

Brainstorm

Essays by the Students of the University of Oklahoma
Expository Writing Program



Volume X
2018

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Acknowledgements

Neither the Edith Kinney Gaylord Expository Writing Program nor this publication of student writing would exist without the contributions of so many excellent undergraduate writers. The primary credit for Volume X of *Brainstorm* belongs to the students whose work we showcase this year: Derek Bixler, Miles Francisco, Kenzie Hanna, Erika Moen, Dylan Price, Lukas Sturm, Juliana Voelker, and Jason Yee.

Each of the essays by these young writers reveals a distinctive vision, argument, and voice. With guidance from members of the Brainstorm Editorial Committee, each author undertook additional revision to hone their writing, resulting in the final versions published here. On behalf of the entire Expository Writing Program faculty, I'm proud to share the fruits of their intellectual labors with the greater OU community.

The Editorial Committee would like to thank those students who submitted essays that were not chosen this year. An already difficult selection process becomes even more so when considering that we are a small writing faculty with limited resources. While we would love to publish most, if not all, of the submissions we receive, we can publish only a handful of essays. Nevertheless, we laud the hard work of all Expository Writing students who submitted essays this year, hope they found the writing process valuable, and strongly recommend that those whose work was not chosen submit to other publications, whether at OU or elsewhere.

As a magazine of student writing, *Brainstorm* is the culmination of a semester-long engagement with the writing process in courses characterized by the unique collaboration between students and lecturers that the Expository Writing Program thrives upon. A brief introductory note preceding each essay connects the author to the course and lecturer that helped them conceive, write, and revise their work.

In the spirit of celebrating first-year writing instruction, I would like to acknowledge the Expository Writing faculty who taught in Spring and Fall of 2017, when the essays in this volume were written and revised for publication: Eric Bosse, Margaret Gaida, Rachel Jackson, Liz Locke, Nick LoLordo, David Long, Matthew Pearce, Ebony Pope, Robert Scafe, and Anna Trevino. The Editorial Committee for this volume—Nick LoLordo, David Long, Matthew Pearce, and Robert Scafe—deserve a special commendation for the time they devoted to selecting student essays and the guidance they provided as student authors revised their work for publication.

We are especially grateful to Karen Antell for her copyediting expertise and to Nick LoLordo for laying out the magazine. We would also like to thank Tara Risenhoover and Missy Stewart for administrative assistance at various steps of the submission and publication process, and Associate Provost Michele Eodice, who goes to bat year in and year out for OU's first year writing students and the programs that support them.

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Finally, we would like to thank former President David Boren and the Inasmuch Foundation overseen by William J. Ross and Robert J. Ross, whose generous investment in first year writing at OU has supported the Edith Kinney Gaylord Expository Writing Program for nearly 15 years and has made it possible for our students to produce the excellent written work represented in this volume.

We look forward to publishing future issues of *Brainstorm* under the leadership and support of President James Gallogly by continuing to collaborate with first year writing students in ways that exemplify our shared vision of excellence at the University of Oklahoma.

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About Expository Writing

The Expository Writing Program offers topic-based first year writing seminars that help OU students develop their critical reading, thinking, and writing abilities. Each Expo course is defined by student-lecturer collaboration. Expository Writing faculty are experienced teachers with an advanced knowledge of their subjects committed to helping students develop as writers. Over the course of every semester, Expo students work closely with their lecturer in classroom discussions, in dialogues involving extensive oral and written feedback, and in individual conferences. Students who successfully complete an Expo course come away with the knowledge, argument strategies, and writing skills they will need to make their voices heard in the wider academic world of the university, and the many worlds beyond its borders.

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Frozen and Abandoned: Superveterans, Veterans, and Bringing Them Home

by Jason Yee

Jason Yee is a Business Major from Carrollton, Texas who wrote this essay in the "Myth and Hero" course taught by Liz Locke. The Brainstorm Selection Committee voted Jason's essay the Best in Issue for 2018.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a report in 2014 that revealed "an average of 20 Veterans died by suicide each day, [and] Veterans accounted for 18 percent [of the U.S.'s suicide deaths while constituting only] 8.5 percent of the U.S. adult population" (*Suicide*). According to the report, between 2001 and 2014, substance abuse among veterans who used services from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) rose from 27% to 41%, and, over the same period, cases of diagnosed depression rose from 14% to 23% (*Suicide*). The VHA makes mental health treatment available for both active duty and discharged veterans, but its woeful inadequacy appears in the fact that "[among the daily suicides], six of the twenty were users of VHA services" (*Suicide*). American veterans, both past and present, are affected heavily by the horrors and stressors of war and occupation, and those burdened by the emotional scars of service can easily find themselves facing isolation and ostracism due to the outward symptoms of that burden.

One approach to understanding the thought processes of returning veterans is to look at the myth and storytelling that has come out of our wars, and how those myths amplify and emphasize the realities of our nation's returnees. Nor-

man Austin, professor emeritus of classics at the University of Arizona, writes that "mythology is a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision... of a people or culture" (2). In American comic books, the stories of superheroes – fictional men and women who, according to Stan Lee, Marvel's legendary comics writer and editor-in-chief, "have the inner qualities of courage, integrity, honesty, and compassion" – give us a distinct American-mythos-laden spyglass to see into the values that we hold dear (Lee). Superveterans, superheroes who are either actively in the military or have previously served, particularly magnify our society's view on the mentality, morality, and expectations of our nation's veterans. Three superveterans in particular, Captain America, Eugene "Flash" Thompson as Venom, and The Punisher, shed light on a trio of key themes in real veterans' emotional coping mechanisms. Captain America is, by appearance, an emotionally ironclad warfighter leveraging his duties as a perpetual combatant as an excuse to eschew his past traumas instead of confronting them (*Captain America* #110). The Punisher is a veteran whose moral fiber was so shaken during his service that he becomes a slave to violence and copes with his trauma by shedding his humanity (*Punisher Born*). Eugene Thompson, a character originally introduced in 1962 as the antagonistic high school jock who bullied Peter Parker, also known as Spider-Man (*Amazing Fantasy*), is a medically discharged veteran who reaches out to friends and family to help relieve him of the burden of his trauma, and who only volunteers for superheroic service after making a full mental recovery (*Amazing Spiderman* #622). With these three superveteran models in mind, I make two asser-

tions: first, that Eugene “Flash” Thompson is the best positive superhero role model for American veterans reintegrating into society; and second, that for the sake of American veterans returning from their duty with trauma, we must fully embrace and use the model he provides to change our society’s outlook on how we treat our war-wounded. His model acts in opposition to those provided by Captain America, the perpetual soldier steering himself towards martyrdom in an effort to outrun his past, and by The Punisher, the left-for-dead survivor of the Vietnam War turned psychopathic vigilante who serves as a biting commentary about our past treatment of wounded veterans but nevertheless fails to provide a solution to the problems.

Joe Simon and Jack Kirby created Captain America (known as Steve Rogers prior to his superhero transformation) as the ideal superhero to represent American soldiers fighting against the Nazi Third Reich in Europe during World War II, and his first appearance in March 1941 was a drop of pro-interventionist media in a country led by isolationist doctrine (*Captain America* #1). Rick Remender, the writer of the *Captain America* comics series released in 2014, claimed in a full-page reader response that Captain America is “a patriotic soldier, directed by a personal ethical compass, belief in the American dream and faith in his fellow man... He’s the person you wish you were... [and he] will no doubt spend his entire life protecting people” (*Captain America* Vol. 1). Remender’s revision of Captain America keeps the superhero as an idealized, all-American role model for patriots, but Captain America as a whole, from his inception to his current narrative standing, sets a potentially fatal model for veterans. In *Avengers* #56, writer Roy

Thomas fleshes out the character’s trauma, brought on by failing to save his sidekick, Bucky, from dying in the line of duty. Lee, Marvel’s editor-in-chief, has maintained this trauma as a cornerstone of Captain America’s character for decades, but Captain America never actually confronts it. He suffers frequent performance-inhibiting flashbacks, but his writers regularly use the immediate crisis of each comic issue to drown out any introspection or attempt to deal with his grief. Living with trauma, but never confronting it, and always reburying it when it surfaces, is a dangerous decision for real veterans that no role model should encourage to the war-wounded.

Captain America’s writers clearly had good intentions in mind in encouraging wounded veterans to overcome their traumas, but they have used the character and his sidekick in a way that urges these wounded men and women to just “get over it.” Stan Lee set the precedent for writers attempting to dodge Captain America’s traumatic hang-ups with the egregious “get over it” moment that can be seen in *Captain America* #128, in which Captain America buys a motorcycle—despite on the same page claiming to avoid motorcycles because they remind him of Bucky riding in his sidecar—and then moves on to fight the Satan’s Angels biker gang to completely cure himself of his motorcycle avoidance. This message was Lee’s attempt to address the emotionally shattered men returning home from the Vietnam War in 1970—a time when post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was not yet even recognized—and was a step forward in American mythos’s ability to address war trauma despite its ham-handedness in execution. Ed Brubaker’s attempt to address PTSD through Captain

America three and a half decades later in 2005 was far worse than Lee's, however, in his cheap retconning of Bucky's death in *Captain America Vol. 5* by transforming him into The Winter Soldier—a move implying that emotional wounds can simply be forgotten or painlessly removed via convenient narration. Veterans might easily view this as a vile rebuke to just "get over it" regarding their grief over lost friends and companions. The "get over it" message that Brubaker reproduced in 2005 should have remained a relic of attempted progress instead of being revisited and reinforced in modern times, because this message has potentially fatal consequences for the veterans who attempt to imitate the model set forth by Captain America.

Combat veterans set aside introspection and mental healing during war time for the sake of performance, but ignoring trauma is a temporary patch—one that can fester if left to persist into peace-time—to help them survive the violence of war that they, obligated by duty, cannot abandon. *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience*, a documentary directed by Richard Robbins about various American veterans' service stories during our second invasion of Iraq, tells the story of Colby Buzzell, who, with his platoon, must break through an ambush kill zone. The documentary shows his brush with death as he exits his armored vehicle while under fire to replenish his vehicle's empty gun, and, after the ambush, his moment of introspection in the motor pool, where his sergeant approaches him to check that he is okay. Buzzell's sergeant, seeing his emotional exhaustion from the fight, gives him advice that he had, in turn, received from his father, who served in Vietnam: "Put all the things that bother you and

keep you awake at night and clog your head up—put all those things in a shoebox. Put a lid on it, and deal with it later." Buzzell, after receiving the advice, says, "I've put the events of that day in a shoebox, put the lid on it. Haven't opened it since" (*Operation*). This shoeboxing of trauma—the same choice that Captain America makes—is, according to David Wood, a senior military correspondent for *The Huffington Post*, a technique that lasts "only temporarily"; in the same article, Tom Berger, a Vietnam veteran who served as a corpsman, states that, "left untreated, you reinforce the trauma." The concealment and denial of trauma, when it goes beyond the battlefield, can prevent potentially life-saving treatment from ever occurring. Wood further writes that "[two-thirds of] veterans who commit suicide [are] not enrolled in the VA's health care system... [nor have] they ever been diagnosed [with any mental illness]," which is a powerful statistical indicator of how deadly it can be to ignore or otherwise fail to treat trauma. The battle experience burns a taboo on addressing emotional weakness or vulnerability into the minds of combat veterans, who know that the consequences of even a moment's hesitation during a fight might be death or serious harm to themselves or their friends. This expected behavior pattern—the demand to be always wakeful to outside danger at the cost of never looking inward—persists even after service, when the threat of danger is no longer present, when it should be addressed. Captain America's status as a role model, one who toughs out mental harm and continues to serve with that burden, actively encourages and reinforces that dangerous expectation.

In opposition to my viewpoint, Jacob Hall, a

writer for *Screen Crush*, a movie news and review website, hails Captain America as a role model for all Americans to emulate. Hall writes, “The definitive scene in *Captain America: The First Avenger* isn’t Steve Rogers getting super soldier serum injected into his body – it’s him pre-transformation, jumping onto a grenade to save his comrades without a second thought, unaware that it’s a dud.” Hall lauds Captain America for his origins as “a weak guy who became strong without ever forgetting what it was like to be weak... [and] a good guy who set out to do the right thing... even when the world is against him at every turn.” He further claims that “he’s not the Avenger that I’d want to be, but he’s the Avenger that we should all be” (Hall). Captain America’s jumping on a grenade is, indisputably, a heroic self-sacrifice for the sake of protecting his comrades. Émile Durkheim, a French sociologist considered the father of modern social sciences, writes about “altruistic suicide”:

There are no suicides with a more definitely altruistic character. We actually see the individual in all these cases seek to strip himself of his personal being in order to be engulfed in something which he regards as his true essence.... He must therefore consider that he has no life of his own. Impersonality is here carried to its highest pitch; altruism is acute (Qtd. in Blake 49).

Dr. Joseph A. Blake published a study in 1978 that sorted through Medal of Honor recipient data dating from 1863-1973 and confirmed that American culture idolizes and enshrines the self-sacrifice of our warriors – of the 191 Medal of Honor recipients in his data set, 63 (33%) of them received the award for “grenade acts” or “any case of placing

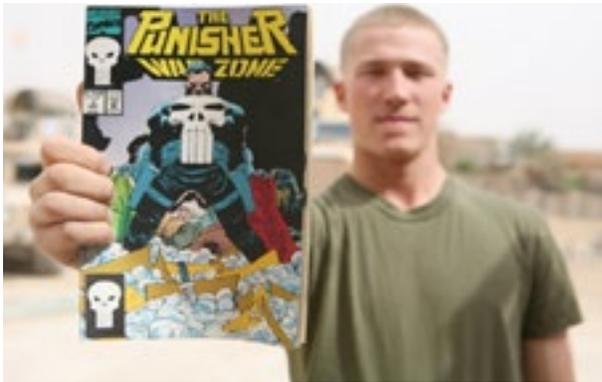
one’s body over an explosive device [to protect others]” (Blake). Captain America’s continued self-destructive behavior, however, goes beyond protective necessity, illustrating an unnecessary desire to display his mental fortitude. This arrogant denial and his selfless status align with Durkheim’s definition of the “optional altruistic suicide,” which is, according to Blake’s paraphrasing, “[a suicide] often involving social prestige... [The self-sacrificial figure is] able to do so because they are so well integrated into the group as to have little thought for their own existence” (Blake).

Captain America is an exemplar of selflessness, but America’s veterans do not need to emulate a model who sacrifices everything he is and takes nothing – not even psychological survival. Our military’s volunteers can be replaced by the next generation of men and women who step up to take the watch, but they cannot be replaced as individuals. The diversity in unique perspectives, thoughts, and actions that our veterans bring to the American diaspora – the diversity that is the core of our nation’s strength – is irreplaceable, and asking veterans who have already made significant self-sacrifices to give more at the cost of their lives – to go down the path of destructively patriotic martyrdom that Captain America has paved – is wildly irresponsible, disrespectful, and harmful. Our veterans cannot be heroes if they do not maintain themselves first, and our war-wounded cannot afford to try to carry their burdens alone.

While Captain America presents a self-destructive model for veterans to follow, *The Punisher* offers only biting commentary on our nation’s treatment of our war-wounded returnees. His antihero model is one based around the punishment

and retribution of those who wronged him instead of recovery and recuperation; in his isolation he has reached an irrecoverable state where he is only capable of wreaking the same destruction upon others that he has inflicted upon himself.

Frank Castle’s loss of humanity is an implicit criticism of how we have handled our veterans in the past, but his story is one that offers only that critique and no vindication for the real people who are suffering the same plight. The Punisher, the opposite of Captain America in morality and coping



Lance Cpl. Brandon M. Barnes, 21, Camp Hit, Iraq.

with his trauma, is a psychotic murderer with villain-punishing intent who abandoned his humanity to confront his trauma instead of outrunning or ignoring it. *The Punisher Born*, the 2003 origin story for The Punisher, places Frank Castle, the super-veteran’s former identity, in a forlorn outpost on the edge of Cambodia during the Vietnam War. He is constantly harried by the voice of his conscience that urges him to kill, telling him that killing is “his last chance [to survive the war]” (*Punisher Born*). When he is the last man standing at the outpost, overrun by waves of Viet Cong fighters, he finally gives in to the voice and kills his humanity, Frank Castle, for the sake of survival, and emerges from the fight as The Punisher. The first three covers of the series display helmet-clad soldiers with their

faces flaking, burning, or chipping away to reveal a bare skull underneath, representing the shedding of the character’s humanity to survive the horrors of war, and to directly reveal The Punisher as a base instinctual desire to live at the cost of human empathy. Becoming numb to the world – whether in the fictional case of Frank Castle’s loss of identity (so deep that it gives him immunity to a supervillain’s psychic attacks in *The Punisher Vol. 2*), or in the case of the very real substance abuse that isolated veterans engage in to survive from day to day – creates a broken state of mind with which our military’s commitment to “leave no man behind” is fundamentally incompatible. But it is a well-known fact of our history that our government – even after promising our wounded that they would not be left behind – harshly betrayed the returning men and women who survived the Vietnam War by abandoning them to live or die by their own devices the moment they reached home soil.

The American public unloaded its frustrations about the Vietnam War onto the veterans who had already shouldered the physical and mental health consequences of the conflict, and the isolation brought on by the social stigma of having served in such a brutal war only acted to worsen their trauma’s symptoms. American society’s homecoming reception for veterans of the war in Vietnam – an unforgiving obstacle that compounded the government’s betrayal – gave little opportunity for the wounded to heal and rejoin society. I interviewed Amy Yee, my mother and a former Marine, who served as a meteorologist’s mate and drill instructor in the Marine Corps at the height of the Vietnam War: “If we went anywhere [in the U.S.]

in uniform, we would be met by protestors. They called us 'baby killers,' spit on us. They would tell



Cpl. Amy Yee using a theodolite to measure winds aloft via weather balloon.

us that we should have been shot for what we had done. We were ashamed of our service. I put my uniform away for a long time, and, when I finally tried to look at it again, it had been so long that moths had eaten everything except the buttons." When I asked if she ever sought assistance from the VHA for her lifelong depression and anxiety, she said, "I didn't know it was available. I thought it was only for the men in combat" (Yee). Dr. Jennifer L. Price, in her analysis of the national Vietnam Veterans' Readjustment Study performed from 1984 to 1988 on Vietnam veterans and their status after the war, found that "a substantial minority of [veterans] were suffering from a variety of psychological problems... [and] only a small number of these veterans actually sought treatment from mental health providers." Price's analysis further found that approximately 830,000 male and female Vietnam veterans, 26% of those serving, "had symptoms and related functional impairment associated with PTSD . . . with four out of five reporting recent symptoms when interviewed 20-25 years after Vietnam" ("Findings"). The Punisher is the ugly face of these disaffected veterans, the

ones who survived in ways that left them with unanswered questions about morality, and they never received absolution, affirmation, or any real answers from society about what we expect of our military. They are a generation of veterans with a gnawing guilt in their hearts and an unresolved feeling of abandonment, proof of which we can see in the founding principle of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), a congressionally chartered organization that assists Vietnam veterans, which reads, "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another" ("Vietnam").

The Punisher provided a scathing critique of our woeful conduct as a nation, but failed to provide the model of recovery that "Flash" Thompson was finally designed and written to fulfill. Present-day veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan did not have a positive role model in our popular culture until 2008, when Marvel's writer Marc Guggenheim filled that niche (albeit slowly, taking five years after the initiation of the Iraq War to put ink on paper) with Eugene "Flash" Thompson (*Amazing Spider-Man* #574). His origin story is a side story within *The Amazing Spider-Man*, though Guggenheim deemed it important enough to be the main feature of issue #574, in which General Fazekas interviews Thompson in preparation for his nomination for a Medal of Honor, our nation's highest military award, for his actions during an urban assault in Mosul, Iraq. Guggenheim reveals his recognition of the need for a positive role model by motivating Thompson's actions through the character's idolization of Spider-Man. When General Fazekas asks Thompson why he performed certain heroic actions during the assault, Thompson alludes to the character traits of Spi-

der-Man, and panels flash to Spider-Man overcoming the odds, even when they are stacked against him (*Amazing Spider-Man* #574). Guggenheim, at the very end of the issue, reveals that Thompson lost his legs as the physical cost for overexerting himself while in a wounded state, though it was a price he gladly paid — an altruistic self-sacrifice of necessity — to save his battle-buddy's life.

Thompson was left harmed both in body and in mind after the ordeal, but his trials and pains were not conveniently written away or considered entirely insurmountable — an affirming message that wounded veterans desperately need to hear. Later, in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #622, writer Fred Van Lente revisits Thompson, now in a VA rehabilitation center, showing him going through the stages of grief (though humorously in reverse, a circumstance brought on by his bull-headedness), but his recovery slips several times. Because of these slips, his recovery is not simply a matter of "getting over it," as Captain America advocates; instead, it is a struggle. In the stage of denial, the final stage of his grief, he comes dangerously close to numbing his pain by dehumanizing himself — similarly to The Punisher — by reaching out to a company called REABILIFY that offers to give him a set of cybernetic legs while also replacing his still-healthy arms with cyber-limbs, solely for the purpose of increasing his combat prowess, with the promise that "He'll be glad he did." In return, the dubious company would get to utilize his "training and experience" after he is enhanced (*Amazing Spider-Man* #622). Thompson's slip into numbness and despair, however, is interrupted just in time by his friends and family — who often are a safety net for real-life veterans. Veterans facing trauma

must reach out for this safety net to initiate their healing. "Flash" Thompson's origin story marks him as a mortal man, and, even prior to that, in his canonical backstory in *The Amazing Spider-Man*, an imperfect man — Peter Parker's high school bully, stubborn, grappling with alcoholism, and an adulterer — which makes him easy for some readers to identify with. He shows that even someone with flaws can have heroic qualities, and even with those qualities, there is no shame or weakness in reaching out to others for help. The Marvel writers' attempt at using Thompson to break the veteran's taboo about reaching out instead of concealing war wounds with shame models a huge step forward in the healing process. The fruits of Thompson's efforts are eventually revealed in *Venom* Vol. 2, where we discover that, after facing his traumas and achieving some recovery, he has taken on the Venom symbiote and its powers to fulfill the responsibilities of superheroism (*Venom* Vol. 2). He heals, he reintegrates, and he returns to face other conflicts for the sake of our society.

Our nation's veterans desperately need a place to reach out to that can provide professional help. This is especially true for the most at-risk men and women who are socially isolated, much as Captain America was frozen in ice for seventy years and thawed to a world without anyone he knew, or as The Punisher faced a lone survivor situation and later lost his family. Guggenheim and Van Lente's highlighting of Thompson as a role model to break the taboo of reaching out for help, however, has not made up for the VA's real-world shortcomings. In April 2016, journalist Dave Boyer wrote in *The Washington Post*:

The agency's inspector general... [revealed]

that seven [VA health care systems in Texas] have scheduling mismanagement that led to extended wait times for veterans... [due to a] lack of supervision, poor training of employees and weak management controls for data manipulation... [and further, of] 73 VA facilities across the country, [the inspector] found scheduling problems in 51 cases. (Boyer)

Boyer describes problems with absentee employees, huge cost overruns to the tune of “1.7 billion [for a facility under construction],” and a lack of oversight of misbehaving employees. According to Curt Devine, writing for CNN, these oversights and failures by the VA may have translated to a situation in which “of about 800,000 records stalled in the agency’s system for managing health care enrollment, there were more than 307,000 records that belonged to veterans who had died months or years in the past.” Mental health maladies, much like physical ones, must be treated early and thoroughly, and having 307,000 veterans die while the VA processed their records is testimony to how deadly a stalled health care system is. Comics writers may be able to address relevant social issues and bring them to light, but their efforts will be squandered if our federal government’s administrative incompetence prevents progress in treating our wounded warriors.

War-wounded veterans are a small, weakened minority in our nation, one that needs a positive role model to know that there is value in their lives, despite their scars, that recovery can happen, and that our nation and humanity as a whole—sitting on the day-to-day brink of self-destruction—still needs their insights, their horrifying testaments to humanity at its worst, if we wish to find and main-

tain lasting peace abroad. Our nation has faced three disastrous, long, inconclusive wars of occupation—the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, and the War in Afghanistan—involving the two veteran-age demographics most prone to suicide (*Suicide*). We damn ourselves to make the same destructive mistakes of our past when our returning veterans remain estranged and silenced in the present. If the superveterans of our American myths can offer these wounded men and women beacons in the darkness with which to find their homes and their voices once again, we must make sure that they burn as brightly and resolutely as Eugene “Flash” Thompson, and brighter.

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Echoes of Resistance: Chicano Protest Art

by Derek Bixler

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El Movimiento, the Chicano activism movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, was instrumental in promoting Mexican-American civil rights. Led largely by Cesar Chavez, this struggle against systemic discrimination in the United States addressed major areas of oppression by advocating for new labor protections for Chicano farm workers, enfranchisement, equal educational opportunities for Chicano children, and other entitlements. As is common with sweeping sociopolitical reform movements, new forms of culture emerged out of *El Movimiento* (more commonly known to English speakers as the Chicano Movement). Countless pieces of Chicano artwork supported the efforts of activists like Chavez by depicting the struggle of a disadvantaged people, calling protesters to action, and celebrating Latino culture in the United States. These powerful works of art became their own form of protest, expressing emotions caused by Chicano hardships or illustrating the cruelty of unjust laws. Historians label this visual artwork (along with other art forms, namely music and theater) as simply the "Chicano Art Movement," which Chicano Studies professors and art experts at the University of California, Los Angeles frame as a clear "outgrowth of the Chicano civil rights movement" (Del Castillo et al. 362). Artists associated with the Chicano Art Movement produced carefully crafted, striking visuals that embodied

the sentiments of countless Mexican-Americans and often aimed to challenge the perspectives of non-Chicanos regarding the political movement and Chicano people in general. According to Chicano culture expert Randy J. Ontiveros, however, few people today outside of art historians and the Latino community know much (if anything) about the Chicano Art Movement (1-2). The social impact of the resistance art from *El Movimiento* has to date been primarily felt within the Chicano community.

However, Chicano artists aren't finished speaking—and new waves of Chicano protest art breaking on American shores carry vast potential to shift the national discourse on immigration. Chicano resistance art has experienced a recent reawakening, especially after the 2016 American presidential election. The reality of a President openly hostile to immigrants has stirred activism and incited powerful forms of protest—such as modern Chicano art. The contemporary United States is a land of mass media and nationwide connectedness, much more so than in the 1960s and 1970s. Whereas the boldness of *El Movimiento's* art was principally experienced within the Chicano community, new Chicano art could "go viral." Although many works of modern Chicano art include complex imagery and symbolism that may be less accessible for a mass internet audience, these works often simultaneously feature bold, straightforward messages and stunning visuals that nearly any viewer can quickly understand and appreciate. This boldness is amplified by echoes of the original Chicano Art Movement in modern Chicano art—namely the visually striking designs, acknowledgements of hardship, and thoughtful symbolism. Ultimately, the best way to demonstrate the influence of *El Movimiento* art on

modern Chicano art is by listening closely to these echoes through the analysis of exemplary pieces from the two eras.

Xavier Viramontes's *Boycott Grapes: Support the United Farm Workers Union* from the first Chicano Movement contains these hallmarks. A striking call to unite around an activist effort, the poster promotes one of the many boycotts led by Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Union (UFWU) during the Chicano Movement. UFWU boycotts fought for fair wages and labor rights for Chicano agricultural workers. These boycotts were often accompanied by labor strikes, the most famous of which is the Delano Grape Strike that started in September 1965 and effectively lasted until 1970. (Viramontes's poster is from a later such strike that started in 1973). The graphic appearing in the bottom corners is the UFWU flag. Its logo celebrates Aztec heritage through use of the eagle, a significant historic symbol of Mexico that signifies the legend of the founding of the Aztec capital city, Tenochtitlan. The concept of Aztlán—a mythical place of origin for the Aztec people, located somewhere north of Mexico—was thematically central to many early Chicano art pieces. Claiming kinship with this ancient civilization gave Chicanos an ethnic heritage that they could celebrate and take pride in. Vivid in color and design, Viramontes's poster depicts an Aztec man wearing a traditional ethnic headdress. The elaborate patterns and size of the headdress indicate that the man is at least a warrior, if not royalty: the most stylish Aztec headdresses were worn only by those in the upper classes of society. The shadows of war paint on the man's face also suggest that he is a warrior. This authority figure is confrontationally calling for the

grape boycott—and the boycott will be a struggle. Zooming in on his forehead wrinkles, it becomes apparent that the wrinkles are actually a bird clutching a snake, a clear reference to the Tenochtitlan founding myth. Earrings apparently made of blue jade stand out in the piece. This is likely an homage to the Aztec water and fertility goddess Chalchiuhtlicue, whose name literally means "she of jade skirt." Chalchiuhtlicue was associated with the bringing or withholding of rains on earth, significant to the growth of crops—including grapes. Harvests are brought to fruition by the sun, and the sun god Huitzilopochtli is present in the blue feathers in the headdress: Huitzilopochtli often took the form of a blue bird and his name literally means "Blue hummingbird on the left." Perhaps the figure is Huitzilopochtli himself, as the man has blue hair (again likely representing the hummingbird) and is holding the literal harvest of the grapes in his hand. The underlying message could be that the call to boycott is coming directly from the god Huitzilopochtli, or that Huitzilopochtli is watching over Chicanos and guiding the resistance effort.

However we might understand these details, the work's core tenor is unambiguous. The artist made no secret of the direct meaning and purpose of his piece: "The squeezing of the grapes symbolizes the blood and sweat of the farmworkers. The intent of the poster was to keep the boycott going. As a poster, I think it was successful" (Viramontes, "Boycott Grapes"). The poster was distributed nationally by the UFWU, and, perhaps in part due to this poster and similar projects' influence in the Chicano community, the grape boycott it promoted continued through 1975 and grew to 17 million participants, according to a national Louis Harris

poll (Meister). The grape boycotts were non-violent resistance efforts in conjunction with Filipino-American farmworkers that led to unionization rights for the laborers and compelled California grape growers to sign contracts guaranteeing higher wages and better safety measures. Viramontes mentions on his website that the initial idea for this poster was to express that Chicano laborers come from a strong cultural heritage and should be treated “with respect.” The brutally serious, confrontational face of the Aztec represents this strong heritage and demands respect. The UFWU’s website discusses the cross-racial solidarity present within the grape boycotts, as Cesar Chavez “insisted” that the Filipino-American farmworkers and Chicano protesters share picket lines and a union hall (Kim). The same color of blood is being squeezed out from white grapes and dark grapes, possibly a statement that white men and people of color are fundamentally equal. The phrase “Boycott Grapes” is dripping with the grapes’ blood, perhaps suggesting that activism is often an aggressive act. The complex image of the grapes showcases the notable ability of many Chicano art pieces to sustain attention through a deep reading of symbolism, while the man’s intense facial expression along with the demand to “Boycott Grapes” renders the piece universally accessible on a surface level. This dual nature is evident in several modern Chicano art pieces as well. The multiple layers of symbolism in the poster also indicate a tension—too complex to fully discuss here—that was present in the broader Chicano Movement: the coexistence of universal civil rights promotion and the ideology of Chicano nationalism.

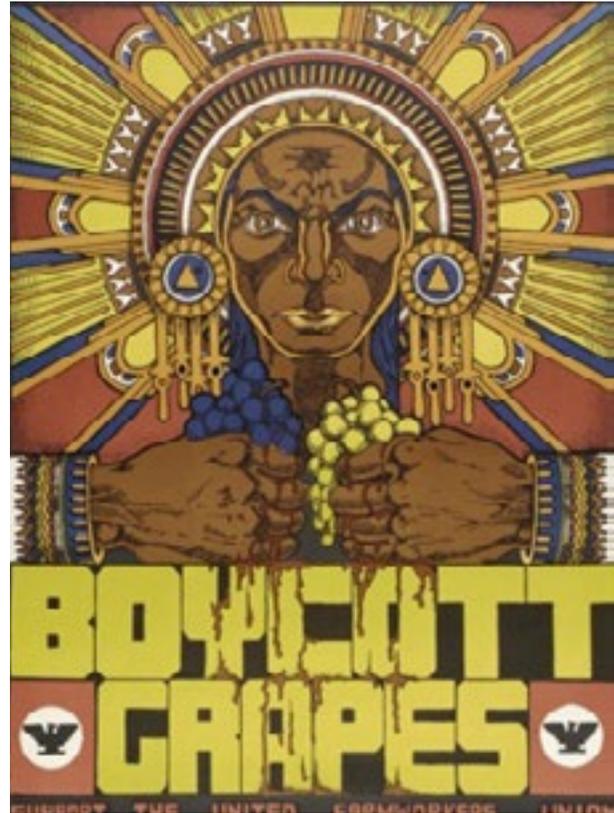
The Chicano Movement, says one scholar at

Michigan State University, was at its core an effort towards the people’s social liberation and legal rights (Rodriguez 1-2). The movement was essentially a struggle for the safety and right to unionize of agricultural workers, increased gender equality, and equal access to education, and against police brutality, disenfranchisement, and even the Vietnam War. Another Chicano expert interprets the movement as highly nationalistic, full of zealous cultural pride. He asserts that a new ethnic identity emerged during *El Movimiento*, rooted in a rejection of the prevalent either/or cultural dynamic of immigration: the encouraged “assimilation” into White-Anglo culture or the provincialism of remaining simply “Mexican” (Gutiérrez 26). As Chicano activist leaders worked to unite the people around the idea that they *deserved* sociopolitical equality, a new passion for self-recognition and cultural independence materialized and manifested in Chicano art.

Writing in 1996, one expert asserts that the Chicano Movement is best thought of as multiple, smaller protest movements linked by overarching social rights objectives (Rodriguez 1-2). The original Chicano Movement did not successfully solve every issue it fought, and more hardships arose after *El Movimiento* lost its political fervor and slowly died out. Summarizing the current scene in 1991, one scholar observed that much of the inequality and racism (though perhaps more “friendly” in appearance) that drove the first period of Chicano resistance art still existed (Del Castillo et al. 1993). And whatever progress has been made since 1991, Mexican-Americans continue to encounter racial discrimination and are consistently forced to endure injustices. As a response to hardships such as

the constant threat of deportation towards undocumented immigrants, inequitable employment opportunities and compensation, and a troubling lack of national political representation—all magnified by the reality of President Donald Trump's holding office—several Chicano artists are once again interested in making bold, direct political statements with their art. After the election in November 2016, there has been a resurgence of the powerful protest art that had become scarce after the original Chicano Art Movement lost momentum. As one reporter interested in the subject observed, Chicano art has "taken on a fiercer political edge since November [2016]" (Myrow). This new wave could signify a rebirth of the original Chicano Art Movement, thematically similar to the original movement yet existing in a new era with new struggles and possessing the potential to reach a broader audience. Questions of assimilation and provincialism have taken a backseat to protesting the GOP's strict deportation policies and pushing back against

Trump's brash, demagogic hostility towards Mexican immigration.



Political posters like this call to action by Xavier Viramontes characterized the Chicano Art Movement.



The Wretched Refuse Find No Shelter Behind Your Golden Wall, by Eric Almanza (2017). Acrylic on wood, 48 x 96 in. Image courtesy of the artist. For more works by the artist please visit www.ericmanza.com.

An exceptionally fiery example of what Myrow labeled a “fiercer political edge” is Chicano artist Eric Almanza’s work *The Wretched Refuse Find No Shelter Behind Your Golden Wall*. Almanza paints a nightmarish vision of President Trump’s Mexican immigration policy – namely, his controversial proposal to build a massive wall across the southern border of the United States. The border as a site has long been a key theme in Chicano art.¹ Almanza’s piece harkens back to earlier Chicano protest art by featuring a call to “RESIST,” while simultaneously depicting a sense of despair within the young girl, who solemnly stares at the ground as a monstrous Trump looms large from behind the wall. The girl is carrying a backpack, which could be a reference to the DACA program (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) that ensures legal status for undocumented immigrants who were brought over the border as minors: a major stipulation of the program is being a currently enrolled student or having graduated from high school (unless the applicant has served in the military). In the first week of September 2017, President Trump formally terminated the DACA program with a six-month delay (allowing Congress to potentially intervene). Almanza’s painting is from October 2017, following weeks of nationwide protests against the DACA decision that have continued through December 2017 (the time of this writing). The only green grass present in the piece is on the Mexican side of the wall, perhaps a play on the idiom “the grass is always greener on the other side.” Another symbol indicating that America isn’t necessarily a

preferable home to Mexico is the raging fire on the American side of the wall, symbolizing the political chaos in Washington or the burning hatred of nativist political groups such as the alt-right towards immigrants. Multiple political studies demonstrate that racial animus was a significant motivating factor for Trump voters, helping carry him through the primaries and, eventually, to the White House (Lopez). Based on the location of the smoke billows, it appears that the fire started at the border. The fire might be an extension of Trump himself, who stated his plan to build this border wall when he first announced his campaign for President. Sitting next to Trump appears to be Russian President Vladimir Putin, likely a jabbing reference to the U.S. Justice Department’s ongoing investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Wearing a Russian flag tie, Putin is positioned in a way that makes him appear to be Trump’s puppeteer or a sort of devil on the President’s shoulder, encouraging Trump’s rage. The graphic above “RESIST” resembles a dreamcatcher, perhaps an ironic use of the word implying that the “DREAMer” (a term used to describe DACA recipients) child’s dreams will be caught up in the border’s grasp before she enters this American land of fire. Almanza has utilized the word “RESIST” as something of a logo or caption in other pieces. The “RESIST” logo is functioning as graffiti on the border wall, perhaps another homage to *El Movimiento*.² The very idea of resistance, critical to the original Chicano Movement, is once again relevant in Trump-era Chicano art.

Some modern Latino artists, such as Sergio Teran, focus their paintings primarily on Mexi-

1 One notable example of historical Chicano art confronting this theme is Malaquías Montoya’s “Undocumented,” which I strongly recommend viewing on the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s website at americanart.si.edu/artwork/undocumented-109594.

2 Graffiti and wall murals were commonly used mediums in the Chicano Art Movement.

can-American culture; others, such as Maria Adela Diaz and Antonio Arredondo Juarez (an immigrant himself who was once undocumented), use photography to capture the experiences of Chicanos (Linn). Thematically, the current wave of Chicano art truly seems to be the beginnings of a resurrection of the original Chicano Art Movement, with great potential to grow in response to the current political climate. However, like the original movement, new Chicano resistance art currently seems to be little-known outside of Mexican-American communities. Could this change?

Yes, this could quickly change. The movement has the capacity to grow in popularity and overall impact for a few reasons. The visual power of the art itself is a crucial factor in potential movement growth. These paintings and photographs offer a vivid glimpse into a community that is at the center of many current political debates in the United States. Simply put, the subject matter of modern Chicano resistance art would resonate with countless Americans. The current political landscape has fostered widespread protests and progressive activism, which is another reason why new Chicano resistance art could spread: this art is conversant with a larger movement. As waves of resistance to President Trump—including frequent political protests and other resistance art forms such as protest music and non-Chicano visual art—continue to organize and spread, poignant Chicano art could well be swept with the tide into the national spotlight. And the broad scope of the "spotlight" today is another critical reason for this potential. In today's United States, artists have an instant platform online. Similar to the Women's March protests or Eminem's "America, Stand Up" freestyle, new

Chicano resistance art could utilize social media networks and other internet mediums to reach a broader audience with its resistance messaging. According to the Pew Research Center, roughly 69% of adults as of November 2016 use social media in some capacity ("Social Media"). Social media isn't just for entertainment, either: another Pew Research Center study reports that as of August 2017, 67% of Americans "get at least some form" of their news from social media platforms (Shearer and Gottfried). Facebook and Twitter have become the nation's America's forum—a new home for news and constant political debates. Chicano resistance art has a clear place within discourse on immigration: online political discussions often begin with a controversial image or meme that has been posted or shared. It would take only one piece of modern (or even historical) Chicano art, whether painting or photograph, going "viral" to bring wider awareness to this art movement and the hardships faced by Mexican-Americans. Almanza's "The Wretched Refuse Find No Shelter Behind Your Golden Wall" exemplifies a piece with this capacity, with its layers of relevant sociopolitical implications and jarring aesthetic. Vivid works like this are well formatted for viewing on smart phones and laptops, further increasing the odds of mass circulation. A similar phenomenon of mass circulation has occurred with political memes and activist graffiti (such as the works by well-known English artist Banksy) going viral on Twitter or gaining notoriety through news coverage (Ellsworth-Jones). Though modern Chicano art is typically more complex than most memes or graffiti, the capability of powerful graphic statements to spread online is clear. Sharing and reposting of Chicano art could also plau-

sibly lead to curiosity about the original Chicano Movement among those who are struck by the intense themes present in a piece. As rhetoric about the border wall spews from the White House and a wide range of immigration policies are constantly being discussed by the American public, it seems to more be of a question of *when* rather than *if* a work of Chicano resistance art spreads and brings attention to the broader movement.

From its inception, Chicano art has aimed to strike a chord within its audience. Whether the goal was to garner support for the UFWU, encourage fierce pride in Chicano Aztec culture, or simply make outsiders aware of the daily struggles encountered by Mexican-Americans, this art has been—and continues to be—committed to *resistance*. Resistance to unfair wages, discriminatory stereotypes, assimilation into Anglo culture, right-wing immigration policies, and deportation. The combination of remarkable symbolic depth and stunning surface visuals is a trademark of several Chicano art masterpieces. This duality enables Chicano art to instantly draw a viewer in and then hold their attention with more weighty ideas—an ideal dynamic for mass circulation. Historically, Chicano resistance art hasn't garnered the attention it deserves outside of its own communities and craves a wider audience in order to further its resistance efforts. Facing a movement of hatred personified by President Trump and capable of shaping American immigration discourse via social media, modern Chicano art has real potential to spread like wildfire.

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From “Never a Nigger” to Diversity Champion

by Miles Francisco

Miles Francisco, who is from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, is pursuing a double major in Political Science and African and African American Studies, and minors in International Studies, Philosophy, and Women’s and Gender Studies. He wrote this essay for the “Truth to Power” class taught by Eric Bosse.

In 2017, for the second year in a row, the University of Oklahoma (OU) was the recipient of the Diversity Champion award given by Insight into Diversity. This award is given to institutions that “exemplify an unyielding commitment to diversity and inclusion throughout their campus communities, across academic programs, and at the highest administrative levels” (“University Community” 2018). A bit of math tells you that 2017 minus two equals 2015, the year that Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) proudly roared the chant heard around the world. Yet in the two years since this incident, this university has been heralded as a beacon for institutional diversity. Take some time to wrap your mind around this feat: from a place that could not get a mention in national news without SAE in the subtext, to Diversity Champion. It is astounding, truly – almost as if the University was just waiting for a racist outbreak from its students to garner national attention and implement this resounding overhaul of inclusion. This incident sparked a rebuttal so strong that it launched the university’s diversity programs beyond all others in this country. Contemplate that. From “Never a Nigger” to Diversity Champion. It is easier to conceive this feat when juxtaposed with Reconstruction. In this analogy, SAE is the Confed-

eracy, the University of Oklahoma the Union, President Boren our Lincoln. This Civil War was much shorter than the real one. President Boren was able to kick SAE off campus and immediately begin the reconstruction of the University of Oklahoma.

Whether the Reconstruction of the United States of America was an utter failure or a success remains a source of polarizing debate today. Some will tell you that President Lincoln, had he not been assassinated, would have been able to bring the country back together under the name of equality. Some will say that Reconstruction successfully brought the southern states back into the Union, fulfilling the original purpose of the period. Others will say that Reconstruction began with Black bodies lying lifeless and ended with Black bodies lying lifeless. To discuss the Civil War in an honest fashion, we must begin with the premise that what Lincoln – and, by expansion, much of the country – was yearning for was not equity for Black slaves; no, the task was to keep the Union intact. It just so happened that slavery was the thing tearing it to shreds. To paint Lincoln as a hero in the story of the Civil War is to embark on the path of the White Man’s Burden. Yes, Lincoln did proclaim emancipation, but not necessarily for the humanitarian reasons your history teachers have led you to believe. In 1876, at an unveiling of the Freedmen’s Monument in honor of Lincoln, Frederick Douglass stated that Lincoln was “preeminently the white man’s President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country” (Douglass 1876).

Whether Lincoln was a hero may very well be a topic for another day, but Douglass, on the topic, had this to say:

The race to which we belong were not the special objects of his consideration. Knowing this, I concede to you, my white fellow-citizens, a preeminence in this worship at once full and supreme. First, midst, and last, you and yours were the objects of his deepest affection and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his stepchildren; children by adoption, children by forces of circumstances and necessity. To you it especially belongs to sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory, to multiply his statues, to hang his pictures high upon your walls, and commend his example, for to you he was a great and glorious friend and benefactor. (Douglass 1876)

Praise who you will and as you must, but do not assume that the marginalized will join in the chorus. We will praise those who we know do the work for the people, those who we know truly care for those most vulnerable among us, not those whose main concern is the preservation of a colonized institution. Lincoln's concern was not with equality or ending slavery for the sake of the millions of Blacks in chains; it was with the country and those who were recognized as human. Now we can begin to realize why Reconstruction did not give way to fundamental differences in the ways Blacks were treated: it was never intended to.

Fast forward to 2015 and the task dropped at the feet of President Boren. I cannot speak to the state of diversity on OU's campus prior to 2016, as I was not an OU student, but the university

was never recognized as diversity champion prior to that year. President Boren had to re-patch his tattered university, and that is exactly what he did. Rather than address the systems of power that granted those SAE members the privilege to chant those words, President Boren implemented the Diversity Experience, brought in Jabar Shumate as Vice President, and put a small bandage on a flesh wound. The Diversity Experience is mandatory for first-year and transfer students beginning with the class of 2019. An experience that most students deem excessively long, some even unnecessary. An experience that puts the burden on students to educate total strangers about their identity. An experience with an impossible task: to plant inclusivity into the minds of 18-year old students from varying backgrounds in the span of a few hours.

I would like to make something clear before I carry on: I am in no way attacking Vice President Shumate's efforts to achieve this task, nor anyone working in the University Community office, nor those that manage the Diversity Experience. As stated, they have been given an incredibly unfair burden. I place the blame on the President and others who hold power at this university for circumventing structural problems altogether and giving a few people of color the mission to do the work for the oppressor, something that is seen unfortunately often in the fight for social justice.

We now know that President Lincoln never sought fair treatment for Blacks, never prayed for the day that a Black man (let alone a Black woman) and himself would be given those self-evident truths. Do we know if President Boren was aware that what he did was not enough? Does he himself know that it was not enough? Does he believe that

it was adequate, that bringing in Vice President Shumate to promote diversity university-wide was enough? The answers hinge on who holds the power.

There is a certain inevitability of White supremacy at historically White institutions like the University of Oklahoma. Just as was the case with our country, a short period of reconstruction would not be enough to dismantle a system of oppression that is as natural to the United States' state of being as is war. I want to define White supremacy before carrying forward, because it, like other terms centered around race, seems to be a source of confusion for many. In the words of critical race theorist Frances Lee Ansley:

By 'white supremacy' I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Vann 2017)

This definition does a good job of encompassing the layers of White supremacy. While it may seem rather general at first glance, it is in fact quite precise and speaks to realities in which we live. To begin, Ansley refuses to abide by the amnesia often seen in discussions about race relations in this country. White supremacy is not just the air around Richard Spencer and his followers; a White supremacist is not just the man caught tying a noose around a poplar tree. We must begin this

conversation from the premise that to be a White supremacist, to participate in this racist system, one does not have to actively engage in overtly racist actions. It has become far easier today to classify racists only as those at Charlottesville, but we have to come to terms with the fact that they are the minority – that most Americans do not wish for their racism to be publicized. Which is not to say that racism is dead, but that Whiteness as a malleable creation has transformed into a much less obvious way of keeping people of color subservient. It is this system that has made it so that at every turn, in every nook of power, there is a White face waiting, even when a "diverse pool of candidates" was considered.

With this definition in mind, let us examine the University of Oklahoma. President Boren, the head of the school, is a White, affluent, able-bodied, cisgender, straight-identified man. The Board of Regents, where the rest of any meaningful power resides, includes eight members, six of whom align with Boren's identity, the other two White women, and all of whom have the common trait of being wealthy. To further cement this lineage of Whiteness, Boren's successor, James L. Gallogly, also aligns with this identity. This is the top of the power structure of the University of Oklahoma, all of which does nothing to combat White supremacy. There is hardly a sign of diversity or inclusion among those who hold the power at the University of Oklahoma. Those that have the clout to alter the reality of justice and equity on this campus chose to tokenize a large minority community by bringing in Jabar Shumate. It is difficult for an objective observer to look at this action as little more than a public relations fix.

I write this critique of my university not because I believe any power-bearing White person here actually believes I am inferior in any draconian type of way, but because they do not and thus we label them as nice, liberal White folk and move on. As if actually yearning for my lynching is the only indicator of White supremacy. As if spitting at my Black body on my way to class is the only indicator of White supremacy. No, I fear that something much scarier seen in the actions of my university after the SAE incident has driven many to believe that this institution is worthy of an award just a year after racist overtones were unearthed. It is my consciousness of the reality of this country, of this system, that drives me to fear, because I am skeptical of the end results. I am skeptical that any fundamental change will come of a place that so readily accepts an award even after failing to address the omnipresent elephant in the room.

The response to "Never a Nigger" is the epitome of what Dafina-Lazarus Stewart calls the "language of appeasement." Stewart posits that diversity and inclusion tactics ask the wrong questions and yearn for answers that mirror change on a rudimentary level, but do not enact justice. It is naming Jabar Shumate Vice President and putting him in charge of all things non-White, to make these things more visible to the media, so we can get back in the good graces of the nation. It worked. I can only speculate as to the intentions of President Boren. But his actions tell me that he was not looking for substantive change, or even modest change, but rather a fix to the image of his university. I see Whiteness reshaped at OU, remaining in the background, continuing to call the shots and ensuring that their stranglehold on power never

ceases. All the while, students, faculty, and staff who yearn for equity and justice have been played for the fool. Which is not to say that these individuals believe racism has suddenly been eradicated from the university, but rather that they have been silenced by a couple of diversity championships.

Jackynicole Eyocko is a former student activist who was at OU during the SAE outburst and was a member of OU Unheard, the group that played a crucial role in pressuring the university's hierarchy into action. She recently looked back at the role she and her fellow activists played in ensuing change. Eyocko, reflecting on this time at OU, states that "many of us did not know what we were doing or what we wanted to get out of our collective fight, but what was immanent was our agency – especially since this 'grand' example of racism occurred during the height of the BLM movement." She felt that this time was bigger than her, bigger than the usual sense of being a Black person at university, here to study and graduate. She felt an obligation to speak up, and she did. Regarding her path to OU Unheard and the work that came before, she says "we never 'became' student activists. We were academic activists during most of [our] university lectures when we had to check folks, including professors." This is a reality for many students of color: They find themselves in classrooms not built for them, chairs not malleable to their existence, institutions unwilling to do the fundamental work to ensure their survival, so they do the work themselves.

A professor who did not feel he had the liberty to be named in this essay recalled his experience with the faculty diversity council and his work on equity issues at OU as a whole. He quickly came

to the realization that President Boren responded more readily to student outcry than to faculty members. In working on the institutional plan for diversity and inclusion efforts at the university, this professor saw much of the same appeasement that I see from my perspective. When he and other faculty members suggested initiatives to address systemic problems, their proposals were often dismissed as remedying problems that were already addressed by existing services, or forced into a framework for addressing technical rather than social or political problems. One specific example he gave was the matter of student food insecurity, which those in power categorized as something already answered through financial aid. When he and other like-minded faculty members proposed a climate survey to track the state of the diversity programs in place and students' reaction to them, it was not brought about. Why initial calls for a climate survey were not heeded is something I can answer based only on conjecture: maybe out of fear as to what the results would bring to light; possibly a fear that this survey would require stronger programs that actually pinpointed the system, rather than who is in the room. Which is precisely the problem with diversity programs in general. Too often "diversity" simply addresses phenotypical traits in order to make an institution appear more welcoming for students who do not fit the mold of what Audre Lorde calls the "mythical norm." Possibly the sentiment was that these things coming so shortly after "Never a Nigger" would mean that little has changed in students' mindset. Efforts to discuss housing precarity, economic justice for students, and other systemic matters were an awkward fit for the technocratic planning

process. Those responsible for institutional diversity planning may not be to blame for this inaction on real systemic work. Some in the administration may fear a backlash from prominent stakeholders. Every person working on equity concerns at this university must be thoroughly aware of the stakeholders who play a role in how far these diversity endeavors can progress. One can speculate that a little too much change may run off the top donors to this university, which is no good for all parties involved.

Eyocko, whose group OU Unheard is an example of the student outcry forcing Boren's ear, spoke about her feelings about the award given to OU just a year later, saying that this feat "ridicules the struggle borne by the hundreds of thousands of black people who have been attending the university since they were allowed to. It is a mockery of 60 years of struggle." She noted that the only institutional changes seen by her and her peers was the hiring of Shumate, adding that no award should be given until an institution "can quantify their 'diversity' initiatives," as would have been the case if a climate survey had been undertaken, as the aforementioned professor advocated. Eyocko feels that the very students who applied the pressure to bring a change were shunted out of the process, rather than becoming part of it by being asked whether they, as students of color directly affected by racist fraternities running privileged on this campus, felt that their campus had become more inclusive. Eyocko says she did not feel "OU did a good job of entering both the fraternity and sorority space." That the diversity training was not mandated on a national level shows that the University and Interfraternity Council differentiated

between "what is institutional and what is one bad apple" and, by doing so, missed a true opportunity to affect millions.

It is the actions of a few fraternity boys that started all of this, so why hasn't it ended with them? It may be that the existential threat of powerful individuals is too large a Goliath to even attempt a battle with. They are President Boren. They are the Board of Regents. They are the very face of White supremacy in all its horror; they are power.

The individuals who are truly worthy of an award do the tireless, daily, often unrecognized work of making this university more open for all students, and being named Diversity Champion is not the reason they do this work. They know the work they do is crucial for the survival and eventual liberation of the masses. Yet this institution proudly flaunts its award while doing little or



*"There will never be a ni**** SAE....You can hang him from a tree / But he'll never sign with me / There will never be a ni**** SAE"*

nothing to address the privilege, the system that makes this institution a welcoming home to White Supremacy.

America (post 1492) and the University of Oklahoma are historically White institutions, with roots grounded in White supremacy, that have upheld this systemic supremacy because their leaders failed to dismantle the systems whose continued existence relies on them. The slogan of this university is an ode to the obliviousness of Whiteness and the horror it has inflicted on so many. The words "boomer sooner" roll so easily off the tongues of thousands every day without a second thought about the facts that the very land on which our university resides is stolen land. These words meant the genocide of Indigenous peoples in this state. Maybe addressing the first words seen by aspiring students would be a step in the right direction towards a sliver of symbolic justice for all the wrong done in the name of liberty.

If the university's response to the SAE incident, scandal - whatever name one deems appropriate - did not bring any change to the institution, to those that need diversity training the most, then what was it all for? To appease. To appease the few faculty of color at the University of Oklahoma rather than improve their numbers and tenure status; to appease the small population of students of color rather than significantly increase their number; to make members of these groups feel moderately safe, or at least provide ample safe spaces, rather than to make the larger university environment actually safe for them. To appease the national media, to show that this was just a blemish, that "Never a Nigger" was just a group of foolish, intoxicated kids chanting something they did not

know the meaning of. If appeasement was the goal, we should call it what it is: the upholding of White supremacy at this colonized institution. Was any other outcome to be expected?

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The Dark Side of Fandom: Competition, Authenticity, and Fanfiction

by Kenzie R. Hanna

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In modern culture, fandoms – communities or subcultures of “fans” – are widespread in entertainment, sports, and media. For example, many Star Trek enthusiasts actually speak the Klingon language, which enables fans from around the world to develop relationships through Klingon communication that would be impossible without the fandom (*Klingon Language Institute*). Despite these ideals of a unified fan base, however, fandoms are often places of division and controversy, especially due to the complexities of each fandom, making it difficult to even define the word “fan.” Unfortunately, this ambiguity causes fandoms to be clearer about defining who is *not* a fan than who is. John Fiske argues that fans “discriminate fiercely [because] the boundaries between what falls within their fandom and what does not are sharply drawn” (Fiske 34). This discrimination is also a method of alienation, as it causes “mundane viewers [to] often wish to avoid what they see as the taint of fandom,” while simultaneously prompting obsessive fans to “argue about what characteristics allow someone to cross it and become a true fan” (Fiske 35). When fans “fiercely” categorize each other and outsiders, conflicts lead to dissatisfaction that detracts from the fandom’s original goal of unity.

Although the fandom knows who is *not* a fan, the level of participation possible within the fan-

dom makes it unclear who is “authentically” partaking in the fandom culture. Camille Bacon-Smith seeks to unravel this confusion by defining terms. For Bacon-Smith, there is an umbrella term; for example, “‘Star Trek fandom’ refers to fans of that source product, regardless of the activity in which the fan participates” (Bacon-Smith 22). However, because there are so many activities to participate in, Bacon-Smith claims that ethnographers should use the term “interest group,” which categorizes fans through “a combination of the preferred genre, delivery channel or source product ... and activity” (Bacon-Smith 23). In application, interest groups connect fans based on their methods of participation within the fandom, such as cosplayers, gamers, moviegoers, and so forth. Although Bacon-Smith specifically states that the term “interest group” does not belong to the fandom community itself when it defines its fandom limits, fans still use this mindset unconsciously to judge themselves and other fans. Thus, Bacon-Smith seeks to unite fans by categorizing them into groups that attempt to form efficient relationships among fans with common interests. However, Bacon-Smith’s solution unintentionally creates the very fan division that it tries to avoid, by keeping fans separate and alienating potential new fans. Grouping fans with similar interests together facilitates a conflict of interest that divides the fandom, where differences in interest defined by mutual curiosity lead to diverging interest in the benefits from status within the fandom.

As a result, the concept of “interest groups” raises many questions. Should fans give more credence to the fans who accept only canonical sources, or to those who contribute through fanfiction?

Is fandom somehow tied to consumption, such that the more one buys, the more one is a “fan”? Bacon-Smith’s argument about interest groups for fans is useful because it recognizes the individual identities that exist in fandoms, because each fan possesses different interests. But I ultimately disagree with Bacon-Smith’s categorizing of fans into interest groups, which divides fans unnecessarily and suggests that some forms of participation are more significant than others, promoting self-interest at the expense of other fans. The use of interest groups ignores the equal legitimacy of fans within the fandom community, and instead places fans in conflict with one another. Instead, fans must remember to return to the true purpose of fandoms: to be an accepting community of individuals with similar interests. In this essay, I argue for an understanding of fandoms as complex utopias, accepting the different roles in a way that still facilitates the inclusive purpose of fandoms, because the fans are united under a common interest. As a result, fans are able to rise to a level of co-ownership with the creator of the text and find equal validity in the numerous forms of fandom participation.

Many of the tensions that exist in fandoms can be traced back to three different but intertwined factors, as exhibited in Star Trek, Star Wars, and Harry Potter fandoms: demographics, consumerism, and fanfiction, respectively. In Star Trek, the complex, multi-generational series divides old and new fans. Consisting of thirteen films (including the recent “reboots”) and seven television shows (*Discovery* currently entering season two), the Star Trek franchise continues fifty-two years after the airdate of the first episode in the original show. Many fans still celebrate the fandom, calling them-

selves “Trekkies” or “Trekks” and attending fan conventions, fandom-themed cruises, and museum exhibits. But fandom involvement varies from fan to fan, according to Robert V. Kozinets, such that “Star Trek fans run the gamut from commonplace mainstream views to highly devoted members of an alternative subculture” (Kozinets 67). Tensions have arisen among fans with the release of the newer reboots, as Star Trek has consistently appealed to older fans who grew up with *The Original Series*, and that older demographic does not wish to see the fandom undergo drastic changes. Star Trek’s demographic problem is amplified in its fandom, because Star Wars appeals to mass culture through consumerism, as the vast scope of the franchise universe lends itself to many products. For example, according to Brendan Cook, fans who consider themselves to be Original Trilogy purists, or film purists, or general canon purists, are divided about what is considered part of the Star Wars franchise “simply because it means so many things to so many people around the world” (Cook 85, Elovaara). Now that Disney has bought the Star Wars franchise, many of the published books and stories about the Star Wars universe are no longer considered “canon” (the official storyline of the franchise) and are categorized as fanfiction. Both Star Wars and Star Trek draw a wide variety of fans who have conflicting opinions about how the fandom should be expressed and how other fans should participate in the culture.

The tensions between fans as creators and fans as consumers are most pronounced in the widespread fan culture of Harry Potter. Fan groups enjoy the series in many different ways, according to their personal creativity preferences. Fan sites such

as The Leaky Cauldron and conventions such as Prophecy and LeakyCon are ways that many fans connect with each other both online and in person. Additionally, fans contribute to the fandom in their own non-canonical ways, with wizard rock bands and fanfiction. The biggest controversy among fans in the Harry Potter fandom occurs through fanfiction, which is a phenomenon that frequently utilizes Harry Potter as source material, since the fans have different ideas about how the original text should be interpreted. For example, many Harry Potter fans participate in "shipping" (that is, pitching a romantic relationship between two characters who often had no indication of being in love) different combinations of characters, such as Harry Potter and Hermione Granger—good friends in the series who never pursue a romantic relationship (Schwabach 391). (Shipping fan art may be viewed at various fandom websites, most notably *DeviantArt*: www.deviantart.com.) Thus, the Harry Potter fandom is remarkable in the sense that it is constantly in motion between the fans, the author, and the text.

The phenomenon of fanfiction will offer clearer insights into the definition of a "real" fan in different fandoms. I have chosen fanfiction instead of other fan expressions, such as cosplay (dressing up as a character from a fandom when going to an event such as a convention), because fanfiction is a creative process in which fans build on existing canon, whereas cosplay is a reflective celebration of canon as it currently exists. Fanfiction is a speculative text about the fandom's characters that places them into new situations and predicts how they would act. In this way, fans can take the original text into their own hands as a personal creation.

As Henry Jenkins III argues about the Star Trek fandom, "Star Trek is not simply something that can be reread [or re-watched]; it is something that can and must be rewritten in order to make it more responsive to [the fans'] needs, in order to make it a better producer of personal meanings and pleasures" (Jenkins 87). Thus, for Jenkins, fanfiction is not only beneficial to fandoms, but perhaps even required for fandoms to fulfill their ultimate role—to personally apply to situations that the fans can understand and create for themselves. For this reason, "the fans often cast themselves not as poachers [a term that Jenkins uses pejoratively when describing fanfiction writers] but as loyalists, rescuing essential elements of the primary text misused by those who maintain copyright control" (Jenkins 87). The fanfiction becomes an outlet for fans, a way for them to connect with other fans in ways that they otherwise could not. By appointing themselves as creators of the text through fanfiction, fans claim that they are better able to understand and interpret the characters and the text than the original author. For example, "many [Star Trek] fan writers characterize themselves as 'repairing the damage' caused by the program's inconsistent and often demeaning treatment of its female characters" (Jenkins 93). Jenkins would argue that fanfiction is not just important but necessary if fandoms are to be meaningful to fans. Molding the text is a method that fans use to connect and shape the text to suit their individual needs.

Although many fans read and write fanfiction, not all participants in the fandom value fanfiction equally. For many fans, fanfiction is an outlet for creative and personal reflection on the original franchise text, but others view it as a defilement

of the canon. This debate becomes more complex when one considers the legality of fanfiction, which has caused some copyright disputes between the author and the fans, especially when fans are economically interested in the fandom. According to Aaron Schwabach, a professor of law, there are three main objections that an author might have to fanfiction: (1) fanfiction “alters the nature of the original work,” (2) fanfiction “anticipates elements of the author’s own future works,” which constrains authors’ ability to publish their own ideas, and (3) fanfiction “borrows extensively from the author’s own work,” leading to copyright concerns (Schwabach 388). In this way, fanfiction often impedes the author’s ability to properly publish and create a franchise world, and may cause some fans to view fanfiction writers as not “real” fans because of their carelessness with the text.

These copyright concerns have caused authors to react in a variety of ways. For example, Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry responded positively to Star Trek fanfiction, allegedly telling George Lucas, “Leave [the fans] alone, they’ll make you rich!” (Schwabach 390). However, some authors place more defined limits on what fans can do with the original text. J. K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter books, has sued fans who attempted to publish fanfiction, “even though the same material had long been available online, with Rowling’s approval” (Schwabach 402). Generally, the distinction between parodic fanfiction and plagiaristic fanfiction is unclear, leading to great confusion among fans and authors about whether fanfiction writers should be allowed to express their individual fandom.

Considering the significant positive impact of

fanfiction on the communities of fans, fanfiction becomes a method to further the communal purpose of fandoms. When an author publishes a text, he or she is, to some degree, releasing control of it, as it is not possible to control who is allowed to consume that text. Additionally, although the fans can be steered toward a particular way of interpreting a text, it is impossible to require a specific interpretation of the text. Thus, when authors release their texts, they are figuratively entering into a contract with their fans. In this contract, the author agrees to guide the fan base through official texts, but the opinions about that text belong to the fans themselves. One good example of this contract is in the Star Wars fandom. Disney bought the rights to the Star Wars franchise in 2012, and by 2014, as the new “creator” of the franchise, it declared that what was previously known as the “Expanded Universe” (texts – not including the Skywalker Saga movies – that were released as additional stories about the Star Wars universe) would now become “Legends,” non-canonical works that should be treated as speculative fanfiction (*Star Wars Expanded Universe*). Thus, echoing the conflict of the Star Wars fandom, Disney has made a clear distinction between what is canon and what is merely fanfiction. Although this canon-fanfiction divide does alienate the fans’ contributions to the fandom to some degree, it is a reasonable compromise that allows these texts to exist without labeling the fans who participate through non-canonical method as “fake” fans. Due to the unstoppable nature of fanfiction in fandoms, perhaps a sharper divide would eliminate some of the conflicts between the definitions of a “real” fan.

In order to undertake this compromise, fan-

dom assumptions need to change: instead of dividing fans into Bacon-Smith's "interest groups," fans must return to the true purpose of fandoms. Fandoms are not places of competition among fans, wherein individuals hope to rise in status above the masses to become an "authentic expert" on everything within the limits of the fandom, as in a capitalistic community. Instead, fandoms should be interpreted with a more socialistic lens, recognizing that communal ideas circulating among fans are unstoppable, and that the community actually becomes the fandom's greatest strength. Through his fieldwork with various Star Trek fans, Robert V. Kozinets has found that the fandom is a "social utopia" in which "some fans assert that Star Trek fandom ... is a place where many of those who do not easily fit into mainstream social roles ... can find a form of sanctuary and acceptance" (Kozinets 72). Kozinets imagines fandoms as communities of harmony and acceptance in a way that Bacon-Smith's idea of interest groups fails to accomplish.

How would Kozinets's social utopia work in application? Conflicts between individuals are inevitable and must be acknowledged when creating a new model for ideal fan interaction. In his book, Will Brooker pursues this inevitable conflict in two chapters that examine case studies of two different examples of fandom interactions: the equally valid methods of fandom participation of watching Star Wars with friends and watching it alone. In this juxtaposition, Brooker demonstrates that fandom is not reliant on social participation or knowledge to make someone a "better" fan. Rather, the fandom's meaning changes based on how people participate with the text. For Star Wars fans watching

in groups, the fandom involves quoting the text, debating the canon, and generally joking about the content with inside jokes. However, without a group, fandom participation is "more like the traditional practice of scholarship, the reclusive study of a dense primary text" (Brooker 64). With these case studies, Brooker demonstrates how the social utopia of fandom can encompass different identities of interest groups and yet view those differences as equally legitimate. Fandom can be associated with individual textual interpretation but also group identity. Ultimately, one can conclude that belonging to a fandom does not depend on one's rank in the fandom; rather, the only requirement is one's participation. Individual reflection is as valid an interpretation of the text as group discussion, and neither method is an exclusive category, as fandoms are intersections between individual love of the text and communal engagement with others. During instances of individual textual reflection, a fan is still actively engaging with the fandom, formulating the personal ideas and opinions necessary for future interactions with other fans. As a result, fandoms need a broader understanding of "fan" to encompass the general sense of Kozinets's utopia but also span the different individual identities within the fandom, forming a compromise between the concepts. An "authentic" fan exists on as a spectrum, not as an absolute, and the terms used should reflect that.

Although current fandoms have language to describe fans—Harry Potter fans are "Potterheads" and Star Trek fans are "Trekkies" or "Trekkers"—these definitions only demonstrate the inclusion-exclusion divide. There is no term for "fan-who-has-only-seen-the-movies," or

“fan-who-attends-conventions-religiously.” Greater precision in describing the nature of one’s participation in the fandom would make it easier for an individual to feel a sense of belonging to that fandom, in a way that would not exclude any individual fans. A myriad of terms could be used, depending on individual interest, such as fanfiction author, movie reviewer, canon specialist, cosplay costume designer, etc. With these terms, fans would feel a greater sense of connection to the larger fandom, without claiming greater authority than other fans. However, due to the necessary precision in fandom language, each fandom should develop its own unique terms that are independent of other fandoms’, which would also reconnect fans to the text in the process. Adjusting fandom language, with the intent to promote greater understanding rather than create division, would minimize conflict among members.

Although fandoms would be clearer if terms existed to mark the distinction between a more “casual” fan and an “obsessive” fan, one potential problem that would arise as a result might be intimidation of new fans. As this essay demonstrated in the beginning, individual fandoms are complex utopias that are difficult to summarize accurately. With the debate about fanfiction’s legality and questions about the authenticity of any individual fan, the tight-knit community of a fandom can be off-putting to a potential new fan. However, the addition of more precise language defining the spectrum of fandom participation in interest groups can allow new fans a better entry point into the fandom, offering them a sense of belonging where none might previously have existed due to their initial lack of knowledge. More precise

diction in fandoms, refocusing the fandom away from pointless competition, would allow fandoms to accomplish their ultimate goal—to give people a sense of sanctuary in a community of people with similar interests and passions.

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“Bad Hombres”: The Subjugation of Undocumented Immigrants in Trump’s America

by Erika Moen

Erika Moen is a Chemistry and Communication double major from Vermillion, South Dakota who wrote this essay in the “Immigrant America” class taught by David Long.

The *New York Times* Editorial Board wrote on February 19th, 2017: “Daniela Vargas of Jackson, Miss., barricades herself in her home after agents detain her father and brother. A mother of four, Jeanette Vizguerra, seeks refuge, alone, in a Denver church basement. A group of Latino men leaving a church-run homeless shelter near Alexandria, Va., are surrounded by a dozen immigration agents who question them, scan their fingerprints, and arrest at least two of them” (para. 5). Several months later, Border Patrol agents wait outside the hospital room of Rosa Maria Hernandez—a 10-year-old with cerebral palsy—until she has recovered from her emergency gallbladder surgery, and then they take her into custody (Stapleton and Kopan, para. 1). This is the dystopian reality that President Trump’s anti-immigration policies have created by expanding the power of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to hunt down, detain, and deport undocumented Mexican immigrants. But Trump’s anti-immigrant dogma doesn’t make much sense given his business background; he should know that American businesses are dependent on these exploitable workers, who are often willing to work for even less than the minimum wage.

Though Trump’s policies have reinforced anti-immigrant sentiment, undocumented Mex-

ican immigrants have been disenfranchised for decades. White Americans may profess fears that immigrants dilute American identity and contribute to an array of social ills (drug abuse, crime, poverty, unemployment—the list is nearly as long as the Mexican-American border itself), but white employers quietly hire illegal laborers at the same time. Nativist attitudes that allow for clandestine economic exploitation have rendered undocumented Mexican-Americans pariahs within American society. Trump’s actions—his Mexican-American border wall idea, his mass deportation plan, and most recently, his proposal to end President Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program—have given these nativist attitudes political salience and legislative power. Instead of taking up pitchforks and torches and joining Trump’s witch hunt, the United States needs to recognize that undocumented immigrants are legally and fiscally subjugated in American society and that naturalization (i.e., opening a path to legal residency rather than continuing this mass deportation scheme) is key to restoring the rights of undocumented Mexican-American immigrants.

Admittedly, in a political climate where Trump’s first 100 days saw a 40% increase in ICE detainments (Shugerman, para. 6), naturalization seems to be an unrealistically progressive solution to illegal immigration. But immigration does not merely concern politics or economics—it concerns human rights. From a humanitarian perspective, it is preferable to be too progressive rather than too conservative on immigration. On one hand, we have Trump, who advocates for swinging fully to the right: militarize the border, punish immigration law infractions severely, and deport all undocu-

mented immigrants. On the other hand, if we were to swing completely to the left, we would have an open border, blanket amnesty, and full sociopolitical rights for immigrants. Neither of these options is ideal; the former denies Mexican immigrants refuge from threatening political and economic circumstances, and the latter option is economically and politically unsustainable. Thus, while the main goal of my proposal is to preserve human rights, I envision doing so in an economically and politically feasible manner.

America ought to shift towards a more rights-based immigration policy because the status quo fails to protect the basic rights of immigrants, rendering them pariahs in society. Owen Fiss defines a pariah in terms of what he calls the antisubjugation principle, which he derives from the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause: "What that principle tests for is not the fairness of an allocative rule but the social structure that such a rule creates" (5). Under his definition, a pariah is a victim of legislation that creates a caste-like system and thus violates the antisubjugation principle. Undocumented immigrants are pariahs because their current sociopolitical and economic treatment subjugates them, forcing them into poverty and restricting their social mobility. Fiss concurs: "Illiteracy is a severe disability in modern society, but perhaps no more so than being malnourished or homeless or sick and in need of medical attention. The state routinely responds to these needs of its citizens, and against this background, the exclusion of immigrants has a severely subordinating effect upon them. So too do laws that bar illegal immigrants from working.... These laws force illegal immigrants to survive by begging or stealing and thus

to live at the margins of society and to prey upon it—no education, no welfare, no work" (6). Though Fiss's portrayal of undocumented immigrants as beggars and thieves suggests racial profiling and seems uncharacteristic of his position on immigrants, his central argument that socioeconomic exclusion subjugates immigrants rings true.

Of course, laws against hiring undocumented immigrants are easily circumvented, so immigrants still have access to jobs. However, unauthorized workers are subjugated by their exploitability. They cannot unionize or form political coalitions to protect their rights because such actions would increase their risk of being exposed and deported, especially under the new Trump administration. Consequently, they have no means of defending their rights when employers underpay them—or when they neglect to pay them at all. Such minimum-wage violations are particularly harmful to undocumented workers, who comprise much of the low-wage immigrant population: "Of the 8.6 million low-wage immigrant workers, 3.4 million (40 percent) are undocumented" (Capps 5). High poverty rates and low annual incomes subjugate this demographic, as Passel and Cohn explain: "Among adults who are unauthorized immigrants, one-in-five (21%) is poor. In contrast, the poverty rate is 13% for legal immigrant adults and 10% for U.S.-born adults" (17). One might argue that minimum-wage laws are not intended for undocumented workers, which may be true; but from a constitutional point of view, as Fiss maintains, legislation should be judged by consequences, not intentions. Minimum-wage violations have subjugating consequences because they perpetuate the cycle of poverty, thereby restricting undocument-

ed immigrants' opportunities for social mobility and reinforcing social inequality. Thus employers have a social and ethical obligation to pay undocumented workers fairly, even if they have no legal obligation in the status quo.

Many employers also treat undocumented workers not as employees but as commodities. They use these workers to increase their profits and fill jobs that would repel most legal residents, but as soon as the employers themselves are at risk, they betray their undocumented employees. Robert Stout explains: "In recent cases, their companies have cooperated with law enforcement agencies by opening personnel records and allowing ICE agents to raid and deport workers. ICE charges the immigrant workers with possessing falsified documents but the employers go scot free whether or not they knew about the false documentation or, in fact, helped workers to obtain it" (6). Employers who hire undocumented immigrants often do so knowingly. They are just as culpable as the employee for the legal violation, yet they claim ignorance to evade indictment for their hiring practices. Such a double standard entrenches the image of undocumented workers as tools — albeit willing tools — rather than people, which allows Americans to clear their consciences about rights violations. If undocumented workers are merely useful objects, what obligation do we have to protect them? Aren't tools meant to be used and then returned to the garage until we need them again?

Trump seems to think that we should track down every tool in the house, return them to the garage, build a wall around the garage, and then make the garage pay for the wall. He doesn't appear concerned about the humanitarian impli-

cations of this mass deportation plan, as shown in his presidential bid announcement: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best... They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (*Washington Post*, para. 11). Though he concedes that maybe not all Mexican-Americans are "bad hombres," this rhetoric demonizes undocumented immigrants, casting them as monsters plaguing society instead of people trying to make a living. Vilifying undocumented immigrants legitimizes harsh deportation policies like the one that Trump advocates; if Americans view immigrants as threats, they are more likely to be complicit in the process of mass deportation. But American society threatens undocumented immigrants, not the other way around. Perhaps some immigrants are violent criminals, but far more of them are victims of poverty, economic exploitation, and anti-immigrant persecution. Trump's alarmist discourse ignores the "push" factors that cause Mexicans to cross the border. In *Crossing Over*, Ruben Martinez describes the desperate circumstances of *la crisis*: "Since New Year's Day 1994, the stock market had plunged alongside the peso, the jobless rate had soared, and the black market had exploded. The rich tightened their belts, the middle class strained under massive debt... And then there were the poorest of the poor, the Indians living in the provinces, a good many of whom had become convinced that, in the face of such adversity, revolution was the only recourse. That or crossing the border" (10). This passage emphasizes that most undocumented immigrants are refugees fleeing poor socioeconomic conditions and political violence in Mexico, not subversives infecting America with countless social

ills. From a human rights perspective, then, we ought to naturalize the immigrants instead of deporting them — especially since many immigrants have found jobs and formed community ties within the United States, thus embedding themselves in this country economically and socially.

Given Trump’s business background, perhaps the economic argument against deportation would be more compelling to him and his supporters. For one thing, deportation on the massive scale that Trump has identified would be outrageously expensive. Fitz and Martinez found that “the funding required to apprehend, detain, legally process, and expel 8.64 million individuals out of the United States is \$200 billion” (14). This amount reflects only the deportation process itself. If enforcement costs like ICE and Border Patrol budgets are included, the total cost for deportation would be roughly \$285 billion (Fitz 17). Furthermore, accord-

ing to Heather Somerville in a recent *Reuters* article, prototypes for Trump’s Great Wall of America have recently been constructed (para. 2), indicating that Trump still has some intention of fulfilling this campaign promise. His wall would cost an additional \$21.6 billion (Somerville, para. 4), and, despite Trump’s insistence, Mexico clearly isn’t inclined to pay for it. To obtain this funding without increasing the national debt, Trump would have to raise taxes and/or slash the federal budget, and his promise to cut taxes indicates clear opposition to the former option. Though he seems prepared to do the latter, such massive cuts would certainly provoke backlash, especially from the left — and Trump can’t afford more backlash since his approval ratings as of November 8, 2017, stand at only 37% among all American voters (Kahn, para. 3).

Some Americans would disregard the monetary costs of the wall if they thought it would keep



On the beach near Tijuana, Mexico, two children peer through the steel border fence that separates them from California (2012).

Mexicans from crossing the border; even Obama, who was relatively liberal on immigration issues, requested \$100 million for increased border fencing in 2009 (Mayer, para. 4). But in an August 2015 article, “Donald Trump’s Mexican Border Wall Is a Moronic Idea,” Douglas Massey, a sociologist and professor at Princeton University, writes: “Migration follows a characteristic age pattern that rises in the teens, peaks in the early 20s, and falls to near zero by age 30... What this means: The average age of Mexicans at risk of initiating undocumented migration has now pushed past the upper limit.... The border is as under control as it’s ever going to be” (para. 11-14). In other words, age is deterring illegal immigration, so we must focus instead on naturalizing the undocumented immigrants who are already here. Yet some might argue that offering immigrants a pathway to legal residency would be unjustified because it is “unfair to those immigrants who have played by the rules and harmful to promoting the rule of law” (*New York Times*, para. 8), according to a statement from Congressional Republicans in 2014. The statement argues that undocumented immigrants should be granted a path to citizenship “only if they were willing to admit their culpability, pass rigorous background checks, pay significant fines and back taxes, develop proficiency in English and American civics, and be able to support themselves and their families (without access to public benefits)” (*New York Times*, para. 8). But undocumented immigrants cannot fulfill these requirements for citizenship if they are still here illegally and under the constant threat of deportation, and making citizenship requirements even stricter without addressing the root causes of illegal immigration will

only encourage more undocumented immigrants to cross the border. Instead, as Massey suggests, we ought to turn our attention away from border security and focus on addressing the so-called invisible problem: undocumented immigrants are still living in the United States but have no legal rights and no path to citizenship.

To solve this problem, I invoke Massey’s proposal as outlined in his 2005 article, “Backfire at the Border: Why Enforcement Without Legalization Cannot Stop Illegal Immigration.” His plan would offer Mexicans temporary two-year visas costing \$400; extend temporary legal status and potentially permanent resident status to non-criminal undocumented immigrants already here; and grant amnesty to children of immigrants (10-11). This plan not only protects human rights by recognizing undocumented immigrants as members of the American community but also provides economic benefits because it would be cheaper for immigrants (\$400 is significantly less than the cost of hiring a coyote) and would create more revenue for the United States—roughly \$225 million annually from visa fees and taxes (Massey 10). Massey’s plan, or something like it, is politically feasible; many politicians and political scholars alike have advocated for a temporary worker program as the solution to the current immigration problem, and Obama’s DACA initiative is reminiscent of Massey’s idea of limited amnesty for children. It would likely have bipartisan support because immigration liberals would support the extension of temporary legal status to undocumented immigrants and the limited amnesty, while immigration conservatives would support the increased regulation of the border and the increased revenue from the fees and taxes,

which could then be used to offset the costs of the program.

As a pariah group, undocumented immigrants reside on the outskirts of American society, but we can't just sweep them out of it altogether, as Trump is proposing. This solution is impractical from an economic perspective and unethical from a humanitarian perspective. We must take the opposite approach: invite undocumented immigrants into American society by offering them a path to legal residency, as Massey proposes. But even legal residency does not go far enough, because immigrants would still be subjugated by high poverty rates and low-paying jobs. Therefore, the United States must also take steps to fiscally enfranchise undocumented immigrants – and by extension, all minimum-wage workers – by raising the minimum wage to at least \$9 or \$10 and by ensuring that wage violations are punished more swiftly and severely than they are in the status quo.

A plan to offer undocumented immigrants a path to legal residency, supplemented by an increase in the minimum wage? Perhaps some readers are thinking that only an idealistic, Bernie-supporting college student could come up with such a proposal. But idealism can be realistic, and at the risk of causing more conventional readers to roll their eyes, I will rely on Bernie Sanders to launch my argument. During his campaign in the 2016 election, Sanders identified as a democratic socialist and advocated for very progressive policies, such as raising the minimum wage incrementally until it reached \$15 by 2024. His radical platform attracted young voters; he won more than two million votes in the national election from those under the age of 30, while Trump and Clinton *combined*

earned only 1.6 million votes from the same demographic (Blake, para. 3). Bernie Sanders' popularity also signifies a larger political trend: a study from the Pew Research Center found that 50% of millennials identify as Democrats or lean towards the Democratic Party, compared to 34% who identify as Republicans or lean towards the Republican Party (Taylor 21). Once millennials start to occupy more political positions, their liberal leanings may translate into more serious consideration of progressive policies that were previously dismissed as too radical.

For one thing, a higher minimum wage would fulfill the guarantees of the Equal Protection Clause under the 14th Amendment by ensuring that immigrant workers receive fair wages. Cohen and Fein put this obligation in historical perspective: “The Reconstruction Congress was intently interested in whether newly-freed slaves would receive ‘fair, living wages.’ Because of the demonstrated importance of this issue to the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment, living wage laws deserve special solicitude under the Equal Protection Clause – especially where, as here, the law benefits large numbers of workers who are low-income people of color” (3). Thus the 14th Amendment implies a right to a higher minimum wage because the framers intended the Equal Protection Clause to benefit vulnerable workers, and today immigrant workers are among the most vulnerable because they face fewer opportunities for social mobility and higher rates of poverty compared to non-immigrant workers. Because many Republicans adhere to an originalist interpretation of the Constitution, their general opposition to defending the rights of undocumented immigrants and to a higher mini-

imum wage seems logically inconsistent with their desire to interpret the Constitution with its authors' intentions in mind – the intention in this case being to combat the subjugation of a vulnerable minority.

Poverty restricts social mobility and further subjugates impoverished groups. In a TED Talk, public health researcher Richard Wilkinson identifies some of these effects: “We collected data on problems with social gradients, the kind of problems that are more common at the bottom of the social ladder...[on] life expectancy, on kids' math and literacy scores, on infant mortality rates, homicide rates, proportion of the population in prison, teenage birthrates, levels of trust, obesity, mental illness.... The more [economically] unequal countries are doing worse on all these kinds of social problems” (para. 5). Poverty is self-perpetuating, so if subjugated groups like immigrants lack social mobility, their children are more likely to be impoverished, and so on, thus entrenching a caste-like system that Fiss would condemn because “no one, innocent or not, should be transformed by the state into a pariah” (5).

Opponents of a higher minimum wage sometimes argue that higher wages would harm those they intend to help – namely, impoverished, low-skill workers. Adams and Neumark contend that “whatever wage gains accrue to workers whose employment is unaffected may have to be offset against potential job losses” (4). In fact, Neumark, Schweitzer, and Wascher found that “the overall net effect of minimum wage increases is to push some families that are initially low-income but above the near-poverty line into poverty or near-poverty” (22). But empirical studies of previous minimum wage increases as well as projections

for future increases both support the argument that higher wages lower poverty rates. Citing the economist Arindrajit Dube, Heather Boushey writes regarding a \$10.10 minimum wage: “On the relationship between the minimum wage and poverty...the vast majority of the literature finds a negative relationship. On average, these studies find a ten percent increase in the minimum wage reduces the poverty rate by 1.5 percent.... Under Dube's preferred elasticity, the increase in the minimum wage would decrease poverty by 4.6 million non-elderly Americans in the short-term and 6.8 million in the longer term” (para. 17). This massive poverty reduction would benefit immigrant workers by breaking the cycle of generational poverty, alleviating some of the social ills associated with it and ultimately narrowing the economic gap that characterizes Fiss's concept of a caste-like society. Though liberals and conservatives disagree on how much the government should directly assist the impoverished (for example, with food stamps, welfare programs, and centralized healthcare), most people – Democrat, Republican, or independent – can agree that lower poverty rates are better. Thus, reducing poverty is a compelling incentive that transcends polarized political boundaries.

Adams and Neumark's argument also relies on the assumption that businesses would be unable to accommodate a higher minimum wage and would therefore have to cut jobs. But a higher minimum wage would actually benefit businesses. For one thing, higher wages are empirically correlated with better employee performance: “More than 80% of employers involved in the London Living Wage Program (LLW) believe the LLW has enhanced job performance and the quality of staff.... After the

San Francisco airport study implemented a living wage policy...44% reported fewer disciplinary issues and 45% reported that customer service had improved” (Living Wage for Families Campaign 2). According to Chapman and Thompson, higher wages decrease rates of turnover and absenteeism: “A study of the Los Angeles ordinance found that absenteeism declined, and the decrease in turnover offset 16% of the total cost of the living wage ordinance. A study of the San Francisco airport found that annual turnover among security screeners fell from 95% to 19%, as their hourly wage rose from \$6.45 to \$10 an hour” (3). Monetarily, a higher minimum wage would boost economic activity by putting more money in the pockets of low-income workers, whose increased expenditures would stimulate economic growth, thus creating more jobs. Cooper and Hall explain: “We find that increasing the national minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 per hour...would result in a net increase in economic activity of approximately \$32.6 billion over the phase-in period, and over that period would generate approximately 140,000 new jobs” (11). This job growth would benefit unauthorized workers in two ways: first, they would have more job opportunities, and second, with more jobs to go around, native workers might harbor less resentment toward undocumented workers for allegedly taking all of the jobs. The latter effect may help quell the conservative backlash that would inevitably accompany the progressive immigration reforms that I am proposing. Thus, conservative concerns about the economic impacts of higher wages are tenuous because empirical and projective evidence points to higher wages benefitting businesses, the economy, and the job market.

A related benefit is that higher wages are correlated with improved worker autonomy and self-respect. A survey of Baltimore workers following a minimum-wage increase found that over half of the workers “expressed a feeling of pride in their jobs after earning increased wages. One worker shared, ‘I feel like I’m working for something now’... [and] others mentioned gratification with statements like, ‘I take pride in what I do’ or ‘It gives me a feeling of wanting to be there; it gives a sense of responsibility’” (Lipp 488-489). Immigrant workers have little autonomy in the current system because, as previously discussed, they are often viewed as dispensable objects.

Higher wages may boost immigrant workers’ morale and validate their work, thus increasing their sense of autonomy, while the legal residency they would gain under my proposal would grant them the right to report violations. Increased autonomy may prompt them to use those reporting rights to combat their subjugation by employers. Undocumented immigrants face countless adversities upon entering the United States. Crossing the border is dangerous and expensive; the only jobs available to immigrants are often exploitative; and the threat of deportation lurks in the shadows—now everywhere. Meanwhile President Trump’s hateful rhetoric and harsh policies serve only to cement undocumented immigrants’ status as pariahs. But as Fiss argues, we ought to eradicate the caste-like system that the subjugation of unauthorized immigrants has constructed because such a system damages human rights and social mobility. I propose an ambitious but not unrealistic plan for de-subjugating immigrants: first, legislators must scrap Trump’s mass deportation plan, de-milita-

alize the border, and provide undocumented immigrants with a path to legal residency, and second, they must implement a higher minimum wage, which will economically enfranchise undocumented workers and bring the United States back to the real roots of its founding – not as an Anglo-Saxon enclave, but as a pluralistic community that defends the rights of everyone under its protection.

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Eraserhead and Masculinity by Dylan Price

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The Sordid Seventies, the Scary Seventies, the Surreal Seventies—all such alliterative aliases could be reasonably ascribed to the decade that former President Jimmy Carter famously believed to have inspired a “crisis of confidence” (Graebner 157). This was a time when the sexual revolution and the women’s liberation movement drew the ire of more traditionally minded men nationwide, with the male gaze giving the evil eye to the women who decided that they had what it takes to do the jobs men had already been doing. Men, traditionally the sole source of income—the so-called breadwinners—would potentially now have to compete with their wives, their neighbors, their neighbors’ wives, and any other woman who had in her head the outrageous notions of women’s liberation and/or egalitarianism. As Beth L. Bailey, a historian at the University of Kansas known for her work in the history of gender, put it in her essay “She ‘Can Bring Home the Bacon,’” men had begun to fear the “‘radical’ women’s libbers” and their demands for “sex-obliterating role reversals” (Bailey 117). Each step women took towards equality further stressed the average American male and his image of himself as a man. This anxiety produced an air of masculine insecurity that brought with it an attack upon what The Village People called the proverbial “macho, macho man.”¹

¹ The Village People seemed to recognize that masculinity is not restricted to traditional forms, as evidenced by the way they parody the over-the-top machismo of their subject. Interestingly,

With a “nebbish” young man in the lead role, David Lynch’s *Eraserhead* followed this insecurity, leading its viewers into the disturbingly relatable tale of Henry Spencer, his not-so-loving wife Mary X, and their grotesque progeny (Gross d12). Supported by appearances from the Beautiful Girl Across the Hall, the Lady in the Radiator, the X family, and bookend cameos from the Man in the Planet, the film portrays Henry and his family in a surreal, Lynchian² kitchen-sink reality, shining a light of inevitability on the shadowy conceptualization of gender roles in the 1970s and the perceived castration of the male persona.

Eraserhead is a unique film, even among Lynch’s strange filmography. It is probably the most perplexing film of his career, and its grip on reality is tenuous at best. Like most films that Lynch directed, it has been pulled apart and dissected repeatedly, but it still maintains an air of mystery, often considered to be so disturbing that many would prefer to latch on to the first interpretation that they agree with and move on. This is not a difficult task, as interpretations are offered from a variety of different sources, from fan blogs to *The New Yorker*. Many believe the movie follows a logical plot that is broken up by disturbing dream sequences, but others argue that the movie exists solely in a nightmare plane. Most of the more prevalent interpretations describe the film as a representation of Lynch’s fear of becoming a

both the song “Macho Man” and the film *Eraserhead* came out in 1977, showing that gender and gender roles were topics that were certainly on the public’s mind around this time.

² “Lynchian” is defined by self-described “fanatical Lynch fan” David Foster Wallace as “a particular kind of irony where the very macabre and the very mundane combine in such a way as to reveal the former’s perpetual containment within the latter” (Wallace 6).

father³; Greg Olson puts forth one such interpretation in his semi-biographical book *David Lynch: Beautiful Dark*. Though most interpretations are plausible, especially in a movie as determined to shun all logic as this one, Lynch himself said in an interview with Bilge Ebiri for *Vulture.com* in 2014 that nobody, to his knowledge, has ever interpreted the movie exactly how he interprets it himself. Lynch's own reluctance to speak on his films is likely due in large part to the impossibility and dangers of translating images into words, or, as Grace Lee puts it in her video "David Lynch: The Treachery of Language," "[taking] something suggestive, and [reducing] it to something definitive" (Lee). It is important to note that no interpretation of Lynch's work should be taken at face value or internalized as truth. It is nearly impossible to truly get inside Lynch's head. Though I do not claim to have solved the Enigma code with this interpretation, I have found no evidence to suggest that this interpretation has ever been proposed before. It is my firm belief that any interpretation that can spur deeper analysis and thought is worth consideration and inevitably will help deepen the understanding of a piece of art, especially one as multi-faceted as *Eraserhead*.

It is important to look at what was happening outside of Lynch's head just as much as inside. In an entry in the *International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers*, Kim Newman cites an article from *Cinefantastique* by K. George Godwin, saying that "seeing *Eraserhead* is an unshared experience: it is as if the film plays not on the screen but inside one's own head" (Newman 383). Even though I

³ This stems largely from the fact that Lynch made the film while in his thirties soon after the birth of his first child, Jennifer. Notably, Jennifer Lynch herself subscribes to this interpretation, or at least believes she is the source of these themes (Olson 87).

agree that the experience of watching this film engrosses the viewer and develops into a deeply personal affair that is never seen in exactly the same way by any two people, I disagree entirely that *Eraserhead* is an "unshared experience." On the contrary, it is very much a product of the culture that gave it life and is therefore shared almost universally on an entirely separate level, even if this is not immediately evident, and even if each viewer experiences it differently. Each character is rooted in some aspect of the culture that fostered its creation: the culture of America in the 1970s. In other words, the world outside Lynch's head.

An important part of this world were those more traditional men who were so appalled by the idea of women's liberation. Held in the highest regard and sought by most men of the 1970s, traditional masculinity is typified by the strong, sturdy man who always has his pick of the ladies and the aggressive capabilities to fight to defend his family and their name. He is the breadwinner, the head of his family, to be feared and respected by his children, and to be loved and adored by his grateful and submissive wife. He comes home with a fat paycheck and expects to be greeted at the door by his wife with praise, adoration, and a home-cooked dinner. A martini or a scotch in one hand and a rotund, aromatic cigar in the other, he relaxes in preparation for another hard but rewarding workday. This sexist ideal is only a slight exaggeration of the very real priority that was accorded men. Their position as the breadwinning head-of-household, however, was threatened in the 1970s not only by the perceived ascension of women, but also by the fact that "only 40% of the nation's jobs paid enough to support a family" (Bailey 109).

This meant that many men had to have at least two jobs to properly support their families, increasing overall stress and complicating their roles as providers (Bailey 109). With the issue of under- and unemployment as prevalent as it was, it is possible that a second job would have been difficult to find. A study from 2004 by Jiping Zuo, a professor of sociology at St. Cloud State University, mentions that “a massive women’s entry into the paid labor force and increasing male under- and unemployment have gradually eroded men’s status as the primary breadwinner,” (Zuo 813). Since humans tend to be resistant to most change, for many men, being forced to rely at least partially on the financial support of their wives likely would have been as pleasant as a chemical castration. The resultant bruising of the male psyche sets the stage for our protagonist: Henry Spencer.

Henry is the soft-spoken centerpiece of the film, who is first seen with a sperm-shaped worm springing from the mouth of his ghostly, disembodied head. He’s got a second-rate apartment in a miserable neighborhood in what appears to be an industrial portion of his city, and he pays the rent with his working-class clerical job at a publishing factory. He is a sort of avatar of the everyman, representative of the average Joe, but in several ways, he fails to achieve the stereotypical ideals held by the average man. He instead portrays a man who is not a suave, courageous alpha male, but rather a timid and fearful man who would likely be mocked and beaten by the former. Henry tends to shy away from any form of conflict and chooses instead to allow himself to be pushed around, especially by the female characters whom he encounters, to whom he often responds without

so much as an indignant remark. His only retaliation is his recurring frown and accompanying look of concern. Meek and resigned, clean-shaven and weak, Henry is a far cry from the ideal representation of a man; he is instead a personification of the self-perceived image of men brought on by the shifting gender roles of the 1970s. He is the broken, submissive shadow of the male psyche, exiled from traditional masculinity.

The film moves at a bizarre pace, and nothing seems to happen until everything happens at once. It starts with Henry’s wandering about in the general direction of his home while on vacation from work. Upon arrival at his apartment, Henry encounters his neighbor, The Beautiful Girl Across the Hall, and she tells him that someone named Mary has invited him to dinner at her house. We soon learn that Mary and Henry used to date, and that he has not heard from her in a while. He visits her home, and, after an awkward dinner with the X family, complete with man-made chickens, Mrs. X comes on to Henry, then informs him that Mary has given birth to his child, but that it is extremely premature. Mary and the baby move into Henry’s apartment, and Henry is soon forced to care for the baby alone when Mary abandons him. Around this time, Henry starts to daydream about the Lady in the Radiator. The disdain he feels towards Mary for abandoning him soon manifests itself in a one-off affair with the Beautiful Girl Across the Hall. Henry then has a lengthy dream sequence in which he once more sees the Lady in the Radiator before his head falls off and is found by a young child and carried off to an eraser factory, where it is used to make pencil erasers (hence the film’s title). Upon waking, Henry finds that the Beautiful Girl Across

the Hall has moved on, and he begins to panic. Now rapidly spiraling out of control, Henry kills his child, and everything starts to malfunction.

Opposite Henry is his wife, Mary X, who marries Henry out of necessity and due to the demands of her mother after she gives birth to his "son" — his son who looks like a skinned rabbit, with a few reptilian characteristics adding to its lack of humanity. Mary is a self-pitying woman who cries often about her own misfortune and never for the misfortunes of others. She seems to present herself as meek and fragile, she dresses plainly and has relatively simple hair — aside from the serpentine coils of hair that hang over her forehead — and she seems at first to be completely unable to assert herself, much like Henry. She appears to be an ideal candidate for a submissive housewife. As she grows more frustrated by her hideous spawn, however, she sheds her unimposing façade, and a venomous bitterness becomes apparent in her words. She lacks any empathy whatsoever towards Henry, often leaving him to care for the baby on his own simply because she is annoyed by its cries and because its existence in general poses an inconvenience to her. This reflects what many men perceived as the abandonment and blatant disregard of wifely duties by the mother upon leaving the household for the workforce, shirking responsibility and forcing the man of the house (in this case Henry) to take over as the active parent and nurse his child alone. In doing so, she effectively bites into the forbidden fruit that is liberation from traditional gender roles, dooming Henry to live outside the role that minimizes his interaction with his progeny, a role that was glorified by the Zeitgeist of 1970s gender stereotypes as the closest a man could

get to paradise.

Henry is not behind the wheel; he is being driven through the narrative, told what to do and where to go by the female characters of the film. Henry hazily wanders. When Mrs. X forces herself on Henry, his only response to her advances is to call for Mary to intervene. Mrs. X informs him that Mary has given birth to his child and demands that they be wed immediately, and he simply follows along. Although Mary pathetically asks whether Henry would be ok with marrying her, he does not really have a choice. When Mary decides that she cannot handle being around the baby, she leaves, forcing Henry to take care of the child, and he makes no protest. He could tell her no, he could tell her that the baby is just as much her responsibility as it is his, or he could even appeal to her sense of guilt by telling her that to leave would be neglectful parenting, but instead he only mumbles out a few words of frustration as she gathers her things. Henry's aversion to confrontation leaves him as the male counterpart to the submissive housewife and forces him to deal with the sick child alone. In fact, the entire plot is essentially driven by female characters taking advantage of Henry's characteristic passivity.

Even the Beautiful Girl Across the Hall gets the opportunity to take advantage of Henry and his nebbish nature when, the day following their night of indiscretion, he finds her entering her apartment with a sleazy-looking man hanging all over her like an opossum. She remains unconcerned and simply stares him down, more repulsed by him than the half-bald rodent hanging from her arm, because when she looks at him, she sees in him his hideous neonate, its grotesque head and neck momentarily

taking the place of his own. Glimpsing this, Henry's aversion to confrontation transitions to full-fledged fear as he quickly conceals himself behind his now-closed door, physically separating himself from intimidation by female sexuality. Her low-cut dresses, late nights, and promiscuous behavior (which ignores the bonds of marriage, even a shotgun marriage like Henry and Mary's) present her to the audience as a participant in the sexual revolution, seeking, in Bailey's words, "liberation in sex itself... on [her] own terms" (Bailey 116). When she spurns Henry in favor of the possum, it represents the sexually liberated woman's rejection of the average man and her own supposed motherly instincts.



The Lady in the Radiator performs her traditional gender role

Every female character in the movie is also seen rejecting or taking advantage of Henry in some way, save one: The Lady in the Radiator. Her role is much more ambivalent and complex than that of the other female characters because she does not necessarily control Henry. The Lady in the Radiator is posed as

a much more comforting and familiar character than any of the other women in the movie, in part because, unlike the other females, she does not speak a single word throughout the movie. Her appearance elicits images of a submissive housewife from 1950s Americana: her blonde hair that has been done up into a clean, domestic style; her traditional heels; and her modest dress that contrasts with the attire of her sexually liberated counterpart, the Beautiful Girl Across the Hall. The similarity between her and the stereotype of a 1950s housewife is not lost on Henry's subconscious, and he sees her appeal whether he knows the reason or not. She appears, however, to reside exclusively in his dreams. The most peculiar trait of the Lady in the Radiator, however, is her face, made grotesque by her disturbingly bulbous cheeks, a gross exaggeration of the chubby cheeks commonly associated with a cute smile and cuteness in general (such as those of a baby). They suggest that, like most stereotypes when viewed head-on, she is flawed, at least in the way she imitates the 1950s housewife. She smiles throughout her appearances in the film, keeping up a veneer of elegant joviality, and sidesteps innocently along an imagined stage to a musical number. When large, sperm-like worms begin to rain from the ceiling in the middle of her dance, she begins to stomp them into the ground without breaking her smile. Henry seems to perceive this act as her trying to free him from the bonds of his marriage to Mary by removing the inhuman offspring, which happens to be the only thing trapping them together. In the inclusion of this scene, Lynch has captured the self-perceived betrayal and castration of the average man at the hands of his supposedly submissive housewife by having

the symbol of domesticity stomping the symbol of male virility, the same "worms" that Henry is shown to produce in the opening sequence, within his dream sequence. Reading about women's liberation in the morning paper shocked and appalled the manly men of the decade, but most would never have suspected that *their own wives* could possibly want anything more than what had been provided for them. This ignorance is reflected in Henry's extended dream sequence, which at one point features the Lady in the Radiator singing a song claiming that "in Heaven, everything is fine." However, as I mentioned earlier, the Lady in the Radiator is mute throughout the movie, and the song is not sung by the actress portraying the Lady in the Radiator; it is not actually sung by an actress at all, but rather only "lip-synched by [the Lady in the Radiator], and sung by a man" (Taylor 65). In true 1950s housewife fashion, she does not speak with her own voice, and is instead literally spoken for by a man. This demonstrates the intended role of women in a domestic heaven on earth as little more than useful household appliances that do all the housework, freeing the man to do whatever he desires. Notably, the Lady in the Radiator tries to get Henry to take her hands during this scene, but when he tries, a peculiar white light flares up and she disappears. She is an unattainable ideal that Henry seeks but cannot have.

Aside from Henry, the remaining male cast is minor and consists of Bill X and the Man in the Planet. Combined, the two have barely a fraction of the movie's total screen time. However, this does not mean that they are insignificant to the film's messages about masculinity. The only other tangible male character in the movie is Bill X, Mary's

eccentric father. Mr. X is most memorable for his bizarre enthusiasm and frankness in discussing his crippling injuries. Like Henry, he is a representative of manhood, albeit an older one. He is a working-class man—a plumber, in fact—whose 30 years of dedication to his trade and providing for his family have taken a toll on his wellbeing, leaving him with bad knees and difficulty in using his left arm, which he rehabilitates by rubbing it, though nerve damage has left the entire arm numb. Mr. X is in a position similar to Henry's, but he is more representative of the working man and the ordeals he faced during the recession and job crisis. Henry, on the other hand, has a white-collar, clerical job, which is traditionally more feminine: in the 1970s, an increasing workforce led to demand for more jobs, so men moved into the fast-growing sector of white-collar, clerical jobs previously held largely by women. Therefore, Henry is a better representative of the contemporary feminized everyman, whereas Bill's blue-collar, labor-intensive job represents traditional masculinity. Bill's injuries represent the ways in which the lack of jobs—and as a result, lack of money—crippled the American working man. His bad knees, damaged in their ability to support the rest of his body, represent the way in which the "working man" suddenly had difficulties attempting to support his family during 1970s. His arm, which he is afraid to damage because he can't feel a thing in it, symbolizes the hardship faced by the working man in continuing to perform manual work, though Henry certainly does not lack experience with this either. Cheryl Elman and Jenny Chesters write of men in the 1970s, "key subgroups of adult men... became subject to job displacement and weakening labor force attach-

ment yet were less likely than other men to (re) enter postsecondary schooling to facilitate employability” (Elman and Chesters, 11). This meant that men had to make a decision: go back to school to get a degree and a chance at a better job, or run the risk of further financial hardship (Elman and Chesters). This difficulty in finding work is seen through both Bill’s frustration and Henry’s “vacation.” Unfortunately, many of the people affected by the job shortage would not have had the money to afford postsecondary education. The anxiety and inability to provide for one’s family was enough to emasculate such men, but even attempting to go back to school had potential for doing the same.

The Man in the Planet, an ugly amalgamation of scarred man and cold machine serving as a bookend near both the beginning and the ending of the film, represents the ugliness of sexism and being stuck in one’s ways in a post-industrial world. He appears to be in control of the world, and when he pulls a lever in his first appearance, it sets in motion the events of the film. In his second appearance, however, he is losing control: sparks fly from his levers, which do not appear to have much of an effect on anything at all. The planet where he resides, representing Henry’s metaphorical world in a very literal way, begins to crumble, falling apart as Henry looks on in abject terror. When the baby finally breaks “Nance’s [Henry’s] fragile hold on reality” (which not only traps him in a dead-end marriage that he cannot escape but also symbolizes his inability to escape his cyclical way of thinking), the Man in the Planet fully loses control over the world and everything begins to glow white (Gross D12). The Lady in the Radiator runs to Henry and embraces him as the white light washes over them.

In this instant, we discover that the Lady in the Radiator, despite implying otherwise for most of the film, never truly fit the stereotype of the 1950s housewife (as is given away by her flawed cheeks). Now that the Man in the Planet is no longer in control of Henry’s world, she is able to embrace and awaken Henry, freeing his mind and waking him up to the idea of women’s liberation. It is at this point that the nightmare—and the film—is over, and Henry has been freed.

Lynch’s *Eraserhead*, like any serious example of the horror movie, functions as a mirror into the psychological headspace of the time in which it was made. It functions like a time capsule of fears and anxieties: after enough time has passed, it is possible to look back and discern its true secrets. Captured and preserved by Lynch’s *Eraserhead* are the collective male psyche’s reactions to the rise of women into something resembling equality. The film also reflects the hostility and sexism that were bound to follow from challenging the beliefs of male identity and from the economic hardships and societal changes that allowed such a thing to happen. It is a film that seems on first viewing to be about nothing at all, and on second viewing to be about something as forthright as fear of parenthood and the anxiety surrounding procreation. But upon multiple viewings, and given the right context, its true meaning can be traced clearly, guiding the viewer to the deeper layers of the artwork, bringing forth the anxiety that was written into the script like runes into an ancient monument—eye-opening when properly transcribed. *Eraserhead*, though it may appear at first to be “a sickening bad-taste exercise,” perfectly develops a piece of the picture, allowing the modern viewer a glimpse

into what was the surreal reality of the 1970s everyman during the sexual revolution and women's liberation movements ("Eraserhead").

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The Politics of Ancient Sexism

by Lukas Sturm

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Writing exists as a means of storing information through time with minimal room for misinterpretation. This serves to keep information from decaying for centuries, but it also means that every bias of the original author is transmitted through the centuries as a part of the writing. It is sometimes easy to forget that just as the information carried by a document won't change, every bias held by the author is equally well-preserved. An example of the insidious nature of such biases can be found in the primary sources on Roman history, in which the almost universally one-dimensional portrayals of influential women allowed them cheap attacks on their political enemies and easy praise for their allies. These flat portrayals influenced works from the weighty *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to the now-televised novel *I, Claudius*. Even after almost two millennia, Roman historians' sexism is still hugely influential on the layperson's view of Rome, as popular histories and seventh grade textbooks often fail to critically analyze these historians' underlying motivations and biases. The ways that Romans used sexist portrayals to further their goals in writing histories should be examined and understood, not only to give a clearer picture of their own history, but also to shed light on how sexism and biased reporting historically have been used as tools to enforce the will of the powerful.

To start understanding how the biases of

historians affect their histories, it is essential to understand who the men behind the histories were. While there was some divergence among individual historians, as a body, they were wealthy, conservative men who had leisure time to write and a motivation for writing. To understand their motivations is essential, as ancient histories were written with a goal, an intent to use the past to comment on the present. The earliest historian discussed in this paper, Livy, lived during the transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire. He wrote history for the explicit purpose of tracing "how with the gradual relaxation of discipline, morals first subsided, as it were, then sank lower and lower" (Livy, I, 9) to reach the depravity of his own time. In a history tracing moral decay, Livy uses shining models of morality to show the glories of the past. The biographer Plutarch chose his subjects for biographies based on whether they exemplified a specific virtue or vice to him. This means that his writings tend to show similar positive archetypes to those of Livy, as Plutarch's *Lives* resembles nothing so much as a collection of morality plays. Born in the last generation of aristocrats who still remembered the power that they had once held, and having served as a court official for the emperor Vespasian, Tacitus uses attacks on the women of the Julio-Claudian dynasty that preceded Vespasian to both attack the founders of the empire and legitimize Vespasian as a hero who ended a corrupt dynasty. One hundred years later, Cassius Dio, another man enjoying the fruits of imperial favor, uses positive tropes to paint the women of the Severan Dynasty in a positive light, expressing his gratitude for their favor. Written at the end of the fourth century CE, the *Historia Au-*

gusta is a major work from Rome's Christian whose portrayals are more one-dimensional than those of Plutarch, often casting the roles of hero or villain based on how friendly the person in question was to Christianity. In deciding how to cast women for their histories, ancient historians often resorted to tropes.

Four main tropes dominate the portrayal of women in Roman histories. These tropes include two positive and two negative portrayals. The first of these tropes, that of the virgin, was ideal for attempting to portray a golden past. The virgin trope shows a woman to whom purity is more important than anything, including her life itself, and illustrates the Romans' concern with sexual purity. The other positive trope is applied to compliment individuals rather than to show a time of more ideal morality. The mother trope hinges on the Roman idea of a perfect mother who had many children, raised them to be loyal to the state, and instilled in them her moral virtues. This is an excellent trope for flattery, as it extends a compliment not only to the mother, but also to her children, who show the virtues that she instilled in them. When someone is a beneficiary of a regime, or wants to paint an idealized picture of an individual instead of a time period, the mother trope allows them to do so. The negative tropes serve as inversions of positive tropes, with the trope of the slut being used to mirror that of the virgin. This portrayal allows historians to use a favorite form of slander, accusations of sexual indecency, to attack a woman's reputation in the most effective manner. The final trope, that of the poisoner, serves as an inversion of that of the mother, with a woman who seeks her own power through her offspring, instead of instilling in them

the virtues necessary to gain power. The poisoner archetype also inverts the mother archetype in its application, being used to slander mother and child instead of to laud them. By application of these tropes, the historians use women as tools to paint their desired picture of any historical period.

Because Livy's intent was to chronicle the fall of Roman virtue, it is unsurprising that he used the virgin trope to illustrate the virtues of the long-past golden days when Rome's moral foundations were solid. Livy's tale of the fall of the Roman monarchy features a woman, Lucretia, who exhibits a number of characteristics that fit the ideal of the virgin archetype. Lucretia was the wife of Collatinus, a cousin of the royal line. When Collatinus and a number of his fellow noblemen drunkenly decided to determine whose wife was best, Lucretia was distinguished from the other noblewomen in that she, even late at night, when the contest took place, was diligently weaving and tending to the affairs of her household, while the other wives partied. Lucretia's beauty and goodness tempted Sextus, son of the king, to rape her. After her rape, Lucretia summoned her husband and father and asked them to avenge her, before committing suicide, saying "not in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia" (Livy, I, 58). The degree to which Livy portrays Lucretia's suicide as noble, as well as the degree to which she clearly believes that her rape was her fault, serve to highlight just how much moral value he ascribed to chastity and purity. This value is made even clearer in a subsequent myth, following the same pattern, about the maiden Verginia. About sixty years after Lucretia, a council of ten men (*decemviri*) was appointed with absolute power to create the Roman

law codes. The leader of this group, Appius, lusted after Verginia and had one of his clients declare the girl an escaped slave of his. Appius judged the case and, despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary, declared that Verginia was indeed an escaped slave. When Verginia's father, Verginius, heard this, he asked Appius for a moment alone, whereupon he stabbed his daughter, shouting "In the only way I can, daughter, I protect your freedom" (Livy, III, 45-58). This is portrayed as a heroic act that caused the Roman people to remove the corrupt *decemviri* from power. In these tales, two traits of the Roman attitude towards women become clear: they valued chastity, and their culture systematically promoted victim blaming. The fact that Livy's ideal women will die to protect their virginity is indicative of a toxic misogyny infecting the ideology of the Roman aristocracy.

Moving into histories that are more factual than legend-based, examples of the mother trope are more common, as there are real people who can be praised. Plutarch uses the trope of the ideal mother as a part of his moralizing, using the mothers not only to illustrate the virtue of Roman motherhood, but also to highlight the moral virtues of their children. Plutarch's first example of this archetypal mother is Cornelia Africana, daughter of a famed general and the mother of two famed politicians. She is portrayed as so dedicated to her late husband that she refused to remarry, even into an African royal family. Plutarch says that she was a good and principled mother and attributes the exceptional talents of her sons, Tiberius and Gaius, more to the quality of the education that she gave them than to any innate skill of their own. Julius Caesar's mother, Aurelia, is another woman por-

trayed with stereotypical moral firmness, praised by Plutarch as "a person of strict morals" (Plutarch 308). Plutarch was known for characterizations that allowed one trait to obscure all others, and through his portrayals of these ideal mothers, he revealed his ideals of Roman womanhood. Cassius Dio, a beneficiary of Julia Domna's patronage, asserts that that empress gave excellent advice and strove to make her violently bratty children harmonious with each other (Dio). These examples of women as mothers are the most positive portrayals given in Roman historical writings about events that actually occurred, and they show that Romans valued women of unyielding chastity who gave their children educations that prepared them to excel. Of course, the most important quality that the Romans saw in these women is simple: they were mothers, perpetuating the Roman state and implanting its morals in their children.

The women represented as poisoners have two significant deviations from the ideal Roman mothers: they want to possess personal power, and they put this desire above the welfare of the state. Historians use the poisoner archetype to disparage regimes that they dislike in two ways simultaneously: the fact that a powerful woman had influence on the emperor strips him of legitimacy, and making the closest woman in his life a murderer taints his reign. Thus, attacks on women, far easier to believe in an environment charged by sexism than attacks on men, served to undercut both them and the emperors with whom they were associated. This served as an effective way of using rhetoric to maintain the status quo, making it clear that if a woman deviated from the course that Roman society laid out for her, she would, however successful

her life, be categorized as an evil, selfish burden to the state. If a woman wanted to be remembered positively, she should have taken the path of quiet motherhood, seeking power for, instead of through, her children. The historian Tacitus uses this archetype to attack the founder of the imperial regime that he derides in futile frustration: as a member of the aristocracy, he attempts to keep the Senate the focus of his story "often to the discredit of the princeps (emperor)" (Usher 208). Usher asserts that Tacitus viewed women as "full of art and malice, but frail and fickle in their resolve," a trope that Tacitus felt must be fulfilled by any woman with access to as much power as the empress.

A prime example of the poisoner archetype is the first empress, Livia. Tacitus, perhaps feeling that the most influential empress should fit his views on women, describes her poisoning all of the chosen heirs of her husband, Augustus, until only her son Tiberius survives to inherit the empire. Tacitus classifies her as a "burden on the state" (Barrett 242) and blames Augustus's death on her impatience for Tiberius to rule. Tacitus's conjecture that Livia poisoned all of the heirs of Augustus, including the one who died a hundred miles away after being stabbed with a sword, is ludicrous and exemplifies the Roman suspicion of powerful women. Another woman placed in this trope, though possibly with more justification, is Agrippina the Younger, mother of Nero, who schemed to cast her husband Claudius's first-born out of his place as heir and then purportedly killed Claudius before he could have second thoughts about the succession. While accusing Livia of killing both Claudius and his son, Tacitus casts her as a scheming harpy "frightening in her hatred" (303)

of any competition for the eye of Claudius. While it is indeed possible that Agrippina was behind the deaths of Claudius and his son, it is equally possible that she is merely the victim of mud-slinging meant to delegitimize Nero, because if the historians had any real evidence against her, they would have used it in their histories. As it stands, Agrippina is simply a powerful woman who was the target of a smear campaign against her son. It is undeniable that Agrippina saw the young Nero as a means of ruling from the shadows, and it is likely that this desire for power was at least partly responsible for the universal condemnation that she received from the ancient sources. However, there is no way of knowing whether Agrippina was the



Livia Drusilla, standing marble sculpture as Ops, with wheat sheaf and cornucopia. Roman, 1st century CE

sneaking poisoner portrayed by historians or merely a woman who took advantage of good fortune when it came to her. By destroying her reputation, Tacitus destroyed that of Nero by proxy, casting the illegitimate succession of his first patron Vespasian as a necessary and just act.

The slut stereotype is interesting: it is applied to women who are already secure in power, demonstrating that the Romans were not only uncomfortable with the idea of women seeking power but immensely distressed when women possessed it. In a work that illustrates this stereotype, Tacitus's sexism is again in play, as are the pro-Agrippina sources from which he likely derived his history of Messalina, leading him to portray Claudius's third wife as a perfect example of the slut archetype. The *Historia Augusta* gives an interesting example of this archetype in Julia Domna, contrasting with Cassius Dio's portrayal of her as an example of the mother archetype. Written in the Christian period of Roman history, it is unsurprising that this later work attempts to delegitimize Julia Domna, a famous patron of pagan philosophy. A smear campaign against her illustrates how the goals of the *Historia Augusta*, a moralizing work of gossip, cause it to differ in structure from the panegyrics of Dio's work. These uses of the slut archetype serve to completely delegitimize women who come to power through marriage by undermining the faithfulness that was an integral component of marriage.

Valeria Messalina, the wife of Claudius before Agrippina, was the subject of a smear campaign by her successor that portrayed her as unfaithful, scheming, and dangerous. Not only was Messalina accused of the rather standard plot to assassinate

the emperor, but she was also accused of being so open in her adulteries that she had a contest with a famous prostitute to see who could have the most sex in a day — and she won. Messalina is unfortunate in that none of her true character has been preserved, and the rumors spread by political opponents have so overwhelmed her story that she appears to modern historians as a portrait of all of the accusations of sexual deviancy that can attach themselves to a Roman woman. She is accused of a secret marriage as a conspiracy to overthrow Claudius, of moonlighting as a prostitute, and of stealing imperial property to decorate her love nest. None of these claims are supported by evidence, and many of them are likely spurious, but they were used against her by her successor with a remarkable degree of success. Agrippinan constituents used sexist portrayals to legitimize Agrippina's position as Claudius's fourth wife, and this irreparably harmed Messalina's image. Julia Domna, portrayed by Cassius Dio with the mother archetype, is seen as a prime example of the slut stereotype in the more fanciful *Historia Augusta*, where she is called "notorious for her adulteries" (415). When the historians writing the histories differ in their goals and their relations to the regime, they use two vastly different stereotypes to portray the same woman. While the poisoner archetype is used to attack women who obtained power through their sons, the slut archetype serves to delegitimize the marriages of the women who held power through their husbands.

There is a counterargument to be made against these accusations of Roman sexism, but it is centered on just one woman, Pompeia Plotina, the wife of the conqueror Trajan. Plotina is portrayed

by the historians as a woman who held power and was, for the most part, worthy of respect. However, it is important to note that we know about her life mainly from the moralizing *Historia Augusta*, which used a sequence of poor portrayals to teach lessons about Roman morality 250 years later. By portraying a good empress in Plotina, the *Historia Augusta* gained more latitude to disparage empresses who, by contrast, did not live up to its moral code. Beyond the weakness of relying on a single woman as a counterexample to the sexism that place multitudes of other Roman women into narrowly defined boxes, there is another problem with the argument that the positive portrayal of Plotina contradicts Roman historians' sexism. Plotina did not seek power. She used it once she had it, and did so in admirable ways to increase her subjects' quality of life. But she had no son to pass power to after Trajan's death, and the historians, beyond their fear of attacking any aspect of the life of one of their favorite emperors, found that their tropes simply did not fit. Plotina had no son to secure the throne for. She did not need to seek pleasure by draining the treasury of the empire at its most prosperous; it already provided wealth enough. Beyond that, she did not seek to put herself into masculine political roles, instead using her power to improve the empire-wide welfare programs, which Roman men were not as jealous of as they were of military and bureaucratic positions. While Plotina was doubtless a remarkable woman, and it is unfortunate that few records of her reign survive, it is nonetheless clear that she does not serve as a valid counterexample to Roman sexism.

These tropes portray powerful Roman women's lives in a way that can be determined by ask-

ing only two questions: "Did she have children?" and "Did she seek power?" This is troubling not only for historians, who are forced to try to paint a fuller picture of these women from scant evidence, but also for anyone who attempts to gain a basic understanding of Roman history. The biased nature of the sources tends to perpetuate a narrative that, at times, is only tangentially related to the truth. It is important, not only historically but also in the modern day, to assume that any source that portrays a person one-dimensionally does so to spread its own bias. It is necessary, therefore, for anyone who wants to develop a true understanding of the aspects of particular issue to read more stories that paint a fuller picture of the person in question. Beyond this, if we desire to step beyond these sexist portrayals of the past, it is imperative to tell more stories of women. The paucity of information, a few sentences per book at most about any particular woman, serves to reduce the narrative to the dour sexism of a few misogynistic writers, without anyone giving opposing narratives that create a fuller picture of their lives.

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Society's Menace: Anti-Gay Violence and the Christian Right

by Julianna Voelker

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"The acceptance of homosexuality is the last step in the decline of Gentile civilization" (Robertson in Fetner 64). This statement by Pat Robertson, a Republican politician and presidential candidate in the late 1990s, reflects the views of many Christian fundamentalists – those who believe in interpreting scripture strictly. To them, homosexuals face the same sinful fate as murderers, adulterers, and rapists, which provides ample reason to exclude homosexuals from their congregations and to believe that homosexuals face a fiery damnation after death. For some, this is enough; the trouble arises when it's not. The modern era of mass media and the push for LGBTQ equality has increased the visibility of homosexuality in daily life, prompting a subsequent pushback from fundamentalists. Christian orthodoxy spread from the church to the home, from the congregation to Congress, and from the Bible to secular law. Religion became the front line in the fight against LGBTQ rights and in the rise of anti-gay violence; in fact, it has held its ground for so many years that it is easy to point a finger at Christianity and claim that religious bigotry is the splinter in LGBTQ activists' heels.

But the struggle surrounding anti-gay violence and LGBTQ rights isn't quite so black and white. As religious opposition to homosexuality spread to the political and legal levels, spurring the creation

of the Christian Right—a political faction seeking to implement socially conservative policies rooted in fundamentalism—the motivations for anti-gay violence altered subtly. While local anti-gay pushback remained rooted in God's supposed condemnation of homosexuality, political Christian leaders became increasingly concerned with, as Robertson put it, "the decline of Gentile civilization" (qtd. in Fetner 64). Social anthropologist Mary Douglas's theory of pollution fear, which asserts that certain groups may "pollute" society simply by challenging tradition, illuminates the reasoning behind this concern and explains how political homophobia emerges from the testing of societal boundaries (Douglas 4). These pollution fears drive the argument that LGBTQ people threaten traditional society, providing the Christian Right enough political and public support to enact its anti-gay agenda using local, state, and national legislation.

To understand the emergence of the modern anti-gay political movement and the changing motivations for anti-gay violence, we must return to grassroots Christianity, localized homophobia, and subtle forms of anti-gay violence. Often, evangelical Christians cite Biblical scripture as the reason for their discomfort with homosexuality. I use the word "discomfort" deliberately, because traditionally defined "homophobia" – or the fear of homosexuals – isn't really *fear*, nor hatred, particularly among everyday Christians. Rather, homophobia manifests as a rejection of the homosexual lifestyle based on a belief in homosexuality's inherent sins; rarely does this belief spur an intense hatred or fear of homosexuals (Sullivan-Blum 51). Yet that does not negate the threat such feelings pose toward LGBTQ people, nor does it imply

that violence against LGBTQ people cannot occur without intense hatred. “Violence,” traditionally defined, brings to mind bodily harm, acts of mental and physical terror, and other horrifying occurrences. However, the most prevalent form of violence against LGBTQ people on the local and political levels takes on a subtler form: the implication that, as a homosexual, you do not deserve the right to exist.

The motivations for parental backlash against LGBTQ children “coming out” with their identities demonstrate that this kind of indirect violence within communities still originates from scripture, despite the changes occurring to political religion’s anti-gay sentiments. In a 1996 public hearing conducted by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission on LGBTQ youth, Amy Paul, a lesbian, testified with 23 other LGBTQ youth on the violence and homophobia that they face in their homes and communities. Paul outlined her Christian fundamentalist parents’ outrage to her coming out at age 19, recalling their threat that she “[could] choose that lifestyle or [she could] choose [her] family” (qtd. in Arriola 430). This “either-or” reaction deals a damaging blow to the mental health of LGBTQ adolescents by labeling an inherent part of themselves unacceptable to their families. Without emotional support from family or friends, adolescents can suffer from depression, anxiety, or suicidal tendencies. A 1993 study of 194 LGBTQ youths who had either come out to their families or were still hiding their sexual orientations found that 81 had attempted suicide due to the belief that their families had invalidated, or would invalidate, their existence (D’Augelli and Hershberger 422). From an early age, children who grow up in

Christian fundamentalist families learn of the sins of homosexuality. To recognize themselves as homosexuals, therefore, and to experience rejection of that identity by their loved ones can pose more of a threat to LGBTQ adolescents than physical violence (Arriola 440).

So how did the Christian Right’s new society-based motivations for anti-gay violence emerge from this localized, Biblical homophobia? After all, a Christian parent doesn’t care about how their homosexual child will affect society—they only care about keeping their family free from sin. To answer this question, I believe that we must fully understand Mary Douglas’s theory of pollution fear, articulated in her book *Purity and Danger*, in which she analyzes the relationship between the sacred and the idea that certain people or actions “pollute” society. She asserts that societies often use pollution as “analogies for expressing a general view of the social order,” and that when a group of people threatens that social order, they become the pollution (Douglas 4). As an example, Douglas mentions a bathroom that had been installed in a house’s back hallway by setting doors at either end of the hall. Although free of dirt and grime, the bathroom seemed “dirty” to her because, traditionally, bathrooms do not belong in hallways; therefore, the bathroom required reordering—even removal—to restore social order (Douglas 3).

A similar concept appears in modern anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. Texas Republican Ron Simmons, an active member of the Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, and a member of the Christian Right, proposed two bills, HB 46 and HB 50, in 2017 that would require transgender people to use bathrooms according to their biological sex.

He claimed that "for 170 years since [Texas has] been a state, bathroom usage was understood... male used male, female used female" (qtd. in Teeman). This idea that male bathrooms traditionally belong to those born male, and female bathrooms to those born female, exemplifies Douglas's theory of pollution precisely; there is nothing inherently "dirty" about transgender people occupying the same bathroom as other people, but the tension this produces against societal norms creates a sense of disorder that prompts pushback from the Christian Right.

When we continue to overlay modern anti-gay violence and political religion with Douglas's theory, the emergence of a Christian Right obsessed with protecting traditional society from the "dirty" influence of homosexuality doesn't seem far-fetched at all. The ideology of heterosexism, developed by Gregory Herek, an internationally recognized authority on heterosexual prejudice against LGBTQ people, helps explain the belief that homosexuality doesn't belong in Gentile civilization. He defines heterosexism as the denial and stigmatization of any non-heterosexual behavior or community, which closely relates to the beliefs of fundamentalist Christians and the Christian Right, since "traditional" society involves both heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family—a husband and wife with children (Herek 316). Evidence of this emphasis on a nuclear family can be found in the many organizations affiliated with the Christian Right, such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council, whose primary goal is to preserve the sanctity of traditional families. Therefore, increasing LGBTQ visibility challenges heterosexism and sparks fear within the Christian

Right—not of homosexuals themselves, but of the disintegration of society as they know it *by* homosexuals. The transgender bathroom bill controversy provides an example of this fear in action; traditional, heterosexual society dictates which gender belongs in which bathroom based on a heterosexist construction of gender. The Christian Right perceives the increasing visibility of transgender people as threatening this tradition, evidenced by the creation of bills that would restrict bathroom use based on biological sex—a traditional definition of gender identity (Teeman). The fear of heterosexism's collapse ultimately escalates the rise of anti-gay violence to the political and legal landscape, where Christian politicians strive to maintain tradition.

Although the Christian Right's struggle to preserve heterosexist American society continues today, its origins date back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when progressive activists began to challenge heterosexism and subsequently prompted the emergence of the Christian Right. Republican politician Pat Robertson led two successive movements in the 1980s—the Freedom Council and the Christian Coalition—that sought to integrate the Christian Right and its heterosexist ideologies into the Republican Party locally and nationally. Robertson's movements succeeded in electing fundamentalist Christians into local Republican political positions, and although these candidates often lasted only one term, their fundamentalist policymaking spelled trouble for the LGBTQ community (Fetner 70-72).

Instances of such policymaking and its roots in pollution fear appear in the uproar surrounding the 1980s AIDS crisis involving homosexual men,

which was immediately seized by the Christian Right as evidence of “divine and just retribution for immoral homosexual behavior” (Rimmerman 133). According to American sociologist Sara Diamond, the fact that “homosexuals [could] now be blamed for the modern-day Plague” connected the LGBTQ community directly to pollution ideas (qtd. in Rimmerman 133). The AIDS crisis appeared to show that unsuspecting heterosexuals could, in fact, “catch” homosexuality’s disease, further infecting traditional society. Legislation such as Proposition 96, a successful 1988 California bill allowing emergency responders to test arrested people for HIV without consent, exemplified the Christian Right’s attempts to prevent the now-literal contagion analogous with the LGBTQ community from spreading and the subsequent limitation of LGBTQ peoples’ rights to privacy. By effectively harnessing the public’s fears of contracting AIDS, anti-gay legislation such as Proposition 96 disguised as anti-AIDS legislation allowed the Christian Right to further label LGBTQ people as a dangerous societal contagion (Rimmerman 133).

Such legislation ultimately reflected the Christian Right’s increasing concern that the LGBTQ community would pollute traditional society, gaining its support from citizens who believed that, as Baptist minister Reverend Jerry Falwell stated in a 1987 televised sermon, “AIDS [was] a lethal judgment of God on America for endorsing this vulgar, perverted, and reprobate lifestyle” (qtd. in Jonsen and Stryker 131). Although it may initially appear that belief in homosexuality’s sinfulness prompted this idea, further inspection of the language used to describe those infected with AIDS suggests otherwise. Paul Cameron, American psychologist and

former director of the Family Research Institute, claimed that AIDS began when gay men conducted “unsanitary” sexual practices and that “gay men brought AIDS on themselves and the rest of the world” (qtd. in Rimmerman 134). The use of the word “unsanitary” specifically implies that homosexuals are inherently dirty; Cameron suggests that this dirt would pollute not only the LGBTQ community but the rest of the world as well, threatening all of society. By connecting homosexuality and the spread of AIDS and implying that both were sources of filth, the Christian Right could convince the public that to fear AIDS was also to fear homosexuality, which allowed politicians to pass anti-gay legislation without public backlash.

In the midst of the AIDS crisis, the 1986 Supreme Court decision *Bowers v. Hardwick* provided another opportunity for the Christian Right to enact anti-gay legislation; this decision reflected both heterosexism and pollution fears. The case involved the arrest of Michael Hardwick, a gay man from Atlanta, Georgia, for violating a Georgia law stating that “a sexual act involving the sex organs of one person and the mouth or anus of another” was a felony (qtd. in Rimmerman 60). While LGBTQ activists hoped that this case would legitimize all sexual conduct and subsequently the right of privacy for LGBTQ people, the Court instead maintained that states had “the right to criminalize private sexual behavior between consenting adults” (Adam 135). In determining whether the Constitution’s due process clause protected LGBTQ sexual privacy, the Court identified two kinds of rights protected by due process, one kind being “rights that implicate liberties that are ‘deeply rooted in this nation’s history and tradition.’” The

Court decided that homosexuality did not fit within these rights, claiming that "proscriptions against [homosexuality] have ancient roots." Because heterosexism remained society's standard, the Court's decision reflected the fear that increased LGBTQ rights would destroy those "ancient roots" and disband traditional society (qtd. in Rimmerman 60). This fear allowed the restriction of LGBTQ liberties and increased anti-gay legislation. Additionally, when inspecting the justices' concurrences and dissents, three mention Judeo-Christian values; specifically, the concurrence from Chief Justice Burger asserts that "condemnation of those [homosexual] practices is firmly rooted in Judeo-Christian moral and ethical standards" (qtd. in *Bowers v. Hardwick*). Although Chief Justice Burger was likely not associated with the Christian Right, and the Court is itself an impartial body, the influence of heterosexism is still present in this decision. Throughout the AIDS crisis, the Christian Right had been capitalizing on pollution fears within the public and the nation to effectively demonize homosexuality and promote heterosexism. The Court was not immune to this, and so the opinions of the judges—particularly the conservative ones, such as Chief Justice Burger—were influenced by the Christian Right's efforts to maintain heterosexism.

In addition to the influence of heterosexism on the Court's decision, the Christian Right's political response to the decision furthered the spread of anti-gay legislation. Despite the 2003 overturn of *Bowers v. Hardwick*, it has drastically affected the LGBTQ community, according to legal scholar Evan Gertsmann, who points out that federal courts "have held that *Bowers* precludes them from treating gays and lesbians as a suspect or qua-

si-suspect class" (qtd in Rimmer 61). The Court's decision thus allowed federal courts to reject the LGBTQ community's status as a group historically subject to discrimination ("Equal Protection"), and therefore the LGBTQ community "[couldn't] receive enhanced judicial protection under the equal protection clause" of the Fourteenth Amendment (qtd. in Rimmerman 61). This left the LGBTQ community vulnerable to further legal discrimination, as if the Supreme Court had rolled out a red carpet for the Christian Right into every government building in the country—and, on top of it all, validated the Christian Right's argument that homosexuality would degrade the fabric of traditional American society.

In the wake of the AIDS crisis and *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the Christian Right continued to enact anti-gay policy, maintaining their local influence even as their national foothold strengthened. One example of such policymaking occurred in New York City in 1992, when a proposed school curriculum called "Children of the Rainbow," which included two LGBTQ texts, received significant pushback from conservative Christian politicians who ultimately got the curriculum banned (Fetner 72-73). The fear that this curriculum would compromise children's "morality" by exposing them to homosexuality exemplifies the effectiveness with which the Christian Right now wielded pollution fear as a tool to gain public support for anti-gay policy. To get the curriculum banned, Christian politicians fed off parents' fears that homosexuality would corrupt their children simply by association ("Children"). The Christian Right used similar tactics in countless other instances of anti-gay legislation, and they continue to do so today.

An article in *Christianity Today*, the leading American conservative Protestant publication, puts the importance of pollution fear in Christian politics into perspective by detailing the Christian Right's response to modern progressive policy that sought to challenge heterosexism and undo previous anti-gay legislation. In discussing the potential repeal of the infamous "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which banned out-of-the-closet LGBTQ people from serving in the military, the magazine asserted that Christians must "deter...President [Obama] from a tragic decision [repealing the ban]" that would "[amount] to a political *validation* of an unnatural, unhealthy... filthy practice" (qtd. in Herman 56). Fear that the government would legitimize the "filthy practice" of homosexuality and allow the LGBTQ community to pollute not only the military, but also the government and its "traditional morals," further motivated the Christian Right to preserve the sanctity of the American government and, ultimately, American society.

My argument so far – that the Christian Right draws its motivations for anti-gay violence from the fear that homosexuality will "pollute" traditional society – likely faces some opposition. One particular fundamentalist counterargument claims that anti-gay legislation originates from a battle for authority. Kevin Tebedo, founder of Colorado for Family Values, articulated this perspective in his 1993 speech to the First Congressional Church in Colorado Springs regarding Colorado's Amendment 2, which prohibited LGBTQ people from claiming protected or minority status. Tebedo proclaimed that the controversy around Amendment 2 had nothing to do with homosexuality as a threat to society; rather, he questioned whether "[it

is] the authority of man, or...the authority of God" that takes "precedence in...society" (qtd. in Cobb 29). On the surface, this argument boils down the Christian Right's anti-gay motivations to a battle for authority: should a secular government have more say over morality than God himself? It could be said that *Bowers v. Hardwick* subscribed to this argument; the justices' assertions that Judeo-Christian values should govern law and society could be seen as support for this battle for authority. Likewise, certain instances of local violence appear to be motivated by this conflict of authority. Benjamin Williams, a man charged with the murder of a gay couple in their own bed in 1999, claimed that he simply "obey[ed] the laws of the Creator" and that "you obey the government of man until there is a conflict...then you obey a higher law" (qtd. in "Williams Admits"). By asserting the precedence of spiritual law over secular law in cases of anti-gay violence, it seems as if this violence does not result from pollution fears, but rather from an attempt to reinstate Biblical law.

However, this belief that religious authority should, in some cases, trump secular authority ultimately boils down to the impression that secular authority has not adequately protected American society from homosexuality's perceived taint. William Dannemeyer, a Republican Congressman in the 1990s with a history of anti-gay activism, warned in his book *Shadow of the Land* that "the United States...is surrendering to this growing army of revolutionaries [the gay movement] without firing a single shot" in the face of the gay movement's "attack on our civilization" (qtd. in Herman 64). The Christian Right clearly fears that the secular government has allowed homosexuality

to "attack" American civilization; *ergo*, the fight for increased spiritual authority emerges from pollution fears and the perceived danger of homosexuality to traditional American society.



Marchers carrying a banner during the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights

From its founding in the 1970s, through the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and the continued anti-gay legislation of the 1990s and 2000s, to the present day, the Christian Right's anti-gay agenda hasn't slowed. Fearing that homosexuality will eventually destroy traditional American society, the Christian Right continues to propose anti-gay legislation and support political anti-gay violence. Their efforts prevail even as pro-gay politicians strive to reverse anti-gay legislation and provide more protection and rights for the LGBTQ community. Groups such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council continue to gain traction among Republican lawmakers and influence Congressional decisions (Martin 361). With the Christian Right continuing to influence current policymaking, it is essential that we understand the societal and pollution-driven motivations behind the Christian Right's anti-gay agenda in order to fight anti-gay violence and protect the rights of the LGBTQ community, so that we all may truly "love thy neighbor" (*King James Version*, Romans 13.9).

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Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art,
The University of Oklahoma,
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Department Collection, 1948

