BLACK POPULAR CULTURE

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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With the illnesses, lockdowns, quarantines, mask wearing, social distancing, testing, contact tracing, and deaths related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 has been quite a year so far, to say the least! Adding to the global health pandemic is America's own cultural pandemic reminding its citizens that racism is still very much present in the United States. Attesting to the continuing prevalence of racism is the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Jacob Blake, followed by protests and uprisings focusing on police brutality specifically against African Americans. In particular, following Floyd's death, an offshoot to the protests brought with it the demand for and, in some cases, the removal or relocation of statues, monuments, and memorials dedicated to confederate leaders. Disease. Death. Recession. Unemployment. Racism. Uncertainty, fear, and the daily changing updates of predictions and the progression of the virus surrounds the entire world.

As history records, when America enters a crisis, one of its methods for managing the crisis is to turn to seemingly disparate aspects of life: religion and popular culture. Not surprisingly, in the early stages of the lockdowns and self-quarantines that occurred across the United States at various points in March 2020, newspaper articles and social media bloggers made recommendations about what to do with our time. By far, the majority of those recommendations related to popular culture. Activities such as watching films, reading books, painting, trying out new meal or drink recipes, exercising, meditating, completing puzzles, playing board games, and binge-watching television series on Hulu, Vudu, and Netflix were at the top of these lists.

Even during the coronavirus outbreak, popular culture products created by or related to the concerns of African Americans are present. These Black popular

culture texts reflect 2020, but also the history of Black popular culture in the United States, contemporary campaigns against structural racism, and possibilities for the future. A major change connected to one Black popular cultural-related product is rather significant, while the other is not as groundbreaking. One product, influenced by the protests following Floyd's death, is surprising, and the other was in motion long before Floyd's death.

The less groundbreaking—although no less significant—Black popular cultural product is Spike Lee's twenty-fifth film, *Da 5 Bloods*, digitally released by Netflix on June 12. A war drama, *Da 5 Bloods* is about a group of four Black (male) Vietnam War veterans who return to the country in search of the remains of their fallen squad leader as well as the treasure they buried while serving there. Lee's film relates to the opposition to the Vietnam War in the African American community. Both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and former presidential candidate Shirley Chisholm opposed the Vietnam War. Muhammad Ali physically demonstrated his opposition to the Vietnam War in 1967 by refusing to step forward for induction. Ali's defiance and King's and Chisholm's arguments against U.S. involvement in the war revolved around issues of racism and the slowing progress of domestic programs focused on helping the nation's most vulnerable populations, including African Americans. Unfortunately, the deadly effects of the coronavirus reminds us in 2020 that vulnerable populations are still vulnerable. Black communities around the United States have suffered disproportionately more, medically and economically, since the pandemic began. Further, enlisting in the military is still one of the strongest pathways of economic stability for economically vulnerable African Americans and other people of color. Lee's film was not planned as a commentary on the 2020 pandemic, but the presence of these sociocultural overlaps demonstrates Black popular culture texts that can speak historically while applying contemporaneously.

The more groundbreaking move related to Black popular culture is the Quaker Oats of North America's announcement on June 17 that the company was going to retire the 130-year old Aunt Jemima brand of pancake mix, syrup, and other breakfast foods. The brand features a Black woman named Aunt Jemima, originally pictured on the label dressed as a plantation servant, hearkening back to the enslavement period in the United States. Recognizable, recurring stereotypes of African American men (including Uncle Tom and Mandingo), women (including Mammy and Jezebel), and children (including pickaninny) crystallized during the nineteenth-century in the minstrel show, novels, plays, advertising, and sheet music

created by White antebellum Southerners. The Quaker Oats Aunt Jemima brand appeared in 1889. Although not as prominent as the other two Black female stereotypes, Aunt Jemima was a less domineering version of Mammy captured on an American food label. The early iterations of the Aunt Jemima brand aligned with several identifiers of the basic Sambo typography: white, round bulging eyes; thick, white, clown-shaped lips; headgear; completely Black skin; and a uniform to denote her occupation as a servant or domestic. The current iconography of the Aunt Jemima brand includes more "normalized" features such as a light brown skin tone, hair permanent, pearl earrings, and makeup.

What this total erasure of Black women from a popular American food brand will mean in relationship to the future portrayals of Black women in popular culture is most likely minimal. However, Quaker Oats' decision to retire the brand highlights a recurring theme regarding them. A spectrum of portrayals of Black women exist in narrative-based American popular culture forms such as advertising, film, and television. On one extreme, Black women are completely absent and in the other extreme, they are invisibilized, marginalized, overly sexualized, or dehumanized when they are present. Adding insult to injury is how instrumental African American women were in creating Southern cuisine. The omission of this fact in major American food brands, historically and contemporaneously, is beyond ironic.

Like the *Da 5 Bloods* and the Aunt Jemima brand point to, this special issue focused on Black popular culture critically examines the roles of both Black women and Black men in United States popular culture. This special issue is co-sponsored by *Africology: Journal of Pan African Studies* (A:JPAS) and *Popular Culture Studies Journal* (PCSJ). However, this special issue originated with neither the journal editors (Jackson and Reinhard) nor the guest editor (Nelson). The idea for a publication on Black popular culture was initiated by Dr. Itabari Zulu, Founder and Senior Editor of A:JPAS, who passed in June 2019. Despite Dr. Zulu's transition, A:JPAS has approved this special issue and thus it is being released now. We believe he would be pleased with the publication.

This mutually inclusive co-sponsorship between A:JPAS and the PCSJ is a demonstration of the dialogue between the concepts of blackness and popular culture. A:JPAS highlights Pan African products and contexts while PCSJ highlights American and international popular cultural products and contexts. Philosophically, the journal editors are expressing their support for both visions and missions. It contains a number of powerful articles that range from noting the

impact and legacy of Erik Killmonger, Tupac Shakur, and the Black Panther Party to linking the various manifestations of the Black Lives Matter movement in our current economic and political climate to the continuous relevant legacies of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. Also crucial are the enriching articles on Black women in comedy and the film industry as well as the appropriation of African American music. In the end, all the articles make a great and potent contribution to the fields of popular culture studies and Pan African studies. We hope the readers find this issue to be enlightening.

Introduction to the Special Issue on "Black Popular Culture"

ANGELA M. NELSON, SPECIAL ISSUE EDITOR

This Special Issue on "Black Popular Culture" puts the concepts of blackness and popular culture in dialogue (see Adjaye and Andrews; Boyd; Brown and Kopano; Caponi; Cashmore; Dent; Dyson; Elam and Jackson; Fishwick; Shaw; Verney; White and White).[1] As a social domain of daily life in historical, contemporary, and emergent cultures, popular culture (past, present, future) has four defining characteristics. Popular culture actualizes, engenders, or signifies pleasure and good; is based on the beliefs, values, and norms (real or imagined) of the people who experience it; is expressed in visible, audible, and performative artifacts (icons and personas) and practices (arts and rituals); and groups, organizations, and institutions situate popular culture within gendered, racialized, political, and economic contexts. Black popular culture is a form of popular culture.

By the early eighteenth century, the term "black" differentiated a largely New World phenomenon of African diasporal cultures and peoples from their ethnic-specific ancestors and relatives (Powell 8). Art historian Richard L. Powell argues that "black" is both a racial identity and a social and/or political condition (10) and that "black," even with hyphenated terminologies such as "African-American" and "Afro-Caribbean," "embraces a range of African diasporal experiences across national and linguistic borders" (12). Black popular culture's defining characteristic is the beliefs, values, orality, musicality, and norms (real or imagined) of people of Africana descent. Black popular culture involves all people of Africana descent

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[1] Other scholarship examines African Americans and the media (Dates and Barlow; Squires); black popular personas as heroes (Van Deburg); aesthetics and rhythm as concept (Neal; Nelson), and black education and politics (Beard; Iton).

ANGELA M. NELSON is an Associate Professor in the Department of Popular Culture within the School of Cultural and Critical Studies and Chair and Graduate Coordinator of the Department of Ethnic Studies at Bowling Green State University. Dr. Nelson has edited *"This Is How We Flow": Rhythm in Black Cultures*, co-edited *Popular Culture Theory and Methodology: A Basic Introduction*, and published articles and book chapters on 20th and 21st century African American popular culture. Dr. Nelson's current research examines Black gospel women's autobiography. She can be reached at anelson@bgsu.edu.

internationally. However, nations throughout the world receive United States culture therefore highlighting U. S. black popular culture most often.

Sociologist William Edward Burghardt DuBois was the first to acknowledge a connection between Black popular culture and religion in 1897 in his essay "The Problem of Amusement." In so doing, he marked a recent but significant urban sociological area of concern: the role of amusements (or pleasure) in the daily lives of people. DuBois did not label the phenomenon he was pondering as Black popular culture but, rather, as Black "amusements" (19). Amusement was the term used by scholars and journalists to refer to leisure and recreational pursuits in nineteenth-century America (see Peiss). Popular culture did not enter the lexicon of American scholarship and periodicals until after World War II (see Hinds et al.). Regarding Black popular culture as a scholarly concept, a special "In-Depth" section of the 1971 winter issue of the *Journal of Popular Culture* was the first scholarly publication to include the phrase "black popular culture." Expanded and published as a book later in 1971 edited by historian Dr. Marshall Fishwick of Lincoln University, the special in-depth section was titled *Remus, Rastus, Revolution*.

Just prior to the beginning of the twentieth century, DuBois's concern was the widening gap between young African Americans and religion due to their participation in urban black popular culture. DuBois's observation is still relevant in the twenty-first century. However, three aspects of the study of popular culture was lacking in DuBois's work. One, DuBois neglected to explore the general implications of black American interaction and engagement *with* the popular culture of their day; two, to explore the racial and gendered implications of Black American interaction and engagement *with* the popular culture of their day; and three, to explore the implications of the commentary *within* the popular culture of their day. This Special Issue on "Black Popular Culture" seeks to fill these gaps at this moment at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Artist and cultural critic bell hooks in "Dialectically Down with the Critical Program" asserts that black popular culture continues to be a "vital location for the dissemination of black thought" and that it is a location where "useful critical dialogues can and should emerge" (51). British cultural studies pioneer Stuart Hall in "What is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" describes black popular culture as a "contradictory space" and as a site of "strategic contestation" (26). Literary scholar Harry B. Shaw in the Introduction of *Perspectives of Black Popular Culture* argues that "Black culture is popular culture partly because it continually looks toward the roots of the common Black experience and draws from those roots for

it creativity" (1). Similarly, Hall states that "black" in the term "black popular culture" signifies the black community (the site or location of the experiences, pleasures, memories, and everyday practices of black people) and the persistence of the black experience (the historical experience of black people in the diaspora), of the black aesthetic (the distinctive cultural repertoires out of which popular representations were made), and of the black counternarratives we have struggled to voice (28).

Responding to the observations of hooks, Hall, and Shaw, this Special Issue records the current "readability" of black popular culture. This collection of papers focuses on U. S. Black popular culture, includes analyses of historical and contemporary artifacts and practices of Black popular culture, and heralds the persistence of the Black experience, the Black aesthetic, and Black counternarratives. These analyses document the discernment of and dialogues about the meanings, contradictions, and contestations of race, gender, and pleasure expressed through the artifacts and practices of Black popular culture and how these meanings, contradictions, and contestations intersect with political and economic contexts. In general, black cultural expression has always been a way of resisting racial and sexual oppression, articulating experiences of resistance and struggle, and articulating oppositional identities. Likewise, all of the papers in this issue deal with representation and agency occurring in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries.

The first three papers examine prominent Black male figures and Black male-dominated organizations in the 1960s: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the Black Panther Party in juxtaposition to *The Boondocks* animated television series (Cartoon Network, November 6, 2005-June 23, 2014), the film *Black Panther* (2018, dir. Ryan Coogler), rapper Tupac Shakur (June 16, 1971-September 13, 1996), and the U. S. commemorative postage stamp (1893 to present). Phillip Cunningham in "'A Homegrown Revolutionary': Linking Erik Killmonger to Tupac and the Legacy of the Black Panther Party" connects *Black Panther* antagonist Erik Killmonger to Black nationalist worldviews of Tupac and the Black Panther Party. Cunningham contends that these links between Killmonger, Tupac, and the Panthers allow the film to function as a Panther allegory upon which one can reflect on the Party's potential and shortcomings. Lisa Gill in "The Iconic Malcolm: The 1990s Polarization of the Mediated Images of Malcolm X" argues that two mediated images of Malcolm X—Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X* (1992) and the U. S. Postal Service's Malcolm X Commemorative Stamp (1999)—moved into

iconic status solidifying the images' position within American mainstream society ultimately proving that Malcolm X's political legacy was divorced from the black community. A. J. Rice and Kyle Mays in "*The Boondocks*, Black History, and Black Lives Matter: Or, Why Black Popular Culture Matters for Black Millennials" argue that products of Black popular culture such as the *Boondocks*' episode, "The Return of the King" (a speculative dramatic narrative imagining Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., awakening from a coma post-9/11), can be used to help raise the historical consciousness of Black youth.

Sean Kennedy in "Trap Spaces, Trap Music: Harriet Jacobs, Fetty Wap, and Emancipation as Entrapment" explores the informal political interventions of rap artist Fetty Wap's highly viewed 2014 music video "Trap Queen" and how the excess of the song and video's liberal heteropatriarchal vision invisibilizes the issues of gender entrapment and violence against Black women. Katrina Moore in "The Fallacy of the Nut Pussy: Cross Dressing, Black Comedy and Women" shows how Black women are entrapped in the comedy of black men who enlist cross-dressing in their comedy. Ultimately, Moore argues that these cultural performances express anxieties, fears, and desires of Black men towards Black women. Angela Nurse and Therésa Winge in "Racialized Representations of Black Actresses: Power, Position, and Politics of the Mediated Black Woman" show that Black actresses in Hollywood films are entrapped in their wardrobe selections. Nurse and Winge argue that dress functions as a mechanism to create, challenge, and reinforce racialized understandings of blackness in popular culture and they explore this idea in the films *Girls Trip* (2017, dir. Malcolm D. Lee) and *Black Panther*.

The final group of three papers problematize race as it relates to the Grammy Awards, White R & B singers, and Oprah Winfrey. Jasmine Henry in "#GrammysNotSoWhite: Critical Race Theory and the Grammys' Race Problem" explores the Grammys' historical lack of racial diversity. Henry argues that the Recording Academy deploys powerful yet subversive colorblind ideologies that obscure racial inequalities and the racially-negligent nature of their 2017 policy changes. Carlos Morrison and Jacqueline Trimble in "Appropriation as Appreciation: Afrocentric Testifying in the Discourse of Teena Marie" situate White R & B singer Teena Marie's music lyrics, public statements, and interviews within a Black cultural space to reconfigure appropriation (which is often driven by profit and the desire for street credibility) as appreciation. Joshua Wright in "OWN: Oprah's Chicken Soup for the Soul in an Age of Angst" argues that while OWN

grants Winfrey a platform to promote her views on self-help and healing, religion and spirituality, and women's empowerment, the network places greater emphasis on issues related to the African-American community than found on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (September 8, 1986-May 25, 2011).

Black popular culture is a social domain that critically examines and facilitates an understanding of the intersections of race, gender, and pleasure in the United States and world. The papers in this special issue demonstrate that United States Black popular culture continues to be a contradictory space full of strategic contestations that intersect and coexist with a multitude of triumphs, challenges, problems, issues, and mysteries in the world.

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"A Homegrown Revolutionary": Linking Erik Killmonger to Tupac and the Legacy of the Black Panther Party

PHILLIP LAMARR CUNNINGHAM

In a 1994 MTV News interview, Tupac Shakur delivered a clever anecdote about being denied food while hungry, noting that a polite request for food becomes an angry demand if hunger goes unsatiated. He concludes by asking, "We was askin' [for social change] ten years ago. We was askin' with the Panthers… Those people who were askin' are either dead or in jail. Now what do you think we're gonna do? Ask?" ("Tupac Shakur: In His Own Words"). Tupac's rhetorical question warns that, given the continuance of systemic oppression, the post-Civil Rights generation may revolt.

Kara Keeling states that Tupac "resists buying into the narrative of a Utopian black revolution [espoused by his mother and former Black Panther Afeni Shakur], but in so doing, he posits the Black Panther Party's struggle as one rooted in another world" (62). Nonetheless, Keeling believes Tupac "reveled in the potency of his inheritance, Panther-style warrior black masculinity" (62). This negotiation between Tupac's Black Panther birthrights and his fidelity to the "thug life" was the hallmark of his relatively short life.

Tupac portends *Black Panther* (2018) antagonist Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan) who, like Tupac, is a "homegrown revolutionary" connected to the Black Panther Party's legacy. On his decision to make Killmonger a Tupac pastiche, *Black Panther* director and writer (with Joe Robert Cole) Ryan Coogler linked Tupac to Oakland and the Black Panthers' legacy: "We wanted to bring the energy of Tupac [Shakur] to a Marvel movie… [T]he 'Pac that we know came from his time in the Bay Area… And that's where you saw these organizations [like the Black Panther Party]" (Travis). Like Tupac, Killmonger—son of a slain Wakandan prince and would-be revolutionary—sought to rectify the disconnectedness between his

PHILLIP LAMARR CUNNINGHAM, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Media Studies at Wake Forest University. His research primarily focuses on black popular culture. His scholarly work has appeared in *Fire!!!: The Multimedia Journal of Black Studies*, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, and *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *M/C Journal: A Journal of Media and Culture*, and various anthologies on comics, film, television, and sports. He can be reached at cunninp@wfu.edu.

birthright and his upbringing.

As such, this essay interrogates the link between Killmonger—vis-à-vis Tupac—and the Black Panther Party. This essay first offers a character profile of Erik Killmonger that highlights his comic book origins, traces which aspects of his background and persona are—and are not—captured in *Black Panther*, and argues why a Tupac-like portrayal is apropos. The essay links Tupac with the Black Panthers, examining how he negotiated with their ideology; it then indicates the ways in which Killmonger evokes Tupac's ethos in *Black Panther*. The essay concludes by arguing that Killmonger—like Tupac—serves as an effective means by which to consider the Party's legacy.

Erik Killmonger: From Page to Screen

In *Black Panther* #23 (2000), Erik Killmonger—having usurped the role of Black Panther from the former king T'Challa—briefly allies with the Avengers to liberate Wakanda from would-be usurper Reverend Michael Ibn al-hajj Achebe. The Avengers' ineffectiveness vexes Killmonger, who laments, "[Becoming Black Panther] was just a stupid childhood fantasy—to unite my two worlds—Wakanda and America—to be a hero in both! But, frankly, I can't stand to be in the presence of such gutless people" ("More of that Business with the Avengers"). This scene is emblematic of Killmonger's dilemma: he is a perennial outsider unable to navigate between the nation of his birth and the land in which he was raised.

Killmonger first appeared in *Jungle Action* #6 (1973), in which he reveals that he is the mastermind behind several destructive guerrilla attacks in Central Wakanda. In his first confrontation with Black Panther (T'Challa), Killmonger throws Black Panther into the raging Warrior Falls (McGregor, Don et al. *Panther's Rage Part 1*). As he recovers from his injuries, T'Challa reveals to his inner circle that Erik Killmonger is N'Jadaka, a Wakandan who—during his childhood—had been captured and enslaved by Ulysses Klaw, a vibranium-seeking physicist who murdered N'Jadaka's entire family and T'Challa's father King T'Chaka (McGregor, Don et al. *Panther's Rage Part 2*). Unable to return to Wakanda after escaping Klaw in the United States, N'Jadaka manages to survive in America where he eventually earns several advanced degrees and adopts the alias "Erik Killmonger." After seeing Black Panther team with the Avengers, Killmonger implores T'Challa to bring him back to Wakanda, where he sets up a rebel village. Unbeknownst to T'Challa, Killmonger seeks revenge against the Wakanadan monarchy, whom he holds

responsible for his family's murder (McGregor, Don et al. *Panther's Rage Part 2*). After their initial battle, Killmonger—a brilliant tactician and skilled warrior— orchestrates another series of attacks against Black Panther before nearly defeating him in hand-to-hand combat. However, Kantu—a survivor of one of the villages Killmonger destroyed—intervenes by pushing Killmonger over Warrior Falls to his death.

Killmonger eventually is resurrected and, on at least one occasion, succeeds in dethroning T'Challa. While each confrontation varies in both form and results, the commonality is that Killmonger often uses Western techniques against Black Panther in his quest for the Wakandan throne. For example, in *Black Panther* #18 (2000), Killmonger attempts to undermine the Wakandan monarchy by destroying the nation's economy (Priest, Christopher et al. *Killmonger's Rage*). In later years, Killmonger—supplied with American weapons—overthrows the neighboring country of Niganda and convinces the Nigandans that Black Panther—recently returned from adventuring with the Fantastic Four—was merely a "lapdog of the United States" seeking to expand the Wakandan empire (Hudlin et al. *Back to Africa, Part 2*).

Though Killmonger is one of Black Panther's fiercest antagonists, he typically has been portrayed by various writers as a revolutionary filled with righteous anger towards Wakanda and the Western world. Unlike other Marvel villains, Killmonger does not seek world dominance; instead, he vacillates between wanting to end the Wakandan monarchy and pushing the globetrotting Black Panther to resist outside influence. That said, Killmonger is a traditional comic book villain because he is willing to go to extreme measures to achieve his objectives.

Michael B. Jordan's portrayal of Erik Killmonger in *Black Panther* maintains some fidelity to the comics though there are key distinctions. In the film, Killmonger—whose birth name is N'Jadaka but whose legal name is Erik Stevens—is the American born son of Wakandan prince N'Jobu (Sterling K. Brown) and an imprisoned American woman. In 1992, N'Jobu—a member of Wakanda's War Dog espionage unit operating covertly in America—is slain in his Oakland apartment by his brother, the previous Wakandan king and Black Panther T'Chaka (Atandwa Kani), after T'Chaka confronts him about working with mercenary Ulysses Klaue (Andy Serkis) to steal vibranium. Critical of Wakanda's isolationist policies, N'Jobu had plans to share vibranium and Wakandan technology with people of African descent worldwide to fight oppression.

Despite being orphaned in America, Killmonger acquires an elite education and

advanced military training; indeed, CIA agent Everett Ross (Martin Freeman) reveals Killmonger acquired his name because he had proven to be a highly lethal black ops agent. He eventually teams with Klaue—Wakanda's most wanted criminal after bombing villagers and stealing a quarter ton of vibranium—before murdering him and bringing his body to Wakanda. As son of a Wakandan prince, Killmonger is permitted to challenge recently crowned T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) to ritual combat for the throne and Black Panther mantle; subsequently, he defeats T'Challa and casts his body into Warrior Falls. As king, Killmonger threatens to create a Wakandan empire but seemingly is foiled and killed by Black Panther.

Coogler's incorporation of a Tupac-like character is consistent with Marvel's modernization of characters mostly created in the mid- to late-1960s. Black Panther—the first Black superhero—first appeared in *Fantastic Four* #52 (1966) and was created by Jack Kirby to fill a representational void in comics. Representational politics aside, *Black Panther* comics, according to Blake Scott Bell, "largely ignored the specific hardships of contemporary civil rights activists who were struggling for the basic rights to express their political and economic needs without being beaten or killed" ("Wakanda and the Dream of a Black Homeland"). Early attempts at involving Black Panther in plots dealing with African American issues—such as Don McGregor's "Panther vs. The Klan" arc in *Jungle Action,* in which Black Panther fights against the Ku Klux Klan—ended abruptly. Indeed, before *Jungle Action*, Marvel briefly had changed Black Panther's name to "Black Leopard" to avoid any connection with the Black Panther Party (Narcisse). However, later volumes of *Black Panther* have not shied away from engaging with issues such as American racism, as these later volumes have been scripted by Black writers Christopher Priest, Reginald Hudlin, and Ta-Nehisi Coates.

As did the aforementioned, Coogler utilizes *Black Panther* to further explore issues of Black identity. In an interview, Coogler highlighted how the film emphasizes the dichotomy between the colonized and the uncolonized (Betancourt). The ability to govern—or lack thereof—is exemplary of this dichotomy; as such, it is unsurprising that Coogler noted that he had President Barack Obama in mind as he scripted *Black Panther.* Like Obama, T'Challa is a relatively inexperienced head of state charged with negotiating between his globalist inclinations and the isolationist beliefs of his people. Coogler envisioned Killmonger's ability to drive a wedge between T'Challa and his disaffected border security chief W'Kabi (Daniel

Kaluuya) over T'Challa's inability to bring Klaue to justice as representative of the criticism Obama might have received had another country captured or killed Osama bin Laden (Travis).

To the degree that Obama is an effective parallel for T'Challa is the degree to which Tupac is for Killmonger. As Michael Eric Dyson writes in *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*, "Tupac is perhaps the representative figure of his generation. In his haunting voice can be heard the buoyant hopefulness and the desperate hopelessness that mark the outer perimeters of the hip-hop culture he eagerly embraced, as well as the lives of the millions of youth who admired and adored him" (13). Furthermore, Dyson contends, "Tupac lived the tension between revolutionary ambition and thug passion," both of which Dyson—among others—argues is a result of his upbringing by former Black Panthers and Black nationalists (64). This same tension manifests itself in Erik Killmonger.

"Power to the People": Examining the Black Panther Ethos

A man garbed in dark paramilitary gear appears in the capital to claim his birthright and to call for justice. This scenario could describe either Erik Killmonger's initial encounter with T'Challa and Wakandan tribal leaders inside T'Challa's throne room or Black Panther Party Minister of Defense and co-founder Huey P. Newton's reciting law protecting the right to bear arms after he and other Party members staged an armed protest at the California State Capitol in Sacramento in 1967.

The Panthers—who had formed a few months earlier—appeared at the Capitol seeking justice for the police killing of Denzil Dowell, a 22-year-old construction worker whom the police accused of burglarizing a liquor store and resisting arrest. Though the coroner's report suggested Dowell may have died with his hands raised in submission, an all-white jury ruled his death as a justifiable homicide (Wasserman). Moreover, the Panthers sought to contest the Mulford Act, legislation banning open carry brought forth by California assemblyman Don Mulford to curtail the Panther's police patrols (Morgan 134). The bill was signed into law by then-governor Ronald Reagan; however, the protest brought national attention to the Panthers' efforts and spurred their recruitment efforts.

Historian and former Panther Paul Alkebulan posits there are three eras of the Panthers: 1966 to 1971, 1971 to 1974 and 1974 to 1982 (x). The Panthers' first year was spent advocating for Black political autonomy, with the group calling for the enactment of policies ranging from full employment, housing, and education to

exemption from military service and prison pardons (Alkebulan xii, Rhodes 32-33). This first year also featured the Party's most fervent challenges topolice authority, particularly through its members' public bearing of arms and advocacy for self-defense. In this regard, the Panthers saw themselves as acolytes of Malcolm X, whose self-defense agenda was coupled with positioning Black liberation as a human rights issue (Roman 8).

The Panthers' Ten Point Program—the articulation of the organization's demands and beliefs—indicates Malcolm X's influence. Though two versions of the Program existed, the first was drafted in October 1966 and appeared in *The Black Panther* newspaper (Figure 1). Amy Abugo Ongiri likens the Ten Point Program to the "What We Want, What We Believe" statement that appeared in the Nation of Islam's official publications (17). Alkebulan argues that the Ten Point Program was not a particularly revolutionary document; he highlights the inherently contradictory notion of demanding government reform at the barrel end of a gun (Alkebulan 15). However, the Panthers soon would back away from some of the inflammatory rhetoric—which included calls for direct attacks on the police—after Huey P. Newton was arrested for allegedly murdering an Oakland police officer during a traffic stop. Newton was convicted of voluntary manslaughter and imprisoned until 1970.

Newton's 1970 release from prison coincided with a shift in perspective, one that embraced "revolutionary nationalism and intercommunalism" and an identification with anti-colonialist movements abroad (Rhodes 32). During the organization's first era, the Black Panthers embraced socialism and cooperated with white leftist groups such as the Peace and Freedom Party—who nominated Panther information minister Eldridge Cleaver as its presidential candidate in 1968. This change in perspective, spearheaded by Newton, left many of the more militant Panthers dissatisfied with the Party's direction, leading to a significant rift.

Newton's embrace of socialism and Cleaver's run for office foreshadowed what Alkebulan conceives as the Panther's second era, one in which the Panthers sought political power. Panther co-founder Bobby Seale's Oakland mayoral run and future Party leader Elaine Brown's Oakland city council campaign were exemplary of this era. Indeed, the Party poured a great deal of funds and resources into their respective campaigns, neither of which was successful. These failures—coupled with Newton's exile to Cuba after being accused of murdering a sex worker—lead to further disruption (Alkebulan xv). Dissension among members would increase during a power struggle between Newton and Brown, as Newton wrested power

from Brown, which resulted in her leaving the party altogether.

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black and oppressed communities.

We believe that Black and oppressed people will not be free until we are able to determine our destinies in our own communities ourselves, by fully controlling all the institutions which exist in our communities.

2. We want full employment for our people.

We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every person employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the American businessmen will not give full employment, then the technology and means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.

3. We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black and oppressed communities.

We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million Black people. Therefore, we feel this is a modest demand that we make.

4. We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings.

We believe that if the landlords will not give decent housing to our Black and oppressed communities, then the housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people in our communities, with government aid, can build and make decent housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people in our communities, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for the people.

5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.

We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self. If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and the world, then you will have little chance to know anything else.

6. We want completely free health care for all Black and oppressed people.

We believe that the government must provide, free of charge, for the people, health facilities which will not only treat our illnesses, most of which have come about as a result of our oppression, but which will also develop preventative medical programs to guarantee our future survival. We believe that mass health education and research programs must be developed to give all Black and oppressed people access to advanced scientific and medical information, so we may provide ourselves with proper medical attention and care.

7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people, other people of color, all oppressed people inside the United States.

We believe that the racist and fascist government of the United States uses its domestic enforcement agencies to carry out its program of oppression against Black people, other people of color and poor people inside the United States. We believe it is our right, therefore, to defend ourselves against such armed forces, and that all Black and oppressed people should be armed for self-defense of our homes and communities against these fascist police forces.

8. We want an immediate end to all wars of aggression.

We believe that the various conflicts which exist around the world stem directly from the aggressive desires of the U.S. ruling circle and government to force its domination upon the oppressed people of the world. We believe that if the U.S. government or its lackeys do not cease these aggressive wars that it is the right of the people to defend themselves by any means necessary against their aggressors.

9. We want freedom for all Black and poor oppressed people now held in U.S. federal, state, county, city and military prisons and jails. We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country.

We believe that the many Black and poor oppressed people now held in U.S. prisons and jails have not received fair and impartial trials under a racist and fascist judicial system and should be free from incarceration. We believe in the ultimate elimination of all wretched, inhuman penal institutions, because the masses of men and women imprisoned inside the United States or by the U.S. military are the victims of oppressive conditions which are the real cause of their imprisonment. We believe that when persons are brought to trial that they must be guaranteed, by the United States, juries of their peers, attorneys of their choice and freedom from imprisonment while awaiting trials.

10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace and people's community control of modern technology.

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

Figure 1. Black Panther Pary Ten Point Program (1972)

("History of the Black Panthers: Black Party Platform Program and Program")

Elaine Brown's leadership tenure and subsequent ouster is indicative of the Panthers' paradoxical views on the role of women. Brown openly lamented that men in the Party saw women as irrelevant and often accused them of undermining the organization because of their alliances with white feminists (Spencer 92). Ongiri indicates that collective memory is partly to blame for this view of the Panthers, as most Americans recall the images of armed men at the Capitol and Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*—with its claims of rape as an act of "insurrection" (21). However, Antwanisha Alameen Shavers argues, "Contrary to what some may believe, the Black Panther Party proved to be one of the most forward-thinking organizations of the 20th century in relation to advocating for the liberation of oppressed groups, especially where gender and sexuality were concerned" (34).

Tupac would inherit many of these perspectives though he developed a worldview that differentiated from his forebears. Sadly, however, his last days were eerily reminiscent of Huey P. Newton's final years. Alkebulan points to Newton's erratic behavior upon return from Cuba as instrumental in the Party's denouement. Aside from his earning a doctoral degree, Newton spent his last years struggling with drug and alcohol issues before being murdered in 1989 by Tyrone Robinson, a member of the rival Black Guerrilla Family (BGF).

Tupac and the Code of Thug Life

Shortly before the debut of the dramatized biopic *Panther* (1995), Polydor Records released *Pump Ya Fist: Hip-Hop Inspired by the Black Panthers*. The compilation album features tracks by politically engaged emcees of that era, including Chuck D of Public Enemy, KRS-One, and Tupac Shakur. On an otherwise provocative and often uplifting album, Tupac's "Throw Your Hands Up" struck a raw note. Unlike the title track performed by fellow West Coast emcee Kam, which served as a rallying cry against police abuse, "Throw Your Hands Up" is a shot across the bows at Tupac's enemies. Though the song's refrain entreats its listeners to settle disputes with fisticuffs instead of weapons, the verses mostly consist of braggadocio; misogynistic references to women as "bitches," "hoochies, and "hookers"; and drug references (2Pac). The track was a far cry from poignant songs like "Brenda's Got a Baby," the tragic tale of an abused pre-teen mother, or the motivational "Keep Ya Head Up." Indeed, "Throw Your Hands Up" was an odd contribution from the one performer with actual Panther bonafides.

While perhaps inapt for a Panther-themed album, "Throw Your Hands Up" certainly was fitting for an artist mired in controversy. When *Pump Ya Fist* was released in March 1995, Tupac—who finally had recovered from being shot five times during a studio ambush a few months prior—was mere weeks removed from being sentenced to 18 months in prison for sexual abuse. A year earlier, he served a brief jail sentence for assaulting *Menace II Society* (1992) co-director Allen Hughes after being dropped for a role in the film. A few months before the clash with Hughes, Tupac had been charged—though not convicted—for assault after shooting two off-duty Atlanta-area police officers.

Tupac's violent end seems like the inevitable outcome for an artist who, as Katie Grimes reminds us, had "experienced state persecution even as a young child" because of the continued FBI surveillance of Tupac's mother and former Black Panther Afeni Shakur (335). Afeni Shakur was not a nominal member of the Party; she was an active member of the New York chapter known as the "Panther 21" after being accused of plotting to bomb New York department stores and police stations (Hall). Tupac's familial connections to the Panthers went beyond his mother and included his stepfather Mutulu Shakur and his godfather Geronimo Pratt, a former leader of the Los Angeles branch who served nearly three decades in prison after being wrongly convicted for murder. Dyson posits that his Panther birthright "hung over Tupac's head as both promise and judgment," noting that, on the one hand, it was used to explain the political nature of his music while, on the other hand, it was used as a rationale for his violent undoing (48). For his part, Tupac did not shy away from his Black Panther legacy; indeed, in an interview he advocated for black gun ownership as he admitted to feeling like "a Black Panther in a '90s kind of way" (Rhodes 46).

That said, Tupac's embrace of the Panthers was neither straightforward nor without critique. Karin L. Stanford draws attention to Tupac's black nationalist leanings that resulted from his connection to the New Afrikan Independence Movement to which his stepfather Mutulu Shakur belonged. The New Afrikans shared many of the Panthers' views though, unlike the Panthers, they were more insular and sought to create a sovereign nation-state (Stanford 7-8). Stanford argues that one can see aspects of the New Afrikan belief system in Tupac's lyrics and politics and through his relationship with Watani Tyehimba, a leading member of the New Afrikan People's Organization (NAPO) who served as Tupac's mentor and business manager (6). Furthermore, Tupac held some resentment for the Panthers, whom he felt abandoned his mother and left the family destitute despite her

longsuffering for the Party (Dyson 53).

One aspect of the Panthers' beliefs that Tupac held sacrosanct was their desire for justice and reform of the criminal justice system. His disdain for police brutality and harassment can be heard on each of his albums, beginning with his third single "Trapped" from his first album *2Pacalypse Now* (1991). The song not only admonishes the police for their actions but also, borrowing from early Panther rhetoric, proposes the solution is firing back (2Pac, "Trapped"). Songs like "Trapped" exemplify Tupac's belief that young, poor black men were victims of the criminal justice system whose only recourse was not reforming but counteracting it (Vaught 91).

Tupac's Code of Thug Life (Figure 2), which consists of 26 edicts for those who lived the "thug life," owed a great deal to the Panthers' Ten Point Program. Seneca Vaught hails the Code as "a remix, appropriating and rearranging elements that were outmoded or ill-suited to the interests of the hip-hop generation" (Vaught 103). The Code sets rules of engagement for rival factions, all with the intent of promoting peace; calls for the protection of children and innocents; encourages self-policing; and offers harsh punishment for Code breakers and informants. Tupac promoted the Code to gang members nationwide in the hopes of increasing political awareness and preparing for revolution (Stanford 17).

The failure of the Code was less in its articulation but more in its author's ability to promote and to adhere to aspects of it himself. Vaught attributes Tupac's failure to his adherence to "revolutionary manhood" (89). Kara Keeling agrees, noting "recourse to this image of black masculinity as the stuff of black revolution serves to sanction and support Shakur's own sexism, misogyny, and homophobia" (62). Moreover, Tupac's various feuds constantly pushed him towards violating many of his own tenets. For instance, Tupac's willingness to use singer Faith Evans, with whom he had a brief relationship, as fodder in his conflict with her husband Christopher Wallace (Notorious B.I.G.)—whom he blamed for his shooting— evidences Vaught and Keeling's critiques of Tupac's often toxic masculinity and his inability to respect women.

Nonetheless, Dyson calls for a nuanced view of Tupac, even in his failings. He deems Tupac as "the conflicted metaphor of black revolution's large aspirations and failed agendas" (48). On the one hand, he chides Panther acolytes for viewing Tupac's materialistic and hedonistic tendencies as compromising his radicalism; on the other hand, he questions those who see Tupac's thuggery as fulfillment of the worst aspects of the Panthers (49).

1. All new Jacks to the game must know: a) He's going to get rich. b) He's going to jail. c) He's going to die.

2. Crew Leaders: You are responsible for legal/financial payment commitments to crew members; your word must be your bond.

3. One crew's rat is every crew's rat. Rats are now like a disease; sooner or later we all get it; and they should too.

4. Crew leader and posse should select a diplomat, and should work ways to settle disputes. In unity, there is strength!

5. Car jacking in our Hood is against the Code.

6. Slinging to children is against the Code.

7. Having children slinging is against the Code.

8. No slinging in schools.

9. Since the rat Nicky Barnes opened his mouth; ratting has become accepted by some. We're not having it.

10. Snitches is outta here.

11. The Boys in Blue don't run nothing; we do. Control the Hood, and make it safe for squares.

12. No slinging to pregnant Sisters. That's baby killing; that's genocide!

13. Know your target, who's the real enemy.

14. Civilians are not a target and should be spared.

15. Harm to children will not be forgiven.

16. Attacking someone's home where their family is known to reside, must be altered or checked.

17. Senseless brutality and rape must stop.

18. Our old folks must not be abused.

19. Respect our Sisters. Respect our Brothers.

20. Sisters in the Life must be respected if they respect themselves.

21. Military disputes concerning business areas within the community must be handled professionally and not on the block.

22. No shooting at parties.

23. Concerts and parties are neutral territories; no shooting!

24. Know the Code; it's for everyone.

25. Be a real ruff neck. Be down with the code of the Thug Life.

26. Protect yourself at all times.

Figure 2. Tupac Shakur's Code of Thug Life ("Code of Thug Life")

In an interview with Dyson, emcee and activist Yasiin Bey—formerly known as Mos Def—articulates the difficulties of being the child of revolutionaries. The son of a former member of the Nation of Islam, Bey empathizes with Tupac, noting how the weight of expectations coupled with constant government surveillance and persecution resulted in a confused second generation that, for all intents and purposes, had been abandoned (67). Tupac's life and lyrics reflected this abandonment, particularly on tracks such as "Me Against the World." Viewers of *Black Panther* would witness this disconnectedness and rage in Erik Killmonger.

"Ain't All People Your People?": Killmonger's Black Nationalism

A pivotal scene in the film underscores this disconnectedness: After defeating T'Challa, Killmonger—like all Wakandan monarchs before him—partakes in a ritual that involves ingesting the heart shape herb that bestows superhuman power, being buried in Wakandan soil, and astral traveling to the ancestral plains to meet with the previous Black Panthers. However, unlike when T'Challa completes the ritual, Killmonger does not meet with the previous kings; instead, he is taken to the apartment in which his father N'Jobu was slain. In a flashback scene juxtaposed with the ritual, young Erik (Seth Carr) plays basketball with friends before noticing a partly-obscured Wakandan aircraft fly away. He runs inside only to discover his father has been killed.

The scene then shifts to Killmonger's astral projection inside the apartment, where he opens a secret wall panel—located next to a poster of Public Enemy's *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988) album cover—and reveals N'Jobu's revolutionary manifesto. The manifesto contains a letter to Erik in which N'Jobu questions his own identity. With the frequent refrain of "Who am I?" the letter suggests that love—presumably of Erik's mother, whom he plots to free from prison during the film's opening scenes—and concern for his son no longer allows him to be an observant War Dog. He foretells that Erik will find himself asking that same question one day. Erik turns to find his father's spirit sitting on the floor, and Erik's adult projection shifts to a child. N'Jobu's spirit regretfully warns young Erik that because he is part-African American, he may not be welcome in Wakanda. Young Erik does not understand, and N'Jobu is unable to provide an answer. N'Jobu asks Erik why he does not cry for him, to which Erik responds, "Everybody dies. It's just life around here." N'Jobu sheds a tear, expresses remorse for not taking

Erik to Wakanda sooner, and laments their severed ties from each other and from Wakanda.

This scene is significant for several reasons: first, again, it highlights the levels of disconnectedness that Killmonger—like Tupac before him—has from his parents, his revolutionary birthright, and the lands from whence he came. Second, it draws connections not only to Oakland and thus the Panthers but also to the revolutionary hip-hop of Tupac's era. Indeed, given that young Erik is depicted as a pre-teen living in Oakland in 1992, it is highly likely that he listened to Tupac, whose first album *2Pacalypse Now* had been released the prior year. Lastly, it shows the roots of Killmonger's revolutionary plans were planted by his father.

An earlier flashback scene reveals those roots. After being questioned by T'Chaka about his betrayal, N'Jobu angrily states:

> I observed for as long as I could. Their leaders have been assassinated. Communities flooded with drugs and weapons. They are overly policed and incarcerated. All over the planet our people suffer because they don't have the tools to fight back. With vibranium weapons they can overthrow every country and Wakanda can rule them all the right way. (1:05:52-1:06:13)

Here, N'Jobu evidences a black nationalistic perspective akin to the early Black Panthers and perhaps more so to the New Afrikan Independence Movement that tied its black nationalism to a reverence for Africa. Killmonger expresses this same righteous indignation and black nationalist perspective when he first encounters T'Challa in his throne room. He first chides the lavishly attired tribal elders— "Y'all up here livin' comfortable"—as the rest of the diaspora suffers. Like his father did before T'Chaka in Oakland, Killmonger calls for Wakanda to share its weaponry so the oppressed can liberate themselves. T'Challa refutes him, stating that it was not in Wakanda's purview to intervene, to which Killmonger replies, "But didn't life start right here on this continent? So ain't all people your people?" His rhetorical question not only is reflective of a black nationalistic perspective but also, like Tupac, a view of himself as "a man of the people" with the correct plan for attaining justice (Seneca 88).

However, just as Tupac's Code of Thug Life veered from the Ten Point Program, so did Killmonger's plans for revolution stray from N'Jobu's plans. Taken at face value, N'Jobu's plans advocated liberating the oppressed so that they can be ruled by a benevolent nation. However, as Killmonger takes his place on the throne, Killmonger commands his followers to dispense weapons so that the oppressed can begin their revolution and, accordingly, the Wakandan empire. He

finds an eager ally in W'Kabi who, after his lover and leader of the Dora Milaje imperial guard Okoye (Danai Gurira) objects, states, "[T]he world is changing… The outside world is catching up, and soon it will be the conquerors or the conquered. I'd rather be the former." Though not expressed by Killmonger directly, this absolute fits Killmonger's "eye for eye" worldview.

Tupac never spoke of empire, at least not in the literal sense. However, his stint in prison along with his growing list of enemies shifted his focus from fighting for justice to attaining vengeance. On the final album recorded before his murder, *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory* (1996), Tupac—who had changed his alias to "Makavelli"—expressed a kill or be killed mentality. For instance, on the album's first track "Bomb First (My Second Reply)," he vows revenge against his growing list of enemies. Similarly, Killmonger's quest for justice was mired in his zeal for revenge. Unlike N'Jobu, who believed Wakanda needed reformation, Killmonger first sought vengeance against his immediate relatives. Furthermore, his orders to War Dogs abroad included murdering the children of the oppressors, an act of retribution, not revolution.

In *Black Panther*, Killmonger—unlike the Panthers and Tupac—never expresses any reverence for women; however, like Huey P. Newton and Tupac, he proved capable of harming them and utilizing them as fodder as illustrated in the second scene in which he appears. Earlier in the film, Killmonger and Klaue—with the assistance of Killmonger's lover Linda (Nabiyah Be)—steal a Wakandan artifact from the Museum of Great Britain. After Klaue is apprehended by Black Panther, Okoye, and Wakandan spy Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o) while trying to sell the vibranium remains from the stolen artifact, Killmonger and Linda rescue him. As they prepare to abscond to South Africa, Killmonger betrays Klaue. After killing the pilot of the plane on which they were about to board, Killmonger targets Klaue, who holds Linda at gunpoint. To get to Klaue, he shoots through and kills Linda, who now is disposable to him. In a later scene, he chokes a shaman who cultivates the few heart shaped herbs in existence when she balks at his order to burn them all.

Thus, Like Huey P. Newton and Tupac Shakur, Killmonger proves a brilliant idealist who unfortunately proves incapable of realizing his ideals due to his own shortcomings. However, like his real-life predecessors, Killmonger pushes Wakanda closer to actualizing those ideals. Indeed, the film's final scene is set in Oakland, where T'Challa and his sister Shuri (Letitia Wright) stand before the apartment complex in which N'Jobu had been slain. T'Challa reveals that he has

purchases the building and plans to convert it into an outreach center. Thus, Wakanda discards its policy of isolationism and moves towards realizing its liberating capabilities.

Conclusion

Shortly after its debut, *Black Panther* generated a great deal of discourse—especially regarding the film's framing of Erik Killmonger as a villain. Philosopher Christopher Lebron offered the strongest critique in a Boston Review essay. Lebron takes the film to task for forcing viewers to choose between two "radical imaginings"—a technologically advanced African nation that has resisted colonialism and the prospect of global liberation; for rendering Killmonger as "a receptacle for tropes of inner-city gangsterism"; and for Killmonger's lack of redemption ("'Black Panther' Is Not The Movie We Deserve").

Though mostly valid, Lebron's article overlooks a few aspects the film, most notably that though Killmonger does not receive redemption within the narrative itself, that does not mean he should not be viewed as a redemptive character. Viewing Killmonger as a mere gangster requires—as it has with Huey P. Newton and Tupac Shakur—ignoring the difficulties of the life he was forced to lead. It requires demeaning his revolutionary potential, ideals, and attempts on the grounds that he was a problematic figure. It also requires the belief that redemption is only possible while one lives.

Along those lines, Lebron fails to see the film (or perhaps does not believe the film achieves its effectiveness) as an allegory for the Black Panthers themselves. To be certain, the film is an imperfect allegory, just as the Panthers were an imperfect organization. Nonetheless, the film—like the Panthers and Tupac—allows viewers to imagine both the beautiful possibilities of black nationalism offered by the Panthers, even as we wrestle with their tragic shortcomings.

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The Iconic Malcolm: The 1990s Polarization of the Mediated Images of Malcolm X

LISA M. GILL

Shortly after the assassination and burial of Malcolm X (MX) in February 1965, Ossie Davis felt driven to defend his decision to deliver MX's funeral eulogy. His response, published in *Negro Digest* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, deflected censure of MX's ideology by identifying his importance to blacks as more cultural than political:

> At the same time—and this is important—most all of them took special pains to disagree with much or all of what Malcolm said and what he stood for. That is, with one singing exception, they all, every last, black, glory-hugging one of them, knew that Malcolm—whatever else he was or was not—Malcolm was a man! White folks do not need anybody to remind them that they are men. We do! This was his one incontrovertible benefit to his people. (Davis 64)

Speaking directly to the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) leaders that had either denounced or distanced themselves from MX, Davis condenses the value of MX to his ability to represent manhood to blacks—no matter their political inclinations. More importantly than MX's ability to represent a specific black manhood is the acceptance that MX gains for his stance as a black man from those within the CRM. As witnessed by his skills as a prominent intellectual, speaker and debater, very few CRM leaders wanted to confront MX publicly. However, the topics that MX discussed and taught were clearly not in alignment with the popular wing of the CRM movement. Thus, making his representation of manhood, in the eyes of many late 1950s, early 1960s activists, problematic.

That Davis explicitly disengages from the discourse of MX's manhood—a revolutionary leader who continued to reject white culture and institutions as consistently, inherently violent toward blacks—is portrayed as less important than a MX who represents black masculinity. Davis constructs MX as the perfect

LISA M. GILL earned her Ph.D. in American Studies at the University of Maryland. Her areas of specialization include Cultural Studies, Black Popular Culture, 20th Century U. S. History, Race, and Gender. Dr. Gill is a Lecturer of African American Studies at Fordham University, where she also serves as an academic advisor for first and second year students. She can be reached at lgill5@fordham.edu.

representation of black American manhood enshrined as such in the minds of people for whom he advocated. At the same time, he downplays MX's ideology and ideas from the physical body he eulogized. This separation was to last in popular culture until the 1990s, a decade in which MX's political thought complicated this simple construction.

For Davis and many others in 1965, this icon of masculinity was the true legacy of MX. MX's portrait of black masculinity was clear—his aggressive confrontations (of police, leaders in the CRM and the press), public displays of anger, vocalization of his suspicion of whites and blacks who worked with them, manner of dress, code switching (depending on his audience), charm, charisma, visualization of a family man, minister, and intellectual prowess. Before black men donned signs in protest that announced their manhood, MX had given them the road map demonstrating how it should be done.

For the generation of blacks who would inherit this legacy in the 1970s and 1980s, MX's manhood was proof positive that he deserved emulation. His mediated image as the archetypal black man found its way into rap songs, videos, and films of the late 1980s and 1990s. Three images in particular were prominent in this era: the photographs of MX with his right hand, index finger pointed in the air, closed mouth, biting into his lower lip, displaying some of his teeth; finger(s) pointed to his temple or ear, mouth closed or open; and the most famous, shotgun in hand, while he looks out the curtained window after the bombing of his Queens, New York home. These images and others was commodified into material culture in numerous ways: MX as masculine hero was imprinted on t-shirts, medallions, earrings, and jackets, and could be seen all over the bodies of young black men and women.

MX's image, especially when worn on young, black bodies, signified the zeitgeist of the early 1990s. But that decade saw a crucial change in MX's reputation and cultural significance. Whereas Davis had defended his eulogy by eschewing MX's politics in favor of a "shining black prince" (a phrase he wielded during his eulogy), the growing importance of MX as the iconic black male led directly to MX's ideas coming back into play. No longer seen as the ostracized leader of a religious sect or as the foil of the proper leaders of the CRM, MX was slowly transformed into a forward thinking, prophetic man who saw the faults in the CRM and dared to offer an alternative approach, a leader who could have created a different path had he not been martyred.

By the late 1990s, the heroic image of MX, that of the "shining black prince" and its attendant un-ironic celebration of monarchy over democracy, came into a sharp competition with more nuanced, historically accurate versions of MX as a black nationalist leader. These dueling representations continued through the late 1990s culminating with the January 1999 presentation of a MX stamp, part of the Black Heritage series created by the United States Postal Service.

This article traces the path in the 1990s from the eulogized black man, a prince among men, an image shorn of MX's political thought, to a more complex view of the historical man. Two portrayals are of particular importance in an examination of MX in 1990s popular culture: Spike Lee's portrayal of the black prince at the beginning of the decade and the United States Postal Service's issue of a MX stamp at the end of the decade. In the USPS's struggles to negotiate between a challenging deified male, acceptable to American culture at large, and an angry, anti-white revolutionary, the complex heritage of Davis's eulogy is laid bare: The USPS stamp could neither portray a prince nor a revolutionary. Their choice of image amounted to a third transformation of MX acceptable to middle America. That third MX was shorn both of black princehood and revolutionary ideas: in domesticating MX, it emasculated him as well.

Although Davis's image of MX as the heroic black prince held general sway in the thirty years following MX's death, contesting images were presented. The first MX stamp was actually produced in Iran in 1984. This stamp honored MX on the "Universal Day of Struggle Against Race Discrimination." Articles and books from an international perspective described MX as a Pan-Africanist and international activist. Theologian James Cone constructed an image of Malcolm as one in line with the direction the movement was heading including a direction that would align MX and Martin Luther King, Jr., by the time of the formers' assassination. According to DeCaro, "religious issues were above all those that pertained to the lives and struggles of his people living on this side of paradise" (270). Gambino, on the other hand, saw MX primarily as a laborer empowered to see the disparities between the conditions of laborers within the prison industrial complex, the post-WWII boom of the 1950s, and finally as the minister and builder of the Nation of Islam (NOI) congregations. MX appeared within these different spaces primarily as a laborer. Gambino believed Malcolm recognized his inability to conform to the status quo of American society which propelled his journey as an opponent of imperialism inside and outside the United States. MX thus became the interloper who offered insight through his criticisms of American society.

However, although varying images were vigorously contested, the most potent image of MX in the 1990s was that of an "authentic" black man, an image that stemmed from Davis but was also polished by film narratives of successful black men, including Lee's image of MX. The reintroduction of black filmmakers in the mid-to-late 1980s, who produced films outside of the Hollywood system and then received distribution from Hollywood, created a renewed interest in black filmmakers, their cultural products, and their viewing audiences. These directors, principally black men, brought the black male as subject and agent into films of the early 1990s. In films like *New Jack City* (1991) and *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), black directors' interpretation of the narrative usually included a black male protagonist who exhibited a strong sense of black manhood, or definitions thereof, that demanded recognition, despite the controversial methods of acquisition. These images and narratives recalled the process MX had used to cull respect from those most reluctant to give it. Spike Lee, John Singleton, and the Hughes Brothers with their films *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Boyz n the Hood*, *Menace II Society* (1993), respectively, all used this formula to establish dominant black male narratives of authenticity.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the image of MX was that of an "authentic" black man, stemming directly from Davis's "shining black prince." Expressed primarily through rap music and urban black youth, this imagery included a few slight references to the political activities of MX but focused primarily on his stance as a black male. Black cultural producers of the 1990s positioned the image of MX in mainstream media to demonstrate black manhood and racial pride. This representation disconnected MX from his political and religious ideologies, which were circulating primarily within the black community in urban centers, black political mindsets, and academic groups. Concurrently, the mediated image of MX was removed from the possession of black people and placed in the lexicon of American heroes. Divorced from his ideas, MX was easily identifiable as a typically American rebellious anti-hero of the tumultuous 1960s. This process achieved for MX something he did not achieve in life—iconization. Without it, MX would have remained in the canon of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) but not in the globally recognized canon of American icons.

Throughout the 1990s, the mediated image of MX could be found on film, clothing, jewelry, labels for food, books, comic books, articles, music, posters, paintings, stamps, and accessories. Created by a myriad of people, many of these images entered the domain of popular culture as references to MX's perceived

legacy. Images such as the bolded letter "X" could be found on earrings, t-shirts, or on a bag of potato chips. Most of these items contained very little reference to the political activism of MX or to his contribution to the CRM of the 1960s. In an article discussing the education and propaganda of the Black Power Movement, Angela Davis notes:

> The unprecedented contemporary circulation of photographic and filmic images of African Americans has multiple and contradictory implications. On the one hand, it holds the promise of visual memory of older and departed generations, of both well-known figures and people who may not have achieved public prominence. However, there is also the danger that this historical memory may become ahistorical and apolitical. (Davis 38)

Addressing the controversy that had embroiled her image when Vibe Magazine decided to model the Black Power Movement through clothing and hairstyles, Davis clearly annunciated the issue at hand in the treatment of black icons of begone eras. Similar to Davis in this photoshoot, the ahistorical treatment of MX led to a political vacuum surrounding his image. Each representation had the potential to be used as a rejection of white societal norms, symbolized most clearly by the wearing of an "X" on the body of the adherent, serving as an affront to white society and "sell-out" black leaders. But for the most part, MX was merely viewed as an iconic rebel used to fight against the "establishment."

From 1992 through the end of 1993, the mediated image reached its zenith as a representation of MX as a rebellious, typically American outlaw. The X fashion phenomenon broke boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexuality. X jackets were available in high-end stores like Bloomingdales, while in urban spaces, medallions, earrings and other items could be purchased at various open-street markets. Throughout New York, t-shirts and caps adored the bodies and heads of those clued into the popularity of the bold letters. Divorced, at times, from any pictorial representation, the image of the "X" reminded all Americans how cool it was to be a rebel without any connection to a movement, political agenda, or group.

Since the interest from academics, followers, and scholarly admirers had never waned, new information did concurrently celebrate MX's insight into the nature of civil rights in the context of world revolutions taking place across the globe. This information actually helped expand and re-configure his image into an iconic American hero. He became seen as a freedom fighter and an inspiration to all Americans. As the mediated image of MX gravitated toward the lexicon that

surrounds American great men icons, the de-politicization of X's image became ever more apparent.

Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X* (1992) was crucial to this process. Discussion of a film based on *The Autobiography* began shortly after the publishing of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in 1965. According to Rodnell Collins, MX's nephew, the first attempt to produce a film on MX came from Louis Lomax (201). Lomax's book, under contract with Twentieth Century Fox, was slated for production, but the project was put on hold in 1968 because of the death of Lomax and the mood of the country (Collins 202). Marvin Worth, who was connected to the project at Twentieth Century Fox, left and became a producer at Warner Brothers.

Taking the film rights with him, Worth moved to secure a script for the film. Rodnell Collins notes that the:

> next major effort to do a film on Uncle Malcolm involved Ma (Ella Collins), James Baldwin, and Marvin Worth in the late 1960s and early 1970s…Others involved with the project were Art Aveilhe, of J.B. Lippincott Company, a book publisher; Bruce Perry of the Socialist Press Media; Arnold Perl, Baldwin's business partner; and a relative of a prominent banker…Baldwin would write the screenplay…(Ella Collins and Baldwin) envisioned a film that would focus on him (Malcolm) as a black nationalist, as a man serious about his Islamic religious beliefs, as a man with prophetic visions about race relations…That was not the film envisioned by Marvin Worth and Warner Bros. (203-4)

Though the script was to be written by Baldwin, he dropped out of the project after Warner Brothers demanded changes that he could not agree with. In a 1976 interview with Jewell Handy Gresham, Baldwin states:

> To put it brutally, if I had agreed with Hollywood, I would have been allowing myself to create an image of Malcolm that would have satisfied them and infuriated you, broken your hearts. At one point, I saw a memo that said, among other things, the author had to avoid giving any political implications to Malcolm's trip to Mecca. Now, how can you write about Malcolm X without writing about his trip to Mecca and its political implications? It's not surprising…Hollywood's fantasy is designed to prove to you that this poor, doomed nitwit deserves his fate. (Boyd 83)

Worth's film project went forward using the screenplay partly scripted by Baldwin. After years of trying to produce a film on MX, Marvin Worth was finally given

approval by Warner Brothers. By that time, Spike Lee had graduated from NYU film school and gained critical success with *She's Gotta Have It* (1986) and *Do the Right Thing* (1989). According to Lee, from the onset Worth wanted him to direct the film (Lee et al 9). From Lee's perspective, the failure of a letter to reach him was the only reason Worth attached Norman Jewison, the director of *A Soldier's Story* (1984) and *The Hurricane* (1999), to the project (Lee et al 9-10). When Lee heard that Worth had contracted a white director to make the film, he went to Warner Brothers and suggested that they reconsider. According to Lee, it "disturbed him greatly and he felt that it was wrong…blacks have to control these films" (Bernotas 82). Lee claimed that directing a film on the life of MX had been his inspiration for going to film school (Lee et al 2). Although Warner Brothers accused Lee of starting a letter-writing campaign against Jewison, Lee was finally named director of the project.

Lee's status as a newly successful director made him acceptable to Hollywood as a black person who could assume the position of director and deliver a film that mirrored the desires of the black community to see representations of themselves on film. Lee's own standing as a black hero made him a candidate for a posture of resistance when it came to the position of director. Lee would oversee keeping MX a black male figure of authority and authenticity.

From the start, Lee had decided to create an image of MX informed by history but loaded with the images Lee believed best represented MX. The relationship between Lee and Warner Brothers quickly deteriorated. Lee and others originally submitted a budget for *Malcolm X* at $38 million.

> The people at Warner Brothers, Terry Semel, the president and CEO, and Bob Daly, the chairman and CEO (two CEOs, don't ask me), immediately said, "You're crazy." They told us to come back again with another budget, and they also told us they weren't going to spend a red cent over $18 million themselves. They wanted the total cost of the film to be $20 million, at first, and I just remembering thinking, "This film is going to cost way more than any $20 million to do it right. And I ain't doing it wrong." I was ready to get up then. I would get back to them on budget later. (Lee et al 23)

As he approached the limit of his funding, Warner Brothers called the film's insurance company, Completion Bond, to let them know that they would not be extending funding. Completion Bond, which had already extended millions, fired the editors and decided that editing would be shut down. Lee, forced to make a decision about finishing the film, decided to act.

> I had to get on the phone because we still have work to do, and it will cost money. The bond company has bailed out on me. They let my editors go. Warner Brothers *been* bailed out of here a long time ago…I called Bill Cosby on Monday, Oprah Winfrey on Tuesday, and Magic Johnson this morning. I saw Rocket Ismail at the basketball game and hit on him. I've got to call Reginald Lewis, Michael Jordan, Janet Jackson. I prayed on it, then drew on Malcolm X for inspiration. I had been studying him for two years doing this film. Malcolm always talked about, DO FOR SELF… I took a page out of the MALCOLM MANUAL. I know BLACK folks with money. I would appeal directly to their BLACKNESS, to their sense of knowing how important this film is. How important Malcolm X is to us. How important it is that this film succeed… I don't and I'm not waiting on white folks. If you know only one thing about Malcolm, that should be it.
> (Lee et al 138; 165; 166)

Lee's next controversy in conjunction with the film was his use of Baldwin's script (Buhle 119). Buhle describes Lee's contribution to the original script written by James Baldwin and Arnold Perl to be "less than half," excluding his directorial contribution and the ending (119). Lee does not deny using the script. According to Lee, it was the best script that he had been given, and he did not want to start writing a new one (Lee et al 27). Baldwin would have disagreed. If the project needed a black director, why did it not need a black script writer? Why did Lee fail to either address Baldwin's concerns or hire another writer to review the script?

From Lee's point of view, he had researched the film for two years and had interviewed many people connected to MX. He failed to provide additional review of the script or a new screenwriter because popular culture had already given him the image of Malcolm that he intended to portray: the authentic black hero, the archetype of black masculinity. Worth, Warner Brothers, and Lee all agreed on that point. Lee's MX would be a hero who had fought for liberty and happiness—core American values. This MX fought for America as much or even more than for the black community.

Visually stunning, the film contains scenes taken directly from MX's autobiography and those created by Lee. The film moves through MX's life from the retelling of his father's death at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan to the day he was assassinated at the Audubon Ballroom. The film opens in the same manner as a typical NOI meeting during MX's tenure. The speaker, who is never identified, recites the NOI creed and then asks the audience to welcome Brother Malcolm to

the stage. Following a round of applause, beginning with the crash of cymbals, we hear MX (Denzel Washington) and see an outstretched flag on the screen as the credits continue to roll. Washington begins speaking to the invisible audience who have been waiting to hear MX. As he begins, the flag is replaced by the video of the 1991 Rodney King Beating on California State Route 210.

Chronicling the atrocities that the white man has committed globally, MX (Washington) lists various charges. Concluding that the white man has been the harbinger of war and destruction, MX (Washington) excoriates the savagery of the white man, while the video of King exchanges the frame, continuously, with the American flag. As the brutality of the beating accelerates, MX (Washington) charges the white man as the most harmful being on the face of the earth. Elevating his "voice" at the naming of each harmful act, MX (Washington) continues to charge the white man as we see King on the ground being pummeled by four or five Los Angeles Police Department officers. Another clash of cymbals brings the American flag back to the screen.

MX (Washington) tells the invisible audience that they are victims of America rather than its citizens, simultaneously the camera closes in on King on the ground, barely moving, still being beaten by the LAPD. Ominously, we flashback to the flag that is shrouded in black smoke and burning around the edges. As the flames begin to spread, the viewing audience returns to the gruesome beating of King as MX's (Washington's) voice exclaims that black Americans continue to be the victims of America. The burning flag replaces King's unconscious body as it is repeatedly beaten while MX (Washington) repeats that democracy has never been offered to blacks on the cotton fields, northern urban centers, or any other places in America. As the cymbals crash for the final time, the flag burns into the shape of the letter "X." As we return again to King being brutalized, MX (Washington) declares that the "American dream has eluded us, leaving us only with the American nightmare." The camera flashes back to the charred, yet in-tact, American flag in the shape of an "X," as the invisible audience shouts and applauds, "We love Malcolm X." The symbolism attached to American values overtakes the emphasis on MX himself.

The film ends with a montage that begins with Ossie Davis' oration of his eulogy. As Davis delivers his eulogy, the scene is spliced with video footage and photos of the real MX, present day Harlem and Soweto (1992 respectively). At the end of Davis' speech, the camera cuts to a classroom in Harlem where the actress Mary Alice tells a classroom full of black children about the birthday of MX and

eventually how each student should be like MX. Some students then proclaim that they are MX. The film then goes to Soweto where Nelson Mandela recites a quote from MX describing the need to have his masculinity and humanity recognized to another group of students. Once again, the students in the classroom proclaim that they are MX, as the film ends with a large "X" and Aretha Franklin singing the gospel song, "Someday We'll All Be Free."

Lee ended the film in a manner similarly to how he began it. The connection between the image of black male identity and the life of MX is so tightly tied that one need only proclaim to be MX to assume his heroics. For Lee, MX is a black man whose greatest contribution was his exhibition of American black male identity. The two final scenes are Lee's attempt to give the impression that any black person can prove their agency through incorporating characteristics that have traditionally been defined as masculine. In the same way that Lee used his X baseball caps to promote his film, the mediated image of MX becomes a commodity that can be attached to a commodified body to display authentic black masculine identity that can be interpreted as authoritative expressions of black agency. In short, the film is really an example of how to demonstrate black masculine identity rather than a homage to the contributions of MX. MX's own ideology is lost in references to America and American history. "The vibrant, pop-culture marketing of the film gave people permission to claim and learn about Malcolm in a forum that was not threatening…America now provided a healthier, safer atmosphere to do so" (X xv). This environment, of course, was the market place.

Spike Lee authorized marketing paraphernalia to be sold in Macy's and Bloomingdale's. Houston Baker surmises, "in the manner of a true postmodern, Lee understands that his job is to get 'paid in full' so that he can continue producing films of Black cultural resistance" (Baker 173). One of the more controversial aspects of Lee's production was this commodification of items connected to MX. Lee had previously generated attention through this method for other films but these films did not have living heirs. MX's widow had not copyrighted her husband's image or images connected to him prior to the release of Lee's film. Aware of this, Lee advanced his marketing campaign without offering compensation to Shabazz. Because Lee stood to profit when legally entitled others did not, Lee's actions were viewed as predatory and highly controversial. Eventually, Lee was forced to share the profits from his X Jackets, caps and t-shirts with Shabazz (cmgworldwide.com).

After Lee announced his connection to the project and began implementing his marketing plan, other vendors began to sell shirts, baseball caps, jerseys, mugs,

calendars, and tapes of Malcolm's speeches at NOI functions for an estimated total of $100 million in profits. Betty Shabazz was finally forced to secure a licensing deal with Curtis Management, the Indianapolis-based licensing company (Rivera). The company typically received somewhere between five to fifteen percent of merchandizing contract sales and was estimated to have received at least five percent for Malcolm's image (Rivera). Commenting on the plethora of X's around the country Barboza wrote in 1992, "it has become fashionably anti-fashionable and like, rap music, democratized. No longer exclusively 'a black thing' even whites, the 'blue-eyed devils' Malcolm once excoriated, wear X caps, as if they're fans of the same unidentifiable team, members of some secret sect" (Barboza). As Malcolm moved into the realm of public-speak fashion, it became even more difficult to maintain a political image of MX. Spike Lee encouraged people from divergent political associations to feel that MX belonged to them too.

Although Spike Lee was not the only impetus for Malcolm's iconization, he certainly helped promote a mediated image of MX that became synonymous with rebelliousness as opposed to revolution. The process of MX's image transformation from revolutionary figure to rebellious American individualist was finalized in 1999 with the MX Commemorative Stamp. The decision to create a stamp to commemorate MX arose because of the influence of Lee's film and the production machine that it sparked. This newly constructed de-politicized, ahistorical mediated image reconfigured MX as a national hero, an American individualist, divorced from his time, ideas, or beliefs. This paved the way for the USPS stamp. Comments by Postal Service Governor S. David Fineman refer to Malcolm as "a visionary, a man who dreamed of a better world and dared to do something about it" (USPS).

Seven years after the release of Lee's film, the image of MX most associated with MX's American iconization is the USPS stamp issued on January 20, 1999. Created and distributed sixteen years after the first MX stamp, the United States stamp was part of the Black Heritage Series, established in 1978 after a request to the USPS by the founding member of the Black American Heritage Foundation to include black images in the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration (American Philatelic Society) and went on to sell-out of its initial printing of 100 million copies (Postal Bulletin 21988). Both images stand as bookends on the spectrum of the image production of MX during the period of heightened interest by a majority of Americans.

In the stamp selection process, after the committee for production selects an image to commemorate, the actual production of the stamp goes to the Stamp

Development Office of the USPS. Terry McCaffrey, the manager of the Stamp Development Office during the USPS MX stamp development and release, explained the process further:

> Once the design is done, it is given back to the stamp director [who] scans it into his computer, affixes the type and perforations to make it look like a stamp, and then it is brought to the next meeting [Citizen Stamp Advisory Committee] and shown in the subcommittee for design. This is made up of six design professionals, they review each piece of art and make comments on it—adjusting color or the art isn't good enough or we want to try something different or whatever—and then it is taken back for those changes and then it is brought back three months later and tried again and eventually it works. So, it takes on average a year to a year and a half to do a stamp because they [CSAC] only meet every three months. (McCaffrey)

When asked how this process went for the design of the MX stamp, McCaffrey responded by saying:

> We had a research team…their name is Photo Assist [Inc.] and they researched Malcolm X's subject and came back with a wider range, array of photographs to work from and the designer narrowed it down to…two or three different photographs that he felt worked well as a stamp...it did take long for the subcommittee to reach agreement that the one we chose is the one that they felt was the best. (McCaffrey)

When asked about the selection, McCaffrey noted the process of the selection committee's decision to choose the photo that was used as the stamp.

> I vividly remember the subject selection, well actually the photo selection…going through the different photos and trying to find a photo that worked well as a stamp... There were a number of photos where he looked very angry. We didn't want to do that, because people do not want to put stamps on their envelopes of somebody looking angry. So we had to find photos that had some depth to it and was a good quality photo, not a candid photograph. (McCaffrey)

The idea of MX as an "angry" person did not originate with the Stamp Development Committee. MX was often referred to by the *New York Daily News* moniker "the angriest black man in America." Malcolm's political behavior that labeled him as an "angry black man," (a title which he embraced and used) would have to be minimized if he were to transition into an American icon. To reach a wider audience, MX's image could not be attached to Black Nationalist ideas, politics, or

images. Presenting an image of MX that supported a political message of revolution and one that would reconnect him to his political ideology and message, would prevent the majority of Americans from accessing MX as simply an American icon.
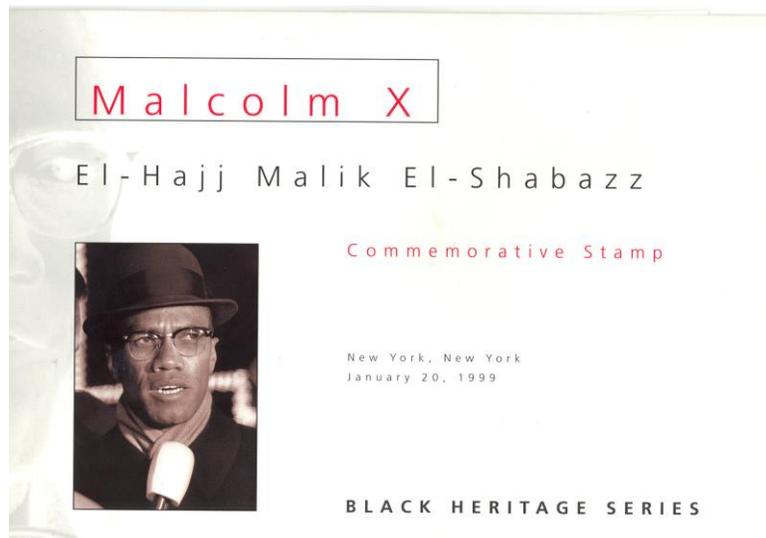
Figure 1. U.S. Postal Service. *Malcolm X/El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz Commemorative Stamp Program—Cover Page,* Cover photos: UPI/Corbis-Bettmann, Stamp Design: Richard Sheaff, Layout and Design: Pat Marshall Design, Inc., 1998.

This is precisely why USPS Governor Fineman referred to MX as "a modern-day revolutionary who openly fought for the end of oppression and injustice" (Lewis 5). Fineman does not mention the methods adopted to bring about revolutionary change such as MX's campaign to bring the United States in front of the United Nations to stand trial for its inhuman treatment of black people by courting the favor of newly independent African nations during the Cold War. Without historical knowledge of MX's legacy, it is difficult to find a verification for this tribute in the USPS's Opening Ceremony Program. In fact, the postal program (see Figure 1) states that MX "disavowed his earlier separatist preaching in favor of a more international, integrationist approach" (see Figure 2). According to the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee's Communication Officer Zayid Muhammad:

In our position then, the government, with this stamp, is continuing its efforts to distort and co-op Malcolm's legacy in death the way they absolutely could not do so in life…by implicitly asserting that he became an "American integrationist Civil Rights leader," and that he was not the fearless, uncompromising revolutionary that we know he was. (Muhammad 9)

MX did note his broadening perspective on race relations in the United States in various speeches and interviews. However, he rarely talked about integration in terms that Roy Wilkins, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, would recognize. MX spoke in terms of coalition building rather than of integration: "People in power have misused it, and now there has to be a change and a better world has to be built, and the only way it's going to be built is with extreme methods. I for one will join with anyone, I don't care what color you are, as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth" (X 182). MX was happy to employ any person in the army he envisioned. But his revolutionary intent is not reflected in the label of "American integrationist."
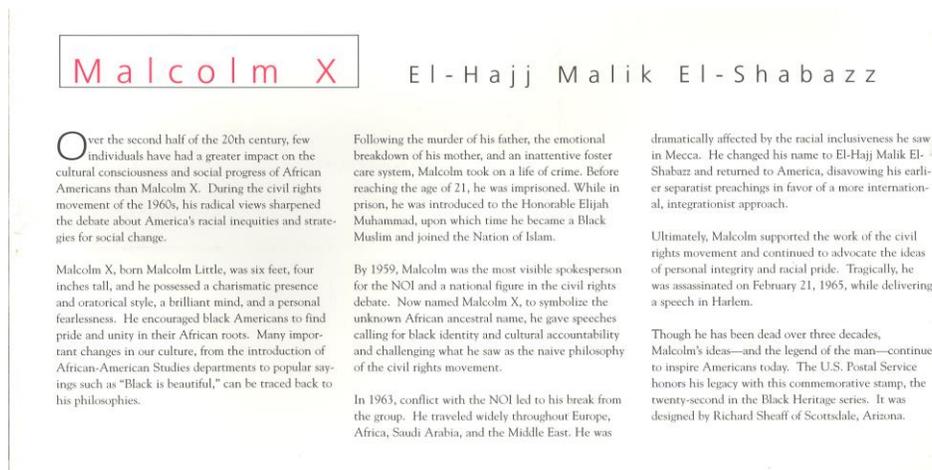
Figure 2. U.S. Postal Service. *Malcolm X/El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz Commemorative Stamp—Biography*, Cover photos: UPI/Corbis-Bettmann, Stamp Design: Richard Sheaff, Layout and Design: Pat Marshall Design, Inc., 1998.

Once the decision to create the stamp had been made, the USPS faced the thorny issue of which photograph to choose. The press release about the stamp stated that the photograph chosen was taken in New York City on May 21, 1964, MX's first appearance after his "historic and broadening trip to the Moslem holy city of

Mecca" (USPS). In fact, according to Paul Lee, the historian for *Malcolm X*, the stamp photo was "taken during an interview in a Cairo, Egypt hotel lobby on July 14, 1964" (Lee "Debate Escalates"). This disparity is significant because it indicates how important it was for the USPS to place the photo and, by extension, the image of MX in his age of enlightenment, and not in the earlier portions of his political life. If the photo could be attached to one of the most significant moments of transformation in the life of MX, it would authenticate the representation of MX as an American icon. Robert L. Haggins, MX's personal photographer, believed that "Malcolm would have rejected the photograph used on the postage stamp" (Gilyard 8). According to Manuel Gilyard, president of the New York Chapter of the Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections (ESPER), Haggins believed that the picture used for the "poster issued by the postal [service] should have been the one used for the stamp" (Gilyard 8). The photo (see Figure 3) showed a smiling Malcolm, in a non-candid photograph, one of the criteria for a stamp.

Figure 3. Photograph of Malcolm X suggested by Robert Haggins. www.malcolm-x.org/media/pic_07.htm.

To imply the USPS did not take into account the previous images of MX would be incorrect. According to McCaffrey:

> the postal service was not apprehensive, but they were concerned about the issuance of the Malcolm X stamp…what the reaction would be with the American public and they debated it within the Committee for a while and it was discussed with the Postmaster General and everyone felt…he certainly was worthy of a stamp even though he is controversial…and we decided, let's go ahead with it…Let's see what happens. (McCaffrey)

The notion that Malcolm's controversial legacy might affect the reception of the stamp implies that the USPS explicitly decided to honor the authentic prince rather than the revolutionary. It is clear that the USPS actively participated in choosing an image of MX based primarily in the perception of MX as an American icon. McCaffrey and others state that the Shabazz family, first Dr. Betty and later Attallah, Malcolm's eldest daughter, agreed with the choice of image. Attallah Shabazz felt that the stamp "shows how Malcolm appeared to most Americans" (Lee "Debate Escalates").

Using another photograph—an "angry" one, for example—might have decreased the momentum pushing MX's image toward iconization. Tension between the prince and the revolutionary is exemplified in debates surrounding the USPS's choice of image for the stamp. Significantly, the image chosen depicts neither a heroic black man nor an angry MX with clenched fist and index finger in the air. The stamp portrays a thoughtful intellectual wearing glasses with his hand curled next to his chin in a professor-like pose rather than a clenched fist. This choice of image presents a fascinating amalgamation of two strains of popular thought surrounding MX in the 1990s. Neither the clenched fist nor the shining prince, this MX is made acceptable to American culture at large expressly by being absorbed into an academic, thinking narrative. A prince governs, a revolutionary fights, and an academic merely philosophizes (see Figure 4).
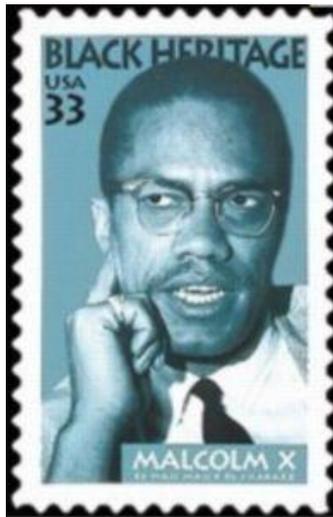
Figure 4. Photograph of Malcolm X Stamp by USPS. colnect.com/en/stamps/stamp/97142-Malcolm_X-Black_Heritage_Series-United_States_of_America.

Overall, the stamp was an enormous success. The stamp sold out of its first 100 million copies, more than twice the number for the previous Black Heritage Stamp (Akilah) and almost five times the number of identified black Americans. As the sale numbers indicate, Malcolm had entered into mainstream culture as currency and commercial property. No longer restricted to black history, the mediated image of MX became that of an American icon, an image that would go into the twenty-first century as a symbol of American transformation and opportunity.

Among opponents of the stamp were Black Nationalists who were appalled by the same co-option that the Lee film produced. Indeed, many of them such as Yemi Touré claimed that "Malcolm's on a Stamp and We Got Licked." Like Akilah Monifah, they struggled to remind the American public of Malcolm's activities and words during the final moments of his life. Many who disliked the stamp such as Paul Lee concluded that the stamp was an attempt "to bring Malcolm 'in' … a cultural symbol, a conferring of status, a mark of acceptance" (Touré).

Yet negative opinions never gained enough momentum to result in a letter-writing campaign to the USPS. As McCaffrey states:

> We expected more criticism from the public, but we never really received it…um…those few letters we received…were…you expect that sort of thing. When we did the Malcolm X stamp, we assumed that there would be criticism, but we were surprised at how little criticism there was…were pleasantly surprised at that. (McCaffrey)

When asked if he and other members of the committee were surprised that the groups that had rejected MX during his lifetime including B'nai B'rith and other Jewish organizations, supported the stamp, his reaction was similar: "We were a little bit surprised by that. We weren't sure who was going to support it, but we were surprised by the array of people that did support it. That's always a pleasant surprise for us" (McCaffrey). The lack of negative public response signaled the strength of the transformation of MX. But it also reflected the nature of the stamp itself. An intellectual MX is a domesticated MX. His fist's transformation to a chin-prop does not leave much ground for disagreement.

With his movie *Malcolm X*, Lee rekindled a mass-marketed revival in MX. The phenomenon of the X-memorabilia took over the country for a short period in the 1990s and assured that MX's mediated image would thrive outside of the black community. *Malcolm X* and the cultural production surrounding it projected MX into the annals of American folklore and substantiated his legacy as an American

icon. It also added significant fodder to the perception of MX as an American intellectual. As Paul Shackel suggests, "The public memory associated with highly visible objects is always being constructed, changed, and challenged, and at all times power and the challenge to power are situational" (657). Certainly, the moment of high visibility of the image during the 1990s is not with us presently. However, a current display of any X paraphernalia still allows the user to "Fight the Power!" Indeed, the construction of MX's mediated image exemplified the construction of public memory debates. The process of commemorating MX led to the incorporation of MX into popular culture. This allowed various types of Americans to become familiar with the mediated image regardless of previous knowledge or connection to MX. Moreover, the circulation of the image in popular culture led to a re-examination of MX by leading international scholars of the black experience.

Fueled by the cultural production of Spike Lee's film and the USPS stamp, MX became an American icon that moved unfettered through different sectors of America due, in large part, to his depoliticization and ahistorical treatment. Without both the cultural production of Spike Lee's film and the USPS stamp, it is doubtful MX would have made the transition from "angriest black man" to American icon. Crucial to the racialized project is the production of images that can signify meanings publicly. The importance of the mediated image, however fragmented, depoliticized, or ahistorical it may be, cannot be understated.

Davis's transformation of MX into a shining black prince allowed a black man to gain heroic stature into mainstream American consciousness. The commodification of MX's image—which extended from hats and potato chip bags to a stamp—did lead to a wider knowledge of MX's thought. Yet, by being made into an American hero, MX lost both his status as a prince and his status as a revolutionary. The process led from his invocation as a "shining hero" to being a letter on a t-shirt symbolizing what he once really stood for to finally being moved to a piece of paper with monetary value. In true American fashion, the process of commodification led to a real commodity. One that could be depicted in a museum, a funny YouTube video, or even on an envelope—able to carry messages or pay bills without the heavy burden of attempting to create a movement to free black people.

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The Boondocks, Black History, and Black Lives Matter: Or, Why Black Popular Culture Matters for Black Millennials

A. J. RICE AND KYLE T. MAYS

We are living in times of great disruption. Black Millennials throughout the United States from Ferguson, Missouri to Baltimore, Maryland, have protested the killing of Black women, men, and transgender individuals at the hands of law enforcement. These protests have illustrated to the world that young, poor working-class Black Americans are increasingly exposing and challenging the contradictions of U.S. democracy: that institutional racism is endemic to this society and that Blacks often bear the brunt of white supremacy's harsh whip (Carmichael and Hamilton 4). The following questions inform this essay: How does Black popular culture serve as an example of "living Black history"? How can Black popular culture be used to foster and deepen Black Millennials' critical engagement with Black history? We contend that *The Boondocks* can be read as a historical text if we expand our understanding of the role popular culture plays in reproducing historical information and take seriously the meaning of these reproductions in the lives of Black people. We use the framework of Living Black History (LBH) as developed by the late Manning Marable to show how *The Boondocks*' episode, "The Return of the King," can be used to help raise the historical consciousness of Black youth. But, first, who are the Black youth that we speak of?

Black Millennials Rising

A. J. RICE is a President's Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Rice is an interdisciplinary scholar of Black politics, global urban studies, critical political economy, and Black Studies. His current research examines how resistance to urban dispossession develops in Black cities and traces the contributions institutional restructuring have made to the neo-liberalization of racial capitalism. He can be reached at ricealbe@msu.edu.

KYLE T. MAYS, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of African American Studies and the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA. He is the author of *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes: Modernity and Hip Hop in Indigenous North America* (SUNY Press, 2018). He is currently writing a book on Afro-Indigenous history in the United States with Beacon Press. He can be reached at mayskyle@ucla.edu.

In mainstream discourse, the discussion of Millennials is often centered on European Americans, their obsession with avocado toast and craft beer, and the substantial burden of student loans. However, as cultural critic Sean Scott notes, "far too much writing about Millennials erases people of color and immigrants" (7). Indeed, Millennials in general have endured "unprecedented wealth stratification; the exacerbation of already-existing divides of race and sex; and America's continuing militaristic endeavors abroad. The product of both landmark mid-20th century Naturalization Act of 1965 and the arrival of Reagonomics in the 1980s, Millennials are simultaneously the most diverse and most disprivileged generation ever" (Scott 4). This erasure of Black youth from conversations about Millennials reflects a broader reality about the "uncertain place of young black people in our political communities" (Cohen 3). To better understand how Black popular culture can foster critical engagement with and among Black Millennials, we must reflect on some of the historical and structural forces that have shaped the lives of this generation.

We use the term Black Millennials to differentiate between blacks from the Hip Hop Generation as outlined by Bakari Kitwana (3) and those born during the last two decades of the twentieth century. While there is difficulty in and inherent limits to defining a beginning and end date for a particular generation, Black folk born between 1980 and 2000 are shaped by distinct life experiences and events (Boyd 52). First, Black Millennials are the first generation of Blacks to witness the election of the nation's first Black President, Barack Obama. They are also baptized in the rhetoric of a post-racialism. Yet, economic and social indicators for Blacks across the nation indicate a rise in racial inequality during their lifetime (Acevedo; Shapiro).

Second, Black Millennials were raised during the age of social media, placing them among the first "digital natives" (Taylor et al. 5). Social media and new media have been instrumental in helping Black Millennials share information. Perhaps one of the best examples has been Black Twitter, which has been instrumental in spreading awareness about the violent murders of Black youth through Twitter (Freelong et al.). Social media, according to Black feminist new media scholars, is also a site of "counterpower," through which Black Millennials have organized social movements, harnessing the power of technology to challenge state power and other forms of oppression (Tynes and Noble 3).

Third, this group is not rigidly defined by age, but by the particular historical epoch in which they have lived. The events of September 11, 2001, and the

subsequent War on Terror are crucial moments in the lives of Black Millennials. Not only have these conflicts led to one of the longest and most costly wars in U.S. history, but it was a key factor in the emergence of the surveillance state (Babu-Kurra). Finally, the life prospects of Black Millennials seem to be worse than their parents, with this current generation experiencing higher levels of joblessness, poverty and incarceration than their parents did (Dalaker and Proctor ix; Alexander 98), a distinct consequence of fundamental changes in the U.S. political-economic system (Dawson and Francis 53).

By the 1980s, intra-racial political tensions that had once been held in check by a general commitment towards Civil Rights exploded within the Black community exposing serious differences along the lines of race, class, and gender (Dawson 142-3; Reed 4). These challenges were compounded by changes in the labor market, linked to the broader restructuring of the U.S. economy. All of these developments, including the intensification of state repression, state abandonment, and urban restructuring all contributed to the erosion of significant institutional basis for, and memory of, Black radicalism (Dawson 37). Nevertheless, it is clear from movements like Black Lives Matter, that the enduring reality of Black oppression continues to occupy the minds of Black Millennials (Taylor 10), and we should seize that opportunity to engage in constructive, intergenerational dialogues.

Living Black History: A Method of Transformational Education

"Living Black History" (LBH) as theorized by the influential historian and Black studies scholar Manning Marable, is a pedagogical "approach that embraces the political nature of history," with a goal "not just to educate and inform, but to transform the objective material, cultural conditions, and subordinate status of marginalized groups through informed civic engagement" (29). This goal is easier to achieve when, as the epigraph above suggests, history feels less distant; when the past feels more present, more personal. In seeking to direct education in the service of liberation, the fundamental concerns and objectives of LBH are remarkably similar to those of critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire, whose work on critical pedagogy is foundational, wrote: "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller

humanity" (qtd. in Marable 47). Despite these similarities, LBH as a method of teaching and scholarship is deeply rooted in the Black Intellectual Tradition (BIT).

Marable asserts that the BIT has been descriptive, corrective, and prescriptive. The BIT has been descriptive by presenting "the reality of black life and experience form the point of view of black people themselves" (Marable 58). The tradition's corrective character is evident through its challenging of racist and stereotypical narratives that have been, and continue to be, reproduced by mainstream American institutions. Finally, the Tradition's prescriptions represent "an intellectual orientation which consistently connected scholarship with collective struggle, social analysis with social transformation" (Marable 58). Both the BIT, and the LBH method which emerges from it, is concerned with creating knowledge and learning practices relevant to the myriad challenges Black communities face.

Central to this pedagogy of liberation is *reimagining* the Black past. While using factual and accurate evidence to understand the significance of the past is important, "another productive and illuminating approach to understanding past events is the critical reconstruction of the 'past' with realistic 'alternative pasts' that were possible" (Marable 33). These realistic alternative pasts are often based on "what if" scenarios, which play with the consequences of reimagining key historical events, raising issues or placing events and people in conversations that force us to think differently about the past, present, and future. We assert that reimagining the Black past through satire like *The Boondocks* can deepen Black Millennial's appreciation of and critical engagement with the legacy of Dr. King while also raising new questions and perspectives about contemporary Black political and social problems.

The Boondocks and the Legacy of the Black Freedom Movement

The Black popular culture product under examination here is Aaron McGruder's critically acclaimed animated series, *The Boondocks*. *The Boondocks* was first published on December 3, 1996, at the University of Maryland as a comic strip. Conceived of as a "racial, social, political satire," McGruder's comic strip would eventually gain national syndication in 1999 and is noted for having the second largest comic strip launches ever, released in over 150 newspapers (Rose). At its peak, *Boondocks* appeared in over 300 hundred newspapers nationally (Younge). In 2004, McGruder converted the comic strip into an animated television series. This animated series has been equally praised and criticized for its raw language,

outrageous characters, and embrace of controversial topics. The *Times* rated the show and comic strip as one of the most controversial cartoons of all time (Fitzpatrick). Despite this controversial image, in January 2006 the show was nominated for an NAACP Image Award for Best Comedy Series. The show offers critical insights and commentary not only on contemporary African American life but also Black history. *The Boondocks* is set in the virtually all-white suburb of Woodcrest, where the Freeman family lives.

The Boondocks, through its characters, produces an example of LBH, inviting viewers to critically engage in both history and the present. At least two of the characters bridge the gap between the Civil Rights Movement and contemporary Black life. For example, the character Robert "Granddad" Freeman, voiced by actor John Witherspoon, represents the mainstream Civil Rights legacy—those who lived through the struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. Granddad often tries to remind his grandchildren, Huey and Riley, about the struggles that he and his generation went through just for them to have basic civil and human rights. He was (allegedly) involved in the Civil Rights Movement and often reminds his grandsons of his contributions to the betterment of their lives today. However, he has difficulty living in a world of social media and contemporary Hip Hop culture.

Huey Freeman's character, which pays homage to Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton, voiced by Regina King, represents a present-day manifestation of the radical element of the Black Power Movement and he is often engaged in activist struggles within the Black community (Rhodes). Although informed by the Black (mostly male) radicals of the past, Huey has a sophisticated understanding of factors that currently impact Black Millennials, including the Prison Industrial Complex and the relevance of Black history in contemporary struggles.

Riley, on the other hand, also voiced by Regina King, represents the contemporary Black youth who knows little to nothing about Black history and is more interested in Hip Hop (gangsta) culture and capitalist enterprises than being socially consciousness. Riley's lack of historical consciousness causes him to tell Huey: "See, that's yo problem, you be believin' anything somebody tells you, or put in a book. See, I keep my mental mind extra secure—nuttin' gets in" ("The Return of the King"). Riley's comment suggests two things. First, Riley lacks any historical consciousness. Second, he learns a lot of his information from African American popular culture. In fact, through Riley and Huey, two brothers, McGruder

captures two distinct, if extreme, positions that have long existed within the Black community. This, no doubt, captures some of the complexity of the political outlook of Black Millennials as they spend more time watching television and consuming and creating various social media products online. This does not mean that Black Millennials do not know any history; however, popular culture can help expand their knowledge base in productive ways. All three characters represent certain views present among the Civil Rights Generation, the Black Power Generation, the Hip Hop Generation, and Black Millennials, in particular their relationship to Civil Rights history.

Black Millennials and the Meaning of Dr. King

Every year thousands of Black youth celebrate the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, especially in February during Black History Month. Indeed, a study conducted by Sam Wineburg and Chauncey Monte-Sano (2008) showed that for a group of 2,000 high school students across the country, Martin Luther King, Jr., was the most well-known figure in U.S. history. This should not be overlooked. What makes King so popular? Historian Clayborne Carson observed that while King played only a minor role in local movements, his intellectual prowess and leadership qualities made him a heroic figure.

In the wake of Black rebellions following the deaths of Mike Brown and Freddie Gray, both white Americans and segments of the Black community had invoked King's legacy as a way of chastising Black Millennials for their responses to the not guilty pleas rendered in each case of police brutality. President Obama, while calling some activists and protesters "thugs," has been checked by Black activists who have been quick to point out that these are responses to contemporary social conditions of racial inequality and exploitation. *The Boondocks'* episode on King is even more relevant today as his image and legacy have been re-appropriated and re-contextualized to criticize activists. This narrative ignores the fact that King, while a staunch advocate of non-violence, also understood *why* some individuals may begin to resort to the destruction of property: a sharp response to the intractability of exploitation and domination under racialized capitalism and an ever-expanding police state whose tactics have become more brutal over time.

This certainly applies to Black Millennials. Another factor that makes King popular—in conservative, liberal, and some radical circles—is his stance against oppression and how those constituents might interpret it. Even conservatives have

co-opted his legacy for their own purposes. Thus, *The Boondocks'* use of King as a historical case study and his meaning and legacy for Black Millennials is relevant, for it not only challenges conservative and liberal discourses surrounding King but also portrays his more radical beliefs.

"The Return of the King" is a fictional account of King's life. The story begins with the assassination attempt on King on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. Yet, instead of King dying, we are told by Huey that he was "critically injured." After a 32-year coma, King awakens on October 27, 2000, and slowly begins adjusting to a new society now inhabited by Black Millennials. To say this least, King struggles to adjust.

Huey's narration suggests that, since King had awakened from his coma, interest in him and his legacy spiked. He travels across the country making appearances; Oliver Stone is tapped to direct a movie about him titled *King*, starring Cuba Gooding, Jr. Comically, our narrator informs us that Spike Lee was "pissed" about Stone being selected as the movie's director. Noticing that the social ills he fought against, including capitalism, racism and militarism, have only continued to grow, King decides to write an autobiography titled a "Dream Deferred," a reference to Langston Hughes' poem, "A Dream Deferred." While we do not know the fictional book's argument, the episode implies that it challenges mainstream society's views about what King's legacy is *supposed* to be: non-violent and struggling *only* against Jim Crow segregation. We know that King, later in his life, spoke out against other social issues, including Vietnam, which made him very unpopular (Garrow 429). In the episode, King would, in another scene, proclaim on national television that he did not agree with the U.S. War on Terror. This shocked everyone. As a result, King's face was plastered on the front cover of *Time* magazine with the word "Traitor" prominently displayed below his image and he experienced a severe public backlash and was shunned as un-American. This scene mirrors how King was actually treated in his later years and offers what his views might be on U.S. military aggression today. It may be safe to assume that King's consistent and trenchant criticism of U.S. imperialism may have remained unchanged.

By the time King's book came out, he has been successfully branded unpatriotic and the seven-figure deal for King's book was rescinded, leading him to release a separate autobiography titled, *A Dream Deterred,* which was deemed "unimpressive" by local critics. King holds a book signing at a local bookstore and Huey, ever the historically conscious Black Millennial, along with his grandfather

and younger brother Riley, go to the store to have his book signed. As they approach King's table, no one is there and King wakes up, wiping drool from his mouth. He begins to sign Huey's book. Granddad, trailing Huey, is visibly upset about someone taking his parking spot. King immediately recognizes Granddad and states, "Robert Freeman?!" Granddad replies, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." They exchange pleasantries, and Granddad invites King to his house for dinner. Though the bookstore is virtually empty, King looks around and says he is still supposed to sign books for a few more hours. Overhearing their conversation, a young, white store employee turns to King and says, "Dude, just go." As they exit the bookstore, Granddad and King are walking side-by-side when Uncle Ruckus throws a brick at them which misses by quite a distance.

At dinner, Granddad, Huey, Riley, and King are joined by Tom DuBois, a district attorney in Woodcrest, along with his wife, Sarah, who is white, and their mixed-race daughter, Jasmine. During dinner, King confronts Granddad as to why he had been prank calling Rosa Parks. Though Granddad denies it, King, showing his increasing aptitude for modern technology, emphatically affirms, "She had the caller ID Robert." Granddad angrily snaps back, "She stole my thunder." Tom intervenes dismissively and says, "Robert!" But King affirms that Granddad was at the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The scene then shifts to a recollection of that now infamous moment on December 1, 1955.

In the scene, Granddad, Rosa Parks, and two other Black men are on the bus and tell each other to hold strong and not move from their seats. This scene is generally familiar to any young person who has learned something about Civil Rights history. Harnessing his dramatic license, McGruder presents Granddad sitting right next to Rosa. Upon being asked to move to the back of the bus by a white officer, the two Black men rush to the back, dancing and saying, "we's movin for ya, boss!" Granddad and Parks refuse to give up their seats. The officer appears to be talking only to Rosa and instructs her to leave. She does not, and this is repeated twice more. Granddad tries to place himself within the conversation but is ignored. The scene then fades back into the present.

This scene with Grandad and Parks is instructive on a number of levels in ways that could be useful for teaching Black youth. First, there were at least a few people before Rosa Parks who did, in fact, resist the humiliation of Jim Crow racism by not giving up their seat on a public bus. We can go back to Homer Plessy (whose case sparked the Supreme Court Decision Plessy V. Ferguson in 1896) and even Ida B. Wells, the Black anti-lynching activist in the late 19th century. There was

also a young Black woman who, only weeks prior to Parks, refused to give up her seat. Yet, we are often unaware of these preceding events. Destabilizing the idea of exceptional heroism reveals to Black Millennials that it was not a select few people who influenced historical change, although history is often taught that way. It also suggests something more: that there are many figures who remain on the margins of history, including Black women, simply for the fact of not being given the recognition that they deserve. In other words, this scene suggests that while we can all participate in social change, history usually only captures the actions of few.

During the episode, Tom DuBois is in awe of King, expressing his gratitude to be dining with the Reverend. Riley, however, is not amused. He does not believe that King is, in fact, THE Dr. King. He tells him, "You don't look famous. What are you, an actor? Is you Morgan Freeman?" Granddad yells at him and tells him that it is indeed Martin Luther King, Jr. This scene highlights a segment of Black Millennials and their lack of knowledge about Black history. On the one hand, we cannot be too upset with Riley, even in the fictional sense. After all, why would he believe that King was who he said he was? On the other hand, it suggests that there is more that can be done to bring to light the varied meanings of King and wrest his legacy away from the narrow confines in which it exists today. In addition to teaching youth about King's non-violent philosophy in opposition to Jim Crow, it would be useful to mention that he was an ardent supporter of the Anti-War Movement; he also opposed capitalism in the hands of a few. For King, racism was not a separate issue from class and the military industrial complex; they were intertwined. If youth were taught this version of King, perhaps we could further their developing notion of activism, which they are currently doing throughout the country.

Nonviolence vs. Armed Self-Defense

A major point of contention following the rebellions in Ferguson and Baltimore that emerged was the issue of non-violent protest and how protesters should resist. Should it be non-violent protest or should they use more "radical" means? The Black condition in the U.S. has never been one of non-violence *or* self-defense; both have existed side-by-side. "The Return of the King" offers a complex picture of this relationship. It shuns the often-portrayed non-violent versus violent binary. This allows for engagement regarding resistance methods used during the Civil

Rights Movement. This episode, then, is in line with recent scholarship that attempts to avoid the dichotomy between non-violence and armed self-defense (Hill; Jeffries; Tyson *Radio Free Dixei*; Wendt). It attempts to show how these political tactics worked in tandem.

The first mention of non-violence appears in the fictional television show *Politically Incorrect*. This show is aired October 15, 2001, a month and four days after the tragic events of 9/11. The host asks King, "You're an advocate of non-violence, but guess what, how do you think the United States should respond to the terrorist attacks of 9/11?" King, uncompromising in his stance for non-violence states, "Well, as a Christian, we are taught that you should love thy enemy and if attacked, you should turn the other cheek." The audience gasps in surprise. The following scenes show King being labeled a traitor on the front of *Time Magazine*, called an "ex-Civil Rights leader" by a White House aide, and, finally, criticized by people on the street. The book contract that King had, his movie, and his reputation were all ruined. Nonetheless, King and Huey remain loyal to the Civil Rights Movement.

The second scene of non-violence presents King on another television show which seems to mock the conservative news station Fox News' *Bill O'Reilly Show*. When King begins discussing his creation of a new leftist, revolutionary party, he is interrupted with shouting by the show's host. The host asks King a leading question, seeking to demonstrate his lack of patriotism:

Host: Do you love America?

King: I'm sorry?

Host: You sure as hell are, buddy. Why can't liberals ever answer that question with a simple yes. If you ask me, if I love America, I say yes. Why can't you say yes? Say you love America right now! Say it!

King: I will not be…

Host: Say it or shut up!

Host: We'll be right back with more [interrupted mid-sentence as Huey threw a chair on stage]… ("The Return of the King")

In the following scene, King and Huey are in the car. While Huey thought the interviewee went well, King attempts to show Huey the waywardness of his "violent" actions, stating, "You know, Huey, those of us who do adhere to the philosophy of non-violence frown upon the throwing of furniture to resolve our political differences." King acknowledges the existence of armed resistance as a political tactic but disagrees with its use. To be sure, King clearly acknowledges

that there are different ways to resist oppression whether he abides by them or not. Huey does not acknowledge this point, though.

King's position toward armed self-defense was nuanced. "The question was not whether one should use his gun when his home was attacked," King says. The issue, rather, was "whether it was tactically wise to use a gun while participating in an organized demonstration" (King 31-2). King, then, was not so dedicated to non-violence that he was unwilling to protect his family and property. These scenes and dialogue offer an entry point to discuss movement tactics and related goals, objectives, and intellectual aspects of the Civil Rights Movement.

While mainstream press would like to characterize King as the epitome of what resistance should be, this episode allows for a different portrayal of King and the limits of his political philosophy of non-violence. While King was a great leader, his philosophy of non-violence was not the norm for Blacks at the local level. African Americans have always considered both non-violence and armed self-defense as possible tools of resistance. In Huey Newton's essay "In Defense of Self-Defense," he makes this point clear: "There has always existed in the Black colony of Afro-America a fundamental difference over which tactics…Black people should employ in their struggle for national liberation" (138-42).

These scenes present, for Black Millennials, an opportunity to critically engage in the meaning of non-violence versus armed self-defense. The episode attempts to complicate this dichotomy, placing both side by side and suggesting that, even as Huey was a supporter of revolutionary violence, he also supported non-violent tactics of resistance. This is certainly not surprising, as the Black Panther Party had a host of social programs. Moreover, historian Timothy B. Tyson has argued that some Black activists found no contradiction between non-violent protest and armed self-defense. "The story of Robert F. Williams reveals that…'armed self-reliance' operated in the South in tension and in tandem with legal efforts and non-violent protest" (Tyson "Robert F. Williams," 541). The episode points out that just because Civil Rights activists did not fundamentally agree on methods of resistance, it did not mean they did not work side by side, for the same goal: Black liberation. This critical engagement with intra-Black coalitions has been another important issue facing those committed to Black Liberation (Carmichael and Hamilton 60-1).

The Civil Rights Movement's Legacy

What meaning does the Civil Rights Movement have for Black Millennials? Two scenes with Riley and Huey capture aspects of the generational divide and connection between the Civil Rights Movement and Black Millennials. The opening scene of the episode suggests a major generational gap. This scene consists of two separate quotes, which McGruder puts in conversation with one another. The first, is a quote McGruder offers from King: "I want young men and young women who are not alive today…to know and see that these new privileges and opportunities did not come without somebody suffering and sacrificing for them." The seeming lack of historical consciousness among Black Millennials is illustrated in the immediate response to King's quote in the very next frame with this second quote: "Whatever, nigga," signed, "Anonymous."

Whereas the Civil Rights generation had Jim Crow racism as public policy and were pretty much excluded from participating in American democracy, both politically and socially, Black Millennials do not experience the same type or degree of disfranchisement as did the Civil Rights generation, although some would argue—quite convincingly—that the emergence and consequences of mass incarceration is a new form of Jim Crow (Alexander 13), which also includes unprecedented inequality.

Scholars should help Black Millennials understand the types of racism they deal with in an age marked by post-racial discourse. Indeed, the same three evils King criticized years ago—capitalism, militarism, and racism—is alive and not only well, but unfortunately thriving. We have a lot to learn from those working on the ground as well. Because social media can serve as a useful tool for activism, we should carefully analyze how Black Millennials use it to share information and to learn, albeit, in a critical manner. We should participate with them by disseminating Black historical information rooted in sound research through mediums and pedagogies that resonate with Black Millennials.

In the *Boondocks* episode, the generational divide between Black Millennials and King is complex. While watching late night television alone on the couch, with Huey joining him, King flips through the channels to see what his people were being exposed to. He is utterly disappointed. He turns slowly to Huey, asking, "What happened, Huey? What happened to our people?" Huey slowly states, "I think," pausing, "everyone was waiting for Martin Luther King to comeback." King, depressingly states, "The Martin Luther King they're waiting for, Huey, is gone forever."

Initially, King seeks to reach out to Black youth, but he finds them politically disinterested and does not relate to them very well. Indeed, while walking around a shopping center with Huey, King becomes overwhelmed with the new technologies that have emerged since his coma: "Huey, I just don't think I belong in this new world. I don't know if I need the 20-gig iPod or the 40-gig. I tried to download some Mahalia Jackson, but I lost my iTunes password." While King struggles to adjust to modern technologies, Black Millennials use these technologies at will (although not all equally).

Later, Huey suggests that they found a political party to respond to the crisis in the Black community. When King asks about the political party, Huey affirms, "not just any political party—a black, *revolutionary* political party." King, believing he did not connect well with young people, states, "You should ask Oprah to do it. She's more popular and if you ask me, a darn pretty lady." King's statement is interesting and obviously out of touch, given Oprah's main demographic has long been middle class white women. King, though, takes on this challenge, and attempts to start the political organizing.

Trying to be relevant, King hires an urban promotions firm to spread the word about an upcoming political event. This is a major mistake. When Huey hears about the first meeting of their Black, revolutionary party on the radio, he asks, "Dr. King, why are they giving away tickets to our emergency action planning meeting on 95.5 WFRK, The 'Freak'?" King responds, showing his ignorance of media and this generation's ways for disseminating information, "Well, Huey, I thought about what you said about not having enough experience with modern media, so, I hired an urban promotions firm to help get the word out…Uh oh; was that bad?"

When they arrive at the emergency action planning meeting, it looks more like a bangin' club than an organizing event. In fact, when they try to enter, a bouncer stops Huey and King, stating, "I'll tell you right now, you ain gittin in with them shoes on." Huey responds, "what's wrong wit' my shoes?" Huey then states, "This is Dr. Martin Luther King." The doorman, more interested in making sure the party is properly secured and poppin', ironically responds, "So what, nigga, I'm Malcolm X."

When Huey and King finally walk into the room where the political party is taking place, they witness people who seemingly have no historical consciousness and no desire for constructive political action. In fact, Huey describes the event in this way, "The first black political party was everything you expected it to be. There was the preacher; the rapper truce, and, oh yea, there was also the inevitable fight."

McGruder presents a picture of a people who are not "woke" (social consciousness) to what is going on around them.

When King stands to speak, he tentatively says, "Excuse me, brothers and sisters, please. Someone turn it [the radio] off." When no one listens, King is forced to speak with a tone that will attract Black Millennials' attention: the *truth*. His tone becomes agitated and more aggressive. While King made one of the most powerful speeches in the summer of 1963, perhaps this fictional speech is more relevant for the Black Millennials. "Will you ignorant niggas please shut the hell up," King angrily shouts. "Is this it? This is what I got all those ass whoopins for. I had a dream once," King bemoans. "It was a dream that little black girls and little black boys would drink from the river of prosperity, free from the thirst of oppression." King continues, critiquing every negative aspect of Black Millennials:

> But lo and behold some four decades later, what have I found, but a bunch of trifling, shiftless, good for nothing niggas. And I know some of you don't want to hear me say that word. It's the ugliest word in the English language. But that's what I see now, niggas. And you don't want to be a nigga cause niggas are living contradictions. Niggas are full of unfulfilled ambitions. Niggas watch and wane, niggas love to complain. Niggas love to hear themselves talk but hate to explain. Niggas love bein another man's judge and jury. Niggas procrastinate until it's time to worry. Niggas love to be late, niggas hate to hurry. Black Entertainment Television is the worst thing I've ever seen in my life. Usher, Michael Jackson is not a genre of music. And now I'd like to talk about *Soul Plane*. I've seen what's around the corner, I've seen what's over the horizon, and I promise ya, you niggas have nothing to celebrate. And no I won't get there with you, I'm going to Canada. ("The Return of the King")

After his exhortation, King quietly walks off the stage, looking relieved. He then slowly looks down to Huey, and says, "Thank you, Huey. Do what you can." This powerful speech, while fictional, makes an important call for action. It was not the "I Have a Dream" King that the mainstream media presents every January. On the surface, it might seem that the fictional King was engaging in a sort of respectability politics, blaming poor and working class blacks for their situations—similar to that which Bill Cosby did to Black folks at the NAACP Awards in 2004 (Dyson). However, on a deeper level, we read it as a call to action, as a way for people to stop indulging in capitalist consumption, and as a way to more carefully engage in a radical critique of society at large, or, to put it another way, become angry, as

queer Black feminist Audre Lorde instructs us. It also provides an opportunity to think about the role of history in our current efforts at liberation.

If this speech were to be given alongside the more "radical" speeches and exhortations of King, it has potential to be a "living black history" text and could lead young people to more critically engage King's intellectual trajectories beyond "I have a dream." Ironically, this critical exhortation did lead to action—although in a fictional world. Yet, even King knew that there was an urgent need for change in the Black community, stating, "We are faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now" (22). King believed that if action were to take place, it must be now.

After King's exhortation and critique of Black Millennials, Huey narrates the people's subsequent reactions. Huey states, "King's speech was replayed the entire next day on the cable news channels. Then, something unexpected happened; people got angry." Subsequently, King's exhortation first led to non-violent methods of resistance. One newscaster says, "Nobody knows exactly what to attribute to the sharp decline in African American dropout rates." Another narrator states, "that is, every African American player in the NBA refuses to play until there is a full troop withdrawal." The next news anchor states, "billionaire Bob Johnson apologizing to Black America for the network he founded." And, finally, a newscaster states, the "White House and Congress are receiving an unprecedented amount of calls from irate African Americans." This scene continues by showing angry Black Americans at the White House gates ready to revolt. It also shows the armed wing of the U.S. government—the police—preparing to respond. Sure enough, the police officers shoot tear gas into the crowd, fire rounds of ammunition, and the crowd scatters seeking cover. Huey then states, "and the revolution finally came." As the crowd is under attack, Huey states, "it's fun to dream."

Unfortunately, while the last scene illustrates potential methods of challenging structural racism in the U.S., it also plausibly captures the potential responses by the federal government. It shows that when African Americans become angry and challenge the status quo, the U.S. government suppresses their efforts with violence. This has historically been the case. What messages does this episode convey to Black Millennials? It says that both non-violent and revolutionary violence are possible avenues for freedom and that they can work in tandem. And Black Lives Matter activists are showing that both forms of action, including, now,

social media, can exist to help alter the conditions that are harming Black Millennials.

Conclusion

Black Millennial scholars may be uniquely situated to help guide Black youth in exploring the meanings and relevance Black history has in their lives particularly through its manifestations in popular culture. As popular culture is without a doubt a major part of Black youth cultures and identities, we as Black Millennial scholars have a responsibility—which we will either fulfill or betray—to make our work relevant, examining and interpreting Black popular culture as an integral part of our research and scholarship. We must find new ways to disseminate Black histories and popular culture, for postmodern Black youth, in ways that appeal to their global sense of self. To be sure, cultural critic Mark Anthony Neal states it best when he argues that intelligentsia should "rearticulate these highly theoretical ideas into language accessible to the very masses, black or otherwise, to which black popular culture is so crucial" (130).

Non-traditional Black popular culture texts such as Black Twitter will not supplant books; it would be foolish to suggest such a thing. However, if Black popular culture is critically shared with Black Millennials, with some enlightened guidance, it will prove to be a powerful tool for disseminating information and facilitating critical inter-generational conversations.

We end this essay by reaffirming that Black Lives, do in fact, Matter. Specific to this essay, Black popular culture and Black history also matters. They matter for the future of our people, the youth we want to educate, and ourselves. When textbooks in the United States omit the important (exploited) labor that early African Americans expended to help build this country and that represents, along with indigenous dispossession, the great and ongoing sin of this nation, it is important now more than ever that we place extra emphasis on the continued struggle to educate our youth, in and out of schools.

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Trap Spaces, Trap Music: Harriet Jacobs, Fetty Wap, and Emancipation as Entrapment

SEAN M. KENNEDY

Set in a New York City trap house—an apartment that serves as the hub for an outlaw drug business—Fetty Wap's 2014 song and video "Trap Queen" depicts the stacks of U.S. currency and the manufacture of product that are core aspects of the genre of trap music. But the song and video also portray an outlier to this strategic essentialism: namely, the loving romance at its center which challenges the mainstream common sense of the misogyny of rap. Likewise, the sonics of "Trap Queen"—upbeat, even joyful—contrast with the aural hardness of much of the genre. In these ways, "Trap Queen" is an important pop-cultural political intervention against both the enduring pathologizing of Black life and the sense of siege with which many Black people, especially poor ones, are perceived to live.[1]

But while Fetty Wap's persona in "Trap Queen" can be understood as a homo-economicus figure (Wynter 123) of the informal economy—a breadwinner who can self-determine his own life, albeit within the narrow bounds of criminalized enterprise—that burdened self-possession is doubled for his female partner presented as a woman who will happily do anything for her "man," from cooking crack to giving him a lap dance (see Figure 1). These labors are shown to be uncoerced. Nevertheless, the larger structures of the racial-capitalist formal economy essentially force many Black women into such gendered survival labor. Indeed, the situation of these women, which Fetty Wap's "trap queen" only partially evokes, illustrates the thinness of freedom under liberal democracy of which emancipation from slavery is considered paradigmatic. But while emancipation secured the "right" to wage labor for people whose toil was formerly

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1. Following many scholars and critics, I capitalize "Black" and other minoritized racial identifications and lower-case "white" in service to reversing difference-based hierarchies.

SEAN M. KENNEDY is a visiting assistant professor in the English department of Gettysburg College, where he previously held a Consortium for Faculty Diversity postdoctoral fellowship. Using his training in Black studies, postcolonial studies, and American studies, Dr. Kennedy's research and teaching aim to enhance understandings of global political economy, governance, and social relations; decolonization and abolition; and political, cultural, and media form. In 2020, he received his Ph.D. in English from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Visit https://sean-m-kennedy.com for more information.

unfree, Lincoln's celebrated proclamation left in place the overall system of racial capitalism, which, twinned with settler colonialism, continues to structure daily life and self and collective imaginaries in representatively governed nation-states like the U.S. Indeed, 155 years after Black people were said to become free, the dual traps at the heart of "Trap Queen"—that of the fugitive male protagonist and that of his idealized female counterpart, a fugitive herself—suggest that emancipation is a profitable form, in many ways, of entrapment.

In the following, I think through two related ideas of "trap" for what they reveal about the ongoing contours of the afterlife—or afterlives—of slavery. The first and foundational notion I attend to is Harriet Jacobs's attic space in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), where Jacobs hides for years until she can make her way north to ostensible freedom. And yet, following Saidiya Hartman's well-known discussion in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), Jacobs's predicament—stuck between a possible return to bondage and a possible permanent escape from it—continues to vex her in her New York City life.

The second notion of "trap" to which I turn is the structural compulsion for Black women to engage in criminalized survival labor. Beth Richie named this tendency *gender entrapment* in her 1996 study *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered Black Women*—an overlooked analytical companion to *Scenes of Subjection*—and it is not substantially different from Harriet Jacobs's dilemma. That is, while Jacobs can find formal employment as a domestic worker in late-nineteenth-century New York and the women of Richie's study are able to find informal employment as criminalized workers in the late-twentieth-century city, in both cases their labor choices are effectively predetermined for them. In this way, they are both trapped, or entrapped, by political economic logics that profoundly shape the life chances of Black people.

I argue that these twin notions of "trap"—incomplete self-possession on the one hand and the survival imperative to commit "crime" on the other—converge in the outlaw drug economy and its social relations that "Trap Queen" and the genre of trap music, at large, portray. Moreover, the massive popularity of "Trap Queen"—viewed 592,863,832 times and counting[2]—illustrates the slippery political work of dominant forms of representation in managing both imaginaries and mainstream

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2. According to YouTube as of this writing. The video is one of the site's "most viewed" "of all time"; the song also tops search results on Genius for "trap."

common sense. This work can be seen especially when a cultural product from an underground genre surfaces into widespread visibility such as "Trap Queen" accomplished vis-à-vis the trap genre. As the debut single by an unknown New Jersey artist, "Trap Queen" benefited from two main factors on its way to iconic status: (1) social media, which carried the song from a specialist audience to the mainstream over many months[3] and (2) Wap's savvy sense of what the popular market demanded: not a fugitive narrative or portentous soundscape—the two elements at the base of the trap genre—but a story of freedom wrapped in a rosy aurality. In this reframing, however, the carceral state and the risk of entrapment into criminalized labor disappear and the trap house becomes an anodyne site of home-based employment unencumbered by the rule of law and its agents. The trappers, meanwhile, become like royalty, rising from the bottom of normative social, political, and economic life to its apex.

Fantasy is one of the key levers of pop music: for the three or four minutes of a song or video, listeners and viewers trade their positions in the status quo for ones of improved status. In this way, "Trap Queen" is a pop masterwork: it re-presents the real-life traps that structurally unemployed Black people face as moments of carefree, though gendered, abundance. The vision Fetty Wap purveys replaces the threat of capture and control that has shadowed Indigenous peoples from the African continent and their descendants in the U.S., both before and after Emancipation, with a fiction of unfettered will and self-containment. No doubt this optic does important affective labor. But is that emotional-psychic reward worth the trade-off in attention to material reality, especially at the scale of "Trap Queen's" audience, most of whom may now have Wap's representation as their only reference point for "trap life"? And if that trade-off is not worth it, what must be done to change this process of re-presenting material reality for mass success?

I turn next to a reading of Hartman's influential chapter of *Scenes of Subjection*, "Seduction and the Ruses of Power," to draw out the deep entanglements of enslavement, criminalization, and gender entrapment on the one hand and discourses of freedom on the other. I then examine the intertwined emergence of the carceral state and hip hop in the late twentieth century and the trap genre's innovations of the early twenty-first century before homing in on "Trap Queen"

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3. The song was released to SoundCloud in March 2014; it debuted on *Billboard*'s top singles chart the "Hot 100" in January 2015 and reached its peak chart position of number 2 on May 16, 2015. See Lipshutz 2015 and "Fetty Wap Chart History."

and gender entrapment. I conclude by offering a few more thoughts on the politics of popular culture today.

Captivity, Crime, and Property in the Self: Three Afterlives of Slavery

On one level, the thinness of emancipation is not surprising: critics of liberalism have shown time and again that the political economic system of representative democracy yoked to private enterprise falls far short of its repetitive promises of individual rights and personal freedom.[4] Genuine self-determination, instead, is reserved only for people who have amassed enough capital of their own that they do not depend on the wage relation, directly or indirectly, for their livelihood. Indeed, it was Hartman's conception of the "afterlife of slavery" and the "illusory freedom and travestied liberation" of formal emancipation that arguably catalyzed anew scholarship from a Black and Brown perspective on the sharp limits of liberal humanism (12). In this section, however, I examine three afterlives of slavery that have not received as much attention as Hartman's other interventions in *Scenes of Subjection*: namely, crime, captivity, and property in the self.

As she makes clear in the chapter that centers in part on *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, captivity and crime are closely linked in historical U.S. slave law. This link was secured through the contradiction of slave agency: the enslaved person was understood to be captive, on the one hand, because of their enslavement—not a person but property—and agential, on the other hand, to rationalize their punishment. Writes Hartman: "The slave was recognized as a reasoning subject who possessed intent and rationality solely in the context of criminal liability; ironically, the slave's will was acknowledged only as it was prohibited or punished" (82). Moreover, this cruel irony of agency and captivity was most profound in the context of the rape of enslaved women, who "could neither give nor refuse consent, nor offer reasonable resistance, yet they were criminally responsible and liable"

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4. See, for example, Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke UP, 2014), 31. Moreover, in his critique of "nominal emancipations" as opposed to "a different sort of freedom" and "liberty's true potentiality," Weheliye references Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* as well as Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (U of Minnesota P, 2003); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2003); Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford UP, 2008); and José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York UP, 2009).

(Hartman 82).[5]

Further, because of the routine rape of enslaved women by their owners and the small acts of resistance of such women even in the context of sexual assault, the enslaved woman faced greater criminalization than enslaved men. Hartman tracks this dynamic in Jacobs's reflection in *Incidents* on her tactics to rile her master such as when Jacobs writes (via the pseudonym Linda Brent) that "I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I favored another; and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in that small way" ("Chapter X"). In response to such transgressions, Jacobs recalls Flint calling her "criminal towards" him ("Chapter XI"); as Hartman notes, the "repeated use of the term 'crime' throughout the narrative documents the displacement of culpability onto the enslaved and crime as a predominant mode of black subjection" (105). Indeed, crime, "in its elasticity, encompasses all efforts to escape, expose, and redress injury" (Hartman 105). Although there are other arguments about the origin of crime, Hartman makes a persuasive case through the analysis referenced here that crime, at least in the U.S. context, is inseparable from the management of slavery and enslaved people-as-property. In the afterlife of slavery, then, "crime" both inheres in the figure of the Black person and signals the state and state-backed crimes committed against Black people. In other words, "crime"—a highly elastic concept as Hartman notes—has no inherent, authoritative meaning because it is a relation of power with parties across that relation always in struggle over the meaning of crime.

There is a similar elasticity to the concept of captivity. For instance, after she escapes Flint, Jacobs's attic hideaway—a trap space where she famously spent seven years eluding her captor and his "slave-hunters"—is not only a place of "imprisonment," as she describes it, but also a place of refuge and one that offered small but important pleasures such as "a glimpse of one twinkling star" ("Chapter XXIX").[6] Indeed, the "loophole" Jacobs "bore" through the attic enclosure afforded

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5. Hartman notes this dichotomy extended to the sexual punishment of enslaved men.

6. "I hardly expect that the reader will credit me, when I affirm that I lived in that little dismal hole, almost deprived of light and air, and with no space to move my limbs, for nearly seven years. But it is a fact; and to me a sad one, even now; for my body still suffers from the effects of that long imprisonment, to say nothing of my soul…Countless were the nights that I sat late at the little loophole scarcely large enough to give me a glimpse of one twinkling star. There, heard the patrols and the slave-hunters conferring together about the capture of runaways, well knowing how rejoiced they would be to catch me."

her a bit of fresh air, not to mention frequent sightings of her children ("Chapter XXI").[7]

The title of the chapter in which Jacobs discusses the loophole is called "The Loophole of Retreat." Hartman understands retreat in this context as "a space of freedom that is at the same time a space of captivity," a double bind that illustrates "the difficulties experienced in trying to assume the role of free and self-possessed individual" (9). As such, "freedom" for Black people post-emancipation is a kind of trap, burdened by both the legacies of enslavement and the exploited labor of the wage, the latter "underlined" for Hartman by "Jacobs's continued servitude" as a domestic in New York City, whose only "newly acquired property" is "the self" (112). In other words, although Jacobs is free, she is still subject to the wage relation and to the residual effects of the chattel relation upon which the wage relation is based. Put differently, whereas Jacobs was directly forced to work under enslavement, she is now indirectly forced to work by the terms of "free" labor under racial capitalism. She has moved, that is, from chattel slavery to "wage slavery," which is distinguished precisely by the fact it is not chattel slavery. So, while Jacobs now "owns" herself, she owns nothing else and must work to live—and work in a severely limited labor market for Black people.

The survival efforts of Jacobs and other Black women, whether enslaved or fugitive, nonconsensual laborer or wage worker, also underline Hartman's theory of "akin to freedom," based on the distinction Jacobs makes between "giv[ing] one's self" to a lover versus "submit[ting] to compulsion" in the case of the master's sexual demands ("Chapter X"). "There is something akin to freedom" in the former scenario, Jacobs writes. As Hartman points out, however, this "something akin to freedom" is fully circumscribed by the much greater agency white women had in this regard by virtue of white supremacy and the legitimacy of the white family (104). Nevertheless, in keeping with Jacobs's other acts against the dehumanizing, sexually violating system of slavery, her notion of "something akin to freedom" is among the "possible gains to be made in the context of domination."

Hartman, in turn, traces the components of this "akin to freedom," writing that, "like freedom itself, [it] reveals the indebtedness of liberty to property and to an alienable and exchangeable self" (110). Moreover, while "[t]his order of

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7. "But I groped round; and having found the side next the street, where I could frequently see my children, I stuck the gimlet in and waited for evening. I bored three rows of holes, one above another; then I bored out the interstices between. I thus succeeded in making one hole about an inch long and an inch broad. I sat by it till late into the night, to enjoy the little whiff of air that floated in."

property"—of giving one's self to another—is "markedly different from that of chattel slavery," "sexuality is at the heart of this exchange," just as it is (was) under chattel slavery (Hartman 112). It is this political economic analysis arrived at through her consideration of crime and captivity that characterizes the burdened individuality and travestied liberation of post-emancipation Black people. Hartman shows, in the first instance, that becoming free meant becoming free to work for a wage: that is, to be exploited for profit rather than being owned as a commodity. In the second instance, she demonstrates that this shift in contractual relations for Black people—from a self that is owned by contract, to a self that is one's own, to contract out for hire—is authorized by both racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy. Emancipation, then, can be understood as an entrapment into racial-capitalist wage work rather than freedom from the wage and racial capitalism. And at the center of that entrapment is the gender entrapment of Black women, forced to do whatever they can to survive whether nonconsensual labor, wage work, or "crime."

Akin to Freedom: The Carceral State and the Trap Genre

Like Harriet Jacobs and many other formerly enslaved people, trap as a music genre also moved from the U.S. South to the North, albeit at a much later historical moment. The genre was popularly codified through Atlanta rapper T.I.'s 2003 album *Trap Muzik*, the first song of which, eponymously titled, presents the key features of the genre. First, the idea of the "trap," which is likened both to a "dope house" but also to a larger predicament for Black recording artists that includes the music industry (suggested by the couplet "This a trap / This ain't no album") ("Trap Muzik"). The second feature is a sense of fugitivity—"Man wherever I be / The feds got me scoped out"—but one not limited to the narrator's involvement in an outlaw drug business. Rather, the "feds" have him "scoped out" "wherever I be": a clear statement that the ontological condition of his life is fugitive. Indeed, midway through the song comes the sound of police sirens and then the sounds of running and jumping a metal fence.

As this defining track demonstrates, trap music as a genre depicts the carceral state and its primary targets: the surplus population of people who have been structurally unemployed from the formal economy for any number of reasons and who, in many cases, have turned to informal economies to make a living. And because they are employed in such criminalized enterprise (such as the outlaw drug business), they face a higher risk of contact with the police and the criminal-justice

system—and, therefore, a higher risk of imprisonment. These risks are compounded for Black people because of the way crime, historically, is attached to them in the afterlife of slavery and because of present and past anti-Black discrimination in education and in the formal economy, which left many Black people out of work when Fordist industries collapsed with the onset of contemporary globalization in the late 1960s and 1970s.

California was a bellwether for the emergence of the carceral state, given both the size of the state's economy and the influence of governor-turned-president Ronald Reagan. Indeed, the growth of the prison-industrial complex in the Golden State was directly related to the political economic need to "take more than 160,000 low-wage workers off the streets" (Gilmore 88). These workers were one of four surpluses idled during the U.S. recession of the 1970s, the others being finance capital, land, and state capacity (Gilmore 85). The "prison fix" became a way to put these surpluses back in action while also addressing restive out-of-work and insecurely employed groups of people. The political cover for this economic reconfiguration was an enhanced deployment of law-and-order politics through campaigns such as the "war on crime" and the "war on drugs." As Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes, the "containment of crime, understood as an elastic category spanning a dynamic alleged continuum of dependency and depravation," became the problem that needed to be solved (85-6). The state "solved" it, in part, by ramping up its criminalization of poor and low-income people—and capturing them in cages. In sum, as prison became a "fix" for various social issues the state no longer wanted to address, structural unemployment became a "set-up for criminalization," as Tryon Woods describes it.

At the same time as the carceral state was emerging in California, soon to take hold elsewhere in the U.S., New York City underwent its own political economic transformation: from a robust welfare state to a state of austerity. Triggered by the city's fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s, financial capitalists, other elites, and the Ford administration worked together to dismantle the public services the city had amassed since the Great Depression in a formidable act of neoliberal revanchism.[8] Across the city, at least half a million jobs were lost from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, and as many as one-and-a-quarter million people faced cutbacks to their

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8. On neoliberal revanchism, see Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (Routledge, 1996). On the details of the political economic response to the city's fiscal crisis, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (Metropolitan Books, 2017).

public assistance (a prelude to "workfare"). The City University of New York, which only a few years earlier had opened admissions far more than ever before, started charging tuition, which immediately reduced student enrollment. Meanwhile, racist spatial policies like urban renewal, redlining, and blockbusting meant that poor and low-income New Yorkers were also more housing insecure just as they experienced greater financial insecurity.

In post-Fordist, post-fiscal-crisis New York, then, economically disenfranchised people had been re-routed from their longstanding neighborhoods to new ones devoid of jobs, experiencing what Mindy Fullilove has called "root shock" in the process. And though construction of public housing boomed, the lack of formal work for its residents, particularly for young women and men, meant that informal work had to fill the void. If housing projects would later become a common site for the drug trade, it only made sense. If people have a place to live but no formal work, it is only rational to become entrepreneurial and sell a product that people want.

Hip hop, it bears reminding, emerged against this backdrop of political economic transformation: the attenuation of formal jobs and public services on the one hand and the rise of the carceral state on the other. Indeed, in neighborhoods such as the South Bronx, the birthplace of hip hop, youth unemployment was as a high as 80 percent in the late 1970s (Chang 13). "If blues culture had developed under the conditions of oppressive, forced labor," as Jeff Chang writes, "hip-hop culture would arise from the conditions of no work" (13). More than two decades later, trap music emerged as an ongoing chronicle of the latest forms of criminalization that Black and Brown people contend with as they continue to encounter a scarcity of jobs and discrimination in the formal job market. And, yet, this musical-lyrical archive of experience largely excludes women as equal players as "Trap Queen" pointedly shows.[9]

Trappin'

Fetty Wap's "Trap Queen" video, released August 7, 2014, has been viewed, as of this writing, more than half-a-billion times, making it, arguably, the most widely seen depiction of a trap house (see Figure 1). As a set of lyrics and images, the song

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9. I should be clear here that I'm not singling out trap music for its tendency to elide or marginalize women, which is a tendency across the music industry. As well, there are female trap producers, such as Jlin, and I analyze Rihanna's use of the trap genre in a work in progress.

and video hew closely to the expected elements of the trap-music genre. These elements include verbal and visual references to U.S. currency, often being counted into stacks (here, by Fetty Wap's character or his "trap queen," or girlfriend); the process of making product (here, cooking crack and meth on a stovetop); and weed smoking, in which everyone partakes. The song's connection to trap sonics, by contrast, is quite tenuous. Instead of the hard-edged, menacing aurality of the genre overall, "Trap Queen" sounds open, laidback, and fun. Altogether, if trap music is typically a bleak account of so-called "thug life," then in Fetty Wap's hands this life is a joyful heterotopia in which self-determination can be achieved sans interference from the law. No doubt this bracing vision of possibility goes a long way toward explaining the song and video's massive popularity, on par only with Katy Perry's and Rihanna's fellow crossover trap tracks "Dark Horse" (2013) featuring well-known trap artist Juicy J and "Bitch Better Have My Money" (2015), respectively.

Although trap music may seem "apolitical," particularly in contrast to the liberal humanism purveyed by Kendrick Lamar (Burton 72), politics is more than ideology, belief, or conscious intent. Indeed, cultural studies scholars from Stuart Hall to Richard Iton have shown that mass cultural products are profound sites of politics, perhaps especially when they are "unrecognizable as politics," as Iton writes (17). Moreover, "a deep engagement with popular culture might enhance our understanding of developments in the formal political arena and…compel a revision of our notions of the political" (Iton 29). Trap music, then, like any other form of cultural production, is a generative venue to trace political developments and possibilities. Further, given its deviance from liberal norms, trap music is a formidable example of what Iton calls the "black fantastic": that is, "the minor-key sensibilities generated from the experiences of the underground, the vagabond, and those constituencies marked as deviant" (16).

Arguably, the primary "minor-key sensibility generated" by "Trap Queen" is its representation of an informal economy in which waged work might not exist. I write "might not" because it is unclear from the song and video what the economic arrangements are of this particular outlaw drug business. Certainly, the depiction of the "trap queen" herself is scored with multiple kinds of unwaged domestic and emotional labor, befitting the song and video's heteropatriarchal framework. And the labor of the lower-level employees—the court attendants, as it were, in this quasi-monarchical vision—is almost out of the frame entirely, save for a few glimpses in the background.

Figure 1. Selected Screenshots from Fetty Wap's "Trap Queen" Video (2014)

On the other hand, given the absence of police or any other threats to the trappers' security and livelihood, the scenario presented by the song and video could be construed as a post-racial-capitalist future in which Black people either control the means of production or are agents in some other economic arrangement. In this interpretation, the drugs stand in for any goods of trade. It is the possibility of genuinely unfettered self and collective determination that is the point, not what the goods are. Indeed, the substitution of an actual fruit pie in the video for the kilo of coke referred to in the lyrics as "pie" completes the fantasy of the song's narrator ("Trap Queen"). That is, he has transposed the material circumstances that entrap people in the outlaw drug business for a vision of life independent of those circumstances. Furthermore, this vision is a type of "gain" that can be made in the context of domination, as Hartman averred.

Then, again, this liberatory possibility is foreclosed by its marginalizing of the female character. Since heteropatriarchy is inseparable from racial capitalism, it is impossible to be free of one and not the other. The moniker "Trap Queen" is an honorific applied to the male narrator's female partner but it belies the exploited labor she contributes in support of the man's agency and pleasure. The song and video elide her plight in a humorous sleight-of-hand that obscures not only her gendered labor, here a send-up of stereotypical labors and desires that inhere in the figure of women under heteropatriarchy, but also the material harms women involved in trap houses or the outlaw drug industry overall may suffer.

The flicker of self-determination on view in "Trap Queen" is also compromised by the song and video's own status as a product of the U.S. mass-entertainment industry. Without putting too fine a point on it, the purpose of such products is to generate profit for the corporations involved. So, while "Trap Queen" makes a couple of political interventions—its interruption of the pathetic accounts of Black life as promulgated by liberal-democratic discourse and its fleeting sense of an alternative future—these inroads are contradicted by the structures of racial capitalism which will not allow a fully liberatory image or narrative to take flight.

Indeed, the song and video's erasure of the police and the prison-industrial complex overall contributes to the mystification of the conditions of life and labor that trap music, as an underground genre to this moment, has worked to expose. In other words, the incomplete heterotopic vision "Trap Queen" unveils—arguably the reason for its popular success—obscures the struggles of real-world "trappers" to make a living under arduous circumstances. And these workers include women who must contend not just with racial capitalism but with heteropatriachy, too.

Gender Entrapping

Published one year before *Scenes of Subjection*, Beth E. Richie's *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered Black Women* is an important complement to the former. Although the two works emanate from different disciplines and deploy different methodologies, they are both focused on the subjection of Black women to violence—and their concomitant criminalization— as a function of political economic design. Specifically, Richie's emphasis on battered and criminalized Black women being "forced to make hard choices with very few options" tracks with Hartman's focus on the double bind of enslaved women in sexual encounters with their masters and with the overall burdened individuality of Black people post-emancipation.[10]

In her interviews with three groups of poor women detained at New York City's Rikers Island jail—Black battered women, Black non-battered women, and white battered women—Richie discovered the elements that would form her theory of gender entrapment. Extending the normative legal definition of entrapment, "which implies a circumstance whereby an individual is lured into a compromising act," Richie defines gender entrapment as both the circumstances that cause battered Black women to commit crimes *and* the penalties they face in the criminal-justice system for these acts. These penalties are meted out despite the infractions being "logical extensions of their racialized gender identities, their culturally expected gender roles, and the violence in their intimate relationships" (Richie 4). In essence, the women's social and economic conditions set them up for criminalization. They could not leave their abusive male partners for financial reasons, and they did not want to leave out of fear of being perceived a failure by themselves and by others. Meanwhile, stereotypes of Black women as tough and resilient foreclosed the possibility of any nuanced understanding of their predicament. People assumed the battered women should have been able to leave their partners or that the abuse they suffered was not as bad as it was. As Richie writes, "The factor that distinguished the African American women who were battered from those African American women who were not battered was the degree to which they *aspired* to the ideological norm" (her emphasis, 135). Importantly, this ideological norm derives

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10. Richie makes the claim of Black women being "forced to make hard choices with very few options" in various ways throughout the introduction to *Compelled to Crime*, beginning on page 1.

from the convergence of the historical logics of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy—a convergence that is part of the afterlife of slavery and which continues to mediate the perceived being of Black women through the fictions of white womanhood. In this way, the idealized female partner of "Trap Queen" opens a window onto one of the primary dynamics undergirding gender entrapment: the aspiration to fit a normative (white) female gender role.

The enduring charge of misogyny against Black male rappers is a historical tension. Indeed, the charge gave rise in part to the theory of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw Williams, who took the obscenity trial of 2 Live Crew in 1990 as an occasion to reflect on a certain scholarly privileging of the harm to Black men over that to Black women (Crenshaw 1282-83). While she too opposed the prosecution of 2 Live Crew, Crenshaw highlighted the way Black women were marginalized in the discussion of the trial and, further, how Black women were generally marginalized "by a politics of race alone or gender alone" (1283). She concludes that "a political response to each form of subordination [racial and gendered] must at the same time be a political response to both."

At this current historical moment, when intersectionality theory and identity politics are criticized from both the left and the right—even as the Right continues to operationalize perceived white suffering in service to a renewed white-supremacist movement—analyzing a popular text like "Trap Queen" in its multiple dimensions is all the more important. Against the fierce, multi-pronged campaign by elites to mystify both the material conditions of life and the social relations of people, all products of racial capitalism require scrutiny. This assessment is perhaps never more urgent than when fictions pose as truths whether in the case of "Trap Queen" or emancipation at large. We must always watch out for the traps and "say her name," as activists online and off call us to do.[11]

Emancipation as Entrapment

Finally, "Trap Queen" is an excellent case study for how and why underground genres (or subgenres) cross over to mass popularity in the twenty-first century. By taking arguably the most important trope of the modern age—freedom—Fetty Wap mystified the material conditions that entrap structurally unemployed Black people

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11. The African American Policy Forum created the Twitter hashtag campaign #SayHerName in 2015 to counter the erasure of Black women from mainstream discourse as victims and survivors of police violence. See Williams and Ritchie 2015.

into criminalized activity. In so doing, however, Fetty Wap also obscured the work of gender, intersecting with race, in entrapping some battered Black women into "crime." As such, and against the song and video's progressive tendencies, a conservative, even reactionary, politic is "trapped" inside "Trap Queen": the reproduction of the logics of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy that first converged in the development of racial capitalism and settler colonialism on the bodies and lands of Indigenous peoples across the world. In other words, the very same rationale used to criminalize both enslaved Black women in the U.S. and some battered Black women post-Emancipation is reflexively deployed in "Trap Queen" through the guise of freedom—that is, emancipation by another word.

In some respects, this contradiction is nothing new: cultural products of high consumption have always been riven with tensions both historical and contemporary. Instead, what I seek to underscore vis-à-vis "Trap Queen" is how the dictates of mass entertainment—popular culture—require many Black artists (and many Indigenous artists and artists of color) to play by the rules, as it were, of racial-capitalist and settler-colonialist structures like heteropatriarchy and white supremacy in order for these artists to be heard and seen. This compulsion to reproduce dominant norms is also a form of entrapment, albeit a profitable, metaphorical one, in stark contrast to the structural entrapment of people by dint of race and gender which offers no long-term profit for them but incarceration or the ongoing threat of it.

To be clear, Fetty Wap is not to "blame" for purveying a fantasy into worldwide renowned and better odds at staying power in the music industry and mass-entertainment firmament than most debut artists. But the trap laid inside that vision—the alibi of emancipation that covers for the gender politics of slavery—makes it harder to abolish the structure of entrapment at the core of the carceral state. Accordingly, to achieve genuine abolition once and for all, mass *movements* are needed (as ever), not mass entertainments, no matter how transformative they may seem.

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Fallacy of the Nut Pussy:
Cross Dressing, Black Comedy, and Women

KATRINA THOMPSON MOORE

At the 2009 Black Entertainment Television music awards show, a parody of a movie trailer was shown. It begins with the backside image of a hefty Black woman, walking in a floral-print dress while wearing a gray-haired wig. Words appear on the screen: "You've seen the grandmother go to the picnic. You've seen the grandmother go to jail, but what do you know about the original mad Black woman?" As the background music starts, an image of two Black women figures appears on the screen. Both women rob a bank with guns in hand. These characters are wearing blond wigs and long colorful fingernails, and each has protruding, colorful lips and an overly large, padded buttocks. In the midst of the bank robbery, a White male security guard heroically runs into the bank, yelling, "Freeze, Skanks!" Within this two-minute movie trailer, the audience learns that this film is titled *Skank Robbers*, brought to them by the makers of *Godzilla* and the producers of *Planet of the Apes*. At the end of the clip, a deep, masculine voice tells the audience, "She's the brain, she's the brawn, and they're both the ugly" (Stephenson).

This phony movie trailer was so well received it was considered as a possible film by Screen Gems Film Company ("What Ever Happened"). This parody offered images of three of the most popular cross-dressed performances of Black male comedians from the 1990s until today: Martin Lawrence's role as Sheneneh Jenkins in the Fox television series *Martin*, Jamie Foxx's character, Wanda, from the Fox comedy series *In Living Color*, and most recently, Tyler Perry's portrayal and franchise of Madea in numerous films and television and theater productions.

Within the African American community, cross-dressing, more specifically, Black men portraying Black women, has often been met with great controversy. Todd Boyd argues that, "[p]erhaps by feminizing the image of Black masculinity,

KATRINA THOMPSON MOORE is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and African American Studies at Saint Louis University. Her research focuses on the construction and display of race and gender in popular culture from the nineteenth century until present day. She is the author of *Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery*. Her reviews and essays have appeared in *Black Women, Gender, and Families Journal*, *Journal of the Civil War Era*, *American Book Review*, and *Journal of African American History*. She can be reached at katrina.moore@slu.edu.

some people are made to feel less threatened and more comfortable… I don't want to see any more Black men in dresses…. There are already too many forces at work in society attempting to emasculate Black men as it is" (Boyd). Boyd's comment speaks directly from a long history of the term "emasculation" being associated with Black male identity due to Black men being denied full participation in White male patriarchal privilege. However, this preoccupation with Black masculinity and cross-dressing often neglects how these performances relate to Black femininity and womanhood. Several scholars have viewed these cross-dressing Black men as representative of Black female stereotypes. Hilary Christian refers to these characters as "misogynoir at its best (or worst) with Black women as the punchline."[1] These roles exhibit the strong characteristics of negative labels that have been placed on Black women for over a century. Nevertheless, a major aspect of these characters has been neglected—that they are portrayed by Black men. For this reason, I distinguish this character type as distinct from other Black female stereotypes and place it into its own category, the Black Macho Woman (BMW).[2] Accurately naming this stereotype within Black comedy distinguishes it from other male cross-dressing roles and Black female caricatures.

The reincarnation of Wanda and Sheneneh and the references to Madea in *Skank Robbers* was not coincidental. These roles were a part of the impetus that launched some of the most famous Black actors' Hollywood careers including Martin Lawrence, Jamie Foxx, and Tyler Perry. For these reasons, this article will focus on Lawrence's Sheneneh, Foxx's Wanda, and Perry's Madea to explore and clearly define the BMW stereotype. Beyond these roles, Eddie Murphy's Rasputia from the film *Norbit* (2007) will be discussed because of Murphy's association with cross-dressing characters throughout his film career. Furthermore, I examine Flip Wilson's character, Geraldine Jones, who Donald Bogle labels as the

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[1] The term misogynoir was coined by activist Moya Bailey and is defined as "intersection of racism, anti-Blackness, and misogyny that Black women experience." The Resistance. "On Moya Bailey, Misogynoir, and Why Both Are Important." *The Visibility Project,* 27 May 2014, www.thevisibilityproject.com/2014/05/27/on-moya-bailey-misogynoir-and-why-both-are-important.

[2] The cross-dressed characters that are the focus on this article will be referred to as BMW or the feminine designations of "her" or "she." The singular they/them/theirs is often used as gender-neutral pronouns. However, these characters do not fall within this category. Since they are portraying a female character, I am using the feminine pronouns to represent their role.

"precursor" to Sheneneh and who laid the foundation for the BMW stereotype (*Primetime Blues* 182). Through female masquerade, these Black male comedians are repositioning Black women into creatures of sexualization, victimization, ridicule, and aggression. I trace the many ways Black male comedians use disguises not only as entertainment but as cultural performances that express their anxieties, fears, and desires toward Black women. Central to my thesis is that the caricaturization of Black womanhood within these BMW performances does not represent a desire to promote female power. Rather, they seek to reclaim male power.

Black Macho Woman

The BMW comes from the incongruity I observed between scholarship on cross-dressing and the actual characters developed in Black comedy. The BMW is not an all-encompassing term. Not every cross-dressed performance carried out by a Black man falls within this category. I construct the term Black Macho Woman based on the work of theorists Michelle Wallace and Robert Stoller. Wallace in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* defines the Black Macho as having "unpredictability, virility and a big mouth," essentially an overtly masculine Black man who often expresses his lack of power through hate and violence toward women, especially Black women (48). The BMW does not hate Black women but reflects a gender tension within the Black community. BMWs wear female clothing but they are assertively and intentionally masculine, sometimes hyper-masculine (Boorstein 163-7). Second, Stoller in *Sex and Gender* asserts that the phallic woman is essentially a woman who expresses "masculinity by imitation and identification, and maleness (a penis) by hallucination," and who castrate men.[3] He continues by asserting that through the disguise of a woman, men restore their "dignity by finally getting…revenge on women…thus salvag[ing] some sexual potency, power, and masculinity" (Stoller 214). Both Stoller's and Wallace's theories epitomizes the BMW in the manner these cross-

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[3] The Phallic Woman reviewed by Robert Stoller is adapted by Freudian theory. There are several key flaws in his overall analysis, and many scholars have responded or furthered his work, such as Judith Butler in her 1993 book *Bodies That Matter*, later in her 1999 work *Gender Trouble*, and Judith (Jack) Halberstam's 1998 work *Female Masculinity*.

dressing performances are used to denigrate black women while empowering black men.

From Wench to Skank

The performance of Black women through cross-dressing began in the nineteenth-century Blackface minstrel show. First introduced by Dan Gardner in 1835, the wench caricature was a staple of the minstrel show (Mahar 95-6). Either through character, skit, or song, White men performed as Black women sometimes through the blackening of skin and donning of female apparel. The manner Black women were portrayed in minstrels, however, varied from the yaller gal to the grotesque wench. The yaller gal was considered a "beautiful female figure" that represented lighter-skinned Black women and was an aspect of the homoerotic nature of cross-dressing on the theater stage. The grotesque wench represented the comically ugly, absurd, unappealing, and almost inhumane aspect of Black women that was undeniably understood to be a male in female garb (Mahar 159).

Cross-dressing Black men, similar to their White male predecessors, control Black female bodies through mockery in performance. The yaller gal and Geraldine are flirts that reaffirm the overtly sexual, or Jezebel stereotype, of Black women. The grotesque wench, Wanda, and Rasputia, are detestably ugly and animal-like and they represent a type of grotesque humor that allows for the degradation of black women. Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interest* states, "the black male comedian was here empowered by his female double" and, therefore, the BMW could "get away with things that were still transgressive" for the Black male comedian performer (Garber 274). Within their performances, these men, both Black and White, are able to gain power through shaping Black women as spectacles of humiliation and humor and, for some of these characters, they attempted to directly dictate female behavior. For example, several characters, such as Rasputia, Sheneneh, and Madea, offered direct advice to actual female characters on how to be better women. As Trudier Harris states, "The Black American Woman has had to admit that…everybody…felt qualified to explain her, to even herself" (4). Of the BMW characters, Rasputia, Sheneneh, and Madea, Madea is the most direct in this manner counseling women throughout the film via direct advice and action. Rachel Jessica Daniel states that this aspect of the character is why Madea is very popular among a mainly Black female audience. She asserts that Madea "has the ability to speak to the various needs of

those in the audience" (130). Daniel further argues that Madea is able to offer both a male and female perspective to the audience members. This type of maternal or girlfriend-like role can also be seen with other BMWs. For example, Sheneneh offered advice to actual women characters on the show on various topics including how to please their man and beauty. Essentially, these black men are using their female roles to dictate and influence actual Black women's behavior.

Black female stereotypes have also contributed greatly to the characteristics of the BMW. The Sapphire, Jezebel, and Mammy stereotypes are often the main descriptors placed on these cross-dressed performances. True, the BMWs exhibit characteristics representative of these negative labels such as the bad bitch attitude of the Sapphire, the large girth of the Mammy, and the overtly flirtatious and sexual Jezebel (Chen et al. 115-35; West; Goldman et al.; Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes*; LeBesco 231-42; Anderson). Since several of these cross-dressed characters overlap within these stereotypes, LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant argues that the "composite figure" should be labeled "sapphmammibel," essentially a "hybridization of Sapphire, Jezebel, and Mammy" (56-69). Furthermore, some of the newer stereotypes of Black women include the overly domineering matriarch, the strong Black woman, and the angry Black woman, each of which has also been an aspect of these Black men's portrayals (Springer 249-76; Collins 72-84). The BMW often reflects many of these controlling images.[4] Cross-dressing is a major part of their humor and an important distinction as compared to other stereotypes often associated with Black women.

Conversely, several actors such as Tyler Perry, Martin Lawrence, and Flip Wilson have stated that they created their female characters to praise Black women. Wilson praised Geraldine: "She's honest, she's frank, she's affectionate…liberated" (Lloyd). According to comedian Kevin Cook in his biography of Wilson, *Flip: The Inside Story of TV's First Black Superstar,* Geraldine was named after Wilson's childhood crush. Martin Lawrence refers to the Sheneneh character as reminiscent of his "niece and sisters" (Zook 57). Tyler Perry states that "Madea is a cross between my mother and my aunt and watching Eddie Murphy…. She is exactly the PG version of my mother and my aunt, and I

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[4] The Sapphire caricature parallels greatly with the BMW, since it was originally portrayed by a White man on the radio with the *Amos and Andy Show,* which aired from 1928-1960. However, the BMW has characteristics that go beyond the Sapphire caricature and, therefore, needs to be recognized as categorically different.

loved having an opportunity to pay homage to them" ("Tyler Perry Transforms"). Other Black actors who cross-dress do not profess such honorable intentions in their construction or portrayal of Black women. Regardless, it is hard to pay homage to characters like Wanda, Madea, and Sheneneh. Whitney Peoples so eloquently states, "[T]his appropriation of the Black female body…is rendered more caricature than homage" (cited in Manigault-Bryant, *Womanist* 151). Furthermore, these characters are intentionally absurd in demeanor and appearance. Regardless whether intended as homage or cruel parody, the origins of the BMW came out of a darker history of mockery and degradation of Black women.

"What You See Is What You Get"

An aspect of the humor of BMW characters is that everyone is participating in the joke. In cross-dressing, the audience is well aware that they are watching men perform as women. However, for the sake of the plot, the characters are accepted as women. Victoria Flanagan states that within the "male cross-dressing model, the authentic masculinity of the cross-dressing male subject is rarely in any genuine doubt. The characters of these narratives are first and foremost 'male,' and their inherent masculinity permeates the cross-dressing context, even though they may appear outwardly female" (50). These performances are not analogous to drag queens or queer identities.[5] The complexity of males performing in female masquerade is too often placed under the broad category of drag. Roger Baker specifically asserts that drag is "about many things…it is about men's fear of women as much as men's love of women and it is about gay identity" (18). For example, dragged performances of such Black men as Wesley Snipes in *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995) and Ving Rhames in *Holiday Heart* (2000) depicts these Black men as gay characters that perform in drag shows. In both dragged films, the main characters are seen throughout their transition from male to female back to male.[6] However, it is rare to view the

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[5] Marybeth Hamilton argues in the chapter titled "I'm the Queen of the Bitches': Female Impersonation and Mae West's *Pleasure Man*," in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies in Cross-Dressing* speaks directly to the concept that female impersonation has an automatic association with "queerness."

[6] Similarly, *Juwanna Mann* (2002), *Tootsie* (1982), and *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) depict the transition from male to female as a part of the plot of the respective films.

changeover by those portraying the BMW. One exception may be seen in the film *Big Momma's House* (2000) and *Big Momma's House 2* (2006). The main character, portrayed by Lawrence, is a cop that must go undercover as Big Momma, a robust Black woman and, therefore, dons a fat suit and female clothing to catch criminals. While portraying Big Momma, Martin Lawrence takes special care to reject male sexual advances and instead shows interest in a female character, Shelly (Nia Long).

The cross-dressing of Black men in these comedic roles has not been used to create sexual desirability of characters. Since the audience must accept the BMW as a woman within the role, that character is often portrayed as possessing an attraction to men.[7] The BMW may be either at the center of desire of men or the initiator of their desire for men. However, this yearning is rarely satisfied. The BMW may be constructed to be unappealing and ugly. However, if the BMW is somewhat attractive, then there is rarely an intimate relationship with men. This was evident within the parody of *Skank Robbers*. The audience was told the film was produced by the makers of *Godzilla* and *Planet of the Apes,* and the BMWs were specifically referred to as "ugly," which was not only used as a comedic gesture but used to emphasize that these characters are so unattractive as to be animal-like. Sheneneh, Wanda, Madea, and Rasputia are constructed to be sexually unappealing and are constantly referred to as ugly by other characters. Sheneneh's unrequited sexual desire is toward the main character, Martin Payne. Both characters are portrayed by Martin Lawrence. Sheneneh may occasionally have a love interest; however, intimacy with a man (or woman) is never viewed. Perry created a background of Madea as being a stripper in her younger years, but due to her age, girth, masculine appearance, and demeanor, the BMW background is used more to add to her humor rather than sexual allure (Tyler Perry, "Taking Madea"). With Foxx's Wanda, ugliness is the main plotline of every skit in which the character appears. As a guest on *The Dating Game*, Wanda, while behind a partition, flirts with the three male contestants. Upon the removal of the partition, the winning contestant attempts to physically assault Wanda and then refers to *her* as a beast. Later, he is eventually thrown over the shoulder of the BMW as she

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[7] Several scholars such as E. Patrick Harris and David Moody have reviewed the relationship between cross-dressing Black comedians and homosexuality. It has been argued that several comedians, more particularly Eddie Murphy, are expressing their own homosexuality through cross-dressing and anti-homosexual rhetoric.

states, "I got you and I am ready to go" ("*Ugly Woman Dating Show*"). Both Wanda and Sheneneh were constructed to be ugly and unappealing, reminiscent of their wench predecessor. Although the cross-dressed performances may depict the latest fashions in clothes and hair, as does Sheneneh, or wear extremely tight and short dresses or lingerie, as does Wanda, these characters are neither meant to be truly sexually appealing to male (or female) audiences nor are they fetishized in any manner.[8] However, there are two outliers, Rasputia and Geraldine.

Louie Robinson describes Geraldine Jones as having a "chestnut face that is immaculately coiffed. The figure—reportedly a size 12 but perhaps closer to a 14…the legs are pretty good, especially in those rather shockingly tinted stockings of fuchsia and chartreuse…and everybody knows she don't take no stuff" (176). Robinson highlights Geraldine's basic characteristics of being fashionable and having a quick wittiness and sassiness which is ever present in the BMW (Robinson 176). Wilson's character differs greatly from its BMW progenies. This character is not meant to be ugly in any way. Geraldine was a flirt that seemed to be desired, often humorously, by the famous male guests such as Bill Cosby, Harry Belafonte, Tim Conway, and Burt Williams. However, if they ever get too close, she quickly puts them back in their place with her staple phrase of "Don't you touch me," which is asserted in various iterations. Geraldine is essentially constructed as a tease (Garber 298). Flip Wilson's desire to make Geraldine sexually appealing is evident in the manner in which NBC censors expressed concern over the large bust size of the character, which resulted in it being reduced several cup sizes (Cook 123). However, to avoid sexual tension and to respect the sensibilities of 1970s television audiences, Geraldine's boyfriend, Killer, who is never seen, forbids Geraldine from having physical intimacy with the male guests. Geraldine's teasing of the celebrity male guests, which can range from flirtatious compliments and comments to slight touches, is framed within the comedy in such a way so that the audience never truly believes there is any attraction to her.

Rasputia may be representative of one of the most grotesque and sexual types of BMWs. The extremely ugly and obese character is often scantily clad in a lingerie or bikini and is very sexually aggressive. Rasputia is sexually active. She has sex with either her husband Norbit (also portrayed by Eddie Murphy) or her dance instructor Buster Perkin (Marlon Wayans), with whom she has an affair. In

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[8] Reference to the trend-setting Sheneneh was mentioned by Cheryl Thompson in "Black Women, Beauty, and the Hair as a Matter of Being," *Women's Studies,* vol. 38, no. 8, 2009, pp. 831-56.

both scenarios, the sex is connected to intimidation. With Norbit, their sex is aggressive and violent. The dance instructor grants Rasputia sex so that he receives favors from her. In many ways, Rasputia is a rapist. In several sex scenes, Rasputia is in lingerie and runs to jump on Norbit for sex. He looks terrified and disgusted. Rasputia dominates Norbit through fear, violence, and intimidation, similar to her relationship with other characters. Furthermore, her personality is only second to her being detestably ugly and fat. In one scene, Rasputia is at a water park in a bikini. Due to her size, park officials question whether she is wearing bikini bottoms since her stomach conceals her genitalia. In response, Rasputia lifts her fat flabs to expose a bikini bottom. Rasputia is the complete opposite of another female character in the film Kate Thomas (Thandie Newton), who is depicted as extremely kind, beautiful, and quite thin. Although Rasputia is an extremely sexual BMW that has physical, sexual relationships with men, her sexuality is completely grotesque. The sexual availability or allure (or rather lack thereof) of the BMWs from Geraldine to Rasputia is closely tied to the continual representations of machismo.

Masculinity is only thinly veiled by the audience's imagination, light makeup, and, occasionally, prosthetics, and female clothing. However, physical and cultural gestures of socially constructed ideologies of masculinity, or rather Black masculinity, are major aspects of the BMW character construction. Geraldine is often known for stating "What you see is what you get." However, it is not that simple. It is not uncommon for the BMW's voice to drop from a falsetto to their deeper male voice within a performance or for there to be visible signs of facial hair or periodic displays of extreme physical strength. Tyler Perry is notoriously known for switching to his normal baritone voice while performing Madea (Daniel 123). In an episode of *Martin*, Sheneneh takes a basketball from the character Tommy, and, to retrieve this ball, Tommy has to challenge Sheneneh's basketball skills. In the end, Tommy is unable to get the ball, and, due to her sports ability, Sheneneh is invited to the court to play on his all-male team. An aspect, or rather stereotype, of Black masculinity, is the concept that Black men are good at sports, especially basketball.[9] Therefore, Sheneneh's sports prowess was an aspect of her masculinity.

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[9] In an interview, actor Dustin Hoffman commented about the sexes after portraying a woman in the popular 1982 film, *Tootsie*. He defined poker as a "masculine sport," therefore demonstrating that it is not unusual for sports to be used as an activity to illustrate one's construction of masculinity. Furthermore, Jeffrey Lane in his 2007 book, *Under the Boards: The Cultural*

Assertions of masculinity in male cross-dressing are not unusual. Elaine Showalter's analysis of these intentional displays of masculinity by men while in female masquerade states that BMWs represent the "phallic woman," essentially asserting "masculine power while masking it" (116-8). However, when applied to Black masculinity, these visages of masculinity while in female masquerade also illustrate the fear of castration. Tommy Curry argues that since "*maleness* has come to be understood as synonymous with power and patriarchy and racially codified as white, it has no similar existential content for the Black male, who in an anti-Black world is denied maleness and is ascribed as feminine in relation to white masculinity" (6). Interestingly, the BMW is often attributed to the emasculation of Black men who perform these characters. However, characters such as Madea and Sheneneh express an assertion of masculinity or power they feel is unattainable within a White patriarchal society.

The BMW is aggressive to both men and women. The assertiveness may also manifest within characters through extreme attitude, anger, and even violence. bell hooks states that Black men "had to be taught that it was acceptable to use violence to establish patriarchal power," and, therefore, the violence seen within these characters is a part of attempting to obtain a White form of patriarchal power (3). In the case of Geraldine, a propensity toward violence or extreme aggression was redirected from the character to an ever-present but never visible boyfriend, Killer. In his name alone, it is evident that Flip Wilson is trying to portray a particular type of Black male. Killer is representative of the overly violent and aggressive black male characters in the Blaxploitation era that were quite popular during the *Flip Wilson Show*'s airing. Although constructed as "liberated" by Wilson, Geraldine is a flirtatious smart-mouth who is always under the control of the invisible Killer. Wilson uses Killer to assert a distinct type of Black masculinity while he safely diverts from masculinity by donning a dress, heels, and makeup. Unlike other BMW's who are openly violent within their female guise, Geraldine disguises those traits through cross-dressing and projects it onto the unseen Killer. Therefore, there is no threat of Geraldine being labeled a Black brute, while Killer's aggression is disguised by his absence. Other BMWs are not as creative in their assertions of power.

Revolution in Basketball, examines the manner basketball, more specifically the National Basketball Association, has become associated with authentic Black masculinity.

One of Madea's main character traits is that she is violent. She is gun-toting and extremely large in height and weight (Perry is 6 feet and 5 inches in height). She will not hesitate to shoot or physically assault any person, Black or White, male or female. Madea is often referred to as *the* "mad Black woman." In fact, the film *Madea Goes to Jail* is based on the character going to prison due to her inability to control her anger. Within the film, the character is involved in a police chase, uses a machine gun to stop a party in her home, and uses a forklift to wreck a car parked in a parking spot Madea wanted. Throughout all iterations of Madea in film, television, and theater, this character's predominant personality trait is that she is short-tempered and violent.

Madea is not the only BMW that asserts herself through violence. Rasputia is an overweight character that intimidates and bullies everyone, regardless of race, gender, and age. Through her girth and simple brute strength, Rasputia is feared by every person in the film and is only defeated by a harpoon-style weapon thrown into her buttocks essentially equating her with an animal that needs to be put down. For Madea and Rasputia, an aspect of their brute strength is asserted through the use of fat suits, which assists in asserting their aggressive, often violent, behavior. However, not all BMWs are openly violent or fat. Regardless, violence, or some form of aggression of power, is a common characteristic of every BMW.

Lastly, similar to the wench caricature, the BMW represents a form of Blackface. Charlotte Coles asserts that cross-dressing "sustains forms of femininity which primarily serve patriarchal interests" (1-2). However, when race is an aspect of the performance, the female masquerade is complicated. The racism of the minstrel show is undeniable. Since the BMW is performed by Black men, it offers to the wider public some validity of their performance style. An aspect of female masquerade almost always contains some form belittling the female gender. However, the depictions of Black women by Black men also bring another dynamic to the performance—race. Similar to their White male predecessors in minstrel performances, the stereotypical construction of Blackness is an aspect of these BMW roles. While Blackface may not be applied in their performances, Black voice and other stereotypes are consistently used. Other Black stereotypes are present in every BMW from Geraldine to Madea through actions and in stereotypical Black dialect.

The BMWs often speak in exaggerated stereotypical Black dialect and engage in eye-rolling and loud, obnoxious behavior. These traits are quite reminiscent of

the wench caricature, whose performers typically donned Blackface and used exaggerated Black dialect. The minstrel-like performances of BMWs have been highlighted in scholarship for decades. Donald Bogle argues that Geraldine is "a collection of repackaged stereotypes" (*Primetime Blues* 180-81). Similarly, Kristal Brent Zook describes Sheneneh as "a stereotypical caricature of a ghetto 'homegirl'" (57). Black director and writer Spike Lee refers to Tyler Perry's character of Madea as a display of "coonery buffoonery" reminiscent of the nineteenth-century minstrel era (Izrael). A major sign that these characters are intentionally (metaphorically) donning Blackface is observed through the outlandish manner in which they are distinguished from other supporting characters. For example, Perry plays several roles in his Madea franchise films, which are always male. Within almost every supporting male role, Perry is constructed as possessing a professional career, as one who rarely uses slang, instead often speaking in a formal English dialect, and as an overall respectable man. Similarly, there is a major difference between the tuxedo donning, well-spoken host, Wilson, and the eye-rolling, hip-shaking, and strong, urban, racialized dialect of Geraldine. For every BMW, an aspect of their humor is Blackness, or rather a stereotypical idea of Blackness.

The Fallacy of the "Nut Pussy"

In October 2017, *Saturday Night Live* actor Jay Pharaoh starred in the Showtime comedy series *White Famous*, which was based on the experience of fellow actor Jamie Foxx's (Foxx, an executive producer, plays a version of himself) experience in Hollywood. The first episode introduces the main character Floyd Mooney (Pharaoh) who is a comedian offered an opportunity to gain fame by appearing in a film in which he will have to cross-dress. Due to the history and controversy of Black men wearing dresses to be successful, Floyd dreams of meeting Foxx to discuss his apprehensions. At the meeting, he walks in on Foxx being straddled by a naked Black woman who is introduced as "just research," while the sexual act continues in front of Floyd. Once their sexual intercourse is complete, Foxx reveals that he is donning a short red miniskirt. Then, Foxx lectures Floyd on the benefits of cross-dressing to become White famous. He states, "When I was thanking the academy, what mother fuckers didn't know is I had my dress on under my suit," insinuating that cross-dressing in Hollywood contributed to his fame. After convincing Floyd to put on a dress, Foxx turns him

toward a mirror and states, "You don't let the dress define you…you define the dress." Floyd lifts the dress which exposes that his genitalia is missing. Foxx responds, "Now you don't actually think you have a dick anymore do you…soon as you put that dress on your dick goes away." Now, according to Foxx, Floyd has a "nut pussy" which is a hairless, pubic area similar to Mattel's Ken doll. The loss of his penis terrifies Floyd as he wakes from the dream ("Pilot").

White Famous was canceled after one season and, overall, received mixed reviews. This first episode reflects a controversial issue concerning the concessions Black men make to gain fame in the White-dominated world of Hollywood. The central storyline focusing on Black men cross-dressing in comedy roles could have brought to the forefront serious discussions addressing Black masculinity and emasculation, popular images of Black women, and several other race and gender issues. Instead, this episode was filled with naked, silent Black women (within the first episode, at least three women are completely naked and used as sexual props) and "penile self-obsession" (Saraiiya). Interestingly, both Jay Pharoah, due to his various roles on *Saturday Night Live*, and Foxx (as the previously discussed Wanda from *In Living Color*), have both donned dresses throughout their careers and have received negative reactions due to these portrayals. However, the manner in which cross-dressing is presented within this episode is through vulgar references and the degradation of almost every woman in the episode. The fear of being perceived as homosexual due to cross-dressing also becomes apparent within the show. What becomes clear is that due to gaining a "nut pussy," Black men must regain their masculinity, in this case, penis, through having open sexual relations with as many women as possible. Marjorie Garber states that the "nightmare vision, of the American black man as always already feminized and humiliated…keeps returning" and that this "image should coexist with another, apparently contradictory image, that of the black man who wields…sexual" power (271). Through sexual relations, Black men can regain the power that Black women as well as White men and White women stripped from them. They also can assert their heterosexuality through the use of women. It is evident that Black women are malleable objects. In *White Famous*, Black women are mere sexual props, and their naked bodies are used to titillate audience members. The use of Black women as sexual props asserts the masculinity and heterosexuality of those men within the series. Similarly, this malleability is transferable with Black men in dresses as the BMW. Black women can be used as objects of disgust, mockery, ridicule, and abuse however the men see fit.

Regardless of the scenario, Black men are gaining power through the degradation of Black women. As a result, Black men, or the Black Macho, can aggressively assert their ideals of Black masculinity within a White patriarchal society that has often ignored them or within a society in which they have felt neglected.

Struggle for power between Black men and Black women manifest in various ways throughout popular culture. Rapper Big Sean states in his song "Blessings": "My grandmother died I'm the man of the house." He explains: "You might say it don't make sense, but it makes total sense because where I'm from grandmas and moms and women are the man of the house, too" (Steinfield). Big Sean is referring to the fact that many Black households have a matriarchal system. Although meant as a sign of reverence to women, the rapper brings to the forefront a major issue that has dominated the Black community for decades. In 1965, the Moynihan Report contributed greatly to the degradation of Black women and the added tension between Black men and Black women. The report stated that Black women "undermined male leadership and imposed a crushing burden on the Negro male" (Moynihan 113). Chanequa Walker-Barnes argues that the Moynihan Report contributed greatly to "this image that undergirds every Black male actor's decision to don a 'fat suit' and wig and to breathe life into the character of a dark-skinned, over-weight, sharp-tongued Black woman" (117). Although the belief that Black women are "too masculine" pre-dates this report, as Melissa Harris-Perry states the "Moynihan Report did not create the angry black woman stereotype. It tapped into an existing framework" in which Black women, once again, were seen as the major problem in the Black community (110-5). Therefore, if you relate this ideology to the BMW, then it is not the dress that causes Black men to be emasculated producing a "nut pussy" and it is not a White-dominated Hollywood system: it is Black women. Therefore, as a reflection of gender conflict, the BMW illustrates a demeaning portrayal of Black women that contributes to the Black man's fame while allowing for the expression of anger, bitterness, and strife towards Black women.

The recent conversations of a possible reboot of the 1990s hit comedy series *Martin* and with it a most likely resurgence of BMW Sheneneh Jenkins, is troubling. Further, the continual success of Tyler Perry and Eddie Murphy, particularly associated with their cross-dressing, illustrates that although with great debate and controversy, the BMW is not going anywhere. Cross-dressing Black men in comedy have financial success and their characters are often quite popular. For years after the *Flip Wilson* variety show stopped airing, he was

constantly asked to perform Geraldine (Lloyd). Sheneneh and Wanda's parody movie trailer *Skank Robbers* was excitingly accepted by the public over 20 years after their respective shows ended. Perry's Madea is a media enterprise within itself or as one scholar observes is a "multi-hyphenate media juggernaut" (Sheppard 5). Clearly, BMW characters are popular. These characters, in varying degrees, are humorous. But what are we truly laughing at? An aspect of their humor will always be that they demean Black women. Simply focusing on Black emasculation or Black female stereotypes is only the beginning of the conversation. Too often these characters are analyzed separately. This article hopes to broaden a dialogue to bring together those Black Macho Women that consistently appear in Black popular culture into a unified conversation.

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Racialized Representations of Black Actresses: Power, Position, and Politics of the Mediated Black Woman

ANGELA NURSE AND THERÈSA M. WINGE

The release of *Black Panther* (2018) and *Girls Trip* (2017) highlighted the discrepancies between movies that feature primarily White versus Black actors and actresses, as well as the storylines and roles. These films also positioned Black actresses in powerful roles that visually communicated their preeminence to the movie-going audience and beyond. These roles are significant departures from the controlling images and stereotypes such as the historic Mammy character of Hattie McDaniel (for this role Hattie received an Academy Award in 1939) to the ultra-sexy, jezebel Foxy Brown portrayed by Pam Grier to the overbearing, Sapphire characters of Taraji P. Henson (Hill Collins 83; Harris-Perry 33). Historically, mediated representations of Black women in films intentionally worked to further marginalize and define the limited positions of women of color in Western society. Today, Black actresses are positioned to portray more than just limited character types, which is typified with their dress (both on and off screen). Accordingly, contemporary Black actresses such as Danai Gurira, Jada Pinkett Smith, Letitia Wright, and Queen Latifah defy confining stereotypes by portraying realistic, exciting, and inspiring characters rarely played by Black women in large budget films for international release. Likewise, these roles of contemporary Black actresses and their related dress redefines, expands, and reorients womanhood as a

ANGELA NURSE is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at University of San Diego. She teaches classes in Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Social Psychology, and Fashion. Her research focuses on how race and gender ideologies influence contemporary dress behavior—ranging from hairstyles to clothing—among women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. She can be reached at anurse@sandiego.edu.

THERÈSA M. WINGE is an Associate Professor in Apparel and Textile Design, at Michigan State University. Her research deconstructs of subcultural visual and material cultures, dress, and narratives revealing structures of meaning and identity. Winge further examines the bricolage of subcultural dress for its significant design elements that contribute to the creation of her conceptual designs, utilizing both traditional and innovative techniques, technologies, and methodologies. Her first book *Body Style* (2012) is about subcultural body modifications, and her second book, *Costuming Cosplay: Dressing the Imagination* (2018) focuses on Cosplayers. She can be reached at winge@msu.edu.

factor for better understanding the role of the concept of race and racial symbols within the film industry and, by extension, to moviegoers.

The persistent notion of race as a biological concept continues to dominate public and mediated discourses. However, the ways in which the concept of race is a constant cyclical process created and re-created through social interactions, intersections, and practices of performance and conspicuous visual displays is often neglected. Dress is a significant dimension of the social process by which notions of race are produced, established, and disseminated. Additionally, popular culture and the media establish and reinforce a hegemonic relationship for the creation and maintenance of the specific details that constitute "race" as a social category, which is not beneficial in advancing positions where films and women intersect.

Dress, which includes clothing, body modifications, makeup, and styling, functions as a mechanism to generate, challenge, and reinforce racialized understandings of Blackness in popular films. We explore the visual stylistic representations and controlling images of Black actresses and women in films that reinforce, challenge, and recreate the lived experience of being a Black woman. We reveal the ways racialized bodies are fashioned and dressed for Black actresses to construct and reinforce the social construction of race in the films *Girls Trip* and *Black Panther*. Finally, we discuss the socio-political positions, power, and status of Black actresses and their characters, who are redefining and challenging stereotypical roles communicated as examples of Black women with their aesthetic styles and costumes and dress.

Blackness in Popular Culture

Representations of Blackness in popular culture are often skewed to extremes, especially for women. The mediated portrayals of Black woman are regulated through hegemonic controlling images. Black women are wedged into stereotypical roles as well as costuming. These limited roles predictably restricted Black women for consideration in future films but also impacted their dress and appearances beyond the screen. Patricia Hill Collins notes four categories that dictate the roles available for Black women in popular culture: Mammy, Jezebel, Welfare Mother, and the Matriarch (Hill Collins 84). Contemporarily, Carolyn West argues that these categories can be readily identified in reality television series as the Strong Black Woman, the Angry Black Woman, and the Video Vixen (West).

Engaging in a similar exercise, Melissa Harris-Perry used the metaphor of a Crooked House to explain how Black women confront race and gender stereotypes. Harris-Perry states Black women are "standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion" (Harris-Perry 28). As a result, Harris-Perry asserts that women actively grapple with the stereotypes of the asexual Mammy, the hypersexual Jezebel, and the angry Sapphire as they traverse society. Here, our focus on film is particularly important as we seek to understand what happens when costumes are painstakingly crafted and actresses are carefully clothed for a specific visual message that contributes to character and storyline development.

Mediated Images of Black Women

We argue that the limited character roles available to Black women are reflected by the limited costumes and wardrobe used for actress' dress in films. Additionally, limited character roles impact more than just Black women's dress on screen as it impedes how the actress is interpreted off-screen which impacts her dress beyond the body of the film itself. We selected *Girls Trip* and *Black Panther* to examine the roles and dress of Black women because these two films succinctly represent contemporary perspectives on racial and gender ideas visually conveyed in the current media.

In *Girls Trip*, Lisa, (Jada Pinkett-Smith), "the mom" character, is often conservatively dressed: Our visual introduction to her character's nature is communicated by an off-the-rack loose, knee-length dress from J. Crew and white sneakers by Keds. Lisa's clothing is often loose fitting and shows very little skin. Her natural hair is hidden by a long brown weave that has a blunt-cut fringe that she either wears in a low, tight, loose wave ponytail at the nap of her neck or simply straight down her back. The consistent elements in her styling are the steadfast symbols of social conservatism which she breaks only when badgered by her friends to dress in revealing outfits.

Sasha (Queen Latifah), "the gossip" character, is trendy, fashionable, and wears a variety of clothing and hairstyles from one scene to the next. Assistant costume designer for *Girls Trip* Provi Fulp states, "We wanted Sasha to be fashion forward, which a lot of times, for plus-size women, it's hard to pull off. Every trend is not for every body type, but it can be if it's done correctly, and Danielle [head costume

designer] really wanted to capture Sasha in that light" (Chan). In addition to conveying Sasha's commitment to fashion trends, her dress also suggests a level of confidence and defiance. Dina (Tiffany Haddish), the "wild one" character, is often dressed in symbols of ghetto-fabulousness as her dress often contains leather, embellishments of gold and silver, bright colors, and multiple patterns. Even when dressed in designer labels, Dina's clothing and styling conveys tackiness and a lower socioeconomic class, as is the case with her Moschino *Dollar Sign* mini Bodycon dress or Tamara Mellon Sleeveless *Fringe* Dress Sunset.

Given the title of "the boss," Ryan (Regina Hall) conveys the "strong black woman" and "superwoman complex" in her dress and actions. Ryan repudiates any display of weakness by refusing to ask for help or showing any inkling of sadness. If Ryan does show emotion, it is with anger and fierce attitude. Ryan's strength is in her enduring courage, which serves as a vessel for her friends' and family's hope. This strength is depicted in her clothing which is tailored to perfection in severe and unforgiving cuts. Costume designer Danielle Hollowell explains how they envisioned Ryan's aesthetic:

> We knew she was a business woman [sic] and she's very successful, so she has money. All her clothes reflect that. She's the kind of girl that's just a power woman and it reflects in the designers we chose for her, like some Stella McCartney, Victoria Beckham, the Misha Collection, Roland Mouret and Zhivago, who made the blush-colored dress she wore. Everything that we chose had to have some kind of power image behind it. (Chan)

This aesthetic is also reflected in Ryan's hairstyle which is often styled in a bone-straight shoulder-length weave with a middle part. Even when dressed for an evening out, Ryan is styled in a nude Zhivago Eye of Horus Dress with shoulder padding or wearing a cape, like a real-life superheroine. The exception is when Ryan is with her husband. During these times, she trades her symbols of power for those of overt femininity such as cleavage-baring necklines.

The styling of these main characters solidifies the film *Girls Trip* as a challenge to the one-dimensional portrayal of Black women in film. In fact, Will Packer, the film's producer, spoke directly about challenging the portrayal of Black women in *Girls Trip*: "What happens is if you don't have a lot of images, then the few that you have have to represent the whole of what black women are" (N'Duka). Packer adds: "[B]lack women, historically in media, have been either over-sexualized, hyper-angry, or super-saintly. Those aren't real people, those are caricatures. The

opportunity to show real people played brilliantly the cast was important" (N'Duka).

Despite using diverse styling to actively challenge the tropes about Black women (such as Mammy and Jezebel), the film falls into the familiar and dated politics, wherein if Black women act correctly and are proper enough or even respectable enough, they will be valued for their humanity.

Even though the characters of Dina, Sasha, Lisa, and Ryan in *Girls Trip* are often presented as diverse and are pushing back against the controlling images through their actions, their dress behavior tends to fall into racist and sexist constructions of respectability. Tamara Winfrey Harris states that is common among the Black community, who still perceives "respectability politics as a form of resistance. And Black women carry a double burden as they are asked to uphold ideas of decency built on both racist and sexist foundations" (Harris 8). By backsliding into assessments of respectability, Black women reaffirm that those women who embody traits associated with controlling images are not fit to be respected. This view represents another way that controlling images limits Black women's social acceptability.

This is evident in *Girls Trip* when Dina, Sasha, Lisa, and Ryan engage in an impromptu dance competition instigated by a rival group of younger Black women. The degree to which each character's body is dressed is suggestive of two different notions of Black womanhood. The younger competitors are presented as quintessential Jezebels who openly display their sexuality on their bodies and one, of which an Instagram model, is having an adulterous affair with Ryan's husband. These Jezebels' tight-fitting mini-skirts, shorts, and crop tops reveal their bare skin and accentuate the feminine curves of their bodies. In contrast, Dina, Sasha, Ryan, and Lisa are upholding the politics of respectability in their looser fitting clothing that shows very little skin. Dina, Sasha, and Lisa wear baggy pants, while Ryan wears a flowing knee-length dress with a cape that covers her arms. The dress of these two different groups (including foundations, garments, makeup, hairstyles, and accessories) communicates two contrasting ideas of femininity: respectable mother and lewd harlot.

Even amid the escalation of the dance competition into a physical fight, the clothing and styling of Dina, Sasha, Ryan, and Lisa maintain an air of respectability, which gives them the edge in social standing against their youthful but scandalous competitors. The respectable and relatively conservative matronly clothing sets them as superiors to the scantily dressed women who seemingly embrace the

sexualized Jezebel stereotype. However, in this dance/fight scene, the costuming fails to challenge the limitations and fallacy of the controlling image of the Jezebel. In fact, the clothing styles used in this scene of *Girls Trip* reinforces the position that women's dress represents the quality of their character and further validates the Jezebel label as warranted if women choose to engage in particular types of dress behavior.

This contrast between respectability and non-respectability is a theme throughout *Girls Trip*. At one point, Sasha sarcastically comments on the unflattering and matronly manner in which Lisa is dressed: "She looks like someone's Puerto Rican grandmother. Now men will fuck almost anything but not you, in that outfit." Although Lisa seemingly challenges the expectation of Black women as hypersexual through her choice of a loose-fitting Dolce & Gabbana White Silk Chiffon blouse with Daisy Lace Trim paired with an equally loose fitting Alice + Olivia Kamryn embroidered tulle maxi skirt, Lisa acknowledges to her friends that she has not had a sexual encounter and is not desirous of it. Lisa's friends chastise her in that she cannot be both sexual and conservatively dressed. They pressure Lisa into wearing a revealing fishnet black dress to go out on the town thereby reinforcing Black women's sexuality Jezebel motifs.

This Jezebel stereotype reemerges in another scene when Lisa admonishes Dina for her skin-revealing dress and unrespectable behavior. Lisa tells Dina to "*put some clothes on*, stop getting trashed every night and fucking random dick every week." Here Lisa conflates Dina's sexuality with revealing clothing, falling back on the trope that if a woman is scantily clad, it means that she is likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, when in fact the two are unrelated. Rather than recognizing Dina's behavior as a nuanced choice, Lisa figuratively labels her a Jezebel, a categorization that characterizes Dina's portrayal throughout the film. Dina does not reveal her reasons for or ideas about her dress as well as her lifestyle choices. Instead, Lisa offers an apology and the matter is dropped. By not offering a counter-narrative to the connection between Dina's dress and her behavior, Lisa's assessment is presented as reasonable and accurate, even if unkind.

In one of the earlier scenes in the movie, Dina excitingly presents decorated vests she made for her friends—much to her friends' dismay. The vests' graffiti-style lettering on denim, personalized with nicknames, and torn sleeves epitomizes an aesthetic from the Black and Brown Bronx working class communities of New York in the 1980s revealing the origins of the friends. Their aesthetic association with lower-class Black culture causes the garments to be rejected and dismissed by

Dina's friends. In the final moments of the film, the four women don the vests as a symbolic gesture of returning to their roots of friendship but it remains clear that these vests are not garments that would be worn for any other occasion.

Overall, the actresses in *Girls Trip* are dressed in highly stylized garments, hairstyles, and accessories that accentuate the diversity among Black women rather than reducing their costuming to the Jezebel, Mammy, Welfare Queen, or Sapphire stereotypes. Despite this liberating leap forward in the portrayal of Black women, the conversations surrounding dress between characters reinforces the linkages between respectability and femininity. The women use Jezebel stereotypes and respectability politics to police each other's clothing. As a result, the transformative thrust is blunted by familiar dress politics that reinforce a link between dress behavior and respect. The dance competition scene also underscores this linkage. The relatively conservatively dressed protagonists are placed in opposition to the dark-skinned women who are wearing body-revealing clothing. Here the enemy is identified by her clothing and is reinforced by her behavior as a contemporary Jezebel or as an "Instagram hoe," a title the characters use to refer to one of their adversaries.

In stark contrast to *Girls Trip*, the main female characters are positioned in more strategically powerful roles in *Black Panther*. Not only does the *Black Panther* challenge the stereotypes in blockbuster movies and the superhero genre, *Black Panther* is the first Black superhero mainstream movie released since *Blade* (1998). Most importantly, *Black Panther* not only features primarily Black actors but also Black actresses in all but one of the significant roles. These representations display an array of Black identities not possible through the tokenized casting in *Blade* or even *Catwoman* (2004). Subsequently, the intersectionalities of these factors create a nexus for Black actresses and Black female moviegoers to see their own experiences and agency reflected back through a lens of fashion and agency.

Okoye (Danai Gurira) is the general of the *Dora Milaje* (the all-female royal guards) in King T'Challa's country of Wakanda. Okoye is King T'Challa's friend and personal guard and her dress creates a dynamic and powerful presence. Even with her small physical stature, her shaved head with ornate scalp tattoo creates a formidable presence. Okoye also wears handmade gold metal rings stacked around her neck with decorative extensions, metal shoulder plates and cuffs, and a leather and metal belt and harness (Kanter). As part of her Wakandan dress, Okoye wears a long red form-fitting dress that is pulled back at the waist to allow fuller

movement of her legs with a brown leather corset-styled harness over the dress and she wields a spear.

Queen Ramonda (Angela Bassett) is the mother to King T'Challa and the royal matriarch. The queen's dress includes gray dreadlocks hidden under a large hat fashioned similarly to a fabric crown,[1] long dresses that sometimes reveals her shoulders and arms but disguise her body's natural shape. She carries herself with regal authority that is reinforced with the strong linear silhouette created with her dress but Queen Ramonda shows deference to King T'Challa. This is not surprising because the queen has little to no individual power. In fact, once the king is dethroned, Queen Ramonda is forced to flee the palace with her daughter Shuri.

Shuri (Letitia Wright) is a scientist, a Wakandan princess, and the sixteen-year-old sister to King T'Challa. As one of the more varied and dimensional characters in *Black Panther*, Shuri's dress mirrors her complexity. Typically, Shuri combines contemporary neoprene and knit fashions in bold colors that reflect global aesthetics in a Western silhouette. In addition, Shuri's confident and even brash and boastful personality is supported by her significant accomplishments as a doctor, scientist, and inventor. For example, she adorns fashionable white surgical garb when performing intricate technical and medical feats. Shuri's reluctance to wear the traditional Wakandan dress of white face makeup and extensive metal and bone jewelry combined with a leather belt, harness, and corset wear for Prince T'Challa's coronation further suggests that she does not fit into traditional expectations for women even in Wakanda. Her dress choices and preferences mirror the complexity of the character.

The Wakandan people's costumes from the king to the people in the street are an amalgam of many African groups and non-African groups. Ruth E. Carter, *Black Panther* costume designer, states:

> Wakanda is rooted in Africa, and because the nation was never colonized, we imagined a world and how it would look if it remained unconquered. My first step was very similar to my approach to *Malcolm X*, *Amistad* and *Marshall*; to do the history, research, and gather the images from the different tribes, indigenous people, to look at Afro futurism, Afro punk, and to bring all of that together and use it for inspiration. (Adams)

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[1] *Black Panther*'s Queen Ramonda's headdress/crown was most likely inspired by Zulu hats; *Isicholos* are worn by married women.

Accordingly, Okoye's neck rings, for example, are inspired from those of the southern African Ndebele people (Adams). Also, the dark black makeup around her eyes reflect the use of kohl by ancient Egyptians and modern North African groups.

The costumes of the female characters also change to reflect the intricacies of the storyline. For example, after T'Challa is dethroned, Queen Ramonda and Shuri's dress changes significantly. In exile, Queen Ramonda and Shuri are wrapped in blankets and knit scarves to protect them from the cold. This type of body-encompassing and soft (tactile) textiles and garments not only establish the vulnerable position of the female family members but also reflects basic human nature to comfort one's self by wrapping supple and forgiving fabrics around one's unprotected body (Black et al. 60). These new more vulnerable appearances for the female royalty visually communicate their impotent position which is highly reflective and dependent on the positions of the familial male characters.

Furthermore, the role of hair (or the lack thereof) for the women in *Black Panther* communicates the importance of Black women's hair and hairstyles. In one powerful scene, Okoye, to disguise herself, dons a red floor-length gown, gold flats, and a bobbed wig. Okoye expresses her dislike for wearing the wig, calling it "disgraceful" and later during a physical altercation violently throws off her wig to distract and disarm her opponent.[2] While women's hairstyles in *Black Panther* range from shaved heads to dreadlocks to braids and plaits, these looks are often achieved through wigs and hair extensions. Black hair in its natural state as it grows from the head, is rarely seen for any of the characters. Returning to the example of exile during King T'Challa's disposement, Queen Ramonda's hair is finally visible showing her age with gray hair hanging down freely, unrestrained without her crown/hat. The shift from highly stylized and coifed to hanging loosely reveals her vulnerability in the moment. The hair styling of the queen and Okoye suggests the importance of hairstyles in establishing each of the character's perceived power and potency.

The actresses in *Black Panther* portray powerful dynamic characters who challenge the stereotypical roles for women, especially Black women. Still, the women are socially and politically positioned as subordinates to their male counterparts. Although Shuri displays exceptional intelligence and

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[2] The scene where Okoye dramatically rips off and throws her wig is reminiscent of a famous moment in fashion when model Alek Wek threw off her blond wig in 1998 while walking the Betsey Johnson runway show (McDonald).

accomplishments and Okoye is a proven strategist, fighter, and loyal confidant, neither Shuri nor Okoye are in positions of power. Despite the significance of *Black Panther* and noteworthy roles for the Black actresses, the film only moves the needle forward slightly for women of color.

Empowering Stylistic Choices

Dress is a non-verbal and visual language that often reinforces controlling images but can also be a means through which women challenge dominant narratives and tropes. Despite the constraints of controlling images, there are overt and covert challenges to this imagery in film. *Black Panther* successfully subverts controlling images by presenting dress infused with complex narratives of Black womanhood. Typically Black women's costume reflects a one-dimensional model of Black femininity defined by controlling images. By adorning Black women in a mixture of dress styles and symbols, at times contradictory, this act represents an important divergence in the representation and racialization of Black women. The symbolic complexity embedded in the clothing helps to convey the nuances of Black women's femininity. By using each garment to communicate competing discourses, such as culture, strength, and, femininity, *Black Panther* challenges one-dimensional stereotypes of Black women. The costuming in *Black Panther* depicts Black women as complex subjects without demonizing other women. This is markedly different in comparison to *Girls Trip*, wherein clothing conveys respectable Black femininity and is presented in contrast to fashion that depicts non-respectable controlling images.

One example of the complexity that is embedded in the costuming of *Black Panther* is the wardrobe of Princess Shuri. Her clothing suggests an alternative identity for Black women as smart and funny and not at all sexualized. Instead of portraying a Jezebel, Sapphire, Welfare Mother, or Mammy controlling image, Shuri's garb conveys other messages as well such as cultural intelligence, strength, and femininity. In one scene, Shuri wears a silver pleated skirt and wide tan belt in combination with a cowrie shell choker necklace and baseball t-shirt that displays an Adinkra symbol known as the seed of the wawa tree. The skirt and belt suggest femininity, while the cowrie shell and Adinkra symbol suggest an Africa-centric aesthetic. In particular, the wawa seed, known for having an extremely hard shell, symbolizes strength and toughness. The symbol of the wawa seed is meant to inspire an individual to persevere through hardship. Costume designer Ruth E.

Carter says this symbol was chosen to communicate Shuri's purpose and importance to the nation of Wakanda (Adams). Shuri's shirt, coupled with her skirt and cinched waist, simultaneously convey strength, femininity, and knowledge. The multilayered costuming communicates that Shuri is an intelligent woman with a high historical and cultural quotient who is at once feminine and strong.

When the Dora Milaje were introduced in the original *Black Panther* comic book, they were portrayed with long flowing hair and mini-skirts and had a much more subservient role to the king. The film, however, opted for a different aesthetic (Broadnax). By changing the dress of the Dora Milaje to include shaven heads, pants, and armor for the *Black Panther* film, the Black women were depicted as powerful. At the same time, their costuming also presents key symbols of femininity through the outline of their breasts under the armor and smoky eye makeup, long eyelashes, and red lipstick. Gurira, who portrays Okoye, states: "The ferocity is not compromised for femininity. They're both allowed to coexist and we don't see that enough and we don't know that enough societally as little girls growing up. You can be both. You can combine those two things and how fun is that?" (Toby).

In reference to the wig-throwing scene, Gurira states, "It's almost like a removal of a shackle and breaking free of a certain type of bondage about what it means to fit into a convention" (Toby). The convention to which she is referring is the social unacceptability of Black women's natural hair, which has been penalized in workplaces and cause for expulsion in schools (Morris). As a result, historically and contemporary Black women have used wigs, extensions, straightened hair, and weaves to achieve a socially accepted aesthetic (Ford). Knowing it serves a purpose, Okoye wears the wig, albeit begrudgingly, when it serves her cause and rejects the wig when it is no longer useful. Wearing a wig and subsequently throwing it off signals the strategic styling and physical malleability Black women are required to engage in to achieve their goals. Often body modifications are hidden and passed off as normal to achieve social acceptability, but in this scene Okoye's modifications are revealed as socially savvy and strategic (Blum). By seamlessly navigating through multiple social expectations, Okoye makes intelligent decisions about her dress behavior.

Presenting dress that reveals the process undertaken to decide what to wear then challenges the notion that women are what they wear or, at least, what they are wearing at any given moment. Also, by revealing the decision-making process that is a part of dress, the myth of clothing as a natural extension of an individual's

essence, identity, or personality falls apart. The linear relationship between physical appearance and character is challenged. By displaying a wide range of dress choices among characters as well as multiple and contradictory layers of symbols within each character's dress, it becomes increasingly difficult to distill each of the women into one-dimensional stereotypes. This is particularly important because the typical representations of Black women in film tend to be limited to controlling images which serve to reinforce oversimplified versions of Black femininity. Furthermore, within the context of film, revealing how decisions are made about dress, plants a seed in the audience about how the other characters arrived at their dress decisions. As a consequence, the film audience is challenged to pay attention to the context and social situations that produce each decision about what to wear, rather than reducing the character's subjectivity to a controlling image.

Power, Position, and Politics of the Mediated Black Woman Discussion

Regarding her role as Okoye in *Black Panther*, Gurira states:

> I loved how subversive [that moment] was, and how it's [playing with] conventional norms around feminine beauty. [Okoye] is just being who she is. You know, being proud of her bald head and her tats. And how her femininity—all of the women [in the film]—their femininity coincides so seamlessly with their ferocity. And how those two things do not have to compromise themselves for the other thing. I thought that one moment kind of encapsulated all of that. (Warner)

Despite the empowering roles and associated costumes for women in *Girls Trip* and *Black Panther*, these Black women's characters are still relegated to the margins of the storylines in favor of heterosexual relationship issues or support for male characters' storylines.

The media claims that both *Black Panther* and *Girls Trip* "pass" the Bechdel Test,[3] but we argue against this claim. The Bechdel Test evaluates how women are portrayed in relationship to male characters. Even in films where the primary characters are women, the female characters' storylines revolve around the male

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[3] The Bechdel Test originated from a comic strip. Over time, the test was named for the comic's creator and included three criteria: (1) fiction work that includes two or more women; (2) at least two of the women engage with one another; and (3) the discussions between women exclude discussions of a man or men (O'Meara). According to our research, both *Black Panther* and *Girls Trip* fail the Bechdel Test.

characters. In *Girls Trip*, the female characters continuously return to topics that are heterogeneous to the male characters such as securing sexual partners, a cheating husband, divorce, and male betrayal. Still, there are scenes from both films that demonstrate real progress regarding the changing roles for Black actresses, where the female characters are not stereotypes and own their agency. The roles of women in these two films are significant and resonated with female audiences even if the films did not pass the Bechdel Test. For example, 45 percent of moviegoers to *Black Panther* were women which is not the typical audience of a superhero film (Coleman) and *Girls Trip*'s primary audience were women which of that number included 14 percent infrequent moviegoers (Kelley).

Though in many ways the women's style disrupts controlling images, they cannot escape the popular symbolism of these visual types. As the Black women attempt to liberate themselves from stereotypical and patriarchal frameworks, they are often forced back into familiar positions with popularized interpretations of their dress and stylized appearances confronting them in contemporary movie portrayals of Black women. For *Black Panther*, it means casting women in supportive roles. For *Girls Trip*, it means only narrowly sideswiping casting women as stereotypes. This is most clear in Dina's costuming which resembles the "welfare queen" who dresses in symbolic displays of wealth that tend to look more tacky than chic. Or, in the case of the man-stealing Instagram villain who is cast as the "jezebel" leading with her sexuality in revealing clothing (Hill Collins 84). And, yet, the other three central female characters, Lisa, Sasha, and Ryan are not as easily cast as controlling images though they often deal in the politics of respectability. This positions *Girls Trip* as well as *Black Panther* as important steps forward in the portrayal of Black women in film while at the same time leaving room for improvement.

Both *Girls Trip* and *Black Panther* offer highly constructed stylizations of the Black female characters. In both films, the primary female characters do not wear or style their hair in natural styles; instead, they have shaved heads, wear wigs and extensions, or display straightened hair or highly stylized hair. Still, all of the images are sexualized even if the actresses do not readily see it as such. In *Girls Trip*, Dina is continually dressed in a sexy ghetto-fabulous aesthetic and all of the women verbally harass Lisa to dress more sensually in order to secure a man for sex. While the women in *Black Panther* are not in constant pursuit of men, they are always sexualized in their dress. Okoye's military dress while formal and imposing is also form-fitting to reveal her feminine form. Prior to exile, even Queen

Ramonda's dress was sculpted to structure her aging body into a younger hourglass silhouette.

Relationships between characters drive storylines and develop dimensional characters with relatable narratives. The women in *Black Panther* are not the central characters to the storyline, unlike *Girls Trip* that primarily focuses on the relationships between four Black women. In *Black Panther*, the evolution of the romantic relationships and friendships revolve around and stem from the battles for power in Wakanda, while in *Girls Trip*, the friendships are more organic with complex hierarchies and involvements. The relationships examined in these two distinct films establish the diversity of characters.

Regardless of their role, these Black female characters represent new and redefined images for Black women. Accordingly, Gurira states:

> It's [Okoye's costume] a subverted standard of beauty. I'm sure people have to pick up on that. That's the first thing I thought. It so subverts the idea of feminine beauty…. Their outfits are very structured but beautiful. Feminine but not revealing. The red lip, the lashes, you know? The bald heads, the tattoos and they're going to kick your butt. (Toby)

In addition, the physical environments and settings for each movie assists in impacting the ways the dress and styles manifest in the real world for Black women. *Girls Trip* is set in the well-known urban environment of New Orleans, Louisiana. In addition to some scenes set in an urban American neighborhood, *Black Panther* is set in the fantastic land of Wakanda that imagines an alternative history and future of the world. In this Afrofuturistic context, Black Africans have developed the technology to propel them beyond any other civilization. "In many ways, *Black Panther* creates a credible alternative to colonialism, exploring an Afrofuturistic narrative of a country that had never been colonized and oppressed" (Murray). This alternative reality contributes to the characters' *Black Panther* dress and fashion latitude that is not possible for the characters in *Girls Trip*. For example, the backdrop for *Girls Trip* is the legal discrimination against Black hair textures in American schools and workplace.

Furthermore, casting of dark-skinned actresses for all of the main female characters in *Black Panther* eschews the typical colorism in film. This is a significant divergence from *Girls Trip*, wherein the protagonists have medium and light skin colors and the villains have darker skin complexions. The lead actresses of *Girls Trip* represent historical trends for colorism in film casting and society

whereas *Black Panther's* Afrofuturistic setting is highlighted by the dark-skinned successful nation of Wakanda (Leary).

Summary

In our research, we explored the ways in which the mediated Black female body experiences racialization through style and dress in recent popular films *Girls Trip* and *Black Panther.* Accordingly, we examined the stylistic choices that represent or challenge dominant ideals of being a Black woman. To this end, we considered the prevailing expectations for Black female bodies and how these expectations are reproduced through fashion and dress. Dress in films (and popular culture at large) functions as a mechanism to create, challenge, and reinforce racialized understandings of Blackness in popular culture. The stylistic presentations of Black women in films reinforce, challenge, and re-create what it means to be Black and feminine. Accordingly, racialized representations of Black actresses reveal the power, status, and politics of the mediated Black woman.

In both *Girls Trip* and *Black Panther*, Black actresses are challenging controlling images and stereotypes imposed upon Black women. Their dress and aesthetic styles are not always predictable from past stereotypes commonly seen in Hollywood films. *Girls Trip*'s roles for the actresses continue some of the traditional stereotypes for Black women but still offers visual evidence of progress in dress, styles, and skin tone. While *Black Panther* forges new territory, the film is just small steps away from old tried-and-true territories. Overall, *Girls Trip* and *Black Panther* challenge past notions of the ways race is performed for blockbuster films. The relative success of each film further offer opportunities for Hollywood filmmakers to embrace more risk-taking scripts that present Black women in diverse and thoughtful roles and dress.

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#GrammysNotAsWhite: Critical Race Theory and the Grammys' Race Problem

JASMINE HENRY

#GrammysSoWhite and the Race Problem

Each year, the announcement of the Grammy Award nominees is immediately followed by rigorous socio-political critique. In previous years, critics lambasted the underrepresentation of black artists in mainstream award categories, their overrepresentation in racialized categories like hip hop/R&B, and absence from leadership positions within the Recording Academy. However, the November 28, 2017 announcement of the Grammy Award nominees prompted a wave of excitement among music industry professionals and fans. Of note, the four mainstream award categories, Record of the Year, Album of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best New Artist, saw a drastic increase in African American nominees. Subsequently, legions of critics took to mainstream media outlets to commend the Recording Academy, the Grammys' governing institution, for seemingly addressing their institutional race issues. Consequently, enticing news headlines leading up to the 2018 awards ceremony read: "The 2018 Grammy Nominations Deservedly Celebrates Artists of Color" (McDermott) and "The Grammys Diversity Triumph. No White Guys in Album of the Year!" (Fallon).

This celebratory discourse is a sharp departure from the condemnation routinely leveled at the Grammys' televised broadcast each year. Previously, headlines like "The Year #GrammysSoWhite Came to Life. Will the Awards Face Its Race Problem?" emerged after several highly-contested snubs occurred during the nomination process and awards ceremony (Caramanica). Frustrated by the consistent nomination omissions and award snubs, black recording artists such as

JASMINE HENRY is a musicology Ph.D. candidate at Rutgers University—New Brunswick whose research centers on Black independent music-making practices and critical race theory. Specifically, her dissertation project focuses on the development, sustenance, and (in)visibility of Black independent music scenes in Newark, New Jersey. As a part-time lecturer, she teaches music business, music technology, and music history courses at several higher education institutions. As the current artistic director of the Newark School of the Arts' media lab, she uses her professional audio engineering experience and scholarship to develop lifelong bonds between youth, music, and technology. She can be reached at jasmine.henry@rutgers.edu.

Kanye West, Frank Ocean, and Janelle Monáe openly criticized the Recording Academy leadership for persistently denying the role the Grammys' nomination and voting policies play in producing unequal opportunities and outcomes for people of color. In addition to vocalizing their concerns, some recording artists boycotted the awards ceremony and declined to submit their eligible works for Grammy consideration. For instance, Frank Ocean abstained from submitting his critically-acclaimed 2016 album *Blonde* referring to the decision as his "Colin Kaepernick moment." Ocean expressed that "[the Grammys] doesn't seem to be representing very well for people who come from where I come from, and hold down what I hold down." Specifically, Ocean identified the Grammys' outdated nomination system as a direct cause of the underrepresentation of black artists in mainstream award categories (Caramanica).

However, despite black artists' outcries and the Recording Academy's unwavering denial of institutional race issues, numerous music industry professionals and critics attribute the wealth of 2018 African American nominees to the implementation of several new policies and procedures. Specifically, in 2016 and 2017, the Recording Academy instituted policy changes that made streaming-only releases eligible, established a new online voting system, and created a nomination review committee for the rap award categories. While some critics interpret the implementation of these measures as meaningful steps toward inclusivity and diversity at the Grammys, I remain critical of the Recording Academy's underlying intentions for instituting these new policies and procedures. For this reason, I suggest framing and examining the Grammys' nomination and awards outcomes as products of a larger racialized social system, the Recording Academy. By doing so, I reveal how these policy changes produce an illusory sense of racial progress, covertly protect white elites' socioeconomic interests, and are susceptible to dilution and reversal.

Utilizing critical race theory (CRT) scholarship I examine the discourse and implications surrounding each policy's implementation to unveil the Recording Academy's underlying motives for enacting the new measures. Specifically, I focus on both the recognized and concealed implications of these changes for black music professionals throughout the eligibility, general voting, and special committee stages of the nomination process. Furthermore, I scrutinize the Recording Academy's strategic deployment of a racially-neutral discourse to combat and invalidate claims of racial inequality at the Grammys. Conducting a study on the Grammys' structure and practices is difficult as the Recording Academy's policies,

procedures, and demographics are not readily available to the public. Therefore, to illustrate these issues, this article draws from a multitude of sources including statements made by Grammy officials, Recording Academy bylaws, narrative accounts from Grammy voting members, and online news articles.

Applying Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory scholarship provides an array of analytical frameworks and tools to examine the dynamic relationship among race, racism, and power deeply embedded in social institutions. Since the 1970s, critical race theorists have formulated numerous race-conscious theoretical approaches and a language to demonstrate how institutional ideologies and policies advantage the privileged while denying the basic rights of the oppressed. In synthesizing the broad range of concepts and issues addressed by this group of scholars and activists, I follow critical race theorists in their contention that racism has become insidiously embedded in institutional structures and practices to the extent that they are nearly undetectable (Delgado and Stefancic 2-4). In this paper, I draw from these concepts to present a race-based systematic critique of the Grammys' struggles with diversity and how these issues connect to larger structural inequalities deeply embedded in the United States music industry. Specifically, these structural inequalities are perpetuated and reinforced by white artists and executives' unjust access to decision-making roles, outdated policies, and colorblind meritocracy.

The Recording Academy's dismissive response to music industry professionals' outcries connotes an entrenched resistance to racial reform firmly rooted by notions of liberalism and traditionalism. On the surface, the existing Grammy policies and practices promote the idea that equality and objectivity are granted to each participant. However, I contend that these policies and practices covertly maintain white supremacy and domination. For instance, Recording Academy President Neil Portnow regularly crafts narratives that depict the Recording Academy membership as both enlightened and progressive. Specifically, Portnow dismisses notions of institutional racism by claiming that: "We don't, as musicians, in my humble opinion, listen to music based on gender or race or ethnicity. When you go to vote on a piece of music—at least the way that I approach it—is you almost put a blindfold on and you listen" (Hogan).

This blindfold analogy equates to what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva terms "colorblind racism" ideologies or "powerful explanations—which have ultimately

become justifications—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them [white elites] from any responsibility for the status of people of color" (Bonilla-Silva 2). Portnow's depiction of musicians as having the capability to hear past racial or gender prejudices is just one example of how white elites deploy powerful yet subversive ideologies to obscure the undisturbed legacies of institutional inequalities that reinforce racial hierarchies and unequal outcomes at the Grammys. Thus, to address dominant group ideologies like Portnow's, this study will draw from what Bonilla-Silva describes as the four frames of color-blind racism:

1. Abstract Liberalism: Engages ideas of political and economic liberalism (equal opportunity, choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters.
2. Naturalization: Explains away racial phenomena as natural occurrences.
3. Cultural Racism: Uses culturally-based assumptions and arguments to explain minorities' positions in society.
4. Minimization of Racism: Suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' opportunities and outcomes. (76-77)

Contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through "new racism" practices, like colorblind ideologies, that are subtle, institutional, and seemingly nonracial (Bonilla-Silva 3). Abstract liberalism, specifically, is used to obscure how the music industry was built upon social, political, and economic inequalities and refute that generations of white elites have inherited privileges through these unjust structures. In the end, this article works against discourses of normalcy and invisibility to expose unchecked institutional inequalities and the potential for meaningful racial reform at the Grammys.

Streaming and Snatching Grammys

The first step in the Grammy nomination process requires Recording Academy members and record companies to submit works for eligibility screening and category placement. Previously, two fundamental principles determined Grammy eligibility: (1) recordings released between October 1 and September 30 and (2) music commercially released through a broad distributor in the United States such as a record label, Internet seller like iTunes, or traditional brick-and-mortar retailer such as Target (Recording Academy). The Grammys' justified their emphasis on commercially-released recordings as these guidelines were used to exclude submissions by amateur artists who often release their music for free. However,

those policies could not account for the changes in music distribution and consumption brought on by the emergence of streaming services such as Spotify and SoundCloud. The outdated eligibility policies were especially disabling to innovative black artists democratizing the music industry using online streaming services and do-it-yourself music-making and promotional practices.

In February 2016, then 15-year old Max Krasowitz created an online petition requesting Grammy eligibility for streaming-only recordings. Streaming-only recordings may be conceived of as recordings exclusively distributed through online streaming platforms and not available for digital download or physical product purchase. On the petition's webpage, Krasowitz proclaimed:

> Artists like Chance the Rapper, who are now getting national recognition and performing on national platforms...are being punished for making their music available…Not all artists should be forced to release their music for free, but the ones who do should not be punished for doing so. (Krasowitz)

Krasowitz' frustrations resonated with other fans and recording artists as many professional contemporary hip-hop/R&B recordings are now released for free on music streaming platforms. Thus, an artist's decision to release their music for free may exclude them from receiving mainstream awards despite their critical success. Building off of Krasowitz' petition, Chance the Rapper used his celebrity and social media influence to lobby for free music to be considered by the Recording Academy (see Figure 1).

Chance the Rapper not only raised the public consciousness surrounding this issue and encouraged more people to sign the petition, but he also directly confronted the Recording Academy leadership. It appears that this confrontation was effective as Bill Freimuth, the Senior Vice President of Awards subsequently released a statement claiming that they would "work with them [the artists] to figure out how those changes might work." Accordingly, in June 2016, the Recording Academy announced that streaming-only releases would be eligible for 2017 Grammy nomination consideration. Consequently, Chance the Rapper's streaming-only mixtape, *The Coloring Book* won the award for Best Rap Album at the 2017 ceremony, making him the first streaming-only artist to win a Grammy.
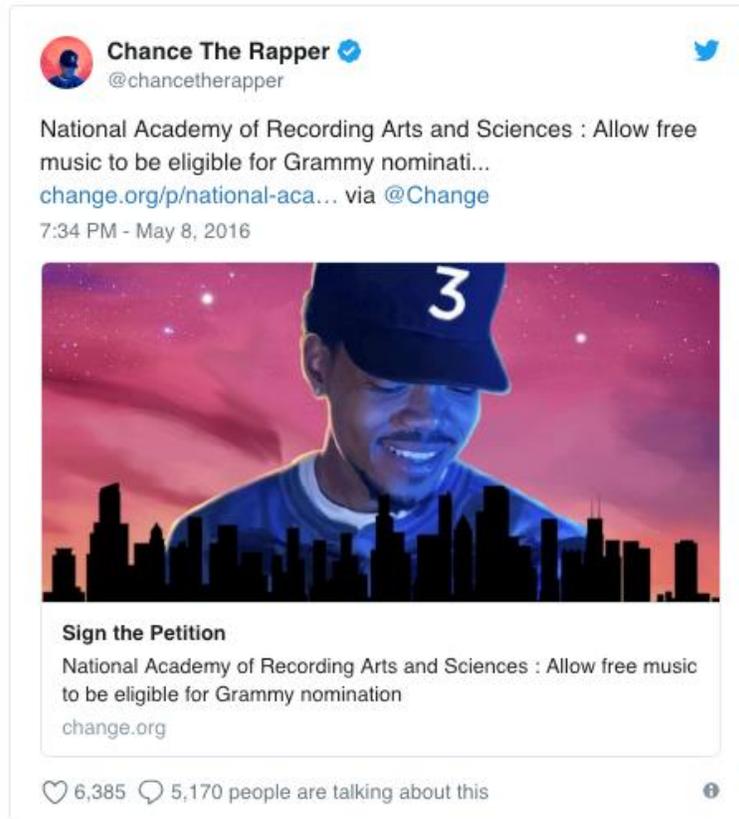
Figure 1. Screenshot of Chance the Rapper's Tweet Sharing Krasowitz' Petition for Streaming Eligibility (@chancetherapper)

To accommodate streaming-only artists and their music, the Recording Academy expanded their definition of general distribution to include "paid subscription, full catalog, on-demand streaming/limited download platforms that have existed as such within the United States" (Recording Academy). In other words, only works released on major paid subscription services like Apple Music, Spotify, and Tidal qualify for eligibility. Additionally, the recording must be released in high-definition quality. Hence, the Grammys are willing to include streaming-only artists only if they meet the institution's commercial standards. Thus, despite Krasowitz and Chance the Rapper's ambitions to make free music releases Grammy eligible, the new policy still excludes artists who release their music on platforms such as SoundCloud and YouTube.

Nevertheless, Chance the Rapper presented his fans and members of the Recording Academy with a bottom-up view of the music industry, giving agency

and voice to marginalized individuals. His streaming artist-centric requests for policy intervention resonates with Kimberlé Crenshaw's belief that policy-makers should develop political and legal policies from a bottom-up perspective to address the needs of the oppressed and underrepresented (1242). Furthermore, this case shows how the advent and proliferation of digital technologies including the Internet, do-it-yourself music-making interfaces, and music streaming platforms undermine major corporations' exclusive control of mass media. Specifically, social media and mobile technologies enable the mass mobilization of a race-conscious youth, a tactic exploited by Krasowitz and Chance the Rapper. Ultimately, digital technologies have provided minority groups with powerful tools and platforms to call out the subtle forms of racism surrounding the Grammys.

However, one must also consider Derrick Bell's concept of interest convergence in which white elites tolerate or encourage racial advances for minorities as long as those advances simultaneously promote white self-interest (523). Notably, these interventions seem to coincide with changing economic conditions such as the destabilization of the music industry due to the rise of streaming services. Considering that the three transnational recording companies (Sony BMG, Universal Music Group, and Warner Music Group) own stock in the major streaming services and have signed several streaming-only artists to record deals, I contend that the Grammys could no longer afford to overlook streaming-only artists and their increasing presence in the mainstream music industry. Ultimately, these incentives raise questions as to whether the Recording Academy acted out of a genuine interest in promoting minority talent or economic necessity and self-preservation.

Everybody's Online: The Myth of Meritocracy

The next step in the nomination process, first-round voting, occurs after the submitted work is deemed eligible and placed in the appropriate award category. During this stage, Recording Academy members vote to determine the five finalists in each category. Before transitioning to online voting, the Recording Academy distributed paper ballots to over 13,000 voting members. However, the paper ballot system was inconvenient for active voting members, namely young and touring individuals. Furthermore, it allowed barely-active members, most of whom being older white males, to vote uninhibitedly. The unchecked power of barely-active, older members is particularly problematic for artists in non-pop genres such as hip-

hop and R&B as they tend to vote conservatively and for the most recognizable artists (Recording Academy).

Rob Kenner, a Grammy voting member, shares that many of the "nominations are chosen by people who have little real expertise in a given field" and that while he refrained from voting in genres he was less familiar with, he could if he wanted to. He also explains the voting members' biases toward famous artists:

> I soon learned another unwritten rule during private conversations with other committee members: be careful about green-lighting an album by someone who was really famous if you don't want to see that album win a Grammy. Because famous people tend to get more votes from clueless Academy members, regardless of the quality of their work. (Kenner)

After observing the Latin Grammys' successful implementation of an online voting system, the Recording Academy designed an online platform to "provide greater flexibility for touring artists, eliminate the possibility of invalid ballots, and protect further against fraudulent voting." According to the Grammy bylaws, all eligible voters are still permitted to vote in the four mainstream award categories but are now limited to vote in 15, instead of 20, specialized genre categories. Furthermore, the new voting platform provides a form of check and balance by requiring members to log on using personalized credentials and disallowing them to vote in categories in which they are unauthorized.

To encourage educated nominations, the online system provides voters with recordings and videos of nominated works (Recording Academy). Following the announcement of the online voting system, Freimuth expressed this prediction:

> We hope that our nominations will better represent the entire community of music makers, especially if there's a particular segment that we've been missing. There may be certain genres within our awards categories where the demographic that tends to participate in making that particular music might be more tech savvy in general, or might have more of a mobile lifestyle than certain other genres, and we think this might appeal to those folks. (Ugwu)

This statement suggests that the Recording Academy leadership has attributed the diversity problem to a lack of participation from younger voters, once again circumventing the idea of having a race problem to an age problem. Freimuth explicitly claimed that "the youth don't want anything to do with the Grammy process" (Ugwu).

However, I suggest that the deployment of this logic is an example of the leadership shifting the blame from the institutional inequalities to the oppressed group (Bonilla-Silva 9). For instance, Portnow affirms that:

> The popular vote stands by itself and completely determines who receives an award in any given year. There certainly could be those that are disappointed and that had a difference of opinion about another artist than perhaps received a Grammy in any given year, but the fact is that they had a chance to vote. (Hogan)

Based on Portnow's interpretation, we can also see how the Recording Academy leaderships' view towards voting rights and opportunities are grounded by the powerful liberal ideology of meritocracy. Meritocracy assumes a level playing field where all individuals in society have an equal opportunity to succeed and that only one's work ethic, values, and drive determine one's successes or failures (Zamudio 9). This ideological stance refutes the possibility of someone's lack of success being caused by historical and social precedents.

Rather, this ideological stance frames each Grammy award winner as an individual who worked harder than their peers and produced an objectively superior musical product. However, even if every member votes, African Americans may encounter representational issues due to their numerical minority status in the white-dominated Grammy voting membership. The voter eligibility system continues to reinforce this dominance because in order to become an eligible voting member, an individual must only meet one of the following requirements:

1. Have been credited with 12 physical or digital tracks released online and currently available for purchase, with at least one track in the past five years
2. Have six credits on commercially released tracks currently available for sale and distributed through physical distribution outlets (such as record stores), with at least one track in the past five years
3. Have won a Grammy before
4. Have received an endorsement from a current voting member (Recording Academy)

Decades of black music professionals' exclusion and erasure from the mainstream music industry imply a white-majority among artists, producers, recording engineers, and executives with eligible album credits. Moreover, requirements one and two emphasize that recordings must be available for purchase, once again disadvantaging many young and diverse streaming-only artists who release their

music for free. Furthermore, more white artists have won Grammys than black artists, and there are fewer black-centric award categories than white-dominated ones. Thus requirement three is also in favor of white members. Finally, in direct conflict with the idea of meritocracy that asserts that privilege is earned and not granted by historical and social factors, number four suggests that someone could become a voting member by asking another voting member in their closed informal network to recommend them.

In interviews, Portnow regularly asserts that the Grammys holds "a democratic vote by majority. So somebody could either receive or not receive a Grammy based on one vote." (Hogan). However, his sentiments do not consider how the voters' white majority makes the Grammys' winner-take-all, peer-to-peer voting system problematic. According to Lani Guinier (7-9), a "one person, one vote" system assumes that everyone can vote and that every vote is equal, obscuring notions of disenfranchisement. Furthermore, Portnow crafts and deploys colorblind ideologies regarding voting practices and outcomes:

> To your earlier question about a racial problem...You don't get Chance the Rapper as the Best New Artist of the year if you have a membership that isn't diverse and isn't open-minded and isn't really listening to the music, and not really considering other elements beyond how great the music is. (Hogan)

Here, Portnow is tokenizing Chance the Rapper's win to justify that the Grammys does not have a race problem because there is proof that a black artist has won in a mainstream award category. This statement is an example of minimization in which an oppressor analyzes and mandates the terms of what is and is not racist (Bonilla-Silva 77). According to Bonilla-Silva, stories like these are important because they help reinforce arguments and persuade listeners that the oppressor's views are correct (95). Ultimately, the Recording Academy leadership's ability to control the narrative and obscure the disproportionality of the voting members contributes greatly to its ability to protect and perpetuate white dominance.

Check the Flow: The Rap Nomination Review Committee

For certain award categories, the final nominees are determined by a secret review committee. The first nomination review committees were established in 1989 in response to criticism that the annual nominations were not reflective of what voting members considered to be the best in the field. Specifically, if a sizable number of

voting members felt that an award category failed to represent current tastes and expert opinions over a significant period, they sent recommendations to the general awards committee and board of trustees. If in agreement, the general awards committee could then establish a nomination review committee (Hilburn 1999). After the first-round nomination vote, a group of undisclosed experts vet the top nominations to ensure that the final nominees are reflective of what they consider to best represent excellence. While there is concern that these undisclosed members may abuse their power, the committees have been greeted with mostly positive feedback.

In June 2017, the Grammys' created a rap nomination review committee to serve as an "additional round of checks and balances to eliminate the potential for a popularity bias that puts emerging, independent music, and late year releases at a disadvantage" (Karp). The creation of the rap nomination committee followed several highly-contested nominations and omissions in the rap award categories. For instance, in 2014, the question of whether to allow Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' album *The Heist* to be nominated in the hip-hop/rap award categories generated controversy between the general Grammy community and members of the rap community. Members of the rap community argued that Macklemore and Lewis' pop-centric album was not worthy of a hip-hop award nomination and that their significant Top 40 radio exposure would likely result in less knowledgeable members voting for them. Even Macklemore agreed with the rap community's opinion regarding his album:

> If we win a Grammy for Best Rap Album, Hip-Hop is going to be heated.
> In terms of [that category], I think it should go to Kendrick…I understand
> why Hip-Hop would feel like Kendrick got robbed [if he didn't win]…We
> obviously had massive success on commercial radio, and I think that, in
> ways, The Heist was a bigger album, but Kendrick has a better rap album.
> (Dobbins)

Nevertheless, the general Grammy committee disregarded the rap community's concerns and allowed Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' album to be nominated. Consequently, the duo earned seven nominations and as predicted, beat out Kendrick Lamar for the Best Rap Album and Best Rap Performance categories. Dismayed by the outcome, Macklemore sent an apology to Kendrick Lamar via text message which he later posted on Instagram (see Figure 2). This result troubled Macklemore to the extent that he decided not to submit his album *This Unruly Mess I've Made* for the 2017 award ceremony (Strauss).

Figure 2. Screenshot of Macklemore's Message to Kendrick Lamar Made Public via Instagram (@macklemore)

This occurrence was neither the first nor last time a black artist was ousted by a white artist who later voiced their concern over the result. For instance, when Adele's *25* won Album of the Year over Beyoncé's *Lemonade* in 2017, she dedicated her acceptance speech to Beyoncé and broke the award in half to emphasize that she believed Beyoncé deserved the award. After the show, Adele explicitly stated: "My album of the year is Lemonade. What the f— does she have to do to win Album of the Year?" (Monroe and Yoo). Beyoncé's consistent snubs further highlight the Grammys' deeply-embedded institutional inequalities as John Vilanova suggests that:

> When renowned creations by racialized artists are only honored in the categories coded black and systematically passed over time and time again for "mainstream" recognition, this belies an in-built bias that precludes nonwhite excellence from being considered on the same terms as white excellence. (Vilanova)

The Grammys' colorblind-meritocratic ideals discount the structural elements such as white privilege and the distinct experiences of minority artists—instead choosing to deemphasize the role of race to reach a broader audience. Take, for instance,

Beyoncé's high-profile Album of the Year losses to Beck, Taylor Swift, and Adele. Beyoncé is the most nominated woman in Grammy history but has only won 35 percent of the time in contrast to Adele's winning percentage of 83 (Vilanova). The discrepancy between high nomination rate and low winning percentage prominent among established hip-hop/R&B music-makers hints at what Vilanova calls a glass ceiling for black artists. Thus, the rap nomination review committee provides an opportunity for knowledgeable experts to override the Grammys' colorblind approach to dealing with overtly racialized categories such as hip-hop/R&B.

By drawing upon the experiential knowledge of cultural insiders, namely rap artists, producers, and executives, the review committee can take a color-conscious approach to develop evaluative criteria and frameworks to specifically determine musical excellence in rap. Specifically, a racially-diverse committee can draw upon what Delgado and Stefancic (9) refer to as the "voice-of-color" thesis which suggests that because of their unique histories and experiences with oppression, minorities can confront issues and values that white voting members are unlikely to perceive and understand in black music. The implementation of this committee is especially timely as black artists are increasingly using more race-conscious approaches to represent themselves counter to the prejudices aimed against them and their music. Particularly, artists like Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar have used their recent mainstream performances and albums to empower black communities and celebrate authentic modes of black cultural expression. However, the Grammys' lack of imagination and tolerance toward race-centric performances often contrasts with the progressive and radical stances of the artists (Caramanica). As a result, members of oppressed groups sometimes frame their ideas in ways the dominant group is familiar and comfortable with, often changing the original meaning of the works (Hill-Collins 293).

Conversely, Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar's politically-charged music serve as forms of counterstorytelling that use oppositional voices rooted in the experiences of the oppressed to reveal racial inequalities and challenge dominant narratives (Zamudio 4). According to Tara J. Yosso, these "counterstories embed critical conceptual and theoretical content within an accessible story format that can serve as pedagogical tools" (15). As such, Beyoncé's 2018 black-centric performance in front of Coachella's predominantly white audience could be viewed as a way of inviting non-black individuals "under the veil" to learn about the distinct worldview black people inherit as a consequence of navigating being black and American or, as W.E.B. Du Bois terms it, their "double-consciousness" (*Souls of Black Folk* 2-

3). Viewing racial inequality from beneath the veil reveals that white elites' ideals of integration, assimilation, and colorblindness often work against the interests of black artists. Thus, having a committee of cultural insiders to evaluate the goals, values, and culture-specific meanings of the nominated works could play a significant role in combatting the traditional notions of musical excellence that contribute to the silencing and diminution of black artists and their works.

#GrammysNotAsWhite, But Still Not Alright

After the secret committee confirms the top five nominations, the nominees are announced to the public. Final-round voting occurs, and the results are later revealed at the broadcasted award ceremony. Unfortunately, the results of the 60th Grammy Awards on January 28, 2018, left some viewers and music industry insiders disappointed. Despite the wealth of critically acclaimed hip-hop and R&B nominees, pop artist Bruno Mars collected most of the ceremony's top honors over Kendrick Lamar and Jay-Z suggesting that voting members' preferences are still firmly rooted in traditional pop styles over radical, racially-conscious works. Thus, while these policy changes have produced some positive outcomes, there is still much work to be done before we can truly commend the Recording Academy for addressing its institutional inequalities.

Despite the increased public consciousness surrounding the entertainment industry regarding issues of diversity, the Grammys have continued to circumnavigate racial issues rather than confront them. Most notably, the Recording Academy leadership's deployment of colorblind ideologies has promoted a false sense of racial progress and unity while covertly maintaining white supremacy. However, considering the heightened state of contemporary race relations in the United States, how much longer can the Grammys utilize the colorblind defense? Specifically, how much longer can the Grammys promote superficial notions of multiculturalism that celebrate diversity yet refuse to acknowledge white privilege and institutional racism?

We should also reflect on the role interest convergence has played in these policy changes. I contend that since hip-hop/R&B was the top genre of 2017, the Recording Academy could no longer afford to marginalize it. Furthermore, both established and up-and-coming artists are now releasing their works via streaming-only formats. Thus, how much longer could the Grammys continue to exclude these kinds of artists before its prestigious status and bottom-line was critically impacted?

In an interview, Portnow discusses how the Recording Academy is "always working on increasing diversity in membership, whether it's ethnicity, gender, genre, or age" specifically to maintain its relevance (Hogan). However, what happens if hip-hop/R&B becomes less popular or relevant? One possibility is that the Recording Academy will cease efforts toward increasing diversity because it is no longer necessary to maintain their relevance. Furthermore, they may attempt to reverse these new policies as we are currently seeing with Affirmative Action policies in the university and workplace settings. Ultimately, as Du Bois once articulated, black artists would enjoy only a "brief moment in the sun" before continuing down the cyclical path of racial reform ("Reconstruction" 784). Therefore, I contend that to move forward, the Recording Academy must adopt race-conscious strategies that directly confront issues of diversity, representation, and inclusion.

Toward Meaningful Racial Reform

John O. Calmore reminds us that "Our efforts must, while directed by critical theory, extend beyond critique and theory to…relieve the extraordinary suffering and racist oppression that is commonplace in the life experiences of too many people of color" (317). By harnessing the momentum of this racially-conscious period in the United States, activists and scholars can pressure the Recording Academy to implement policy changes that mitigate and eventually dismantle the Grammys' institutional inequalities. On these grounds, I recommend the following three-step approach toward meaningful racial reform:

1. Diversify Leadership: Elevate qualified and knowledgeable black music professionals into positions of power and key decision-making roles.
2. Implement Race-Conscious Measures: Develop long-term, race-conscious policies that acknowledge institutional racism, that diversify membership and results, and that work to redistribute power among Recording Academy members. Most importantly, the Recording Academy should develop strategies that increase voter strength among marginalized groups.
3. Develop Transparent Agendas and Modes of Communication: Increase transparency of Recording Academy policies, procedures, and practices among members and the public. Furthermore, promote open and constructive dialogue among Recording Academy members regarding issues of race and diversity.

When implementing these changes, the Recording Academy should take caution to avoid essentializing the experiences of minorities. Discussions of racial issues in the United States tend to focus on the challenges faced by African Americans thereby excluding other minority groups. When other minority groups are mentioned, their experiences are often analogized to those of African-Americans (Delgado and Stefancic 57-8). Thus, policy changes must also consider and confront the unique oppressions of these distinct groups. Furthermore, issues of intersectionality should be considered as most critical race theorists reject the notion that "one can fight racism without paying attention to sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, and other forms of oppression and injustice" (Delgado and Stefancic 22). Overall, implementing race-conscious strategies and deconstructing the dominant group's colorblind ideologies will play an important role in dismantling the race-based barriers that prevent black artists' achievement, mobility, and recognition.

Conclusion: Critical Race Theory and the #MusicIndustrySoWhite Problem

Subtle and persistent forms of racism drawing from unchecked inequalities of the past continue to reinforce racialized structures and practices that maintain white supremacy while simultaneously disadvantaging minorities. Notably, the mass media portrayal and representation of African Americans is a double-edged sword with the ability to both counteract and perpetuate prejudices and stereotypes. While ceremonies such as the BET and Soul Train awards regularly recognize and celebrate black music professionals, the inequitable treatment of black artists at the Grammys and other prestigious ceremonies like the Emmys, Oscars, and Tony awards remain problematic as these ceremonies serve as promotional events for record labels, reinforce the popular music canon, and allow individual artists to amass cultural capital. At these ceremonies, award nominees and winners are imbued with connotations of greatness, excellence, and success often resulting in increased exposure, opportunities, and sales. Thus, images of achievement in the mainstream industry can have a meaningful impact on members of historically-marginalized groups as Beyoncé expressed in her 2017 *Lemonade* acceptance speech:

> It's important to me to show images to my children that reflect their beauty
> so they can grow up in a world where they look in the mirror—first through

their own families, as well as the news, the Super Bowl, the Olympics, the White House and the Grammys—and see themselves. And have no doubt that they're beautiful, intelligent and capable. This is something I want for every child of every race, and I feel it's vital that we learn from the past and recognize our tendencies to repeat our mistakes. (Caramanica)

In the end, the ongoing struggle for inclusive policies and practices in the mainstream entertainment industry mirrors the widespread issue of racial inequality in the United States. Future applications of critical race theory can provide an invaluable view of the racial relations within the contemporary music industry as we move further into the twenty-first century. Particularly, critical race theory's ability to reveal deeply embedded institutionalized inequalities and social activist agenda could play a key role in helping black music professionals to share their diverse black experiences, unmitigated cultural expressive practices, and to secure socioeconomic prosperity.

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Appropriation as Appreciation: Afrocentric Testifying in the Discourse of Teena Marie

CARLOS D. MORRISON AND JACQUELINE ALLEN TRIMBLE

One of the major debates or controversies in the Black[1] popular sphere concerns the role of White artists in Black culture. Some Black scholars, artists, journalists and writers argue that white recording stars such as Taylor Swift, Macklemore, Robin Thicke, Miley Cyrus, Justin Timberlake, and others appropriate Black idioms, practices, and nuances. The thinking is that these White artists have little understanding of or appreciation for Black history, political struggle, or condition but mimic various aspects of Black popular culture in their music and videos for profit and street credibility within the Black community. Moreover, many have suggested that radio stations and record companies are the real culprits behind the rise of White artists: "The gatekeepers of the radio stations and record companies who have less investment in Black people and culture are more likely to elevate an Iggy Azalea over an Azealia Banks" (qtd. in Thompson 99). The current debate has roots in a long history of cultural appropriation extending from minstrelsy to Pat Boone's making millions singing covers of Little Richard's "Tutti Fruitti" and Fat's Domino's "Ain't That a Shame" to Taylor Swift's recent rendition of Earth Wind and Fire's "September." Undergirding each of these examples are artists and record

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[1] The terms "African American" and "Black" are used interchangeably throughout the article.

CARLOS D. MORRISON is Professor of Communication in the Department of Communication at Alabama State University. He received a Ph.D. in Intercultural Communication and African American Communication from the Kathy Hughes' School of Communication at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Dr. Morrison teaches courses in both Communication Studies and Mass Communications. His research area focuses Black popular culture and African American rhetoric. He can be reached at cdmorrison@alasu.edu.

JACQUELINE ALLEN TRIMBLE is Professor of English and chairs the Department of Languages and Literatures at Alabama State University. A Cave Canem Fellow and an Alabama State Council on the Arts Literary Fellow, her poetry has appeared in *The Louisville Review*, *The Offing*, and *Poet Lore*. A recent essay, "A Woman Explains How Learning Poetry is Poetry and Not Magic Made Her a Poet" appears in *Southern Writers on Writing*. Her other work is online, in journals, and in anthologies. *American Happiness*, her debut collection, won the 2016 Balcones Poetry Prize. She can be reached at jtrimble@alasu.edu.

companies making money off of Black creativity, often with little benefit to Black artists.

Yet, is it fair to suggest that most (which is often how the discussion is framed) White artists who embrace Black cultural idioms, practices, and nuances care very little about Black people and love Black culture for profit only? Is this true of artists such as Christina Aguilera, Hall and Oates, Joss Stone, and Lisa Stansfield? The Black community often claims to know the difference between those who are appropriators and those who have an appreciation for the culture: "We're pretty good at splitting up who is genuine" (qtd. in Thompson 99). Are we? This line between appreciation and appropriation was the source of criticism leveled at Latino Bruno Mars's 2018 Grammy win in the R&B category. The trepidation of encroachment in many critics' displeasure for that win shares a fear with the speaker in Langston Hughes's "Note on Commercial Theatre":

You've taken my blues and gone—
You sing 'em on Broadway
And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,
And you mixed 'em up with symphonies
And you fixed 'em
So they don't sound like me.
Yep, you done taken my blues and gone. (215-16)

Black creativity often has been and continues to be a response to oppression, erasure, and pain. Black music—from the spirituals, which functioned as coded messages, laments, and sources of comfort, to Hip Hop, which expressed the anger of Black youth and deconstructed White power structures—is resistance against the erasure and the inferioritizing of Black people. It has been and continues to be a way to own our spaces, our bodies, and our history. How, then, can it be desirable for this art form with a legacy rooted in the specific struggle of Black people to be co-opted by people who do not share the history, the struggle, or the pain out of which much of this music arises? Culture, however, is a fluid thing, and though bell hooks astutely observes that cultural appropriation is likely a means to mitigate Black resistance while evoking nostalgia for a past in which White supremacy was comfortably and overtly asserted (26), is it not possible for an artist outside the community to produce music within genres identified as Black who appreciates, rather than merely appropriates?

In a 2015 *Ebony* magazine article on the misappropriation of Black culture, illustrator Gluekit presented a visual collage of White recording artists, which

included Iggy Azalea, Van Morrison, Robin Thicke, Miley Cyrus, and others. In the picture, Teena Marie appears next to Elvis Presley. Are we to infer, then, that like Elvis, Teena Marie has taken Black music and made it her own, yet remained indifferent, at best, to Black people? This essay argues that while profit and street credibility drive appropriation of Black culture by many artists, Teena Marie is an exception. To do so, we will situate Teena Marie's discourse via her music lyrics, public statements, and interviews firmly within a Black cultural space to reconfigure appropriation as appreciation via Teena Marie as a case study. First, we will catalog Teena Marie's production as an artist to illustrate her decades-long commitment to Black musical forms and her acceptance within the Black community. Then, relying on Molefi Asante's notion of location as method, we will reveal an Afrocentric space in the discourse of Teena Marie, thus examining the way in which her rhetoric testifies to and affirms Black cultural space. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion on appropriation and make suggestions for future study.

In the Beginning: Mary Christine Brockert

One of the most successful White female R&B singers, instrumentalists, songwriters and producers was Mary Christine Brockert, better known as Teena Marie. Also called "Lady T" by her fans, Teena Marie was born in Venice, California, in 1956 and grew up in a predominantly Black West Los Angeles neighborhood called "Venice Harlem." As a result, she was very comfortable living around and interacting with African Americans. Teena Marie recalls how growing up in a predominantly Black neighborhood affected her: "I had a lot of black friends and I learned a lot about blacks and black music… All the kids used to call me Off White because I acted sort of black and I was comfortable with the black kids" (qtd. in Perrone 7). Perhaps influenced by this environment, Teena Marie, in her early teens, formed her own R&B band. Her musical tastes were shaped by the Motown Sound, particularly by artists such as Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye who were on Motown's *Tamla* label. While her band was moderately successful, Teena Marie, more importantly, made the music world take notice of her voice.

In 1976, Teena Marie began her career in earnest at a Motown-affiliated Gordy label in Los Angeles, California. Though she worked with a variety of producers, no recordings were "green lit" by Berry Gordy and she was becoming frustrated until she caught the attention of singer, instrumentalist, and producer Rick James,

who, impressed with the alabaster-skinned artist with the powerful Black-sounding voice, produced her debut album entitled *Wild and Peaceful*. The album is significant because it was produced by James, gave Teena Marie her first top-ten hit single, "I'm a Sucker for Your Love," and allowed Motown to assess whether Black listeners would respond positively to a Black-sounding White artist. The record label was so uncertain about the response to having a White face on the album cover, the *Wild and Peaceful* sleeve featured a picture of a seascape instead of Teena Marie. Motown's public relations strategy created a "Who is that?" buzz around the new artist which made record sales soar. Teena Marie went on to grace the cover of several Motown albums which included hits such as 1980's *Lady T,* ("Behind The Groove"), *Irons in the Fire*, ("I Need Your Lovin," Teena Marie's first top-40 hit), and 1981's *It Must be Magic*, her first gold record. The album included such R&B hits as "Portuguese Love," "Square Biz," and the title track, "It Must be Magic." These songs established Teena Marie as an R&B artist who could produce danceable hit records for Motown's Black audience.

However, while Teena Marie was successful, she wanted more control over her musical destiny and her money. As a result, she entered a contractual dispute over the payment of royalties and the release of new material. Pierre Perrone posits that "her desire to control her career led to conflicts with Gordy, who refused to release her from her contract, yet wouldn't sanction any more records by her either. This resulted in a legal case and an historical ruling that granted her freedom in 1982 and became known as the 'Brockert Initiative' after her real name" (3). The "Brockert Initiative" essentially dictates that a record company has to release new material from an artist if the record company is going to keep the artist under contract. Otherwise, the record company has to relinquish its legal control over the artist. After winning her legal battle against Motown, Teena Marie parted ways with the "Sound of Young America."

Epic Records, the 1980s, and Teena Marie as R&B Balladeer

After leaving Motown, Teena Marie signed a recording deal with Epic, a Columbia Records subsidiary. It was at Epic Records that Teena Marie produced some of her most memorable work. Cultural critic Barry Walters claims that "Teena recorded most of her dance floor anthems while at Motown, but at Epic her ballads blossomed [with songs such as] 'Shadow Boxing,' 'Out On a Limb,' 'Dear Lover,' and 'Cassanova Brown'" (9, 10). "Shadow Boxing," "Dear Lover," and "Casanova

Brown" were not only big hits for Teena Marie on her first album for Epic entitled *Robbery* in 1982, but, also, are some of her most powerfully, soulful R&B ballads, suggesting that, though she had left Motown behind, her sound and relationship to Black music were not just superficial trappings but an essential part of her identity. The mid-1980s continued to be good for Marie. In 1984, *Starchild*, her biggest selling album with Epic Records, produced two top-selling hits for Teena: "Lovergirl," and "Out on a Limb." "Lovergirl," which was in heavy rotation at R&B radio stations throughout the country, peaked at #4 on *Billboard* in March 1985. The album also included a tribute to one of Teena Marie's heroes, R&B singer Marvin Gaye, in a song entitled "My Dear Mr. Gaye." In "Out on a Limb," Teena Marie finds herself loving a man whom she cannot let go. She laments that she does not understand his hold over her ("Baby, baby, baby, it's a mystery") and that whatever he has done to her has her "spinning around" and feeling "insecure." Because she is powerless to resist him, she finds herself "giving in to [him] again." The vulnerability in these words recalls the plaintive lyrics of Black singers like Nina Simone, Billie Holliday, Etta James, and many others who love in spite of their better judgment and to their own detriment. Perhaps for this reason, "Out on a Limb" resonated most with her Black audience, which found the emotion believable and familiar.

In 1986, Teena Marie released *Emerald City*, an experimental mixture of rock and funk. While not a commercial success as Teena Marie's previous albums, it is significant as a cult classic and stands as her only concept album: "On wax, Marie cast *Emerald City* as a modern city gripped in perpetual night, its green glow eerie, hypnotic and dangerous" (*QH* 2). As a concept, *Emerald City*, which includes "Emerald City," "Once is Not Enough," and "Shangri-La," chronicles Pity's (Teena Marie's alter ego) quest to find an emerald stone that will make her turn green since she has lived her life as all of the other colors. Notably, the album's "You So Heavy" included a guitar solo by the late blues/rock guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughn. As a result, music critic Chuck Eddy ranks *Emerald City* "#9 in *Stairway to Hell*, a catalog of 'The 500 Best Heavy Metal Albums in the Universe,' even though there's nothing conventionally heavy metal-ish about it" (Walters 10). In addition, "You So Heavy," like "Casanova Brown," was also a tribute to her mentor, Rick James, harkening back to her musical roots.

In 1988, Teena Marie decided to return to R&B with the release of *Naked to the World.* While some might argue this return was precipitated by the commercial response to *The Emerald City*, we suggest that she returned to the category not only

because of previous financial success but also because this was her musical bailiwick. This idea is corroborated by the Black audience's response to "Ooo La La La," one of the album's songs, which resonated with her African American audience so well that it went #1 on *Billboard*'s Hot Black Singles chart. While "Oh, La La" was her only #1 single, other notable songs that saw air play included "Trick Bag" and the title song "Naked to the World."

Hip Hop, the 1990's and Beyond

Due to poor record sales and a shift in musical tastes from R&B to rap, Teena Marie's final album produced with Epic in 1990 was *Ivory*, which included "If I Were a Bell" and "Here's Looking at You." "If I Were a Bell" went to #8 on the R&B charts. In the song, Teena Marie proclaims proudly her desire to tell everyone about her one and only lover and that "it's wonderful," yet, it was clear at the beginning of the new decade that Black listeners were not feeling too "wonderful" about hearing R&B ballads from the "Ivory Queen of Soul." The bell was ringing but it was for hip-hop culture now. Rap music dominated the musical landscape in the Black community. "New Jack Swing" was in full effect. Groups such as Naughty by Nature, Soul II Soul, Salt N Pepper, and Public Enemy were the rage, and R&B seemed old-fashioned and out of touch with the realities of the urban youth culture. However, despite not being signed to a major record label or having any major hit records on 1994's *Passion Play* (released on independent label, Sarai Records) or 1999's *Black Rain* (promotional pressing only), Teena Marie benefitted from hip-hop culture. Perrone posits that "throughout the '90s, many rap and hip-hop acts sampled classic Marie tracks such as 'Square Biz' and, when she made La Dona in 2004 for Cash Money Records, she could call on guests like Common, Lady Levi and MC Lyte, as well as [Rick] James and the soul singer Gerald Levert . . . [for collaborations] respectively" (4).

After being away from the music industry for ten years raising her daughter Alia Rose and occasionally performing—sometimes with her daughter who she exposed to the business of Black music as well (Brown 2), Teena Marie signed with hip-hop label Cash Money Records. This blending of hip-hop overtures and R&B birthed *La Dona* in 2004, Teena Marie's eleventh album. *La Dona* earned gold record status and the album rocketed to the #3 spot on *Billboard.* Moreover, it was the song "I'm Still in Love" that propelled the album forward making *La Dona* the top charting album of Marie's recording career. "Lady Tee" was later nominated

for Best Female R&B vocals for "I'm Still in Love" at the 2005 Grammy Awards. The success of *La Dona* led to the 2006 follow-up *Sapphire*. The album had a heavy influence of R&B, soul, and hip-hop. The album featured collaborations with Smokey Robinson, Gerald Albright, George Duke, rapper Kurupt, and Teena Marie's daughter, Alia Rose. Featured songs included "You Blow Me Away," which was another tribute to Rick James, "Ooh Wee," and "Cruise Control." Henderson claims that "though both *La Dona* and *Sapphire* peaked at number three on the R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart, [Teena Marie] switched to Stax for her next album, 2009's *Congo Square*" (2).

Now signed with Stax/Concord Records, Teena Marie released her most ambitious recording, *Congo Square* in 2009. While the album includes signature R&B and funk tunes, it also has a strong jazz influence. Teena Marie said that she named the album in honor of the rich musical tradition associated with Congo Square in New Orleans, Louisiana. In "Congo Square," Teena Marie sings a roll call of Black artists, old and new, who have performed in that space—Lester Young, Erika Badu, Louis Armstrong, Nancy Wilson, Jill Scott, Ella Fitzgerald—applauding their legacy and their resilience. As writer Gail Mitchell notes in, "'Congo Square,' Marie pays tribute to artists who inspired her, ranging from Sarah Vaughan and Curtis Mayfield to Marvin Gaye and Billie Holiday. The album borrows its title from a section in New Orleans' French Quarter where slaves were allowed to wear their fancy clothes to dance and sing on Sunday" (2). In addition to "Congo Square," the album included "Can't Last a Day," a duet with Faith Evans, "Ear Candy," and "Ms. Coretta," which was a tribute to Mrs. Coretta Scott King.

Teena Marie's jazz influenced album proved to be a hit with her audience. *Congo Square* soared to the Top 20 of *Billboard's* Top 200 chart. "Can't Last a Day" made the Top 10 in the R&B category. *Congo Square* illustrates an important feature of Teena Marie's career as an artist who consistently sang, identified with, and paid tribute to Black music and performers. She did not dabble, slipping into the R&B vernacular from time to time, but rather she built her career on ballads, funk, and blending various genres associated with Black culture. Even her foray into rock was mitigated by funk and short-lived at that. Furthermore, Black audiences accepted the White woman with a Black voice as one of their own and made her a star from the beginning, Teena Marie's entry into the music business was an enigma. Fans frequently asked "Who is this petite White woman who sounds Black" and "How is she so immersed in African American culture"? To

answer these questions, we must locate Teena Marie in Black cultural spaces. To do so, we will look to Molefi Asante's notion of location as a method of analysis.

Asante's Location as Method

To locate Teena Marie in a Black cultural space and thus, within Black popular culture, we will rely on Molefi Asante's thinking about location, text, and Afrocentricity. In his article "Locating a Text: Implications of Afrocentric Theory," Asante posits that scholars have at their disposal an "Afrocentric viewpoint on texts" and do not have to rely on "the staid domains of an encapsulated theory" (Asante, *Locating a Text* 1). Furthermore, Asante argues that "Afrocentric theory. . . establishes two fundamental realities in situating a text: location and dislocation. The serious textual reader is able to locate a text by certain symbolic boundaries and iconic signposts offered from within the text itself. However, much like any traveler, the reader's [or recording artist's] location is also important in order to determine the exact location of the text" (1).

Asante claims that there are three critical elements associated with location. These elements are language, attitude, and direction (Asante, *Locating a Text* 3-4). In locating a text, it is important for the critic to identify the language in the text and/or the language used by the artist such as Teena Marie. This identification of language may take the form of "grammatical rule, nuances, words and deep systems" in the text under study (3). These linguistic nuances become "markers" or "residue" of the cultural identity of the artist and, thus, tell us about the thinking of the writer or artist and where he or she is located. Asante posits that "my attempt is always to locate a situation, an event, [or] an author. Location tells you where someone is, that is, where they are standing. It may not tell you where they are heading, but you do know where they are given certain markers of identity" (Asante, *Malcolm X as Cultural Hero* 100). So, if one sees "a reference to Africans as primitives or to Native Americans as 'a bunch of wild Indians' or Latinos as 'greasy,' then one knows the cultural address of the author" (Asante, *Locating a Text* 6). Relocation, on the other hand, involves the subject (Teena Marie) occupying a space not of her choosing. Here, Teena Marie's reality is defined by some other entity such as the dominant culture.

Teena Marie and the Location of a Black Identity

Molefi Asante posits that Afrocentricity is the "placing of African ideas at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior (Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* 2). An important African concept that situates Teena Marie within a Black cultural space is the fact that she grew up as a member of an African American collective known as Venice Harlem. As a member of this predominantly Black neighborhood, Christine Brockert, aka Teena Marie, interacted and communed with other members of the Black community—not as an outsider but as a member of the village. No doubt, her multi-ethnic background of Portuguese, Italian, Irish, and Native American ancestry gave her a broader, holistic understanding of herself as "other." As we suggested earlier in the essay, Teena Marie had numerous Black friends who taught her about Black culture and Black music. Teena Marie even appeared on an episode of *Soul Train.* These experiences place her within a Black cultural space.

Teena Marie also experienced the "burden of Blackness," to borrow from writer and cultural critic Greg Tate, when she was called derogatory and racist names such as "off white" and "nigger lover" by Whites observing her friendships with Black people and her embracing of Black culture. These "non-villagers" sought to mark Teena Marie's identity and her reality by relocating her to a space of inferiority and degradation. Teena Marie notes, "I can remember being chased home a couple of times and being called nigger lover. I was only 13 or 14, and to a young mind, that's heartbreaking. I can remember going in my house and sitting in my room and crying" (qtd. in Perrone 7). Nevertheless, she regained control of her identity by changing her name at the age of seventeen from Christine Brockert to Teena Marie as her interest in pursuing a recording contract in R&B continued with Motown. The name change serves as a marker of African American culture because (1) the *spelling* of the name "Teena Marie" connected her to a Black cultural space while "Christine Brockert" associated her with a White cultural space; (2) the name "Teena Marie" also connected her to the Motown label while cloaking her Whiteness in darkness on her debut album *Wild and Peaceful*; and (3) the name "Teena Marie" helped her audience identify with her Black identity via her soulful singing which, like her name, is the embodiment of the African concept called *nommo*. Carlos D. Morrison and Ronald L. Jackson II suggest that "from an Afrocentric perspective, *nommo* serves as the foundation for the creation of reality; it possesses the magical and generative power of the word manifested in the naming process. . . Naming is a powerful phenomenon of self-definition" (19-20).

In addition to the name "Teena Marie" being a marker of a Black identity, Teena Marie had a series of nicknames that further identified her with African American culture. In the song "Square Biz" from the *It Must be Magic* album, Teena Marie chronicles the litany of names she has been called: Casper, Shorty, Lil' Bit, and even Vanilla Child. However, she dismisses these names that are meant to diminish her by saying not only do they not determine who she is but also that they cannot deter her because they don't "cramp [her] style." Asante claims that nicknames, like the ones above, "serve as markers of the African presence in the 'sounding sense' of black America. Almost all young men and women receive nicknames at an early age, and these names are designatory, referring to one's physical appearance [as in Teena Marie's case] . . . character . . . or relation" (Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* 85). Though racially White, it is clear Teena Marie identified with Black culture. From changing her name to growing up in a Black neighborhood to appearing on *Soul Train* to feeling the burden of racism, Teena Marie's lived experiences were within a Black cultural space. Further, Teena Marie's diction was rooted in an attitude of Blackness that she willingly embraced. Asante posits that "attitude refers to a predisposition to respond in a characteristic manner to some situation, value, idea, object, person, or group of persons. The writer [or artist] signals his or her location by attitude towards certain ideas, persons, or objects. Thus, the critic in pursuit of the precise location of the author [or singer] can determine from the [artist's] characteristics or persistent response to certain things where the writer [or artist] is located" (Asante, *Locating a Text* 4).

One of the first areas where one discerns Teena Marie's Afrocentric attitude is in her self-identification. Teena Marie once said, "Overall my race hasn't been a problem. I'm a Black artist with White skin. At the end of the day you have to sing what's in your own soul" (qtd. in Coates 1). In this profound statement, Teena Marie acknowledges that the music she sings and loves is a production of the culture she has embraced. Teena Marie understood that Black music was in her soul, and, in embracing it, she had to give voice to what was in her soul by wielding *nommo*, the magical power of the word made manifest in her soulful singing. In so doing, Teena Marie became a part of a continuum of African American singers. "She [Teena Marie] was not simply in the George Michael 'Father Figure' category, she was of that Chaka Khan/Freddie Jackson/Jeffrey Osborne/Denise Williams stamp. You didn't hear Teena Marie and say, 'I thought she was black,' you said, 'No, seriously, I'm sure she's black'" (Coates 1). *Los Angeles Times* journalist Gerrick Kennedy further solidifies the point by saying that, "unlike some rap purists

who downplayed Eminem as he was rising, Marie made it impossible to question her authenticity. She sang with such passion, conviction and blues that she was often labeled 'a black girl trapped in a white woman's body'" (2).

Another area where one discerns Teena Marie's Afrocentric thinking is in her love for Black history and Black musical icons. As we suggested earlier, Teena Marie wrote several songs that paid homage her mentor, friend and singing partner, Rick James. On her final album, *Congo Square*, Teena Marie dedicates the song "The Pressure" to James. In reflecting on James, Teena Marie says "[Rick James] was my musical soulmate and I think it's kinda obvious through those records. . . I think God places certain people together to make magic and that's what the combination of Rick and Teena did" [on the song, "Fire and Desire," for example] (qtd. in Tyler 8). Teena Marie's "My Dear Mr. Gaye" on the *Starchild* album also paid homage to the musical legend, Marvin Gaye. Teena Marie notes her proclivity for the Black sound and the way it shaped her imagination: "Each song I come up with began to sound like the style of some favorite artist of mine from the past, Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye, Billie Holliday, the old Chicago soul of The Emotions and the new Chicago vibe of Kanye West. Ice Cube's bumpin' trunk vibe and, of course Rick James" (qtd. in Perrone 7). In "Congo Square," Teena Marie demonstrates an understanding of the history of African American music and spaces when she notes, "Congo Square is in New Orleans and . . . in slavery times the slaves were allowed to go dance and sing on Sundays...I thought about Congo Square, I thought about the great jazz era-people like Louis Armstrong, who is the father of Jazz and I thought about Billie Holliday (qtd. in Tyler 6). Teena Marie's thinking reflected an Afrocentric disposition. It was a disposition geared towards African American history and culture with an emphasis on Black music. Teena Marie was influenced by Black music artists such as Rick James, Marvin Gaye, and Smokey Robinson. Moreover, she understood the importance of Black historical figures like Coretta Scott King and Black historical locations like Congo Square, as evidenced by the appearance of these cultural touchstones in her music.

In addition to language and attitude, direction is the third element that assists the critic in locating an author or artist's text. Asante defines direction as "the line along which the author's sentiments, themes, and interests [lie] with reference to the point at which they are aimed" (Asante, *Locating a Text* 6). Here the critic attempts to surmise the "point at which they are aimed" or the objective through identification symbols: "One is able to identify. . . [the objective] by the symbols which occur in the text. For example, a writer [or artist] who uses Ebonics, African

American language, in his or her works demonstrates [an objective] along the lines of Afrocentric space" (6). There are elements related to African-American communication that "push" Teena Marie's rhetoric in the direction of an Afrocentric space. These three elements are call-response, *nommo*, and testifying. We will now examine a specific text by Teena Marie, "Fire and Desire," through the lens of these concepts.

Call-Response, *Nommo*, and Testifyin in "Fire and Desire"

Sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman defines call-response as the "spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all the speaker's statements ("calls") are punctuated by expressions ("responses") from the listeners" (104). One of Teena Marie and Rick James's most memorable and enduring songs is "Fire and Desire." The song is about two previous lovers who reminisce about their defunct relationship. Rick James calls and Teena Marie responds as they chronicle the ups and downs of a tempestuous union, its warmth and coldness, and its solidarity and disconnection. While both lovers (James and Teena Marie) had "played the field" and had a good time doing it, by the end of their exchange, they come to the same conclusion: the relationship was rooted in "fire and desire" and its dissolution or disharmony could be blamed on both of them. In the exchange during this song, James and Teena Marie are immersed in a communicative dynamic that is indicative of the African Cosmology. Smitherman suggests that "the traditional African world view conceptualizes a cosmos which is an interacting, interdependent, balanced force field...Consequently, communication takes on an interactive, interdependent nature" (108). Given that James and Teena Marie's discourse was rooted in blame and disunity, their communicative interaction demonstrated a "desire" to move in the direction of unity and harmony, which is the aim of Afrocentric discourse and the foundation of African cosmology. "Thus, call-response seeks to synthesize speakers and listeners in a unified movement" towards unity and harmony (Smitherman 108). James and Teena Marie achieved this objective through the powerful nature of their interactive discourse.

As suggested earlier, *nommo* is the generative power of the word. It is the notion that the spoken word, in the hands of the right rhetor, has transformative power. Thus, *nommo* is grounded in the African oral tradition where the village griot uses the power of orality to tell stories of epic battles or oral histories of the tribe. Teena Marie, like Rick James, was a griot, steeped in African American history and

culture, who welded the power of *nommo* to move the African American masses. The overwhelmingly positive response to her music by the Black community is testament to her power to tell stories with which the audience could identify emotionally. When Teena Marie sings in "Fire and Desire" "You burned me, you burned me" or better yet, "Love them and leave them…That's what I used to do," she evokes the presence of *nommo*; her vocal expressiveness rises and falls evenly with her singing partner James bringing the Black listener into the discourse. When Teena Marie died, Black performer after performer noted the power of her influence on their own work, the beauty of her music, and her indescribable ability to move them with her voice and lyrics. Mary J. Blige remembers her as "a model and a muse," and writes, "She inspired me vocally as a child. . . Her songs I sang in the mirror with a hair brush...Every girl that grew up in the hood, with her blasting through the windows, cars and radio waves can feel me...All of your music will live forever through me" and Alicia Keys describes "Fire and Desire," in particular, as a "beautiful song" that "just [had] that THING!" (qtd. in Michaels). These Black artists and many others lamented the loss of a woman who had spoken their deepest feelings and with whom they felt a familiarity and a connection. When Blige notes "your music will live forever through me," she is implying that Teena Marie has become a part of African American cultural heritage.

In addition to both call-response and *nommo*, testifying is another key concept present in Teena Marie's discourse. Smitherman claims that testifying is "a ritualized form of black communication in which the speaker give verbal witness to the efficacy, truth and power of some experience in which all blacks have shared" (58). While Smitherman suggests that testifying is generally thought of within the context of the Black church, "testifyin can be done whenever anybody feels the spirit—it don't have to be no special occasion….[When Teena Marie] talks about the greatness of her man and how he makes her feel . . .that's testifyin too (58). In "Dear Lover," Teena Marie writes a passionate letter to her lover who is on the verge of moving on from the relationship. She commands that he listen to her, telling him that she has "been wishing on the rings of Saturn" and otherwise "praying" to the universe to intercede on her behalf to sway her lover's thinking. Teena Marie's own thinking is very spiritual and very "deep and like Stevie [Wonder] and Marvin [Gaye], two of her obvious heroes—sometimes a bit spacey in the best way" (Walters 10). However, Teena Marie's desire to hold onto love does not mean she is blind to the faults of her beloved. In "Cassanova Brown," Teena Marie testifies to the trials and tribulations of falling in love with a playboy,

namely Rick James, and she notes that though his women were numerous, "he loves me only." "Cassanova Brown" pays homage to James, who jump-started her career and with whom she had both a professional and personal relationship. Teena Marie observes, "Rick knew there were feelings in my heart and songs upon my lips. He didn't say: 'This is a white girl, I can't produce her.' Our relationship grew into something really beautiful" (Perrone 4). In both "Dear Lover and "Cassonova Brown," Teena Marie testifies to the power of Black love. While "Dear Lover" speaks to the transformative nature of spirituality, "Cassanova Brown" speaks to the ideal of reciprocity being a transforming agent.

Conclusion

Mary Christine Brockert, who became Teena Marie, was not the typical young, White girl growing up in Los Angeles, California. Born in Venice, California, Brockert grew up in Black West Los Angeles in a place commonly referred to as "Black Venice." In this predominantly Black neighborhood, she became immersed in Black culture and Black music: an immersion that would later undergird her appreciation for the culture and provide the foundation upon which her sound and her music would be built. Further, Brockert's early identification with Black people led other Whites to label her "off white" and call her a "nigger lover." Clearly, many of her White peers no longer viewed her as White. Teena Marie's love for Black music continued to grow. She became known in the community as a young woman who could sing, and her style of singing was molded and shaped by the R&B sound that permeated West Los Angeles at the time. Teena Marie was influenced by the Motown Sound and admired artists such as Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, and Stevie Wonder. The influence of these artists, her unique sound, and her association with Motown along with changing her name catapulted Teena Marie into stardom and allowed her to connect with Black audiences who accepted her as one of their own.

To be sure, Teena Marie's music reflects a wide range of Black cultural expression: traditional R&B love ballads, rapping call-response, *nommo*, "artist as storytelling griot," and testifying. Though she was not Black, and, therefore, could be said to have appropriated Black culture, Teena Marie did so with appreciation, love, and care for the Black community. The evidence for this lies not only in her immersion in the community in her youth but also in her continued appeal and her acceptance by the community. In her last album, *Congo Square*, Teena Marie plays

tribute to such music greats as Louis Armstrong, Sarah Vaughn, Ella Fitzgerald, and Billie Holiday as well as to Congo Square itself in New Orleans and Coretta Scott King. Her music was such a part of the R&B playlist that Teena Marie was often sampled by rap and hip-hop groups. The African American community generally does not think of Teena Marie as an appropriator because, as one Black colleague pointed out to me, "Black folks *liked* Teena Marie." As Barry Walters points out "other white R&B singers have been briefly accepted by black radio and fans. Teena is the only one to be totally embraced" (9). Ta-Nehisi Coates further suggests that "Teena Marie died with an eternal hood-pass. The term 'blue-eyed soul' is presently being affixed to her" (1). Even the spelling of her name connected to Black cultural identity allowing her to marginalize her Whiteness. Her attitude reflected Afrocentric thinking. It is clear from her lyrics and interviews that she not only used the Black musical tradition, but also that Teena Marie embraced and celebrated its importance.

If it is true that Teena Marie had a "hood-pass," why was illustrator Gluekit's picture of Teena Marie placed next to a picture of Elvis Presley in the *Ebony* magazine article? This gives the impression that, like Elvis, Teena Marie was an appropriator without appreciation. One explanation for the picture may be that Teena Marie is included just as an example of a White performer who sang Black music. The Black community aware of a history of cultural appropriation feels the need to police or to serve as gatekeepers of their cultural heritage, scrutinizing which White artists may be acceptable and which may not be. "Today, a performer's sound and image are scrutinized for street credibility before making the playlist, white singers have vanished from the R&B charts and the rap groups have stopped sampling pop acts" (Walters 9).

While it is important for the Black community to serve as gatekeepers, the problem here is that many African Americans believe that no White artists should be singing R&B, or any other Black art forms, barring the way for a future Teena Marie. A history of White artists making money off the backs of Black creativity while Black artists were minimally compensated or not at all has added to the skepticism of Black cultural critics and audiences alike. Given the complications engendered by the commodification of Black culture, the power of White privilege, and the aforementioned long, unpleasant history, how are we to distinguish between appreciation and appropriation?

For future studies concerning the evaluation of "blue-eyed soul" artists, we recommend three fundamental questions to be addressed in the research moving

forward: (1) What does the White artist's background and experiences say about his or her connectedness to or care for the Black community; (2) In what way does Asante's notion of language, attitude, and direction concerning the White artist shed light on his or her location; and (3) Does the White artist "catch the burden," meaning does the White artist face humiliation and discomfort for taking on a Black cultural identity? These questions assess whether White artists risk as much as they benefit from their cultural appropriation or whether they are merely taking on the "cool" fashion of Blackness which may be discarded once the money has been made. Appreciation implies a lasting connection, one that is more than a passing embrace, and one not designed merely to inscribe White privilege.

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OWN: Oprah's Chicken Soup for the Soul in an Age of Angst

JOSHUA K. WRIGHT

"*I want to use television not only to entertain, but to help people lead better lives.*" – Oprah Winfrey

No individual has shaped the American zeitgeist over the past thirty years more than Oprah Winfrey. With a unique brand of entertainment that was part therapeutic, part spiritual Winfrey used her television platform to reach the hearts and minds of the American public. Winfrey gracefully transcended race unlike any black celebrity before or since her. At its peak, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (ABC), which won 47 Daytime Emmy Awards, averaged 42 million viewers a week. Millions of white women adopted Winfrey as the African-American sister or best friend that they never had. For African-American women (and men), Winfrey was the ultimate embodiment of racial uplift. Winfrey rose from poverty in Mississippi to become the first black female billionaire in North America. Although critics have accused her of pandering to white viewers, she never lost support within the African-American community. The National Museum of African-American History and Culture (NMAAHC) opened the "Watching Oprah" exhibition in June 2018. "Just as Oprah Winfrey watched TV coverage of the Civil Rights Movement and was shaped by the era in which she was born and raised, she has gone on to have a profound impact on how Americans viewed themselves and each other in the tumultuous decades that followed," says the museum's founding director, Lonnie Bunch.

JOSHUA K. WRIGHT, Ph.D., is an associate professor of history in the Global Studies Department at Trinity Washington University in Washington, D.C. He teaches courses in American History, African Diaspora and Black Studies, International Affairs, and Political Science. He is the author of *Empire and Black Images in Pop Culture* (McFarland 2018) and a co-editor for the 2019 special issue of *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies* entitled "I Gotta Testify: Kanye West, Hip Hop, and the Church." In addition, he hosts a radio series and podcast distributed by WESM 91.3 FM and National Public Radio (NPR). He is available at jkwright1492@yahoo.com.

In the final room of the NMAAHC exhibition, visitors will find the famous black custom- made Atelier Versace gown that Winfrey wore to the 2018 Golden Globe Award ceremony. On January 7, 2018, she received the Cecil B. DeMille Award. Winfrey delivered a rousing speech that sounded like a campaign speech. "I want all the girls watching here to know that a new day is on the horizon," said Winfrey (Izadi). Weeks earlier Winfrey made news when she tweeted a *New York Post* article that called her the Democratic Party's best candidate to defeat President Donald Trump when he runs for reelection in 2020. Following her Golden Globe speech, the news media, social media, Hollywood elite, and close friends ran wild with speculation that she could be gearing up to run for office. Four months earlier Winfrey hosted a segment of CBS's *60 Minutes* titled "Divided," in which she spoke to a panel in Grand Rapids, Michigan, composed of seven people who voted for President Trump and seven who did not. The panelists discussed their feelings about Trump's response to the racial unrest in Charlottesville, Virginia; his efforts to end Obama's health care program; his stance on immigration restriction; and other topics. One of the panelists expressed fear that the nation was on the verge of another civil war. Could an Oprah Winfrey presidency be the antidote to cure the nation's ills? Currently, Winfrey says that politics is not in her future. Indeed, she may be most effective in her present-day role as the nation's unofficial "Healer-in-Chief."

This article assesses Oprah Winfrey's impact and effectiveness as Healer-in-Chief through the use of the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN). Since leaving her syndicated daytime series in 2011, Winfrey has served as the Chief Executive Officer of her 24-hour cable network. OWN grants Winfrey a platform to promote her views on self-help and healing; religion and spirituality; women's empowerment; and the family which she has used to build a billion-dollar brand over the past three decades. OWN attracts viewers from all social backgrounds; however, the network's largest audience is African-American women and men. Much of the programming is geared toward African-American viewers. My research focuses on the most dominant themes found in OWN's programming: self-help, spirituality and religion, and women's empowerment. The same three themes emerged from the biographies and scholarly works on Oprah Winfrey and selected episodes from *The Oprah Winfrey Show* that I reviewed.

My research also includes the results of surveying 146 African-Americans from the Washington Metropolitan area between the ages of 18 and 64. The surveys were completed between May and June 2018 using Survey Monkey. Respondents shared

their views on the OWN network and the prospects of her political career. 72.41% of the respondents were African-American women and most respondents were over the age of 45. The largest group (34.48%) was between the ages of 55 and 64. The majority of respondents were college educated. 37.50% had master's degrees, and 18.75% had a doctorate degree. 90.34% of respondents categorized themselves as Oprah fans. 55.17% watched *The Oprah Winfrey Show* occasionally when it aired. 19.31% and 13.79% of them watched the series weekly and daily, respectively. 11.72% of respondents never viewed an episode. 46.21% of all respondents watch OWN occasionally. Of the total number of respondents, 33.79% watch weekly, 6.21% daily, and 13.79% never watch the network.

Oprah Winfrey and Self-Help Television

The Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) debuted in 80 million American households in 2011. OWN is a 24-hour cable television network and the second network founded by a black woman (Cathy Hughes launched TV One in 2004). Winfrey took over as OWN's Chief Executive Officer and Chief Creative Officer in July 2011. The network has offered a variety of programming which includes new series hosted by Winfrey, reality series, original dramas and sitcoms, and primetime soap operas. Self-help themes permeate many of the network's non-scripted series. On January 17-18, 2013, OWN's *Oprah's Next Chapter* featured an exclusive, worldwide two-night interview with disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong. After years of denying that he had used performance enhancement drugs to win seven consecutive Tour de France titles after overcoming cancer, he confessed to Winfrey. The interview was therapeutic in that it allowed Armstrong the opportunity to admit to his flaws, take responsibility for his failure, and ask for forgiveness. Eight months later disgraced actress Lindsay Lohan appeared on *Next Chapter.* Lohan, then 27, admitted to Winfrey that she was a recovering alcoholic who had done cocaine 10 to 15 times. She blamed herself and not her parents for her poor choices. OWN eventually aired *Lindsay,* an eight-part docuseries from March-April 2014, about Lohan's rehabilitation recovery.

Other memorable episodes of *Next Chapter* have included interviews with Rev. Al Sharpton and Jason Collins. Sharpton blamed his polarizing persona as a race-baiting provocateur and past obesity on his inability to properly deal with the bitterness he had bottled up from growing up poor and fatherless in a racist society. In her sit down with openly gay NBA player Jason Collins, the now retired athlete

shared his experience of conquering the fear of coming out to the world about his sexual preference. *Oprah: Where Are They Now* includes interviews with past celebrities who have overcome obstacles. Her former daytime competitor Ricki Lake shared stories of overcoming obesity, sexual abuse, and divorce.

Oprah's Masterclass is less therapeutic in nature and more focused on motivational life skills from the nation's most successful celebrities. On this program, the celebrity narrates his or her own story. Rather than dwell on their successes the point is to document the trials they faced on their way to the top of the mountain. The show's tagline is "use your life as a class." One episode that stood out to me dealt with Tyler Perry, one of the most successful television and film writers and producers in Hollywood. His multiple scripted series and primetime soap opera *The Haves and the Have Nots* (2013-) are responsible for much of OWN's sustainability. He reveals on *Masterclass* that he began writing as a form of catharsis to heal from his alcoholic father's physical abuse and the sexual abuse inflicted upon him by others. Before he had blockbuster films, he was writing Christian plays which used comedy to address the painful experiences of his past. His initial plays were flops. Perry credited his faith in God for his fortitude. He uses his brand of entertainment as a form of therapy to allow others to heal from their pain. Faith, family, and forgiveness is his mantra.

The Roots of OWN's Self-Help Philosophy

Born to a teenage single mother in rural Mississippi in 1954, Oprah Winfrey's life has been one long story of overcoming tremendous odds, reinvention, and self-improvement. Her mother was a maid and her father was a barber. From the age of nine, she was molested and sexually abused by an uncle, a cousin, and a family friend. By 14, Winfrey was sleeping with older boys and pregnant with her son Canaan who died stillborn. Her mother Vernita Lee sent her to live with her father Vernon in Nashville, Tennessee. Oprah excelled academically and socially in this new environment. She won the Miss Black Tennessee beauty pageant, secured a part-time job at a local black radio station, and was awarded a full scholarship to Tennessee State University by the age of 17 (Johnson-Sterrett 30). Two years later Winfrey became the first black female anchor, earning $15,000, at Nashville's CBS affiliate WTVF-TV.

In 1976 she became the co-anchor of the 6 o'clock news on Baltimore's WJZ-TV. Winfrey's emphatic manner of reporting did not sit well with the station's

producers. She was demoted and made the co-host of the station's half-hour morning talk show *People are Talking* (30). The morning show gave her the freedom to relate to guests the way she does best. Winfrey moved to Chicago in 1983 to become the new host of *AM Chicago*, a half-hour morning show on WLS-TV. Three years later, the program was expanded to an hour, renamed *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and nationally televised in six million homes. The show's popularity can be attributed to Winfrey's uncanny ability to use her personal struggles to connect with viewers and audience members. In 1986 she shared her past experiences of sexual abuse with the audience. She dedicated episodes to allow rape victims to tell their stories and to educate viewers on the multiple forms of sexual violence. Sujata Moorti refers to these episodes as "Cathartic Confessions" and "Emancipatory Texts." According to Moorti, "The act of giving voice to pain contains the potential to transform these television programs into cathartic events for participants" (83). In addition to her battles with sexual abuse, Oprah frequently shared her struggles with her weight and diet. She introduced her audience to Bob Greene, a weight-loss guru and her trainer, with whom Winfrey published a weight-loss book (*Make the Connection: Ten Steps to a Better Body—and a Better Life*) and produced an exercise video (Razza 41-43). On Winfrey's February 14, 2005, episode, "Oprah's Boot Camp," she and Greene presented a guide to achieve a total body makeover in 12 weeks.

Winfrey's story suggests that she and, by extension, her fans, are responsible for creating their realities. This message extends beyond weight loss. It pertains to getting off welfare, earning a college degree, starting a business, or breaking down racial barriers. Janice Peck says, "By endorsing the individual's ability to recognize and overcome her problems, talk shows have incorporated the Enlightenment equation of knowledge and power and extended it to the therapeutic equation of self-knowledge and individual 'empowerment'" (Peck 18). The "therapeutic ethos" found in daytime television in the 1980s-1990s was rooted in the teachings of Sigmund Freud who argued that a "paralysis of the will" prevented a person from succeeding in life. Winfrey not only relied upon a therapeutic model; in her early years, she applied the framework of the "recovery movement" originating from the 1930s Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) program. AA, which was based on Protestant religious principles, used a 12- step process to help alcoholics empower themselves to overcome the causes of their addiction. The AA model was adopted in the 1960s to help those struggling with their weight or drugs.

Winfrey's success and emphasis on responsibility was a byproduct of President Ronald Reagan's endorsement of conservative values and the traditional family in the 1980s. "The family-centered diagnosis of the cause and cure for personal malaise operated as a central frame of intelligibility in *The Oprah Winfrey Show* throughout the tenure of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Alcoholism, drug abuse, addiction, divorce, domestic violence, child abuse, crime, and poverty were laid at the doorsteps of the so-called dysfunctional family" (Peck 83). Episodes titled "Pros and Cons" and "Homeless People" featured guests who blamed themselves for living on the street or having to rely on welfare to support their families. Winfrey and the audience encouraged them to rely on themselves, not the government, to pull themselves up by their bootstraps (Peck 139). In 1994 she announced the creation of a program to help 100 families cycle off of welfare in two years. The next year she aired an episode called "Is Affirmative Action Outdated?" which presented white panelists preaching to a white audience about the danger of racial quotas used to promote diversity. Peck has called Winfrey a neoliberal who embraced the Clinton era's brand of Reaganesque conservatism. However, it can also be argued that Winfrey was inspired by and following in the traditions of self-help practices resonating in the black church and black mutual aid societies dating back to the Antebellum and Reconstruction.

Fighting to Be Healed

The Oprah Winfrey Show featured professional psychologists, therapists, life coaches, and spiritual advisors. The "Oprah Effect" helped to make financial advisor Suze Orman a household name. Winfrey did the same for Dr. Phil McGraw and Iyanla Vanzant, who both now have series on OWN. McGraw launched his daytime series, *Dr. Phil,* in 2002. Since 2011, episodes have been airing on OWN and in syndication worldwide. McGraw's episodes involve a sit-down interview with a troubled individual. The studio and television audiences view video footage of the individual misbehaving. Family members, who are usually to blame for the person's dysfunctional behavior, join McGraw and the individual on the stage to provide further testimony. McGraw may also bring on other professional experts to diagnose the problem. Unlike Winfrey who empathizes with her guests, McGraw offers a no-nonsense version of tough love (Nussey 57). McGraw's guests and live audience members tend to be white.

Iyanla Vanzant (born Rhonda Eva Harris) has been called the rowdy black sister that Winfrey always wished she had. Vanzant was raped at nine and became a mother by 16. She spent years in an abusive marriage before divorcing with three children in tow. She was on welfare for a time. Vanzant lost her home to foreclosure, nearly went bankrupt caring for an adult daughter who died from colon cancer, and contemplated suicide. Her setbacks fueled a remarkable comeback which led to a law degree, ordination as a Yoruba priestess and New Thought minister, six books on the *New York Times* best-sellers list, and the top-rated reality series on OWN, *Iyanla: Fix My Life* (2012-). Vanzant initially caught the public's attention in the 1990s. She appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* 20 times between 1998 and 1999. Her star faded after a disagreement with Winfrey led the two to sever ties for 11 years. Vanzant and Winfrey publicly made amends in 2011 on one of the final episodes of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. The series premiere of *Fix My Life* was a two-night episode featuring reality star and domestic abuse survivor Evelyn Lozada. Future seasons included gut-wrenching sessions with the victims of the 2016 Pulse Nightclub Massacre, men who were raped or molested as children, disgraced African-American Olympic hero Debi Thomas and the bipolar rapper DMX. Vanzant's therapeutic techniques include meditation, breathing exercises, mantras, and unconventional exercises like wearing masks or holding bricks that symbolize mental barriers blocking individuals' happiness and freedom. Most of the show's guests are black men and women. Vanzant's approach is the opposite of Winfrey's. She is loud, outspoken, fiery, and has no problem calling her guests names if it takes that to wake them up. "I am not going to fight you for your healing," she says. If tough love fails, Vanzant will pray for her guests, hug them, and offer a shoulder on which to cry.

Other OWN series that fall into the self-help category include (1) *Released,* a docuseries on newly released black prisoners; (2) *Flex and Shanice*, a reality series about a black celebrity couple putting their lives back together after bankruptcy; (3) *Black Love,* a docuseries consisting of candid interviews with famous and unknown black couples about the secrets of success in their marriages. (4) *The T.D. Jakes Show* features Bishop T.D. Jakes, senior pastor of The Potter's House in Dallas, Texas, who meets with guests sharing stories of personal struggle and remarkable triumph.

Survey respondents were asked the following question: What do you think about the self-help methods and messages promoted by Oprah and on OWN's programming? Only 11.35% of the respondents prefer OWN's self-help

programming. One respondent said, "I think they are helpful and with good intent. At the end of the day, everything doesn't work for everybody, but it's great to see people overcome the challenges that they face" (see Table 1).

Keywords from Written Comments	No. of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Great	18	12.86%
Helpful, relevant	41	29.29%
Informative, interesting	15	10.71%
Inspirational	10	7.14%
Positive	14	10.00%
Not relevant	8	5.71%
Never or Seldom Watch	14	10.00%
No Opinion	20	14.29%

Table 1. Respondents' Assessment of Self-Help Methods and Messages Promoted by Winfrey and OWN Programming (Answered: 140; Skipped: 6)

Oprah Winfrey as a Spiritual Guru

If you are not able to or do not attend church on Sunday mornings at 11:00 AM, you can tune into OWN's *SuperSoul Sunday* series. The hour-long series features Winfrey engaging in inspirational conversations with best-selling authors, uber-successful leaders, pastors, and spiritual guides. The conversations are typically filmed outside, surrounded by trees, on a beautiful sunny day. Vanzant sat down with Winfrey for one episode. Vanzant described prayer as an "orgasmic" experience that connected her to God. Many of the show's conversations center on spirituality as much as religion. Wayne Pacelle, the president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, spoke about humans achieving spiritual awakening through their connection with animals. A Brooklyn megachurch pastor, A.R. Bernard, told Winfrey that millennials who say that they are spiritual, not religious, are just hungry for a connection with God.

Winfrey's *SuperSoul Sessions* are televised recordings of day-long motivational lectures from celebrities, change makers, and wisdom teachers. One of the speakers was Angela Davis. Not the famous black power activist, but a black fitness evangelist. Davis, 42, told the audience that she once suffered from depression and

doubt. Her husband encouraged her to trust in God, believe in herself, exercise, and spread her gospel to others. She told everyone in the audience that they were the apple of God's eye and born with a purpose. All they have to do is follow the yellow brick road of faith. Mega-influencer Tony Robbins appeared on another episode. Winfrey sat in the audience for this soul session. Robbins asked the crowd to stand and recognize (applaud) Winfrey for all that she has overcome–in terms of suffering–and how much she has accomplished despite suffering. Robbins says, "The majority of people in our culture have low energy because they just fit in. Because if you stand out like Oprah, you become a target. So you have to decide. Do I want to fit in or do I want to be what God meant me to be which will naturally stand out?" (Robbins). Television viewers and live audience members are supposed to leave these sessions empowered to improve their lives. A survey respondent remarked, "Reality TV, unfortunately, reduces complex issues to soundbites and I fear a lot of participants do not achieve the change they desire."

John Gray, a black former associate pastor at Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, and now pastor of Relentless Church in Greenville, South Carolina, offered one of the most entertaining and timely speeches. Gray is the star of *The Book of John Gray,* an OWN reality series about his family and his gift for helping others. Gray's *SuperSoul* speech, titled "The Bridge," was a hybrid of a sermon, a TED talk, a motivational speech, stand-up comedy, and a musical performance. He used many of the same buzzwords and phrases found in *Iyanla: Fix My Life* such as "We gotta learn to heal." The purpose of his message was to tell listeners how Americans can meet in the middle, putting aside their differences Gray's message was tailor-made for the angst many are feeling since the election of President Donald Trump in 2016. "How do we heal? I know that we're broken. And how can you not be broken when we're in the age of alternative facts. That's like saying I got fat from eating alternative snacks." (Gray)

Gray told the story of Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman. Jesus built a bridge with this lady who *did not* come from where he was from and *did not* believe in his ideology. Gray portrayed this Samarian woman as a black woman from the hood and Jesus as the figure with a British accent. The woman by the well had a "ratchet" friend named Shaniqua. Gray said this version of the story appeared in the NIV (Negro International Version of the Bible). The mostly white audience burst into uncontrollable laughter. The camera panned over several black women nodding their heads in agreement. Gray went on to say that Jesus did not judge or shun this woman. He loved her. "I am not talking about romantic love. I am talking

about a real love…..a Whitney Houston kinda love. I Will Always Love Youuuuuuuu!" The audience rose to their feet to applaud his rendition of Whitney's hit record. A black woman shouted out, preach! "I am trying guuurl," said Gray (Gray). Gray's sermon was an aspirational depiction of the church of Oprah. In Winfrey's America 11:00 on Sunday morning was no longer the most segregated hour. It was inclusive and all were invited to the party.

The Gospel of Oprah

When *The Oprah Winfrey Show* began in 1986, the most-watched daytime talk show was *The Phil Donahue Show* (1970-1996). Winfrey's early episodes relied on what could be considered "shock TV" to compete with and surpass *Donahue.* She visited Utah's Bunny Ranch brothel for one episode. Other episodes focused on topics like penis size, group sex in prisons, and cheating husbands. In 1998 her show slipped to second in the ratings behind the lewd *The Jerry Springer Show* (1991-2018). At the same time, she starred in the film adaptation of Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved.* Winfrey described her work on the film as a spiritual awakening. When she returned for the 1999-2000 season, her series went from being called "Shock TV" to "Change Your Life" television. Not only was there more emphasis on self-help but also religion and spirituality. She concluded one of these early new episodes with low lights and New Age music playing in the background. She told the audience, "I am defined by the world as a talk show host, but… I am a spirit connected to the greater spirit" (Garchik).

Winfrey's spiritual journey has been evolving since her childhood. Her grandmother took her to church every Sunday when she lived with her in Mississippi. She served on the junior usher board. She was raised not to question God and taught that behavior not approved by the Bible was sinful. Following the death of her baby, she became a more devout Christian. By the time she graduated from college and began her broadcasting career, Winfrey's devoutness started to wane. Winfrey began having casual sex, experimenting with LSD and cocaine, and indulging in junk food. She engaged in a long-term affair with a married man, disc jockey Tim Watts. The affair led her to bouts of depression and suicidal thoughts. She still attended church but only because that is what she thought black people were supposed to do. One Sunday she was attending Bethel AME Church in Baltimore, Maryland. Rev. John Richard Bryant was preaching when she had an awakening. "Why would God be jealous of anything I have to say? Or be threatened

by a question that I would have to ask?" (Mansfield 29). After moving to Chicago, she joined Rev. Jeremiah Wright's congregation at Trinity United Church of Christ but left in the mid-1990s.

Stephen Mansfield traces Winfrey's spiritual evolution in his 2011 book *Where Has Oprah Taken Us?* He points to her "gushing support" of Rhonda Byrne's book *The Secret* (2006), which teaches that individuals are responsible for their decisions and thoughts, as a sign that she had become a disciple of the New Age Movement. New Agers are individuals who take a holistic approach to the divinity and the place of human beings in the universe. New Age spirituality developed in the U.S. and other parts of the West in the 1970s. The roots of this spiritual movement originate with Americans gaining awareness of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions of the Far East during World War II. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, American youth belonging to the Beat Movement and Counterculture began finding more solace in these Far Eastern religious practices than traditional Christianity. Transcendental meditation became popular in the 1960s (Eskenazi 98).

Winfrey, who rejects labels, has never identified herself as a New Ager; however, she began publicly referring to herself as a spiritual person in the 1990s. "I have church with myself: I have church walking down the street," she said. Her television studio evolved into the "Church of O." On her webpage, there is a "spirit" link that directs readers to articles on spirituality. On some episodes, Winfrey encourages the audience to open their minds and to be open to accepting all spiritual beliefs. She uses the catchphrase "it's not about religion." Mansfield sees Winfrey's stance on religion versus spirituality as a reflection of the people that she chooses to have in her life as mentors and life coaches. He says her spiritual advisors include Marianne Williamson, who rebrands Christian concepts in her book *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles.* Williamson is a presidential candidate for 2020. There is Eckhart Tolle, author of *A New Earth: Awakening Your Life's Purpose*, which Winfrey described as one of the most important books in our generation. There is Gary Zukav, co-founder of the Seat of the Soul Institute and author of *Seat of the Soul.* All of these people appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show.*

We must not overlook Winfrey's spiritual awakening while filming Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a Civil War era story about a group of black women haunted by a poltergeist. *Beloved* addresses the religious and spiritual viewpoints of black women during slavery. Winfrey became a strong advocate for Morrison's literature and heavily promoted her once overlooked work in her famous "Oprah's Book

Club" episodes and reading list. Several works by Morrison (*The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon,* and *Paradise*) evoke themes of African spirituality (Zauditu-Selassie). OWN's non-scripted series promote a holistic view of religion and spiritual awakening combined with self-help ideology.

Only 12.06% of survey respondents prefer the faith-based programs instead of OWN's other programming. One survey respondent says, "The spiritual messaging I've noticed has been open enough to be inclusive of a myriad of beliefs. I think this is a positive and respectful way to include such messaging so as not to alienate particular groups of people or perpetuate harmful dogma." By contrast, another respondent warns, "I just find that there are some ideologies and philosophies I have to discern based on my foundation of belief. It's encouraging for the temporary feel good, but not always beneficial for the long term" (see Tables 2, 3).

Answer Choices	No. of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Self-Help	16	11.35%
Master Classes	26	17.73%
Religious and Spiritual	17	12.06%
Sitcoms	11	7.80%
Reality Series	15	10.64%
Scripted Dramas	49	34.75%
Primetime Soap Operas	8	5.67%

Table 2. Type of Programming Preferred on OWN (Answered: 141; Skipped: 5)

Keywords from Written Comments	No. of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Encouraging	41	29.29%
Informative	19	13.57%
Inspirational	11	7.86%
Positive/Respectful	17	12.14%
Dislike/Not My Thing	15	10.71%
Never or Seldom Watch	22	15.71%
No Comment	15	10.71%

Table 3. Impressions of the Religious and Spiritual Programming on OWN (Answered: 140; Skipped: 6)

Lean In

Oprah Winfrey has a well-documented history of empowering women and girls. Notable examples include her groundbreaking book club featuring countless female authors who are introduced to her college preparatory leadership academy for girls in South Africa. A 2017 poll from public opinion research firm Perry Undem listed Winfrey among the top four feminists in America. Her Golden Globe speech serves as one of the more memorable moments of the Me Too Movement. As far back as her ABC years, Winfrey has advocated for women. Whether it was weight loss, getting off welfare, starting a business, or overcoming abuse, she has been a leading advocate for feminist values. The term, feminist, is complicated as it relates to black women. Who can forget Sojourner Truth asking white first-wave feminists fighting for suffrage, "Ain't I a woman" at the 1857 Women's Convention or the black women of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority being made to walk in the back of the line at the 1913 Suffrage March in Washington? The leaders of the second wave Feminist Movement, in the 1960s and 1970s, were more concerned with problems facing middle-class white women. Black women, in response to this lack of intersectionality, formed their own brand of feminism. Frances Beale published her groundbreaking pamphlet, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," which was later included in Toni Cade Bambara's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970). Beale's argument harkened back to Mary Church Terrell's 1904 description of black women: "Double Handicapped." By the late 20th century, black feminism evolved to include womanism, a term coined by Alice Walker in 1983 to describe bonds formed between black women who embrace the culture, spirituality, and femininity together. Winfrey played Sophia in the film adaption of Walker's seminal novel, *The Color Purple.* Although Katrina McDonald and Constance Razza view Winfrey as the "sister outsider" and "everywoman" who does not relate to the majority of black women, this has not diminished her support in the African-American community. Furthermore, OWN's programming especially targets black women. These series come at a time in which countless black women, from Congresswoman Maxine Waters to *The Atlantic's* Jemele Hill, are being disparaged in the media and by political leaders.

Winfrey's support of women is exemplified in two OWN series where women take on influential roles: *Greenleaf* and *Queen Sugar.* The former series centers on a fictional first family of a megachurch in Memphis, Tennessee. Bishop James

Greenleaf (Keith David) is the founder, senior pastor, and CEO of Calvary Fellowship World Ministries. Bishop Greenleaf's eldest daughter Grace (Merle Dandridge) takes over in the pulpit after he becomes sick with Parkinson's disease. Grace's role as Calvary's senior pastor in her father's absence speaks to how far women have come in the black church. Although we see prominent female pastors today like Bishop Vashti McKenzie and the late Apostle Dr. Betty Peebles, this is a recent phenomenon. Male leaders asserted that "black men should reclaim their manhood" through church leadership, writes Bettye Collier-Thomas in *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (124). Collier-Thomas reveals the efforts of women to assert agency and claim power in the face of discrimination. *Greenleaf* depicts the 21st century emergence of black women ascending to leadership behind the pulpit and all other aspects of the church.

As the Bishop Greenleaf's health deteriorates, his wife, Lady Mae (Lynn Whitfield), takes on a more significant role at church and home. Upon learning of his infidelity, Lady Mae divorces him and pursues her own career as a pastor. She eventually assumes full leadership of the church. The Bishop's youngest daughter Charity (Deborah Joy Winans) overcomes a weight problem and an unsatisfactory marriage to a closeted gay man to pursue a career as a Gospel singer and a fulfilling romantic relationship. The Bishop's daughter-in-law Kerissa (Kim Hawthorne) is the headmistress of a prestigious private school and the brains in her household. Winfrey's character Mavis is single and owns a nightclub. Women play pivotal roles on the Board of Trustees at the Bishop's church (Calvary Fellowship World Ministries), and they handle the finances at the rival church, Triumph. Former Destiny's Child member Letoya Luckett plays the wealthy villain and one of the series' primary antagonists Ms. Rochelle Cross.

Loosely based on the novel *Queen Sugar* by Natalie Baszile, the televised adaptation follows the efforts of three young adult siblings (Charley, Nova, and Ralph Angel Bordelon) to save their father Earnest's (Glynn Turman) 800-acre sugarcane farm in rural Louisiana following his sudden death. Charley, who manages her husband Davis' basketball career for a living, has her world rocked to the core after he is accused of participating in the gang rape of a younger Latina escort at a hotel. Charley files for divorce and relocates to Louisiana with her teenage son Micah (Nicholas L. Ashe), eventually becoming the first black woman in the state to own a sugar mill. Nova is an herbal healer and socially conscious journalist who writes about the racially biased corruption in the New Orleans' police department and the local justice system. She speaks on panels with scholars.

Tina Lifford plays the family's matriarch, Aunt Vi, a small business owner who is married to a much younger man.

Queen Sugar is created, produced, and directed by African-American filmmaker Ava DuVernay. DuVernay has shifted the paradigm in filmmaking with her beautifully crafted films *Selma* (2014), *13th* (2016), and *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018), and by hiring only minority women to direct all episodes of *Queen Sugar.* In addition to working with DuVernay, OWN has opened its doors to African-American screenwriter and producer Mara Brock Akil, creator of multiple past series about strong black heroines. OWN began airing Akil's latest series *Love Is* in June 2018. OWN also began airing *Mind Your Business,* a new self-help series hosted by Mahisha Dellinger, for female entrepreneurs.

Survey respondents were asked to share their thoughts about OWN's depiction of African-American women and women's empowerment. Most comments were overwhelmingly positive and complimentary. Respondents described females on OWN as empowering, realistic, accurate, respectful, strong, independent, refreshing, awesome, wonderful, amazing, uplifting or diverse. Most said the programs avoided stereotypes, but one person said they were too stereotypic, and another respondent said characters were "too ante-bellum." One respondent observed that most shows featured middle-aged, educated, wealthy or religious women. She continued, "I don't see my generation 27 to 49 being depicted." Another respondent complained that the male characters were not strong. That person advised, "[T]here needs to be an equal showing of strong black women and men that support each other and their families" (see Table 4).

Essence of Comments (Keywords)	No. of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Positive, Accurate, or Varied Depictions	112	80.00%
Negative or Stereotypical Depictions	9	6.43%
Never or Seldom Watch OWN; No Access	8	5.71%
No Opinion	10	7.14%

Table 4. Assessment of Depictions of African American Women on OWN (Answered: 139; Skipped: 7)

Family Matters

The Oprah Winfrey Show placed a great amount of emphasis on the family. OWN's programming continues this pattern. Episodes of *Dr. Phil* usually involve dysfunctional white families coming together to save a wayward child. On OWN, the portrayal of the African-American family is quite varied. Many of the reality series show loving families working together to overcome trying times. For example, *Welcome to Sweetie Pie's* (2011-2018) followed the ordeals of Miss Robbie (Montgomery), a former backup singer for Ike and Tina Turner, and her relatives to run their soul food restaurant chain in St. Louis. *For Peete's Sake* (2016-2017) focused on the family of celebrities Rodney and Holly Robinson Peete. Episodes addressed sensitive issues like their son's autism. *Released* (2017) dealt with challenges newly released prisoners faced in attempting to reconcile with family members.

Queen Sugar generally receives positive reviews for its nuanced yet, overwhelmingly, positive depiction of a strong black family in the South. The Bordelon family juggles fighting off a racist white family trying to steal their lucrative sugarcane farm and their own family dramas from divorce to lupus. *Greenleaf* and *The Haves and Have Nots* can are far more polarizing. *The Haves and the Have Nots* features the fictional Harrington family in Savannah, Georgia. David Harrington (Peter Parros) is a corrupt, wealthy judge and former lieutenant gubernatorial contender married to Veronica (Angela Robinson), a snobbish, treacherous Ivy League-educated attorney. Veronica displays much of her wickedness towards her gay adult son Jeffery (Gavin Houston) whom she views as a punishment from God for a past abortion. Veronica blames Jeffrey for David's infidelity and later tries to burn David to death by pouring a flammable liquid around his bed. David survives and asks for a divorce. Jeffrey stabs Veronica, but the blade gets lodged in her breast implants, saving her life. The real star of this soap opera is an upscale escort named Candace Young (Tika Sumpter) who hails from a working-class family. The family on *Greenleaf* lives in a luxurious mansion equipped with servants. Every member of the Greenleaf family is involved in the ministry. Yet, sadly, there is much to abhor and little to admire. Adultery, financial corruption, secret homosexual relationships, pedophilia, rape, violence, and murder threaten to destroy the family and their church.

Most survey respondents view OWN's depiction of the African-American family as representative of the diversity in real-life. One person said, "It doesn't feed into stereotypes, and it allows us to focus on issues happening in black families that are usually kept secret." Another respondent observed that there are not enough

shows to illustrate the "numerous realms of what the black family may look like." Someone else said the shows were atypical because they included largely well-to-do families (see Table 5).

Essence of Comments	No. of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Positive, Diverse, Pro-Family	98	71.01%
Negative, Stereotypical Depiction	10	7.25%
Mixed: Some Good, Some Bad Portrayals	5	3.62%
Never or Seldom Watch	13	9.42%
No Opinion	12	8.70%

Table 5. Impressions of the Depictions of the African American Family on OWN (Answered: 38; Skipped: 8)

Can Oprah Make America Great *Again*?

While some may find fault with her views and methods, OWN's success affirms Winfrey's role as the nation's leading guru—for better or worse—in this complicated age of President Donald Trump that is characterized by angst and division. OWN offers therapy and self-help advice in various forms. OWN empowers all people, regardless of their class, race, gender, sexual preference, or religion, to live a purposeful life. OWN provides hope to its viewers. OWN provides a safe haven for the religious and the spiritual. OWN addresses the concerns of feminists, womanists, and everyone in between. OWN uplifts traditional family values. OWN builds bridges that encourage us to put aside our differences, meet in the middle, and value each other's humanity. OWN builds bridges that encourage us to love each other unconditionally. While this audacious brand of hope may sound Pollyannaish, it just might be the kind of chicken soup that is necessary to heal a wounded country. However, does this qualify Winfrey to run for the White House in 2020 or 2024? Of the 139 persons who responded to this question, only 62 or 44.60% would be willing to vote for Winfrey if she ran for president in 2020. Tables 6 and 7 contain a breakdown of reasons survey respondents would or would not vote for Winfrey if she were a presidential candidate. Seventy-seven (55.40%) would not vote for her. By contrast, 98 out of 141 persons (69.50%) affirmed that Winfrey has a greater impact on America as Healer-in-Chief.

Essence of Comments	No. of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Truthful, trustworthy, like a moral compass; better than incumbent	14	22.58%
Relatable, in touch with people	19	30.64%
Able to bring people together, good listener, sensitive	10	16.13%
Would seek wise advisers & empower others to help	2	3.22%
Positive role model & competent business professional	3	4.83%
Diplomatic. Would be effective on world stage	4	6.45%
Would represent all people. Has cross-over appeal	2	3.22%
It's time for an intelligent, assertive woman or another person of color	8	12.90%

Table 6. Reasons Some Respondents Would Vote for Winfrey as President in 2020

Essence of Comments	No. of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Insufficient political experience	43	55.84%
No public platform; position on issues is unknown	5	6.49%
Too caring and compassionate for a gutter fight	4	5.19%
Would not be able to bring people together	2	2.59%
Lacks interest; should not waste time and money	6	7.79%
Prefer a married (male) president with children	2	2.59%
America doesn't need another celebrity president	5	6.49%
Should not jeopardize current role, which is powerful and has broad, positive impact	10	12.99%

Table 7. Reasons Some Respondents Would Not Vote for Winfrey as President

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Prototype of Sunken Place: Reading Jordan Peele's *Get Out* through Octavia Butler's *Kindred* as Black Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction Narratives

BRITNEY HENRY

Science fiction and speculative fiction have imagined new worlds, species, and technologies that have influenced individuals and societies. These genres have a significant space within American popular culture as "popular culture is woven deeply and intimately into the fabric of our everyday lives. While it may be tempting to imagine such amusements and attachments as apolitical, popular culture reflects and plays a significant role in contouring how we think, feel and act in the world for better and often for worse" (Mueller et al. 70). Science fiction and speculative fiction are not apolitical. These genres within the space of Black culture have illustrated forgotten or distorted historical events within American culture.

America has a history of othering the Black body and the alterity of this body comes in the form of systematic oppression and racism. History has inflicted serious trauma and damage mentally and physically on Black bodies. I use "body" instead of "person" here because of the objectification of the body without regards to personhood which Hortense Spillers refers to as, "a territory of cultural and political maneuver" (67). Furthermore, the flesh and body are conceived as being separate. The body can become an object and dehumanized whereas the flesh takes the impact of the pain being inflicted. Black flesh has been abused, sexually degraded, and scientifically exploited throughout history. Mark Dery furthers this notion stating:

> in a very real sense, [Black people] are the descendants of alien abductees;
> they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force
> fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what

BRITNEY HENRY is doctoral student of English Literature at The University of Delaware. Her scholarly interests include popular culture studies, Black science fiction and speculative fiction, trauma studies, book history, and archives. Britney's research is concerned with characters' relationship to the body and identity individually, but also societally when disability, trauma, and/or exploitation occurs. She was one of the 2019 recipients of the NEH-GBHI scholarship for Rare Book School, and she recently curated and digitized an exhibit, "The Wade Hall 20th Century Paperbacks Collection" in Auburn University's Ralph Brown Draughon Library's Special Collections and Archives. She can be reached at bnchenry@udel.edu.

has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on Black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and tasers come readily to mind). (180)

Black life in America started with dislocation and, from there, stripping of identity and ownership of body.

The examples that Dery calls upon are events that happened throughout America's past that could easily find themselves within the creation of a science fiction narrative. With this understanding, "Black existence and science fiction are one and the same" (Eshun 298) because "the sublegitimate status of science fiction as a pulp genre in Western literature mirrors the subaltern position to which Blacks have been relegated throughout American history" (Dery 180). History is the basis from which Black science fiction and speculative fiction is derived, illustrating the ways in which Black existence is equivalent to the genres themselves. Two examples are used to illustrate this relationship. Jordan Peele created a sci-fi nightmare in his award-winning film *Get Out* (2017). While his film was marked as horror in the American market, this film is a Black science fiction and speculative fiction narrative. Peele uses slavery as the monster from which his character must escape, much like Octavia Butler did in her novel, *Kindred*. Slavery is the historical marker from which they make their sci-fi nightmare. Reading *Get Out* alongside *Kindred* illuminates how both Peele and Butler enslave their protagonists to illustrate the trauma of slavery both in the past and the present.

American History, Slavery, and the Sunken Place

Kindred takes the protagonist, Dana Franklin, back to 1800s Maryland to help her distant grandfather, Rufus Weylin, impregnate her distant grandmother, Alice Greenwood, so Dana will be born in the future. The horror in this narrative lies in Dana', a Black woman, transportation to a plantation, and Rufus being the son of a slave owner. Dana has to endure slavery and the violence that ensues to ensure her own future. *Get Out*'s protagonist, Chris, is a Black man who goes away with his white girlfriend, Rose, to meet her family. Chris does not realize he is about to find himself in modern-day enslavement due to the family's operation of taking Black bodies and using them for their own gain by abducting and displacing Black personhood through the means of surgically removing their brain and transplanting a white individual's brain in place thus severing the connection between the Black body and personhood. Peele's film introduces viewers to the sunken place. This is

a space that is both literal and metaphorical. An individual in the sunken place is constantly surrounded by external trauma and violence. This is a space that is overwhelming and weighs down on the individual as they lose their sense of self-expression rendering them completely suspectable to mental and physical violence. The sunken place is only accessed through external forces which create open wounds that are debilitating to the individual who is sunken. If the individual is able to escape, they do not come back whole, whether in the form of damage to their flesh, personhood or both.

Both narratives are portrayals of the sunken place, reinforcing Eshun's belief that the black experience is science fiction. While Peele has given this new language, "the idea of using sci-fi and speculative fiction to spur social change, to re-examine race, and to explore self-expression for people of color, then, is clearly nothing new" (Womak 122). Reading Peele through Butler reiterates that Black authors have been contributing to the genres of science fiction and speculative fiction long before Peele visualized *Get Out* on screen. Butler's resonances are significant to twenty-first century popular culture as she illustrates prototypes of sunken place through her narrative's setting, 1800s Maryland, and Rufus. *Kindred* is a useful rubric by which *Get Out* can be accessed within the space of these genres. The narratives being presented illustrate what is at stake when Black individuals are in the sunken place and the cost of getting out.

Get Out articulates the sunken place as a physical and mental hold, a regressive site. A regressive site is a place that does not comply with the time period in which it is situated. For Chris to sink into a mental sunken place, he is guided to a state of heightened suggestibility by Rose's mother, Missy. To sink Chris to this place, Missy questions him about his mother's death making him dredge up a suppressed memory. Internalized trauma allows Missy to sink Chris, the ultimate act of intimate violence—a kidnapping of the mind. Chris is left with a reopened wound. The pain inflicted in reopening the wounds of his mother's death is evident in Chris's body language. Tears stream down his face and his eyes widen as he tries to fight back the traumatic memory, his fingers scratching at the chair in which he is sitting. Missy's act of violence leaves Chris vulnerable and exposed to the next stages of mental anguish.

Chris not only experiences the sunken place mentally, but also physically. The location of the Armitage family home is isolated and reminiscent of a plantation. When Chris and Rose arrive at the Armitage home, Chris sees Walter, a Black groundskeeper. He is then introduced to Georgina, a Black housekeeper. This

setting Peele gives is a regressive site similar to *Kindred*'s location. Furthermore, Victoria Anderson argues, "the slavery subtext is hinted early on when we find out that Rose's mother goes by the name of 'Missy': a common appellation for the Mistress of the slave-holding" (Anderson). Peele uses Walter, Georgina, and Missy to demonstrate Chris's stepping backing in time to a sunken location. Chris mentions this regression to his friend Rod, "Yo, and it's the Black people out here too. It's like all of them missed the movement," to which Rod responds, "cause they probably hypnotized" (Peele 0:51:49-0:51:55). Rod, this narrative's Cassandra, tries to tell Chris the truth he is not seeing. Missy has placed all the Black characters in the sunken place. Her hypnosis is an act of racialized violence. The characters have not missed the movement, they have been displaced by white characters. They may have bodies, but the Black characters have limited consciousness. Missy has hijacked their psyches. Chris is complacent and brushes off Rod's comments, not knowing he is next. Chris is being hunted by this family. The kidnapping of Black people is a game to the Armitage family. Chris will have to run to save himself.

As the film progresses, Chris becomes uneasy about his surroundings but not enough to notice that he is in danger. What he does notice though are the many instances of bodily objectifications before and during the Armitages' party. The night before, Walter frightens Chris by turning towards him, making a sharp turn before crashing into Chris. Walter has been displaced by Roman, Dean's father, Roman was a runner, losing to a Black Olympian. Dean tells Chris "[he] almost got over it" (Peele). Now inhabiting Walter's body, Roman is able to run again and use the "natural gifts" Walter possesses. At the party, Chris is introduced to Gordon who loves golf and says to Chris, "Let's see your form" (Peele). Chris's introduction to Lisa and Nelson is worse: Lisa exclaims, "So, how handsome is he" as she grabs his bicep (Peele). While Chris looks visibly uncomfortable, he makes no attempt to move, perhaps too stunned. Lisa then goes on to ask, "So, is it true… is it better?" alluding to Chris's virility (Peele). Chris is unaware that his body is being auctioned off. Rose continues to show Chris off to potential buyers. Another one of the bidders comments, "Now the pendulum has swung back. Black is in fashion" (Peele). This commentary explains why the Armitage family and their inner circle wants to possess Black bodies; the flesh is a fashion statement and symbol of power and control. The way in which Chris's body is assessed illustrates a modern auction block. The bidders are dehumanizing Chris and he does not realize the red flags. Bidders want to see his form and ask about his sexual performance, turning his body from being to object. The flesh is being appraised

and touched as bidders make their rounds meeting Chris. During their conversation, Rod tells Chris, "White people love making people sex slaves" (Peele). The Armitages are operating a modern form of slavery. Their practice is the ultimate act of regression. The auction is silent and operated with bingo cards reiterating that this is a game to the Armitage family.

The instances that Chris experiences and notices illustrates how explicit Peele is in his depiction of exploiting the Black body—the offenses against the personhood and flesh that are the reality for Black people in and outside the space of this film. The depictions of exploitation signal the audience and Chris that he is in danger as well as the Black characters' performance within the film. Walter, Georgina, and Andre have all been operated on, having their brains removed and replaced by those of the Armitages' inner circle of family and friends. Georgina and Walter have been displaced by Rose's grandparents. Andre has become Logan, one of the Armitage's friends. When Chris is being prepped for his own operation, Jim Hudson, the blind man who bought Chris's body, tells Chris:

> The piece of your brain connected to your nervous system will still be there. So, you won't be gone, not completely. A sliver of you will still be there somewhere. Limited consciousness. You'll be able to see and hear what your body is doing but your existence will be as a passenger, an audience. You'll live. (Peele 1:24:00-1:24:37)

Chris finishes Jim's sentence, "in the sunken place" (Peele). Jim becomes a slave master with ownership of Chris's consciousness as well as his body, specifically his eyes. Roman, Rose's grandfather, tells Chris "you [African Americans] have been chosen because of the physical advantages you have endured your entire lifetime. With your natural gifts and our determination, we can be a part of something greater" (Peele 1:14:29-1:14:40). "We" is exclusive in Roman's statement and does not include Black people; it is white determination enslaving Black bodies. This act of violence is a twenty-first-century form of slavery. They are buying Black bodies, furthering the argument that the Armitage home is a regressive site. Their surgical method abuses the flesh and makes it blatantly clear that the Black body is a site of scientific exploitation. The means of creating something greater is akin to Frankenstein and the use of others' flesh to create a whole being. This practice is alienating Black people and dislocating them from society.

The first Black character the audience sees being dislocated by the Armitage family is Andre Hayworth. He is displaced by Logan. Logan signals to Chris that

something is terribly wrong as he is twirling around in front of a group of white people who clap and say bravo. He is showing off his new "fashionable" body post-operation. The signals become explicitly clear when Chris subtly tries to take a photo of Logan. The camera flash triggers Andre into consciousness. His eyes and facial expression immediately shift into panic and his nose starts to bleed. Chris has reopened a wound. Andre starts to scream and attacks Chris. He repeatedly tells Chris to get out. In this moment, Andre is no longer a passenger in his body. His screams of "get out" are directed at Chris as a warning, but also Logan, his slave owner. Andre's escape is only partial—he is inarticulate, and his means of communication are through screaming and the utterance of "get out" repetitively, much like the song being played as he is being abducted. The partiality of his being is disabled as he is stuck in the sunken place. Despite the inarticulation, Andre's partial escape offers Chris the chance to "get out."

Trauma, Black Science Fiction, and the Sunken Place

Peele may have given us the language of sunken place, but these tropes of trauma also occur in *Kindred*. Butler's novel illustrated these tropes within the scope of Black science fiction long before Peele visualized them on screen. Near death experiences and severe injuries to Rufus's body are what brings Dana back to the past. Rufus is sinking Dana and pulling her against her will to 1800s Maryland. Dana tells readers, "so he called me. I was certain now. The boy drew him to me somehow when he got himself into more trouble than he could handle" (Butler 26). The first time Dana is pulled back, she saves Rufus from drowning. Mrs. Weylin, Rufus's mother, believes Dana is harming her son, as Dana says, "suddenly, the woman began beating me. 'You killed my baby!' She screamed" (Butler 14). Mr. Weylin then comes to the scene of the accident with a gun pointed at Dana. The act of saving Rufus is not rewarded. Because she is Black, Dana is beaten and almost shot to death. Butler indicates Dana's body is expendable and unwelcome. This scene demonstrates that Dana's journey back in time causes her harm. Fear and injury inflicted on Dana's flesh send her back to the present. The abuse of her flesh unsettles Dana. Coming from the 1970s, she is unfamiliar with the extent of this physical violence. She is susceptible to perpetual pain because she is connected to a man whose body is deemed more important than her own. Pain sinks her in and brings her back to illustrate that the trauma she sustains in the sunken place, Maryland, does not stay sunken, it comes with her.

Dana cannot escape her Maryland or Rufus, the external forces keeping her sunken, because she must ensure Alice is impregnated by Rufus so that her distant grandmother is born. Without the conception of Hagar, Dana would not be born. She is responsible for Rufus despite his disregard for her wellbeing and thus, she cannot prematurely get out of the sunken place. Much like Peele's film, location and people are significant elements to an individual's impact of sunkenness. Alice, Dana, and Rufus are connected to each other for the purpose of creating life despite the objectification and violence against both Black bodies. Even though Alice has now been added to this entanglement, Rufus is still the main source of power and control due to three main factors: gender, race, and setting. Rufus is what sinks both women, the reason being, "racial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relations between various spaces and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power relations between races" (Mohanram 3). This inequitable power relation between races is exemplified through Rufus' characterization. The hold that both the location and Rufus have on Alice and Dana is detrimental to both women's personhood.

Kindred depicts the dangers of being a Black woman in the Antebellum South. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf argues "the black female body is a useful body because it is both a laboring, sexual and reproducing body… the use of violence to break them in, to fragment them and make them cease to be subjects, to transform them into 'docile bodies' that become bodies that labor" (318). The body was objectified, sexually degraded, commodified, and controlled. For white men, Black women's bodies were useful for sex and reproduction. Not only were they forced to sexually satisfy these men, they were also forced to bear children to labor on the plantation or to be sold to other slave owners. These women were no longer subjects but objects for men to do with as they pleased. Butler illustrates Bakre-Yusuf's notion of the Black female body through Alice and Dana. The second time Dana is sunken, she meets a patroller. Butler writes "I guess you'll do as well as your sister," he said. "I came back for her, but you're just like her." That told me who he probably was… he reached out and ripped my blouse open. Buttons flew everywhere, but I didn't move. I understood what the man was going to do" (42). The patroller's words and actions remove subjectivity from Dana's body. She is made an object when the patroller mistakes Dana for Alice's mother and then states, "I guess you'll do." He harmed Dana and Alice's mother as a way of breaking them. Their bodies have been subjected to physical and sexual violence. Her body is useful for sexually

satisfying the patroller. Dana defends herself and comes back to the present before he can rape her enacting more trauma on her body and personhood.

Rufus employs the same acts of violence onto Alice's body. He treats the Black female body as an object of his desire and a being to possess. Alice was a subject to Rufus when they were younger; he had a sense of her personhood and perhaps loved her. Dana states, "he spoke out of love for the girl—destructive love" (Butler 147). Rufus conflates love with possession. He wants Alice even though she does not feel the same for him. His "love" is the external force that sinks Alice into the sunken place. The obsessive desire to have Alice is volatile. He enlists Dana to help him bed Alice, but she resists. This resistance is met with violence. Rufus tells Dana, "How about this: you talk to her—talk some sense into her—or you're going to watch Jake Edwards beat some sense into her" (Butler 163). Rufus is willing to break Alice into submission to sexually satisfy himself. This ultimatum illustrates that Rufus is the product of his environment and what he thinks is love is actually a need to control Alice. It is toxic and inflicts trauma on both women: Dana for having to participate in the coercion of forced sex and Alice for having to submit to this act of intimate violence. Dana tells Alice that Rufus wants to have sex with her, and she questions Dana on what she should do. Dana states, "'I can't advise you. It's your body,' Alice then replies, 'Not mine, his. He paid for it, didn't he?'" (Butler 167). This conversation about ownership is significant. Black women had no rights to their bodies. Rufus paid for Alice, believing he paid too much for what she was worth. Her body is a commodity and it belongs to Rufus to objectify. Female bodies labor for their masters—a sexual labor Alice must participate in despite what she wants. Dana tells us, "She went to him. She adjusted, became a quieter more subdued person. She didn't kill, but she seemed to die a little" (Butler 168). This intimate act of violence against Alice's flesh inflicted mental trauma. The quiet here indicates pain. Alice was not only broken down into submission through rape, but also by the harsh realities she lived. She understood that her body was not her own.

Dana almost suffered the same fate as Alice. Rufus attempts to rape Dana and she says, "Slowly, I realized how easy it would be for me to continue to be still and forgive him, even this" (Butler 259). Alice never forgave Rufus for the trauma inflicted on her body and personhood. She did not willingly submit herself to his desires. Dana's ability to continuously forgive Rufus for the trauma he has inflicted is part of what keeps her sunken. Rufus soon begins conflating the two women, both serving different purposes for Rufus—Dana, his confidante and protector, and

Alice his lover. For Rufus, one woman cannot exist without the other. He states, "'Behold the woman,'[…] he looks from one to the other of us, 'You really are one woman. Did you know that'… Alice then responds, 'I guess so. Anyways, all that means we're two halves of the same woman—at least in his crazy head'" (Butler 228). Rufus has removed individual personhood from each of these women and has made them one. Alice and Dana are laboring and sexual beings for Rufus. He believes he owns these women and this belief is demonstrated when Dana's husband, Kevin, comes back for her. Rufus responds like a man obsessed, "'Damn you, you're not leaving me!' He was going to shoot. I had pushed him too far. I was Alice all over again, rejecting him" (Butler 186). Dana sees herself in Alice because she states "I was" instead of I was like.

No comparison exists here: not only is Rufus conflating the two women, Dana is doing so as well. Dana forgets that no matter how strikingly similar they are in appearance, they are not one woman. Dana has a way out; Alice does not. Alice has become hateful and is slowly losing herself the more Rufus tears down her personhood and enacts violence to her flesh. Alice goes back and forth between hating and loving Dana because she does not have to suffer the ways in which Alice does. Regardless, both women are sunken. While their positions differ, they are still affected mentally and physically by Rufus and 1800s Maryland. Dana makes this clear, "We were failures, she and I" (Butler 177). The misery they are both succumbing to sinks them farther into the sunken place.

A wound can heal, scab over, and sometimes leave a faint reminder of the acts of violence endured. Mental trauma leaves wounds that stay open, without scabbing over.The first moment Dana was brought back to the past, her personhood was at risk. When she comes back to the present, she states, "I was shaking with fear, with residual terror that took all the strength out of me" (Butler 15). Every time Dana goes back to the Antebellum South, she leaves a part of her behind, pieces of her sanity being chipped away. The more violence inflicted on her body, the more Dana falls into the sunken place. She contemplates suicide, a clear indication of how much mental trauma she is suffering. She remarks, "I longed for my sleeping pills to give me oblivion, but some small part of me was glad I didn't have them. I didn't quite trust myself with them just now. I wasn't quite sure how many of them I might take" (Butler 178). Dana's physical pain was starting to cause anguish; she was willing to do anything to get out. Dana is self-aware which is what keeps her from fully succumbing to the sunken place despite the person she is constantly saving continuously sinking her. The moment readers see Dana contemplating taking the

sleeping pills it is a clear indication that she has to pull back and think, is this really what she wants? The moment things get too dangerous for Dana, she has the ability to leave. She also has hope in the form of Kevin. Alice is not granted those luxuries. She is an enslaved woman in the 1800s. Alice can never escape the sunken place in which she resides. Dana reflects on this, stating:

> I should have been more like Alice. She forgave him for nothing, forgot nothing, hated him as deeply as she loved Isaac. I didn't blame her. But what good did her hating do? She couldn't bring herself to run away again or to kill him and face her own death. She couldn't do anything at all except make herself more miserable. (Butler 180)

The only thing Alice can do is continue to take the violence enacted on her flesh and personhood. Dana feels as though she should be more like Alice but that would come with many consequences. Alice was letting her mental trauma fester into hatred for herself, Rufus, and Dana. Her suffering was inevitable because this was the reality of being enslaved in the 1800s. Misery was the only option available to Alice because any other option would leave her susceptible to more violence.

The trauma Alice had sustained was too much for her to endure. The constant objectification and degradation of her flesh broke Alice's personhood. She could not find sanctuary within her sunken place. Dana finds Alice and says, "I wanted her down… I broke my fingernails, trying to untie it until I remembered I had my knife. I got it from my bag and cut Alice down" (Butler 248). The sunken place fully devoured Alice. She was Andre Hayworth for Butler's narrative, signaling to Dana that it was time to get out before she too was sunken. Dana has to cut down a version of herself, no longer having to watch Alice suffer in the sunken place. Dana hurts her fingers in the process of cutting "her" own body down. Not only does she have to bear the emotional pain of cutting down Alice's body, but also the physical pain from the process in which she attempts to do so. There is no longer a connection between these two within the sunken place and Dana loses a piece of herself. Cutting down Alice's body is a pivotal moment within the narrative and the turning point at which Dana realizes it is time to get out.

Dana was unable to remain unimpaired by her travels because that was unrealistic for Black existence during this era. The sunken place does not leave people whole—parts of their being would be missing through acts of violence against their flesh and the disregarding of their personhood. Throughout history and at present, Black bodies are othered and objectified as if they are inhuman. For Dana to experience the horror of Antebellum slavery, she would have to bear the

markings of this system that broke people and left them without the ability to be whole. Dana's escape from the sunken place leaves her without an arm. She kills Rufus and escapes the sunken place. Despite Dana's freedom from Rufus, she is not free from the trauma inflicted. Part of her remains in the past, "Something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it—painlessly, at first—melting into it, meshing with it as though somehow my arm here being absorbed into something. Something cold and unliving" (Butler 260-1). This is the aftermath of slavery, the "memory unforgotten" (Hogan 196). Butler writes that Dana's arm was absorbed into something cold and unliving—it was the wall between the past and the present, but also Rufus's dead hand pulling Dana back one last time. This gripping hold of Rufus dismembered a piece of her. He is the embodiment of oppression and slavery much like the Armitage family. Dana now has the physical reminder of escaping the sunken place.

Chris does not have a physical reminder of escaping the sunken place, but just like Dana, he is mentally scarred. Chris and Dana had to kill to save themselves. The sunken place ends with death to either the external force or the individual being sunken. Both narratives illustrate loss through the sunken place, each character escaping as a partial being. This loss they experience is phantom pain. Linda Hogan describes phantom pain as a phenomenon that is "unlike other types of pain, no body part need be present for it to occur… it is an apparition, a ghost thought to exist only in the mind, as a memory unforgotten." The problem with this pain is "its invisibility." It does not always rely on visible evidence but belongs to "secret histories of inner worlds" (196). Racial trauma is phantom pain, felt mentally by the individual. This pain may not be seen but one can feel it, "a form of wounding, hurting, or defeating… the phenomenon of trauma presupposes the reality of being exposed, open" (Yancy 142). By this definition, the phantom pain felt from racial trauma is the pain that is felt when one is in the sunken place. The sunken place leaves individuals exposed with wounds that will fester even after one is able to get out. This is the pain that Black people feel in what Saidiya V. Hartman refers to as the "aftermath" of slavery—it is a ghost sitting within the mind. Phantom pain and racial trauma is effectively articulated through Butler and Peele, illustrating each character's response to both concepts.

Conclusion

Kindred proves useful as a rubric to access *Get Out.* Butler is significant to the space of Black science fiction and speculative fiction. Peele's language and explicit use of the genre's conventions as laid out by Eshun and Dery solidifies his place within Black science fiction and speculative fiction. Butler and Peele created protagonists who lived through constant violence and damage to their flesh and personhood, demonstrating what it means to be Black in America. Having their protagonists live at the end articulates what it means to survive trauma, but also the costs of having to live with mental and physical damage—a reality that most Black Americans face.

Both narratives illustrate that the aftermath of slavery has a strong grip on America without any plans of letting go. Black Americans are still trying to escape the sunken place that is systematic oppression, police brutality, and racism. Getting out is not yet a reality within America and, if one is able to survive the trauma, they will be not the same individual; there will always be the possibly of triggering what Toni Morrison refers to as (re)memory, "recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past…the pitched battle between remembering and forgetting" (Morrison). Popular media will circulate comic strips, pictures, and videos, of Black Americans who have been abused or killed because of the color of their skin. The trauma of being Black in America is an ever present wound, festering when exposed to new violence to either the flesh or personhood. Peele's contribution to Black science fiction and speculative fiction makes it blatantly clear that twenty-first century America is not yet woke. We still have work to do.

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"We're Taking Africa to the World": Commercial Self-fashioning as a Vehicle for Collective Aspirations in the 21st Century

JANNA SERRES

"It's finally cool to be an 'African'" (Kaumbutho). This 2017 blog post by Kenyan poet Kimathi Kaumbutho echoed the performative claims heard throughout the African middle class in the wake of the changing narrative about "Africa," from "The hopeless continent" (*The Economist* 2000) to "Africa rising" (*The Economist* 2011). Elements and signs of "Africanness" have indeed been increasingly featured in "global" popular culture, from clothing lines to films, and even the practice of capitalism is rebranded with "African traditional principles" through the Africapitalist and Ubuntu "economic philosophies." But as suggested by Kaumbutho's list of achievements "Africans can take pride in," one cultural medium has proven particularly instrumental to this new wave of positive identification with "Africa": Nigerian music. As Nigeria was arguably entering a post-oil era in the 2010s (Burns and Owen), its renewed popular music industry benefitted from the development of digital technology and the expression of corporate interest by telecom companies, retail brands, and foreign-educated young professionals, making it an exemplary manifestation of a new pan-Africanism founded on neoliberal aspirations (Shipley *Living the Hiplife*).

Global professional services firm PwC announced that total revenue for Nigeria's entertainment and media industry was expected to grow to US$8.1 billion in 2019, calling it the "fastest-expanding major market globally" (Oxford Business Group). However, only a very small share of this revenue occurs from the actual sale of cultural products (PwC 22). Instead, revenues are generated by turning consumers into fans who can be monetized through corporate sponsorship. As

JAANA SERRES is a first year PhD student and the Ioma Evans-Pritchard scholar in the Social Anthropology of Africa at Oxford University. Her research examines the boom of the Nigerian music industry that has dominated African popular culture since the mid-2000s, with a focus on its moral economy. In particular, she is interested in the interplay of individual, corporate, and social aspirations in attempts to overcome victimising narratives via individuated success stories. Her research will explore notions of agency, hope, and performativity in relation to neoliberal practices of entrepreneurship and self-branding in the music industry. Janna can be reached at jaana.serres@gmail.com.

power in Nigeria is traditionally defined by someone's capacity to maintain a broad network of willing support that can be mobilized for various forms of action (Barnes 7), Nigerians have rapidly seized upon the possibilities offered by social media to become "influencers." With Nigeria's "new retail economy" emerging as "Africa's growing giant," in the language of management consulting firms (McKinsey), music has accompanied the rise of consumer spending by serving as a vehicle for brand penetration.

The confluence of celebrity culture with the neoliberal requirement that everyone be an enterprise for themselves (Foucault 206), through the mediation of digital technology, is a widespread global phenomenon. Yet, the "sticky engagement" (Tsing 6) of neoliberal ideology and technological innovation with the historico-sociological configuration of Southwestern Nigeria's musical patronage (Alaja-Browne; Waterman), conspicuous status enhancement pursuits (Apter; Lawuyi) and Igbo entrepreneurship (Olutayo) evades a simple narrative of Western corporate expansion and requires an exploration of other operating forces.

Heeding the Jean and John Comaroff's claim that the history of the present may be more acutely grasped from the vantage of "Africa" ("Theory from the South"; see also Mbembe "Africa in the New Century" 326), this paper examines why neoliberal discourse and practices have been invested with pan-African aspirations in the Nigerian popular music industry. A discourse promoting individuated modes of wealth acquisition through engagement with technology and entrepreneurship of the self has indeed found great resonance in Lagos, serving explicitly as a vehicle for hopes to assert global membership. At the same time, music is seen as Nigeria's greatest export; while the proceeds of oil are perceived to only enrich a few, music brings joy and pride to everyone.

This paper is based on an ethnography conducted in June-July 2018 for a master's dissertation. The ethnography involved unstructured interviews with music professionals, including: commercially successful and aspiring artists, producers, and DJs; artist managers; radio hosts and other personnel; label executives and employees; marketers, media consultants, and bloggers; pirate mixtape producers and distributors; and other professionals working at organizations that contribute to revenue generation in the music industry (telecom companies, streaming platforms, financial institutions, and law firms). The study also included participant-observation at studio sessions, industry events, shows, night clubs, radio shows, private parties, and everyday life settings in Lagos, as well as on social media.

I first describe the recent context in which Southern Nigerians have engaged with what is generally known as "neoliberal discourse" in Euro-America, reconfiguring deep-rooted ideas that status advancement results from individual effort and that anyone may rise to prominence (Barber "The Generation of Plays"; Waterman) under a new terminology. As Michel Foucault explained, it is "completely impossible to deal with the diffusion of the German model in France and the American neoliberal movement at the same time. The two phenomena are not completely overlapping and cannot be superimposed on each other, although there is, of course, a whole system of exchanges and supports between them" (193). The development and naturalization of neoliberalism in Nigeria is similarly a complex process that cannot be reduced to an import from the United Kingdom or the United States, or a prescription by the International Monetary Fund. Attempting to describe the diffusion of a certain neoliberal discourse in Lagos and its music industry would be far beyond the scope of this paper.

Yet, certain factors and circumstances have had a notable impact on—or are revealing of—the enthusiasm around recent neoliberal trends that manifest in the Lagos music industry. This section is based on literature review and draws on remarks from informants showing the particular way in which Lagos music professionals have engaged with such trends. In a second part, I situate cultural production, and music in particular, in the construction of "New Africa"; that is, a continent firmly writing itself within a new, decentered but global world (Mbembe "Africa in the New Century"). This section builds upon James Ferguson's observation that "a wide range of social actors on the continent understand their own situations, and construct their strategies for improving them, in terms of an imagined 'Africa' and its place in a wider world" (6). Finally, based on my ethnography, I argue that a neoliberal discourse, which promotes an unmediated link between the market and the self, can be attractive to those who aspire to categorical equality and the transformation of their condition. In erasing scale and structural factors, self-enhancement values restore dignity and a sense of agency that were robbed by colonization, failed post-independence state-led development, and the humanitarian discourse that followed since the 1990s. In particular, the practice of self-branding in the music industry allows for performative anticipation of full economic and cultural participation.

Following Achille Mbembe, who notes that the scope of research on Africa is often limited by a focus on "the problem of knowing whether or not the acts they describe and interpret are inscribed in a process of either resistance or

accommodation to the established order" ("Provisional Notes" 29), this paper focuses on the meaning that the studied agents give to their own actions. This approach is specifically important with respect to the study of popular culture, and youth-dominated cultural industries in particular. Karin Barber noted in *Readings in African Popular Culture* in 1997 that "cultural commentators have been so keen to valorize the 'indigenous' and the 'traditional' that they have simply ignored what most people are interested in" (7). Even while there is much focus on popular culture in contemporary scholarship on Africa, the efforts to emphasize new ways of "resisting," through political and social critique, parody, or transgression—or often simply through poverty—have obscured major trends or recast them as the advancement of a commercial culture which does not deserve further analysis.

Yet, I cannot resolve myself to describing Tosyn, the Nigerian radio celebrity, singer, and social media influencer who I lived with, as well as all the African entrepreneurs I know who work tirelessly toward the transformation of the continent, simply as clueless agents in the expansion of a hegemonic world order. The perception of "Africa" and black communities in general as the last frontier of neoliberal participation tends to turn them into proxies for an ideological battle onto which Western hopes and anxieties can be projected, leaving little room for an elaborate understanding of how agents make their actions intelligible to themselves.

Backdrop to the Emergence of a Renewed Nigerian Music Industry

In the late 1980s, economic crisis and the rise of piracy caused foreign record labels whose structures had supported global acts such as Fela Kuti, King Sunny Ade, or Majek Fashek, to close their Lagos offices (Adedeji 252). The Nigerian government adopted a Structural Adjustment Program in 1986 under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and while it proved unsuccessful, it marked the commencement of an economic liberalization process with major consequences for the music industry. In 1992, regulatory control of broadcasting and telecommunications was transferred from government ministries to two new regulatory bodies, whose powers were extended in 1998 and 1999 to further liberalize these sectors, creating intense competition.

Privatization led to a proliferation of TV and radio channels hungry for new content (Akpan 98; Barber "Popular Arts" 7), resulting in a flow of foreign images, ideas, and narratives (Larkin). The forces of media, technology, and travel, as in the rest of the world, fueled consumerism and the craving for new commodities and

spectacles (Appadurai *Modernity at Large* 14). While exposure to "global" cultural content increasingly connected material inequality and stratification to questions of cultural difference (Ferguson), it also introduced channels for the expression of difference, promoting the idea of categorical equality (Wilk). In the late 1990s, popular music centered around rising private radio and television, heavily reliant on foreign content; however, ten years later, digital music production technologies and social media allowed local artists to create their own version of celebrity culture and completely eclipse foreign artists.

The new direction taken by marketing has supported this trend. Whereas earlier marketing techniques used the rhetoric of development to present the potential consumer with a teleological project (becoming "modern"), new brand marketing aims at insinuating itself into existing social structures to capture attention and insert strategically placed corporate signs (Bradshaw and Zwick). Drawing on ideas of governmentality (in the Foucauldian sense), this new marketing taps into existing cultural diversity with the aim of increasing exposure to a brand (Pier). Since the rise of new communication technologies in the late 2000s, telecom companies operating in Nigeria have established relations with local artists who bring their uniquely fashioned identities—as reggae singer, "indigenous artist," cosmopolitan, etc.—to corporate sponsors. Through their association with brand ambassadors, companies draw new populations into global capitalism as consumers, regardless of their disposable income.

Writing about dance and beer companies in Uganda, David Pier has situated this phenomenon in the context of African clientelism, with its dense fabric of patronage networks through which wealth is redistributed. Indeed, the complex, shifting set of obligations maintained between artists and corporations is not wholly different from the relations traditionally entertained with a powerful patron. In Yoruba popular theatre and music, the "big men" gratified by a praise-singer would typically be expected to reward such artist with cash (Barber "Preliminary Notes" 351; Waterman). Today's contractual relations between artists and corporations are also highly publicized and considered to be symbols of status, with the public scrutinizing the financial details through blogs and news websites.

Since the primary objective of biopolitical marketing is circulation, popular music's function as a conduit for other forms of interaction has made it a medium of choice for marketers. In *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination*, Veit Erlmann explains that "music becomes a medium that mediates, as it were, mediation" (6). This is particularly true of African popular music, which Jesse

Shipley ("Transnational Circulation" 368) described as a primary mode through which African youths establish connections, and, increasingly, imagine more enduring linkages. My ethnography shows that a main focus for Nigerian commercial artists is to create memorable lyrical hooks using local slang and to feed dance crazes, both designed to boost circulation. Social media also has a multiplier effect, which artists have aggressively seized upon by engaging with their fans through challenges or controversies. Since telecom companies control access to the Internet, they have created an ecosystem where any kind of engagement with artists on social media or streaming platforms directly benefits them through the consumption of cellular data.

Spearheaded by MTN, a pan-African telecom giant that started as a black-owned business in the wake of South Africa's empowerment initiatives (Cotterill and Fick), telecom companies in Africa have conveyed a certain vision of art and success hinging upon celebrity culture (Halifu). Music is perceived as an important avenue of ostentatious social mobility, with sponsorship contracts reported to amount up to half a million U.S. dollars (Nairametrics.com), as well as talent shows that can position someone in the public eye seemingly overnight. Since the first season of MTN *Project Fame* in 2008 these competitions have proliferated, extending to other creative pursuits, and developing innovative formats specifically tailored for the African market. For example, First Bank Nigeria developed the online reality writing competition *The Writer*, and MTN launched a lottery in which MTN subscribers can participate using their phone credit, whose prize is a collaboration with any artist of their choice, as well as branding, promotion and marketing opportunities.

At the same time, the conjunction of the "Africa rising" narrative and 2008 the financial crisis convinced many Nigerians living in the United States and the United Kingdom to move to Lagos, where they brought a strongly afro-optimist vision, market-mediated identity politics, and entrepreneurial ambitions infused with neoliberal aesthetics (Shipley "Aesthetic of the Entrepreneur" 252). Since the early 2000s, the business world has indeed been celebrating Africa's strong economic growth and hailing the continent as the next investment destination (Gabay). While this narrative has been somewhat qualified in recent years, by the early 2010s "Africa rising" had become a business mantra: the Economist used it as its cover page in 2011; followed by Time magazine a year later; and the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank both used the slogan in 2014, as the title for an international conference (in Maputo, Mozambique) and a feature story

(Worldbank.org), respectively. The same rhetoric was ubiquitous in the world's top universities, as illustrated, among others, by the 2014 African Economic Forum at Columbia University, titled: "A Continent Ascends, Emergent Perspectives from the Frontier." Economic enthusiasm is now increasingly recast as cultural confidence, in a celebration of Africans' potential in a globalized world. The conference "Creating Wakanda: Youth, Technology and Entrepreneurship Across Africa" held at Oxford's School of Government in 2018, for example, was a celebration of what private enterprise can do for "Africa," a private sector controlled by Africans.

These discourses have resonated with many members of the African diaspora who were eager to participate in the transformation of the continent, as my interviews and participant-observation (in Lagos and online) revealed. From record label executives and digital platform founders to radio station owners and even artists, some of the most influential personalities in the Nigerian music industry today are indeed "repats." Convinced of the international potential of Nigerian music, foreign-educated entrepreneurs have been determined to bring African content and business practices on par with "international standards" to "put Africa on the map." Presenting themselves as less focused on social ties (though well-connected) and more on market opportunities and efficiency, they have been instrumental in disseminating corporate values and a new outlook on how business should be conducted. These cosmopolitans emphasize the importance of attracting investors and opening up share capital, (in contrast to the traditional model which favors full ownership for control and prestige), building scalable businesses, and tapping into Nigeria's cultural capital as a path to prosperity.

A separate force that brings together entrepreneurship, media, and the place of Africa in the world is the rise of the charismatic churches. Encouraging their members to seize the consumerist possibilities and media technologies offered by neoliberal capitalism (Meyer), the charismatic churches have provided moral justification for individuated modes of wealth accumulation and self-branding. Charles Piot (56) has described how the Pentecostal focus on the individual appeals to those who are weary of the old narratives that have for too long defined Africa as victim of forces and histories beyond its control.

The salvatory power of private enterprise and the belief in individual potential appear necessary in a context where the state is seen as incurably passive and predatory. From bus drivers to corporate executives, Lagosians express a lack of faith in state-led development and a sense of pride in achieving success without

government support. Government officials are considered so deeply corrupt and incompetent that the only state action which can be envisioned is that of facilitator. Several persons from different backgrounds casually explained during my fieldwork in Lagos: for the state to become a development actor, a revolution would be needed first. Since revolution seems a distant prospect in current day Lagos as most people see their countrymen exclusively focused on their individual issues and "hustles," the rise of the private sector appears to be the only viable option to move forward.

In particular, ordinary people understand that a discrepancy exists between their focus and the interest of the government. Oil accounts for less than ten percent of Nigeria's gross domestic product, but over two thirds of the federal government's revenue are derived from it (KPMG 4), making the government appear disembedded from social reality. Far from being discouraged by the lack of government support, entertainment professionals commonly joke between themselves that the government does not understand the potential of music until they can profit from it and that, indeed, the entertainment industry may be successful because the government has not paid attention to it. In contrast, the Lagos State Government has been celebrated for its pragmatic and outward-looking policies in recent years, further marking out Lagos from the rest of the country. Notably, the Lagos Global initiative (which refers to the Office of Overseas Affairs and Investment established in 2015) has been largely met with approval and was hailed as a model of what the government should do by several music professionals I talked to. Its slogan, "Lagos to the World," is a phrase frequently deployed by artists and commentators that regular Lagosians may also use in everyday speech. The "global" as a discursive element (Tsing) is used here strategically from the periphery in hopes of reaching the "global centers."

The Role of Cultural Production in New Africa

In addition to being celebrated from an investor perspective because of its huge "untapped markets," Africa's "potential" is also a source of hope at the beginning of the twenty-first century because of the particular brand of creativity and cosmopolitanism that the continent generates. Characterized by hybridity, transnationality, and mobility, the African identity as defined in the Afropolitan movement (Eze; Mbembe; Mbembe and Balakrishnan) is well adapted for today's de-territorialized world. These "comparative strengths" find particular expression

in the artistic domain, where an orientation to being-in-the-world, to appropriating and constantly assembling different signs and registers meets the possibilities offered by new communication technologies. Mbembe argues indeed that, increasingly, the term "Africa" tends to refer to a "geo-aesthetic category" ("Africa in the New Century" 322).

This is certainly the case when it comes to Nigerian pop music. Indeed, it is not uncommon for a "Nigerian" song to be the result of the collaboration between a beat-maker in London, a rapper in Lagos, and a video director in Atlanta, all attentive to infusing their craft with "Africanness." Far from the attempts to provide an essentialist view of Africa, Nigerian artists showcase instead the dexterity with which they wield multiple influences, transforming them into flattened out symbols that can be juxtaposed. A public relations professional explained: "[artists] often wear a locally made dress but will accessorize it with a Gucci bag." Accordingly, musicians embrace the idea developed by Richard Wilk that "the global system is a common code, but its purpose is not common identification, but instead the expression of distinctions, boundaries and disjunctures, in ways that subtly serve particular groups and interests" (124). Rather than rejecting this common code because it originated elsewhere, media-savvy Nigerians try to make sure that their interests, as well as those of the "Continent," are served by the insertion of upwardly mobile Africans in this system.

Shipley argues on the basis of his study of Azonto, a musical-dance craze that originated in Ghana and was later taken up by Nigerian pop stars, that mobility itself is a sign of Africanness and personal success ("Transnational Circulation" 363). Popular culture has become a primary means of managing meaning in the formation of globalized identities in an interconnected but culturally diverse world (Hannerz), and young Africans are very much aware of this. While economic needs and personal preferences are certainly relevant to individual aspirations, Arjun Appadurai has drawn attention to the cultural processes through which "collective horizons" are shaped, pointing out that they form the basis for collective aspirations ("The Capacity to Aspire" 67). In Nigeria, as in much of the continent, world-making projects that fantasize Africa on a global scale are very much in the minds of everyone. Brad Weiss has noted the "ordinariness of extraordinary aspirations" in the streets of Arusha (38).

In Lagos at the end of the 2010 decade, with 60% of the population under 25 (CIA.gov), these extraordinary aspirations are personified by two names in particular: Wizkid and Davido. Having racked up international awards and world-

famous collaborations, these poster boys of Afropop are constantly praised both in the media and informal talk for presenting an image of African success to the world. I could observe (on social media, in the bus, at restaurants, and a variety of other casual settings) how the pride and sense of possibility conjured by these two names cut across social class, occupation, and, to a large extent, tribe. At a panel on "Musical Culture and Identity Formation" at the University of Lagos as part of the 2018 Conference of the Lagos Studies Association (LSA), a student explained to the enthusiastic applause of the audience: "Last month Wizkid walked the Dolce & Gabana walkway in Milan. Twenty years ago the most famous artist, Daddy Showkey, was showing *us* the ghetto, bare chest. We have come a long way" (emphasis added). Daddy Showkey belongs to a generation of reggae artists hailing mainly from the overcrowded Ajegunle neighborhood of Lagos, singing bouncy songs about a variety of topics that aimed to be relatable for the average Nigerian. In contrast, through their material success, pop stars provide a path for the negotiation of a self-conscious "Africanness" in a globalized world. Such sentiments are frequently expressed on social media as well, with one Twitter user praising artists for "showing us class, money, style, freshness. Not […] rough hair."

Artists also have the potential to project a certain image of places under-represented in the "global imagination," as emphasized by another LSA panelist: "New media relies on iconic visual cues. Lagos can provide that: the Lekki-Ikoyi Bridge, the mansions in Banana Island. The visual elements that exist in Lagos could be harnessed more effectively." Thus, beyond individuated modes of success, music's multiple mediations can also apply the signs of prestige and cool to the motherland to transform its perception outside. This what Wizkid did when describing his hometown to fashion magazine *Vogue*:

> New York style is very, very similar to Lagos style. Because New York is a cosmopolitan city, you have so many different people from different parts of the world, just throwing on whatever they like, whatever they think looks good. Lagos style is the same; when you stand on the street, that is like a fashion show on its own. (Houghton)

The capacity to export cultural products is widely recognized as a crucial strength that needs to be leveraged, including through neoliberal strategies, for Africans to become actors and shapers of globalization. Addressing African artists at the Johannesburg Goethe-Institut's African Futures Festival in 2017, Mbembe explained: "Our major cities must set up metropolitan cultural districts with tax benefits for artists and purchasers. We have to tap into the growth of African

diasporas and the way in which this diaspora has historically contributed to the expansion and export of African-hybrid forms of popular culture." Lagosians will notably present their cultural production and entrepreneurial mentality as Nigeria's competitive advantages in the contest for a "place-in-the-world" (Ferguson 6).

Consumer-facing multinational corporations have taken heed of Nigerians' ardency for the arts and striven to be perceived as supporters of local artistic industries, especially music. The fantastic expansion, over the last decade, of the telecommunications industry in particular cannot be separated from its involvement with popular music (Osumare). MTN, which was arguably the largest source of revenue for Nigerian artists at a point in time, used the 2018 World Music Day to celebrate its role in the "transformation of the African music industry" (Businessday.ng). Emphasizing a national and African artistic identity, and linking it to neoliberal values of individual aspiration, competition, and consumption is a way for multinational telecom companies operating in Nigeria to reinforce their "proudly Nigerian" selling point while reshaping this very identity. Hailing from Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, they offer an aspirationally global discourse: "We are creating cultural platforms to develop African culture" (personal communication with a former Marketing Manager of two telecom companies). Through this process, individual and corporate aspirations appear tied into a broader movement of African emergence. Such a project also offers motivation to those, mostly Nigerian, who manage those corporations. When a Nigerian executive at the Lagos office of a multinational music TV channel expressed what he saw as the mission statement of his job: "We're taking Nigeria to the world, we're adding that new color to the palette of ethnicities/genres," this was seamlessly connected to the social values he holds. From telecom executives to corporate lawyers or investment bankers, the passion is palpable when they discuss their involvement in the music business: "When it comes to music, our artists can sit at the table," one explained.

Engaging with local artists was initially a cost-efficient strategy for multinational companies tapping the Nigerian market in the early 2000s. The amount of pride elicited by the development of the Nigerian popular music industry into the "new cool," with Wizkid and Davido often hailed as the ambassadors of Africa, is a self-fulfilling prophecy of neoliberal discourse on opportunity and value creation. Through the rags to riches and "Africa to the world" stories told in and around the music, the periphery is projected as a site of possibilities in the 21st century, no longer to be defined in collective consciousness only through its

limitations. Popular music in Africa presents an image of the individual fluidly moving across social and geographic boundaries, erasing structural inequalities. Since Davido is the son of a billionaire and most Nigerian stars come from the middle class, the narrative told in corporate offices as well market eateries often focuses on Wizkid and Olamide instead, who both grew up in the overcrowded residential areas of Lagos Mainland. In the absence of basic infrastructure, cultural products are easier to export than other commodities, and the presence in global charts and international award shows creates a much-celebrated categorical equivalency (see Wilk on beauty pageants). "African" and "international" become different "standards" within a single framework. As the head of a leading African streaming platforms put it, regarding his efforts to negotiate the rights of international artists in spite of the current lack of demand: "We want to also have foreign artists on the platform, so you can have Wizkid next to a Beyoncé and people will see that they are on the same level."

The Negation of Scale as a Pre-condition for Hope and Action

A characteristic of neoliberal subjectivity is that the agent evolves in a society in which the political, social, and economic structures are taken for granted (Türken et al.). In this context, a discourse promoting work on the self appears empowering, since it emphasizes the transformation of what the agent has control over. An individual is responsible for the development of her own self, managing it as though it were a business (Gershon), and limitless possibilities are supposed to ensue. As Foucault observed with regard to human capital theory, just as neoliberal thought was gaining ground, economic science shifted its focus in the relationship between worker and capitalist to the standpoint of the former (224). This change of paradigm has had dramatic consequences in Africa, where, as Pier described about Uganda, "development" is now less associated with top-down government projects, and more with individual efforts to attract investors, expressed through words such as "mobilizing," "promotion," and "exposure," with entrepreneurialism promoted as a moral and spiritual activity (416) (see also Piot for a similar argument about Togo).

The reconfiguration of subjectivity called for by the neoliberal conception of agency is supported by positive psychology, a transformative work on emotions that Sam Binkley has described as a "work of governmentality" (48). Happiness or confidence thus become means to achieve success that the neoliberal subject can

choose to strategically deploy by working on herself. Taking human capital theory to another level, positive psychology achieves a radical transcendence of the classical capitalist disjunction between work and consumption, the latter being traditionally associated with a future moment of satisfaction and happiness (De La Fabián and Stecher). This discourse is self-reinforcing among Nigerian entertainment professionals, who consistently celebrate and reward "leadership skills." As a female DJ and record label executive said to an audience of aspiring artists: "When you enter the room, you are a product first, you need to be seen as a bankable individual." Here, "bankable individual" means someone who exudes confidence. Another Nigerian record label executive lamented to me that: "In Nigeria they make music like they're pleading, in the US they make music like they're an authority, even if they are from the hood!" He knows that there is a diaspora market ready to buy "with pride," and, accordingly, he encourages his artists to change their subjective perspective on themselves to become successful. In addition, since it has been widely assumed at the highest echelons of the Nigerian music industry that "good music is music that makes you happy," artists are expected to radiate positivity so as to allow the public to forget the issues they are faced with.

Consisting of four "sources of competitive advantage" that can be cultivated—confidence, hope, optimism, and resiliency—"positive psychological capital" (Luthans and Youssef) is characteristic of the conception of people as owners of skills and traits, in which they are expected to continuously invest. But while this theorization of neoliberal governmentality captures the autonomy and agency embedded in market rationality, it does not fully break away from the possessive individualism that was central to the liberal perspective. Yet the social contract model of personhood fails to account for the determining role of audience perception in the definition of the self in the context of the new economy—which can be described as a virtual, reflexive and networked economy (Adkins 111). Rather than the accumulation of embodied skills and traits as properties of the self, it is the effects produced by the performance of the self on the intended audience that is characteristic of the neoliberal self. This model of self-conscious or reflexive management of appearances was originally developed to describe the transformation of cultural production from a system organized around the author and the embodiment of her creative expression to one governed by branding and simulation (Lury). Adkins argues, however, that as the distance between

production, products, and consumption is erased, the new economy as a whole is organized by the cultural principles of the brand.

In contemporary Western societies, the entrenched conception of the corporate form as a separate, bounded entity led to considerable resistance against the current phenomenon of self-branding. As a contrast, in Lagos the concept and practice smoothly integrated into the dominant model of sole proprietorship and "building oneself up." Furthermore, Barber described already how the advent of videos in Nigeria meant that the youth were able to witness their own activity of conspicuous consumption writ large, to the extent that in consuming video dramas, they were mimicking the process of big men's self-creation displayed for them ("Preliminary Notes" 359).

As notions of ownership and the workings of property rights are being significantly reconfigured all around the world, the case of Nigeria's music industry may show that, in the words of the Comaroffs, Africa is "running ahead" of Euro-America ("Theory from the South" 32). In the absence of a robust intellectual property regime to cling on to, Nigerians have rapidly embraced a system in which claims to ownership may be indirect; instead of rights attached to creations, ownership exists via the negotiated interactions between audience and brands. In this new framework for economic activity, the neoliberal subject invests in themselves and in the audience by constantly focusing on building, educating, and entertaining a public for her brand. Indeed, it is crucial to develop the audience's ability to decipher the signs that the neoliberal agent creates, reworks, circulates. The radio personality I was living with would spend day and night working on her media and entertainment brand, and, outside of her three-hour show, that work would consist in engaging with her audience from home: drafting captions for her social media posts and catchphrases she could use the next day on her show, interacting with fans and celebrities on various social media platforms, keeping up with the latest trends, creating five-minute podcasts, writing on her blog, etc. Since most of her revenue comes from endorsements, her outfits and general appearance also require careful thought. Several aspiring artists explained to me that most of their efforts are spent on social media, since creativity is not about the music's quality but about targeting the right market and positioning.

In the new economy—and in Lagos in particular, where traditional revenue streams are often inadequate—an engaged audience is used as a basis for recognition and rewards of one's work. The audience thus becomes a key intermediary in economic relations. But as Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian

Longhurst note, "the essential feature of [the] audience experience is that, in contemporary society, everyone becomes an audience all the time" (68). While measures of "intangibles" such as customer loyalty and satisfaction are used by management consulting and accounting firms for calculations of economic value (Adkins)—or audience ratings for cultural goods (Lury)—the diffuse nature of contemporary audiences and the flexibility of neoliberal corporate relations means that the only constant is the individual. While this phenomenon is visible in the United States as well, with business empires being built on communication strategies centered around one person, who can then apply their brand to various products and services—as is the case with influencers and pop stars, but also with Donald Trump or Elon Musk—for cultural and structural reasons this practice is an integral part of Lagosian life.

Far from being limited to artists' marketing strategies and deals with corporations, the idea of coding attributes of personhood as part of the process of branding oneself extends to all social relations. Entertainment lawyers will cultivate their own brand of cool, showcasing an aspirational lifestyle of professional success. Pirate mixtape sellers in Alaba market emphasize their ascension in the face of hardship, with thousands of social media followers. Seen as a democratic means of empowerment, personal branding is also in line with the particularization of prosperity brought by God's blessing which is encouraged by the charismatic churches (Meyer 19). A woman with an amputated arm thus turned her plight into a brand with her "1armwarrior" signature and 21,000 followers on Instagram, allowing her to convert her positivity and faith into tangible consumer items.

The theoretical framework that focuses on the performance of the self renders visible the negotiation involved in the self-fashioning that permeates the Nigerian entertainment industry. Under the coded terms "confidence," "pride," or "happiness," people understand that a certain narrative is expected to be presented. In the words of an artist manager: "if you walk proudly in your slippers in Bariga [an overcrowded Lagos suburb], there's no way they [music video channels] will take it." Conversely, a social media influencer and radio personality who is also a recording artist was careful not to promote her music in the mainstream, as it would risk confusing her brand. Indeed, one of her songs is called "Fimisile" (meaning "leave me alone") and describes the emotional labor that she performs to always appear "upbeat," "happy," and "fresh" on her show, social media content, and during social events.

As part of this reflexive management of appearances through self-promotion and branding, ethnic identity has come to play a strategic and complex role. Since many mid-level actors in the Nigerian music industry have been trained by returnee entrepreneurs with a strong Afro-optimist consciousness, an explicit discourse of "strategic cosmopolitanism" (Mitchell) is deployed as part of business savvy. During a filmed discussion intended for his YouTube channel, an artist manager explained to me: "We have things to offer them [foreigners] that they can't find on Google." Anna Tsing has shed light on such global connections, deconstructing the "global" to expose it as the process of finding new sites of engagement. She explains that the appropriation for capital of the value produced in unplanned patches is what makes the concentration of wealth possible. Lagos entrepreneurs display a clear understanding of these mechanisms of capital accumulation under global capitalism, using their Africanness as a differentiating factor to attract investors. "Africa is a thing now, so we have to pre-package our products as African," the artist manager added.

The fact that twenty years ago American music was blasting throughout Lagos is something people like to recall—and probably exaggerate—to contrast it to the situation today. Foreign labels left Nigeria at the turn of the 1980s, following the end of Nigerian music's golden age, and the lack of structure and financial backing caused the local music industry to almost collapse amidst rampant piracy and ongoing political and economic crisis. Today, any American superstar is eclipsed by local artists, with pirated mixtape sellers not even bothering to add international songs to their compilations anymore. While Nigerians all celebrate this general evolution, public debates surround the terms on which Nigerian culture is commercialized. As Nigerian popular music has decidedly moved away from replicating American hip hop and has found its own successful voice, many Nigerians are suspicious of the exoticizing efforts of certain industry professionals. These tensions are reflected in the ongoing discussion about the appropriate naming of the genre.

The debate surrounding how to market Nigerian popular music internationally is indicative of a subtle understanding of the dynamics of global capitalism that Nigerian professionals intend to deploy with respect to their cultural production. They embrace the promise of universal recognition embedded in a neoliberal discourse that allows for the misrecognition of scale (see Gershon) but refuse to simply serve as the foot soldiers of global capitalism. Conscious that difference is an intrinsic feature of the global economy of music (Erlmann), they are keen to

cooperate through self-presentation and self-differentiation, but in a rather different way from the *Ethnicity, Inc.* model described by the Comaroffs. Instead of providing a reified version of what the Comaroffs call the "simulacra of ethnicized selfhood" (*Ethnicity, Inc.* 139) to fit a predefined category of otherness, Nigerian ethno-entrepreneurs—in the same way as Africans elsewhere throughout the continent—want to promote a dynamic version of their "culture," reflecting the syncretism and constant innovation that constitutes their lived experience.

Barber noted with regard to African popular culture in general, "performances constitute audiences, and vice versa" ("Preliminary Notes" 353). Live performance no longer lies at the center of Nigerian public's engagement with popular music; yet, as digitally circulating songs have become the primary mode of informal connections for Africans born since the 1980s (Shipley "Transnational circulation" 368), audience-hood is a renewed dynamic, an interactive force. Interaction is a feature of the new economy and the audience is now the primary corporate measure in the Nigerian music industry, regardless of any monetary transactions, since financial rewards will often come from other sources. As a result, "engaging" with the right audience is essential, even when using platforms that give access to a limitless range of audience. Barber has described how, in Yoruba popular theatre, while the performers and the audience share the same plane in space, the audience is treated as internally differentiated, with its own foci or centers of attention that the performers acknowledge and address ("Preliminary Notes" 351). In particular, the gratified addressees would be expected to reward the praise-singer.

As Nigerian popular music is offered an increasingly international platform through global promotion and inclusion in top playlists on streaming websites, the question of audience representation is problematized. The rise of private radios and Internet broadcasting, the spread of mobile phones to every corner of Nigeria, and the wide distribution of pirated mixtapes (including to the diaspora with the advent of digital download websites) had made more palpable the imagination of an atomized, dispersed but coherent "Nigerian" audience. This notion is, of course, not meant as an analytical category, but is an ideological trope that people in Lagos resort to (erasing, for example, the Northern states where the application of Sharia law makes the distribution of party music more complicated). Nigerians express tremendous support and gratitude to artists for putting Nigeria "on the map," thus viewing artists as "ambassadors" of the country—sometimes even suggesting (only half-jokingly) that they could replace current politicians in certain positions.

As the renewed interest in Nigerian music by international media and music corporations grew and tempted artists who had already achieved fantastic success throughout the continent to set their eyes on new horizons, different projections of audience-hood started to emerge. The two biggest stars in Nigeria (and arguably Africa), Davido and Wizkid, signed worldwide deals with Sony Music in 2016 and 2017, respectively, as the record label was launching an office in Lagos. While these moves were initially widely celebrated as further evidence that Nigerian artists can "sit at the table," the enthusiasm soon gave way to disappointment, in the face of growing indications that the collaboration with the Japanese-American behemoth was not merely facilitating the export of Nigerian music, but instead was reformatting some of Nigeria's favorite cultural products to tailor them to new markets. As is often the case, the expectations were eventually frustrated since the anticipated public did not respond favorably at the time, despite considerable marketing efforts in the United States and the United Kingdom (Born 382). Meanwhile, the Nigerian public perceived that it had been overlooked.

While both Wizkid and Davido have their own labels via which they can release new songs for the Nigerian market, the local public and artists do not envision a two-track system in which Nigerian tastes and practices would remain cut off from the international market. It is exactly the opposite view that motivates artists and the millions of people who stand behind them locally. Rather than presenting a edulcorated version of their culture to a "global" public to apply the *Ethnicity, Inc.* model (Comaroff and Comaroff), Nigerians have embraced the concept of ethnoscape (Appadurai *Modernity at Large*) and intend to leverage it for global access. After largely unmet expectations of global reach for his Los Angeles-recorded album under Sony Music, Wizkid came back to Lagos and released hit after hit, in collaboration with the best Nigerian talents. He announced that his forthcoming album will be titled "Made in Lagos," a marked return to the register of local pride, in contrast to the album recorded under Sony Music's patronage which was titled "Sounds from the Other Side" and may have appeared to dismissively present some exoticism to the Global North. Davido has similarly reframed his ambitions and asserted the centrality of his "African" public in a communication stint with *The Guardian*:

> They [Sony Music] tried to fix me up with a producer and I decided to come home, but I'm still signed to them, it's going good. They have realized how much potential is here because even when I am all over the world it is my African songs that even the oyibo [white] people fuck with. (Porbeni)

Using "Back to Basics" as a slogan for his brand, Davido went on to win the Best International Act Award in June 2018 at the Black Entertainment Television (BET) Awards in Los Angeles, one of the most important awards ceremonies in the global music industry—an information that flooded the social media feed of Nigerians for days.

Conclusion

In this paper I have shown how most Nigerians at every echelon of the commercial music industry have adopted a neoliberal discourse postulating that the branded, enterprising, and commodified self can performatively transform its circumstances and contribute to changing Nigeria's—and Africa's—"place-in-the-world." The premise of commensurability offered by neoliberal ideology is fueling performative anticipation among Lagos youths when other options seem too distant. Using the frameworks laid out by Celia Lury and Lisa Adkins, I have shifted the focus from the cultivation of the self to the performative possibilities of such discourse. With this study of young, upwardly mobile Lagosians, I have described a subjectivity which is significantly orientated towards the needs and desires of an audience which is ever present, real or imagined.

Young Nigerians want full participation in "global" culture and economic networks. But while this accession to global membership involves external recognition, the discourse of entrepreneurship allows for the assertion of agency in recasting the external gaze as a consumer to win over. An artist manager explained it in those terms: "Our music needs to be pre-packaged for the global market, we can't wait for Sony or Universal to do the work for us." Rather than "yearnings for cultural convergence with an imagined global standard" (Ferguson 20), this paper has attempted to show that it is a claim to categorical equivalence that drives the cultural and economic endeavors of young Africans. As Wilk has theorized with respect to Belizeans and international beauty pageants, they want to participate in the "global" contest, or, as Lagosians say instead, with business always in mind: "sit at the table." A music executive thus posted a picture of himself literally sitting around a conference table with the representatives of a Chinese investment fund captioned: "Never stop dreaming and believing!" But in contrast to the Belizeans described by Wilk, Nigerians intend on winning. As I have shown with the examples of Wizkid and Davido, the two emblems of the "Lagos to the World" slogan, while Nigerians' world-making projects certainly fantasize a global scale,

it has to provide more benefits than nominal membership. Furthermore, "global" here is not a euphemism for Euro-America but needs to be understood instead as the opposite of "bilateral," a refusal of dependence to a metropole.

Of course, social networks, on which much of the movement described in this paper relies, magnify a sense of reach and the importance of a trend. In spite of the celebrated "global connectedness," one is primarily exposed to content originating from one's direct and indirect social circle—which, in the case of Nigerians, reaches to every continent through ethnoscape—thus amplifying the effect of performativity. The requirements of self-branding also bring about a high level of conformism which leaves little room for political debate or collective action, and can even weaken social ties, as I was able to witness with my host, whose self-fashioning caused to shun unplanned social interactions.

Yet, when a situation is dire, what are the alternatives to reconfiguring structural forces as individual and cultural challenges capable of resolution? Could it be that the restoring of a sense of agency and pride is a priority? Isn't it what the regional head of Sony Music, a "repat" from London, is attempting to do when he declares at a party with upcoming artists: "This is just the beginning, I can predict that in 2021 it will really explode." Is it very different from Mbembe writing: "The typically "African" idea of art fully resonates with the digital spirit of our times. This is why there is a good chance that the art of the twenty-first century will be Afropolitan" ("Africa in the New Century" 322). In the same way in which Mbembe acknowledges that "there [is] a moment when French, English, or even Portuguese are no longer foreign languages, [but] African languages" (Balakrishnan and Mbembe 35), one can argue that capitalism—and even neoliberalism—are not necessarily foreign to Lagos.

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Black Popular Culture Icon Inspires Space, Exploration, and Communication Futures

MICHELLE FERRIER

"Captain, hailing frequencies open."

On the bridge of the USS Enterprise, Lieutenant Uhura turns to Captain Kirk: "I'm picking up a faint signal coming out of Gamma Quadrant, Sector 15, Mark 5."

Lt. Nyota Uhura, as played in the original series by Nichelle Nichols, is captured in this iconic pose in my painting that I completed just a month ago.

MICHELLE FERRIER is the executive director of the Media Innovation Collaboratory, a dojo leading student entrepreneurs, innovators and communities to design new ways of connecting, collaborating, learning, exploring and creating new media tools. She received her Ph.D. in Texts and Technology from the University of Central Florida. She is the founder of TrollBusters, Online Pest Control for Journalists. Michelle's artwork can be found on Instagram at michelleferrier, and can be reached at michelleferrier@gmail.com.

Nichols and her character made a deep impression on me that has resonated throughout my life and career. This painting celebrates the release of the biopic *Woman in Motion* (2020, dir. Todd Thompson),[1] a documentary that shines a light on the deep impact of Nichelle Nichols on space exploration. The film chronicles Nichols' journey from singing in Duke Ellington's orchestra to portraying Chief Communications Officer Uhura on *Star Trek*, who then used her science fiction fame to challenge the real space program with the question "Where are my people?" and helped launch new STEM education initiatives with the message "Space is for Everyone!"

In her *Star Trek* role, Nichols broke color barriers, but in a twist of art imitating life, she would become an ambassador for NASA to help recruit a more diverse astronaut pool. Her character and life inspired me and others like Mae Jemison, Ronald McNair, Sally Ride and the first women and African-American, Latino, and

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[1] Directed and Produced by Todd Thompson, the film features actors, activists, scientists and astronauts including Nichols, Neil deGrasse Tyson, George Takei, Pharrell Williams, Martin Luther King III, Al Sharpton, Vivica A. Fox, Walter Koenig, Rod Roddenberry, Michael Dorn, and more. The film is distributed by Shout! Studios and has Nichelle Nichols as a co-producer and Benjamin Crump and Greg Galloway as executive producers. The film's trailer can be viewed at https://womaninmotionmovie.com, which also has a link to the executive summary of her report to NASA on her recruiting campaign.

Asian Space Shuttle astronauts. Ben Crump, a civil rights attorney and executive producer on the documentary, said on the film's website that "Nichelle Nichols not only was a trailblazer in Hollywood, she was a trailblazer for the future of our society. She took the fight for Civil Rights, diversity and inclusion and gender equality to new frontiers with NASA which continue to serve America's space program today. She was ahead of her time." She would lure me as a child to the television screen to imagine a different, better future.

I was a young girl when *Star Trek* debuted on television sets across the United States in 1966, running in its original season through 1969. Popular culture was deep into space and alien encounters. *Lost in Space* debuted on television screens in black-and-white in 1965 and ran through 1968. In it, a family must learn to survive when their mission fails and they cannot return to Earth. *The Jetsons*, a cartoon show about a futuristic family, has a matriarch that sends her husband off to work each day in his flying saucer. The patriarchy clearly made it to the future in *The Jetsons*. It aired in color during primetime from 1962 to 1963, then in reruns in syndication. However, *Star Trek* was the adventure show that outshone all these others, delivering the alternative futures my young imagination craved.

It also was the only show in which anyone in the future looked like me.

Just three years old at *Star Trek*'s debut, I was already reading books. I quickly graduated from children's fantasy to science fiction, setting off on exploration with the NCC-1701 crew as it roamed the stars on a mission from Starfleet—to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.

During this time, Americans were captivated by real-life space exploration as well as civil unrest. I watched as NASA sent Apollo 7 to space in 1968 and Apollo 11 landed humans on the moon in 1969. Police brutality and violence also paraded across America's televisions alongside peaceful protest. Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered in 1968. When I was nine years old, my family visited Cape Canaveral in 1972 for the Apollo 17 launch. I still have the mission button that I purchased at the NASA gift shop. I remember the long drive from Orlando to Cape Canaveral and back. I had forgotten that we had been forced to change our lodging when the hotel manager refused our reservation because we showed up Black.

Space became my obsession. Science fiction my playground. In it, I imagined futures where my color becomes less important than my species or planet. I watched as Lt. Uhura made first contact with new cultures as a communications officer. I saw her role as the highest expression of my love for bridging cultures and peoples to imagine something better.

In 1977, NASA asked Nichelle Nichols to assist them in recruiting a diverse astronaut corps, leveraging her fame from *Star Trek* to bring people of color into the new Space Shuttle astronaut training program.[2] In that role as NASA's ambassador, Nichols made public appearances and commercials, touting a career in aerospace. Her face became part of the interstitials in the television shows I watched, showing the way to an offscreen career in space exploration.

In 1978, I purchased my own subscription to the debut magazine, *OMNI*, that featured space, imagination and the future. I decided I wanted to be an astronaut and a pilot. I took the military ASVAB test to determine eligibility for Air Force flight school. I failed the eye exam.

In 1980, I was nominated by my science teacher to participate in a summer internship program at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center (that is me in the newspaper story below). That summer, I studied meteorology as part of the Earth Remote Satellite Sensing Unit on the campus right outside of Washington, D.C.. My first summer, I digitized Landsat data, creating the first digitized maps of the Earth's surface of roads, land features, and structures. These digital renderings became the basis of our global mapping systems for navigation and roads. Using LandSat photographic images, we plotted points spaced millimeters apart along roads, rivers, and other topographical features, creating the first digital renderings of the Earth's surface.

I returned to NASA the following summer, this time in the Space Shuttle engineering unit, working with scientists building navigation and operating software for the new shuttle program. I became part of the newly launched Summer High School Apprenticeship Research Program (SHARP), recruiting talented high school students of color interested in STEM careers. I learned computer programming in FORTRAN, dove into research on spinoff technologies, and began exploring new communication technologies being developed by NASA for Earth surveillance using remote sensing.

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[2] For more on Nichols relationship with NASA, see this Smithsonian Channel Story on Nichelle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtMNAHwPSgA.

Michelle P. Barrett
Thomas S. Wootton
Rockville, MD.

This summer was not spent idly searching for something to occupy my time. As an AU participant, somebody else did it for me. I was placed at the Eastern Regional Remote Sensing Applications Center, (ERRSAC) located in building 22. Here, I worked under the guidance of my mentor, Dr. Herbert Blodget, and others of the staff. Mornings were spent digitizing which is the process by which analog values are converted into digital values. After-

I applied to aerospace engineering programs all over the country. In 1981, I set off to Virginia Tech to study aerospace engineering. I worked summers at NASA as a program assistant in the SHARP program for three years, where I helped write reports and newsletters; design our communications, programs and events; and document the experiences of our summer interns. I also was able to travel via NASA's own propeller planes to our other facilities in Langley, Wallops, and Washington, DC., where the scientists and engineers of color were hosting other SHARP students for the summer, hoping to guide them into STEM careers. I swear to this day that I met Katherine Johnson, the mathematician who rose in NASA to train early "human computers" how to program the new mainframe computers at NASA facilities. I surely met some of her recruits to engineering and programming, who were the scientists who mentored us during our summer internships and shared their experiences as experts of color on NASA campuses.

That is why I painted the second piece, from the movie *Hidden Figures* (2016, dir. Theodore Melfi), when I painted Lt. Uhuru. Both are my lineage—the women of color in technology, in science and in space exploration—that that provided pathways for navigating to the stars. I know in my five years as part of the SHARP program that I met and learned from these hidden figures. That they must have had a hand in developing such a program as SHARP, to introduce young adults to careers in STEM and space. After all, they had started a similar training program for women of color.

I did not graduate in engineering, instead taking up business courses and a journalism degree. Early in my communications/technology career, I pushed early bulletin board systems to nonprofit organizations as tools for communication and connection. I organized some of the first Mac User groups in the Washington, D.C, area and beta tested new digital tools for design and publishing. I worked with colleagues in the nonprofit sector to build out the HandsNet social sector community on the Internet before the World Wide Web. I was part of the National Education Association's web development team, creating the first online presence

for the organization in AOL and then on the web. I was a cybernaut, building out this new cyberspace.

I began to look at digital tools for creating community, connection—a way to make visible a constellation of talent in a geography. I began mapping ecosystems like media and local systems, to understand how to deliver better news and information, but also to create connection and shared work. I dove deeper into digital networks, communication, critical media studies and building out new digital tools and media innovation and entrepreneurship. I developed some of the first online only student news enterprises and the first media entrepreneurship classes and curricula.

I have come full circle following in Nichols pioneering footsteps to boldly go where no one has gone before. I completed my Ph.D. in Texts and Technologies. I am a digital content and infrastructure architect, designing emerging cyberspaces for learning, collaboration, and exploration. Today, some of my research and work hearkens back to my days at NASA. I map media deserts, using digital forensics and remote sensing to design digital community spaces. I help connect the lived experiences of residents to imagine better inclusive communication tools, systems, and representations. I work at the intersection of technology, media, science and culture, examining ways to create the future.

Truly, I am walking in Nichelle Nichols' legacy and through the doorways opened by pioneering NASA scientists, mathematicians, and engineers of color. Today, I run the Media Innovation Collaboratory, the training ground for students to imagine better. A place for students to explore, seek, develop, and co-create new ways of communicating, new technologies, new ways of connecting people and communities. I have been living Nichols' legacy, ensuring that new communication technologies have someone that looks like Lt. Uhura on the command bridge.

Life creates art. Art imitates Life. Life inspires imitation. Imitation inspires art.

Black popular culture is featured prominently in my artwork. My themes are drawn from current events like the Black Lives Matter Movement and protests against police brutality growing across the globe. I have also painted stark black-and-white historical images of Black life and culture as a way of marking and remembering. I have painted icons like Billie Holliday. Bob Marley. Michelle Obama. I have painted my grief through Prince's death, expressing his legacy in purples and raw creative power. I now work from "The Prince Room," a room filled with his memory that has become my office since the pandemic and a place to paint, listen to music, do my research, and grieve in my purple womb.

And most recently, I have painted to honor Chadwick Boseman as King T'Challa in *Black Panther*. As an icon of Black popular culture, the world is weeping for the fallen Wakanda king. The impact of Boseman's performance on a new generation is still unfolding. The cover painting is titled "Kisses for the Once and Future King," a passing of the torch and a Wakanda Forever salute to send the King on his way.

I have been a painter, just as I have been a writer and an aspiring astronaut, all my life. Most recently, while in lockdown from the COVID-19 pandemic, I have lost my words and my ability to express my pain and anger. I feel choked of spaces to breathe, to express my rage and act. And so I turned to canvas again, to paint the pain I saw expressed through photojournalists who brought us striking images of protest from around the globe in support of Black Lives Matter.
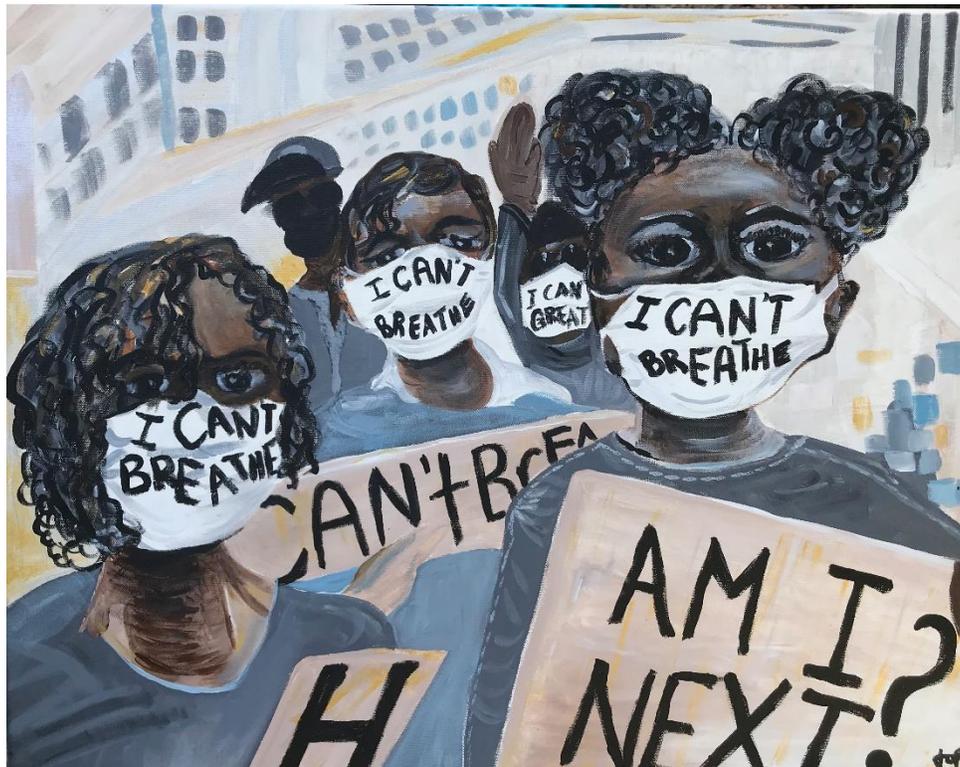
I have been painting my grief, at the death of people of color in all spaces–while shopping, grilling, selling water, sleeping. I have been painting my way through the pain, memorializing all the losses, the lost potential, the lost dreams. I have also been painting myself into the protests, blending my emotions with the canvas to

touch the viewers soul in a different, visceral way. Beyond words. Implanting memories and emotions like an earworm cropping up in your memory, haunting you throughout the day. Bypassing the cognitive functions to elicit a connection.

Hailing on different frequencies, perhaps.

To boldly go.

Wakanda Forever

RAVYNN K. STRINGFIELD

Chadwick Boseman's career defied the limits of temporality. He portrayed some of Black history's most influential icons, including Jackie Robinson, James Brown, and Thurgood Marshall. His personal presence, as many have noted, was rife with kindness and compassion. For many, one of his greatest contributions was to help many reimagine the potential of Black futures by taking up the mantle of Black Panther. For me, my love of Black Panther, and the questions I asked while engaging with the media featuring him, were critical to my coming of age as a scholar and fundamental to my formative years in the Academy.

I pivoted into studying American comic books after spending the last couple years of my undergraduate education studying *bande dessinee* (Franco-Belgian comic books) featuring people of color from outside *L'Hexagone* (i.e. France)*,* which was the focus of my thesis. The questions I had about representation in French comics could be applied to American ones, and the first character I began to engage with in this new critical way was Black Panther.

My work with Black Panther began the summer before I started grad school with a blog called *King of the Black Millennials* that I co-authored with my close friend and filmmaker Micah Ariel Watson. I brought my deep love of comics, and Micah brought her training in film to the conversation. While it was for public consumption, we were teaching each other about the various ways we could study Black history and media. Approaching her Junior year in college, Micah wrote, "I think it's important that the Millennials' imaginary king first played real Black royalty. […] Superheroes like Black Panther cannot exist in isolation. They become powerful on the shoulders of the Kwame Nkrumah's and Simone Manuel's and Nat Turner's of the world that remind us how beautifully powerful we are."[1] Even in 2016, we were attempting to think through what it meant symbolically for

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[1] Micah Ariel Watson. "A Brotha Named Chadwick." *King of the Black Millennials*, 21 Aug. 2016, https://kingoftheblackmillennials.wordpress.com/2016/08/21/a-brotha-named-chadwick.

RAVYNN K. STRINGFIELD is a Ph.D. candidate in American Studies and Africana Studies at the College of William and Mary. She received her Master's in American Studies from William and Mary with a thesis on Marvel *Black Panther* comics. Her research interests include digital humanities, African-American literature, and superheroes. She can be reached at rkstringfield@email.wm.edu.

Chadwick, with all that he brought as an actor and his body of work, to play a hero that pushed the limits of our collective imagination.
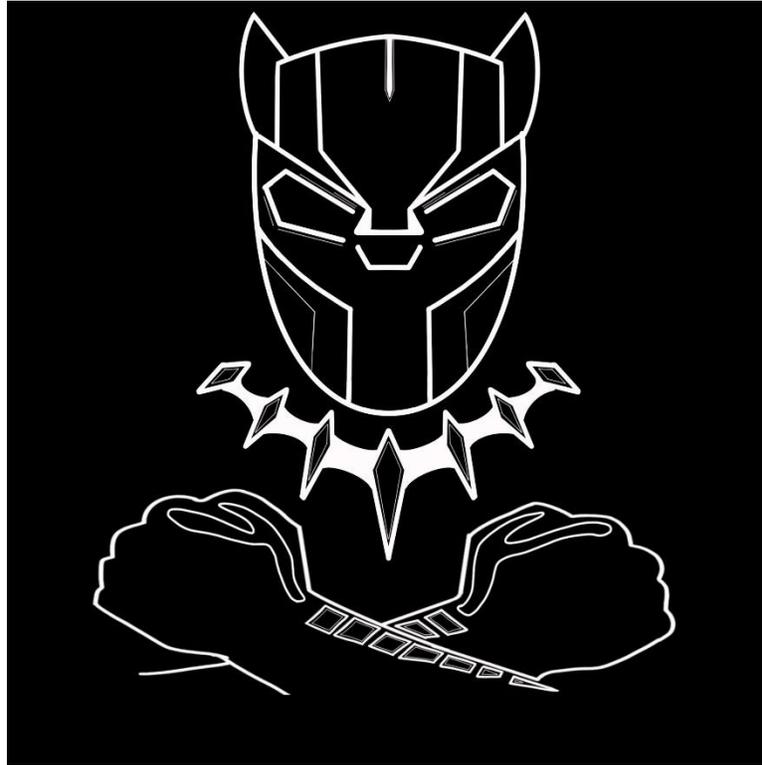
Image: *Wakanda Forever* by Abigail Cano

The work that Micah and I began became the foundation for my scholarship as a first semester graduate student: the synchronicity of the Stokeley Carmichael's first Black Power speech, the founding of the Black Panther Party and Black Panther's first appearance in a *Fantastic Four* comic, all occurring in 1966 plagued me. Over the course of at least three seminar papers, a scalar project, my first conference presentation and my master's thesis, I explored that synchronicity, the history of the first Black illustrator on *Jungle Action featuring Black Panther,* Billy Graham, and the evolution of the Dora Milaje, ending with Roxane Gay's work on *World of Wakanda.*

In the midst of all of this work, the *Black Panther* film was released. I approached it hesitantly, skeptically, because after all of that, I did not know if I could handle disappointment. But with Boseman as the leading man, a legendary

supporting cast, Ryan Coogler at the directorial helm and Ruth E. Carter on costumes, I should have had more faith.

I saw *Black Panther* for the first time at an early showing the day before it was officially released at the movie theater just a quick walk up the street from my apartment. I had planned my outfit for months before; I carefully twisted out my hair and adorned the most Wakandan jewelry I had. I went by myself for two reasons: because if I did not like it, I wanted to avoid the awkward post-movie conversation that follows every group viewing of a film, and because if I did, I knew I would cry.

And I sobbed in that theater packed with Black folks, collectively gasping with joy and cackling at the expertly delivered one-liners. I cried because all of these people were seeing, on a big screen with surround sound, what was possible. We were collectively seeing a vision of a Black future. We were collectively experiencing a joy that was beyond explanation or analysis. We had a metaphorical Black diasporic King that many of us could, and did, rally behind.

Of course, the critiques would come; it is a flawed assumption that art created by Black people cannot be critiqued by other Black people. Such a stance relies on the idea that representation should be and is enough. I would argue that, yes, representation is important, and we should continually work towards crafting and creating art that constantly defies, ruptures, and builds anew.

Chadwick Boseman was unquestionably part of this process of using art to investigate how we view history and how we imagined futures. He worked to give us a place to start and build upon, one that he developed with quiet dedication and resolve. That was his legacy, and it is a good one.

We never imagined that a rallying cry would become a farewell so soon: *Wakanda Forever.*

Introduction

CHRISTOPHER J. OLSON

As numerous scholars and cultural critics before me have noted, popular culture has always intersected with politics. Whether it is Sherlock Holmes expressing his belief in globalism (see Doyle and Faye), Superman battling the Ku Klux Klan (see Bowers), or Paddington Brown espousing an ethos of tolerance (see Grayson), popular culture reflects, reaffirms, and challenges a range of ideologies across the political spectrum. This might explain why popular culture frequently becomes a contested arena. For instance, the film *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988, dir. Martin Scorsese) sparked protests prior to its release due to a controversial sequence in which Jesus renounces his divinity and fathers children with Mary Magdalene, an act that many Christian groups considered blasphemous (for more on the protests, see Harmetz). Similarly, the Gamergate and Comicsgate movements of the early 21st century emerged in response to calls for increased diversity in the video game and comic book industries respectively (see Kain and Francisco). Most recently, conservative groups (including far-right conspiracy sect QAnon), launched the #CancelNetflix campaign in response to the streaming giant's advertising for *Cuties* (2020, dir. Maïmouna Doucouré), a film that critiques the sexualization of young girls, especially girls of color (see Alexander). Through their subject matter and the response(s) they elicit, texts and incidents such as these demonstrate that popular culture and politics have long crossed paths, despite calls to "keep politics out of _____" (fill in the blank with your popular culture of choice).

The reviews in this issue consider texts that engage with the overlap between popular culture and politics in a variety of ways. For instance, Taylor J. Ott writes about the anthology *The Sacred in Fantastic Fandom: Essays on the Intersection of Religion and Pop Culture*, edited by Carole M. Cusack, John W. Morehead, and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson. Meanwhile, Carljohnson G. Anacin reviews Erica B. Edwards and Jennifer Esposito's *Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture: Clarity in the Matrix*, which provides readers with a framework for conducting intersectional analyses via explorations of such popular texts as sitcoms (*Cristela*, *Black-ish*, *Fresh Off the Boat*), musicians (Big Freedia), and films (*Black Panther*). Kathleen Turner Ledgerwood provides a look at Valerie

Estelle Frankel's two-volume anthology *Fourth Wave Feminism in Science Fiction and Fantasy: Essays on Film Representations, 2012-2019*, while Dennis Owen Frohlich discusses *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture: Ideology, Semiotics, and Intertextuality* by Bradley E. Wiggins. Beyond book reviews, this section also features critiques of the television series *A Place to Call Home* and *That's So Raven*, with Gordon R. Alley-Young arguing that the former show highlights class inequalities in Australia while Brecken Hunter Wellborn identifies the racial, gender, and queer dynamics at play in the latter. The reviews included here all reinforce the idea that popular culture is inherently political.

As always, I want to thank my assistant editor, Sarah Pawlak Stanley, for her diligence in helping to put this section together (and for catching all the grammatical and mechanical errors that I missed). I also want to thank you for reading this section, and say that I hope you find the reviews collected here useful in pointing you toward texts and scholarship that assist you in your academic pursuits, both pedagogically and scholarly.

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Book Reviews

Bryan, Victoria. *Prestige Television and Prison in the Age of Mass Incarceration: A Wall Rise Up.* Routledge, 2020.

Research shows that individuals who are told lies often enough may, over time, believe the lies as truth. That is, "even patent lies may slowly become more credible, provided enough repetition" (Martinez-Conde). The "illusory truth effect" has many implications in "daily life, where consumers of news and products are often repeatedly exposed to both plausible and implausible falsehoods" (Martinez-Conde). Popular television series are no exception, and they often serve as a source of tremendous influence on American society, culture, and psychology (Hamer, Poole, & Messerli-Burgy; Mackay, 2018; Pearce & Field, 2016).

On average, nearly 80 percent of the U.S. population watches TV on a given day (Krantz-Kent). Despite increasing media fragmentation, the numbers are staggering (Uncovering Trends). From 2013-2017, "the U.S. civilian noninstitutional population ages 15 and older spent an average of 2 hours 46 minutes per day watching TV" (Krantz-Kent). Both the content of television programs and time spent viewing can be primary sources of negative impacts, rather than the medium of television per se (Psychological Effects). In general, individuals "don't realize how much the stuff we read and watch shapes the way we see the world and the people in it" (Stone). As Victoria M. Bryan, author of *Prestige Television and Prison in the Age of Mass Incarceration: A Wall Rise Up* notes, "[f]or better or worse, popular culture is of paramount importance when it comes to honing the general public's understanding of prison" (12). Moreover, as viewership of plots and narratives which are often overly reductive rises in the United States, so too does incarceration.

In *Prestige Television and Prison in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, Bryan takes on critical prison study through the genre of prestige television, the truth of mass incarceration, and the often reductionist ways that popular culture depicts prison systems and associated stigmas. Bryan examines four prestige television series that work in distinct and unique ways to authenticate the truths of our prison system. Bryan simultaneously provides context and reasoning for the importance of doing so.

Chapter 1 focuses on *Rectify*, a series that follows Daniel Holden and his

adjustment to life after solitary confinement and almost two decades of incarceration (19). Bryan describes the series as not only "aware of the connection between solitary confinement and social death, but actively engaged with bringing that reality to the attention of the viewer" (23). The series explores complexity as it presents in multiple and varied forms throughout all aspects of our carceral system (including with respect to forced coercions, illusions of truth, and lingering stigmatization). Chapter 2 focuses on *American Horror Story*, a series that explores the complex question of what society chooses to normalize, provoking more nuanced and complex reflections on the horrors of our system of carcerality. In the series, characters are not presented as simply good or bad. Rather, tensions and complexity are effectively woven throughout plots and storylines so that the series "shines as a critique of incarceration culture" (44). Chapter 3 explores *The Walking Dead*, a show about zombies that "utilizes varying degrees of direct and indirect representations of incarceration in the United States to expand what we understand as a carceral space" (64). The series "dramatizes the fact that we often focus our attention on the wrong enemy" when seeking to address society's many ails and, in fact, often worsen and intensify those same social challenges through simplistic and misdirected messaging, including in popular culture and news media (66). Finally, Chapter 4 presents *Orange is the New Black*, a series that demonstrates how both the prison industrial complex (PIC) and its multifaceted oppressions has become "part and parcel of the United States" (87). Just as the "crux of the show is the ability for free world viewers to identify with stories from inside a prison," the crux of the text is the ability for readers (educators, activists, change makers, citizens) to identify with the reality of our carceral system, including its horrors, oppression, and complexity (93).

Bryan intentionally curates a collection (*Rectify* and *Orange is the New Black* are set primarily inside of prisons; *American Horror Story: Asylum* focuses on prison as an abject space; and *The Walking Dead* explores the threat of something non-human or "Other") that successfully tests Jason Mittell's estimation that "the twenty-first century marks a shift from the traditional expectation that formulaic storylines and predictable characters are the makings of successful television programming" capable of sustained interest on the part of viewers, both individuals and society more broadly (5). Ellsworth R. Fuhrman and Carol A. Bailey write that "concern for the link between the individual and society is an ancient one" and suggest limitations associated with traditional approaches to an examination of individual-society relationships in that they "do not contain a rich enough sense of

the relationship between the individual, society, and nature" (2). Bryan, too, demonstrates acute awareness of the complexity that is a fundamental component of critical prison study as well as popular culture and its relationship with viewer psychology and perceptions regarding carcerality, citizenry, and related oppressions. The text is both a tool and a direct response to the challenges of reductionist depictions of prison, the individuals housed therein, and the PIC in mainstream media as well as a guide for how to consume and assess media going forward.

Relatedly, the text serves as an example of instructional strategies (such as problem-posing inquiry, reflective questioning, and culturally responsive curriculum) that might be employed to teach about complex and complicated topics. John Dewey has written on the importance of ongoing reflection to ascertain meaning and refine understanding. Each previewed series serves in unique and distinct ways to, as Bryan says of the Walking Dead, "productively trouble the PIC" and productively prompt reflection on the part of readers. In doing so, Bryan, in the spirit of Dewey (1933) and not unlike the work of philosopher Hannah Arendt, encourages the type of thinking and reflection that is necessary to develop deeper understandings of a system and counter natural, more mechanical tendencies both with respect to what we consume as well as to how we act (Ferlazzo).

The text prompts powerful reflections on the hidden curriculum that is a fundamental component of television consumption as well as on the long-term implications of consumption choices. Moreover, the work offers viewing, teaching, and learning options that both highlight the horrors of mass incarceration and the stigmatization of imprisonment in ways that promote awareness, reflection, and action beyond reductive considerations of our carceral system and call into the question the illusion of truth that so often accompanies popular culture and media depictions of our incarceration and prison system.

Jennifer Schneider
Southern New Hampshire University

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Cusack, Carole M., John W. Morehead, and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson, eds. *The Sacred in Fantastic Fandom: Essays on the*

Intersection of Religion and Pop Culture. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2019.

The edited volume *The Sacred in Fantastic Fandoms: Essays on the Intersection of Religion and Pop Culture* is timely for a postmodern moment in which people are seeking to re-enchant a primarily rationalistic world. Across ten essays, as well as a hefty introduction and conclusion, the editors and contributors of this volume explore how the practices of fandom in popular culture reveal a quest for, parallel with, or reference to facets of the sacred.

Carole M. Cusack and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson write in their introduction that while others in the field have asserted that religion and fandom are "essentially discrete phenomena" (2), they intend the essays to demonstrate "the ongoing fascination with, and existence of, the coalescing of religious and fannish interests and how this continues to make us question, deconstruct, and reconfigure the hegemonic cultural assumptions that reduce and devalue meaningful, world-building, and enchanted experiences with media sources" (7). A major strength of the volume is that the individual essays revolve around this thesis, thus avoiding a sense that the collected voices talk past each other, as often occurs in edited volumes. It is made even stronger by the fact that the essays not only coalesce, but are written from a myriad of religious, disciplinary, and pop cultural perspectives. Topics covered in this volume range from Christianity to Islam to Chaos Magic; include methodologies from film studies, cultural studies, and religious studies; and cover a wide swath of popular culture, from *Harry Potter* and cosplay, to *World of Warcraft* and *Sherlock* and fanfiction.

The volume is helpfully divided into three sections, each of which focuses on a specific facet of the intersection between fandom and the sacred: "Sacred Reading: Analyzing the Text," "Sacred Viewing: Watching the Text," and "Sacred Play: Performing the Text." The first section opens with an essay that analyzes *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*, a popular podcast in which the hosts read the texts of *Harry Potter* as though they were sacred texts. Cusack argues that the podcast represents a "radical democratization" of the sacred, through which fans of *Harry Potter* are personally empowered to make sacred meaning (18). Using *Star Wars* and *Sherlock* as examples, Rhiannon Grant explores how fans enter the world of the texts and make truth claims from therein, much like how doctrine functions in religious traditions. Linda Howell parallels the "symbiotextual" relationship between the fandom and creators of *Supernatural* with the Jewish midrash tradition,

arguing that, like midrash, *Supernatural* fan work supplements the authority of the original text. However, unlike midrash, fan work can also alter the text (54). Finally for this section, Greg Conley illustrates how practitioners of Chaos Magic seamlessly combine their occulture with their fandom, as their worldview does not depend on a distinction between "real" and "unreal." Together, these essays demonstrate that fandom uses and relates to texts within popular culture in religious ways.

The second set of essays explores the experience of watching a piece of popular culture in the form of film or television. Marc Joly-Corcoran makes a particularly concrete contribution to the discourse on religion and fandom by coining the term "cinephany" to refer to the affective relationship that a viewer has to the piece of media. Joly-Corcoran breaks down the term into six types of affective reaction, which most readers should recognize themselves in and now are helpfully given language for. Jyrki Korpua et al. use sociological data to investigate the experience that viewers had upon watching *The Hobbit*, and find that many either treat the original J.R.R. Tolkien text as sacred and thus blasphemed by Peter Jackson's adaptation, or reflect on viewing the films as a sacred experience, often using religious language to describe them. James Reynolds unpacks how the narrative of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creatively uses the concept of the soul, which works to draw in the viewer because it parallels the viewer's own experience of growth and division in their identity. This section of the volume thus adds an affective and experiential dimension of fans' relationships to popular media to the conversation.

The final section turns to exploring how fans performatively engage with the objects of their fandom. Jovi L. Geraci uses psychological analysis of the relationship between videogame players and the game to argue that in *World of Warcraft*, players can enact themselves as messianic heroes in a kind of religious experience. Juli L. Gittinger looks at interview data with Muslim women cosplayers to explore how those who wear the *hijab* navigate cosplaying while maintaining modest religious dress codes, thereby subverting dual paradigms – what it looks like to be Muslim and what it looks like to be a cosplayer. Robertson then takes us back to the Wizarding World, this time analyzing the phenomenon of *Harry Potter*-themed weddings, and, using interviews, argues that the themes of *Harry Potter* fall neatly into the place where traditionally religious ones would have been. By way of conclusion, James Morehead argues that fan conventions parallel transformative festivals in their symbolism, ritual, and even as pilgrimage. Overall, these essays communicate that popular culture holds deep meaning for its fans, and

that we can better understand fandoms by reading their engagement with popular culture as engagement with the sacred.

The only thing that gives me pause is that this volume does not include how fandom might also parallel the less desirable aspects of religion, for example, gendered and racialized gatekeeping. Of course, no volume can be expected to cover every aspect of a topic. Yet the more negative facets of fandom are frequent enough experiences that it does read as something of a lacuna – hopefully one that a future book may remedy.

Because it is "academic yet accessible," this book is suitable for a range of audiences from the general population to professors. It may be particularly useful in teaching undergraduate students to answer that pesky question, "What is religion, anyway?" It would also be helpful for scholars hoping to understand trends in U.S. culture that are replacing "traditional religion" with other means of seeking the sacred.

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Taylor J. Ott
Fordham University

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Edwards, Erica B. and Jennifer Esposito. *Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture: Clarity in the Matrix*. Routledge, 2020.

We engage with movies, shows, music, and posts, both in traditional media and social networking sites every single day. Most of the time, these popular cultural products pique our interest because we find them entertaining or the characters resonate with our identity. Yet they are much more than just mere entertainment and pastime, and Erica B. Edwards and Jennifer Esposito call for us to engage with popular culture texts using intersectional analysis method and theory. *Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture* helps readers understand "popular culture artifacts…[through an] exploration into the multi-dimensional realities of cultural production and representation" (13). That is, to examine how categories and identity markers such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, among others, are represented in the texts and, at the same time, how these representations interact with the audience (and vice versa). By looking at popular culture artifacts this way, the complex voices we need to consider when watching

a sitcom, listening to a song, or scrolling through social media posts surface and become examinable.

The book offers theoretical, methodological, and practical value. In Chapter 1, the authors introduce the concept, theory, and potential of intersectional analysis by relating it to *The Matrix*. Just as Neo was made to choose between the red pill and the blue pill, the authors ask us to choose the red pill to see and understand popular culture in a different light – that is, to reveal, read, navigate, and contest patterns of oppression and representation in texts through the use of intersectionality. Nonetheless, the book proceeds with caution and proper elucidation as the authors discuss the history of intersectionality and the concerns it seeks to address. In Chapter 2 as Edwards and Esposito describe the relationship of intersectional theory, methodology, and methods. One good thing about this chapter is how the authors are quick to admit that they did not develop the theory and mention that there have been other approaches used in analyzing popular culture, including content analysis, Marxist analysis, psychoanalytic theory, semiotic analysis, and grounded theory. By doing this, the book distinguishes itself from other methodological and theoretical approaches while clarifying its premise and promise to "understand the social and ideological function of popular culture" (39), unmistakably needed in the age of multimedia. Chapter 3 reinforces the two previous chapters by highlighting ethical considerations that arise when doing intersectional research. This is important as it emphasizes that despite using popular culture texts and artifacts as nonhuman participants, research ethics must not be neglected in doing intersectional analysis. Thus, the book offers practical ethical approaches that could guide researchers in interactional analysis.

The next chapters are more engaging as the book presents actual examples and application of the intersectional analysis in sitcoms (Chapter 4), music (Chapter 5), film (Chapter 6), and social media (Chapter 7). Each of these includes specific case studies, data collection processes, analysis, and discussion. In Chapter 4, for instance, the authors use three sitcoms – *Cristela*, *Black-ish*, and *Fresh Off the Boat* – to illustrate how to analyze intersectionalities in such a medium. The value of the book also slowly unfolds while reading these chapters as they follow the usual research cycle – from defining the issue, presenting the cases (sitcoms, in this case), detailing the data collection and analysis (including the coding), and discussing the analysis and implications of the whole process and findings. In this chapter, the authors note that representation in these sitcoms is incomplete since they mostly portray white supremacy, instead of the superficially depicted image of Latinx,

Black, and Asian identities. This reading is very important as we increasingly see such representations in sitcoms and TV series on different platforms. Such analysis ensures that representations are properly accounted for, though it would have been great to see how other markers such as gender (*Cristela*), youth (*Fresh Off the Boat*), and parentage (*Black-ish*) intersect with the issue earlier raised.

Chapter 5 is an example of intersectional analysis in music, particularly in reading Big Freedia. An acclaimed hip-hop and bounce artist who "identifies as Black, gay, gender non-conforming male who prefers female pronouns" (99), Big Freedia is an apt text to be read for intersectional analysis. However, the analysis is not limited to Freedia and her music as the authors emphasize that the data and contextualization of intersectional analysis should be beyond the person and the music. Like the previous chapter, the book presents the data collection process and analysis done by the authors. The discussion and value of Freedia's work outside and in conjunction with her identities lead us to think of how she "shows how to transgress the boundaries prescribed by white supremacist heteronormativity in the West and invites us to create and experience pleasure in our lives" (114). Hence, intersectional analysis allows us to not only read and listen to popular music beyond the artifact, but also to see into the industry that perpetuates (mis)representation and oppression.

Chapter 6 gives an intersectional reading of films, specifically the highly acclaimed movie *Black Panther*. In doing this, the authors offer another way of doing intersectional analysis, by combining survey. The chapter is notable as it reads a film that celebrates Black representation in a popular motion picture. However, the book further analyzes *Black Panther* through the intersection of various identities of race, class, gender, and ideologies beyond the aesthetics of the film. Seen through an intersectional lens, the movie "offers a limited portrayal of Black liberation and erases the larger matrix framing Black experiences…in film and real life," which is an important point when reading film as a popular culture artifact concerning representations and power (142).

From films to music, the book moves to a relatively new medium that has become part of popular culture texts in the recent decade: social media. Chapter 7 analyzes the Instagram account and story of GBJ (@GetBodiedByJ) in relation to race, gender and class as represented in her body and social media posts through the ambivalence of "self-love." This chapter also reflects some ethical considerations raised in Chapter 3, particularly in collecting data from social media. The emphasis on data collection ethics is important since "social media is not static"

and involves real people in a public domain (151). In doing intersectional analysis, the authors reveal the potential (and difficulty) of understanding motivations and actions as contextualized in historical, cultural, and economic milieus in the virtual space of social media. The authors admit that there is so much to explore in social media through intersectional analysis because it is a vast field encompassing diverse (re)presentations.

The book ends with an epilogue (Chapter 8) that summarizes the book and reminds us of some assumptions that would affect the use of intersectional analysis. To reinforce this, the authors also present ways to move forward in using intersectional analysis in studying popular culture broadly conceived. *Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture* is a perspective-changing piece of work essential for researchers, teachers, and students. This is not only essential material for the field of popular culture studies but also in education, media studies, and cultural sociology. In each chapter, the authors offer us their reflexivity in dealing with the theory and method through the section "Theory in the Flesh," which is valuable for qualitative researchers. Likewise, the section "Pedagogical Possibilities" is a helpful tool in the field and classroom when dealing with popular culture.

Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture is an excellent resource when studying popular culture, and readers would benefit from seeing more types of media and issues, which of course is not always possible given that popular culture is a vast field, to begin with. As can be seen throughout the book and is mentioned by the authors in the last chapter, doing intersectional analysis is not easy, as it requires practice and more importantly a shift in mind frame. The book allows you to tread lightly and be at ease when critically reading popular culture texts. Of course, some might try to resist doing so, as viewers frequently prefer entertainment to critical analysis.

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Carljohnson G. Anacin
Griffith University Gold Coast Campus

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Frankel, Valerie Estelle, ed. *Fourth Wave Feminism in Science Fiction and Fantasy: Essays on Film Representations, 2012-2019 Vol. 1.*, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2019.

Frankel, Valerie Estelle, ed. *Fourth Wave Feminism in Science Fiction and Fantasy: Essays on Television Representations, 2013-2019 Vol. 2.*, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2020.

The two volumes in Valerie Estelle Frankel's *Fourth Wave Feminism in Science Fiction and Fantasy* offer critical interpretations of female characters who are often overlooked in scholarly works. Two volumes dedicated to the recent representations of women in science fiction and fantasy in film and television is a welcome analysis of the rich, recent media landscape that echoes fourth wave feminism. While most of the essays in these volumes do not focus specifically on the fourth wave of feminism, they all draw from the period that is being referred to as "the fourth wave," generally starting around 2012 and moving into the present. While most journalists and scholars point to feminist actions in online spaces during this wave, it is important that we analyze the influence of the fourth wave in the media we consume. Additionally, as Frankel points out in the introduction to the first volume, we also need to be critically aware of the interconnectedness of the internet and culture on mediated narratives.

These edited collections offer rich analysis of several recent female characters in science fiction and fantasy mediated narratives. The first volume focuses on film representations from 2012-2019. Tackling a variety of subjects and films, these essays provide a wide array of analysis in cinema. The first section of this volume, "New Rules," discusses the evolution of trends for representations of women in films, discussing issues like the Mako Mori test, representations of sisterhoods working together to defeat angry men, and identity politics in a variety of films. The essay titled "Blockbusters for a New Age: Sisterhood Defeats Angry Young Men in *Black Panther*, *Captain Marvel*, *Last Jedi*, and *Ghostbusters*" provides the kind of in-depth, cross-film franchise analysis that is insightful for feminist media scholars to engage in, shedding light on patterns of representation and response to these representations in online communities.

The second section in this volume, "Deconstruction," centers on changes in representations of women in films including *The Final Girls*, *Happy Death Day*, *Annihilation*, and *Maleficent*. This section proves valuable for analysis of changing representations of women across sociohistorical time periods. The tropes of mothers in films and women in slasher films serve as valuable re-constructions of women's roles in a variety of films in the fourth wave. The third section focuses on

"Children's Stories," bringing insightful analysis of Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, females in millennial Disney movies, diversity in Disney's females, and gender-bending in *Rise of the Guardians*. Scholars who delve into young adult media and children's media will find this section helpful in discussing the roles of young women in film as well as the effects media trends have on young viewers.

The fourth section focuses on "Superheroes" with four essays on recent representations of women in superhero films. While two of these four essays focus solely on *Wonder Woman*, whose character has spanned generations and led to fruitful scholarly analysis, the section's last essay that compares feminist representations of women in Marvel's *Black Panther* and DC's *Wonder Woman* offers an insightful comparison that may change the ways in which critical feminist media scholars analyze females in superhero films. Additionally, the first essay in this section on Wasp in the *Ant-Man* films is a brilliant analysis of an often-overlooked character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

The introduction to the second volume provides a succinct overview of women in television and how the feminist representations in science fiction and fantasy television shows have paved the way for more intersectional representations on the small screen. "Fighting Authority," the first section of this volume, offers stunning analysis on women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Sense8*, and *Orphan Black*. The analysis of queer cultural production in *Sense8* and *Orphan Black* offers a rich dive into the intersectionality and systems of power and oppression in these shows. "Warriors in a Respectful World," the second section of the volume on television, dives into a few shows that have not garnered much scholarly attention yet, including *Wynonna Earp* and *Vikings*. The first essay in this section compares female power in Wynonna Earp and Supergirl, making stunning connections between the heroines in these two very different shows. The third section, "Intersectionality," offers analysis of strong black female characters, intersectionality in *DC's Legends of Tomorrow*, problematic white women in *Black Mirror*, and queer identity in *Doctor Who*. This section is rich for any scholar wanting to consider how science fiction and fantasy plays a role in intersectional representations of feminism. The last section in this volume, "Girl-Centric Kids," focuses again on television shows geared toward young females. Additionally, though, the essay on transmedia adventures in online spaces geared toward attracting girl consumers of *DC*, *Marvel*, and *Star Wars* is a welcome and insightful analysis of transmedia marketing to young female fans.

Overall, these two volumes touch on a variety of mediated narratives in the fourth wave. Critical feminist scholars and fans of science fiction and fantasy will find a great deal of pleasure in the different essays and approaches provided in the two volumes. All I want from this volume is more of the strong analysis in the introduction to the second volume tying all these analyses together and offering us a bigger picture of representations of feminism and female characters. May we have some more, please?

Kathleen Turner Ledgerwood
Lincoln University

Friedenthal, Andrew J. *The World of DC Comics*. Routledge, 2019.

As part of Routledge's *Imaginary Worlds* books series, which seeks to examine the story worlds and "subcreations" of the "imaginary world tradition," Andrew Friendenthal's *The World of DC Comics* explores the uniqueness of the DC multiverse. Friedenthal establishes the centrality of the multiverse to DC's storytelling history and explores its unique storytelling capacity, as well as how various creators have used the multiverse to their advantage.

In the introduction, Friedenthal lays the groundwork for why it is even important to explore the DC Comics multiverse. Friedenthal briefly explores the scientific basis of the multiverse and the use of the multiverse by other creators, specifically Michael Moorcock. While DC Comics is certainly not the first creative agency to use the multiverse in their stories, the creators at DC were the first to "*refine* that concept into a unique storytelling engine" (4).

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a brief exploration of the history of the DC multiverse by exploring seminal stories in its history broken up into two phases: expansion and contraction/limitation. The chapter on expansion covers events like "Flash of Two Worlds" and the annual team-ups between the Justice League and Justice Society in the Silver and Bronze ages of comic, while Chapter 2 addresses the history of the multiverse from *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and its sequel crises in the 2000s and beyond.

In Chapter 3, Friedenthal highlights one of the most unique elements of the DC imaginary world – its creation exploration by multiple authors. Unlike the world of *The Lord of the Rings*, with its one creator, the DC universe has had multiple creators take its reins and add to its lore, creators who Friedenthal refers to as the

"cartographers" of the DC universe. Friedenthal explores the contributions of four key creators: Gardner Fox, one of the creative minds behind the famous "Flash of Two Worlds" story that inaugurated the DC multiverse; Marv Wolfman, writer of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which destroyed that same multiverse; Geoff Johns, who wrote *Infinite Crisis*, the 20-year anniversary sequel to the original crisis, which restored a limited number of alternate Earths; and Grant Morrison, who has explored the storytelling potential of the DC multiverse in multiple works. Friedenthal explains the unique stamp each creator has added to the multiverse, how they viewed the multiverse's status as a viable storytelling engine, and how they used it to craft unique stories.

Chapter 4 looks at how stories about DC's multiverse have fared in other media, as well as how the multiverse of DC's main rival Marvel Comics differs from DC's. Finally, Friedenthal asks readers to consider what world builders or subcreators can learn from the DC universe as they create worlds of their own.

One of the strengths of Friedenthal's books is how much he covers in such little space. The DC multiverse involves a multi-volume encyclopedia's worth of characters, storylines, and publication histories, but Friedenthal provides a coherent, non-exhaustive overview of some of DC's most complicated stories in the service of advocating for DC's multiverse as an important storytelling device. He does this in part by centering his analysis around certain themes and how those themes are explored by a creator's use of the multiverse as a storytelling device.

If there is one complaint to level at this book, it is that I wish it was longer. This is not so much a critique of this book, which in very little space provides an overview of the DC multiverse, its history, major events, and major "cartographers," as well as a thematic analysis of the purpose the multiverse serves in DC's stories. However, for a more in-depth analysis of the DC multiverse, readers will have to look elsewhere.

Scholars and laypeople who are interested in world building will like this book, and even if they are not interested in DC Comics specifically, the analysis of DC Comics as an example of world building should be enough to keep them engaged. As a brief exploration of how DC has used the multiverse to generate some of its most memorable stories, it works. DC Comics fans will undoubtedly wish this was a more exhaustive volume about the nitty-gritty details of DC's story world, but the chapter endnotes are full of references to scholarly works and comic volumes that explore the DC universe in more detail. Additionally, the casual non-fan who wants

to know how to make sense of the DC universe will be greatly helped by this volume.

Friedenthal manages to do a lot in a little bit of space. He discusses numerous complex comic book events and comic creators, who have a large body of work attached to their names, clearly and with brevity. As mentioned, this is not an exhaustive work, but it does tell readers what they need to know about the DC Comics multiverse to explore it as an interesting example of world building.

Matthew Brake
Independent Scholar

Grant, Barry Keith and Scott Henderson. *Comics and Pop Culture: Adaptation from Panel to Frame*. U Texas P, 2019.

The relation between comics and film is an area of study that many scholars have investigated. Due to the rich contexts that both media provide, there is no lack of need for regular inquiry, debate, and investigation into the nature of comic adaptation and its role in popular culture. Barry Keith Grant and Scott Henderson's *Comics and Pop Culture: Adaptation from Panel to Frame* continues this necessary exploration with a set of eighteen conversations regarding filmic adaptations of comics and the cultural milieus they affect. Grant and Henderson divide the collection of essays into two parts: the first concerns issues and debates that surround comic books and their respective films, while the second focuses on the process of adaptation and the issues that arise therefrom.

Too often in academic work, the subject matter is presented with a detached lens to assert one's ethos in the edited volumes. However, *Comics and Pop Culture* is an unapologetic celebration of the historical, cultural, and processual affect of comics and film by academics who are fans of the subjects of which they write. These include Scott Bukatman, Blair Davis, Miriam Kent, and Aviva Briefel, among other notable comics and film scholars. Yet this love is not without critical discussion of the myriad of subjects that comics and film encapsulate. *Comics and Pop Culture* explores beyond the fields of film studies, theatre, and popular culture; it also includes historical narratives, queer studies, feminist studies, technoculture studies, and narratology. Furthermore, it delves deeply into the intersections of politics and ideologies, as well as how the representations and mediations of these concerns are pointedly chosen by their creators.

The first half of *Comics and Pop Culture* considers how films not only act as adaptation, but as an extension of the comic book content, material, and genre. Aaron Taylor's "Genre and Superhero Cinema" investigates the development of the superhero film as its own genre within cinema, which pairs well with an earlier chapter by Liam Burke, which taxonomizes comic-to-film adaptations. The book's first section additionally does not limit itself to films, but also speaks to serialized adaptations. As such, the collection lends itself to the larger conversations regarding the historical significance in American media of the serialized narrative, reaching as far back to serialized stories sold to newspapers all the way to expansive film universes that span decades. More importantly, perhaps, the book considers instances when the culture in which the first film of the series is produced no longer resembles or reflects the culture that houses the final installments of the narrative.

Several chapters question authenticity and fidelity in adaptation – both in terms of the "trueness" to the source material as well as to the timeliness of the cultural contexts of the time. The conversation of "authenticity" in the comic-to-film adaptation of *Scott Pilgrim Versus The World* in John Bodner's study on symbolic texts is quite different from James C. Taylor's chapter, "CGI As Adaptation Strategy," which investigates the cultural associations with 2D image and visual markers of the kinetic body. This conversation runs through the second part of the book, providing an enriching and diverse view of the many ways that scholars can question, emulate, and create authenticity in adaptation. Included in this conversation is the concept of fidelity, which also affects the authorial moves that these scholars track in the continued discussion between chapters in how comics have been adapted to film, why these choices matter, and what these conclusions mean for the future of the comic book film. Jeffery Brown's chapter, "*Black Panther*: Aspiration, Identification, and Appropriation," proves to be exceptionally poignant, especially in the wake of Chadwick Boseman's death, which leaves a painful void in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* in terms of the representation and legitimation of Black fans and Black American comics.

Comics and Pop Culture is not a book wrapped in heavy theory, although it does draw from a wealth of other scholars in film and film-adjacent studies. If one were to look for deep analysis of visual semiotics or participatory theory, this book does not delve much beyond a comprehensive and accessible overview of conversations that can ultimately lead to questions that involve deeper discussion. That is not to say that this book is not valuable without theory, but that it provides a wonderful start to a conversation that other scholars may pick up to investigate in

other ways. In that aspect, it proves itself to be a valuable resource for the ongoing scholarship around the things we love to study: comics, film, and pop culture.

Kelly Brajevich
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

Grossman, Julie and Will Scheibel. *Twin Peaks*. Wayne State UP, 2020.

Originally titled *Northwest Passage* and pre-sold as a televisual milestone before its pilot episode first aired, *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-91) remains perhaps the most revered cult TV artifact of the last three decades. Following widespread acclaim for its belated third season, *Twin Peaks: The Return* (Showtime, 2017), and a slow-burning critical rehabilitation of big-screen prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), David Lynch's tree-laden phantasmagoria has attracted an impressive body of scholarly work in recent years. This includes Franck Boulégue's *Twin Peaks: Unwrapping the Plastic*, Lindsay Hallam's monograph on *Fire Walk With Me* and the edited collections *Return to Twin Peaks*, *The Politics of Twin Peaks*, and *Critical Essays on Twin Peaks: The Return* – all of which owe varying degrees of intellectual debt to evergreen anthology *Full of Secrets*: *Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*.

Julie Grossman and Will Scheibel's compact book is the latest addition to this ever-expanding world of *Peaks*ian scholarship. With chapters addressing an uncontroversial range of topics--authorship, genre, gender, performance, intertextuality—Grossman and Scheibel initiate critical debate by placing the expansive paratextuality of *Twin Peaks* at the epicenter of their study. Three decades after it was first broadcast, they argue, the mixed-media universe of *Twin Peaks* "continues to exist at the threshold of multiple, mutable worlds (diegetic, generic, textual, temporal and technological)" (24). Understanding the relationship between Lynch and co-creator Mark Frost as a transmedia dialectic, Grossman and Scheibel position *Twin Peaks*'s pioneering fusion of televisual convention with avant-garde sensibility as a groundbreaking progenitor of 21st century "Quality TV."

As director, writer, producer and actor, Lynch's multivalent creative roles in *Twin Peaks* have historically served to underscore narrow auteurist readings of the series. For Grossman and Scheibel, however, *Twin Peaks*'s popularity with early 1990s soap opera audiences suggests a more diffuse appeal. Far from a postmodern

satire of generic conventions, they suggest, *Twin Peaks* is better understood as simply another stage in the evolution of prime-time TV melodrama. Employing understated critical revisionism, Grossman and Scheibel emphasize *Twin Peaks*'s unsettling fusion of melodramatic affect with generic hybridity. Placing incestuous sexual violence at its thematic epicenter, the genre-shifting sprawl of *Twin Peaks* repeatedly invokes *film noir*, teen drama, soap opera, science fiction, police procedural, and gothic horror in its sustained exploration of psycho-sexual trauma. In the harrowing expressionist nightmare of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, for example, Lynch mobilizes the most progressive aspects of the *femme fatale* archetype to empathically depict the fractured subjectivity of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee). Continuing this focus on the intersecting politics of gender and genre, Grossman and Scheibel argue that the proto-feminist characterizations of Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn), Donna Hayward (Lara Flynn Boyle/Moira Kelly), and Diane Evans (Laura Dern) "constitute a resistance to [the] objectification and victimization" (57) of women in *Twin Peaks*.

This critical strand is continued in a lively discussion of *Twin Peaks*'s various ancillary paratexts. These include *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*, *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier*, and bestseller *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* – a series of tie-in books that underscore the amorphousness of *Twin Peaks*'s transmedial diegesis by remediating the off-screen lives of characters such as Laura Palmer and Norma Jennings (Peggy Lipton). In what are perhaps the most intriguing sections of the volume, Grossman and Scheibel examine the stylized performances of actors Kyle MacLachlan, Ray Wise, and Sheryl Lee, linking their articulation of fractured modernist selfhood with the "intermedial storytelling" of *Twin Peaks* more broadly (80). Pointing to Lee's audiobook narration of *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* and its paratextual "conversation" with *Fire Walk With Me* (86), the authors argue that the interwoven transmedia stories that constitute the *Twin Peaks* universe "posit authorship, adaptation, and performance as mutually enhancing processes" (85).

Too often, however, this book feels like something of an oddity. At barely 100 condensed pages, this small volume seems quixotically ill-equipped to deal with an unruly cult brand that – as the authors are at pains to point out –willfully resists reification or narrative closure. Yet, when the authors hit their critical stride, the book can be fascinating. Grossman and Scheibel's thoughtful commentary on "Lynchian" performance style is original and engaging, for example – but even here their argument is frustratingly undermined by its brevity. Moreover, the book

communicates little of the tonal and aesthetic gulf separating the sprightly *Twin Peaks* of 1990-91 and the reflexively depressive *longeurs* of *The Return*, nor of the way Mark Frost's ancillary books encourage readers to understand *The Return* as a critique of the socio-economic conditions which fostered the rise of Donald Trump.[1] Indeed, much of *The Return* can—and should—be read as a revisionist critique of the political complacency Linnie Blake identifies as a hallmark of the original series. Such matters, sadly, fall outside the narrow remit of this book.

Grossman and Scheibel's failure to acknowledge Blake's acerbic critique is symptomatic of the book's relentlessly positive assessment of *Twin Peaks*. Presumably designed to appease the series' notoriously obsessive fandom, this strategy often proves disingenuous. The somewhat overdetermined valorization of female agency makes little sense without contextualization within broader scholarly debates about gender and misogyny in Lynch's work,[2] for example, while the authors' description of Audrey Horne's bank protest as "a strong activist gesture of rebellion against capitalist exploitations" comes perilously close to self-parody (48). Perhaps most unforgivable, however, is the critical flattening of *Twin Peaks*'s uncanny seductions into a breakneck exercise in current media studies orthodoxy – a project that is unlikely to sate fans, scholars, or curious neophytes. A little too *heimlich* for its own good, this overview of *Twin Peaks* offers a clean, reasonably priced room when it should have been where pies go when they die. Damn shame.

Martin John Fradley
University of Brighton, UK

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[1] See, for example: Fradley, Martin and John A. Riley. "'I don't understand how this keeps happening … over and over again': Trumpism, uncanny repetition and *Twin Peaks: The Return.*" *Make America Hate Again: Trump-Era Horror and the Politics of Fear*, edited by Victoria McCollum, Routledge, 2019, pp.195-210.

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Han, Yaya. *Yaya Han's World of Cosplay: A Guide to Fandom Costume Culture*. Sterling, 2020.

As an emerging field, cosplay studies has yet to find its defining academic text. Earlier studies such as Therèsa M. Winge's *Costuming Cosplay* have noted that, to date, books on cosplay fall into one of three categories: "how to" guides covering sewing, crafting, electronics and other costume-related skills; photo books such as the *Cosplay in America* series; and academic texts – the number of which have increased since Susan J. Napier's *From Impressionism to Anime* and, arguably, Roland Kelt's *Japanamerica*. Yaya Han's new book *Yaya Han's World of Cosplay: A Guide to Fandom Costume Culture* introduces a personal narrative to the mix – giving an overview of her personal history of cosplay with that of fan costuming in Japan and America (with stops in China and Germany where Han grew up).

As a fan of Han's work, I am not sure how objective I can be in this review (let me tell you about the time she *looked* at my costume back stage five years ago; or how I almost crushed her with my massive hoop skirt and petticoats at the same event); nor is Han's book an academic text. It is one woman's personal tale of cosplay, family, and belonging written for fans of cosplay, of popular culture, and of Yaya Han (registered trademark).

One of my major quibbles with published academic works such as *Costuming Cosplay*, Paul Mountfort, Anne Peirson-Smith, and Adam Geczy's *Planet Cosplay*, and all the way back to *From Impressionism to Anime* is the low-quality images of

the cosplayers featured in each study. *Yaya Han's World of Cosplay* makes up for this with full-color glossy images not only of Han but also of a whole host of big-name cosplayers from around the globe – although not all of them are named in the pages. Indeed, if I have any complaints about Han's book, it is that there are no citations in the text. This lack of attribution is somewhat ironic given that Han advises aspiring cosplayers "give credit where credit is due" (18). This may of course be an editorial issue—I remember Han addressing something along these lines during one of her numerous Q&A sessions across multiple SNS platforms— or simply the reality of a trade book as opposed to a scholarly one. I was amused to see the same scan of the *My Anime* magazine from June 1983 in which Nobuyuki Takahashi first coined the term "cosplay" that everyone has used since it was first uploaded to Akibanana.com (now defunct) sometime before 2008—sadly there is a formatting issue with the resolution that will hopefully be fixed in later editions. Takahashi himself posted what appears to be the same set of scans on his website *Studio Hard* in 2013. All the photographers and cosplayers, including Takahashi, who provided photos are listed on the photographer credits on page 231, but since many photographers and cosplayers use "stage" names it is a poor guide for those seeking to know more.

Yaya Han's World of Cosplay mixes Han's cosplay narrative with crimson edged "how to" sections that cover everything from how to start making a costume (16), an introduction to sewing and armoring (53), how to negotiate photo shoots (120), advice on navigating online and in-person bullying (158), and how to build a cosplay empire (210). These "how to" pages come at the end of each section and compliment the content that preceded them, so "Starting a Costume" closes Part One, "Welcome to the World of Cosplay." This first section introduces readers to a young Yaya who hid in the corner surrounded by adults and drew—a far cry from the woman who now commands attention at fan and cosplay events—while also introducing us to cosplay and fandom events.

Part Two, "The History of Cosplay," offers an overview of the history of fan costuming and cosplay in Japan and the U.S. as well as Han's personal history with costuming and cosplay. Han gives 1939 as the start date of fannish dressing with the work of Myrtle R. Douglas aka Morojo (29-31). Like many other studies that establish 1939 as the start of fan costuming, this date elides a rich history of dressing up that includes masquerades and costume balls. What Han's work does do is document the divide between anime and manga sourced costumes and the much more respected costumes based on sci-fi and fantasy properties in the 1990s (32).

For many, cosplay was a dirty secret kept hidden from family and work colleagues, the pressures of which eventually drove practitioners from the hobby (51). On a personal note, I can relate to this as I was determined to keep my own cosplay a secret, until I was outed to Kotani Mari at a Japanese studies conference. Han ties this narrative to her childhood in China and Germany before she moved to the U.S. and discovered "her people."

Part Three, "The Creative Expression of Cosplay," and Part Five, "The Industry of Cosplay," chart Han's own journey to cosplay fame while also providing advice for those wanting to follow in her footsteps. Part Three focuses on conventions and competitions around the world while Part Five reframes these events in context of the Yaya Han cosplay empire.

Of particular interest, though, is Part Four, "The Duality of Cosplay," which engages with the unpleasant side of cosplay—negativity, fat shaming, racism and black face. While these topics are regularly discussed by fans across social media platforms, they still need further study by academics who are themselves cosplayers and fans and thus members of these online spaces. While cosplay is often presented as a monolith where all the oddballs and misfits are friends with each other, the reality is often very different. Han points out that not only does cosplay differ from country to country (154), but that not everyone is welcomed with open arms—and that this is not okay. Perhaps the most powerful message of Han's text is this:

> Cosplay is a safe space for so many of us because we know what it is like to be judged. No matter where we live or the color of our skin, we each have faced hardships and tried to fit into a society with rigid ideas of right and wrong. [Cosplay] is our weird and wonderful escape. So, let's make it a safe space for as many people as possible. (155)

Although not an academic text, *Yaya Han's World of Cosplay: A Guide to Fandom Costume Culture* comes at a time when cosplay studies is still searching for its seminal text. While not an academic text, it bridges the gap between lay work and academic volume. Han's insights are invaluable—both as someone who has been active in the American cosplay scene since 1999, and as a pioneer of the serious business of cosplay.

Emerald King
La Trobe University

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Jaramillo, Deborah L. *The Television Code: Regulating the Screen to Safeguard the Industry.* U Texas P, 2018.

Policy studies might not be an area of research often associated with popular culture studies. Yet the space of media policy as both an academic subfield and a day-to-day practice might bridge such disassociations. Des Freedman had previously written that media policy is viewed as "the boring next-door neighbor who spends too long at your house, convinced that he has lots of interesting things to say while everyone else makes polite excuses and tries to usher him out" (11). At the outset of her book *The Television Code*, Deborah Jaramillo echoes this sentiment in stating that "The Television Code is a fascinating yet dull document, full of the anxieties and consensus politics of the 1950s" (1). However, there is something interesting in that sentiment: "Anxieties" and "consensus politics," terms that denote feelings and actions among groups of actors. These are central to Jaramillo's book, as she traces and underscores the roles that viewers, the federal government, and trade associations played in crafting the Television Code (more formally titled The Code of Practices for Broadcasters in policy speak) which was in effect between 1952 and 1983.

At the outset of her introduction, Jaramillo argues "that the heart of the Television Code is the trade association" (4)—whereby the standardization practices that are adopted through policy, pushed for by trade associations, redirects television programming to be understood as a market function rather than a creative one. "Divorced from the process of creation" the National Association of

Broadcasters (NAB) spearheaded the Television Code (11). Across six chapters and a conclusion Jaramillo effectively demonstrates how early television was constrained in its creative capacity due to the code's ability to entice broadcasting stations' subscription to its standards. Chapter 1 sets the tone with a historical context on the role of radio regulation as it carried over into television's early days—demonstrating the problematic nature of broadcast content for both governmental and industrial authority.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus extensively on the industry actors, with specific focus on the role of the trade association—encapsulated in NAB and the short-lived Television Broadcasters Association (TBA). Chapter 2 focuses on how these two trade associations defined themselves in contrast to radio and among their own memberships. As the trade associations sought to distinguish themselves, the interconnectivity between television stations and AM stations generated internal struggles and negotiations within the trade associations. The TBA's unsuccessful navigation of this interconnectivity resulted in its downfall, and a renamed NAB (National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters) that would "monitor signs of government overreach" (53). Chapter 3 maps out the lead-up to the Television Code in which the NAB framed issues related to content as a "dire struggle between the democratic principles held by capitalists and the tyrannical intentions of a coercive government" (61).

The television audience becomes the focus in Chapter 4, as television viewers of the late 1940s and early 1950s wrote letters of complaint and calls for government intervention to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The letters effectively worked as a "neighborhood watch program" that monitored and called for action against television broadcasters and the content of television programming (85). Culturally, as Jaramillo notes, television's placement in the home connected it with the family unit. This placed broadcasters and television content in a rocky relationship with a vocal portion of the television audience. Once the Television Code was implemented, the FCC had "an extra paragraph in its reply letters and an additional escape route" to appease citizens (107).

The role of the government in the Television Code completes the book in Chapters 5 and 6. Elected officials, government employees, and federal agencies (such as the FCC and the Federal Trade Commission) play their part in the Television Code's construction and implementation. While Chapter 3 focused on the front room talk of the NAB, Chapter 5 shows how its back room talk within policy spaces take shape. Focusing on the FCC, Jaramillo builds off existing

literature noting the agency's "odd position" and its ambiguous role in the Television Code—in which the NAB leveraged the agency's authority to implement its own standards through the code. Senator William Benton is the focal point of Chapter 6, a demonstration of government interference and the NAB's response. Benton was a proponent of educational programming and a subscription-based service for television, resulting in a conflict of ideals between his leveraging of government oversight and the industry's commercial focus. The NAB was successful in utilizing the Television Code to off-set any challenges to the model under which television was operating.

Overall, this is a well-researched, articulate, and sound book that would contribute toward thinking of popular culture studies in ways that intersect with overlooked subfields such as media policy, and, perhaps, political sociology. This book effectively maps out the road to the Television Code, along with the detours and back roads that led to its ultimate implementation. Jaramillo calls attention to the arena that media policy provided for viewers and industry trade associations to express their anxieties and concerns over specific cultural and economic values. Readers would benefit from this focus and utilizing it in new ways to interrogate popular culture content beyond textual readings.

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Jason A. Smith
Independent Scholar

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It was during the 1985-86 school year when I first heard the word "AIDs." As I read Malynnda A. Johnson's *HIV on TV: Popular Culture's Epidemic*, my mind transports back to the made-for-TV movies, soap opera story lines, episodes of specific shows, and of course the headlines that permeated the terms AIDS and HIV into Generation X vocabulary.

Johnson begins by providing a foundation of studying the HIV/AIDs crisis through a media lens. She notes that HIV/AIDs is a popular topic of "research in many areas, such as stigma, social support, and barriers to testing" (xiii); yet analyses of the media's social construction of HIV/AIDs remain scarce – until this book. More than just a book for media scholars, Johnson's text would also be welcomed in pop culture, health communication, and rhetoric courses.

The examination of HIV/AIDs storylines begins with Johnson's argument that television is more than just entertainment; it is also an educational tool. The exploration of theories, such as social cognitive, the elaboration likelihood model, theory of entertainment persuasion, and motivating change through entertainment education, provide the reader with a thorough understanding of television as educator. The text then moves on to explore the various structures the media narrative of HIV/AIDs portrays. The history of the evolution of the storylines, moving from a "gay disease" to one that famous people (e.g. Magic Johnson) and children (e.g. Eric White) can contract. Johnson does such a great job of providing various examples of the HIV/AIDs storylines that members of Generation X (or at least this member) will be drawn to memories of Robin Scorpio and Michael "Stone" Gates and afternoons spent discussing such topics as sex, Stone's health, and Robin's positive HIV test on *General Hospital.* Daytime dramas, or soap operas, is just one genre explored in the text.

Johnson admits that the book is a combination of rhetorical and qualitative methods. She watched over 100 hours of television shows and made-for-TV movies and conducted interviews with actors who portrayed HIV/AIDs-positive individuals. She classifies the shows by genre, focusing on how HIV/AIDs is used as a punchline in comedies, how the news coverage of HIV/AIDs evolved, and even the various ways television dramas handled the issue. Her exploration of these storylines takes readers back to the early 80s when Mark Harmon's character, Dr. Robert "Bobby" Caldwell of *St. Elsewhere*, dies of AIDs in 1985, after contracting the virus through unprotected sex. For many dramas of this era, HIV/AIDs is portrayed as a death sentence; for other shows, like *Designing Women*, it is merely discussed as a stereotypical death sentence for certain groups of individuals.

The third part of the text focuses on the HIV/AIDs body. Johnson found that only two characters from the 100+ shows she analyzed were gaunt and sickly. The exploration of various characters and the actors who portrayed them during this section demonstrates the straightforwardness of how life-altering HIV/AIDs is. Readers are reminded of Gloria Reuben, who portrayed Jeanie Boulet on *ER*, and

how her character faced job limitations and threats of being fired. Offscreen, Ruben became an AIDs activist and spoke of the challenges that portraying an HIV-positive character had on her and her life.

Once Johnson started talking about the different genres and the different ways HIV/AIDs was embodied, I could not put the book down. I should have made a list of shows to go back and view for the first time (*St. Elsewhere)* or watch again because her descriptions of the characters and plots magically transport readers back to the area where you first watched or heard about the virus. Yet, as I read through the shows, I could not help but be disappointed that reality television was not explored. For instance, Johnson did not mention *The Real World: San Francisco.* Pedro Zamora (1972-1994), a housemate during that season of the venerable reality TV franchise, was revealed as HIV-positive, and he taught other housemates about the disease while advocating for more funding toward finding a cure. Perhaps that examination is a chapter for another book, another study.

When I first heard of the impending publication of *HIV on TV*, it was at a Central States Communication conference in 2016. It took another two years for the publication. The irony of reading the book while living in/through another pandemic is not lost on me. What I do know is that Johnson's study of HIV on television, the theories described, the methods used, and the results, can and should serve as a model for how current and future shows compose the COVID19/coronavirus storylines. Just like the 1980s narrative of HIV/AIDs, the 2020 narrative of COVID19 hits upon a lot of the key points Johnson makes: shame, stereotyping, people doubting that they have the disease, no cure in sight, etc. Also like in the 1980s, Johnson's concluding question still applies today: "After all, who would want to find out that they in fact are going to be punished for their actions?"

Sarah Symonds LeBlanc, PhD
Purdue University Fort Wayne

Meehan, Paul. *The Haunted House on Film: An Historical Analysis*. McFarland, 2020.

As a structure both imaginative and architectural, the haunted house presents an intriguing contradiction: at once familiar and familial, it is an inherently prosaic domestic space, yet it is also the abode of a malignant Otherness. The haunted house is an unsettling site where the intimate encounters the alien. Attempting to articulate

the nature of the uncanny, those fears aroused by what is well known and deeply rooted in the psyche, Sigmund Freud (1919) famously deployed the image of the home as an emblem for repressed anxieties. For Freud, the homely (*heimlich* in German) encompasses not only that which is friendly, intimate and familial, but all that is "concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it" (3). Freud's architectural conception of repression hinges on the linguistic and conceptual proximity of the sinister and the habitual. Although more interested in the psychic space of the unconscious than the creaking doors and cobweb-strewn fixtures of ghostly manors, Freud's marriage of the homely and the horrifying encapsulates all that is intriguing about the haunted house.

Paul Meehan's new book, *The Haunted House on Film: An Historical Analysis*, evinces a similar understanding of the unique intersection of mundanity and terror that renders the haunted house such a potent imaginative construct. A comprehensive analysis of the filmic haunted house from the silent era to the present, Meehan's study tracks the evolution of the haunted house from a storytelling device to a fully-fledged cinematic genre. *The Haunted House on Film* is an ambitious work, and it regularly probes the boundaries of how we as viewers understand haunting. The book asks whether haunting can comprise personal and psychological ghosts as well the ectoplasmic variety while also asking us to reconsider what constitutes a "haunted house"; can apartments, businesses, even items of furniture be haunted? Significantly, Meehan also pushes beyond the critical proclivity to confine haunted houses to the horror genre, showing how these eerie properties have played central roles in comedies, romances, musicals, and mysteries.

The introduction sketches a broad overview of the haunted house as a concept, identifying its emergence in antiquity, swiftly tracing its evolution through the Gothic Revival of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before addressing the more contemporary literary haunted houses found in the works of Shirley Jackson, Stephen King, and Anne Rivers Siddons. This section also includes an engaging discussion of the haunted house's role in visual culture before the advent of cinema, with Meehan undertaking a particularly insightful exploration of the nineteenth-century "Phantasmagoria" and its role as a precursor to the special effects technologies used in later cinematic hauntings. Chapter 1 constitutes a detailed study of the "Mystery House Films" of the silent and early sound periods. Although noting the preponderance of specters in the early "trick films" of special effects pioneers like Georges Méliès, Meehan is quick to draw attention to a curious

phenomenon: the earliest anglophone productions often featured haunted houses with no hauntings. As Meehan explains, predominantly protestant nations like the United States had little room for limbo, purgatory or the ghosts that resided there. Instead, the first haunted house films produced in these countries tended to portray eerie buildings that are rumored to be haunted, but instead of encountering supernatural entities audiences are instead confronted with criminals, bank robbers and spies who craftily use the house's malign reputation as a cover for their nefarious activities. As such, the first haunted houses to flicker across the silver screen were generally seen in "mystery house" films like *The Bat* (1926, dir. Roland West), *The Cat and the Canary* (1927, dir. Paul Leni), and *The Old Dark House* (1932, dir. James Whale). Similarly, Chapter 2 discusses how the American aversion to specters resulted in a proliferation of haunted comedies, replete with faux spirits, that principally spanned the period from the 1910s to the 1950s. Chapter 3 moves the discussion into more explicitly supernatural terrain with its analysis of the gothic romance genre, which in the 1930s and '40s combined aspects of the "woman's picture" with the haunted house thriller. Examples of these eerie romances include William Wyler's 1939 adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940)*, the spectacular gothic melodrama *Dragonwyck* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1946)*, and a more contemporary revival of the genre, Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015).

In Chapter 4, Meehan explores the classical period of anglophone haunted house cinema, an epoch which spans the 1940s through to the 1980s. As Meehan persuasively argues it was only in the 1940s, with the success of Paramount Pictures' *The Uninvited* (1944, dir. Lewis Allen) that the phantasmagoric began to penetrate mainstream anglophone cinema. Even then, though, *The Uninvited* was something of an outlier and it was not until the 1960s—an era marked by a growing interest in the occult and a shift away from traditional religiosity—that the supernatural haunted house film would bloom in the United States and Britain, with films like *The Innocents* (1961, dir. Jack Clayton), *The Haunting* (1963, dir. Robert Wise) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968, dir. Roman Polanski) all being produced during that tumultuous decade. Chapter 4 also charts the development of the haunted house film through the 70s and into the 80s where it would reach new heights and solidify into a recognizable horror subgenre with iconic works like *The Shining* (1980, dir. Stanley Kubrick) and *Poltergeist* (1982, dir. Tobe Hooper). The following chapter expands this discussion of the mid-twentieth-century haunted house by broadening

its analytical scope to include the B-movies of iconic schlock director William Castle and the innovative gothic works produced in Italy during this period.

Chapter 6 is perhaps the most absorbing chapter in the book as Meehan dedicates the entire section to one of horror cinema's most fascinating and enduring tropes: the "based on a true story" film. Investigating a wide array of films purportedly based on real events, including *The Amityville Horror* (1979, dir. Stuart Rosenberg), *The Entity* (1982, dir. Sidney J. Furie) and *The Conjuring* series (various, 2013-present), Meehan explores the often porous boundary between fact and fantasy that defines such films. The book's final chapter features an analysis of the twenty-first-century haunted house film that questions how new technology and computer-generated effects might allow filmmakers to reimagine spectrality for a new age. The chapter also incorporates a brief examination of the West's turn-of-the-millennium fascination with Japanese horror cinema (J-horror) and explores how these films merge folkloric representations of spirits with contemporary technological anxieties. The book closes with a brief conclusion featuring a synopsis of key arguments and concerns.

Paul Meehan's *The Haunted House on Film* is a comprehensive and ambitious overview of uncanny homes in cinema. Meehan is a creative scholar who constantly challenges our understanding of what constitutes a haunted house while consistently pushing against accepted generic categorizations that would, traditionally, see these edifices consigned to the realm of horror. Meehan carefully and diligently illustrates the ubiquity of the haunted house as a cinematic trope in genres as ostensibly diverse as comedy, romance, and mystery. Furthermore, as a critic, Meehan has a firm grasp of cinematic techniques and their capacity to complement narrative and thematic concerns. His discussion of Jack Clayton's *The Innocents*, for example, stresses cinematographer Freddie Francis's exploitation of deep focus to create a surrealistic, often claustrophobic atmosphere. That said, there are some minor oversights and typos peppered throughout the book. For instance, the author regularly refers to "Charlotte Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*" and "Emily Bronte's *Jane Eyre*," confusing the sisters' most well-known works. Nonetheless, Meehan's book is generally well-researched, and the reader senses that such errors could have been avoided with more careful proofreading or a greater degree of editorial oversight. Similarly, the book is largely descriptive in tone, and while it might provide a good starting point for teachers, researchers, and fans, there is little in the way of rigorous academic analysis. This is unfortunate because Meehan clearly knows his subject very well and puts forward numerous fascinating insights

throughout his study: his discussion of the dearth of ghosts in early haunted house films and the cultural contexts informing this conspicuous absence is particularly astute.

Readers may find themselves somewhat disappointed that Meehan fails to develop these analytical perspectives more fully as they serve to expand our understanding of the films discussed and deepen our appreciation of the haunted house's evolving representational forms. Ultimately, *The Haunted House on Film* is a comprehensive study that demonstrates a nuanced understanding of how haunted homes marry the familiar and the strange, while providing the reader with a well-researched synopsis of the trope's evolution across a century of cinema.

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Miranda Corcoran
University College Cork, Ireland

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Nochimson, Martha P. *Television Rewired: The Rise of the Auteur Series*. U Texas P, 2019

In *Television Rewired: The Rise of the Auteur Series,* author Martha P. Nochimson documents the explosive shift away from formulaic plot lines, and toward a new (for television, anyway) auteur expression. She credits the creative vision of David Lynch's 1990 television series *Twin Peaks* as "our portal to auteur television and a new aesthetics of mass-media storytelling" (1). *Television Rewired* also examines television that successfully (or not) followed *Twin Peaks* through this portal and created their own vision of auteur worldbuilding. Having authored eight previous books on television and film, done a stint in television writing, and taught a course on the oeuvre of Lynch at the David Lynch Graduate School of Creative Arts, Nochimson establishes her expertise as the foundation for her solid, but accessible, insights into the process of auteur television expression.

At first, I felt put off by what I read as Nochimson's judgmental attitude toward the formulaic narratives of early television plotlines. Her opinion clashed with my own memories of these shows and, I will admit, some of my present choices. I absorbed the lessons in *The Andy Griffith Show*, and the fledgling feminism in *I Love Lucy*. At first, Nochimson seemed to diminish my love of passive television viewing. Yes, the "perfect hero" of the narrative unrealistically tied up every loose end. I understood this, but I enjoyed escaping into the "reality" of *L.A. Law* for an hour.

My first impression changed by the time I finished reading the introduction. Nochimson's criticism is not disdainful of the medium. She respects the potential of television to become an art form. Having worked within the confines of formulaic television, she "was troubled by a strong sense that [she] had the vocabulary for speaking of formula in television, but not enough vocabulary for speaking of television that breaks free of it" (17). *Television Rewired* relates Nochimson's journey as she learns the vocabulary by immersing herself in conversations with auteur television writers.

Nochimson states the evolution of auteur television began with the 1990 premiere of *Twin Peaks*. Previous shows tried to break the formulaic mold with plots that discussed rape, poverty, or the Women's Liberation movements, yet the strong main character who tied up all the loose ends by the end of the episode remained. Nochimson believes one reason *Twin Peaks* succeeded was due to David Lynch's creativity, but this would not be enough to usher in a new age of television viewing. The popularity of *Twin Peaks* proved the public was ready for something else, and Lynch was able to provide it. High ratings meant there was room for auteur storytelling in the line-up of popular television. In subsequent chapters Nochimson discusses the effect this had on the future of television series narratives from the 1990s until his return to television in 2017 with *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

Nochimson successfully articulates this effect by explaining "the why" of modern television narratives. Nochimson explains Lynch opened up formulaic formula into a modern vehicle that "portrays human life as a voyage into fear and wonder, sometimes branching out into the part of surrealism that overlaps psychology and physics, sometimes branching into the mysteries of philosophical and sociological relativism" (7). For me, this describes my experience with the writing of David Lynch, David Chase, and David Simon. Watching *Twin Peaks, The Sopranos*, or *The Wire* became a different entertainment experience from the one I was used to. I rooted for Lucy as she tried to convince Ricky she wanted to

work at his club, I listened to Andy's heart-to-heart talks with Opie. However, watching Tony and Carmela interact was something different, but I could not explain the impact I felt. Reading how Nochimson learned the language of auteur television helped me to better articulate what this "something different" is. The main characters of formulaic writing remain Dale Cooper, Tony Soprano, or Jimmy McNulty, but they are not in charge of the narrative. The auteur writers are creating a "grand narrative" rather than episodes. Nochimson spoke to David Simon, creator of *The Wire*, at length about moving away from a "unified narrative" about the Boston he wanted to write about: "He had to invent a narrative form reflecting the 'tangle' of people and systems that he saw with his own eyes...He had to invent a non-formulaic narrative that would make us reject false, simplistic answers that had no bearing on the immediacy of the city. He evolved *collage narrative*" (94, italics mine).

Collage narratives do not contain the perfect, problem-solving main character who solves all the problems. In fact, the plot depends on the flaws of the main character to tell the story. Even more important, the characters never rise above, become cured, or succeed despite their imperfect natures. The collage is more like real life, but Nochimson never uses the terms "real" or "reality." It is important to remember that while the form details the real complexities of life, it remains a created narrative. She explains it is the collaboration of writing, acting, lighting, music, and blocking that solidifies into an auteur artform of television storytelling.

The popularity of this form continued to influence other series writers after *Twin Peaks, The Sopranos*, and *The Wire*, but Nochimson discusses a trend toward "a matter of form divorced from function" that she calls "Formula 2.0" (210). Nochimson respects the series *Treme*, *Mad Men*, and *Girls* because they stay true to the form of the grand narrative. There are loose ends and questions at the end, but we have a better understanding of their world. She discusses that even though some newer series study complex relationships (*Masters of Sex*) with "A trace of cutting-edge storytelling" (the reboot of *The X-Files*), the formulaic structure remains. Many of the newer series "delight in playing with special effects, inventive framing, and trendy editing" (211), but continue to depend on the problem-solving skills of a main character to create closure within a plot of "smooth interlocking pieces of a puzzle" (212).

After reading *Television Rewired*, I learned a new vocabulary for television viewing. The book is not a judgment of what is good or bad. Nochimson expanded my appreciation for television by explaining exactly what it is I am watching.

Noreen Hernandez
Northeastern Illinois University

Perez, Maya, and Barbara Morgan, eds. *On Story: The Golden Ages of Television*. U Texas P, 2018.

Fans of PBS' *On Story* will no doubt enjoy this collection of interview transcripts compiled by Maya Perez and Barbara Morgan. Even if readers have not seen the series featuring on-stage interviews with Hollywood's leading writers and producers conducted at the Austin Film Festival, they will find a connection with this text. By focusing on some of the biggest hits of comedy and drama from the past few decades, readers will be familiar with most, if not all, of the shows. These programs are part of our lives, so we cannot help but connect with the content.

From *The Dick van Dyke Show* to *Orange is the New Black*, from *the X-Files* to *Breaking Bad*, the book shares stories from celebrated writers like the late, great Carl Reiner, Jenji Kohan, Chris Carter, and Vince Gilligan about how their shows developed, the challenges each faced, and lessons learned from years of struggle before finding success. The result is intimate insight that feels akin to a one-on-one conversation with legendary talents who share wisdom about Hollywood's grinding cycle of phone calls, meetings, and rejections.

First and foremost, this is a book about writing. Although its specific focus is writing series television scripts, anyone who has ever struggled to put word on paper will find inspiration. Many of these legendary creators articulate the passion required for successful writing. "Writing is it," says Carl Reiner. "You're alone with a pencil or typewriter and an empty piece of page. It's like getting lost in the woods and finding your way out" (51). During his 2004 interview, the late Garry Shandling – a man known for profound humor – explores the genesis, development, and process for successful writing in strikingly serious terms. *Lost* co-creator Damon Lindelof acknowledges the thrill of hitting one's stride after creating quality work, only to recognize art's fickle nature: "The first time you experience it, you have the hubris to think you're never going to miss a shot again, and then that goes away. So, the next time it happens, you realize that it's fleeting, and you cherish it all the more" (107).

Characters and collaboration are common themes across interviews. Many of the creators note that characters should drive television writing; be true to the

characters, they advise, and focused, quality stories will likely follow. Many of the writers also believe that a collaborative process is required for successful storytelling. They take us into the "writers' room," a creative space where pitches are made, stories are developed, and writing staffs feed off the energy of colleagues to produce scripts. "Most of the time," *Better Call Saul*'s Peter Gould says of the writers' room, "it's a fun place to be, but there are moments when it feels like being stranded in a sequestered jury" (179). *Rectify*'s Ray McKinnon acknowledges, however, that solitude still has value: "I've discovered most writers aren't people who should be in a room for long periods of time with anybody, much less other people who shouldn't be in a room with people" (137).

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the collection are the inside stories giving readers behind-the-scenes anecdotes of what led to some of the most memorable episodes of these iconic series. Alec Berg provides some of the book's best laugh-out-loud moments when he recounts experiences with the hit shows *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Seinfeld*. We learn how Michael J. Fox came to be cast in a *Curb Your Enthusiasm* episode in which Larry David's character has a confusing encounter with a Parkinson's patient, and details behind the *Seinfeld* episode in which Jerry dated a gymnast while Kramer battled a kidney stone. We also get a gem of an anecdote from *New Girl*'s Elizabeth Meriwether, who shares the winding path her show traveled to land Prince as an episode's guest star.

Another recurring theme throughout the book is fandom. *X-Files* creator Chris Carter notes it would be unrealistic to focus too much on buzz from legions of fans dedicated to their favorite shows and characters, but he also describes how feedback from one specific fan shaped his series' final episode. *Lost*'s Damon Lindelof offers another perspective, discussing how fans allow creators to determine whether storylines are working. The fans, he notes, are a gauge that can change a program's course.

Male voices dominate the text, accounting for 71% of interviews; however, this is more an indictment of Hollywood than a criticism of Perez and Morgan. The editors do an admirable job of including diverse voices. An equal number of male and female writers are included in the comedy section, but men dominate dramas. This underscores the idea that the entertainment industry has work to do opening doors for female leaders in dramatic programming. There are a few interviews with Black and Asian writers and some who identify as LGBTQ+. Some readers may wish to see more diverse representation, but ultimately the book arguably does a better job of inclusion than Hollywood on most days.

This book features something for everyone. Pop culture fans will enjoy the inside stories about their favorite programs; details about casting, relationships, and story development are often as entertaining as the shows themselves. Writers will draw inspiration from the creative processes used and challenges faced by the biggest names in the business. Scholars will appreciate the contribution the interviews make to our study of television. These transcripts allow the reader to see moments of human failings and success that we can all relate to. We see the self-doubt that comes from the creative process and the thrill of success when it finally arrives. We can relate to the fear of acting alone and the growth that comes from teamwork. We see value in learning from past mistakes and recognizing growth. In the end, these revered writers' stories offer guidance for finding our own success.

W. Joe Watson
Baker University

Rehak, Bob. *More Than Meets the Eye: Special Effects and the Transmedia Franchise*. NYU Press, 2018.

For fans of fantasy film and television, special effects (SPFX) are part and parcel to the enjoyment of the genre. Yet it is all too easy to apprehend these effects as technological feats spontaneously materializing through the genius of a few auteurs or SPFX teams for each film or franchise. Bob Rehak's book, *More Than Meets the Eye: Special Effects and The Transmedia Franchise*, complicates this problematic assumption by thoroughly illuminating the otherwise hidden life cycles and migrational flows of these special effects. While Rehak grounds his study in the close examination of a few of the most prominent transmedia franchises, cases that bridge the late analog to the early digital eras (*Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, etc.), the discussion is ultimately much wider ranging and more theoretically engaged than an analysis of these franchises' special effects might suggest on its surface.

Rehak's book departs from the question, "what might be missing from our critical understanding of contemporary special effects?" (2). In the introduction, Rehak suggests we need to see "past the state of the art" and introduces numerous conceptual tools to aid in this new view. Drawing on the seminal influence of Christian Metz, Rehak establishes special effects as discursive constructs and not merely technological or industrial acts. Thus, for Rehak, "the way we choose to

describe them profoundly shapes what we understand them to be" (7). One of the core analytical values orienting this study is its movement beyond questions of the successfulness, realism, or seamlessness of technique in the history of SPFX, instead focusing on the history of how images were produced, from pre-visualization (aka previz) through production, and then to continue to track their circulation and discursive afterlives. Rehak is not interested in passing judgment on the relative effectiveness of analog vs. digital SPFX either, but rather in seeing how they are fundamentally inseparable. A focus on the "chain of evidence" is also a central theoretical tool deployed here to better understand, and extend, what Rehak views as somewhat limited existing scholarly discussions of SPFX, complicating over-simplified origin stories of "groundbreaking" images and effects and instead view them as a much more complicated historical process of gradual evolution and migration of industrial practices and images.

In Chapter 1, the first of four case studies commences, with Rehak considering the emergence and evolution of the *Star Trek* storyworld from the 1960s into the 1970s. Rehak's discussion of the role of what he labels "design networks" in objects and imagery across the *Trek* universe is more far reaching and complex than people might realize, involving an "open-source universe" which results in a "contested zone of manufacture in which labels like professional and amateur, authorized and unauthorized, legitimate and illegitimate roil in perpetual flux" (31). I appreciate how, in this chapter, Rehak's discussion of *Trek* complicates the distinction between special effects and nonspecial effects, as an industrial logic related to cost savings, reproducibility, and production logics. Additionally, one of the more important scholarly interventions of this chapter is to privilege "object practices" over "textual practices," something that has been under-emphasized in other studies of special effects (58). Lastly, Rehak establishes some key wider truths of transmedia franchises in general here—namely, that they operate at "scales and durations exceeding traditional categories of film and television studies" (70).

Chapter 2 is a logical counterpoint to Chapter 1, presenting a contrast between two major fantasy franchises, *Trek* and *Star Wars*—one fundamentally "co-creative," the other strictly controlled from the helm by George Lucas. Perhaps the most important point to come across here is not just the central role of previz to the development of the *Star Wars* storyworld, but also the problematic role of previz in Lucas wielding unprecedented creative control over the franchise and its future. This discussion is important, on the one hand, because it demonstrates how much credit should go to Ralph McQuarrie's previz paintings for determining the overall

look and feel of the franchise. On the other hand, this example demonstrates how previz functioned for Lucas as a means of locking down creative control and limiting the appearance of co-authorship. By theorizing previz, Rehak's goal is to extend the scholarly discussion beyond those more neat, classifiable pieces that academics tend to focus on: the director, the screenwriter, the finished film/text itself. Essential to this analytical angle is the critique of the idea of the auteur as a problematic category which serves essentially to preserve the "orderly cosmology of creation" (84). This chapter could potentially change how the average person views George Lucas's role in the franchise, for example, in its discussion of *Star Wars* animatics (moving storyboards) drawn from old WWII movies—an interesting point of argument going some way toward debunking the originality myth of the director's "vision" through which we might all-too-conveniently view the franchise.

Chapter 3 shifts away from focusing on any one franchise, instead looking at the history of augmented performances, as an important vehicle for discussing the intersection of analog and digital modes of production. As with other chapters, Rehak tries to steer away from the more ideological bent that prior discussion of the topic of "synthespians" has taken; the tension between the "real" and the "artificial," or technology vs. performer debate in screen performance. This chapter delves into the history of augmented performance, including a discussion of the stop motion animation used in the original *King Kong*, to the creation of monsters in the horror and sci-fi genres of the 1950s, before moving on to digital performance in the 1990s. A discussion of Gollum in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films serves as a key case for thinking about the problematic category of authenticity in screen performance. Rehak submits, "my assertion that augmented performance has always been 'real' can be inverted to argue that 'real' performance has always been artificial" (146).

In the final chapter, Rehak charts the migrational path and lifespan of a specific special effect, "bullet time" from *The Matrix* franchise, until its eventual decline from overuse. This is different than the other chapters because it tackles the idea that the "look" of an effect is in some ways now more important than questions of the technological method. Importantly, Rehak, as with so many other points of discussion in this book, is able to contextualize particular special effects within a longer historical timeline, highlighting important aesthetic and technological antecedents, so we avoid falling into the trap of an ahistorical fetishizing of technological triumphs or cult of personality aggrandizing of auteurs like the

Wachowskis. One key way Rehak accomplishes this is by carefully tracing the technical and creative antecedents to the "bullet time" effect, as a range of different "frozen time" SPFX emerged in the 1980s, well before *The Matrix* franchise.

While there is an obvious timeliness to this study, given the SPFX-dependent franchises now dominating Hollywood, Rehak's text is in constant conversation with the wider fields of genre studies, media history, convergence culture, and transmedia archaeologies—both challenging and affirming them—making it an important contribution on theoretical grounds alone. *More Than Meets the Eye* is an important example of a much broader sort of critical inquiry of SPFX, one that considers the present state of digital SPFX in constant view of their direct analog antecedents, getting beyond facile discussions of the state of the art and technological breakthrough. While Rehak wants to highlight the technological history of special effects development, he avoids over-focusing on them to the exclusion of other vital pieces of historical evidence. As he puts it, he is wary of a "technological folklore friendly to the industry," disputing the revolutionary nature of digital visual effects, or that the emergence of CGI somehow spells the end of an "authentic cinema" (149).

Matthew P. Ferrari
Westfield State University

Reinhard, CarrieLynn D. *Fractured Fandoms: Contentious Communication in Fan Communities*. Lexington, 2018.

Fandom is becoming more toxic. Or at least the media is becoming aware of the toxic nature of fan communities. From the hate levelled at *Star Wars* actor John Boyega to the racism enacted by *Drag Race* fans and the misogyny aimed at *The Last of Us Part II* actress Laura Bailey, the last 12 months have seen scores of fracturing and dissolving fan communities. Interest in the "dark" side of fandom within cultural studies has been on the rise, and this is certainly an area in need of deeper interrogation. CarrieLynn D. Reinhard's *Fractured Fandoms* thus comes at an opportune time and its analysis of toxic fan behavior through the lens of communication studies offers an alternative way of approaching this object of study.

Reinhard opens with quotes from three fans and this sets the tone for the rest of the book. Fan voices are centralized in each of the chapters, and with over 100 fans

interviewed for the book Reinhard has access to a wide range of stories from fans in different fandoms, countries, and stages of life. This enables her to thoroughly document the experiences of fans from different communities. Although each fan's story is different, the book is structured to highlight the similarities between each one. Chapter 1 lays out what fandom and fans are as well as tracing the history of fan studies. It also defines fractured fandom as "manifesting from and being exacerbated by communication problems" (15). These communication problems are further defined in Chapter 2, where Reinhard examines the five issues that lie at the heart of these communication problems: misunderstanding, defensiveness, differences of opinion, power plays, and boundary policing. Both chapters are populated with stories from fans detailing their experiences, which take place on- and offline. Much work within fan studies focuses on the digital – partly because this allows scholars easy access to current issues – and thus the inclusion of stories such as Nina (who was attacked in a game store), Bea (who witnessed a fan trying repeatedly to get onstage at a Liza Minelli concert), and Illeana (who was bullied while cosplaying at a *Doctor Who* convention) sit alongside those of Twitter flame wars, cyberbullying, and online harassment. Although this focus on offline fractures is an important analysis, Reinhard's skill lies in demonstrating that the division between on- and offline behavior is not as marked as perhaps we may think. Nina discussed being physically attacked and was subsequently harassed, receiving hate mail and death threats. Bea's experience of another fan taking away from her concert experience is discussed alongside digital power plays in an online Italian *Star Wars* community.

Many of the experiences discussed in *Fractured Fandoms* are negative and had long-lasting impacts on the fans involved. Reinhard examines these impacts, which include emotional, mental, physical, behavioral, and social, as well as the overlaps between the different kinds of harms. This affords the reader the opportunity to understand just how long fans' negative experiences can stay with them and affect their life—both fannish and otherwise. Although there is a focus on negative experiences, as would be expected in a book on fractured fandom, Reinhard also illustrates the positives that can come from these harms. Once again utilizing fans' experiences, she highlights how the presence of a negative does not preclude something positive coming from it, a more balanced approach than the sometimes black and white thinking of "fandom is beautiful" and "fandom is toxic."

There are, however, some limits to the communication studies approach Reinhard takes. She suggests that "if communication problems lie at the heart of

these fractures, then hopefully improving communication can resolve the problems that occur or prevent them from occurring in the first place" (14). Yet in many cases it is not communication (or lack of) which causes the problem. It is underlying politics, philosophies, or morals, which are much harder to resolve. If one fan genuinely believes that same sex relationships are abhorrent it seems unlikely that changing communication practices within the fandom will fundamentally change that fan's view. Reinhard acknowledges this to an extent, recognizing that "ideology can make people avoid communicating with others they may consider less than human" (106), but suggests that "overall, the fan collective's self-policing represents the best tactic for handling harassment" (109). Given the many issues outlined in the book, relying on fan communities to self-police is perhaps too optimistic. Indeed, examining how fans attempted to resolve fractures found that many fans decided to shut down communication to bring an end to the issue.

Chapter 9 offers some suggestions for improving communication skills, suggesting that increased communication literacy could allow fans to "enter these situations and address the communication problems and power dynamics to potentially prevent the fractured fandom from occurring, or resolve the problem after it occurs" (182). Of course, this relies on the fans doing the work to then engage with fans who are not doing the work, and seems to bring us back to the problem we currently see in toxic fandom: those people who hold racist, homophobic, misogynistic, or other undesirable views are unlikely to change regardless of whom they talk to. As much as hearing from fans who have experienced negativity within fandom is valuable to the field, hearing from those who have enacted that negativity would prove a useful counterpoint, particularly when thinking about the communication processes that enable fractured fandoms and potentials for resolving them.

Bethan Jones
Cardiff University

Taylor, T. L. *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. U Princeton P, 2018.

True to its role as the first monograph about game live streaming, sociologist T.L. Taylor's *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming* functions as both an introduction to and justification for live streaming research. While

ultimately drawn toward incredibly valuable questions of labor, user-generated content, usage and monetization rights, and the transformative work of game live streaming communities, *Watch Me Play* is an accessible text that both legitimizes academic inquiry into live streaming and provides a concrete base from which to build. Taylor uses comprehensible language to explain nuanced practices from gaming, legal, academic, and financial contexts, making this book useful for academics and students, as well as consumers, producers, streamers, and designers.

The emerging network of platforms, media forms, and communication methods orbiting game live streaming might seem hopelessly complex for those unfamiliar with streaming or gaming. As Taylor describes throughout the text, one of the greatest hurdles in studying and critically discussing live streaming as a media practice is that the global gaming community, for all its interconnectedness, is largely inaccessible. From exclusionary jargon and entrenched discriminatory practices to the material constraints of needing access to the internet and expensive hardware, engaging in game live streaming communities as a spectator or streamer has high barriers for participation. As a result, reading the cultural practice critically as an academic might feel daunting. That said, one of *Watch Me Play*'s greatest strengths is in its accessibility and inclusivity in the face of these barriers. Taylor weaves her personal experiences within the game live streaming community with her academic and alt-ac work in eSports, making the text useful for those unfamiliar with the basics of game live streaming and professional streamers alike. As a result, *Watch Me Play* feels like a necessary read for any interdisciplinary scholar interested in the confluence of media practices and the emergence of new media forms.

Taylor presents the findings and conclusions from her fieldwork and extensive background in internet studies across six chapters. The topics range from tracing the origins of game live streaming, to a deep dive into streamers and their communities. Chapter 1 introduces the idea of game live streaming by dispelling the common misconception that live streaming came out of nowhere. Rather, as Taylor explains, the act of publicly sharing what was once private play serves as a natural extension of our networked media environment. Moreover, the rapid growth and professionalization of game live streaming signals a broader cultural interest in participatory media that closes the gap between creators and spectators. Importantly, Taylor emphasizes that "game live streaming should not be seen as an unencumbered or utopic story of the triumph of grassroots engagement," considering the space's longstanding exclusion of marginalized peoples (258).

Watch Me Play could be divided into three major parts. The first two chapters provide theoretical and practical foundations in television, new media, internet, and network studies that can pave the way toward understanding the origins and future of live streaming. In the first chapter, "Broadcasting Ourselves," Taylor details her experience noticing live streaming for the first time – a casual encounter with an early Twitch.tv broadcast of a *StarCraft* tournament in Paris – followed by a deep fascination with the phenomenon. As Taylor explains throughout Chapter 1, her fieldwork here consisted of observing Twitch broadcasts and the ongoing chat as a spectator and behind the scenes of a live broadcast, interviewing streamers and industry workers, learning how to broadcast her own gameplay, and engaging with archived media. Naturally, Taylor's inquiry into the development of game live streaming necessitates a focus on this emergent media's origins. In Chapter 2 ("Networked Broadcasting"), Taylor further situates game live streaming as a natural answer to established media institutions in the post-network era.

Chapters 3 and 4 dive into the complexities of game live streaming. Taylor primarily focuses on the streamers and associated media industries but acknowledges the powerful role of audiences for both streamers and producers. In "Home Studios" (Chapter 3), Taylor focuses on the experiences and production practices of individual streamers. This extensive study of live streamers and the intersections of play, labor, and broadcasting ultimately positions platforms like Twitch as hubs for "a new form of media labor" (133). Given her 2012 intervention in eSports studies, *Raising the Stakes*, Taylor's subsequent discussion of eSports broadcasting feels like a natural progression. Chapter 4 ("Esports Broadcasting") relies extensively on interviews with eSports players, producers, and broadcasters. In addition to an extended conversation about eSports business models and a brief discussion of the industry's emergence, this chapter furthers the text's earlier conversation about the relationship between live streaming and television.

In the final two chapters, Taylor addresses continuing concerns about invisible or precarious labor, inequity between streamers and regulatory entities, and other issues related to play and labor. These chapters introduce some of the most urgent needs for live streaming research: equitable regulatory practices that acknowledge the transformative work of users and players performing free labor. Taylor firmly contends that "game communities are avid, dynamic interlocutors with the systems that they engage" (237). Yet while Taylor and others read these communities as actively transforming media objects, therefore complicating complaints about copyright infringement, the massive corporate bodies at play in the gaming and

game live streaming industries often disagree. Nevertheless, the streamers Taylor interviewed continually reference the way that their labor—the process of streaming a game developed by someone else for a community of players they have drawn on a platform they use but do not own—transforms the original game object into something else: a stream, not a game. These closing chapters demonstrate different, sometimes conflicting views of ownership and copyright within the broad game live streaming community and the network of regulatory bodies that circumscribe it.

Largely due to the contemporary nature of the subject, *Watch Me Play* provides a frank, critical venture into studying an emerging media form wherein the fascination stems in part from watching the media form and its practitioners grow and evolve. However, beyond the immediate value of a primer on live streaming for those not familiar with the practice, one of this book's greatest strengths is its clear call to action for researchers across disciplines. Indeed, Taylor implores that researchers across disciplines must "take games seriously as a site of valuable empirical data and knowledge creation, and see games as now a decidedly central part of our media, networked, and sociotechnical landscape" (10-11). Taylor repeatedly seeks to include imagined colleagues across digital media disciplines in and out of the Humanities, encouraging interest in both live streaming as a phenomenon and as the most recent collision of exigent media forms to flourish into a media environment of its own.

Janelle Malagon
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

Webley, Stephen J. and Peter Zackariasson, eds. *The Playful Undead and Video Games: Critical Analyses of Zombies and Gameplay.* Routledge, 2019.

Zombie studies are a vibrant discipline at the intersection of horror, film, and game studies. They form a distinct cluster within more general monster studies, the subject matter of which spans from ancient compounds of legendary creatures to contemporary video games. In *The Playful Undead and Video Games: Critical Analyses of Zombies and Gameplay*, eighteen authors explore influences from all

kinds of media on the well-established zombie survival genre to find out what makes zombies preferred "chainsaw fodder" in video games.

The legacy of film director George A. Romero is the first source of inspiration and a basis for further comparison. Stephen B. Webley, the editor of the collection, shares his love for the "Romeroesque" twice: in the editorial and in the final chapter. In this way, he starts and then summarizes the discussion of social and political issues that figuratively brought zombies to life. In between, Brandon Kempner and Michael Epp perform two common but distinct interpretations of capitalism critique that originally lurks from Romero's films and bleeds into next generations of zombie-themed media. Then, Eugen Pfister analyzes *The Last of Us* as a comment on American democracy, and notices: "The zombie myth in the twentieth century may have begun with a sociopolitical and cultural critique… Today, however, zombies function increasingly as a brand" (217). Even if killing zombies makes us feel like we are fighting capitalism, in fact we have already supported its primary cultural industry when we purchased the game.

As an alternative, Vanessa L. Haddad offers a psychoanalytic explanation of zombie fighting. According to her, it embodies the tension between Eros and Thanatos: love, aggression, and death. Altogether, there are many different interpretations in the book to choose: for example, the literary scholar Mitchell C. Lilly argues that zombies are responsible for uncertainty and unpredictability (151), while Bernard Perron, a horror game researcher, sees them as inherently predictable (199).

Perron and Kristine Jørgensen, both established game studies scholars, provide two comprehensive introductions to the history and culture of zombies in games. Perron looks into common tropes such as the straight arms of "videoludic undead." Jørgensen stresses once again that not all zombie games are horror games, and not all undead people in horror games are zombies. Mythologies of the world are populated with the folkloric undead, such as the mythical Icelandic "draugr," to whom Penny de Byl refers in her chapter on *Skyrim*, or the Japanese "shibito" —a very particular kind of the legendary uncanny explored by Madelon Hoedt. These former humans can think for themselves, while a self-aware and reasonable zombie is a transgression. The unique position of a zombie as the ultimate Other paves the way to queering it by making it a player character, as Tanja Sihvonen argues.

Interdisciplinary studies become even more productive as more disciplines merge. Matthew Barton turns to comics studies when he disentangles the visual language of *The Walking Dead* franchise. Alan McGreevy offers his expertise in

microbiology and explains, together with Christina Fawcett, how *Resident Evil* medicalizes the undead. Finally, Timothy A. Wiseman reviews the history of zombies and the copyright law. He explains how a failure in copyright protection has led to their current proliferation in media. Without this mistake, "…zombies in video games may never have arisen in the way we know them today" (249).

Zombies are a very convenient enemy for game designers and developers. In fact, their slow pace, lack of coordination, and complete absence of strategic reasoning reflects the current state of AI in games. To provide a professional perspective from the industry, Matthew Barr presents the results of interviews with 20 game designers who worked on a variety of zombie games, from *The Walking Dead* series to the early Ukrainian classic *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*

To gamers, a zombie massacre is a guilty pleasure without guilt: zombies do not think, do not feel, and do not hesitate to kill any human within their reach. However, Adam Chapman warns us against taking the "Nazi zombies" at face value: out of the historical context, it is too similar to the usual dehumanized depictions of enemies in war propaganda. "There is… a banality to the evil of the zombie," he writes, referring to Hannah Arendt (52). Indeed, going a bit further than the scope of this book, I can attest that the "Nazi zombies" were in fact invented by the Soviets, as WWII posters clearly show. This may become another groundbreaking topic for future research informed and inspired by *The Playful Undead*.

The only notable issue with the book is that we just cannot get enough of zombies. There are 18 chapters in this middle-sized, 276-page publication, and some of them feel abrupt and inconclusive. Their authors would benefit a lot from just a bit more space to develop their arguments. Hilariously, the name of the philosopher Georgi Agamben is misspelled as "Amamgen" in the last chapter. This is a minor problem, but we might wonder how small things like this could happen to a publication that costs over $150 in hardcover. Finally, it might be a stretch to state that "the draugr of Old Icelandic mythology has… a history as rich as that of his Haitian counterpart" (68). While the authentic Norse mythology has been profoundly developed and well documented at least as early as in the twelfth century, zombies as we know them are a product of Western colonialism, and they are at least five times younger. Other than that, *The Playful Undead* provides an indispensable groundwork for further explorations of zombies in games. It takes its readers along a wide array of safe pathways across horrific imaginary worlds. Such

guided tours are even more important now, when the real world has come dangerously close to the fictional image of a zombie apocalypse.

Alesja Serada
The University of Vaasa

Wiggins, Bradley E. *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture: Ideology, Semiotics, and Intertextuality.* Routledge, 2019.

Media scholars tend to take small, relatively inconsequential things, and by using dense academic language, make them seem far more important than they are. Internet memes – the pictures, the gifs, the remixes of popular culture, the inside jokes passed throughout social media – could be one such topic. In the grand scheme of things, what impact did the death of Harambe, the Cincinnati Zoo gorilla who was shot in 2016 and quickly became an internet meme, really have on most people's lives? (The book reviewed here is dedicated to him, so perhaps some impact). Thankfully, in his new book *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture: Ideology, Semiotics, and Intertextuality*, Bradley Wiggins has taken the low-brow form of communication that is internet memes and expounded on their significance in a way that adds greatly to our understanding of online communication practices.

Many people know that the word "meme" was coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. Wiggins lays out a case that the Dawkinsian definition of a meme, while important for explaining how things like slogans and song lyrics get repeated ad nauseum in culture, is insufficient for understanding internet memes, which he defines as "a remixed, iterated message that can be rapidly diffused by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of satire, parody, critique, or any other discursive activity" (11). The function of an internet meme is "to posit an argument, visually, in order to commence, extend, counter, or influence a discourse" (11). Folding in concepts like ideology, semiotics, intertextuality, structuration, hyperreality, and more, Wiggins successfully establishes a theoretical foundation for discussing relatively simple and primitive digital images that can be made and shared by anybody. As someone who teaches visual communications and has a module on memes, I have been looking for a text like this that provides a solid theoretical understanding for talking about this genre of communication. While the messages behind internet memes are

often humorous in intent, the visual argument behind such memes can be quite complex in some cases, setting up premises and leaving conclusions unstated (Wiggins sees the visual *enthymeme* as the backbone of internet memes) in a way that allows the imagined audience to fill in any gaps.

Wiggins often breaks from the theoretical discussions to focus on specific applications, showing how the theory can be used to understand memes related to current events, such as Catalonian secessionism or Russian political interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, as well as memes related to Russia's own presidential election in 2018, among other events. Wiggins is diligent in discussing internet memes outside of a strictly American context; as an American and frequent user of social media myself, I was familiar with many of the memes discussed in this book, but seeing how these memes are used in other cultures shows how this genre of communication can be appropriated in different ways.

The book also spends time overviewing commercial applications of internet memes, such as Geico Insurance's attempt to use the *Numa Numa* video guy in one of their 2009 commercials, five years after the original *Numa Numa* video went live on the website Newgrounds. Approaching these commercial uses of memes through the lens of "the semiotics of cool," Wiggins discusses how such attempts by companies or organizations to capitalize on memes' popularity can backfire with audiences. There is also an interesting legal debate here about whether commercial use of memes falls under the "fair use" clause of copyright law. The chapters on genre and audience are particularly helpful in establishing what is gained by speaking of memes as a genre of communication. The analysis of audience shows how difficult it is to speak of a meme's audience when the meme itself may reach people never intended by the creator, and likewise may never be seen by the intended audience due to the ephemeral nature of social media.

The final chapters on memes as sites for identity construction and memes as art offer some interesting theoretical possibilities, but they have less development and connection with the theoretical foundation laid in the first half of the book, making them feel more tangential than integrated. For example, Wiggins articulates that the Babadook meme, based on a 2014 horror film, has particular affective resonance with the LGBTQ+ community, thus rendering it a tool for constructing one's identity in online spaces, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 Supreme Court case Obergefell v. Hodges which legalized gay marriage in the United States. The challenge with viewing memes as sites for identity construction is that we rarely

know who the authors of memes are, or their intentions, and we have limited understanding of how audiences are reacting to memes or internalizing them.

Wiggins's book is strongest when it focuses on discursive power, the ability of audiences to engage in quite serious discourses using a genre of communication noted for its contradictions: memes are simultaneously silly and serious, simple and complex, deployable by anybody yet often understood only by those in the know. There is a "newness" to this book, focusing on numerous memes popular between 2015-2019, but these examples will quickly fade from people's memories as new memes replace old ones. The theoretical ideas laid out here, though, will hopefully remain impactful well into the next decade.

Dennis Owen Frohlich, Ph.D.
Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania

Television Reviews

A Place to Call Home. Created by Bevan Lee. Seven Productions, 2013-2018. Amazon.

A Place to Call Home (APTCH), available on PBS/Amazon Prime, is a stylish 1950s melodrama that examines how postwar cultural change transforms both the privileged Bligh family and postwar society. The series begins with matriarch Elizabeth (Noni Hazelhurst) attempting to thwart widowed son George's (Brett Climo) relationship with Jewish nurse Sarah Adams (Marta Dusseldorp), as well as granddaughter Anna's (Abby Earl) relationship with Italian-Catholic immigrant farmer Gino Poletti (Aldo Mignone). Elizabeth, seeking to shore up the Bligh legacy, forces grandson James (David Berry) to marry Olivia (Arianwen Parkes-Lockwood), thereby hiding his homosexuality. Critics like Katherine Byrne have panned similar historical dramas such as *Downton Abbey* (DA), claiming it "sanitizes class inequality by framing it in terms of mutual support and even love" (320). APTCH, meanwhile, highlights such class inequality, as Elizabeth, ensconced in her Ash Park estate, sits in stark contrast to the disenfranchised of 1950s Australia.

Ash Park's walls cannot block out an increasingly multicultural world. When the family attends plays and watches movies (e.g., *South Pacific*, *Twelve Mile Reef*, *Roman Holiday*), purchases home decor (e.g., Asian wallpaper motifs, Middle Eastern furniture and textiles), listens and dances to music (e.g., *Come On-A My House*, El Negro Zumbón/*The Black Buzz*), and reads books (e.g., *Giant*, *They're A Weird Mob*) they encounter themes of intercultural exchange and/or conflict, some in oversimplified, stereotypical, and/or racist ways. Thus, when Gino wants to profess his love, he sings *O Sole O Mio* in the Neapolitan language to Anna at the church fete, hoping to break through Elizabeth's façade of steely resistance (S1E2).

APTCH depicts the personal costs of living in a society characterized by a rigid social hierarchy, cultural conformity, and patriarchal families. When Olivia's child is stillborn, she illegally adopts a child born of incest to save her marriage. When Anna tells Gino she is infertile, he annuls their marriage, putting her at odds with social expectations for young women. Even James commits to barbaric, though historically accurate, pseudo-medical interventions to change his sexual

orientation. Lucy Brown argues that historical drama writers engage "'writing back' to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to illuminate previously hidden lives, homosexual and otherwise" (263). APTCH, by exploring hidden lives and struggles of 1950s life, counters the idyllic misconceptions that social historian Stephanie Coontz argues audiences derive from old television programs: "contrary to popular opinion, 'Leave it to Beaver' was not a documentary" (29). In the world of APTCH image belies reality, as demonstrated when James and his lover Dr. Henry Fox (Tim Draxl) go to see a romantic movie along with a lesbian couple so the quartet can pose as two heterosexual couples (s4, e3).

APTCH's characters are primarily white, a frequent criticism of historical dramas, but the series explores how in the 1950s full white privilege requires British ancestry, Protestant Christianity, and social standing. Nurse Sarah, who is Jewish, faces police harassment, gossip, and anti-Semitic slurs while Gino is beaten, harassed, and called names (e.g., dago, wop, eyetie) for dating and marrying Anna. Jewish and Italian people in the 1950s were considered ethnic and not white in the way Elizabeth is regarded as white. Elizabeth's whiteness is symbolically reinforced through her choice of pastime, tending her English rose garden, as well as in the bride she selects for James: Olivia, "an English rose" as one profile identifies her ("An English Rose").

Changing standards of whiteness over time illustrate cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall's assertion that race is a "floating" or "sliding signifier" as its meaning changes across time and context (Jhally and Hall). In the show, the character of Frank Gibbs (Aaron Pederson), a painter and Aboriginal veteran who self-identifies as Black, faces life-threatening systemic racism (i.e., racism in medicine) when he passes out on the hospital steps and is dismissed as drunk by Dr. Fox until Sarah diagnoses a diabetic coma (S5E1). Julieann Coombes argues that the barriers faced by First Nations peoples persist to this day and can include "lack of culturally appropriate communication, racism […] and family separation" (4). Doctors refuse to release James from a clinic purporting to cure his homosexuality until his father demands his discharge. Henry and Frank's healthcare disparities can be traced to the same pseudo-medicine that pathologized and marginalized people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals. Gender scholar Siobhan Somerville argues that "early twentieth-century scientific discourses around race became available to sexologists and physicians as a way to articulate emerging models of homosexuality" (264-65). Given this history of medical marginalization, it is not surprising that the National

Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities designates people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals as health disparity populations even today.

Across six seasons audiences watch the Bligh family evolve from an elitist dynasty to a culturally diverse, chosen family headed by an interfaith couple by series end. The reimagined Bligh family is united through fellowship and love rather than blood and marriage, coming to include: various religions and social classes; a twice-widowed loner; a disabled Aboriginal veteran; and five single parents, including two gay fathers, three divorcees, and a range of political perspectives. Perhaps this reinvention is attributable to the tendency that Brown has noted in some historical dramas like DA to "examine the past with modern, perhaps even rose-colored, sensibilities in mind" (268). However, recent historical dramas, for instance Ryan Murphy's recent Netflix series *Hollywood*, have taken off the rose-colored glasses to deliberately rewrite our classist, racist, and homophobic social histories. Bevan Lee's transformation of the Bligh family is a promising first step in diversifying the popular imagination of an era addicted to images of conformity in service of the heteronormative nuclear family rather than striving for a yet-to-be-realized future that everybody can call home.

Gordon R. Alley-Young
Kingsborough Community College - City University of New York

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That's So Raven. Created by Michael Poryes and Susan Sherman.
Buena Vista Television, 2003-2007. Disney+.

With the recent launch of the Disney+ streaming service, audiences can now revisit
a great deal of the historical Disney catalogue in one location. The numerous
Disney Channel series particularly provide the potential for nostalgic audiences to
revisit the programming from their youth and allows young viewers to engage with
this youth-oriented programming for the first time. Therefore, it is important to
revisit and analyze some of the most influential of these works and explore what
relevance they may have for contemporary viewing. One of the most important
Disney Channel series, for representational and industrial reasons, to reappear
through Disney+ is *That's So Raven* (2003-2007). The show remains relevant
because of its politics of relational empowerment, defined here as encouraging
viewers to find internal confidence through the identification with characters on
screen. The protagonist, Raven Baxter (Raven-Symoné), represents an especially
intriguing intersectional and empowering figure for young audiences.

   That's So Raven centers on Raven, a psychic African American teenager and
aspiring fashion designer. Raven's psychic powers manifest themselves through
visions, with Raven seeing brief flashes of future events. Each episode's narrative
relies on Raven's response to her visions as she tries to ensure or prevent something
from happening. Throughout, Raven, along with her best friends Chelsea
(Anneliese van der Pol), a naïve, nature-loving white girl, and Eddie (Orlando
Brown), an aspiring African American rapper, don various disguises and embark
on wacky adventures. When things invariably fail to go as planned, comedy ensues.

   Raven's – and to a lesser extent her friends' – exploits are in part successful
because of their transformative comedy. In *Divas on Screen: Black Women in*

American Film, Mia Mask identifies the "comedic charisma of transformation," whereby humorous appeal comes from the "playful corporeal performance of various identities, which interrupt and destabilize the status quo" (114). Perhaps the most recurring comedic device used throughout the series is disguise. In most episodes, Raven finds herself in various situations that require costumed infiltrations into spaces where she would not be able to enter herself. In "If I Only Had a Job" (S1E18), Raven disguises herself as a fictional popstar to abuse celebrity privilege and get her father his job back. In "Five Finger Discount" (S3E5), Raven dons a mall cop uniform to prevent her brother from shoplifting. In each instance, Raven's comedic charisma of transformation not only allows the audience to derive pleasure from vicariously playing dress-up, but also through watching Raven destabilize various social boundaries.

The first way to understand how Raven embodies an empowering intersectional figure is through her feminist potential. Undoubtedly, Raven can be viewed through the lens of postfeminist Girl Power, which activates girls to define their own form of femininity. This activation, however, is largely catalyzed through consumerist notions of being able to assemble said definition of femininity through purchasing (Genz and Bradon 79). For this reason, products, and in particular clothing, seem to play an integral part in Girl Power's presentation of femininity. Raven, with her extensive collection of trendy, multi-colored, and high-heeled outfits could easily be read as an embodiment of consumerist Girl Power. Yet Raven's girliness is not created solely through the accumulation of products, but instead comes from individual creation. The majority of the ensembles she puts together are either directly sewn and constructed by Raven or are repurposed from other existing clothes and materials. If Raven's wardrobe is read as an identification of her specific portrayal of femininity, her Girl Power aesthetic is not purchased, but rather, individually constructed.

The intersectional empowerment from Raven continues through her Blackness. The argument can be made – and Treva B. Lindsey has – that Raven's empowering potential lies exclusively in her visibility as an African American girl onscreen, as the show tends not to engage in racially conscious storytelling (23). On some level, this is true: as with most Disney Channel programs, much of the series takes place in a fantasized post-racial utopia; however, one episode in particular, "True Colors" (S3E10), makes sure to emphasize Raven's specifically Black experience. When Raven and Chelsea apply for a retail job, Raven does not get offered a position because the manager "[doesn't] hire Black people." The episode's content is, of

course, handled in a gentle way to make it palatable to young audiences, but the manager's act is described specifically as racist. To expose the manager's behavior, Raven and her friends team up with a local news reporter to catch the manager saying something racist. As Morgan Genevieve Blue writes in her analysis, "the episode simplifies racism as a problem of individual prejudice against Blackness, solved by making the crime and criminal publicly visible" (69). In addition to Blue's reading, the episode also serves as an empowering narrative for Black action against racism. While the series does not explicitly detail dismantling white supremacy as a system, Raven's individual accomplishment makes a difference, which allows the viewer to connect with, and perhaps learn from, her action. Though few episodes engage directly with race as much as this one does, it is an important example of the show's overall goal: to represent and empower Black girls.

Less directly than the two sites of potential empowerment described above, Raven Baxter can be viewed as a relational figure through her queerness. Beyond the obvious queerness of Raven's gender-bending performances of various masculinities and femininities through her many disguises, queer possibility also exists through the character's psychic secret. Throughout the series, Raven only discusses her psychic powers with her closest friends and family members. Frequently referred to as her "secret," Raven fears her psychic abilities becoming publicly known and being ostracized for it. This indirectly represents a facet of queer experience many young queers experience – living with a secret that could lead to othering. The episode "Double Vision" (S3E7) comes closest to an explicit presentation of queerness, as it features a "psychic coming out" storyline. Raven discovers that Ben, a boy at school, is also psychic. The two bond and relate over their shared experiences, which allows Ben to come out to Raven as a psychic. Unlike Raven, Ben has not even shared his secret with his family, and Raven encourages him to be honest with the ones he loves. Though the show never engages directly with queerness – again, unsurprising due to the studio of its creation – Raven's queerness allows for identification, relation, and empowerment.

Through the show's intersectionally empowering comedic figure, Raven Baxter, *That's So Raven* remains an important children's program for understanding how representation is configured for young viewers and nostalgic audiences.

Brecken Hunter Wellborn, MA

Independent Scholar

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POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is an academic, peer-reviewed, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study popular culture. The journal serves the MPCA/ACA membership, as well as scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

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EDITOR

CarrieLynn D. Reinhard, Ph.D.
pcsj@mpcaaca.org

FOR SUBMITTING ARTICLES

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is an academic, peer-reviewed, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study popular culture. The journal serves the MPCA/ACA membership, as well as scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

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Based on analysis of the proceedings of the Midwest PCA/ACA and the national organization reveals that most popular culture scholars are interested in American-based:

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- Literature
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- World Wide Web
- Mobile Computers
- Professional Wrestling
- Archives and Museums
- Food and Drink
- Fairs, Festivals, and Carnivals
- Toys
- DIY and Crafting

However, many scholars approach these topics from an interdisciplinary perspective, which adds significant value over single-issue or more focused/specialized journals.

All contributions to the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* will be forwarded to members of the Editorial Board or other reviewers for comment. Manuscripts must not be previously published, nor should they be submitted for publication elsewhere while being reviewed by the *PCSJ*'s Editorial Board.

Submissions (three documents, MS WORD, MLA) should be submitted via our [PCSJ Google Forms](#).

1) Short Bio: On a separate document, please also include a short (100 words) bio. We will include this upon acceptance and publication.

2) Title Page: A single title page must accompany the email, containing complete contact information (address, phone number, e-mail address).

3) Manuscript: On the first page of the manuscript, only include the article's title, being sure not to include the author's name. The journal employs a "blind review" process, meaning that a copy of the article will be sent to reviewers without revealing the author's name. Please include the works cited with your manuscript.

Essays should range between 15-25 pages of double-spaced text in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, including all images, endnotes, and Works Cited pages. Please note that the 15-page minimum should be 15 pages of written article material. Less than 15 pages of written material will be rejected and the author asked to develop the article further. Essays should also be written in clear US English in the active voice and third person, in a style accessible to the broadest possible audience. Authors should be sensitive to the social implications of language and choose wording free of discriminatory overtones.

For documentation, the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* follows the Modern Language Association style, as articulated by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert in the paperback *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (New York: MLA), and in *The MLA Style Manual (*New York: MLA). The most current editions of both guides will be the requested editions for use. This style calls for a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. This approach reduces the number of notes, which provide further references or explanation.

For punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, and other matters of style, follow the most recent MLA Handbook and the MLA Style Manual, supplemented as

necessary by *The Chicago Manual of Style* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). The most current edition of the guide will be the requested edition for use.

It is essential for authors to check, correct, and bring manuscripts up to date before final submission. Authors should verify facts, names of people, places, and dates, and double-check all direct quotations and entries in the Works Cited list. Manuscripts not in MLA style will be returned without review.

We are happy to receive digital artwork. Please save line artwork (vector graphics) as Encapsulated PostScript (EPS) and bitmap files (halftones or photographic images) as Tagged Image Format (TIFF), with a resolution of at least 300 dpi at final size. Do not send native file formats. Please contact the editor for discussion of including artwork.

Upon acceptance of a manuscript, authors are required to sign a form transferring the copyright from the author to the publisher. A copy will be sent to authors at the time of acceptance.

Before final submission, the author will be responsible for obtaining letters of permission for illustrations and for quotations that go beyond "fair use," as defined by current copyright law.

FOR SUBMITTING REVIEWS

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is seeking authors to review works on any aspect of U.S. or international popular culture. In particular, we are interested in books, films, videos, websites, or any other works that critically engage popular culture that have been published, released, or posted in the last two years. We will also consider older seminal pieces that deserve a second look. If you submit a review of the latter, a rationale for the relevance of the review today will be expected.

Reviews should adhere to the ethos of the *PCSJ* and be largely positive with any criticism of the work being constructive in nature. For more information about this journal, please visit: mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal.

Written reviews should be roughly 800-1,000 words and should be typed, double-spaced with 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Research and documentation must adhere *to The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and *The MLA Style Manual*, 8th edition, which requires a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. Punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, and other matters of style must also follow *The MLA Handbook* and *The MLA Style Manual*. If you are interested in submitting any alternative form of review, please contact the reviews editor directly with your proposed format. Guidelines will be determined depending on the proposed format.

Reviews should be sent electronically to Christopher J. Olson at olson429@uwm.edu with **PCSJ Review and the author's last name in the subject line.** Reviews should include both the review and the reviewer's complete contact information (name, university affiliation, address and email). Reviews should be sent as Microsoft Word attachments in .doc or .docx format, unless an alternative format has been approved by the editor.

If you are interested in reviewing for the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* or if you are an author or publisher with a work you would like to have reviewed, then please contact Christopher at the following address or email:

Christopher J. Olson, Reviews Editor
Email: olson429@uwm.edu

FOR REVIEWING ARTICLES

Our reviewers are important to us. We appreciate their service as well as the significant role our reviews play in ensuring quality of our publication.

If you are interested in being part of the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* as a reviewer, please complete our online form (mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal/for-article-reviewers).

For our reviewers who would like a certificate for service, please complete our online form (mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal/for-article-reviewers).

Upcoming Special Issues

In addition to *PCSJ* calls for ongoing journal and reviews submissions (above), we are also planning for special issues. In other words, the special issues will appear alongside *PCSJ* articles and reviews in upcoming volumes. If you have an idea of a special issue, please contact CarrieLynn D. Reinhard at pcsj@mpcaaca.org.

April 2021: Robots and Labor in Popular culture
October 2021: Serious Play: Legitimizing Live Streaming as Pop Culture

MidwestPCA/ACA

The Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association is a regional branch of the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association. The organization held its first conference in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1973. After a five-year hiatus during the 1990s, the organization held a come-back conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 2002.

MPCA/ACA usually holds its annual conference in a large Midwestern city in the United States. In the last several years, conferences have been held in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio. Upcoming conferences will be held in Missouri and Indiana. The conference typically is held in October.

Anyone is welcome to join and submit proposals for consideration at the MPCA/ACA conference. Membership in MPCA/ACA is by no means limited to those working or living in the Midwest or even the United States. In fact, presenters have come from as far away as Florida and California, and Norway and Australia.

POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL