

JOHN JAY'S

FINEST

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**outstanding undergraduate writing
from across the curriculum**

Jeffrey Heiman
Adam Berlin
Editors

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

With the pandemic coming and going, and coming and going, and as out-of-balance as the year has been, we were so pleased to read such focused, innovative submissions for the 2022 issue of the *Finest*. Perhaps all this travail helped our students find a steadying place in their thoughts and on the page.

This volume contains examinations of current politics, of COVID-based stresses, of pressing social concerns, of court-room processes, and analyses of race, gender, and the self. Most interesting is how the very personal recurs in these pages, and we wonder if the disruption and isolation of COVID links to this looking within. The evidence is in the line-up of fiction, drama, and first-person narrative as well as in academic investigations growing out of first-hand experience.

While many of us are back in the classroom, the shift to public gathering remains uncertain. Still, last year's launch on Zoom was intimate and affable, and we're delighted once again to be able to share the work and the accomplishment—even if in virtual closeness.

As every writer knows, writing is solitary work, and yet what makes it to the published page is a collaborative process. The interchange in a classroom, culminating in an assignment, means that student and professor are working together in productive dialogue, reading, refining, and thinking onward. It's this dynamic that makes so much inquiry possible, and the work here highlights the intellectual life at our college.

The day would not be possible without the support of many at John Jay. We thank President Mason and Provost Li and all in their offices for supporting the project. This year the *Finest* has once again joined forces with Bettina Muenster and the Office for Student Research & Creativity. We thank Bettina for extending the reach of the *Finest*. For their logistical support, we thank Raeanne Davis and Maribel Perez. And this year again, appreciate Dalyz Aguilar's fine cover design.

To John Jay College's professors, who inspire, who challenge, and who demand careful, responsible, and effective writing, we salute your dedication. And, of course, our admiration and congratulations go to all the students in this year's volume. We are proud to publish your fine work.

Jeffrey Heiman
Adam Berlin
April 2022

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♦ ENGLISH 101

STUDENTS AND STRESS: PRESSURE IN SCHOOL AND THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

JORDAN BECKER

AS A NEW GENERATION enters the routine of adult life in America, it becomes easy to wish for the simpler times of adolescence. Rather than paperwork and taxes, the allure of Saturday morning cartoons call. We all have fond memories of traipsing through our houses, bundled into thick pajamas bought without a thought of where the money came from. I often find myself longing for the innocence of those times, especially when I look to the children of today. In fact, I know two brothers who live just like this, yet I cannot find it in my heart to envy them. This is because, despite the tender age of eight, they suffer from general anxiety, social anxiety, separation anxiety, and anger issues. These are their official, psychiatrist-given diagnoses. They tend to struggle with tasks such as emotional regulation as well as speaking to others. Because of these

The Assignment and the Writer: In English 101, students embark on a sustained inquiry-based research project for much of the semester, integrating secondary sources into a final culminating essay that explores a single inquiry question in depth. In her approach to the assignment, Jordan formulated a truly original inquiry by integrating her observations of young children with her own experiences as a student who was subjected to stressful primary and secondary school environments. Through a masterful structure, she used the results of a fascinating educator interview as a frame to guide her exploration of secondary source research. In its final iteration, her essay offered the story of our contemporary education system and sounded powerful call to action. **- Professor Kim Liao**

struggles, they then became codependent on one another. It is always difficult to hear when people close to you are struggling, but this hurts more deeply since these brothers are so young still. How could these two boys who still hang their paintings on the fridge already be struggling so hard with their mental health? Has the mental health epidemic truly spread so far? What could be causing these children to be experiencing some of the same issues that I now face as a college student?

Looking back, while considering my own journey with mental health, I see a definite pattern. College is naturally a very stressful environment as the pressure to succeed in order to secure a job is looming. This pressure, which trickled down to my high school experience, is what truly acted as an accelerant for my own anxiety. In comparison, when these twin boys were younger, their mother elected to place them into a specialized private preschool in order to “Get a leg up onto other students.” Her ideology was that beginning her children’s education in a more rigorous environment would allow for success later in life. However, this is clearly not the case as they now exhibit struggles that then place them at a disadvantage to their peers. This then violently reminded me of my own experience in early elementary school within a program known as TAG, which stood for talented and gifted. To secure my spot, I was first chosen by a teacher to take an exam. Passing this test, I was then admitted into the program. I would then be required to remain after school some days, or even be pulled out of class to learn about advanced topics and systems. At this point in my life, I was nine years old. As a nine-year-old, I would cry almost weekly after TAG. I exhibited extremely low self-esteem about my academic performance, and I constantly shut down in response. These breakdowns were caused by an increased amount of pressure to remain afloat in a program that forced you to succeed or fail. This was a feeling that I was not yet equipped to handle emotionally. Overall, the program put me through a lot of stress, and I first began to develop anxiety surrounding school, an issue that only grew as I got older. This then began to affect my social life and my interactions with others, similarly to the adjustment issues that the twins have.

However, I did not begin to experience these struggles to such a severe extent until later in my life. Why is it that mental health struggles are spreading to younger children and how does school play a role in their development? In order to answer this question, I conducted an interview with long-term kindergarten teacher Ms. Silvers. Ms. Silvers has worked with young children for the last twenty years and is now preparing for her retirement at the end of the year. She believes that “If you are always challenging children, they tend to get uncomfortable” (Silvers), and according to her, the education system has become nothing but challenging in recent years. If the amount of competition and pressure within the school system has spread to lower grades, this could

be the reason for the drastic decline in mental health and social interaction that was observed in the two brothers.

When she (Ms. Silvers) first began teaching, she was proudly one of the pioneers, and a fierce advocate, of all-day kindergarten in her school, Shoenley Elementary. The reasoning behind having all-day kindergarten, in her opinion, was to expose the children to their peers and to foster their interactions with one another. This was in addition to having free all-day daycare for parents of course. At first, only simple basic skills were taught such as the alphabet until she, "Saw changes... but it would be offset by long playtimes, and nap times. We had a lot of projects and crafts" (Silvers). So, even though there was some introduction to academics, they still focused more on stress-free activities. This would leave room for fostering the necessary peer interactions that are crucial to child development. However, this changed drastically once the state government became more involved in the elementary curriculum. They introduced guided reading which then led to a mandate on where children should be with reading skills by the end of the year. Then, teachers began to be evaluated based on where their students were in both math and reading (Silvers). This timeline shows a clear trend in how the expectations for lower elementary (PreK-5), especially kindergarten, are rising throughout the years. This increase in expectation leads to more pressure placed on students to succeed.

One of the biggest instigators of this rigorous curriculum in America was the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002. This act put into place a system in which the federal government became more involved in education. This is also the law that introduced standardized testing for grades 3-8 within schools. This was to gauge what amount of the students attending were considered "Proficient." Following the trend of increased expectations, proficiency was first defined by each school individually. However, this soon evolved into Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals that each school was required to meet. According to an article published in Education Week, "If a school misses its state's annual achievement targets for two years or more... it is identified as not "making AYP" and is subject to a cascade of increasingly serious sanctions" (Klein). These "Sanctions" could include allowing students to transfer, or even complete state control of the school. If this occurred, the state would then have the power to shut down or convert the school to a charter school. This introduced some very serious consequences and a huge drive to make these students pass. Many involved placated themselves by claiming that this was all for the student's benefit.

However, the real purpose of the Act was not even to help students, but to increase America's educational standing internationally. The real reasoning behind the law was revealed to be, "Out of concern that the American education system was no longer internationally competitive" (Klein). In

addition to that, it “Sought to advance American competitiveness” (Klein). This led to the current system in which children are treated like statistics and numbers rather than individuals with unique needs. This lack of care for the children shows deeply in the obvious negative effects of the act, and subsequent lack of change. The steamrolling of the curriculum caused by the act places so much stress on the students that it has driven them to extremes. Ms. Silvers notes, “I never worried about cheating, but we’re teaching them that they have to do anything to get this right” (Silvers). The students are internalizing their stress and believe that following others who are stronger in academics is their only choice. This stifles their ability to be independent. Their need to cheat is extremely telling as to the effects of NCLB as they, as Ms. Silvers emphasized, feel as if it is their only option. Yet, cheating in actuality only serves as a disadvantage later in life as they never learn how to work on their own.

No Child Left Behind places stress on students directly and indirectly through the strain placed on teachers. This pressure comes in the form of ensuring students pass standardized testing. The consequences for consistently failing to make AYP goals become increasingly grave for each year of failure. Since consequences reflect poorly on one’s ability to teach, the educators are pressured to ensure the student’s success. This results in teachers quitting due to the strain, resulting in a lowered retention rate. For example, Evergreen Elementary was a school that had failed to make AYP many consecutive years. One teacher from Evergreen Elementary School expressed that he felt, “targeted by his principal,” and “could not implement good teaching practices in his classroom due to the pressure to teach to the tests and raise students’ SOL scores” (Orange). This was not an isolated opinion as about 75% of the teachers observed in this study left at the end of the school year. This includes both leaving through free will as well as being let go by the school due to insufficient student scores. This then leads to teachers beginning to fear for their jobs, thus creating a stressful environment for both teachers and students. This then makes a hostile environment, causing other teachers to leave, ensuring that the students have no stability or trust in their educators.

Even Ms. Silvers believes that “We are going to see more and more young teachers leave the field because they will become frustrated.” She is even planning her own retirement in the winter due to the stress of her career. Many educators, seeing that a school has a low retention rate, will be discouraged from applying for a job. The district will have difficulties acquiring experienced teachers that will improve the success of the school due to high rates of teacher turnover. Since many seasoned teachers, such as Mr. Parker, find themselves leaving, this means that the district will have to hire newer, and thus less experienced staff. The supervisors of the school will not yet trust this newer staff. For the new teachers to prove their worth, they will

place more pressure on the students to perform well on standardized tests. By placing this oppressive influence, they will struggle to gain the student's trust. This is already a difficult feat without an established reputation in the school. This student-teacher bond is integral to a conducive learning environment. If the student cannot trust a teacher on a personal level, they will not trust them on an academic level, and it is apparent that these mandates make it even harder to establish that connection.

Some of this pressure manifests itself into teaching only to the test, neglecting students' individual needs, rendering them unable to create the solid foundation needed for their future as a student. This includes both their academic needs such as studying and test-taking skills as well as their emotional needs such as regulation. For example, after many years of failing the AYP, Evergreen Elementary implemented a very strict core curriculum schedule that the teachers were expected to stick to. This ensures that even if the students were struggling with a basic concept, they were expected to move to more advanced topics. This sets them up for failure as they cannot build the proper foundation needed to succeed. This leads to breakdowns and low self-esteem. A first-hand account from a teacher states, "A few of them cried through the tests; they couldn't read well, yet were expected to complete the test" (Orange). An emotional response such as this one showcases that there is something flawed in the system as it is causing extremely high levels of distress to many students.

The aforementioned emotional health issues are caused by this distress. Ms. Silvers believes that this leads to children, "Not ever feeling like they can succeed and do the right thing. Pulling back and not even trying. It is just giving up sometimes." This statement is almost eerie in its description. This is because she is describing the children in an incredibly dejected manner. She notices a lack of motivation, which is present in children as young as the age of five. Lack of motivation is in fact one of the most apparent symptoms of depression. Even sadder, this is not the only symptom that she notices. Another symptom is a lack of self-esteem. Ms. Silvers also has heartbreaking stories such as "One little boy who has just a terrible time writing... so he just scribbles, and gets the paper full... And that's just the pressure of what he is not capable of" (Silvers). He exhibits such little belief in himself that he would rather do a poor job purposefully than try and fail. Last but not least, many children with onset anxiety or depression tend to socially isolate as an unhealthy coping mechanism. Aligning with this she had students who, "Get underneath the table because they didn't understand what was going on" (Silvers). This student is ill-equipped to deal with their emotions, and thus will hide in order to cope. This will develop into an unhealthy coping mechanism in which they fail to rely on others as well as adults. This will only allow any mental health issues present to become worsened through the lack of support. There are countless

stories throughout her years of teaching, all showing the devastating effects of pressure on children's mental health. There are breakdowns, avoidance, and even early onset signs of anxiety and depression. All of these occur as a direct response to being given work that they are not ready for yet. This damage soon becomes irreparable, leading to a more severe form of this issue.

Another one of the most obvious, but often-neglected, symptoms of stress is that it negatively impacts the physical performance of children, thus hindering their performance in school. According to the American Psychological Association, "Our bodies are well equipped to handle stress in small doses, but when that stress becomes long-term or chronic, it can have serious effects on your body" (APA). These bodily effects can include muscle tension, headaches, stomach aches, issues with breathing, an impaired immune system, and many other chronic issues spanning the entire human body. If this is what most adult bodies are subjected to, how can we expect children to cope with stress to the same degree? Children's bodies are weaker and not as well equipped to cope as adults are. In addition to these symptoms, KidsHealth reveals in their article "Childhood Stress" that children specifically experience, "Mood swings, acting out, changes in sleep patterns, or bedwetting... Some kids have physical effects, including stomachaches and headaches." (Kidshealth). Being in pain, especially at a young age, is not conducive to a working environment such as school. Pain tends to hinder your abilities and actions, which would then cause students to underperform, leading to more stress. This cycle will only continue; stress leading to pain leading to stress. This means, under these conditions, young students' physical health is severely compromised. The area where children tend to face the most issues of this nature is within the education system (KidsHealth). This means that an environment meant for conducive learning can be hurting them in the long run.

The physical effects are not the only cause for concern as an increased amount of pressure placed on success causes them to academically fail as well. Many people believe that emotional health is a necessary sacrifice needed if one wants to succeed in life. This is simply not the case as the pressure to succeed actually harms academics, especially in large doses. Increased pressure from external factors has been proven to cause a response known as the Choking Phenomenon. In these cases, it is observed that typically high-performing students will freeze and panic in stressful situations. In order to prove this theory, there was a major study conducted in China on elementary-aged students. Students were given academic questions in environments that carried different amounts of stress with them. It was found that in most cases, high-performing students will experience ill effects more than lower-performing students do. One such condition was a limit on time. It was found that "For HWM (High Working Memory) children, this increase in speed co-

occurred with an increase in error rate” (Wang, Zuwei, and Priti Shah). This scientific study proved that almost all students, not just high-performing ones, experience a significant drop in capability when faced with external pressure. However, the more gifted the student, the more apparent these effects were. Therefore, it is not fair, nor is it helpful to expect improvement from students when they are working under these conditions.

So, knowing that it is unfair to expect success in this situation, how then is it fair to judge students, and therefore teacher performance, strictly on a singular cumulative test given at the end of the year? This standardized test places children in the exact position that they were in the study. They have to take a test, for a certain grade, under a time constraint. This, according to the study, is a prime example of when the Choking Phenomenon is enacted, ensuring that any scores will be subsequently negatively impacted. Therefore, not only will their mental and physical health be impacted, but their academic standing as well. Since there seems to be no benefit to the current system, that means something has to change.

Despite the worrying effects of stress in schools, there have been efforts enacted to counteract the devastating effects on the youths of today. For example, social-emotional learning (SEL) is beneficial in improving both the emotional health and academic performance of students. SEL is a program that is being implemented in public elementary schools that instructs students on a plethora of topics. These topics include, but are not limited to, conflict resolution, emotional identification, and emotional coping skills. These skills aim to improve the way that young people interact with one another. An example that Ms. Silvers found very helpful is using a beloved children's figure in order for the children to express their emotions. She asks, “Are you feeling red, yellow, blue, or green? Red being the bad or angry, and green being happy and the excited. I used one of the pokemon figures, the chameleon, and talked about “the chameleon is feeling red”. And we talked about what he could be feeling, and then we made a whole list of how we could go about and encourage him to become green. We talked about that too, and they came up with some great answers. Stay calm. Be kind. Take a deep breath.” This is one example of many different tactics used to aid in the expression of emotions in children. Once they learn how coping skills can be used hypothetically, they can then begin how to use it themselves. This specific example also introduces emotional identification, allowing them to express themselves more easily in the future.

It is only when emotional health is nurtured, that academic life can flourish. An analysis of SEL programs all over the country found that “The participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behavior compared with a control group, as well as an 11-point gain in academic achievement percentiles” (Scelfo). This shows that the

program is effective in raising academics as a comparison showcases an increase in scores compared to those schools lacking an SEL program. An increase in scores means that more students are comprehending the information that is taught to them. It also means that they are being taught the skills to deal with their frustration, negating any test-taking anxiety or shutdowns that have been noticed in high-performing students. SEL shows that we as a society do not have to sacrifice mental health in order to make way for traditional modes of success. They can, and will, coexist if given the chance.

Could social-emotional health have been the answer in preventing the two brothers' struggles with mental health? At that age, they were not well equipped to deal with the strong emotional effects of failure. It was expected that they maintain a certain level of academics that is simply unattainable. Due to their lack of emotional comprehension, this manifested itself into early-onset breakdowns. These then inhibit them from performing with a clear and rational mind. Not only that, but due to a stronger focus on academics, social interaction and mental health has become neglected, furthering their regression. Since social-emotional health has been proven to reduce a majority of these issues, it very well could be an early preventative to the problems that they have experienced. Knowing my own journey, I could have also benefited immensely from this program. By enabling me to learn coping skills, I could have handled the stress of the TAG program with more finesse. Instead of a stressor, it could have become what it was meant to be, an aid for achievement. While it would be impossible to negate the presence of stress as I grew older, building those skills over time would have counteracted the adverse mental health effects rather than letting them fester. While I would most likely still suffer the effects of stress in my life at some point, it would not be the near-constant presence that it is today. However, without rollbacks on the amount of stress placed onto students early in life, the cycle will only continue.

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♦ ENGLISH 101

FETISHIZATION OF ASIAN WOMEN IN US CULTURE AND MEDIA

ASHLEY PARK

THE FETISHIZATION, SEXUALIZATION, AND INFANTILIZATION of Asian women is no stranger to internet culture, Hollywood, and history. In America, we see the trend of anime and kpop, where Asian women are depicted with huge chests, high pitched voices, and often act like children. In particular, film tropes such as the Lotus Flower or Dragon Lady are a vehicle for cultural and racial misinterpretation, both being depicted as threats to Western society. Consequently, “yellow peril” and anti-Chinese sentiment is catalyzed by and perpetuates such depictions. I will discuss how the fetishization, along with other forms of oppression, of Asian women are especially pertinent in US media and culture. Not only that, but to show how these misogynistic attributes and violent racism is applicable to current power structures, thus affecting all women. With this paper, I will address how these forms of gendered and racialized oppressions contribute to the ongoing cycle of subjugation against Asian women. I hope to raise awareness on these issues because violence, ideological or physical, is often overlooked due to people's perceived Asian proximity to whiteness.

The Assignment and the Writer: In English 101 FY24, students explored their writing voice(s) by re-imagining the writing classroom through the practice of language liberation. For the final research paper students were asked to choose a topic they planned to investigate in conversation with injustice, oppression, and/or liberation. Ashley chose to focus her essay on a topic that had piqued her curiosity since the start of the semester. She tactfully uses language liberation as a tool to raise awareness on the fetishization of Asian women in western media and explores the intersecting power structures that have led to their oppression. Ashley evokes a unique perspective, care, and consideration of the topic and the art of writing to craft a transformative experience.

– Professor Dasharah Green

To understand the depths in which infantilization, hyper sexualization, and fetishization of Asian women permeate in US culture and media, it necessitates a historical analysis of their physical and psychological subjugation. US intervention in Asia, more prominently during the Korean and Vietnam War and in the Philippines, catalysed the perception that Asian women are prostitutes or that their “moral duplicity” should taint westerners (Hwang and Parrenas, 2021, p. 4). Camp towns that were established around US military bases gave US soldiers easy access to Asian sex workers, that subsequently led to the idea that they only existed for pleasure, devoid of any human value. With this, the influx of Asian immigrants in the late 19th century and “alien spouses” erected the belief that Asian women would spread diseases in the West. This strike on Asian existence, combined with “yellow peril” following the World War, enabled such marred depictions of Asian women to flourish. The racialization of such identities does not escape its historical precedent.

Historically, laws which villainized Asian immigrants and laborers set the precedent for current hyper-sexualization of Asian women in America. The Page Act of 1875 was one of many laws enacted, particularly against Chinese Women, restricting them from entering the US. Yeun (2021) writes “...they were successful in enacting it against women because they perceived that or they constructed that they carried venereal diseases and, actually, that they were temptations for white men” (p. 4). Thus, all Asian women were perceived as prostitutes. In addition, due to the quota system which limited immigration, US soldiers garnered support to be able to bring back their overseas wives. Consequently, the War Bride Act of 1945 was enacted. This legislation allowed wives and children of US soldiers to enter the country as a “non quota” immigrant after World War II. Perpetuating the notion that Asian women were essentially seen as souvenirs or objects to the American GIs, it is only when the Asian women are “saved” that they are not seen as disease ridden objects.

Touching on another facet of American culture complicit in this objectification, Hollywood and Western media at large manifest and reflect these ideologies of Asian women, generally through its historical context. Chang (2006) quotes:

“In addition, as media had previously reflected political activities repeatedly, Vietnamese women became the new performance subject during the 70s and 80s with the Vietnam War. Evidence of this can be found in the highly acclaimed films *Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987). The popular, modern musical, *Miss Saigon* (1989) is yet another appropriation of *Madame Butterfly* by merely changing the historical context into the circumstances of the Vietnam

War softening the explicitness of the Orientalist theme” (Uchida, 1998, p. 168)” (p. 15).



Western imperialism and dominance of Asian nations encouraged a culture which dehumanized Asians, a trend which would soon be reflected in Western media and the aura of exoticism and sexualization which surrounded its depiction of Asian women. By depicting Eastern cultures as “backwards”, the subjugation of its peoples was justified, thus, the creation of a subservient, seductive, and even evil identity. Moreover, the anti-Chinese sentiment and “yellow peril” in the early 20th century, in tandem with laws, further shaped this identity of sexual deviance and moral corruption. Asian women continue to be characterized as impressionistic and sexually pleasing to the white man.

Hollywood has been a major player in disseminating old yellow peril rhetoric, utilizing this fear to create harmful tropes. The most famous being the Lotus Blossom and Dragon Lady. The Lotus Blossom trope is characterized as servile, docile, and is often infantilized. Miss Saigon, a famous Broadway show, depicts a romance between an Asian sex worker and an American GI. Here, the woman is so dependent on their love that she kills herself in a rush of despair. Woan perfectly encapsulates this by stating “She not only exemplifies hyper-sexuality, but hyper-heterosexuality, male-centered and male-dominated” (Woan, 2008, p. 279). There exists an archetype in which Asian women must fulfill, a role of self sacrifice. Not for themselves but for others. Thus, we must analyze how such patriarchal standards affect the way that Asian women are dominated.

One example of Hollywood’s complicity is shown in Austin Powers in Goldmember (2002). At the sides of Austin Powers are two Japanese women in schoolgirl costumes, Fook Mi and Fook Yu. The schoolgirl costumes, usually worn by children, are used to sexualize and infantilize grown women,

catering to the many pedophilic ideals that exist, especially when associated with Asian women. Powers standing in the middle and front of the two women, depict the social and sexual power dynamics that replicate reality. The names simultaneously trivialize Asian Culture while reducing Asian women down to mere sex toys. To add to the aforementioned trivialization, on his bucket list was to have a threesome with these twins, through a “top secret massage”.

Another trope is the Dragon Lady; in Hollywood cinema, they are represented as dangerous killers, coupled with an equally dangerous sex drive. An example of this is Lucy Liu in *Kill Bill* (2003). Liu's character, O-Ren Ishii, performs copious amounts of violence alongside the other assassins; however, she is the only one decorated in traditional Japanese clothing and fights with swords. Here, we see themes of orientalism, as Asian culture is used as an aesthetic, alongside the Dragon Lady trope. With two very disparate views, Asian women are under the constant struggle of victimization or villainization, sometimes both.

“Temptresses” is more often described of Asian women than the aforementioned tropes. Fitting the concept of danger, it is an amalgam of all the things I have addressed : “yellow peril”, hyper-sexualization, and the morally duplicitous being. The title of temptress often implies that a sort of corruption occurs. The corruption of who, though? The answer could possibly be white men or Western society as a whole. Being seen as dangerous not only villainizes Asian women but fuels racism, xenophobia, and sexism. All of which have negative effects not only on Asian women, but all women of color. Remoquillo describes the villainous, yet sexually tempting depiction of an Asian woman as “Her undeniable sex-appeal and the male protagonists’ struggle to defeat her throughout the series works to affirm the perceived deviant sexuality of Asian women with the U.S. during the mid-1900’s while also upholding white female sexuality” (Remoquillo, 2016, p. 61). *Kill Bills* (2003) O-Ren Ishii not only maintains the Bride's white female sexuality but also her white fragility. Placing O-Ren Ishii, at the side of the Bride, absolves her from the same violent acts that are committed. The only boundary existing between them are the racial tropes assigned to Asian women and her white fragility. History heavily influences the media that is created.

Although Asian tropes are seen in mainstream media, they are also seen in Asian fetish porn. Asian fetish is defined as the intense attraction to Asian women, creating the inability to form relationships with their own race (Chang, 2006). Permeating into the sexual dynamics in relationships through fetishization, Asian women are seen as commodities of pleasure to white men. Here, the common argument arises: how is it racist or fetishizing if we like what we like? Many fail to realize that their preconceived beliefs of what they see as “I like what I like” is deeply rooted in racism and racialized misogyny. Asian women will be depicted as school girls or virginal figures, as they are

brutalized. These stereotypes and perceptions are constructed through “Rape and War” of Asian countries and subsequently, their women (Woan, 2008).

Sexual stereotypes exist, and often obstruct the way that we see Asian women within relationships. This frequently leads to abuse and violence. For instance, the Atlanta Spa shooting was perpetrated by a man who needed to satiate his sex addiction; the addiction being Asian women. Fetishization is harmful in that it enables its perpetrators to view violence as a justified vent of their frustration. People will act on their colorblindness and conclude that attacks like this are not racially motivated, however, it is exactly that. “Why treat whatever fetish he has, you know, with Asian women - why treat the women as the problem?” (Yuen, 2021, p. 3) It is absolutely dehumanizing. Further, many people believe that the Atlanta shooting was not racially motivated, rather, it victimizes the man who wanted to tame his “temptations” (Chang, 2021).

Asian women are seen as expendable objects that do not bring detriment or distress to society when harm is inflicted upon them. Apathy to such notions creates a space for ignorance but also great harm to Asian experiences and identities. Here, I completely agree with the authors' take on such events. The perceived dispensability of these women allowed the assailant to justify his desire to contain them. The hypersexualization of Asian women allows us to coexist with our white counterparts while we are kept under the reins of inferiority, maintaining a very deliberate race and power structure. Hwang and Parrenas (2021) states “...Gendered racialization of Asian women as hypersexual can result in their perception as disposable bodies for white male rage” (p. 1). We need to come to the conclusion that fetishization, does in fact, equal violence. Whether violence in words, ideologies, or physical violence, it will always manifest dangerously within people, institutions, and laws.

An experience of dehumanization through objectification and hypersexualization is one of the many examples that not only me, but the many women who have faced this. As an Asian woman, I feel like I am always under scrutiny in the way that I speak or present myself. Many men see my existence as inherently sexual. I can imagine these stereotypes are ones that many individuals hold. To further illustrate this frustration, I had my friend Amanda speak about her encounters with, in particular, white men. While discussing the topic of Asian women, her peer said that he wanted to be with Asian women because they “always maintain their youthfulness.” Yuen, when she stated that her anatomy had been questioned as different, as I've also been asked the same thing (Yuen, 2021). In reality, this comment alludes to the infantilized view and pedophilia. My earliest experience of this included the time when I was on my way to a bar mitzvah in a bus full of kids. Randomly, a kid sitting behind me asked “do Asians have tight pussy?” We were 12 years old. I did not think

much of it, assuming there was no malice; however, it just shows how harmful stereotypes are engrained at such a young age, unable to realize the effect of such comments. When indicating our race, it would imply a comment that is sexual in nature. We are not seen as human beings but rather instruments of pleasure and sexual gratification. They will allude to our unattainability but approach us with malice, whether conscious or not.

White domination makes its way into the scrutinization and mockery of Asian bodies beyond fetishization. Brady and et al, explore the way in which Asian women experience body satisfaction or dissatisfaction as a result of this. By examining the intersectionality of race, gender, and overall identity, these factors are crucial to exploring these themes. Eurocentrism is known to be the biggest influence to maintaining or achieving certain beauty traits. However, ethnic identity may also deter conformity to these standards; though, the literature on this is very limited. “Collectively, women were exposed to various cultural beauty norms that influenced their likes and dislikes about their bodies yet often these expectations of attractiveness prized Eurocentric features and devalued Asian features” (Brady, 2017, p. 484). A very particular case for Asian women, the racialization, hypersexualization, and exoticization of them are a precursor to body dissatisfaction. With this, intersectionality allows one to understand that these issues are very much interconnected to the patriarchal and racist systems that exist today. To add, other experiences and parental and peer influences, also fuel certain perceptions of body image. Being able to navigate beauty norms can be extremely difficult while Eurocentric standards are pitted against Asian women's physical existence. The struggle of young Asian girls exploring these differences, which are often forced into their faces, have to battle white attributes, lifestyles, and family structures. Growing up in a society that prioritizes and values western features, BIPOC experience and configure their bodies and faces to that standard. Our features undergo the process of othering, creating a much more difficult journey towards acceptance of self. These very issues surround women of color, fully encompassing our understanding of beauty and worth; while we navigate ourselves around the unattainable norm, our white counterparts grow alongside and within it. The socio-cultural implications of these pressures contribute to the larger examination of body image, perception and identity. These perceptions translate into the way in which non-Asian counterparts view Asians as people to subjugate and pressure into Anglo conformity.

Our ability to navigate these issues is often hindered by existing oppressive structures that are pervasive through our everyday lives, from education to law. White centric curriculums, racially tone-deaf laws, and the perpetuation of stereotypes deeply stagnates us from moving away from sexism and racism. Chang (2006) perfectly encapsulates this sentiment by stating:

“However, the consequences of the stereotypes continue to have serious implications for the life experiences of Asian-American women, and thus inherently seriously affect all groups of women: Caucasian women, women of color, other minority women, and Asian women themselves. As long as women are being dominated and defined by those other than themselves, women of different groups will be pitted against each other when they should be collaborating” (p. 25).

Representation in the media is also equally important to create unbiased views on people outside of their race and ethnic groups. When rarely correctly emulated on television, viewers see all Asian people and cultures as a monolith, including their experiences. Diversity in storytelling is necessary, as TV tropes are not the only experiences that exist. To further our knowledge on the oppression of women, we should study black feminist thought, listen to our BIPOC peers, and use the tools already given to us by other social movements and expand on it. And thus, the liberation of all women can only occur by defeating the patriarchal society we live in, marginalizing us into the confines of such images.

To further alleviate these injustices, I must spark imaginations that will incite emotions of hope, fear, and need. My research heavily emphasizes a systemic issue within a country that benefits from racialized and complacent systems, contributing to the oppression of women. These issues similarly affect all women and do not serve to liberate us from such systems. This not only contributes to the marred, infantilized view of women but it perpetuates pedophilia as well. It is necessary to threaten the status quo and further invite others to think in a radicalized and open view about such systems. A huge facet of liberation is the permeation of societally deviating ideas and conversations that have not yet reached the wandering and soon to be catalyzed mind. By doing this research, I hope that all women can resonate with this paper and with rage. I hope for that rage to be transformed into visions of a just and liberated future.

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♦ ECONOMICS 101

CHIPPING ART

WILSON KORIK

AFTER READING A FEW DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES on the subject, and finding the points of view of Jemima Kelly (Kelly, 2021) and Clive Thompson (Thompson 2021) to be the most interesting, I decided to focus my study on the topic of NFTs. NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, are a crypto-currency hosted system intended to provide some equivalent of ownership receipts to pieces of digital art, introducing an element of scarcity to what is currently a system with no factors of scarcity. This scarcity, in theory, provides an artist, or an art-collector, with some form of recognized value for his or her labor, and by extension, for the products of his or her labor. Described in layman's terms, if a piece of digital art is equally owned by all who can access a computer, then the art has no real monetary value: no one has to pay for it, except the artist with his or her time, so the act of creating digital art is currently a loss of value. NFTs fiscally incentivize the act of creating digital art, and values the time and effort of digital creators.

The Assignment and the Writer: In Economics 101, students are presented with a general introduction to the field. Students are expected to engage with a variety of approaches to economic theory, history, and debate. As a final assessment of their ability to synthesize some key concepts and vocabulary from the course, students have to find and interpret two newspaper articles that are about the same or a very similar economic topic. Then, students must relate these news articles to their own lives and write about how they interact with this economic phenomena on a personal level. Wilson Korik not only chooses an incredibly prescient topic in NFTs, but successfully applies insights from our own course to investigate the role of NFTs in measuring the value of a digital artist's work. On top of this, as a digital artist himself, Wilson is able to show how the burgeoning world of NTFs impacts them.

– Professor William Machi

If the draw of crypto currency is its untraceability and ambiguous tax status, who is to say that the corporatization of cryptocurrency won't defeat the whole purpose? Won't Silicon Valley's dodgier players just find a new unregulated form of currency? If the entire purpose of NFTs is the decentralization of digital currency, which requires the metadata of several devices, how will the technology become energy-sustainable in the long-run? Is illicit cryptocurrency mining going to see an increase, considering that much more of it will be necessary to sustain the bubble forming around NFTs? As the modern world approaches some form of "post-currency," switching from an unbacked dollar, to credit, to a string of accidental code, to pictures bought with said strings of accidental code, what really defines the value of currency? Now that there are industries (for lack of a better term) that require cryptocurrency to run, and that are largely purchased with cryptocurrency, will bitcoin become more liquid? How quickly will it inflate, until it devalues to a mode of currency comparable to the dollar? What will be developed next when this "post-currency" devalues?

Personally, as a digital artist, NFTs have me torn. I understand the value of owning the receipt and original copy (or, rather, a ticket certifying the original copy) of a piece of art: in the digital art community, theft is a massive problem. When another person online steals an artist's work, they are, in essence, stealing money from an artist: when a commodity completely lacks scarcity, and everyone can own it, the value of the commodity depreciates significantly. So the development of a tracing system for a picture, and a system denoting ownership, is huge. However, I personally believe that the detriments of NFTs much outweigh the benefits: for one, the technology is far from sustainable. The amount of energy used to store NFTs, as is, is huge: as with any form of decentral metadata, energy efficiency is difficult, when the very technology needs several devices to work properly. In addition, it's clear who this craze is for: Silicon Valley players enjoy the exclusivity of the technology, as the scarcity inflates the worth of what is basically just a receipt to own a tiny bit more of a picture that anyone can look at. As much as I want this technology to have its uses as a watermarking system, the fact of the matter is that that's not what the system is intended for. The system is, instead, intended to trade amounts of money so large they no longer feel like real dollar amounts, with ambiguous tax status.

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♦ ENGLISH 101

WHY?

TERRENCE PAIR

ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS for a child to do is to explain his or her self—why he or she did what he or she did. For a child to explain what's troubling him or her, or explain the troubles he or she is facing is nearly an impossible feat. As a person who was once a child myself, a troubled child at that, I speak from experience.

For at the tender age of ten, my innocence was destroyed, and I was unable to explain it to anyone because I was unable to identify the problem. How does one seek help when they have no idea what they need help with?

My innocence was destroyed when I became aware of the severity of what was going on around me: that my mother was a drug addict, addicted to crack cocaine. In discovering this, I discovered that I had to give up my childhood, become a man, and take care of myself and my younger sister, Ebony. I believed that if I didn't do it no one else would. This belief came from not seeing anyone trying to stop or discourage my mother from doing drugs—so why would I think someone cared to help me and my sister eat?

The Assignment and the Writer: In English 101, students learn about the conventions and expectations of academic research and composition. Early in the semester, students write a short piece of creative nonfiction describing a formative life experience; these works often provide a springboard for subsequent inquiry-based projects. In our class, the students read an excerpt from Malcolm X's *Autobiography* and Langston Hughes's "Salvation," then write about an important change in their own lives. Terrence's piece "Why?" impressed me with its unflinching honesty, its empathy for his younger self, and its highly engaging authorial voice. It was clear within the first weeks of the course that Terrence's writing deserved to be experienced by a wider audience. — **Professor Ashley Minihan**

One would think that a child forced into such a sad situation was a rarity. But as sad as it is to admit, growing up in Brooklyn in the 1980s, my situation was common. A lot of children lacked parental guidance at home. And those without parental guidance at home grew up to become the violent, drug dealing criminals that inundate New York State's prisons during the 1990s. But I'm digressing.

My mother fell deep into the drug world and I fell even deeper into the streets. Her days and nights were spent finding ways to feed her drug addiction, while my days and nights were spent finding ways to feed me and my sister's stomachs.

I was not bereft of a father; he just happened to be inactive most of the time. I want to believe he loved his children, but he was just too busy cheating on his then girlfriend and mother of his youngest child, and keeping track of the many women he was bedding (a trait I sadly inherited, but a tale for another time).

In just the fifth grade I was a stranger to school, at least the inside of school. Each morning I would drop my little sister off at school, and then my friend Stevie and I would hop on the J train at Koskiosko train station and head to Chambers street in Manhattan. There we would head into any store that would allow us in, search for things of value, then steal them. We took everything from toys to clothes and sold them back in Brooklyn, to neighbors. This was our day job.

At night, just blocks away from my home, I.S. 57 (a junior high school my parents attended) would open its gym doors to the local kids in the neighborhood. A lot of kids came to the school to hang around and meet up with friends, others came to play basketball. The school was opened three days a week—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And while most kids were there to socialize, my friend Stevie and I were there to steal peoples' coats (Triple fat goosedowns were in fashion then). Lots of people walked home cold during the winter of 1985.

On the nights I.S. 57 was closed, Stevie and I would station ourselves outside of grocery stores, waiting to rob groceries and money from children our age or older whose parents sent them to the store.

Numb, heart steeled, and inured to the screams of victims, I felt no regret nor held a minim of guilt for committing such flagitious, depraved acts. The streets were filled with snakes so I had to become a mongoose. I had to eat. My sister had to eat. If someone else had to "not" eat in order for my sister and I "to" eat... I think you know the rest!

I come from a very large family. My great-grandmother had thirteen children and my grandmother had eleven of her own. Between them all I had well over a hundred relatives: fourteen aunts and uncles, and the rest first and second cousins. But the problem was: most of them were on drugs, too, and

had problems of their own. Those who weren't on drugs weren't visible when I needed them. And because of their absence, I had to become the child that need no one. Independent.

Fortunately, because of my outstanding absences, my school contacted B.C.W. (The Bureau of Child Welfare), which is now A.C.S. (Administrative Child Services). After an investigation of my home situation, B.C.W. found my mother to be an unfit parent, which resulted in my sister and I being removed from our home in Brooklyn, placed under the supervision of my maternal grandmother who lived in Laurelton, Queens.

The change of environment should have been considered a blessing, for Laurelton is a good neighborhood, filled with private houses. However, for me, a child now used to taking care of myself, the change was an unbearable nightmare.

Reason being: people were now trying to be parents to me—my grandmother, aunts, and uncles—telling me what I could and couldn't do, forcing me to go to school, and imposing on me a curfew. I was also introduced to disciplinary actions (punishment) for not following house rules. One of the hardest things I had trouble accepting, was having the guardianship role I held over my little sister stripped away from me.

It was a lot for my young self to take in. These people had no idea who I was nor the things I'd gone through, yet they thought they could tell me what to do. In my mind I was an adult in need of no one. In their minds I was but a rebellious child. I cared for my relatives; I just didn't think they had the right to tell me what to do.

Their solution to my every wrong was punishment. Not once did someone ask me why I was so recalcitrant. Though even if they had, at the time, I would have been unable to explain the whys or what I went through to become who I was. Regardless how grown I thought I was, I wasn't aware of why I did anything. Needless to say my dysfunctional childhood grew to a dysfunctional adulthood.

Truthfully, though, as I see it now, the trip to adulthood wasn't that rough a ride. Of course the transition wasn't easy, but at some point I began to mellow out. I'm not sure exactly when. Maybe it started when I began to take notice of girls—or when girls began to take notice of me! (Funny how a few smiles and *you're cute* from young Ladies can make a bad boy want to be a good guy.)

Another possibility that may have had an impact on my decision to change, was the threat I received from my grandmother: She threatened to send me away if I didn't straighten up. I don't know where she planned to send me—my guess was foster care—but I didn't want to find out. Besides that, I knew I had to change; if not for myself than for my sister, my heart. So

gradually I conformed—abdicating my rule of self—and converted back to a child.

Before, structure in my life was non-existing and chores were alien, especially washing dishes—that was a girl's job, so I believed. But eventually I came around and learned to complete my chores without complaint. I also learned how to come home at an appropriate time—and stop taking things that didn't belong to me, which, admittedly, took a little longer to abandon.

What took the longest, though, was un-learning distrust and violence, and re-learning how to trust and depend on others, those now responsible for me, to take care of me. That was hard. Harder was asking others for money. At the simple age of eleven, twelve, asking for what most children my age asked for—money—felt humiliating, degrading to this prideful child. But I swallowed it; and with time, that seditious trait imbued in my heart subsided.

But, still, it wasn't until I was old enough and wise enough to understand my childhood pains, that I was able to work towards healing—breaking the chains of anger that held me bound.

♦ ENGLISH 101

A SERPENT NAMED AMERICA AND THE ISLAND OF EDEN

ISAMAR BRITO

IN PUERTO RICO, you can always smell rain. When it has rained, when it will rain, if it is raining. It's the first thing I notice every time I land there. It's an addicting smell; one of trees and dirt, waves and sand. A smell that tells me I'm home.

On a day in September of 2017, the smell was not as it usually was. The smell fell flat, the air was humid and eerie. My mother and I had just traveled to Puerto Rico in a hurry. Hurricane Maria had recently struck the island with full force leaving us fearful of what could have happened to our family.

Upon arriving at an unusually empty airport, I was taken aback by the scene before me. Hurricane Maria had hit the island with extreme and brute force. I saw this in the drive to my grandmother's house. Every aspect of the island felt different, it changed.

The Assignment and the Writer: In English 101, students embark on a sustained inquiry-based research project for much of the semester, integrating secondary sources into a final culminating essay that explores a single inquiry question in depth. Isamar took this mission to heart, exploring the colonial origins of Puerto Rico and interviewing a number of subjects to portray a vivid portrait of an island exploited by its parent country—the U.S. In her masterful prose that weaves together personal experience, historical research, and academic research, Isamar launches a scathing analysis of the economic and political forces that continue America's exploitative relationship with Puerto Rico, offering a powerful argument for change.

— **Professor Kim Liao**

The drive up there had always been beautiful. We would drive through a highway that gave us peaks of little towns hidden by trees and leaves. Here everything is hidden. All one can see is the road ahead and its curves. It was something I knew well, something I had seen since I was a little girl. Yet, now, I did not get to see my familiar scene. When it came time to go up the mountain to my grandma's house, I noticed something new, a river. My mother, who had lived in Puerto Rico her entire life, was taken aback. She had never seen that river in her life. The hurricane, it seems, had torn every plant from its roots. We could now see down the mountain as we rode up. We could see the houses, the dirt, the destruction.

Hurricane Maria did not care about dignity or privacy or people's lives. And it seemed that neither did the United States. My mother and I stayed as long as we could, but ultimately we had to go home. As the states gawked and sent out "thoughts and prayers," Puerto Rico suffered.

When states had the privilege of receiving aid, Puerto Rico received a President who threw paper towels at his citizens like they were not human. Emergency aid never came. This was the year I began truly considering the immense threat American colonialism posed on my island.

Before getting into the complicated history of United States colonialism, what actually *is* colonialism? Well according to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* the history of the term is complicated. This is due to the fact that the terms Imperialism and colonialism have widely been used as interchangeable terms. Thus, Margaret Kohn goes into specifics about the definitions they work off of. To Kohn, "Colonialism is a practice of domination.... [or] the subjugation of one people to another" (Kohn, Margaret). In simpler terms, colonialism refers to a people using economic or political control over another group of people. Countries like the United States have unbridled power and influence. They use this to control other nations that perhaps do not have the same power that they have.

Historically the act of colonialism had been justified through what is called a "civilizing mission." It was believed that it was necessary for "'uncivilized' societies to advance" into self-government (Kohn, Margaret). This justification is even seen throughout Spanish colonialism where, "colonists explicitly justified their activities in the Americas in terms of a religious mission to bring Christianity to native peoples" (Kohn, Margaret). Colonialism has been used to subjugate people of color to white nations. These countries attempt to spread values they deem to be morally superior over other societies. Much like the case with Puerto Rico and the U.S., who took ownership of the island after "saving" them from Spanish rule.

Often, when we talk about the term, it's related to the actions of Europeans. It is rare to see American Imperialism be brought up in these

conversations. And that is why it is my hope that throughout this paper I remind Americans that they are not exempt from the horrors of colonialism. That this country is in fact complicit in what we condemn other countries for.

Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States. While its official title is “United States territory,” Puerto Rico has never reaped a single benefit from the United States in its history. The United States became involved with Puerto Rico while helping defeat Spanish rule over the island in 1898. In December of that year, Puerto Rico was signed over to the United States. Puerto Rico’s rapid change in leadership quickly caused difficulties for native Puerto Ricans. They had lost key export markets in Europe and the Caribbean while also being subjected to “punitive U.S. tariffs” (“Puerto Rico, Colonialism In”, Pedro Caban).

In 1901, Congress passed the Foraker Act which essentially stripped Puerto Ricans of any role in their own government. In Washington, Puerto Rico had no representatives and all those who made any decisions for the island were appointed by the United States. While the United States would describe their goal for the island to guide the Puerto Rican people into self-government, their actions showed otherwise. Puerto Rico from the very beginning was not awarded the right to choose. The intention behind this was clear: feign democracy, practice control. The act told Puerto Ricans that, “Puerto Rico belongs to the United States, but it is not the United States, nor a part of the United States” (Fernandez et al., p. 143). In 1917, the Jones Act was passed. The act gave Puerto Ricans citizenship, and yet still treated them as second class. It was clear that “[the] rights of citizens of Puerto Rico were not comparable to the rights of citizens in the states” (Caban, 517). Under the guise of citizenship, Puerto Rico was subjected to an undemocratic ruling. Puerto Rico was nothing more than a pawn in the American game of domination. In this game, America does not see the Puerto Rican people as deserving of representation, respect, or basic rights. Instead, what they are is cheap labor.

The United States did not only rule over Puerto Rico through laws and regulations, they controlled Puerto Rico economically as well. Through their “unlimited constitutional powers” (Caban, 517) the United States shifted the Puerto Rican economy to become reliant on raw sugar. In the 1930s, Caban states that over 60% of Puerto Rico’s “export” earnings were sugar exports. Even then, the United States had an unbridled control over Puerto Ricans as, “[four] U.S. firms controlled over 23 percent of raw sugarcane lands and accounted for 51 percent of raw sugar production” (Caban, 517). The U.S. morphed the island's economy into one that benefits the mainland. As the United States saw the profits of sugar exports, Puerto Ricans saw hardships. The island soon saw themselves fall into poverty. This poverty is one that has rolled over into Puerto Rico’s present. Luis Muñoz Marín, a former governor of Puerto Rico, blamed United States occupation for this, “The American flag

found Puerto Rico penniless and content” (Wagenheim and Wagenheim, p. 154). To put this into perspective Muñoz Marín was a governor famously *against* the pro-independence movement, yet is quoted to have said this. The U.S. reaped the benefits of their own makeshift sweatshop while Puerto Ricans suffered.

It's easy to look back at these events and forget that they happened. Forget that Puerto Ricans have suffered at the hands of Americans. Many are not even aware of the situation in Puerto Rico. But the people who stood up to American colonialism in the 20th century are still alive and they remember it exceptionally well. People like Heriberto Marín, interviewed by Jon Anderson in 2017 for *The New Yorker*, still live to tell the story of Puerto Rican efforts for independence. Marín was part of the group of brave Puerto Ricans who stood up to the United States government at a time where a growing independence sentiment was spreading across the island. In his interview, Marín tells Anderson that the uprising represented, “the era of decolonization... It was David against Goliath” (Marín).

An exceptionally beautiful part of this interview is his very clear sense of pride in being part of the movement, even as he details the horrible treatment he faced subsequently. Marín was a *Cadeta de la Republica* under Albizu Campos, an important figure in the Puerto Rican independence movement. Born in Jayuya to poor farmers, Marín had grown up under a government who in 1937 killed twenty people and wounded hundreds in Ponce which was eventually, “concluded [to be]... constituted [as] a massacre” (Caban, 518). Less than two decades later, on October 27th of 1950, Albizu Campos called the *nacionalistas* to action. In Jayuya, the *nacionalistas* had ended up seizing police stations. The Jayuya uprising had famously led Blanca Canales to raise the Puerto Rican flag declaring freedom within the towns. Heriberto Marín, who had grown up on the Canaleses land, had the honor of helping Blanca Canales raise the flag. Marín does not regret his decision despite being sentenced to a hundred and fifty-four years in prison. He goes on to explain a particular detail of the current state of one of the prisons he was thrown into. In his interview, Marín says that the ironically named La Princesa, “[prison was turned into the] Puerto Rican tourism office... There is no historical consciousness here” (Marín). Tourism was another economic venture the United States had taken on behalf of Puerto Ricans. In a way, La Princesa still stands. The economic control tourism has over the island is quite literally a prison.

In Puerto Rico throughout the 20th century, revolts were not the only action that could get you thrown into prison. In 1948, the United States made it punishable by 10 years in prison to fly the Puerto Rican flag. This was done as an effort to keep the pro-independence movement at bay. It's quite ironic that the same country whose very Bill of Rights protects a citizen's freedom of

speech was responsible for a law such as this one. Those who posed a threat to the American mission in Puerto Rico were, “[not] only the Nationalists but also the Independence Party and Socialist Party... [who] were subjected to arrest and intimidation” (Caban, 520). Despite promoting free speech on the mainland, Puerto Rico was not part of those laws. To the U.S. Puerto Ricans were disposable. Their voices and their lives did not matter. They were objects and numbers, not people.

This reigns especially true through the topic of population. The United States long battled with Puerto Rico’s overpopulation. American officials blamed the poor economic health of the island for the excess amount of people. In order to combat this, the United States commenced a new form of population control: sterilization. The program was, “endorsed by the U.S. government [who] began sending health department officials to rural parts of the island... By 1946, postpartum sterilizations happened frequently in... Puerto Rican hospitals” (Andrews, Katherine). In “The Dark History of Forced Sterilization of Latina Women,” Katherine Andrews portrays the dangerous effects of such efforts. Many of the Puerto Rican women who had fallen victim to the sterilizations had no clue what they were getting into. A USAID grant provided free sterilization of Puerto Ricans. The program also took the opportunity to use, “Puerto Rican women [as]... guinea pigs for U.S. pharmaceutical companies who were developing the modern birth control pill” (Falicov). Again, Puerto Ricans were not seen as human beings. They were seen as objects for American development. American white women would, perhaps, be the first with access to working birth control yet Puerto Rican women suffered for that privilege.

According to a study done by Catherine Chase Boring, “of the sterilizations that took place between 1954-1982, 21% of women felt some regret for having the operations and 11% felt definite regret for having been sterilized” (Andrews, Katherine). The women involved were not given a warning and were not told the full story. The United States used its power over them for their own benefit leaving women violated and regretful for years to come. But how does this translate into today's Puerto Rico?

As you may have guessed, these problems did not begin and end in the 20th century. Puerto Rico is still under American control, and thus, are still being subjected to unfair and harmful practices. I spoke with two Puerto Rican teenagers in order to see their current perspectives on modern-day colonialism practices. Each gave me personal insights and views on the ways in which their island has suffered.

First I spoke to Angeles (she/they), an 18-year-old from Aguadilla. They have a deep love for their island. They seem to have always known that colonialism was present within the island but didn’t fully comprehend its impact until studying Puerto Rican politics. She explained that “studying

[Puerto Rico's]... evolution as a colony when we were at the hand of our native peoples, to the hands of the Spanish, and now in the hands of the U.S.." had led her to clearly see what was going on around her. They told me that, "Maturing meant[understanding]... what was happening to not only our island but to our people as well because of the United States," (Angeles). Angeles expressed disdain for American control over the island. They told me that the United States had posed a threat to Puerto Rican culture, "the second we became their colony," (Angeles).

When I asked what the Puerto Rican colonial status meant for their personal Puerto Rican identity, Angeles shared this: "My experience growing up in colonialism meant that I would be raised with little to no connection or understanding of my native culture. I was put into English-focused schools from kindergarten all the way to my high school graduation. I, alongside my community, had to experience a series of disasters from 2 hurricanes back-to-back, to earthquakes, to a global pandemic and see how- despite being an American colony- the US never truly helped us. Areas of our island never fully recovered from Hurricane Maria and we had to stand by while the president of the time mocked us and threw rolls of toilet paper at us when we were begging for help," (Angeles).

The situation Angeles is seen referring to above happened in 2017. Hurricane Maria was a Category 5 hurricane that devastated the Caribbean in that very year. In Puerto Rico, fatalities were reported to reach over 3,000. Following the deathly blow, Former President Donald Trump had arrived in Puerto Rico after nine days of radio silence from the United States. During his time in Puerto Rico, he threw paper at Puerto Ricans, had compared Hurricane Maria to Hurricane Katrina in attempts to belittle the Puerto Rican people, and even told Puerto Ricans, "you've thrown our budget a little out of whack" in reference to the United States spending. According to BBC News, the former president had visited only 7% of the island, exclusively the places that had power. In the face of the crisis, Puerto Rico was viewed as a burden to America's wallet. They were dehumanized; the image of an American president throwing paper towels at people struggling to survive etched into their minds for years to come. And it's clear that even in 2021, young people like Angeles still have not forgotten.

Much like Angeles, Matthew (he/they) an 18-year-old from Caguas, believes that the United States poses a major threat to Puerto Rico. When I asked him if he had thought American culture was dangerous to that of their own, there was no doubt that they agreed with Angeles.

"Yes", they told me. "We almost didn't have the right to waive our own flag until 1952 where it was finally accepted as our national flag [even though]... the flag was created in 1895 during El Grito de Lares," (Matthew).

For Matt, Puerto Rican colonialism also affects his relationship with

his very own culture. They told me that, “colonial status opens doors of xenophobia towards us and we are seen as lesser-of both by Americans *and* by our fellow latines... Our experiences are often isolated or ignored since we’re too “gringofied” for others to really care and help. More often than not we get made fun of for our colloquial Spanish which became Spanglish over the years.” The Puerto Rican experience is thus unique under colonialism. Having a latine identity under American rule is difficult due to the ways in which American culture is imposed on Puerto Ricans whether it be through economics, politics, education, or language. Puerto Ricans are not given the option to preserve their culture in ways other Latinx countries have. Every time the island has been forced under new rule, Puerto Ricans saw a new distortion of themselves. To the Americans, Puerto Rico is too Latinx, but to other Latinx people they are too, as Matt puts it, “gringofied”.

Making Puerto Rico appeal more to Americans is not something new. Much like in the 1930s, the American government has played a crucial role in the ways in which the current Puerto Rican economy has shifted into what it is today. As described by the two interviewees, Puerto Rico currently has an economy that heavily relies on the tourism industry. With Puerto Ricans still recovering from Hurricane Maria as well as Covid-19, the economic situation in the island is increasingly more complex. And once again the complexity of this stems directly from the United States’ neglect of their colony in the Caribbean. ^[SEP] America has quite infamously had a difficult time controlling the spread of the virus which in turn had caused many countries to close their borders to U.S. citizens. But trust American entitlement to overpower the strength of closed borders. Led by the American need to conquer all, many mainland Americans fled to Puerto Rico as their island getaway from the pandemic. Here, they went to forget the struggles many of them had surrounding the virus. There was only one problem with this little taste of tropical freedom. America had once again forgotten that real people had lived there.

On the island, a multitude of events ensued showing extreme disregard of the island and its inhabitants. Ones where tourists acted violently against Puerto Ricans who had asked for them to follow simple regulations, and ones where the visitors acted without remorse. A situation like this was outlined in an NBC article in March of 2021. After watching the ways in which Americans had invaded the island, Puerto Rican native Israel Meléndez Ayala told NBC that, “[The tourists] were behaving as if no one else existed in Old San Juan... We're still living in the middle of a pandemic, and people can't come here and act as if the virus doesn't exist. ... They have a sense of entitlement and apathy I don't understand," (“Chaotic Situation”, Nicole Acevedo). NBC reported that a multitude of viral videos showcased tourists ignoring, “the island’s midnight curfew, mask mandate and physical distancing guidelines... [as well as]

getting into fights, dancing on top of vehicles, and destroying private property” (“Chaotic Situation”, Acevedo).

Here the issue becomes complex. While closing the airport and, by default, its borders to mainland Americans would solve the problem of disorderly conduct by tourists, it would also cause other problems within the cash flow that comes to the island due to tourism. The United States has created a situation that makes it impossible for Puerto Rico to win. Close the airport and lose money, or keep it open and face violence and destruction.

Economically, the problems do not just stop at tourism. Thanks to the island’s long history of mismanagement and “Wall Street vulture funds” (“Beyond the Tax Breaks”, Solá-Santiago), the island was thrown into unpayable debt. In 2016, American Congress passed the PROMESA bill. This law established a financial oversight board and a plan for reconstructing debt on the island. Since then, the board has used this law to- you guessed it- create reconstruction plans that directly benefit the United States.

Act 60, or the Tax Incentive Code, creates a tax sanctuary of sorts for businessmen. The act says that those who relocate to the island for 183 days qualify for tax exemptions. On its surface, once again, it seems like a harmless attempt to benefit the nation’s economic status yet Puerto Ricans are seeing otherwise. Journalist Ana Teresa Toro tells refinery.com that the Act perpetuates the “savior narrative” that Americans had attempted to infuse in all coverage of Puerto Ricans after the Hurricane. While America had done virtually nothing to help Puerto Rico recover, media coverage told the story of an island that could only be saved by the grace of America. Teresa Toro explains moving to the island as follows:

“Of course, it’s easy to move to Puerto Rico right now. You will find a depressed economy, a lot of cheap properties because people have been forced to migrate to the United States... It’s a prime moment for final pillage.” (“Beyond the Tax Breaks”, Toro).

Colonialism on the island once more produced a situation where only outsiders could benefit from the state the island seems to perpetually be in. When rich businessmen and investors relocate to Puerto Rico to flee taxation they directly raise the cost of living and take away land from native Puerto Ricans. Toro makes the claim that the incentives being introduced are all just a “new iteration of colonialism that sets a vision of Puerto Rico without actual Puerto Ricans” (“Beyond the Tax Breaks”, Solá-Santiago). And Toro’s perspective is one shared by many Puerto Ricans.

A direct reflection of the danger the act will pose to the island is the recent move social media influence Logan Paul took to Puerto Rico. During his time on the island, he has disrespected sacred land, refused to follow basic

instructions, and caused damage to public property. He exemplifies the fear Toro had concerning the goal of the incentives, “[they will come to] exploit our resources...[and] do the minimum... it’s an unbalanced pact” (“Beyond the Tax Breaks”, Solá-Santiago). The reality is Paul is just one of the many rich Americans coming to the island to exploit its resources. It’s easy for them to do it because that was the exact purpose of these incentives. It was never to help Puerto Ricans, and it never will be.

The United States is not good for Puerto Rico. Every single aspect of Puerto Rican livelihood has been altered so heavily by American colonialism that it makes it impossible for the island to flourish. Every single benefit is reaped by America. And in knowing this it is no surprise that there are many Puerto Ricans who deeply desire independence.

When I spoke to Angeles and Matt, I had asked them about independence and what that would mean for them. Their responses were far from one-dimensional and reiterates the idea that the issue is multifaceted. Independence to them feels almost impossible. And that is exactly how America structured Puerto Rico to be.

Angeles tells me that to them, “Independence for the island would mean healing... But... [it] would also mean lack of stability... We are so deeply reliant on the U.S. that independence would lead to [the destruction of our economy], and would [be]... impossible for us to jump back,” (Angeles). The United States has created a situation that seems impossible to get out of. And that is scary.

For a country that prides itself on its own independence, its own focus on freedom, the United States does not live any of it. It’s a facade for something more insidious. While America pretends to fight for everyone’s freedom, they oppress and exploit ethnic minorities under our very noses. It needs to stop and Puerto Rican voices need to be heard.

It is time for Americans to hold their own government accountable for their actions. For America to change its control and hold over people who just want freedom. In doing so, perhaps this will never happen to a group of people in this country again. Perhaps we can end suffering before it begins. Perhaps Puerto Rico will see its own independence. Whatever comes from it, Puerto Ricans must be heard for the rest to follow. America needs to know what is happening under their noses, they need to know what they are doing to people who are supposed to be fellow citizens.

Hoping for independence knowing the circumstances may feel premature, but believing there can be change is among the most important steps in fighting for that change. And Puerto Rico is an island of strong people who deserve lives free of colonialism. Marín powerfully puts it as follows:

“We Puerto Ricans are also a heroic people because we resisted Spain for five hundred years, and now we have resisted the United States for a hundred and nineteen years. We are like trees that not even a hurricane has been able to uproot because our roots grow so deeply. Our leaves may be torn off, but they will grow again. These are the fruits of what we have sown.” (Herberto Marín).

Puerto Rico deserves an island free of American intervention.

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♦ ECONOMICS 170

CRIME, CLASS, AND CAPITALISM™

ANTON MENDELSON

THOUGH MARX ADDRESSED CRIME AND CRIMINALITY to a limited degree, as Greenberg mentions in his book, “Crime and Capitalism: Readings in Marxist Criminology”, the nature of Marx’s discipline allows for an expansion of his approach into many other fields. In a preface he wrote for his book “A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy”, Marx argues for the concept of fundamental relations that form a base “on which rises a legal and political superstructure”(Marx, 4). That is, the social relations involved with production — relationships that tend to be fraught with conflict — are projected into a “superstructure” in which laws and politics are formed. These relationships of

The Assignment and the Writer: This essay assignment in Economics 170, *Crime, Class, and Capitalism: the Economics of Justice* asked students to analyze the class dimensions of mass incarceration in the U.S. In his essay, Anton skillfully applies Marxian social theory to argue that criminal law, policing, and incarceration cannot be fully understood if removed from the context of capitalist class conflict. His analysis ranges from the class content of the selective criminalization of behaviors across the class structure to the protection from criminal justice systems that wealth can afford, and he posits original frameworks for typologizing different forms of theft according to their class content. It is a brilliant contribution to the tradition of Marxian criminology.

– Professor Eric Seligman

production exist between two general social groups defined by their ownership: the working-class proletariat, who owns only his labour, and the bourgeois class of owners, who command the means of production — the tools, land, and resources necessary for the creation of goods. Marx argues that, in order for profit to exist, one input in the production process must be undervalued — the labour. Thus, inevitably the two groups stand in opposition of each other. I wish to posit in this essay that the U.S. Justice System exists within the context of class conflict which inform laws and shapes how and for whom policing works.

Law is often treated as amoral, rational structures on which a civil society exists, and while that is true to the extent that they identify and punish major social harms, there is plenty of room for the influence of class bias. To return to the Marxist method of social analysis, we can look at many modern laws in the terms of class conflict. Laws further class interest by allowing for certain social harms committed predominantly by the upper class to go relatively unpunished. As Greenberg mentions, the definition of social harm is “based on the conceptions... held by those who have the power to make the law, and consequently tend to exclude from scrutiny harms caused by the actions of the upper class.” (Greenberg, 5). Though it is difficult to evaluate the social harm of a crime, the fact remains that, while the vast majority of incarcerations are for violent crimes committed by low-income earners, crimes committed by the upper class incur great, and often unreciprocated, social harm (Usmani; Sawyer and Wagner). One of the greatest examples of the wealthy leveraging their political power was during the financial crisis in 2007-8. Bailouts protected many major institutions from financial repercussions, while most executives avoided any sentencing. Though, what these people did was legal, the fact remains that the consequences of their actions destroyed the lives of millions of people. In light of this reality, it begs the question whether “crime prevention [is] a socially neutral function and that questions of policy [are] no more than issues of technical, administrative expertise. Thus Smith and Fried (1974:140) observe, ‘Nevertheless, their *incarceration* is political since it is the end-product of decisions to treat some social harms as deserving of penal sanctions and others as not-with little regard to the actual extent of social damage.’” (Greenberg, 8).

Even within the most basic structures of the law there are certain designs that allow for the wealthy to shrug off punishment. A fine for a traffic violation levied against a person living paycheck to paycheck could be life altering. It could mean missing rent, being evicted, not taking your child to the doctor — not so for a rich person. On minimum wage, a ticket could amount to over two days of labour time. For someone with more means, it could be the sum of a few minutes of labour time. While fines and tickets are generally distributed evenly across crimes committed throughout the spectrum of wealth,

their nature as a set tax on socially harmful behavior disproportionately affects the life of the lowest strata.

Modern taxation acts as another avenue for the wealthy to avoid the criminal justice system — even more obviously and impactful than traffic violations. Tax loopholes, minimal taxes on capital gains, and off shore accounts, among others, allow the wealthy and corporations to avoid enormous sums they should owe to society. To dismiss the billions lost to the public in taxes due, is to dismiss social harm that, while not necessarily equal to, say, the social harm of murder, does impact the lives of many. Under new legal definitions, I find it very believable that tax loopholes could be viewed as theft of public property, and even more severe crimes considering that that money could be used for healthcare or social services, and the loss of it could cost lives.

The trap of the Justice System's socially reproductive nature, another aspect which disproportionately affects the poorest people, not only impedes the lives of those who have already been incarcerated, but their families on the outside as well. Multiple aspects of one's incarceration could lead to further expansion of the Justice System, starting with the incarceration itself. Since the majority of incarcerated are men, many families lose their bread winner (Usmani). Once inside, while it doesn't represent a huge portion of the economy, costs are imposed for daily necessities. The commissary system imposes costs for food, hygiene products, and even the bare minimum of entertainment (Raheer). Prisoners are charged for phone calls, emails, and high costs are set for money transfers from their families. Once outside, employment prospects for ex-cons are very thin — many end up homeless. The Justice System excludes the poorest people from improving in their socio-economic situation, leaving them and their families desperate, and more likely to continue with criminal behavior (Usmani).

To attempt to extract or isolate the Justice System from the greater economic factors that surround it would be in error. The influence of the owner class on what is criminal behavior and how it should be policed, the equilibrium perpetuating the creation of situations that push people into criminal lifestyles, created by economic burdens put on people even tangentially involved with the Justice System, proves to be of great importance. Marx's theory of the base-superstructure relationship seems, considering what I have discussed earlier in this essay, to prove true. As the power balance in the relations of production is skewed in favor of the bourgeoisie, the superstructure, the laws and regulations reflect their interests, allowing leniency for acts that cause, potentially, extraordinary social harm. I am under no illusion that dismantling an institution so entrenched within both politics and society will be possible, however, in order to begin to make real change, we need to zoom out. We need to begin to analyze it, see it as a product, and

reproducer, of the larger social structures at work. The next step in this process would be making laws more sensitive to nuance. To figure out how to apply law more equally as well as more egalitarian. That means, regulating the social harms incurred by the wealthy, as well as focusing on rehabilitation and mercy as opposed to excessive punishment and increased burden.

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♦ SOCIOLOGY 232

THE DAY I BECAME A VICTIM: CONFRONTING RACISM AT THE FOOD COURT

TI'ARA JOSEPH

I

EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT THE FAMOUS LIES that America loves to tell itself: 'This is the land of the free where freedom and equality for all exists! We are a colorblind society where all are welcome!' But it's just like they say, 'If you tell yourself a lie enough, you may start believing it is true.' This is the only possible reason that I can think of why America continues to brag and boast that it is not a racist country when such is very much alive and well. The resistance seems to have gotten a boost in recent times with the BLM movement protests and riots against systemic racism and white supremacy. This paper will examine a personal encounter with acts of racism through using a combination of theoretical perspectives put forth by Michael Omi and Howard Winant in the text, 'Racial Formation in the United States,' as well as Douglas Massey in the text 'Categorically Unequal,' in an attempt to explain why such a reality continues to exist in America.

The Assignment and the Writer: In Sociology 232, Social Stratification, students analyze a personal experience with social inequality in light of theories learned in class. Ti'ara's essay is exemplary for her thoughtful theoretical exegesis and her vivid depiction of the confusion, anguish and frustration of enduring a racially based provocation. Please note that this represents a small sample of Ti'ara's outstanding contribution to this course. Her weekly Discussion Board posts evinced the work of an engaged scholar immersed in the readings and how they might be amplified or critiqued in light of her personal journey. Her pride in her work is one we can now, fittingly, share. — **Professor Robert Garot**

II

According to Omi and Winant, race is a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. Although this concept invokes biologically based human characteristics, selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. The categories employed to differentiate among human groups along racial lines reveal themselves, among serious examination, to be at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary. They raise the question, 'If the concept of race is so nebulous, can we not dispense with it, or do without it at least in the 'enlightened' present?' However, they then state that an affirmative action to such would present obvious practical difficulties as it is rather difficult to jettison widely held beliefs which are central to everyone's identity and understanding of the social world. Further, a deeper difficulty is inherent in the very formation of this schema, in its way of posing race as a problem, a misconception left over from the past, and suitable now only for the dustbin of history.

When one first reads this it may seem a bit confusing; however upon closer attention one comes to the realization that what Omi and Winant are explaining is factual. Although America is convincing itself that it is colorblind, many people simply cannot ignore race as this can be described as the 'central axis' of the US as everything truly revolves around one's race: it determines access to various institutions or avenues for success, how one is treated in society and so forth. Further, race is seen as a problem due to various historical occurrences or processes like slavery, Jim Crow, the existence of the Klu Klux Klan, and white supremacy, among other things, all which were based on race and created the idea that white people are God sent and superior, whereas blacks come from the devil. They are seen as inferior and deserve to be treated as such, which many still abide by today.

Omi and Winant go on to assert that at the micro level, racial projects, which do the ideological 'work' of making the link between structure and representation, also link signification and structure, not so much as efforts to shape policy or define large scale meaning, but as the applications of 'common sense.' In order to see such projects operating at the level of everyday life, we have only to examine the many ways in which we, often unconsciously, notice race. It is without a doubt true that one of the first things that we notice about people when we meet them is their race, and we use such to provide clues about who that person is, due to preconceived notions which we may have about that particular race. This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize as they may be 'mixed,' which becomes uncomfortable and a crisis of racial meaning for a moment. Our ability to interpret racial meanings are based on preconceived

notions of a racialized social structure, such can be seen as for example, during the pandemic, when Asians were discriminated against since former President Trump would have often called the virus a 'Chinese virus.' His followers took his words as gospel and decided to act on such belief. They saw Asians as a threat due to the preconceived notions about such persons which would have been drilled into their heads. As Omi and Winant state, comments like 'funny you don't look black' tend to betray the underlying image of what black should be: loud, 'ghetto', violent/aggressive, since we expect people to act out their apparent racial identities and become disoriented when they do not (this can perhaps help to explain why there have been so many acts of police brutality against black men as the cops expect such men to be very violent and when they are the opposite such officers get 'disoriented' and thus act out what they believe is actually the case). Race therefore becomes 'common sense,' or a way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the social world.

Such, Massey would argue, comes about due to the psychology of social classification. He argues that people use social schemas or conceptual categories to examine themselves and the social roles, groups, and individuals that they encounter through a process known as social cognition. Through this process, individuals divide the world into categories, and are reliant on such categorical judgements under (perceived) conditions of threat or uncertainty. The human brain has two parallel processors which function independently, although they are interconnected: the emotional brain rooted the limbic system, and the rational brain centered in the prefrontal cortex and areas of the neocortex. As the number and speed of connections running from the limbic system to the neocortex are greater than the reverse, emotional memories (typically unconscious), tend to greatly affect how humans make use of the categories which exist in the rational (conscious) part of the brain. Such emotional memories, when associated with specific social classes, can contribute to prejudice. Thus, although some people may be principled racists who consciously believe that African Americans are inferior and thus rationally seek to subordinate them, others may sincerely believe in equal opportunity and racial justice and yet have some unconscious anti-black sentiments and associations that were created through conditioning processes, even though this prejudice may not be consistent with that person's beliefs.

III

I now consider myself to be a walking testimony of both theories. It feels as if this just happened yesterday, because the memory of it constantly replays in my mind as if it is on some never-ending loop. I still get goosebumps and shivers at the very thought of this occurrence, because never in my sixteen (at the time) years of life did I imagine that something like that could have happened to me.

About two summers ago when I had finished high school, my parents thought that it would be best for me to travel to the United States. It was for me to get accustomed to a new life, seeing that I would have been moving there from the Caribbean to live and go to school. The adjustment was not bad initially since I was not a stranger to the 'American way of life' as I visited there at least once every year. Additionally, since I was going to be staying in Brooklyn, the place I am most accustomed to, the shift from the Caribbean life did not seem bad for me because this part of New York is known to be a 'hotspot' for West Indians. It should be noted that I always thought of the US as my happy place because of the type of freeness and relaxation that I felt whenever I visited, as well as because of the 'American dream,' which was sold to me ever since I was a little girl by various television shows, movies and advertisements which made me long for the day that I would be able to live there! However, one day when my family decided to take a trip down to Queens, my entire outlook on the US changed.

Early one summer morning, my parents were giving my brother and I the plan for the day which included a lot of running around, with our final stop being the Green Acres Mall in Queens. The day had been going great thus far, but as we got closer to the mall, it began to look as if we were about to get caught in some heavy rain showers: a storm was coming. Upon arrival we decided we should hit the food court first since we were all starving. The mixture of scents of the various food options made me want to try everything. I was drawn to a booth with Chinese food, and the scent that had been holding my nose and stomach captive was that of freshly fried plantains. Fortunately for me, I was next in line and got the last few pieces, along with some other food items from that fresh batch and I was ready to dive into my meal. Unfortunately for me, however, there was a lady behind me who had also been eyeing those plantains and was therefore not pleased when I got the last bits.

As soon as I gave my order, I began hearing murmurs and feeling a hot set of air on the back of my neck as if the person speaking was intentionally coming up directly behind me. It started with what I had believed were innocent comments such as, "I hope she doesn't take all of those. There better be enough for me!" in a high pitched and innocent sounding, almost childlike voice. This, however, immediately changed into a deep and dark Southern voice, almost sinister, that was filled with anger and rage when my brother (who is tall and dark skinned) and father (who is also tall but 'buff' and a bit lighter than my brother), came to meet me and stood next to me while I waited to pay for my food. Snide comments such as, "These damn niggers! I hate all of them! Why don't they just go back to Africa?" were among the things that I began hearing from the person standing behind me. Only this time, she was no longer speaking in murmurs onto my neck, but had begun raising her voice,

almost as if she had started to yell for attention and support with each comment that was being made.

After hearing these comments, we decided to walk away and ignore the voice so that we could have continued along with our day. Seeing that I was the closest to the person, I decided that I should not turn around to face her before I walked away (even though I wanted to see her), but that I should instead walk in the direction that I was already facing and find a seat there. That was a bad idea. As soon as I began walking away, I felt a sharp pull on my hair, which had been braided, and the next thing I knew was that I was on the cold, hard-tiled ground facing the ceiling, staring into the bright white lights. Before blacking out for a few seconds because of how hard I hit the ground, the sinister voice that I was hearing behind me in the line was now coming from above me and had erupted into laughter because of what she had just done. This was accompanied by a burst of heavy rainfall from outside which hit the roof of the mall with just as much force as I had hit the ground- the storm had arrived.

My brother and father, upon seeing what had happened, rushed to my side to pick me up when the lady started making more snide comments such as, "All you monkey niggers should just leave us in America alone! Go back to your country, you don't belong here! Go pick some cotton!" and even attempted to hit my brother. Although my head had been spinning because of the fall, I jumped up to defend my brother, who was already being shielded by my father, and I wanted to see what the person looked like. To my surprise, she was a small and almost frail- elderly Caucasian woman. I was baffled for a split second when I looked at her because I could not believe that such a sweet-looking elderly woman was capable of such evil. I was snapped back to reality however when she looked at me in my eyes, almost as if she were staring into my soul, and said "Did the monkey hurt itself?" This filled me with rage and sadness because I had never heard such comments in my life before, which caused me to feel hurt, but also upset because of what she had done. A part of me wanted to cry because of all that had just happened, but another part of me wanted to swing back at her. Nonetheless, we again decided to walk away and pay no mind to what was going on, as if we were so successful with that the last time, right?

When I was about to take my first bite of my food, I began wondering to myself, "all of this over some plantains?" when suddenly, something knocked our table hard and caused some of my mother's drink to spill. To no surprise, it was the lady who had come back to torment us some more. She repeated her original set of comments, but on realizing that we all were ignoring her to the point where we decided to get up and move, she decided to turn it up a notch and spat in my father's food- everyone in the food court was staring at this point. Eventually, the security, who had been there the entire

time but was perhaps too appalled to do anything in the beginning (or at least so I hope), rushed in when he saw what she had just done and escorted her out of the food court, and he then apologized to us for everything that she did. Not long after we decided it would just be best to go home and get some rest to forget everything that happened that day- hoping that it would soon become a distant memory.

That night before I went to bed, I laid down and again stared into the bright white light in the ceiling. I began to think about what had happened, and I got angry when I realized that no one around us even tried to jump in and help us. They all just stared at us and spoke among themselves, allowing it all to happen. I told myself that maybe it was because they were all in a state of shock and could not wrap their heads around what was going on, but then I realized that although they were staring at what was going on, most of them were not even looking at the old lady, their eyes were fixed on us. Why? What did we do? Then another shocking reality hit me: the persons who were staring at us did not look like us, they were all Caucasian as well. Did they enjoy what was happening? Did they agree with the lady and her comments? I began crying again because I was confused that such a thing would have happened to us. Was the cause of this really some plantains? Or was it because America is still a very racist country? Are we still in the era of Jim Crow and segregation? Were we not supposed to go to that mall or eat in that food court just because we are black? If so, why wasn't there any sign saying, "whites only"? I thought that America was the land of the free, where all are equal and are welcomed? I felt the total opposite that day. Was she expecting us to lash out at her, that this is the way that 'blacks are supposed to act in America'? Was she trying to get us to lash out at her? I realized right then, at that moment, that no matter how many years have passed since the days of slavery, I will forever be seen as an outsider and an 'alien' and will forever be treated as an outcast simply because of my race.

IV

Based on my experience, various aspects of both Omi and Winant as well as Massey's theories are glaring. As Omi and Winant would have explained, one of the first things that we notice about people when we meet them is their race, and we use such to provide clues about who that person is, due to preconceived notions. Based on this, it can be assumed that the lady who I had such a violent encounter with was very calm with me at first as she perhaps assumed that I was Caucasian or perhaps mixed, just not black, due to the fact that I am light-skinned. This is especially so as a sharp change in her attitude, tone and overall manner was seen only when my dark-skinned brother came and stood with me. On her realizing that I was in fact black and not white and/or mixed, she decided to lash out on me as she perhaps then saw me as

some sort of threat simply because of my race. Such may have been because, due to her appearance in age, she was raised in a time where the groups such as the KKK were prevalent in society and would have terrorized blacks, all while making such persons seem like the enemy and themselves like the saviors of society. Thus she still holds on to the beliefs/ideologies which would have been drilled into her head at that time and she still acts on them or behaves as if we are living in the era of Jim Crow. Hence, she treats black people in a similar manner to how she would have either treated them herself back in those times and/or would have been raised and taught how to treat such persons by her parents and other whites in her community, especially since she spoke in a deep Southern accent, thus suggesting she would have been raised in the hotspot for racism during that era.

Further, as I would have kept my composure without responding to her distasteful comments and continued to go along my way with my brother and father, it can be assumed that this would have angered her more. As Omi and Winant explain, this would have betrayed the underlying image of what a black should be or act like as she would have expected me to act out my apparent racial identities, and when I did not act in the way that she expected (loud, aggressive, violent and so forth) she then became very disoriented and decided to take her racist actions up a notch by, more or less, physically assaulting me by making me fall to the ground. It is in moments like these that I truly agree with persons like Phipps whom Omi and Winant make reference to in their theory. They explain that she wanted to change her race from black to white as she looked more White and identified more with the latter, because I'm sure that if I was just a tad bit lighter such would have never happened to me as she would have seen me as her equal rather than as a threat. There, race to her was 'common sense' or a way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the social world, that blacks are bad and should be treated horribly. As it relates to the other people who were there and did nothing to intervene, it can be said that to them this was perhaps 'common sense' for them as well, maybe not in the sense that because we are black, we therefore deserve to be treated as we were, but more in the sense that because she is a racist white woman, then those sorts of actions and so forth were expected from her.

Moreover, one can perhaps go as far as saying that this 'common sense' of hers came as a result of what Massey describes as the psychology of social classification. Through the process of social cognition, she would have divided the world into categories and would have then become reliant on such categorical judgements under (perceived) conditions of threat or uncertainty. She was perhaps uncertain about my race until my brother appeared which then made me (or us) a threat in her mind, causing her to become reliant on her preconceived ideas and judgements about black people. Such comes about due to the two parallel processors of the human brain, the emotional and rational,

with each playing an important role in shaping the way we think and view others. As explained by Massey and as highlighted above, since the number and speed of connections running from the emotional part of the brain to the rational part are greater than the reverse, emotional memories (typically unconscious), tend to greatly affect how humans make use of the categories which exist in the latter (conscious) part of the brain. When associated with specific social classes, such can contribute to prejudice. Massey explains throughout his theory that such prejudice or anti-black sentiments and associations may have come about or been created through conditioning processes (for example, the repeated visual pairing of violent crimes with black perpetrators on television) which may thus cause such persons to act out on those ideas, sometimes unconsciously. Hence, it can be assumed that even if she was not a conscious racist, she would have been unconsciously conditioned to think and act like one again due to her age which suggests that she grew up during the era of Jim Crow, and which also suggests that for either all or most of her life, she would have seen black people get vilified on the news and be portrayed as nothing but criminals who want to harm whites in every way that they can; and such is brought into play/to life due to the way in which the human brain works. Hence, it can be said that her calling me a 'monkey' and other such comments as well as becoming very violent with myself and my family may just have been her subconscious speaking up and/or her emotional brain telling her that this is what she needs to do as she is under attack. With regard to the bystanders, it can also be said that their emotional brain perhaps prevented them from intervening maybe because they too had unconscious prejudiced views about us (blacks) and thus part of them agreed with what she was doing, or because such emotions simply clouded their judgements and thoughts as they may have had prejudiced views about the woman, which left them confused or unsure about what they may be able to do to help us.

V

In conclusion, while I do believe that such theories do a good job at explaining my experience, as I was shocked by how well they went together, I am of the belief that it is still a bit inadequate in the sense that I somewhat view them as an excuse for racism and inequality, although I know that they are not such. This is because they simply attempt to explain what causes racism and/or people to act on such racist or unequal beliefs about others, but they do not explain what one may be able to do when they encounter such situations and they also do not point out the fact that persons may go so far as to act on such deeply held beliefs which they have about 'others' in possibly violent ways, as was my experience. So, although yes, they suggest that one should expect to encounter acts of racism or come into contact with racists here and there, as such is more or less the basis of the American society, it does not prepare one

for how serious and heated such encounters may be: what I would call the different 'levels of racism' and/or 'types of racists' that one may encounter. I would like to learn more about what one should do during such an encounter, as the authors do not offer real solutions to combat racism (rather they more or less simply state that as such is deeply rooted in history, and it is difficult to get rid of/remove from the minds of many). I, like the theorists, am simply using the word racism (and social inequality) in its broad sense and through that I may perhaps be missing out on key factors on why certain 'types' of racists act the way that they do as well as what may be the triggers for such, because there are people who are racist but may never show such in public. There are those who would simply stick to making slight, covert racist comments, and then there are others who act on their beliefs very violently. Such persons are not all the same and there may be several reasons for such, which these theories are missing out on fully explaining as they simply scratch the surface of this issue (perhaps because gathering information from conducting research on this topic may not be as easy as it seems, even in such as racist country as America).

To gather further data in order to test this theory, I may perhaps conduct field research whereby I, along with some of my dark-skinned friends, go to live in the most racist part of the country for a few months and simply observe and record the way in which we are treated. I would get a Caucasian friend to come with me as well, perhaps undercover so those living in the area do not suspect that they are with us, and get them to conduct interviews and so forth with the members of the community and find out their views on us, and the reason why they hate blacks so much as well as what can be done to change their view on such persons, among other things. This can perhaps help in categorizing such persons into different groups and levels of racism, as I am sure that they each would not have the same explanations or beliefs, and some may be far more hateful than others. For future research, I suggest that similar approaches be undertaken so that racism can be explained in depth. Go to the root of the matter rather than simply sticking to the surface level of such an issue.

♦ POLITICAL SCIENCE 235

***JOANNA BIELAWSKI V.
CITY OF CLEVELAND, ET AL***
COURT OBSERVATION

SHRISTI THAPA

Joanna Bielawski v. City of Cleveland, et al
Carl B. Stokes U.S. Courthouse, Cleveland, Ohio
Civil Jury Trial
Judge Donald C. Nugent, presiding
Plaintiff's Lead Attorney: Kenneth D. Myers
Defendant's Lead Attorney: John Bacevice
August 6-12, 2012

PRELIMINARY INSTRUCTIONS BY JUDGE NUGENT TO THE JURY

JUDGE NUGENT WELCOMED everyone to the court and asked the jurors to keep an open mind. He explained that it was important to understand that the lawyer's arguments were not evidence. He further explained that what the lawyers said would help them understand the testimony of the witnesses.

The Assignment and the Writer: In Political Science 235, Judicial Processes and Politics, students write a cogent summary and analysis of what they see watching a videotaped jury trial available in an online database of the federal courts. In their observations, students also make meaningful connections to relevant course readings and discussions. Ms. Thapa chose to follow a "reverse discrimination" case brought by a white plaintiff against her Black supervisor at a Cleveland, Ohio, airport. Ms. Thapa's paper (a condensed version of which is presented here) is comprehensive, detailed, and nuanced, offering a careful journalist's keen report about the litigation. Plus, her linkages to course materials are abundant and on target.

– Professor Daniel Pinello

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE PLAINTIFF, GIVEN BY MR. MYERS

Mr. Myers clarified to the jury that what he said was not evidence but an overview of the case.

Joanna Bielawski was a program safety manager at Cleveland Hopkins Airport hired in 2007. Her job was to make sure that people stayed safe on the job. Before her, the position was vacant for about a year and a half. The federal regulations mandate that people at Airports have to have safety training. But, before Ms. Bielawski was hired, it was not being done.

The Airport administration was run by Ricky Smith, an African American man, who was the Director of the Division of the Department of Port Control for the City of Cleveland. He had worked there since 2006. When Ms. Bielawski was first hired, she worked at the department of the Airport that did operations, headed by Fred Szabo, a Caucasian man. Under Mr. Szabo was Eric Williams, an African American man, who was the direct supervisor of Ms. Bielawski.

For about two years after Ms. Bielawski got hired, everything was good at the workplace. She had a very good performance review after her first year of building programs. Then, in March 2010, she was hired to do safety training for the Airport.

Suddenly, Ms. Bielawski was transferred from the direct supervision of Mr. Szabo and Mr. Williams to the Airport administration side. She was then placed under the supervision of Jeanette Saunders-Willis, an African American woman. Ms. Saunders was the acting head of the administration department and was eventually made the full-time head of the department.

Ms. Bielawski's transfer to administration from operations added to her workload. Along with safety management, she now had to work for risk management.

Ms. Bielawski's office was out on the Airport grounds, where the fire office was also located. So she had a lot of interactions with the firefighters working at the Airport.

Mr. Myers told the jury that the evidence would show that many people at the Airport, for racial or non-racial reasons, had a problem with Ms. Saunders' supervision. In addition, Ms. Bielawski, whose performance review had been very good when she worked under Mr. Szabo and Mr. Williams, suddenly could not perform well.

Ms. Bielawski was the only white manager in the administration department. At the first weekly managers' meeting under Ms. Saunders, everyone sat around the conference table, leaving no room for Ms. Bielawski. She had to sit on the side. During several events that occurred during a year and a half, Ms. Bielawski felt excluded and discriminated against. One of such events was how Ms. Saunders ran her day-to-day business.

Mr. Myers informed the jury that the evidence would show that many people under Ms. Saunders' supervision were upset with her and filed complaints against her. Accordingly, whenever a white manager would leave the job, the position was filled by black people who were not as qualified as the people who left. In the case of Ms. Bielawski, she was replaced by someone who did not even meet the minimum qualifications for the job.

In the weekly meetings, which included Ms. Bielawski, about five other managers, and Ms. Saunders, who headed the meeting, Ms. Saunders used racial epithets like the "N" word and urban vernacular. Additionally, she talked about personal business and movies she had watched at the meetings. Thus, race became a predominant topic in the weekly meetings. Naturally, this course of events made Ms. Bielawski uncomfortable.

In June 2011, the Airport administration decided to move Ms. Bielawski's office from the Airport grounds to the Airport's second floor, where the administrative offices were located. Her new office was right down the hall from Ms. Saunders' office. Ms. Bielawski talked to her former boss, Mr. Szabo, about the exclusion, abuse, ranting, and raving that she faced. Mr. Szabo informed her that it was not his chain of command and that she should go through the appropriate chain of command. But in this case, she had a problem with the chain of command itself.

In July 2011, Ms. Bielawski submitted her letter of resignation. In the exit interview, one of her required questions was her reason for leaving the job. She stated that her reason for leaving the job was Ms. Saunders and her inappropriate racial comments during professional meetings. Ms. Bielawski further answered that Ms. Saunders was not qualified to run the department. She added that Ms. Saunders did not release the funds required for her to run the safety programs. She submitted the answers to Mr. Szabo, who was still chief.

After a week, Ms. Bielawski reconsidered her resignation because she realized it was a good job until she was put under Ms. Saunders' supervision. So, she emailed Mr. Smith suggesting she be transferred back under the supervision of Mr. Szabo. Mr. Smith did not reply to her email. So she wrote letters to Mr. Smith and Mayor Jackson. When she got no response, she hired an attorney to write a letter for her. Eventually, she went under a civil process to become reinstated to an eligibility list. The civil service commission allowed Ms. Bielawski to put her name on the list. Regardless, the employers were not obligated to pick someone from the eligibility list. As a result, she never got her job back.

When Ms. Bielawski was hired, the minimum qualification of the job was a four-year degree in occupational safety or a related field. Ed McDonald, an African American man, hired to replace Ms. Bielawski, had a marine background. He had done some public safety work but had no education or

training in occupational safety. When Ms. McDonald was hired, the qualification was changed to a four-year degree in occupational safety or business administration. In case the qualifications were not met, three years of business experience could be a substitute. Mr. McDonald did not have a college degree at the time. He was in the process of getting one within a few years.

Mr. Myers told the jury that Ms. Bielawski claimed that she was forced out of her job, also called constructive discharge, due to a hostile work environment. The plaintiff also claimed retaliation since she was not hired due to her exit interview answer of racial allegations against Ms. Saunders. Mr. Myers asked the jury to keep an open mind and hold him to his burden of proof.

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DEFENDANTS, GIVEN BY MR. BACEVICE

Mr. Bacevice greeted the jury and stated that he represented the City of Cleveland, Director Smith, and Ms. Saunders.

Mr. Bacevice started by stating that the charges from Mr. Bielawski were baseless. The federal spending and civil service issues that Mr. Myers talked about were completely irrelevant to the case. He further explained that the only thing that mattered was race. He informed the jury that the evidence would show that Ms. Bielawski's interpretation of the events was misguided and malicious.

Mr. Bacevice continued that Mr. Myers' claim that only African American managers were in the weekly meetings under Ms. Saunders was false. The meeting had a Hispanic manager and also a white employee named Diane Stevens. Ms. Stevens reported directly to Ms. Saunders. There were plenty of seats at the conference room table, but Ms. Bielawski chose to sit away from everyone. Thus, the first meeting was the beginning of Ms. Bielawski's pattern of disengagement and disinterest in her job.

Ms. Bielawski was particularly good at occupational safety, but she struggled with work comp and risk management, but not to the point where the Airport administration considered her termination. The resignation letter dated June 27 was written on either July 14 or 15th. Ms. Bielawski did not give her two-week notice before her resignation.

Mr. Bacevice continued that the alleged use of the "N" word, the use of urban vernacular, and other such allegations of racism were, in fact, offensive to African Americans. He informed the jury that they would hear testimonies from witnesses who worked under Mr. Saunders and Mr. Smith and how they were as supervisors. Ms. Bielawski left the job unprofessionally, without a two-week notice. She also made sure that she had a safety net before she left. She left the Airport job on the 15th and started another job on Monday the 18th.

Mr. Bacevice asked the jurors to keep an open mind and listen to what everybody had to say. Then he asked the jury to return a verdict in favor of the defendants.

TESTIMONY BY THE PLAINTIFF:

JOANNA BIELAWSKI; DIRECT EXAMINATION BY MR. MYERS

Ms. Bielawski graduated from Cleveland State University with a Bachelor of Science in Geology, attending night classes. She worked at McDonald's investments during the daytime. She later applied for a job at Case Western Reserve University and worked there for seven years.

Ms. Bielawski applied for a job opening for Safety Programs Manager at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. During her interview led by Mr. Szabo, she was told that the Human Resource Department handled workers' compensation.

However, after Ms. Bielawski started her job, workers' compensation came under her responsibility. She had to report the injuries to the City Hall Office and follow up with the injured worker and their manager.

Risk management was never a part of Ms. Bielawski's job until M. Saunders took over Operations. The Department of Port Control did not have someone handling risk management. During her interview, Ms. Bielawski was not told to handle risk management.

Ms. Bielawski's first year at the office was mostly workers' compensation. She prepared reports of injured employees and investigated fraudulent claims.

Ms. Bielawski's first supervisors were Mr. Szabo and Mr. Williams. Her office was located on the postal road. All the other administrative offices were located on the terminal's second floor, including Mr. Szabo and Mr. Williams.

Regarding safety, Ms. Bielawski reviewed personal protective equipment around the central receiving area at the Airport, among other jobs like building maintenance. A part of her job also included being a liaison with federal agencies like USDA and NASA.

Ms. Bielawski got along with Mr. Szabo and Mr. Williams very well. She met with Mr. Szabo every Thursday for weekly managers' meetings. Similarly, she met with Mr. Williams weekly in the managers' meetings and quarterly for performance appraisals.

Ms. Corchado wanted Ms. Bielawski to handle all of the workers' compensation, but Ms. Bielawski did not want that. Therefore, Ms. Bielawski solved the issue of work division with Ms. Corchado. Ms. Bielawski complained about the condition of the safety programs with Mr. Smith. She had no issues with Mr. Szabo and Mr. Williams.

The Department of Port control was not compliant with the Ohio Administrative Code and the National Fire Protection Association. However, Ms. Bielawski did her best to accomplish the compliance after she started her job. When Ms. Bielawski was hired, she did not have an assistant. So she requested one.

In early 2010, Mr. Szabo notified Ms. Bielawski that she was being transferred under the supervision of Ms. Saunders. However, Ms. Bielawski had noticed Ms. Saunders' poor treatment and did not want to be transferred under her. Ms. Bielawski felt protected under Mr. Szabo and Mr. Williams and feared she would be terminated under Ms. Saunders.

Ms. Bielawski started working under the supervision of Ms. Saunders at the beginning of April of 2010. Unfortunately, Ms. Bielawski was not informed that her office location would be changed. Initially, Ms. Saunders forbade Ms. Bielawski from attending Mr. Szabo's weekly meetings, but after a year, Ms. Saunders allowed her to do so.

At the first meeting, Ms. Saunders did not invite her to sit at the conference table or welcome her. Comparatively, Mr. Szabo's meetings were professional and followed an agenda whereas, Ms. Saunders' meetings included personal discussion and the use of foul language.

In Ms. Saunders' weekly meetings, Ms. Bielawski was the only white manager apart from Ms. Stevens, who was Ms. Saunders' executive assistant.

Additionally, words like "bitching" and "pissed" were used multiple times in the weekly meetings by Ms. Saunders. Ms. Saunders used the "N" word while she explained the term "picnic." Ms. Bielawski was offended by the use of such words in a professional setting. No other managers that attended the meetings used foul language apart from Ms. Saunders.

Ms. Bielawski did not hear Ms. Saunders use phrases like "baby mama" and "baby daddy" directly. She did, however, hear Ms. Saunders use phrases like "we be doing," "I be checking," and such. No other managers except Ms. Saunders use such language. It made Ms. Bielawski feel excluded since she could not understand the language used by Ms. Saunders while other people did. There was a communication barrier.

Ms. Bielawski felt like she was not being treated the same way as other managers by Ms. Saunders. For instance, in a performance management meeting, when managers had to give a presentation, if Mr. Smith had questions on the manager's presentations, Ms. Saunders would help the other managers but not Ms. Bielawski.

The topics of discussion during the meeting were racially oriented. For instance, Ms. Saunders talked about "fish and grits" and "greens" that Ms. Bielawski felt were prone to the African American community. Additionally, Ms. Saunders mentioned in a meeting that the movie *The Lion King* was "a black man's yearning to be free." That made Ms. Bielawski feel excluded.

Ms. Saunders singled out Ms. Bielawski to do busy work like a safety programs presentation that no other manager had to do. Ms. Saunders did not approach Ms. Bielawski with an email or verbal confirmation to perform risk management duties.

The racial tension and hostility caused eczema on Ms. Bielawski's hands resulting in her inability to sleep properly. Finally, she talked about her situation with Ms. Corchado on Human Resources. Ms. Corchado advised Ms. Bielawski to file an official complaint with Human Resources, but Ms. Bielawski felt that she would be retaliated.

Mr. Bielawski talked to Mr. Szabo about her situation with Ms. Saunders. He advised her to go around the obstacle. Ms. Bielawski thought about getting help before quitting the job, but she did not want to continue to be Ms. Saunders' target.

Ms. Bielawski was not informed directly about the change of location of her office. She found out through a company presentation. Ms. Bielawski could not be in close proximity to Ms. Saunders because of the tension.

Ms. Bielawski wrote a letter to Mr. Szabo instead of Mr. Smith or Ms. Saunders because she felt more comfortable with Mr. Szabo. Ms. Bielawski made allegations against Ms. Saunders in the letter so that the City Hall would know of this and start an investigation.

Ms. Bielawski never wanted to leave the job in the first place, so she sent an email to Mr. Smith showing an interest to be rehired. In a meeting, when Ms. Bielawski mentioned that it was the last day, they did not want her to leave.

Ms. Bielawski contacted Mr. Szabo to be rehired after quitting. She also contacted Mr. Smith and the mayor's office but got no response. Finally, Mr. Szabo expressed that he wanted Ms. Bielawski back, but she had to go through Mr. Smith.

In the process, Ms. Bielawski went to Civil Service to be reinstated. As a result, Ms. Bielawski was reinstated but did not get her job back.

When Ms. Bielawski quit her job at the Airport, she had a job previously offered to her lined up at the VA medical center as a health physicist. However, she did not know that the position was still available to her. The job was good but not Ms. Bielawski's career focus. As a result, she stayed at the job for only a year with less salary.

Following that, she found an opening in Westlake at Energizer Holding Company as a safety health environmental coordinator. The job was closer to her home but paid less than the City of Cleveland job. She worked there for thirty-seven months and was terminated because the company let go one-third of its workforce.

After that, she was employed by Vitamix Corporation, whose salary was less than the City of Cleveland. However, the Airport job, before being transferred under Ms. Saunders, she had was more satisfying.

Ms. Bielawski sent an email to Mr. Smith asking Safety management be put back under operations. He replied to her, saying he would consider it. There were no follow-up emails on the issue after that by Mr. Smith.

Ms. Bielawski claimed that her budget for Safety programs was increased for an additional employee. They were created under Mr. Williams, except for one. She could write checks, but either Mr. Williams or Ms. Saunders would have to sign them.

After Ms. Bielawski resigned, she sent a follow-up email to Mr. Smith expressing her interest in being rehired, to which Mr. Smith never responded. She also sent a letter to Mayor Jackson, but she did not hear back from the mayor's office.

Ms. Bielawski brought the lawsuit against the City of Cleveland because of the racial injustice, harassment, and hostile work environment during her time at the Department of Port Control.

SUMMARY OF THE DEFENDANT'S ARGUMENTS AND THE LAWS THAT APPLIED TO THE CASE BY MR. BACEVICE

Four claims were made against the defendants: reverse discrimination, hostile work environment, constructive discharge, and retaliation. The first three were inextricably intertwined. To show retaliation, the plaintiff must show that she engaged in activity protected by Title Seven. Ms. Bielawski testified that there was no adverse action, such as suspension or being disciplined, taken against her. Mr. Bacevice asked the jury to rule in favor of the defendants regarding the retaliation claim.

To claim a hostile work environment, the plaintiff must show that they were a member of the protected class, were subjected to unwelcomed racial harassment, or harassment was based on race, and the harassment had the effect of unreasonable interference with their work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. Title Seven was not a general civility code for the American workplace, and personal conflict did not equate with discriminatory animus.

Plaintiff was able to take the time to find other jobs, so she was not compelled to leave immediately. Instead, she waited until she had another position. However, five days later, she wanted to get the job back. The plaintiff described only one incident where she heard Ms. Saunders use the "N" word, the "picnic" incident. That incident, alone, was not enough to create a hostile work environment, nor was it enough to create a constructive discharge.

There also was no intent to force the plaintiff to quit her job. The defendant Ms. Saunders testified that she wanted Ms. Bielawski to succeed

prior to her resignation. The City of Cleveland did not have any sort of policy or broad pervasive reverse racism. Director Smith did not know of the alleged hostile behavior or the alleged environment that led to the supposed constructive discharge. As far as Ms. Saunders' behavior, one incident was not enough to create a hostile work environment. Therefore, Mr. Bacevice asked the jury, under rule 50, that the defendants be granted judgment in their favor on all accounts.

SUMMARY OF THE PLAINTIFF'S ARGUMENTS AND THE LAWS THAT APPLIED TO THE CASE BY MR. MYERS

The protected activity was Ms. Bielawski's allegations on Ms. Saunders in her exit interview. The retaliatory act was Mr. Smith's decision not to rehire Ms. Bielawski upon knowing of the allegations on the exit interview.

In addition, there were ample testimonies by Ms. Bielawski and other employees that there was the constant use of slang, urban vernacular, and the "N" word. Ms. Bielawski was treated harshly by Ms. Saunders, which Ms. Brown and Ms. Corchado confirmed.

The explanation of the term "picnic" using the "N" word made Ms. Bielawski feel as though she was being pegged as White. The Lion King remark should not have been made in a professional setting.

Mr. Szabo notified Mr. Smith of the problems Ms. Bielawski was having with Ms. Saunders. However, Mr. Smith did not take action about it. In addition, Mr. Smith also hired African American employees to replace the Caucasian employees who either retired or resigned.

TESTIMONY OF THE DEFENDANT: RICKY SMITH; DIRECT EXAMINATION BY MR. BACEVICE

In a performance evaluation of Ms. Bielawski in 2008, her supervisor stated that she had to be more open-minded.

The Cleveland Hopkins International Airport employed 400 people. Well over 50% of the employees were Caucasians. Mr. Smith started working at the Department of Port Control in 2006. One of his priorities was to change the organizational culture of the Airport.

Mr. Smith also made changes to the organizational structure. At the time he started, everything had to be channeled through the Chief of Staff. To make the work environment efficient, Mr. Smith created eight additional divisions. With each division, the intent was to have expert managers in that particular area. The additional divisions allowed Mr. Smith to hire competent employees.

The safety and risk manager was responsible for the welfare of the workforce. The primary focus of the manager was to promote good safety behavior and to keep them safe. It also included a function of workers' compensation. Before Mr. Smith started working at Hopkins, the Occupational Safety manager reported to the Human Resource Department.

On more than one occasion, Ms. Bielawski talked to Mr. Smith in an informal manner about her concerns about the lack of support from Deputy Commissioner Eric Williams. As a result, Mr. Smith came up with a strategy to help Ms. Bielawski during her presentation.

The 2010 reduction in Ms. Bielawski's budget was due to the Airport's revenues trending behind projections. As a result, Mr. Smith instructed all the managers to develop a revised budget plan for their divisions.

In the same year, Mr. Smith transferred the Safety Programs manager position from CLE to Administration Performance Management (APM). Mr. Szabo had an opinion on the transfer and did not want Safety to be transferred from under Operations. Nevertheless, Mr. Smith transferred Safety Programs from under Operations to Administration Performance management.

Ms. Bielawski was good at certain parts of the job, but she was unwilling to embrace all of her job duties. She constantly had to be reminded that workers' compensation was a part of her job, and she had to handle it. When Ms. Bielawski was under APM, she did not officially complain to Mr. Smith about the racially hostile environment in the meetings.

The employee offices were moved to keep them in close proximity to their managers. Similarly, Ms. Bielawski's office was moved in close proximity to Ms. Saunders for better communication. Mr. McDonald, who replaced Ms. Bielawski after her resignation, was stationed at the same office in the suite of APM.

Ms. Bielawski's resignation was dated June 27, 2011. However, Mr. Smith saw the letter a couple of weeks after the letter was dated on the last day of Ms. Bielawski's job at the Airport. The resignation was surprising to Mr. Smith for multiple reasons. One, it was written to Mr. Szabo when Ms. Saunders was her supervisor. Second, the fact that she was resigning was a surprise too.

Mr. Smith was also surprised by Ms. Bielawski's exit interview and her allegations against Ms. Saunders as creating a hostile work environment by using slang and racial slurs.

Mr. Smith had never seen Ms. Saunders treat a Caucasian employee unfairly based on her race.

Mr. Smith had never heard Ms. Saunders use the "N" word or any foul words. He found it offensive that someone would attribute "fish and grits" and "greens" to African Americans and consider it to create a hostile working environment.

Mr. Smith did not see logical reasoning behind considering “urban vernacular” to be offensive. Instead, he considered it to be light-hearted and less robotic.

There were several employees that Mr. Smith hired who were Caucasians. For instance, Robert Fischetto, Jill Kalamante, Andreas Custos, Christine Gil-Marten, Jennifer Johnson, Paul Harris, Melissa Brkich, Hugh Holland, Shannon Bernhardt, Matthew Crawley, Sharon Muir, Bill Mullins, and Richard Pancam.

CONTINUED DIRECT EXAMINATION OF MR. SMITH BY MR. BACEVICE

Mr. Bacevice continued listing Caucasian employees hired by Mr. Smith like Diane Cardona, John Hoose, and Jean Simmons. All of the names that Mr. Bacevice listed were management and supervisory positions. The Airport had a diverse workforce and management team.

The photograph of Ms. Saunders’ weekly managers’ meeting room displayed that it could comfortably fit ten people at once.

TESTIMONY OF THE DEFENDANT:

JEANETTE SAUNDERS; DIRECT EXAMINATION BY MR. BACEVICE

On Ms. Saunders’ first weekly managers’ meeting, possibly six people attended. Exhibit H, a photograph of the conference room, showed eight chairs around the table. However, Ms. Bielawski sat up against the window at the back. Ms. Saunders invited Ms. Bielawski to the table, but she did not join the table.

At that meeting, Ms. Bielawski was on her phone and not engaged. A couple of times, she walked out of the meeting to take calls. The disengaged behavior was fairly common for Ms. Bielawski at Ms. Saunders’ meetings.

Ms. Saunders explained to Ms. Stevens why “picnic” was considered derogatory but did not use the “N” word. The explanation was not directed at Ms. Bielawski.

Ms. Saunders had not watched the movie *The Lion King* and denied making a racial comment about it.

Ms. Saunders, through an investigation, found out that Ms. Willis, an African American woman, called Jennifer Johnson, a Caucasian woman, “little white girl.” In addition, Ms. Willis made Ms. Johnson do her son’s homework. When Ms. Saunders heard of this, she held a pre-disciplinary hearing against Ms. Willis. Following that, an investigation was launched by Cedric Jones. Ms. Willis resigned from the organization the day she was supposed to be suspended.

CONTINUED DIRECT EXAMINATION OF MS. SAUNDERS BY MR. BACEVICE

Ms. Saunders testified that she only cared about performance in her department and not her employee's race. Her nomination of employees for awards was purely based on performance. Regardless of her employees' race, she continued to work together with all of them to balance their work and personal lives wherever necessary.

The emails sent out by Ms. Saunders to Ms. Bielawski and other managers were respectful and professionally written. Ms. Saunders praised Ms. Bielawski through her emails whenever she deserved it.

CLOSING STATEMENT BY PLAINTIFF, GIVEN BY MR. MYERS

Mr. Myers told the jury that the closing statement was not evidence. He reasserted that Hopkins Airport had an atmosphere that was not inclusive. Mr. Smith created an environment where it was okay to in meetings to talk about race and use phrases like "I be" and "we be."

Mr. Myers questioned the discussion of award ceremonies and dinners for minority groups during meetings. He also questioned the use of words like "sister" and discussion of soul foods like "fish and grits." He asserted that the use of such language created a hostile work environment.

Ms. Bielawski told her colleagues about her discomfort as the only white manager in the room. Ms. Stevens and Ms. Jimenez, who still worked for Ms. Saunders, denied claims of the racially hostile environment during the weekly meetings or otherwise.

Ms. Saunders admitted that she used the "N" word in her deposition but denied it during her testimony. Ms. Bielawski was uncomfortable during Ms. Saunders' meetings because she was pegged as the white girl and was made to feel excluded.

Ms. Bielawski let Mr. Szabo know that she did not want to be transferred under Ms. Saunders. She was performing her job very well until she got transferred from under Mr. Szabo.

From the very first meeting under Ms. Saunders, Ms. Bielawski felt uncomfortable and intimidated. Ms. Bielawski put up with Ms. Saunders' hostile behavior for eighty meetings. She was given a hard time. It got worse when the management wanted to move Ms. Bielawski's office to be close to Ms. Saunders' office. Ms. Bielawski resigned after that.

Mr. Smith replaced Ms. Bielawski with Mr. McDonald, an African American man whose background was in corrections and who had no college degree.

CLOSING STATEMENT BY DEFENDANTS GIVEN BY MR. BACEVICE

Mr. Bacevice reasserted that the case was about the racial relationship between Ms. Saunders and Ms. Bielawski. Mr. Bacevice claimed that race was in no way a factor in their relationship.

Ms. Bielawski testified that she had interacted with Ms. Saunders a couple of times, and she did not feel comfortable with her. Mr. Bacevice differentiated between race and racism to the jury. Racism must not be tolerated, whereas appropriate general talks about race were encouraged.

Regardless of Ms. Saunders' use of the "N" word, one instance would not suffice to meet the standard to create a hostile work environment. Ms. Bielawski also claimed to be offended by the discussion of soul food like "fish and grits" and "greens."

Mr. Bacevice reminded the jury that they were ordinary, reasonable people. He asked them if the use of phrases like "I be," "we be," "baby mama," and "baby daddy" was offensive and could be classified as racist.

Ms. Bielawski had a job lined up before resigning. The work environment was not hostile, and she had to work immediately. She had the time to look for another job and resign when it was convenient for her. However, five days later, she wanted the job back.

Mr. Bacevice questioned the plaintiff's claim of the interpretation of *The Lion King* as "a black man's yearning to be free" to be offensive.

COMMENTARY ON THE TRIAL OBSERVATION AND LINKS TO COURSE MATERIALS

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits racial discrimination, among others, in the workplace. The *Joanna Bielawski v. City of Cleveland* trial was an example of a Title VII lawsuit. On pages 17-21 of Chapter 1 ("Foundations of Law in the United States"), *Judicial Process in America* says that although the United States of America is not the most litigious nation in the world, the statistics are comparable to the most litigious nations. Ms. Bielawski's interpretation of an uncomfortable situation at work to be "reverse racism" and hence sue the City of Cleveland along with her supervisors could be the reason why the number of lawsuits in America is high.

On pages 349 and 350 of Chapter 11 ("The Civil Court Process"), *Judicial Process in America* talks about the opening statements presented by the attorneys of the case and its importance in outlining the case for the jurors. In my opinion, Mr. Myers' opening statement for the plaintiff beat around the bush by giving information about federal spending and civil services to the jury when the issue of the case was racial discrimination. Furthermore, the plaintiff's arguments included her supervisor not releasing funds at her

disposal, which, again, to me seems more like a personal matter and not a reason to sue the supervisor.

In contrast, Mr. Bacevice's opening statement to the court properly outlined the case to the jury. He brought the jury's attention to the central issue of the case, which was racial discrimination. In addition, he also stated the fact that the plaintiff had another job lined up before leaving her job at the Hopkins Airport, and her resignation letter was backdated. Therefore, there was no constructive discharge at hand. Most importantly, he outlined the racial allegations made by the plaintiff to make it easier for the jury to understand the case.

On pages 350 and 351 of Chapter 11 ("The Civil Court Process"), *Judicial Process in America* talks about the overall presentation of the plaintiff's and defendant's case by questioning the witnesses. On several occasions, Mr. Myers' questions were irrelevant to the case. Therefore, there were multiple objections raised by Mr. Bacevice and sustained by Judge Nugent. In my opinion, Mr. Myers crossed his lines when he examined Mr. Smith by asking questions that had racist undertones. Specifically, when he acted out "black street language" to Mr. Smith. I think Mr. Myers' behavior while questioning the witnesses in the courtroom had more racist issues than the plaintiff's whole case. Such conduct is inappropriate in general, let alone in a courtroom.

Furthermore, Mr. Myers provided questionable evidence to a racially hostile environment. For instance, the use of terms such as "baby mama" and "baby daddy" to create a "racially hostile environment" is something I could not understand. In addition, the discussion of "fish and grits" and "greens" to have created a "racially hostile environment" further made the plaintiff's case weak. In short, there was no case of a racially hostile environment at the plaintiff's hand.

In contrast, Mr. Bacevice did a good job in presenting the defendant's case overall. There were fewer objections on the grounds of relevance, and less of so were sustained by Judge Nugent. His questions and conduct were apt and appropriate.

On page 305 of Chapter 10 ("The Criminal Trial and its Aftermath"), *Judicial Process in America* explains how the nature of the judge's instructions can "nudge the jury in one direction or the other." When giving his instructions in the middle of the trial, he informed the jury that the plaintiff's arguments, although a stretch, was of racial discrimination. He informed the jury that there was no evidence against Mr. Smith and the City of Cleveland of participating or being aware of a hostile work environment. Therefore, the only claim that went to the jury for deliberation was the allegation against Ms. Saunders to have created a racially hostile work environment. Since jury verdicts are

influenced by the judge's explanations, Judge Nugent's tone towards the case may have affected the jury's verdict.

Chapter 5 ("State Judges") of *Judicial Process in America* talks about the different ways in which the states elect or appoint judges. And Chapter 6 ("Federal Judges") of the *Judicial Process in America* talks about how presidents appoint judges with similar ideological values. Judge Donald C. Nugent was appointed by President Clinton and perhaps leaned towards democratic principles. Therefore, keeping the facts of the case in mind, his instructions to the jury were in favor of the defendants who were African American in a case of racial discrimination.

On page 302 of Chapter 10 ("The Criminal Trial and its Aftermath"), *Judicial Process in America* states that the role of the judge during the trial is passive. It was evident in *Joanna Bielawski v. City of Cleveland* that the judge's role was relatively passive. Judge Nugent gave instructions to the jury. Besides that, he would be called upon to rule on the motions raised by the attorneys. The attorneys and the witnesses had more active roles.

On page 304 of Chapter 10 ("The Criminal Trial and its Aftermath"), *Judicial Process in America* talks about the jury's role during the trial. The jury is passive during the trial. Likewise, it says that the jurors are not allowed to take notes during the trial. In *Joanna Bielawski v. City of Cleveland*, the juror was not allowed to take notes. Instead, Judge Nugent advised the jurors to rely on their memory to assess the testimonies.

On page 348 of Chapter 11 ("The Civil Court Process"), *Judicial Process in America* talks about depositions as a tool for discovery. In this case, one particular deposition was at the center of the debate. In her deposition, Ms. Saunders admitted to using the "N" word when explaining the term "picnic." However, she denied it at the time of her testimony. The deposition perhaps helped the jurors decide the credibility of that portion of her testimony.

On page 348 of Chapter 11 ("The Civil Court Process"), *Judicial Process in America* talks about the production of documents as a tool for discovery. The importance of this tool was highlighted when Mr. Bacevice presented a photograph of the "infamous" conference room where Ms. Bielawski attended Ms. Saunders' first weekly managers' meeting. The photograph showed eight chairs at the table, and only six managers were present at the meeting. Despite Ms. Saunders and Ms. Stevens inviting Ms. Bielawski to join everyone at the table, she remained at the corner. It was an important tool used by Mr. Bacevice to show Ms. Bielawski's deliberate negligence and a pattern of disengagement at the meetings.

On page 351 of Chapter 11 ("The Civil Court Process"), *Judicial Process in America* says that the plaintiff may bring rebuttal evidence aimed to refute the defendant's evidence. Mr. Myers brought Mr. Jones as the plaintiff's rebuttal evidence. However, Mr. Jones' testimony was mostly

limited to interactions between him and Ms. Bielawski. Mr. Jones' testimony went back to questioning the job description of Ms. Bielawski and the location of her office. The testimony did not cover any racial part of the case. Overall, I think the rebuttal evidence by the plaintiff was not strong enough to refute the defendants' evidence.

♦ AFRICANA STUDIES 227

**A CRITICAL SUMMARY
OF ESTHER FARMER'S
*COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS
IMPROVISATIONAL PERFORMANCE***

ANDREW OLDFIELD

IN THE ARTICLE “Community Development as Improvisational Performance,” Esther Farmer (2005) tells the story of how creating “stages” of opportunity for conversations between many people who would otherwise never have spoken, blossomed into unscripted dialogues where these “actors” were able to interact without expectations and agendas to improvisationally develop skills and solutions where both they and the community grew.

In this context, improvisation means unscripted, with no set outcome in mind. It means creating space to let people who might otherwise never even set foot in the same room have a different way of interacting where old expectations have been set aside. It means not having any expert or outsider direct the process in a way that attempts to control or determine the outcome. The idea is to let them “act” in a new space where they can step outside their old roles, or grow beyond themselves, step into a place of seeing themselves as “becoming” rather than limited by who they currently “are.” The process also involves all participants playing off what others contribute, very much like

The Assignment and the Writer: The assignment, for Africana Studies 227 Community-Based Approaches to Justice, was to write a critical summary of the Esther Farmer reading. In addition to a basic summary, students were to provide a critical analysis of the article and connect this reading to another course reading. Drew hit the ball out of the park with his essay. Not only does he do an excellent job of summarizing the article, but he provides deep analysis of many of the issues and practices the author explains. In addition, he thoroughly and creatively compares this article to four other course readings. He reflects on things in completely new ways and pulls it all together masterfully.

– Professor Jessica Gordon-Nembhard

actors doing improv. Here residents and other stake holders share ideas about how to develop their community, which meld and merge or build on each other to slowly create a greater whole. One example of this is how the 24-hour tenant patrol in one building was expanded throughout the whole project. Another example is the way including people previously deemed “unacceptable” in community conversations expanded from at first including the drug-trade-involved youth to later including the coalitions (who were protesting for greater minority inclusion in the construction trade) which had been slowing down renovations and competing with youthful project residents for jobs. Including the coalitions led to collaboration between them and the project youth seeking work, rather than competition for jobs, and the invocation of the Section 3 law where construction companies were required to hire project residents.

Farmer followed this practice by creating opportunities for new conversations between individuals and groups who might never have spoken, simply for the sake of letting people feel heard, seen, included, valued and giving them an opportunity to contribute, grow, find their voices and be as involved in the community as they might wish. Being included, given a chance to find their voice, to be – and to be recognized as – “becoming” allowed them to enter a new “stage” or environment that wasn’t defined by old roles and expectations. Such as controversially giving the new Tenant President working space in the staff management office, while this might in other cases have bred conflict, instead here relationships were developed where all played off each other’s skills, knowledge and relationships as they learned to appreciate each other.

It was interesting how so many different groups with little or negative relationships all shared a common goal – to stop the violence – but couldn’t find a way to interact. And it was inspiring how, once the process of building new stages for new conversations began, it continued to expand to include more and more groups, even eventually the police who helped create a bike race and the Fuji bike company who donated parts and became a yearly sponsor of the bike race. It was especially inspiring to think of hundreds of children from a housing project normally at odds with the police having their first positive experience with police building bikes for them to use in the race – where previously fear of violence meant you couldn’t even get a pizza delivered. The community building of the bike race was so successful, it sparked other events such as talent shows and after-school centers, as well as inspiring other local agencies and businesses to seek ways to get involved with this transforming community.

Farmer also wrote about finding and developing local leaders, such as: the woman who had lost a son to community violence and came to the office angry about lack of community participation on meetings; and another woman

who was a leader looking to organize 24-hour tenant patrols in the most drug-infested building in the project. This reminded me of how in “Mobilizing the Community,” Barajas (1998) found that formally or informally acknowledged leaders are instrumental in mobilizing others into action, as well as give a head start on assessing community needs and positions. The way the author reflected on her professional role supporting – but not directing – community development reminded me of how Barajas’ discussed Organizers Roles and Skills. Farmer neatly filled out every one listed... being a teacher to build the capacity of a community to solve its own problems; being a catalyst identifying skills in community members and motivating them to contribute these skills to the betterment of the community as they promote a sense of teamwork, community, and a can-do attitude; being a facilitator for projects and tasks completion by providing participants with information (not taking the lead); and acting to link people with information and people to each other (as Farmer did with information on the Section 3 law, and the two emerging leaders with each other, and the office staff with the President of the Tenant Association).

I was also often reminded of “Community Justice: A Conceptual Framework” by Karp & Todd (2000) where inclusion, being one of the seven principles of community justice, was described as moving away from defining “kinds of people” as good or bad and focusing on reintegration. With a similar message to Karp & Todd, Farmer spoke here about the youth who were involved in the drug trade not being all good or all bad, much like everyone else who live in the project. She emphasized that such judgements weren’t useful in community development, and that input from everyone had value and potential. Farmer’s article also reminded me of Karp & Todd’s four outcomes of Community Justice. She seemed to hit on all of them: integration, where marginalized members of the community (such as the drug-trade-involved youth, or in some ways even the coalitions, and perhaps from the perspective of the project residents even the police) are not shunned, displaced or exiled; increased community capacity to solve its own problems, leverage resources for its development, and enforce local normative standards; community satisfaction where the subjective feeling of satisfaction in your community led to children in the playgrounds again, neighbors outside talking to each other, and of course pizzas being delivered; and a sense of community where all felt included and had a sense of membership/belonging where their contributions to the community made a difference and they could feel an emotional connection to others in the community.

Farmer comments that “Too often low-income people in inner city communities are related to and relate to themselves as ‘fixed’ in the sense of lacking the capacity to develop. People see themselves as broken and in need of experts to repair them. These categories often become so calcified and

entrenched that they are seen as almost impossible to transcend” (2005, p.2). This observation reminds me of “Mapping Community Capacity,” where to paraphrase McKnight & Kretzmann (1996), social service agencies often see people as broken, inferior or incapable and fail to empower clients to solve their own problems, and how this creates an ongoing cycle of dependency, rather than striving to empower people to reach their maximum independence. Farmer exhibited a more strengths-based approach in line with what McKnight & Kretzmann suggested as a “capacity based” approach used to focus on the abilities, skills and assets of low-income people and their neighborhoods – as well as modeling how community development can’t happen from the top down or the outside in – but you can provide assistance to help them do it for themselves. In addition, the concept of primary, secondary and potential building blocks for community development was evident in Farmer’s article. Primary building blocks include the skills of residents and the groups the residents organized into. Secondary building blocks include the outside professional that the author was, and the local police department. Potential building blocks include the bike company and news outlets that highlighted the changes in the community that helped bring in new investment.

Finally, Farmer’s article also reflects concepts from “Mapping the Assets of your Community” where Beaulieu (2002) highlighted the difference between development OF the community and IN the community. Both were evident in the changes at the Farmer’s Maple housing project. Development OF the community took place in uncovering emerging leaders and expanding the knowledge and skills of them, as well as others in the community – including the youth who became community organizers. It also was evident because communitywide improvements could not be fully realized unless people representing all parts of the community were involved in deciding the future of their community – as the breakdown of barriers in Maple housing allowed to happen. Then with those changes having occurred there was development “IN” the community where the bike company became an ongoing sponsor and local business and city government began to invest in the area.

Overall, Farmer’s article was interesting, educational, and inspirational – though I did find some areas to be unclear, unexplored, or to perhaps feel a bit too “in the eye of the beholder” to be concrete and replicable. On her LinkedIn in page, Farmer describes herself as a “teaching artist/director” – so it makes perfect sense she would be inclined towards and comfortable with a theater-related lens for the processes she describes. While the process seems powerful and effective, I’m not sure the improvisational theater lens is one that a majority of likely community participants would understand, appreciate or be comfortable with – moreover, if explained as such, some might pull back from it simply due to the framing in a theater context. While Farmer consistently explained the ideas and actions she described in a theatrical

context, it was never made clear to me if anyone else involved had that perspective explained to them or if anyone else ever adopted that lens themselves.

Additionally, while Farmer explains her improvisational method and references that it “is based on the theoretical and practical work developed over the last thirty years at the East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy” and “serves as the basis for several large-scale adult and youth development projects nationally” (2005, p. 2) there is little description how it was applied elsewhere, how successful it was, or how replicable it may be. In fact, at more than one point in the article she mentions that some things might not have worked under other conditions or with other individuals – which makes it all the more difficult to picture this approach as widely replicable. Further examples of where and how such a model has been applied and ideas of what made it more or less challenging and or successful would allow readers a better chance to apply similar concepts in their own work.

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♦ ENGLISH 201

CENTURY EGG

AMY ZOU

AS GROUPS OF FOURTH GRADERS RUSHED into the large cafeteria, sounds of chatter filled the room. Ms. Bella had left us at our assigned lunch table with the strict cafeteria supervisor, Ms. Wendy. I could hear her hoarse and scratchy voice from across the noisy cafeteria, yelling at our class to sit down. Most of the students lined up when Ms. Wendy called my class for lunch. I caught a glimpse of the boy eating at the table across from me. The crust of the pizza he had stuffed in his mouth looked like cardboard, the cheese looked like glue, and the lumpy tomato sauce looked like goo. Lucky for me, my mother prepared lunch for me today. My food thermos rested on the greasy, white-topped lunch table. I placed my hands on the lid of the thermos and twisted, but it wouldn't budge. My classmates came back to the table with their lunch trays, one by one, and I asked them if they could help me open the container. After a few tries, the lid was off; I was ready to enjoy my lunch.

The Assignment and the Writer: In English 201, students learn the rhetorical characteristics of cross-disciplinary writing styles. The theme that students explore in this section is diversity, equity and inclusion in the context of educational settings and learning experiences. Amy Zou's piece, a memoir, recreates moments through narrative techniques and sensory detail. Zou skillfully navigates the conventions of memoir where she uses detail and dialog to recreate the past while highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion in a school setting. With her focus on storytelling, Zou makes us feel, remember and care as we read.

– Professor Madhura Bandyopadhyay

I examined the congee inside the thermos. It was one of my favorite dishes, Chinese congee with pork and century egg. My mother knew I loved century eggs, which were preserved eggs where the egg whites became black, translucent, and gelatin-like while the yolks were greenish black. With my metal spoon, I carefully scooped a piece of the egg, along with some rice.

“Ew, what is that?” one of my classmates stared at me and asked.

“It’s a century egg.” I explained what it was, but she wouldn’t stop telling people how “nasty” my food looked.

“That’s not an egg,” she kept saying.

I quickly threw my spoon into the thermos and secured it tightly. As I felt my cheeks burning and my eyes watering, I immediately placed my arms on the table and buried my head in them, telling everyone that I wasn’t feeling well.

Later that day, I arrived home with my thermos and placed it on the kitchen counter.

“Mom, you don’t need to make me lunch anymore,” I told her.

She opened the thermos and noticed that I had barely eaten anything. She shook her head. As I watch her pour out the congee, I told her, “I don’t like it. Plus, we have lunch at school anyways, so you don’t need to cook in the morning anymore.” I walked towards my room without her saying anything.

Eight years later, I rested on the blue cafeteria chair, chewing the same cardboard-like pizza that every school serves. I grew accustomed to the stale whole grain-rolls, the bitter salads, and the dry turkey sandwiches. There was no way I could get through six to seven hours of classes without eating. After my last year of high school, I would no longer have to eat the “pile of hot garbage,” as my friends would describe it. As I continued to think about life after high school, my friend settled down in the seat across from me. She pulled out her rectangular lunch box and unzipped it. Inside, there was a thermos and a Ziplock bag. She took out the thermos and took off the lid.

“What did your grandma make for you today?” I asked, examining her thermos.

“Fried rice and an egg!” she exclaimed, pulling out the paper towel inside her Ziplock bag, unfolding it to reveal a hard-boiled egg.

“Lucky. I wish my mom made me lunch every day. School lunch tastes disgusting. Too bad she is busy with work.”

She sliced the egg in half with a plastic spork. “Here, I like egg white more than yolk. You like the yolk more than the egg white.” She handed me the half with more yolk.

I began to notice the different types of food people ate during lunch. While most students ate school lunch, others brought their own. I imagined the creaminess and sweetness of the boy’s peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, the

savory taste of the girl's ham and turkey sandwich. The aromas from someone's fried rice and another person's burrito bowl mixed and filled the room. What one person had was different from what another had. And to me, each dish looked delicious. As I ate the egg my friend offered me, I thought of my favorite egg, the century egg. I remembered when my mother was not as busy and always offered to make me lunch. I missed eating the food she made me, but I knew I would no longer be able to enjoy it at school.

While I thought nothing much of the incident afterwards, I did mention to my mother how my friend's grandma always made lunch for her. I told her maybe I should bring lunch to school because of how unappetizing school lunch was. Even though I knew she wouldn't have time to make me lunch, I continued to let her know that the food she made tasted great.

In New York, schools serve meals such as pizza, PB&J sandwiches, or turkey sandwiches. As children grow up accustomed to the food they see and eat every day at school, food from other cultures seems foreign to them. Food shaming occurs when an individual notices that others do not have the same food preferences as them and thus demeans them for it. Even though this is more likely to occur with children, it happens with adults as well. In an attempt to assimilate into American culture and traditions, many turn away from their own cultures and force others to do so as well. They are also less likely to accept the traditions of other cultures. It is important for schools to address this issue by finding ways to prepare meals of different cultures and allow students to embrace various cuisines.

♦ SOCIOLOGY 275

PRESENT DAY GENOCIDE: UIGHUR MUSLIMS IN XINJIANG

SEEMA RAMDAT

INTRODUCTION

IN THE XINJIANG AUTONOMOUS REGION of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Uighur Muslims have been forcefully imprisoned by the Chinese Communist Party. Uighur Muslims are a religious group in the nation and belong to the Xinjiang Autonomous region - where 380 reeducation camps have been created to detain the group. Thus, it is relatively straightforward that the detainment of Uighur Muslims is purposeful and targeted towards them specifically. This is evident since internment camps are strictly located in the region where Uighur Muslims are a majority.

The Assignment and the Writer: In SOC 275, Political Prisoners, students study historical and contemporary forms of forcible confinement. The class examines the political, social, and economic conditions that have motivated governments to radically limit individual freedom, as well as the harsh conditions imposed within the prisons, often in violation of the Geneva Convention. The "Research Briefing Paper" asks students to report on a situation of interest to them. In this case, Seema provides an in-depth and insightful analysis of the case of the Uyghurs in China. The case analyzes the context of the situation, examines sociological theories that explain the harsh, dehumanizing efforts of the state, and informs students about a genocide taking place as part of the political strategy against a people with a culture, language, and religion that is different.

– Professor Martha Rose

The Chinese Communist Party postulates many justifications for the minority group's relocation into prison. Albeit, none of them are morally justified given the heinous conditions said persons are subjected to. The unjust internment of Uighur Muslims is a current issue that is slowly gaining international traction and attention. The declaration of this phenomenon as a genocide has been spearheaded by the United States' recognition of the suspicious sprouting of reeducation camps as a signal of crimes against humanity.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The exact timeline of when mass detentions began is unknown due to restrictive media policies in China. Currently, most evidence retrieved on these reeducation camps has been garnered by satellite footage and a relatively small amount of defector reports and interviews. Still, it is estimated that arrests started in April of 2017, with an initial two million Uighur Muslims detained.

China, a relatively homogenous nation, has systemically relocated and arbitrarily incarcerated Uighur Muslims into, what they call, reeducation camps. Forced relocation is utilized to combat religious extremism that is commonly (although false) associated with the Islamic faith.

The religious minority runs the risk of being detained if they fit into the arrest criteria. Uighur Muslims have been recorded to be arrested for traveling to "extremist nations," attending services at a Mosque, being caught reading the Quran or having "more than three children" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). This criteria strictly targets individuals of the Islamic faith as it cites the Quran as a mortal sin and, through its association with middle eastern nations, as extremist. Thus, China is intentionally attempting to conduct ethnic cleansing by removing a particular demographic from a specified region.

Reeducation camps are prison institutions where incarcerated Uighur Muslims are expected to conduct forced labor. These camps are created with the intent to shape prisoners into law-abiding citizens who respect Chinese culture and virtue (HRW, 1998). Such a declaration, made by the Chinese government, proves that the PRC deems Islam as a national security threat and that anyone practicing Islam is not a law-abiding citizen. In layman terms, Islam is perceived to be the antithesis of Chinese values and is thus, a threat necessary to subdue through forced detention.

POPULATION

1.5 million Uighur Muslims are incarcerated for practicing their faith, making them political prisoners (VOX, 2021). As of 2021, China formally recognizes five primary religions in the nation: Chinese folk-religionists (30.8%), Buddhism (16.6%), Christianity (7.4%), Islam (1.8%), and Daoism (0.4%) (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Given these statistics, it is

estimated that there are 23 million Muslim followers in China, with 6% of the observing population being incarcerated in reeducation camps (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). The listed statistics emphasize that Islam is seldom practiced in the Communist nation and is, in fact, highly suppressed. Anyone of the Islamic faith is considered enemies of the state due to the religion's correlation with extremism and militancy in the nation.

HISTORICAL DISCRIMINATION: HAN CHINESE V. UIGHUR MUSLIMS

The Xinjiang Autonomous region is indigenous to the Uighur Muslim population, who established their language and culture. However, after falling under the People's Republic of China (PRC), more Han Chinese individuals—other known as the dominant ethnic group, migrated to Xinjiang (VOX, 2021). This migration shift spearheaded ethnic tensions and uprisings that would lead to the subjection and insubordination of the Uighur population, despite their mass numbers.

The Xinjiang region is populated by twelve million Uighur Muslims and ten million Han Chinese individuals (NY Times, 2018). However, in the entirety of China, 94% of the 1.4 billion population comprises Han Chinese individuals. Whereas Uighur Muslims only comprise 13.5 million in the nation - most of the demographic belonging to the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (NY Times, 2018).

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES TO DESCRIBE HISTORICAL DISCRIMINATION

IN-GROUP/OUT-GROUP

There is a wide variation of sociological theories that explains the exclusionary history of Uighur Muslims in China's Northwest region. As the above information has established, Uighur Muslims are an ethnic minority compared to the Han Chinese. The Uighur's lack of numbers in China, as a whole, translates to a lack of political power and distribution of human rights functions. Uighur Muslims lack political authority in the region, and thus cannot affect change. This effectively makes Uighur Muslims the out-group in political affairs and daily life, where Han Chinese individuals are within the in-group.

There have been instances where Uighur Muslims have assembled to create political change and speak out against daily discrimination. Before the mass imprisonment of Uighur Muslims in 2017, Uighur intellectuals documented their repression in China for years. One political prisoner, Ilham

Tohti, created a website that illuminated the lack of human rights afforded to the ethnic Muslim minority in the region (Vox, 2020).

The Chinese government subsequently removed the website as a means to silence the ethnic minority. Tohti would later be kidnapped and detained while his family was constantly blackmailed with death threats by Chinese authorities (Vox, 2020). If local constituents attempt to raise public awareness, they are speculated to face life in prison, much like Ilham Tohti.

Also, as Uighur's have concocted a unique language and traditions, they are not considered deserving of the epithet of "Chinese citizens." They are not beneficiaries of the social contract created between Chinese authorities and the Han Chinese. Thus, Uighur Muslims are displaced from in-group favoritism and subjected to out-group discrimination (Haenfler, 2013).

STRAIN THEORY

Another sociological theory that explains the build-up to the political imprisonment of Uighur Muslims is a concept defined as strain theory. As Uighur Muslims are conceptualized as constituents of the out-group, they don't receive societal, economic benefits. The poverty witnessed by Uighur residents in Xinjiang is the highest precedent in any Chinese providence. Counties with a high concentration of Uighurs see a decline in employment rates by this ethnic minority but an increase of labor opportunities afforded to Han Chinese individuals (Borgen Project, 2020). Employment discrimination prevents Uighurs from making an ordinary income, thereby propelled into a state of poverty.

Strain theory argues that denied "legitimate access to society's cultural goals (e.g., wealth, status, power), some individuals will inevitably turn to illegitimate means of achievement," including crime. (Robert Merton, 1938) (Haenfler, 2013). There is a psychological strain endured by individuals who have limited opportunities to survive and thrive. Thus, the affected out-group will, in some cases, turn to deviance or violent acts to access their wealth aspirations.

This is the case amongst Uighur Muslims in the Xinjiang region, where a handful of the population have committed violent acts of rebellion to attain independence and financial freedom (Borgen Project, 2020). The Chinese government, specifically the new Communist party boss, Chen Quanguo, and the Han Chinese majority view this deviance as deriving from their Islamic faith instead of social conflict (HRW, 2021). Hence, these acts have only bolstered the Chinese authorities' justification for their forced imprisonment of Uighurs into reeducation camps.

REEDUCATION CAMPS

The purpose of reeducation camps is to reeducate Uighur Muslims from an extremist religion into "productive and moral members" of society. In the Xinjiang region, there are 380 camps constructed to detain and forcefully house the ethnic minority. As all of these camps are designated to the Xinjiang region, which is inhabited by most Uighurs in China, Chinese authorities are directly targeting this ethnic group.

In these 380 reeducation camps, 1.5 million Uighur Muslims- men, women, and children alike, are victims of forced labor and systematic torture. Former detainees interviewed by Amnesty International cite that they face daily dehumanization aimed at making them physiological incapacitated. These tactics are explicitly violent, ranging from "beatings, electric shocks, solitary confinement," rape, starvation, sleep deprivation, exposure to penetrating cold weather, and "the abusive use of tiger chairs" (Amnesty International, 2021). These egregious tactics are used as collateral, ensuring that prisoners do not retaliate against their abuse and reeducation to become "moral, higher individuals."

Tiger Chairs are steel torture chairs that bind the imprisoned individual from head to toe with ropes or cuffs. This torture device is utilized to restrict any movement from the political prisoner while they are repeatedly beaten and abused. The more the "subject" restrains or fights, the tighter the ropes and cuffs become on their body. Several prisoner accounts argue that these restraints get so tight that prisoners naturally urinate and defecate themselves in Chinese cells (BBC, 2021).

Uighur Muslims who have yet to be detained must restrict their Internet activity and in-person whereabouts to not be surveilled by security forces. Apps like WhatsApp, which many foreign users frequent, are placed under surveillance by police forces to ensure knowledge of abuse isn't circulated to outsiders (Amnesty International, 2021). In addition, Xinjiang Muslims have been banned from practicing Islam and forced to eat pork to show their allegiance to the Chinese culture. This violent mandate is the definition of ethnic cleansing as it is the purposeful removal of an ethnic group from a specified region (Amnesty International, 2021).

INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS

Public awareness is present in this instance, as the international community has condemned China's actions as genocidal. China has justified its detainment of the religious minority to counter extremism and radicalization posed by the group. Twenty-four countries, in 2019, has recognized China's human rights abuses and issued a "public rebuke" on the Chinese government's actions, forcing the United Nations to consider creating a specific monitoring mechanism for this isolated event (HRW, 2021).

Though, China has attempted to cover up its actions by garnering support from corresponding nations. The Human Rights Watch reports that China "coordinated" a response to the United Nations High Commissioner, with "North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and other nations with poor human rights records" (HRW, 2021). In this public response, each nation argued that China's actions were justified, widely supported, and necessary to reduce religious extremism globally (HRW, 2021).

The United States has joined the international community, in 2021, by recognizing China as committing crimes against humanity (HRW, 2021). The United States has not taken further disciplinary action against the economic superpower owed to fears of losing a vital trading partner. Other nations have not taken corrective action owed to fear of facing an economic decline, lack of UN direction, and lack of proof - owed to low media coverage in the Communist repressive state.

CONCLUSION

Undeniably, in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, the People's Republic of China is conducting crimes against humanity through the forceful detention of Uighur Muslims. Although international pressure remains in response to this genocidal event, progressive action is still minimal. It is disheartening and draining to understand that the United Nations has not yet created a unique monitoring system to track the ethnic cleansing occurring.

This lack of resolution is owed to China's power-hold and hierarchal placement on the UN Security Council. The United Nations Security Council determines what type of action should take place in a nation that violates human rights. The Security Council determines whether humanitarian or military intervention should occur in an unstable region.

However, the United Nations has been unable to intervene in this instance since China is a sitting permanent five-member on the Security Council. Whenever a P5 member rejects a resolution, the United Nations cannot provide aid to the respective country or ethnic group. China has constantly voted no on conducting investigative operations on their land (HRW, 2021).

The United Nations also needs consent from the hosting nation to have humanitarian or military intervention occur. Chinese authorities have not consented to any intervention as they have called these genocidal claims baseless (HRW, 2021). Until China's repressive P5 veto power can be revoked or circumvented, there is limited international action that could take place.

The United Nations, by granting this tool to world superpowers, is hypocritical. The United Nations was created after WWII, primarily focused on preventing an atrocity like the Holocaust from materializing again. Albeit, it has failed to take preventative measures or react accordingly. To indeed

amend this situation, there needs to be executive action taken to override China's veto power and allow for proper investigative and disciplinary measures to occur against the People's Republic of China.

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♦ ENGLISH 212

CALLING ME HOME

MICHAEL LEE

Time: 1920s

Setting: In the early morning on the outskirts of a rural town, a young man is joined by his mother Jen while he sits on the steps of their weathered porch. He looks west, only glancing away briefly when his mother Jen sits next to him.

Characters:

Jen Reilley. Late forties with graying hair and calm disposition. Smile lines etch her face. Mother of Samuel Reilley.

Sam Reilley: Twenty-four years old, bags under his eyes and with a heavily scarred face sits outside in the early morning looking west.

The Assignment and the Writer: In English 212, Introduction to Creative Writing, students read and write in three genres. In this piece, Michael Lee approaches the work with intuition and feeling and creates a quietly compelling dramatic scene, *Calling Me Home*, about the return of a soldier to his mother and home town. The scene is set in the 1920s but is utterly contemporary. The soldier's mother and the town welcome him home, but he no longer knows where he lives, literally and figuratively. His perceptive mother confronts him about the genial mask he's wearing but to no avail. Almost nothing is more difficult to embody than ambivalence, but Michael Lee does just that, with hard-won knowledge and subtle skill.

– Professor Estha Weiner

Jen: Can't remember the last time you were up this early.

Sam: Wasn't much time to sleep the last few years. Guess I got used to early mornings..

(They sit in silence for a few minutes before Jen places a hand on her Sam's shoulder.)

Jen: What's on your mind?

Sam: Nothing, Ma. Nothing. Just excited to be home.

(Sam removes Jen's hand from his shoulder.)

Jen: Oh? Are ya, now? Home, I mean. You've been walking around this house, this town, for a week now. But I can't say it feels like you're back.

(Sam laughs slightly.)

Sam: How does it feel?

Jen: Like you're visiting.

Sam: Mother. You. Are. A lovely, benevolent, completely mad old woman. Where else would I go but here? Where the beer is cold, the beds are soft and the landlords are so accommodating.

Jen: Hmm, to wherever that mind of yours keeps wandering off to.

Sam: It wanders back.

Jen: For a little while. I remember how you used to spend your summer out on this porch. looking East, down the road. Looking to where your friends were waiting, to the bakery where Sarah would pretend to be surprised when you stopped by the same time every day. Listening for the church bell to call the town in on Sunday.

Sam: And now I'm looking West.

Jen: And now you're looking West. Where the only thing waiting for you is an hour's walk on a dusty trail. And the only thing calling is a lonely train whistle billowing steam.

Sam: I'm not trying to leave. I spent six years dreaming of walking down that road, chest full of medals, head held high.

Jen: And instead you snuck off the train, uniform in a duffle bag, with only a set of new scars on your pretty face to show for your time gone.

(Long pause)

Sam: And you didn't recognize me.

Jen: I still don't. Not because of the scars. Never that. But six years is a long time and I expected my *boy* to come walking off that train. Instead, there was a tall man with an empty smile and a sadness in his eyes I haven't seen since the first time I met your father.

Sam: Ma -

Jen: And that's fine. I love you, Sam. I will always love you.

(Sam nods his head angrily.)

Sam: Yuh just don't know me. Yeah?

Jen: How could I? My quiet boy now runs the conversations in every bar he walks into. You talk for hours without saying a damn thing. So no, I don't know you Sam, but I want to. I don't care about the war. I don't care about the scars. I don't care why you are always acting so cheerful when you are so clearly not. I just want to know you as well as I used to.

Sam: I don't know what you want me to say. I've been gone for six years. Met folks from around the world. Guys that right now, this early in the morning, have been up for hours already doing what needs to be done. Doing what's expected of them. But here? Here in this place, I've been dreaming about. Six years gone by and the people are still telling the same fucking jokes. Getting upset over the same fucking arguments. I know, I'm cursing, but it seems pretty fucking strange doesn't it. The only thing that's changed here, is that now I have more stories than the town combined. I don't run the conversations at the bar, I am the conversation.

They say, "I bet you're glad to be home Sam."

"So proud of what ya done, boy."

"If I had been there, then I would have done this."

"I would have enlisted, if only that."

I don't wear a uniform. Everyone knows exactly who I am and is willing to give me their opinion about it.

Jen: They're just not used to you being back yet.

Sam: I don't care. I used to do more in the morning than these people do in their day. I'd wake up and know what was expected of me, what I needed to do and how to get it done. Now I wake up, and I sit on a fucking porch. I look East, I look West and I wait. And I have no idea what the hell I'm waiting on.

Jen: You can do whatever you want to, Sam. There's plenty of work. They'd all be happy to have you.

Sam: It's not enough. I don't know how any of this will ever be enough.

♦ SPANISH 215

COMING OUT

GEMA GARCÍA

NO ME ACUERDO NI DEL año ni de la edad que tenía cuando salí del *closet*. Mis únicos recuerdos son del lugar en que sucedió y la reacción de mis padres. Mi *coming out*, como se dice en inglés, ocurrió en Ecuador y mis padres estaban decepcionados. Ellos siempre tuvieron ilusiones sobre mi sexualidad: querían que me casara, que tuviera hijos, que viviera una vida “normal” de una mujer heterosexual. Así que decidí primero hablar con mi mamá para aclararle que la fantasía de ella de ser abuela y tener un yerno nunca se haría realidad. Se lo dije en su apartamento en Portoviejo, una ciudad en la provincia de Manabí, en donde se criaron mis padres. Mi mamá estaba en su cuarto, sentada enfrente del espejo, secando su cabello negro y rizado. Entré a la habitación para sentarme en su cama, me sentía un poco nerviosa y después se me salió como un vómito:

The Assignment and the Writer: This essay was initially written in Spanish as a final assignment for Spanish 215, Spanish Conversation and Composition. This course discusses Latin American Chronicles, exploring contemporary representations of race, migration, sexuality, and class issues. Gema decided to work on her experience coming out to her parents in early adolescence. The paper is a compelling "testimonio" on the heavy burden of sexual prejudice and how to overcome it. Gema presented it at a National Symposium in Spanish in 2021, as one of the winners, and brilliantly translated this piece into English herself as part of her experiential learning work in the BA in Spanish (with concentration Translation and Interpretation). The accuracy of her translation and her excellent word choice allow the English reader to fully partake in the emotions of in the original essay. This is the first time that a paper written in Spanish is published in the Finest. — Professors Vicente Lecuna and Aída Martínez-Gómez

– Mami, me gustan las mujeres. Soy lesbiana.

Su rostro no tenía ninguna expresión, pero sus palabras transmitieron todos sus sentimientos.

– ¿Qué? ¿Cómo que lesbiana? Pero te gusta usar maquillaje, eres femenina. ¿Crees que te gustan las mujeres porque estás insegura de tu cuerpo? ¿Y piensas que ningún hombre se sentirá atraído a ti?

– Mami, una lesbiana no es una mujer que tiene cualidades masculinas o la autoestima tan baja que prefiere salir con mujeres en vez de hombres. No seas tan ignorante para generalizar de esa manera. La feminidad no es un sinónimo de heterosexualidad. – Me levanté y salí de la habitación y cerré la puerta. –

Las palabras de mi madre dolieron, pero lo que dolió más fue su idea de una mujer lesbiana. Una mujer por naturaleza en su percepción sería incapaz de ver a otra mujer como un objeto de deseo, al menos que haya algo mal con ella. Antes de cerrar esa puerta quería gritarle:

“¡Vete a la casa de la verga!”.

Pero no respondí porque su reacción era inevitable, como la de mi papá. Cuando le confesé a mi padre sobre mi orientación sexual estábamos en una fiesta en Portoviejo, en la casa de uno de mis tíos. Estábamos escuchando a Rubén Blades y me sentí inspirada a no silenciar esta parte de mí identidad que traté de reprimir por tanto tiempo. Le pedí que caminara conmigo; tenía algo importante que decirle. Cuando le dije que era lesbiana él solamente me miró con una gran tristeza en sus ojos y expresó:

–Me rompiste el corazón. – Me quedé sin palabras, no por sorpresa, sino porque mis padres rechazaron la parte de mí de la que menos me avergüenzo. –

Traté de no ofenderme por las reacciones de ellos; ese prejuicio que poseían era un malentendido. Mis padres crecieron en un país donde el patriarcado influyó sus ideas sobre el mundo exterior. Ambos fueron criados en Sudamérica y tienen familias católicas. Mi mamá nació en 1965 y mi papá en 1954, tres décadas después de que Ecuador les concediera a las mujeres el derecho a votar. Cualquier preconcepción que los dos tuvieron se lo atribuyo al entorno al que pertenecieron durante ese tiempo. Ellos no crecieron expuestos a la homosexualidad como algo natural en su juventud, era un pecado. Vivieron dentro una burbuja, en la cual la heteronormatividad era la única expresión pública de la sexualidad humana. Cualquier otra expresión de sexualidad se consideraba un castigo de Dios. Algunos años después de mi *coming out*, entrevisté a mis padres por el teléfono sobre la concepción de la homosexualidad en Ecuador en su juventud. La pregunta que les hice a los dos fue la siguiente:

– ¿Cuáles fueron las ideas o conceptos que la sociedad tenía sobre la homosexualidad cuando ustedes eran jóvenes?

Mi madre contestó primero:

– Los padres de esa época dicen que eso de la homosexualidad no estaba bien. Los padres querían que los trataran los psicólogos porque se creía que estaban poseídos por el diablo y que sus deseos sexuales no eran normales.

Mi padre también afirmó lo mismo sobre el sesgo del que fue testigo en su juventud:

– Cuando yo vivía en Ecuador mi madre, los padres no aceptaban si un hijo o una hija era homosexual. Los trataban mal, los marginaban y cuando salían a la calle a caminar, la gente se les burlaba.

Luego de entrevistarlos empecé a reflexionar sobre mi noción del lesbianismo y como es diferente de la de mis padres debido a que nací en la ciudad de Nueva York. Desde que era una niña pequeña siempre vi personas *queer* en programas de televisión, en las pantallas del cine, parejas en las calles de Manhattan besándose; para mí ver dos personas del mismo género juntas no era nada extraño. Todo lo contrario, era algo familiar porque reconocía esa añoranza y atracción hacia el mismo género. A diferencia de mis padres no interioricé la heterosexualidad como el estándar normal de la sexualidad humana.

Ellos no reconocen el privilegio de su sexualidad y el poder que tienen de oprimir mi expresión sexual. A diferencia de ellos expresar mi sexualidad me puede poner en riesgo en otras partes del mundo; besar a mi novia en la calle puede resultar en que un perverso nos persiga o que nos acose. Jamás podría expresar mi sexualidad libremente a causa de que el lesbianismo es todavía percibido como algo contra la naturaleza. Mis padres tienen el beneficio de no conceptualizar las varias dimensiones dentro de su preferencia sexual y de no pensar en cómo el sistema del heteropatriarcado construido para ellos ha reforzado el miedo a la homosexualidad. Mis padres son evidencia de lo dominante que es la heteronormatividad; a ambos les costó tiempo aceptarme. Les costó tiempo romper con todas las tradiciones de su cultura, de admitir que las ideologías con las que crecieron sobre el lesbianismo son nada más que falsedades. Tenían que reflexionar, contemplar lo que significaba quererme, a pesar de que soy totalmente lo que ellos no imaginaban.

Las últimas dos preguntas que les hice a mis padres sobre el lesbianismo fueron las siguientes:

– ¿Qué piensan sobre los padres que no aceptan o aman a sus hijas porque son lesbianas? ¿Piensan que aceptar la homosexualidad de una hija es quererla?

Mi papá habló primero; después mi mamá respondió:

– Para mí son malos porque no la aceptan como son, tienen que aceptar que así nacieron y quieren vivir su vida de esa manera. No estoy de acuerdo con no aceptar una hija así, yo lo veo eso mal. Esos padres son ignorantes. Así no se puede vivir feliz. Para mí siempre has sido la misma, te respeto, aunque

en el momento que me dijiste me quedé impresionado. Me siento orgulloso de ti, hija.

—Creo que los padres que no aceptan el lesbianismo de su hija están desilusionados porque tienen el deseo de que su hija les va a dar nietos y que una mujer deber llevar un camino diferente. Si esos padres no reconocen que su hija nació así, jamás se van a acostumbrar a este cambio ni intentar aceptarla. Los tiempos cambian y cambia la mentalidad de uno. ¡Cómo no te voy a querer a ti simplemente porque eres lesbiana! No, eres mi hija y tengo que aceptarte, no negarte mi amor.

Antes de colgar el teléfono les dije:

—Han sido unos años llenos de desafíos para ustedes dos para finalmente estar cómodos con mi sexualidad. Sé que no ha sido fácil adaptarse a que su única hija sea lesbiana, pero aprecio el esfuerzo que ambos hicieron para no ver mi orientación sexual como la totalidad de mi ser. — Y colgué. —

La entrevista con mis padres fue unas de las conversaciones más honestas que hemos tenido acerca de mi sexualidad. Sentí las emociones de mis padres cuando respondían las preguntas, la vergüenza por no aceptarme inmediatamente. La intolerancia que una vez tuvieron sobre la homosexualidad desapareció y su estado mental llegó a cambiar por tener sus propias experiencias con una hija lesbiana. Todos los prejuicios anteriores que tenían solo eran malentendidos porque crecieron en un mundo donde la heterosexualidad fue moldeada para ser la única forma de sexualidad humana. Nunca los juzgué por sus sesgos; tampoco fui paciente porque la aceptación que necesitaba era solo la mía. A través de los años me empezaron a dar su apoyo y amor incondicional. No soy ingrata porque sé que mis padres tenían la opción de no aceptarme y echarme a la calle. En vez de discriminarme, ellos eligieron amarme y reconocer que la homofobia es inaceptable.

Tengo veintisiete años y creo han sido más de diez años que salí del *closet*. Este largo camino de aceptarme a mí misma ha estado lleno de dudas, lágrimas e inseguridades. Salir del *closet* es aterrador; uno nunca sabe lo que recibirá a cambio de su honestidad. Mi honestidad obligó a mis padres a confrontar la homofobia en su cultura y separarse de ese pensamiento peligroso para poder aceptarme y amarme como soy.

♦ SPANISH 215

COMING OUT

GEMA GARCÍA

I DO NOT REMEMBER THE YEAR nor the age I was when I came out of the closet. My only memories are the place it happened in and the reaction of my parents. I came out in Ecuador and my parents were disappointed. They always had fantasies about my sexuality: they wanted me to marry, to have children, to live the “normal” life of a heterosexual woman. I decided to come out to my mother first, to dissolve the illusion she had of becoming a grandmother and having a son-in-law. I told her inside her apartment in Portoviejo, a city in the province of Manabí, where my parents were raised. My mother was in her bedroom, sitting in front of the mirror, blow drying her black curly hair. I entered the bedroom and sat on her bed, I was a little anxious and then it came out like word-vomit:

“*Mami*, I like women. I am a lesbian.”

Her face had no expression, but her words transmitted all her feelings. She replied:

“What? What do you mean, lesbian? But you like to wear makeup, you are feminine. Do you think you like women because you are insecure about your body? Do you think that men will not be attracted to you because of this reason?”

“Mother, a lesbian is not a woman that possesses masculine qualities or a low self-esteem that she would prefer to go out with women instead of men. You are being ignorant to generalize that way. Femininity is not synonymous with heterosexuality.” I stood up and left the room.

The words of my mother hurt, but what hurt more was her idea of what a lesbian is. In my mother’s perception, this type of woman would be incapable

of seeing another woman as an object of desire, unless there was something wrong with her. Before closing the door of her room, I wanted to yell:

“Go fuck yourself!”

But I did not respond because I knew her reaction would be the same as my father's. When I came out to my father, we were at a house party in Portoviejo hosted by my uncle. We were listening to Rubén Blades, and I felt inspired to not silence a part of myself that I had suppressed for so long. I asked my father to take a walk with me as I had something important to tell him. When I told him I am a lesbian, he looked at me with such sadness in his eyes and said:

“You broke my heart.”

I was speechless not because his reaction startled me, but because my parents neglected the part of me of which I am least ashamed.

I tried not to be offended by my parents' reaction as the prejudices they held at that time were a misunderstanding. My parents grew up in a country where the patriarchy influenced their ideas of the exterior world. Both were raised in South America and had Catholic families. My mother was born in 1965 and my father in 1954, three decades after Ecuador granted women the right to vote. Whichever preconception my parents had during this time, I attribute it to the environment they belonged to. In their youth, they were not exposed to homosexuality as something natural; it was considered a sin. They lived inside a bubble in which heteronormativity was the only public expression of human sexuality. Any other form of sexual expression was deemed a punishment of God. A few years after coming out to my parents, I interviewed them about the concept of homosexuality in Ecuador during their youth. The question I asked both is as follows: “What were the ideas or concepts Ecuadorian society had about homosexuality when you were young?”

My mother responded:

“The parents of that era used to say that homosexuality was not good. They wanted their children to be treated by psychologists because they believed they were possessed by the devil; their sexual desires were perceived as abnormal.”

My father affirmed he was a witness to the same bias in his youth:

“Honey, when I lived in Ecuador, parents would not be accepting if their daughter or son were homosexual. They were mistreated, marginalized, and when they walked on the street, people would mock them.”

After interviewing my parents, I began to reflect on my ideas about lesbianism and how they differ from my parents' views because I was born in New York City. Ever since I was a little girl, I was always a witness to queerness through watching TV shows, the screens of movie theaters, or couples kissing on the streets of Manhattan. Two individuals of the same gender being together was nothing strange; on the contrary, it was something

familiar because I identified with that longing and attraction towards the same gender. Unlike my parents, I did not internalize heterosexuality as the standard of human sexuality.

My parents do not acknowledge the privilege and power of their sexuality, and how it has the capability to limit my sexual expression. Unlike them, expressing my sexuality can place me in grave danger in certain parts of the world; kissing my girlfriend on the street could result in being followed by a pervert or harassed. I will never be able to fully express my sexuality if lesbianism continues to be judged as something against nature. My parents have the benefit of not conceptualizing the various dimensions inside their sexual orientation; they never have to think about how the heteropatriarchy functions as a constructed system that instills the fear of homosexuality. They are evidence of how dominant the heteropatriarchy is. It took my parents a long time to accept me and break away from the traditions of their culture; admitting that the ideologies they were molded to believe about lesbianism are nothing more than falsehoods. They were forced to reflect and contemplate the significance of loving me, even though I am the totality of everything they did not imagine me to be.

The last two questions I asked my parents were about lesbianism:

“What do you think about parents that do not accept or love their lesbian daughter? Do you believe accepting her homosexuality means to love her?”

My father spoke first and later my mother:

“Parents that do not accept their daughter are not respectable people. They must accept that their daughter was born this way, and this is how she chooses to live her life. I do not agree with parents that neglect their daughter that way; I see them as ignorant. You cannot live happily that way. You have always been the same person to me, although in the moment when you told me I was stunned. I am proud of you, *mija*.”

“I believe parents that do not accept their daughter because of her lesbianism are under the illusion of a desire that their daughter would give them grandkids and that a woman is supposed to lead a different path. If those parents do not recognize that their daughter was born that way, they will never adjust to the change or attempt to accept who she is. Time changes and one's mentality changes with time. How can I not love you simply because you are a lesbian? No, you are my daughter and I have to accept you, not deny you, my love.”

Before concluding the interview, I expressed to them:

“These last few years have been fueled with challenges for both of you to finally be comfortable with my sexuality. I know it has not been easy to adapt to the idea of your only daughter being a lesbian, but I appreciate the

effort both of you have made to perceive my sexual orientation as not the sum of my being.” And I hung up.

The interview with my parents was one of the most honest conversations I’ve had with them regarding my sexuality. I could feel the intense emotions my parents felt in each of their responses to my questions; I also sensed their shame for not accepting me immediately. Their state of mind managed to change after having direct experiences with a lesbian daughter; the intolerance they once had towards homosexuality disappeared. All the prejudices my parents previously held were only misunderstandings as they grew up inside a world where heterosexuality was molded to be the singular expression of human sexuality. While I never judged my parents for their biases, I did not wait for them to accept me because the only acceptance I ever needed was my own. Throughout the years, they began to give me their unconditional love and support. I am not ungrateful to my parents because I know they could’ve chosen to not accept me and kick me out to the streets. Instead of discriminating against me, they chose to love me and acknowledge that homophobia is unacceptable.

I am 27 years old, and I think it has been more than 10 years since I came out of the closet. It has been a long road to self-acceptance; a road filled with doubts, tears, and insecurities. Coming out is terrifying because one never knows what they will receive in exchange for their honesty. My honesty compelled my parents to confront the homophobia in their culture and separate themselves from that dangerous ideology, allowing them to accept and love me for me.

♦ ENGLISH 216

THIS IS WHAT MAKES US GIRLS

RAE'L HARRY

I MET LOLA our first day of junior year. It was the worst time possible I could think of to move to a new school: two years in, and everyone already knew each other, especially in such a small town like Staten Island. Hell, these kids had known each other since elementary. Friendships had been formed and broken seven times over by the time I arrived. Where was I going to fit in?

I resented my mother a little bit (deep down, I know it was more than a little bit) for making the decision to move here, for forcing me to start over. After my sister's death, and her divorce from my father, she decided she needed a fresh start. So, she got a new job, bought herself a little sports car, gathered her remaining two children, and took a ferry across the bay. My father let her, thinking it would be easier on us to not fight about who stayed with who. It felt like my younger brother had no thoughts about it at all.

The Assignment and the Writer: In English 216, Fiction Writing, students write original, character-driven stories that, ideally, are low-to-the-ground. That is, with all the manipulation that goes into developing characters and moving them forward, the piece should read real. In her poignant short story *This Is What Makes Us Girls*, Rae'L shows us a high school student, new to Staten Island, navigating a complex relationship with her "best friend," the most popular girl on campus. Allegiances are tested, lessons learned. With sharp prose, a keen attention to gesture and detail, and the restraint to let subtext do its work, Rae'L's story resonates with vulnerability and texture and truth. — **Professor Adam Berlin**

I remained vocal about it—right up until she tried dropping me off in front of St. Charles High School.

“Here is fine,” I told her, pointing to the corner of the tree-lined block the school was on. I didn’t want to draw too much attention to myself on the first day and pulling up in a sleek black drop-top was a sure-fire way to do that.

“On the corner?” my mother laughed. She pulled down her sunglasses to examine me. We were almost carbon copies of each other: caramel colored skin, short, thick bodies, brown kinky hair. We even had the same dimply smile—just like the one she flashed at me then. “What, are you ashamed of me or something?”

“No,” I lied. “This is just not the impression I want to give on my first day. It’s gaudy.”

“Trust me, Carmen,” she said. “There are much *gaudier* people in this town than us.”

“Exactly why we don’t belong here,” I shot back under my breath. I almost regretted it, in the wake of my mother’s silence. A twinge of guilt flittered in my chest as my mother pulled over to the corner. She put the car in park and looked straight ahead out the windshield.

“I wish you would stop criticizing me,” she said. I tensed up. “I don’t know what you want from me.”

I sighed. “It’s fine, ma.” I didn’t know what I was saying was fine. Nothing was fine, but this is how I pretended it was. By saying it was.

I grabbed my bag and quickly got out the car. “Have a good day today, okay?”

“You too, sweetie,” she smiled, but no dimples showed.

It was there that I found Lola: walking down the long block to school, and there she was, crouched against a tree, bawling into her knees. A thought passed through my head to just keep walking. I could go past her without her hearing a thing, and not interrupt what seemed like a low moment. I almost did, but I felt like a crappy person after the conversation with my mom. So, I awkwardly stopped a couple of feet in front of her, wondering what to say.

“Hey,” I started. “Uh, are you okay?”

Lola’s head shot up, revealing probably the prettiest face I think I’d ever seen in my life. She had the smoothest brown skin, made glowy by her own tears. Full lips with a cupid’s bow that would make even the angels jealous. And the biggest, Bambi brown eyes, smeared dark with runny mascara. She took a sniff and breathed out.

“Don’t you ever just hate boys?” I blinked at her, not knowing what to say. Was she outside, crouched in the dirt, crying over...a *boy*?

“Like, don’t you ever just want to—” she took her long, slender fingers and wrapped them around an imaginary neck before squeezing them together.

My eyes widened. Suddenly feeling like stopping was a bad idea. Lola giggled. It sounded almost child-like. "You probably think I'm crazy, huh?"

I shrugged. "Maybe a little bit," I said.

She nodded, and I couldn't ignore the sudden sadness that washed over her features. "Yeah. Sometimes I think I'm crazy too."

I bit my lip, and then decided to speak honestly again: "Look. I don't really know you like that. But I do know that you are *way* too pretty to be ruining your makeup and outfit over some boy."

Her eyes switched back to me, and her lip trembled again. She shot up to her feet, and it happened so quick that it startled me. Two things surprised me: the first was how tall she was. Lola was all leg, showed off in a cute mini skirt. The second was the tight hug she gave me. She suddenly wrapped her arms around my neck, draping my face in her long black hair, and held on to me like her life depended on it. Not knowing what else to do, I hugged her back.

"Thank you," she said. "For reminding me who I am."

"Yeah, sure," I said, eating the silky strands of her hair. "No problem."

That first day of school, she toted me around school on her arm like a purse, introducing me to everyone that she knew. And that also happened to be everyone. It wasn't a surprise—such a pretty girl like her had to be popular. After we shared our names, I told her the light version of my story on the walk to our class, and by the end of the day, the whole school knew that there was a new girl on the island. It was a whirlwind—almost overwhelming. But something about being next to Lola gave me a confidence I had never found in myself. When she asked me if I wanted to hang that weekend with some friends of hers, I didn't think twice. My other option was being at home, and that was the last place I wanted to be—and just not on a Friday night.

That night would only be the first of me doing things I never thought I'd do. Lola pulled up in front of my home in a black Jeep, hanging out the passenger seat window. The car belonged to Terrance, a curly headed kid, whom, judging by the way Lola draped herself over, was her new romantic interest. Whatever had happened to the boy that left her in tears the day I met her, she had clearly moved on from him. I sat next to his friend in the backseat, Rocky, a blond kid who was quiet, but had a sweet smile.

"Gentlemen," Lola addressed them. "This is Carmen. My new best friend."

I couldn't help but beam at the title.

The night started off normal: we went to a diner to grab something to eat, and then bowling down the street. It was only walking back to the car that Lola got the bright idea to sneak into a hotel pool.

"Guys," she said, pointing to the fence across the street. "Wanna go for a swim?"

I laughed, shaking my head. "Yeah, you have fun doing that."

Terrance, however, was already crossing the street. "Hell yeah, I do!"

Rocky gave a small sigh, and a resigned shrug before following his friend. I watched in disbelief as Lola flashed me a charming smile before going to follow them.

"Wait!" I stopped her. "Are you crazy?"

She laughed. "You said so yourself."

I rolled my eyes. "*This* is more than crazy. It's illegal. It's trespassing!"

"It's only trespassing if we get caught."

"Lola!" I protested, and this time, she rolled her eyes.

"What the craziest thing you've ever done?"

"What?"

"The craziest thing you've ever done. Something so wild that you still can't believe you did it."

I shook my head. "I don't—"

"Carmen. You need to do at least one thing that you can tell a story about. Something you can tell your kids or your mom years later when she can't do anything about it. You can come with us," she paused, and a steely look crossed her soft features, "or be a loser about it and stay here. It's your choice."

My adrenaline was pumping. Just the idea of getting caught paralyzed me with fear. But a small part of me didn't want to be seen as a loser. A bigger part of me didn't want to disappoint Lola. She had a way of sweeping you up in the moment—sugar coating things in a way where you couldn't help but romanticize them too.

"Yo," Terrance waved at us from across the street. "Hurry!"

Lola raised an expectant eyebrow at me.

I bit my lip, still a bit reluctant, but ultimately, I gave in. "Fine," I said, barely believing the words coming out of my own mouth. A smile broke out onto Lola's face, and a sense of relief washed over me. Even though I was scared out of my mind, I couldn't help but smile a bit too. I mean after all, who doesn't love a good story?

Our friendship would boil hot for the next year. We became inseparable. Like sisters. People would refer to us as a unit—if one was coming, the other was expected to be there as well. Well, I rarely got invited to places, but that was okay. I didn't mind because being around her was always an adventure. She somehow made this small island seem big. The pool hangouts after dark became routine for us, but there were also the parties, the spontaneous ferry rides to the city at ungodly hours of the morning, hell—Lola

even made going to the movies an experience with her loud, witty comments that would piss off other movie goers.

But what really brought us close, was that I knew all her secrets. One day, after we got tipsy at a nearby bar (courtesy of the men Lola charmed into buying drinks for us), we stumbled onto South Beach and just talked. Well, she did. I mostly listened, but again, I didn't mind. The things she was telling me felt sacred. She told me about her parents—her father was flaky, around sometimes but mostly not. Her mother, she claimed, was a massive narcissist. “She swears her problems are worse than anyone else's—especially mine,” she said. “If I complain about anything, suddenly I'm ungrateful. Like, what the hell? She's always like, ‘you're pretty and popular, what do you have to complain about?’”

I listened sympathetically as she went on about her delinquent older brother, and how he was her mother's favorite. He wasn't doing anything but constantly getting himself in trouble, but because he kissed up to her mother, she let everything he did slide. Then, they attacked her whenever she brought either of their behavior up. I didn't interact much with Lola's family when I was at her house, but I never assumed that was what it was like for her behind closed doors. It made me feel guilty for thinking my own home situation was bad.

But the thing that twisted my stomach the most was hearing Lola's shift in tone when she discussed her failed relationships. She listed them, and their problems: Too controlling, too nice, not ambitious enough, boring, boring, boring. But there was something underneath her apparent dismissal of them. She'd recently decided to end things with Terrance, but came to my door in tears, wondering why he couldn't be what she wanted. It surprised me, because I hadn't known she felt so strongly about the boy in the first place. Eventually, she laughed it off, and so I did too. Just like now.

“Jeez,” I said. “You get bored easily.”

“I don't get bored easily—these guys just can't keep up,.” Lola shot me a smile. “That's why I have you.”

I laughed. “Girl, I'm barely managing. Besides, who are these guys anyway? Jared? Marcus?”

We laid in the sand, looking up at the stars. She sighed. “You don't know them.”

“If I don't know them, then how the hell do *you* know them?” I chuckled, but Lola remained silent. I looked at her from the corner of my eye, and saw the dark look on her face. I knew something was off. I flipped onto my side.

“Lola?”

“They were older,” she revealed. “Much older.”

A cold feeling washed over me. “What do you mean?”

"Like, I was 15, and they were 18. Sometimes older."

My heart dropped. "Jesus, Lola."

"Yeah, I was stupid. I thought I was in love. They made me feel like I was in love."

"Hey," I sat all the way up. "You weren't stupid. You were young. Those men took advantage of you."

"I liked it though," she admitted quietly. It was dark, but I could see the glistening in her eyes. "I loved the attention. I *needed* it."

"You didn't know any better," I told her. "How could you at that age? You were just looking for love, and they knew that. You're the victim."

"That's such an ugly word."

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," I assured her. A memory popped up in my head. "Who were you crying over the day I met you?"

She looked away from me. "No one. He doesn't matter anymore. None of them do. Besides, I'm talking to Rocky now. He treats me good."

She sat up with me and began rubbing the sand from her arms and legs. "Enough about me. How are things at home with you?" I knew she didn't like Rocky the way she claimed. He was filling whatever hole was inside her. Though I wanted to talk about it more, I could tell she didn't, and I had to respect that. Besides, I swear I could feel my blood pressure spike at the simple mention of home. It felt like things were getting worse. My mother and I couldn't speak two words to each other without getting into an argument. So I tried my best to avoid her. The less time I was at home, the better.

"It sucks," I started. "I--"

Lola's phone pinged. She immediately picked up and giggled at whatever was on screen. Whatever moment I felt like we were sharing was shattered. This was a bad habit of Lola's. Anytime the conversation shifted away from her, it felt like she'd lose interest. Even if it was me. An annoyance crept up on me, but I tried to push it away. It wasn't that big of a deal to get upset over.

I checked my phone, hoping it would distract me from the lonely moment. The time flashed 12:44, and I cursed underneath my breath. How was it almost one in the morning? I pushed myself to my feet and found my head still spinning from the alcohol. I groaned, knowing there was no way I could go home like this.

"Hey, can I crash with you tonight?" I asked.

"Sorry girl," she waved her phone at me. "Rocky is actually coming to pick me up. We can give you a ride though!"

I sighed. "Sure." I would have rather swept the sand of the beach we were on than third wheel with them, but at that time of night, I had no choice. When Rocky pulled up about 15 minutes later, my anxiety built, blowing any remaining buzz I had, over how I was going to get into my room undetected. I

gave unenthusiastic byes as the Jeep pulled up in front of my house, distracted by the foreboding dark windows. As I slipped out the car, the front door light flicked on, triggered by my movement. I walked up, slid the key in the door, and twisted the knob as silently as possible. I took a peek in to see the television softly playing some late-night adult cartoon, and my brother knocked out on the couch.

Perfect, I thought, planning to use the noise from the TV to cover the sounds of my late-night arrival. I slid in and locked the door behind me before creeping up the carpeted stairs. I made it to my room, pulling off my sweater, kicking off my shoes and pulling down my jeans when I heard—

“Carmen.”

My mother’s voice sounded from down the hall and I froze. There was no way—“You freezing in place isn’t going to make you suddenly not there, Carmen,” she said, and I released my form in defeat.

“Come here, right now,” she demanded, and I silently screamed into the darkness of my room before pulling back up my jeans and shuffling down the hall to her room. I stopped in her doorway to find her bedside lamp on, and her sitting up in bed, arms folded. Her lips were pursed in annoyance, and I could already feel what was coming. I’d dreaded it the entire way here.

“I told you last time you came in at this time of night that it would be your last,” she started. “Would you like to tell me what you were doing and who you were with?”

Exhaustion hit me like a ton of bricks, because no, I didn’t want to tell her. It would just start an argument I was too sober to deal with. So, I said, “Not really.”

“Was it Lola?”

“Do I really even need to answer that?”

“Carmen,” my mother said in a warning tone. “That mouth is getting smarter and smarter every time you open it. I don’t know how *Lola* speaks to her parents, but you’re picking up one too many things from her.”

I didn’t respond, and instead looked at the ground, hoping that this would be over quickly.

“This is the deal.” My mother slid her legs from out underneath the duvet and set them on the ground. “You’re going to respect the rules of my house, or you can not deal with them at all.”

I scoffed. Was she threatening to kick me out?

“Is something funny?” She raised her voice. “Because I don’t think I’m cracking jokes here.”

“No, it’s just ironic,” I said. “‘Cause I can’t dream of anything better than leaving this house.”

She stood. "Oh really? Because your life so damn bad, right? Because I don't cook for you? Because I don't provide a roof over your head? Because I don't pay for all the nice things you have?"

"No," I snapped back. "Because you pretend like nothing's wrong. Like you didn't just start a whole new life and dragged us with you. Away from Dad, away from my friends, away from Serena—everything that made me happy you took away."

"And what about my happiness? You're not the only person that matters, Carmen! I made the best decision for all of us at the time --"

"—No, you ran, Mom. That's what you did. You ran from Serena's death, you ran from Dad, and you covered it all up with your nice little car, and this house and and you acted like none of it ever even happened! You don't even talk about her!" I felt a ball forming in my throat, but I forced it down. I would not be weak right now. "We never even talk about her!"

My mother put a hand up. "Just stop, Carmen. I can't do this right now."

"See!" I flung my hands up in frustration. "You've never been able to do it! All of this didn't just happen to you. It happened to me, too!"

"You are so selfish." My mother shook her head at me. "You have no idea how hard it is. You have zero sympathy. I've only ever done things for you and Cameron. The one thing, the *one* thing I can't do right now you throw in my face."

"I'm not throwing it in your face. I'm trying to get you to *see*."

"I do see!" she shouted.

"No, you don't!"

"Guys," Cameron appeared at the top of the staircase, rubbing his eyes. "Can we not do this right now?"

I fell quiet, my heart hammering and my hands shaking. "Yeah. I'm done."

I left my mother's doorway and whisked past my little brother to the bathroom door. "Sorry for waking you," I told him, before closing the door.

I leaned back against the door, fighting the tears that were building. I hated it here. I hated that there was never any peace. I hated my mother's infinite list of bad decisions that led us to this point. I hated the way my mother looked at me when I told her how I truly felt. I hated that it felt like I had no one to go to with all the hate in my heart. I knew if I texted Lola right now, there would be no response.

I swallowed hard and pushed off the wall. I just needed a good shower. To wash all of it away. I cleaned the day and the argument away, and got ready for bed. As I slipped out the door, I heard my mother's sniffles through her door. My heart dropped. I crept towards it and leaned to hear better. "I don't understand why she's so cruel to me," she said, I assume to someone on the phone. "Sometimes I wish Serena had just survived instead. She could mitigate

all of this. I don't know what to do without her..." I pulled back and walked back to my room. I fell into bed, burying my face in my pillow. I didn't know what to do without her either, Mom.

That summer was when things would begin to change. I began to change, taking fashion and beauty tips from Lola. I'd watch her as she got ready for every party, and bought similar clothes, being more comfortable showing off my legs and midriff. People started to notice me. *Boys* started to notice me. It was an unexpected, but welcome change. I had never been asked out by a guy before, so naturally, I went to who I considered to be the expert with men: Lola. But when I asked her what to say, she shrugged me off.

"I don't know. Tell them yes if you want to."

I pretended not to be stung by her dismissiveness. That was the thing about us. We were intimate enough to check each other's pants for period blood, but distant enough that the mention of her hanging with someone else, or me suddenly getting attention from guys was enough to make things awkward. I told myself that maybe her breakup with Rocky made her sensitive about the topic, since all we had now was each other.

So, I ended up telling the boys no. The truth was, I knew I wasn't interested in them. The one person I wanted attention from, seemed like they could care less when it came to me. I was waiting for her to change. Hoping for her to. To put in as much energy into our relationship as I did. For now, I would be there for her. I felt like she needed me. Too many people in Lola's life existed just to use her. Men, her family, the friends who wanted to be around her just because she was popular. I understood the rush being around Lola gave some people. I watched her go day by day, soaking in attention from whoever gives it to her. They loved her, but only when she was doing something for them. Performing, flirting, or charming them. They used her for validation, and then forgot about her once she was gone. She felt like opportunity. Who knew what would happen when you were around her? Still, those feelings were fleeting. I felt obligated to be the one thing in her life that stayed. Who else would?

That summer, we got jobs to occupy all our free time. Lola needed the money, and I needed to be anywhere other than home. At work, the same diner we hung out at for the first time over a year ago, we would plan our lives together after high school.

"We should just move back into the city," I suggested, wiping the counters down as I finished the last bit of closing tasks for the night.

"Absolutely not," Lola said, sitting atop the counters. She picked at her nails, her legs swinging absentmindedly. "We need a totally fresh new start. We have to be completely inaccessible. We know too many people in the city."

"Florida?"

"Do I look white and retired to you?"

“Okay then, how about California?”

Her eyes brightened. “That’s perfect. A big city filled with big opportunities. I could model, or act! And we could both work part-time jobs while you go to college, and I pick up gigs here and there. And you could get a dog like you’ve always wanted! Oh my god, and our apartment would be so cute!”

My heart warmed at her excitement. She wanted to leave just as much as I did—if not more. She deserved a new life. The bell over the door rang as someone swung it open. I cursed under my breath. “You were supposed to lock the door, Lola!”

“Oops,” she said. “I’ll tell them we’re closed.”

She hopped off the counter and disappeared around to the front of the restaurant. I waited for the bell to ring again, but after a few minutes of complete silence, I got worried. Maybe someone was giving her a hard time.

I followed Lola’s path around the corner and stopped in my tracks at what I saw. Lola stood inches away from a man’s face, a furious look splayed across her soft features. The man looked familiar, and it took a minute for me to register who he was. My head spun as my mind made the connection. Lola’s back was turned to me, but the man’s furrowed eyebrows changed to surprised when he caught my eye. Lola whipped around to look at me before taking a step back to put space between her and the man.

“Hello, Carmen.” He waved, looking sheepish.

“Dr. Renn,” I said coldly. “We’re closed.”

Our history teacher awkwardly looked at Lola, for back-up or reassurance, I didn’t know. But she didn’t even look in his direction. Just stared off at something behind me, not acknowledging him at all. He swallowed hard and nodded.

“Right. Well, I’ll see you girls on Monday.”

He began his walk out the restaurant, and I shouted out after him, “And can you grade my damn essay already, please?”

Once the door closed behind him, I ran to lock it before turning on Lola. She was still in the same position she was before, not looking at anything.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I said.

“I don’t want to hear it,” she responded, finally moving behind the counter.

“He’s our teacher,” I stated.

“Thanks, Captain Obvious.”

“Was it him?” I pressed, following her, dropping my keys onto a table.

“The man you were crying over, right?”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Carmen!” She walked away from me, heading towards the back room of the diner.

"You wouldn't tell me about him. This is why, huh?" I followed her. "Cause he's our freaking teacher?"

We entered the room, and she sat on the edge of the table, her lips pursed and arms crossed in stubbornness. I shook my head. "Lola, this could ruin you."

"No." She turned her eyes on me for the first time. "It would ruin *him*. I'm the victim, right?"

My shoulders dropped. "Lola. You're so much better than this. You don't need these men coming in and out of your life, taking advantage of you."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Carmen."

Anger rose in my chest. "I know better than anyone what I'm talking about! You do the same thing over and over again. Run to a boy for validation, and when he gets tired of you, you run back to me, shattered. And I know because I have to put together the pieces again. It happened once already with *him*, and it happened with Terrance! Now you're trying to go down that same path again. I'm not having it."

"No one ever asked you to do that," she said, and it felt like she'd spit in my face.

"But you did, Lola. You did when you dragged me into your life," I stepped towards her, my voice rising at my anger. "When you found some poor sucker who would do anything you asked and then labeled her your 'best friend.' You literally only care about yourself."

She was silent, and my head spun as I realized it. The one-sidedness of this relationship that I had been making excuses for months. Outside of herself, Lola *didn't* care about me. But I had been too enraptured with feeling like she could save me from whatever it was that I was running from, that I allowed her to push past my boundaries, walk all over me, and use me however she wanted.

"Wow," I said, as the silence truly settled between us. "Nothing, huh?"

She stared at the ground.

"You know," I said. "I really wanted the best for you. I still do. I might be the only person in this whole damn town who does. But I'm not wrecking myself for you anymore."

I walked past her and grabbed my bag hanging on the back of the door. I exited the store, not bothering to look behind me. Outside, the humid air felt like it might suffocate me. Still, I decided to walk home anyway. As I went, I thought the worst thing about this was her silence. Did she want to stop me? Did she even care enough to? Or would she just call up someone who could replace me? My face burned with anger as I thought about it. How used I felt, and how foolish I was to let it happen. I walked the rest of the way home trying not to think about it. Trying not to check my phone to see if she had texted, trying not to feel the full brunt of what felt for some reason like a breakup.

I reached home, my legs dragging my feet to the front door. I rummaged through my bag for my keys, confusion building when I didn't feel them. My frustration grew as I pulled items from my bag, searching frantically for the set but not being able to find them. I paused as I remembered locking the door after Dr. Renn left, and then leaving the keys on the table. I groaned, tears prickling at my eyes as the events of the night started to hit me at full force. Suddenly, the door swung open.

My mother stood on the other side, confusion written across her face.

"Carmen?" I looked at her, in her robe, and watched as she took me in.

"Sweetie, what's wrong?"

It all hit at once.

I ran into her arms and cried.

♦ LITERATURE 373

THE SILENT OPPRESSOR IN *OROONOKO*

FRANCESCA CHERY

APHRA BEHN'S *OROONOKO* provides a detailed account of an African prince's European enslavement in Surinam. Set in the seventeenth century, the story is narrated by a nameless woman who stands as a witness to this tale. The work depicts a man of high status who is tricked into slavery where fierce honor and love not only characterize our protagonist, Oroonoko, but mobilize the novella's plot. In *Oroonoko*, there are prominent themes of colonialism, slavery, and racism. The functioning themes in Behn's work cannot exist without enablers such as the narrator that help to maintain the oppression that Oroonoko and other Africans face. Despite not having a direct hand in the conflict, *Oroonoko's* female narrator is implicated in the slave trade because the established voice reflects a classist and superior mindset that aligns with the privileged yet destructive agenda of the European oppressors.

The Assignment and the Writer: In Literature 373, Topics in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century Literature, students encounter literary responses to New World colonization such as Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), a major candidate for the first novella in English. Engaging with anti-racist pedagogy, this topic question asked readers to gauge the extent to which the English narrator is implicated in the international slave trade. Francesca's sophisticated essay focuses on perspective, using the tools of close reading to argue that Behn's female narrator possesses a colonialist aesthetic that makes oppression seem natural and imperialist expansion appear inevitable. In short, this student writer builds a claim about the politics of a work by hewing closely to its language.

– Professor Ann Huse

Behn indicates from the start of the story – through the detailed narration – that practices like colonialism represent the norm. Before detailing Oroonoko's story, the narrator provides the reader with insight into the general functions of 17th-century Britain as it relates to economic advancement. The narrator tells us of the manner in which individuals are brought into new colonies: “for those they make use of there, are not natives of the place; for those we live within perfect amity, without daring to command them; but on the contrary, caress them with all the brotherly and friendly affection in the world” (Behn 144). There is a positive tone throughout this description which alludes to how normalized colonization is. The narrator speaks in great detail about a great rapport between the Surinamese white colonists and the Natives when trading goods such as fish, skins, little rarities, and feathers (Behn 144). Essentially, the narrator relays that acquiring these goods is necessary, and using them serves a valuable purpose for them. Of course, the white colonists continuously demonstrate goodwill with the Natives because it allows them to profit and capitalize. They acknowledge that if the Natives are to remain useful to them in this manner, a harmonious relationship is key; therefore, in order to achieve their other goals, they must enslave another group: the Africans. As long as there are benefits, then it is a means worth pursuing, and such a mindset creates agendas for growth, advancement, and power maintenance which are also present in the slave trade.

It is essential to explore the principles – namely the narrator's – presented in the narrative that allow practices such as the slave trade to be justified and perpetuated. Firstly, there is the manner in which the narrator describes Western culture. One instance in which the narrator's voice reflects prejudice is when she praises the Natives' beauty. The narrator speaks of their pleasing shapes, pretty features, and how, overall, they are very charming, except for their color, which is a reddish yellow (Behn 145). The compliment is seemingly innocent, and the detail appears to be a mere preference regarding what is the most beautiful skin tone; however, the comment goes beyond subjectivity. The minor detail alludes to the narrator's idea of racial superiority, even in a superficial sense. Eventually, we see how this superiority extends to other aspects where it becomes more dangerous and establishes the basis for oppression as seen with slavery.

When the narrator finally recounts Oroonoko's slave tale, the way that she introduces him is also telling when it comes to her views of cultural superiority. Initially, she labels Oroonoko as “a gallant slave” who perfectly charms others with his great character (Behn 144). Throughout the novella, Oroonoko is highly regarded by everyone. The narrator provides background information on his upbringing and education, and we see how his education aligns with that of Western values. The text states that he possesses “those refined notions of true honor, that absolute generosity, and that softness that

was capable of the highest passions of love and gallantry” (146). These are traits attributed to being under the care of a Frenchman of “wit and learning,” a royal tutor who taught Oroonoko morals, language, and science, all of which he valued. Oroonoko’s background is reflective of ethnocentrism because the characteristics that he comes to possess are most valued within the West Indies culture under English colonialism. The nobility that depicts Oroonoko is consistent with the superiority of that particular culture. All aspects rooted within that culture, whether that be looks, education, and poise, represent the standard. The narrator places great emphasis on his physical characteristics that set him apart, which again communicates microaggression and prejudice. As opposed to the “brown, rusty black” and “African and flat nose” of the majority, Oroonoko’s face is of a “perfect ebony” with a rising Roman nose (Behn 147). In other words, the narrator emphasizes that his best features are also his European ones, which perpetuates European standards and a sense of superiority.

When Oroonoko is eventually tricked by the Captain and enslaved, the narrator continues to highlight her admiration for Oroonoko concerning the way he carries himself despite his terrible circumstances, as opposed to critiquing how and why he is faced with said circumstances. For instance, she emphasizes that although Oroonoko is a slave, he continuously differentiates himself in a way that has left her in awe of him. The narrator states that Oroonoko “endured no more of the slave but the name” and spoke with air impatient enough to relay that he would not be in bondage long, nor did he have the toil and labor of one (Behn 164). The narrator glorifies Oroonoko as this honorable and brave individual. While these are admirable traits of his, the projection of heroism undermines his struggles as a victim of oppression placed in a dire situation. Even in the description of Oroonoko’s hunting, we see how the narrator paints him as this individual with immense courage, skill, and strength when Oroonoko takes on the tiger. The traits that Oroonoko possesses are fitting of an individual that would lead a slave rebellion as he did. Oroonoko is a man of virtue, loyalty, and honor as the narrator, and many accurately characterize him; however, she also fails to acknowledge how little this personal integrity is actually worth in the end. The narrator’s inability to view Oroonoko beyond an “exceptional” person and simply a human being treated unfairly makes her an enabler because it is consistent with the same principles that allow for the slave trade to exist in the first place.

Oroonoko is perceived as a respectable individual, and yet these striking distinctions do not prevent him from being subjugated or oppressed just like any other African. The narrator’s supposed displeasure with Oroonoko’s enslavement is noteworthy. She does not believe that an individual of such high rank should be enslaved. Essentially, the novella’s argument is not about the cruelty of slavery with respect to basic human rights but rather

which specified groups of people are deserving of such a right. In the narrator's perspective, Oroonoko should have differential treatment due to his royal status. That the narrator does not actively condemn such acts and instead justifies them and focuses on his valuable traits makes her complicit. She has portrayed Oroonoko as this hero who faces unfortunate circumstances, which eventually leads to a tragic end. It seems as though the narrator only deems Oroonoko as important and the situation as tragic because he is a valuable person according to her standards. This mindset parallels modern-day classism. The disparities and discrimination and consequential strife that are so prevalent within our society are a consequence of a philosophy that some people are less deserving of certain rights or opportunities on the basis of their identity or status.

♦ AFRICANA STUDIES 310

ATTITUDES & ACCEPTANCE RATES: THE COVID-19 VACCINE AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS AND WHITES IN RICHMOND HILL, QUEENS

RASHMATTIE HIRALAL

JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH

THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH is to educate and raise awareness for African Americans and White Americans in Richmond Hill, Queens, who may be hesitant about getting the Covid-19 vaccine. This research will highlight the most effective ways to encourage individuals to take the Covid-19 vaccine. This research will also enhance the knowledge of older generations within the community who are headstrong or lack understanding of Covid-19 vaccines. Moreover, it will benefit individuals who are aware of the Covid-19 vaccine and are interested in learning more about the vaccine's effectiveness, safety, and availability, while addressing public health concerns and herd immunity.

The Assignment and the Writer: Mattie Hiralal's essay is an example of the original research conducted in AFR 310 (Research Seminar in Africana Studies) where students may pursue any topic of interest pertaining to the Africana diaspora, broadly defined. Mattie's research was particularly salient because she asked a timely question that was not only relevant to a specific community but could have implications for other communities, as well. In only 16 weeks, she conducted a literature review, created an online survey, sampled a population, and recruited participants for her study. She received 55 useable responses—a rather extraordinary feat during a pandemic—and made three status PowerPoint presentations to the class as well as a culminating 10-minute PowerPoint presentation.

– Professor Teresa Booker

RESEARCH AIM

This research investigates the various factors that motivate attitudes and vaccine acceptability of Covid-19 vaccines between African Americans and Whites in Richmond Hill, Queens.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Determine whether African Americans are more accepting of the Covid-19 vaccine than White Americans in Richmond Hill, Queens.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Are African Americans more or less accepting of the Covid-19 vaccine compared to Whites in Richmond Hill, Queens?

LITERATURE REVIEW**VACCINE HESITANCY**

Vaccines are developed to be effective mechanisms that prevent and reduce the increasing rates of viral infectious diseases nationwide. Scientists and researchers are cooperating and working swiftly for the development of vaccines against the Coronavirus. However, vaccine hesitancy has become a major issue that prevents many individuals from different backgrounds from taking the Covid-19 vaccine. The scale of vaccine hesitancy is examined from complete refusal to full acceptance, influenced by the level of confidence and willingness to get vaccinated (Hooper et al., 2021). According to Akarsu et al. (2021) if the vaccine had been recently developed, chances are the levels of hesitancy and anxiety would be high and the level of trust in the vaccine would decrease. It states, "people trust vaccines is the slow and methodical process it takes to develop them, which may take up to several years before final approval" (Akarsu et al., 2021, para. 4). Trust in vaccines depends on the amount of time it takes to develop the vaccine to ensure the safety and efficacy of the vaccine.

Various factors fuel vaccine hesitancy, including anti-vaccination campaigns, mental health, potential side effects, and misinformation in how the media distributes accurate and reliable information. For instance, the impact of anxiety on an individual contributes to greater levels of vaccine hesitancy, personal responsibility, and risk perceptions of possible negative outcomes that reduce the number of visits to health clinics (Imai & Furukawa, 2021). There are two forms of pandemic-related anxiety which are disease anxiety and consequence anxiety (McElroy et al., 2020). Disease anxiety is concerned about catching or transmitting the virus while consequence anxiety is concerned about the effects of the pandemic. Also, anti-vaccination campaigners utilize popular social media platforms including Instagram,

Facebook, and Tik Tok to spread misinformation, or inadvertently draw statements based on inaccurate facts (Huynh & Senger, 2021). Anti-vaccination campaigners share a common belief that pharmaceutical companies have taken advantage of health experts, scientists, and doctors as a way of making a profit out of the various types of Covid-19 vaccines. However, others may intend to cause disinformation by intentionally spreading deceptive rumors hoping to disrupt health service organizations, dissuade families, and friends from getting vaccinated. Moreover, the rising numbers of mortality rates that are displayed throughout the media are causing severe emotional, psychological, and physical distress as the public experiences social distancing and isolation (McElroy et al., 2020).

PRIORITIZATION OF RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS & DISTRIBUTION OF COVID-19 VACCINE

Throughout the nation, racial or ethnic minorities in the United States suffer disproportionately from Coronavirus. African Americans are more likely to be diagnosed, to be hospitalized, and are more likely to pass away from the Coronavirus (Ferdinand, 2021). According to Peek et al. (2021), racial disparities in Covid-19 mortality rates have been increasing since April 2020 between African Americans and Whites across the United States. Areas with higher populations of African Americans are reported to have higher death rates due to the impact of structural racism and residential segregation that exist (Peek et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic further reveals such inequities in education, employment, health care access, income, availability, and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines. Low-income neighborhoods of African American populations are reported to have higher numbers of Coronavirus infections. Due to more crowded living conditions, higher unemployment, greater rates of chronic diseases, lower rates of health insurance, and less preventional practices of social distancing (Ferdinand, 2021). The low rates of vaccination among African American individuals are solely not based on vaccine hesitancy but other structural factors including inadequate access to vaccine distribution clinics in local areas, limitations in the cold-supply chains, and competition between buyers and consumers (Hooper et al., 2021). Economically, an individual's willingness to get vaccinated may depend on whether or not the vaccines are free. According to Akarsu et al. (2021), unemployed individuals were more likely to be undecided compared to individuals who have social insurance (SSI) or private health insurance.

The struggle for equal access to Covid-19 vaccines is because of the continuing impacts of Structural Racism that affects most inequalities in the United States. Many African Americans who face hardship in battling their complicated health conditions oftentimes struggle to overcome them due to the effects of unfair treatment in the healthcare system. The link between structural

racism and health care systems prolong for decades from African enslavement to racialized residential segregation, police violence, mass incarceration, and unequal medical treatment. It states “distrust is often traced to the legacy of the infamous syphilis study at Tuskegee” where hundreds of Black men were denied treatment (Warren et al., 2020). African Americans' distrust of medicine, physicians, and public health officials reflect experiences from the way they have been treated in the past. The way African Americans were subjugated and dehumanized for centuries from African Slaves to later today as Black U.S. citizens (Wake, 2021).

RAISING AWARENESS & EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

It is important to raise awareness and educate the public in order to increase an individual's confidence and willingness to receive the Covid-19 vaccine. According to Warren et al., (2020), it is recommended that priority of vaccine distribution and earning trust with credible evidence is necessary for those who are considered more disadvantaged. The approach targets those who suffer from various social determinants of poor health conditions among individuals from racial and ethnic minority groups. Also, it is recommended that health officials should take some level of responsibility to provide improvements on immunization policies and acknowledge the characteristics of different vaccinations including their contents and side effects. In ensuring the success for the future of the Covid-19 vaccination crusade, it is crucial for political leaders, health experts, and the media to be more attentive to the process of vaccination development and the consideration of the public's concern (Akarsu et al., 2021). A human factor-center vaccination campaign is recommended to address hesitancy, improve confidence among diverse communities, and ultimately better the public's understanding of the value of getting vaccinated (Schoch et al., 2021). Lastly, it is important to educate the public to spot misinformation and disinformation online to avoid spreading misconceptions and be analytical consumers of the media.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Efficacy is defined as the effectiveness or capacity to produce a desired or intended result (Wake, 2021).

Disinformation refers to something or someone who intentionally spreads false information to influence public opinion or divert the truth (Warren et al., 2020).

Dehumanization is defined as depriving something or someone of human qualities including their personality and dignity or degrading conditions and treatment (Ferdinand, 2021).

Structural Racism is perceived in how societies manifest racial discrimination through public policies, cultural representations, institutional practices, and systems that violate the human rights of minority groups (Peek et al., 2021).

Misinformation is misleading information or inaccurate use of facts (Warren et al., 2020).

Vaccine Hesitancy is “a complex cognitive and behavioral construct that varies for specific vaccines, places, and times” (Hooper et al., 2021, para. 3)

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my survey was to understand the attitudes and acceptability rates of the Covid-19 vaccine between African Americans and Whites in Richmond Hill, Queens. My survey consisted of nine demographic questions compared to sixteen non-demographic questions. The majority of my survey questions were closed-ended questions. Also, four of the questions in my survey represented Likert scale questions. In order to create my online survey, the survey administration software tool that I used was Google Forms.

My overall population pertaining to individuals in Richmond Hill, Queens were African Americans and White Americans. In choosing my sample, I used systematic sampling to remove close togetherness in population or clustered selection. I advertised my survey through various social media apps for conveniences such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Through social media apps, I started asking for participants before Thanksgiving weekend and mostly asked individuals who are at least eighteen years of age and older. After Thanksgiving weekend ended, I launched my survey on November 29 using the various social media platforms available to advertise for participants. Please see Appendix A at the very end to view the list of survey questions.

RESULTS

In conducting my research, approximately 55 people were sent the survey link and 52 people responded to my survey questions. However, only 30 of the responses were usable results that pertained to my research. Based on my demographic findings, about forty-three percent (43%) of the respondents (N=13) were Whites, non-Hispanic and fifty-six percent (56%) of the respondents (N=17) were African American or Black, non-Hispanic. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24 which is about forty-six percent (46%) of respondents (N=14). In the last 6 months, one hundred percent (100%) of the respondents (N=30) resided in Queens. In regard to current employment status, approximately forty-six percent (46%) of the respondents (N=14) have a full-time job and thirty-six percent (36%) of

respondents (N=11) have a part-time job. Also, thirty percent (30%) of the respondent's (N=9) political viewpoints are slightly liberal.

The second half of my survey questions consisting of non-demographic questions begins with the Likert scale question asking participants whether or not they are aware of various kinds of vaccinations such as Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna. One hundred percent (100%) of the respondents (N=30) are aware of Pfizer and eighty-six percent (86%) of respondents (N=26) are aware of Moderna. Ninety-three percent (93%) of respondents (N=28) are aware of Johnson & Johnson. Participants were asked if they received a Covid-19 vaccine and thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents (N=11) said "no" compared to forty-six percent (46%) of respondents (N=14) said "yes". About fifty-six percent (56%) of respondents (N=17) said they did have Covid-19. In receiving the Covid-19 vaccine, eighty-six percent (86%) of respondents (N=26) believed the vaccine was created too quickly for it to be effective. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents (N=21) stated that a monetary incentive would motivate them in changing their minds about receiving the Covid-19 vaccine. Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents (N=14) said that it is very important to prioritize certain groups in receiving the Covid-19 vaccine. In understanding what would strengthen confidence in the uptake of the Covid-19 vaccine, one hundred percent (100%) of respondents (N=30) said the vaccine is effective enough to protect me.

My findings suggest that individuals would take the Covid-19 vaccine if a sufficient amount of monetary incentive was involved to change their minds despite vaccine hesitancy. Based on the results, it did not answer my research question. Although I received 52 responses, I only had 30 usable respondents. This is not enough to come to a solid conclusion or answer. For individuals who did not receive a vaccine yet, the divide was mixed between 18 responses where twenty-seven of respondents (N=5) said yes they will be getting it as soon as possible and twenty-seven percent of respondents said maybe (N=5). Twenty-two respondents (N=4) said no they never plan on getting it. Further research is necessary, with a greater number of respondents, to establish whether African Americans are more or less willing to receive the Covid-19 vaccine than Whites in Richmond Hill, Queens.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- This study was limited to Black or African Americans and White Americans although Covid-19 vaccine attitudes and acceptance affects other racial and ethnic groups including Afro-Caribbean, Asian Americans, Hispanic, and Latino Americans.
- The study was limited to Richmond Hill, Queens because of time constraints. Queens is a large borough with other neighborhoods

including Forest Hills, Long Island City, Flushing, Far Rockaway, Jackson Heights, and Astoria.

- My survey contained only 25 questions and most are closed-ended questions. This limited the possibility of asking other valuable questions that would enhance my data analysis and options.
- This survey was an online-web-based survey leading to the possibility of respondents with biases affecting the sample and not everyone has internet access (older generations).
- Of the 52 responses received, only 30 responses were usable results which are not enough to determine whether or not African Americans are more or less acceptable to receiving the Covid-19 vaccine compared to Whites in Richmond Hill, Queens.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. To which gender identity do you most identify?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender Female
 - d. Transgender Male
 - e. Prefer not to answer

2. What is your age?
 - a. 18-24
 - b. 25-34
 - c. 35-44
 - d. 45-54
 - e. 55-64
 - f. 65-74
 - g. Above 75
 - h. Prefer not to answer

3. What is your ethnic background?
 - a. White, non - Hispanic
 - b. Black, non - Hispanic or African American
 - c. Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin
 - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - e. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - f. Asian Indian
 - g. Other
 - h. Prefer not to answer

4. Where have you resided in the last 6 months?
 - a. Queens
 - b. Bronx
 - c. Brooklyn
 - d. Manhattan
 - e. Staten Island
 - f. None of the Above

5. What is your marital status?
 - a. Single, never married
 - b. Married/ Domestic Partnership
 - c. Widowed
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Separated
 - f. Prefer not to answer

6. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?
 - a. Less than a high school
 - b. Some high school
 - c. High school graduate or equivalent (e.g., GED)
 - d. Some college
 - e. Associate's degree (e.g., AA, AS)
 - f. Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS, AB)
 - g. Graduate degree (Masters, Professional, Doctorate)
 - h. Prefer not to answer

7. What is your current employment status?
 - a. Full-time employment
 - b. Part-time employment
 - c. Self-employed
 - d. Contract/ Temporary
 - e. Unemployed
 - f. Disabled
 - g. Retired
 - h. Prefer not to answer

8. How would you define your family income?
 - a. Less than \$10,000
 - b. \$10,000 - \$19,999
 - c. \$20,000 - \$29,999
 - d. \$30,000 - \$39,999
 - e. \$40,000 - \$49,999
 - f. \$50,000 - \$59,999
 - g. \$60,000 - \$69,999
 - h. \$70,000 - \$79,999
 - i. \$80,000 - \$89,999
 - j. \$90,000 - \$99,999
 - k. \$100,000 - \$149,999
 - l. \$150,000 or more

9. What is your political viewpoint?
 - a. Very conservative
 - b. Slightly conservative
 - c. Neither conservative nor liberal
 - d. Slightly liberal
 - e. Very liberal
 - f. Prefer not to answer

10. Which of these vaccinations are you aware of? If you choose other please specify.
 - a. Pfizer - BioNTech
 - b. Johnson & Johnson (Janssen)
 - c. Moderna
 - d. AstraZeneca
 - e. Novavax
 - f. Other _____

11. Have you received a vaccine for Covid-19?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Not yet
 - c. No
 - d. I don't want it

12. To your knowledge, do you have (or have you ever had) Covid-19?
 - a. Yes, I have Covid-19
 - b. Yes, I did have Covid-19
 - c. No, I do not have or have had Covid-19
 - d. I don't know
 - e. I don't care to say

13. Based on the previous question, if yes, did you experience any symptoms?
 - a. Yes, I experienced symptomatic
 - b. symptoms

- c. Yes, but I experienced asymptomatic
 - d. symptoms
 - e. No, I did not experience any symptoms
 - f. I don't know
14. If you did not receive the vaccine yet, do you plan on getting it?
- a. Yes, I will be getting it as soon as possible
 - b. Yes, however, I plan to wait until it is 100% effective
 - c. Maybe
 - d. No, I am never planning to get it
 - e. I don't know
15. What are your concerns about receiving the Covid-19 vaccine? Please select all that apply.
- a. I am concerned about potential side effects or health complications
 - b. I prefer to utilize natural remedies or local alternatives
 - c. I may not be able to afford the vaccine
 - d. I believe covid-19 is not real or just a conspiracy
 - e. I do not trust the vaccine or vaccine manufacturers
 - f. I believe the vaccine was created to quickly for it to be effective
 - g. I do not think I can get Covid-19
 - h. I think I can get covid-19 from taking the vaccine
 - i. I have no concerns
16. If you have not taken the vaccine, how hesitant are you in taking it?
- a. Extremely
 - b. Very
 - c. Moderately
 - d. Slightly
 - e. Not at all
 - f. I have already taken the vaccine
17. If given the choice, where did you/ do you plan to receive the Covid-19 vaccine?
- a. Family Physician or other physician's office
 - b. Health department clinic
 - c. Hospital
 - d. Vaccination Site
 - e. In-store Retail Pharmacy or Drugstore (e.g. CVS, Walgreens, Rite Aid etc.)
 - f. Not Sure
18. Are you planning on getting additional doses of the vaccine (booster shots)?
- a. Yes
 - b. Maybe
 - c. No
19. Do you trust the Government in how they are handling the Covid-19 Pandemic?
- a. Strongly Agree, through the implementation of government policies and measures (e.g. social distancing, masks, sanitization, etc.)
 - b. Agree
 - c. Undecided
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree, the Government is manipulating/controlling us
20. What are your trusted sources for gaining Covid-19 vaccine information? Please select all that apply.
- a. Scientists, Doctors, Health Experts
 - b. Ministry of Health

- c. Public Health Organizations (CDC, PAHO, WHO, CARPHA)
 - d. Social Media/ Apps
 - e. Friends/Family/Acquaintances
 - f. Religious Institutions
 - g. Journalists/News
 - h. Newspapers/Articles/Web-based
 - i. Local Health Workers, Clinics, Community Organizations
21. Did you lose your job and experience a loss of employment income since March 13, 2020?
- a. Yes, lost my job/laid off, and experienced loss of income
 - b. No, but had to accept a cut in pay and experienced loss of income
 - c. No, did not lose my job and did not experience loss of income
22. Would a monetary incentive motivate you to change your mind about receiving the Covid-19 vaccine?
- a. Yes
 - b. Maybe, pay enough or don't pay at all
 - c. No
23. How important is it to prioritize certain groups (racial/ethnic minorities) in receiving the Covid-19 vaccine?
- a. Very important
 - b. Important
 - c. Fairly Important
 - d. Slightly Important
 - e. Not Important
24. What would be important for you to know to strengthen your confidence in taking the Covid-19 vaccine? Please select all that apply.
- a. The vaccine is effective enough to protect me
 - b. Increased levels of neutralizing antibodies
 - c. The fast development of the vaccine did not jeopardize the safety
 - d. The vaccine works to prevent the transmission of Covid-19 from one person to another
 - e. The risk of getting sick with Covid-19 is greater than the risk of potential side effects from the vaccine
 - f. Health Experts who recommend the vaccine
 - g. I do not need any more information
25. Do you feel that the current status of the Covid-19 vaccination in the United States is at herd immunity?
- a. Far below
 - b. Moderately below
 - c. Slightly below
 - d. Met expectations
 - e. Slightly above
 - f. Moderately above
 - g. Far above
 - h. I don't know

APPENDIX B: PROOF OF RESPONSES

Total Responses:

1. To which gender identity do you most identify?

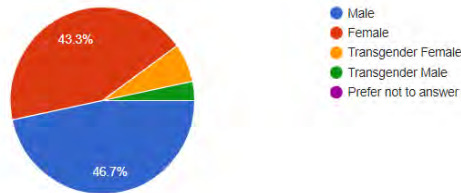
52 responses



Usable Responses

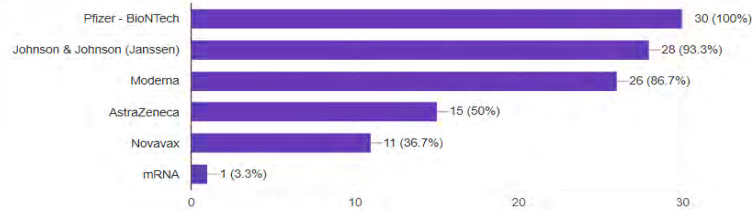
1. To which gender identity do you most identify?

30 responses



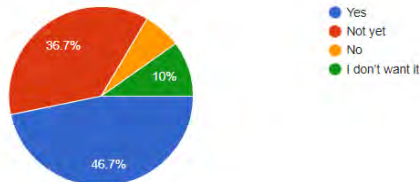
10. Which of these vaccinations are you aware of? If you choose other please specify.

30 responses



11. Have you received a vaccine for Covid-19?

30 responses



◆ HUMANITIES AND JUSTICE STUDIES 310

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN IN QING FICTION AND REALITY

ELEANOR ARIAS

“IN CHINA, A WOMAN IS NOTHING” is the way Yu-I Chang introduces the story of her life to her great niece, Natasha, in *Bound Feet and Western Dress* (Chang, 6). Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) law and culture differed significantly from that in the Western world. Confucian culture was patriarchal, because it was based on hierarchical relations between superior and inferior relations. Women were subordinate to their husbands, just as citizens were subject to the emperor, sons to fathers, and elders to younger siblings. According to Yu-I, who was born in Qing China and died in New York in 1989, a woman is always ruled by some man. As a girl, you have to obey your father, as a woman, you have to obey your husband, and if widowed, your sons would take responsibility for you (Chang, 6). Were women truly treated as if they were nothing? While that answer might have depended on a woman's particular family, Qing law might be seen to protect a woman's chastity and her value as a wife more than her body as a matter of principle. Thus, marriageable women and women in the household of a father, father-in-law, or husband would have more protections than marginalized women, such as prostitutes and some widows.

The Assignment and the Writer: Eleanor Arias's paper fulfilled the research requirement of my HJS 310 (Comparative Perspectives on Justice). In addressing the dilemma of women under Qing law and Confucian ethics, Ms. Arias elegantly contrasted the real plight of powerless women, victimized by male superiors (magistrates, husbands and stepsons), with their fictional counterparts in Qing tales of the marvelous, where the wronged women, particularly widows and prostitutes, were able to secure an ideal justice. In querying Qing legal culture, she independently analyzed Qing law cases, while adroitly adapting the findings of legal scholars, and her paper concludes with an astonishing role reversal, where a divorced woman was able to exercise real legal agency, with the support of her parents-in-law.

– Professor Toy-Fung Tung

If one were to examine Qing law cases, the value of female chastity would be clearly evident, but does this dispel Yu-I's implication that women were at the mercy of male relatives? For example, Qing law treated the crime of rape and other sexual violations very seriously. In one case, we read:

The governor-general of Chihli has reported a case in which Fan Yu-ch'uan tried unsuccessfully to rape a girl of fourteen, Li Erh-Chieh. In view of the girl's youth and immaturity, Fan feared the rape would be difficult to carry out. He therefore started thrusting his finger into her vagina, causing a flow of blood....

The governor-general has accordingly sentenced Fan Yu-chuan to exile [at a distance of 3,000 li] under the statute...on attempted but unsuccessful rape.

(Case 222.16, Bodde and Morris, 427). The commentators, Bodde and Morris, add: “[h]ad the rape been achieved, it would, under the same statute, have been punished by strangulation after the assizes” (Bodde and Morris, 428). Clearly, rape was an especially serious crime in Qing China, because, had the rape been successful, the rapist would have gotten the death penalty of strangulation. Given the Qing culture's veneration for female chastity, a practical reason for preserving the girl's virginity was to keep her marriageable in the near future, so her family could collect the betrothal payment. Some may argue that rape laws were designed to benefit the girl's father and future suitors rather than the girl. But these laws also show that a woman's body was protected by law, as long as she could be viewed in her relations as a daughter, wife, or mother/mother-in-law—that is, in legitimate relations to a man.

The Qing law revolving around women's bodies was highly ambiguous. While adultery was one of the four serious crimes to which a magistrate needed to attend (the others being robbery, murder, and fugitive slaves), and this agreed with Confucian family values, women were also routinely “sold” into marriages or prostitution by their superior male relations for economic reasons. This was not a legal practice but it was tolerated. According to Philip C.C. Huang, out of 131 cases he examined in one archive, almost half, or 68 cases, dealt with the “buying and selling of wives into marriage or prostitution, the abduction or seduction of females for sale, the forcible remarriage of widows, and the practice of purchasing young girls as future daughters-in-law” (Huang, 6). While Qing law condemned the selling of one's wife into another marriage or concubinage, or worse, into prostitution, these sales were such a widespread practice during the Qing that the Qing judicial system responded with toleration (despite such sales violating the family values of Confucius). By 1818, the Board of Punishment (one of the

highest levels of the judiciary) took a position that decriminalized the selling and buying of wives. Under extreme circumstances of poverty, the husband could part with his wife without suffering the punishment for the offense of *maixiu maixiu* (wife selling) (Huang, 6). Usually, being sold into a new marriage was a better outcome for women than being sold into prostitution (*maichang*). Selling a wife into prostitution, or the selling of a wife's sexual favors, of course, violated Qing adultery laws. Significantly, the powerless victims, or women forced to become prostitutes, were not considered at fault in the eyes of Qing law. The people that were seen as culpable were the "actors" or men who controlled the women. Here, the law implicitly considered the women sold into prostitution as "objects," who were taken by "theft and robbery" (Huang, 7). Given what we know, this implies that the perpetrators were the husband, father, father-in-law, or some other male relatives, who were giving the woman up as a prostitute:

[I]n the peasant society of Qing China, once a woman's husband died she became vulnerable to abusive treatment by her marital family, the more so if she had no heir or was young and attractive (and therefore could fetch a higher price on the market for women). If a widow (*shuangfu*) did not have the recourse of returning to her natal family, she could find herself under great pressure to be remarried (*gaijia*) for the betrothal gift price (*caili*) she could bring or, worse, be sold into concubinage or prostitution.
(Huang, 8).

In Qing society, a woman was worth "nothing," because her legal status and her protection under the law depended on her relation to a superior male. Specifically, the women who were marginalized were widows without husbands or sons, women without a natal family willing to take them back, or prostitutes cut off from all protective Confucian familial ties. The fate of such women could often have a gruesome end. What life was like for such women cannot be appreciated from legal analyses alone. To understand their plight, we have to turn to a genre of Qing stories called *zhiguai* or tales of the marvelous, often involving ghosts. In some of these stories revolving around prostitutes and childless widows, we see how these marginalized women were beaten, mutilated, or worse, driven to suicide. Incidentally, causing a person to commit suicide was a crime under Qing law (Art. 299 Qing Code, Jones trans.) Unlike legal reality, within these stories of the marvelous, we get to see some form of karmic justice for the victims, due to supernatural intervention. Where Qing law generally failed these marginalized women, they were sometimes avenged in a fictional world of ideal justice

Ghost or *zhiguai* stories did not agree with Confucian ideals and values. Confucius has been known for his pragmatic and humanistic approaches toward fundamental political questions about state, government, power, law, and...Confucius's hesitation in discussing supernatural forces appears to be surprisingly secular...Lao Tzu warns those who govern a country to always remain vigilant of the power of demons, as demons do have the power on them if they do not follow the Way. On the contrary, throughout his *Confucius Analects*, Confucius repeated his unwillingness to discuss supernatural forces and judgment in the afterlife.

(Yi, paragraph 24). However, Ji Xiaolan, in his career as a Qing official, gathered many tales and anecdotes of the marvelous. According to Ji Xiaolan's translator and commentator, David E. Pollard:

The Neo-Confucian view ruled out [the] afterlife: they held that the *qi* of living beings dispersed forthwith upon death and mingled with the *qi* of heaven and earth: end of story. The basis of all ghost stories, contrariwise, is that the story continues: ghosts retire to a parallel universe where some seem to live uneventful lives until disturbed, while others actively intervene in the earthly world because they have unfinished business, usually a grudge or grievance of some kind, most dramatically one that led to unnatural death.

(Pollard, 21).

As Pollard suggests, ghosts and other specters in Qing literature may be related to the wrongful death of a disturbed person, or some other injustice. Furthermore, ghost stories can also be used to provide social commentary on the morals and the matters of the times, since they were ostensibly about unreal ghosts. As we shall see in two stories below, "Helping a Ghost Get Revenge," and "The Immortal Prostitute," a vengeful ghost could have been pressed into suicide by injustice or simply have some unfinished business that needs resolving. Sometimes, the spirits are angry to the point that they become crazy and deranged lunatics. This means that within the stories the spirits can inflict an evil curse against those who treated them unjustly in life, and thus, be avenged. The key here is that the injustices were real and happened in the human realm. Regarding how ghost stories should be understood from a Confucian perspective, Ji Xiaolan appealed to his readers:

When I write of other people's affairs, I always set down what is told to me; whether it is false, factual, or less than the whole story, others are in a position to know, but I am not. . . .

However, since I do endeavor to give a full and fair rendering, and try to impart some kind of positive moral—not, as so many similar works of the past, standing facts on their head, paying off personal scores, romancing about fine dandies and fair ladies, or catering to prurient interests—I hope that gentlemen of discernment will not think my work beneath their notice.

(Ji Xiaolan, Pollard, epigraph).

With a discerning mind, let us now examine how the conditions of marginalized women were depicted in Qing fiction. In “Helping a Ghost Get Revenge,” a tale from *Censored by Confucius*, a *zhiguai* collection written by Yuan Mei, a concubine was purchased by Ma Jixian, a man in his old age, to care for him, and she was so good to him that he willed her 2,000 caddies of gold and his house, upon his death. However, under Qing law, women could not own land, so the execution of Ma’s wishes depended on his son, Huanzhang, and the son’s uncle, Prefect Wu. In this tale, the Ma family patriarchs did not respect the dying wishes of Ma Jixian. After his death, they took the concubine’s gold. Unfortunately, the widowed concubine had no sons by Ma Jixian to protect her and her property, and her birth family had no intention of providing for her. When she later returns to Ma Jixian’s house to do the final prayers for his passing, she is told to leave as soon as she is done. After crying all night, the concubine hangs herself, and the Ma patriarchs sell the house to Mr. Zhang, a good Buddhist, who believes in the afterlife. Zhang wants some peace in his new house, so he makes a deal with the concubine’s ghost—he will make a charmed tablet into which her spirit can go, and he will convey her to the house of Ma’s evil son and his uncle. Once there, she curses them and they both die mysteriously within days. Her revenge was complete, since Huanzhang had no sons, and “his property was claimed by relatives. Wu also had no descendants, so the fortunes of this line of his family also went into an immediate decline” (*Censored*, 169).

This story, among many others, shows how supernatural karmic justice compensates for the lack of legal justice. Ma’s son violated the teachings of the Confucian relationship between father and son by disobeying his father’s dying request. We are also told that the son was wealthier than the father, so he had no need for the concubine’s property. While the concubine honored the Confucian husband-wife relation, Ma Jixian gave her no male heirs. Sadly, the Ma patriarchs were within their legal rights, because women could not own property. Justice for this widow concubine comes from the ghostly realm, which is shown here to reinforce Confucian values.

Another example of supernatural karmic justice is found in “The Immortal Prostitute” (*Censored*, 82-84). A failed scholar named Wang was

trying to travel up to Mount Yun'ai, known as a place of immortals. He wanted to try his luck at becoming an immortal after he failed the civil service examinations. There, he met a "high-ranking prostitute," Xie Chongniang, a woman whom he loved about six or seven years ago (*Censored*, 82). The former prostitute told him she had come to the mountain to commit suicide after Prefect Wang (same name as scholar) had her stripped naked and viciously beaten. But an old woman saved her and taught her the mystical arts, so that now she had become one of the immortals. She also told him that the old woman on one of her trips to "heaven" saw the Perfect being "whipped by a god" while reciting his sins (*Censored*, 83). How could she, then, become an immortal? What of the "sin" of prostitution, asks Scholar Wang. She answers: "If a butcher lays down his knife, then he can become a Buddha in that instant" (*Censored*, 83). Wang asked her to teach him to become an immortal, but all she does is sleep with him without allowing him any sex. Finally, Xie sends him back to his family and when he refuses, she pushes him off the mountain cliff. When he returns to his family, he finds that he himself has been dead for twenty-seven days. Scholar Wang's ghost also finds out that Prefect Wang died some time ago. Under Qing law, prefects and magistrates were allowed to administer beatings for offenses such as adultery, while serious sentences ranging from penal servitude to death had to be reviewed by higher authorities. However, Xie was being punished, the story tells us, so Prefect Wang could look good to his superiors. In the afterlife, he gets whipped, while the prostitute he punished for egotistical reasons was now an immortal. As historians, analyzing the past, we can see how useful *zhiguai* or ghost stories may be in illuminating the workings of Qing law and society, as well as Qing social norms and ideals of justice. Stories of vengeful ghosts or other specters are a means of showing how injustices could go unpunished under Qing law, especially when the targets were marginalized women. In the two stories above, a widowed concubine and a high-class prostitute both were avenged, and the prostitute was now more knowledgeable than her former scholar-lover.

In two more stories, we again see a disturbing trend among these tales, which show us power-hungry officials, with high-ranking jobs, who are abusing their positions to "punish" prostitutes and/or their clients. These un-Confucian magistrates are shown abusing their authority and later being themselves punished by supernatural forces, since they could not be punished under Qing law for sentencing people to beatings. Along with Prefect Wang in "Immortal Prostitute," we have Magistrate Zhu in "The Magistrate of Pingyang" and the unnamed magistrate in "Quan Gu." All three of these magistrates targeted prostitutes, while bragging about their own superior morality.

In "The Magistrate of Pingyang," we see the condemnation of a magistrate who prided himself on being Confucian gentlemen, while in reality

being a cruel and immoral sadist. In this tale, Magistrate Zhu punished prostitutes by “stripping them and repeatedly ramming cudgels up their vaginas” and he would also “promptly order that clients’ faces be smeared with blood from the prostitutes’ buttocks” (*Censored*, 11). He was especially ruthless towards the women he considered “beautiful,” and he would order their heads shaved and nostrils slit, because “[i]f all beautiful women are made to be plain, then our society will be rid of the scourge of prostitution” (*Censored*, 11). He bragged that he had absolutely no sexual desire and what these women were doing was a serious crime: adultery. Magistrate Zhu’s arrogance was paid for in the blood of his own loved ones. When he was traveling to his new post, he chose to stay on the haunted floor of a guesthouse. There, he was tricked by “the local earth god” into thinking that he could be a ghostbuster, and he was told to be ready when demons would come later that night. Eventually demons did appear to Magistrate Zhu and he spent all night killing those demons, who were in actuality, his wife, concubines, and all his children. Ultimately, the magistrate collapsed dead after finding out what he had done.

The story, “Quan Gu,” follows the fate of Chen, a wealthy young man, who falls in love with Quan, a teahouse owner (teahouses were associated with prostitutes). They had an affair and he paid those who knew to keep the affair secret. However, this was not enough for the blackmailers, and the secret got out. The head magistrate, who prided himself on being a “neo-Confucian who maintained a strict moral code among the populace” (*Censored*, 136), sentenced Chen to 40 strokes. When Quan pleaded for mercy for Chen, he also sentenced her to 40 strokes, allowed her tiny slippers to be “fondle[d]” by everyone, and ordered her to be sold as a concubine (*Censored*, 137). Chen made an arrangement to purchase Quan. This greatly offended the magistrate, so he decided to punish the two lovers again. This time, he had Quan beaten on her bare buttocks, and when Chen tried to stop it, the magistrate slapped Chen’s face a hundred times and had him beaten, so that he later died of injuries. Quan was again sold. Liu, a “provincial-level scholar,” mysteriously appears and says he came to see what the magistrate had been doing, since he assumed that he was punishing robbers or other criminals. After Liu found out that all he had done was punish a mere “affair,” he asks why. The magistrate replies that he did not want to be accused of being a “sex maniac” (because Quan was beautiful), and he did not want to look as if he had been “bribed” by the wealthy Chen. Liu tosses his scarf and marches out. After a near decade (this karmic justice took a long time), when the magistrate was transferred to Song-jiang, a mysterious intruder (as if supernatural) came in through the window and smacked the magistrate three times on the back before escaping. This gave the magistrate serious back pain, which led to his death ten days later. He died with a huge protrusion growing on his back, which looked

“exactly like a pair of human buttocks” and felt “like the pulp of a rotten peach” (*Censored*, 138). This death is another example of “poetic” and supernatural justice, when the law offers no remedy.

We have examined the counterpoint between legal justice and ideal justice for marginalized women in Qing China. Now we will turn to Yu-i Chang's memoir about her life, which was initially one of privilege, until her family became poor. As a result, she was married at 15—but she was also divorced at 22 (Chang, 7). Yu-i's husband, Hsü Chih-mo, was one of the literary innovators of modern China, and he asked her for a divorce after the birth of their second son in Paris. In an instant, Yu-i became a marginalized woman. A divorced woman was assumed to be blameworthy. But, with the help of her brothers, and continuing support from her in-laws for their grandson, Yu-i remade herself, unwillingly, into a modern, independent, and self-supporting woman. Her husband was not a Confucian son. He divorced Yu-i without his parents' consent and did not give her time to consult with her own parents. He asked for a “modern” divorce, without grounds under Qing law, which allowed divorce only if the wife's actions satisfied one of the “Seven Outs”—such as when the wife was refusing to accept her husband's concubine or disobeying his parents (Chang, 131). In the end, Yu-i became the first woman vice-president of the Shanghai Women's Savings Bank (Chang, 179), and she also made a lot of money on the stock market and running a clothing store with her brother and ex-husband (Chang, 181,187). Eventually, she not only built her in-laws a new house, but she supported Hsü Chih-mo's second wife after his untimely death.

Yu-i contemplated suicide when her husband demanded that she abort their second child (which she refused to do, on Confucian grounds). She could easily have become one of the scorned women ghosts, such as the widowed concubine in “Helping a Ghost Get Revenge,” but instead, she fulfilled all of her husband's obligations to his parents, when he himself neglected them. She remained the beloved daughter-in-law to her ex-husband's parents despite her divorced status. This led to an astonishing reversal of her marginalized status as a divorcee. When Hsü Chih-mo wanted to get married again, this time to a beautiful young socialite, his parents refused to grant permission, unless Yu-i traveled back to the family house and gave *her* permission in person. To understand how remarkable this moment was, we have to return to Qing sex laws. In the selling of wives or their sexual favors, women were supposedly the ones giving ‘consent’ to these actions, while the man supposedly did these acts with her ‘consent.’ This situation revolves around the Chinese word *he*:

When referring to the woman, the *he* meant to consent to the following: *helüe*, consenting to being abducted; *hemai*, consenting to being sold; *heyou*, consenting to being seduced; and *hejian*, consenting to illicit

sex. When applied to the man, it meant literally doing something to a woman with her consent—thus, *helüe*, abducting a woman with her consent; *hemai*, selling a woman with her consent; and so forth. Note that this usage was gender specific. The man did the *lüe*, *mai*, *you*, and *jian*. He did not *he*; the woman was the one who *he*-ed.

What these *he* categories reveal, in fact, is the way Qing law saw the nature of choice or will exercised by the woman. In all of these categories, the man was assumed to be the active agent; her choice consisted of consenting or resisting.
(Huang, 11) (italics added).

Under Qing law, this basically gives the woman zero ability to make a positive choice; she can only decide to give consent (or not) to what a man decides. When Yu-i's in-laws forced their son to secure Yu-i's permission to remarry (and in a sense, to cast her aside), they put *him* in the woman's position of being "the one who *he*-ed," or consented, rather than being the one who controlled the choices!

Confucius may have ignored the supernatural, while encouraging people to focus on living a virtuous, peaceful, and harmonious life. But that was the vision for a Confucian gentleman. What about the women that were condemned to injustice in Qing society? The women that had to consent to sell themselves for money? The women who were put at odds with their own morality? The *zhiguai* stories of ghosts pose some very real questions. How could marginalized women live by the Confucian way, if they were put in positions to be harmed, killed, or forced to commit suicide? What happens when the perpetrators are magistrates, or worse, husbands or fathers, who get off scot free because of their positions? Would it be fair to say that Confucius's teachings are flawed to the extent they are thoroughly patriarchal? Perhaps we should also question the Qing laws that deprived marginalized women of agency. If the only way these women could receive justice was in *zhiguai* tales, through supernatural intervention, then those tales were certainly indirectly critiquing Qing society.

In conclusion, we notice a gap between the ideal justice in *zhiguai* tales and the injustices permitted under Qing law for marginalized women, who were "nothing," because they lacked the protection of a superior male relation. Yu-i was a real woman, who lived through Qing China's transition to the modern world. In Qing China, she tells her great niece, a newborn girl's umbilical cord is discarded or buried outside of the house, while a boy's umbilical cord is honored by being put in a jar under the mother's bed (Chang, 6). This may be how Yu-i's life began, but later as a marginalized, divorced woman, she defied all conventional expectations by being able to support

herself, her son, and even her in-laws. So, just as she was not the “one who *he-ed*” (in the position of powerlessness) when her husband cast her aside and wanted to remarry, she was also in the end, not “nothing.”

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♦ HONORS 380

A SUCCESS AND A FAILURE: GAY MARRIAGE AND THE DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION MOVEMENT

MADELYN MULLEN

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ARE POPULARITY CONTESTS. It's even in the name. *Social* movements are indeed *social*. To be successful, a movement requires several components including exceptional leadership and insightful messaging. But these are not sufficient conditions for success. Without popular support, a movement cannot succeed. This is exemplified by the movements for marriage equality and death penalty abolition. Both movements possessed exceptional leadership and insightful messaging, but the abolition movement ultimately lacked popular support. This caused its eventual downfall. Popular support is the foundation, and a house without a foundation cannot stand for long.

During the mid-1960s, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) kickstarted the death penalty abolition movement. They did what was unthinkable just a couple years prior: question and resist the constitutionality of the death penalty. At first, it looked like the abolition movement was headed for triumph. In 1972, after many legal challenges and a finely crafted moratorium, courtesy of LDF, the Supreme Court ruled the death penalty unconstitutional in *Furman v. Georgia*. Problem is, it didn't last. It was the eye of the hurricane.

The Assignment and the Writer: This section of Honors 380 focused on legal and social issues surrounding the use of the death penalty in America. A central question is whether the abolition campaign, led principally by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, has succeeded as a social movement. This assignment asked the students to identify the elements of a successful social movement and draw a comparison between the movement to abolish the death penalty and another social movement. In this elegantly written essay, Maddy Mullen incisively compares the mixed record of the capital punishment campaign with the unqualifiedly successful movement to constitutionalize the right of same-sex couples to marry.

– Professor Evan Mandery

In a flash, the Court reaffirmed capital punishment. In July of 1976, the Court overturned *Furman* with *Gregg v. Georgia*. Ever since, the death penalty has persisted. In 2020, the Trump administration executed thirteen federal prisoners in a matter of months (Honderich, 2021). And, currently, Arizona holds access to the lethal drug Pentobarbital and the Arizona Attorney General, Mark Brnovich, is yearning for a chance to administer it.

Same-sex marriage has been constitutionalized since 2015, thanks to *Obergefell v. Hodges*. And no panic of reversal sits on the horizon, even with today's conservative leaning Court. But gay marriage has also been on a tumultuous journey. The first rumblings of marriage equality began in the 1990s. At this time, some states allowed for civil unions, most did not. In 1996, The Defense of Marriage Act, which legally defined marriage as between a man and woman, halted any further state legislation for the time being (*The journey to marriage equality in the United States*).

In the early 2000s, things began to turn around. In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage. Then, more states followed. In 2008, the California Supreme Court ruled marriage discrimination unconstitutional. But the decision was dismissed not even a year later by the passage of Proposition 8, a ballot initiative that changed the state constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman (*The journey to marriage equality in the United States*). But the movement continued on and in 2015 marriage equality was secured in all 50 states.

Marriage equality and death penalty abolition movement share many similarities. They both had leadership and meaning. Both fought most of their battles in courtrooms. Both movements were relatively new at the time of their initial litigation. And both movements were laborious and rocky. Nevertheless, 2,504 inmates are currently on death row and marriage equality is enshrined as the law of the land (*Death row USA*).

*

Proper leadership can make or break a movement, but it isn't the paramount element. Still, sociology researchers at Northwestern found that good leaders are essential to social movements – “they inspire commitment, mobilize resources, create and recognize opportunities, devise strategies, frame demands, and influence outcomes” (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). For example, take Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. It is no wonder why his words “I have a dream” are forever etched into the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. King's gifts of oration and communication enamored people, both Black and white. He transformed the demeanor of the Civil Rights movement and ultimately led to much of its success.

LDF had Tony Amsterdam in its arsenal. Amsterdam commanded whatever room he stood in front of. He was unstoppable in and out the courtroom. Poised, present, and persuasive, he owned whatever space he

occupied. Throughout his life, he faced the Supreme Court multiple times, he's a true SCOTUS hall of famer if there ever was one (*Anthony G. Amsterdam*).

Amsterdam's enlistment with LDF marked a turning point for the abolition movement. He became the distinguished leader it desperately needed. Relentlessly determined and sharp as a tack, Amsterdam put his entire being into the movement. LDF had many other brilliant and enthusiastic lawyers, but Amsterdam outmatched all of them (Mandery, 2015, p.43).

Amsterdam brilliantly argued some of the most influential death penalty cases in history. This includes *Furman v. Georgia*, the ground breaking case that overturned the death penalty and *Lockett v. Ohio*, which allowed for all mitigating evidence to be introduced in a capital trial. The NYU law magazine reports that, "Even the Supreme Court justices, who would prove Amsterdam's toughest audience, did not know quite what to make of the lawyer whose intellect was matched only by the intensity of his opposition to the death penalty" (Labi).

In the end, all of Amsterdam's efforts were not enough. Capital punishment was ultimately reinstated and practiced. Amsterdam undoubtedly changed the game, but he was just one man. Even outstanding leadership cannot substitute the absence of popular support.

On the other hand, individual leadership was not a substantial weapon in the gay marriage movement. No prominent leader existed for gay marriage, or for the LGBTQ+ rights movement in general. Several LGBTQ+ plus activists took part in the movement, but no clearly defined leader stepped up to the plate. Gay marriage had a different kind of leadership.

The type of activists involved in gay marriage ranged far and wide from legal scholars, and brave individuals who sued for their rights, to Lady Gaga and her liberation anthem "Born This Way." But what one thing accounted for the lack of leadership was the wave of politicians (who are leaders themselves) embracing gay marriage. The Brennan Center found that by 2013, the gay marriage movement finally had significant support from political leaders, which led judges to have an easier time legalizing marriage equality (Kowal, 2015).

Community leaders were also crucial to the acceptance of marriage equality. In fact, researchers found that people "...were more likely to express support for marriage equality when they had been exposed to that message from an "in-group" leader, such as an athlete on their favorite sports team, a politician or a pastor" (Schmidt, 2019). So, while no one leader helped advance the LGBTQ+ agenda, local, community, and political leaders were still relevant and indispensable to the movement.

*

To stand up for something people need clear messaging. Not only do people need a force to rally behind, but a meaning. Specific and understandable

messaging is key to increase participation and support. Moreover, messages that deal with widely held values, such as civil rights and freedom, are more prone to success (*Messaging strategies*). Both marriage equality and capital punishment abolition had varying degrees of success on this front and both of their messages were subject to change.

LDF is a branch of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Historically, LDF has only defended Black clients. When it came to capital punishment, LDF had to decide if they should stick to their roots, by only defending people of color, or risk their foundation in order to condemn the entire practice. This was no small decision. LDF was already on a shoestring budget and taking on white clients could lead to a loss of funds. They also risked a blow to their reputation. Most importantly, it was a risk to their clients. In their decision, LDF had to consider "the possible submerging of special claims of individuals and groups such as southern black rapists in a general effort including all persons sentenced to death" (Muller, p.169). Nevertheless, LDF took the gamble.

For LDF, capital punishment switched from a race issue to a principle issue. From this, LDF attorneys only got busier, but their message around the death penalty became simplified. People knew what they were fighting for. Their unified message also led to complete control over death penalty cases. After 1963, when LDF began accepting white death row clients, they managed every notable death penalty case in the country (Mandery, 2015).

Message evolution was a considerable piece of the marriage equality movement as well. For many LGBTQ+ activists, in the years preceding *Ogberfell*, marriage equality was never the goal. They sought other things like adoption rights, anti-discrimination laws, and criminalizing conversion "therapy." Marriage was viewed by many activists as a "straight phenomenon." As much as they loved and cherished their partners, marriage wasn't particularly important. Verta Ann Taylor, a professor of sociology at the University of California, found that many activists worried "...the legalization of same-sex marriage will encourage LGBT couples and families to mimic heterosexual families structured around male dominance..." (Estrada, 2013). Furthermore, some activists believed that other issues were far more pressing than gay marriage. "I'm not concerned about whether I can get married..." wrote queer activist Legba Carrefour, "but whether I will die in the street at the hands of homophobes" (Geoghegan, 2013).

Still, LGBTQ+ activists decided to fight vigorously for marriage equality. The majority of Americans believe that marriage is important to living a fulfilled life (Barroso, 2020). And, it's true, marriage often comes with various social, economic, and health benefits (Schwartz, 2005). Marriage is generally associated with white picket fences, children, and a Golden Retriever named Bailey.

A couple of years before *Ogberfell*, researchers conducting focus groups and polling found that calling gay marriage a “right” was the wrong move. They found more heterosexual support for “the humanitarian idea that gay people might love and want to commit to their partners, just like anyone else” (Wofford, 2015). Terms like commitment and partnership were found to be useful. Phrases such as “love is love” were born. And so, because of the high regard of marriage and ideas surrounding love in American culture, the LGBTQ+ community made marriage equality their headliner issue. It normalized their cause. One of the researchers in the focus group project, Doug Hattaway, said, “The rapid turnaround in public support for marriage equality is unprecedented, and it shows that message really matters...” (Wofford, 2015).

*

The success of social movements boils down to people and popularity. Marriage equality easily takes the cake on this factor. Support for gay marriage has grown at a rapid pace. In 1996, just 27% of Americans supported marriage equality. In 2004, it was 31%. Today, it’s 70%. And for the first time, even the majority of Republicans are in favor (McCarthy, 2021). What used to be highly controversial is now mundane. Signs that read “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” used to project most people's sentiment, now opposers are the minority.

The unprecedented speed at which LGBTQ+ activism has grown has a lot to do with proximity, empathy, and love. Mahzarin Banaji, a Harvard researcher speculates that gay marriage is different from other social movements because “...often times “love is already in place” (Schmidt, 2019). Being a member of the LGBTQ+ community isn’t always a physical characteristic, unlike race or sex. One can easily bond with a gay person without knowing they’re gay. And when news of their sexuality comes out, feelings don't just vanish. This makes prejudice and hostility toward the community much trickier.

Look at Dick Cheney. He is one of the most recognizable names in conservative politics. Yet, his daughter, Mary, is a lesbian. In a statement regarding gay marriage, Cheney stated, “With respect to the question of relationships, my general view is that freedom means freedom for everyone. People . . . ought to be free to enter into any kind of relationship they want to” (Gluek & Hohmann, 2013). Having Mary in his life has certainly shaped his stance. And while he probably isn't waving a rainbow flag, his love for Mary and hope for her happiness led him to adopt a broader worldview.

Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in America, used his voice to urge LGBTQ+ members to be open about their sexuality. “I would like to see every gay doctor come out, every gay lawyer, every gay architect come out, stand up and let the world know.” Milk stated, “That would do more

to end prejudice overnight than anybody would imagin.” (*Harvey Milk*). Milk was spot on. As more people came out, support for the LGBTQ+ community grew. Homophobia becomes a more difficult task when your son is gay, or when childhood best friend is bisexual. As more members came out, the harder prejudice became.

On the other hand, the death penalty abolition movement is far more remote. A slim minority of people have been sentenced to death or know someone who has. Death row makes up just 0.000750179% of the population (*Death row USA*). Besides, no one even likes to think about death. It is an intimidating, dark, and eerie subject that most people try very hard to keep out of their thoughts. Although, people on capital juries are forced to fall down that rabbit hole, whether they like it or not. In 2019, the Death Penalty Information Center conducted juror interviews after a capital trial in South Carolina. They found lingering stress and anxiety after the trial ended. ““I think about it every day,”” one juror reports, ““Many times during the trial, I went in the jurors’ bathroom and just wailed – cried my eyes out”” (*Jurors report experiencing continuing trauma after serving in South Carolina Death-penalty trial*).

Just as no one is ecstatic about being on a capital jury, no one is thrilled about death penalty activism either. No abolition parades take over Manhattan’s West Village. No abolition protesters march in the streets. No abolition story takes over the 5PM nightly news. Very few people are truly invested in it. It’s easy to imagine why. People on death row are often the most hated individuals in the country. Abusers, serial murders, and rapists are the vulnerable group in the death penalty abolition movement. Very few are quick to defend them.

Moreover, people seem to like the death penalty as an option. In 1972, when *Furman* ruled capital punishment unconstitutional, only a handful of people were partying, unlike the aftermath of *Ogberfell* that had the White House illuminated in bright rainbow lights. In fact, support for the penalty skyrocketed after the decision. Opinion polls taken in 1972 showed a cool 50/50 split, directly after *Furman* it grew to 66%, then to 75%, and in the 90’s it reached a whopping 80% approval rate. Today it’s 60% (*Gallup poll*).

Humans are wired to seek revenge. Some people support capital punishment to channel their desires for it. In a series of mock trial simulations, researcher Lawrence White concluded the most popular reasoning for death sentences was an “eye for an eye”. Similarly, in multiple Gallup polls the two most consistent answers for capital punishment defense have been “An eye for an eye/They took a life/Fits the crime” and “They deserve it” (Jones, 2021).

Overcoming lack of support and human instinct is quite a daunting task. Justice Stewart thought that through striking down the death penalty, the Court could lead public opinion. He has been proven wrong many times over.

Because of its attractive qualities, general discomfort, and distance from everyday life, the death penalty is hanging on.

*

In order for social movements to succeed, people need to get on board. The marriage equality movement was attractive. It was filled with love, fairness, and emotion. The death penalty abolition movement required a deep inspection of human nature and an honest confrontation about death, which people generally loathe. In the end, leadership doesn't matter if no one is following. Messaging doesn't matter if no one is listening. Gay marriage was able to get followers and listeners, the death penalty abolition movement was not.

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♦ LITERATURE 374

IDEOLOGIES IN HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS' *LETTERS WRITTEN IN FRANCE*

DESTINY FALLS
SARAH RAMSAROOP
ADRIANA VALDEZ

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT is to delve into the mind of someone present during the French revolution. Helen Maria Williams' *Letters Written in France*, a text published in 1791, is a series of letters written at the start of the French revolution (1789). These letters inform an anonymous friend about the build-up to the revolution, and France during the revolution, simultaneously weaving in the effects of the revolution on an ordinary couple's life. Our replies to the letters identify course themes observed in the original letters and provide a new perspective on concepts in Williams' letters.

The Assignment and the Writer The project Destiny Falls, Sarah Ramsaroop, and Adriana Valdez wrote for the course on "Literature and Revolution" is a wonderful critical experiment. Using the epistolary form, the project imitates and critiques Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France* (1790), a rare text by a woman writer who went to France to witness the unprecedented drama that was the French Revolution. Falls, Ramsaroop, and Valdez use the letter form to mirror Williams's excitement about unprecedented radical social change and the role of women in creating a more just society. Their letters also question the power of the letter form, however, suggesting that even this genre of authenticity can offer only a mediated representation of feelings, historical events, or personal experience.

– Professor Olivera Jokic

Helen Maria Williams (1761-1827) was born in London to Helen Hay and Charles Williams. She is best known as a writer of novels, poems, and translations of French texts. Because of the content of her writing, she is also regarded as a social critic who supported radical ideals and abolitionism. Educated by her mother, Williams was able to climb the literary ladder by writing poems and essays to help her mentor, Dr. Andrew Kippos, and to establish her political status. A great deal of her life was spent in France, from where she recounts the French Revolution in *Letters Written in France*.

This paper focuses on the way her writing supported the French Revolution. Helen Maria Williams wrote *Letters Written in France* in the epistolary form, which is unique because it personalizes her experiences and thoughts of the French Revolution. The epistolary form creates a moment of connection between the reader and the writer. As we read Williams' letters we see her entries as truthful and vulnerable rather than strictly academic. Williams' letters feel endearing and exciting. Her emotions are at the forefront as she recounts the French Revolution from her point of view. The epistolary method is most effective at conveying the significance and shock of the revolution by highlighting the complex emotions of different people during this time. Williams explains the intricate details of their private lives to demonstrate how these private lives reflect public and societal instability.

Traditionally letters are perceived as personal and private, but Williams' public use of the form demonstrates how the French Revolution turns the personal attributes of life into political ones. We highlight the personal-as-political by creating our own replies to Williams' letters, and we analyze Williams' tone for authenticity. Replies to Letters Three, Eight, and Twenty-Five will center around the excitement and passion in Williams' writing. The intention is to question how an outsider's perspective affects their perception of dramatic events. Writing as another outsider, our replies will challenge Williams' reliability as a narrator. In the same epistolary form, we consider the complex emotions of the time and intellectual concepts discussed in class to investigate the impact of the French revolution.

We also examine the feminism in Williams' letters, which speak to the various ways women contributed to the revolution. Williams incorporates many of the ideals of feminism mentioned in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. Feminism is one of the primary themes in our course, and Letters One, Five, and Nine also suggest how a regime change requires a shift in gender norms.

A group project will always produce varying perspectives on the same text. As a group, we decided to use our different angles to advantage. We each composed replies to three different letters in Williams' text, and each reply centered on our own perspectives that relate to the larger concepts discussed in

our course: personal-as-political, feminism in a limited society, and the idea of authenticity of various sources of information. These three concepts became the focus of our letters.

REPLY TO LETTER 1: "PARIS: BREAKING AWAY FROM VENTRILOQUY"
CONCEPT: FEMINISM IN A LIMITED SOCIETY

Dear Helen,

It pleases me to know you have arrived in Paris on time to attend your show. It gives me great honor to know you're willing to share such wonderful and new experiences with me; although I do wonder if this play is as good as you claim, England is home to many great writers and theatrical events. You may believe your description to be bare, but I believe it is enough for me to understand what is happening and to erect a desire to see the play myself. It marvels me to see the strides you are taking for the female population and feminism. It may seem as though your letter is just a tribute to your experiences, but indeed it are not. You are leaving behind the restrictions and defined "female" duties placed on us as women. Using your literacy and education as the foreground of your adventures will be the stepping-stone for young girls to strive for more. Your actions contribute to feminism and the breaking of stereotypes.

It's a magnificent sight to see, the emotions and breaths held by French citizens as the church bells ring in Bastille as if it were the first time again. Your mere presence is a testament to Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist ideals; it's a new piece published that I have all my young ones reading. I highly recommend you pick up Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of The Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects", you'd love it. She beautifully expresses that it is our job to redefine ourselves and receive an education that is equivalent to that of our male counterparts. I think you will thoroughly enjoy the pamphlet. She explains that women are not just to be trained in romanticism and motherhood but must learn politics, music, and how to articulate themselves in a manner outside of ideals defined by society. Your mere decision to travel and experience the French Revolution exemplifies the practice Wollstonecraft preaches.

Helen, you portray to me the *Te Deum* in such a manner that shows where your education lies and the power we women hold in a life outside of romanticism. Sharing the scene, music, change in tone, and reaction of the French as they relive the taking of Bastille breaks the stigma associated with the "housewife" view placed on us. If you can't find a copy, then let me know in your next letter; I can send one over with my next letter.

Yours truly,
A dear friend

P.S. Please be careful. You may be breaking stigmas and holding power in the eyes of revolutionaries, but there are still dangerous people out there.

REPLY TO LETTER 3: REVOLUTION OR FESTIVAL?

CONCEPT: AUTHENTICITY OF EMOTIONS REGARDING THE REVOLUTION

Dear Helen,

It is so great to hear from you. Being apart has made me miss you and the news of what is happening has come this way. I'm glad you are enjoying yourself. Seeing a priest in between two soldiers had to have been a good laugh. Treating them like ladies is a sight I wish to have seen myself. Forbidden carriages for days in a row must have been quite the feat. There is so much excitement going on and while it does sound fun, what about those who oppose it? I don't imagine that everyone is happy with what has happened, has there been any resistance to the joy and enthusiasm of the people?

The rejoicing sounds breathtaking. I can imagine the excitement through your words. "Vive la nation" has such an exhilarating ring to it, it makes me want to revel in my own freedom. When I first read it, I could imagine the fist in the air and the joined screams from the people. I find myself a little jealous not to be witnessing it as you are currently. I would do the same as you and join in as well. However, I do hope that you aren't getting too excited out there. There is a lot going on and your safety is what I care for. You paint such vivid images, and I can see the people and the decor. Does the cheering mean that the people have won? I would imagine so and yet it feels like this revolution has taken many by surprise. The dancing and singing has to be a sight in itself.

You speak of how this ordeal has lasted days. Have you rested well? Being tied up into all the excitement, must have kept you up. I'm curious to see all you have learned of their culture as well. You must come and visit soon. To teach me the dances and songs of the revolution. I may not be where you are, but you have written its ordeal so vividly that I must see this in your presence. I am happy that the people can find joy and means to celebrate. I presume from your letters that this really means a lot to the people. Continue to celebrate but safely Helen. I adore you and can't wait to read the next one.

With Love,
Your Friend

**REPLY TO LETTER 5: "ROYALS STAKE A CLAIM"
CONCEPT: FEMINISM FOR WHICH WOMEN?**

Dear Helen,

It would come as no surprise that I am shocked by the prince's openness to a regime change and willingness to see the people get what they want. Also, I am amazed to see that the royal family allows him to have the freedom of choice and free will over his beliefs. Madame Sillery is the type of woman that will create a better future for our girls, helping to form polite, well-educated women. Madame Sillery, an author of the children's book, seems to be a fine woman that will lead and educate the French children into prosperity under the new regime. By permitting the young princesses to assist in their education, they are beginning to take agency in a male dominant world. Madame Sillery seems to believe that both men and women deserve the same level of education and gives the princesses and princes the same opportunities to be a better generation. I think this Madame Sillery depicts feminism and the core of the French Revolution- we must do away with the social hierarchy and caste system. There must be a change in France and Madame Sillery is growing those young lads to see the change as normal rather than an abrupt change; I know there are some old farts that probably believe the regime change and revolution are unnecessary.

Doing away with her name because she believed in the National Assembly's fight to abolish nobility and titles, and Madame Sillery's name change is the first step in feminism and taking back our bodies. Changing to fit the new regime and her status as a well-educated woman, Madame Brulart, previously Madame Sillery, will be the first person I visit when I go to Paris- I'd love to get her views on some of the feminist changes we can start implementing in our everyday lives. As for those pesky French women that refuse the French Revolution by holding onto their familiarity with aristocracy, we must say good riddance; it is time for a change in France and maybe our England, too.

To the women who exhibit feminist acts highlights one of Wollstonecraft's important phrases:

I wish to persuade, women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, the delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt. (Wollstonecraft 111)

By offering up their jewelry in the name of revolution and still fighting for a change despite a lack of recognition shows me, and hopefully you, how strong the female population is. You made the exceptional comparison to women acting as the “secret springs in mechanisms” and I think Wollstonecraft saw this too. The women actively contributing and participating in the French revolution are coming out of the “secret springs” role and becoming more recognizable pieces like car bodies, AI parts, and even the mastermind behind some inventions.

By sharing your letters, that one day we can share with the larger population, you are publicizing our unrecognized contribution to society. I am looking forward to your next letter and your further illustrations of female contributions to the French revolution.

Yours truly,
A dear friend

P.S. I can't believe Mons. De Chartres destroyed Louis the Fourteenth's punishment cage—a representation of tyranny it is indeed—and initiated the revolution. I agree this is a testament to his humanity and desire to make France a better France. Have you gotten the pamphlet? Oh, never mind, I'll just send it with my next letter!

REPLY TO LETTER 8: “NOT SO ONE-DIMENSIONAL AFTER ALL”

CONCEPT: AUTHENTICITY OF EMOTIONS REGARDING THE REVOLUTION

Dear Helen,

You remark on the French Revolution as beautiful and yet I cannot fathom it. How can a revolution be beautiful when it requires violence and wrongdoing? Are you merely speaking to the passion behind the revolution? It seems you are having a great time viewing this. The witnessing of a revolution unfold could make one excited I suppose.

In anticipation of your letters, I've found myself reading through some articles regarding this revolution. It seems your reaction and fascination with this revolution differs quite a bit to that of Edmund Burke's. He seems to believe that the ideas that the revolution has been founded upon are too abstract and unreachable. While you find it beautiful and can see the passion in going against one's country, Burke finds it distracting to what the government can provide. Since I am not there, my perception is from what I hear from you and through the passion you describe and the frustrations Burke seems to convey, I find this entire ordeal exhausting. I can see that Burke is rather stuck in his traditions. He'd rather things be peaceful for the sake of peace rather than the sake of equality and comfort for all. I would ask him if he ever thought about

how his treasured traditions looked to other people. When something is held dearly by us it is nearly impossible to be objective when faced with an opposing position. I can see that the French people are suffering and that they are exhausted as well. Burke believes that staying true to the laws already in place could be a way to gain the liberty the people seek however weren't they already doing that? Where was their liberty? I would ask him that if I had the chance. With so many differing opinions and many voices to be heard, I am questioning whether your response to this revolution is from genuine concern and authentic want for change for the French civilians or if this experience has taken some toll on you. You have called this revolution Sublime in a way that only you can witness. Are there no bad days? No days of regret? No days of wishing it were over? It sounds a bit too light for this to be a revolution. You say the men are leading the movement with passion and knowledge of the people's needs. You also say women bring about actions by utilizing pretty faces. Is that the role of women? To be pretty faces? I hope they too, (the women), can use their passion as well. Beauty is great and can lead to wonderful tactics however it is not all there is to give. I do hope you are staying safe Helen. Waiting to hear back from you soon.

Sincerely,
Your Friend

REPLY TO LETTER 9: "ROMANCE VS. REVOLUTION"
CONCEPT: FEMINISM IN A LIMITED SOCIETY

Dear Helen,

To all your companions that believe your enthusiasm and acceptance of the French Revolution makes you a Republican, I say, diversity in thought is key to a well-rounded world. And there may be "finer" ways to gain liberty, but there has never been a peaceful display for change that is working and forcing the government to give the people what they deserve. I, too, stand with the French Revolution and the French people. I stand by your defense for France.

I think it is your well-rounded education and travels that have allowed you to show what an independent woman is and how we too have opinions that may not change how we see our country but hold weight too. It is the never-changing theme of our lady England and the posh beliefs of our nations that makes others believe the French Revolution is going too far and is barbarous. We are never seeking liberty or change, as you have said, England remains in her "matron state" and "sober veneration." I do believe the English are jealous at the lengths the French citizens would go to gain their freedom and to finally find peace and liberty.

In the hours spent awaiting your letters, I have been rereading and analyzing Wollstonecraft's and firmly believe you are walking proof of her pamphlet. You're well versed in your education, and it has allowed you to look at the world from a political and social standpoint. Someone might think you snuck into your brother's weekly lessons and stole his notes. As a woman, we are taught to see the romance in everything, but the way you handled your critical friends through a lens of politics and understanding the society around you speaks to your intelligence and Wollstonecraft's fight for equal education. You walk and breathe feminism!

Yours truly,
A dear friend

REPLY TO LETTER 17: "SOCIAL VS. PERSONAL PROBLEMS"
CONCEPT: THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

Dear Helen,

What a captivating story you have just told me! I hope that everything goes well with Mons. du F----- and that his father does not betray him like he worries he will. I could never understand why parents allow themselves to have poor relationships with their children well into adulthood. But alas, things cannot always be perfect (as you and I both know very well).

And as for the sickness that takes over Madame du F----- after her husband's departure, how is she doing? And what of the child? Please report that all is well, if the news is otherwise then I do not want to hear it! Why did her husband's fellow-traveler give her such a cold look and response? I fear that his cold demeanor is a representation of how his father plans on treating him once he arrives. I do not trust his father!

It has been a while since you have mentioned the revolution in France. How is that going? I can only imagine that this seemingly lovely couple with their own problems is only a small glimpse at the instability during these uncertain times. It is almost as if the problems of society trickle down into one's relationships and societal problems become personal problems. Oh my, am I looking at this too deeply? Because this is something I have thought a lot about lately especially since you are over there right in the middle of everything. This family is not the only one that you mention to me in your letters, so I can only imagine that I am right about personal problems being political problems. Is it safe to assume that the personal is political? I think so, and more so now after reading all your letters to me and seeing how difficult and trying these times have become since the revolution. But they have also been difficult and trying before the revolution. I guess it depends on who you ask. We both know that Burke thinks French society would have been better off without a revolution and that everyone needs to survive and thrive with the

laws already in place. I guess not many people agreed with him seeing that there was a revolution. What do you think? Please, stay safe!

Warm regards,
Your Friend

REPLY TO LETTER 18: "A FORCED ABSENCE"
CONCEPT: THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

Dear Helen,

It is great to hear from you, although you did not address my thoughts in my previous letter on the personal being political. That is okay, because even though you may not agree with my wording, your explanation of the extenuating circumstances in the relationship of Mons. and Madame du F---- is more than enough! I knew my intuition was on to something! That Baron du F----- is a no-good father! Who is he to decide who his son can and cannot marry? And on top of that, his son already married Madame du F---- so why must his father go through extreme lengths to make his son return home, imprison him, and keep him disconnected from his wife for two whole years! I cannot imagine what I would do in Madame du F----'s position. How does she even maintain herself and her child? Sure, she works now, but how long can that last? Well, it does seem that she has supported herself for two years in her husband's forced absence. I don't know what to say about that though. I know that it isn't particularly easy for women to get by on their own especially when the husband isn't around. That needs to change and soon because we deserve better, and men do not need to be the sole supporters or providers anyway.

I think you make such a bittersweet point when you write, "In the dismal solitude of a prison, his pains were alleviated by the soothing reflection that he suffered for her he loved; while that very idea was to her the most bitter aggravation of distress." Mons. du F---- is at peace knowing that he did everything he could for the woman he loves, and Madame du F---- is distressed by the same thought. It is particularly sad to know that she has endured two years without hearing any news about her husband since his arrest for marrying Madame du F---- (what an absurd reason to arrest someone!). And their child that calls for Mons. du F----! Another heartbreaking moment. I am starting to feel somewhat intrusive to this family. I am learning so much about their struggles, and their lives while they know nothing about me. But I cannot shake the feeling that I still need to learn more about them. I have found myself in a very difficult position, morally that is, but I must persevere because I only hear from you through these stories.

I was truly moved when you mentioned Mons. du F----'s brother and the difficult situation that his father puts him in. He is stuck having to choose

between his father, the man who has control over his inheritance and his future, and his brother, the man whose inheritance he would be taking because their father refuses to give it to Mons. du F----. You make me wonder what is to become of their relationship since you write, "Or, was it not sufficient to remain a passive spectator of injustice, without becoming, as he afterwards did, the agent of cruelty on a brother?" What injustices will one brother commit onto another? This sounds an awful lot like Cain and Abel from the biblical stories. Are you intentionally alluding to them? Isn't the French revolution slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"? I am curious to hear in your future letter just how Mons. du F----'s younger brother's actions are representative of liberty, equality, and fraternity when it seems like he and his father are going against those very ideas. It is almost as if they are against the revolution itself. Do you see where I am going here? The! Personal! Is! Political! Helen! Missing you dearly! Please write back to me soon as I eagerly await to hear more about this fascinating couple and their tragic experience!

Warm regards,
Your Friend

REPLY TO LETTER 19 "A FATHER'S CRUELTY"

CONCEPT: THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

Dearest Helen,

Do you not see the connection between private and public life? The personal really being the political. The first line of your most recent letter to me just screams this concept! Maybe I can break it down for you. You write, "Mons. Du F---- was repeatedly offered his liberty, but upon conditions which he abhorred" for what is liberty if it is conditional? This reminds me of the early times in the revolution. The French citizens were fighting for their own liberty from the monarchy, not the perceived liberty that the monarchy claimed to give its citizens. This "perceived liberty" only served the monarchy, not the French citizens, and Mons. Du F---- embodies the same French resistance to monarchical control with his father. In this case, his father represents the monarchy and Mons. du F---- represents the French citizens. He continues to fight the oppressive regime and continues to claim his wife as his legitimate wife, and he refuses the conditional liberty which would have him reject his wife. Coincidence? I think not!

This letter is quite different from the rest of your letters to me. In this letter you include another letter but from Mons. du F---- himself! The poor man is suffering more than he cares to let on. But he is suffering at the hands of his father who, as you so eloquently point out, is supposed to convey "all the ideas of protection, of security, of tenderness" but does the opposite instead. Interestingly enough, Mons. du F---- is a father himself and he wishes nothing

less than the best for his little girl and his wife, unlike his own father who is tormenting him by keeping him away from his family. Mons. du F---- decides to reject the toxic cycles he learns in his youth and implement new healthy cycles with his family. Yet, I still cannot seem to understand why a father would go through such lengths to stop something that has already happened. You would think that Baron du F---- would just be happy for his son and excited to meet his granddaughter. It is dismal that this is not the case for these two men.

I unfortunately (yet, also thankfully) did not hear anything about the injustices that Mons. du F----'s brother does to him in this letter. But you did inform me of the abhorrent conditions and treatment of all the prisoners in Providence. Preventing people from speaking to one another is truly a difficult feat, yet it is one that is accomplished toward these prisoners.

Going back to the letter that Mons. du F---- sends his wife, (well, with hopes that it reaches his wife) I would like to say thank you. In my previous letter to you, I mentioned how I felt like I was invading the family's privacy, and here you are sending me extracts from a letter written by Mons. du F---- himself! Must you be so cruel knowing that my curiosity is insatiable. Nonetheless, I loved hearing from him. You could really sense his pain, hurt, and desperation to see his family once again. His father has truly placed him in a difficult situation. He inspired me to write the following poem:

Fathers can be cruel to their sons
Rather than protect them, they hold up what they love for ransom
Why can't all fathers love their sons like their mothers loved them
Perhaps there needs to be a new revolution to condemn
The hatred some fathers hold toward their sons

And maybe then "Liberty Equality and Fraternity" will truly be for everyone

I know it's rough, but it was inspired by Mons. du F----'s experience. Maybe you can share it with him if you see him again any time soon. Anyway, I must go, I left the kettle on!

Stay safe, Helen! Please write again soon. I would like to hear about what happens with the younger brother!

Warm regards,
Your Friend

REPLY TO LETTER 25: "ADIEU TO OUR WINDOW SEAT OVERLOOKING FRANCE"

CONCEPT: AUTHENTICITY OF EMOTIONS REGARDING THE REVOLUTION

Dear Helen,

While I am glad that you would be coming to visit soon, I also am sorry for your departure from France. There will be no more letters describing the lives and happenings of France in such a way that you do. Your passion for Shakespeare is understandable. I too find his work to be amazing and on its own level. However, I can also see how the standards between what people find to be valuable art is different in every culture. The gentleman with no name who believed that art and state shouldn't mix might not have truly experienced art the way we have. However, in saying that, I also see that your own passion regarding the subject may not let you see it objectively. Perhaps you may be the one who is prejudiced against their views. The similar way that you have seen this revolution as exciting and thrilling could be the way others see it as a burden and/or unnecessary. I don't mean to question your authenticity in the way that you have it, because I believe these are your words and thoughts truly. I am merely suggesting that your authenticity and your opinion as an onlooker presents itself with a different lens than those of the citizens.

I do feel rather bad about the young men forced into prison due to their families. Confinement of physical body and mind must put an amount of stress on oneself that is unexplainable. Mere moments alone can intensify the emotions surrounding our thoughts so I imagine that years would bring about such a state that one could only hope to stay sane in. The gentleman's brother was so young when sent into prison, for a young adult who should be focusing on growing a career and a life, to have that stripped away would have been terrifying. I hope those men can recover for the lost time with themselves and loved ones. In solitude with the gentlemen who have been freed, I have taken a toast to them. It is nothing but a small recognition of their suffering, however, from many miles away, I feel for them, and I support them.

Your return from France has been anticipated by many people. These letters have given me such a sense of wonder and understanding that I feel almost as upset that you must bid farewell. Among the voices of the people, you have found a way to use your own and being the recipient of these letters, I find this connection between us memorable. Stay safe on your departure, bid France a beautiful goodbye for me, and join in with the people for one more "Vive la nation" for me.

With great admiration,
Your Friend

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♦ ENGLISH 320

SWISS-FRENCH BEN

GRACE SUN

SWISS-FRENCH BEN takes his eye off the gin and not-quite-tonics—cheap at two euros—and laughs at me. His wide mouth spreads into a thin smile with eyes closed and head tilted up. He holds onto his stomach and tries not to lean on the wobbly table.

He laughs in a French accent. Ben doesn't chuckle, doesn't "ha-ha." His curated high-pitched "ahi-ahi" barely makes a dent on our ears. I've grown accustomed to this sound. My head is heavy. The bar is too dim to hear. And there is music around us, but my ear is too focused on Ben to notice.

He tapers off and grabs the table. The drinks shiver, Hannah grabs her beer, Gia leans away and apologizes to a man behind him. Ben says, "You're fucking stupid—so funny." He mimics my speech, as everyone eventually does. If I hadn't drunk so much I wouldn't think about it. His elbow bumps into Hannah's arm while he reaches for his gin and tonic. Ben tells me, "You have to listen to the trill. This is deep house, not techno. Techno is the unz-unz, this song has too much tempo to be techno."

I nod. "I can hear the unz-unz."

The Assignment and the Writer: You wouldn't think an essay called—and ostensibly about—*Swiss-French Ben* would have been written for a Workshop in Autobiography, where the assignment is always the self. Yet here, in this sly, insightful, very original piece, Grace Sun keeps her eye on the scene in order to observe herself in it. She's at just the right angle to look through Ben's antics at her own curiosity, her telling physical responses, even the pleasurable dislocation of an innocent abroad. There's a gentle irony throughout the essay and a sharper one at the end, signaling this narrator's sense that as meaningful as a connection seems, it may really be only of the moment. Grace has got full control.

— Professor Jeffrey Heiman

“There is no unz-unz!” Ben says. He licks a finger then holds it to the air as if tasting the music. “Mhm, yes, do you hear the deepness? Techno is light, it’s beautiful. This is beautiful too.”

I mimic his tone, “Mhm...no.”

“Ridiculous!” He turns toward Gia and juts his thumb at me. “So funny.” He finishes his drink and swings his legs over the seat. We sit on battered ottomans and wooden chairs crowded around a table engulfed in condensation. I rub it off on my pants. It smells sweet. I don’t remember spilling anything. There’s a pool of carbonated liquid in our ashtray. Black and gray ash mingle in a swirl. Hannah sniffs her turtleneck and tells us the aroma reminds her of home. I mix the concoction with my finger and create a puke yellow. Gia mocks her, and I can feel a heady nausea. I palm my heart, then my face. This feeling is red. But my friends are still talking. Ben buys us another round. I see him bobbing his head up and down like a pigeon to the music. His gangly body moves on its own rhythm as he waits for the bartenders.

I wonder if Berlin is always like this. Or perhaps, the strangers we find gravitate to the foreign—a sort of truce, an unspoken camaraderie. I have yet to shake this feeling. Like the travelling profession, we collect temporary friends. Two American radio-hosts we met on Karl-Marx-Straße join us after hearing Cotton Eye Joe from Gia’s phone, an Indian-British man reads our palms and teaches us how to roll cigarettes, two Romanian girls drag us around the city—my image of Berlin shrinks as I kept seeing Alexanderplatz’s television tower poke out from all four cardinal directions—and Ben who hails from the Alps returns to us with beers in hand. The song fades into a new one as Ben seats himself.

“Is this techno?” I ask.

“Grace, stop, you’re killing him,” Hannah says.

Even this close, the red distance is palpable. I think it’s the alcohol. It always makes my heart tremble. I must be confusing tipsiness with something else. There’s no tightness in there, my breathing is stable, and my friends are talking. The first panic attack I had must’ve left a mark. It was a year ago but my body remembers.

Ben gapes comically. Mouth drawn open, eyes blown wide, and he follows with a brief “ahi-ahi.” Ben hands me a beer and holds his diagonally, the lip pointing at me. “No, no, no. This is House. There’s a four-by-four beat. Techno has no snare.” Hannah nods with him. He notices something and stops. “Come, let me show you something German. It’s like a handshake.”

I follow his movements. The necks of our bottles clink on both sides, then the bottom of our bottles, then the flat side. Incredible. Amazing. I am dazzled. I do the same ritual with Hannah, then with Gia. They clink their bottles with each other and then with Ben. Our night continues and drifts

through different bars and different streets. Ben insists we go to a techno club but my ID doesn't have a birthdate on it. So we stand on a train platform ignoring the ticket machines behind us. Ben is giggling as we add drawings to the heavily graffitied walls. A tall man slinks his way out of his group and points at my drawing. "What is this? You did this?" he asks in a Scottish accent.

"Yeah." I take a step back and hold my beer bottle by the neck.

"Away ye go!" He says more but none of it is intelligible. Less so due to his drunken slurring—I have a theory that it's mine. That it's always been mine. I've been so strange these past few days, or rather, with the lack of any reaction I felt strange. Conversations and bars and clubs, the distance is close. No one says anything, though, and I don't know I have to cry.

The man gives me a thumbs up and leaves with a "Cheers."

We ride the train to Mendelssohn-Bartholdy-Park. I tell Ben how quiet these trains are compared to New York's and the conversation turns into a complaint about the MTA. He listens intently and interjects an occasional "Oh, really?" and "Wow."

"You should visit sometime," I say.

"Oh, I don't know. America sounds scary."

I agree with him. I've never felt safe at home.

"You should visit me! I'm going to France soon on a road-trip," Ben says.

Gia leads us through pitch-black streets to the hotel Hannah and I share. Scandic Hotel stands on its own like a beacon surrounded by dark streets. We funnel into our room decorated in midcentury-modern orange. Gia kicks his legs onto my bed and reclines in an egg-shaped lounge chair. Hannah pulls out a small bottle of vodka. She searches for the free mugs we got from Christmas Market glühwein. And Ben stands in the middle of the room between our two beds, head swishing slowly back and forth between nowhere and here, at the small hourglass table and the uncomfortably small chairs. I motion him to sit.

I nod at him while Hannah pours the vodka into green juice. "Have fun in France."

Ben holds up a finger and takes out his wallet. "Here, here. If you have this, then you can find me." He hands me a white card with a green border. His black-and-white picture in the corner is smiling. The address of a language school, his birthday, and a class number are printed in hard-to-read grey.

I feel I should choke, but my voice is steady. "Don't you need your ID?"

"I'll get a new one."

We clink our mugs together. Gia promises to buy me more green juice as we drink the last jug. They sit on my bed, their voices low chuckles and rumbles. I wonder how I look on the outside. Are my laughs well-placed, words

misplaced, do I stare too much or is everything only red to me? Gin and tonics make me weak. I hope they leave soon. I can sob better in the shower.

A week goes by, then two years. Gia and I are in New York, Hannah is in Chicago. And I don't feel as strange anymore. Ben is somewhere in Switzerland or France or in between. He is also in New York, tucked in a drawer under museum tickets and Polaroids.

♦ ANTHROPOLOGY 450

CHALLENGED BUT NOT LIMITED: NEW YORK CITY'S DISABLED COMMUNITY IN THE FACE OF COVID-19 (AN EXCERPT FROM AN ETHNOGRAPHY)

TOI JILES

WHEN I EMBARKED ON THIS RESEARCH PROJECT, I set out to uncover the hindrances that I perceived to be taking place inside the disabled community courtesy of Covid-19. I wanted to learn what Life was like for them pre-Covid-19 and the months that followed since its debut. During the course of my research, I was brought to the realization that New Yorkers are tough as iron, even when they are physically disabled. As a native New Yorker, one would think that I would already know this, but I am embarrassed to say that the insertion of Covid-19 knocked me off of my square. Thankfully, neither my family members, friends, nor I were suppressed health wise; yet, the new rules

The Assignment and the Writer: In Anthropology 450, Major Works in Deviance and Social Control, senior undergraduates focus on a contemporary social problem and examine it using the theories and methodologies of Anthropology and other social sciences. The goal is to produce an analysis of data from an ethnographic field project, which they devise and implement based on their chosen problem. John Jay senior Toi Jiles sensitively focuses on how ethnography can reveal to us the everyday-ness of those challenged with disabilities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. She also shows us how this revelation might move us to question—and perhaps transcend—our own limits and visions as human beings.

– Professor Edward Snajdr

and regulations outlining how humans were to socially-engage while socially-distancing threw me for a loop. Customs and traditions tied to formal celebrations, mourning or simple gatherings at local restaurants became hazardous and unattainable. As a busy New Yorker, I struggled with the psychological and emotional side-effects of having to slow down and carry out simple tasks from afar. I was unprepared by all of this and as an abled-bodied person, I kept thinking about people who could only feel the sun and not see it. How were they coping? That question constantly came into play because for a moment, the routines I had developed over the years, suddenly became a memory.

I felt the abrupt inconvenience of the virus' impact at the Bergen Street subway station in Brooklyn during the spring of 2020. When I approached the token booth clerk who was nestled safely inside the glass booth, he refused to honor my transaction when I attempted to hand him my paper money meant to be used to load up my Metro Card. He said new rules were put in place due to the pandemic, and that he was not allowed to touch money because it was one of the ways the virus could spread. I was so confused in that moment. My interaction with another human-being was altered, and I was unprepared for that. I was even more annoyed because I felt that the announcement for this mandate should have been in heavy rotation on the news so that veteran subway riders like me could have been more prepared. While I begrudgingly used the vending machine, it was not lost on me that members of the disabled community frequent the subway to get around. What if on that day a blind person, who may have been traveling alone, was in need of assistance? Would they have been refused help because of this mandate, and how would they be expected to get to their destination?

I have had several disabled people on my Life path. Some were blind, deaf or confined to a wheelchair. None were destitute, cast off or maligned to a corner unable to be full participants inside of their own lives. They were not intentionally made to feel different from their family, classmates or professional peers. Some possessed intimidating personalities not to be stirred, while others remained cool and collected in the face of circumstances fair and unfair.

My "*what about-ism*" was triggered that day in the train station because my sprightly routine came had come to a halt. Was there anyone on standby, qualified enough to give a comprehensive breakdown to the revised definitions to social engagement, the new normal and what or who is considered essential? These thoughts lingered and piqued my interest to delve deeper into this subject; and gave me a legitimate reason to poke and prod inside this exceptional population. Perhaps the data would highlight what New York City's disabled community can achieve when their latent wheel power and grit

is forced into motion. Most importantly, I wanted this space to allow me to safely share outlooks I would normally choose to hide.



October 8, 2021

When I did my research to find credible places to study, I did it with some haste. My speed had nothing to do with disinterest; it had more to do with scouring the web to find organizations that are open and operating at full capacity. At first glance, I mistook Xavier Society for the Blind as a school. The day I decided to use their premises for field research, I had the intellection of blind students entering and exiting the building in my head. As I stood outside, I decided to take the chance and go inside and pay their “school” a visit. When I exited the elevator and pressed the bell outside their office, I was greeted by a friendly, middle-aged gentleman, who was possibly Sicilian or Jewish. I explained who I was and the purpose of my (unexpected and unannounced) visit. He clarified that Xavier Society was not a school, but a library. He told me to wait while he stepped away; then he returned with a young woman, possibly Irish or Italian, tall and professionally astute. She greeted me. I repeated my introduction to her and she politely agreed and ushered me in.

As a social scientist, being amongst the coterie of my interest is vital to my research as well as my soul. The rude interjection of Covid-19 has been crushing and repressive to the anthropology community. The *exhilaration* and elation by being able to do this interview on-site cannot fully be explained.

The three of us have our impromptu meeting in a conference room with glass windows. Once seated, I give an in-depth summary of what led to my interest in this research and this community. The floor opens up and the interviewees introduce themselves.

A: *My name is Ashlyn. I'm the Coordinator of Communications and Fundraising here at Xavier Society for the Blind.*

S: *And I'm Saul Landy, Client Services Coordinator for Xavier Society.*

T: Thank you, pleased to meet you. As the impact of Covid-19 heightened, what were some of the coping strategies, tactics and approaches used when the visually impaired were facing the many social and structural changes brought on by the pandemic? For example, as children we are taught that in case of an emergency, if there is a fire, we have to use the stairs and not an elevator. If the electricity goes out, we are to use flashlights or candles. For all other emergencies, call 911 for assistance. I do not recall drills on how to mentally or physically navigate our way through a pandemic? What were some of the perspectives shared, if any?

A: *Um, well, I know our focus here at the library is on materials that are spiritual and inspirational, mostly Catholic but not strictly. So the majority of the people we serve are Catholic, so they found getting to church or you know, obviously the churches were closed and things like that. So throughout the pandemic we had been serving our clients still from home so they would get our materials and it helped them, you know, continue to practice their faith, you know, learn about and develop it.*

T: Did you see an increase of requested materials to get through the pandemic because they had to social distance and quarantine?

S: *It was a period of time that we were naturally not functional for a very very brief amount of time, so they, so for that amount of time, (Saul is a little nervous. I reassure him that it's okay and to take his time). So for that moment, so once we came back, we had request for materials coming in very often.*

T: Just out of curiosity, are the two of you, do you, or are the two of you related or in direct contact with someone who is visually impaired or who is not associated with your library?

S: *I, myself am visually impaired.*

T: You are? (I say this with some surprise). Oh, so how would you describe the quality of your Life pre-pandemic? Were you happy? Just okay or frustrated? And I ask this question because due to the serious nature of the virus, establishments were shut down. Many people had to work remotely and that left in-person visits to doctor's offices, restaurants, movies, family gatherings and networks where you used to be hands-on with other humans at a standstill. How did you cope under quarantine mandates?

S: *Well, I myself happen to be a very independent. The only issue is that, with my vision I can't drive. So I rely full on public transportation. So it was ...I was hesitant at first with the whole social distancing and everything, but over a period of time, I just slipped right back into the way things were.*

Saul's mentioning of how he "slipped right back into the way things were" speaks volumes. He says this so matter-of-factly as if the pandemic was a quick-fading fad that left no residue and went unnoticed. Maybe I am biased. Perhaps his snapping back into his own personal routine as a visually impaired person can teach the masses of able-bodied people a valuable lesson. Non-disabled people see disability as both a category belonging to "the other" and an experience that does not change over time. If that is true, it makes the master narrative all the more potent. Able-bodied and neurotypical people's lives change all the time, often without too much difficulty. It's much easier to find cultural and personal stories about abled people who have an active role in shaping their Life and finding happiness than it is to find such a story about a disabled person (Hoban, 2021).

T: Okay, but as someone who is visually impaired, the mandate called for humans to stand six feet apart and I know on occasion when riding a subway, sometimes visually impaired people rely on someone to loan them their arm so they can get off and on the train or they are just crossing the street, you know they rely on a sighted person to help them cross safely. Did you go through a phase where you may have been afraid to be touched by someone because you thought you would catch the virus from a stranger?

S: *I mean, I am fully functional. I am completely independent. I can cross streets by myself unless you know, they're not marked, or there's no one around, I, so it was never really an issue for me. The only difference was the social distancing.*

T: Speaking of help and assistance, due to businesses closing down, there was an increase in technology use. For instance, the use of Zoom skyrocketed and was the main platform used in keeping employees, family members and friends

connected. How were the disabled accommodated in being able to use Zoom and/or other electronic networks that temporarily replaced the services traditionally offered by other humans?

A: *Well, I can speak personally about that but I know that we had made a lot of our materials downloadable from our website that hadn't been before. Our clients could log in, download audio books, download braille files for their electronic readers and things like that. We're doing a Zoom event in two weeks, so it will be interesting to see how that goes, but I've been on plenty of Zoom calls with other visually impaired people.*

T: How does that work? For those of us who are fully sighted it's like logging on and you know, trying to get in passcodes, you know, even for a sighted person it is sometimes a headache. How did the...how do the visually impaired use them? I mean I know some people are partially sighted but for those who are just completely blind....

S: *Well I mean, myself even have problems reading small print so I happen to have software that blows up the screen. We have patrons, clients who are completely blind, quite a few who are more tech-savvy than some of the I.T. people I know.*

A: *I can concur with that.*

T: Wonderful. Wonderful. I am happy to hear that. Would you like to expand on that because the next question was what customized technologies were already in place for the disabled pre-pandemic? Are you aware of any technologies currently being customized for post-pandemic? Like has this put, like a new proposals on the table to accommodate people just in case there is another emergency or a global pandemic or any other world event?

A: *Um, not that I can think of. I mean there's plenty of technology that I think that was in place, that has helped them even more since then, screen readers things like that, but I don't know...you know.*

S: *I can't give anything, that came out or was released you know, post-pandemic and everything that I can think of has been around for quite a while.*

T: Is it safe for me to assume that the visually impaired community was already fully equipped just in case of an emergency, something a sighted person may be lost on?

S: *I believe so. I think that the um, you know, I think that the Americans with Disabilities organizations make sure that having things around in that not necessarily you know 100% but for the most part I think there's technology or devices that help most anything.*

T: I know this was an unexpected visit (I laugh) and I am really really happy with your participation and taking the time out today.

Conclusion

The Americans with Disabilities Act set a standard for the rest of the world. It meant that, legally, any public place must accommodate anyone who wishes to go there; wherever there's a stair, there must also be a lift or a ramp. It caused the proliferation of automated doors; including textured curb cuts that alert the visually impaired that they're about to step into traffic (Davidson, 2019).

After tying up my third and final interview with Saul and Ashlyn, I became curious about the ADA and decided to visit their website. Seeing how this Act was only put into effect in 1990 left me with a lot of questions because people living with disabilities is an age-old phenomenon. Saul spoke about the ADA confidently, believing that it made sure that those who are disabled can count on their expertise to guard them from being discriminated against. I wondered what that meant when it came to Sonia. I cannot say for certain if she is aware of the ADA or well-versed on their policies or if she has refused services offered by them. I do know that sometimes economics plays a crucial role in who can *afford* a referral to organizations designed to champion on behalf of the disabled. Poorer disabled people are usually left in the dark and shuffled off to overloaded and impersonal government agencies.

I believe Ernie benefitted from organizations pre-dating the ADA that helped women like his mother and babies like him. I cannot be sure if that was the case being that his mom, and so many women like her, were treated like guinea pigs and their children lab rats. Someone in a position of power *had* to create a foundation safeguarding their livelihood to ensure that Ernie and his generation who were victims of experimental drugs, could lead happy, active and solvent lives.

Advocates like Ashlyn, helping hands like Mr. Vega and even the violin player who is friends with Sonia, play a crucial part to the well-being of the disabled. *Their* abled bodies cement the pleasure and desired qualities of Life the disabled get to enjoy in spite of their confines. It is an all-hands-on-deck operation when you are in the presence of persons with visual and physical needs. Knowing that to also be true for an abled-person, I am confident in believing that is why my subjects blew my mind with their responses.

The abrupt inlaying of Covid-19 did not have a greater impact on the disabled because they are disabled. From what I gathered, once everyone found their footing in the new normal, Life went on. It is evident that Life is still going on although each of my subjects are unique and existing in spaces not identical to the others. My reaction to the sudden change within my existence on the planet, made me believe members of the disabled community of New York City felt the same way I did and I was wrong. Each response to my questions rendered me speechless. I was not expecting to hear most of what I heard. Sonia was happy with social-distancing and Saul acclimated to the changes and moved forward confidently. Ernie lived through 2020 and graciously departed in 2021. That was Ernie. He would have never missed out on the excitement of something new, even when it was a pandemic that required sheltering-in-place. He got to see what humankind could do under duress and he got to see some humans be kind under duress.

None of my disabled informants were victims, and that is a lesson abled-bodied people can learn.

In Loving Memory of Ernest Mucci

♦ HONORS 401

A THEORY ON PARTISAN REALIGNMENTS WITH THE CONSIDERATION OF GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

ELISA MATEO-SAJA

I. INTRODUCTION

THE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY is undergoing a metamorphosis; our political climate has entered into a new realm of tensions and division over the past five years. Red versus blue, left versus right and, more important, an us-versus-them mentality plagues our political system. The American electorate is changing in demographic ways and also in its political ideologies. These tensions and heightened awareness of government and politics are evidence of the current partisan realignment the nation is enduring.

The Assignment and the Writer: In the Honors Capstone Seminar, students develop, execute, and present original research projects. These projects are developed over the course of a year, resulting in a research paper and presentation given during Research and Creativity Week. The work presented here is the final research paper. Elisa conducted empirical research on partisan realignments, which have been largely ignored in political science over the last 20 years. Her compelling argument, for which she finds support through case studies of previously identified realignment periods, is that grassroots activity is important to creating realignments in partisan political control. Elisa extends this analysis to identifying two recent potential realignment periods, providing a sound and sophisticated interpretation of the last few decades of American politics.

– Professor Andrew Sidman

A significant factor in United States partisanship stems from the misunderstanding of the major political parties to navigate their constituents' needs. Voters rely on parties to help them decide which candidate to vote for, but their party does not reflect all of their views, especially not at a national level. Classical partisan realignment theory is evidence of the lacking progression in our understanding of American partisanship. V.O. Key introduced the theory of partisan realignments and critical elections in 1955, and it suggests that the United States undergoes periods of partisan transitions, marked by important elections. The current realignment framework focuses too heavily on the end of the realignment cycle, which occurs at the national level. It neglects to include how everyday Americans participate in our government.

American politics is built on the premise of democracy and a voice for all. Nevertheless, realignment theory lacks the crucial consideration of the average voter, and I seek to amend that in my analysis. Considering the involvement of localized political organizations, now commonly referred to as grassroots organizations, may shed light on factors not accounted for in existing realignment theory, leaving the theory considerably vague. I hypothesize that realignments occur over an entire era, and while critical elections may indicate peaks in partisanship, the root of shifts in behavior stem from mass political action at a local level. The earliest work on realignments recognized the importance of mass political action. However, since then, the field has done little to study and understand the centrality of grassroots organizations in building the momentum of and sustaining realignments.

II. CLASSICAL REALIGNMENT THEORIES

The American political sphere is governed by two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats. Throughout the nation's history, these two parties have changed names and agendas but have maintained their monopoly on the American public. Throughout history, however, there have been crucial moments where one party has dominated the federal government. On occasion, the public reconsiders its needs, and the power shifts. These shifts are known as partisan realignments.

The origin of critical election theory stems from the works of V.O. Key. A critical realignment election is "a category of elections in which...the decisive results of voting reveal a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate" (Key, 1955, p.4). Key's (1955) first paper on realignment theory looks at election data from the New England region. It explores a national "critical realignment" theory based on the small group of states. The current working theory identifies the building of political homogeneity and incurs that "change itself does not produce a realignment, but it creates an opportunity for exploitation of political leadership" (Key, 1959, p.204). Key

argued that small shifts in the voter base could be exploited to become large-scale realignments if party officials use the right strategies. Subsequently, Key (1955, 1959) implies that the presidential candidates are correlated with why these elections are “realigning.” The essential conclusion of Key’s works is how realignment occurs in the United States’ existing two-party system. Key identifies the three essential factors that comprise a critical election are: (1) a sharp and durable shift in the electorate’s party alignment; (2) “electoral involvement [that] is relatively quite high”; and (3) voters that are “unusually deeply concerned “ with the election (Key, 1955, p.4). Existing realignment literature primarily focuses on the presence of a shift in the electorate’s party alignment and high electoral involvement but has spent less time addressing Key’s final criteria, a strong collective concern. Deep concern, as Key says, is not an immediate reaction but instead a progression that occurs over time. Key (1955) also states that a power shift in the community is a part of the shift in party alignment or possibly the creation of a new and lasting voter group. While Key claims his work represents the entire country and thus his theory on realignment could be nationally applied, he may have overestimated the implication New England states had on the rest of the electorate.

Researchers have looked at statistical occurrences of these critical realignment elections; there is a consensus that the elections of 1800 (Thomas Jefferson), 1828 (Andrew Jackson), 1860 (Abraham Lincoln), 1896 (William McKinley), and 1932 (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) are critical elections (Key, 1955; Meffert & Norpoth, 2001; Merrill, 2008). While these elections have since been agreed upon by other researchers as realigning understanding the events that built up these elections is crucial to understanding the phenomenon of realignment.

Contemporary works have proposed various factors that could serve as realignment indicators. Burnham (1967) suggested that realignment occurs roughly once per generation, approximately every 30 years (as cited in Merrill, Grofman, & Brunell, 2008). In this research, Merrill et al. (2008) continue to say that realignments can be seen as a shift in the voter base that supports a given party. Given that American demographics change in a generation for several reasons, such as immigration, a generational realignment is a logical conclusion. Campbell (1966, 76) suggests that realignments occur in the face of a national crisis and opposing party solutions (as cited in Merrill et al.).

A study by Norpoth, Sidman, and Suong (2013) found that one of the essential factors that served as the foundation for the critical realignment in 1932 happened far after 1932. They argue that the durability and the creation of a new voter group occurred over time after the 1932 election, with World War II and the Great Depression’s effects playing a significant role in the electorate’s party affiliations (Norpoth, Sidman, & Suong, 2013).

The research on critical elections and national realignments seem to imply that one of the critical factors necessary for a realignment is that lasting party shifts occur in the time surrounding the critical year and not in the specific critical election (Meffert et al., 2001; Norpoth et al., 2013). Suppose this data is consistent for the other commonly cited critical elections, as it is for Key's research of 1928. In that case, it may be indicative that the period surrounding a critical election offers more crucial data than the critical election years themselves.

Key's theory of the critical realignment assumes that the entirety of the United States shifted in a critical presidential election, and the long-term shift was seen in more local level politics over time. Even though the 1932 election is a "confirmed" critical election, Key's (1955) paper focuses a significant amount of time on the 1928 presidential election and particularly the presidential candidate Al Smith. Key (1955) points out that Al Smith worked to activate the low-income, Catholic urban immigrants, a new voter bloc at the time. Key's data points to an essential element of realignment that realignments build over time and are not the instant phenomena that critical elections suggest. Realignment research has become stagnant in recent years, and Key's framework does not reflect the modern American party system and contemporary voting patterns. While Key's work is not conclusive, further research in this area may provide evidence of realignments that occur slowly, starting at a local level and eventually becoming national trends. Most evidently, the lacking justification for Key's final criteria of realignment, widespread and profound concern from the public, may be best explained by looking outside of the elite scope of American politics.

III. GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

Activism has a long history in America and democracy, and many political scholars have looked at its effects. Activism, at its core, aims to change people's views and transform the institutions that shape society (Svirsky, 2010). However, it is still a question as to whether this type of political engagement has led to critical elections. Small-scale political groups are riddled throughout American history, and even now, they are pillars of our democracy. Presently we often refer to these groups as "grassroots organizations," referring to local non-profits, primarily run by volunteers looking to affect a collective goal (Smith, 1997). Common examples in our current climate are Black Lives Matter, Fair Fight, and FreedomWorks. While some of these have grown to address national agendas, they are rooted in local actions organized by people within the community. The origins of these groups and other organizations like them can likely be tied to a principle of American democracy: the importance of public input on the government. Following that logic, American's are likely to work in collective settings to bring political

change when they see fit because they believe their participation in government is crucial to an effective democracy (Finkel, Muller & Opp, 1989). Grassroots organizations offer the space for collective action with community support and can often be a source of information for the community at large (Smith, 1997).

Some studies have shown that individuals are more likely to participate in “activist” activities when they have a stronger political affiliation (Saunders, & Abramowitz, 2004). This study also highlights the extremism that activist movements often portray. They are rarely reflective of the moderate beliefs that a significant amount of the country hold (Saunders, & Abramowitz, 2004). Nevertheless, despite movements primarily being radical in nature, Arceneaux and Kolodny suggest that with proper organizing local groups can rally support from uneducated voters and improve turnout for their endorsed candidates (2009). Furthermore, grassroots organizations have also been tied to campaign strategies that target voters from the opposition that may be susceptible (Cornfield, 2007 as cited in Arceneaux & Kolodny, 2009). If grassroots organizing can mobilize an uninformed electorate, even outside of their traditional demographic, they may be instrumental in the partisan transition. Especially important is that grassroots organizations are often able to achieve increased voter turnout not only with endorsements but by using mainstream political issues that even disengaged voters can relate to (Arceneaux & Kolodny, 2009). Given Key's third qualifier for critical elections being unusually great concern from the electorate, grassroots organizations' ability to highlight particular political matters speaks to their involvement in a partisan realignment. Research has also shown the intense impact that activists have around party policies not only in party leaders but also in individual party affiliates (Miller & Schofield, 2003). Local organizations have strong ties in both the elite and civilian spheres of political engagement, making them the crucial bonding instrument in communication in the two sectors of democracy. This level of connection is essential in voter party affiliations, as grassroots organizations are not diluted with national or federal level agendas and can serve as the body that makes higher-level policy legible to the average voter.

It is also imperative that in the discussion of grassroots organizations and realignments, we consider intentionally ignored communities. Michener demonstrates in her work the ability of community-oriented groups to mobilize voters that are often left out of campaign efforts by political and economic elites (2019). Grassroots offers a unique opportunity to transition voters and mobilize entirely new voter blocs that could lead to partisan realignments.

This is why I believe grassroots organizing offers a unique addition to American politics. The current existence of grassroots activism in America represents non-party affiliated groups that disseminate information to the public in a way they can understand. Thus, grassroots organizing may affect a greater population than political elites can. Given the present literature, I

hypothesize that grassroots involvement plays a decisive role in indicating and inciting the transition of American partisanship throughout the nation's history.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To test the hypothesis stated above, I compiled information on the five major realignment elections and the grassroots organizing that was taking place in the surrounding years, both leading up to the elections and after the elections concluded. The five most-cited critical elections being 1800, 1828, 1860, 1896, and 1932.

My study focuses on these realignment periods because the existing research indicates that these elections have a vital role in American electoral history. These periods also have rich histories of local political action that I believe played a role in the greater national political agendas, and ultimately the partisan realignments. My study is creating an initial framework and outlining only a few of the important local actors that could have contributed to a national realignment and highlighting key factors previous research has not accounted for. This study examines the period around each critical election to identify the grassroots-related factors that presage these realignments and allow them to continue after the critical election.

Once common factors have been identified in these realigning periods, I consider potential recent realignment periods that existing literature has not identified. In the years following the 1932 realignment, America underwent a realignment and is currently experiencing another. I followed the same analysis pattern for the two new potential realignments by identifying mass political actions during the time periods and their effects on the national political agenda.

V. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: *Grassroots Activity Throughout Realignment Periods*

In order to better understand the role of grassroots organizing in partisan realignment I will analyze the role of mass political action leading up to the historical critical elections. This analysis will show why the politics of the common people should not be ignored in the theory of partisan realignment.

The Election of 1800

The first critical election we will explore is the election of 1800, where incumbent John Adams faced Thomas Jefferson. Both framers of the American democracy, Adams was a Federalist whilst Jefferson represented the Democrat-Republicans (Rubel, 2001). The Federalists represented the elite of American politics: the North East, rising industrialists, and defendants of England regarding foreign policy (Rubel, 2001). On the other hand, the

Democrat-Republicans were the party of recent immigrants; they concerned themselves with individual liberties and states' rights (Rubel, 2001).

At this point in history, most Americans were not voting. For one, a large part of the population consisted of non-eligible voters: women, Black and Indigenous people, indentured servants, and all the White men that did not meet the rigid requirements for voter eligibility. And yet, this is considered a point of inflection of American partisanship. Many framers promoted an elitist view of government and elections, one in which government service was performed by a landed elite, elected by a land-owning and well-educated public. It would not take long before the apparent contradictions between this model and democracy created stresses on the system, which were ultimately and thankfully resolved in favor of greater access of the mass public to voting. However, in 1800 the president was not decided by popular vote.

The House of Representatives decided the election of 1800, and the poor planning of the election led to a tie between Jefferson and his running mate Aaron Burr. Ultimately, Jefferson won because Hamilton persuaded representatives to submit blank ballots to avoid another stalemate. The election of 1800 led to the first peaceful transfer of power between opposing political parties, thus proving the American democracy stood a chance (Rubel, 2001). Though the Federalists and the Democrat-Republicans were barely even political parties as we understand them today, it was the transfer from one ideology to the other without blows that made the event so important to the principles of the American democracy. However, while critical, this election is evidence of the alignment of American partisanship, not a realignment, because it was the first. The election of 1800 marks the first peaceful transition of power; however, the election of 1796 barred similarities to the election of 1800 and was influential in developing the political parties. Nevertheless, neither election is relevant to the discussion on partisan realignment because most American people did not participate in either election, meaning they could not meet Key's main criteria.

The Election of 1828

With the minimal scale of the 1800 election in mind, we move to the election of 1828 and the rivalry of John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. Where 1800 is a subtle transition in many ways, the election of 1828 was the exact opposite. Many consider Jacksonian politics and his campaigning to be the beginning of the modern election. Jackson and Adams led a contentious battle up until the ballot. Jackson represented the Democrats and John Quincy Adams the National Republicans (Rubel, 2001). While party allegiances were only beginning to solidify, the American election had expanded beyond the elite politicians, and many Americans would be voting for the first time in 1828. It was not just the electorate that had grown since 1800; by this time,

new states had been added to the union, which meant new local issues were developing as well as new perspectives on national governance. America was expanding its population and its geography, and more local government meant more opportunities for grassroots politics.

While most campaigning still occurred at the local level Andrew Jackson, whom many have compared to Donald Trump, stirred something in new demographics that previous politicians had not. Andrew Jackson, as a military man, was not the typical politician (Parsons, 2009). He had not had the same education as his opponent. However, he was the consistent image of the American war effort with successful massacres in New Orleans and Florida, fresh in the minds of the average American (Rubel, 2001). On the other hand, Adams was a former diplomat, the sitting president, and a representation of American nobility as the first president to be related to a former president (Rubel, 2001). Jackson became a symbol of a new America. He supported the farmer as opposed to the industrialist. He was from Tennessee, which made him an outsider even in statehood, given that four of the six presidents were all from Virginia. Jackson was firm on his belief to expand America under Manifest Destiny and amplify his merciless oppression of non-white people. Necessary for Jackson was not just his strong background and charisma but also his approach to the election. Jackson's campaign worked in many local municipalities to familiarize the people with Jackson.

To best understand the events of the election of 1828, we must also consider the election of 1824. In 1824 Jackson and Adams first ran against each other; however, the election had four major candidates, none of whom won the majority of the electoral vote. Jackson, however, won the popular vote (Parsons, 2009). Because the election of 1824 was decided in the House of Representatives, and to prevent Jackson from winning, Henry Clay negotiated that his supporters would vote for Adams in exchange for the position of Secretary of State (Parsons, 2009). Jackson and his supporters were infuriated and referred to it as the "Corrupt Bargain" (Parsons, 2009).

With the election of 1824 fresh in the minds of Americans, it was no shocker that the election of 1828 was a ruthless one. With biting newspaper advertisements riddled with gossip and slander (Parsons, 2009). But it also made the campaign more involved and influenced by other party members, such as Martin Van Buren. Van Buren was a well-connected politician, senator from New York and ran the Albany Regency (Parsons, 2009). In a bid to prevent a second term for John Q. Adams, Van Buren enlisted Adam's Vice President, John C. Calhoun, as Jackson's running mate for 1828, and he used his network of strength through the Albany Regency to create a coalition of Republicans in the South and North Eastern support (Parsons, 2009). Additionally, Van Buren saw the opportunity to turn Jackson's previous

injustice into another victory of the popular vote, and it was in these actions that Jackson's grassroots support was ignited.

Jackson had a unique appeal to the masses, which made him a perfect candidate to segue the American campaign into an affair of the people. Jackson's win of the popular vote in 1824 set the stage for what came in 1828, and Jackson's campaign team wanted to achieve a new level of voter turnout and set out to reach voters that had never cast a ballot before. Hickory clubs, an ode to the public's affectionate nickname for Jackson, were local Jacksonian-supported organizations (Parsons, 2009 & Rubel, 2001). These clubs often planted hickory trees or raised hickory poles in their towns and counties. They organized meetings around other large events to rally as many voters for Jackson in one time as they could (Parsons, 2009). They used this network of Hickory clubs to coordinate allegiance with county committees and expanded Jacksonian supporters into the offices of representatives that selected the nominations (Parsons, 2009). 1828 was the first presidential election year in which most states held nominating conventions, which made for favorable support for Jackson even more accessible (Parsons, 2009). Try as Adams did, he was not successful. His voter base organized conventions of their own but were never able to reach the same level of enthusiasm as the Jacksonians. Overall, Adams' strategy neglected most regions of the country without gaining significant support from other politicians in the South or West (Parsons, 2009).

In the end, Jackson won the 1828 election, for the first time in American history, the popular vote held heavyweight with all but two states, Delaware and South Carolina, using the popular vote to determine their electoral college votes (Parsons, 2009). The election of 1828 presented the challenge of the American system in two forms: the power of elites through existing systems of government and challenging opposition from a man supported by the people. While just one election prior, the elites were able to hold the election by votes through the House of Representatives, when the election remained in the hands of the public, it was Andrew Jackson, an accessible politician¹ in a time of minimal national communication that was able to embody American idealism.

Party officials and the elite noticed the organizing of everyday voters by Hickory Clubs because the election of 1824 was a narrow victory. In order to maintain democracy, the inclusion and acknowledgment of new voters was a necessity, but it also meant a shift in the conversation. The elites focused on

¹ I find it imperative to note that while Andrew Jackson was able to effectively serve as a politician for the electorate at the time, which was mainly in favor of the continued theft of land from the Indigenous population, it does not amend his erroneous actions. It should be abundantly clear that, while a political success, Jackson's actions were consistent with those of a bigot, a racist, and a murderer.

new voter groups because they would have lost in 1828 and afterward without them. The Jacksonian realignment is evidence that the Republicans lost the support of the public, which they needed to maintain national authority. As a result, the Jacksonian Democrats monopolized the government because they held the public's attention throughout the era, but this was only possible because of local groups like Hickory clubs. The nation did not have the technology or infrastructure to keep the public informed of the affairs of the president, but local groups were able to serve voters in this way and sustain the Democrats' support throughout the era.

The Election of 1860

The election of 1860 is most likely one of the best-known critical elections. While the nation was on the precipice of civil war, Abraham Lincoln's contentious election is an easily recognized pinnacle of partisanship. While most people are familiar with the main issue leading to tensions in America, the debate over slavery, what is less told is the story of the two ideological perspectives approaches to spreading their beliefs to the American populous. In the election of 1860, the American elite could no longer postpone the discussion of slavery as it affected political action, which led to the importance of the grassroots organizing of the era.

James Buchan was the incumbent leading into the 1860 election. As a northern man, many people had expected different actions from him, but while in office, he affirmed that while he disagreed with slavery, he felt states had the right to make their own decisions because of the existing constitutional protections (Rubel, 2001). During his time in office, *Dred Scott vs. Sanford* was decided, effectively ruling that African Americans could not be citizens of the United States and thus make the national debate all the more contentious. While Lincoln is well known for his actions, what is less discussed are the actions of local groups that led to Lincoln's success.

In Troy, New York, there was a congregation of Black men and women, Black Trojans, that worked for universal abolition and civil rights of Black Americans across New York state. While they were aware of the many issues with Abraham Lincoln, they understood what his victory could mean for the future of the United States. Two districts of Troy had more robust support for Lincoln than their counterparts, and these two wards were also the two districts that supported the Black Trojan's movement for Black suffrage (Burns, 2019).

Meanwhile, in Illinois, a similar set of movements was developing. Starting in the 1830's Illinois had a large community of activists that began speaking out against slavery. The activist energy culminated in the 1837 Illinois Anti-Slavery Convention, which eventually led to thirteen active abolitionist organizations forming (Chapman, 2015). One of the most

prominent in Illinois was the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society (IASS), most well-known for the group's prominent leader and newspaper editor Elijah Lovejoy who was murdered in a pro-slavery mob (Chapman, 2015). The IASS prided itself on being more action forward than its eastern counterparts leading more demonstrations and protests. The activist coalesced to form the Liberty Party, which ran abolitionist for local political offices (Chapman, 2015). While most activist sentiments were rooted in religious values, they were still a powerful political force. The decades of abolitionist activity continued to bring slavery into political life in Illinois, where future president Abraham Lincoln was getting his political start. While in the 1840s, the state was still very divided on the issue, by the time of the 1860 election Lincoln and his abolitionist platform could win the state beating out the three other major presidential candidates.

Furthermore, while the elite politicians were slow to act in the decades leading to the Civil War, the local abolitionists were not. They frequently formed activist organizations and made their ideologies clear to try and make changes in the local politics, and eventually had effects on the national level. For most people, politics was often confusing and difficult to follow, and the turmoil of America's original sin compounded with day-to-day issues. Local leaders were instrumental in clearing up the fog of elitist agendas and incoherent messaging on slavery for decades. Frequent and vocal activism offered a pillar of consistency and a foundation for the future of government that the elite hid from. In the election of 1860, the candidates had to take note of these organizations to succeed amidst a large pool of competitors.

The Election of 1896

Despite leading into one of America's lesser-known presidents, the Progressive Era in American politics paved the way to many grassroots movements. The Gilded Age of American politics flourished the economy for particular people. It led to the foundation of mass amounts of wealth that birthed today's "old-money" families in the United States, like Carnegies and the Morgans. Understandably, the leniency in economics and labor abuse fueled the labor movement and strides for workers' rights. The era was driven by labor movements and women's and religious movements, all working to create a more liberal America.

Post-civil war America, while not harmonious, was more connected and with the country's largest tensions being put to rest in the years after the civil war. Moreover, the industrial revolution radically changed communication, allowing national organizations to flourish as they became more feasible. The change in communication is imperative in understanding how the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was able to have many chapters that organized with similar agendas. The NAWSA

was able to publish a newspaper known as the “Women’s Journal” to circulate their information and motives (Lange, 2015). Despite the NAWSA’s national acclaim, the Women’s Rights movement is well known for its many divisions and independent agendas. Within what became known as the first wave of feminism, there were also movements for Christian women and Black women (Lange, 2015). The NAWSA was nationally open to all women; however, local chapters could exclude people. Exclusionary chapters led to the creation of independent organizations like the Ohio Women Suffrage Associations and the New Hampshire Women’s Association, the African American Women’s Club, and the Woman’s Christian Temperance movement (Suffrage Organizations, 2021). This plethora of movements showed strength in local organizing, with the NAWSA winning suffrage in Western states first (Wyoming, Colorado and, Utah). Despite having ample support in states like New York and Virginia, only some chapters could transition their action into policy. The prominent activist of the Women’s suffrage movements and the early states that granted women’s right to vote were not republican supporters. Thus they did not vote for McKinley.

The women’s temperance movement had many of the same leaders and operated at the same time. Another movement that coexisted in the Progressive Era was the people’s populist movement. Many supporters of the Women’s movement were also more aligned with the People’s populist party (Edwards, 2000).

William McKinley won the 1896 election and transitioned the executive branch from Democratic power to Republican control, but the Republican party dominated the realignment period preceding McKinley’s election. The Lincoln realignment period had seven unique presidents (Cleveland is elected twice non-consecutively), and only two during the era were Democrats. Andrew Johnson, the first Democrat, changed his party identification after completing Lincoln’s second term, and Cleveland was unable to hold the office for two consecutive terms (Rubel, 2001). The era was marked by single term republicans, an indication of the national party turmoil. The party recognized that in order to maintain their power and have more impactful presidential legacies, they needed to shift their behavior and be more aware of the people. This action came in two ways first through recognizing the vital role of women in the future of the American electorate, and secondly, by choosing to engage labor movements and the working class. In 1896 Republicans only narrowly won the presidency, during a transition not only of politics but also of information. The Republican party needed to focus on new voter groups showing national activity and increased power of information to continue their electoral success. In the McKinley realignment, the Republican party dominance was maintained, thus ruining the traditional understanding of

realignment work. The more critical shift, however, is apparent in the political action of the period.

The grassroots organizations of the late 1800s and the early 1900s did not affect change in the party power of the American president, but they did help to effect sweeping national changes. McKinley's presidency in many ways, acted as a transition. His major party competitor, William Jennings Bryan, was a Democrat and a supporter of the populist movement (Rubel, 2001). He advocated for farmers and laborers. While his campaign was unsuccessful, it signified a significant portion of the support of the national electorate of workers' rights, which was a radical change from the Gilded Ages' dominance of elite businessmen and robber barons.

McKinley's successor, Theodore Roosevelt, while still a Republican, redefined the party's national agenda and curbed the history of the party to be more aligned with the wills of the populous. Before McKinley's presidency, the constitution had undergone the Reconstruction Era amendments but had been untouched in the decades preceding him. However, during the McKinley realignment period, four constitutional amendments were all passed, and unlike previous eras of change, they each had unique areas they addressed. Lincoln's realignment added the twelfth through fifteenth amendments. However, all were regarding the inclusion of Black Americans in the United States and attempting to amend the generational trauma brought about by slavery. But the sixteenth amendment addressed taxation; the seventeenth made senators popularly elected instead of appointed; the eighteenth enacted prohibition; and the nineteenth granted women's suffrage nationally. Each issue represents the unique movements of McKinley's realignment. While the advocates would likely have aligned with Democratic or Populist party politicians, Republican politicians did make monumental changes that were at one point oppositional to the party.

The McKinley realignment is an essential transition in realignment studies. After the Lincoln realignment, America underwent the industrial revolution. Leading into McKinley's presidency, the American electorate was reformed by introducing new voters, but the entire nation also saw the development of new technologies that redefined political action. As a result, McKinley's realignment is the earliest to show a new wave of organization of voters and a shift in realignments no longer needing to revolve around presidential campaigns because the national media became a more inclusive affair.

The Election of 1932

The 1932 realignment is likely the most visible in public memory. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) is one of America's most well-known presidents. His policies and tactics are well known in political research for

expanding the presidential office and shifting the Democratic party into the modern era. However, behind the vast number of political changes were not just elite politicians. The era is well known for the formation of many grassroots organizations, two types in particular that changed American politics: Labor movements and Identity movements.

The Labor movement was not new to American politics. The New Deal era and the crisis of the Great Depression left people once again looking for economic alternatives as they suffered through the hardships of the capitalist downturn. America was not immune to the communist rhetoric that was spreading through the rest of the world. As the American workforce began to dwindle, the Communist party across the nation began organizing demonstrations (Gregory, 2015). The party organized Unemployed Councils, which worked on several large marches in big cities like New York and Chicago (Gregory, 2015). While the Communist Party was involved in most of the organizing, there were also movements in Seattle and several cities in California that were organized independently advocating on behalf of workers (Gregory, 2015). Many of the efforts were designed to express the frustration of workers with the elite and business class. However, many also helped organize mutual aid efforts for the unemployed to gather support for homeless and hungry workers (Gregory, 2015).

Identity movements were also on the rise at this point in American history. With the increased organization against the dominant powers in America, minority communities began to participate in the rising activism in their unique ways. Like the Labor movement, racial and cultural movements were not invented during the FDR realignment; however, the newest generation transitioned the movements to reflect their wants and needs.

Latin Americans were a growing group in the 1930s and throughout the FDR realignment. Like other minority communities, they struggled to have representation in political matters and were denied fundamental human rights in the United States. The Great Depression, exasperating the problems of their community, led Latinx Americans to organize to make sure their voices were heard. One example of the Latinx movement can be found in the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the oldest civil rights group for Latin Americans (Gregory, 2015). LULAC was formed in Texas in 1929 (Gregory, 2015). With years of organizing, the group spread awareness and created more chapters, and during WWII, LULAC had multiple chapters in eight different states (Gregory, 2015). LULAC was formed to end the widespread xenophobia and segregation Mexican Americans faced in the 1930s (Gregory, 2015). In order to work on this issue, LULAC aimed to get support from other grassroots organizations like the Sons of America and the Knights of America, which had similar intentions and helped to garner broad support for the issues facing Mexican Americans. These groups played a

prominent role in representing Latinx Americans, mainly because learning English was difficult as a Mexican immigrant. The rampant segregation and the nature of labor Latinx Americans took on often prevented their children from enrolling in schools, and learning English in a segregated society without school was extremely difficult. The language barrier made fighting these injustices extremely challenging, but local organizations gave Latin Americans not only a support system but provided them with a collective of voices which lessened the burden of individuals who could not speak English. Many of the Latinx movements were molded after movements created by Black Americans.

Black Americans played a crucial role in supporting many movements by other communities but, of course, also in the fight for their rights. In the 1930s and through the duration of the FDR realignment, these movements took shape in groups like the NAACP. The NAACP was formed long before the FDR realignment, but by 1941, the organization had over three hundred and fifty chapters and over seventy thousand members across the nation (Gregory, 2015). The NAACP worked largely to fight the injustices of segregation, creating a Legal Defense fund to work to protect and defend Black Americans from unfair laws and persecution (Gregory, 2015). The group also worked tirelessly to promote Black political engagement even through strenuous efforts to prevent Black voters from participating.

The NAACP's structure was also essential in disseminating information to Black Americans. The vast network they had achieved was a tremendous service to keeping Black Americans connected and informed about issues across the nation. However, by the end of the FDR realignment, other groups would join the NAACP to fight for civil rights for Black Americans, particularly the Black Panthers. In 1966 in California, the Black Panthers were formed by two college friends, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, to create an organization to protect minority communities from the U.S. government (Gregory, 2015). While often disregarded as militant revolutionaries, the Black Panthers sought to fight oppression across many communities and fight the great oppressive factors of global capitalism to create a more just future for all. The Brown Berets were a similar Latinx organization inspired by the Black Panther Party, organized against police brutality, racism, and systemic inequalities for Latinx Americans (Gregory, 2015). The movement was primarily found in California but had a few chapters in various other states.

The McKinley realignment addressed similar distress from the public. Leaving the Gilded Age, the people looked for regulation and government involvement to help redistribute wealth and opportunity to local people. The post-1896 America calmed those needs for a time, redefining what Republican politics looked like and giving politicians the space to serve the people while still holding control with elites' citizens. However, these efforts were ultimately insufficient as the FDR realignment seeks to settle the same unrest.

In 1932 the organization is still revolving around resetting the power structure in the United States and making room for the underrepresented and intentionally ignored communities. The 1929 financial crisis that led to the Great Depression exacerbated the lack of change made in the previous era and emphasized the issue with performative change instead of instrumental change.

In the FDR realignment, new voter groups, particularly the younger generations, made it impossible to ignore grassroots organizations' activity. FDR's realignment is the final of the researched realignment periods, and thus its end date is not conclusive. The motives and movements that originated in 1932, many of which still exist today, held strong relevance well into the seventies; some never lose their importance. I would argue that the era can be ended shortly after 1964. The 1964 Civil Rights act represents the era of activism and showed an expansive policy move that aligned with the requests of organizers.

VI. POTENTIAL REALIGNMENT PERIODS

WITH THE CONSIDERATION OF GRASSROOTS ACTIVITY

After 1932 there has not been another realignment in American history, according to the existing literature. With the consideration of grassroots organizing and recognizing a collective concern, I believe I have been able to identify realignment periods in the time since the New Deal era.

The Era of the American Nightmare

The FDR realignment arguably ends with the success of the Civil Rights Act, an act made by a Democrat in response to local organizing. The era is filled with movements from left-wing activists, as is mentioned above, and their success is evident in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. These actions are not unnoted by the Republican party, and Barry Goldwater's 1964 Presidential campaign is a testament to that.

Goldwater embodied much of the grassroots mentality as a "plain spoken" conservative Republican that prioritized a small federal government and state and local actions (Sabato, 2014). At his core, Goldwater was opposing the traditional political elite in the way he appealed to voters. While Goldwater's campaign was unsuccessful, with Lyndon Johnson winning over sixty percent of the popular vote, it was an essential indication of where the Republican strategy would emerge (*1964 United States presidential Election*, n.d.).

I believe these actions lead to the political activation of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which is thoroughly explored in McVeigh, Cunningham, and Farrell's 2014 article. The KKK are essential in this realignment as they were a dominant factor in mobilizing White voters in southern states to uphold white supremacy over their previous party identifications (McVeigh, Cunningham

Farrell,2014). It is also important to note that this local activity was often found in areas with higher populations of Black Americans, where KKK activists thought their political agendas were most in danger of changing. McVeigh et al. show that through four decades, the KKK sustained an increase in Republican support through Southern states.

While the KKK was started in 1865 and has ties to American politicians dating as far back, their activity in 1960 assisted in redefining the Republican party and relocating White Southern voters that were previously Democrats but opposed the recent actions on Civil Rights. Nixon's election may be the critical election in the era, given Barry Goldwater's measly turnout and Nixon receiving over forty percent of the popular vote in a three-candidate race. The Nixon realignment is continued with an era of viciousness in the struggle for political control.

During this realignment, Americans were active, but violence became ingrained in politics in many ways. Some examples being the War on Drugs, the Vietnam and Korean Wars, the assassination of numerous public figures, including Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr, and Bobby Kennedy, the Kent State Massacre, the Detroit Riots, and the many bombings from the Weather Underground.

While the bloodshed of this era is undoubtedly vital to note, the opposition to the Liberals of the Great society found their match in the normalization of a Republican resurgence through casual suburban gatherings. Groups like the College Republican and active participation in social clubs led to easy and frequent dissemination of Republican ideologies.

The era of the American Nightmare began with the end of Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream. It represented the repeated attempts, from the left and the right, to preserve their image of the American dream through violence. The period was marked by war, domestic terror attacks, mistrust in government, and a struggle to preserve the image of a strong American democracy. While President Carter offered a brief reprieve of this era of Republicans, Ronald Reagan's sweeping success and vehement declaration of a "tough on crime" agenda are significant in an era ushered in by a terrorist organization.

The American Rebranding

The final realignment is currently ongoing. The American Nightmare Era concludes with George H.W. Bush's single term, whom many thought of as an extension of the Reagan administration, and the Clinton presidency brought the era to a close. Seeing major struggles throughout the Clinton presidency and the narrow loss in the 2000 election, Democrats were reeling from decades of an inadequate national presence. Their reformed strategy has propelled us into the era we currently exist in, brought on, not only but in large part, due to the technology revolution that created the internet and social media.

The realignment we are facing now is based around the Democrats' fight to gain control again through the activation of non-white and young voters: The American Rebranding.

Beginning with the Obama 2008 campaign, their new media strategy began a path toward activating a new set of voters to help revitalize the Democratic party. Essential to this attention to marginalized communities can in part be attributed to the Immigrants' Rights Protest movement, which drew a significant amount of attention to the non-white electorate. The movement began in response to a House bill that would have enforced further criminalization of immigrants through increased enforcement organizations (Gregory, 2015). The protests spanned multiple weeks and various cities. Most notably, on April 10th, nationally held protests and walkouts tried to emulate a "Day without Immigrants" in over 100 cities with close to one and a half million advocates participating in some form of a coalition (Gregory, 2015).

The Age of Rebranding is continued with significant actions like Black Lives Matter and the MeToo movement. Out of this era, we have seen the rise of nearly countless grassroots organizations that have changed the scene of modern politics in many ways. The Obama presidential campaign utilized new media like Facebook and Twitter but in no way came close to how these platforms were used in the 2016 and 2020 elections (Nelson, n.d).

Groups like Black Lives Matter, Mijente, MoveOn, Sister District, and FreedomWorks have all had a hand in activating voters in an attempt to swing this realignment period one way or the other. At the moment, it is difficult to assess which groups will be the most influential on the era, but it is clear a transition is upon us. The American electorate is shifting in its racial and ethnic makeup. The control of the branches of government is contingent on the ability to activate growing groups and not just the dominant ones. The growth of social media platforms has allowed for grassroots organizing to soar to new heights, with political action at the click of a button.

The entirety of the Trump presidency made it clear that the American electorate is at a contentious divide, but in the near future, that tension will end. The victor of the American Rebranding will lead our nation into a new political age that will likely see sweeping change to our government structure. If the left is successful, there will be serious consideration of expanding the American states, progressive policies on the environment, the economy, and healthcare, and intentionally ignored communities may become the leading changemakers. If the right wins out, America may face continued reverting to Reagan era policies, small government initiatives, and a rollback on environmental and economic protections.

VII. CONCLUSION

Existing realignment literature has not agreed on a realignment since the New Deal era. That means it has been 89 years since the last realignment period or that America is still experiencing the New Deal realignment, both of which I believe are incorrect. My analysis of the American elections integrates the American voter into the traditional understanding of partisanship through grassroots organizations. In each of the historical realignment periods, local political action was instrumental in fortifying what became of the dominant political party and how they governed. Mass political action has continued to be a driver in our government system since 1932 in the American Nightmare era and what will become the American Rebranding.

My research is limited in part because of minimal reporting on the history of these organizations. However, it also does not include many other political organizations that could have played a role in realignment. Nonetheless, our current political climate has shown us how vital local voices can be in the national agenda. Understanding how and why realignments develop is instrumental in understanding the volatility of American partisanship.

While previous theories attempted to explain the phenomena, grassroots organizing reintroduces the voter into the discussion. If democracy is built on the constituents, a theory of partisanship must include their involvement. Over time, individuals change their minds, learn and develop. They grow to reflect the changing world around them. Politicians do the same, but they need to follow their supporters and they do this by understanding local groups. In the aftermath of crisis and upheaval, it is not the political elite that stabilize the nation. It is in our communities that we find a way forward.

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