensive and contains worrisome amounts of pollutants to which Palestinians are then exposed through their consumption of any crops or water that hasn't been destroyed.

Some may argue that pollution is unavoidable in this conflict, though Israeli industries have poorer regulations on their waste in Gaza and the West Bank, not to mention that this comes as Israel had already been limiting food and water sources for Palestinians. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) analyzed the land around Wadi Shakhit, an agricultural valley, in Hebron, a city in the West Bank, as well as around the Immanuel industrial zone in Qalqilya, another city in the West Bank, for pollutants. Palestinian farmers in these areas had voiced concerns about wastewater from Israeli settlements being released on their land, and as the NRC found, the samples they took "showed the presence of faecal-associated E. coli bacteria in high quantities, which provides an indication of recent sewage or animal waste contamination" ("West Bank: Israeli Settlement Wastewater Destroys Palestinian Lands and Livelihoods"). The release of pollutants on Palestinians' land has expanded from being done by the Israeli military to Israeli settlements in general. With untreated waste being released in this manner, it's obvious that Israel has no regard for the health of Palestinians, which will decline as they have no way to combat this contamination of their land and water.

It's easy to forget about the slow violence of climate change amidst the much faster violence of war, though the threat never dissipates. The Coastal Aquifer, the groundwater from which Gaza receives most of its water, had already been experiencing saltwater intrusions due to increased global temperatures causing global sea levels to rise (see Figure 5). It now faces pollution contamination from Israel, which has resulted in "only 4% of the 180m m3 extracted from it each year being potable" ("UN Report Details Environmental Degradation in West Bank and Gaza"). In the West Bank, "Half of the wells owned by Palestinians have dried up over the last 20 years" ("UN Report Details Environmental Degradation in West Bank and Gaza"). Israel's deliberate destruction of the environment in Gaza and the West Bank is compounding on top of the effects climate change has been having on this land. The availability of nutritious food and clean water were already beginning to decline in Palestine due to the climate crisis, and now the sources left have either been destroyed or polluted by Israel.

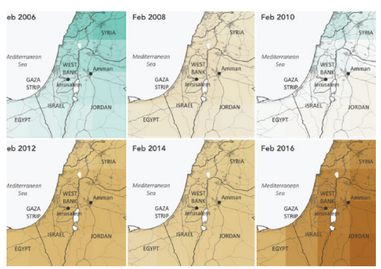


Figure 5. Compilation of graphs from February 2006-2016 of groundwater storage in the Coastal Aquifer supplying water to Palestine and Israel, revealing a declining trend ("UN Report Details Environmental Degradation in West Bank and Gaza").

Quality food and water sources have been significantly cut down by the Israeli military in their efforts to force Palestinians off of the land in Gaza and the West Bank by creating conditions of starvation and dehydration. These tactics "threaten food security and livelihoods, increasing the vulnerability of rural communities" (Weir). Moreover, this destruction will have "lasting effects on future generations, perpetuating intergenerational poverty" (*The Israeli Occupation's Use of Starvation as a Weapon of Genocide – Union of Agricultural Work Committees*). Inhumane only begins to describe this situation, which has quickly become a genocide of the Palestinian people given that so many are dying because they can't evacuate and fall subject to unlivable conditions.

Clearly, land is at the center of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Based on the environmental destruction that Israel has been committing, it seems as though they'd rather have it be non-arable and even uninhabitable than share it with the Palestinian people, who are indigenous to the land in the first place. While Palestinians could combat the loss of arable land and potable water sources with relief aid from other countries around the world in order to survive and maintain their presence on their land, Israel has cut external support off from Gaza and the West Bank as well.

With fewer resources available in these areas due to Israel's environmental destruction and contamination, Palestinians have had to rely on humanitarian aid from other countries, including Turkey, Egypt, Qatar, and India. Yet, Israel has begun to restrict their access to this aid by setting up checkpoints and limiting the items that can be delivered to Palestinians as well as blocking transportation with supplies from entering Gaza or the West Bank. This has shined light on Israel's long history of control over Palestine's economic and infrastructural systems prior to the events of October 7th, 2023, of which they are now taking advantage as they commit genocide on Palestine.

Although Israel escalated its military operations in Gaza and the West Bank after declaring war on Hamas after October 7th, the land dispute they've had with Palestine started in the twentieth century. Since then, Israel has "maintained military rule over some portion of the Palestinian population for all but six months of its 73-year history" (Shakir). Because they've had a hand in Palestine's politics, economics, and territory for so long, the people in Gaza and the West Bank are "almost entirely dependent on Israel for access to fuel, electricity, medicine, food, and other essential commodities" (Human Rights Watch). This makes Palestine more vulnerable to governmental collapse since they are not in control of their own essential systems, from food and water to fuel and electricity, and would not have an independent foundation upon Israel withdrawing any support they may have given. Accordingly, Israel has more ability to bring about the downfall of Palestine by sabotaging these infrastructural systems than if they didn't have previous control over this country. Unfortunately, this has already been set in motion.

Rather than solely targeting the military, Israel's restrictions on Palestine's access to humanitarian aid and infrastructure is meant to further harm Palestinian civilians. High-ranking Israeli officials have admitted "their aim to deprive civilians in Gaza of food, water and fuel – statements reflecting a policy being carried out by Israeli forces" (Human Rights Watch). For instance, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has stated "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed" (Fabian). While Israel could have attempted to keep the conflict strictly between their military and that of Palestine, they immediately involved the wellbeing of innocent Palestinians.

Shutting down infrastructural systems has a much higher impact on Palestinian civilians than their military, especially when humanitarian aid cannot get through to Gaza or the West Bank. This situation has left "Food stocks almost nonexistent. Livestock farmers are facing substantial losses, with high mortality rates among animals due to bombings and lack of fodder. The occupation forces have destroyed most of Gaza's fishing fleet and imposed a complete blockade on the sea, firing on boats and even individual fisher people" (*The Israeli Occupation's Use of Starvation as a Weapon of Genocide – Union of Agricultural Work Committees*). Considering the environmental destruction that Israel's military carried out on Palestinians' land, farmers and landowners weren't even given the chance to fend for themselves.

As we can see, Israel is intentionally trying to starve and dehydrate Palestinians in order to achieve their goal of gaining complete control over the land of Gaza and the West Bank. The level of cruelty that Palestinians are facing is unimaginable, especially when humanitarian aid is available but inaccessible because of Israel's control. This control has also been destabilizing the infrastructural systems Palestinians have always known. For instance, a pipeline supplying water from Israel to Gaza was kept shut down when a water desalination plant in Gaza became nonfunctional on December 6th, 2023, "increasing the risk of dehydration and waterborne diseases arising from the consumption of water from unsafe sources" (Human Rights Watch). When Israel could have made water available to those in Gaza, the pipeline remained closed. Similarly, "only 1 of 24 hospitals in northern Gaza are functional and able to admit new patients, although services are limited, as of December 14th, 2023" (Human Rights Watch). Israel's restraint of necessities and resources comes as Palestinians are on the verge of death. These examples prove that Israel's intentions are to control Palestine's land by bringing about the downfall of their society as they have withdrawn all support.

Evidently, Palestinians could no longer produce their own food with Israel destroying agricultural lands and were faced with sabotaged infrastructure as Israel restricted or completely cut off fuel, electricity, and medical systems with

the portion of control they maintained over Palestine because of settler colonialism. When it comes to humanitarian aid, most is lost in attacks from the Israeli military, and any aid that does make its way into Gaza or the West Bank has been in insufficient supply. By destabilizing these systems and blocking humanitarian aid, Israel is essentially supporting their mission of preventing essentials like food and water from reaching Palestinians, forcing them to starve. It's obvious that the deprivation of humanitarian aid in Palestine is another strategy Israel has implemented to try to displace and remove Palestinians from the land to which Israelis believe they have the right because of divine right and as compensation for their suffering from the Holocaust.

By staying on the land, the state of Palestine has a chance at persisting, though staying means fighting to survive in inconceivable ways and the possibility of death is high due to the horrendous conditions this paper has outlined. As the United Nations' World Food Programme found in December 2023, "The proportion of [Internally Displaced Populations] households reporting their members going to sleep hungry at night at least 10 times in the past 30 days has increased from more than one-third (34%) during the pause to half of all households" (M.I.). Thus, Palestinians who are still on the land in Gaza and the West Bank are making the greatest sacrifice for future generations – that of persevering through the pressures Israel is putting on them – so that they can live to see the olive trees grow once again.

It's obvious that Israel is indeed committing genocide against Palestine, violating countless international human rights laws in the process. Genocide is defined as "Intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions" (United Nations) in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. As this paper has proven, Israel is intentionally destroying agricultural land and polluting water sources in Gaza and the West Bank on top of blocking humanitarian aid from entering these areas and destabilizing their infrastructure. This aligns with the United Nations' definition of genocide as Israel has deprived Palestinians of these resources necessary to their survival and impeded relief supplies from reaching them. Food First Information and Action Network's (FIAN) International Secretary General Sofia Monsalve confirms this in her explanation that "Israel's intentional destruction of food systems, blockades on humanitarian aid and the deliberate starvation of a population are not only violations of the right to food…They also constitute a war crime, as starvation is implemented as a tool of genocide" (*The Israeli Occupation's Use of Starvation as a Weapon of Genocide – Union of Agricultural Work Committees*). Conflict over land cannot be stopped, though international human rights law dictates that "evacuations must be carried out under conditions that ensure those displaced have access to unimpeded humanitarian aid, including sufficient food and work, otherwise they may amount to forcible displacement" (Human Rights Watch). Had Israel allowed Palestinians access to humanitarian aid, this would not be a genocide. Because this isn't the case, Israel is committing genocide against Palestine so that they may achieve their goal of completely controlling the land.

Israel's genocide of Palestine has greater implications than it may seem at first. It's important to consider the entire history between Israel and Palestine, especially the evolution of the power and control Israel has practiced over Palestine in the past century. As such, Israel's violations against Palestinian food sovereignty "exist within the broader framework of Israeli settler colonialism – Gaza has been under Israeli genocide since October 2023, under Israeli siege since 2007, and all of historic Palestine has been under occupation since 1948" (*The Israeli Occupation's Use of Starvation as a Weapon of Genocide – Union of Agricultural Work Committees*). Undoubtedly, Israel's attacks on food sources and humanitarian aid since October 7th, 2023, has been deliberate and their use of starvation as a weapon has served as a conduit for the genocide of the Palestinian people. Therefore, food sovereignty will be a critical part in Palestine achieving national sovereignty and independence from their settler colonialists. Yasmeen El-Hasan, Union of Agricultural Work Committees' International Advocacy Coordinator, has said "If we had control over our land and natural resources, Palestine wouldn't be facing issues of food insecurity and starvation" (*The Israeli Occupation's Use of Starvation as a Weapon of Genocide – Union of Agricultural Work Committees*).

In order for Palestine to achieve food sovereignty as the first step in gaining national sovereignty, the current conditions in Gaza and the West Bank must change. It would be ideal for Israel's government to "abide by the prohibition on attacks on objects necessary for the survival of the civilian population and lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip" (Human Rights Watch) and "restore water and electricity access, and allow desperately needed food, medical aid, and fuel into Gaza, including via its crossing at Kerem Shalom" (Human Rights Watch). Yet, we must face the reality that this is unlikely as they've had over a year to realize the impacts of their actions and amend them, though they haven't done so. Israel has even continued to destroy the environment and block humanitarian aid to Palestine during periods of ceasefire. Instead, global superpowers can cease support for Israel in order to pressure them into allowing humanitarian aid to reach Gaza and the West Bank and end their genocide of the Palestinian people, making the war strictly between the militaries of these two nations. More specifically, "The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and other countries should suspend military assistance and arms sales to Israel as long as its forces continue to commit widespread and serious abuses amounting to war crimes against civilians with impunity" (Human Rights Watch). It's urgent that these changes occur as soon as possible because the situation in Palestine will only continue to worsen and more Palestinians will die as Israel prevents aid from reaching them. Palestine deserves the chance to be a country with national sovereignty, and its people deserve to see future generations thrive on their land.

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Living for the Camera: The Unseen Psychological Harm of Family Vlogging Channels

Faith Wagoner

The "members of the LaBrant family are kind, loving, genuine and really very sweet. They occasionally talk about their faith in God and are transparent about the difficulties they've faced as a blended family."

This is what contributor Kristin Smith from *Plugged In* had to say about the popular family vlogging channel *The LaBrant Fam.* After watching hours of this family's content (at the expense of my YouTube algorithm) I can see how someone might come to this conclusion. Two loving parents and a bunch of cute silly kids all doing nice things for each other and living great lives with some tears here and there for a touch of realism. What problem could anyone have with that? Well, I and several others are beginning to question the morality of producing content surrounding your children and what effects this type of upbringing will have on the children involved.

But first, what even are family vlogging channels? Family vlogging channels consist primarily of videos documenting the everyday lives of real families mostly posted to YouTube but have found a community on other platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Many attribute the first family vlogger title to the channel *SHAYTARDS* when Idaho father Shay Butler began uploading videos of his children on YouTube in 2008. This channel found rapid success and by 2010 more and more families were hopping on the trend of posting their families' lives to the internet for all to see.

There is some appeal to both partaking in and viewing this content that I want to address before delving into the dangerous side effects. According to Jenna Bartkovsky from Rowdy, "These channels can provide parenting tips and offer a sense of support for viewers undergoing similar struggles or circumstances. Additionally, family vlogs offer a glimpse into the lives of (seemingly) relatable families, allowing viewers to connect with the vicissitudes of everyday life." Videos of happy families can provide comfort and positivity to those struggling with familial issues or unfortunate circumstances and parents who are struggling with aspects of parental life can find relief in the form of shared experiences. Seeing another family's hardships and perseverance can certainly bring hope to viewers and help them to feel less ostracized in their difficulties. There is also the financial aspect of this content as the owners of these channels are provided with income from YouTube relative to their success as well as add revenue and possible brand deals. This can help many families who are struggling and create more opportunities for the children involved as there is more financial stability. These effects are all wonderful but they also come at quite a heavy cost.

To begin my research, I have chosen to look into other forms of child involvement in the entertainment business, specifically child acting because the experiences of child actors can portray how children of family vlogging channels may be affected. This is because many of the children are forced to "act" or behave a certain way and are given lines in some cases. These children are also exposed to the same publicity and scrutiny as child actors and are likely to experience similar repercussions because of this. I then picked three popular family vlogging channels to explore and critique to get specific examples of the wider concerns that I have about this form of content. The three channels I selected were *Family Fun Pack, The LaBrant Fam,* and *The Churco Fam.* I will inform you in advance that all three of these channels are formulaic in their exploitation of their children and rest assured that the hours I spent scouring through their channels were indeed long and painful. Finally, I decided to touch on the legal actions being taken to protect these children and the limitations of this legal help. Overall, I believe you will find that the exploitation of children found in family vlog channels raises severe concerns for the children's psychological development and mental well-being as demonstrated by the history of children within the entertainment industry and the examples that I have provided.

With how relatively new family vlogging channels are, it can be difficult to see the negative effects that this kind of attention has on the children involved. For this reason, it can be helpful to look at evidence surrounding children in other forms of entertainment.

The appearances of children in films can be dated back to the late 19th century when films were still silent and colorless. The title of "First Child Actor" is hard to distinguish but due to a rough timeline provided by several production companies, many believe that this title belongs to Benoît Duval. According to Starico, Benoit Duval was

> the first child actor ever [to appear] in theaters. Benoit was an apprentice at the Lumiere factory in Lyon, France. The director Louis Lumiere called him to be the co-star of the movie L'Arroseur arrosé in which he plays the part of a prankster boy that pulls a prank on a gardener that is watering a garden.

industry. When thinking about famed child stars in America, there is perhaps no one more well-known than Shirley Temple. While many people picture a bright-eyed little girl with tight curls and a sweet smile, few imagine a scared young child growing up in an industry that sought to sexualize her at every turn. In 1931, she landed her first role in an Educational Pictures series called *Baby Burlesks.* The series went on to create a film entitled *War Babies* in which she portrayed a prostitute named Charmaine when Temple was just three years old. Her blossoming career as a child star led her to a menagerie of films featuring scenes where she was held, caressed, and fondled by several grown men while singing sexually-suggestive songs in a small dress. This overt sexualization of minors displayed on screen was not uncommon among Hollywood but her stardom undoubtedly lent itself to the commonality of such scenes. It was easy to forget that Shirley was a child in need of protection when said child was a wildly famous star and much wealthier than the average viewer of her films. Hollywood also understood that the inclusion of such scenes provided money and they did not much care about who they were garnering money from or why their audiences enjoyed such displays of child sexualization. Just as "the arrival of Shirley Temple to the film industry" led "creeps from all across the globe [to] fulfill their sick, twisted fantasies from the comfort of the movie theater," then the current position of social media is no less than a gold mine for modern-day creeps (Fay).

The undisguised mistreatment of Shirley Temple and other child actors visible to the viewer is truly appalling but the abuse of these children continued off-screen as well. In a blog about the abuse Shirley Temple faced at a young age written for Cinemasters, Rua Fay draws from Shirley's autobiography:

> In her 1988 book: Child Star: An Autobiography, Temple described the Baby Burlesks series as "a cynical exploitation of our childish innocence." She also explained that if any of the preschool age children misbehaved on set, they were locked in a windowless booth called the "punishment box" and be forced to sit on a solid block of ice for extended periods of time. Temple was sent to the "punishment box" several times but claimed it did "no lasting damage" to her psyche. (Fay)

While I do not intend to undermine Temple's assessment of her own mistreatment, I do have doubts regarding the damage this abuse had on her. According to the World Health Organization, abuse inflicted on a child creates stress that can impair the development of a child's nervous system and immune system. This places survivors of childhood abuse at an increased risk of physical and mental health problems. The expectation for physical punishment for "misbehavior" is one that likely carried with Shirley throughout her life and may have impacted her ability to discern abusive and toxic environments for years to come.

On top of this abuse, Shirley's place in the public eye privyed her to a variety of rumors and extreme criticisms that she likely would have never been exposed to if it weren't for her fame. Several supposed fans of the actress believed her to be a grown woman pretending to be a child and were very insistent that their claims be investigated. This rumor was so prevalent, especially in Europe, that the Vatican dispatched Father Silvio Massante to confirm her age when she was ten years old. Others were adamant that her signature blond curls must be a wig and according to Temple's autobiography, "Occasionally bystanders reached out to tug my hair to test its authenticity" (Temple and Black 68). Her upbringing also taught her to place the utmost value in her appearance and youth as she was expected to wear a dental plate during filming to conceal the gaps in her teeth and her hair was routinely soaked in vinegar, a process that burned her scalp and stung her eyes. Neither the speculations of her age nor the intense focus on her appearance could have been good for her developing self-image, especially at a time in her life that is already confusing enough without the fear of the world's judgment placed upon her shoulders.

Now think of all the Shirley Temples that live within today's internet confronted with the hatred that follows publicity brought upon by the hands of those who swear to protect them from harm. The success of Shirley Temple is rare but the exploitation of her childhood innocence is anything but, even decades later. Thankfully, such blatant displays of child sexualization are no longer permitted in films but this only makes the sexual abuse of children happening off set harder to discern. With the rise of the Me Too Movement and similar causes, many former child actors have come forward with their experiences of sexual abuse in the performance industry, often from individuals with positions of power in their field. A very recent documentary series released earlier this year titled *Quiet on Set: The Dark Side of Kids TV*, works to uncover the toxic culture behind some of the most popular children's shows of the late 1990s and early 2000s, many of which include the involvement of teenage actors. Throughout the series heavy focus is placed on Dan Schneider, the creator and producer of several popular shows including *Drake & Josh, iCarly,* and *Zoey 101*. According to *UDaily*, The University of Delaware's independent student newspaper, "The documentary features interviews with some of the former child actors who starred on Schneider's shows and the abuse that they faced at the hands of Schneider and other crew members" (Wojciechowski). *Quiet on Set* and many other accounts of the mistreatment of child actors within the entertainment industry play a vital role in understanding how harmful these environments can be for the children involved.

As important as it is to expose and raise awareness for these forms of sexual and physical abuse, it is also important to think about the negative social and psychological effects caused by child stardom. When someone becomes famous, even by small standards, it can change the way that people interact with them and can create a new layer to the dynamic that is formulated when meeting new people. The same can

be said about child stars. Once they reach a certain degree of fame it can be hard to distinguish between someone wanting to be friends with the individual you are versus someone who wishes to befriend you for more self-serving reasons such as a raise in social status or monetary gain. There is nothing necessarily wrong with befriending individuals who seek to improve their lives using someone else's success, but this can easily breach into toxic relationships if one is not careful. Many child stars are also never allowed to learn primary social skills depending on how early their stardom began. To accommodate rigorous filming schedules and locations many children are taken out of school or find themselves being constantly moved around to different schools. This can be detrimental to the student's educational development and social well-being. Frequently changing schools, as Cleveland Transformation Alliance states, "can disrupt the continuity of a child's educational experience, making it harder to build on previously learned knowledge and skills … [and] challenge their sense of identity and self-esteem". Without the experience of typical schooling or extracurricular activities, many children are unable to develop the skills typically expected of them, such as the ability to make new friends or collaborate on projects. In any social setting where one individual is different from the majority, a rift is created between the two sides. The majority of children are not famous so this can cause the child star to feel isolated from their peers and ostracized even if their peers are not engaging in harmful behavior. Even if it is unintentional, the lives of children raised in the spotlight are going to be different than the lives of the children who are not and this can easily lead to a sense of loneliness from the former.

The term "child actor syndrome" is a term (not an actual psychiatric diagnosis) often used in media and is defined by Pipe Dream as "adults who grew up from childhood acting. They may struggle with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues as a result of the scrutiny they lived under during important developmental years" (Denning). While there are likely many factors that contribute to one developing "child actor syndrome," it is alarming to see how common mental health issues and drug addiction appear to be among previous child stars. The entertainment industry is notorious for its drug use and toxic conditions, but I'd say it's deeper than that. I speculate that this "child actor syndrome" might instead be the manifestation of a form of identity crisis. It is not impossible to imagine that constantly portraying the same or different characters would have some effect on an individual's developing idea of identity. If you grow accustomed to playing a certain role for an extended time then it is possible to begin seeing yourself tied to this role and eventually, it becomes hard to separate yourself from it. When the role is suddenly taken from you, you lose a sense of who you truly are and scramble to pick up the pieces. It's as if you were a ballet dancer who was suddenly instructed to tap dance like a professional tap dancer for several hours every day for an extended period. You learn what it means to tap dance, how to complete the intricate steps correctly, and perform as if it is second nature. Then suddenly, you are told to retire your tap shoes and return to ballet as if you never tapped at all. Surely your feet would not so easily forget the feeling of tapping even if you wished them to. On the other hand, individuals who are constantly made to switch characters and learn new roles are likely to grow used to the feeling of always changing and might find it difficult to suddenly settle on one identity. I believe that both situations seem plausible for any actor regardless of age but the effects are especially enhanced when it comes to children whose minds are still developing. Understanding one's identity is a complicated process but when you are tasked with portraying a character your own identity can get caught behind the characters. This factor may contribute to the commonality of child actors struggling with mental health issues as they have to unlearn how to play a role given to them by someone else.

Additionally, many child stars end up taking on the mantle of the sole provider for their family when they start earning money. This topic involves a lot of nuance because there are many complexities surrounding struggling families and the difference between supporting your child's interest and exploiting their talents for financial gain but I still believe this to be an important point to highlight. Some families forced, or strongly encouraged, their children into the entertainment business, while others claim that it was entirely the child's idea and they only wished to be supportive. Regardless of how this reversal of roles begins, this swap of responsibility can create immense pressure for the child. Different former child stars have different opinions surrounding their former status as a child breadwinner but this is understandable as each family has their own complexities to add to this already shaken family dynamic. Keke Palmer was a child actress whose family moved to California for the sake of her acting career. By the time Keke was 15, her parents stopped working to care for Keke's needs on set as well as her three siblings at home. Despite her parents' seemingly innocent reasons for relying on Keke for their income, she remarked on the stress of the situation. "So everybody's positions were flipped upside down, which is why some years after that, I did start to feel pressure. I started to realize that I was the financial breadwinner and that if I didn't have a job, who would have a job" (Palmer). Actor Cole Sprouse, on the other hand, stated that he and his brother were "put into acting when we were 8 months old by our mother because we needed money," but claims that he does not regret his past and would go through it again if given the choice because of all the opportunities it gave him. He did, however, claim that he was granted his life of financial stability by "trading his childhood," which I believe revealst the extent to which these child stars were expected to grow up and mature far quicker than most kids. When the roles of provider and recipient are reversed among parents and children, it can place an immense amount of pressure on the child where they feel the need to keep working even if they no longer desire to. This inverse dynamic can also create tension among family relationships, as evidenced by many former child stars emancipating themselves once they are able, although, as previously stated, there could also be many other factors at play here.

Another form of children in the entertainment industry can be seen in children's involvement in reality television, a more recent development. This comparison might be a better comparison to the children of vlog channels because family vlogging in itself is somewhat akin to reality television in which the individuals involved are seemingly portraying their "real" selves. I say this with quotations because the very presence of a camera and an implied audience automatically adds a layer of performativity whether intentional or not. Individuals who wish to garner attention from an audience are more likely to try and display only the best versions of themselves or act in an exaggerated manner in hopes of entertaining whoever may be watching. In this way, children, especially the really young, are the closest to portraying their "real" selves as they are not yet able to understand the idea of an audience behind a camera and if they do grasp the concept, it is likely that this will not change their behavior because of it. It usually isn't until someone else tells them to act in a certain manner for the camera that they will begin to put on a different persona like the adults, or older children, around them.

In many ways, I believe that reality television can be even more harmful to children than child acting because of the lack of privacy provided to the children involved. Cameras are recording and distributing these children's private and often embarrassing moments for the world to see. Tears are often sought out by the producers because they garner more views regardless of the reason behind the tears or the child's desires. There have also been several instances where children are told what to say and then their words are portrayed as if they were their own. Children too young to understand how their words will be displayed are often treated as props to create a desired storyline instead of being treated as actual people. One such instance can be seen when Maddie Ziegler reflected on her time on the reality television show *Dance Moms*, "People thought I was a brat because in all my interviews, I would say, 'I'm the best. I know I'm going to win.' But that's because the producer was telling me to say that. I don't think I'm better than everyone else. I was just doing whatever they told me to do because I thought that's what you did." Ziegler, and likely many of her young co-stars, were simply doing what they thought was expected of them and then faced the scrutiny of thousands of strangers for something they never even meant. This wasn't a fictional story in which audiences would get angry at a fictional character that happened to be played by a child, audiences would grow angry with actual children, who were left to face the consequences alone.

Now with the rise in popularity among vlogging channels, I fear that these same consequences are being placed on children on a much wider range of children albeit on a smaller scale with a few extra complications to throw in the mix. The complication of family vlogging channels comes from the exploitation of children for profit, whether intentional or not, and the exposure of children to an audience that many of them are too young to comprehend.

I do not hold the belief that all parents who participate in these channels are malicious beings who have no care for their children. I am sure that many if not most of these parents believe themselves to be doing an innocent act that brings nothing but joy and financial stability to their families. The issue in itself stems from their denial to look past the intent of their actions and the refusal to place any weight on the concerns about abuse and child stardom that many viewers have pointed out.

As stated previously, I have selected three of these family vlogging channels to present today as a means of explaining the potential dangers of this form of content. It is not my intention to compare the channels to one another in terms of success or harm but instead to view each channel as an individual case worth discussing for its unique video style and the different ways in which damage is dealt to the children involved. The channels I have selected are *The Churco Family, The LaBrant Fam*, and *Family Fun Pack*. I have selected these channels because they all incorporate the word family in the titles, so the intended focus for these channels' videos is irrefutable. From my understanding, each of these channels was created for different reasons and has now developed into filming a similar form of content. To begin this discussion, I'd like to start with the oldest of these three channels.

The *Family Fun Pack* channel dates back to October 5, 2011, when a video of twin one-and-a-half-year-old boys crawling into their cribs without help was posted publicly and went viral. According to the mother Kristine this video was not intended to be seen by more than a couple of people as she wrote in the video description, "I took this video for family who lives far away, so they could see how the family was growing and becoming pretty athletic at a young age." It was by pure chance that this video became so widespread on the growing internet. Seeing the success of this video, parents Matt and Kristine decided to continue documenting and uploading short clips of their children's lives, including recitals, funny moments, and birthday celebrations. It wasn't until years later that they posted their first form of longer vlog-style content on April 8, 2014, titled, "24 Hours With 5 Kids on a Rainy Day." This nearly 15-minute-long video contains footage of the children eating, playing with toys, and bathing while a timestamp is plastered on the screen letting you know when each activity was performed. I found this last part particularly disturbing because while any nudity is blurred, I still believe it to be a strange decision to post videos of your nude children, even if it is blurred,

to an internet filled with perverted individuals who may view this content in less innocent ways. Regardless, this video performed well and many 24-hour vlog-style videos followed this one.

At some point, a different channel trend entered the mix as well. Several toy reviews can be found in the earlier years of Family Fun Pack in which the children are recorded explaining and reviewing a variety of toys for around 3 minutes. While I was unable to determine whether these toys were sent to the families by the manufacturing companies due to the channel's popularity or the toys were bought by the parents, the inclusion of a link to where one could purchase the toy under review was always included in the description. This inclusion of a link implies that the family was being sponsored by these toy companies and the faces of the children were exclusively being used to promote products. This is undoubtedly a form of work and performativity brought upon the children at such a young age. While it can be argued that playing with toys is a form of enjoyment for children and therefore cannot be considered work, I'd like to add that work can and should be fun if you are in a position to find a job that suits your interests. While many famous singers enjoy singing, most would not argue that music is their job and singing is their work. These children playing with and reviewing toys are in a similar position, granted that they even desired to play with these toys in the first place. It is likely that they wished to play with different toys that day or didn't want to explain their every action to an audience at that moment, but were strongly encouraged, possibly forced, to do so anyway for the sake of profit. While toy reviews are no longer featured on the channel, the kids can still be found posing in outfits sponsored by clothing brands on Kristine's Instagram.

Over time, short snippets of funny moments disappeared on their YouTube channel almost completely being replaced with challenge videos such as "Cap'n Crunch Cereal Challenge" or cooking videos such as "Caramel Popcorn DONUTS! - Family Fun Pack Cooking." Both styles required the kids to participate in some form of labor with a certain level of excitement to entertain viewers. It was also at this point that the videos became more edited and the children were made to pose for a thumbnail that would attract attention. The family continued the vlog-style format with each holiday, trip, or special occasion warranting its own video. Many of these videos also include clickbait titles such as "Chris's First Crush" and a thumbnail full of hearts, and while such content never actually shows up in the videos, it is still odd to enforce a romantic dynamic for the sake of views. Not everyone would agree this could be considered sexualization but implying a romantic tone to a relationship between two individuals who have never implied the desire for such can cause uncomfortable feelings for both parties. This embarrassment is also heightened by the fact that the individuals in question are teenagers and according to HealthDay News, "Young adolescents are more likely than young adults to see themselves in ways that may depend more on what they believe others think about their abilities and attributes." I am also concerned with the performativity needed for such videos as these children are taught to behave in a certain way to garner as much attention as possible. This in turn is teaching them to value attention above all other forms of validation and this constant monitoring limits the display of genuine emotions of these children as they feel the need to perform regardless of their true feelings. This concern is heightened by the inclusion of vlogs featuring children sick or injured or attending funerals. Tears of these children become a way of making more money as their feelings are displayed as a way to amass sympathy from viewers and unfortunately, this is typically a successful way to attract views. This point of the parents caring about monetary gain more than their children's privacy is only highlighted by the fact that most of the children also have their separate YouTube channels and each child has their own Instagram account as well as the pets having an account specifically dedicated to them. More accounts lead to more revenue after all.

Next, I wanted to highlight a more recent trend of *Family Fun Pack* which comes in the form of a series called "The Cursed Babysitter." This series consists primarily of skits acted out by the family in which the parents leave for some reason and an intruder breaks into the house and terrifies the children while they are gone. While these sketches are obviously fake, I take issue with this for many reasons. In these videos, the performativity required is at its highest as the children are given lines to say and directions on how to perform.

Now, we have entered the child actor space almost entirely except the directors/producers are the parents, the set is their own home and the characters they are portraying are terrified versions of themselves. I also take issue with the participation of the youngest members of the family in these videos. By the latest installment of this series, posted November 17, 2024, the family consists of Kristine and Matt and their 8 children. In this video, all of the children are present including a 3-year-old and a 6-month-old baby. The 3-year-old does have a few lines but it becomes clear that she does not truly understand what is happening when she becomes visibly upset and begins to cry as her siblings act scared of the "intruder." The baby also begins to cry at all the commotion and this is simply left in the video for seemingly dramatic effect. It is at this point that we can see the parents explicitly enacting fear upon their young children for the sake of a sketch that could have easily been accomplished without their participation. I also fear that this kind of video may cause distortions in the younger children's ability to perceive danger as they grow accustomed to these scenarios of fake intruders. Another concern that many have raised for the children of this family comes from the fact that the majority of the children act much younger than they truly are. I do see the validity in raising these concerns because younger children tend to garner more views and similar techniques have been used by other families in the past but I do not wish to dissect the already scrutinized behavior of these children for the sake of this argument. I will note that most of the children continued to ride in car seats past the age of nine and the twins mentioned in the beginning were kept in toddler race car beds until they turned 13 but this might just be a parenting style that I do not know much about.

The last topic I wanted to discuss regarding *Family Fun Pack* comes from a short video called "We're YouTubers.... of course we....." In this video, the family participates in a popular trend in which they list things that they consider normal because of their status as YouTubers. A statement that I found to be alarming was when the oldest daughter stated, "We're YouTubers, of course, people at church and school are going to make fun of us." Teasing is something that happens to almost every kid at some point in their life but to willingly subject your kids to this form of ostracization for the purpose of content seems unusual. As discussed previously, this level of fame in children often leaves them feeling isolated from their peers and unable to connect to those around them. Unfortunately, in this, the social lives of these children have been harmed in other ways by this family content than just exclusion. Later in the video, Kristine states, "We're YouTubers, of course, people assume we overwork our kids." This is then immediately followed by the oldest daughter stating "We're YouTubers, of course, we're always filming in case something exciting happens." To point out and seemingly mock a common critique of your content and parenting choices in the same video where you admit to constantly filming your kids for the sake of content is truly a bold choice. I am aware that the last statement was most likely an exaggeration but this does little to diminish the concerns I have regarding this form of content and this family in particular. The lack of privacy given to the children in this family regarding all manner of personal information is likely distorting their perception of boundaries and limiting the privacy they allot to others in the process. From the looks of this channel's uploading schedule, it does not look like they will be slowing down any time soon sadly.

The next family vlogging channel I wanted to take a look at is the second oldest channel of the three and currently exists under the name of *The LaBrant Fam*. This channel developed differently than the previous one as it was originally intended to be a channel dedicated to the relationship between Cole LaBrant and his girlfriend Savannah Soutas with the channel being named Cole&Sav. Cole LaBrant gained notoriety when he and a few of his friends became popular on a different social media platform called Vine in 2013 on the channel "Dem White Boyz." Savannah also amassed a significant following by using her profession of photography to take and upload pictures of herself and her young daughter. The first video published on this channel was a video storytime of Cole attending a makeshift prom alongside a few of his friends. The first video featuring a child was posted on September 8, 2016, when Cole filmed a vlog-style video of him and Savannah taking Savannah's three-year-old daughter on a trip to Disneyland. This video did considerably better than their previous videos and from this point forward the majority of this channel's videos featured Savannah's daughter in some way. The channel grew to be extremely popular as the young girl's energetic personality and silly dances brought in many viewers. At some point, the couple began collaborating with other popular Youtubers with every collaboration featuring Savannah's daughter. Their daughter became somewhat of a bargaining chip as it appears that she was allowed to be involved in other internet celebrities' videos as long as they were featured in a *LaBrant Fam* video as well. At this point, she was made to pose for thumbnails and act a certain way for the cameras. In 2017 Cole and Savannah got married and upon realizing that Savannah was pregnant decided to change the name of their channel to *The LaBrant Fam* ensuring that their channel would remain centered around the lives of their children.

A trend that I wanted to discuss on this channel is a series of videos involving a premise of their daughter and another young boy being a "mini version" of Cole and Savannah. In these videos, the couple dresses the kids to match themselves and the four go on "double dates" like in the video titled "Taking Mini Cole and Sav on Hilarious Double Date!!! (Secret Crush Revealed...)" In this video, the young boy is set up to be a secret admirer of their daughter and upon discovering who he is, Cole pretends to give him a threatening talk regarding his intentions toward his daughter. Ignoring all of the harmful stereotypes provided by this premise, I am alarmed by the couples' romanticization of their six-year-old daughter and her friend. Both children appear embarrassed and uncomfortable as Cole and Savannah ask them questions about what they think of each other's physical appearance. While I understand that many perceive the innocent embarrassment of young kids in this way as cute, this is still causing children emotional distress on purpose and then displaying this distress to the world. Cole and Savannah then proceed to take their daughter and the young boy ice skating and Savannah proceeds to laugh and make fun of the young boy when he struggles while on the ice. She insists that "he finds it funny too" but this is no reason to record and mock someone else's child for entertainment value. At the end of the video, it is revealed that the young boy's family also happens to run a family vlogging channel, and their daughter was also incorporated in a video on their channel and suddenly everything makes much more sense. If the recipe for successful content is embarrassing your kids and exploiting their innocent friendship then at least let both channels have a piece of the pie right?

Cole and Savannah decided to expand their family and as

I am writing this they have five children. Rest assured, each new baby came with a pregnancy reveal and reaction video (in which the children were recorded and told again and again about the news until they reacted in a way that their parents, and audience, would approve of as can be seen in "TELLING EVERLEIGH HER MOMMY IS PREGNANT!!! (TELLING OUR PARENTS TOO))," an elaborate gender reveal party video, a live birth vlog, and plenty of other baby-related content. As each child has grown their milestones and meltdowns have been documented in an aesthetically pleasing manner for their viewers fit with background music and a subtle editing style. Having five kids is not the easiest however as Cole and Savannah have recently posted a video explaining that they have been overwhelmed with life recently. Savannah went on to explain they haven't posted as much content recently because they "don't have help at all. Like we don't have babysitting help and I think a lot of people don't realize that." I understand that having 5 children would be a big handful and I don't wish to undermine this family's struggles but their position as influences gives them the opportunity to step away from their jobs for a period of time with little repercussions. This contrasts greatly with the majority of their viewers who don't get this luxury so to complain about this seems to be out of touch with the reality of most parents. It is also odd to mention their lack of babysitting help considering how wealthy the LaBrant family is. According to NeoReach, the LaBrant family makes about 5.5 million dollars a year off of ad revenue alone. I would hope that a good portion of this money is put into savings for their children's futures, but with this amount of money, this family could easily afford a babysitter for each one of their children. This is yet another luxury that so many families do not have, which is why many were not too pleased with the parent's complaint of having no babysitting help. Furthermore, within the same video, less than five minutes after the previous statement a child is heard screaming in the background and Cole reassures us that they are having a date night later so they had "the babysitter come an hour earlier so we could film this" so I guess they do have babysitter help after all.

The concern of the LaBrant family exploiting their children has been brought to Cole and Savannah's attention multiple times throughout the years. The couple tends not to interact with these criticisms but in one instance Cole decided to defend him and his wife's decision to make content revolving around his children. When someone on Twitter mentioned that the LaBrants use their children for fame Cole responded by tweeting "We don't 'use our children for fame'.. we hate the fame. It's the worst part of what we do. Savannah & I both had large followings before ever posting our kids. They're our kids and pride and joy so of course we include them in everything we do now." To Cole's credit, they did both have followings before posting their children but it was nowhere near as large of an audience as they have garnered now. It is also worth mentioning that both Cole's and Savannah's previous content was completely different than it is today. They don't lead the same lives as they had before children but occasionally include their children in their content, they decided to reframe their content to surround their children's lives. To add to that, I truly do not believe that they hate the fame that their success has brought them. Both Cole and Savannah are constantly mentioning how much they love their fans and how much joy their audience brings into their life. They always ask their audience for feedback on parenting decisions and place value on what their fans think of them. If they truly hated the fame brought on by this large audience then they would feel content to those who eagerly support them. Fame is not a constant undying thing. It can fade and if the LaBrants were truly sick of all the eyes watching them they would stop posting and maybe even delete their channel. But they don't and I suspect they never will because their actions show that they thrive off of attention and gratification from their audience. Their posting schedule has slowed down as of late but I doubt that it will stay that way for long.

The last family channel that I looked at also happens to be the most recent with their first YouTube video being posted September 13, 2022. Unlike the other channels we have discussed, the *Churco Family* channel was always intended to be a family channel centered around the children of parents Laine and Nick. The couple did not begin on YouTube as they had amassed a following on other social media platforms by posting short videos of their daughter. At some point, they decided to migrate to YouTube and try out longer-form content which has not stopped since. I am particularly alarmed by the amount of videos posted on this channel. The *Churco Family* YouTube channel has posted over 3000 videos within a less than three-year span. If you do the math this adds up to over 3.5 videos being uploaded per day. This can be compared to The LaBrant Fam's channel containing around 600 videos and the Family Fun Pack channel containing around 2900 videos despite both channels having been around much longer than *The Churco Family* channel. To maintain this uploading schedule the parents of this family must be recording their children almost every minute of the day to make content, leaving very little room for anything else.

The *Churco Family* participates in many of the same trends as *The Labrant Fam* with videos such as "Toddlers First BOYFRIEND" and "Daddy Stops Toddler From Seeing Boyfriend." The main differences in these videos are that the children are even younger and there is more importance placed on the "overprotective dad" stereotype. This channel in particular seems to be intended for younger audiences as toilet humor is incorporated into nearly every upload and outdated memes are used sporadically during editing. Similar to the other channels, tears, injuries, and illnesses seem to be gold mines of content used to rake in viewers at any expense. The couple's daughter had learned to say the channel's intro "What's up Churco Fam" before she was three and she and her baby sister had been made to pose in thumbnails long before that. I also suspect that the oldest daughter is often told what to say during these videos as she frequently uses vocabulary and sentence structures far beyond that of a typical toddler. There isn't much more to say about this channel without repeating what has been said about the others, as most of them follow a format, but unfortunately, *The Churco Family* channel does appear to only be getting started.

Within each channel, the reversal of the financial obligation of the family can be seen because even though the parents feature heavily in the videos and do the majority if not all of the editing, the success of the channel relies heavily on the actions of the children. This puts immense pressure on the children involved and may create an environment in which they feel obligated to continue featuring in these videos for the sake of the family. It is also alarming to see how so many children, not just in these three channels but all over the internet, are being raised to constantly seek validation in the form of views and likes. Many of them have been raised to perform for the camera since birth and I worry about the consequences of this decision. These children may grow up to say that they enjoy being in the public eye but is that really a fair statement if they were never given the opportunity of a private life? I also worry about their futures once there are no longer cameras pointed in their direction. I imagine this would cause a break in the reality that they have grown to know and create many issues for them as they navigate through adult life outside of their old family channels.

Throughout the years several laws have been put in place to protect children in the entertainment industry including but not limited to the Coogan Law which was passed in 1939. The California Child Actor's Bill, also called the Coogan Law, is a child protection law that requires at least 15 percent of a child actor's earnings to be placed into a trust that they'll be able to access once they reach adulthood. This law has also been put into effect in New York, Louisiana, Kansas, Nevada, Illinois, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and New Mexico (The Comprehensive Guide to Child Actor Laws by State). Many states also require that a child obtain a permit for working before they can participate in the film industry but the specifics vary from state to state. Many states do not have any of these limitations put into place for child actors, which is a problem in itself, but with the creation of family vlogging channels being relatively recent, barely any protections are granted to the children involved.

Illinois became the first U.S. state to pass a law protecting the financial interests of the children of family vlogging in August 2023. This bill requires parents to put aside 50 percent of their earnings for a piece of content featuring their child into a trust that the child can access upon turning 18. It also ensures that if there's no money available for them upon turning 18, they can sue their parents. Minnesota was the next state to pass this kind of legislation, in May 2024 Minnesota went even further by prohibiting children under 14 from appearing in more than 30 percent of their parents' social media content. If children do appear in these videos and the videos are monetized, money must be put into an account, similar to Illinois (more states are adopting laws to protect children of family vloggers).

California issued Senate Bill 764, otherwise known as the Child Content Creator Rights Act, on September 26, 2024. This law provided similar protections to the law passed in Illinois and focused solely on the financial compensation of children in the social media world. In October 2024, 21-year-old Shari Franke, a former daughter of a family vlogging channel, testified to Utah lawmakers about how being raised in the public eye had changed her.

> "I come today as a victim of family vlogging," Shari said, "to shed light on the ethical and monetary issues that come from being a child influencer." She added, "If I could go back and do it all again, I'd rather have an empty bank account now and not have my childhood plastered all over the internet. No amount of money I received has made what I've experienced worth it." (Maddox)

Shari had been a part of the channel called *8 Passengers* in which the mother, Ruby Franke, posted videos featuring her husband and six children. While Shari considers her involvement in the channel a form of abuse on its own, she and her siblings were physically and mentally abused by their parents both on and off-screen. In August 2023, Franke was charged with child abuse and pleaded guilty four months later. These children often faced cruel punishment for simple mistakes including being denied water for extended periods of time, being handcuffed, and being made to sleep without a bed. In August 2023, Franke was charged with child abuse and pleaded guilty four months later[1].

As proven previously, the children of family vlogging channels are at a higher risk of developing mental health issues and identity disorders as seen by the psychological ramifications of child acting. During the COVID-19 epidemic that started in 2020, many of these channels saw a huge uptake in viewership as people were quarantined inside their homes and looking for a way to cope with isolation. Videos of happy families and silly situations provided many with comfort during difficult times and while it is great that people found ways to get through the pandemic, this only made things harder for the children of family vlog channels. Being inside all day meant more content to be made especially as these channels found sudden uptake in

1. I chose to refrain from using the 8 Passenger channel for my analysis because of the complications of this family and the intertwining of abuse into the exploitation of children for views but I still feel like Shari and her siblings' experiences need to be discussed. Her testimony provides proof of the long-lasting effects that having one's childhood displayed to an audience can have on an individual and her family's situation serves as evidence of how easily abuse can go unnoticed, regardless of how popular the channel may be.

their audiences. Thankfully, after lockdowns were lifted and vaccines were distributed many viewers drifted away from these channels and turned to focus on their own lives once more.

This year there has been a massive turnaround in the general perception of family vlogging channels and children online overall. The controversy and legal situation surrounding the *8 Passengers* channel have started necessary conversations regarding the exploitation of children on social media and the harmful ramifications that these channels have. While a decrease in popularity is certainly a great thing for the future of these children's lives, I fear that there will always be an audience for these channels. As long as there are people who are willing to turn a blind eye towards the potential harm to children for the sake of entertainment, these channels will have reason for continuing their content. People need to be made aware of the danger of such channels and the adults in charge of these channels need to be held accountable for their actions. I don't just mean financially either. Preventative measures must be taken to ensure the safety of children within the new age of entertainment found on social media.

If you happen to be a parent who is already posting videos or information about your child/children online or considering this option, I urge you to remember a few things. If you start seeing dollar signs whenever your child cries, laughs, or says/does something cute or funny: there is a problem. If people are continuously telling you that you are exploiting your children for fame and profit: they are not haters, you should place weight on their concerns, and you should rethink your decisions. If your child ever expresses a lack of interest, reluctance, or discomfort in filming an aspect of their life: simply don't film it! Finally please keep in mind that you are someone whose obligation it is to keep your children's best interest at heart when they are still in a fragile state of their life. Remember all of the child actors who have come forward about their experiences in entertainment and the several negative psychological effects that living in the spotlight can have. Remember that there is so much more to life than living for a camera and your children deserve to discover this for themselves.

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Representation of South Asian Art and Architecture in Western Museums

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The representation of South Asian art in museums in Western and colonial countries has improved significantly over the last few decades. Historically, it was often presented through a Eurocentric viewpoint, due to about 200 years of colonization, but after coming out of British rule, countries were able to rebuild and reclaim cultural symbols. However, they had centuries of older art and architecture from territorial rule, such as the Gupta Empire, the Chola dynasty, and more famously, the Mughal Empire. With thousands of years of tradition and various religions portrayed in South Asian countries, why is there a lack of proper representation of its history in the Western world? Who or what determines what type of art is presented in museums, and why don't we see those from South Asia?

Growing up in a big city in North Carolina, I have had my fair share of visiting art museums, but one of the main things I've noticed is the lack of South Asian exhibits in these museums. There were multiple exhibits with 18th-century European, modern, or contemporary art, but there was a lack of representation of countries further east; much of Asia, mainly South Asia. This was the lack of representation I received as a second-generation Indian immigrant who didn't grow up around many people of her descent.

This paper reflects my ongoing interest in exploring how post-colonialism intersects with art history, specifically in the context of South Asia by asking:

How has the portrayal and representation of South Asian art in North American museums evolved, and what impact has this had on perceptions of South Asian cultural heritage compared to European artwork?

I would like to portray the representation of artwork in Western museums and focus on decolonization efforts and how institutions have worked towards a more inclusive presentation of other cultures. Through the study of famous exhibitions and the curatorial strategies of major museums in places of Western influence (such as the UK and North America), I'm interested in understanding how these countries shape public perceptions of South Asian cultural heritage and if they are effective in breaking down colonial hierarchies or don't create inclusivity; comparing these efforts with the privileging of European art. I aim to create broader discussions about cultural heritage and proper representation by focusing on the convergence of post-colonialism and art history. I hope to show how art institutions can create spaces that reckon with colonial legacies and create a more inclusive future.

"Do you let a sculptural fragment stay in the field and put a garland around it? Or do you put it in a museum? Often, you saw both."

- Pujan Gandhi (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

When exploring the historical factors that have impacted South Asia, whether we go back to religious influence or modern-day events, we are drawn to one big force that has changed the course of history for the countries located in South Asia and surrounding forces; colonialism. The powers of the West have left a huge mark on the cultural aspects of South Asia through a convergence that lasted for centuries, impacting Indigenous groups. This can be seen in the art world as well through the representation of South Asian art and architecture in Western museums that show cultural exchange and colonialism.

The representation of South Asian art in North American museums has evolved from colonized portrayals to more inclusive narratives, challenging the perceptions of cultural hierarchy and increasing the appreciation for its heritage compared to traditionally dominant European art. However, it isn't actively portrayed by museums with these exhibits being difficult to locate, or very small. Regardless, efforts have been made to include South Asian culture through small organizations, with the final goal of properly portraying artwork across several centuries.

Historically, South Asian art in North American museums has often been marginalized or misrepresented, overshadowed by the predominant focus on European masterpieces, due to an abundance of artwork related to Christianity, compared to South Asian art that focused more on Hinduism and Buddhism. South Asian and European artwork revolves around religion, culture, and architecture. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met Museum) wrote an article explaining general South Asian artwork and a few pieces the museum has to offer from this descent. Symbols like the Buddha or many hand gestures are prominent in showing the religious backgrounds of these pieces, so they must be displayed properly in North America, as any wrong explanation could depict a completely different religious

figure. Even with ongoing challenges and future directions in achieving equitable representation in the art world, efforts for further research have contributed to a more authentic and diversified understanding of South Asian art and have allowed it to be represented properly in North America.

Historical Context of South Asian Art in North American Museums

For hundreds of years, England was establishing colonies around the world, including South Asia, and by the late 19th century, amidst colonial rule, art helped India rally against its oppressors. Early exhibits in North America were influenced by colonial attitudes but didn't properly portray the integral cultural components of Indian artwork, but rather the uniqueness of it.

Religious images dominate the surviving art of the great periods of South Asian sculpture, from the second century B.C. to about A.D. 1500. What remains are stone temples, stone and metal temple sculptures, and smaller religious sculptures created for personal worship. Similar to many ancient pieces of Greek and medieval European times, many of these images were said to have originally been painted. The walls of sacred structures were also sometimes enriched with mural paintings and textiles.

India uses various forms of artistic tradition to express traditional or classical forms of art, dance, and music. The most common form of artistic tradition is citra, which includes painting, sketching, or any kind of delineation. It's followed by ardhacitra, which is a sculpture in relief that doesn't include body parts, and finally, citrabhasa, art on a wall or cloth. These various types of art are typically portrayed in Indian temples, not only to show off a skill or give a hidden meaning but also to tell a story that can be seen across the temple walls.

In Indian art, worshippers recognize images of an individual deity or spiritual being by the particular attributes a person holds, and by the deity's pose, gestures, color, and decoration. Certain symbols are common in the iconography of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, such as the lotus, a symbol of spiritual perfection, the wheel, symbolizing time or enlightenment, and the halo, a light source circling a deity to show transcendent radiance.

Since ancient times India has also been famous for fabrics. Greek and Roman texts mention the luxurious and finely woven cottons of Banares. These textiles are called "muslins" in tribute to their place of origin. Ikat weaves and permanently dyed cotton are equally ancient textile techniques. Mural paintings were also common, with them having decorated the walls of palaces and mansions, but cannot be found from the 16th century onwards.

The Bengal School of Art, for example, allowed for the reclamation of cultural heritage, emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Artist Abanindranath Tagore began this movement to revive traditional Indian art forms that had been marginalized by colonial authorities. Artists from the Bengal School rejected the Western realism promoted by British art schools, instead of drawing inspiration from Indian paintings and murals. By embracing indigenous styles they were able to create works that celebrated India's cultural history. Artists would present at international exhibitions to begin to subtly challenge the colonial stereotypes about India as "inferior".

After colonial rule, South Asian architects had to bring back a more personalized form of work that portrayed their true culture. This meant they had to use modern architecture, breaking away from the traditional designs enforced by the British. One of the main forms of architecture in South Asia is Hindu temples, which are objects of worship. Their typical form shows the cosmic mountain that accommodates the deity honored and housed in the temple. As the devotee circles the temple exterior in a certain direction, they worship the various gods portrayed on the walls, particularly the deity honored within. Within temples are the performances of poojas, or rituals, done by a priest to ask the god for blessings.

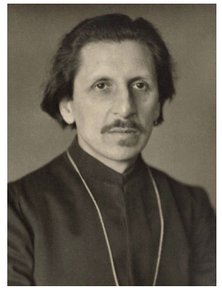
The biggest comparison between South Asian and European art is religious symbolism, as

South Asia tends to depict Hindu, Buddhist, or Islamic deities or architecture, and Europe depicts many classical themes and Christianity. Although architecture varies by intricate carvings or columns and domes, the two styles convey a similar religious meaning that is important to understand the significance of culture in two entirely different settings. In 1917, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston appointed the historian and philosopher Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (pictured left) as the curator of Indian art in the United States (Minneapolis Institute of Art). This essentially meant that he would research and find pieces for museum exhibitions based on public desire. He came to America with his collection of art, including those from Rajput kingdoms, and primarily, a Nataraja (dancing Shiva) statue, an epitome of South Indian Hindu idols.

The Nataraja became a prominent figure in the art museum's South Asian collections, used as a prop in performances, and became a symbol of grace. It was said to be the most "perfect expression of rhythmic movement in the world" (August Rodin, sculptor). Once it became popular, it was seen in more museums and spread to galleries from New York (ex. in the Met Museum, shown on the right) to Los Angeles. Post Indian-independence, the Nataraja became a strong symbol of the newly independent nation, despite it being a Hindu symbol. The display of the Nataraja was often accompanied by narratives that celebrated India's contributions to global artwork, strengthening any cultural ties with the West. Rather than just a symbol of grace and movement, it represented India's postcolonial identity, reminding the world that, even while facing colonialism and cultural appropriation, India was able to preserve its artistic heritage and keep its place in the nation's culture.

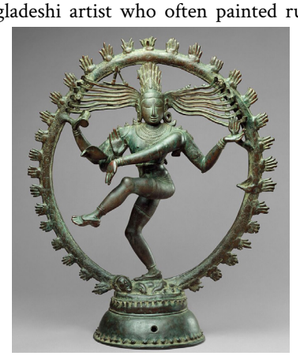
A Comparison of South Asian and European Artwork

South Asian artwork often connects with mythology, spirituality, and cosmology, whereas European religious art, specifically through the Renaissance, focuses on a more biblical narrative. Medium Magazine says that artists in South Asia were more engaged with their cultural heritage, taking inspiration from Persian and Islamic traditions to explore contemporary issues, but comparatively, Western modernism has positioned itself in opposition to tradition. South Asian modernism didn't emerge as



just a regional adaptation of Western art movements, but also as a reinterpretation of traditional forms. The rise of photography in India led to the decline of paintings that combined both European and Indian techniques. This also reflected the changes in Western art where photography also impacted academic painting. The decline of traditional forms only encouraged South Asian artists to try to decolonize their art from European works.

Medium Magazine also did a comparison of the works of South Asian and European artists that explored the lives of rural communities. Paul Gauguin, a French artist was a leading figure of Post-Impressionism that depicted the lives of Polynesians. His pieces were influenced by the European fascination of non-Western societies and the romanticizing of them. However, though he portrayed a variety of colors and abstract, he lacked authenticity in his interpretations after drawing from Western ideas and challenging traditionalist European works. Zainul Abedin was a Bangladeshi artist who often painted rural Bengali



communities to portray their struggles.

For example, his famous piece "Santhal Couples" (1968) was created during the colonial period to show the Santhal tribe in Bangladesh. Unlike Gauguin, though, Abedin emphasized the social responsibilities and the realities of living in a rural community, depicting what people experienced rather than the outsider's interpretation. He focused on local communities to challenge the colonial erasure of indigenous voices.

This contrast shows the different approaches of the two artists; although Gauguin had a creative style, his work often sustained a colonial gaze that made his subjects seem "exotic" - or unlike what he'd ever seen before. Abedin's pieces, on the other hand, served as a powerful symbol of social commentary and cultural reclamation. He portrayed lived experiences in his community, preserving the dignity of his subjects while also maintaining the real story. He presented the true impact of colonial powers.

Negative Presentations of South Asian Cultural Heritage

Cindy Bu, who works for Washington University in St. Louis wrote a research paper on the Discriminatory Presentation of Asian Art in US Art Museums. It said, "In general, there is a lack of art museum support for Asian artists in the U.S. for their artwork due to the lack of interest in presenting contemporary Asian artworks, and they have to be their own advocates." Most of their work would be stored in grassroots organizations, which work with the community for influence. They work on marketing to one target audience and use the people in a given region for continuous movement. However, since grassroots organizations are small, they only reach a small amount of people.

Bu's paper focuses on the misrepresentation of Asian art, mainly in the context of East Asia. However, if the problems with the representation of East Asian art are commonly seen by the general public, the same can be said about South Asian art. Bu argues that "Visitors might not realize how they are directed in a certain way to navigate the galleries in the art museums. People typically encounter the European master's artworks first and then the Asian ones juxtaposed with them." The Metropolitan is one of the largest displays of South Asian art in the United States due to having a variety of art exhibits, but actually falls under the institutions that do this, presenting European and other Western art first. The map to the right shows the layout of the Met Museum. Located on the second floor, Late South Asian art is exhibited with artwork from the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, and Central Asia, separated from the larger "Asian Art" section on the other side of this floor. After walking up the stairs to the second floor, the first thing visitors will see is a large collection of European paintings. Then, they are led to Modern and Contemporary Art and more European paintings and sculptures before approaching any kind of



Asian art. They'll come to this only after seeing plenty of Medival and American artwork on the first floor. Presenting European artwork first creates a Western "beauty standard" in the minds of visitors, taking away from the true tradition presented by other cultures, like the pieces of Asian descent.

The misrepresentation of South Asian art in Western museums often stems from colonialism. Colonists would collect South Asian artifacts and present them on their own accord, reducing the intricacy of works. Even today, exhibitions lessen the diversity of South Asian traditions, focusing mainly on Hindu and Mughal art, straying away from Buddhist, Jain, and other folk-style pieces. Without the proper depiction, these pieces may be presented as relics without their cultural significance, creating potential stereotypes that don't honor the complexity of South Asia.

Shifts in Representation of South Asian Art

The representation of South Asian art in museums and galleries has significantly evolved. These changes show societal shifts, the post-colonial perception of art narratives, and the influence of globalization. Museums have progressively worked to focus on authenticity and diverse perspectives to tell the proper stories portrayed by South Asian artwork. While historical artwork is important to understand one's culture, artists often blend traditional South Asian themes with modern ideas like migration and identity to reflect the contemporary South Asian experience as well.

During colonial rule, South Asian artwork was often displayed through a Western lens, rather than through its cultural and historical roots. Museums would treat them as exotic artifacts, and wouldn't bother about their significance. Efforts have been made to "decolonize" museums by collaborating with scholars and artists. Institutions like the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum have worked to reshape their South Asian exhibits by incorporating pieces from the culture. Doing this has allowed exhibitions to honor the stories, traditions, and meaning behind the art, rather than just presenting it as an object of curiosity.

One of the largest presentations of South Asian artwork in the Western world is in the Metropolitan Museum, more commonly known as "The Met", in New York. The reason this museum is so special is due to its presentation of over 5000 years of art from around the world, while also being able to present race, color, religion, sex, age, origin, disability, etc., this principle of diversity and inclusion is used throughout the museum.

In the Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, there is an essay written by Vidya Dehejia on "South Asian Art and Culture". Throughout this essay, Dehejia describes the various locations of South Asia, depicting different types of art that are more important in each place. She also emphasizes the importance of religion. For example, Hinduism is frequently seen throughout art through temples, which

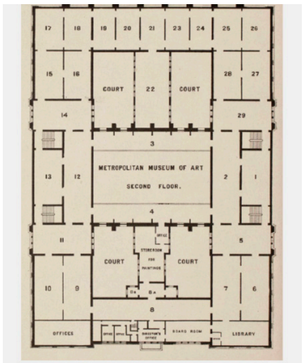


Fig 2
Map of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Second Floor from Ward, Logan. "Museum Orientalism: East versus West in US American Museum Administration and Space, 1870-1910"; originally from, Guide to the Halls and Galleries of the

were built to "enshrine the image of the chosen deity" while also being covered in carvings and paintings. Sculptures were also commonly seen since sculptors were able to depict whatever they desired, whether that be a god/goddess, or a village woman.

In addition to historical pieces, modern museums have found new ways to present South Asian art. Digital tools, interactive exhibits, and multimedia installations allow visitors to engage more deeply with the art and its stories. These innovations create experiences that help audiences understand new cultures that they may not have been exposed to in the past and the significance of each piece.

Furthermore, museums are increasingly emphasizing South Asia's contributions to global art history. For example, comparisons between Mughal miniatures and European Renaissance works reveal shared techniques and mutual influences, challenging the notion of art as regionally isolated. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London is a prime example of a museum contributing to global art history, including pieces from the 17th-century Mughal era to modern-day art from Bollywood, India's Hindi Film industry. Among its highlighted South Asian pieces are Mughal miniature paintings and stones, Indian textiles, sculptures and ceramics, jewelry, and woodwork. To the left,

we also see a Bangladeshi quilting tradition called "Kantha" which is a part of V&A's South Asian textiles. The Victoria and Albert Museum also presents posters from famous Bollywood movies, emphasizing the influence of this new global culture on South Asia and even Western Hollywood.

Globalization has also opened doors for contemporary South Asian artists, who are now gaining international recognition. These artists blend traditional motifs with modern themes, addressing issues like identity, migration, and social justice. Their work bridges the past and present, reflecting South Asia's evolving place in the global art world.

Challenges and Future Directions

The path toward an entirely decolonized museum space is not entirely straightforward. The responsibility of museum staff goes beyond just adding artwork to a collection, but should also require the examination of proper presentation of this form of art that influences public understanding. Collaboration with South Asian communities and artists can bring more authenticity and inclusivity that may not be seen everywhere. Only after one museum puts in the effort to make any kind of change will the idea be spread nationwide.

Suppose Americans traveling within the United States will go to a museum in the city they are visiting. In that case, they are more likely to go to those free "official" ones in the center of the city over the ethnic ones that are further away. Only through a nationally recognized museum, one that as a public infrastructure serves the purpose of representing the importance of artworks and the individuals behind them, can the elevation and recognition of minority groups be recognized. It is through giving their proper display in public recognition that allows for the discrimination of Asians and other minority groups to be improved in society. As mentioned earlier, the layout of museums already affects how people perceive art due to its order of presentation. Institutions must be mindful of the flow of their museum when displaying artwork, allowing for everything to be properly appreciated. Even if a museum has minimal South Asian art, it's important to be considerate about how it's displayed.

In addition to the efforts within museums, the digital realm has also become an important platform for showcasing diverse artwork. Online exhibitions, virtual tours, and social media campaigns allow for new and wider audiences to experience art that they may not have direct contact with. Digital platforms provide a unique opportunity to showcase pieces in an accessible way. With online spaces pushing for broader collections of South Asian artwork, visitors learn about new cultures, which will encourage museums to represent these as well. Digital space will lead to the participation of younger generations that are in touch with online culture, increasing future appreciation for South Asian art. Interactive workshops and community-based events that are open to the public are also a way for visitors to connect more personally with artwork. Creating a diverse environment is important for understanding cultural heritage and building a more inclusive art world.

It is, however, looking up for the future of South Asian art in America. The Bay Area of California, where the growing population can be attributed to the fastest-growing market for contemporary South Asian art due to museums like the San Jose Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Asian Art Museum. There have been a few major exhibitions of contemporary South Asian art, and even though the list is small, it's a major start. Essentially, it's up to citizens who love new South Asian art and have the money to spend on it, to do so, and then donate those pieces to local museums.

The representation of South Asian art and architecture in the Western world, especially through museums has gone through a significant evolution, showing societal shifts towards colonialism, cultural heritage, and inclusivity. Although these institutions were once dominated by a European mindset that prioritized Western art and aesthetics, or just general Western influence, the efforts of post-colonial scholars and artists have been able to challenge



this mindset to encourage a more accurate portrayal of South Asian culture. However, significant gaps remain in how South Asian art is presented.

As many South Asian artifacts were obtained or forcibly removed during periods of imperial rule, the colonial legacy has been able to overshadow exhibitions. Artifacts were seen as exotic items, but their true cultural value tied to religion and history was stripped away. Even today, museums face the challenge of lashing back for misrepresenting cultures properly. Institutions have been encouraged to reevaluate their representation of art to emphasize the responsibility required to represent different cultures. Small artists created their grassroots organizations to display artwork from their own cultures, due to the lack of it in Western media and more popular institutions.

There is however a growing recognition of the need to increase the public understanding of South Asian art. Small organizations have made efforts to collaborate with South Asian artists to shift the focus from expensive pieces to collections of the region's art and architecture,

whether they're small or large. For example, exhibitions that emphasize the similarities between Buddhist, Islamic, and Hindu art pieces have helped break down rigid views of South Asian culture.

As a second-generation immigrant, I felt drawn to this topic due to my increasing interest in art and the desire to present my culture to others. The absence of meaningful South Asian exhibits in any Western museum I've visited has only shown me the missed opportunities to build connections and understand more of my own culture, especially with it being shaped by both Eastern and Western influences. For generations of immigrants and their descendants, seeing South Asian art should be able to validate their heritage and bridge the cultural gap.

Moving forward, Western museums need to understand why they must include, not only South Asian art but artwork from various cultures. This should require a commitment to decolonizing museum spaces to educate audiences about the historical and cultural significance of the pieces displayed. This way, they can also develop a respect for newly discovered diversity. Achieving a proper representation of South Asian artwork is an ongoing journey, but through combined and continued efforts, museums can become spaces where South Asian art and architecture aren't just compared to Western pieces, but are seen the same way, allowing for a better representation and understanding for the future.

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Battling Barriers: The Economic Insecurity and Marginalization of South Asian Immigrants

Thrista Venkat

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer remarked in her TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story" that "stereotypes are containers. They hold not just our assumptions, but our expectations, and often overlook the complex realities of those they define." The phenomenon defined by Adichie can be observed through a stereotype many young Asian American immigrants and first-generation Asian Americans encounter. For these groups there is an expectation of inherent academic and professional success.While these expectations may seem flattering at first glance, a deeper examination reveals that they perpetuate harmful stereotypes, extending into socioeconomic and sociopolitical spheres. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the model minority myth. South Asians are often perceived as a model minority—highly successful, well-educated, affluent, and self-sufficient, with little need for economic support. However, stereotypes such as the model minority myth can be incredibly harmful as it can reduce support for relevant legislatures, limit access to socioeconomic programs, and foster misconceptions of their needs. This study analyzes the barriers to financial mobility in South Asian immigrant communities in the United States. Using a combination of historical analysis, survey data, and first hand testimonies, as well as focusing on four specific barriers, cultural differences, language barriers, lack of documentation and lack of understanding US financial systems, this study aims to highlight the damaging effects of the "model minority" stereotype and highlight the need for specialized policy to promote financial education within the South Asian immigrant community.

The model minority myth was coined in 1966 after a major wave of Asian immigration to the United States by sociologist William Petersen in an essay he wrote for *The New York Times Magazine* called "Successful story: Japanese American style." This was created as an umbrella term to describe successful Asian minorities, who had overcome severe hate and discrimination and avoided becoming "problem minorities," as Petersen says in his article. They are defined as law-abiding, educated, and successful.The model minority stereotype downplays the economic and social hardships faced by Asian American immigrants, reinforcing policy inaction (Peterson). The internalization of this thought can lead to the perception that Asian American immigrants need less help or aid than other minorities. This is observed in a tabulation of legislation (Peterson). A key example is Proposition 209 proposed in 1996 by California legislation. Proposition 209, or the "Prohibition Against Discrimination or Preferential Treatment by State and Other Public Entities" can be summarized as the antithesis of today's affirmative action (UCOP). The main goal of Proposition 209 was to create race-blind admission; however, in reality it led to the introduction of de facto quotas in schools like UC Berkeley and UCLA. This disproportionately underrepresented Asian American subgroups forgoing socioeconomic disparities among these subgroups (UCOP). This phenomenon is aptly described in Lisa Lowe's essay on the "International within the National." Lowe addresses the long standing history of economic exploitation as it relates to political and cultural suppression and erasure. She describes Asians as nonwhite exceptions. She describes the culture of America as something that is imagined as if Asian Americans were not central to its definition, creation and life. She says in her essay:

> Asian immigrants have been included in the nation in a manner that secures their continual racialization as laboring subjects, even as they are ideologically figured as potential citizens.

She relates Asian American immigrants as those who are citizens enough to be a labouring subject but in other aspects of privilege are treated as another. The model minority myth constructs Asian Americans as an economic construct while rendering them as politically passive. This exemplifies the continuing economic exploitation of Asian Americans as they are seen as only a labour force but in other aspects, second class citizens. The majority of South Asians began immigrating to the United States in the early 20th century and are one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups since the 1960s. Asian American immigration in general has increased exponentially (see Fig. 1).

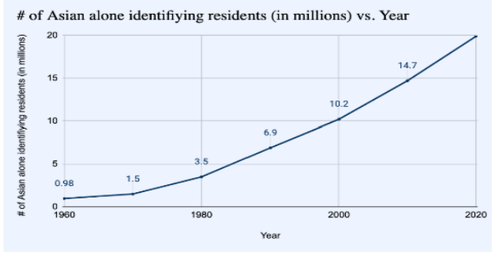


Figure 1. Graph showing Asian identifying residents from 1960, counted in millions

South Asian immigration can be broken down into three waves. The first wave in the early 1900s (around 1930-1940), the second wave in the 1960s, and the third wave in

the 1980s and beyond (Chandrasekhar).

The first wave of South Asian immigrants began in the 1940s. These immigrants were mainly Punjabi Sikhs who arrived working on railroads in Western United States. This wave of immigration was highly restricted due to extensive legislative procedures. This immigration was limited by the 1917 Immigration act which banned almost all immigrants from Asia, including South Asians (Office of the Historian). The court defined naturalization to be exclusive to Caucasian residents. South Asian immigrant Baghat Singh's attempt to naturalize was denied by the Supreme Court on the count of race. The conclusion of the United States vs. Baghat Singh in 1923 led to the ban on Indian naturalization (Office of the Historian).



Figure 2. Bhagat Singh pictured above. Served in the United States. Army in World War I.

The second wave of South Asian immigrants can be defined after 1965. The immigrants who arrived in this time period can be considered more educated and affluent. This wave of immigrants were directly affected by the Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminates almost all bans against Asian immigration (Chandrasekhar). This wave consisted of highly trained immigrants specifically in STEM fields, with an uptick in doctors, engineers, and scientists.

There were many push and pull factors that drove specifically Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi immigration. Due to major political unrest within these countries, the separation of India and Pakistan and the independence of Bangladesh could have acted as a push factor. This group of highly educated and successful immigrants played a pivotal role in perpetuating the model minority stereotype.

The third wave of immigration occurred in the 1980s and onward. Compared to the previous waves, it included a bilateral experience. Many South Asians arriving at this time worked low-wage jobs and found significant barriers to socioeconomic mobility (Batalova). Lower human capital compared to earlier immigration waves made it difficult for South Asian immigrants to assimilate into the mainstream workforce. However, from another perspective, South Asian immigrants thrived. The introduction of H1-B visas enticed skilled workers to enter the United States tech industry, and many highly skilled workers in IT and software immigrated from India and Pakistan (Batalova). Due to the rise of post-secondary education and economic liberalization in India, many citizens sought to immigrate to the US to find better opportunities. After this period, the influx of skilled workers began an ongoing debate about H1-B visas and green card caps. Following the events of September 11, 2001, there was a rise in anti-South Asian, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic sentiment in the US, which affected immigration patterns. Heightened security measures, stricter immigration policies, and racial profiling created significant challenges for South Asian immigrants, particularly those perceived as Muslim.

Analysis of Barriers to Socioeconomic Mobility

In the survey portion of this study I define 4 barriers to economic mobility. This section aims to provide relevant legal cases and policy to illustrate the barriers defined in the survey part of this study. The four barriers defined are as follows:

1. Language barrier
2. Lack of documentation
3. Lack of understanding of US financial sytems
4. Cultural differences

This section bridges the historical and institutional contexts with the lived realities of South Asian immigrants, offering a comprehensive analysis of the systemic barriers influencing their socioeconomic mobility.

The first barrier identified is language. South Asian immigrants speak a wide variety of languages including Tamil, Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, and many more. This linguistic diversity can create significant challenges in accessing financial resources and services. Financial institutions often solely cater documents and services to English and Spanish speakers, which is difficult for South Asian immigrants still learning the language. Linguistic barriers also prevent immigrants from accessing legal resources and government programs designed to support them.

For example, programs such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or unemployment benefits require applicants to fill out forms available only in English or Spanish, and government agencies are very little help with this issue. Despite laws such as the Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1975 and Executive Order 13166, which mandate language accessibility, many institutions fail to implement these mandates, and many offices lack interpreters for commonly spoken South Asian languages (Dilley, "Executive Order 13166").

Several legal cases highlight the systemic failure to accommodate language diversity. Lau v. Nichols (1974) was a suit filed based on a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1971, in San Francisco, California, the public school system was integrated which included over two thousand students of Chinese descent who were distinguished as not proficient in English. The school system only offered one thousand students a supplemental English course, and these classes were taught in exclusively English (Lau v. Nichols). Lau, along with some fellow peers, filed a class action suit against the officials of the school district. Their claim was based on the failure to provide English language classes as a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Lau v. Nichols). The district courts ruled in favor of the school district's stance. When the case was taken to the federal level, the Supreme Court ruled in unanimous favor of Lau citing violations in the California Education code in the SFUSD handbook and Section 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Lau v. Nichols). While Lau won the case, this suit is a prime example of systematic failure to accommodate language diversity, and to help those of immigrant identity and immigrant descent learn a crucial skill to success in the United States.

Lack of documentation acts as a significant barrier to socioeconomic mobility for South Asian immigrant groups in the United States. Documentation status—ranging from work permits and Social Security numbers to permanent residency or citizenship—plays a critical role in determining access to basic rights and opportunities. For many immigrants, especially those on temporary visas or without legal status, the absence of documentation can limit access to employment, housing, banking, and social services. The Immigration Act of 1990 introduced the H1-B visa. This was a way for US companies to poach skilled workers from foreign lands. According to the passed policy the H1-B visa:

> Establishes a program for granting temporary protected status and work authorization to aliens in the United States who are nationals of countries designated by the Attorney General to be subject to armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary temporary conditions. (Immigration Act of 1990).

Immigrants relying on H1-B visas subsequently rely on employer sponsorship (USCIS). This can limit upward mobility and bargaining power. Moreover, H1-B visas are notorious for creating legal issues, especially when it comes to visa renewal or visa processing. These legal issues often result in standstill, creating time periods of confusion where immigrants have and do not have documentation. This can make it incredibly difficult to access financial tools.

This policy also creates an annual statutory cap on the number of H1-B visas allotted. Since the policy was established in 1990 there has been an annual cap of 65,000 visas with an additional 20,000 visas allotted for foreign professionals with a master's degree or doctorate from a United States higher education institution (Immigration Act of 1990). The policy also accounts for "Diversity Immigrants," establishing a specified number of visas for countries with immigration levels below 50,000 over the past five years (Immigration Act of 1990). The annual cap of 65,000 visas directly impacts South Asian immigrants, who represent the largest proportion of H-1B visa applicants (Immigration Act of 1990). The visa cap exacerbates competition within this group to apply and disproportionately affects countries with a high volume of applicants.

Signed into law by President Trump in April 2017, the Buy American and Hire American Executive Order aimed to increase wages and employment rates for U.S. workers by enforcing stricter immigration policies and tightening visa regulations (USCIS). This order directed DHS to limit H1-B visa accessibility to only the most 'meritorious' applicants, making it significantly harder for many skilled workers to secure employment in the U.S. (USCIS). The H1-B visa exemplifies a long-standing pattern in U.S. history: the reliance on an Asian workforce while restricting their rights. Since the late 19th century, Asian immigrants have been economically essential yet politically and culturally invisible, forming a shadowed labor force. The model minority myth further reinforces this by framing Asians as industrious and economically successful while rendering them politically passive, thereby justifying their continued economic exploitation.

Understanding the financial system of the United States is crucial for anyone living in the country. Many foreign nations have diverse financial systems and markets, which can make it challenging for immigrants to adapt to a new approach to managing money. There are many examples of the various hoops immigrants have to jump through but a prominent one is the H1-B Visa Taxation complexities. Many workers on an H1-B visa endure legal issues due to confusion with taxing requirements. They are often required to pay taxes for both their mother country as well as United States taxes. Furthermore, taxes are a complicated process and minor mistakes can avalanche into further issues with the IRS bringing need for unnecessary audits. This will be the main focus of sections 3 and 4, Methodology and Results.

Cultural differences can act as a major barrier to economic mobility in the United States. Many immigrants feel isolated due to the stark differences between their culture and the culture of America leaving them feeling intimidated. Language barriers work in parallel to cultural barriers. Many South Asians know English as their second, third or fourth language or not at all and most financial services only offer English or Spanish speaking services. Many immigrants embrace traditional gender roles ergo first generation women might be discouraged to seek out financial literacy services.

Cultural discrimination can also act as a driving factor. In the aftermath of the Al Queda terrorist attacks in the early 2000s, notable 9/11, many South Asian immigrants, especially Sikh and Muslim subgroups, faced discrimination because of their cultural dress. This was a direct prevention to economic mobility in two ways. Firstly, out of fear of prejudice and hostility. South Asian immigrants may have hesitated to seek financial services, and when they did seek out financial resources, they were met with discrimination (Abbas).

The model minority myth also brackets with this barrier. Many government and financial resources and institutions have a predisposition to discriminate against South Asians. Due to wide South Asian success, many institutions assume that this group does not need any "additional" help hence creating an initial bias towards them. This creates a barrier when accessing loans, business funding, or high-level financial services.

These four barriers collectively impede South Asian economic mobility. While each of these challenges is highly significant, the discussion will shift to focus specifically on the barrier posed by a lack of understanding of the United States financial systems.

Methodology

For this study, a survey of 43 South Asian immigrants from all over the US was conducted. It highlights the experiences immigrants navigating the US financial system. The survey largely displays the importance of financial literacy to socioeconomic mobility and the lack of government and corporate support of South Asian immigrants attempting to assimilate to the United States financial system.

To begin the survey, a list of demographic questions was asked. The relevant questions include:

1. Where are you from in South Asia?
2. What year did you emigrate to the US?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. Where do you live now in the USA?

The community I am most closely affiliated with is the Tamil community, which consequently constitutes the largest proportion of survey respondents. However, this demographic representation does not influence the validity or relevance of the survey results. Survey respondents originated from all over India: Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala and Delhi. Additionally there was an extensive range to the times in which respondents immigrated, from the early 1970s to the late 2010s. The highest concentration of respondents immigrated in the mid to late 90s.

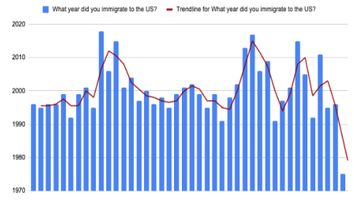


Figure 3. Bar plot of years of immigration of respondents from 1970 to 2020. Trendline shows the moving average of the plot.

Most respondents cited education at higher institutions, either a bachelors, masters or professional degree. 79.1 percent of the respondents had a master's degree or higher as their highest educational level. 16.3 percent of the respondents cited their highest level of education was a bachelor's degree. 2.3 percent of the respondents replied that their highest level of education is an associates degree and 2.3 percent of the respondents said their highest level of education was a high school diploma or equivalent. Respondents immigrated to places from all over the United States. The figure below displays this.

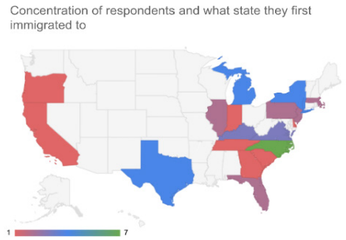


Figure 4.

Other questions discussed their opinions on whether corporations, the companies they worked for, schools they attended and the US government aided in upward economic mobility financial education. The results of many of these questions will be presented in the Results and Discussion sections. When the respondents were asked what was their largest barrier to socioeconomic mobility this was the displayed result. As seen in the figure, 53.5 percent of respondents felt that their lack of understanding US financial systems was their biggest barrier to socioeconomic mobility.

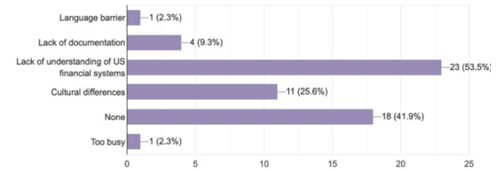


Figure 5. Plot of the percentage of respondents stating their biggest barrier to socioeconomic mobility.

The respondents were also asked their socioeconomic status prior to immigrating. They were asked to rate this from 1 to 5, 5 being very high and 1 being very low. 48.8 percent of respondents said they ranked a 3, or middle socioeconomic status. 11.6 percent of respondents cited they were 2, or lower socioeconomic status and 27.9 percent said they were higher socioeconomic status. These survey insights lay the groundwork for a detailed exploration of the data in the results section, where the patterns and barriers identified here will be analyzed further.

Results

The survey respondents were asked a series of questions focused more on answering questions specifically about understanding these immigrants' experience with the barrier of lack of understanding US financial systems. Some of the questions include:

1. When you first arrived, were there economic opportunities advertised?
2. What was your level of familiarity with the United States financial landscape and personal finance when emigrating?
3. How important do you think financial literacy is to achieving socioeconomic mobility in the US?
4. When you first arrived in the United States, were there any financial literacy courses offered?
5. Rate from 1 to 5 the willingness of the government to help with financial literacy and economic opportunity when you first arrive in the United States.
6. Has your financial literacy impacted your ability to participate in activities such as buying a home, starting a business, or investing in education?

Firstly respondents were asked questions based on economic opportunities to assess their ability to make money. These opportunities were defined as job opportunities they learned about, pathways to careers that were advertised, as well as pathways to higher Education. The results are displayed in Figure 6 below, where 76.7 percent of respondents said

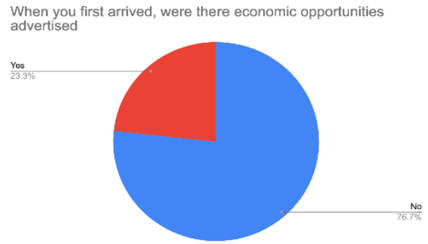


Figure 6. Shows the percent of respondents who responded yes or no to whether economic opportunities were advertised

there were no economic opportunities advertised and 23.3 percent said there were opportunities advertised. The respondents who replied yes were asked to explain how this opportunity was presented to you and who presented this opportunity. Most cited word of mouth through peer networks at work, professional associations and networks through their work, the government, university career fairs and university job websites. This aligns with the model minority myth's shadowing of South Asian struggle. While many assume that this group can navigate professional success independently, the reality is that immigrants are left to rely on informal networks, reinforcing systemic inequality.While 23.3 percent of respondents were advertised economic opportunities, the majority of respondents did not have this luxury.

Next, the respondents were asked about their experience with personal finance and finance. This was asked to gauge a level of understanding of personal finance and United States financial systems when they first immigrated. This method for this question was a rating system, 1 being no experience or knowledge at all to 5 meaning advanced knowledge of personal finance and US financial systems. 76.7 percent of respondents said there were no economic opportunities advertised and 23.3 percent said there were opportunities advertised. The respondents who replied yes were asked to explain how this opportunity was presented to you and who presented this opportunity. Most cited word of mouth through peer networks at work, professional associations and networks through their work, the government, university career fairs and university job websites. This aligns with the model minority myth's shadowing of South Asian struggle. While many assume that this group can navigate professional success independently, the reality is that immigrants are left to rely on informal networks, reinforcing systemic inequality.While 23.3 percent of respondents were advertised economic opportunities, the majority of respondents did not have this luxury.

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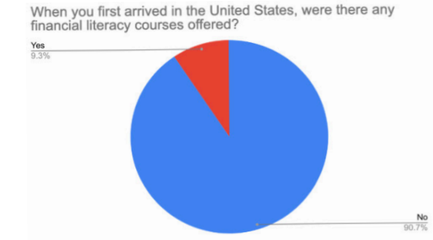


Figure 7. Shows the percent of respondents who responded yes or no to whether financial literacy courses were advertised.

55.4 percent of respondents rated their familiarity with US financial systems and personal finance as 1 or 2 which corresponds to very unfamiliar and unfamiliar respectively. 32.6 percent of respondents rated 3 neither familiar or unfamiliar. They were then asked how important they believed financial literacy was to socioeconomic mobility based on their experiences. 67.4 percent of respondents cited that financial literacy was extremely important to socioeconomic mobility in the United States (rated it 5 in a range of 1 to 5) and 20.9 percent cited that it was important to socioeconomic mobility (rated it 4 in a range of 1 to 5).

Similar to the economic opportunities questions, they were then asked if any financial literacy courses were offered by corporations, universities or the government.

90.7 percent of the respondents cited that no financial literacy courses were offered anywhere to them and 9.3% of the respondents cited that financial literacy courses were offered. Of the respondents who responded yes, they were then asked to explain how this opportunity was presented to you and who presented this opportunity? The answers given included the respondent's consulting firm to some extent,

the internet, onboarding documents from the respondent's company as well as courses offered by their university. While receiving financial literacy education was the experience for some, for the majority of the South Asians surveyed, it was not. This reveals that South Asians are not inherently financially successful as the majority in this survey had to seek financial education options themselves.

When the respondents were asked about specifically government aid in financial literacy 44.2 percent responded that they were little to no help with financial literacy rating government help a 1 or 2 out of a range of 1 through 5. The last relevant question to help understand these immigrants' experience with the barrier of lack of understanding of US financial systems was whether or not their financial literacy had helped them in participating in financial services such as starting a business, investing in education, investing in stocks and mutual funds, acquiring a loan and buying property. 62.8 percent of respondents responded with a 4 or a 5 meaning helpful and very helpful respectively. 27.9 percent of respondents cited that financial literacy neither helped nor hurt their participation in financial services.

These results highlight significant gaps in financial literacy resources and economic opportunities for South Asian immigrants, with most respondents citing limited support from government and institutions.

Conclusion

The model minority myth has deeply shaped the narrative surrounding South Asian immigrant communities in the United States, influencing policy decisions that neglect their material needs. More than just a cultural stereotype, it functions as a mechanism that perpetuates economic exploitation, reinforcing systemic biases against South Asian groups. The significance of this myth lies not merely in its existence but in how it actively sustains the economic conditions that hinder mobility and equitable treatment. From education to the economy, Asian immigrants have faced unique challenges compared to other groups and have often had to forge their own paths to overcome these obstacles. This paper underscores the significant barriers to financial mobility, including language challenges, restrictive immigration policies, and an increased focus on limited access to financial literacy resources. The survey results demonstrate that the model minority myth actively fuels systemic neglect. The assumption that South Asians are inherently economically successful leads to policy failures, where financial education and immigrant services remain inaccessible. This pattern reflects a deeper history of economic exploitation and erasure. Efforts should focus on dismantling stereotypes, improving educational access, and revising immigration policies to promote equity.

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Challenging Stereotypes of Indian Culture in Global Media

Aditi Varshney

The goal of this research paper is to investigate and critically evaluate the portrayal of Indian identity in both Indian soap operas and Western media. As an immigrant born in India who now lives in the United States as a green card holder, I have often grappled with the duality of my cultural identity. As the oldest daughter in an Indian family, I have navigated the intersections of tradition, modernity, and expectation—all of which are reflected, and often misrepresented, in media portrayals of Indian life. These personal experiences have driven my desire to examine how these portrayals influence public perceptions of Indian identity, particularly among the Indian diaspora.

Growing up, Indian soap operas like Yeh Rishta *Kya Kehlata Hai, Balika Vadhu*, and *Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma* were a constant presence in my household. These shows depicted values, societal roles, and family structures I was expected to embody. At the same time, Western shows like *Jessie* and *Never Have I Ever* provided representations of Indian-American identity that felt simultaneously familiar and alien. This duality created an internal conflict: I felt connected to these portrayals yet also recognized their oversimplifications and misrepresentations. This tension has led me to critically examine how ,.media shapes my own and others' cultural understandings.

As an Indian-American woman, I occupy a space where I am both included in and excluded from the "Western audience." While I consume and engage with Western media, I often see representations that fail to account for the complexities of my identity. I argue the mechanisms by which media both include South Asian characters while simultaneously maintaining the homogeneity or "whiteness" of an assumed mainstream audience. Using Stuart Hall's theory on the local and the global, I analyze how these shows homogenize South Asian representation while also creating avenues for resistance.

This research was inspired by a personal interest in how media portrayals affect the lived experiences of marginalized communities. In examining the aforementioned shows, I sought to identify common tropes and stereotypes that oversimplify Indian identity. While these portrayals are often rooted in certain cultural truths, they frequently fail to account for the diversity, modernity, and evolving nature of Indian society. By focusing on both Indian and Western media, I aimed to highlight how these portrayals interact with and reinforce each other to create a monolithic, and often flawed, view of Indian culture in the West.

I critically examine the broader implications of media representations of Indian identity, acknowledging the entertainment value of shows like Balika Vadhu and Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai, while addressing how their dramatized portrayals of social issues, such as child marriage and family dynamics, can mislead international audiences about modern India. Similarly, Western media's depiction of Indian-American characters like Ravi in *Jessie* and Devi in *Never Have I Ever* highlights cross-cultural challenges but often reinforces reductive stereotypes. By analyzing these shows, this research seeks to challenge clichéd portrayals and promote more authentic, multifaceted representations of Indian identity. Indian soap operas are cultural staples in India, while Western programs like *Jessie* and *Never Have I Ever* influence younger, multicultural audiences globally, making them significant in shaping perceptions. The study calls for media creators to embrace diverse, nuanced portrayals of Indian culture, reflecting its complexity and breaking free from simplistic tropes, to foster global empathy and challenge cultural biases.

In a period where the media determines so much of what we know about the world, what we see on screen frequently influences how we see other cultures. Indian soap operas and Western dramas, in particular, have a tremendous influence on ideas of "Indian" identity, although they frequently lead to stereotypes and oversimplifications of Indian culture. *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai, Balika Vadhu*, and *Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma* show Western audiences an image of India that focuses on traditional family structures, rigid gender roles, and dramatic societal issues such as arranged weddings. While these portrayals are based on certain cultural features, they frequently exaggerate or idealize them, providing an imperfect image of current Indian life. Western shows like *Jessie* and *Never Have I Ever* follow similar trends, depending on stereotypes such as the "Indian nerd" or the controlling immigrant parent. These portrayals, whether comic or dramatic, simplify the complexities of Indian-American identities to basic cultural cliches. By researching how Indian and Western media portray Indian culture, we can gain a better understanding of how these representations impact public opinion and reinforce narrow, outmoded stereotypes that fail to capture the variety of Indian society.

Western media, in turn, uses reductive cultural stereotypes to present Indian-American characters, especially in shows like *Jessie* and *Never Have I Ever*. In *Jessie*, the character of Ravi was made to be somewhat awkward, nerdy, and socially isolated, really playing into that "model minority" stereotype that places Indian people as being smart but socially obtuse. This character representation disregards the diversity in the Indian-American experience whereby people migrating from different sets of backgrounds and regions in India lead very different lives. In *Never Have I Ever*, while the show attempts a more nuanced portrayal of an Indian-American teenager, it does weigh heavily on Indian tropes: the overwhelming Indian mother and generational conflict between immigrant parents and American-born children. Such portrayals, while modern, continue to reinforce the stereotype of the Indian family as rigidly conservative and culturally distant from mainstream American life.

The paper also puts forward the view that both Indian and Western media portray Indian culture in a way that encourages monolithic, one-dimensional representations that are not cognizant of the rich diversity and complexity of Indian society. From the depiction of arranged marriages and family customs to the usual stereotypical portrayals of Indian-American life, these media depictions only deepen this narrow view of Indian culture, which does not represent the diversity within India or even its diaspora. By portraying such narrow and stereotypical images, these media representations not only shape the perception of Western viewers but also contribute to the perpetuation of biases and misunderstandings about Indian identity. The paper, therefore, stresses the urgent need for more authentic, diverse, and multifaceted representations of Indian culture in both Indian and Western media to foster a more accurate and inclusive understanding of the complexities of Indian society and the global Indian diaspora. This calls for more nuanced portrayals that reflect the evolving realities of Indian life, its people, and the vibrant diversity that defines it.

In today's global times, international media acts as a bridge between cultures, allowing viewers to visualize and understand societies across the world. Indian soap operas and dramas have become a global phenomenon, entertaining millions of viewers with their brilliant visuals,

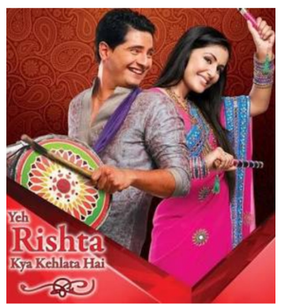


Figure 1. Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai (2009-present)

complex storylines, and cultural profundity. Shows like *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai, Balika Vadhu*, and *Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* are staples in Indian households and are gaining popularity worldwide. While they portray different traditions and social dynamics, the caricatured performances have tended to create a reductive understanding of Indian culture in the West.

The Western media themselves contribute much to the distorting of the Indian identity. In Disney's *Jessie*, Ravi comes across as a caricature of the "nerdy Indian boy," with a thick accent and weird cultural mannerisms. This depiction, though comic, reinforces Indians as being brainy but awkward. *Never Have I Ever* further complicates that by focusing on the identity struggles an Indian-American teen, Devi Vishwakumar, goes through. But even that show is not immune to some familiar tropes, such as the heavy-handed, traditional parent one, and reinforces Western assumptions about Indian families.

I critically examined how Indian soap operas and Western media have contributed to stereotyping and reducing "Indian-ness" to simplistic terms in the West. Through an analysis of popular shows both in India and the West, I see how these representations shape perceptions among Western audiences of Indian culture. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of moving beyond clichés and stereotypes for creators of media to represent Indian identity in global entertainment more meaningfully.

Global media in today's world acts as a cultural bridge between societies that are geographically far apart. Indian soap operas and dramas have been in demand all over the world because of their colorful visuals, detailed plots, and rich cultural details. *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai, Balika Vadhu*, and *Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma* are some shows that have been a regular part of most Indian households and are slowly gaining popularity abroad. While they depict very distinct traditions and social dynamics, the often-blown-out-of-proportion acting develops a reductionist Western view of Indian culture.

Indian soap operas exaggerate certain cultural aspects in their portrayal: lavish religious ceremonies, hierarchical family structures, and strict, conservative gender roles. For instance, Yeh Rishta Kya https://ncssm.myschoolapp.com/app/student#resourceboard Kehlata Hai frequently features multi-episode wedding celebrations, complete with traditional attire and age-old customs, creating an image of Indian life as perpetually steeped in ritual and festivity. While these elements reflect aspects of Indian culture, their dramatization risks presenting a narrow and outdated perspective. Likewise, Balika Vadhu addresses the grave issue of child marriage but often comes across to the Western viewer as representative of the prevalence of such traditions within contemporary India rather than an attempt on the part of the show to condemn the failings of



Figure 2. Jessie (2011-2015)

society.

Yet, at the same time, Indian identity is also heavily dictated by the Western media. In Disney's *Jessie* (figure 2), the character of Ravi has come across as a caricature of the "nerdy Indian boy" with a heavy accent and cultural eccentricities, humorous but feeding into an irritating stereotype of Indians as brainiacs who are socially backwards. On the other hand, *Never Have I Ever* offers a more nuanced perspective in the exploration of the identity struggles of Indian-American Devi Vishwakumar. Yet, even this series falls into the same patterns that have been there before, such as the strict, traditional parent stereotype, which can reinforce Western assumptions about Indian families.

Indian soap operas and Western media frequently portray "Indian-ness" as a caricature, perpetuating prejudices that affect how Western audiences see Indian culture. Popular Indian and Western performances often convey a restricted, monolithic vision of Indian identity, restricting the breadth of understanding. Media creators must look past these clichés and acknowledge that Indian culture is always changing. Rather than depending on a single, clichéd portrayal, producers should embrace a range of different representations that reflect the depth and diversity of Indian culture. By doing so, they may ensure that, even as society evolves, media portrays Indian culture in a more authentic, multifaceted manner, opposing reductive narratives and developing a better global understanding.

Indian Soap Operas: Reinforcing Traditional Stereotypes

Indian soap operas, while being a source of entertainment in many parts of the world, often present a skewed version of Indian society. These shows are frequently consumed by Western audiences, giving them a glimpse into what they perceive as "traditional" Indian life. However, the exaggerated portrayal of Indian values, customs, and family dynamics often oversimplifies the complexities of the culture. For instance, *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* depicts an ideal Indian family life based on multi-generational households, arranged marriages, and a never-ending preoccupation with family izzat or reputation. While these themes in the serial are based on very real practices in India, their portrayal in the show does not reflect the full range of family structures and dynamics that exist in modern Indian society.

The constant portrayal of family-centric life in *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* amplifies the idea that all Indian families are built upon rigid traditionalist norms. This portrayal isn't entirely incorrect, though incomplete. In reality, everything from nuclear to joint families can be found in India, and the practice of arranged marriages has considerably changed as well. Many young Indians today are seeking love marriages, with more autonomy in the selection of partners. However, shows like *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* continually reinforce the image of a homogenous, traditional India, where family is the central institution, and arranged marriages are the



Figure 3. Balika Vadhu (2008-2016)

default. This simplification of Indian family life leads the Western viewer to believe that all Indians live and die by these practices when, in fact, India is a country with a rapidly modernizing, diverse social landscape.

Another Indian soap, Balika Vadhu (figure 3), presents the critical social issue of child marriage. While the show aims to address this regressive practice, it often portrays it in such an emotionally charged and dramatic way that it risks creating a false impression of child marriage as an epidemic in India. The storyline of Anandi, the child bride, follows her suffering and resilience within an archaic social structure that forces young girls into marriage. Though the intent is to condemn this practice, the intense emotional scenes and dramatic family conflicts may lead Western audiences to believe that child marriage is still widespread in India. This is far from the truth, as India has made significant strides in the fight against child marriage, passing laws and raising awareness for its eradication. However, Indian soaps amplify this issue for the sake of dramatic storytelling, which may give the impression that child marriage is not only common but deeply embedded in Indian society. Yet, a key question arises: can a production company realistically be motivated to reduce the dramatic element of the storyline for a Western audience without diminishing the show's significance to an Indian audience? If the exaggerated emotional portrayal resonates with Indian viewers, who understand the show's role in challenging child marriage, would toning it down for the sake of Western perceptions undermine its cultural relevance? It's a balancing act between addressing real issues while maintaining the cultural and emotional impact of the story.

Balika Vadhu, like other soaps, uses the format to portray social issues as both entertaining and educational. But this can turn into a self-contradictory strategy, distorting reality. The Western audience viewing these shows will be very much exposed to the dramatic conflict of child marriage, making them think that India still practices and accepts such customs, despite its legal system and active civil



Figure 4. Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma (2008–present)

society working in the direction of eliminating it. While the portrayal of child marriage is undoubtedly critical, it is one that fails in nuance and cannot seem to show the complexities or progress of Indian society today.

Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma (figure 4), one of the most watched comedies from India, is taking an entirely different direction. While comedy, this series repeatedly creates humor based on misunderstandings between characters from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, characters hailing from different parts of the country often face a language problem, which leads to comical situations where misunderstandings over cultural and traditional practices, food habits, and everyday mannerisms are highlighted. Although the show presents these interactions in a light-hearted manner, it goes on to reinforce the stereotype of Indian culture as traditional, backwards, and unable to cope with modernity. These comedic misunderstandings often present Indian culture as intrinsically awkward, something that can only be misconstrued or poorly represented. It is such portrayals that help along the image of India as a country mired in its past, juxtaposed with the far more cosmopolitan and modernized view of Western societies.

While *Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma* is not meant to be serious, relying on those misunderstandings and cultural clashes reinforces this idea of India being so unsophisticated. This would be where humor often develops due to the "otherness" of Indian culture itself, as if customs, language, and traditions per se are humorous or far-reaching for any outsider. This portrayal reinforces the idea that Indian culture is, at its core, something foreign and incomprehensible to the West, rather than something to be understood in its complexity.

Western Media: Stereotyping Indian Identity

The depiction of Indian characters in Western media is similarly reductive, oversimplifying the complexity of the Indian diaspora into easily digestible tropes. In *Jessie*, the character of Ravi is depicted as a nerdy, socially awkward Indian-American teenager who struggles to fit in with his peers. His character is defined by his academic excellence and a heavy accent, reinforcing the stereotype of the "model minority"-the idea that all Indian people are academically inclined but socially inept. As much as this may mirror the experiences of some Indian-American youth, it is narrow and a limiting rendering that cannot hold under the diverse representations of Indian-American identities.

This portrayal reduces Ravi to a one-dimensional character with little room for depth or complexity. His "nerdy" traits and academic focus are played for laughs, but the character rarely deviates from this template. In emphasizing Ravi's awkwardness and academic success as defining features of his character, *Jessie* reinforces the stereotype that Indian-Americans are, by nature, socially challenged and obsessed with their studies. This representation does not account for the complete spectrum of experiences within the Indian-American community, where people might not fit into this mold at all, and cultural assimilation would look



Figure 5. Never Have I Ever (2020-present)

very different for different people. The portrayal of Ravi as the quintessential "Indian-American nerd" simplifies an entire cultural experience into a single narrative, making it harder for audiences to see the vast diversity within the Indian-American population

Devi Vishwakumar, on the other hand, is a more complex Indian-American character in *Never Have I Ever* who struggles with the conflict between her desire to blend in with American culture and her traditionally raised Indian side. Devi's portrayal of Ravi in *Jessie* is constrained by clichés, although Devi's issues with cultural identification, generational conflict, and the immigrant experience are more thoroughly explored. Nonetheless, *Never Have I Ever* continues to rely on some cliches, particularly when it comes to Devi's mother Nalini. Devi is shown as being under strict pressure from Nalini, a domineering, traditional person, to preserve Indian traditions and ideals. Despite the show's efforts to give Nalini more nuance by examining her

personal troubles and grief over her husband's passing, she mostly plays the part of.

It nevertheless falls into well-known patterns that run the risk of oversimplifying the complexities of Indian-American life, even though *Never Have I Ever* offers a more dynamic and relevant take on the Indian-American experience. A narrative of generational conflict and pressure to adhere to conventional norms is perpetuated by the portrayal of Nalini in particular, which feeds into the caricature of the rigid, conservative Indian parent who is unable to comprehend the aspirations and hardships of the younger generation. Devi's character strength, however, comes from the way the show captures the subtleties of her identity as someone torn between two cultures and her complex experience. This more nuanced representation offers a chance to transcend the simplistic idea that immigrant families are fundamentally conservative and instead highlights the variety of the Indian-American experience. Families' adherence to customs varies, and generational disputes over cultural identity are not always felt in the same manner. *Never Have I Ever* is successful in providing a more nuanced and realistic portrayal, but it needs to go farther to depict the entire range of Indian-American life without reinforcing restrictive stereotypes.

Simplification of Indian Identity through Indian and Western Media

The presentation of Indian culture in Indian soap operas and Western media often presents a unitary and oversimplified version of Indian identity. Indian soaps, through their exaggerated version of traditional family values, arranged marriages, and social ills, show less than a fully representative view of India. Western media, on its part, reduces the Indian-American experience to a stereotype: the "model minority" or the "overbearing Indian parent.". These portrayals reduce the richness of Indian culture and identity into a set of easily recognizable tropes that fail to capture the diversity of experiences within the Indian and Indian-American communities.

The reliance on stereotypes in these shows creates the belief that there is no change in Indian culture, it is rigid, and it can be comprehended with simple frameworks. Whether it is the emphasis on traditional family dynamics in *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* or the portrayal of the socially awkward Indian-American teenager in *Jessie*, these representations obscure the complexity of Indian identities, both in India and in the diaspora. Most such serials have thus failed to portray the real India due to their preoccupation with more readily identifiable characteristics or melodramatic genres. They fail to depict the depth of social, political, and cultural changes that are so fundamentally part of contemporary Indian society.

The portrayal of Indian culture through Indian and Western media serves to shape the view of India and its people in the Western mind. This limited portrayal of Indian culture leads to a "monolithic" view of India, as the U-High Midway article describes, where all Indian people are assumed to share the same values, customs, and experiences. This reductionist oversimplification results in biases and misunderstandings that lead to Western audiences' impression of Indian culture as very traditionalist, patriarchal, and even primitive. By reinforcing such stereotypes, both Indian soaps and Western media can have no better scope of understanding the nuances of the culture but leave the audience with a fixed, one-dimensional view of what it is to be Indian.

As India continues to modernize and its people find their place in increasingly complex global dynamics, it is time media representations began to reflect this diversity. Representations of Indian culture and identity must move beyond tired stereotypes to reflect the multifaceted, dynamic nature of Indian society. Only then can we hope to close the cultural divide between East and West through more accurate and nuanced portrayals.

In order to solve the stereotyping and oversimplification of Indian identity both within Indian soap operas and across the West, a number of solutions can be suggested that ensure more realistic, diverse, and multi-dimensional depictions of Indian culture. First, the storylines and character development of both Indian soap operas and Western media should be diversified. Indian soap operas usually include a lot of traditionally oriented family relationships, such as *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* and *Balika Vadhu.* While these are part and parcel of Indian culture, it is equally important that modern and progressive changes taking place within Indian society become visible. The inclusion of more characters who break traditional molds in terms of career choice, modern relationships, and engagement with social issues would represent contemporary India more accurately. Likewise, a series like *Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma* could expand beyond the comic misunderstandings into serious issues of urbanization, youth culture, or even the changing status of women. In Western media, *Jessie* and *Never Have I Ever* could continue to flesh out Indian characters as representative of the multi-faceted nature of the Indian-American experience. These shows could delve more into the different identities that exist within the Indian diaspora, showing people in different professions and facing different challenges other than those related to cultural expectations.

The second highly recommended solution is to improve collaboration between Indian and Western media makers. Such collaborations would enable the interchange of cultural ideas, resulting in more accurate and authentic representations of Indian culture. Collaborating allowed Indian media creators to learn from Western studios' worldwide storytelling systems, while Western creators gained vital, culturally sensitive insights from Indian filmmakers. These cross-cultural cooperation could help bridge the gap between how Indian culture is portrayed

in local and global contexts, ensuring that cultural representations are complex and avoid simplicity. Co-productions between Indian and Western studios would bring together a variety of viewpoints, particularly in depicting the rich experiences of immigrants and the Indian diaspora, which are sometimes disregarded by mainstream media. Furthermore, increasing diversity behind the camera, by including more authors, directors, and producers from the Indian diaspora, would contribute to a more authentic representation of Indian culture. This involvement will avoid the simplifying or stereotyping of Indian identities and ensure that media stories represent the genuine intricacies of Indian life, providing a more fair and inclusive picture that crosses cultural boundaries. Bridging the cultural divide through collaboration is critical for developing narratives that are not only internationally approachable but also highly respectful and truthful in their cultural depiction.

Promoting media literacy is an important solution, particularly in detecting stereotypes and critically engaging with the content that viewers receive. Schools can implement media literacy programs that teach students how to assess the portrayal of various cultures in films, television shows, and news channels. For example, the Media Education Foundation provides educators with resources for teaching critical thinking on media portrayals, assisting students in identifying biases in the portrayal of Indian culture in shows such as Balika Vadhu or *Never Have I Ever*. Community organizations could also hold seminars on media literacy, in which participants investigate how stereotypes influence perceptions of race, ethnicity, and nationality in popular media. Public awareness programs, such as The Media Literacy Project in New Mexico, can assist in raising awareness about the media's capacity to shape public opinion and encourage people to confront stereotypes. Increasing cultural exchange initiatives between India and the West can also help to dispel prejudices. For instance, student exchange programs like the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Program (YES) allow students to live in India and experience the culture firsthand, providing them with an authentic understanding of Indian life that goes beyond the dramatic portrayals seen on screen. Cultural festivals, such as India Day celebrations in places like New York and Chicago, can also assist Western viewers connect directly with Indian traditions, food, music, and customs, providing a more complete and diverse picture of Indian culture. These projects help to close the gap between media depictions and real-world experiences, promoting a more nuanced knowledge of Indian culture in the West.

The Indian soap operas and Western media are the two most leading arbitrators in shaping the perceptivity of Indian culture and identity in the West. But often, the representation goes hand in hand with oversimplification, exaggeration, and stereotyping. For example, *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* has a very strong plot on family hierarchies and strict gender roles, presenting this as some sort of ideal of family life, which might not necessarily be realistic regarding today's India. By propagating this concept, Balika Vadhu further supports this belief about Indian society as retrograde in the people's mindset and obscures progressive changes currently ongoing in India. In the case of *Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma*, despite serving comic relief to its audience, one would observe its support for excessive characterization, most of the time too sweeping in order to overstate the Indian lives' complications.

Media portrayals within the West, such as that found in *Jessie* and *Never Have I Ever*, also engage in the simplification of Indian-American identities through high borrowings of stereotypes. On *Jessie*, the character Ravi fulfills the stereotype of being that "Indian nerd" where all comedies are targeted at or happen with him, strengthening typical clichés about how intelligent and clumsy Indians usually are. On the other hand, *Never Have I Ever*, while trying to explore more nuanced Indian-American experiences, still relies on certain stereotypes-the overbearing immigrant parent and the academically successful child-to drive the plot forward. While both shows try to portray aspects of the Indian-American experience, they often reduce complex identities to cultural tropes, failing to represent the full range of experiences within the Indian diaspora.

Comedies and dramas frequently fail to convey the vast complexity of diversity within Indian cultures, presenting a monolithic image that ignores fundamental disparities in religion, language, class, and the rich regional variances not only inside India but also among expatriate populations around the world. This narrow portrayal risks giving Western consumers a skewed, too simplistic perspective of Indian culture, formed more by entertainment than real-life experiences. To overcome this issue, both Indian and Western media must portray more diverse and nuanced depictions of Indian culture. This can be accomplished by creating multidimensional characters, using nuanced plots, and moving beyond one-dimensional stereotypes. Indian soap operas, for example, might contain current subjects such as social reform, technology, and urban life while also honoring India's rich cultural heritage.

Western media, as seen in sitcoms like *Jessie* and *Never Have I Ever*, should also emphasize more facets of Indian-American culture, highlighting the diversity of individuals' personalities, objectives, and relationships. Collaboration between Indian and Western creators may also play an important role in providing more authentic interpretations. Such collaborations will allow creators from both regions to exchange ideas and create stories that reflect the complexities of Indian society. Equally crucial is expanding representation behind the camera by bringing in more Indian authors, directors, and producers to construct storylines around actual local experiences rather than outsider opinions.

Another critical resolve is to promote media literacy among audiences. Viewers must be encouraged to engage critically with the media they consume, acknowledging that on-screen portrayals may not always mirror reality. Education programs, media campaigns, and community activities can all contribute to raise critical awareness and prevent viewers from internalizing narrow, erroneous depictions of Indian culture. By encouraging people to seek out multidimensional, authentic portrayals, we can come closer to more accurate and inclusive media narratives.

Finally, increased cultural exchange between India and Western countries can help break down barriers of misunderstanding. Programs that allow individuals to experience Indian culture firsthand, such as student exchanges, internships, cultural festivals, and travel initiatives, provide a much more holistic and multidimensional understanding of Indian society. The above interactions provide a platform for one's meeting and interaction with Indian communities and experience of various regional practices in ways that transcend the constraints imposed by television and film. The cultural exchange programs can help bridge the gap between the stereotypes created by the media and the real life of Indian people living both in and out of India by building stronger connections between Indian and Western societies.

In the end, the portrayal of Indian culture in Indian soap operas and Western media continues to shape perceptions of Indian identity in the West, often reinforcing stereotypes and oversimplifications that fail to capture the diversity and complexity of Indian society. However, through increased collaboration, diverse storytelling, and promoting media literacy, we can encourage more accurate, nuanced, and multi-dimensional representations of Indian culture. In doing so, we will be able to cultivate a deeper understanding of Indian identities, break down stereotypes, and create a more inclusive and respectful global media landscape that reflects the rich diversity of human experiences. These efforts will not only benefit the portrayal of Indian culture but will also contribute to a more informed and open-minded global audience that values cultural diversity and complexity.

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The Therapeutic Power of Cinema: Harnessing Chromatic and Acoustic Cinematography for Emotional Healing

Suhas Nallam

Cinema is the language of us all, speaking in frames that capture the essence of universal human experience. It is a mirror reflecting our deepest fears and highest aspirations. In it, we find solace, connection, and the power to see the world anew.

For me and the people of Andhra Pradesh, cinema is the heartbeat of our culture. It unites our diverse lives in a shared world of stories and dreams. In our vibrant state, movie stars are revered as demigods, whose on-screen triumphs are celebrated as personal victories (see Appendix A, Figures 1-4). The release of their films is akin to a festival, where communities gather in joyous anticipation, united by not only the magic that unfolds on screen, but also the feeling that the movie star is one of our own. This communal experience breaks the unfamiliarity that we share as fans, bringing us together by our shared love for cinema and the stars on screen.

Watching films and experiencing the whistles and yells of excitement as our stars entered and proceeded through a myriad of action sequences and dance numbers, I grew a liking to the festive feel of Indian cinema.

My father, a fellow movie buff, was the one who introduced me to the wonders of Indian cinema, where every film industry—be it Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, etc—reflects the diverse cultural landscape of our nation. Because of him, I learned to appreciate the distinct narratives and storytelling styles of each region. Regardless of language, films from all regions captivated me, each offering a unique and enthralling experience.

While the communal and cultural significance of Indian cinema initially drew me in, the profound cinematic immersion of global cinema has kept me captivated. As I widened my base from Indian cinema to the likes of the Korean, American, and virtually every industry that was creating widely acclaimed forms of media, I developed a sense of appreciation towards some of the most skillful craftsmen in this field. Their ability to utilize the power of effective storytelling, meticulous world building, and emotional resonance created, for me, an escape from the confines of reality. For a few precious hours, my entire attention is devoted to this alternate universe that is presented before my eyes. As I let loose, the screen begins to transform into a sanctuary, where my mind can find solace and peace. Over time, this enjoyable hobby of watching movies slowly evolved into a more serious tradition. I began to see myself in that new world, becoming part of the characters' journeys and the narrative that unfolded. But I never understood why.

What exactly had made me lose track of time and all things around me? Why had I kept coming back to films as my escape? Why were they all of a sudden making me feel better? What empowers cinema with the ability to govern my conscience?

I realized that this power was attributable to the art of storytelling and the use of deliberate detailing that is found in the craft of filmmaking. Why use a oner for this scene, but fast cuts in another? Well, there is a science behind the creative process. Compelling narratives employ specific cinematographic techniques that can enhance the audience's view of what is being presented to them.

Storytellers make use of what is most evidently present before the audience—visuals and acoustics. This diluted method of representing films allows one to simplify the craft as a whole, but in this duality of film, there are much smaller subsections that one can delve into and calibrate to their liking. In regards to the visual spectacle that a film embodies, color, camera angle, shot duration, and a variety of other aspects culminate together to create effective storytelling. The most apparent would be color, as it is the epitome of the flashing lights we see on the screen. Sound, on the other hand, is another powerful tool that storytellers can utilize to their advantage. It can be bisected into non-diegetic (sounds that the characters cannot hear, but the audience can: background music, voice-overs, etc) and diegetic (sounds that the characters and the audience can hear: dialogue, sound effects, etc).

Cinema, like many other art forms, reflects the saying that "you get what you give." Filmmakers can only establish strong levels of emotional connectivity if they employ strong cinematic tools. Cinema and mass media hold a unique ability to influence society by bridging the gap between the known and the unknown. Filmmakers must recognize the power they wield, as their deliberate choices in storytelling and characterizations can shape how people think and act. Meaningful and impactful stories have the potential to leave a lasting imprint on society.

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Cinema, like many other art forms, reflects the saying that "you get what you give." Filmmakers can only establish strong levels of emotional connectivity if they employ strong cinematic tools. Cinema and mass media hold a unique ability to influence society by bridging the gap between the known and the unknown. Filmmakers must recognize the power they wield, as their deliberate choices in storytelling and characterizations can shape how people think and act. Meaningful and impactful stories have the potential to leave a lasting imprint on society.

On a psychological level, cinema offers a lot to society. For me personally, cinema has always been an escape from reality—a medium that has reduced my anxiety. However, I do not believe that it must always be an escape from reality. It can rather become a bridge to psychological barriers. The creative endlessness of cinema offers a strong avenue for therapeutic methods. Cinema can be used in a variety of ways to treat and combat a multitude of mental health conditions. Through the use of storytelling, characterizations, character arcs, and the other components of a narrative, films can easily become the missing link in mental health therapy. In fact, "cinema-therapy" has already become a part of a few mental health settings.

However, there remains a shortage of films tailored to these settings, with even fewer offering strong potential for therapeutic use. Filmmakers have been engrossed with the commercialization of cinema, and as a result, big-budget action films have dominated our cinematic landscape. With the potential for money-making bigger than ever, production houses and directors have strayed away from telling stories that are truly meaningful to them and society. Filmmakers must once again return to purposeful stories that can address the shortage of high-quality films. This, in

turn, can promote more organic and natural cinema, which can have a strong impact both personally and commercially.

For a film to be integrated into cinema-therapy it must display a high level of emotional connectivity. This can be achieved through the deliberate integration of chromatic and acoustic cinematography techniques. By harnessing the power of color and sound, filmmakers can create a compelling medium for storytelling that fosters emotional connectivity. This approach not only enhances the therapeutic efficacy of cinema-therapy but also provides patients with a means to articulate their feelings through narrative forms. In doing so, it aids in the suppression of harmful conditions and the improvement of mood regulation in mental health settings.

Cinematic Techniques in Emotional and Therapeutic Engagement

Emotional Connectivity Through Cinema

Cinema offers more than just visual entertainment; it serves as a powerful medium for emotional engagement and therapeutic intervention. Films allow viewers to project their own emotions onto the characters and narratives they see on screen, facilitating emotional release and introspection. This facilitation often relies upon emotional connectivity, or how easily the audience is able to relate with the film. Strong emotional connectivity enables individuals to empathize with characters and externalize their internal emotional struggles. Specifically, this empathetic interaction creates a safe and controlled environment in which individuals can process their feelings without the direct confrontation often required in traditional therapy (Marsick, 2009).

Catharsis, Empathy, and Identification

By fostering emotional engagement, films provide a unique platform for catharsis, empathy, and identification, all of which are critical components in therapy. Films reflect the internal battles viewers may face, offering a sense of validation and connection that can help relieve their stressors. This specific concept is known as "emotional contagion." Through emotional contagion, viewers internalize and experience the emotions portrayed on screen, helping them better understand their situations.

Evolution of Sound and Color in Cinema

Initial Rejection of Sound in Cinema

The transition from silent films to films that incorporated sound was not immediate nor universally embraced. The silent film era had established itself as an art form where actors' gestures and facial expressions were paramount, creating emotional depth through visual storytelling alone. Film critic Maurice Kann noted that industry leaders, including prominent producers and directors, feared that the introduction of sound would detract from this established artistry. In turn, many critics believed that sound would merely serve as a novelty—a passing gimmick incapable of conveying the subtle emotional nuances of silent films. Additionally, the technical limitations of early sound systems, such as the Kinetophone, combined with studios' reluctance to invest the funds needed for sound, hindered the transition to synchronized sound in cinema. (Kann, 1928; Hutchinson, n.d.).

The Jazz Singer as a Pivotal Marker of Change

This initial resistance, however, was shattered by the release of The Jazz Singer in 1927. Warner Brothers, then a relatively small and struggling studio, took the bold risk of incorporating synchronized sound into the film. As a result, The Jazz Singer demonstrated the profound emotional impact that synchronized sound could bring to cinema. The film's use of sound enhanced character development and created a new level of realism, offering audiences a more immersive experience. The success of The Jazz Singer forced major studios to reevaluate their stance on sound. Within a few short years, synchronized sound became the industry standard, marking the beginning of a new era in filmmaking (Hutchinson, n.d.; Kann, 1928).

Evolution of Color in Cinema

While sound reshaped the auditory experience of cinema, the development of color further transformed the medium by adding a new layer of emotional resonance. Early cinema, as we all know, relied on black and white visuals. Filmmakers had to use light and shadow to create any sort of mood and atmosphere. However, as color technology advanced, it opened up new possibilities for storytelling. The introduction of color in films allowed filmmakers to evoke a broader range of emotions. For example, red and orange hues are often used to evoke excitement, passion, or even anxiety, while blue and green tones can calm the viewer and create a sense of tranquility. This deliberate use of color helps guide the audience's emotional responses to the narrative (Berens, 2014).

Now, with further advances in technology, filmmakers can precisely control the color palette of a film through post-production processes, using Look-Up Tables (LUTs) to craft emotional harmony or discord within a scene. For example, the complementary pairing of teal and orange is frequently used to create a sense of warmth and familiarity, whereas, contrasting colors like red and green evoke tension and unease (Everett, 2018; see Appendix B). These techniques, when applied in cinema-therapy, can help viewers process emotions by engaging them visually and emotionally in the narrative. The therapeutic implications of these cinematic developments further validate the role of color and sound in enhancing emotional connectivity (Powell, 2008).

Theoretical Foundations

Dolf Zillman's Mood Management Theory

Dolf Zillmann's Mood Management Theory provides a psychological framework for understanding how individuals interact with media to regulate their emotions. The theory posits that individuals, often unconsciously, select media content based on their emotional states in an attempt to maintain or improve their mood (Reinecke, 2017). For example, someone experiencing negative emotions may choose to watch an uplifting film to enhance their mood, while someone feeling stressed may opt for a calming, visually soothing film. Films offer a strong medium for this because they engage both visual and auditory senses, creating an impactful emotional experience. Additionally, the theory's emphasis on operant learning mechanisms suggests that individuals learn to associate certain types of media with emotional outcomes, meaning that they will seek similar content in the future to replicate those emotional experiences.

In a therapeutic setting, Zillmann's theory helps explain why films are effective tools for emotional regulation. Cinema offers a controlled environment in which viewers can explore and process emotions in a safe and contained way. By selecting films that align with a patient's current emotional state or therapeutic needs, therapists can help patients achieve mood regulation more effectively (Reinecke, 2017). This underscores the importance of carefully curating media content to achieve specific emotional outcomes, a practice that is central to the concept of cinema-therapy.

The Role of Emotional Connectivity in Therapeutic Cinema

As stated before, emotional connectivity is a key element of therapeutic cinema, allowing individuals to project their emotions onto characters and narratives in a way that facilitates emotional release and processing. In a study on cinema-therapy with preadolescents experiencing parental divorce, the children were able to identify with characters and articulate previously unexpressed feelings by watching films that reflected their own emotional experiences (Marsick, 2009). This process, known as "interactive viewing," allowed the participants to engage emotionally with the film in real-time, discussing their thoughts and feelings with the therapist as they watched. This not only helped them process their emotions but also fostered a sense of catharsis.

Films serve as a mirror for patients, reflecting their emotional struggles in a way that feels less threatening than direct confrontation (Wedding & Niemiec, 2003). Films chosen for therapeutic purposes are not random; they are carefully selected based on the patient's personal experiences and emotional needs, ensuring that the emotional content of the film resonates with the viewer. This allows them to externalize their feelings and work through them in a supportive environment. This enables cinema to have the therapeutic potential to reduce emotional distress and foster a sense of emotional connectivity between the patient and the narrative (Sacilotto et al., 2022).

Chromatic & Acoustic Cinematography's Relevance in Cinema-Therapy

Color, specifically, holds power in cinema-therapy. A few decades ago, a color-mood analysis system was developed to use color composition in predicting the emotional tone of a film. By analyzing the dominant colors in a film and mapping them to specific emotional responses, the system could predict how viewers would emotionally engage with the film. This technology is particularly relevant in a therapeutic context, where certain colors can be used to evoke specific emotions that align with therapeutic goals (Wei et al., 2004).

But beyond automated systems, filmmakers have long used color intentionally to manipulate emotional responses. The work of cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, for instance, uses color to convey complex emotional states, such as anxiety or obsession. His use of yellow in Dick Tracy (1990) creates a sense of unease and psychological tension (Berens, 2014; see Appendix C). Similarly, we now see complementary color schemes like Teal & Orange employed to enhance emotional engagement (Everett, 2018). When these techniques are combined with sound design, they can create a powerful emotional experience that can be harnessed in therapeutic settings.

Empirical Foundations

Statistical Efficacy of Cinema-Therapy

The efficacy of cinema-therapy has been demonstrated in numerous empirical studies, providing strong support for its use in mental health treatment. A study conducted on young adults with anxiety showed a significant reduction in anxiety levels after participating in a structured cinema-therapy program. The study involved watching films that encouraged reflection and emotional identification with the characters, allowing participants to explore their own emotions through the lens of the narrative. Specifically, the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale, used to measure anxiety levels, showed a statistically significant decrease in anxiety among the experimental group, highlighting the therapeutic potential of cinema in reducing emotional distress (Dumitrache, 2014; see Appendix D).

Comprehensive Review of Cinema Therapy by Sacilotto et al.

A scoping review of 38 studies examined the use of cinema-therapy and video-based treatments in various psychological conditions (Sacilotto et al., 2022). The findings underscore the broad applicability of cinema-therapy, particularly in treating Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Schizophrenia. Of the 38 studies included, 36 reported positive psychological and emotional outcomes,

demonstrating a consistent pattern of improvement across diverse conditions. Several key factors contribute to the efficacy of cinema-therapy, such as emotional engagement with film narratives and the use of carefully selected films that resonate with the viewer's experiences.

Powell's Study on Cinema-Therapy and Mood Regulation

A more focused investigation examined the use of cinema-therapy specifically for mood regulation in adults diagnosed with Major Depression (Powell, 2008). Over the course of a five-week intervention, participants were exposed to films featuring themes of hope, resilience, and overcoming adversity, such as The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (2001). The selection of films was intentional, emphasizing the need to match the emotional tone of the films with the viewers' therapeutic needs.

The study utilized the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) to measure changes in participants' levels of hopelessness. Results showed a significant reduction in feelings of hopelessness, with a clinically meaningful decrease of 25% by the end of the program. Furthermore, participants reported a comparable improvement in overall optimism and mood, suggesting that cinema-therapy can be an effective adjunct to traditional depression treatments (Powell, 2008; see Appendix E).

The research highlighted the importance of not only selecting films with appropriate themes but also using them as tools for emotional engagement and reflection. By identifying with the characters' journeys and witnessing their successes, participants were able to project their own struggles and emotions onto the narrative, creating a sense of hope and resilience within themselves. It was concluded that cinema-therapy could be particularly valuable for patients with mood disorders, offering a non-invasive and emotionally immersive way to explore and regulate their mental state (Powell, 2008).

Chromatic Cinematography

Psychological Impact of Color in Cinema

Color, as discussed earlier, plays a crucial role in influencing audience emotions. Its psychological effects have been studied extensively, laying the basis for its deliberate incorporation into cinema-therapy. In one such study, a series of experiments examined how different color palettes affect arousal and cognitive function. The findings showed a direct correlation between color-induced arousal and emotional responses, with warmer colors, such as red and orange, evoking higher levels of arousal and excitement, while cooler colors, such as blue and green, promoted relaxation and calmness. These results suggest that filmmakers can use color strategically to guide the audience's emotional responses, making color a powerful tool for emotional manipulation in cinema (Küller, Mikellides, & Janssens, 2009).

Further studies have analyzed how certain films make the most effective use of color. For instance, Vittorio Storaro's use of yellow in Dick Tracy created psychological tension and anxiety (Berens, 2014). Similarly, modern filmmakers continue to use color grading to evoke emotional harmony or discord (Everett, 2018).

Case Studies of Color Use in Cinema

Several case studies illustrate how color enhances emotional engagement. One study examines the use of contrasting colors in Apocalypse Now (1979) and The Last Emperor (1987), where vivid reds and greens are employed to symbolize the inner psychological conflict and emotional instability of the characters, emphasizing their descent into turmoil (Berens, 2014). Color, in these films, becomes a visual representation of their mental state.

Similarly, the Teal & Orange color grading in films like Mad Max: Fury Road (2015) is used to create a striking contrast between the harsh desert environment and the characters' resilience. The warm, orange tones of the desert convey the oppressive heat and desperation of the world, while the cooler teal shades highlight moments of determination and survival, drawing viewers deeper into the emotional stakes of the characters' journey (Everett, 2018).

Acoustic Cinematography

Role of Sound in Enhancing Emotional Resonance

Sound is an equally powerful tool in shaping the emotional tone of a film. Crossmodal correspondences—the connections between different sensory modalities—enhance the emotional impact of sound in cinema. For example, low-frequency sounds are often associated with large, ominous objects, creating a sense of dread or awe, while high-pitched sounds signal danger or tension. By manipulating these auditory cues, filmmakers can heighten the emotional experience of the audience, making sound an essential element of emotional storytelling (Görne, 2019).

A study focused on the therapeutic potential of sound revealed that specific sound frequencies could alleviate psychological stress, making sound an effective tool in mental health treatment. The findings underscore the importance of sound design in therapeutic cinema, where sound can be used not only to enhance emotional resonance but also to promote psychological healing (Jain, Saxena, & Tripathi, 2023; see Appendix F, Figures 1 & 2).

Examples of Effective Sound Design in Film

Sound design plays a critical role in guiding the audience's emotional engagement with a film. In Come Up for Air, a short film about a young girl coping with her father's lung cancer, the score, composed using a combination of MIDI and traditional instrumentation, mirrors the emotional contour of the protagonist's journey. Light, playful timbres convey innocence, while low, sustained notes underscore the emotional weight of the story. This careful use of sound guides the audience through the emotional highs and lows of the narrative, making it a powerful tool for emotional storytelling (Schulte, 2019).

Similarly, the sound design in Inception (2010) amplifies the tension and complexity of the narrative. Hans Zimmer's deep, resonant tones evoke a sense of grandeur and intensity, drawing the audience into the psychological drama of the film. These examples highlight the importance of sound in shaping the emotional experience of the audience, making it a crucial element of therapeutic cinema (Görne, 2019).

Novel Therapeutic Applications of Chromatic and Acoustic Cinema-Therapy

Classical Conditioning

Classical conditioning is a powerful tool in cinema for influencing emotional behaviors. In this process, a neutral stimulus is repeatedly paired with an emotional response, conditioning the audience to associate that stimulus with a particular feeling. Filmmakers use this technique by linking specific colors, sounds, or visual cues with certain emotions. For example, red and yellow tones in a film can evoke anxiety or tension, while cooler tones like blue and green promote relaxation and calmness. Over time, viewers become conditioned to feel anxious when they see red or yellow, even before the action unfolds on screen (Berens, 2014).

Filmmakers can further use classical conditioning to reinforce key themes or emotional states. Repeatedly associating a particular color, sound, or visual motif with a certain character or idea can drill that association into the audience's mind, ensuring that even subtle appearances of the stimulus evoke the intended response. This technique can also introduce something entirely new—such as a novel symbol—by pairing it with universal emotional cues, like specific musical scores or familiar color schemes. In doing so, filmmakers can guide the audience's emotional understanding of something unfamiliar.

Operant Conditioning

Operant conditioning in cinema occurs when characters are rewarded or punished for specific behaviors, shaping how the audience perceives those actions. By watching the consequences unfold on screen, viewers are conditioned to associate certain behaviors with positive or negative outcomes. For example, a character who is rewarded for acts of kindness may reinforce empathy in the audience.

This approach allows filmmakers to subtly influence emotional responses, helping viewers internalize positive behaviors. Films that emphasize traits like resilience or compassion can encourage healthier emotional responses and coping mechanisms in real life, making operant conditioning a valuable tool in therapeutic interventions (Wedding & Niemiec, 2003).

Acoustic Cinematography

In a sector that is primarily monopolized by talk therapy, cinema-therapy offers a relatively new alternative that may be better suited for many mental health patients, especially those who find it difficult to engage emotionally through words alone.

Cinema offers what words often can't: actions—actions that evoke emotional release, help patients understand the moralities and consequences of certain decisions, and serve as a valuable guide to leading a healthy lifestyle. Thus, it is imperative that cinema-therapy be strengthened and reinforced as it appears more often in mental health settings. One way to do so is to have a deliberate integration of chromatic and acoustic cinematography techniques in cinema-therapy. This can significantly enhance emotional connectivity, thereby reinforcing cinema-therapy's therapeutic efficacy. This approach helps patients express their emotions in a way that eases their symptoms and improves mood regulation.

By incorporating cinema-therapy, clinicians can offer a more holistic and multimodal approach to therapy, allowing for greater yields of therapeutic efficacy. The visual and auditory elements of film can trigger memories, emotions, and reflections that might be difficult to access through words alone.

Moreover, the structured use of color and sound in films can serve as therapeutic tools that evoke specific emotional responses, making therapy sessions more impactful. For instance, certain colors can be used to calm anxiety or evoke a sense of safety, while specific sounds can help patients relax or become more introspective.

Although this may seem like a rather straightforward and seamless integration, mental health professionals may need to receive training for cinema-therapy. This may involve understanding the psychological impact of various cinematic elements and how to effectively integrate them into therapy sessions. Additional research into the efficacy of cinema-therapy could lead to the development of standardized protocols and best practices, ensuring that this innovative approach can be widely and effectively implemented.

Additionally, the potential for cinema to serve as a therapeutic tool may lead a shift in how films are created and perceived. Currently, the film industry prioritizes financial success over artistic expression. The therapeutic potential of films, however, highlights the need for more projects that focus on emotional depth, narrative complexity, and psychological insight. While it is unlikely that commercial cinema will diminish given its immense financial success, there must be a growing recognition of the value of art cinema. Filmmakers and production houses must strike a balance by investing in projects that

Figure 1

Fan Celebrations of the Gabbar Singh Re-release



Note. This image captures fans gathered at a theater during the re-release of Gabbar Singh (2012). The screen showcases fans' "devotion" to the lead actor Pawan Kalyan as they celebrate his comeback hit, throwing confetti and raising their phones to capture the spectacle. Image from Digitals Telugu, 2024, Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmoEZVquS7k). In the Public Domains.

Figure 2

Fan-made 50-ft Cutouts for the RRR Release



Note. Fan-made cutouts of actors Ram Charan and NTR Jr. outside Sudarshan 35mm Theatre in Hyderabad for the release of RRR (2022) illustrate the deep connection between cinema and its audience, showcasing the immense cultural significance movie stars hold for their fans. Image from Telengana Today, 2022, Telengana Today (https://telanganatoday.com/fans-celebrate-rrr-day-in-theatres-calling-it-pride-of-indian-cinema)

Figure 3

Pal Abhishekam for Superstar Rajinikanth



Note. Fans perform a traditional "Pal (milk) abhishekam" by pouring milk over a giant cutout of Superstar Rajinikanth. This ritual, typically reserved for deities, reflects the profound devotion fans have for the actor, treating his film release as sacred events. Image from A. Kohli, 2016, NDTV (https://www.ndtv.com/offbeat/on-kabali-friday-5-pictures-that-sum-up-rajinikanth-fever-neruppu-da-1434742)

Figure 4

Fan Celebrations of the Gabbar Singh Re-release



Note. This image shows actor Prabhas surrounded by an enormous crowd of fans during a public appearance midway through a film shoot, showcasing his immense popularity and the deep connection fans feel toward him. Image from D. Goyal, 2020, NDTV (https://www.ndtv.com/entertainment/pic-when-baahubali-sized-crowd-welcomed-prabhas-on-the-first-day-of-filming-2257905)

Appendix B

Emotional and Psychological Associations with Color

Color	Positive Trait	Negative Trait	Emotion
Red	Active, Emotional	Offensive, Embarrassed	Anger, Love
Orange	Ambition	Tiring	Joy, Determination
Yellow	Lively, Energetic	Cautious	Fear, Joy, Happiness
Green	Calm, Neutral	Greedy, Sick	Faith, Greed
Blue	Faithful, Traditional	Depressed	Confident, Sadness
Purple	Leadership, Passive	Arrogant, Sorrow	Introspective, Melancholic

Note. This Look-Up Table (LUT) from Everett (2018) is essential for understanding the psychological impact of color in visual media. Each color in the LUT is paired with its corresponding positive and negative traits, as well as the emotions it is likely to evoke. For example, red may trigger intense feelings like love or anger, while blue can convey calmness or sadness depending on its application. This table serves as critical information for filmmakers, who utilize these color associations to shape viewers' emotional responses and enhance engagement with the cinematic narrative. The LUT provides insight into how color plays a pivotal role in manipulating mood and enhancing the storytelling process in films.

Source: Everett, 2018

Appendix C

Dick Tracy (1990)



Note. Yellow is a complex color often associated with both positive and negative emotions. While linked to happiness, wealth, and wisdom, it can also provoke feelings of anxiety and irritation (Storaro, 2004; Bellantoni, 2005). Bellantoni (2005) explains that although people typically view yellow as a cheerful color, its presence can lead to heightened stress and impatience, even making individuals more prone to anger. Additionally, yellow is frequently used in films to symbolize obsession, as it is a color that lingers in the viewer's mind. In the movie Dick Tracy, the character's yellow attire—comprising a jacket and hat—represents his obsessive focus on duty, which ultimately causes friction in his personal life.

Source: Berens, 2014

Appendix D

Results from the Study on Cinema-Therapy's Effect on Anxiety Reduction

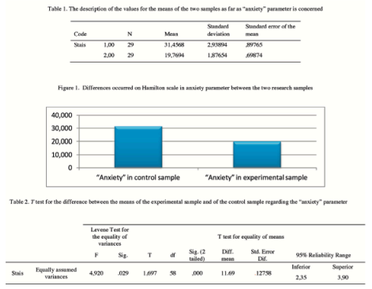


Table 1. The description of the values for the means of the two samples as far as "anxiety" parameter is concerned

Code		N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of the mean
Stais	1,00	29	31,4368	2,93894	,89765
	2,00	29	19,7894	1,87654	,69874

Figure 1. Differences occurred on Hamilton scale in anxiety parameter between the two research samples

Table 2. T test for the difference between the means of the experimental sample and of the control sample regarding the "anxiety" parameter

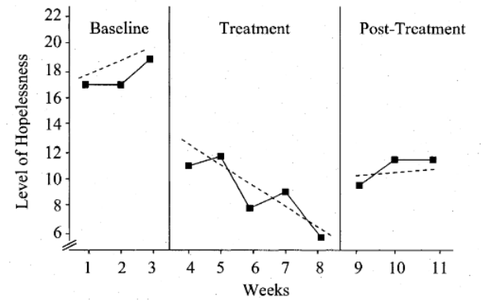
		Levene Test for the equality of variances		T test for equality of means					
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Diff. mean	Std. Error Dif.	95% Reliability Range
									Inferior / Superior
Stais	Equally assumed variances	4,920	,029	1,697	58	,000	11,69	,12738	2,35 / 3,90

Note. This appendix presents the results from Dumitrache's (2014) study, highlighting the differences in anxiety levels between the control and experimental groups after participating in a cinema-therapy program. Table 1 and Table 2 show the statistical details of the study, including means, standard deviations, and the T-test results. The bar graph (Figure 1) illustrates the significant reduction in anxiety in the experimental sample compared to the control group, as measured by the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale.

Source: Dumitrache, 2014

Appendix E

Levels of Hopelessness During Cinema-Therapy Treatment (1990)



Note. This graph illustrates the changes in participants' levels of hopelessness throughout a cinema-therapy treatment program, measured using the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS). The chart shows baseline measurements before treatment, a significant decrease in hopelessness during the treatment phase, and a stabilized post-treatment phase. The data underscores the efficacy of cinema-therapy in reducing hopelessness among participants over an 11-week period.

Source: Powell, 2008

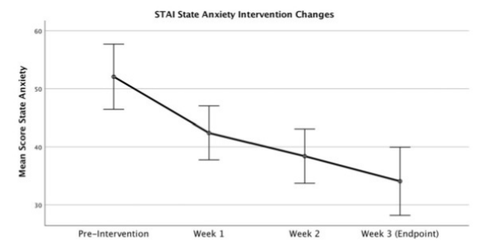
Appendix F

STAI State and Trait Anxiety Intervention Changes

This appendix displays two figures representing the changes in state and trait anxiety levels during a three-week intervention of sound-therapy, as measured by the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). Both figures highlight the effectiveness of the intervention in reducing anxiety over time.

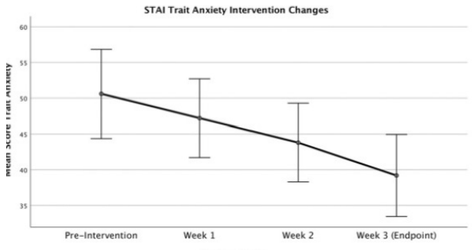
Figure 1

STAI State Anxiety Intervention Changes



Note. The graph illustrates changes in state anxiety, which refers to temporary and situational anxiety experienced by participants. The data shows a clear reduction in mean state anxiety scores from the pre-intervention phase through to Week 3 (the endpoint of the intervention). This indicates that the intervention had a strong impact on reducing participants' immediate feelings of anxiety in response to specific circumstances. Error bars represent the 95% confidence interval, underscoring the statistical significance of the results.

Figure 2
STAI Trait Anxiety Intervention Changes



Note. The graph depicts the decline in trait anxiety, which is a more consistent and long-term characteristic of anxiety. The figure reveals a steady decrease in mean trait anxiety levels over the course of the three-week intervention, suggesting that the intervention was also effective in reducing the participants' overall predisposition to anxiety. The error bars, indicating a 95% confidence interval, reflect the reliability of these findings.

Source: Jain et al., 2023

The Rise of the Franken-Milks: Exploring Alternative Milk's Surge in Popularity

Valentina A. Kimes

Looking at the dairy aisle is disorienting. Cartons line the glass doors, all claiming to be milk. Yet, traditional dairy milk only takes up a small portion of these shelves. This research explores the rise of alternative milk's popularity and the challenges that come with both. My findings have led me to discover how both companies and social movements have taken advantage of these challenges by persuading consumers with marketing strategies.

Ever since the Neolithic revolution, humans have been drinking milk. Plaque from cavemen has revealed that humans have been drinking the milk of sheep, cows, and goats (Smithsonian Magazine). This creamy and vitamin-rich drink has offered a vast array of nutrients and protein for centuries. This was especially helpful when considering that before the superstorification of the world, there was not easy access to the critical nutrients that are found in milk (Nutrition and Metabolism). In places that utilized cattle, people evolved to keep the enzyme lactase. This enzyme is typically lost after breastfeeding. The lactase enzyme converts lactose into glucose and galactose, which can be absorbed into the body with no adverse effects.

Places that have evolved to favor this gene include Northern Europe, with more than ninety percent lactase persistence in the population. Sixty-five percent of the global population is lactose intolerant, the majority of this lactase non-persistence is present in people of East Asian descent, where seventy to one-hundred percent of people in these communities are lactose intolerant (Smithsonian Magazine).

Yet, milk is falling out of favor. In 2021, milk consumption per person per year was 16 gallons. When compared to the first year of recorded consumption, 1975 bringing in 29 gallons, this is staggering. Many people are drinking milk substitutes rather than dairy milk. Plant-based milk grossed $2.5 billion, expanding by a 10% growth rate and making up 15% of total milk sales (Statista).

Many people perceive milk alternatives as healthier for both the consumer and the planet, which has some truth to it. Each liter of dairy milk emits almost three times the carbon footprint when compared to the next highest emitter, which is rice milk. The major factors that contribute to this are methane and land usage. Cows require large expanses of land and also produce vast amounts of methane. The carbon from cow manure is traditionally decomposed and stored in the soil, where it can be later used by other organisms for nutrients (Ethical Consumer). This isn't possible for the nine million cows forced into factory farms (National Humane Education Society).

Factory farms use feed–essentially kibble for livestock– to feed their cattle rather than grazing their cattle. In addition to having poorer nutrition, feed is the largest source of greenhouse gases in agriculture. The crops used for feed are responsible for about 6% of food-production-related greenhouse gas emissions (Our World in Data).

The number of cows in America has remained largely the same since the 90s; however, the methane emissions from dairies have doubled because of the way that cow pies are poorly managed–stored in a liquid form that harbors bacteria that produce methane ("Food and Water Watch"). This is a leading reason why the dairy industry is responsible for 2% of US greenhouse gas emissions (World Wildlife Fund). Factory farms have made a false effort to reduce emissions, such as changing feed to slightly lower methane output from cow burps rather than addressing the real issue. That is, factory farming is in itself always unethical (National Humane Education Society).

Small dairies continue to get flushed out of business, struggling to stay profitable and unable to compete with factory farms' low prices. This is a crying shame when considering that these are the few people who are committed to ethical practices within the dairy industry. The main reason for the climate concerns and mistreatment of cattle is big dairy conglomerates (The Guardian). On average, the small American dairy farm has turned a profit only twice in the past twenty years. Despite a large amount of physical milk, the high costs of production and the customers' expectations for low costs have forced small-scale dairies into unprofitable positions.

In addition to the monopoly issues, climate change also poses a threat to small-time farmers as it has driven up temperatures and has been a cause of water shortages in places all over the world (USDA). Farms in hotter states such as Florida and California are losing 25% of their annual milk production, and 1.9% of countrywide production is lost annually due to these high temperatures (CIG). This causes a loss of $670 million per year and an estimated $2.2 billion by the end of the century. To combat this, farmers are forced to install expensive cooling systems. The corner-cutting

practices employed by factory farms later come to bite them as they end up paying for their mistakes. However, nobody is hit harder than small farmers. The installation of cooling systems isn't possible for many farmers who practice ethically because of the high price tag.

When looking at this, it may seem obvious to throw out all the milk in your fridge. However, many companies are stepping up to the sustainability challenge. The U.S. dairy industry aims to achieve greenhouse gas neutrality by 2050, which looks feasible. The carbon footprint of a gallon of milk decreased by 19% between 2007 and 2017 (Nature Conservancy). Over the past 70 years, the dairy industry has been able to reduce land use by 90%, reduce water use by 65%, and reduce feed used by 77% per glass of milk produced (Clear Center UC Davis). This has been achieved by breeding cows that require low maintenance and can produce large quantities. This way, farmers can expend the least amount of resources and walk away with the most amount of product.

Animal welfare concerns about factory farming are very real, not just a bunch of PETA hoaxes. Life for a cow in a factory farm is scary and sunless. The cows aren't able to go outside, ever. They are kept inside, fed hormones in the form of cheap kibble, and have their tails docked to make udders easier to access. Their urine, feces, and milk are removed by machines hooked to them (Piedmont Refuge). Cows are social animals, typically forming close bonds with those in their herd. They are unable to do this in a factory farm setting, where calves are stripped from their mothers and sent to the slaughterhouse (PMC). Factory farms aim to get the most profit with as little work as possible. This mindset allows animals to be caught in the crossfire of corporations' greed.

These ethical concerns surrounding dairy milk have led many to turn to milk alternatives. These alternatives include a vast range of choices, such as nut-based, seed-based, legume-based, and grain-based options (FDA). Plant-based milks have been around since 14th century China, but in the 90s, they hadn't caught on with American consumers. You could find rice milk in obscure health food stores nestled in the back beside the gluten-free pasta. It wasn't until 1996 that Silk, a soy milk company, became a pioneer in the alternative milk category. Silk began putting its product in the dairy aisle and packaging it in cartons that looked similar to dairy milk. They boasted about their "dairy-free," "GMO-free," nectar-of-the-gods, perfect product, and customers loved it—for some time.

After the initial craze, customers soon found that the lack of the things that made milk "milk" made for gross, grainy white water. To combat this, Silk and other companies that followed Silk's lead on plant-based milk began putting sugar and additives into their plant-based milks to mimic the natural lactase sugar and the creamy consistency found in dairy milk. After all the time in the lab, a Franken-milk was born.

Even though it may seem like an innocent, healthy product, milk alternatives have never been without controversy. As a matter of fact, all milk has always held social significance, especially in America (JSTOR). Milk symbolizes many things: innocence, life, and abundance (University of Michigan). But it also symbolizes ideals that the far right has taken advantage of. In the past, milk symbolized the perfect nuclear family—a healthy, white, and heteronormative family. A drink that can only be drunk by those possessing a gene mutation most commonly found in Europe.

Milk alternatives, specifically soy milk, seem to be the opposite of this ideal. Soybeans contain a small amount of phytoestrogen isoflavone. This is a type of estrogen produced by nonhuman organisms. Phytoestrogen can help humans by benefiting the cardiovascular system and regulating metabolism. There is no evidence that soy or isoflavones can affect testosterone in humans (Medical News Today, 2024). However, upon the discovery of an "estrogen" in a food, people were terrified.

There is a Foucaultian fear that milk alternatives—or largely all vegan food options—will emasculate men. Historically, milk was almost exclusively consumed by Europeans because of their genetic mutation. This has trickled down to today where the majority of people who are lactose tolerant are white. This is used as evidence of white superiority. In a 1933 agricultural history book there is a passage that states,

> A casual look at the races of people seems to show that those using much milk are the strongest physically and mentally, and the most enduring of the people of the world. Of all races, the Aryans seem to have been the heaviest drinkers of milk and the greatest users of butter and cheese, a fact that may in part account for the quick and high development of this division of human beings. (Hedrick, p. 231)

Because masculinity is a critical part of American culture, others can capitalize on the fears of emasculation. The far-right has painted a picture of a "liberal food industry" trying to emasculate men with their hidden estrogen. This has led to many far-right activists using milk in their protests, sometimes pouring it over themselves to express their manhood (The Conversation, 2024).

Another social issue faced recently has been raw milk. Raw milk was largely consumed by all until the 20th century. The milk from cows that lived in the country wasn't desired because transportation and cool temperatures for far distances weren't possible in horse-and-buggy times. So, many cows lived in the cities, close to breweries where they ate the leftover alcohol. As you can imagine, this was straight nast. This practice was dubbed "swill milk" and was responsible for killing 8,000 New York City babes in just one year (The New York Times, 1858). So, when pasteurization technology came out, city officials jumped on it.

Many states made pasteurization mandatory, which allowed larger dairies to gain an edge over the small-timers that couldn't afford this technology (The New York Times, 1987). Many opposed this state standard as it was deemed unconstitutional and unwarranted government policing (Marler Blog, 2024). However, these complaints were discarded because the health of the public spoke for itself. In 1938, a quarter of all food-borne illnesses were due to unpasteurized milk. This was reduced to 1% by 2005 (Marler Blog, 2024).

Despite the regulations on milk, the thirst for the raw never ceased. After a generation of obesity and processed foods, a desire for the natural was sparked. Organic foods were on the rise, and raw milk was able to hop on the train and ride it to whole food freedom. With claims of vitamins and probiotics that are lost in the pasteurization process (Raw Milk Institute, 2024), raw milk gained a following that no longer needed to hide in farmers' basements. This demographic was led largely by left-leaning people wanting to opt out of the ultra-consumerist and processed lifestyle.

Raw milk was largely supported by the blue until COVID. This is when the Left prided itself on believing in science. Raw milk no longer fit into this Liberal ideal, so they passed it to the Right. Being a rebellious "fuck you" to the experts (scientists and the government), raw milk aligns with many Right ideologies. Raw milk isn't the only case like this. Anti-vaxxers (people who are against vaccinations) were once half Red and half Blue, but because of recent education and trust polarization (Pew Research Center, 2021), anti-vaxxers are primarily right-leaning.

Throughout history, milk has consistently stood at the center of a wide array of political issues. The plant-based debate is just one of them. Although the health concerns surrounding plant-based milk aren't as dangerous as those surrounding raw milk, they still should be considered.

Many plant-based milks have health claims, but are they true? When considering fat and calorie content, yes. When compared to one cup of whole-fat cow's milk, plant-based milk has between 35-75% less fat. Additionally, when comparing calories, milk alternatives have fewer calories. Though aside from soy milk, no milk alternatives hold a candle to cow's milk when looking at protein content. Additionally, milk contains many critical minerals such as calcium, potassium, B12, and vitamin D (Nutrition.org). Even though soy is one of the most common allergies, its milk is most similar to cow's. It contains all the essential amino acids and is the most nutritionally balanced plant-based milk.

Hemp milk is another good option, as it is a complete protein and is rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Don't let the awesome name fool you; it only contains trace amounts of THC and does not induce any of the typical "high" effects that marijuana and CBD do.

Milk alternatives aren't always milk replacements. Because of the way that the proteins in milk alternatives react to heat, they might require extra care. Also, the taste of the milk is to be considered when making coffee or a recipe. This is a major reason that milk alternatives hadn't quite taken off in the '90s. That was until big brands like Oat-Ly! Began to cater to baristas specifically. The milk didn't split when put in coffee and had the same foaming properties as milk. This made oat milk an easy staple in every coffee shop. Soon, other milk alternatives were welcomed into coffee shops. This was great for plant-based milk because it allowed new customers to try the product in a safe, familiar environment before purchasing a whole carton.

Aside from the signifiers of the alt-right, milk can signify more. Specifically within the alternative milk sphere. Almond milk holds a health-conscious connotation, and oats hold a "granola" one. Because of all the coverage and debate on milk, one can assimilate the spirit of social waves and align oneself with their ideal perception.

This works particularly well when milk choice's meaning is amplified in a coffee shop. The place where milk choice determines more than just what white liquid will be mixed with espresso. The place where your decision to skip out on the additional $0.40 splurge for oat milk will determine whether you can hold your head high while claiming the drink with your name poorly spelled, or if you have to wonder if there will be any spit in your overpriced latte. How could you have no reverence for the pain inflicted on helpless animals? At the coffee shop, you will never possibly be cool enough. Even if you get the same haircut as the barista and an edgy tattoo, you will be judged swiftly and scornfully. Milk is a medium for morality–a way to broadcast to the world where you stand.

Alternative milk companies strategically fed into these stereotypes by shunning dairy milk for its unnaturalness, with slogans such as Oatly's "It's like milk but for humans" (Marketing Magazine). This has proven largely successful; dairy milk's popularity has been on the decline, and plant-based milk is only becoming more popular by the day; for example, oat milk sales have increased a whopping 182% from 2020 to 2021. While expressing one's opinion is typically free, this form of expression can be costly.

The social culture around milk is problematic, especially with the narratives created by plant-based milk companies because milk alternatives are not economically accessible. A gallon of the most popular plant-based milk, almond and oat, costs around $6.56 and $6.97 (Toasttab.com). The average gallon of dairy milk costs $4.08 (USDA). The high price point of alternative milk excludes the poor, so the product that gives social acclaim is only accessible to the wealthy. By leaving out the poor from this social experience or, rather, making this social experience difficult to attain fiscally, it sets up a system where the people receiving moral clout are exclusively, or mostly, wealthy.

Morality is a luxury. It is far less expensive to choose products that are made cheaply and exploitatively. To pay the small-time farmer for the milk that was sourced ethically, from a cow with a name rather than a number, is

something that is most accessible to the rich who have the disposable income to carve out the few extra bucks rather than, say, a mother of many children living paycheck to paycheck. This only continues to be a problem as marketing strategies continue to get more fierce and milk continues to be caught in the line of fire for many social issues.

Another example of the dairy industry's strategic marketing was skim milk. In the 20s, the streams in dairy towns were flooded with rotting dairy products. The excess buttermilk flowed into fields and waterways. Ditches became cups holding the fly-filled rotting white mess. In 1930, a mere 17% of waste from Wisconsin milk plants was treated because of a lack of access to city sewers. This left 42,513 pounds of yuck overflowing into adjacent fields and waterways. In the early twentieth century, many people sprawled out across America. The dairy plants needed to get it together, for their image was starting to spoil (Slate). Skim milk had to step up to the plate when the federal government requested 200 million pounds of dried milk. Coveted for its long shelf life, dried milk held a crucial role in the war, being a cornerstone of nutrition in war relief programs. Companies used skim milk for this project, and it was a huge success. When the war was approaching its end, milk companies needed to find a way to keep the demand for skim milk up.

As whole milk prices increased in the 40s, companies put skim milk on a pedestal. Promising weight loss, a growing concern in the post-war abundance era, the dairy industry gained the support of doctors. With this strategic ethos-logos marketing, consumers came flooding in. Thus, the transformation of skim milk's perception began. From a cheap relief food to a dietary alternative. Skim milk also changed the way that the dairy industry approached marketing. They once marketed to women as the customer, but not the consumer, boasting of milk's imperative role in children's development. Now, women were addressed as both the buyer and the drinker. Skim milk advertisements were littered in women's magazines with promises of a desired, slender figure (Slate, 2014).

Today, milk alternatives are using similar strategies to the ones employed to promote skim milk. Plant-based milk is capitalizing on the ethics of health with deceptive marketing that encourages consumers to believe that it is healthier for humans to drink plant-based milk rather than cow's milk. This is similar to the way companies convinced mothers their children need powdered formula and whole milk in order for their children to be healthy.

Similarly to the way physicians helped advertise skim milk in the fifties, companies now have taken advantage of customers with their health claims. While the health claims may be true when looking at specific kinds of unsweetened plant milk, for the most part, this isn't true. There are many milk alternatives with more calories and added sugars than a typical glass of whole milk. Even when looking at the unsweetened counterparts, it is important to consider that all of the sugar in cow's milk is naturally occurring because of lactose. Additionally, cow's milk is full of critical nutrients that aren't present or aren't bioavailable in alternative milks.

Many milk alternatives are full of seed oils and additives that extend the shelf life and also make the drink taste good. Some experts even state that a glass of oat milk should be considered a dessert (Crowell, 2020). While it is fine in moderation, a consumer shouldn't think that milk alternatives are inherently healthier than traditional cow's milk (Eating Well, 2023).

Additionally, alternative milk companies capitalize on consumers' guilt about buying milk because of its environmental impact while having a plethora of ethical dilemmas themselves. Almond orchards use over 1.5 million acres of land in just California. This number grows by 5% every year. In addition to the land used, almond milk needs 1,612 gallons of water for one cup. Furthermore, the bees are dying! It was discovered that in 2018, the Californian bees worked so hard pollinating almond orchards that over 50 billion bees died in less than a year (Bee Informed, 2019). The one thing almond milk has going for it is that because they are trees, they are a carbon sink.

But wait, there's more! Rice milk is responsible for the most greenhouse gas emissions out of all plant-based milk. This is due to the methane that's created from bacteria in rice paddy fields. Coconut milk is responsible for much of the deforestation in Indonesia and the Philippines. Laborers on these coconut plantations are routinely exploited for poor pay. When shipping a liquid from these countries to all around the world, the carbon footprint can add up quickly. Even though plant-based milk might appear to be innocent with its cartoon-looking packaging, it is far from it.

While it may look like dairy milk is on its way out the door, this isn't the first time it has been challenged. In the 80s, a new beverage swept the market: soda. Once, you had to go to your local pharmacy to procure this bubbly beverage, but because of big companies such as Coca-Cola, every American could buy a six-pack at their local grocery store. Against soda, in its fizzy, colorful, and sweet glory, milk never stood a chance. To combat this, the milk industry launched a fierce advertising campaign, "Got Milk?". This campaign highlighted milk's nutritional value and perpetuated the idea that for children to grow tall and strong, they need milk. More than that, though, this campaign was cool. With many celebrity endorsements and creative videos, the campaign was an instant success, increasing milk purchases by 15 million gallons in the first year.

The dairy industry is trying to face its next opponent with another campaign. Big Dairy funded an advertisement called Wood Milk, which displayed a satirical ad for "wood milk," showing a ground-up tree mixed with water to make a gross concoction. At the end of the advertisement, Aubrey Plaza says, "Is Wood Milk real? No, only real milk is real" (YouTube, 2020). This sets the stage for Big Dairy's next initiative: to limit the use of "milk" in marketing to only products derived from lactating mammals (Business Insider, 2023).

Milk has a long and complicated history. More recently, plant-based milk has been on the rise due to the taboo that dairy milk has become between health, animal welfare, and political concerns. This being said, plant-based milk harbors a plethora of issues, including humanitarian and environmental dilemmas. To ward off these concerns, large companies have used strategic marketing to offer peace of mind to the customer. Largely milk will be fine. Big dairy will persist, overcoming another competitor with campaigns and corrosion. In some years–if not already–plant-based milk will become as corporate and unethical as its cousin.

So, milk is horrible! Well, it may not be that milk itself is awful; humans have been drinking it since 8000 BCE (Prolactal, 2024). Maybe it's more that capitalism is to blame. To receive the most profit for the least amount of work, exploitation will occur. Whether that is placing animals or people in the line of fire. The only way to change the system is to change one's habits. Perhaps that can look like purchasing ethically sourced milk or maybe abstaining from milk as a whole. It isn't about which is better: dairy or plant-based; it is more an exploration of how every industry finds itself corrupt in its journey for profit.

Both dairy milk and plant-based milk alternatives have complicated ethical dilemmas such as animal cruelty, health factors, and carbon footprints. Customers try to navigate these issues with their dollar. Companies and social movements have taken advantage of these challenges by persuading consumers with marketing strategies. None of this is new, though; the dairy industry has faced similar challenges throughout history.

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From Ragtime to Rap: The Cultural Significance of Black Music in Contemporary America

Zora Hill

Hello, my name is Zora Hill and I am a senior at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in Durham. Today, I will be presenting my research following the knowledge I have acquired on the historical significance of Black music in America. I hope you enjoy it.

The experiences of the Black community have been expressed through music, with Black artists reaching audiences during distinct social movements in history. I will explore the intricacy of the music industry and the fallacious narrative of the interchangeability of Black music and trending music through social movements. Through the dissection of songs composed under genres such as hip-hop, rap, and blues, I will uncover the foundation, fruition, and public acclamation of music within the Black community. The unearthing of this history will allow for the valuation of Black artists and their impact to come to light. It will assist me in illustrating the significance of Black instruments, rhythms, literature, and experiences in creating music for the world to hear. I review the role of music in empowering the Black community by examining the works of many Black singers, writers, and musicians. I will emphasize the efforts made by Black artists during the Civil Rights Movement, Harlem Renaissance, and Black Panther Movement to influence contemporary artists and pull from oral traditions in order to combat the emulation of historically Black musicality through reappropriation. I argue that music has been a platform for talented Black artists to speak their minds somewhat freely, uplifting aspects of Black culture, such as certain rhythms, samples, and instruments. The role of Black music in documenting Black experiences and impelling social movements is extensive in American history. In particular, the compositions of artists during the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Panther Party Movement have greatly contributed to the unification and progression of the Black community. In this podcast, I analyze "Self-Destruction" by The Stop the Violence Movement, "Panther Power" by Tupac Shakur, "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday, and "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Weldon Johnson, which offer examples of the significance of Black music. The observations regarding the popularization of Black music will reveal the double-edged sword constituted by the generalizations and appropriations of Black music founded in white supremacy, which contributed to the destruction of Black culture and its place within the music industry. This research will further the analysis of Black history and explore the role of music as an expression of Blackness.

The integration of Black music into my life occurred throughout my childhood, often taking place on the road. Even at the age of eight, as I sat in the booster seat in the back of my father's car, I joined him in listening to tracks from the "golden age" of hip-hop, such as "The Low-End Theory" from A Tribe Called Quest and "Three Feet High and Rising" produced by De La Soul, regardless of my consciousness of the latency of each lyric. My father and I would make a game out of counting the number of allusions referenced throughout the '90s albums, and the number of layered beats we could distinguish. When I rode in my mother's car, we hung on to the passionate rhythms composed by Lauryn Hill, singing along to songs from "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill."Additionally, my grandparents' house became an abode for soul, fostering music from Earth, Wind, & Fire and The Temptations. As I grew older, the implicit messages regarding relationships, politics, and emotions were brought to light. The luminance of Black expression has contributed to my perspective on music, which has become a cherished love language within my family. My research intends to explore why Black music is revered within the Black community, and the influence of its significance on contemporary America.

We'll start with the movement of the Harlem Renaissance, a turning point in the creation of Black art. Black music produced during the Harlem Renaissance simultaneously acted as an archive and a catalyst for the progression of the Black community during social movements, evident in the popularization of jazz music, such as "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday in the early 20th century. The Harlem Renaissance began in the early 1920s, concentrated in the neighborhood of Harlem, Manhattan in New York City. This resurgence of artistic expression was also referred to as the "New Negro Movement" and as African Americans migrated to the North, urban cities became sanctuaries for self-expression by means of song, literature, and other forms of art, with the genre of jazz at the forefront of the musical world. The symbolism of jazz music as a revival of Black culture contributed to its individuality, built upon by tone, instrumentation, and rhythm.

This allowed Black female artists such as Nina Simone and Billie Holiday to personalize the genre, conveying the trauma of the African American community in each performance. Jazz was a tapestry of other Black genres, adopting the syncopation of ragtime, and the orchestration of blues. In "A History of the Harlem Renaissance, edited by Rachel Farebrother and Miriam Thaggert, the author states, "The development of jazz from these roots is emblematic of the freedom from slavery. Jazz was created from musical as well as physical and economic freedom…The two salient qualities that make jazz what it is - syncopation and improvisation - represent not only freedom from traditional form but also freedom in the context of African American History" (351). The unconventionality of jazz from the white musical norm allowed it to truly express Blackness. "Strange Fruit" took the world by storm during the Harlem Renaissance.

"Strange Fruit" evolved from poem to song, performed by Billie Holiday in the 1930s. The gripping portrayal of the lynching of Black Americans in the Jim Crow South, with lyricism utilizing the characterization of Black people as elements of nature, became an allegory against lynching in America, reaching communities across the nation. However, the individuality of Billie Holiday's performance of this song has contributed greatly to its influence. In "Strange Fruit: Music Between Violence and Death," John Carvalho states, "...Billie Holiday embodies and discharges the violence represented and repressed in that song, the ritual murder of black Americans, the orderly hatred, motivated by fear, of all 'colored people,' the harassment, disrespect, and disenfranchisement of everyone excluded from the collective guilt of the 'civilized'" (Carvalho 2013, 116). The author explains the distinct diction of Holiday's voice, mentioning how the pronunciation of each word conveys the trauma of the Black community, truly portraying the reality of lynchings in Black America. The author additionally notes that the spectacle of Holiday's performance was mostly, "...the black intelligentsia who, knowledgeably, associated lynching with the pervasiveness and complexity of racism, in general, experienced by black people, then as now, as fear, anger, resignation, horror, defiance, disrespect, and resolve, and who identified with Holiday in a way that her white audience never could have" (Carvalho 2013, 114). The collectivity of experiences of racism and abuse within the Black community contributed to Billie Holiday's engagement, as her Black audience was able to resonate with the emotion in the voices of Holiday and other Black singers.

The impact of "Strange Fruit" as a marker of the individuality of Black expression is prominent within the contemporary music industry. Audio clips from Billie Holiday or other renditions of this song are often sampled in popular music of the 21st century. American rapper Kanye West sampled Nina Simone's rendition on his 2013 album "Yeezus." The 1965 cover by Simone is noticeably more used in hip-hop tracks, as it became a more modern front to the divergence of Black music in America. In "Strange Sampling: Nina Simone and Her Hip-Hop Children", Salamishah Tillet explains that "we can think of Simone's 1965 cover of 'Strange Fruit' as both a tribute and departure from [the] original…" Simone's became a sacred song of the Civil Rights Movement due to the notion of black radicalism created by the additional vocals and lack of instrumentation in Nina Simone's revival. This song is among the multitude of songs embedded into Black culture that fuel social movements. Other forms of expression are also used as catalysts throughout history.

The influence of Black music is further exemplified through artist techniques, such as sampling. Black artists utilize sampling to convey political messages to their audiences, most substantially in the genre of hip-hop. The Central Music Institute defines sampling as, "...taking a section of audio from another source…and then reworking it into the creation of a new track" (CMI 2024, 1). The act of sampling derives from the use of breakbeats and the manipulation of vinyl records, with some of its origin stemming from house music. The Stop The Violence Movement, a hip-hop group and collaboration of renowned American rappers, released a track called "Self-Destruction", containing samples to reach their audiences regarding their critiques of political and societal concerns, specifically addressing violence in the rap community.

The concept behind The Stop The Violence Movement's foremost and only track arose after the violence at a Long Island Concert in 1987, in which an attendee was murdered. The media uplifted raised concerns of violence, at the hands of rap, plaguing communities of color. The goal of the musical colleagues was to raise awareness about the truth of rap, combatting racial stereotypes of violence. In "Stop the Violence: Overcoming Self-Destruction", Nelson George recounts that, "television and radio reporters joined newspaper headline writers in shouting 'rap violence!' Rap and youth: evil and dangerous…No one tried to understand the episode as a symptom, rather than a cause, of a violent society. They wanted to blame the kids. They wanted to blame rap" (George, 1990, 13). The fashion, language, and music built by the Black community were associated with that of a life of crime. So, rappers such as Public Enemy, MC Lyte, and Boogie Down Productions fueled a movement. Nelson writes, "...others preferred the name 'Stop the Violence Group.' But 'Movement' was finally decided on because it suggests something that is progressing, that isn't exclusive, that is alive and growing."

The track is introduced with the words of Malcolm

X, an African American activist and revolutionist of the Black Panther Party Movement. X was a Black Nationalist, leading a radical movement supporting the self-determination of Black Americans in the 1950s and 60s, aligning with Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. on certain issues. The Stop The Violence Movement samples his speech succeeding King's "I Have a Dream" speech. His speech was entitled, "Message to the Grassroots", attempting to reach the general Black public.

As a beat plays in the background, Self-Destruction begins with X stating, "We all agree tonight…that America has a very serious problem. Not only does America have a very serious problem but our people have a very serious problem. America's problem is…" leading The Stop The Violence Movement into the chorus, "Self-destruction, you're headed for self-destruction." Though not sampled, in the remainder of the speech Malcolm X proceeds to say, "America's problem is us…you represent a person who poses such a serious problem for America because you're not wanted" with the label "us" referring to the Black community. X identifies a common oppressor, the white man, and urges the Black public to, "realize we're all the same family" going on to say, "And when you have a family squabble, you don't get out on the sidewalk. If you do, everybody calls you uncouth, unrefined, uncivilized, savage…argue it out behind closed doors, and then when you come out on the street, you pose a common front, a united front. And this is what we need to do in the community…we need to stop airing our differences in front of the white man." Malcolm X urges the Black community to unite, regardless of differences in order to simultaneously combat the societal norm of violence and the oppression of white supremacy. The Stop The Violence movement references this message in order to allude to the notion that issues like Black-on-Black crime and the fallacy of violence in hip-hop will lead to the self-destruction of Black Americans.

The application of sampling, in addition to lyricism such as, "I never ever ran from the Ku Klux Klan and I shouldn't have to run from a Black man 'cause that's self-destruction." and "It's time to stand together in a unit 'cause if not, then, we're soon to be self-destroyed, unemployed, the rap race will be lost without a trace." contribute to the political messaging that derives from the artistic choices of artists within the Black community, acting as a tool for the unification, education and enlightenment of Black youth.

Other components of Black music allow artists to redefine Black expression, such as lyricism and vernacular customary in the African American community. The structure of genres such as rap mirrors that of poetry, by way of rhythmic schemes and patterns, allowing composers and performers to innovatively expand the boundaries of literature upheld by the concept of "whiteness" and formality. Furthermore, the exertion of specific phrases prevalent in the African American community, distinctly categorized as AAVE, of African American Vernacular English, are common linguistic tools of the communication of the exclusivity of the African American identity in media. Modern forms of African American Vernacular English include "ain't", and "yo."

Vocabulary, rhyme, and grammar uplift the individualism of Black music, as it does not obey the formality of other genres, instead drawing on the heritage of spoken language. In the work of Geneva Smitherman, entitled, "The Power of the Rap: The Black Idiom and The New Black Poetry", she explains, "American Black poets are articulating the new consciousness in the lingo of the Folk. For the people's lingo is the poet's lingo too. No longer is the Black writer to be set apart from his ghetto brethren by using the 'standard' dialect (known as 'talkin' proper,' or 'tryin' to talk white' in the Black community)" (Smitherman 1973, 261). Smitherman argues that rap works to reclaim the oppression of the Black community from white supremacists, empowering differences seen as improper by society. Similarly, the works of Black authors and poets drew on the concurrent acts of familiarity in language amongst Black readers and resistance in response to societal standards of literature.

African American writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston chose to write the way in which she spoke, with a vernacular common in the southern folk African American community. In her celebrated works such as "Their Eyes Were Watching God" and "Dust Tracks on a Road," she creates a space for the raw and palpable authenticity of Black voices. In "Zora Neale Hurston, Biographical Criticism, and African Diasporic Vernacular Culture," Jason Frydman writes, "...a combination of narrative, ethnographic, epistolary, critical, and biographical discourses has produced Hurston as a literary historical figure with whom her audience feels an intimacy as familiar as the vernacular with which she has been so strongly identified" (Frydman 2009, 99). This communication of the cultural distinctions of Black speech is still apparent, though it has evolved with the incorporation of music. Smitherman continues, writing, "Within the limitations of written form, today's poets are attempting to capture the flavor of Black American speech…through their artistic efforts, the poets seem to be saying: if the message is new, the medium must be new also" (Frydman 2009, 260). The creativity within self-expression displayed through the use of common Black dialects is empowering to Black listeners, seen as a radical method of uniting the Black community through the kinship of a shared language, in addition to the shared history, traditions, and experiences in America, of Black audiences.

The vernacular within genres such as hip-hop is not the sole component of a track's lyricism. The hip-hop

industry is a platform for Black artists to critique American society. Allusions to key contributions to society became prevalent in tracks. Artists often included references to history and popular culture, through album names, like Lauryn Hill's "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" mentioning the renowned work "The Mis-education of the Negro" written by Carter G. Woodson. "Fight the Power," a song derived from Public Enemy's 1990 album "Fear of a Black Planet," brought attention to young audiences in resisting the white perception of Blackness. Additional track titles of artists, including Tupac's "Panther Power," often alluded to groups advocating for social reform, like the Black Panther Party. Tupac Shakur was an American rapper who gained fame in the 1990s, following the Black Power Movement, which declined in the mid-1970s. Shakur was one of many Black artists who exemplified the popularization of music as a media platform for political expression in the "golden age" of hip-hop from the 1980s through the late 1990s.

In "Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap," Jeffrey Ogbar writes, "Emerging out of the highly politicized era of Black Power, many of the hip-hop generation were keenly aware of the pernicious stereotypes of black people in American popular culture… significantly because of the historical moment of Black Power that precipitated a new racialized consciousness among black people" (Ogbar 2007, 17). Ogbar advances by stating, "...there were clear messages from rappers that reflected a salient sense of historical continuity between the pernicious minstrel images and contemporary black cultural production" (Ogbar 2007, 18). The cognizance inflicted upon witnesses and participants of the social movements in the decades prior prompted a wave of the unapologetic reinstatement of the definition of Blackness regardless of the narratives upheld by white supremacy and the extreme binaries that painted the Black community as "thugs" and "criminals". The release of songs including "Panther Power", brought light to the anger of Black Americans experiencing incessant oppression and fallacies, while also educating Black youth on the history of the radicalization of African Americans, referencing motifs of Black resistance.

Shakur begins "Panther Power" by rapping, "As real as it seems, the American Dream ain't nothin' but another calculated scheme to get us locked up…," immediately addressing the fabrication of the value of equal opportunity in the United States. He repeatedly criticizes rhetoric referring to significant structures in American history, by saying, "Lady Liberty's a hypocrite, she lied to me…" and "Uncle Sam never did a…thing for me…" The condemnation of the Statue of Liberty, whose broken shackles represented freedom, and Uncle Sam, a characterization of patriotism, discern the disadvantages of Black Americans in a white America. Shakur draws attention to the conception that the American values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, are not on the path laid for young Black people, as opposed to their white counterparts. Tupac directly addresses his listeners through a second-person narration, saying, "It's your panther power that makes you a star".

Moreover, Tupac reclaims the portrayal of violence in the African American community in this song, by repurposing it to the Black Panther idea of government resistance. In Dylan Tyler Girouard's work, "Grassroots to Hip-Hop: An Analysis of Black Panther Rhetoric Used Within Hip-Hop Culture," he dissects "Panther Power" writing, "Most notably, Shakur references guns similarly to the Black Panthers by rapping, "Calling me a mad man 'cause I'm strong and bold / With this gun full of the knowledge of the lies you told." Guns, a rhetorical attachment Newton and Seale used influenced by Malcolm X, are referenced by Shakur as a tool for political resistance" (Girourard 18). The Black Panther Party supported the self-defense of Black Americans as a form of government resistance and promoted the use of personal firearms within their organization. Tupac furthers his claim of resistance, concluding this track by rapping, "Time to change the government now." "Panther Power" is a call to Black youth for the revival of radical sociopolitical movements against racial injustice such as the Black Power Movement.

This track denotes the politicization of hip-hop in the music industry preceding the Black Power Movement. Black artists such as Tupac Shakur document the resistance built upon by the anger, oppression, and sadness of the Black community, preaching for unity and consciousness of politics. To be a hip-hop artist is to defy the formality of white societal norms and to take up space in the predominantly white music industry, but to explicitly criticize fundamental American values within hip-hop is to resist whiteness and uplift true Blackness in music, painting pictures of culture, tradition, and emotion, awaking a new generation of Black listeners. The "golden age" of hip-hop advances the tradition of political consciousness and one's potential to reform their identity, which was seldom represented in music during this time.

The consolidation of the Black community through music is further perceptible within the genre of Gospel. The intersection of religion and race through Gospel music contributed to the unification of the Black community, reaching a peak during the Civil Rights Movement. The rise of empowering hymns, actuating the intersection between Christianity and Blackness, such as "We Shall Overcome" and "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by J.W. Johnson, contributed to the themes of hope and community during this fight for social justice. "Lift Every Voice and Sing", which was deemed the Black National Anthem in 1919, goes as follows: "Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us; facing the rising

sun of our new day begun, let us march on till victory is won". The act of marching on, both physically, through demonstrations such as the 1963 March on Washington, and metaphorically, through enduring institutional oppression and racial injustice, was a frequent allocation dating this social movement. Songs such as these were catalysts in the unification of the Black community, often featuring words like "we" and "us", preaching the strength of joining together.

In "Sit in, Stand up, and Sing Out!: Black Gospel Music and the Civil Rights Movement," Castellini states, "Gospel communicated black cultural values, reinforced black identity, and shaped the sociopolitically conscious 'soul' phenomenon that promoted black pride. The sacred family tree of gospel, spirituals, soul, and freedom songs together formed the soundtrack of the civil rights movement. As the common thread in civil rights music, and as an invaluable organizational and motivational tool, black gospel unquestionably played a leading role in the movement story" (Castellini 2013, 2). Components of Black music are often present in denominations of Christianity, such as Black Baptist Culture. Hymns are blends of soul, ragtime, and jazz, uplifting themes of faith in God through times of hardship. Since enslavement, the Black community has utilized music in the commemoration of hope. Castellini writes that "The implication is that a special historical relationship exists between the original freedom songs of slavery and those of the civil rights movement, which explains the particular suitability of adapting old spirituals to modern protest" (Castellini 2013, 23). Freedom songs evolved alongside the Black community, into songs calling for the emancipation of Black Americans in a different conviction. "Soul: A Historical Reconstruction of Continuity and Change in Black Popular Music" by Robert W. Stephens also highlights the birth of soul music from the Civil Rights Movement, from the foundation of sociopolitical unrest.

The songs of the Civil Rights Movement acted as tools of defiance, similar to that of protests. They fueled the power of sit-ins, marches, protests, and boycotts. The foundation of Christianity lies in values of family, with many verses of the Bible teaching followers to act as brothers and sisters in Christ, and these are portrayed in a multitude of Gospel songs in the 1960s. Themes of community, and hope, alongside musical integrants similar to that of the Harlem Renaissance, act as anecdotes of the power of music, in uplifting musical traditions, such as the rhythm of songs throughout genres or the expression of Black trauma through diction, in influencing historical social movements. In the dissection of the fruition of influential Black music genres, such as the influence of soul on Gospel music, the musical and historical components that contributed to their impact can be further understood, the evolution of Blackness alongside music will bring forth the relationship between the two, and their concurrent significance in American history.

As we advance into contemporary America, the evolution of Black music clearly emerges into view. The branches of the term "Blackness" grow as Black artists extend their sphere of genres, with roots still tracing back to the commonality of the Black experience in white America. Though the predominantly white music industry pushes Black artists into socially conforming genres that distinguish the notions of "Black music" and "white" music, Black artists attempt to reclaim Black culture. Jazz, soul, and hip-hop are widely recognized as stepping stones toward Black expression, but the scaffolding of genres seen as "white", including country and bluegrass, was constructed upon by the authenticity of Black culture as well. The reappropriation of Black culture parallel to the distinction of Blackness in music is evident in Beyonce's album "Cowboy Carter".

The white supremacy embedded into the foundation of America is further exemplified in the American music industry. Though the social movements covered, such as the Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Movement, and Black Power Movement, depict the importance of the individualism of Black music in the expression of identity, monolithic labels are still placed on Black artists, siloing the music industry, and interfering with the development of Black artists outside of these genres. In Tamaron McKnight's "Culture vs. Experience: The Popularization of Black Culture in White America", she writes, "This sentiment is also true of Rock music and Country music. While both of these genres are generally considered to be largely by White people and for White people, both genres have roots in Black music—Rock music evolved directly from R&B while Country evolved from folk and blues music. However, as the genres grew popular among White audiences, record labels gradually rebranded them as such" (McKnight 2014, 4). The extremities of Blackness and whiteness cause genres to become polarized, belonging to just one of the two races.

The historical dichotomy between Blackness and whiteness is discernable in early instances of appropriation, such as the minstrelsy of Black artists in the Jim Crow era. In "Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-hop", authors Taylor and Austen write,"White and, later, black entertainers corked up, donning absurdly exaggerated, often hideous blackface makeup to create a visual image of the comic Stage Negro…frequently advertised as a true reflection of the character and culture of former black slaves, it was accepted as such by a vast number of Americans" (Taylor & Austen 2024, xiii). This acquisition of Black culture as well as others, erases the incorporation of Black culture into the works of Black artists, devaluing Black expression.

So, Black artists fight to reclaim the utterance of

Black culture, by taking back genres deemed as white. In Beyonce's account of the creation of her eighth album, "Cowboy Carter", she took to Instagram, writing, "This album has been over five years in the making. It was born out of an experience that I had years ago where I did not feel welcomed…and it was very clear that I wasn't. But, because of that experience, I did a deeper dive into the history of Country music and studied our rich musical archive. It feels good to see how music can unite so many people around the world, while also amplifying the voices of some of the people who have dedicated so much of their lives educating on our musical history…" (Carter, 2024 Instagram) The backlash of Carter's spin on country music, with the incorporation of pop and R&B, brings light to her intent to break free of societal notions and conveys empowerment in the reclamation of bluegrass and country roots.

In all, the ability to make a statement with the use of different instruments, rhythms, and tempos, highlights the gravity of music in general on American society. Moreover, the collective works of Black artists in using the platform of the music industry to express political concerns, societal critiques, cultural pride, the advancement of tradition, and to make space for Black youth, have influenced social movements and contributed to the progression of America, documenting impactful periods of advancements along the way. The analysis of music genres, artists, and songs prominent in Black popular culture illuminates the interactions of Black Americans within a world of white supremacy, oppression, and deluding narratives, while simultaneously paving the way for insight into the perspectives and experiences of generations of Black Americans.

This concludes the podcast presentation of my research, I hope you enjoyed it. Thank you for listening.

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An Analysis of Punk Music's Societal Impact

Vincent Barboriak

On June 7th, 1977, the English band The Sex Pistols gathered on a boat in the River Thames. On the day of the Silver Jubilee, the 25th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's ascension to the throne, the band had planned to perform their anti-monarchy single "God Save The Queen" on a boat named the Queen Elizabeth in close proximity to the palace at Westminster. Photographer Dennis Morris remarked, "[It] was one of their best gigs - They had time to play." Music writer Jon Savage went even farther, stating, "They were by far the best I ever saw them that day. You can't beat the Sex Pistols, jubilee weekend." The Pistols had created music that channeled English teenage dissatisfaction and used their art to attack the establishment, gaining widespread popularity in the process. In interviews, they encouraged societal change benefitting the working class and drew attention to the poverty that England had produced in the 1970s. They were also a band which was assembled for the specific purpose of capitalizing on a pre-existing aesthetic in the direct pursuit of profits. In fact, the aforementioned concert was planned to stir up publicity for the band, and backed by corporate forces. Richard Branson, the already successful head of *Virgin Records,* the label which the Pistols signed to, was on board with the band and their manager during the concert on the Thames. Author Peter York deposited, "Clever young Richard Branson, who was a merry prankster, thought: 'I don't know what this punk thing is about, but there's some money in it' (1)".

The above anecdote is one example of the multifaceted nature of punk music. Though much of the music itself is layered with the intention to draw focus to social issues, the inevitability of the movement's mainstream breakthrough created the conditions for corporate entities to capitalize on punk artists and further their own interests, prompting punk music's ideological messaging power to be brought into question. I argue that although punk music and its corresponding movement had certain failures in its campaigns for societal change, the movement also made undeniable progress in decreasing the dependence of musical artists on major labels and raising awareness for social issues in popular music. This is evidenced by the connections between punk music and the beginnings of independent record production as well as punk's staunch support of key issues like racial justice, which mainstream music rarely addressed. When changes in a major industry or culture emerge, and these changes can be attributed to the presence and artistic creations of a movement, it can be said that the social movement and its art achieved success in promoting some ideological change. It should be noted that the existence of these changes do not negate the ways in which punk did enforce negative societal conditions, be it through the perpetuation of exploitative practices in the music industry or through its descriptions of sexism and violence. Also, the existence of progress does not prove that the progress made was to the extent the majority of punks desired, nor is punk a monolith with a well defined group of social stances and goals. This paper will seek to first understand the processes of the development of subculture and counterculture before examining how art is related to culture and used to transmit ideology. This knowledge will then be applied to the development of the punk subculture, both in Britain and the United States. From this point, certain aspects of punk music, such as particular moments in its history, certain bands, and broader contemporary cultural trends will be focused on examining the extent to which punk music promoted and succeeded in contributing to societal change versus how it reinforced pre-established economic and/or social conditions.

To begin examining punk's cultural and ideological influence, we must first explore how culture emerges and what its relation to ideology is. Although culture is easy to relate to ideology, it cannot be reduced to a mere expression of that ideology. Culture emerges from the collective shared 'way of life' of a group of people. From the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "[T]he term "culture" can refer to the set of norms, practices and values that characterize minority and majority groups" (2). This differs from ideology, which is a group of ideas taken from lived experience which informs someone's theories of the world. As these definitions imply, the ways of life which help define a culture also serve as the lived experiences used to construct personal ideologies. These ideologies can also influence the same cultures from which they emerge. Indeed, ideologies often operate to socially or politically organize communities, such as tribes, classes, and societies. Ideologies with this much power become cultural aspects and/or 'schools of thought' of the group they are applied within, and the cycle continues. To apply this knowledge to punk music's cultural and ideological impact however, the relationship between art, culture, and ideology must be examined.

This cultural development is also expressed and influenced through art. Art in general is a produced creative expression of a person or group of people, and it both influences and is influenced by the culture surrounding it. It is well known that the different societal values of different cultures influence the art of those cultures. For example, the visual artwork of egalitarian societies tends to repeat similar visual elements and use symmetry more often than the artwork of more stratified societies" (3). This is likely due to the fact that egalitarian societies have fewer social separations between society members, and this relative societal evenness is reflected in its culture's visual designs. This trend extends beyond the visual arts, and can be applied to other artistic expressions such as music and dance through artistic elements such as lyrical complexity and choreographic repetition respectively. Though this example shows that art is necessarily influenced by the culture from which it emerges, art also exerts its own influence on that culture and transmits ideology to that culture. Its existence not only preserves culture, but serves to educate its viewers about the culture or cultures it represents. Art can also serve as a vessel for social commentary or protest, inspiring its viewers to be more critical about aspects of society, inciting counter cultural movements, and transmitting aspects of the author's ideology. Several examples of works of art intrinsically linked to the ideologies of counter cultural movements have been observed throughout history, from the gospel songs preaching resilience to those in the Civil Rights movement to Pablo Picasso's Guernica being a powerful anti-war expression. In each of these, specific works of art served as a signifier of a progressive movement's cause. Thus to discuss punk as a subculture and form of artistic expression, its cultural origins and impacts should be examined.

The punk movement and its music came into prominence in the early 1970s in Britain and the United States at a time when the working class was struggling under high unemployment and economic stagnation. These conditions led the already disillusioned youth to take a countercultural response to the failure of politicians and society as a whole to support the common citizen. This response resulted in the formation of the punk subculture. In the words of Marxist Critic Niel Eriksen:

> [T]he lack of opportunities or alternatives to the prevailing economic conditions gave rise to a much angrier cry of protest, more aggressive and even at times more violent. Specifically, the most important musical developments in England developed as a working class sub-cultural response to the conditions of existence of sections of the working and unemployed youth centered around the musical expression of punk rock." (4)

This musical expression of protest Eriksen refers to can be both related and contrasted to that of the 1960s before it. Like Bob Dylan or John Lennon (the latter even admitted that his song "Imagine" was only a few steps away from a rephrasing of the Communist Manifesto), punk artists expressed anti-war and anti-corruption sentiment, though unlike their predecessors that were involved with the hippie subculture, softer lyrics wishing for peace and love were replaced with intense anger and disillusionment at the perceived powers that were, attempting to rebel in the general direction of anything and everything they saw as contributing to their economic poverty.

This general rebellion can be seen in the fact that much of early punk fashion was themed around breaking cultural norms. Safety pins, commonly thought of as a purely utilitarian item, were used to hold clothing together and signify punk's do-it-yourself nature. Even Swastikas were used aesthetically as a form of rebellion against those who had lived through war in the 1940s (5). It is important to note that though this description implies punk music as well as the movement as a whole could be entirely characterized merely in opposition to existing cultures, it also drew its own ideological influence from other philosophies such as anarchism and nihilism. This is not to say punk was a monolith of these philosophies of course. In fact, different sects of punks including communist punks and Nazi punks both existed, often in direct conflict with one another.

As the punk movement grew in size, its art grew in popularity, especially its music. The common aesthetics and working class sentiments expressed in the lyrics of artists like the Ramones, New York Dolls, and the Sex Pistols resonated strongly with those who felt that their government had overlooked and abandoned them. The musical elements of punk resonated with many working people as well. Many punk artists lacked any classical training in their instruments whatsoever. The simple compositions that then necessarily emerged helped connect punk to common listeners, further helping increase punk's popularity. For example, even when British radio refused to play the song, the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK" reached the number two spot on the UK charts (6). This popularity did not go unnoticed. Like the capitalist culture industry always does when a new cultural export gains significant popularity and monetary potential, punk music was almost immediately commodified and sold en masse to the working class it sought to represent. As given in this paper's introduction, major record labels noticed there was money to be made in punk and jumped at the chance to transform its music into a cultural product and sell it. Although the support of major labels helped punk music and punk artists reach a wider audience, which this paper will refer to as 'the mainstream', the influence of large corporations constrained the messaging of punk bands. To understand the inner workings of this process, we can turn to Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the Culture Industry.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's theory of the Capitalist Culture Industry describes how popular culture is sold back to the people of a society to keep them docile with the current economic conditions. They describe how standardized cultural goods are created as commodities to accumulate profit, but also serve to pacify the consumers of those goods. As Adorno states, "The culture industry is not the art of the consumer but rather the projection of the

will of those in control onto their victims. The automatic self-reproduction of the status quo in its established forms is itself an expression of domination" (7). In this quote, Adorno speaks about how the commodification of culture oppresses consumers by suppressing what makes a form of cultural expression transgressive in the first place and fitting it to a status quo. When sold to the masses, unique artistic works are fit to the pre-existing formula of what a film, book, or song should be and stripped down of as much revolutionary nature as possible. This both serves to maximize the profitability of cultural products and to reinforce societal norms, because easily consumable elements of popular culture have widespread appeal and the consumption of those simple exports distracts working people from considering their economic struggles. Thus, art is commodified into a form of social manipulation.

The culture industry is also in a position of vulnerability to the creatives from whom it takes and its own base of consumers (4). The artistic works it turns into cultural products are the fruits of human creative labor, something that must be suppressed to preserve the existing systems of social and economic inequality that the culture industry seeks to uphold. In his 1974 work *The consciousness industry; on literature, politics and the media,* Enzensberger argues, "It is inherent in the process of creation that there is no way to predict its results. Consequently, intellectuals are, from the point of view of any power structure bent on its own perpetuation, a security risk" (8). This quote demonstrates why creatives must be kept under control by existing hierarchies, as their art has the potential to disrupt those structures. However, as with all capitalist industries, the Culture Industry is primarily driven by profit. Because of this, it is still forced to sell cultural expressions with progressive ideals if their remunerative potential is high. This is especially relevant in discussions of mainstream punk music, which was well within the grasp of record labels' control, yet was financially viable due to widespread dissatisfaction among the working class caused by a capitalist system those big record labels existed within. These relations limited punk's ability to advocate for social change, but also helped it reach a larger number of people, both hampering and supporting its messaging power.

Though mainstream punk's ability to transmit progressive ideology was limited by its strong monetary value and position within the culture industry, it still managed to use the increased outreach it saw due to its label associations to speak against economic exploitation and serve as a type of protest music. Protest music is music that seeks to promote some kind of change against unfair conditions, where its songs can become powerful battle cries to unite those committed to a movement. As Sumangala Damodaran states:

> Every period of social upheaval gives birth to songs of discontent. Some songs are crafted specifically as rallying cries to garner support for a cause or to broadcast a grievance, whereas others express or describe conditions in society that give rise to the discontent. The expressions can be based on the individual, can be part of collectives or musical communities, or part of organized political movements. (9)

Mainstream punk music fits into this role nicely, being born of and popularized by collective discontent with exploitative economic conditions.

To examine how mainstream punk music served as protest music to promote progressive social and economic ideals, The Clash, one of the most popular and respected punk bands in the late 1970s and early 1980s, can be considered. The first way The Clash promoted these ideas was through the writing and themes of their songs. The band wrote songs protesting consumerism ("Lost in the Supermarket"), economic inequality ("White Riot"), war, military coups ("Washington Bullets"), and more. On the aforementioned "White Riot" for example, The Clash encourages white youth to take inspiration and join in the protest of Black youth, with vocalist/guitarist Joe Strummer singing, "Black man gotta lot a problems/But they don't mind throwing a brick/White people go to school/Where they teach you how to be thick" (The Clash, "White Riot"). Beyond the contents of their songs, the band's fourth studio album *Sandinista!* took its name from the contemporary Sandinista National Liberation Front, a Nicaraguan socialist party resisting US occupation, Strummer wore merchandise relating to far left political groups on stage, and the band demanded their label to price The Clash's double albums as single albums, so those projects remained affordable to listeners. In this, the band managed to incorporate political messaging that resonated with listeners into their art and fought with their label for the listeners sake, even at times sacrificing the paychecks of band members.

The band also wrote about their frustrations with their label's influence on their music. In the 1977 song "Complete Control," Strummer sings, "They said we'd be artistically free/When we signed that bit of paper/They meant 'Let's make a lots of money/And worry about it later' (The Clash, "Complete Control")." This lyric is an obvious criticism of CBS records, who had upset the band by releasing the song "Remote Control" as a single despite the members' protests. "Complete Control" was released to great critical and commercial success, and is still cited as one of the greatest punk songs of all time (10). Though the Clash's ability to serve as 'revolutionaries' was undoubtedly limited by the partial control big record labels like CBS and Sony records held over their music, they fought against this control, and said conflict was addressed in their music.

In all, The Clash made a noticeable impact on the social awareness of British and American youth. This impact can be seen even today, with the political messaging and affiliation of The Clash still having an effect on workers. After Joe Strummer's death in December 2002, a 2012 tribute event was held to commemorate the singer's last

London concert, which was held in November of 2002 in support of a Firefighter's strike in London. In this tribute event, Fire Brigades Union General Secretary Matt Wrack stated, "Firefighters are immensely proud of our links with Joe Strummer and what he stood for politically and as a musician. We're delighted to have helped support the 10th anniversary memorial" (11). The Clash also inspired the politically conscious artists who would eventually follow them. Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine credits The Clash, specifically their 1980 album *London Calling* as changing his life. "It was at a time that I was becoming politically aware, and here was a band who made me feel that I wasn't alone. I wrote my first political song immediately in the aftermath of listening to *London Calling*… The possibility of combining kick-ass music and lyrical content that mattered became real" (12). Tom Morello and Rage Against the Machine would go on to wear their far left political ideology on their sleeves as one of the most politically conscious music groups of the 1990s.

Punk music also weakened the control of major labels through its contributions to and connections with independent record production. New recording technologies being available at affordable costs allowed artists to make and distribute their own music without major labels. This led to musicians and/or their managers founding their own labels. Examples of this are Miles Copeland (the older brother of The Police founder Stewart Copeland) founding Illegal Records, and Bob Last founding Fast Product, both of which released the earliest music (often punk and almost always punk influenced) of bands whose popularity eventually skyrocketed, like The Police and The Human League.

Beyond technological advancements, punk's 'do-it-yourself' culture also linked it to independent record production. Punk bands attempted to control the process of making their own music as much as possible. One of the earliest examples of a punk artist recording and distributing their music independently comes from the band The Buzzcocks, who recorded their first EP, *Spiral Scratch*, by themselves with only £500 and released it on their own label New Hormones. The EP's record sleeve displayed the recording cost, number of takes, and number of overdubs, demystifying the record production process to those who purchased it and showing how simple it could be to produce music. "While the Sex Pistols, with their 'Anarchy in the U.K.' single (released the previous November on EMI), showed that virtually anyone could be in a band, the Buzzcocks showed that anyone could release a record" (13). Many other independent labels that emerged around this time cited *Spiral Scratch* as the release which inspired their formation, including the aforementioned Fast Product. This growth of independent music fostered by punk artists served to put pressure on major record labels, weaken their grasp on the industry, and help smaller musical artists to profit from their work.

Punk musicians also took social stands with their connections to progressive social movements. The most obvious example of this is Rock against Racism (RAR). RAR was a movement that formed in 1976 in response to growing right wing nationalism in Britain and the rise of the white nationalist National Front Party. British politician Encoh Powell had recently given his famous "rivers of blood" speech, in which he warned of the dangers immigration posed to the white British. Powell stated, "We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependents, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant descended population" (14). This speech heightened racial tensions in the UK and was correlated with an uptick in racial violence against immigrants. RAR also grew in response to racist, anti immigration, and fascist statements by musicians like David Bowie and Eric Clapton. Specifically, after Clapton went on a rant against immigration at a 1978 concert, saying, "Enoch was right… I think we should send them all back," (20) movement founders Red Saunders, Roger Huddle, Jo Wreford, and Pete Bruno published a letter in protest. In it, they wrote:

> Come on Eric... Own up. Half your music is black. You're rock music's biggest colonist... We want to organise a rank and file movement against the racist poison music... we urge support for Rock against Racism. P.S. Who shot the Sheriff, Eric? It sure as hell wasn't you! (19)

The last reference to the song "Who Shot the Sheriff", was especially poignant as the song was one of Clapton's recent hits, despite the original version of the song being written and performed by Bob Marley.

In conjunction with other left wing groups like the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), RAR organized concerts and festivals headlined by artists of a diverse field of genres, including punk. It was unique in that it encouraged jam sessions for Black and white artists to play music together in a show of solidarity. Some punk artists such as Gang of Four, Delta 5, and the Mekons even took an active role in organizing local RAR events, with local trade unions and sympathetic councils also helping to organize. Others like The Clash performed at some of RAR's biggest and most iconic concerts ever. The wide variety of concerts and festivals hosted by RAR drew a vast number of listeners, with the largest ever RAR concert drawing over 40,000 attendees. This vast reach further inspired music listeners to take note of and reject racist and nationalist ignorance when they saw it either in music or in politics. Historian Evan Smith argues that RAR and the ANL were, "largely successful in publicizing the Nazi elements of the National Front and eroding popular support for them through the massive dissemination of anti-NF propaganda, with 5.25 million leaflets and a million badges and stickers distributed during the first year of ANL's existence" (15).

RAR was also important in how it inspired other musical movements for social justice. 'Rock gegen Rechts' is the motto of musical events organized by anti-fascist

movements in Germany and Austria. A 2002 concert organized by anti-fascist groups was organized under one of RAR's main taglines, "Love Music Hate Racism." This concert was headlined by several foundational punk acts such as The Buzzcoks and Mick Jones of The Clash, further showcasing punk's strong connections to RAR. Rock Against Sexism (RAS) is another group that emerged directly from RAR, with certain RAR sects becoming parts of the RAS movement.

Despite all of these examples of mainstream punk promoting social awareness and serving as a movement campaigning for change, it did have significant failures that should be addressed. Some of these failures stem from the fact that punk was not a united front. Indeed, not all popular punk acts were as socially conscious as The Clash or Gang of Four. Many mainstream bands were controlled by their label in such a way that 'punk' was used as an aesthetic to maximize potential profits rather than a progressive social movement. In this, labels channeled the anti-corporatism philosophies of the punk movement into broader anti-authoritarianism, and discouraged many mainstream punk artists from speaking on specific social injustices. Additionally, punk music had significant issues with its promotion of violence against women and subgroups of racism.

Perhaps the best example of punk being used as an aesthetic to sell music comes from one of the first and biggest mainstream punk artists ever, The Sex Pistols. Famously, the band was organized by manager Malcolm McLaren, who diligently modeled them based on the fashion style of his clothing store, Sex. The outfits the band wore, how they carried themselves in public, and even some of their members were chosen for them by McLaren in the hopes of generating a specific aesthetic and enhancing the Pistols' commercial appeal. McLaren told the band to be immature, vile, and controversial in order to stir up publicity and promote themselves.

One of these controversies was a 1976 interview with television host Bill Gundy on a live broadcast. In it, the band repeatedly cursed, unheard of on live programming at the time, causing the interview to be the subject of intense media scrutiny. Guitarist Steve Jones said of the interview, "[F]rom then on, it was all about the media. In some ways it was our finest moment, but in others it was the beginning of the end" (16). Though it is debatable to what extent this interview was the turning point Jones describes it as, it nonetheless shows a trend of the Pistols using their platform and music for the purpose of causing controversy. The band's focus in both their music and their public appearances was on breaking general social norms in the hopes of shocking viewers, not necessarily promoting progressive politics. Although the Pistols occasionally did occasionally speak on economic injustices like in their legendary single God Save the Queen, it was never the primary focus of their music. Malcolm McLaren even starred in a mockumentary about the Sex Pistols, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, in which he acts as "The Embezzler", a figure that manipulates the band with the goal of making as much money off of them as possible. It should be noted that this mockumentary is commonly viewed as McLaren's side of the story, and members of the Sex Pistols were unhappy with how they were depicted as minor characters compared to McLaren. Despite this debate, McLaren's retelling of the Sex Pistols's story shows his focus on profit over any promotion of progressive politics and how mainstream punk bands were often used by the music industry in opposition to the punk movement's own anti-capitalist ideologies.

Even some of the greatest progressive punk bands were eventually turned into a shell of themselves existing for profit. The final album from The Clash for example, *Cut The Crap*, was marred by turmoil. Prior to its release, drummer Topper Headon and co-lead singer/songwriter Mick Jones were dismissed by Joe Strummer and manager Bernard Rhodes. Rhodes took over as producer and also took Jones's role as co lead songwriter. On release, the album was critically destroyed, with Rolling Stone writing, "There was a time when The Clash embodied all that was noble about punk…" In some accounts, Rhodes saw Jones's absence as his opportunity to join the band, potentially inspired by fellow punk manager turned solo artist Malcolm McLaren, who had created top-10 hits in the UK years prior. Rhodes attempted to exercise as much control as possible over the rest of the band in both their music and their public appearances. Pete Howard, the drummer who replaced Topper Headon, recounted, "I remember having an argument with [Clash road manager] Kosmo Vinyl once. I was saying, 'This is like being in the fucking Moonies. You've got this fucking dwarf Buddha [Rhodes] standing up there handing out dictums, and you have to follow them" (17). With all of this internal drama as well as personal issues befalling Joe Strummer, Rhodes rushed to record Cut the Crap without the rest of the band, instead using studio musicians and a drum machine in place of members. "Pete Howard was replaced by some dolt with a drum machine, which was like replacing a Maserati with a Matchbox" (17). Upon its release and abysmal critical reception, Strummer disowned the album and officially dissolved The Clash. In this process, even a band like The Clash was controlled by their manager in an attempt to produce commercially successful music.

Punk also failed in how it at times glorified violence, sexism, and racism. Despite how some punk bands did promote progressive themes, others, especially in America, consistently included brutality and discrimination central themes of their music. In 1977, Robert Christgau of the Village Voice argued, "[T]he mechanical, pleasureless, hostile sexuality projected by names like Vibrators, Sex Pistols, and (get this one) Buzzcocks is, once again, more than liberal-baiting. The avant-punk scene is certainly no better place for women than any other rock scene and in crucial instances it's worse" (18). Much of this can

be attributed to the fact the punk movement consisted predominantly of white men (there is a reason the Clash titled their song 'White Riot'). Most cultural movements that are majority white and male include certain sexist and racist undertones, and punk music was no exception. In the words of Niel Eriksen, "British working class culture is not without racism and sexism, and the British punk subculture exhibits its share of negative aspects" (4).

An extreme example of this is the presence of white power skinheads in the punk subculture. As briefly mentioned in a previous section, Nazi Punks did exist despite their hateful ideology existing in complete contradiction to most accepted tenets of the punk ideology. The punk subculture had long used Nazi iconography as a form of rebellion, however this iconography predictably also drew those from a far right background to punk events and the subculture in general. These white power skinheads made appearances at punk shows and also made their own music, often referred to as hatecore. Examples of white power punk bands are Skrewdriver and the Dentists. Hatecore is sonically very similar to standard punk music, however its lyrics express disdain and disgust for ethnic minorities. Additionally, the aforementioned right wing National Front party organized a series of concerts they called Rock Against Communism in response to the emergence of RAR. These events consisted of performances by right wing punk artists. The presence of Nazi and white power ideologies inspired American punk band the Dead Kennedys to release a single entitled Nazi Punks Fuck Off," consisting of lyrics attacking the presence of white nationalist ideology and iconography in punk. In it, vocalist Jello Biafra states, "You still think swastikas look cool/The real Nazis run your schools/They're coaches, businessmen, and cops/In a real Fourth Reich, you'll be the first to go" (The Dead Kennedys, "Nazi Punks Fuck Off").

It should be noted that although these are examples of punk music promoting hate, white power punks were significantly a minority compared to more socially consious punks. Also, if extreme cases of punk music promoting hate were examined, extreme cases of punk promoting equality should also be examined. For example, Leeds based group Gang of Four took unabashedly Marxist stances on issues like war, economic oppression, and sexism. Eriksen contemporaneously described, "Lyrically the songs of the Gang of Four are generally complex and focus on reference points outside the traditional sphere of music, such as the torture of Irish political prisoners in the H-block and the Bikini Island H-bomb tests" (4). Punk music was not a monolith and despite the failures outlined in this section, the overall force of punk's emergence into the mainstream promoted progressive ideologies more than regressive ones. Beyond the strictest definition of the punk genre, artists from punk-adjacent genres like New Wave could be examined.

New Wave is a genre created when bands began to separate from accepted norms of punk and musically experiment. In fact, many punks originally referred to themselves as New Wave, but the term only caught on and stuck to those artists which were influenced by punk but also incorporated musical elements like synthesizers, electronic production, and sounded much lighter than traditional punk. Examples of these new wave artists are New Order, Talking Heads, and The Cars. Bands like Talking Heads ditched macho posturing and with it much of the sexism common in punk. In addition to this, they incorporated a vast number of musical influences from funk to disco to pop along with more complex instrumentation into their music, separating themselves from the simplicity of much hardcore punk music. Record producer David Sitek recounts, "When I was a kid, I was really into hardcore punk. Hardcore was very rigid. Talking Heads was the first band I remember telling my punk friends about, saying, 'Yo, check this out! This four-chord thing we're doing? We're missing out on something!'" (20). In addition to their production, Talking Heads also were a band with a political consciousness, if not as overtly political as groups like The Clash or Gang of Four. Their ideology was mostly seen through interviews with lead singer/visionary David Byrne and in their willingness to incorporate obscure Black influences in their music while respecting and crediting the originators of those influences. Some examples of these influences include Nigerian Afrobeat musician Fela Kuti and funk group Funkadelic. In this, New Wave shows that punk's impact on promoting progressive social ideals is beyond just its own genre.

Punk music undeniably made a major impact in furthering progressive social and economic movements, which led to the empowerment of individuals in relation to corporate society. Punk's championing of independent record production as well its public stand against social injustices gave artists the tools they needed to have more control over their work and prompted the general public's heightened awareness of economic and social inequality. However, punk was capitalized on by labels and recording companies as an aesthetic or trend, increasing the profits of music corporations. It also occasionally reinforced reductive ideas about gender and violence, though it should be noted these failures were not monolithic across the punk movement. With these conflicting themes, it is important to understand punk music due to its great impact on British and American culture in the 70s and 80s, and its lingering cultural presence today. It is also important to expand upon this analysis, and say many other countercultural forms of art expression in the capitalist culture industry could be analyzed in much the same way as punk music is here. Despite its shortcomings, mainstream punk music succeeded in promoting progressive ideas and inspiring politically conscious artists who would follow.

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Bars of a Caged Bird: Respectability Politics & Black Women

Viviana Gardner

Growing up as a black woman in America has taught me a multitude of things—from the often unfair way the world operates to the oppressive ways of social systems to the disgusting ways of social constructs. Above all, it has taught me what it means to be in between. Two major facets of my identity—my gender and my race—have been scrutinized by the patriarchy and spat on from the confines of racial biases. These racial biases created a cage within a cage around me for my captors to gawk at me, my identity nothing more than a mere spectacle for them to imitate and mock. Much like Maya Angelou, I was no freer than a caged bird, clawing at the iron bars that imprisoned me, and as the days went on, I found it harder to sing. I knew that my place in society was always going to be questioned and as much as I fought the oppressive standards set by a racist and patriarchal society, I knew that if I wanted to "prove" that I belonged somewhere, I had to play the part. It seemed rather paradoxical: the only way out of the system was buying into it more. I became hyper-aware of how I was perceived. My eyes were always trained on the wants and demands of the society in which I lived and I found myself drowning in the expectations that I was never meant to reach. Throughout it all, I stood true to my identity: I was not just a woman, nor was I just a black person—I was a black woman with no way or desire to separate myself from the two suppressed groups that had created an inescapable chasm of oppression. The intersectionality between race and gender, now presented as a strange phenomenon—to be in a convergence point of two oppressed social constructs is to be forgotten about and trampled upon. This realization hadn't come upon me all at once. It was an epiphany that had to be worked towards by recognizing and noticing the patterns of social behavior and occurrences. Simply put, it seemed as if I was meant to take the good with the bad when it came to the misogynoir I was ruthlessly being subjected to.

This phenomenon was not limited to me. Many black women have had to go through this for centuries. Through this, they created safety mechanisms to protect themselves. These safety mechanisms were rooted in the concept of respectability—a concept of social acceptance that was entrenched with the idea of whiteness. If they couldn't reach whiteness, they could only make their image as close to it as possible through the erasing of their own culture and the taking on of a more widely accepted one—this process is called assimilation. Alongside assimilation, there came an uptake in a similar concept: respectability politics. As defined by Dictionary.com, respectability politics are "a set of beliefs holding that conformity to prescribed mainstream standards of appearance and behavior will protect a person who is part of a marginalized group…Respectability politics place blame on groups already hindered by discrimination."

Respectability politics are heavily intertwined with assimilation, both involving conforming a minority group to a larger, "more accepted" group. However, the sad truth behind both concepts is that you'll never truly reach the goal you've set—the severance between you and your culture may feel strong, but is not definite. To your oppressors, you will always be as you are perceived.

Recently, I stumbled upon a broadcast named *Soul!* that focused on African-American music, dance, and literature. In one episode, Nikki Giovanni & and James Baldwin—two famous civil rights activists and writer—were featured and they discussed the relationship between black women and black men while providing insight into the intersection between the ideals of feminism and black culture. While listening to this broadcast, there was one conversation that struck me as profound. It was discussed how it was once commonplace for a white man to spew racist rhetoric at his black employee and then have that employee go home to home and beat his wife and their children. Baldwin argues that while this system is wrong, it is natural to human nature. Giovanni counters this claim by saying that his point introduces the idea that to feel like a man, the woman must walk ten paces behind him. She goes on to say that it wouldn't matter if she were to walk ten paces behind a dog - the point is that she'll always have to walk behind someone or something to adhere to some form of social hierarchy that will always consider her "less than."

The statement she's presenting is not about who rules whom; it's the notion of ruling itself. The root of this issue is patriarchy and the destructive and insatiable ways it ties into racism. Patriarchy is set up in such a way that it uplifts the oppressors while creating consequences that will go unchecked for those affected. Giovanni's conviction of her never standing far enough behind a man for him to be considered a man translates into a hopeless realization: no matter how much effort you try to put into meeting the goals of the patriarchy, you'll come up short every time.

This conversation changed the focus of my thoughts and made me look into a perspective that I had not previously looked into deeply: the African-American community's treatment and view of the women within it throughout history and how they persist today. While being seen as black,

the patriarchy still affects the oppressed woman, regardless of the race to which she belongs. The discrimination based on their race was not too far from the discrimination they received from their gender. If the patriarchy demanded that women stand ten paces behind a man to feel like a man, then black women must stand twenty paces behind them to not only feel like a man but to also uphold the racial system in which they must stay subservient. I believe it is here where we can begin to dissect the aspects that make up this dynamic and even begin to make strides in breaking down the bars of the cages built on racism and misogyny.

Through examining the harmful effects of respectability politics, particularly as they intersect with the patriarchal and racist structures of American society, we can better understand the internalized misogyny within the Black community and its devastating impact on Black women to explore how perception and assimilation have fostered generational trauma and division within the community. Ultimately, this research aims to trace the roots of these issues to their present-day manifestations, revealing the urgency of dismantling respectability politics to prevent further fragmentation and to begin healing the ongoing wounds within the African-American community.

To truly begin dissecting this behemoth of a topic, it is integral to begin with its roots - femininity. The concept of American feminism itself branches from the idea of femininity historically centered around whiteness. This Eurocentric notion has allowed for the exclusion and rejection of the ideals of black femininity as if these two words were oxymoronic. Generally speaking, art has been a reflection of the times. With that being said, we can analyze the societal perception of black women during this time by observing the artwork created featuring them or their counterparts while noting the differences in their portrayals. "The Octoroon," a sculpture by John Bell created in 1868, depicts a woman who is one-eighth black and seven-eighths white. The sculpting of this work is intentional and every aspect of it speaks to the complexity of her identity. The statue is made of white marble and the woman is shown to be completely naked with chains binding her wrists together, holding what appears to be a cloth cover and flowers. The color of the marble is a reflection of her white complexion and the waviness of her hair speaks to her African heritage - the same heritage that shackles her to the confines of societal perception when it comes to femininity. During this time, naked white women were not to be shown in art as it was seen as an immoral breach of their purity. Simultaneously, black women were seen as biological marvels as their body was deemed impure and exotic, so it was common for their bodies to be put on display. The flowers and drapes she loosely grasps are representations of the femininity and respect that are within reach, but the shackles of society prevent her from donning these items freely.

Although we can see the portrayal of these harmful perceptions through the artistic lens of a white man, we can look through the lens of an actual black woman, such as Sarah Baartman for further understanding. Unfortunately, although there is no official and confirmed account from Baartman, we can still examine the information we are given in combination with a study of colonial history. Born in South Africa, Sara Baartman lived as a servant. She may have spent a while in Cape Town before Hendrick de Jong, a man who is presumed to be the father of her second child, decided to display her body to sailors at the local Naval hospital for cash. After this, Baartman was "persuaded" to come to London, where she would be shown in a "freakshow" to be ogled, poked, and prodded at. During this time, it was alleged that she consented to the displaying of her body, supported the work of her employers, and was even in a contract with them. Despite these claims, it is widely believed that many details about her willingness to participate in these shows were fabricated and it is more than likely that she was coerced or forced into going along with these shows. The exploitation of Baartman often disguised its hideous and dangerous behavior under the guise of scientific research and truly acted as a form of entertainment for the white audience to enjoy the "exotic" nature of a black woman's body that was far different from their own.

In the black community, it'll be rare to find a household that does not have some form of affiliation with religion —especially Christianity. For years upon years, religion has been a saving grace for many and something people resonated with; thus, the churches associated with them naturally followed this pattern. The church often acted as a safe space for black people to find comfort in each other and a higher power they all believed in. While the intertwinement of black culture within Christianity can be attributed to the effects of colonialism, I'll cast this discussion aside for the sake of brevity. In Christianity, there has been a long-standing belief in "a woman's place". The church often sustains the belief that there is a "natural order" to life in which the woman will fall behind her husband dutifully and faithfully. Furthermore, this ideology contributes to a common theme in the church of scrutinizing the woman's actions that do not follow the "natural order" idea while holding the man to lower standards.

This standard for women, built upon the back of religion, opened the door for an uptake in modesty culture. During the 20th century, societal norms were in place for women to grow into and maintain one place in life. The birth of a girl was assumed to be linearly aligned to the pathway of a wife and child-bearer. For black women, however, this ideal was rather skewed as their pathway was assumed to be from their birth to a wayward deviant. In Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives*, she describes the predominantly black streets of Harlem and briefly mentions the "too-fast" women on street corners. The term "too-fast" is one that many black women are all too familiar with. It was used to refer to a girl as promiscuous or to describe behaviors associated with promiscuity. However, these signs were very surface-level and were not remotely associated with the idea or concept of sex. Having your hair straightened and wearing red nail polish were both regarded as "fast" behaviors, but were rather innocuous things. Regardless, these behaviors were morphed into signifiers for "being loose," carrying the idea that these repeated behaviors would lead one down a path of prostitution—a treacherous path that was not only fraught with pain and hardships but one that was frowned upon by society. With the church's strong principles of modesty and the societal fear of falling into undesirable behaviors aligning with prostitution and waywardness, a great number of black women began to hate and detest the "too-fast" behaviors and discouraged their kids from participating. Unfortunately, the fear of falling into the deviance that society abhors only causes the over-policing of the behaviors of young black women. This over-policing in the black community often erased the idea of innocence when it came to black girls. Heavy was the hand of societal standards and hard was the hit of immoral over-sexualization on the young and traumatized black girls. By not blaming the society that churned out the idea that black women are innately promiscuous and forcing young black girls to abstain from otherwise innocuous behaviors to adhere to unrealistic societal standards, you only restrict her freedom while making her more vulnerable to situations in which her sexuality or sexual freedom is tested and taken away from her.

In 1937, Zora Neale Hurston published *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, showcasing a black woman, Janie Crawford, going through the tribulations of domestic abuse, the effects of sexual assault, and the policing of her sexuality. Within the first few chapters of the book, we see Janie explore her sexuality through the metaphor of a pear tree as she experiences her first kiss. Her metaphor describes the balance of nature and the natural act of sex itself in terms of a pear tree in bloom and the bees coming to pollinate it, meeting in "marriage" and "frothing in delight." The kiss is special to Jamie—an action so enlightening and exciting to her with the ideals of what her sexuality meant to her. However, before she can enjoy the kiss and dream of the prospects associated with it, her bliss is suddenly whisked away by her grandmother, Nanny. Nanny informs her of the trouble that her pleasure-filled activity brings and discourages her from indulging in it. She then tells Jamie that she wishes for her to be married soon to keep her away from harm and danger because she won't always be there to do it. Jamie protests the proposal; the idea of marriage and the embarrassment of womanhood is something Jamie does not want to face - the end of her childhood at the first sign of love and sexuality is frightening to her. Love and sexuality—both unfamiliar concepts—that were being subtly presented to her have now been categorized as something that could hurt her. The created meaning of these concepts has now taken place in Jamie's mind and has resonance with the beliefs that she was forming herself through her own experiences. Jamie's ability to form her interpretations about love and sexuality has been stripped away from her—forcing her on a path in which she will be unable to explore these concepts and understand her experiences based on her grandmother's preconceived notions and fears concerning the methods and intentions behind her exploration—effectively creating a cage around her in which she is contained by the concepts she is forbidden to know about. The cage is not something physical, but rather a mental block that prevents her from questioning Nanny's beliefs and staying in the realm of safety by marrying a man of Nanny's choosing. While we see Jamie eventually leave this marriage and Nanny pass away, the influence of Nanny's words and advice persists within Jamie's mind when she marries another man who will eventually go on to abuse her.

> Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance. Still she hung back. The memory of Nanny was still powerful and strong. (Hurston 29)

This quote speaks volumes about the influence of Nanny on Jamie's perception of her sexual desires and self-perception. The cage that Nanny placed Jamie into for her safety has now caused her to deny herself pleasure and happiness for the "safety" found in the union of a loveless marriage. Jamie is but a sample of the large population of black women who have consistently found themselves unable to pursue their interests or find their version of peace due to the imposition of others' interpretations and ideals, chaining them to what they believe is best in terms of safety or the interest of others.

Nanny's reaction to Jamie's exploration of her sexuality is rather severe, but it does raise a rather intriguing question: what makes her react in such a fashion? To answer this question, we must look into the past, specifically Jamie's mother. At the age of seventeen, Jamie's mother, Leafy, was raped by her teacher. After undergoing such a traumatic event, it wrecked her mental state—even more so after learning that she was pregnant with Jamie. During her pregnancy, she took up alcoholism and stayed out late at night. When Jamie was born, Leafy left without a trace and was never seen again. Nanny tells Jamie this to explain why she wishes to see her married before her death. Nanny states:

> "Ah don't want yo' feathers always crumpled by folks throwin' up things in yo' face. "Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cup outa you. Have some sympathy fuh me. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate." (Hurston 20)

Nanny's intentions are pure—she wants to keep Jamie safe by marrying her off to a man who will provide her a home and financial stability. Her actions are reactions to current happenings, mimicking the events she viewed long ago —

the same events that traumatized and took her daughter from her. The cycle of preservation and safety through undesirable actions is a cycle that we see begin with Jamie's mother, but it is not clear where it will end—this creates generational trauma. If these actions and beliefs are cyclic, what will it take to break the pattern?

With Jamie, we saw the instilling of generational trauma and cyclic behaviors being reinforced by the well-meaning family in a desperate act of searching for safety. However, what occurs when this well-meaning family is taken out of the equation and we are only left with the traumatized individual? What becomes of them? In the narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, written by Harriet Jacobs, the splitting of families is detailed in a scene in which she attempts to confess to her grandmother that her slave master was taking advantage of her. Throughout the work, Jacobs highlights how she was granted certain privileges that the master's mistress did not take kindly to. After finding out that the slave master was having intercourse with Jacobs, the mistress interrupts the confession to confront her. After the confrontation, Jacob's grandmother says, "'O Linda! Has it come to this? I had rather see you dead than to see you as you are now. You are a disgrace to your dead mother'" (Jacobs 1045). This quote is key, as it shows that not only has Jacobs lost her mother, but has just been denounced by her grandmother, creating a disappointment with her for concerning herself with the master, so much so that she denounces her and takes her deceased mother's wedding ring from her. Jacobs considered her grandmother to be the rock in her life, so without her, she had lost all of her familial connections. The baby's father—a slave owner—will not care for the child and will most certainly not resemble a father figure due to the vastly different power imbalance between the slave and the slave owner. Before all of these events even took place, she lost her mother at a young age. Without her mother, grandmother, and an actual father figure for the child, she was left alone with no one to rely upon.

Although Jacobs was taken advantage of by the predatory slave master, the shame from her grandmother led the way for guilt to settle on Jacobs, putting more strain upon her. This moment stands to show that all of her familial ties have been severed and how she is forced into a position that will force her to undergo stress without support due to the institution of slavery and the further preservation of those ideals.

Through societal and community perceptions, it is clear that black women were not seen as equals and were consistently being trampled over. With a desperation to find safety, many black women turned to the only option they felt like they had left—assimilation. According to Britannica, assimilation is "the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. [T]he process of assimilating involves taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the society." By eradicating your connection to your own culture and attempting to assimilate into the "popular, accepted" one, you internalize the hate put onto you and your culture. You attempt to assimilate yourself physically and socially to the point where you have colonized your mind.

With the harmful notions of black culture constantly being thrown back into the faces of black people to mock or shame them, it seemed natural that many people in that community wanted to avoid those presumptions at all costs. The way to avoid this was to assimilate. By erasing aspects of their culture that shone through them, they were able to make themselves "more digestible" to the general public. In becoming "more digestible," they make themselves more appealing to their oppressors or completely immerse themselves in assimilation, finding safety in the concept of "passing" when it comes to whiteness.

In April of 1929, Nella Larsen published a novel titled "Passing, telling the story of two black women—Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield—exploring the racialized landscape of their society while adapting and embodying what it meant to be "passing" in terms of whiteness. While both women's skin tones are not something that they changed to assimilate themselves, they both utilize the advantages that their lighter complexion brings them. When analyzing the characters of Irene and Clare, we see that they are heavily juxtaposed with each other. While both are light-skinned women who can pass as white and use this fact to their benefit, their values differ immensely. Although Irene socially identifies herself as a black woman and views "passing" to be traitorous to your race, Clare sees it as an opportunity to obtain all that has been missing from her life. Throughout the novel, we see "passing" being used as a safety mechanism.

In the first few chapters, we see a flashback in which Irene reflects on meeting Clare for the first time since they were children in The Drayton, a hotel that only serves white patrons. During their meeting, Clare and Irene discuss Clare "passing" as a fully white woman. She reveals that she chooses to "pass" for economic benefit, a better social standing, freedom, and the ability to pursue and marry an outwardly racist white man, who is unaware of Clare's real race. Irene believes Clare's intentions to be disgustingly self-serving and akin to turning your back on your race, as Irene chooses to identify and socialize with her race. Irene's logic is not without fault, however, as her presence within The Drayton symbolizes how she uses her ability to pass as white for personal gain as well. When questioned about her reasons for not choosing to pass, Irene answers that she has everything that she needs, besides a little bit more money. To this, Clare responds:

> Of course…that's what everyone wants, just a little more money, even the people who have it. And I must say I don't blame them. Money's awfully nice to have. In fact, all things considered, I think, 'Rene, that it's even worth the price (Larsen 44).

Growing up, money didn't always come easy for Clare, with the root cause frequently being her race. With all she wanted being a single identifier away, the opportunity was too tempting to resist. In her eyes, letting go of her true identity to immerse herself in the more accepted one grants her freedom that she believes is otherwise unattainable. However, this freedom is built upon questionable standings. What quantifies freedom? How free is that freedom when you have to strip away parts of you to fully bask in it? In the exchange of identity for freedom, how do you not lose yourself?

This freedom is brought into question when Clare is pregnant with her daughter, Margery. When discussing her pregnancy experience, she reveals the constant anxiety concerning her baby, but this concern does not stem from the health of her baby; rather, it stems from the skin complexion of her baby. Recounting her pregnancy to Irene, Clare says, "I nearly died of terror the whole nine months before Margery was born for fear that she might be dark. Thank goodness, she turned out all right. But I'll never risk it again. Never! The strain is simply too—too hellish" (Larsen 59). Clare's idea of freedom is fragile and hinges on a major secret. If the birth of her daughter exposes the lie that she has built everything on, then her "freedom" will crumble. The path to her "freedom" was paved with a facade. If freedom was to live in your truth, then Clare was living in the captivity of lies. By escaping the confines of one of her cages, Clare obtains a previously unknown freedom. Still, in the process, she clips her wings, rendering her unable to fly freely in her new reality where she is still constrained by the bars of patriarchy's cage.

While Clare's story is a fictional one, it parallels what many black women felt they had to do to be free. Leaving their culture behind to experience a taste of life without the restrictions of race, while still being held back by the chains of misogyny. With that being said, many took to fighting back against their oppressors, one step at a time. However, for black women, this was easier said than done.

The concept of American feminism itself branches from the idea of femininity that has historically been centered around whiteness. This Eurocentric notion of femininity has allowed for the exclusion and rejection of the ideals of black femininity. This rejection leads to the masculinization, sexualization, and othering of black women, which has led to these black women having to seek safety in ways that only restrict their freedom. During the early stages of feminism, black women were not only outcasted but also targeted. Margaret Sanger was a prominent women's rights activist in the mid-twentieth century, often hailed as the mother of birth control, as she took major steps to fight for the right of people to make informed choices about their bodies and actions. Sanger's main goal was to advocate for more education and accessibility to birth control. Unbeknownst to many, though, it was heavily implied through secret letters she had sent that the motives behind her actions were unscrupulous. Sanger, a white woman, evoked core principles of eugenics to promote birth control for women, as she wanted to decrease the "negro population" by reducing the birth rate of black children. The letter detailed that allowing more underprivileged groups access to birth control would lead to a decrease in "undesirable" populations. These populations included people of lower socioeconomic class and black people. While many people believe that Sanger did not truly believe in this and only played up the eugenic narrative to pave the way for accessible birth control, the harm remains.

During the early stages of feminism, black women were not only outcasted but also targeted, as seen through Margaret Sanger's use of eugenics to promote birth control for women. Even when the topic of discrimination is discussed, black women are specifically left out due to the intersectionality of their identity. In discussions combating racism, black men are made the focus, and in misogyny, white women are presented front and center - a topic presented by Kimberly Crenshaw and Ida B. Wells. From these issues rose the powerful force of black feminism, where black women were not only accepted but acknowledged as well. Early prominent voices of black women, such as Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells, challenged various forms of societal expectations put upon women at large. Specifically, how racism and sexism had managed to harm Black women in various ways. They laid the foundation for what would later be formally developed into an organization of black feminism that covered intersectionality, community, and empowerment, mainly by rejecting the idea that Black women must meet the standards set by the white, societal norms to be valued.

Kevin Gaines's book, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, is an account of the extensive work and ideals of Black intellectuals that shaped and paved the way for activism for African-Americans throughout history. Among these activists is Anna Julia Cooper, an intellectual and strong voice when it came to the empowerment of black women.

Anna Julia Cooper was a major figure in the intellectual history of Black feminism and racial uplift during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In *Uplifting the Race*, Gaines examines Cooper's contributions within the broader context of Black intellectual thought and activism during the era. Cooper, who was one of the few Black women to earn a doctoral degree at the time, made important contributions to education, advocacy for Black women, and racial justice. Her work is often associated with the Black intellectual tradition that sought to improve the social and political conditions of Black Americans through education, moral reform, and social activism. Anna Cooper's most famous work, *A Voice from the South*, outlines her philosophy of

black uplift, emphasizing the importance of education for black men and women and insisting that black women have a distinctive and crucial role to play in the advancement of the race because of their role in the family and as community leaders. Cooper also made a point of emphasizing that Black women's contributions often went unrecognized in mainstream discussions of race and gender.

However, there were still issues within Cooper's method: she often played into the idea of respectability to a certain extent, seeing it as a way to access political and social power, as revealed by Gaines: "Yet even as she challenged those aspects of uplift ideology and social reform that invoked and perpetuated race and gender inequalities, she espoused the middle-class, nativist biases of the period, reflecting black elites' indignation at the racism of poor whites and immigrants" (Gaines 133). While her vision was different from the narrow view of respectability put forward by the white society, it still had hints of the same conformity that the narrow view of respectability pushed upon those who did not fit the standard. In Cooper's view, respectability did not relate to the conformation of black people to the ideals of white, middle-class women but was a means for uplifting the black community through education, moral development, and solidarity.

Cooper argued that black women in particular needed to prove their moral and intellectual worth in order to counter the stereotypes of black inferiority that saturated white society. This was all part of a broader respectability politics of the era, which confronted racist thinking about the "inferiority" of black people by proving that black people were capable of education and middle-class respectability. In short, it had seemed as if she was attempting to fight the idea of respectability by feeding into the idea of respectability - an odd, yet predicament cycle that many activists, perhaps like Margaret Sanger, find themselves in. Cooper was an important figure in the legacy of black women because she represented a common struggle within black intellectual thought: the balance between striving for social respectability and challenging the racial and gendered structures that perpetuate oppression. While speaking out about the issues that black women face and actively promoting black feminism, Cooper still resides in the confines of her cage, attempting to forage a way out by chaining herself to the bars.

The balance between a rock and a hard place is not easy to navigate, but I believe it can be traversed through the forging of a new path. The injustices propagated through centuries of racial and gender oppression are going to take more than mere recognition; they require action. The systems contributing to the marginalization of Black women are deeply embedded in society's structures, from education to politics to culture. Solving the many complex problems black women face today requires more than isolated acts of resistance or reform; rather, it requires a systemic reset. Solutions come from a deep commitment to the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The roadmap of collective liberation will involve changes in policy, including affordable healthcare, reproductive rights, and economic justice; it will require cultural shifts so that black women are taken seriously and genuinely heard. We have to decolonize our minds. Challenging the idea of respectability, how we let it perceive others, and realizing that it is nothing but a confine, holding us back from the people we could be. To do this for black women, we need to listen to them, amplify their voices, and create spaces for them to express themselves fully and unapologetically.

Growing up as a Black woman in America has painfully made clear that no matter how much you try to mold yourself in the most assimilatory ways, the cages that racism and patriarchy have constructed are quite intact. The manipulation of Black culture through physical and social assimilation never fully hides you from those who would just not see you as anything other than "other." The more you try to fit into the very society that constantly sets out to undermine you, the further away you feel from yourself. Respectability politics, which demand that marginalized people conform to a narrow set of behaviors and appearances, are particularly insidious in their effect on Black women, leading us to internalize the very biases that oppress us. This phenomenon of self-hatred, rooted in the desire for safety and acceptance in a world that will never fully accept you, has been a part of black women's experiences for centuries. They live in a cage within a cage, begging to be set free.

We have seen it in the sacrifices our ancestors made, trying to save themselves and their families by sacrificing their identities and culture to get the approval of the whites. Yet, despite all attempts at assimilation, the fact remains that no matter how hard you try to distance yourself from your roots, you will never be able to fully escape the identity imposed upon you. To those in power, you are forever marked by your race and gender, and their judgment of you is shaped not by your individuality but by the stereotypes and fears that have long been constructed around Black women. It is within this examination of how these dynamics have played out throughout history and their impacts today that one could best understand the internalized misogynies and traumas that mold the collective psyche of the black community and prevent the advancement past these issues. Black women, trapped in a cage within a cage—one of racism and one of misogyny—must break free not by conforming to the systems that imprison them, but by dismantling those very structures and forging a path to liberation on their own terms.

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Activism And Aesthetics: African American Art and Its Influence on Aesthetic Values from the Renaissance Era

Caroline Downs

An artwork always makes use of historically given material, and it is through the 'formal reconfiguration of these materials, [that it] exposes the possibility that something could be otherwise.
- Molly Anne Rothenberg

Distractedly wandering through the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, my attention was suddenly overtaken. Before me was one of the most striking pieces of art I had ever seen. A Black woman, larger than life, stood confidently, grasping the ponytail of a White woman's severed head in her hand. In the other hand, a sharp dagger dripping with blood. Surrounding the woman were twisting vines and flowers, brightly framing the scene that seemed as if it should not be so delicate. Looking at the plaque, I realized I recognized the scene: it was a retelling of the Biblical story of Judith and Holofernes, and the painting was created by the modern artist Kehinde Wiley.



Figure 1. Wiley, Kehinde. Judith and Holofernes, 2012, oil on linen. North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC.

For centuries, artistic depictions of Judith and Holofernes have been used as a way to demonstrate female power. The story involves a woman seducing and murdering a general to save her town and family. In the original text, "one does not learn much about the emotions of the protagonist Judith" (Schmitz 187). Therefore, many artists have theorized about the nature of her attack. Some believe her to be fearful, and others depict her as vengeful. A 1599 painting by Caravaggio (Fig. 2) shows Judith and her maid cautiously cutting the man.



Figure 2. Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. Judith Beheading Holofernes, 1599, oil on canvas. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica at Palazzo Barberini, Rome.



Figure 3. Gentileschi, Artemisia. Judith Slaying Holofernes, 1620–21, oil on canvas. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

A few months before, I had learned of the version painted by Artemisia Gentileschi (Fig. 3). In contrast to previous versions of the retelling, her painting depicted Judith looking angry and determined, holding Holofernes down as blood splatters everywhere. I remember being awed by Gentileschi's ability to defy the norms of gender roles and art. She created a space in which women can defend themselves and those that they love. Wiley's placement of the woman in his painting tells a

different story: by incorporating race, he is addressing the privilege that White women so often take for granted. Removing the maid from the scene makes the Judith figure independent. Imbued with the same rebellious and shocking narrative, this painting has a very different effect on the viewer. I realized that Wiley was not trying to incite resentment or anger. He was simply finding his unique way to acknowledge systemic oppression. And it worked. I would not have stopped to look at the painting if it had not been so striking. I would not have remembered the painting if I hadn't recognized the story. When I look at other works of art, I think about how this painting explains why certain works of art, namely European ones, reinforce White beauty standards and power. I can consider what it means for the audience, especially if it is created for a Black audience. It also made me wonder about the choices Wiley made in imitating this story in particular, and how this type of representation is present in other works.

Activist art seeks to betray our expectations of art, but what are our expectations in the first place? Renaissance art sought to create the most beautiful pieces possible, rooted in the idea of symmetry and harmony. Most art is based on the beauty of the human body, often seeking to create the most aesthetically pleasing figure possible. Modern art rejected these ideas: it became an alternative to restrictive academic views on art. This created an opening for artists to experiment with new techniques.

One other crucial element of modern art is its ability to connect with viewers. Renaissance art sought to create a distance between the subjects and the viewers. Art was for the wealthy and powerful who wanted to display their wealth and power. Therefore, they were commissioned to appear imposing and aloof. Modern-day African American artists do the opposite: their subjects are begging for you to interact with them and hear their stories. Titus Kaphar, for example, takes it a step further by urging viewers to watch him create his art, so the viewers cannot help but form a deeper connection to the art.



Figure 4. Thomas, Hank Willis. The Embrace. Bronze sculpture, 2023. Boston Common, Boston, MA

The 2023 installation of *The Embrace* caused a significant amount of controversy. Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King's iconic photograph, the sculpture was criticized for looking like male genitalia at some angles. The artist, Hank Willis Thomas, argued in an article by The Guardian that critics are forgetting his original urge for unity and equality in the surrounding Boston community. He welcomed the attention, though, saying, "People are going to forget about the statue in a week, so what could happen in a week or two is that our organizations, from coast to coast, could find some common ground and maybe be able to help each other create better neighborhoods" (Chan). It turns out that the coverage the statue was receiving helped the causes that the statue was created for, demonstrating the power that unique and striking art has on its activist message.

While Renaissance sculpture sought to awe audiences with its perfect proportions and symmetry, modern artists must experiment with new forms to maintain the interest of their audience. It appears that many modern activist artists like to modify and experiment with the forms and structures reminiscent of Renaissance art rather than the original meaning.

Experimenting with form varies by medium, but Jean-Michel Basquiat is undoubtedly a master. Like Wiley, Basquiat experiments with masculinity and gender in his works, examining the role it has in his own life and the lives of others (Luckett 105). In his Modena Paintings collection, he blends his abstract, splotchy technique with typical Italian motifs. His work *Untitled* (Woman with Roman Torso [Venus]) (Fig. 5) shows a distorted outline of the Venus de Milo statue. The collection was displayed in Italy and was greatly admired by art critics. They liked his perspective and the energy of the paintings: "fresh, wild. They are like energy bombs" (House). His works are reminiscent of graffiti artwork, combining aspects of his American, Haitian, and Puerto Rican identity. Throughout his travels in Italy, Basquiat allowed himself to be inspired by his surroundings without having the pressure of pleasing his audience.



Figure 5. Basquiat, Jean-Michel. Untitled (Woman with Roman Torso [Venus]), 1982. Acrylic and oil stick on canvas.

To fully understand modern aestheticism, one must look to the origin of African American activist art and why it diverged from traditional aesthetics.

Activism for African Americans has been fraught with violence from racist counter-protesters. Many artists began their careers adressing lynching, including W.E.B. Du Bois. Photography and documentary footage proved to be an important way "to let the people of the United States, and the world, know WHAT is taking place," allowing activists to "try to convict lynchers in the courts" (Lampert 126). Paired with essays by many other activists, these photos proved to the general public that lynching was a cruel and unnecessary punishment for Black people who were usually innocent. Du Bois believed that "readers needed to know every detail of lynchings" as well as personal information about the victim (Lampert 128). This created a connection to the viewers that made this issue impossible to ignore. Photography as a means of communication allowed for the creation of a visual history. Black photographers were able to frame themselves and their subjects in a way that valued their beauty and importance.



Figure 6. Parks, Gordon. Emerging Man, Harlem, New York, 1952. Gelatin silver print. Princeton University Art Museum.

Gordon Parks similarly harnessed the power of photography, although he was working amid civil rights movements in the mid-20th century. A pioneer in photography and photojournalism, he often used his personal experience with racism and segregation to dictate his works. Inspired by Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, Parks's photograph *Emerging Man* (Fig. 6) describes his sense of alienation within American society. Ellison's novel describes the "psychological damage inflicted by racism" experienced by the main character, a Black man rendered "invisible" in the eyes of white society ("Emerging Man").



Figure 7. Lyon, Danny. Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement. University of North Carolina Press, 1992



Figure 8. Douglas, Emory. Poster from *The Black Panther,* 1969. Offset lithograph

Creating art became a powerful way to challenge racism, and many Black artists agree that their art was created for themselves rather than an audience. Langston Hughes famously said, "if white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful" (Hughes). Creating powerful art meant the primarily Black audience was motivated to become involved in the abolitionist and desegregation movement. For example, photos of protests like the one taken by Danny Lyon (Fig. 7) proved to the public that there was support for these movements. This photo was used on promotional posters that garnered support from the surrounding community, creating a path for more protest.

The Black Panther Party, an activist group created in 1966, focused primarily on preventing police brutality and protesting against racist legislation. Emory Douglas's graphic designs for the party were an excellent example of promotional activist art. Figure 8 depicts a cover designed for the newspaper distributed to supporters. His pieces helped build support for the party and inspired many changes to its organization and function (Adler & Gardner). Their bold lines and striking appearance brought support to the party, allowing them to continue defending themselves and their communities.

A crucial aspect of Black identity is a connection to community, which was important for providing protection and a sense of self. According to Du Bois, African Americans experienced "double consciousness," the struggle between the perception of the self and societal expectations. The multiculturalism of the United States facilitates cultural interaction, which leads visual artists to adopt new techniques. Black artists adopted European techniques out of a desire to experiment with new forms, expand their audience, and to embrace their identity as both the descendants of African people and as Americans. African

American art is inherently American art, as each influences the other.

Du Bois was also interested in the connection between Africa and African Americans. He believed that "relationships between homeland and its diaspora can, for the most part, be beneficial; the dispersed communities reaffirm their sense of being by deepening their attachment to a place of ancestral origins" (Okeke-Agulu). Motifs from African art were used heavily in the works of Black artists worldwide. Understanding one's heritage and ancestry can foster a sense of closeness to family that cannot be replaced by violence. Incorporating a story into a piece of art makes it more relatable to the audience.

Art, meant to shift the idea of what we already know, can be used in powerful ways by activists to express anger, fear, and joy. Activist artists have developed several techniques that are especially effective for capturing an audience: often those that are striking and unique. African American artists especially have various influences on their styles, including classical European Renaissance works. Using recognizable stories can have a larger impact on the audience: they can see the original works in a different light while considering the effect of race on other works. The rise of African American activist art has led to a radical shift in aesthetic values attributed to the change in the audience's interaction with and relationship to a given piece of art.

Titus Kaphar began his artistic career when he realized that Black representation in art is alarmingly low. After teaching himself to paint, Kaphar began recreating paintings from the Renaissance period as well as early American works, often replacing white subjects with Black ones to highlight the history of white supremacy and privilege.

In other works, Kaphar references European artists to acknowledge the white privilege present in their compositions. In this work entitled *Shifting the Gaze* (2017), Kaphar uses white paint to cover up the White family in the painting, allowing the viewer to see the Black slave boy who had been shrouded in shadows before. His 2017 TED



Figure 9. Kaphar, Titus. Shifting the Gaze. Oil paint on canvas, 2017. Jack Shainman Gallery.

Talk "Can Art Amend History?" demonstrates his process by filming him painting over the original scene. As he begins to swipe paint over his piece, he states, "all this art history that I had been absorbing helped me to realize that painting is a language." Kaphar is effectively rewriting the narrative of the original painter. He wants to expose what was ignored when the painting was created. As the white paint fades, the white figures will reappear. In the meantime, the painting provides an opportunity for the audience to refocus their gaze. This video also demonstrates a crucial element of activist art that Kaphar utilizes often: he demonstrated his process by painting for an audience. It was alarming to watch the scene that Kaphar took so long to paint being covered up, but it made the dedication to his work even more clear

The original painting entitled *Family Group in a Landscape* was a 17th-century work by Frans Hals largely admired for its depiction of the parents "holding hands and looking at each other," praised as "the very picture of conjugal happiness" and morality ("Family Group in a Landscape"). Kaphar was rightly upset at the underrepresentation of the boy; many descriptions of the painting give him one sentence, with equivalent regard given to the family's dog. Even more than in Kaphar's recreation, the boy is set deep into the shadows. At first glance, he is barely visible to the viewer, especially from afar.



Figure 10. Hals, Frans. A Family Group in a Landscape, c. 1645-1648, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

This raises the question: why did the original artist include the boy in the first place? It was highly unconventional to include a Black person in a family photo, and many sources suggest that he was probably a slave or servant boy. Although he is set far into the background, he is the only subject looking directly at the viewer. Art critics have a few theories about his placement, possibly that the artist shared "some level of sympathy with the boy" or that the family wanted to appear "trend setting or otherwise virtuous" compared to their aristocratic counterparts (Taylor). My guess is that the choice was probably to the advantage of the family or the artist, not an attempt to bring recognition to the boy as Kaphar does in his modified version.

Despite his attempts to create art for African Americans whose ancestors experienced enslavement and systemic oppression, Kaphar explains in his 2022 documentary short *Shut Up and Paint* that "ninety percent of what [he sells] doesn't go into Black or brown homes," and instead

to wealthy white households. His documentary shows him taking a phone call with a gallery that had just refused to buy and display his artwork:

> What you're trying to explain to me is I'm making paintings about white supremacy, and that institutions that facilitate white supremacy are saying, 'if you just don't talk so loud about that and not say the things that it's actually about, not say the things that actually motivate you to make what you make, then… we would accept what you do,' and so I'm like, 'why would I do that?'

Most art buyers or curators separate Kaphar's work from the meaning behind it. White audiences whose experiences differ so greatly from Kaphar's intended audience appreciate the paintings only for the aesthetic beauty, causing Kaphar to question the effectiveness of his current medium. Instead, he has shifted to filmmaking, which allows his message to be sent to all audiences regardless of income. This demonstrates another important question for activist art: what is the most effective way to send a message to the people who need to hear it? Abolition movements used filmmaking to reach wide audiences beginning with the moving panorama, a system of "paintings on canvas" that were "accompanied by music and narration" (Lampert 33). Filmmaking allows viewers to make a connection to the scene: they feel as if they are interacting with the characters and getting to know them rather than just watching their stationary figures.

Kehinde Wiley experiments with gender and race similarly to Kaphar, replacing and modifying the figures in older paintings. He wants to adapt the most beautiful parts



of European painting, stating, "There's something glorious about the portraits that you see of aristocrats and royal families. Something beautiful in those expansive imperialist landscapes" (Morris). However, Wiley wants museums to appeal to everyone, meaning more art should represent African American audiences. He aims to do just that: placing Black figures in paintings that display their power and dignity.

Napoleon Crossing the Alps (1801) was painted in honor of Napoleon Bonaparte's journey across the Alps to conquer Italy. At the time, creating political paintings was a way to show support for a leader and display their power and prestige. The artist, Jacques-Louis David, was a fervent supporter of the emperor, and he greatly exaggerated the scene. For example, he replaced the original mule with the majestic steed pictured (Zaczek).

Wiley reclaimed power for Black men with his recreation



of the painting entitled *Napoleon Leading the Army Over the Alps* (2005). He challenged the power that centuries of white men abused and created a statement about sexuality and masculinity, a theme he explores often in his art. Using "jewel-like sperm cells scattered across the surface," Wiley uses his own experience with sexuality to discuss how hypermasculinity "associates with aggression" ("Napoleon Leading the Army Over the Alps").

There is something powerful about Wiley creating a piece about racial justice out of what was originally government propaganda. He maintains almost none of the original meaning. The advantage of using this painting is simply to use a motif that can be quickly recognized as royalty. In this way, he uses our own perceptions of power in art against us: he places what is unexpected in a familiar scene. Like Kaphar, Wiley can also take advantage of the audience's image recognition. In fact, when the original image is searched online, many results depict Wiley's painting rather than the original one.

In addition to replicating and modifying European pieces, individual techniques like that of grisaille have been adapted by Black artists. Originally, this technique involved using grey paint underneath color paint to emphasize shadows and highlights within a piece. It created a richer and more developed color scheme. Also, it provided a "three-dimensional effect, resembling sculptures" (Bowers). Amy Sherald uses this technique as a way to emphasize the humanity of her subjects by leaving their skin grey. By de-emphasizing the role of race discrimination in the lives of her subjects, she has reclaimed their humanity and their personality, while maintaining the history of their lives and families that so significantly affects them. This technique deepens the audience's relationship with the subjects: they can see the personality that Sherald took the time to get to know.

Another striking element of Sherald's works is the direct eye contact each subject makes with the viewer. In an interview with Colossal Magazine, Sherald describes portraiture as "passive," as if the viewer is watching the subject. Renaissance paintings of wealthy aristocrats, to appear intimidating, often showed an unapproachable, haughty expression. In contrast, Sherald creates subjects that are "present, they're willing, they're open, and they want to meet you as the viewer" (Beete). A simple but vibrant background allows the viewer to appreciate the subjects for who they are rather than placing them in the context of what is around them. She maintains the dignified stance of elite and powerful figures in her portraits. However, one distinction that can be made between the work of Amy Sherald and that of Kehinde Wiley is her use of plain backgrounds and more ordinary clothing: she



represents her subjects in a way less reminiscent of royalty. When looking at Sherald's Michelle Obama portrait in the National Gallery, I was struck both by the confidence she exuded and the kind expression she wore. Even though her power was undeniable, her likeness felt human in a way that most portraits are unable to capture.

One of her most famous works depicts Breonna Taylor. Created shortly after her murder during a police raid, she is calm and confident, wearing an engagement ring she never got to receive. By speaking with Taylor's mother, Sherald



was able to capture her subject's personality and love for fashion (Greenidge). Like photographs and articles about lynchings, artists and activists used personal details about the victims to strengthen their message. It is a powerful message about violence against innocent Black women and why it must be stopped. Black women are constantly fighting against discrimination based on both race and sex. According to the activist group Guerrilla Girls, "Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female." (Hessel & Rudnick). Black women especially are constantly over- or under-sexualized to their disadvantage in many different ways: their body shapes are desired yet discriminated against. Black female artists have



begun to create art addressing the historic discrimination of Black bodies, reclaiming their own sexuality and inspiring others to do the same. However, the liberation of sexuality for Black women has arguably led to the reinforcement of oversexualized stereotypes.

Largely informed by her experience as an African American and Mexican woman, Elizabeth Catlett's works vary from prints to sculptures. In her piece entitled *Torso* (ca. 1994), "Catlett directs the viewer's attention on the features of the Black female body, particularly her bulky and broad hips and thighs, signifying beauty, power, and



strength" (Rowell 1008). Renaissance sculptures depict an idealized version of bodies: perfect proportions, slim. In this sculpture, Catlett can celebrate bodies that are underrepresented and discriminated against. The Black bodies that are so often oversexualized were reclaimed with Catlett's demonstration of their beauty and elegance.

Linoleum printing, another technique originating in Europe, has been adopted by African American artists to create bold prints, usually using contrasting colors. Reminiscent of Emory Douglas's Black Panther graphics, the "long tradition of artists using woodcut and linocut prints to address the issues of their time" found it an effective way to portray scenes of war and struggle (Adler & Gardner). The power of linocut prints comes from their sharp edges and defined shapes: there is something satisfying about their exactness.

In Catlett's print entitled *Roots* (1981), the head of a Black figure is superimposed on a larger, more abstract figure. The background is a patterned recreation of the American flag. She wants her audience to be "both [B]lack and [W]hite Americans" who recognize the history of the United States to be strongly rooted in the collaboration between "both Western African and Western European experiences" (Rowell 1005). Acknowledging exploitation and collaboration can enhance our understanding of American history.

Although Catlett drew inspiration from European art, she was specifically against the use of these muses too heavily. At one point in her career, she stated, "I have now rejected 'International Art' [European Art] except to use those of its techniques that may help me make the messages clearer to my folks. If my work at the moment seems contradictory in its form, I hope it is clear in content and that the form will clarify itself" (Rowell 1001). Throughout her career, Catlett wanted to maintain the uniqueness of Black art while continuing to search for new techniques and develop her style.

African American activist art has led a shift in aesthetic values attributed to the change in the audience's interaction with and relationship to a given piece of art, sometimes using classical Renaissance techniques as the basis for their inspiration. In addition, incorporating different aspects of identity, such as gender, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity, can deepen the audience's understanding of the artist's experience and can provide an opportunity for the audience to make a deeper connection with the artist. Activist art is intended to push the boundaries created by academic and traditional art. As artists continue to expand their ideas of art, they must maintain the eyes of the viewer to convey their message. Art that is different, shocking, and powerful takes precedence over what is repetitive. To expand visual interest, many postmodern artists rethink their techniques and inspiration. Art must also have a story that can be followed by the viewer, regardless of background. This makes having a recognizable story more impactful: artists can build off of a basis of knowledge that much of their audience already has. The future of art is impossible to predict, but incorporating the voices of minority artists will allow art to be both more universal and more innovative. The works of Black artists are just beginning to inspire the ideas and aesthetics of their future generations.

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Sovereignty and FAP Recognition: The Death of Indigenous Popele

Jacey Hilburn

The Lumbee tribe, one of the most well-known tribal nations in America, is the largest Indigenous tribe east of the Mississippi River, with the majority of their distribution in the Southeastern lands of North Carolina. Yet, unlike nations such as the Navajo and Lakota, who have the same name recognition, the Lumbee do not possess recognition from the U.S. government as a tribal entity, and therefore, have no sovereignty. Their story is one that is consistent across tribes in the U.S. due to the extremely rigorous, settler colonialist, failed, and outdated framework of the current process to determine federal recognition known as the Federal Acknowledgement Program (FAP). This program is integral in not only providing sovereignty for tribes, but also providing protections and funding that are not accessible to non-recognized tribes. However, the problem of federal recognition is not a one-sided issue because once tribes do obtain recognition from the government, they are left deserted with some of the worst living conditions, access to education, and healthcare due to the exploitation of the American government. These truths of the Indigenous experience reveal how sovereignty as it is defined and enacted in the United States is failing Indigenous communities. In this paper, I offer a multi-pronged argument critiquing the current inception of the FAP for its necropolitical and settler colonial underpinnings. I maintain that despite these failures, Indigenous tribes need recognition, and in the course of my argument, I propose a new enactment of FAP-based recognition that revises the process and outcomes that currently subject Indigenous people to lesser life outcomes.

The Federal Acknowledgement Program (FAP) claims to provide a pathway for federal recognition to Indigenous tribes, however, its settler colonial and necropolitical framework combined with its extreme rigor, intentionally prohibits tribes from gaining access to this right. To understand the settler colonialist nature of the FAP, it is imperative to understand what settler colonialism is. In his paper, "Settler Colonialism and Elimination of the Native," Patrick Wolfe describes settler colonialism as, "an inclusive, land-centred project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies" (Wolfe, 393). The framework that Wolfe provides for settler colonialism not only recenters it as an ongoing system but also reveals that its true intention is land acquisition at the cost of Native lives.

In this paper, I argue that settler colonialism is not only a land-centered project as Wolfe argues but is also an enactment of necropolitics. Achille Mbembe, one of the forerunners in thought concerning necropolitics, defines it as the right of the nation-state to kill. Specifically, in his paper, "Necropolitics," Mbembe states, "To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (Mbembe, 12). As seen through Mbembe's definition, sovereignty, and therefore power, is directly linked to the ownership of death and the means to execute death. Within the Westernized context, sovereignty as the right to kill is embodied through violence, and who has the right to enact it. Take, for example, war which is violence conducted and condoned by the nation-state, in comparison to protesting, which is violence by citizens policed by the nation-state. This scenario reveals how only the nation-state has the right to conduct violence and control death, which according to Mbembe, is what defines sovereignty. Using the idea of sovereignty as Mbembe defines it allows us to draw a line between recognition and settler colonialism. Since the system of settler colonialism is to eliminate the Native, which means having access over Native lives, it is also inherently necropolitical since the nation-state is deciding who lives and who dies. This connection becomes apparent when analyzing the FAP to see how it is not only built with a settler colonial framework but is also an enactment of the necropolitical sovereignty of the United States.

Given this, it follows then that the FAP, the only governmental-sponsored route for recognition that often grants land to Indigenous people, would be designed against Indigenous peoples to appeal to the settler colonialist structure that America was built on. This system is inherent in the FAP by analyzing its language. One of the first appearances of settler colonialism in the FAP is in its section, "What terms are used in this part?" in which it defines 'key terms.' Among these terms are "Historical" and "Indigenous" where historical is defined as "before 1900" and Indigenous as "native to the continental United States in that at least part of the petitioner's territory at the first sustained contact extended into what is now the continental United States" (25 CFR Pt. 83, 3). While these definitions may seem innocent, in reality, they narrow what constitutes Indigenous people. For example, the FAP has seven major requirements that Native tribes have to meet in order to qualify for recognition. These requirements are: Indian entity identification, Community, Political influence or authority, Descent, Unique membership, and Congressional termination. Within these requirements, the definitions above appear, specifically the definition of historical when determining what qualifies for descent. And, as is stated in the FAP, a tribe meets the requirement for descent if, "the petitioner's membership consists of individuals who descend from a historical Indian tribe" (25 CFR Pt. 83, 9). As per the definition given above, historical equates to before 1900, meaning that tribes have to prove that their blood traces back to before this time period. This task can be extremely difficult for tribes due to the historical context that frames this time period, such as racism, which drastically limited access to resources, and the cultural significance of oral history rather than paper history, to name a few. Ultimately, the language within the FAP is created to restrict Indigenous access to recognition, so that the American government will not have to pay back Native peoples what they are owed, which in terms of recognition is access to land and money, furthering the idea that the FAP is settler colonialist and designed to fail Indigenous communities.

Furthermore, the language within the FAP is not the only settler colonialist aspect of its existence. Instead, the ways in which the FAP is run are intentionally confusing for Indigenous tribes, thus, benefiting the American government. For example, since the FAP is a government-run program, it changes every four years depending on which president is in office. These changes often create fundamental differences in how the FAP is run, either making it more rigorous or reducing the requirements for recognition. In Lorinda Riley's paper, "When a Tribal Entity Becomes a Nation," she explores these ideas. Her view on the FAP becomes especially apparent when she states,"revisiting each administration's regulatory actions and analyzing them through a political lens allows one to see that the FAP is actually a patchwork quilt of different administrations' priorities" (Riley, 479-480). Her statement reveals the volatile nature of the FAP and how it is weaponized by the government for the government's benefit instead of the good of Indigenous peoples. This truth reveals how the FAP was never built to help Indigenous people, and consequently, that it was ultimately built to kill Indigenous people by controlling their access to livelihood.

Not only is the FAP hard to navigate due to its continuous changes, it is also extremely burdensome on tribal communities. As previously stated, tribes have to meet seven criteria in order to be recognized as an Indigenous tribe. Each of these criteria requires different levels and types of documentation to prove the 'legitimacy' of a tribe. However, it is on tribes alone to present this documentation to the FAP board and conduct their own research outside of federal assistance. This is seen throughout the FAP when it states, "OFA will not be responsible for the actual research on behalf of the petitioner" where OFA stands for the Office of Federal Acknowledgement which is the ultimate reviewer of the information given during the FAP process (25 CFR Pt. 83, 5). While this may seem fair to Indigenous tribes to gather information about their tribal history, it is in actuality extremely burdensome due to the amount of documentation that the FAP requires. This load of information needed for this process is seen in the section, "What must a documented petition include?" in which the FAP lists out requirements of the documentation needed for each part of the review process. One of these requirements is:

> "(4) Membership lists and explanations, including: (i) An official current membership list, separately certified by the petitioner's governing body, of all known current members of the petitioner, including each member's full name (including maiden name, if any), date of birth, and current residential address" (25 CFR Pt. 83, 10).

In this example, the FAP is requiring in-depth information on all of the tribal members and having to have this information approved by the state. If we take the example of the Lumbee, the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River, this means that they would have to trace down each ancestor, uncover if they had any children, if they had children outside of marriage, what their maiden name is, their home address, etc. for every single tribal member. They would then have to have this information approved by the state of North Carolina. This process alone could take many years and thousands of dollars just for this single requirement. Considering that this is only part one of one section within the FAP reveals how extreme the burden is of gathering sufficient information to appeal the process that will ultimately determine the fate of Indigenous livelihood.

The burden of the FAP process is furthered by the Indigenous voices who have raised protests or concerns against it. Take the testimony of Reverend John Norwood, a member of the Nanticoke-Lenape tribe, for example. Rev. Norwood gave his address in front of the United States Committee on American Indian Affairs concerning the recognition process. In his speech, he said:

> "However, when reviewing petitions for federal recognition, the manner in which the seven criteria of the administrative process have been applied by the Office of Federal Acknowledgement has become increasingly unreasonable, overwhelmingly expensive, and unjustifiably unpredictable… so much so it is estimated that 72% of currently federally recognized tribes could not successfully navigate the FAP as the criteria are applied today (Oversight Hearing, 4-5).

This perspective from Norwood adds context to how the FAP was designed to fail Indigenous communities by demonstrating how 72% of tribes, who have proved their status as federally recognized, would fail the process today. If 72% of recognized tribal communities are ill-equipped to navigate the current FAP process, it reveals how dire the state is for unrecognized tribes and how this process was never built with Indigenous livelihood in mind. These

claims are further compounded in an additional statement from Norwood which follows:

> "The process meant to aid legitimate tribes has become a burdensome obstacle to their recognition. Successful applications once were only a couple of hundred pages of material. Now, tens of thousands of pages of evidence are required, costing upwards of millions of dollars and taking up to thirty-five years of delays in making final acknowledgment determinations. After pouring such resources into an intergenerational effort, many worthy tribes are still unreasonably denied" (Oversight Hearing, 5).

Norwood's testimony shows how tribal communities are not only struggling to navigate the FAP process, they are struggling to pass it as well. And, according to Norwood, it is not because they are not "worthy" it is because the process is unreasonable. From costing millions of dollars, which tribal communities tend to not have, to requiring thousands of pages of evidence, which require hours of labor and intense research, tribal communities are wholly disadvantaged to claim what is rightfully theirs. This reality furthers the argument that the FAP is a failed process designed to restrict Indigenous rights instead of providing them, revealing its necropolitical and settler colonialist nature.

While I have discussed why the FAP is a failed process, I now transition into why the rights and protections it grants are necessary for Indigenous people. The FAP process not only gives tribes sovereignty, it gives them access to resources and protections that are not granted to non-recognized tribes. One key protection that is only granted to federal tribes is the Indian Child Welfare Act, more broadly known as ICWA. ICWA was created by the federal government in 1978 to combat the vast number of Indigenous children who were taken out of their tribal communities and placed within the foster care and adoption system. This act was meant to tackle the historical trauma of stealing Indigenous children by providing a way to prioritize keeping Native children in Native homes. However, this right is only available to federally recognized tribes because it is a federal law. In the *Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act*, it states, "The Federal ICWA applies only if the Tribe is a federally recognized Indian Tribe and therefore listed on the BIA list" (18). This guideline shows as an overarching federal protection, non-recognized tribes are left out. In context, this means that millions of Indigenous children are left to the vultures vulnerable to be stolen from their families and tribal communities because they lack federal recognition, which, as seen earlier, is nearly impossible to obtain.

The stealing of Native children from their communities prohibits their right to learn more about their heritage and culture, ultimately contributing to the assimilation and elimination of Native peoples. Patrick Wolfe expands on this idea in his work "Settler Colonialism and Elimination of the Native," when he states, "Indeed, depending on the historical conjuncture, assimilation can be a more effective mode of elimination than conventional forms of killing, since it does not involve such a disruptive affront to the rule of law that is ideologically central to the cohesion of settler society" (402). Wolfe's analysis reveals how assimilation functions as a form of elimination and how within settler societies, such as the United States, these forms of ultimate death are more "acceptable" because they do not undo the laws of the land. When viewing ICWA under this lens, it is apparent that the United States is continuing the necropolitical and settler colonial mission to eliminate Native people in any way possible to maintain its power, especially through bureaucratic means such as ICWA.

The vulnerability that tribes face without federal recognition, such as the devastation of ICWA, demonstrates their need for it despite the failed process of the FAP. In the words of the podcast, *Challenging Colonialism*:

> "Without having access to those federal laws and protections I think a lot of non-federally recognized tribes our human rights are disregarded and we can be treated differently at all levels of government…there's just these really important places of access that we aren't able to fully participate in" (Chilcote et al.).

Not only are tribes restricted from federal protections granted since they are not recognized, but they are also limited in the number of resources they have access to as well. The federal government sets aside funding and opportunities that are only available for federally recognized tribes to access. While these resources are flawed within themselves, they do exist to attempt to give tribal communities additional footing to enhance aspects of their livelihood and career goals. Some of the programs that are offered are the Bureau of Indian Affairs Financial Assistance and Social Services program and the Matching Grants to Tribes Scholarship program to name a few. The Bureau of Indian Affairs Financial Assistance and Social Services (FASS) program is designed to provide five realms of assistance, which include: General Assistance, Child Assistance, Non-Medical Institutional or Custodial Care of Adults, Burial Assistance, and Emergency Assistance to American Indians who no longer qualify for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. These forms of assistance are often only given to families who find themselves in dire situations and need, and could potentially be the difference between death and survival. However, this opportunity is only available to federally recognized tribes, meaning that other Indigenous people who find themselves struggling to survive do not have the same safety net to fall upon. This reveals again that when concerning Native lives, the United States falls upon a necropolitical use of their settler power to control the access and rights of Indigenous people, often determining whether they live or die.

In addition to the Bureau of Indian Affairs Financial Assistance and Social Services program, there also exists the Matching Grants to Tribes for Scholarship program. Firstly, it is imperative to address the longstanding notion that Native Americans go to school for free - they do not. However, there do exist programs that attempt to help send Native children to college such as the Matching Grants to Tribes for Scholarship (MGTS) program. This initiative is designed to provide assistance to tribal communities to allow their tribal members to be educated in healthcare and then come back to serve their respective communities. Grants like these are vital to the survival of tribal communities because they allow tribal members to obtain an education and bring that wealth of knowledge home to benefit their families. Yet, once again, this program is only available to federally recognized tribal communities because it is a federal initiative. So, like with the Financial Assistance and Social Services program, non-recognized tribes are forgotten. Remember, this forgetfulness is not an innocent one, it is one of death. Without access to these programs and funding, many non-recognized tribes are left to fend for themselves in a cruel world with no support behind them, revealing the necropolitical power of the American government.

My last point about the need for federal recognition centers around tribal sovereignty and the right of Indigenous people to govern themselves. While many tribes do fight for recognition for the resources that they can obtain from it, they mainly fight for their access to what has been historically denied to them, their sovereignty. In the beginning, I introduced the idea of sovereignty intertwined with the idea of necropolitics, which in its simplest form is the right to kill. Currently, as it stands, this is the only type of sovereignty that exists within a Westernized construct because we have yet to find a way to detach it from settler colonialism and Western ideas of power. However, by granting Indigenous people sovereignty, which I think is increasingly necessary, it provides them with the opportunity to return to cultural practices and ideals that founded Indigenous culture. This return to cultural ways is seen in Sarah Deer's work, *The Beginnings and End of Rape* in which she addresses the colonization of Indigenous peoples, the shift of our practices, and the attempt to return to them through the context of rape.

In the chapter, "What She Say, it Be Law," Deer analyzes how sovereignty in Indigenous tribes can benefit these communities by analyzing decisions from tribal courts. Foremost, it is necessary to understand that tribal courts only exist within federally recognized communities. While other communities may have circles of elders to decide on tribal issues, their decisions do not affect the law. However, the decisions of tribal courts do, which is what makes them so powerful. In particular, Deer analyzes one case, *Fort Peck v. Martell*, in which the Fort Peck Court of Appeals went beyond a Western mindset when analyzing crime and applied a different set of structures to determine the guilt of a rapist. In this case, a man coerced a woman off the reservation offering her drugs and alcohol then proceeded to rape her off of tribal lands. Since the rape occurred off tribal lands, he argued that the Court had no jurisdiction. However, the Court responded, "key elements of the crime took place on the reservation, namely, the 'coercion methodology' used by the defendant" (Deer, 30). And in the words of Deer, " this is an innovative analysis of the crime, framing rape as a series of actions for which the perpetrator should be held accountable, a ruling that reflects an understanding of rape that is typically absent from American law" (Deer, 30). This ruling, and Deer's following analysis, demonstrate how tribal courts can take the understanding of law and crime as it is acknowledged in the Westernized, and specifically Americanized, context and reshape its ideals to the benefit and protection of their tribal communities.

Giving tribal communities the power to interpret law outside of a Western notion allows them to extend an arm of protection over their members, granting them the right to live. And, as Deer also noted, this all-encompassing protection is something that is not found within the American government. This lack of protection is due to the necropolitical and settler colonial foundation in which America was founded and rooted causing it to vie for power and protection for itself, rather than for the people. And, ultimately, this is the America that unrecognized tribes have to face. While members of federally recognized tribes can rely on a system of protection that is not rooted in Whiteness and the protection of it, unrecognized tribes cannot. This truth is why recognition is so important because it allows tribes to escape from an oppressive society that is rooting for their death in an attempt to protect their lives through sovereignty and the protections that recognition bestows. However, as we have seen, America refuses tribes this protection through the rigorous process in place to grant it, ultimately leaving them stranded in a society that is designed for their death.

Yet, paradoxically, the recognition that tribes seek does not provide protections from the ongoing systemic oppression and disenfranchisement of Indigenous people, instead, it encourages it. In the beginning of my paper, I addressed why tribes need federal recognition and how it was designed against them to ensure that they never gained access to those rights. I now transition into the enactment of recognition within Indigenous communities to reveal how the sovereignty that the United States granted them is ultimately killing them. It is imperative to demonstrate that the current recognition process, both to get recognized and be recognized, is a Westernized version of sovereignty inextricably tied to settler colonialism in an attempt to kill the native. To reveal the failures of recognition itself, I will analyze problems within sovereign communities such as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women crisis, food insecurity, health crisis, and more, to show how recognition

on both fronts is killing Native people and revealing how it is failed, in order to propose a new process that protects and preserves the life of Indigenous peoples.

Within tribal communities, the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) arises out of the sovereignty that is granted to them through the recognition process. Previously, I analyzed the benefits of tribal sovereignty through court cases attempting to redefine rape in order to protect Indigenous peoples. While this redefining is necessary and powerful to show the benefits of sovereignty in tribal communities, it also hints at a larger problem within Native communities which is the violence against Native women. For example, in 2016, there was a report of 5,712 missing Native American and Alaska Native women, however only 116 were logged by the Department of Justice database (Missing and Murdered Indigenous People). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "murder is the third-leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women and that rates of violence on reservations can be up to ten times higher than the national average" (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2). These statistics show that on average, Native women are experiencing a disproportionate amount of violence when compared to other races.

The high amounts of violence that Native women experience are a product of the recognition that they obtain from the United States. Since recognition grants sovereignty, the cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women often fall between conflicting alcoves of jurisdiction between the United States or the tribal nation. For example, in certain instances, tribal governments have the full authority to prosecute and investigate a crime, meaning that the lives of their tribal members are going to be put first. However, there are other situations in which their sovereignty does not apply and goes to the United States, specifically when criminal acts are conducted by a non-Indian member, resulting in the prioritization of the United States and its interests over that of the tribal nation. These distinctions of jurisdiction are outlined by the U.S. Department of Justice in its 2016 *Indian Country Investigations and Prosecutions* study when it states:

> "Section 1153 gives the Federal government jurisdiction to prosecute certain enumerated offenses, such as murder, manslaughter, rape, aggravated assault, and child sexual abuse, when Indians in Indian country commit them. Section 1152 gives the Federal government exclusive jurisdiction to prosecute all crimes committed by non-Indians against Indian victims in Indian country. Section 1152 also grants the Federal government jurisdiction to prosecute crimes by Indians against non-Indians, although that jurisdiction is shared with tribes, and provides that the Federal government may not prosecute an Indian who has been punished by the tribe" (5).

These distinctions are important when analyzing MMIW, specifically when concerning the "crimes committed by non-Indians against Indian victims in Indian country" because it allows for them to be exploited by non-Indigenous members, specifically White men, who know that the federal government will not take action in solving these cases. This sentiment is reflected in the first-person story of a member of the Muckleshoot tribe when she states:

> "the perpetrators of the violence on Indigenous women are non-Indigenous men who are able to come onto reservations space and do harm and not come to any justice because of their non-Indigenous status…the tribal courts have no jurisdiction over them, the state courts have no jurisdiction over that reservation space and the only people that do have that jurisdiction are the federal courts and the federal police which are the FBI and the BIA. So, when an Indigenous woman is murdered…the FBI is not going to come investigate what they consider to be a small-time murder. The tribes aren't given the actual power to protect their people and that power is given to people who aren't using it" (Muckleshoot).

Her story gives life to how recognition is allowing for the death of Indigenous people by leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by the United States both from its members and from its systems.

Overall, the example of MMIW demonstrates how the sovereignty of Native people is being exploited and is ultimately resulting in their death. The jurisdiction distinctions limit tribal sovereignty by outlining when it does and does not apply, restricting the power they have to protect their communities and ultimately leaving their fate to the federal government. In addition, these differences in jurisdiction make Indigenous people vulnerable to exploitation by non-Indigenous persons, namely, in the context of MMIW, White men. These two powers combined continue to represent the settler colonial and necropolitical sovereignty of the United States when concerning Indigenous lives. By allowing the death of Native women at the hands of colonizers, not only is the United States enacting its power of necropolitics, it is continuing its settler state by eliminating the women to prevent the continuation of the Indigenous race, ultimately wiping anyone left to lay claim to "American" land.

MMIW is not the only way recognition perpetuates the death of Native people, instead, the failure of recognition and utter lack of protection that sovereignty grants is seen in the capitalistic exploitation of Native people in concerns to drug and alcohol abuse. In many Indigenous communities, alcohol and drug abuse is a prevalent issue among tribal members. The American Addiction Centers reports 7.1% of Native people have an alcohol abuse disorder and that approximately 25% have reported binge drinking within the last month (Kaliszewski). These statistics become even more startling when considering the fact that Native American people make up approximately 2% of the population (By the Numbers). These statistics reveal how tribal members are still facing a crisis within their communities showcasing how the promise of recognition to protect the lives of Indigenous people is failing. This is because recognition does not solve the problems within Indigenous communities such as poverty, mental health, and the continued effects of settler colonialism. Instead, it exacerbates them by leaving sovereign communities weak to the continued influence of the United States's own agenda.

The idea that the sovereignty granted to Indigenous people traps them in a cycle of submission to the settler colonial and necropolitical society that America was based on is seen in the example of the Pine Ridge Reservation. This reservation, among others, has made laws against selling alcohol on tribal lands in an attempt to prevent the prevalence of addictive substances in their communities, ultimately hoping to preserve the lives of their tribal members. However, right outside of the reservation grounds is a town called Whiteclay made of only 14 members who predominantly sell alcohol to Lakota tribal members. In a documentary with the Guardian, they reported, "four liquor stores for decades sold over four million cans of beer a year almost entirely to members of the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe…where the sale of alcohol is banned" (The Guardian). These stores represent a distinct disregard for Indigenous sovereignty and the respect for tribal law, so much so that the tribe sued Whiteclay in an attempt to shut down its business. In the end, their suit was successful in prohibiting the continuation of Whiteclay. However, despite the success of this tribe, the fact that the problem existed in the first palace demonstrates how tribal sovereignty pales in comparison to the sovereignty of the United States government. In order to counteract this balance, Indigenous people have to appeal to the federal government to determine the fate of their lives. This once again demonstrates how sovereignty, which is granted through the recognition process, is failing Native communities.

In combination with MMIW and the undermining of tribal sovereignty, there also exists rampant food insecurity within recognized tribal communities, which is a result of the failures of recognition. For instance, many recognized tribal communities reside on a reservation allotted to them by the federal government, which is one of the benefits that come with being a recognized tribe. However, these reservations were not the original homes of Indigenous people due to relocation events such as the Trail of Tears, or if it was the tribe's original homeland, the reservation allotments were deemed the most undesirable and added no benefit to the government. Because of this, many tribal practices concerning hunting and gathering were disrupted, leaving them without their means for traditional food, or the lands they had were unequipped to handle large agriculture. For example, the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities reports, "Often, the choicest treaty lands – for example, parcels closest to streams for crop irrigation – were excluded from allotment, deeded excess on Indian needs" (Maillacheruvu, 8). In addition they also found that "reservations constrict Tribal communities' ability to hunt, fish, farm, and gather as they had for centuries before" (Maillacheruvu, 2). These actions by the federal government reveal its settler colonial nature. By granting Indigenous people the worst land possible and removing them from their homelands, they intentionally set them down a path of starvation, fulfilling both the mission of settler colonialism, which is a land requirement and enacting a necropolitical structure.

In addition to tribal members being removed from their traditional food practices, tribal lands themselves are a food desert, revealing how recognition does not have the strongholds to provide for Indigenous people. Take the Navajo tribal nation for instance, the largest recognized tribal nation in America, and their access to food stores. In a tribal nation that is the size of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont combined, there are only 13 grocery stores to feed this nation (Kreider). When taking in the sheer size of the Navajo reservation, these 13 stores are not enough for each tribal member to get access to adequate nutrition and are often too far away for tribal members to access. This leads to many tribal members having to live off of canned and processed foods, or potentially, nothing at all. Indeed, it was found that, "On reservations, the food insecurity of Indigenous people is, "double, and at times triple, the food insecurity white people faced" (Maillacheruvu, 3). This shows how recognition does not provide a pathway for Native people to thrive, rather it is leaving them on land that is ill-equipped to meet their needs and is ultimately resulting in the deaths of Indigenous people.

The failures of recognition concerning food insecurity go beyond the land itself and into the lack of protection that recognition provides from Western capitalistic systems on Indigenous land. Consider the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities study which found that:

> "A gallon of milk cost the average U.S. consumer $2.48, but reservation residents in the study paid an average of $3.47, nearly 40 percent more, according to a 2018 report by First Nations Development Institute. A loaf of bread cost the average U.S. consumer $1.02, but the price in Indian Country was $1.89, roughly 85 percent more. Apples cost about 30 percent more in Indian Country. Certain unhealthy foods, however, were cheaper than the U.S. average. Indeed, another analysis by First Nations Development Institute found that the average price of Cheetos was consistently lower than the U.S. average" (Maillacheruvu, 4).

The up-marking of food represents how expensive it is to be Indigenous, and how it pays little to be recognized. This is due to the failure of federal recognition to protect against Western systems, such as capitalism, which work against the interests of Native people. Therefore, phenomena such as supply and demand are able to run rampant in Indigenous communities, forcing them into a corner of starvation, ultimately allowing America's settler-colonial and necropolitical agenda to succeed due to the failures of

recognition.

Because of the food insecurity that is rampant across tribal communities, the health of Indigenous Americans is worsening, demonstrating how the deficiencies within recognition permeate every aspect of Native lives. For example, Native American people have the highest rates of diabetes in the country, sitting at 33% of all people diagnosed with diabetes in the United States despite only being 2% of the population (Spanakis et. al). These high rates of diabetes are directly linked to the access to food in tribal communities. If we revisit the report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities which demonstrates that the price of processed foods on reservations is cheaper nationally compared to fresh produce, it is no surprise that diabetes is rampant in the Indigenous population. In addition, it is not only the rates of diabetes that are high, it is the death rates as well. Compared to non-Hispanic White populations who have diabetes, Native people are 1.6 times more likely to die from the disease (Office of Minority Health). These statistics continue the idea of necropolitics and settler colonialism finding its way into the lives of recognized tribal communities, further advancing the idea that recognition does not protect tribes from exploitation by the American government. Where the diabetes rates correspond to the lack of adequate nutrition in tribal communities, the death rates correspond to the lack of healthcare infrastructure that exists in tribal communities.

Many tribal nations do not have the infrastructure or the resources to provide adequate healthcare to their tribal members due to the isolation that sovereignty inherently applies, revealing how the purpose of recognition to protect Indigenous communities is failing. The failing healthcare system in reservation communities is seen through the commentary of the show, *Reservation Dogs. Reservation Dogs* is a comedy television series that is predominantly made by Native and Indigenous artists which provides commentary on "rez life" while also revealing the problems that Indigenous people are facing, such as a failing healthcare infrastructure. In episode two of season one, titled, "NDN Clinic," one of the main characters Bear is attacked by a gang on the reservation and has to go to the clinic to get checked out. Once he arrives, with his nose bleeding, he is not immediately sent back, rather he has to check in with the nurse at front. Their conversation goes as follows:

Bev: "What are you here for?"

Bear: "Got into a fight. Busted my nose"…

Bear: "How long's the wait?"

Bev: "You been here a thousand times, you should know."

Bear: "Damn. Hate this place" (Harjo et. al).

After this conversation the screen pans over to a view of the "NDN Clinic" and it is overcrowded with dozens of people waiting to be seen. The overcrowding of this clinic is due to the failing infrastructure of the healthcare system that exists on tribal lands to provide for all of its citizens. This lack of access to healthcare is due to the failures of recognition. Since recognition grants sovereignty, it is fully on tribes to provide healthcare for all of its citizens. But like the access to food, they do not have the resources to do so, and the resources that they do have are overwhelmed, as demonstrated in *Reservation Dogs*. This is because recognition leaves them in a position to have sovereignty, but not the type of sovereignty that benefits Indigenous lives, instead it is a sovereignty that leaves Native people vulnerable to inadequate access to their needs, ultimately resulting in their deaths.

Inow transition to the final aspect of my essay which is advocating for a new way to recognize Indigenous peoples, both through the recognition process and by redefining recognition to support Indigenous communities rather than harm them. Throughout this essay, I have made the argument for how the Federal Acknowledgement Program is failing and how it leaves unrecognized tribes vulnerable to being excluded from protections such as ICWA and the chance to protect its communities through sovereignty. Then, I shifted and dissected how recognition was enacted in tribal communities, ultimately looking at how it had failed to meet the needs of its tribal members and continued the necropolitical and settler colonial frame that unrecognized tribes face. When looking at how recognition has failed on both sides, both in the process and execution, it is apparent that recognition as it currently stands is not working and needs to be redefined.

Firstly, I propose that the process for becoming a federally recognized tribe should not be determined by the United States, but rather by a council of tribes. For too long the power to decide who is and who is not Indigenous has been taken away from and weaponized against Native people by the American government. This is seen through the FAP itself, from its language to its ever-changing enactments, revealing how the process as it currently exists is meant to benefit the government and those in power, not Indigenous communities. To restore this imbalance, the power needs to be given back to tribal members to determine their rights for themselves, removing indigeneity from Westernized concepts of recognition.

For the enactment of recognition itself, I propose reshaping what sovereignty is and how it works in present-day society along with reparations to tribal members from the federal government. As it currently stands, the sovereignty that tribal members get through recognition leaves them deserted without the resources that they need or the power that is required to protect their members to the fullest extent. This is because the sovereignty that is granted to them is one that is a Westernized construct of power and rooted in necropolitics and settler colonialism. The failures of sovereignty are seen through tribes' inadequate access to food, and healthcare, and the exploitation that they experience by the government and non-Indigenous powers. To counteract this problem, the sovereignty of tribes needs to return to what it once was before contact with settler nations, which is that tribes have the full power to protect their citizens and define their own laws. In context, this is tribes no longer having to petition the federal government to remove those who harm their livelihood or contest with the government about jurisdiction, rather it is truly tribes being a nation within a nation, having the same power as the federal government so that they can protect Indigenous peoples as they see fit.

In order to expand tribal sovereignty, reparations are due from the federal government to tribal communities. As it currently stands, tribes do not have the resources to provide for their communities, and expanding sovereignty alone does not fix this problem because the problem is rooted in historical trauma that the American government has failed to address. From events such as the Trail of Tears that displaced tribal members in unfamiliar lands, helping lead to their starvation and health crisis, to the continued inaction of the federal government to stop crises such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, tribal communities are bleeding out and a simple expansion of power does not fix these issues. Rather, the government needs to realize the harm it has done to Indigenous communities and pay reparations in the form of building up the healthcare system that exists in tribal communities, providing more resources to tribal police so they can effectively manage to protect their communities, or it can be as simple asking what tribes need and providing the resources for them to do so. By doing this, tribes can build up the resources that they need to effectively provide for their communities, which in turn, will make their sovereignty stronger and more beneficial to protect the lives of tribal members.

Overall, the federal government needs to acknowledge how it is failing Indigenous communities through recognition, both through the process and enactment, and to undo its settler colonial and necropolitical systems so that Indigenous people are no longer fighting to survive, but, instead are living out their right to live and thrive. I also want to flag that this paper is not an all-inclusive struggle of what Indigenous people are facing and that more events and trauma are happening both in recognized and unrecognized communities that contribute to the issue of the FAP process and the recognition of Native tribes. Instead, this paper is one that is meant to begin the discussion of looking at recognition as a failed system in both the process and enactment so that we can begin to undo the harm to Indigenous communities.

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An Afterword to Volume Ten

I have long believed in the poetry of science, which is to say, in its promethean power to create and sustain what Percy Bysshe Shelley calls "the genuine elements of human society," teaching the mind to "love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure. . ." I also share Shelley's belief that poetry opposes "the cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world [while], for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscrib[ing] those of the internal world." The "poetical faculty" is that which refuses those forms of scientific rationality which would "circumscribe" or indeed eliminate the nature that we share with others, including our animality. (There is another argument to be made about the purging of the "animal" from rationalistic conceptions of the "human," but I shall leave this for another day.) The point here is that, prior to thought and inseparable from thinking, there is the living and breathing of our relation not only to other humans in a common but unequally shared vulnerability or precarity, but to the whole of that life over which we would extend in violence "the empire of man." To dominate that life, we must first dominate ourselves; and poetry refuses such dominion, imagining instead of an instrumental rationality "the cultivation of those sciences" which conduce to what the naturalist and preacher Jonathan Edwards calls a "new sense of things."

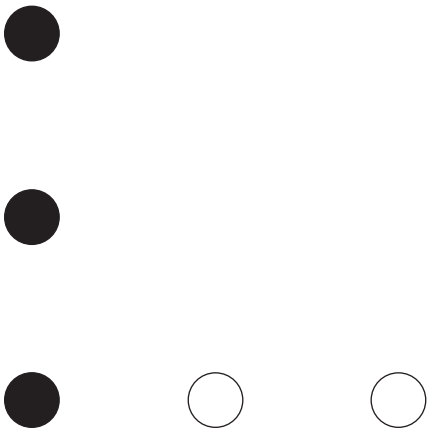
In another lifetime long years ago, I spent many hours wandering through the Peabody Museum and even more at the Tozzer Library, reading anthropology while dreaming of an American literature before America. In the course of my wandering through the worlds of Lewis Henry Morgan, Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss—does anyone read romantic anthropology today, I wonder—I discovered Claude Levi-Strauss's works: first, Tristes Tropiques, which so beautifully addressed my own sadness at the loss of rural societies, then La Pensée sauvage, which evoked not so much "savage" as wild thought, spontaneous and local in its irreducible particularity. I should note that my initial attraction to the latter was mediated by Thoreau's reflections on wildness in "Higher Laws, where, startled by his instinct or desire for a "primitive, rank, and savage" life, Thoreau declares his love for "the wild not less than the good." He then turns in revulsion from the disturbing "generative energy" of the wild, opposing its "sensuality" and "uncleanness" to "purity." Thoreau's retreat from the ecstatic apprehension of the play of the wild and good within him to a moralizing opposition between impurity and purity works to degrade both the wild and the good, for it purifies the "higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life" of its relation to the natural world, including the unruly impulses of his own physical being. It is only later in Walden where, in the thawing warmth of spring, Thoreau discovers in the renewal of an industrially damaged world the words and the courage necessary for the reparation of a damaged life: beholding the embankment riven by the railroad, he finds in the earth itself the poetic imagination of "hybrid," even "grotesque" forms of a life whose expansive and fluent movements exceed the constraints of moral and scientific classifications alike.

Although the wildness which disturbs Walden differs from the indigenous thinking which Levi-Strauss's great work seeks to understand, its tendency towards the grotesque or the hybrid and away from the category of "purity" anticipates in interesting ways the direction of Levi-Strauss's play on pensée, which also means "pansy," the flower that appears on the cover of La Pensée sauvage. For what interests him is a thought refusing abstractions, a thinking about flowers in terms of flowers—a local knowledge or indeed science of plants without the abstraction of the word "plant." According to Levi-Strauss, indigenous peoples think about the world in concrete and complex ways—"no ideas but in things" would perhaps be the poetic formulation, but these things are objects known only in and through their relations to other objects, not by means of a thought (of kingdoms and other divisions) which divests them of their singularity. Levi-Strauss does not deny the larger relation of, say, pansies to orchids or asters; rather, he seeks to discover the structuration of thought by local knowledges, ways of thinking that grow wild in and from nature, cultivated by the scientific practices of indigenous peoples.

If, as William Wordsworth writes, poetry is "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science," then it is the work of research in humanities to cultivate "the impassioned expression" of that love for science, or knowledge, which brings all of our students to NCSSM. From its inception a dozen years ago, our program has sought to discover previously unsuspected forms of "the genuine elements of human society" and to imagine new possibilities for their flourishing. As readers of Fifth World 's earlier volumes know, we take our journal's name and inspiration from the work of Hopi muralists, who represented the emergence of a new world, the Fifth World, through the creative mingling of traditional and new knowledges. I shall leave it to our readers to learn more about the Hopi imagination of the Fifth World. Suffice it here to say that our work has been and continues to be intensely affected not simply by this beautiful image of hope, coming as it did after images of a people's actual destruction—the long catastrophe of western conquest—but also and inseparably by its insistence that we, too, can and must learn from those peoples who came before us. Such knowledge is difficult not least because it is also a demand for justice, which is to say, for an understanding that does not appropriate but is instead altered by its engagement with another.

This, then, is the nature of the humanities' abiding significance for scientific study: not only the critical scrutiny of scientific language for its non-scientific elements, elements which reinscribe forms of social and political violence ("the empire of man") upon nature, including that which we call our own—not only the critical vocation, but the poetic avocation of a science which refuses, exceeds, and escapes such dominion. Thus, even as our journal announces the emergence of a new generation of writers, artists, scientists, so it seeks in the publication of their "impassioned expression" to reaffirm the centrality of the humanities to our school's greatest work, which is the education of the scientific mind to "love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure . . ."

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Within the sheets of this constellation of a book, we, the writers, study the human condition across various spheres—some through the lens of anti-intellectualism's corrosive rise, others by guiding readers. For better or for worse, we trace the moments when the human condition has revealed its capacity for manufactured cruelty, and the moments when it has ignited resistance.







Retrospect

