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Race, Dystopia, & American Identity

"If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."-Audre Lorde

Contents

Preface

To approach the themes of Race, Dystopia, and American Identity with detachment is a privilege that I do not have. I wish I could tell you that there was a single incident that sparked a connection to these themes—that there was a single moment that enlightened me to the dystopian presence that is race and American identity. But the truth is, I was born into it. I was born into a dystopia labeled reality. I was displaced into the American labeling.

The common question, *where are you from?* Is understatedly violent to those whose lineage leads to bondage. The blood running through my veins is African, yet my feet walk on the very American soil sustained by the blood, sweat, and tears of my ancestors. I am captive in a genderless body—my instant transition from woman to man by just putting on a hoodie, exposing a dystopian reality that I am at best gendered masculine, at worst a transient human. Perhaps the most dystopian attribute of my raced American identity is that my last name speaks of a man who raped his way into my bloodline.

I also speak English.

Some would even say it is my native tongue, but there is nothing native about it. Moments that remain native to the displaced are works like Gertrude Dorsey Brown's "Scrambled Eggs," Richard Wright's *Native Son*, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, or Toni Morrison's *The*

Bluest Eye, as they betray America for what it is, and what it has always been for those whose bodies arrived as cargo.

Dystopia is not hurt feelings, or a bruised ego. Dystopia is a systemic stain that makes what should be impossible not only possible but legal.

The pieces that you will read in this Special Edition of *The St John's University Humanities Review* address, race, dystopia, and American Identity from diverse vantage points. Tackling hashtags, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, and popular culture—this special issue of *The St. John's University Humanities Review* will make you think about Race, Dystopia, and American Identity; namely, what it means to be raced, what it means to be dystopian, and what it means to be American. You may even find that each is one in the same.

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Dedication

For Laura Nelson (1867-1911)

To those who illustrate all three prongs of this issue: Race, Dystopia, and American Identity— from the formally informal African burial grounds, to the African atoms that populate the water tombs eternally fixed in the Atlantic.

Review of Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

Carmen Walker

"I, too, am the afterlife of slavery"

In the Wake, On Blackness and Being, is a declaration for seeing the lives of black people as they are situated in the aftermath of transatlantic slavery. This book marks the second written by Christina Sharpe, an Associate Professor of English at Tufts University, which addresses the agency of black life after slavery. *In the Wake* is both a painfully beautiful and emotionally demanding book that must be read.

Carmen Walker, PhD is an Associate Professor of Government in the History and Government Department at Bowie State University where she teaches in the areas of comparative politics, women and politics, public policy, and international relations. Her current research projects include work on the intersections of the social sciences and humanities in the classroom and the activism of women in welfare rights organizations.

Central to Sharpe's work is the concept of the wake. Its use is personal and represents an attempt to move beyond the vocation of explaining the persistence of problematized black life. This shift in no way suggest that there is no longer a need to understand the ways in which structural and systemic processes, policies, and laws intersect to create dead and live zones of

possibility in the world for people of African descent. No, in the same way that we need historical and legal research like that of Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow Mass Incarceration in The Age of Colorblindness* (Alexander 2012) and the more recent economic and policy examinations of Andrea Flynn et al. in *The Hidden Rules of Race Barriers to an Inclusive Economy* (Andrea Flynn 2017), we also need the human imagery of what is inside these types of critical projects. Sharpe's evocative analysis, *In the Wake*, performs this task. Her work moves in and out of personal and public spaces to address political issues such as globalization, mass incarceration, the refugee crisis, and trauma. *In the Wake* is a moving testament to the necessary interconnectedness of the humanities and social sciences.

Readers are given access to Sharpe's reconciliation of pain and celebration of family and black lives lost too soon. For example, with her analysis of Dionne Brand's *Verso 55*, readers too are allowed a sacred opportunity to concomitantly celebrate, love, and mourn those, who in spite of death, "like us, are alive in the hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorous, and iron; in sodium and chlorine…they are with us, in the time of the wake, known as residence time" (Sharpe 2016, 18,19). Throughout this book, passages like the poetics of Dionne Brand and others seem to hold our hand through this process, "They said with wonder and admiration, you are still alive, like hydrogen, like oxygen" (Sharpe 2016, 18, 19).

Sharpe asks, "…what, if anything survives this insistent Black exclusion, this ontological negation, and

how do literature, performance, and visual culture observe and mediate this un/survival" (Sharpe 2016, 14). Throughout the book, Sharpe uses poetry, photography, fiction, non-fiction to answer this question. These painful reminders tell us that throughout the globe, on both land and sea, black lives are lived outside the zones of protection. In challenging language, disrupting narratives, and deconstructing representations of black identity, Sharpe intertwines prose and praxis. With her text as "wake work," Sharpe foments the praxis of seeing black life and black resistance.

The wake performs three functions. Sharpe uses the concept to call forth the process of mourning, caring for, and celebrating black life in spaces built upon not simply assumptions of black inferiority, but more deeply, the refusal to see black life outside of anything beyond what can be contained, owned, or occupied. Here again, Sharpe asks, "What does it look like, entail, and mean to attend to, care for, comfort, and defend, those already dead, the dying, and those living lives consigned to the possibility of always-imminent death, life lived in the presence of death…" Sharpe acknowledges that this may look like the "rememories" of the fictional character Sethe in *Beloved*, based on the life of Margaret Garner, with these poignant words: "I also know that this may look like me, remembering my paths and my knowing of the paths that may await my daughter's tomorrow" (Sharpe 2016, 104, 105).

The wake is also a reflection of what remains. Sharpe examines the aesthetics of what remains in that

anti-black space and what comes to mind is the 22-year-old African American young woman, suffering from mental illness, who was "dumped" on the streets of Baltimore in the cold of January wearing only a hospital gown (Cohn 2018). It is perhaps the eyes of a young unnamed Haitian girl "marked" on her forehead by a strip of tape with the word "ship" or the arms of a black mother "marked" as a "former mother," that exemplify how black pain is not seen. However, it is in the gaze of the young girl's eyes, along with the arms of the mother, that you see black people's refusal to relinquish their rights to survival. This is where it seems that Sharpe's wake moves from existence within the aftermath to resistance (Sharpe 2016, 31, 32, 46).

Sharpe's use of additional metaphors to provide the reader with an awareness that post-slavery black life is constantly positioned to be calculated or assessed; that globalization, in its contemporary form, may simply be a reconfiguring of the ongoing historical transatlantic slave trade experience and central to its continuation are new forms of ships and new ways of holding, dumping, and selling the commodified black life in its various forms. It is on the ship, argues Sharpe, that the unmaking of black people – (un)gendering, (un)mothering, (un)fathering, (un)humanizing takes place and the memory of this ship is always called forth to, as Sharpe writes, "…make visible the ship, and its wake, in the slave." This narrative explains the persistence of negative antebellum stereotypes which, when employed, seek to hold, and deny black women and men the agency associated with moth-

erhood, womanhood, fatherhood, manhood, sexual autonomy, citizenship and recognition in the modern American state. This frame is necessary for showing why African and Arab migrants must be (re)presented as incarnations of terror to justify their containment or rejection. You will not see babies connected to the wombs of mothers who have died in need of help or fathers and their children in distress. Like Phyllis Wheatley and the origins of her name, the memory of the slave ship is always called forth in spaces where black life seeks refuge. The images are called forth as reminders of some inherent difference and need for separateness (Sharpe 2016, 43).

The 'hold,' provides another metaphor deserving attention; hold meaning that portion of the slave ship which contains the "cargo" and hold meaning "to grasp on to" and once again, "to contain." Stereotypes "hold" in the contemporary memory that which once was before the middle passage, but is no longer and it is the state which reserves the right to take or retake those "not marked as male and female, but as differently sized and weighted property." Sharpe continues to describe the space in which black life exists as one of constant negation. The new "hold" now serves the mass prison industrial economy (Sharpe 2016, 73-75) which detains refugees and undocumented immigrants, the black and brown fathers and women whose wombs now serve as the new sites of the middle passage, for they are the producers of the children who will be transformed by a language which cannot grasp their black lives, only the shadows or public artificial images of them as violent thugs and aliens.

Before reading this book, I could not fully explain why the absence of stories like that of Lydia in State v. Mann, have remained a constant in my life and teaching. My task to excavate Lydia's life is the necessary wake work Sharpe describes in this book. Perhaps it is from Sharpe's revealing of all that the media chose to omit in their public image of her cousin Robert, gunned down by Philadelphia police in 1994, (Sharpe 2016, 6, 7) that I recognize the consciousness and care required to speak life to all that was not said publicly about the life of Lydia. Who loved her? Who hurt her? How did she create home in this space? What were her talents? How did she resist? What made her finally run? Where could she go? The presence of the same wind, air pressure, humidity and even sunshine from that 19th century day, in which North Carolina's Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin opined that while tragic, Lydia's life as well as death was a necessity because the "power of the master must be absolute to render the slave perfect," remains (State v. Mann 1829). In the same light as Robert, there was no language to seek justice for Lydia. The reality of this absence along with the murders of Robert and Lydia leave us with a thought raised by Joy James and Joao Costa Vargas on black innocence and survival in the American empire, "What will happen then if instead of demanding justice we recognize (or at least consider) that the very notion of justice…produces and requires Black exclusion and death as normative" (Sharpe 2016, 7).

There is a consciousness connected to this realization. *In the Wake* reminds readers that even on the hottest

days, the continuous climate of anti-blackness that preceded and chilled Lydia's life, remains. The power of Saidiya Hartman's words, used in Sharpe's text and which serve as the title of this review, also rest here with the understanding that the weather has not changed in this new time and place that we live 'in' and 'are' the "afterlife of slavery" (Sharpe 2016, 33).

What was meant to be or not be the future of black life is ever present for Sharpe and this climate of anti-blackness is described as 'the weather.' Even in this hostile climate, what is important is that the language and practice of resistance is always possible, and this is demonstrated throughout Sharpe's work. "The weather trans*forms Black being, but the shipped, the held, and those in the wake produce out of the weather their own ecologies" (Sharpe 2016, 106). In one of her most poignant forms of wake work, it is her example of black redaction, that demonstrates how media often fails to "see" black life in their attempts to present black life. From this, Sharpe's notion of black redaction and black annotation function as the critical practice of centering black voice and gaze while erasing that which may distort the way in which black life is seen in public images (Sharpe 2016, 113-134). This is the type of wake work which must be done.

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Review of Karen Tei Yamashita, *Letters to Memory*

Ruth Y. Hsu

Letters to Memory, Karen Tei Yamashita's seventh book, reinvents the Japanese American World War II internment narrative in terms of generic innovations and thematic reorientation of extant internment stories from one dominated by portrayals of Japanese Americans as victims to foreground existential questions about the constitutive process, composition of national and minority identities, and forgiveness.

Ruth Y. Hsu is an Associate Professor of English at Manoa, the flagship campus of the University of Hawaii. Her areas of specialty focus on Asian American, Asian Diaspora literature and cultural studies. Her most recent publications include a chapter in an anthology of scholarship devoted solely to the writings of Yamashita; a forthcoming essay on Orange Is the New Black and Sense8 included in a collection on race in popular culture. Ruth Y. Hsu (along with Pamela Thoma (Washington State University) are co-editing a volume for the Modern Language Association series, Approaches to Teaching World Literature; this volume will be titled, Approaches to Teaching the Works of Karen Tei Yamashita.

Given the current climate of immigrant opposition, Yamashita's book is immediately relevant and revelatory, in the way that a motif over time becomes revelatory, exposing, in this case, a nation's fervent and tentative, sincere and ambivalent, reactionary and forward-looking struggles with debates about America's essential racial and ethnic makeup. Beyond de-

picting the centrality of race ideology to American identity, Yamashita's book imagines how Americans—of varying colors, memories, experiences—might thoroughly face its past, forgive the unforgiveable, and work towards a true commonwealth. This significant theme of *Letters to Memory* reorients the narrative teleology dominating published literature on Japanese American internment.

Internment literature are novels, memoirs, graphic narratives, and photography books on the forced uprooting and incarceration of an entire ethnic minority group. About 70,000 of the 120,000 imprisoned Japanese Americans were born in the US, while most of the rest had lived in the country for decades; for example, Kishiro Yamashita—Karen Tei's grandfather--immigrated to the US in the early 1900s. Internment was brought about by President Roosevelt signing Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. Typically, internment literature focuses on the injustice and racism of EO 9066, on Japanese Americans as victims, and their unerring loyalty to the US. This accurate depiction, nonetheless, is a partial one and often served to bolster existing stereotypes of this minority as impossibly dangerous and docile and deviously inscrutable yet simple. The internment also caused lasting rifts within the community, expressed as recriminations against parents and grandparents for "going quietly" or as a self-abnegating need to prove that one is indelibly American; it traumatized, at minimum, two generations of Japanese Americans and continues to haunt the memories of this minority. For Japanese Americans and other racialized minority groups, an inclusive, multi-racial

American identity has always been utopia; and, their everyday living has been a dystopic desert of socio-political segregation and exclusion from prevailing master narratives told by the majority.

Letters to Memory does not understate or simply rehearse the racism and injustice of the internment. Instead it memorializes individuals—in particular, John, Karen Tei's father and Methodist minister--impacted by EO 9066 by using multi-generational family archives of letters and photographs, sermons by John, newspaper articles about the internment, and other ephemera. Handwritten letters or diary entries reproduced in the book offer tantalizing hints of the letter writer's characteristics as well as their many mundane concerns. For example, John's notes on titles for his sermons in camp are done in large, slightly rounded, legible lettering, revealing, perhaps, someone who tended to be direct and straight-forward. Similarly, photographs show unremarkable scenes of weddings, church groups, funerals, and the arrival of babies that could be of any American. Photographs of John prior to internment show him smiling and happy with family and friends. Some pages consist of chapter or section title printed over a faded facsimile of a typed or handwritten letter, evoking the idea that individuals and memories are transitory and that as older generations die so do potentially their irreplaceable stories and experiences. *Letters to Memory* is a fine-grained and intimate portrayal of characters possessing the full range of human emotions: anger, resentment, fear, hope, joy, confusion, yearning, and more. This poly-vocal narrative is a refreshing departure

from previous internment literature in that characters come across as distinct individuals not as representatives of a type.

The story of John is a crucial locus of this re-memory prose, and Karen Tei is most elegiac and compelling in her storytelling about her father. Yamashita recreates him on the page in multiple ways, for instance, through her mother, Asako's, and her own memories of him, and from copies of sermons, school records, and photographs. Yet, Yamashita also encounters provocative gaps in the archives and in the remembrances of family and friends. Their silence attends her most pressing questions: how angry was John about their incarceration? What was going through his mind when he proposed marriage to Asako with these words, "Come live with me in poverty"? The thingness of letters and newspaper clippings begins to feel to her like sand easily dispersed by a callous wind, the same wind that uprooted Japanese Americans, blew them into isolated camps hastily thrown up in deserts and mountains, and that later scattered them across the US, like chaff. The author is driven in her work partially because her father is no longer alive to help her more fully understand how he survived being labeled an un-American, being exiled in his own country, and side-lined in his church. Yet, John, Yamashita surmises, must have found forgiveness in his heart, eventually.

Letters to Memory takes the reader beyond Japanese American internment and the current anti-immigrant storm in the US. For, its timeless concerns are

about ethics, faith, grace, forgiveness, and sacrifice; these topics are brought forth in each chapter through the framing device of the Socratic method. The book begins with the author addressing a contemporary interlocutor she names Homer in "Letters to Poverty," followed by Ishi in "Letters to Modernity," Vyasa in "Letters to Love," Ananda in "Letters to Death," and Qohelet from Ecclesiastes in the final chapter of *Letters to Memory*, "Letters to Laughter". Yamashita assigned these names to actual present-day individuals, who specialize in academic disciplines such as History, Anthropology, and Literature. In her invocation of these mythic characters from various cultural traditions, she connects the Japanese American internment experience to one of diasporic exile, only too frequently a shared, human experience, throughout time and place. What wisdom might these contemporary interlocutors and their mythical avatars offer to a people exiled in their own home? Homer, bard of epics about uprooting, war, and the yearning for return, is a fitting way to begin the story of Japanese Americans. However, Yamashita's memoir of retrieval and loss concludes with a prayer to the future: the story of the birth of John and Asako Yamashita's fourth great-grandchild.

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Review, Gretchen Carlson, *Be Fierce: Stop Harassment and Take Back Your Power*

Lara Merlin

Gretchen Carlson, former co-anchor of the conservative morning show *Fox and Friends,* achieved one of the great—and most elusive—goals of American liberals: deposing the noxious mastermind of Fox News, Roger Ailes. Her accusations of sexual harassment against Ailes presumably landed because of her right-wing credentials. Along with a hefty $20 million settlement from Fox, Carlson assumed the role of an unlikely catalyst for the present debate on sexual harassment. Like the Hollywood A-listers who would soon after bring down producer Harvey Weinstein, Carlson capitalized on her fame as a cable news personality and former Miss America; her celebrity both drew attention to the cause and also diverted attention

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from the activists who have sought workplace gender equity for decades.

Given the intense polarization of cable news, conservative readers are most likely to know Carlson through her stint on Fox, liberals through clips of her shown by *The Daily Show*. She vociferously complained that liberals waged "a war on Christmas." Claiming ignorance, she famously looked up the definition of the word "ignoramus" on air, leading Jon Stewart and others to charge that the Stanford- and Oxford-educated journalist was "playing dumb" to fit in with Fox's expectations that its female on-air personalities be blonde, attractive and not too bright. In this book, however, Carlson dubiously positions herself as a long-standing advocate for gender equity.

In *Be Fierce: Stop Harassment and Take Back Your Power* (published in late 2017), Carlson omits details in her case against Ailes, thanks to a nondisclosure clause in her settlement. Instead, she examines the dysfunctions of the American workplace through the stories of women who contacted her after her case became public. The copious personal accounts demonstrate the pervasiveness of harassment, and the book highlights the toll harassment takes on women's professional and personal lives. *Be Fierce* reads like a manifesto, the result of Carlson's conviction that it is not a book, but a "movement"—an idea that is timely, though grandiose.

Carlson depicts for a general audience the dystopia that is the American workplace, at least for women. Carlson does not engage with sexual harassment

faced by men, queer and/or gender non-conforming people, and trans folk. She makes the important point that contrary to most people's assumptions, Human Resources departments exist not to support workers but rather to protect the company. In practice, this typically means sidelining and silencing sexual harassment complainants in order to protect powerful men. Such insights into American corporate practice—perhaps surprising coming from a former Fox personality—help readers to understand the ways that the system is stacked against women.

Carlson demonstrates that all women are at risk for sexual harassment. To protest the belief that only young and attractive women will be victims of harassment, Carlson includes examples of tweets that suggested she was too old and ugly to be harassed by anyone. She scorns the widespread view, notably expressed during the election by Donald and Eric Trump, that strong women do not get harassed. She further counters the belief that women can simply change jobs and/or file complaints, detailing the difficult choices women face.

The subtitle "Stop Harassment and Take Your Power Back" suggests that *Be Fierce* fits into the self-help category, and it accords with the positivism of the genre. Much of the book advises women who are being harassed (document your situation in a file that you keep at home, not at work) and considering a course of action (learn the laws in your state on consent for recording conversations). Carlson includes expert opinion, a 12-point plan for initiating a complaint, a screed against forced arbitration clauses, a commendation for men who

are allies, and suggestions for raising both boys and girls. The book employs the language of empowerment, with chapter titles such as "Are You Done Taking Sh*t?" and "You Can't Break a Badass." Although Carlson elsewhere acknowledges the harsh reality that victims may have abundant reasons to remain silent, the book nonetheless cheerleads for a "tough" response that undercuts her refutation of the idea that only "weak" women are harassed. She puts the onus on the individual to respond to systemic problems, as if a plucky attitude would suffice to counter institutional sexism.

The feminism that Carlson espouses is (in the broad sense) decidedly liberal. The category of women is monolithic and not intersectional. The model victim is implicitly a white, middle class, cis woman. Differences of race, class and gender normativity are largely ignored, and she does not question how these differences might inform one's experience of harassment. The women whose stories she recounts tend to be professionals, or in nontraditional jobs in fields such as law enforcement or the military. There are few examples from women in pink collar positions. She does understand the economic realities of working class women sufficiently to point out that not all women have the luxury of walking away from a job that subjects them to harassment. She does not discuss the specific harassment of queer or trans women, let alone queer or trans men. Though she includes the stories of a few African American and Latina women, Carlson likewise seems to see race as incidental, rather than as fundamental to the experience of dystopia that women of

color experience.

The omission of race, class and sexuality as categories of analysis is particularly glaring given the title of the book. Carlson spends the final chapter detailing her definition of *fierce*, sourcing it to Shakespeare's "though she be but little, she is fierce" from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Yet word "fierce" has come to take a prominent place in contemporary popular culture, and like many trendy words derives from black culture. In particular, it emerged as a compliment among the 1980's New York drag ball scene's African American and Latinx gay and trans participants. The term reached mainstream audiences through Jennie Livingston's 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning*, and was further popularized by Tyra Banks on *America's Next Top Model*, thanks to the influence of gay black men in the fashion industry. Carlson's use of the term highlights a kind of muscular femininity that is appealing to mass audiences because it reads as macho rather than feminine. The failure to acknowledge the origins of her title underscores a missed opportunity to imagine the more broadly intersectional movement that would be necessary to truly challenge the dystopic elements of the American workplace.

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Vallista and the Role of a Fool within Dystopian Spaces

Angela Whyland[1]

The medieval fool, or court jester, traditionally functions as the prick against a king's conscious. The fool, alone, is allowed to move outside of social restrictions, to say what others cannot to the king, to give a voice to those silenced in the halls of power. But far from just a singular character in medieval literature, there may be no more pervasive character that ranges across all cultures, continents and times.[2] The fool ap-

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[1] Angela wishes to thank the journal for this opportunity and supportive critique; her faculty mentor, Dr. Marlen Elliot Harrison for encouragement to pursue a dream, and the readers of this special issue.

[2] Otto, Beatrice. "Fools are Everywhere". *History Today*. 51.6 (June 2001): 34.

pears in many seemingly diverse forms: Shakespeare's Falstaff, the Native American trickster Coyote, Twain's Tom Sawyer, or Kerouc's Dean Moriarity to name a few.[3] What fools have in common is that they use humor, and insight, to point out unpalatable truths about human dystopia, in ways that can catch the ear of a king, and a country of readers.

Steven Brust's Dragaera series as a whole, and the series latest installment, *Vallista*, function as a kind of fool.[4] These novels break the presumed boundary between science fiction and fantasy and the perceived boundary between popular fiction and literature. The series is set on the planet of Dragaera, where humans possibly arrived by space exploration or were brought to the planet as a part of an experiment by a godlike species, the Jenoine. The resulting dominant species from this experiment, which humans call Elves, is one that was genetically engineered. Yet, magic, meaning the use of esoteric study combined with will to change the world, also exists. There are few novelists in Brust's class, but where they exist, they generally have muscular literary underpinnings, and the Dragaera series is no exception. A section of the series is a pastiche of Dumas's Three Muskateers trilogy. *Vallista* dialogues with classic examples of

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[3] Llano, Stephen. "The Clown as Social Critic: Kerouac's Vision." Clowns, Fools and Picaros: Popular Forms in Theater, Fiction and Films. Ed. David Robb. Amsterdam: Brill Academic Publishing, 2007.

[4] Brust, Steven. *Vallista*. New York: Tor Publishing, 2017.

Gothic literature, and uses this dialogue to explore human nature, and our own possible participation in the creation and maintenance of dystopia.

In 1983, in the first book of the Dragaera series, Steven Brust introduced a new fool into pop culture and literature, Vlad Taltos. Vlad's a skilled assassin, a member of a disenfranchised species (humans), a quipster, a retired mob boss who ran away from the mob (on moral grounds), and a troubled character who lives in this fictional, future dystopian world designed by a godlike super-powered species, simply, to stagnate. Vlad's also quite comedic, and insightful, a quality which makes the series a cult favorite, and more recently a *New York Times* best seller. *Vallista* is the 15th novel in this series. Vlad Taltos, written in the anti-hero trope, has always been the fool, we hate to love. He is also an unreliable narrator, with a penchant for lying both to himself and the readers of his stories, a point that becomes more significant after examining the novel in its entirety.

Juxtapositioned against a future setting where time linearity becomes questionable, the series re-examines an older Dragaeran history, simultaneously engaging with what it means to be human, alien, and both. The characters are written without gender bias, a dual standard that cuts across time, race and culture. While there are numerous examples within the series, in *Vallista* readers become reacquainted with Devera, a female child who can move in time and space in a godlike manner, and a young female ghost, who is discarded after creating a magical structure previously thought impossible. Deeply

conscious of how power structures are enabled by injudicious divisions like race or gender, in *Vallista*, Brust continues to destabilize our preconceptions of truth.

Each of Brust's novels, is named after a different Dragaeren house, or family. Vallistas are the architects, who both build and destroy. In *Vallista*, Brust structurally presents a gothic, haunted house mystery. Traditionally, the haunted house in psychological critiques of Gothic novels, symbolizes a character's disturbed psyche. In *Vallista*, that is with a twist. The hero, who has both altered and missing memories, is physically and psychically captured within the structure built by others while trying to rescue his niece, Devera. In trying to solve the mystery of how they are both captured, Vlad demonstrates how individuals are both captured and complicit in dystopian structures. The house functions as a symbol of the relationship between society and our individual choices. *Vallista* shows how individual people are complicit in both creating a dystopia (the builders of the house) and sustaining that dystopia in failing to see the dystopia for what it is, lying about inequitable social structures or alternatively, protest and rebellion, themes that reflect current events and protests in American society.

Science fiction and fantasy commonly involve contact with another species, during which, readers are asked to consider what defines humanity. Dragaera is a fictional world set in an alternate human future, in which a more scientifically advanced alien species has experimented with blending human genes with the native Dragaeran, and the Dragaeran's genes with those of native

Dragaeran animals. The resulting society is highly stratified, and humans are ranked beneath even the lowest of Dragaerans. This hierarchical structure is an obvious dystopia for humans, but a less obvious dystopia for some Dragaerens. This hierarchical structure arbitrarily places humans and Dragaerens into classes at birth that determine both their profession, status, and economic opportunities. This sentiment speaks to those who think class or racial designations are capricious or unfair, illustrating the series as designed by way of the fool. Particularly, the series, through Vlad, deliberately seeks to afflict the reader's conscience regarding dystopian elements of our own world, and our complicity in sustaining those elements.

A thorn in our conscience, *Vallista* is a funny, insightful, and frightening commentary on American culture. There are the powerful builders of the house, which, like the United States, was created to achieve an idealistic goal in our case, democracy. In *Vallista*, the creator becomes, in the current time, a ghost only faintly remembered, or understood by the living. A ghost who haunts Vlad with the injustice that was complicit in how this house, representing current society, was built and which still, underpins the continuance of dystopia. Then, there are all of the minor characters in *Vallista*, who represent the many people that receive the tragic fruits of injustice pertinent in our dystopian present. There are also a few seemingly powerful characters that just want to take advantage of the existing system, or play their fiddles while Rome burns. In its best moments, *Vallista* brings us closer to the many minor characters, Vlad, the fool intro-

duces to readers. These minor characters represent all of us, who may *seem* to be captured in a structure built by others, and yet, unconsciously, reinforce the ongoing survival of that structure by refusing to acknowledge dystopia.

Vallista is a stunning, and painful, critique of the current world, shown through the insight and humor of the fool. As a fool, Vlad is uniquely situated to point out unpleasant truths to those that have the power to create change. An outsider and individual human, who is disenfranchised and seemingly captured in a dystopia, Vlad is uniquely similar to each reader who, as individuals, may feel powerless. Vlad, an unreliable narrator, is uniquely situated, to allow us as readers to ask in what way may we refuse to see the dystopian modern world in which we live. At the heart of the book is this powerful query offered by the fool—in looking truthfully, at the world, what are we willing to see, say, and do?

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Better Living through Segregation *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty

Matthew Spencer

Perhaps no contemporary American novel has come out swinging harder and faster than Paul Beatty's *The Sellout*. *The Sellout* is Beatty's fourth novel since shifting from award-winning poet to novelist in the early 90s, and his language mastery is evident from the outset. Readers barely get past the first few sentences of the opening prologue before confronted with a wicked combination of Beatty's laser-beam sardonic wit, in concert with his willingness to not only approach the topic of race in America, but to posit race in the center of the dinner table as if emptying his pockets after centuries of abuse. Readers watch as the protagonist, identified only by the last name "Me," smokes marijuana unabashedly in the Supreme Court chambers while awaiting the entrance of the justices. He relays the basic plot the whole while he is

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on trial for an impressively heinous collection of crimes including reinstituting slavery *and* segregation in post-racial America. Or, as he imagines in discussion with a young black boy attending the trial with his mother, "You know how when you play Chutes and Ladders and you're almost at the finish line, but you spin a six and land on that long, really curvy red slide that takes you from square sixty-seven all the way back to number twenty-four? . . . I'm that long red slide." As he explains, Me represents a regression from the perceived post-racial utopia some believed America had become. Indeed, much of the novel's discourse on social progress, or the lack thereof, can sting as it reminds readers that the grass is not necessarily greener on the other side of the Civil Rights Act. What the novel accomplishes by the end, however, is not the complete refutation of progress, but a call to think more deeply about its definition and its visual manifestations.

Me's story takes numerous turns that all lead toward a discomfort mainstream America seeks to avoid at all cost. Me, an urban farmer who is far more concerned with citrus trees than institutional racism, finds himself pulled into the fray by the gravity of his surroundings. His father—a failed psychologist— makes him the subject of many racially-focused experiments, including one in which Me must administer a shock to himself if he cannot correctly answer questions about black history. His longtime love interest has several children with her incarcerated rapper husband and drives a city bus that Me frequents specifically for her company. The book's title im-

bues clarity when the intellectual rival of Me's father labels Me the titular cultural and racial "sellout" for immersing himself in farm work rather than the struggle for liberation. Yet, this is not the most crucial relationship in the novel. Perhaps the most crucial relationship in the novel is between Me and Hominy Jenkins, the sole living Little Rascal who revels unashamedly in the coonery of his entertainment career and insists on becoming Me's personal slave. While all of this may sound dire, Beatty smashes through the bleakness, completely bypassing the nuance one would think is needed in handling such situations in favor of snark and irreverent images. One such gag is Hominy arriving to his work as slave around one o'clock in the afternoon and serving as Me's personal life-sized lawn jockey, complete with racing silks and lantern.

Even though the events of the novel take place before the inauguration of Barack Obama, the novel reads like a long but comedic "I told you so" for those who thought eight years of a black man in the White House meant the long, tragic history of race in America had finally come to a fairy-tale ending. Indeed, Me engages race with a sharp humor that teeters between outright sarcasm and something deeper. The nameless narrator challenges readers with jokes that provoke more thought than laughter. Notably, Me provides cause for readers to question whether laughter is appropriate at all. This is evident in Beatty's casual use of the n-word, hard "R" and all. He inserts the racial epithet into the story so many times that it becomes unclear whether its use functions to desensitize the reader to the term or produce a

hyperawareness to its connotative bite. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Beatty commented, "I wanted to see if I could make myself flinch." Any readers of the novel with passing knowledge of American history will also find themselves flinching with each page, but not without reason. The book is a provocation not for the sake of provocation, but to awaken readers to a reality of deep fault.

Beyond these social questions, the novel is also keenly concerned with place. The central plotline, which is often lost momentarily in the blur of subplots and picaresque characters that vanish as abruptly as they appear, is Me and Hominy's attempts to get their hometown of Dickens, located in south L.A., back on the map. While gentrification continues to engulf many predominantly black areas, Dickens suffers a more nebulous fate, seeming to just fade into non-existence. Not everyone shares Me's and Hominy's desire for reincorporation though, with Me noticing, "most Dickensians were relieved to not be from anywhere." They are saved the embarrassment of recognition or ignorance from anyone who may ask them where they are from. However, becoming "nowhere" or "nothing" is a tall order, and as with the idea of post-racism, the novel shows how difficult it is to completely dissociate from the past. In order to revive the town, Me and Hominy turn to resegregation as a twisted means of uniting the community through offense. They start small with the bus of Marpessa, Me's sweetheart, and then move up to the school, even going so far as to set up a fake construction site across the street for the fictional Wheaton Academy, an all-white school with superior fa-

cilities. Ironically, the strategy pays off and the public school thrives, proving Me right and reinvigorating the town under the guise of succeeding in the shadow of oppression. The novel's final moment of triumph comes while Me awaits the verdict of his trial and he sees Dickens listed on the weather ticker of the local news—a sign that Me has consummated his quest to literally place Dickens back on the map.

While the quest to reincorporate Dickens provides the space for much of the novel's drama and humor, the "it's not much by it's ours" attitude toward the reestablishment of Dickens is one of its most perplexing aspects, a sort of "Make South Central Great Again" longing for a return to the "bad" old days. This observation may sound odd, comparing a woke novel of racial and social satire with the rhetoric of white nationalism. However, its that same tug of opposition that illustrates just how murky a culture's discourse can become, and *The Sellout* firmly positions itself in this gray-area and refuses to budge. No scene illustrates this ambiguity better than when Me's father is murdered at an intersection by the LAPD. One would assume that a murder scene with such a blatant, linear connection to the countless killings of innocent black Americans would be handled with the greatest care and reverence. Instead, as is the case throughout the novel, Beatty zigs when he is expected to zag, refusing to take on a solemn tone. Alternatively, Me ruminates on his flawed relationship with his father as he takes it upon himself to carry the body first to Dum Dum Donuts for his father's weekly meeting with the small circle of neigh-

borhood intellectuals he organized, and then home where Me buries his father in the corner of the small farm plot. In doing so, Me refuses to pursue legal restitution—he even reminds the officer on the scene that no LAPD officer has ever been convicted of murder in the line of duty—while also consciously shrugging off the racially motivated nature of his father's murder. Instead, he accepts the murder's unfairness and turns it into a purely personal matter, even going so far as to say that his father tied one hand behind his back as a child to teach him about inequality, "Fuck being black. Try learning to crawl, ride a tricycle, cover both eyes while playing peek-a-boo, and constructing a meaningful theory of mind, all with one hand." His relationship with his father and its scars take precedent over the greater social implications of his father's killing, once again showing how Beatty insists on looking at things from as many angles as possible instead of reflecting on a single narrative. That is not to say that Beatty employs the kind of "both sides" rhetoric that can excuse atrocities, or that he is uncaring in dealing with difficult topics, only that his work cannot be neatly swept into one stream of discourse.

While the novel is clearly designed to inspire a more multifaceted approach to discussions of race, pursuing such ambiguity of thought can leave the plot seeming more torturous than meaningfully ridiculous at times, and it certainly drags a bit in the final third. The characters are mostly entertaining, but, like Hominy, they can come off as a little too caricature-like at times. The long, comedic asides Beatty takes can begin to feel tiresome,

but his skill as a writer more often than not keeps readers interested enough to grin and chuckle accordingly upon concluding any given paragraph. Such is the case early on when Me muses on what the Lincoln memorial would do if brought to life. The joke seems critically overwrought with descriptions that seems like low-hanging fruit. However, as the surreal digression of the passage comes to a close, Beatty weaves an image of Honest Abe as a trash-talking basketball star which is sure to make even the most reluctant reader unable to suppress a laugh at the author's dedication to such an excess of absurdity. These snippets are Beatty at the height of his power as a humorist and they keep the novel afloat when it seems to sink into banality.

In an interview with the BBC, Beatty mused, "America's never who it thinks it is." Movies, TV, history books, and our fellow citizens all present versions of the country that, depending on our own outlooks, can please, shock, or even disgust. One can scarcely read, watch, or listen to reporting about the current state of affairs in the U.S. without hearing an utterance of the phrase "more divided than it's ever been". What a book like *The Sellout* makes evident is that those divisions have always been there—they where just simply not acknowledged. While describing how he dealt with a fellow Dickensian who was threatening to kill himself, Me's father tells him the secret to how he defused the situation. His father tells the man, "Brother, you have to ask yourself two questions, Who am I? And how may I become myself." He uses this therapeutic approach because, "You want the client to

feel important, to feel that he or she is in control of the healing process." It is no stretch, then, to think of those two questions in relation to the introspection *The Sellout* thrusts upon its reader. Who are we? How may we become ourselves? These are enormous questions containing circuitous details and caveats that would take years to flesh out, but all healing has to start somewhere.

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Race in American Suburbia: Afrofuturism in *Get Out* and "White Zombies"

Sarah Papazoglakis and Kara Hisatake

Get Out (2017) portrays racism in the United States as a horror story. The plot centers around the dangers that white suburbia poses to the black community, opening in New York City with black protagonist Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya), an up-and-coming photographer who is invited to meet his white girlfriend's family in suburban upstate New York. Over the course of Chris' weekend visit to the Armitage family home, his girlfriend, Rose Armitage (Allison Williams), introduces Chris to her "liberal" family and their predominantly white community, where he is quickly ensnared in a sinister plot that threatens his life.

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While the Armitage family epitomizes the American Dream through their material prosperity, the family home is also the site of scientific racism in which white people literally colonize black bodies. Jordan Peele's dystopian *Get Out* recalls an earlier *Key and Peele* comedy sketch, "White Zombies" (2012), in which black characters are immune from racist white zombies who will not eat black people. The sketch begins in suspense with two black friends trying to escape a flood of white zombies surging through a suburban street. Suspense quickly turns to comedy as they realize that their lives are not in danger and in fact, the black community is thriving in this white zombie apocalypse. Just as *Get Out* imagines a white suburban utopia as a horror-filled dystopia for the racial "other," "White Zombies" envisions a black suburban utopia made possible only by dystopian conditions for whites.

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Get Out and "White Zombies" present an updated critique of the racial logic undergirding the contemporary white suburb by locating tools of racial terror in the

wealthy white family home and the spread of infectious disease. In *Get Out* and in his collaborative work on *Key and Peele*, Jordan Peele uses dystopian horror and comedy to present an afrofuturist vision of black survival. By reading survival as afrofuturist, we emphasize the significance of a black future in two versions of speculative fiction in which black people are consistently written out of the story: the race-free, technological utopia and the zombie apocalypse.[1] In these texts, survival is more than just living; it represents freedom from the conditions of oppression, both psychological and structural.

Surviving the White Utopia: A Black Horror Story

Get Out comments on the history of the segregated white suburb that originated with "white flight" from the city to the suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s, during the lifetime of Rose's grandfather, Roman Armitage. As racial enclaves built for white people escaping the multiracial inner city, the suburbs have been critical to white identity formation. "'White' unity," according to historian George Lipsitz, "rested on residential segregation, on shared access to housing and life chances largely unavailable to communities of color."[2] In the film, the white suburb evokes the

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[1] Alondra Nelson has called the vision of a future in which "race (and gender) distinctions would be eliminated with technology" the "founding fiction of the digital age" that afrofuturism disrupts.

[2] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998), 7.

southern antebellum slave plantation in the middle of upstate New York, a place generally remembered as a critical juncture on the Underground Railroad, not a site of slavery.[3] The first image of the Armitage family home shows black workers pruning the white family's grounds. Even Dean, Rose's father, calls it "cliché" to be a rich white family with black servants, saying "I hate the way it looks." He might hate the racial optics, but he does not hate the fact of racism that it exposes. In contrast to the urban inner-city, the suburb is cast as the most dangerous place in the United States in the film. The discourse of anti-black racism is not easily deciphered in what is said, but rather manifests more fully in the visual symbols and structures of the Armitage family and their property.

Responding to national conversations on race in the Obama Era through popular culture, Peele "wanted [the film] to represent the fact that what many people may not understand is the fear that a black man has walking in a white suburb at night is real."[4] Before the credits, the film's prologue scene follows a black man named Dre (Lakeith Stanfield) lost in suburbia. Dre describes his surroundings as a "creepy, confusing ass suburb," a "hedge maze" where he sticks out "like a sore thumb." Black fear of the white suburb is validated in this periph-

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[3] Edgar McManus' *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (1966) remains one of the most important works to contend with the profound influence of the slave trade in New York state.

[4] Jordan Peele, interview by Michel Martin, *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, February 19, 2017.

eral scene in which Dre is stalked and kidnapped by a masked man who later turns out to be Rose's brother Jeremy Armitage. The suburb has functioned historically as a physical and psychological boundary that divides white and black people. It is the locus of the American Dream, a dream deferred for the black community generally excluded from the upward mobility idealized in the suburb. Suburbia, declares urban historian and architect Dolores Hayden, "is a landscape of the imagination where Americans situate ambitions for upward mobility and economic security, ideals about freedom and private property, and longings for social harmony and social uplift."[5] In the film, the suburb still acts as a barrier, even in an era that purports to be post-racial. Punctuated by Flanagan and Allen's "Run, Rabbit, Run!" song about a farmer's weekly killing of rabbits, Dre's character emphasizes the persistent victimization of black bodies in this homogeneous space.[6] In a twist on typical horror film schemes, in which black people are rarely featured as main characters and are often the first to perish, as is the case with Dre, the black protagonist Chris survives in *Get Out* while the entire Armitage family dies.

The film takes critiques of this racialized space into new imaginative terrain by portraying the white sub-

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[5] Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 3.

[6] The scene also signals a connection to anti-racist social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, that bring light to the persistent threat white suburbia poses to black bodies.

urb as predatory. White life, quite literally, preys upon black life in an effort to secure immortality. The path to suburbia, lined with trees, is marked with a haunted history. The opening credits that punctuate the moment of Dre's kidnapping is then followed by a long span of trees demarcating the suburban space set to the film's Swahili theme song "Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga." Using language of the black past, the Swahili lyrics repeat the words: run, get out, listen to the past. At the end of the credits, the bucolic trees are contrasted immediately with three photos of the black inner city that we assume to be Chris' professional photographs. The first photo in the sequence features a black man holding balloons on the sidewalk. The second foregrounds a pregnant black woman standing in front of a car with a man and a high-rise apartment building behind her. A third photo displays a pitbull on a chain in front of a housing complex leaping forward, pulling his owner behind. These photos are set to a different song—Childish Gambino's "Redbone"—with a cautionary refrain: stay woke. In the film, "stay woke" is given multiple meanings beyond its reference to staying "awake" to oppressive forces in our culture. The refrain also speaks to Chris' need to resist the hypnotic "Sunken Place," and the need for black people to be aware and actively fight against a world of racial discrimination and injustice.[7] The photos and soundtrack are staged as two

[7] Drawn from African American Vernacular English, the term "stay woke" is also a popular hashtag for activism on Twitter and has gained popular usage with the Black Lives Matter movement after the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson.

poles of the U.S. racial landscape in this introductory framing: the white suburb and the black inner city. One depends upon the other. Even from this early moment in the film, Peele articulates an afrofuturist framing that centers black life in American society. The film works against long-held stereotypes of the inner city as an impoverished site and a "drain" on American society. The black future is located in the city, far away from the suburbs.

Shielded from the visibility of a multiracial urban center, black bodies are cannibalized and consumed in the privacy of suburbia, portrayed in the film as an extension of the antebellum plantation. In a scene entirely without dialogue, Dean Armitage stands in a gazebo with a framed photograph of Chris. He waves his hands, conducting a silent slave auction in which bids reach $10,000 to "win" Chris' body. The scene takes place in the context of a party on the Armitage estate with their mostly-white neighbors. Having arrived in black cars reminiscent of a funeral procession, the party-goers sound the death knell for Chris, dehumanizing him by fetishizing his physique based on his golf swing or his sexiness. One attendee even remarks that blackness is "in fashion," a commodity for purchase by the highest bidder. Laden with meaning, these upper- and middle-class white partygoers disavow political correctness in the privacy of the Armitage home and reduce Chris into a stereotype of black masculinity. One woman even feels Chris's biceps and asks Rose if the age-old stereotypes are true that sex is better with a black man. We find out later that the party guests are inspecting Chris's body as prospective buyers. Comparing the

presence of a token black figure in a nearly all-white party to the conditions of the historical slave auction, this scene exposes the hypocrisy of tokenistic forms of racial inclusion found in predominantly white spaces, like the suburbs, and warns of the dangers suburbia poses to black bodies. A utopia for whiteness as the "perfect" solution forwarded by the Armitages, suburbia emerges as a dystopia for black people that reproduces the conditions of race-based slavery in a post-racial age.[8]

One such condition is the use-value of blackness for white suburbanites, explored through the recurring figure of the deer throughout the film. Chris and deer are both cast as reviled intruders on suburban land who must be tamed. Chris has a wordless connection with a deer killed by Rose's car on their way upstate at the beginning of the film. When they recount the accident to Rose's father, Dean exclaims: "one down, a couple hundred thousand to go . . . . I do not like the deer. I'm sick of it. They're taking over. They're like rats. They're destroying the ecosystem. I see a dead deer on the side of the road, I think to myself, that's a start." The image of the deer plaguing the otherwise pristine countryside repeats, evoking similarities between the animal and black people who, historically, have been persecuted as so-called social pariahs. The deer, a highly adaptable species, becomes a po-

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[8] There is one Japanese man at the party, Hiroki Tanaka, indicating both the way that Asians are held up as the model minority that can participate in whiteness to a certain degree, and the way that Asians are holders of global capital—the man is not Japanese American, but from Japan.

tent representation of black resilience in the film's sci-fi twist: the Coagula procedure, a neurosurgical operation that enslaves black minds in a "Sunken Place." The procedure transplants the brain of a new white "owner" into the body of the black victim, after holding an auction for the "body." As the object of Chris's gaze before and after the "Behold the Coagula" video plays before him, the buck head trophy on the wall in the Armitage house is transformed from trophy of man's triumph over nature into a tool that allows Chris, the hunted, to become the hunter. The Coagula procedure reduces black bodies—and only black bodies—into trophies that confirm white superiority. Dean fetishizes black bodies, for he believes that white people are "gods trapped in cocoons" destined to metamorphose into bodies they have enslaved through tactics of torture, terror, and coercion. In the film, the suburb is the only place that is racially, culturally, and socially isolated enough to enable such a horrific manhunt of defenseless black men and women.

The hierarchy of white-black race relations under white supremacy is naturalized in the imagery and discourse of the Coagula procedure. The utopian suburban tree-lined landscape at the start of the film serves as the soothing backdrop for the family patriarch, Roman Armitage, who touts the violent procedure in a promotional video. A direct contrast to Chris' candid photos of urban black life, the Armitage family's land—orderly and manicured—functions as a metaphor to sell Coagula: "unruly" black bodies will be pressed into submission. They promise that Coagula will restore the racial order of things.

The film draws upon the history of rendering black people property in the United States through chattel slavery to show how the racial past is continually adapted to serve the purposes of white supremacy in the nation's present. Saidiya Hartman reminds us that "in the social landscape of the pastoral, slavery is depicted as an 'organic relationship'" in which white domination over black bodies is rendered as a paternalistic "ideal of care, duty, familial obligation, gratitude, and humanity."[9] Roman's son Dean gives Chris a tour of the family property, introducing the expansive backyard as "the pièce de résistance." Also referring to it as "the field of play," Dean declares: "I love that the nearest house is across the lake. It's total privacy." A metaphor for Coagula's transformation of black bodies into white property, Dean's perfectly isolated, perfectly white dream home itself is the outward, structural articulation of the "Sunken Place." This white utopia of "total privacy" is built upon the American Dream's principles of prosperity, individualism, and property ownership. Racial isolation makes Coagula possible, the Armitages' utter isolation weaves the web of horror that ensnares Chris, making the impossibility of escape palpable. Much like antebellum slavery, Coagula turns black bodies into property, a form of intergenerational wealth, passed down from one generation to the next.

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[9] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), 52-53.

The Coagula procedure itself is imagined by the Armitage family as the natural order of things in the promotional vídeo. The "perfect" union of black "natural gifts" and white "determination," Roman Armitage claims the procedure is "inevitable." White women perform a key function in the first phase of the procedure: Rose seduces Chris and her mother, Missy, hypnotizes him. The beneficiaries of racial discrimination, Rose and Missy, furnish the critical emotional link that makes Chris vulnerable to the more outwardly evil, bodily harm inflicted by Jeremy and Dean.[10] Dean performs the neuro-transplant, the ultimate act of violence in phase three of the Coagula procedure. Coagula's technologically advanced brain transplant constructs a perversely colorblind utopian vision of a future in which black and white are bound together, integrated as one. Coagula renders blackness vulnerable to scientific and technological progress. *Get Out*'s afrofuturist vision therefore disrupts "the founding fiction of the digital age that race (and gender) distinctions would be eliminated with technology."[11] The film itself comments on the duality of technology. On the one hand, technology functions as a tool for upholding racism

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[10] Much historical and theoretical work has been done to show how white women used racial hierarchy to derive power for themselves. In one such recent study, *Dispossessed Lives* (2016), Marisa J. Fuentes examines how white women constructed themselves as "reproducers of freedom" as a way of differentiated themselves against black women as "reproducers of slavery."

[11] Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts," *Social Text 20, no. 2 (2002): 1.*

in the film. On the other, technology in the film situates *Get Out* as an afrofuturist work "grounded in the histories of black communities" that envisions blackness in the future as power rather than weakness.[12] Peele's future is one in which scientific progress and new technologies of race open up possibilities for new forms of black agency and self-assertion, not the elimination of racial difference or the reproduction of violence on black bodies. Chris breaks free from the "Sunken Place" by appropriating cotton, the camera, and other tools of violence historically used against black people. Strapped to an armchair, Chris scratches into the stuffing of the chair and blocks his ears with the cotton lining he pulls out of it. By the end of it all, Chris survives by destroying the agents and structures of oppression, not only the Armitage family but also the Armitage house. But he cannot do it alone. Two other black men are instrumental in killing Rose and providing a means for his escape from the suburb: Walter, the groundskeeper, and Rod, his best friend.

In the violent final scene of the film, it is black brotherhood that frees Chris from the evil intentions of the Armitage family. His black brothers have been warning Chris all along: Dre urgently warns him to "get out" and Rod acts on his seemingly too-crazy-to-be-true theory about Rose and her family by driving to Chris' rescue. Walter, freed from the "Sunken Place" by Chris' use of the camera flash on his phone, kills Rose and then, himself, thereby also killing her grandfather since they are

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[12] Ibid., 9.

one and the same. The climactic moment at the end of the film reimagines the all-too-familiar scene of racialized police violence: a siren blares and lights flash over Chris as he crouches over Rose's injured body, surrounded by the dead. The irony, of course, is that Rod has appropriated a Transportation Security Administration vehicle from his workplace. He uses police lights as a shield to enter and exit white suburbia. The scene rewrites the overplayed scene of brutal police killings of black men, too-often excused as part of the ruse of safety and police protection of the community. Only under the cover of law and order authority is their escape from the suburb possible. Although the world of *Get Out* is structured almost entirely by white supremacy, Chris, unlike many black characters in horror movies, *gets out*. His survival symbolizes a resilient black future in spite of the black lives—Walter's, Dre's, Georgina's, and the black people in Rose's photographs that she keeps like trophies—that are lost.

White Dystopia as Comedy

Controversy ensued during film award season when *Get Out* was nominated as a comedy for the Golden Globes. Peele was outraged by the classification, declaring to the press: "what the movie is about is not funny".[13] The film's

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[13] Eric Kohn. "Jordan Peele Challenges Golden Globes Classifying 'Get Out' As a Comedy," *Indiewire*. Nov. 15, 2017. Accessed Jan. 10, 2018. http://www.indiewire.com/2017/11/jordan-peele-response-get-out-golden-globes-comedy-1201897841/

moments of comic relief do not classify it as comedy. In the past, Peele has used comedy to make incisive social commentary about anti-black racism and its relationship to suburbia. In the 2012 *Key and Peele* sketch "White Zombies," anti-black racism is a suburban pathology, literally. Together with Keegan-Michael Key, Peele imagines the durability of suburban anti-black racism as a key feature of the zombie apocalypse. The sketch begins with a friend—an armed white savior—who promises the two black men: "I will get you out of here." As the camera pans, zombies enter the shot and immediately attack their white friend, leaving the two black men unharmed. Key and Peele panic as a wave of zombies surrounds them. Running for their lives through the suburban street against the tide of corpses, they soon realize that the zombies are ignoring them. Indeed, the zombies deliberately shy away from them. It's a scene all too familiar for black men in the white suburb. Not even the zombie apocalypse can destroy anti-black racism, a defining feature of the U.S. suburb. Key delivers the punchline: "Racist motherf***in' zombies!" Racism becomes the stuff of comedy because it is precisely this brand of suburban prejudice that protects them from the plague that only kills white folks. Different from the horrors of anti-blackness portrayed in *Get Out,* the sketch uses irony and fears of infection to ridicule anti-black racism and reduce its itinerant violence by imaging it as a plague that destroys white racists themselves while the objects of prejudice are shielded from harm.

Even after death, racism has an afterlife. When Key and Peele approach one white zombie couple in a car, the man locks the door, despite the fact that the car windows are broken. As they approach another zombie family, the little girl attempts to walk towards Key and Peele but her parents prohibit her from coming into contact with black flesh. The zombies in this absurd dystopia are made of up typical white middle-class suburban figures: police officer, physician, businessman, cheerleader, and housewife, who litter a landscape of abandoned cars, manicured lawns, and large houses. Anti-blackness is so foundational to the suburb that it remains unbroken even after the world-altering zombie apocalypse hits the town.

For *Key and Peele*, the zombie infestation of the white world is not necessarily the end of their world. Enclosed behind a white picket fence, a black neighbor appears, smiling with a six-pack of beer in hand, and calls to Key and Peele: "Hey guys! Isn't this great? These racist zombies are leaving us alone! C'mon, we havin' a party!" He takes them to a backyard, where music is playing at a large intergenerational black family barbeque. No longer seeking the sheriff's station, a place that often menaces rather than protects the community where their white friend was leading them, Key and Peele take refuge inside the picket fence where the black community finds a utopian freedom from white oppression. If the white suburban utopia of *Get Out* produces horror, "White Zombies" finds a black suburban utopia in the demise of the white suburb. In this comedy sketch, anti-black racism is

the plague of the suburb, not multiracial, heterogeneous neighbors.

Taken together, *Get Out* and "White Zombies" offer an afrofuturist vision of black survival and resilience in the face of anti-black oppression that draws upon the history of oppression of the black community in the United States. The destruction of the suburb as a racist, segregated, white space is crucial to the realization of this vision, as is the appropriation of the tools of oppression toward liberation. Narrative itself is one such tool. In the horror version of a black future, survival is portrayed as an escape from the monster at hand. Comedy, however, allows for a more open-ended future that gestures toward black community life and reproduction beyond individual survival. In both the film and the comedy sketch the solidarity of black brotherhood ensures survival. The exclusion of black women as agents in the making of these futures poses a serious threat to the alternative worlds and imagined possibilities explored in these works. Peele's afrofuturism is a masculinist one that locates the future of black life in the survival of black men while black women, like the detective who dismisses Rod's fears, remain marginalized. In a culture in which black males are incarcerated at a rate of five times that of white men and subject to more excessive force than other demographics in the United States, such a vision of black brotherhood produces a searing critique and fills an important gap in typical representations of black male sociability in film and TV. Peele's work helps to identify the dangers suburbia as well as the ingenuity of black survival under conditions of

oppression. His work centers survival, especially in the context of a larger black brotherhood, to offer afrofutristic visions of the black community in the narratives in which they usually disappear.

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Dystopia-Contesting Dystopia

Charli Valdez

In his book, *La Nueva California*, Hayes-Bautista maps the progress of the identity formation of Latinos[1], Latin American immigrants and their descendants, in California. He opens with how Latinos were defined by non-Latinos in the 40's, arguing that ultimately there will neither be pure "assimilation" nor pure "separatism." Meanwhile, in his analysis of the racial politics of the film, *I am Legend*

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[1] The Latino communities discussed in this paper are Cuban-American and Mexican-American (aka Chicano), the latter the largest among Latinos in the United States. Latinx, as a term, is relatively new and encompasses a range of gender identities. Latina/o is an older term that sought to rebut the masculine presumption implied by the term Latino. In *Sense8*, for example, the characters Lito, Hernando and Daniela are Mexican specifically and Latin American more broadly, but would not generally be considered "Latinx".

(2007), Sean Brayton, author of "The Racial Politics of Disaster and Dystopia in *I Am Legend*," discusses how the narrative of the far right believes that difference, immigration, and multiculturalism (or persisting non-separatist non-assimilation) are the harbingers of dystopia. While white supremacist, sexist, transphobic, and heterosexist impulses paint dystopia with that brush, the growing voice and presence of Latinx texts assert that the true dystopia is a very present and enduring reality of intolerance and hate. In this article, I present three rhetorics that contest the far-right's bigoted framing of dystopia: the subtle counter-storying in the movie *Chef (2014)*, the oppositional alternate reality dystopic mapping in "My Aztlán", and the aspirational metaphors of the dystopic speculative television series *Sense8*.

In his 2011 book, Brayton analyzes film and literature, describing the political visions that inform each of these cultural texts, however, he also considers the populist dystopic rhetoric of the far right echoing through media and popular culture. This dystopia is defined by invasions of foreigners, in particular Mexicans. The rhetoric decries "Hispanicization" and Lou Dobbs's fear of an Aztlán conspiracy to "reconquer" the American Southwest, Beck's phobia of Mexican "illegals," and growing anti-immigrant sentiment within the Patriot movement." (Brayton 2011, 68) One methodology in opposing such far right rhetoric (the stereotypical representations of Latinas/os in the media and the legal assumptions based on these discursive iterations) is, according to Richard Delgado and others, Critical Race Theory's

counter-storying rhetoric. In the 2012 book C*ritical race theory: An Introduction, Second Edition,* Delgado (48) writes that counterstories can subvert such discursive aggressions "that marginalize others or conceal their humanity." The film *Chef* is a particularly subtle and effective example of such a counterstory.

Sofia Vergara, an actress born in Columbia, stars as Inez in *Chef* and delivers a quiet and understated performance— a counterstory to her more widely known overdetermined spitfire character Gloria Delgado-Pritchett in sitcom *Modern Family* (2009). Although Vergara entered the industry through modeling and starred in movies prior to the role of Gloria, *Modern Family* was her breakout moment. Vergara received four Emmy nominations in this role. She plays the young beautiful wife of Jay Pritchett (Ed O'Neill) and the mother of Manny Delgado (Rico Rodriguez). The plot spins around the intertwining families of Jay, his son Mitchell (and husband Cameron), his daughter Claire (and husband Phil) and their children. Gloria is not the only archetypal character in the series: Cameron plays a stereotypically effusive gay role, Jay the old stock grumpy white man. True to the spitfire type, Vergara, as Gloria, acts big, her code-switch-rants overdetermined emotionally in her relationships—especially in her relationship with her white husband. This iconic spitfire type is not new, of course. Lupe Vélez was one of the first. Velez was first cast in the Laurel and Hardy film, *The Gaucho* (1927) and had a healthy career that peaked with the Mexican Spitfire films between 1940 and 1943. In her 2011 article, "Spitfire: Lupe

Vélez and the Ambivalent Pleasures of Ethnic Masquerade," Sturtevant (21) argues that in the latter films in particular, Velez apprised roles in which her "characters are childish… throw temper tantrums… misunderstand American customs, and … speak with exaggerated accents… the kind of inert and fixed identity that defines the very concept of stereotype." In particular, given the limited roles available for Latinas at the time, such stereotyping might have given the American audience the impression that the spitfire personality was a shared trait of all Latinas and, as Delgado suggests, that stereotyping can conceal the humanity not only of that character but of the Latinx community overall. This dehumanization through stereotyping contributes to the marginalization of Latinx communities. In turn, Hershfield writes: "If a movie star has no 'personal identity' … she is composed of a presence and a set of discourses that symbolize an iconic identity."[2] What is a stereotype, like the spitfire icon, but the absence of individualized personal identity? In a sense, the humanity of the Latina actress herself, be it Vélez or Vergara, is concealed behind the mask of caricature. The concealing of a human and personal identity has a number of powerful knock-on effects: failure to recognize talent, to write good Latinx roles, and to nominate and award Latinx actors among them. Vergara's role and professionally contextualized performance in *Chef*, does rebut the spitfire type, by delivering a character with a

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[2] Linda B. Hall, "Images of Women and Power," in *Pacific Historical Review* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), 11.

human and personal identity that reveals the humanity of the actress herself, however, there is also another textual-level of counterstory delivered by this film.

Chef also provides a counterstory in the quality, nuance and range of its Latina/o characters. These include Vergara's role as Inez, her son, Percy, and Martin (John Leguizamo), who ultimately helps prepare and run a food truck with Carl Casper, the titular chef. Characters Martin, Percy and Inez don't rely on the dominant narrative depiction of the all-too familiar marijuana-smoking, gang-banging stereotypes that movie-goers must tire of; they are (relatively) fully-developed Latina/o characters. Inez is wealthy, stable, capable, and savvy in ways that Carl is not. Martin is quirky and loyal and Percy acts as their social media marketing expert. While this depth of characterization is of counterstory note, it is ultimately problematic that both major and minor Latina/o characters rally, work, sacrifice and dedicate themselves to support Caspar, the white male lead in his quest to become a self-actualized chef. Carl's son works on the food truck Martin cleans and, upon seeing Carl's need to move heavy appliances into the truck, convinces a group of Spanish-speaking workers to help Carl. Inez arranges for the acquisition of the truck in the first place. In their personal relationships, this food truck family mimics the labor relations we find prevailing throughout the country – Latinos working to support, clean, and do the heavy lifting for the anglo community. For a point of comparison and a vision of how a plot can produce a counterstory, Anthony Lucero's film, *East Side Sushi* (2014), stars Diana Eliza-

beth Torres as Juana, the Latina protagonist-chef who becomes enthralled by the world of sushi chefs. The community rallies around Juana in support her of her quest to win a sushi chef competition and ultimately work as a real, and recognized, sushi chef.

In *Chef*, the minor Latina/o characters, Perico, Carl's father-in-law, and Flora, hold roles that are more superficially familiar in that the they play a Cuban musician and Inez' nanny respectively. Nevertheless, these characters also act in an understated manner. Finally, there is a host of background characters, from salsa dancers to a cabbie, whose realistic depiction breaks from Hollywood's trite habit of caricature and are as crucial to the the glamorous foodie scenes that populate the film.

Chef does advance the racial expectations of the viewer while providing a counterstory to the loathsome and paranoid rantings of Dobbs and company, however, it also reifies a capitalist, if not strictly individualist, model. Carl's lowest and highest point are symptoms of this undergirding capitalist sensibility. At his lowest, Carl loses his position as a chef at a distinguished restaurant, is publicly embarrassed by a viral video of him losing his temper as he confronts a critic, and resorts to launching a food truck. As he initially inspects the truck, Carl finds himself in an industrial yard with the aforementioned Spanish-speaking workers on break who only come to his aid when Martin intervenes and asks for their help in exchange for "tortas de pingao," slang that Carl problematically, if whimsically, appropriates later. At his lowest, then, Carl finds himself without an upstanding job and

the prestige that conferred upon him and so down that he must rely on the generosity of Latino laborers. After a long road trip, success ultimately arrives not in a celebrating culinary pleasure, nor in strictly critical success, but climaxes in the form of a restaurant that is bought and paid for by Carl's former nemesis, the restaurant critic he infamously confronted. The financial bank-rolling, the investment in Carl's genius, is the ultimate reward. If capitalist in sensibility, the film is not strictly individualistic; Carl's community-support combined with a family-unit larger than the capitalist individual or nuclear-family distinguishes *Chef* from other narratives in which financial success is equated with character actualization. The film is conflicted, imperfect, but advances a very effective counterstory.

In Cuadros' 1994 viscerally disturbing story, "My Aztlán: White Place," the unnamed protagonist shuttles between two communities (gay and Chicano) to which it would seem he belongs, but from which he is actually evicted. As the story opens in Los Angeles, he is returning home from a night out at several (white) gay bars, feeling nostalgic for his childhood home, recalling the pale fingers of the "West Hollywood bar types'" on his dark skin, emphasizing their disconnect in a tightly-wrought critique of white supremacist discourse: "They ask where I'm from, disappointed at my answer, as if *they* are the natives."[3] The protagonist is embittered by their fetishiz-

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[3] Gil Cuadros, *City of God* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2001), 53.

ing of (imagined) foreigners, their judgement of him because he's not foreign (internalized as a "neither-nor" reminder of his non-belonging in that foreign community), and the hidden assumption of oppressive entitlement to claim this space as their own in fetishizing foreignness.

On his way to his apartment, he drives to his old neighborhood, mapping the dystopic reality of eminent domain and his supplanted family: "I was born below this freeway, in a house with a picket fence now plowed under… Black spray paint letters fuse into unlit alleys. Parked cars are tombstones. The air is sewer-scented." And in the next line, the bottom falls out of the unfolding tragic map: "She knows when I ramble it's the virus" (Cuadros 54). The virus the protagonist speaks of is AIDS. The "she" spoken references the protagonist's mother. Shouldn't he at least belong more to each community given that he endures the grievances that are endemic, if not specific, to his communities? The connection, compassion, and sharing of common experiences fails to materialize. Instead it's as if his mother fails to recognize how profound his dystopic mapping of the neighborhood is, or worse, that *he* fails to realize it. There is some comfort in her recognition of some of his behaviors, but that too is overturned as he reflects later on her physical abuse and general distaste for his sexual orientation.

There is little plot to the story: he ends up at his apartment and throws up. He remembers how his lover threatened to leave him because of his self-destructive behavior, behavior he learned from his abusive father.

The protagonist remembers how his lover pulled away when he curled up next to him, only to die a month later. The protagonist, alone in the world and in his apartment, masturbates to memories of racially problematic sexual encounters, drifting toward death, "I can feel my body becoming tar, limbs divide, north and south. My house smells of earth and it rumbles from the traffic above."[4] Cuadros presents the body of its nameless narrator as a house paved over, the plowed under home, the earth to which he is returning, the tombstones relevant now. And although the protagonist is alone throughout this bleak story, readers are invited in, to connect, to experience the liberating and community-making power of compassion.

"My Aztlán" is indeed a bleak and a tough read, but more than that it is also a visceral read that would push boundaries in a university syllabus, let alone a high school classroom, yet roughly a third of the way into the story, the protagonist offers a glimpse of imagined optimism: "I imagine the house still intact, buried under dirt and asphalt, dust and neglect. Hidden under a modern city, this is my Aztlán, a glimpse of my ancient home, my family."[5] Aztlán is commonly defined as the mythic Aztec homeland that is frequently referred to in Chicana/o poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Despite the utopic possibilities hinted at by the trope of Aztlán, and the attending (historical, racial, geographical, psychological, literary and filmic) aspirations that it implies in its various iterations,

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[4] Cuadros, *City of God,* 58.

[5] Cuadros, *City of God,* 55.

the intersectional crisis of identities of the protagonist form what, in his 2008 article, "The Utopia/Dystopia of Latin America's Margins: Writing Identity in Acadia and Aztlán," Spires (111) might characterize as an ongoing "neither…nor" crisis. Beyond his racial mis-objectification as "Mexican" in the anglo bars he frequents, he is equally out of place in Chicano communities as a gay man — symbolizing the inability of both communities to comprehend and acknowledge him as epitomizing a dystopic experience. Spires suggests that Aztlán is both an eutopian and outopian dystopia, the emerging vision in the face of the impossibility of a separatist reality.[6]

In the alternate history of *The Man in the High Tower,* the Axis powers win World War II. It depicts a present (the USA ruled by Japanese and German authority) that might have happened, an alternate reality. The dystopic "alternate reality" in Cuadros' story "My Aztlán," meanwhile, depicts what has happened given the fact that history unfolded precisely as it has for Latinos – an alternate reality that exists in discourses and spaces removed and separate from dominant white supremacist narratives of American culture, reality and history. As Hayes-Bautista predicts, neither pure "assimilation" nor pure "separatism" are in the cards. Cuadros' protagonist fails to assimilate with any of his communities, yet he simultaneously inhabits and moves within these communities, delivering a dark peek into his world.

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[6] Spires, "The Utopia/Dystopia," 111.

Curiously, the series *Sense8* takes this notion of separatism, connection, and compassion both larger and smaller. Characters hail from different nations and continents. Cultural misunderstanding and disconnect are international matters more than the vexing domestic divisions the previous two texts address. While the focus of *Sense8* is global (larger), its utopic aspirational plot centers on eight individuals' ability to visit each other's minds (smaller). While the domestically separatist borders discussed before lay within the USA, in *Sense8* they are both the national borders that divide the world and the borders of our bodies & minds.

The series opens with eight different main characters in eight distinct nations that cohere telepathically around the vision of the near-capture-suicide of Angelica Turing. As the series unfolds the characters gradually see through each other's eyes, communicate telepathically, loan and borrow each other's skills, and feel (both emotionally and physically) through each other. The concept recalls Subcomandante Marcos' 1997 poem, which opens: "Yes Marcos is gay. Marcos is gay in San Francisco, Black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an Anarchist in Spain."[7] Marcos' poem, in turn recalls, if not rebuts, Whitman's "Song of Myself," naming the subaltern, the "exploited, marginalised, oppressed minorities resisting and saying 'Enough'. Marcos contests American exceptionalism in idealistically draw-

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[7] Sperry-Garcia, "Dancing with the Zapatistas ed. by Diana Taylor and Lorie Novak (review)," 214.

ing a parallel between such minority communities. If well-intentioned, it is as simple in its idealism as *Sense8*, which, in his 2016 article "Utopia as Horizon," L. Timmel Duchamp (83) astutely argues, suffers from "depictions of diversity [that] pretty much gloss over the deep differences inflecting the characters' lives and offer up more of a We-Are-the-World image of diversity." Duchamp notes that Capheus, in Nairboi, is the only character who isn't financially privileged and there is much to critique and parse in the aspirations of the series. It, like *Chef,* is conflicted and imperfect.

The dystopic plot in *Sense8* engenders nine fronts, eight plots attending to the particularly challenging situations each sensate finds themselves in and a ninth plot in which powerful entities see sensates as a scourge and hunt them. The multicultural range of the characters doubles with their identity as sensates and the intolerance exhibited arrays itself against not only difference, in its many forms, but also compassion and understanding itself.

The scholar Alexis Lothian in his article "*Sense8* and utopian connectivity" notes that "Utopian discourse was a marketing strategy for digital media in the 1990s"[8] that promised connection and growing equality. The personal digital age aspired to this from the outset, with Apple's famous first-Macintosh commercial in which a female athlete uses a sledgehammer to smash a dated

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[8] Alexis Lothian, "*Sense8* and utopian connectivity," in *Science Fiction Film and Television* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 93.

large-screen CRT TV, technology built around uni-directional communication. The sensate eight of *Sense8* begin by communicating first with one then several then all of the cluster. They communicate through sound, sight, smell, touch, & taste, and not so much thought as dialogue. They communicate through shared emotion and ability as well. While Lothian misreads Claire Light's discussion of language in her piece, "*Sense8* and the Failure of Global Imagination," stating that the sensates transcend linguistic barriers by speaking English, that is in fact not entirely the case. In one scene, Kala Dandekar and Capheus Onyango do speak, and note that they speak, English with each other, but in episode 5 of season one, Capheus and Sun Bak note that they are able to understand each other despite the fact that they are speaking Swahili and Korean respectively. Claire Light takes more interest in the opportunity for progressive action at the production level, noting that hiring writers from each culture and translators for distribution in non-English speaking countries could have resulted in a richer text.

In *Sense8* the dystopic premise is the same as it is outwardly in Cuadros' story and subtly in *Chef*: dystopia is defined by the present and enduring "alternate" reality intolerant to multiculturalism, xenophobia, and hate. In the *Netflix* series, there are a number of brief and glancing rhetorics that orient against such intolerance. In the sixth episode of season one, in a quick terrace discussion with Amanita and Grace, Nomi wonders why this disparate set of minds have been yoked together. Grace, in her reply, notes that variation is the engine of evolution and "to be

something more than what evolution would define as "yourself," you'd need something different from yourself." Difference is centered as a kind of biological imperative. Multiculturalism is the engine of progress.

While there is a discourse of intolerance promulgated by political figures, pundits, and ideologues, a number of conservative dystopic films and books that cohere around xenophobia and an aggressive antipathy toward difference, *Chef*, "My Aztlán", and *Sense8* resist this far right narrative in distinct ways. While *Chef* is not a dystopic film, its subtle counterstory undercuts the stereotyping that far right dystopias are predicated on. "My Aztlán", meanwhile, maps a dystopic reality lived as a result of forces and policies that result from far right dystopic discourse. Finally, *Sense8* presents a speculative dystopia that focuses on the struggle between intolerant xenophobia and celebrations of difference.

The future, if slow moving, may be kind. As Deena Zaru suggests, within the title of her 2018 CNN article, "This [2018] was the most Latino Oscars ever (but still not so much)." As more and more Latinx directors, actors, and entertainers take the stage, their humanity, as too the increasingly nuanced roles and scripts, will do much of the work necessary to counterstory the dominant xenophobic narrative found in the dramatic rise of hate groups, the election of the 45th president, the surge in hate crimes, and the validation of white supremacist groups that have taken hold of the country. At the 2018 Oscars, Frances McDormand famously urged her community to use inclusion riders in their contracts, which

led to a flurry of google searches that evening and articles the next morning by the likes of the Boston Globe and NPR. An inclusion rider is basically a clause that a Hollywood star can place in their contract that commits the production to at least a minimum amount of diversity. Producers, directors, writers, and actors take heed. Being inclusive of the Latinx community at a contractual level through inclusion riders and more, can actively contest the actual dystopia of erasure, exclusion, and intolerance that cultivates the struggle of the oppressed.

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"Follow your leader": *NCIS,* the San Dominick, and *Benito Cereno*

Meredith M. Malburne-Wade, PhD

Currently in its 15th season, the CBS television series *NCIS: Naval Criminal Investigative Service* focuses on concepts of justice and morality. The show's continued success lies in the likeability of its characters, including Mark Harmon's Supervisory Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs, and former cast member Michael Weatherly's Senior Special Agent Anthony DiNozzo. Viewers tune in to root for the success of these characters over criminals, terrorists, and "badness" personified. Indeed, in October of 2015, more people—15.7 million—watched episode four of season 13 of *NCIS* than the Democratic presidential debate, which aired at the

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same time.[1]

The agents of *NCIS* have become the embodiments of "goodness" and moral superiority meant to elicit our support, earn our approval, and restore our belief in the American justice system. It is a difficult mission for a television series aimed at entertainment, especially given the growing distrust of police forces and government agencies in the wake of cases, such as the shooting of Michael Brown and the choking of Eric Garner, that raise concerns about racially-motivated lethal force and police misconduct. In "Trust and legitimacy: Policing in the USA and Europe," Tom R. Tyler argues "every encounter that the public have with the police, the courts and the law should be treated as a socializing experience that builds or undermines legitimacy."[2] The more we trust our police officers and legal system, the more willingly we submit to their rules and regulations. While watching a television show is certainly not the same as a real-life interaction with the justice system, the popularity of the large number of shows like *NCIS* (including two *NCIS* spin-offs, multiple *Law & Order* shows, *Blue Bloods,* and many more), suggests many Americans turn to the small screen to restore their faith in a troubled system: to be entertained by the "good guys," we have to believe they are, in fact, good. Such shows help affirm the "panoptic

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1 Tom Huddleston, Jr., "More People Watched 'NCIS' Than The Democratic Debate," Fortune.com, Oct. 14, 2015.

2 Tom R. Tyler, "Trust and Legitimacy: Policing in the USA and Europe," *European Journal of Criminology* 39.1 (2011): 257, accessed December 13, 2015, doi: 10.1177/1477370811411462.

modality of power" while remaining removed from the "juridico-political structures" themselves;[3] that is, viewers become increasingly "normalized," ready to accept without significant question or resistance.[4]

What happens, then, when a show such as *NCIS,* usually the purveyor of clear standards of "goodness," revises an earlier, morally ambiguous novella, leaving us with more questions than answers? On October 21, 2014, *NCIS* released episode five of season 12: "The San Dominick." Readers familiar with Herman Melville should already be intrigued as *The San Dominick* is the name of one of the main ships in Melville's 1855 novella about a slave mutiny, *Benito Cereno.* This *NCIS* episode builds off the familiar plot line, contemporizing *Benito Cereno* while contributing to the moral ambiguity in decidedly disturbing ways, ways that shift, but nonetheless entrench, racism and prejudice, moving such racism from the black body to the brown.

Melville's novella (itself a revision of a historical text, Amasa Delano's 1817 *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*[5]) tells the story of American ship captain Amasa Delano who discovers a

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3 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books 1977): 221, 222.

4 Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000): 5.

5 Amasa Delano, *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres: Comprising Three Voyages Round the World; Together with a Voyage of Survey and Discovery, in the Pacific Ocean and Oriental Islands*, 2nd edition (Boston: E.G. House, 1818).

wayward slave ship off the coast of Chili in 1799. Upon boarding the ship, Delano is regaled with stories of woe that allegedly explain why the ship went astray. Delano believes the lies he is told, blind to the true narrative for the majority of the novella—as is the reader. His blindness is derived from his own prejudices: he suspects the Spanish captain, Benito Cereno, must be to blame as he sees him as capricious, cruel, and weak; he does not suspect Cereno's "faithful" slave companion, Babo, because he sees slaves as stupid, loyal, and obsequious. It is not until the Spanish captain abandons ship to escape his captors that Delano learns the truth: the slaves conducted a successful mutiny and have been pretending to be subservient so they can continue their attempted return to Africa. The slaves murdered much of the crew, including the man who purchased them, Don Alexandro Aranda, whose skeleton has become the ship's new masthead, meant to remind the surviving crew not to stray from the mutineer's demands.[6] Delano's crew attacks *The San Dominick,* killing many mutineers. Babo is captured, tried, convicted, and killed. Cereno dies soon after.

The *NCIS* episode follows a similar trajectory, but it makes important substitutions. While out for training aboard the *USS Serano,* a name meant to recall "Cereno", Agent Gibbs notes a body floating in the ocean, a man whose badge lists him as a security officer on the *San Dominick* cargo ship. Gibbs boards the *San Dominick,* a ship

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6 Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, in *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*, by Herman Melville (New York: The Modern Library, 2001): 237.

off course but allegedly headed for Spain (another reference to Melville's Spanish captain). The captain provides his own tales of woe, similar to those in *Benito Cereno*. The captain has a silent sidekick, Renaldo Aranda (the slave owner's last name in Melville's novella), who never leaves his side, much like Babo in *Benito Cereno*. As in *Benito Cereno*, the "faithful" companion's body is *othered* by race; this time marked not as a black man enslaved in the Americas, but as a Spanish-speaking (Brazilian) Latino. When the captain collapses due to a hidden stab wound, he is escorted off ship, and Aranda, now a confirmed pirate, holds Gibbs at gunpoint.

The NCIS team works to free Gibbs from afar, realizing the alleged dead crew member was a Venezuelan pirate in disguise, the original ringleader of the *San Dominick* take-over (this time, the mutineer goes overboard instead of the crew). Aranda, the new leader, demands a ransom, but Gibbs takes control of the gun, shooting Aranda in the leg. Gibbs ultimately discovers a bomb aboard the ship, a bomb Aranda knew nothing about. As the complicated web unfolds, viewers learn the white captain was the mastermind the whole time: he conspired with the original leader (the now dead pirate) to hijack the ship, a ship transporting millions of dollars in cartel drug money. The captain removes the money before the ship sails, planning to escape while the pirates go down with the ship, leaving him free to make a fresh start. Of course, Gibbs and his companions disarm the bomb and arrest the bad guys—including the captain—within the allotted time frame, making sure "good" finally triumphs.

On one hand, *The San Dominick* is fun for fans with knowledge of Melville as names and details allow for a game of hide-and-seek. This "sense of play" is intrinsic to any revision.[7] On a deeper level, however, this episode plays a dangerous game with the original text and subtext, exploiting stereotypes and fears as a form of troublesome entertainment. Melville's novella has itself been seen as a tale of questionable morality since its original publication. This story of a slave revolt is curiously devoid of moral or ethical judgments, presenting the scenario as seen through the eyes of the obtuse Delano, a man who sees the slaves as "too stupid" to mutiny.[8] Alongside Delano's overt prejudices and racial blindness is Babo and the slaves' intense retributive violence as they kill their former captors and remove Aranda's skeleton for the masthead. Surely the slaves have every reason to seek their own release from bondage by any means necessary, but Melville writes them with little sympathy, heightening Babo's cruelty from the original 1817 *Narrative*. Without clear markers of good and evil, all aboard *The San Dominick*—visitor, captain, and slaves alike—become fraught with violence and cruelty.

Analyses of *Benito Cereno* often center on this ambiguity. Scholar Allan Moore Emery argues Babo is a "devilish symbol of *all* the depravity—black, white, male,

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7 Julie Sanders, Adaptation and Appropriation (New York: Routledge, 2006): 7.

8 Melville, *Benito Cereno*, 212.

female," representing the evil of "all mankind."[9] While colleague Robert S. Levine argues the text has "antiracist and antislavery themes," and readers are meant to see "our own analogous forms of complicitous blindness" through Delano's eyes as we question our participation in "dominant modes of cultural power."[10] Kevin Michael Scott sees the novella's "inversion after inversion of white and black" as an expression of Melville's desire to "blur distinctions and imply the inextricable linkage of the two."[11] Jason Richards argues for viewing Melville's piece as a retelling of American minstrels where Babo "turns wickedly white" by adopting his own form of blackface to fool his would-be captors.[12] Each critic sees something different in the men (and women) aboard *The San Dominick*. Most wish to argue Melville was decidedly anti-slavery by the time he wrote *Benito Cereno*, and thus signs of sympathy must be present *if we just read closely enough*. Perhaps Faye Halpern puts it best: "'Benito Cereno' does not offer evidence for what kind of stand it

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9 Allan Moore Emery, "The Topicality of Depravity in 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature 55 (1983): 330, 331, accessed October 17, 2005, doi: 10.2307/2925677.

10 Robert S. Levine, "Reconsideration: Teaching in the Multiracial Classroom: Reconsidering Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *MELUS* 19.1 (Spring 1994): 113, accessed December 4, 2015.

11 Kevin Michael Scott, "'Likewise Masked': Blackface and Whitewash in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *Poe Studies* 39.1 (2006): 129, accessed December 4, 2015, doi: 10.1111/j.1754-6095.2006.tb00193.x.

12 Jason Richards, "Melville's (Inter)national Burlesque: Whiteface, Blackface, and 'Benito Cereno,'" *ATQ* 21.2 (June 2007): 83, Accessed December 4, 2015.

takes toward slavery, even though we want it to."[13]

This text is the fraught piece of Americana *NCIS* revises. In doing so, knowingly or not, indeed *willingly* or not, the show carries forth the historical and emotional baggage of its predecessor. As Julie Sanders highlights in *Adaptation and Appropriation,* revisions are "frequently, if not inevitably, political acts."[14] There is no adaptation without some form of comment on or criticism of the original. Much of the political commentary derived from this *NCIS* episode originates in the decision to move the focus away from the black body and place it instead on the brown body. Such a move sounds like an oversimplification of race and culture, and indeed it is. But it is an oversimplification, I argue, made by the novella and the *NCIS* episode. In what Toni Morrison would call "shorthand," or the "taken-for-granted assumptions"[15] about race, both Melville and the *NCIS* writers use black or brown bodies to stand in for a litany of cultural assumptions and beliefs; what is particularly disturbing and dystopic is the revision of an 1855 novella in 2014 that relocates, but nonetheless carries forward, such a race-based shorthand.

Melville's reasons for highlighting slavery and mutiny in 1855 were clear and have been discussed at length by scholars: the *Amistad* was fresh in readers'

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13 Faye Halpern, "In Defense of Reading Badly: The Politics of Identification in 'Benito Cereno,' 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' and Our Classrooms," *College English* 70.6 (Jul. 2008): 564, accessed December 4, 2015.

14 Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 97.

15 Toni Morrison, preface to *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination,* by Toni Morrison (New York: Vintage Books, 1993): x.

minds; the Civil War was not far in the future. Tensions were running high in the North and South following the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The revolution in San Domingo, Haiti, likely the namesake of Melville's doomed slave ship *The San Dominick*, revived fears of slave rebellions in the United States. *NCIS* did not venture far from Melville's blueprint when writing the *San Dominick*. Turning away from Melville's original focus, the writers nonetheless maintained his intention, highlighting a current-day problem in race relations by exploiting fears of two markedly different groups: modern-day pirates and Spanish-speakers.

NCIS' reasons for highlighting Latino piracy are less clear. Modern-day piracy is generally associated with Somali attacks on shipping vessels in the Indian Ocean. In 2011, 3,863 ships were fired upon by suspected pirates, with the number dropping to 851 in 2012.[16] Somali pirates are generally known for demanding large ransoms for crew members, some of whom have been held for years.[17, 18] While the rates of attack by Somali pirates on the east coast of Africa dropped in 2012, the number of attacks off the coast of West Africa, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea, increased, including an increased risk of

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16 Alan Cowell, "West African Piracy Exceeds Somali Attacks, Report Says," The New York Times, June 18, 2013, A6.

17 Ibid, A6.

18 Mthuli Ncube and Michael Lyon Baker, "Beyond pirates and drugs: unlocking Africa's maritime potential and economic development," *African Security Review* 20.1 (2011): 61, accessed March 8, 2018, doi: 10.1080/10246029.2011.561019.

violence and death.[19] While the large ransoms generate large news stories throughout the world, these attacks have other impacts as well, with scholars noting the severe economic impacts, via restrictions on fishing, trade, and tourism, pirates have on nations such as Seychelles and Mauritius.[20] Fears surrounding piracy were brought to the big screen by the 2013 biopic thriller *Captain Phillips,* which told the story of an American cargo ship captured by Somali pirates. The ship's captain was taken hostage and eventually rescued by Navy Seal snipers. The film, which had grossed $107,100,855 as of February 2014, was nominated for six Academy Awards.[21]

The 2013 *NCIS* episode, while playing off these fears, alters the players in a very specific way: unlike *Captain Phillips*, the pirates are not Somalian or West African, but Spanish-speaking and Latino, likely Venezuelan and Brazilian. It is a strange decision on behalf of the writers of *NCIS.* It is not based, as seen above, on current concerns about piracy. It does not seem based on its literary predecessor, *Benito Cereno*, either. There are Spanish crew members (from Spain) in *Benito Cereno,* and critics, including María DeGuzmán in *Spain's Long Shadow,* have noted how the novella demonstrates distrust of the darker-skinned Spaniard. Nonetheless, much of *Benito Cereno's*

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19 Alan Cowell, "West African Piracy Exceeds Somali Attacks, Report Says," A6.

20 Mthuli Ncube and Michael Lyon Baker, "Beyond pirates and drugs," 61.

21 "Captain Phillips, " IMDB, accessed December 14, 2015, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1535109/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

criticism centers on the black/white binary. In "The San Dominick," the decision to use Latino, Spanish-speaking pirates demonstrates a clear move away from that black/white binary and toward another contemporary American fear: the distrust of Spanish-speakers. Such a move highlights concerns of illegal immigration and the growing Latinx presence—including legal immigrants and citizens—in the United States. This move *should be* highly controversial. It ignores significant historical and literary precedent. It ignores any consideration of Afro-Latinos, non-Spanish speaking Latinos, and Spanish speaking non-Latinos. It ignores ideas of colonialism, post-colonialism, slavery, rape, and miscegenation. Even in its use of pirates, it ignores the real, devastating economic underpinnings causing and resulting from piracy itself. In short, it takes a morally ambiguous text that explores slavery, colonialism, and its subsequent violence and replaces it with a *non*-morally ambiguous text (after all, viewers are supposed to end the episode supporting the NCIS "good guys") that ignores slavery, colonialism, and its subsequent violence in favor of perpetuating simplistic, troublesome stereotypes.

Fears of Spanish-speaking immigrants and citizens in the United States are certainly not new, but they have become especially virulent in recent years. Latinos "represented 23% of all elementary and high schools students in the USA" as of 2011, and "account for the majority of

K-12 students in California, New Mexico, and Texas."[22] Those numbers are projected to increase: "by 2050 there will be more school-aged Latino children in US schools than non-Latino White school-aged children."[23] With this population growth comes increased stereotypes and backlash in the United States. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic have noted specific stereotypes used to limit Mexican Americans, stereotypes often applied to Latinx immigrants more broadly, including "the conniving, treacherous bandido" and "the happy-go-lucky shiftless lover of song, food, and dance," all of which "change according to society's needs."[24] These stereotypes are pervasive, working their way into American political rhetoric in 2015 as a then-Presidential candidate illustrated in his claims about Mexican immigrants in a campaign speech: "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."[25] These claims are far more important for understanding the generalized fears and fear-based rhetoric surrounding Mexican and

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22 Cynthia A. Gómez et al, "The New Majority: How Will Latino Youth Succeed in the Context of Low Educational Expectations and Assumptions of Sexual Irresponsibility?" *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 11.4 (Dec. 2014): 348, accessed December 14, 2015, doi: 10.1007/s13178-014-0165-6.

23 Ibid, 348-349.

24 Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Racial Depiction in American Law and Culture," *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 209-210.

25 Michelle Ye Hee Lee, "Donald Trump's false comments connecting Mexican immigrants and crime," *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2015.

Spanish-speaking immigrants than they are for their connection to reality. This rhetoric becomes especially problematic when we consider, as noted in the opening of this paper, that more people watched an *NCIS* episode than a Presidential debate. When fear-based rhetoric dominates both politics and the recreational shows *replacing* political involvement, it becomes difficult to see how more nuanced, historically accurate portrayals find their way to the general public.

Part of the problem with such views are two-fold: first, they make incorrect assumptions about immigrants based on sweeping generalizations; and second, they assume, or at least encourage, the view that all "Latinos are foreigners," or more specifically, all Latinos are illegal immigrants.[26] While the excerpt from the speech above may refer explicitly to Mexicans, the sub-text appears to be based on a monolithic group of Latinx people. It is a phenomenon Suzanne Oboler addresses in her discussion of the term "Hispanic," noting such terms lump "millions of people of a variety of national backgrounds" into singular categories, and those people include "longtime native-born U.S. citizens and residents with more recently arrived economic immigrants who may have crossed the U.S. border yesterday."[27] There is an intrinsic danger to such thinking that expresses at best xenophobia and at

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26 Kevin R. Johnson, "Citizens as 'Foreigners,'" *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 199.

27 Suzanne Oboler, "Hispanics? That's What They Call Us," *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 3.

worst racism. It is a racism rooted in fears of the *other* generally, and, currently, the Spanish-speaking citizen, resident, or immigrant specifically.

Those fears come to light in "The San Dominick." By replacing African slaves with Spanish-speaking pirates, the writers highlight contemporary racialized fears in ways that are sometimes overt, sometimes covert, but always disturbing. Gibbs becomes aware of something awry on the ship when he notices Aranda wearing sneakers instead of steel-toed boots. Melville's Delano, we recall, thought the slaves aboard the ship "too stupid" to mutiny, a comment that reflected Delano's privileged blindness, not the slaves' capabilities.[28] Yet here, it is the actual pirates who were "too stupid" to convincingly hide their real identities, intentions, and motives. These stereotypes continue when we learn the pirates were duped by their white captain. *NCIS* assigns traits—unpreparedness, lack of forethought, stupidity—to its Spanish speaking characters, heightening existing stereotypes and reifying feelings of white superiority.

Those feelings of superiority are reinforced when Gibbs seizes Aranda's gun, shooting him in the leg. Gibbs forces Aranda to respond to his fellow pirates on the radio, mocking his language, telling him, "What you need to do is respond to your friend and tell him you're *bueno*" [00:24:41].[29] The conversations in Spanish be-

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28 Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, 212.

29 *NCIS*. "The San Dominick." Season 12, episode 5. Directed by Arvin Brown. Written by Christopher Silber. CBS, October 21, 2014.

tween the pirates continually remind the viewers of what, according to *NCIS*, makes these men "bad." Spanish is equated to violence; violence is equated to language. This moment is not what Gloria Anzaldúa advocates for when she speaks of a "discursive space for the telling of stories from the Latina [sic] perspective."[30] Instead, this is a perspective *of* a Latino; it is a reduction of many Spanish-speaking cultures into a moment of violence and failure.

Gibbs uses the leg injury to elicit information from Aranda. As he puts pressure on the wound, the reader is forced to recall the violent retaking of *The San Dominick* in Melville's novella, and the even more violent retaking in the 1817 historical account when captors "secured" the enslaved, "hands and feet, to the ring bolts in the deck; some of them had part of their bowels hanging out, and some with half their backs and thighs shaved off."[31] Like the slaves upon the ship, Aranda is ultimately defeated, displaying, for better or for worse, the triumph of whiteness and goodness (or, more complicatedly, whiteness *as* goodness). In both Melville's novella and this episode of *NCIS,* whiteness is reinforced by weaponry. The power of the state, the power of the law, rests in the power of the weapon. Outmanned and outgunned, Melville's mutineers and *NCIS*' pirates succumb. *NCIS* removes some of the moral ambiguity—these are not mutineers attempting to save their lives; they are pirates putting the lives of

30 Margaret E. Montoya, "Masks and Identity," *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 38.

31 Amasa Delano, *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*, 326.

others at risk. They are, on the surface, less complicated. But the stereotypes they represent—and the show's decision to use Spanish-speakers as the embodiment of evil—exposes a seemingly innocuous episode as a portrait of problematic choices.

Aranda, overtaken and injured, makes one last push for control. Unaware of the master plan, he believes other pirates will rescue him (and the money). He threatens Gibbs, "You think you're in control now but you're not. When the others come, they're going to kill you" [00:25:34].[32] As Gibbs tightens the tourniquet, Aranda quickly breaks, telling him everything he wants to know. Mocking Aranda's capitulation, Gibbs smugly asks, "Now you were telling me, who's in control?" [00:26:14].[33] It is a strange moment: Gibbs is suddenly marked by violence, implying a less-than-faultless image of the usually composed character. It is as if Gibbs becomes part of the violence around him, unable to resist it. We see similar moments in *Benito Cereno* as the slaves mirror their captors' violence. The novella also ends with violence, as Babo, the basis for Aranda's character, is "dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule," his head "fixed on a pole" to be "met, unabashed," by the "gaze of the whites."[34] Like its predecessor, this *NCIS* episode incites mimetic violence; like its predecessor, this

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32 *NCIS*.

33 *NCIS*.

34 Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, 257.

episode leaves us with the "gaze of the whites." In the end, we are supposed to believe evil has been stopped and goodness has prevailed. But we are given an American ship captain driven by greed, Spanish-speaking pirates who are easily manipulated, and "heroes" marked by violence —a dystopic resolution, indeed.

This *NCIS* episode may have started as a game of hide-and-seek, but it ends attempting to continue a "possessive investment in whiteness" where race is equated to power, privilege, and "goodness."[35] In doing so, the episode complicates an already complicated predecessor, *Benito Cereno*. It *should* complicate readers' and viewers' understanding of power and privilege, of how, as citizens, we "read" ethnicity and culture and what assumptions we bring (or are *expected* to bring) to Spanish-speaking characters. Perhaps these complications are more than viewers normally expect from nightly entertainment. Nevertheless, such a moment of revision reveals how very far, nearly 200 years after the original historical publication, dystopic representations of race have yet to go.

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35 George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006): vii.

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Refusing Silence: #MeToo, The Silence Breakers, and Changing the Conversation

Alissa Burger[1]

In 2017, Hulu released *The Handmaid's Tale*, a critically acclaimed series adapted from Margaret Atwood's 1985 dystopian novel. In this dark future, widespread infertility has resulted in a patriarchal, misogynistic society in which the remaining fertile women are forced into service as handmaids, raped by powerful men while their wives silently look on. While Atwood's novel has been a feminist classic for decades, this adaptation resonated especially powerfully in 2017, within the context of the 2016 election and the dis-

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turbing discourse surrounding women's power and rights that accompanied it, as *The Handmaid's Tale*'s "uncompromising exploration of fear and power and its abuse … also captured the lightning of the moment in a bottle of dystopian genius" (d'Acona 2017, para. 5). While Atwood's Gilead and its abusive society are fictional, the violence and oppression Offred and her fellow handmaids face have all too real correlations to daily issues faced by women. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2018), one in five women have been raped in her lifetime and one in four women have experienced severe domestic or intimate partner violence. Recent years have witnessed political attacks on women's reproductive rights, from the debate over insurance companies denying birth control coverage to the limitation or denial of access to abortion. Trump won the presidency in spite of multiple accusations of sexual assault and the release of an *Access Hollywood* recording from 2005 in which he declaimed that he could "grab 'em by the pussy" shortly before the election ("Transcript" 2016, para. 22), within the larger scope of an election cycle that Meredith Blake (2017) notes "itself coalesced many concerns about the treatment, and perception, of women." Women also face a range of daily abuses and aggressions, including sexual discrimination and harassment, which according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), includes "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature" ("Sexual Harassment" 2018, para. 1). These onslaughts are compounded by various attempts to

silence women's voices and deny women's anger. While it is horrifying that *The Handmaid's Tale* may have "migrated from creative construct to the realm of the thinkable" (d'Acona, 2017, para. 9), the handmaids' resistance also highlighted the ways in which women fight back that similarly resonated with current events and the real world. While women and their allies have been long been fighting for recognition of and effective response to harassment and sexual assault, 2017 was a watershed year in changing this conversation, coalescing around women's refusal to stay silent any longer.

#MeToo and *Time*'s "Silence Breakers"

One of the most impactful entries into this discussion was the explosion of the hashtag #MeToo, as women from all walks of life took to social media to share their stories and add their voices to the outcry. First coined by Harlem activist Tarana Burke in 2006, Burke started #MeToo to help sexual assault survivors talk about their trauma, show solidarity, and "spread awareness and understanding about sexual assault in underprivileged communities of colour" (Shugerman 2017, para. 8) and Burke has described it as "a catchphrase to be used from survivor to survivor to let folks know that they were not alone and that a movement for radical healing was happening and was possible" (qtd. in Shugerman, 2017, para. 9). In 2017, the phrase was popularized with a wider audience by actress Alyssa Milano, who in the wake of multiple allegations against Harvey Weinstein tweeted "Me too …

Suggested by a friend: 'If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem'" (qtd. in Gilbert 2017, para. 2). Milano's tweet garnered 32,000 responses within twenty-four hours, which began a dynamic conversation, but in many ways simultaneously and problematically excluded or elided Burke's authorship and contributions. Nearing the end of 2017, *Time* magazine's editor-in-chief Edward Felsenthal (2017) notes that "the hashtag #MeToo has now been used millions of times in at least 85 countries" (32).

The definition and discussion of consent has taken center stage, with an emphasis on active consent supplanting the familiar "no means no" with a voluntary and affirmative "yes means yes." Across America and around the world, women (and a much smaller, though not insignificant number of men) rallied around the declaration of #MeToo and in doing so, dramatically changed the public conversation about harassment, sexual assault, and rape. As Sophie Gilbert (2017) explains, "For a long time, most women defined their own sexual assault and harassment this way: as something unspoken, something private, something to be ashamed of acknowledging [but] … Silence, though understandable, has its cost" (para. 2). When those who have experienced harassment, sexual assault, and rape remain silent, they are isolated and that trauma is internalized, often at great personal cost, both emotionally and psychologically. However, in the past, speaking out has come with its own set of dangers and consequences, well evidenced by a climate of backlash,

disbelief, and victim-blaming that has all too often resulted in women being further harassed, publicly shamed or attacked, pressured back into silence, or if the complaint of harassment or assault occurred within the workplace, facing further discrimination, losing her job, or even being driven from her chosen career (Carlson, 2017, 6-7). The pressure of silence and stigma against speaking out effect women at the highest levels of their professions. As Stephanie Zacharek (2017) wrote in "How do you solve a problem like Harvey Weinstein?,"

> In a better world than the one we live in, any performer coerced in this way—made to feel that her career hinged on her sexual compliance at the hands of a powerful bully—would feel free enough to speak up. But until shockingly recently, the outcome of doing so was entirely predictable: a woman who spoke up risked losing her standing in her profession, or at the very least being labeled a whiner who didn't know how to play the game. And the man in power would lose nothing. If anything, he'd just grow more powerful. (para 2)

If high-profile public figures, like Ashley Judd, Salma Hayek, Angelina Jolie, and Gwyneth Paltrow—who are among the dozens of women who have accused Weinstein of sexual harassment—have felt pressured into silence to protect their careers and reputations, or have had their

experiences discounted and ignored when they did speak out, as Judd did (Zacharek, Dockterman, and Edwards, 2017, 36), the challenges encountered by everyday women who face harassment, assault, or rape in their lives and workplaces are even more daunting and the personal stakes arguably even higher.

In December 2017, *Time* named "The Silence Breakers" their Person of the Year. As Felsenthal (2017) contextualized this choice, in 2017 #MeToo "became a hashtag, a movement, a reckoning. But it began, as great social change nearly always does, with individual acts of courage" (32). In addition to some of the celebrities who have been associated with the movement and have spoken out in high profile ways about their experiences with sexual harassment and assault, such as Milano, Judd, artist and activist Rose McGowan, actor Terry Crews, and singer-songwriter Taylor Swift, *Time* also featured the images and stories of largely unrecognized and unsung heroes, including hotel workers and housekeepers, account managers, engineers, entrepreneurs, charity workers, university professors, and employees in the agricultural, food service, and healthcare professions. With this scope, *Time* acknowledged that sexual harassment and assault impact the famous and the unrecognized alike, reverberating through every aspect of American culture, regardless of gender, race, class, or profession. *Time*'s selection advances the conversation in significant ways and in multiple directions: celebrities have a de facto public platform and famous faces ensure high-profile media coverage, while the inclusion of everyday survivors serves as a

powerful reminder that harassment, sexual assault, and rape impact every group and community, and that the readers' mothers, sisters, friends, and coworkers could well be among them. Focused profiles and quotes from the featured individuals ensure that personal stories, recounted in their own words, are central to *Time*'s coverage, though just as with the larger #MeToo movement, there is great power in survivors raising their voices as one. Lobbyist Adama Iwu, who spoke out against sexual harassment in California politics, addressed the significance of combined voices, saying "you have to address it head on and as a group …. We can't all be crazy. We can't all be sluts" (qtd. in Zacharek, Dockterman, and Edwards, 2017, 67). In addition to raising a common voice, Iwu here taps into the emotionally-loaded and value-laden connotations associated with the word "slut," which is often used as a derogatory designator for women whose sexuality falls outside of accepted cultural norms or arbitrary definitions of morality that equate sexual purity with personal worth, and which is frequently mobilized in an attempt to shame and silence. However, the word "slut" has in recent years been reclaimed by women actively and enthusiastically owning their sexuality, as evidenced by phenomena such as diverse and wide-spread Slut Walks, which dynamically attack the stigmatization of women's sexuality and sexual expression, as well as refusing "slut-shaming" discourses of sexual assault that center around interrogations of women's sexual histories or clothing choices. Inspired by #MeToo, survivors from all walks of life are recognizing that they are not alone,

finding solidarity and support within the larger conversation and raising their voices, both individually and collectively, refusing to be silenced any longer.

In addition to increased visibility and the sharing of their stories—which is a revolutionary step in its own right—survivors from all walks of life are fighting for substantial change, pushing for their harassers and assailants to be held accountable, as "The zeitgeist has been animated by women harnessing their outrage and turning it into action" (Blake, 2017, para. 10). The final months of 2017 illustrated this shift in the conversation and responses to survivors' claims, as in the wake of Weinstein, "the head of Amazon Studios, an influential art publisher and employees at the financial-services firm Fidelity had all lost their jobs over harassment claims. By the end of the month, the list of the accused had grown to include political analyst Mark Halperin, a former TIME employee; opinion-shaping literary critic Leon Wieseltier; and numerous politicians and journalists" (Zacharek, Dockterman, and Edwards, 2017, 54). Alabama Republican Roy Moore lost his Senate bid amid allegations that he sexually abused underage girls and Minnesota Democrat Al Franken resigned following claims of sexual misconduct. *A Prairie Home Companion*'s host Garrison Keillor's contract was terminated and an investigation of misconduct launched by Minnesota Public Radio ("Statement" 2017), host Matt Lauer was fired from the *Today Show* following a sexual misconduct review (Ortiz and Siemaszko 2017), and actor Kevin Spacey was cut from the award-winning Netflix series *House of Cards* (2013—present) fol-

lowing allegations of sexual harassment and assault on set (Melas, 2017). Survivors are refusing to be silenced or ignored and as the investigations of and fallout surrounding abusers in late 2017 demonstrates, the world seems finally ready to listen, take these accusations seriously, and respond swiftly, an undeniable sea change in the discussion surrounding harassment, sexual assault, and rape.

Changing the conversation is a start but for transformation to truly occur, it is also necessary to alter structures and policies to empower and support survivors. As Clarissa Jan-Lim (2017) reports, survivors are now calling to account "an entire system that has repeatedly demonstrated how ill-equipped it is to help survivors" (para. 6). The fight for substantial, systemic change similarly typified 2017 as women and their allies responded to the outcome of the election, the culture it highlighted, and the potential threats to women's reproductive freedom—among other issues—faced if the president carries through with his campaign promises, a fight that is inextricably interwoven with the larger #MeToo conversation. As Blake (2017) argues, without the 2016 election's discourse and outcomes, "the current #MeToo moment might never have occurred … the outrage that inspired thousands of women to wear pink pussy hats in marches across the country the day after the inauguration also stirred women like Ashley Judd and Rose McGowan to speak out on record against other alleged predators" (para. 6). One specific example of working toward systemic change is proposed legislation to end forced arbitration clauses in contracts for employment,

spearheaded by Gretchen Carlson and presented with bipartisan support in December 2017 (Guynn, 2017). Carlson, a former FOX News anchor who was the first to speak out about Roger Ailes's culture of sexual harassment at that network, has become an outspoken activist in combatting sexual harassment and assault, and is the author of the 2017 book *Be Fierce: Stop Harassment and Take Your Power Back*. As Carlson (2017) argues, mandatory arbitration is especially problematic when it comes to considering claims of sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace because of its "complete lack of transparency … [which] protects serial harassers from being confronted by other women, and limits the pressure to remove them from the company" (127). Prevented from telling her own story in its entirety by an arbitration clause in her contract with FOX News, Carlson and other survivors are frustrated by these commonplace clauses, which often offer employees who have been harassed or discriminated against little recourse and contribute to the pressure to stay silent, which in turn "undoubtedly stops other people from coming forward" (Carlson 2017, 127).

Challenging the structure and changing the system, through activism like the Women's March and its nationwide and international satellite marches, as well as advancing legislation combatting forced arbitration to break the silence surrounding workplace harassment are an integral part in continuing and changing the conversation surrounding harassment, sexual assault, and rape culture.

Work Yet to Do

While the dynamic conversation centered around #MeToo, *Time*'s "Silence Breakers," and the systemic fight for change are a step in the right direction, there is still plenty of work left to do and problematic elements of this discussion that must be effectively addressed. First and foremost, while the #MeToo movement has created a space for survivors to share their stories and find support with one another, not everyone's voices are equally represented. As Stephanie Zacharek, Eliana Dockterman, and Haley Sweetland Edwards (2017) note in their profile of the "Silence Breakers," "Those who are often most vulnerable in society—immigrants, people of color, people with disabilities, low-income workers, and LGBTQ people—described many types of dread. If they raised their voices, would they be fired? Would their communities turn against them? Would they be killed?" (38, 42). This is an incredibly significant concern, as people within these groups are both more likely to be assaulted and less likely to have easy access to recourse. As Sandra Pezueda, a former dishwasher profiled in *Time*'s "Silence Breakers" piece explains, "Someone who is in the limelight is able to speak out more easily than people who are poor. The reality of being a woman is the same—the difference is the risk each woman must take" (qtd. in Zacharek, Dockterman, and Edwards 2017, 45). A celebrity speaking out faces a very different reality from that of a minimum wage worker for whom cut hours or a lost job means not being able to afford groceries or potential homelessness. The

high-profile nature of the conversation that has been garnered by celebrity faces and testimonies has undeniably highlighted the need to address these issues, but that same intensity needs to carry through to hearing the voices, believing the claims, and fighting for justice for those well outside of that privileged cadre. Justice needs to mean justice for all, regardless of gender, race, class, immigration status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

The "mainstreaming" of the #MeToo movement has also highlighted significant issues of racial injustice. While Milano made the tweet that launched a social media movement, #MeToo was started more than a decade previously by Tarana Burke, a Black woman and activist from Harlem. Since Milano was made aware of Burke's work, she has made sure to credit Burke in any discussion of #MeToo and the two women are featured in side-by-side photographs in *Time*'s "Silence Breakers" profile, though notably Burke was not featured on the cover. While many critics have argued that it doesn't really matter where, when, or by whom the phrase was initially coined, this glosses over a longstanding exploitative pattern of appropriation and highlights the troubling ways in which some voices are silenced while others are heard. As Melissa V. Murray (2017) addresses this issue, it "isn't about who gets credit for a hashtag—it's about the marginalization of Black women in movements that we've started … [S]ince #MeToo is all about giving voice to the previously silenced, let's do it right this time" (para. 3). While a celebrity's tweet triggered the avalanche, Murray argues, "#MeToo is a phenomenon that's long overdue—

and if folks took the pain of women of color more seriously, it might have come about much sooner" (para. 8). Actress Gabrielle Union echoes this problematic distinction, arguing that "I think the floodgates have opened for white women … I don't think it's a coincidence whose pain has been taken seriously. Whose pain we have showed historically and continue to show. Whose pain is tolerable and whose pain is intolerable. And whose pain needs to be addressed *now*" (qtd. in Krischer 2017, para. 34, emphasis original). Similarly, through pleased with the visibility and vitality of the current #MeToo conversation, Burke hasn't lost sight of those who are unreached or excluded, witnessing the sexual harassment of a Black waitress and reflecting "if I am being honest with myself, and you, I often wonder if that sister in the diner has even heard of #MeToo, and if she has, does she know it's for #UsToo?" (Burke 2017, para. 3). This movement will only be truly effective when these inequalities are addressed and everyone's voices are included, heard, acknowledged, and believed.

Finally, another problematic issue with #MeToo is that it puts the responsibility for speaking out about and challenging harassment, sexual assault, and rape right where it has always been: on its survivors. In many ways, thus far #MeToo has been a one-sided conversation and what is largely missing from this conversation is abusers taking responsibility and holding themselves accountable for their actions. As Megan Nolan (2017) points out, survivors should not have to repeatedly "[perform] our pain" (para. 6) in order to be taken seriously, be believed, or

achieve recognition and validation of these experiences. While #MeToo has been powerful in showcasing the widespread nature of these issues, survivors don't owe a finally interested public their stories, especially considering the fact that many of them may have told those stories—at great personal distress and potential risk—and been disbelieved or dismissed in the past.

While these are undeniably issues that need acknowledgment and the movement needs to be vigilant in working towards inclusivity and turning words into actions that will affect concrete and systemic change, #MeToo has broken a long-held silence and started a dynamic and positive conversation that provides survivors with support, solidarity, and a belief that their voices and their stories matter and will be heard. However, a hashtag does not translate directly into lasting change: following the Isla Vista shooting in 2014, #YesAllWomen exploded in the weekend following this tragedy, as "half a million tweets … appeared around the world, as if a dam had burst" (Solnit 2015, 124). The conversation exploded, grew contentious (with retorts and refusals of #NotAllMen), and largely faded away. It was a social media moment, but not a movement, not a change. Creating a new and more just world for victims of harassment, assault, and rape on the foundation of #MeToo will take real world activism, commitment, and a lot of hard work. Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* ends in a similar moment of resistance and revolution, as Offred "step[s] up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (Atwood 1986, 295), not knowing what comes next but reveling in the hope—

though not the promise—of change. Atwood (1986) leaves readers with two inspirational moments: the "historical notes" section following the novel's conclusion (299-311), which reveals that the resistance was triumphant (though within the benefit of historical reflection and hindsight, the speakers don't fully reveal how or at what cost) and the motto "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*" ("don't let the bastards grind you down"). Reflecting on this contemporary moment of challenge and change, resisters can draw strength and inspiration from *The Handmaid's Tale*, taking these dystopian lessons to arms in the real world fight for equality and a more just world, following in the footsteps and continuing the work of the "Silence Breakers" and #MeToo. In the words of Tarana Burke (2017), "now the work really begins. The hashtag is a declaration. But now we're poised to really stand up and do the work" (qtd. in Bromwich 2017, para. 6).

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Amid the "Whitelash": Van Jones and Ta-Nehisi Coates on America in the "Trumpocalypse"

Phillip Lamarr Cunningham

On November 9, 2016, as it had become evident that Donald Trump was president-elect, CNN political commentator and social justice advocate Van Jones chided his fellow pundits for not discussing race as a factor in Trump's election. On the verge of tears, Jones lamented that Trump's election represented "a whitelash… against a changing country, a whitelash against a black president in part."[1] While much consternation from conservative and right-wing circles followed, Jones's statement likely came

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[1] Van Jones, interview by Anderson Cooper, *CNN Live*, CNN, November 9, 2016.

as little surprise to anyone who has followed his career. Jones's past provocative statements—most notably his referring to Republicans as "assholes" during a lecture—cost him his position as green jobs czar in President Barack Obama's administration in 2009. Nonetheless, over the years, Jones has garnered a reputation as a fiery yet earnest commentator, author, and activist.

Conversely, Ta-Nehisi Coates— a correspondent for *The Atlantic* who emerged during the Obama era—did not react strongly to Trump's election. As Jones delivered his heartfelt concerns about the Trump presidency on CNN, Coates was in the process of writing "My President Was Black," a longform reflection on Obama's presidency that appeared in the January/February 2017 issue of *The Atlantic*. The article primarily focuses on Obama's legacy; however, towards its conclusion, Coates writes the following about Trump's election: "Historians will spend the next century analyzing how a country with such allegedly grand democratic traditions was, so swiftly and so easily, brought to the brink of fascism. But one needn't stretch too far to conclude that an eight-year campaign of consistent and open racism aimed at the leader of the free world helped clear the way."[2] Thus, like Van Jones, Coates envisions Trump's election as a "whitelash"; however, Coates' measured response—one that acknowledges the importance of a historical perspective—is part and

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[2] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "My President Was Black," *The Atlantic*, January/February 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/01/my-president-was-black/508793/.

parcel of not only his writing but also his status as a public intellectual.

These initial reactions to Trump's election portend Van Jones' *Beyond the Messy Truth: How We Came Apart, How We Come Together* (2017) and Ta-Nehisi Coates' *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (2017). While Jones and Coates both agree that there is, indeed, a "whitelash," their arrivals at this conclusion, their approaches, and their solutions—much like their public personas—are discernibly different. As its subtitle suggests, Jones' *Beyond the Messy Truth* is prescriptive and optimistic whereas Coates' *We Were Eight Years in Power* is self- and outwardly-reflexive and, as its subtitle suggests, dour.

Jones begins *Beyond the Messy Truth* with a bit of self-reflection, albeit one that intends to legitimize his position as intercessor. He begins by acknowledging his own progressive biases before touting his ability to critique those with whom he is ideologically aligned and to work with those with whom he is ideologically opposed. Regarding the former, he highlights his unlikely allegiance with Republican stalwart and former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrinch—a point upon which he expounds in Chapter 5—to combat the opioid crisis; regarding the latter, he points to his frequent clashing with Democrats on their "tough on crime" policies during President Bill Clinton's administration.[3] Despite his ability and willingness to work as an intermediary between parties,

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[3] Van Jones, *Beyond the Messy Truth: How We Came Apart, How We Come Together* (New York: Ballantine, 2017), 9.

Jones faults the two-party system for what he has deemed the "Trumpocalypse." He heralds the Trumpocalypse's Four Horsemen as neoliberal economic policy (such as the North American Free Trade Agreement), neo-draconian social policy (such as the "War on Drugs"), neoliberal economic policy (such as Wall Street deregulation), and neoconservative foreign policy (such as the Iraq invasion).[4]

Jones' assessment of the whitelash is a means to an end, for *Beyond the Messy Truth* is primarily concerned with resolution. For Coates, however, the whitelash is the end: his essay "The First White President" serves as the epilogue for *We Were Eight Years in Power*, which is a collection of his essays from *The Atlantic*. Whereas Jones attempts to clarify his whitelash comment by arguing that Trump supporters had a variety of motives beyond (but not necessarily excluding) maintaining white supremacy, Coates envisions Trump's ascendency as a capitulation to white supremacy that "hinges on the fact of a black president."[5] While Jones and other likeminded individuals highlight the woes—addiction, unemployment, and neglect from the Democrats—of working class whites, Coates finds this emphasis perplexing given the overwhelming support from whites of virtually every demographic. However, he offers a rationale: "[R]acism re-

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[4] Ibid., 8-9.

[5] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2017), 344.

mains, as it has since 1776, at the heart of the country's political life."[6]

Getting to what Coates posits as an indisputable truth is the primary goal of *We Were Eight Years in Power*. The thread that binds this collection of essays together is the notion that Obama's presidency represented a black respectability—or, as Coates refers to it, a "Good Negro Government"—that has been feared for centuries as it undermines the premises upon which white supremacy is built.[7] Granted, Coates is critical of black respectability politics, particularly as he chides Bill Cosby in Chapter 1—a reprint of "This Is How We Lost to the White Man: The Audacity of Bill Cosby's Black Conservatism"—and President Obama in "My President is Black"—reprinted in Chapter 5—for partaking in them. He finds Cosby's disdain for activism problematic and accuses him of "historical amnesia" for treating black America's problem as a recent phenomenon.[8] While he considers Obama's ability to pacify white voters part of his genius, he laments Obama's unwillingness to tackle racism in a more fervent manner. However, therein lies Coates' point: Obama, the realization of black respectability politics and a person averse to radical policies such as reparations (for which Coates makes a case in Chapter 6), still proved too frightening a prospect for much of the American populace.

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[6] Ibid., 347.

[7] Ibid., xv.

[8] Ibid., 29.

To the degree that Coates is concerned with the long arc of history, Jones is motivated by, to borrow a phrase from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the fierce urgency of now. *We Were Eight Years in Power* sets the stage for the whitelash; *The Messy Truth* tells its reader what needs to be done in the wake of it. Given that he faults hyper partisanship for our current woes, Jones offers both parties a form of "tough love" in separate open letters in Chapters 2-3. Essentially, he admonishes both parties for straying so far from the center and counsels both to acknowledge the needs of constituents both parties have forsaken—that being the white working class for Democrats and people of color, immigrants, women, and the queer community for Republicans. He highlights his friendship with Newt Gingrich as a model for how those who are otherwise ideologically opposed can work together, nothing that "Your 'ninety percent enemy' can still be your 'ten percent friend'—on every point where you agree."[9]

Jones' has denied having any aspirations to run for office; however, *The Messy Truth* likely will make readers recall Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), particularly since both texts call for consensus building as the path forward. Like Obama, Jones calls upon readers to continue the work of the nation's founding founders, noting "In a healthy society, common pain should lead to common purpose. Common purpose should lead to common

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[9] Jones, *Beyond the Messy Truth*, 128.

projects."[10] Those common projects include reforming the criminal justice system, tackling the opioid crisis, and developing and supporting a high-tech, clean energy labor force. He concludes *Beyond the Messy Truth* by appealing to a collective belief in American exceptionalism, albeit one that is inclusive of the contributions from women and people of color.

Coates and Jones are not completely misaligned; indeed, the seventh chapter of *We Were Eight Years in Power*—a reprint of "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration"—assails the criminal justice system for its detrimental impact on black families. However, as one might imagine, Coates lacks Jones' faith in the American project; as such, he does not plead for unity around common causes or make policy recommendations. Instead, Coates writes, "What is needed now is a resistance intolerant of self-exoneration, set against blinding itself to evil… One must be able to name the bad bargain that whiteness strikes with its disciples."[11] As is Jones, Coates is adamant that a fight for humaneness is on the horizon.

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[10] Jones, *Beyond the Messy Truth*, 141.

[11] Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, 366.

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