

Netherlands American Studies Review

Spring 2022

NETHERLANDS **NASA**
AMERICAN  STUDIES 
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Welcome

to the fifth edition of the Netherlands American Studies Review, the bi-annual student journal of the Netherlands American Studies Association (NASA). Our aim is to showcase excellent student work related to North American history, politics, literature, and society written at Dutch universities.

In this Spring 2022 issue, you will find nine carefully selected pieces that reflect the topical diversity and interdisciplinary nature of our field in the Netherlands. Our contributors cover a wide variety of issues, ranging from Cold War feminism to antebellum Southern literature and from LGBTQ+ representation in Westerns to African American participation in blackface performances. These papers were written by students in different stages of their higher education, ranging from the early years of their bachelor's to the final stages of their PhDs.

We are thankful for all the students who sent us their work, for the editors who worked tirelessly to select and fine-tune these papers, and, of course, for the NASA Board, which has supported us throughout the process. We are proud of the final product and hope it will inspire you as much as it did us.

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ISSN: 2772-4492

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Look What You Made Me Do: The Polemics of Female Country Stars and Politics

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*This paper was written for the course Music, Politics, and Resistance
the ReMA program in Arts, Media and Literary Studies*

“In the past I’ve been reluctant to publicly voice my political opinions,” American country singer Taylor Swift wrote in a public statement on her Instagram account in 2018. Nevertheless, the artist decided to take a public stand against the Republican Party. Swift had good reasons for being reluctant to voice her political opinion. The country genre is known to attract conservative sentiments that are deeply rooted in the Southern and Central parts of the United States, from where the music originates. In those red states, liberal, progressive, and democratic opinions and statements are often considered undesirable. When Natalie Maines, lead vocalist of the American country band ‘the Chicks’ (formerly known as ‘the Dixie Chicks’), said during a London concert in 2003 that her band was “ashamed that the President of the United States is from Texas,” her statement caused a lasting scandal. Consequently, the band was blacklisted from radio stations and people gathered publicly to burn their CDs. Fifteen years later, when Swift endorsed liberal politicians and publicly announced her progressive political stance, the public reaction was much less critical. Although the Chicks and Swift both faced specific misogynistic slurs meant to undermine their reputations, Swift continued to have many supporters, while the Chicks' careers were destroyed.

In this essay, I argue that the Chicks controversy created new opportunities for women to make political statements in country music. Moreover, the band’s outspokenness generated a progressive shift in genre expectations between 2003 and 2018 that allowed female artists to step out of the apolitical domestic space. In examining this dynamic, I will explore the role of female country artists by analyzing responses to liberal political statements by the Chicks and Taylor Swift. First, I will analyze the Chicks’ public image within country genre conventions, paying particular attention to the gender stereotypes. Second, I will address Swift’s political views and its reception, focusing on views on ‘femininity’ and ‘girlhood’. Last, I will consider why Swifts’ and the Chicks’ backlash differed from each other in terms of consequences.

The Chicks started as a US country band in Dallas in 1989. On March 10, 2003, nine days before the American troops invaded Iraq, they gave their controversial concert at the Shepherd’s Bush theater in London. Their critical statement about President Bush reached the North American continent within hours and was broadcast all over the media, especially in Texas. As mentioned earlier, American country stations that had praised the Chicks earlier now began boycotting their records and placed trash cans in front of their studios so that the

band's CDs could be destroyed. What followed were insults and death threats towards the artists, with some commentators claiming on live television that the chicks "are the dumbest bimbos (...) I have seen" and that "these are callow, foolish women who deserve to be slapped around."¹ These misogynistic references exposed that public outrage was not only based on claimed unpatriotic expressions. Instead, the resistance revealed that the Chicks did not adhere to conventional gender-specific expectations in the country genre.

Industry statistics indicate that female country artists have been severely underrepresented and receive less airtime than their male counterparts.² Even the most successful female country singers get only a small fraction of the commercial success and critical acclaim of their male counterparts. Cultural scholar Molly Brost argues that this gender imbalance is linked to implicit "genre-specific authenticity" norms that country musicians are expected to obey.³ In popular culture in general, female artists are often subject to gender-specific conventions. Americanist Gayle Wald identified the "trivialization, marginalization, and eroticization" of women in popular culture.⁴ According to Wald, the music industry imposes these harmful musicological, aesthetic, and visual representation strategies imposed on women.⁵ In country music, these gendered conventions derive from the US conservative origins of the genre. As sociologist Gabriel Rossman points out: "Country music has always been associated with pastoral white America and its values, such as independence, patriotism, and religion."⁶ Political scientist Lesley Pruitt further incorporates the gendered component, arguing that discourses dominate where men exhibit "aggressiveness, reason, rationality, and protection; women should demonstrate the corresponding feminine attributes: peacefulness, caring, emotion, and vulnerability."⁷ As Brost emphasizes, the expectation that female country singers should always and everywhere embody 'traditional' femininity is impossible to meet.⁸

Within the conservative and male-dominated country genre, women must above all embody 'home', as cultural scholar Pamela Fox points out.⁹ These domestic influences uphold traditional, conservative stereotypes of women as wives and mothers. Musicologist Lane Crothers further identifies "women as wives and mothers" as one of four stereotypes of women in popular culture.¹⁰ Therefore, women in country music are mainly placed in the apolitical domestic space. When female country artists express their political opinions, they disrupt the gendered expectations that are imposed on them. Fox further observes that the achievement of being musically successful constitutes female country musicians as "distinctly gendered 'failures' of country authenticity."¹¹ Moreover, by "'choosing' the tour bus," female country artists lost their claim to 'home' altogether.¹² The outrage around the Dixie Chicks involves the idea that the female musicians removed themselves from the domesticity of country music.¹³ They left America and had abandoned American ideologies on tour in Europe. Such transgressive acts of breaking gender expectations in country music can be linked to the concept of 'inauthenticity' in popular culture studies. 'Authenticity' is a critical term in which each genre creates its own traits and expectations. By articulating political opinions that opposed country music's conservative views, critics now viewed the Chicks' public image as 'inauthentic'. The public perception of the Chicks as representatives of country music, a genre they had dominated for years, was no longer compatible with the newly discovered political outspokenness of female artists.

One of the reasons for the fierce reaction to Maine's statement could be the domestic political situation in the US in 2003. As Brost argues, the country was still trapped in the trauma of 9/11 and the Chick's controversy should be examined within this time frame.¹⁴ The 9/11 attacks led to an expansion of presidential power as Bush declared the 'war on terror' and expanded the powers of government to pursue military action abroad and gather American intelligence.¹⁵ Bush's approval rates increased while the Dixie Chicks announced their dislike of the president's politics.¹⁶ Hence, a comment like Maine's publicly criticizing the president was unacceptable to conservative patriots, which included many country listeners.¹⁷ The fact that the statement was made in Europe was perceived as particularly hurtful because national pride was violated in the face of other nationalities.¹⁸

Philosopher Claire Katz argues that the Dixie Chicks "were not simply called unpatriotic, they were called 'Dixie Sluts' and 'Dixie Bitches'."¹⁹ These terms were only used for women who "act contrary to the prescribed passive role assigned to them."²⁰ Brost illustrates in her essay on country artist Carrie Underwood that "it is impossible to deny that the Chicks have had an influence on the female singers who have appeared on the scene in the years since 2003."²¹ She claims that transgressive behavior by female country artists is now more tolerated because of the controversy surrounding the Chicks. Although the Chicks are no longer active participants in the mainstream country genre, "their musical example lives on in singers like Underwood, Wilson, Lambert, and even Taylor Swift."²²

In an interview with *The Guardian* in 2019, Swift acknowledged the Dixie Chicks controversy:

I come from *country music*. The number one thing they absolutely drill into you as a country artist (...) is 'Don't be like the Dixie Chicks!' (...) I watched country music snuff that candle out. The most amazing group we had, just because they talked about politics. And they were getting death threats. They were made such an example that basically every country artist that came after that, every label tells you, 'Just do not get involved, no matter what.'²³

During Swift's career, which started at seventeen with the debut album *Taylor Swift* in 2006, she maintained the image of America's sweetheart. However, critics often labeled the artist as untalented and vocally weak, which can be related to the fact that she is a female musician. Musicologist Travis Stimeling argues that criticism of Swift is rooted in the widespread belief that "pop stars – typically, but not exclusively, young women – lack the musical talent necessary for a successful music career."²⁴ However, through modern recording technology and the media, they "can convince audiences of their musical prowess."²⁵ Stimeling refers to a "gendered rhetoric of inauthenticity" that serves solely to denigrate female pop stars.²⁶ This positioning of adult women as girls, and viewing them as inferior, can be observed in 'girl culture'. According to Wald, girl culture refers to "popular cultural practices that (...) constructs girlness as a separate, exceptional, and/or pivotal phase in female identity formation."²⁷ Within this view, girls are also assumed to still be in the process of becoming adults and need not be taken seriously.

This child rhetoric has also been used with the Dixie Chicks controversy. As Pruitt points out “following the notion that women are immature and unable to think rationally, the Dixie Chicks were represented as irrational and childlike” in such a way as they were perceived as girls and not as autonomous women.²⁸ Feminist musicologist Jacqueline Warwick addresses the challenges and problems with girl culture and emphasizes that girls “have little social power, and their interests and concerns are often regarded with derision (if they are noticed at all).”²⁹ Warwick characterizes girl culture as a “training ground for repressive womanhood,” which correlates with the social oppression of women in popular culture.³⁰ She differentiates between ‘girlhood’ and ‘girlness’, in which ‘girlhood’ points to underage women who are no longer seen as children but not yet as women. ‘Girlness’, on the other hand, refers to behaviors that can be channeled by children and women, as well as by men, at any time.³¹ This concept is often identified with love stories, heartbreak, and friendship as common themes.

Swift performs ‘girlness’ as part of her persona, and political engagement, strength, and resilience are traits typically excluded from this type of expression. Voicing a political opinion as a woman then becomes a transgressive act, since it contradicts the expectations of ‘girlness’ as sweet, innocent, and volatile. Swift is notably identified with White femininity and has been repeatedly criticized in that regard.³² Nonetheless, in 2018, when Swift began making public political statements during the US midterm elections, her post was liked by more than two million people.³³ While many people have taken a positive stance on Swift’s political statements, there were negative reactions as well. For example, she was accused of speaking out too late and acting ‘non-performatively’. Non-performativity, according to feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, describes how institutions express inclusive and liberal stances without enforcing them or contributing to the cause.³⁴ Instead of only considering institutions to be capable of this, Swift’s example shows that public figures, too, can act non-performatively. An example of this is how American media personality Kim Kardashian did not endorse Joe Biden during the 2020 American presidential campaign, but instead announced their support for him after he had won the election.³⁵

After Swift issued her political statement, conservative fans felt offended and called on the artist to exclusively focus on her music. They further claimed that she was especially harming her young female listeners with political statements.³⁶ Former US President Donald Trump said at the time in response to Swift’s posts that he would like “Taylor’s music about 25% less now,” ridiculing the artist and positioning her opinion as irrelevant.³⁷ In addition to this, Swift’s act has been mocked by critics who argued both she and her fans have no political power. This claim highlights the diminutive perception of girls that Warwick identifies, since Swift performs girlhood as part of her public persona. Swift and her fan base are portrayed as childish and immature, as though they do not know what they are advocating for. While this rhetoric has also been used with the Chicks, as mentioned earlier, Swift and her fans now became associated with ‘girlness’ and ‘girlhood’ as well. The artist is often juxtaposed like a Barbie, which Warwick identified as “the very nadir (i.e. low point) of girliness.”³⁸

When Swift published her Instagram post, a surge in voter registrations could be seen, as reported by the US platform *Vote.org*.³⁹ This action indicates that the perception of Swift’s

'girlness' as socially and politically weak is unjustified. Interestingly, downplaying Swift's political power may have contributed to her not being prosecuted as harshly as the Chicks', since she was not taken as seriously. Nevertheless, as argued by Brost: "For a female country performer, the consequences of stepping outside prescribed genre boundaries can be especially harsh."¹⁰ While Swift has received criticism from conservative sources like that of the Chicks, she has been able to withstand criticism from the country genre due to her dual image as a pop artist. Swift has a loyal fan base in the country genre and is popular with pop music audiences as well. Unlike country music, liberal opinions and values are widely shared in the pop genre. This may also be a factor in the reaction to Swift's political involvement since many artists in the pop genre share liberal political views.

This paper has argued that the Chicks provided an impetus for women to make political statements in the country genre. It has been suggested that this change allowed women to step out of the apolitical domestic space. While this argument is partially true, Swift's resilience to criticism cannot be attributed solely to the Chicks' controversy. Swift claimed that the band's controversy first prevented her from making her political opinions publicly known. It was only after the artist established herself as a pop musician that she dared to make political statements, which she was urged to do, in her own words "due to several events in my life and in the world the past two years."¹¹ It is also possible that former Trump's controversial presidency normalized political disapproval by artists, as many public figures spoke out against his administration. Furthermore, it is arguable that Swift and her fan base were simply underestimated, in the sense that her statements were not perceived as threatening as the Chicks'.

After expressing their political criticism, the Chicks were aggressively targeted in 2003, particularly because they violated gender conventions. The backlash surrounding their and Swift's political expression shows that country artists are often reduced to such gender conventions. Swift and her audience were presumed to be entitled to informed valid opinions and political influence. However, voting statistics reveal that this was a misconception, since increased registrations can be attributed to Swift's social media post. Critique on both female performers indicates that women in country music continue to face gendered conventions and risk subjection to condemnation for 'transgressive' political behavior.

Notes

¹ *Dixie Chicks: Shut up and Sing*, directed by Barbara Kopple and Cecilia Peck (New York: Weinstein Company, 2006), 00:41:10.

² Jada E. Watson, *Gender Representation On Country Format Radio: A Study Of Published Reports From 2000-2018*, SongData (Nashville, 2019), <https://songdata.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SongData-Watson-Country-Airplay-Study-FullReport-April2019.pdf>.

³ Molly Brost, "Post-Dixie Chicks Country: Carrie Underwood and the Negotiation of Feminist Country Identity," in *The Politics of Post-9/11 Music: Sound, Trauma, and the Music Industry in the Time of Terror*, eds. Joseph P. Fisher and Brian Flota (New York: Ashgate, 2011), 161.

⁴ Gayle Wald, "Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth," *Signs* 23.3 (1998): 588.

⁵ *Ibid.*

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- ⁶ Gabriel Rossman, "Elites, Masses, and Media Blacklists: The Dixie Chicks Controversy," *Social Forces* 83.1 (2004): 68.
- ⁷ Lesley Pruitt, "Real Men Kill and a Lady Never Talks Back: Gender Goes to War in Country Music," *International Journal on World Peace* 24.4 (2007): 86.
- ⁸ Brost, "Post-Dixie Chicks Country," 162.
- ⁹ Pamela Fox, "Recycled 'Trash': Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography," *American Quarterly* 50.2 (1998): 244.
- ¹⁰ Lane Crothers, *Globalization and American Popular Culture*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 66.
- ¹¹ Brost, "Post-Dixie Chicks Country," 244.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 168.
- ¹⁵ Franz-Josef Meiers, "The Return of the Imperial Presidency? The President, Congress, and U.S. Foreign Policy after 11 September 2001," *American Studies* 55.2 (2010): 249-286.
- ¹⁶ Gary Langer, "Poll: Bush Approval Rating 92 Percent," *ABC News*, October 1, 2001.
- ¹⁷ Brost, "Post-Dixie Chicks Country," 169.
- ¹⁸ Josh Tyrangiel, "Chicks in the Line of Fire," *Time*, May 21, 2006.
- ¹⁹ Claire Katz, "'The Eternal Irony of the Community': Prophecy, Patriotism, and the Dixie Chicks," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 26.4 (2008): 151.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Brost, "Post-Dixie Chicks Country," 169.
- ²² Ibid., 170.
- ²³ Laura Snapes, "Taylor Swift: 'I Was Literally about to Break'," *The Guardian*, August 24, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/aug/24/taylor-swift-pop-music-hunger-games-gladiators>.
- ²⁴ Travis Stimeling, "Taylor Swift's 'Pitch Problem' and the Place of Adolescent Girls in Country Music," in *Country Boys and Redneck Women: New Essays in Gender and Country Music* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 85.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Wald, "Just a Girl?," 587.
- ²⁸ Gabriel Rossman, "Elites, Masses, and Media Blacklists: The Dixie Chicks Controversy," *Social Forces* 83.1 (2004): 90.
- ²⁹ Jacqueline C. Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid., 3.
- ³² Tyler Bickford, "The Whiteness of Tween Innocence," in *Tween Pop: Children's Music and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020): 106-139.
- ³³ Claudia Rosenbaum, "Taylor Swift's Instagram Post Has Caused A Massive Spike In Voter Registration," *BuzzFeed News* (BuzzFeed News, October 9, 2018), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/claudiarosenbaum/taylor-swift-voter-registration-spike>.
- ³⁴ Sara Ahmed, "The Nonperformativity of Antiracism," *Meridians* 7.1 (2006): 104-126.
- ³⁵ Tayo Bero, "Celebs Who Didn't Endorse Biden-Harris Were Still Celebrating," *Teen Vogue*, November 11, 2020, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/celebs-who-didnt-endorse-biden-harris>.
- ³⁶ Erin Durkin, "'She just ended her career': Taylor Swift's political post sparks praise and fury," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/oct/08/taylor-swift-instagram-post-endorsement-democrats-tennessee>.
- ³⁷ Rosenbaum, "Taylor Swift's Instagram Post Has Caused A Massive Spike In Voter Registration."
- ³⁸ Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*, 2.
- ³⁹ Lisa Respers France, "Voter Registration Reportedly Spikes After Taylor Swift Post," *CNN*, October 9, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/09/entertainment/taylor-swift-voter-registration/index.html>.
- ⁴⁰ Brost, "Post-Dixie Chicks Country," 170.
- ⁴¹ Snapes, "Taylor Swift: 'I Was Literally about to Break.'"

The Importance of Deregionalizing Southern Antebellum Literature, 1824-1856

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This paper is based on a thesis written for the MA program in North American Studies

The American antebellum period produced many literary figures that remain famous to this day, including short story writer Washington Irving, essayists Ralph Waldo Emerson, writer Henry David Thoreau, and late-antebellum poet Walt Whitman. Perhaps even more famous still is Harriet Beecher-Stowe, who instantly became a household name among the American public after publishing the antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Today, the literature written by these writers greatly influences our collective perception of antebellum thought and culture, from Emerson's ideal of self-reliance to Stowe's abolitionist activism. Notably, these writers were all born and raised in the American Northeast. Public knowledge of their Southern counterparts, such as William Gilmore Simms or John Pendleton Kennedy, is close to non-existent. Even within academic circles, research on Southern antebellum literature is narrowly defined and limited to measuring the proslavery literature of the South against the abolitionist literature of the North. This is a phenomenon I refer to as the 'North versus South dichotomy', which suggests that the antebellum South is generally juxtaposed against the North for the purpose of explaining the causes of the American Civil War.

A major problem with the North versus South dichotomy is the presupposition of an inherent sectionalism between the antebellum North and South. Academics have historically assumed that within this sectional view, the North should be seen as the 'true' United States, representing 'true' American values, whereas the South should be considered a regional power, desperately holding on to their outdated worldviews. This is especially true with regard to Southern literature, where this dichotomy is used to relegate Southern novels to the realm of regionalism, while Northern novels are generally seen as 'American'. Examples of this process of othering the South can be found throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. In 1941, *The Mind of the South* author Wilbur J. Cash described the antebellum South as largely illiterate, arguing that Southern institutions had "no record that it ever added a single idea of any notable importance to the sum total of man's stock."¹ He even claimed that "leaving Mr. Jefferson aside, the whole South produced, not only no original philosopher, but no derivative one to set beside Emerson and Thoreau."² The process of regionalizing the South would continue. In 1987, literary scholar George Dekker wrote about Southern literary figures that "their best work is clearly inferior to that of Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville."³ Dekker claimed that Southern novelists wrote in order "to preserve a regional identity (...) against the dominant national culture."⁴ These types of juxtapositions have also been made more recently, albeit less forcefully. For example, in 2015, literary scholar Katherine Burnett

argued that “the [United States] had split into two distinct regional factions over the continued existence of slavery.”⁵

Scholars have historically juxtaposed the North and the South to point to inherent differences between the two regions in order to explain the Civil War, but this narrative has notably been questioned in 2010 by literary scholar Jennifer Rae Greeson. She has framed the North versus South dichotomy in the context of ‘internal othering’. Othering is usually understood as a process wherein the differences with other nations or cultures are enlarged in order to construct a national self-image. However, Greeson explained that this phenomenon is also applicable to the South as a region, describing it as positioned in “a different juxtaposition. As an internal other from the start of U.S. existence,” a place that “lies simultaneously inside and outside the national imaginary constructed in U.S. literature.”⁶ She argued that the othering of the South is used to create distance between itself and “a guilty colonial past.”⁷ Greeson’s analysis exposes how and why the field of literary studies has upheld the North versus South dichotomy.

Even though modern scholars are more open to investigating the connections between North and South, there is still a tendency to view these regions as inherently different. Like Greeson, I will argue that the North versus South dichotomy has historically served as a tool to regionalize American racism. Additionally, I will argue that the modern focus on Southern slavery is a consequence of this regionalization. By focusing solely on the regional divide over the issue of slavery, we fail to correctly identify institutional slavery as part of a broader culture of racial stratification within the US. White domination and exploitation of other racial groups needed to be maintained through cultural legitimization, which can be identified within antebellum literature. In order to provide evidence for these claims, I will juxtapose antebellum proslavery literature with antebellum frontier literature. Where the former aimed to legitimize White supremacy over African Americans, the latter uses similar legitimization for White domination over Native Americans. Comparing the historic treatment of Native Americans with the atrocities of slave labor helps us confront the continuing legacy of racism, not only in the South, but throughout the US. Another downside of the dichotomy is the focus on a narrative influenced by White historic discourse, which undervalues the impact of the voices and actions of people of color.

One genre that laid the basis for this dichotomy was the plantation romance novel, which became a well-known staple of American literature in the nineteenth century. Starting with Virginian politician George Tucker’s *The Valley of Shenandoah* (1824), the plantation romance novel described the pastoral South as a world where the slaveowner was struck with grief when he was forced to sell a slave, or when a slave died.⁸ Because of the aggrandizing of slaveowners and the attempt to cover up the atrocities of slavery, these stories are known as ‘plantation myths’. Within Tucker’s romance we can discover tropes that would remain popular throughout the antebellum. Slaves are portrayed as loyal towards their masters. This is conveyed within the novel through the son of the plantation owner, Edward, who is forced to sell the family slaves during an economic downturn. Edward laments that “the debts which have come against [his] father’s estate will make it necessary that the plantation should be

broken up” to which Uncle Bristow, one of the elder slaves responds “with an accent of alarm... ‘What! Nigger and all?’”⁹ Bristow’s responses are described as the “lamentations of [an] affectionate slave.”¹⁰ Evidently, Tucker tries to explain that slaves do not want to be sold because they have a strong sense of loyalty towards their master.

Within the story, this loyalty is described as a product of a paternal slaveowner who is kind towards his slaves, “because it pleases [him] to see them happy.”¹¹ This myth of the kind slaveowner is accompanied by the myth of the happy slave. When one of the White characters, Jones, watches the laboring slaves sing, “he [is] amused at seeing the alacrity [willingness] of the slaves, and hearing their rude songs in gathering fodder.”¹² In this story, the slaves are not just happy, but they are specifically happy to work as slaves.

Lastly, the genre conveyed the myth that plantations were akin to a family, with the slaveowner as the father, functioning as the head of the household. Within this family unit, slaves functioned as children. Infantilization is psychologically considered to be a component of dehumanization, used, in this case, to ignore the notion that the slaves can adequately think for themselves.¹³ *The Valley of Shenandoah* portrays the selling of slaves as the breaking up of a family, a process that “seemed to be even more painful” for the slaves than for the slaveowner.¹⁴ Uncle Bristow asks Grayson, “‘Will you sell the pictures too?’ (...) pointing to several family portraits.”¹⁵ They continue to reminisce over old ‘family members’ in the pictures, who have passed away, as Master Grayson promises that he “shall not part” with the pictures, confirming the familial bond.¹⁶ All of these myths would remain common until, and even after, the Civil War.

Literary scholars have argued that plantation myth novels were part of a Southern reactionary movement against early abolitionism. From 1830 onwards, the most famous abolitionist at the time, William Lloyd Garrison, printed pamphlets to protest slavery. In 1831 he called Southern slavery a place of “hidden depravity and vice... [such as] sexual abuse and torture.”¹⁷ Greeson refers to this as the ‘reimagining’ of the South, meaning that these pamphlets were written to affirm the otherness of the slave states. She argues that plantation myth novels were written as a direct response to these abolitionist portrayals of the South.¹⁸ An obvious problem with this theory is that the first plantation myth novel was written well before 1831.

It is true that Southern proslavery novelists defended their ideals against Northern abolitionists. However, proslavery literature was not exclusively written as a response to Northern abolitionism. Perhaps the biggest influence on Southern proslavery literature were the numerous slave rebellions throughout American history. In 1822, Denmark Vesey, a Black man born into slavery, was sold to a Bermudan slaveowner, who later resettled in South Carolina. Here, Vesey organized a rebellion against the White population. He had read antislavery literature and planned an uprising with hundreds of followers. After the White population had arrested everyone thought to be involved, thirty-two Black people were exiled, and thirty-five more were hanged. Four White men were tried as well, who were then fined and briefly imprisoned for inciting rebellion.¹⁹ Clearly, a much lighter punishment than Black people received. The fact that these four White men had supported the rebellion fit into the dominant narrative of antebellum America. As historian Philip F. Rubio writes, it was believed

that “slaves were not capable of staging uprisings unless manipulated by alien agitators.”²⁰ The people most often blamed were White ‘agitators’. This belief took away the agency, individuality, and humanity of African American slaves, which aided the perpetuation of White superiority.

The reality that slaves rebelled frequently prompted proslavery Whites to legitimize the morality of slavery. For this purpose, infantilization was a powerful tool. By portraying Black slaves as childlike, their desire for freedom could be blamed on a small group of White troublemakers, who ‘tricked’ slaves into rejecting slavery. The clearest example of literature dehumanizing slaves through these mechanisms is Robert Montgomery Bird’s *Sheppard Lee* (1836).

In this novel, the main character, Sheppard Lee, is magically transported into the bodies of several people who represent different groups of American society. One of the bodies he inhabits is that of a Black slave. The name Bird gave to the slave was “Nigger Tom” (henceforth referred to as Tom). As a White man inhabiting a Black body, he becomes the only literate slave on the plantation and is characterized as intellectually superior to the other slaves. When Lee meets the slaves, he assumes they want freedom and devises a plan to convince them to rebel. He does this with the aid of abolitionist pamphlets from the North, clearly a reference to the pamphlets distributed by Garrison and the emerging abolitionist movement. Initially, the slaves are weary. “Don’t b’leeb in ‘m ,” said Governor, one of the slaves, referring to the abolitionists. “Who says chain nigga in Vaginnee?.. An’t I slave, hah? Who chains Gubbe’nor? (...) Little book big lie!”²¹ Here Bird tries to counter the abolitionist arguments of the enchaining of slaves. Bird claims that slaves were freer than abolitionists suggested.

Eventually, Tom makes the slaves question their freedom. These fictionalized slaves do not possess the capacity to think of rebellion by themselves. When writing on the question of freedom, Bird addresses his audience directly to say that “that question had never before been asked on Ridgewood Hill. But all now asked it, and all, for the first time in their lives, began to think of their master as a foe and usurper.”²² It was not the slaves, but a White man with Northern abolitionist propaganda, who ‘tricked’ the slaves into insurrection.

The story continues to convey the idea that slaves do not have the mental capacity to be civilized free men. Governor immediately turns against Christian values and towards bloodlust, saying “I’ll be de great man, and I shall hab my choice ob de women,” and “[w]e shall have wifes enough when we kills white massas.”²³ Shepard Lee realizes his mistake, but he is too late, the entire White family is murdered and eventually Tom is caught and hanged.²⁴ Bird concludes this section of the novel by warning his audience once again of the dangers of abolitionist literature: “The power of that little pamphlet (...) was shown in the numbers of wretches by whom the prison was crowded; for it had been used to inflame the passions of the negroes on several different estates.”²⁵ Bird could not thus conceive of the possibility that slaves would revolt on their own accord, because of their own struggle for humanity. Before abolitionism became popular, local White agitators were blamed. Now the blame could be shifted towards Northern abolitionists, reinventing slave rebellion, as if it were invented and instigated by outside agitators instead.

Sheppard Lee reaffirms that the South blamed Northern abolitionists for the slave rebellions, taking away the agency of the enslaved. By denying African American slaves narrative power, instead giving it to other White people, the South was unknowingly shaping the North versus South dichotomy. Not because they wanted to schismatize with the North, but because they wanted to distance themselves from the atrocities of the slave system. By accepting that Southern proslavery literature solely acted in opposition to the North, as is the case with the North versus South dichotomy, we view history through a White perspective, and perpetuate attempts to minimize the impact of Southern slaves on antebellum history.

The tradition of overemphasizing the importance of Northern abolitionism on Southern antebellum literature has led to the image of Southern novelists preoccupied with defending slavery. Although this was indeed an important part of Southern literature, the justification of slavery in the plantation romance novels was only one of the ways Southern writers tried to reaffirm White superiority. The most prevalent example being the litany of frontier novels written in the 1830s. These were novels that helped to build an ideological justification for the genocide of Native Americans. By comparing plantation romance novels and frontier literature, we can discover similarities between the dehumanization of racialized communities and the affirmation of White superiority. Simultaneously, the similarities between these types of novels undermine the North versus South dichotomy, as the displacement and genocide of Native Americans were not specifically Southern phenomena.

Frontier novels were especially popular in the 1830s. This is no coincidence, since these novels directly responded to the infamous Trail of Tears of 1830 and the Black Hawk War of 1832 (the Black Hawk War was essentially a failed uprising against the forced expulsion of Northern Native American tribes). These political events were largely ignored by antebellum novelists. Instead, they wrote about historical events, while pretending that, in their own time, Native Americans had already essentially gone extinct.

While ignoring the presence of Native Americans, novelists did respond to other Whites, who they accused of romanticizing Native Americans. One of these critics was Bird himself. In the preliminary notes to his best sold work, frontier novel *Nick of the Woods* (1837), he notes that “the North American savage has never appeared to us the gallant and heroic personage he seems to others,” criticizing positive depictions of Native Americans.²⁶ Even though the nickname of the villain in *Nick of the Woods*, Black Vulture, is a clear reference to Black Hawk, Bird never talks about these real-life events, and instead engaged with White discourse.²⁷

As is the case with proslavery literature, within frontier literature there is a refusal to give agency to people of color. For instance, in South Carolinian novelist William Gilmore Simms’ *The Yemassee* (1835), a book about a colonial war between Native Americans and White settlers, Native American agency is taken away by blaming the Spanish for being “at the bottom of the conspiracy.”²⁸ Native Americans are portrayed as dependent on the provision of “hatchets, knives, nails, and gaudy dresses, furnished by Spaniards, who well knew how to tempt and work upon the appetites and imagination of the savages.”²⁹ Although the concrete aspects of the conspiracy are never fully discussed, it is clear that the author tells

a story familiar to their audience: Native Americans are not strong or clever enough to threaten colonists without outside help.

Bird's frontier novel has a more fantastical approach. In *Nick of the Woods*, the Native Americans are controlled by two White men, Abel Doe and Braxley, who try to steal the rightful inheritance of the aristocratic protagonist, Captain Roland. Braxley is a businessman who masterminds a plan to kill Roland and steal his fortune, while Abel Doe is an impoverished White man who needs to implement the idea. Abel Doe becomes a self-proclaimed "White Injun."³⁰ Doe devolves because of his contact with the Native population, as he himself declares "for I have made myself jist the d-dest rascal that was ever made of a white man. Lying, and cheating, and perjuring, and murdering."³¹ One of the many strange examples of Braxley, Doe, and the Native Americans being keenly self-aware of how evil they are. Another example being Wenonga, an Indian chief, who cries out "me drink white-man blood! Me no heart!"³²

Although there are differences in the antebellum White perspective on African Americans and Native Americans, the overarching process of dehumanization is very similar: people of color are considered too uncivilized and unintelligent to form any type of resistance without the aid of White men. Both frontier novels end with the extermination of the Native population, which the authors considered to be happy endings, since Natives, like Wenonga, are portrayed as too dangerous to live. In *Nick of the Woods*, a group of settlers is determined to fight these 'bloodthirsty savages'. In the end, they conquer and annihilate the tribe, while one of the characters "the valiant Dodge, displayed (...) a scalp of black hair" as a victory-token.³³ "The destruction or capture of every inhabitant," is described as an act of heroism.³⁴ Bird dehumanizes Native Americans in such a way that he could justify any horrific genocidal act.

The Yemassee has an ending as gruesome as *Nick of the Woods*. After the Yemassee tribes are destroyed, the settlers send their slaves onto the battlefield where "the negroes, now scour[e] the field of battle with their huge clubs and hatchets, knocking upon the head all of the Indians who yet exhibited any signs of life. As wild almost as the savages, they luxuriated in a pursuit to them so very novel."³⁵ By associating African Americans with the most explicit acts of genocide, Simms manages to uphold White moral superiority, while simultaneously dehumanizing Native Americans and African Americans. It is clear that proslavery novels and frontier novels used very similar tactics to legitimize and uphold White superiority. People of color were seen as incapable of acting independently, and dehumanizing them provided moral justification for subjugation. These racist themes are so predominant throughout both plantation myths and frontier novels, that it makes these novels strikingly similar. The dividing lines created between these types of profoundly racist literature is artificial, as their main purpose is to legitimize the White supremacist worldview.

Common racist tropes of the antebellum were not exclusively used to defend slavery, but were also deployed to defend White superiority. Still, it is true that many writers perpetuating these stereotypes are seen as Southerners today. This does not mean, however, that Southern novels only appealed to Southern audiences. In fact, during the antebellum, these novels were considered American literature.

When proslavery writer, John Pendleton Kennedy published his most successful novel, *Horse-Shoe Robinson, A Tale of Tory Ascendancy* (1835), he put a letter he wrote to Washington Irving into the preface. Irving was a fellow novelist from New York, often remembered for his short stories *Rip van Winkle* (1819) and *Sleepy Hollow* (1820). He was also Kennedy's friend. In this letter, Kennedy thanks Irving for showing him "that an American book may be richly worth reading."³⁶ Although Kennedy was a Southern writer, he still considered both himself and Irving as American novelists. In this preface, Kennedy also directly addresses his audience, stating that "my readers will perceive that I have been scrupulous to preserve the utmost historical accuracy in my narrative."³⁷ With these statements, Kennedy joined an American antebellum convention, proclaiming to write a true American novel based on historical facts.

Simms's *The Yemassee* contains similar sentiments. Simms describes it as a true 'American romance'. One that "is so styled, as much of the material could have been furnished by no other country."³⁸ He also assures the reader of his knowledge of "the general peculiarities of the Indians, in their un-degraded condition," as his "authorities are numerous."³⁹ He finishes his preface by adding "that the leading events are strictly true, and that the outline is to be found in several histories devoted to the region."⁴⁰ These writers were not just writing romance novels: they were creating an American origin myth, promoting their version of American values. Values that included a strong belief in racial stratification.

Claims of historic accuracy and 'Americanness' of novels were clearly thought to be virtues by leading newspaper, too. New York magazine *The Knickerbocker* praised the first volume of *The Yemassee* as a "successful effort to embody the genuine materials of American Romance."⁴¹ When the second volume was released, *The Knickerbocker* released another review, praising the accuracy of the novel, including a description of Simms having "gone into the lodge of the red man, and with the pencil of a painter, has given us living, breathing sketches of aboriginal life."⁴² The review also tried to confirm the accuracy "of early border warfare,- the romance of superstition, and of wild and characteristic savage customs," which the reviewer considered to be "portrayed with a faithfulness and skill, that mark the writer as a correct observer, and a faithful limner."⁴³ Another New York magazine, *The American Monthly Magazine*, described *The Yemassee* as "a historical romance of our own forest-land - rescuing from the oblivion, into which they are too rapidly sinking, a thousand beautiful facts, [and] a thousand fanciful superstitions of the bold spirits."⁴⁴ Praising Simms for preserving White supremacist American history, a version of history that promoted White supremacy.

Even in the late antebellum, when tensions over the Fugitive Slave Act were at their highest, proslavery literature remained positively reviewed by Northern news outlets. *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854), a proslavery novel written by Caroline Lee Hentz, a Northern woman who had moved to the South at the age of twenty-four, was well reviewed by the Philadelphia *Home Magazine*, which praised "her descriptions of social life at the South" as "transcripts upon the truth of which we may depend."⁴⁵ In other publications, like ads for the novel in *The New York Times*, the novel was described as American, calling it "a lofty strain of pure and patriotic sentiment."⁴⁶ All of these major newspapers and magazines

based in the North did not challenge racist depictions of people of color as ahistorical. In fact, the appraisal of historicity was directly tied to American mythmaking. The perceived accuracy of historical claims was, in all of these examples, tied to stories legitimizing White dominance.

All these novels were popular with the public, too. Simms, for instance, was pleasantly surprised that the first edition of *The Yemassee* sold out within a month. In the second edition preface, Simms writes that the “call for a second edition” was “sudden (...) so soon after the first.”⁴⁷ He remarks that “[t]he first edition was a remarkably large one – twenty-five hundred copies – twice the number usually put forth in this country.”⁴⁸ This means that, according to Simms, the novel sold the equivalent of two editions within a month.

Bird’s *Nick of the Woods* was even more popular. *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature* remarks that it was “the best seller of this era.”⁴⁹ The novel managed to sell up to twenty-four American editions, as well as two British, one German, one Dutch, and one Polish edition, making it a transatlantic success.⁵⁰ *The Planter’s Northern Bride* was sold per chapter, but by the time the last chapter was released it had sold an equivalent of almost a hundred thousand copies.⁵¹ In comparison, Thoreau’s *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), released in the same year, only sold 728 copies in its entire first year and was sold overwhelmingly regionally.⁵² Still, authors like Thoreau and Whitman are considered ‘true’ American writers, whereas three writers who outsold these Northerners within a month, are considered regional. Although Whitman and Thoreau are widely considered to be better writers, it is hard to argue that these ‘American’ writers had a bigger impact on antebellum American society than these ‘Southern’ writers. In fact, all the evidence points into the opposite direction.

This paper has been, to a large extent, about othering; an analysis of the in-group devaluating the out-group(s) in order to improve its self-image. Antebellum novelists had a strong sense of the other, and many devoted their time promoting and legitimizing hierarchies that supported White superiority. The books discussed in this article have some striking similarities: White people are portrayed as inherently superior, which legitimizes their place on top of the racial hierarchy where people of color are dehumanized and unable to have any semblance of rationality, unless educated by a White man and, importantly, people of color are not seen as capable of forming resistance, unless aided by White agitators. By focusing on outside agitators their agency was neutralized. The aspect of blaming outside agitators for internal problems could also be seen as another form of othering, specifically portraying ‘agitators’ as un-American outsiders sowing discontent in an otherwise ‘idyllic’ society. The internal realities of the brutality of slavery and Native American genocide could only be legitimized by blaming others for these horrors, when not able to acknowledge the agency of racialized people without undermining the ideology of White superiority. These racist attempts to silence people of color laid the foundation of the North versus South dichotomy. This is therefore a mechanism historians should be aware of, as not to unknowingly perpetuate the silencing of alternative narratives.

Most of the academics discussed in the beginning of this article have unjustly described the South as un-American. As this paper has shown, Southern writers were popular with both

the media and among American readers, more so than Thoreau or Whitman. Describing these Northeastern writers as true American writers, and writers like Simms and Hentz as regional, would have made no sense to an antebellum American. Southern writers were American writers. They were described as such by Northern newspapers and magazines, and sales numbers verify this. Contemporary novelists and media saw their racist values as historically American, using structural racism to construct the American identity. Excluding these factors from the narrative aids the denial of what Mesle calls, “the profound racism of American sentimental culture.”⁵³ It should therefore be concluded that the legacy of American racism is not a Southern problem, but an American problem.

Notes

¹ Wilbur Joseph Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Random House, 1941), 95.

² *Ibid.*, 96.

³ George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 274.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵ Katherine A. Burnett, “The Proslavery Social Problem Novel: Maria J. McIntosh’s Narrative of Reform in the Plantation South,” *College Literature* 42.4 (2015): 624.

⁶ Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-6.

⁸ Nathalie Dessens, *Myths of the Plantation Society: Slavery in the American South and the West Indies* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), 156-157.

⁹ George Tucker, *The Valley of Shenandoah, or, Memoirs of the Graysons, Vol. II* (New York: C. Wiley, Wall-Street, 1825), 196.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹² *Ibid.*, 315.

¹³ Lasana T. Harris, “Dignity Takings and Dehumanization: A Social Neuroscience Perspective,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 92.3 (2017): 726.

¹⁴ Tucker, *The Valley of Shenandoah*, 212.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Greeson, *Our South*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁹ “Denmark Vesey: American Freedman and Insurrectionist,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Denmark-Vesey>; Philip F. Rubio, ““Though He Had A White Face, He Was a Negro In Heart”: Examining the White Men Convicted of Supporting the 1822 Denmark Vesey Slave Insurrection Conspiracy,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 113.1 (2012): 50-51.

²⁰ Rubio, “Though He Had A White Face,” 52.

²¹ Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee, Written by Himself. Vol. II.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), 184.

²² *Ibid.*, 187.

²³ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 203-204.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

²⁶ Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods, or, the Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky*, ed. Cecil B. Williams (New York: American Book Company, 1939), 5.

²⁷ Cecil B. Williams, “Introduction,” in: Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods, or, the Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky*, ed. Cecil B. Williams (New York: American Book Company, 1939), xlii.

²⁸ William Gilmore Simms, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina. Vol. II.* 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844), 51.

²⁹ Simms, *The Yemassee Vol. II.*, 97-98.

³⁰ Bird, *Nick of the Woods*, 313.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 312.

³² *Ibid.*, 334.

³³ *Ibid.*, 394.

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- ³⁴ Ibid., 396.
- ³⁵ Simms, *The Yemassee Vol. II.*, 241-242.
- ³⁶ John Pendleton Kennedy, *Horse-Shoe Robinson: A Tale of Tory Ascendancy* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1835), iii.
- ³⁷ Ibid., xiv.
- ³⁸ William Gilmore Simms, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina. Vol. I.* 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844), vii.
- ³⁹ Simms, *The Yemassee Vol. I.*, vii.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* 5.3 (1835): 260.
- ⁴² *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* 5.4 (1835): 341.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 341-342.
- ⁴⁴ *The American Monthly Magazine* 5.3 (1835): 171.
- ⁴⁵ *Home Magazine* 3.5 (1854): 397.
- ⁴⁶ *New York Daily Times*, March, 1854.
- ⁴⁷ Simms, *The Yemassee Vol. I.*, viii.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Jay Porter, "Historical and Cultural Contexts to Native American Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, eds. Jay Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51.
- ⁵⁰ Williams, "Introduction," xxii.
- ⁵¹ "Caroline Lee Hentz," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed December 2, 2021, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2449>.
- ⁵² Walter Harding, "The First Year's Sales of Thoreau's Walden," *The Thoreau Society Bulletin* 117 (1971): 1-3.
- ⁵³ Sarah Mesle, "Sentimentalism's Nation: Maria J. McIntosh and the Antebellum Contexts of "Southern" Fiction," *Studies in American Fiction* 40.2 (2013): 207.

“Masked Resistance in Plain Sight”:

On the Subversive Contradictions of Blackface in America’s Early Twentieth-Century Spotlights

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This paper was written for the course Rhetoric & Composition IIb in the BA program in American Studies

Blackface is considered to be one of the most controversial elements of American performance history. Commonly known to be practiced by White entertainers as a way of conveying racial stereotypes of African Americans, its history is further complicated by Black performers’ involvement in the practice. This aspect of blackface history is less known, but is certainly not to be left unexposed. Indeed, the participation of Black performers in the blackface tradition demands more exposure in American entertainment historiography as it encompasses striking elements of cultural resistance to racial prejudice that are commonly overlooked. While blackface is usually studied in light of its racist and discriminatory properties, it paradoxically allowed for social commentary on the very issue of racial discrimination. This can be seen most profoundly in the oeuvre of Black performer Bert Williams. Through the eyes of his Black audiences and critics, blackface reveals itself to be a complex multifaceted matter, of which the meaning was constantly negotiated onstage. Blackface gave Black Americans a space to criticize, satirize, and challenge the legitimacy of Jim Crow, allowing Black performers to engage audiences in bold conversations and ultimately shed an authentic light on the life of – what they referred to as – the ‘American Negro’.¹

The practice of blackface had been introduced long before Bert Williams took the stage in the 1890s. In fact, while it is most associated with mid-nineteenth century minstrelsy in the United States, traces of it can be found as early as the medieval period. Performance scholar Ayanna Thompson defines blackface as the using of prosthetics, such as makeup, burnt cork, and masks, to imitate the complexion of another race – a custom that dates back to sixteenth-century European medieval plays and Shakespearean theater.² Thompson describes how blackface made its way to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, where it developed into the genre of minstrelsy. Entertainer Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice is most known for popularizing this genre in 1830, which involved predominantly White men wearing blackface, imitating slaves or freed Black persons through comedic skits and dances. The reoccurring and well-received minstrel characters of Zip Coon and Jim Crow popularized the racist and derogatory characterization of Black slaves further, embedding them in public perception, to the detriment of Black Americans. Thompson’s work shows that, for centuries, the entertainment stages in Europe and America were dominated by blackface and race impersonations by White performers. As she herself concludes:

“European blackface and American minstrelsy alike assume that performing Blackness is a white birthright — that the stage is a white domain in which Blacks are not allowed to tell their own stories, or even enjoy basic dignities.”³

This was still true in the early twentieth century, as Jim Crow and blackface prevailed in the entertainment industry, making it difficult for Black performers to participate. Black artists were often rejected in favor of White acts — particularly blackface acts. In his book *Blacks in Blackface*, film historian Henry Sampson describes how this was a period when many Black performers struggled to find engagements, as White theater managers turned them down to give White acts in blackface theater engagements instead.⁴ Black artists felt financial pressure to ‘cork up’. Sampson quotes Laura Bowman from the *Baltimore Afro-American*, who disclosed that White managers would offer longer bookings if they darkened their faces and sang stereotypical minstrel songs like “Old Black Joe.”⁵ George Walker from the famous Williams and Walker duo, explained that “the opposition on account of racial and color prejudice and white comedians who ‘blackened up’ stood in the way of natural Black performers.”⁶ Blackface was familiar to people and audiences preferred it. Bert Williams experienced this too, recounting how he had no success performing until one day “just for a lark” he blacked his face for a song and it “went like a house on fire.”⁷ Coinciding with Walker’s experience, Black performers like him did not make it big until they gave what audiences most wanted: blackface. Negotiating work and wages thus became a matter of negotiating racial stereotypes.

Labor negotiation was not all that went on behind the black mask, however. At first glance, the use of blackface seems to reflect on the essence of Jim Crow segregation: Black people having to ‘succumb’ to racist rules and White expectations in order to participate in society. This was ostensibly so in the theater profession as well: blackface seemed to be the harsh entrance ticket to the stage. However, blackface proved to be an entrance ticket of a different sort as well: an entryway to enter public discourse. Black performers held audiences in entertained awe with their ‘blackened up’ grins, while their characters and songs opened up space for commentary on Black experiences in early twentieth-century America. Paradoxically, blackface thus became a tool to challenge Jim Crow.

Bert Williams is one of the most famous Black comedians to have performed in blackface, and serves as a good example of this paradox. Though he performed unheroic characters in the derogatory blackface his entire career, the Black public praised him for what he did for the ‘American Negro’. African American educator Booker T. Washington lauded him as being a “tremendous asset to the Negro race,” crediting Williams with doing more for the Black population than Washington had himself.⁸ Although present-day writers describe Williams as having ‘capitulated’ to the demands for the stereotyped caricature, Black writers of his time hailed him as a hero, beaming with near parental pride when Williams gained one success after another.⁹ His Black fans often overwhelmed theaters; one Cleveland theater manager once joked after Williams’s shows, that, of the three million Black Americans, only four were absent at the show that night.¹⁰ The immense appreciation of this blackface performer gives reason to believe Black spectators interpreted his black mask differently than a mere racist stereotype.

This seemingly contradictory reception of blackface performances highlights the importance of an awareness of the ‘White gaze’ that often dominates discourse on this part of America’s entertainment history. Historian Camille Forbes touches on the different White and Black gazes in her article “Dancing with Racial Feet,” where she analyzes Williams’s performance in light of ‘racial performativity.’ Drawing on Judith Butler’s gender performativity theory, she posits that race is performative, and racial identity is “embodied, instituted by repeated enactments that create (...) ‘a constructed identity’ believed by both the performers and the audience.”¹¹ In a sense, racial identity is thus based on the interpretation of others. Forbes further theorizes that Williams ‘performed’ Blackness as a Black man and blackface performer, which was interpreted differently by audiences who had their own ideas of what his performance should signify. White audiences might have viewed his performance in the context of minstrelsy, measuring how authentically he played the minstrel part. Black audiences, on the other hand, might have viewed his act in the context of respectability and representation of Blackness, watching how his act did not “burlesque the race” and trample on “[community] values.”¹² When looking at Williams’s blackface characters and the responses they elicited, it becomes apparent that among Black audiences, there was a complex dichotomy and exchange between blackface as an archetype and blackface as representational of Blackness. This is where that performativity emerges, as, often enough, the meaning of blackface depended on the way audiences chose to read it.

The early twentieth century was a time when Black respectability and representation became increasingly important and closely watched – not in the least onstage. Forbes contextualizes Williams’s theater work within what she defines as the postbellum struggle by Black Americans for racial uplift and the defining of the ‘New Negro’: a process that involved reforming the image of Black people, creating ‘representational visibility,’ and presenting a respectability.¹³ Theater played an important part in this. *New York Age* critic Walter Leston bore evidence to this in 1908 when he stated: “While it is a fact that many whites are influenced by the white man’s characterization of the Negro and Negro life, the colored shows are informing hundreds daily with the great progress the race is making and the current way we talk, dress, sing and carry ourselves generally.”¹⁴ Theater was thus seen to be an important avenue for influencing public perception of Blackness.

At the time when the representation of Black people onstage was highly valued, Black performances – including those in blackface – were closely monitored. In her book “Staging Race,” historian Karen Sotiropoulos explains that Black artists had the tricky task of balancing their humorous acts to appeal to the White gaze, while retaining respectability to appeal to the Black gaze.¹⁵ Not all blackface performances were interpreted, nor appreciated, equally the same. One edition of NAACP magazine *The Crisis* shows this, comparing the performances of two Black artists:

Among many colored theatergoers, Charles Gilpin’s rendition of “The Emperor Jones” caused a deep sense of irritation. They could not distinguish between the artistic interpretation of a type and the deliberate travesty of a

race, and so their appreciation was clouded (...) No such irritation bemused our understanding of Bert Williams, for he was to us the racial type itself.¹⁶

These few lines mark a crucial element in understanding Black appreciation of blackface artists. As Sotiropoulos notes, Black audiences were well aware at this time that the performers they were applauding on stage had to incorporate stereotypes to accommodate extremely tight cultural, social, and political spaces.¹⁷ This ‘double consciousness’, as coined by DuBois, captured the feeling of always looking at oneself through the eyes of another – a feeling that hovered over Black Americans, also onstage.¹⁸

As this piece from *The Crisis* shows, however, the general Black audience did differentiate between Black blackface artists who were read as betraying their constituencies by “travestying the race,” and artists like Williams, who was consistently praised for his insightful portrayal of the ‘Negro philosophy’. “Bert Williams (...) had the unusual ability to put into his songs and stories the humorous quality and philosophy of the negro race,” wrote *The Alexandria Gazette* in 1922.¹⁹ As actor Lester Walton admired, Williams “never [degraded] his race in his work” and made “Negro mannerisms a telling feature.”²⁰ Booker T. Washington similarly praised the way he “[put] into his form some of the quality and philosophy of the Negro race” in such a way that everyone could understand and appreciate the “inner life” and “peculiar genius (...) of the Negro.”²¹

It thus becomes evident that while blackface was fictional and often a caricature, it was still interpreted to capture some essence of truth about Blackness. That blackface was a fictional archetype seems apparent. Black artists themselves seemed to interpret it this way, and their use of makeup, costumes, and wigs to transform themselves certainly suggests this. Williams pointed out how he had to learn the dialect of the staged ‘American Negro’ which he found “as much a foreign dialect as that of the Italian.”²² He discussed at length the research he had to do to create every movement, pose, and detail of his character, because it was so different from himself.²³ Amidst all this fiction however, notable Black artists like Williams seemed to retain sub-currents of truth. The blackface archetype rested on half a century worth of stretching and reconfiguring of elements of Black dialect and culture, that had been morphed into the popular, dumb-witted stereotype. It nonetheless had roots in Black history and culture, something Williams carefully put into his performances, something his Black audiences read and interpreted closely. Black spectators somewhat legitimized his blackface performance as truth – picking up on strains of realness that subtly lay in his performance. So subtle perhaps, that White audiences then, and arguably White writers today, did not pick up on it at first glance.

This context gives insight into why the praise for Black performed blackface in the Black press so often commented on Williams’s portrayal of the Black race. His melancholic character in itself already countered the plantation-loving “darky” White minstrel artists had always portrayed him as.²⁴ The derogatory nature of blackface was softened by the humanizing characterization in his acts. More importantly however, Williams brought refinement, grace, and depth to his characters that seemed to embrace a collective experience of Blackness. In 1922, *The Crisis* wrote:

By a strange and amazing contradiction, this Comedian symbolized that deep, ineluctable strain of melancholy, which no Negro in a mixed civilization ever lacks (...) His role was always that of the poor, shunted, cheated, out-of-luck Negro and he fostered and deliberately trained his genius toward the delineation of this type because his mental as well as his artistic sense told him that here was a true racial vein.²⁵

The way in which he crossed from fiction and caricature over into representational reality allowed him to reach Black viewers to strike another emotion, touching on the injustices they collectively knew. As *The Crisis* captured poignantly: “He was so real, so simple, so credulous. His colored auditors laughed but often with a touch of rue,—this characterization was too near to us; his hardluck [sic] was our own universal fate.”²⁶

Perhaps Williams’s most popular song “Nobody” provides the best evidence of this. This comedic song describes the misfortune of Williams’s popular ‘Jonah Man’ character:

When life seems full of clouds and rain
And I'm full of nothin' and pain
Who soothes my thumpin', bumpin' brain?
Nobody
When I was in that railroad wreck
And thought I'd cashed in my last check
Who took the engine off my neck?
Not a soul
(Chorus)
I, ain't never done nothin' to nobody
I, ain't never done nothin' to nobody, no time
So until I get somethin' from somebody, sometime
I don't intend to do nothin' for nobody no time.²⁷

This humorous song has an undercurrent of social commentary. At first glance, a black-faced character bemoans his bad luck in amusing rhymes. But peel back the mask, and one hears a Black man singing about getting sidestepped for no reason. Hidden in the humor is a wry commentary on the experience of the Black man in Jim Crow America. Williams knew that experience, which he described as the “humiliations and persecution that [had] to be faced by every person of colored blood.”²⁸ He himself had performed for the King of England and the French president, but in America “the thing they call race prejudice” would follow him as his stage hands and janitors treated him with condescension and a lack of respect.²⁹ It was something he always struggled with: “Frankly, I can’t understand what it is all about. I breathe like other people, eat like them (...) They say it is a matter of race prejudice. But if it were prejudice, a baby would have it, and you will never find it in a baby.”³⁰ The humorous layer

in “Nobody” disguises the frustrated question that Black Americans felt, but could not always freely express: why do you treat me so? “I ain’t never done nothin’ to nobody.”

Not all his commentary was hidden so thickly under the veneer of black makeup. He sometimes ostentatiously addressed Jim Crow, like in the song “Swing Along” from *In Dahomey*. It tells children to hold their heads high with gladness even as the White folks are “watchin’ an’ seein’ what you do, white folks jealous when you’s walkin’ two by two.”³¹ Though light-hearted upfront, it is a confrontational song that encourages pride under the hostile White gaze. Such a message undoubtedly would have caused friction in public in any other setting, and it would most likely have been limited to the abolitionist press. It is not strange to assume, however, that it was blackface and the air of comedy that allowed Williams to bring such a message to the public and convey it, even as the “white folks were watchin’” in the audience. In the safety of the theater, “prejudiced whites” did not feel threatened.³² Imaginably, the entertaining black mask was somewhat of a distracting, soothing balm on the discourse it disguised. It suggested entertainment and fiction: appealing to the White gaze while still speaking clear and true to the Black gaze.

It is without a doubt that not all of these undertones were picked up on by White audiences. As Karen Sotiropoulos notes, Black jokes often went over the heads of White viewers – literally, eliciting laughter from the segregated Black gallery above, while leaving ‘White’ seats below quiet.³³ The following reviews by White critics, quoted in *Staging Race*, are telling. In a 1907 Cole and Johnson production “the white people laughed moderately at incidents that made no impression on the Negroes, while the latter shouted in glee at jokes that did not interest the white spectators.”³⁴ Referring to “the upstairs spectators,” “the gallery,” or “Coontown,” critics distinguished when scenes elicited different responses from the mixed audiences.³⁵ One review on Williams and Walker’s *Bandanna Land* noted how the best lines were drowned out by the “hoarse laughter” from the noisy “colored contingent.”³⁶ Another critic wrote that “the touches which portray the life and character of the ordinary Negro arouse quick and hilarious laughter among the colored auditors, pretty good evidence that the authors and actors have told the truth.”³⁷ All in all, there was more going on than met the (White) eye. These reviews reveal the role the theater stage had as an outlet for criticism, satire, and humor for Black Americans, providing a place where they could unabashedly laugh at the painful situations they faced daily. They could do it in public, right under the White gaze.

When looking at the American entertainment stages of the early twentieth century, it seems Jim Crow had the upper hand. However, a closer look reveals a remarkable opposition to Jim Crow, through the very blackface performances he originated in. Blackface reveals itself as an unexpected avenue for social commentary that Black artists subtly set to their hand to address, even challenge, racial segregation in twentieth-century America. Bert Williams’s work and the way the Black public embraced it reveals the complexity of blackface, which is not as black-and-white as it is often presented. The meaning of blackface was negotiated onstage, resulting in mere entertainment for one group, while rich in satire and social commentary for another. It takes suspending the dominant White gaze and listening to Black

voices to do justice to these great contradictions in history. Blackface proves to be one of the greatest contradictions, in which the “hideousness of the eternal black makeup” was read to capture the collective experience and refinement of Blackness, resulting in that the most beloved hero of the early twentieth century was a Black man who only performed in blackface.³⁸

Notes

¹ Bert Williams, “The Comic Side of Trouble,” *The American Magazine* 85 (1918), accessed via HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015038079474>; Jessie Fauset, “The Symbolism of Bert Williams,” *The Crisis*, 24.1. (May 1922), accessed via Modernist Journals Project, <https://modjourn.org/issue/bdr521457/>.

² Ayanna Thompson, “Blackface Is Older Than You Might Think,” *Smithsonian.com*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/blackface-older-you-think-180977618/>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows*, second edition (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2014), 1371.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1372.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2227.

⁷ Williams, “The Comic Side of Trouble.”

⁸ Booker T. Washington, “Greatest Comedian,” *The Colorado Statesman*, September 24, 1910, accessed via Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025514/1910-09-24/ed-1/seq-1/>.

⁹ Steven C. Tracy, “Review Essay: ‘Something You Don’t Expect’: The Recordings of Bert Williams,” *MELUS* 29.2 (2004): 290–99; “The Jonah Man!” *The Indianapolis Freeman*, January 31, 1903, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=ZJknAAAAIABAJ&sjid=bwQGAAAAIABAJ&pg=2161%2C3825100>.

¹⁰ “Bert Williams, World’s Famous Funny Comedian at the Tabor,” *The Denver star*, March 6, 1915, accessed via Library of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84025887/1915-03-06/ed-1/seq-1/>; Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 68.

¹¹ Camille F. Forbes, “Dancing with ‘Racial Feet’: Bert Williams and the Performance of Blackness,” *Theatre Journal* 56.4 (2004), 608.

¹² *Ibid.*, 609–610.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 608.

¹⁴ Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*.

¹⁵ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America*, 2.

¹⁶ Fauset, “The Symbolism of Bert Williams.”

¹⁷ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America*, 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2–6.

¹⁹ “The World Will Miss Bert Williams.” *The Alexandria gazette*, (Alexandria, D.C.), (14 March 1922), accessed via Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85025007/1922-03-14/ed-1/seq-3/>

²⁰ As cited in Forbes, *Dancing with Racial Feet*, 610.

²¹ Washington, “Greatest Comedian.”

²² Bert Williams, “The Comic Side of Trouble,” *The American Magazine* 85 (1918), 6, accessed via HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015038079474>; J. B. “Bert Williams,” *The Soil* 1.1 (Dec. 1916).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ J.B., “Bert Williams.”; Forbes, *Dancing with Racial Feet*, 615.

²⁵ Fauset, “The Symbolism of Bert Williams.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Bert Williams - Nobody,” *Genius.com*, <https://genius.com/Bert-williams-nobody-lyrics>. While this is not the official transcript of lyrics, it coincides with the recorded performances by Williams.

²⁸ Williams, “The Comic Side of Trouble.”

²⁹ Fauset, “The Symbolism of Bert Williams.”

³⁰ Williams, “The Comic Side of Trouble.”

³¹ “Swing Along,” *Song of America*, songofamerica.net/song/swing-along/.

³² Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America*, 68.

³³ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 63 – 65.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁷ Ibid., 65.

³⁸ Fauset, "The Symbolism of Bert Williams."

Making a Man out of You: Performative Masculinity and Homosexuality in Jane Campion's *The Power of the Dog* (2021)

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*This paper was written for the course Mediating 'America'
the Pre-Master in North American Studies*

The Western genre comes with traditional tropes and iconography. Its stories often feature cowboys and 'Indians', revolver duels at noon, horses and cows on the plains, and circling vultures. A central character in these settings, portrayed in American silent films such as *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), Italian-produced Spaghetti Westerns of the mid-1960s, and the 1984-1985 animated television series *Lucky Luke*, is the lone White male hero. This character is often assumed to be heterosexual, saving female love interests from villains that terrorize the town. Conversely, homosexual characters are traditionally left out of Western cinema. More recent decades, however, have seen the creation of queer spaces in country culture with, for example, the critically-acclaimed film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and Lil Nas X becoming the first openly gay Black artist to win a Country Music Award.¹

A recent addition to LGBTQ+ representation in the Western is Jane Campion's film *The Power of the Dog* (2021). Where the earlier two examples display or take pride in their queerness, Campion keeps sexuality below the surface. She hints at the main character's homosexuality, who seems to fit into the role of the traditionally tough and lonesome heterosexual cowboy of Western cinema. How this character, Phil Burbank, is depicted prompts the question whether his (performative) masculinity serves as a façade for his sexuality. Furthermore, his portrayal asks how homosexuality fits into the cinematic history of the Western.

The Western lies at the heart of US culture and cinema. In a 1995 encyclopedia on the genre, film journalist Phil Hardy writes that in Hollywood "more Westerns have been made than any other kind of film."² Film critics have attempted to provide a definition and determine what the genre exactly is. Critic Robert Warshow, for example, places 'the man with the gun' at the center of the Western in 1954. This character, Hardy writes, inhabits "a simple, unchanging, clearcut world in which notions of Good and Evil could be balanced against each other in an easily recognizable fashion."³ Moreover, "good not only invariably triumphed but did so with style and grace."⁴ Yet, essentialist definitions such as these do not acknowledge the complexities of the Western. As Hardy writes, categorical definitions like Warshow's are often attempts to "to pick out its essence, in such a way that their preferred films are the classics of the genre because they best exemplify the Western as defined by their

criteria.”⁵ While Hardy does not provide an actual clear-cut definition of the Western, he highlights a key aspect: its ability to evolve.⁶

At the end of the nineteenth century, ‘manifest destiny’ reestablished itself as a prominent theme in American popular culture.⁷ This belief indicated “that the United States was endowed by God with a mission to spread its republican government and brand of freedom and Christianity to less fortunate and uncivilized peoples.”⁸ Its popularity coincided with the opening of the first movie theaters, leading the Western – which already existed in literary, theatrical, and art form – to be adapted for the big screen. Film historians Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin identify the rise of ‘experimental Westerns’, which often featured battles between White settlers and Native American communities and “were trying out various visual and narrative formulas that would soon belong to the ‘classical’ Western.”⁹ In this sense, the genre finds its origins in White settler colonialism.

By the 1920s and 1930s, the Western became so popular that up to twenty-five percent of classical Hollywood films belonged to the genre. Similarly, subgenres such as ‘silent epics’ and ‘singing cowboy movies’ started to emerge. During the 1930s, however, Westerns adopted a stigma as “unimportant, low-budget films,” and it took until 1939 for the genre to be revived by John Ford’s *Stagecoach*.¹⁰ This film featured “thrilling action sequences among the breathtaking scenery of the Old West in which a White male hero defeated Indians and other bad guys.”¹¹ According to Benshoff and Griffin, this movie “cemented in the public’s mind what the classical Hollywood Western was all about.”¹²

In the 1930s and 1940s, traditional Western themes started to get questioned by filmmakers, and the genre began to diversify. The 1930s, for example, saw the production of Black Westerns, which allowed Black audiences to see actors of color play “the same types of roles that White actors were playing within Hollywood movies.”¹³ Nevertheless, these films upheld traditional racist casting and visual coding practices, such as ‘white’ signifying goodness and purity, and ‘black’ indicating evil and darkness. The 1960s ‘spaghetti Westerns’ broke entirely with the American ideals embodied by the frontier hero and instead depicted characters as “violent, greedy, petty criminals who ruthlessly murdered others before they themselves were killed by equally cynical gunfighters.”¹⁴

The 1960s were also when issues of gender and sexuality started to gain attention. In the 1960s, the cowboy became ‘queered’ in films like Andy Warhol’s *Lonesome Cowboys* (1967) and John Schlesinger’s *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), which were “precursors to *Brokeback Mountain*.”¹⁵ Benshoff and Griffin agree, arguing that Warhol’s “camp western” explored and exploited “homosocial-homosexual boundaries” between the main characters.¹⁶ Moreover, there are scenes in which the male characters are partly undressed, bathing or wrestling, which functioned as “bonding rituals for the [and] eroticized viewing pleasure for the audience.”¹⁷ Sue Matheson adds *Red River* (1948), *Calamity Jane* (1953), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) to the list of modern Westerns that portray homosexuality.¹⁸ Therefore, while *Brokeback Mountain* has been “broadly hailed as a cultural milestone” for homosexualizing cowboys, it was not the first film to show this sexual diversity.¹⁹

Westerns continued to evolve in the 2000s. For instance, the film *The Harder They Fall* (2021) had a completely Black cast, and the miniseries *Godless* (2017) included Black,

lesbian, and strong female characters. Such modern Westerns showed the genre moving beyond the traditional White, heterosexual male hero that embodied American masculine ideals. Although *Brokeback Mountain* and *Godless* moved away from heterosexual male protagonists, Blanco-Herrero et al. argue that “a certain level of masculinity is still necessary to lead or play a relevant role in a Western film.”²⁰ The film discussed in this essay, *The Power of the Dog*, continues this tradition as well, revolving around two brothers on the US countryside.

The Power of the Dog is a “Western gothic psychodrama,” which is known for its emphasis on the psychological developments of its characters.²¹ The film is an adaptation of Thomas Savage’s eponymous 1967 novel and has been awarded with three Golden Globes and one Oscar for ‘Best Director’.²² The story takes place in 1925 Montana, where brothers Phil (played by Benedict Cumberbatch) and George Burbank (Jesse Plemons) run a cattle ranch. When George unexpectedly marries widow Rose Gordon (Kirsten Dunst), his brother Phil sets out on a path of psychological warfare against his new sister-in-law, driving her to alcoholism. Rose’s son Peter (Kodi Smith-McPhee) joins them at the Burbank ranch and he initially falls victim to Phil’s taunts as well. Phil eventually befriends Peter, and the two men open up about their lives. Before their connection can culminate into a close friendship – or romantic relationship – Phil dies of anthrax. It is revealed that he was infected by the rawhide of an infected cow, given to him by Peter (his step-nephew). Although it is never explicitly stated, Peter’s opening monologue, his knowledge of diseases, and the fact that he wears gloves when handling the rawhide suggest that he intentionally murdered Phil.

Through the majority of the film, Phil is presented as a cruel, but charismatic man. Not only does he hold strong authority over his farmhands; he is revered by them. The brothers are further presented as direct opposites, as George is a gentle and awkward push-over and visibly aspiring to a high social rank through his clothes and surrounding company. Phil, on the other hand, is a bully and a tough laborer who castrates bulls with his bare hands and has “never tried the house bath before.”²³ It is especially through Phil’s character that *The Power of the Dog* expresses the Western motifs of ‘male bonding’ and ‘competitive individualism’.²⁴ Phil is almost always surrounded by his crew of admiring cowhands and later hopes to mentor Peter.

Although Phil behaves like a working-class farmer, he has skills from the upper classes. These skills are shown, for example, when Rose attempts to master Strauss’s ‘Radetzky March’ on her new piano, and Phil sabotages her practice by playing the piece on his banjo in the next room. This scene reveals the character’s extensive musical knowledge, which surpasses that of Rose, a former pianist.²⁵ Additionally, it is revealed that Phil attended Yale and studied Classics, which prompts the Governor to ask whether Phil “swears at the cattle in Greek or Latin.”²⁶ The fact that the Governor accepts George’s invitation in the first place indicates the men’s social background. According to film critic Peter Bradshaw, they owe their standing to “their rich, sophisticated and politically well-connected parents.”²⁷ The appearance of these parents makes clear that the brothers come from money, and that their successful ranching business came to them by birthright, rather than through hard work. Their upbringing marks the Burbank brothers as members of the American gentry class. This class,

historian Patrick Wyman points out, contradicts the idea of the ‘American Dream’ in which “the belief that hard work and talent, and maybe a bit of luck, can take a person into the ranks of the elite.”²⁸ Moreover, this ambition does not ring true to the privileged gentry, which has been born into wealth and has no need to aspire to it. The brothers’ social background further shows that Phil acts as something he is not (i.e. a tough ranch worker), while George is trying to own up to his class background with fancy clothes and social connections.

When the viewer realizes that Phil is putting on a working-class act, other parts of his projected identity become visible. The character is presented as the pinnacle of the traditional Western masculine ideal. Benschhoff and Griffin describe this idealized character as “a strong, unemotional, aggressive hero closely tied to nature and hard manual labor.”²⁹ This trope suggests that Phil is similarly acting out a stereotype or a role. Film critic Guy Lodge similarly observes this performance-aspect in his analysis of the film, which he first attributes to Cumberbatch’s acting skills: “Whenever he plays American (...) Cumberbatch gives the appearance of *acting* more than usual.”³⁰ Moreover, “his growling drawl and wide-gaited cowboy swagger feel like put-ons, almost distractingly unnatural to him.”³¹ Once the viewer becomes familiar with the character and the story, they realize that this ‘unnaturalness’ is not awkward acting. Instead, the viewer becomes increasingly aware that the “tensely macho affectations aren’t so much Cumberbatch’s as Phil’s: the actor is channeling the character’s own uneasy but compelling performance of alpha masculinity.”³² Therefore, the overly masculine image that Phil projects to the world is, in fact, a façade for a part of his identity.

Phil’s mask falls away in the short, private moments that the viewer is allowed to see. An example is when Phil goes out to the stables at night to polish the saddle that belonged to Bronco Henry, his former mentor.³³ In an almost shrine-like place in the barn, complete with a commemorative plaque and candles, Phil oils and polishes the saddle with an uncharacteristic tenderness which, in Lodge’s words, “borders on the erotic.”³⁴ This tenderness includes his hands gliding across the leather with the familiarity of a much-repeated ritual. These scenes are shot in low lighting, dark but for the glow of moon- and candlelight on leather and Phil’s skin. Tellingly, this action contrasts with the one taking place in the house he flees from, where his brother and new sister-in-law are making love. Another intimate moment shows Phil reverently handling a handkerchief embroidered with the initials “BH.”³⁵ He puts the handkerchief to his body and face, watches it flutter in the wind, smells it, and even masturbates with it. Afterwards, he is seen wearing the handkerchief around his neck as he bathes in the river. Peter eventually stumbles upon the scene, and is chased off by Phil, revealing that it was a private and intimate moment.

Phil continuously shares stories about this Bronco Henry, who was a father-figure to him and taught him the ranching ways. Furthermore, this secondary character provided the masculine ideal that Phil aspires to and tries to emulate. The sexual nature of his relationship with Bronco Henry remains unconfirmed, but it is suggested through the dialogue. Towards the end of the film, Phil recounts sharing a bedroll with Bronco. When Peter asks whether they were naked he only chuckles, giving both Peter and the audience an unspoken answer to the question.³⁶ Phil’s homosexuality, as Annie Proulx points out, is “something that in the cowboy world he inhabited was terrible and unspeakably vile.”³⁷ It is something Phil needs to

hide from the outside world, and he does so by following “the code of the west,” refashioning himself “as a manly, homophobic rancher” and calling Peter feminine nicknames.³⁸ The character clings to patriarchal sexuality biases, in which “heterosexual men are tough, bold, and assertive” as ‘real men,’ while homosexual men become associated with femininity and weakness.³⁹ By relying on these patriarchal codes and societal assumptions, Phil is able to hide his sexuality from the outside world — and repress a part of his identity — since, as Proulx writes facetiously, who “could mistake rough, stinking Phil for a sissy?”⁴⁰

Phil’s struggle with homosexuality explains why he initially mocks Peter, his step-nephew, and later tries to befriend him. Peter’s character does not pretend to be anything but himself, while Phil tries to hide everything about his identity. Phil may also view Peter as a kind of threat, “fearing that a kid who cares so little for performative masculinity will see right through his own.”⁴¹ While Phil chooses to perform a hypermasculine image, Peter chooses the exact opposite, reflecting a misogynistic image of effeminate men as “failed men.”⁴² However, Phil then makes the decision to befriend Peter. In the novel, Phil thinks to himself that he “always gave credit where credit was due. The kid had an uncommon kind of guts.”⁴³ Additionally, by offering to teach Peter the ways of life on the ranch, Phil is echoing or even repeating his mentor-pupil relationship with Bronco Henry that he experienced when he was a young man himself, and may also aspire to the sexual aspect of it. Peter therefore presents both a threat to Phil’s concealed homosexuality and a motivation to express it.

The fact that a homosexual reading of the film depends on the viewer’s ability to ‘catch on’ to Phil’s behavior can be seen as problematic. Connotative homosexuality, as Benshoff and Griffin point out, has long been a usual way of portraying gay characters in Hollywood.⁴⁴ Campion uses such connotations sporadically, such as with the hidden stash of muscle magazines that Peter discovers, which passed for gay porn in the 1920s.⁴⁵ Another example of implied homosexuality is when the farmhands bathe and relax at the river partially or entirely naked, which can be viewed as a “luxuriant display of male beauty.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, the film’s focus on ropes, whips, and leather conveys “rustic BDSM iconography,” expressing “the queer longings” by the characters.⁴⁷ As in Hollywood tradition, the homosexual character gets a tragic ending, which includes Phil dying through Peter’s act of handing him an infected hide rope.⁴⁸ While this plot point indicates that the film adheres to harmful representational practices, of punishing non-heterosexuality, it is also where it gains its strength. The film shows the harmful impact of strict gender roles and sexual repression from the outer world and on the main character.

In *The Power of the Dog*, Phil might at first glance seem like the embodiment of the traditional Western masculine ideal: as rough, aggressive, and unemotional. On closer inspection, however, cracks appear in his conservative façade, as revealed in the private moments with the memory of Bronco Henry, the mentor Phil admired and loved. The film conveys that the character adheres to patriarchal gender codes to hide his homosexuality. In response, Phil ridicules men who do not conform to his counterfeit behavior, such as Peter, because they are a threat to his own performative identity. It is arguable that Phil’s homosexual repression eventually results in his demise. Where other contemporary Westerns diversify

the genre by portraying homosexual protagonists and characters with gender nonconforming behavior, *The Power of the Dog* goes a step further by questioning the themes of toxic masculinity and repressed homosexuality.

Notes

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- ² Phil Hardy, *The Western, The Aurum Film Encyclopedia*, (London: Aurum Press, 1995), xv.
- ³ Hardy, *The Western*, ix.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, x.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, “Native Americans and American Film,” in *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2021), 114.
- ⁸ Mary Beth Norton et al., “The Contested West, 1815-1860,” in *A People & A Nation: A History of the United States*, 10th ed., (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2015), 319.
- ⁹ Benshoff and Griffin, “Native Americans,” 115.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 118.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 118.
- ¹³ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, “African Americans and American Film,” in *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2021), 87.
- ¹⁴ Benshoff and Griffin, “Native Americans and American Film,” 120.
- ¹⁵ Sue Brower, “‘They’d Kill Us If They Knew’: Transgression and the Western,” *Journal of Film and Video* 62.4 (2010): 48.
- ¹⁶ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 123.
- ¹⁷ Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Images*, 123.
- ¹⁸ Sue Matheson, “Introduction,” in *Love in Western Film and Television: Lonely Hearts and Happy Trails*, ed. Sue Matheson (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.
- ¹⁹ Helene A. Shugart, “Consuming Passions: ‘Educating Desire’ in Brokeback Mountain,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 28.3 (August 1, 2011): 188.
- ²⁰ David Blanco-Herrero, Laura Rodríguez-Contreras, and Begoña Gutiérrez-San-Miguel, “New Forms of Masculinity in Western Films: The End of the Marlboro Man?,” *Communication & Society* 34.2 (April 1, 2021): 11.
- ²¹ Peter Bradshaw, “The Power of the Dog Review–Jane Campion’s Superb Gothic Western Is Mysterious and Menacing,” *The Guardian*, November 17, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/nov/17/the-power-of-the-dog-review-jane-campions-superb-gothic-western-is-mysterious-and-menacing>.
- ²² “Winners & Nominees 2022,” Golden Globe Awards, accessed February 22, 2022, <https://www.goldenglobes.com/winners-nominees>; Kimberly Nordyke, “Oscars: Full List of Winners,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 28, 2022, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/2022-oscars-winners-list-1235119314/>.
- ²³ Jane Campion, *The Power of the Dog* (Netflix, 2021), 2:53-3:00.
- ²⁴ Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, “Western, Detective, Musical,” in *Camera Política: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 79–80.
- ²⁵ Campion, *The Power of the Dog*, 46:46-48:56.
- ²⁶ Campion, 54:02-54:16.
- ²⁷ Peter Bradshaw, “The 50 Best Films of 2021 in the UK, No 1: *The Power of the Dog*,” *The Guardian*, December 17, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/dec/17/the-50-best-films-of-2021-in-the-uk-no-1-the-power-of-the-dog>.

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- ³⁰ Guy Lodge, “‘A Cold-Souled Brokeback’: Queerness and Desire in *The Power of the Dog*,” *The Guardian*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/dec/02/a-cold-souled-brokeback-queerness-and-desire-in-the-power-of-the-dog>.
- ³¹ Lodge, “‘A Cold-Souled Brokeback,’” *The Guardian*.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Campion, *The Power of the Dog*, 41:37-42:39.
- ³⁴ Lodge, “‘A Cold-Souled Brokeback,’” *The Guardian*.
- ³⁵ Campion, *The Power of the Dog*, 1:11:38-1:14:11, 1:16:11-1:16:33.
- ³⁶ Campion, 1:49:16-1:49:55.
- ³⁷ Annie Proulx, “Afterword,” in *The Power of the Dog* (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 277.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, “Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, and Classical Hollywood,” in *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2021), 308.
- ⁴⁰ Proulx, “Afterword,” 277.
- ⁴¹ Lodge, “‘A Cold-Souled Brokeback,’” *The Guardian*.
- ⁴² Benshoff and Griffin, “Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, and Classical Hollywood,” 309.
- ⁴³ Thomas Savage, *The Power of the Dog* (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 216.
- ⁴⁴ Benshoff and Griffin, “Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, and Classical Hollywood,” 313.
- ⁴⁵ Campion, *The Power of the Dog*, 1:14:12-1:16:10.
- ⁴⁶ Campion, 1:10:53-1:11:19; Lodge, “‘A Cold-Souled Brokeback,’” *The Guardian*.
- ⁴⁷ Lodge, “‘A Cold-Souled Brokeback,’” *The Guardian*.
- ⁴⁸ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, “Sexualities on Film Since the Sexual Revolution,” in *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2021), 327.

The White Man's Burden and the Global Color Line: A Historiographical Analysis of African Americans and the American Empire, 1898-1902

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*This paper was written for the course Major Issues in American Studies
the MA program in North American Studies*

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, tensions rose between Black and White Americans. In the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, an increasing number of new restrictions and laws restrained the recently obtained rights of African Americans and legally segregated the population. Known as Jim Crow laws, these restrictions were derived from anxieties that Black Americans would gain power and rise to a more prominent place in public life. These measures enforced racial segregation in public places and transportation based on the doctrine of “separate but equal.”¹ Although the first Jim Crow laws took effect in the 1870s, their enforcement became more widespread in the 1890s.² The ideology of biological race was deeply rooted in the nation’s consciousness. People of European descent were considered physically, intellectually, and morally superior to other races. When in 1896 the Supreme Court passed *Plessy v. Ferguson* to uphold the laws, judges used pseudoscientific evidence to argue why the races should be kept separate.³ In addition to the Jim Crow laws, opportunities for education and employment for African Americans were reduced, their votes were suppressed, scientific experiments were done without Black patients’ consent, and judicial protection for Black Americans weakened. Lynching became increasingly more common, as did race riots, vigilantism, and other kinds of violence.⁴ The White elite united across state lines. The United States remained, in the eyes of its White leaders and population, a White nation.

At the same time as segregation spread through the United States, the nation’s leaders were turning their attention overseas. In the late nineteenth century, European colonial empires had divided amongst themselves the African continent and much of Asia. The relatively young United States, which had been preoccupied with expanding along its Western frontier, possessed very little territory outside the continental United States.⁵ In the late 1890s and early 1900s, however, the Spanish-American war turned the United States an imperial power. Sympathetic to the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain, the US intervened in 1898 and won a swift victory.⁶ The subsequent peace treaty assured Cuba’s independence and transferred another Spanish colony, the Philippines, under US control. Americans ignored the Philippine declaration of independence and fought a costly war between 1899 and 1902 to secure control of the islands. Acquiring colonies overseas made the US an empire with a global reach.⁷

The new territories brought up questions about race and citizenship, both at home and abroad. Whereas many White Americans felt a surge of patriotism and pride at the

annexations, Black Americans had to ask difficult questions about their place in society. This paper will explore the historiography on Black Americans' attitudes and experiences with American empire, specifically during the wars in Cuba and the Philippines. It will show that their reactions were varied; most were critical of the wars, either because of anti-imperialist beliefs, fear for the future of people of color abroad, or because Black Americans' focus was at home and on the hardships they faced in everyday life. Nevertheless, it will argue that some Black Americans held a more positive view of empire, mainly because they hoped to gain a more equal status by fighting in the wars, while others felt a sense of solidarity with Cubans and the Filipinos. It will end with an overview of the debate on how the racial ideology in the mainland affected the way the United States ruled over its colonized territories.

Drawing on African American newspaper sources to analyze the community's responses in his 1972 article "Black Americans and the Quest for Empire, 1898-1903," historian Willard B. Gatewood argues that while Black Americans were as interested in the ideas of expansion and empire as most White Americans, their approach was different. The racism and violence they had to face in their everyday lives shaped their understanding of the motives behind expansion, and their position on the margins of society gave them a special point of view, revealing "the discrepancies between the rhetoric and realities of imperialism."⁸ They recognized the racism inherent to both the imperialist and anti-imperialist camps. Gatewood argues that some African Americans sympathized and identified with the colonized Cubans, because they were fellow people of color and were oppressed under Spanish rule. Many supported the cause of Cuban independence but strongly opposed the United States taking any role in Cuban affairs after liberating the country, suspicious of White self-interest in the war. They feared that the same structures of power and oppression, including racial ideology, would be transported to the island. The natives of Cuba would be treated the same as African Americans at home.⁹

Most African American editors also identified as anti-imperialists, writes historian Richard E. Welch in *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine - American War, 1899-1902* (1979). "Imperialism" was defined, by Black newspaper *Gazette*, as "white domination of 'colored peoples.'"¹⁰ Many African Americans saw US expansion as a continuation of slavery and segregation. There was great sympathy and condemnation of the war amongst African American journalists, and even feelings of kinship with the Cubans and Filipinos. There was confusion, however, over what the nature of this kinship was. The main conflict they faced was the wish to oppose imperialism while showing support to Black soldiers.¹¹ They did not want to lose sight of the most important goal: better conditions at home. Open defiance was rare. Even those who wanted to actively protest the wars were prevented from joining the predominantly White anti-imperialist movements.¹²

Historian Piero Gleijeses builds on Gatewood's research by doing a closer examination of both Black and White newspapers in his article "African Americans and the War against Spain" (1996). Despite some sympathy for the struggle against colonial powers, he emphasizes that from the beginning the main focus of Black Americans was on what was happening at home. Black newspapers focused on the wrongs suffered by the community, for

example, the government's failure to condemn lynchings.¹³ Their initial opposition to both wars quickly turned to support because they could not risk getting accused of being disloyal. Gleijeses argues that Black newspaper editors considered securing rights in the United States more important than acting on any solidarity they may have felt to other people of color abroad.¹⁴

When it came to Black Americans participating in the war, Gatewood argues, some saw participation as their duty, since the war was fought in the name of civilization. There were hopes that a common purpose would bring Americans together and create unity that might lead to improvements for Black Americans. It also represented an opportunity for Black soldiers to prove themselves worthy of citizenship, to gain respect and confidence, and to prove their loyalty and patriotism to their country.¹⁵ On the other hand, a number of Black editors and spokesmen condemned participation in the war because of their oppression at home. For them, there was no reason or obligation for Black men to risk their lives for a country that failed to grant them equal protection.¹⁶ While many White Americans felt the wars were a civilizing mission, Black Americans felt no such sense of duty. Many Black newspapers also criticized Rudyard Kipling and his poem "The White Man's Burden." Written by a British poet, it encouraged Americans to go to war in the Philippines and conquer it. "It has ever been the dark races who have born the world's burdens," wrote the *Colored American*. "The white man's burden is a myth. The black man's burden is a crushing, grinding reality."¹⁷

Gleijeses suggests that for Black Americans, the main choice lay between "dignity and pragmatism" - between collaboration and accommodation.¹⁸ Foreign policy was intrinsically linked to domestic policy and all reactions to the war were influenced by the political struggles at home. Some Black newspapers, such as the *Colored American*, saw it as their duty to convince White Americans that Black men and women were patriotic and ready to fight. To them, the war was an important test, a chance to prove their loyalty.¹⁹ White newspapers such as the *Washington Post*, however, often disregarded the other side completely and dismissed their complaints.²⁰ While some White editors thought African American soldiers perfectly suited for the war due to their immunity to tropical diseases, other papers stoked White Americans fears that Black soldiers would return 'arrogant' after they had been trusted with weapons.²¹ Some Southern White newspapers openly called for readers to arm themselves and prepare for a fight against the threat posed by returning Black soldiers. Any unrest that came to pass was blamed on African Americans.²²

Despite doubts, thousands of Black men enlisted as volunteers in the army. Some states refused Black volunteers outright while others created all-Black regiments. Among these were North Carolina, Illinois, and Kansas. Southern states such as Virginia and Alabama had Black regiments with White commanders.²³ The volunteers that were refused often successfully protested their exclusion but in service they were disappointed to encounter the racial discrimination of the War Department: few Black officers, segregation at camps, racist insults, and riots. Jim Crow laws remained in place in public places and transportation.²⁴ In North Carolina, the call for volunteers to Cuba was met with an enthusiastic response. Black soldiers organized themselves and appealed for a chance to fight.²⁵ Gatewood argues they

succeeded in large part because of the state's governor's interest in amassing Black votes.²⁶ Black newspapers in the state praised the governor for allowing the Black battalion to fight, and for naming a Black commander. The act was considered by the Black press as a significant 'experiment', something that would have consequences for all Black Americans in the future.²⁷

The war of 1898 was an initial triumph for Black soldiers. At first it seemed the opportunity to prove their competence and bravery they had been hoping for. A Black unit fought with the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill, for which they were lauded by Black newspapers. Soldiers and African American communities alike were proud of their own, even going so far as to declare that Black men were physically superior, capable not only to withstand disease but bullets as well. However, their enthusiasm waned soon after homecoming. Theodore Roosevelt changed his attitude and accused Black soldiers in Cuba of cowardice. When Black soldiers realized that racism and mistreatment of people of color by those of European descent was as rampant in Cuba as it was in America, they left the island gladly. Disillusioned by the conditions at home, the lack of recognition for their bravery, the elimination of the Black units after the war, and a government that would help Cuba but ignore its own citizens, African American soldiers became increasingly frustrated.²⁸ In their 1975 article "David Fagen: An Afro-American Rebel in the Philippines, 1899-1901," historians Michael C. Robinson and Frank N. Schubert show that after returning from war, Black soldiers became aware that despite serving on the battlefield, changes to the circumstances at home were still far off. Some radicalized and started fighting back. There was indeed a rise in armed conflicts between Black and White soldiers, as well as civilians who were inspired by the bravery of Black soldiers.²⁹ The 1898 race riot in Wilmington was particularly bloody example of this sort of conflict.³⁰

In addition to physical violence, there was an intellectual side to the radicalization of returning Black soldiers; men met in societies and clubs like the local Y.M.C.A. to discuss politics, the war, and join forces in protests.³¹ Gatewood writes that the experiences of Black soldiers at home and abroad informed African Americans' political views. Black spokesmen condemned the war effort as a racist scheme, no different from European colonialism. When information about the mistreatment of Filipinos came to light, many Black voters turned against imperialism.³² Some went so far as to turn their backs on Republican President McKinley and Vice President Roosevelt. Nevertheless, in the election of 1900, most Black voters still supported the party of Lincoln; they did not trust the Democrats to care about African Americans.³³ The realization that the war would not bring about any significant change brought a sense of powerlessness. After the war ended and the Philippines were under American control, the focus of Black protesters and newspapers turned back to the conditions at home. Acceptance of the United States as a colonial power had not come easily, but more urgent problems ultimately trumped concerns for the situation in faraway places.³⁴

For Black authors, too, problems at home remained a more pressing issue than empire, according to literary scholar John Cullen Gruesser. In *The Empire Abroad and the Empire at Home: African American Literature and the Era of Overseas Expansion* (2012) he argues that whatever their view on imperialism and the war against Spain, Black authors were

more concerned with how the acquisition of empire would affect race relations in the United States.³⁵ There was no consensus among them, just as no consensus existed amongst the wider African American population. However, American territorial expansion allowed and compelled them to write about the situation at home and to draw parallels between empire overseas and empire at home, theorizing about imperial subjectivity.³⁶ The majority of Black Americans who wrote or spoke about empire were writers, editors, and businessmen. The educated elite, whose main priority was improving their status and finding a place where they could thrive and create new opportunities. While some condemned imperialism outright, others saw the addition of new territories as a positive for Black Americans because it would bring in more citizens of color and give them new leverage. In African American literature there was a rising sense of Pan-Africanism. In poetry, Afro-Caribbean heroes were linked to Black Americans. As W.E.B. DuBois's speech about the problem of the color line indicates, Black intellectuals saw it as their duty to talk about race and empire, even suggesting that they saw the future of colonized people of color as their responsibility.³⁷ Historian Paul A. Kramer argues that DuBois's speech reveals that he considered the situation in the colonies a continuation of what had happened in the United States. DuBois welcomed the natives of new territories as allies to Black Americans and suggested they stand together. For him, the previously American "negro problem" was now global.³⁸

Rather than suggesting that the wars of expansion were the result of foreign or domestic political aims, nationalism, or the ideology of White saviorism, historian Michele Mitchell attributes them to a crisis of masculinity. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented an era of heightened anxiety and hypermasculinity in the United States, which manifested itself in an obsession with empire, something that was associated with masculinity and power.³⁹ In her article "'The Black Man's Burden': African Americans, Imperialism, and Notions of Racial Manhood 1890-1910" (1992), Mitchell argues that although this mindset was possessed by many White men, the crisis was more acute for Black men because they were feminized in culture. 'Manliness' was a quality reserved only for White men, it was something a Black man could never attain.⁴⁰ Therefore, imperialism was an alluring idea for African American men since it gave them a chance to claim the masculine qualities that came from acting as a soldier or a missionary. Emphasizing their masculinity was a way to also reclaim their dignity in a country where it was being stripped away.⁴¹

The crisis of masculinity was not the only cause of anxiety around the turn of the twentieth century, writes Susan K. Harris in *God's Arbiters: Americans and the Philippines, 1898-1902* (2011). There was also a perceived "cultural crisis" owing to the recent influx of immigrants moving into the United States, as well as Black Americans moving from the South to the North.⁴² Social Darwinist ideas became dominant and increasingly popular all across the country, and questions of race and racial purity gained traction.⁴³ Both White and Black Americans understood race as having fixed characteristics. The annexation of the Philippines raised the issue of the race of Filipinos, now American imperial subjects. Filipinos were considered neither Black nor White, which caused confusion and questions around the possibility of them becoming citizens. Harris claims that racial mixing was a fear shared by a majority of Americans regardless of their background. Black and White Americans had major

anxieties about their race mixing with Filipinos.⁴⁴ Debates on human origins, including which race was created first, can be seen in literature as well. Many novels and other literature featured mixed race characters and plots that dealt with confusion about a character's heritage.⁴⁵

Between 1899 and 1902, approximately 6000 Black men served as part of US military campaign against the Filipino forces lead by Emilio Aguinaldo. Most of the battles they took part in were small skirmishes, and, in addition to the fighting, they would take on tasks such as patrolling, supply, and labor work.⁴⁶ In the United States, both imperialists and anti-imperialists saw Filipinos as racially inferior, as stupid and childlike, incapable of governing themselves - much like they saw Black soldiers as physically strong, but incapable of succeeding without White leadership. Imperialists believed it was their duty to govern as representatives of a superior race and during their occupation a system of oppression not unlike the one in Jim Crow America was put in place.⁴⁷ Filipinos were not granted full political participation nor self-determination and they were segregated from White soldiers in the same way that Black Americans were.⁴⁸ In the Philippines, Black soldiers faced a difficult situation. The regiments that had fought for the freedom of colonial subjects in Cuba were now expected to join the US army against fellow people of color.⁴⁹ Black soldiers had to put up with verbal and physical abuse; beatings, slurs, even mob violence, while they witnessed White American soldiers treat - and call - Filipinos the same way. Some Black soldiers concluded that those Filipinos who were fighting the American occupation were doing so because they knew under US rule they would be treated like Black Americans.⁵⁰ Filipino insurgents made the connection too, and were quick to use any doubts Black soldiers had to their advantage. They spread propaganda which pointed out the similarities in their treatment, claiming Filipinos and African Americans were fighting the same war and should unite forces. It even referred to famous lynchings and gratuitous violence that was occurring in the United States.⁵¹

Although Filipino propaganda made a connection between Black Americans and Filipinos, historians have disagreed over the real nature of the relationship between the two groups. Welch argues that for Black American soldiers their national identity trumped any feelings of solidarity based on race and treatment. Being a soldier in a foreign land made them draw a line between Americans and foreigners and made them treat Filipinos as belonging to the latter group. In short, there was no special bond between them.⁵² This view is contested by Scot Ngozi-Brown in "African-American Soldiers and Filipinos: Racial Imperialism, Jim Crow and Social Relations" (1997). He suggests that Black soldiers were angry at how Filipinos were treated and they socialized with the locals much more than White soldiers did.⁵³ They also had relationships with Filipino women, even married them, though often remained suspicious of the men. Some saw Filipinos as "mulatto people," racially mixed like many Black Americans.⁵⁴ A number of them chose to remain on the islands after the war. In fact, more African American soldiers stayed behind than after any other military assignment or war.⁵⁵ Staying with their wives and children was an important reason for their decision, but equally important were the jobs and business opportunities they found on the island. Many refused to return home where they would experience social immobility under Jim Crow.

However, although status and wealth were crucial factors, there was undeniable solidarity between Black soldiers and Filipinos. Ngozi-Brown argues that the close relationship made Black soldiers question US Army propaganda and see their enemy not as an ‘other’, but as more of a friend than the White soldiers.⁵⁶

In his 2014 article “‘I Feel Sorry for These People’: African American Soldiers in the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902,” historian Timothy D. Russell supports the argument that there were feelings of sympathy and anger among Black soldiers because of their discomfort at being used to oppress other people of color. He provides evidence of the inner conflict in the form of two personal stories of Black men in the Philippines: David Fagan and John Calloway.⁵⁷ Private David Fagan was one of only few Black soldiers who defected. Disillusioned with the war and his superiors, he was influenced by Aguinaldo’s propaganda asking Black soldiers to change sides. After joining the Filipino forces, he was given the rank of officer, which was meaningful to him since very few African American soldiers had the opportunity to move up in the US army. The title made Fagan feel like he had some power over the White officers.⁵⁸ The details of the end of his life are uncertain. He was wanted for treason and a Filipino hunter eventually claimed to have killed him and brought his head as evidence.⁵⁹ However, it is not completely certain the head was Fagan’s. Whatever his fate, he fought with the insurrectionists until the end, which shows that he shared a feeling of kinship.⁶⁰ Another case Russell highlights is that of Sergeant-Major John W. Calloway. Calloway had many Filipino acquaintances and felt he shared a strong connection with them.⁶¹ A seemingly innocuous letter he sent to a Filipino friend caused the US army to arrest him. In the letter, he wrote of his deep dissatisfaction with the way the Americans treated Filipinos and how the war was unfolding. However, he believed that eventually Filipinos would secure civil rights and did not question the morality of their mission to ‘civilize’ Filipinos.⁶² Calloway’s arrest, Russell argues, shows the anxiety amongst White American leaders about Black Americans fighting wars, especially against other racialized people. The letter is evidence of the amount of thought Black soldiers gave to the discrimination they witnessed and suffered from. However, it also suggests their military identity and faith in their duty as soldiers remained dominant.

In the decades after the war there was a consensus amongst historians and political theorists that White supremacist ideas, the “White man’s burden,” and social Darwinism were major motivations behind the United States going out in search of new territories. Black contemporary writers such as DuBois agreed, suggested, and feared that American racial oppression would be exported to the colonies. Welch has dismissed the war as a one-off in American history, without any major impact on longer-term politics. However, he saw the war as holding up a ‘mirror’ to American society at the time, showing its racism and heightened patriotism.⁶³ This can, according to Welch, be seen in the responses of American people before, after, and during the war. More recently, historians have presented different views. In *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (2004), historian Eric T. L. Love argues that the situation of African Americans was considered such a substantial problem by White American leaders that they deemphasized the racial aspects of empire. They rejected the “White man’s burden” and no longer highlighted the war as a civilizing

mission.⁶⁴ Racism was predominantly employed by the opponents of empire to argue against accepting people of color as citizens. Imperialists, on the other hand, emphasized that the colonies were sparsely populated and that natives would not be a threat. Love also argued that an empire was first and foremost needed for trade.⁶⁵ Others have taken a more international view. Kramer has written that although the war in the Philippines was often defined by contemporaries as a benevolent mission, American imperialism was nowhere near exceptional and, in fact, it was comparable to European imperialism. Kramer, however, disagrees with the notion that the United States ‘exported’ their ideology of race to its colonies. Instead, the “two histories—of the racial remaking of empire and the imperial remaking of race—are not separable.”⁶⁶ The war redefined understandings of race in its context. In order to understand it, one must look beyond America and see it as a continuum of a transnational history of colonialism.⁶⁷

Historians have agreed that, although the opinion of African Americans over US imperialism were divided, a great majority of them were against it. They opposed expansionism because they recognized in it the ideology of White supremacy. However, since their main focus was on combating racism at home, concerns over appearing unpatriotic often trumped anti-imperialist sentiments. Even if African Americans felt a degree of sympathy for other racialized people, they were anxious about racial mixing, and feared for their own hard-fought future in US society. Many Black men enlisted in volunteer militias in both Cuba and the Philippines, and though some rebelled, or even defected, many considered national identity to be more important than racial solidarity. Many hoped that by fighting in Cuba and the Philippines, they could prove they were not aliens in their own country, but US citizens, equal to their White countrymen. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars, however, their situation improved little. Less than two decades later they found themselves facing a new war which arguably had a bigger impact on American society and Black Americans: The First World War. The ‘Great War’ revived debates that had started during the wars of American imperialism, chief among them whether or not to arm the disenfranchised Black men and send them to fight abroad. The wars of American empire in Cuba and the Philippines offer an important precedent which informs the study of any twentieth-century American wars, especially if historians are to better comprehend the experiences of Black Americans.

Notes

¹ Antony G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 320.

² *Ibid.*, 292.

³ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁴ Nicole A. Waligora-Davis, *Sanctuary: African Americans and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22.

⁵ Hopkins, *American Empire*, 332-333.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 370-372.

⁷ Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 10-11.

⁸ Willard B. Gatewood, “Black Americans and the Quest for Empire, 1898-1903,” *Journal of Southern History* 38.4 (Nov. 1972): 545.

- ⁹ Ibid., 545-546.
- ¹⁰ Richard E. Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine - American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979): 108.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 107.
- ¹² Ibid., 115.
- ¹³ Piero Gleijeses, "African Americans and the War against Spain," *North Carolina Historical Review* 73.2 (April 1996): 213.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 184.
- ¹⁵ Gatewood, "Black Americans," 547-548.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 549.
- ¹⁷ Gleijeses, "African Americans," 208.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 185.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 208.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 195.
- ²¹ Ibid., 191.
- ²² Ibid., 199-200.
- ²³ Willard B. Gatewood, "North Carolina's Negro Regiment in the Spanish-American War," *North Carolina Historical Review* 48.4 (Oct. 1971): 371.
- ²⁴ Gatewood, "Black Americans," 552-553.
- ²⁵ Gatewood, "North Carolina's Negro Regiment," 373.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 372.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 375.
- ²⁸ Gatewood, "Black Americans," 557.
- ²⁹ Michael C. Robinson and Frank N. Schubert, "David Fagen: An Afro-American Rebel in the Philippines, 1899-1901," *Pacific Historical Review* 44.1 (Feb. 1975): 70.
- ³⁰ Gatewood, "Black Americans," 556.
- ³¹ Robinson and Schubert, "David Fagen," 71.
- ³² Gatewood, "Black Americans," 559.
- ³³ Ibid., 562-563.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 564.
- ³⁵ John Cullen Gruesser, *The Empire Abroad and the Empire at Home: African American Literature and the Era of Overseas Expansion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 6.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 7.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 1-2.
- ³⁸ Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 14.
- ³⁹ Michele Mitchell, "'The Black Man's Burden': African Americans, Imperialism, and Notions of Racial Manhood 1890-1910," *International Review of Social History* 44, Supplement 7: Complicating Categories: Gender, Class, Race and Ethnicity (1999): 99.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 80.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 83-4.
- ⁴² Susan K. Harris, *God's Arbiters: Americans and the Philippines, 1898-1902* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 69.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 66.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 66.
- ⁴⁶ Timothy D. Russell, "'I Feel Sorry for These People': African American Soldiers in the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902," *Journal of African American History* 99.3 (Summer 2014): 205-6.
- ⁴⁷ Scot Ngozi-Brown, "African-American Soldiers and Filipinos: Racial Imperialism, Jim Crow and Social Relations," *Journal of Negro History* 82.1 (Winter 1997): 42.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 45.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 42.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 46.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 46.
- ⁵² Welch, *Response to Imperialism*, 112.
- ⁵³ Ngozi-Brown, "African-American Soldiers and Filipinos," 47.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 47.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 51.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 50-51.
- ⁵⁷ Timothy D. Russell, "'I Feel Sorry for These People'," 206.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 207.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 209.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁶¹ Ibid., 211.

⁶² Ibid., 209.

⁶³ Welch, *Response to Imperialism*, 156.

⁶⁴ Eric T. L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xi-xii.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁶ Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

Avoiding the Dangers of Communism?

American Women's Identity, the CAW, and the Cold War

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*This paper was written for the course Global Order in Historical Perspective
the MA program in International Relations*

The early Cold War heavily affected ideas about gender, particularly the position of women and assumed gender roles in the United States. It also came to shape feminist organizations that campaigned for gender equality. During World War II, traditional societal structure had changed, as many women worked in factories to support the war effort, while men were fighting abroad. After the war, women mostly resumed their domestic spheres, and many American social commentators encouraged women to embrace their traditional roles once again.¹ The notion of the ideal American nuclear family, living in the suburbs with husbands earning the income and women as housewives, became widespread in this period.² However, not all women subscribed to this image and instead campaigned for a change to these gender roles. An example of such a movement was the Congress of American Women (CAW), the American branch of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), which was founded in 1945.³ The CAW itself was founded in 1946 and campaigned for women's rights, world peace, and antiracism, and embraced left-leaning feminism.⁴ In the tense political atmosphere of the Cold War, both the CAW and the WIDF were suspected of being Soviet spies by the American authorities.⁵ In 1950, the CAW was banned by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was set up in 1938 to investigate disloyalty amongst US citizens.⁶ After World War II, the organization investigated communist influences and possible communist threats to American society. Its operation techniques included intimidation, which often led to witnesses feeling pressed to name apparent communist sympathizers.⁷

Despite the CAW's short existence, the organization offers important insights into feminism in the US during the 1940s and 1950s. The scholarship on the WIDF, the CAW, and feminism in the early post-war era discusses important themes, such as the role of gender as a concept, feminist organizations, and their connections to the Cold War. Historian Francisca de Haan has shown that Western historiography has long overlooked left-leaning feminist organizations like the WIDF and the CAW because they were labeled as communist.⁸ However, the WIDF was a global organization which, while having communist influences, aimed to unite like-minded women from around the world.⁹ Scholarship also agrees that the organization was heavily impacted by the Cold War, which even led to the dissolving of the CAW and subsequent historical neglect by scholars.¹⁰

While scholars have argued that the CAW and the WIDF were long overlooked, different views on gender and the Cold War exist in the literature.¹¹ For instance, the

stereotype of suppressed suburban women in the house, raising children, and running the household was first publicized in *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan (1963).¹² Friedan argued that women were unhappy in their roles as housewives and had to find happiness in individual achievements, for instance by pursuing professional careers.¹³ One of Friedan's most notable critics is historian Joanne Meyerowitz, who has shown that women were not solely reduced to housewives in American culture, as their non-domestic stories were also celebrated.¹⁴ Besides, as historian Elaine Tyler May has argued, many American women chose the idealized life as they preferred security and stability after the war.¹⁵ According to May, gender roles provided security during the Cold War and were considered a defense against communism.¹⁶ Historian Landon Storrs has furthermore illustrated that in the 1950s, women who did not conform to this image, for instance those who were employed in high-level government positions, were often suspected of being communists.¹⁷ He explained that it was feared that these women would be targeted by communists with propaganda of gender equality that would disrupt the patriarchal family.¹⁸ Since family life was considered a defense against communism, communist influences on women would threaten political and societal stability.¹⁹

While scholarship on feminism in the early post-war period and the Cold War has explored these topics, the place of the CAW in this broader development has not been discussed enough. Therefore, this essay will explore the following research question: What does the role of feminism and the CAW in mainstream American society reveal about identity and gender norms in the US from 1945-1960? To answer this question, excerpts from the 1947 book *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* by Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham and the 1948 pamphlet *Woman against Myth* by Betty Millard will be consulted. It is important to mention that this essay will solely focus on White, middle-class American women in reference to the 'ideal' American woman, as the consulted scholarship also mostly discusses this group. Naturally, American society has always been very diverse, and it is impossible to claim that one ideal American woman exists. However, considering that addressing the 'ideal' type of American woman for all socio-economic classes and ethnicities would not fit into the scope of this essay, it will only focus on this group.

First, this essay will discuss the different forms of feminism and gender roles that were present in mainstream American society, and among the CAW and the WIDF. This will be followed by an examination of how these two groups differed in their views on feminism and gender roles and what this difference reveals about American identity overall. Overall, this essay will show how dominant ideas about gender and feminism in American society have interacted with the CAW's and, to a lesser extent, the WIDF's ideas about gender roles. Furthermore, it will be discussed how historians have understood both the ideas from the CAW and dominant American society and what this demonstrates about American identity in the post-war era. By analyzing the abovementioned HUAC report, this essay will also discuss the influence of the CAW on the perception of gender roles in mainstream American society.

Competing ideas on feminism and gender roles were present in US society from 1945 to 1960. After World War II, many soldiers returned home from the war to retake their jobs, which were performed by women during the war.²⁰ It was initially believed that women would want to remain in the work force but instead, they often returned to their roles as housewives. After the war, the societal image of the idealized family and devoted wife was promoted by social commentators and magazines, and most women embraced this role once again.²¹ However, feminism was present in American society in the early post-war period as well.²²

The idealized image of the American family was publicized in the 1947 book *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* by Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, which argued that women were biologically destined to be housewives and mothers. According to them, problems in society were caused by feminist ideas of women wanting to be men and acting against their 'natural' roles.²³ *Modern Woman* represents one interpretation of the role of gender roles in the post-war United States. Indeed, many young Americans embraced the idea of domestic life, as they sought security and stability, and wanted to enjoy the advantages of modern technology that facilitated their lives after the war.²⁴ Moreover, family life, with its clear ideas of gender roles and femininity, was considered a way to secure the freedoms that American democracy granted.²⁵

Since ideas of gender equality were supported by the Soviet Union, anti-communist fears and policies – also known as McCarthyism – led to feminists being framed as communists.²⁶ However, it is important to mention that while the Soviet Union claimed to have achieved gender equality, there were certainly limits to this equality, especially from a modern-day perspective.²⁷ Lundberg and Farnham expressed this belief in *Modern Woman*, which argued that “agents of the Kremlin abroad continue to beat the feminist drums in full awareness of its disruptive influence.”²⁸ Additionally, Storrs has suggested that “right-wingers viewed communism as a challenge not only to capitalist class relations, but also to prevailing gender and race hierarchies. For them, the need to stabilize white male supremacy was one important reason to oppose communism.”²⁹ Thus, this example illustrates that for many conservative intellectuals, the fight against communism was closely tied to the fight against feminism, because ideas of gender equality were considered disruptive to the traditional patriarchal family.³⁰ In *Modern Woman*, women seeking employment outside the home were considered a humiliation for their husbands that could be resulting from communist influences.³¹

The association of feminist ideas with communism can also be seen in the suspicion of women in positions of power being communists. Many female government officials who leaned left were targeted by right-wing conservatives. While left leaning and liberal men were also targeted, official reports demonstrate that women were judged by different standards. Women made up eighteen percent of high-level cases for investigating the loyalty of employees, while only representing three percent of high-level employees.³² These accusations against women were based on anti-feminist beliefs, such as the claim that women in high-ranking government positions were no longer controlled by their husbands. This was allegedly a sign of communist influences. Accusations clearly consisted of anti-feminist language, as the image of women in positions of power was not easily reconciled with traditional ideas of

femininity.³³ Clear images of gender roles were used to promote certain ideas of American identity in the first decade of the post-war period, with women in positions of power in the workforce being considered communist and thus undesirable.

However, despite the idealization of certain gender roles and the apparent connection between feminism and communism, American society was not solely idealizing the role of women as housewives. While women in domestic roles were addressed by popular culture, this was not the only setting which women were seen in. Evidence has demonstrated that popular culture equally highlighted women's individual public achievements in politics and activism. As shown by Meyerowitz, "domestic ideals co-existed in ongoing tension with an ethos of individual achievement that celebrated nondomestic activity, individual striving, public service, and public success."³⁴ Women who were employed in certain white-collar jobs, for instance, as secretaries, were not judged as much.³⁵ Moreover, women who were supporting mothers but also had a career in politics were celebrated.³⁶ These portrayals demonstrate that while traditional gender roles prevailed in American society, other ideas existed as well.

Dominant American ideas about gender differed heavily from those supported by the WIDF and CAW. The WIDF campaigned for anti-fascism, lasting peace, women's rights, and, in terms of members, was the largest international women's organization in the post-war era.³⁷ The organization strove for complete gender equality, equal pay, and equal status for women in education, as well as programs that supported the vocational sector and guaranteed maternity leave.³⁸ The WIDF received funds and support from Soviet-funded organizations and communist countries, which resulted in the organization being suspected as a communist spy in Western countries.³⁹ Yet, due to this communist funding, the WIDF was able to organize conferences and keep in close contact with likeminded groups.⁴⁰ However, their goals illustrate that the organization did not consider itself to be communist and many members also did not identify as such.⁴¹ The Cold War, however, forced the organization to choose a side and, by 1948, most non-communist members left and it publicly favored Soviet ideology.⁴²

The WIDF's American branch, the CAW, was founded in 1946 and sought to unite American women from all socio-economic classes and ethnicities.⁴³ The organization broadly attracted women who identified as left-wing feminists, liberal women's rights activists, and labor unionists.⁴⁴ Its three main areas of interest were international peace, child welfare, and improving the status of women.⁴⁵ Overall, their feminist aims correlated closely with the ideology of its parent organization, but also with the ideas of the American Communist Party (CPUSA). Both the CAW and the Communist Party campaigned for more women in politics.⁴⁶ The CPUSA inspired policies of the CAW, but the CAW focused more on concrete issues affecting women, such as women's rights.⁴⁷ In practice, this meant the CAW advocated for rent control, equal pay, and access to education for women. They also campaigned for access to professions for both African American women and White women, government-funded nurseries, proclaimed a stronger voice for women in politics, and aimed to increase of female representatives in political offices.⁴⁸

With regards to communism, the CAW supported Soviet ideology on gender equality, as Betty Millard's 1948 pamphlet *Woman against Myth* demonstrates.⁴⁹ Millard was a Communist Party member and chair of the CAW's committee for women's rights.⁵⁰ Her pamphlet is generally considered the embodiment of the CAW's ideas on women's rights.⁵¹ In it, Millard stated that while the USSR had "a conscious political philosophy and program designed to bring women into equality, [America] does not."⁵² Millard argued that "Women must continue to be a major force in their own advance, but they can move ahead only in common action with labor."⁵³ She further explained that "to be a major force" is to "struggle together with such organizations as the Congress of American Women for price and rent control, (...) as a way of arresting the drive of the monopolists toward reaction and war."⁵⁴ The CAW thus praised the USSR as a champion for gender equality. Yet, while Millard expressed support for the Soviet Union and was a communist, not all members identified as such.⁵⁵ Only some members were also members of the CPUSA.⁵⁶ However, from 1948 to 1950, when most leading non-communist members had left, support for the Soviet Union became a key focus of the CAW.⁵⁷ Both the WIDF and the CAW expressed support for the USSR and became pro-communist, though it would be wrong to suggest that they were not a feminist organization or that they were simply following Soviet orders. Pursuing gender equality was evidently essential to the group.⁵⁸ As shown by De Haan, the organization was long considered a tool for the USSR, but De Haan considers it to have embraced 'left leaning' feminism.⁵⁹

Both mainstream American society's image of gender roles and the perception of the WIDF and the CAW illustrate much about American identity for women in the early Cold War. Dominant ideas about gender framed the ideal woman as feminine and as a housewife who enjoyed the benefits that the American capitalist system granted. The infamous 1959 'kitchen debate' between then Vice president Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev demonstrates how these ideas were used on the political stage.⁶⁰ By discussing the utility of multiple household appliances, the politicians discussed which political system was superior to the other and offered a better standard of living. The debate serves as an example for demonstrating different ideas about gender, whilst simultaneously arguing about which of the two superpowers was superior. To illustrate, equipped with innovative technology, Nixon argued that American homes in the post-war period facilitated the life of women who were ideally not expected to work, in contrast to their Soviet counterparts.⁶¹ As shown in the debate, the fact that Soviet women were working was considered proof of the USSR's inferiority to the United States, where a capitalist system supposedly secured prosperity for all.⁶² American men were considered breadwinners and women "would professionalize homemaking."⁶³ This idealized view sees a secure home with established gender roles and material prosperity as the best defense against the Soviets, and would offer the American Dream to all.⁶⁴ This notion that material wealth, along with new innovations, would make life easier for housewives, as discussed in the kitchen debate, became a symbol of American identity during the early Cold War. The home was considered the place where American freedom was most visible.⁶⁵

By contrast, the Soviet idea of freedom for women claimed that gender equality was essential, argued a Moscow newspaper: "It is only the Soviet Government, (...) that for the

first time in history has guaranteed to women genuine equality with men in all spheres of state, social economic and cultural activities and led them on the highway to a free, creative and happy life.”⁶⁶ The notion of self-supporting women, like Soviet women, did not fit the American domestic ideal.⁶⁷ Self-supporting women were viewed with suspicion, as the concept was considered un-American.⁶⁸ This framing demonstrates that during the early Cold War, ‘Americanness’ was often associated with material wealth, independence, and living the American dream of suburbia, with clearly defined gender roles for both men and women. Specifically, women were ideally not required to work, and men provided for them and their family.⁶⁹

Because the WIDF and CAW did not submit to this American ideal, their activities were considered highly suspicious by American authorities. The framing of the two organizations as communist and un-American is illustrated by the 1949/1950 HUAC report, which reflects the anti-communist witch hunt of McCarthyism. Since HUAC investigated suspected communists which posed a supposed threat to the US, the WIDF and the CAW were ideal suspects. Both were labeled as communist front organizations and were accused of “operating against the democratic nations under close Soviet direction and control.”⁷⁰ The report accused the CAW of not dealing with problems of gender equality, but instead “serv[ing] as a specialized arm of Soviet political warfare in the current “peace” campaign to disarm and demobilize the United States (...) in order to render them helpless in the face of the Communist drive for world conquest.”⁷¹

Hence, HUAC blamed the CAW for being used by the Soviets to promote anti-American propaganda.⁷² The report elaborated on the CAW’s alleged perception of gender and demonstrated that the organization criticized the role of housewives and American family life in general. More specifically, it stated that CAW member Margaret Krumbein claimed that “‘under capitalism, (...) women are kept in a doubly economic position of servitude.’ Husbands insist ‘that the housewife stay at home,’ and ‘not go out to fight back the ravages upon the home and family by monopoly capitalism.’”⁷³ Moreover, the report quoted WIDF member Jeannette Vermersch’s critique of “non-Communist countries [that] ‘want to put across a conception of the family, based on (...) resignation (...) above all before the capitalist masters’.”⁷⁴ The report then stated that Vermersch and the CAW criticized “those who believe ‘women’s function is to (...) do the cooking, [and] the housework.’”⁷⁵ Therefore, HUAC argued that the CAW condemned those who believed that the ideal role for a woman was that of a housewife, symbolizing the position of women in idealized American society. However, the CAW did not oppose the role of housewives, but instead advocated for women to have multiple options beyond becoming housewives.⁷⁶ The organization celebrated women’s roles as mothers but simultaneously challenged the view that it was the only possible position for them.⁷⁷

In response to the CAW’s “blind devotion” to the USSR, the report presented examples to illustrate what the situation was truly like over there.⁷⁸ The examples they provided created an image of over-worked women who are expected to run the household, whilst being employed in occupations traditionally associated with masculinity, for instance, as miners or road workers.⁷⁹ These negative portrayals of the CAW’s idealized Soviet woman,

show that HUAC wanted to portray the CAW as an ‘other’ to the ideal American woman. This ‘other’ is the idea of womanhood that represented everything the idealized American woman was not.⁸⁰ Specifically, the ‘other’ is the archetypical communist woman, who works hard, and despite apparent gender equality, lives a harsh life. In contrast, the model American woman, as demonstrated in the kitchen debate, lives a prosperous life as a mother and housewife.⁸¹ Thus, for HUAC “it is all the more necessary that American women be alerted to its [the CAW’s] true character and aims.”⁸² In fact, the HUAC argued that the CAW only used women’s rights to attract new members: “the dominant Communist group in the Congress of American Women has no interest in or devotion to American democracy and that the suffrage issue is being raised to give respectability to the CAW and to serve as bait for the unwary.”⁸³ Thus, the report’s intent was to warn ‘true’ American women of the false promises of the CAW. Since American politicians claimed the Soviets were deliberately targeting women, HUAC’s ‘warning’ illustrates how the ideal American woman was considered vulnerable to the communists.⁸⁴

The othering of communist women is also visible in other parts of the report. As De Haan has argued, by framing the CAW as “puppets of male Communist Party leadership” HUAC implied that the CAW did not have any agency and therefore posed a danger.⁸⁵ The CAW was labeled as a group of unfree women with no agency that solely followed Soviet orders. This can be linked to conservatives’ widespread belief that communist women were loyal only to the party and not to any men.⁸⁶ However, although the CAW was communist leaning, it was a feminist organization that was not following Soviet orders.⁸⁷ In contrast to the CAW’s ideas of gender roles, the ideal American woman was considered feminine and attractive and ideally, she was not required to work, as she would “professionalize homemaking.”⁸⁸ Additionally, she was free to make her own choices even in domains outside the house, but preferably in positions with limited power.⁸⁹ Women working in white-collar professions were not discouraged, but if they were employed in high positions of power or were considered too dominant, they were considered communists.⁹⁰ American women working in white-collar professions, such as secretaries or even doctors, were not entirely discouraged, as long as the kind of employment fit in the category of appropriate jobs.⁹¹ While women’s participation in politics was used to present “a positive image of the modern American woman in the post-war world,” the ideal American woman should still only be a low-ranking official or housewife.⁹² The idealized American woman was hence free, feminine, and living in comfort, but not too ambitious, dominant, or masculine.

To conclude, this essay has shown that both conventional American society and the WIDF and the CAW had contrasting ideas about gender. For mainstream American society, a woman’s place was in the house as a housewife and mother. However, working women in positions that did not include too much power and no physical work were also deemed appropriate. The post-war home symbolized the ideal American life with clear gender roles, which offered protection against communist influences. From the perspective of the WIDF and the CAW, gender equality was advanced by the USSR, with communist ideology promoting more women’s rights than the American ideal allowed. Although the organizations

were pro-communist and Soviet-funded, they were autonomous organizations. American identity and ideas about gender were constructed by ‘othering’ the hard-working communist woman who lived the harsh life that so-called ‘true’ gender equality created. HUAC framed the two organizations as communist spies that tried to undermine American democracy, as their ideas of gender roles were considered communist indoctrination, and they were accused of solely following Soviet orders. Since they were labeled as ‘unfree’ Soviet marionettes, they and their ideas were ‘othered’ to the ideal American woman, who was free and was not required to work.

Despite the CAW’s short existence, the organization’s ideas survived as they inspired other communist women in their fight for gender equality and even the women’s movement in the 1960s.⁹³ Thus, both the WIDF and CAW and their framing by HUAC reveal much about American identity in the early Cold War, as gender roles were used to show what was deemed American and what was ‘un-American’.

Notes

¹ Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 46-47.

² Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 46; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1988).

³ Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 46-47.

⁴ Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex* (Duke University Press, 2019), 81; Francisca de Haan, “Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt: Die Frühen Jahre Der Internationalen Demokratischen Frauenföderation (IDFF/WIDF) (1945-1950),” *Feministische Studien* 27.2 (2009): 250-254.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶ Francisca de Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF),” *Women's History Review* 19.4 (2010): 548.

⁷ “House Un-American Activities Committee,” Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, National Archives, accessed 12 April 2022, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/presidential-inquiries/house-un-american-activities-committee>

⁸ De Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms,” 548; De Haan, “Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt,” 241; Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, “Fighting Fascism and Forging New Political Activism: The Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in the Cold War,” In *De-Centering Cold War History*, eds. Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney and Fabio Lanza (London: Routledge, 2013), 53-54.

⁹ Melanie Ilic, “Soviet Women, Cultural Exchange and the Women’s International Democratic Federation,” In *Reassessing Cold War Europe* (London: Routledge 2010), 171-188; De Haan, “Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt”; De Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms.”

¹⁰ Amy Swerdlow, “The Congress of American Women: Left-Feminist Peace Politics in the Cold War,” in *U.S. History as Women’s history: New Feminist Essays*, eds. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 301; De Haan, “Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt,” 254.

¹¹ De Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms”; Swerdlow, “Left-Feminist Peace Politics.”

¹² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1965).

¹³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

¹⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” *The Journal of American History* 79.4 (1993): 1455-82.

¹⁵ May, *Homeward Bound*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10, 19-20.

- ¹⁷ Landon R. Y. Storrs, "Attacking the Washington 'Femmocracy': Antifeminism in the Cold War Campaign against 'Communists in Government,'" *Feminist Studies* 33.1 (2007): 118-152.
- ¹⁸ Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex*, 80.
- ¹⁹ May, *Homeward Bound*.
- ²⁰ Weigand, *Red feminism*, 46-47.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 46; May, *Homeward Bound*.
- ²² Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 46-47.
- ²³ Edwin G. Boring, "Review of: Modern Woman: The Lost Sex," review of *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, by Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 42.4 (1947): 480-81; Donald W. Calhoun, "Modern Woman: The Lost Sex," review of *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, by Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, *Social Forces*. The Williams and Wilkins Press, 1948.
- ²⁴ May, *Homeward Bound*, 10-13; 35-36.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-11.
- ²⁶ Ilic, "Soviet women," 16; Storrs, "Attacking the Washington 'Femmocracy'," 124.
- ²⁷ Ilic, "Soviet women," 168-169.
- ²⁸ Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947) as quoted in Storrs, *The Second Red Scare*, 89.
- ²⁹ Storrs, "Attacking the Washington 'Femmocracy'," 120.
- ³⁰ Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex*, 79.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ³² Storrs, *The Second Red Scare*, 89.
- ³³ Storrs, "Attacking the Washington 'Femmocracy'," 143.
- ³⁴ Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," 1458.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1466, 1477-1478.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1468.
- ³⁷ De Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms," 548.
- ³⁸ De Haan, "Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt," 246.
- ³⁹ Mooney, "Fighting fascism," 55-56; Ilic, "Soviet women, cultural exchange," 160.
- ⁴⁰ Mooney, "Fighting fascism," 56.
- ⁴¹ de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms," 555.
- ⁴² de Haan, "Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt," 254-255.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 242.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.
- ⁴⁵ Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 48.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 56-57.
- ⁴⁷ Swerdlow, "Left-Feminist Peace Politics," 301.
- ⁴⁸ Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 56-58; De Haan, "Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt," 251.
- ⁴⁹ Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 57-64; De Haan, "Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt," 251.
- ⁵⁰ De Haan, "Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt," 251.
- ⁵¹ Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 64.
- ⁵² Betty Millard, *Woman against Myth* (New York: International Publishers, 1948), 22, <https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A31735059397616/viewer#page/4/mode/2up>.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ⁵⁵ de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms," 555.
- ⁵⁶ Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex*, 81.
- ⁵⁷ Swerdlow, "Left-Feminist Peace Politics," 308; de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms," 555.
- ⁵⁸ de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms," 564.
- ⁵⁹ de Haan, "Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt," 250-254; de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms," 548.
- ⁶⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*, 16-19.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 17-18.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 17-20.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁶ “U.S., British Women Hailed in Moscow; Their Share in the War Effort Is Noted in Observance of International Women’s Day,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 1946, 15, available from <https://timesmachine-nytimes-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/timesmachine/1946/03/09/100995429.html?pageNumber=15>.

⁶⁷ May, *Homeward Bound*, 19.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

⁷⁰ United States Congress House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) [henceforth HUAC], Report on the Congress of American Women (Washington: United States Government Printing Office 1950), 1, <https://archive.org/details/reportoncongress1949unit/mode/2up?view=theater>.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1.

⁷² Ibid., 2.

⁷³ Ibid., 86.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁶ Millard, *Woman against Myth*, 12-13; Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 56.

⁷⁷ Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 56.

⁷⁸ HUAC, *Report*, 19

⁷⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

⁸⁰ de Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms,” 556.

⁸¹ Ibid., 557.

⁸² HUAC, *Report*, 110.

⁸³ HUAC, *Report*, 103.

⁸⁴ Mooney, “Fighting fascism,” 56.

⁸⁵ De Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms,” 556-557.

⁸⁶ Storrs, *The Second Red Scare*, 91-92.

⁸⁷ De Haan, “Hoffnungen Auf Eine Bessere Welt.”

⁸⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, 19.

⁸⁹ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique.”

⁹⁰ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” 1466; Storrs, *The Second Red Scare*, 103-104.

⁹¹ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique.”

⁹² Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” 1465-1469.

⁹³ Weigand, *Red Feminism*, 64.

The Ideology Behind the Technology: Reflections of Neoliberalism in *Black Mirror*'s "Hated in the Nation"

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*This paper was written for the course Domestic Cultures of US Imperialism
the ReMA program in Arts, Media and Literary Studies*

Black Mirror is a British science-fiction series created by Charlie Brooker which explores how technology may influence life on earth in the near future. The episodes address themes like celebrity culture, social media use, and the power of big tech, through the setting of different dystopian futures. The last episode of season three, "Hated in the Nation," narrates the murder of 387,000 people by programmer Garrett Scholes. He executes the killings by hacking Autonomous Drone Insects (ADIs), which are small drones that imitate the pollination process of bees to prevent environmental collapse.¹ The episode touches upon multiple contemporary political discourses like government surveillance, climate change, and cancel culture. Even though *Black Mirror* is a British production, many episodes are applicable to contemporary American culture. For example, when it comes to surveillance technology, many Americans witnessed their paranoia become a reality after the 2013 Snowden revelations of nationwide surveillance by intelligence agencies.² "Hated in the Nation" reflects some of these anxieties in American culture surrounding surveillance technologies.

"Hated in the Nation," explores different contemporary technologies and their uses. The episode follows Detective Chief Inspector Karin Parke and Trainee Detective Constable Blue Colson from the London police department, investigating the murder of journalist Jo Powers, who recently gained much media attention because of a controversial article she wrote. Shortly after the murder of Powers, rapper Tusk is killed, who received the same online hate as Powers. The detectives, now in collaboration with Shaun Li from the National Crime Agency, soon find out that both victims were killed by ADIs, the bee-like drones made to continue pollination of flowers after the extinction of bees. After they speak to Granular, the company that made the ADIs, project leader Rasmus Sjoberg tells the detectives that the bees know how to locate their victims because they have facial recognition technology. This is the result of a requirement from the government for funding the project. Sjoberg says: "We had to consent to permitting government security services access to the visual feed at times of quote, 'increased national security.' Which is, as I understand it, pretty much all the time."³ Colson's computer skills help the detective team discover a manifesto in one of the ADIs, in which the killer, former Granular employee Garrett Scholes, explains how he used the hashtag #DeathTo to start a "Game of Consequences."⁴ The game entails that each day the person who gets tagged the most on social media with the hashtag #DeathTo gets killed by an ADI. Though the public participates, they are not aware of the lethal nature of this game. Scholes's underlying message is that technological advancement has gone too far and people

should suffer the consequences of the hurtful things they post on social media. When Shaun Li tries to de-activate all ADIs to stop the murders, he instead activates Scholes' endgame, sending the ADIs to kill all 387,000 people who joined the hashtag game.

To further explore the theme of American surveillance technology in this episode, this essay will argue that the use of technology in *Black Mirror's* "Hated in the Nation" reflects the encouragement of neoliberal market ideologies by using a framework of the targeted militarized consumer, as well as exposing hacktivism as an enforcer instead of a disrupter of neoliberal surveillance technologies. I will do this by using media scholar Caren Kaplan's work on how military technologies like GPS make its users 'militarized consumers' through a neoliberal ideology of targeting. Neoliberalism, here, constitutes the ideology of free market capitalism which becomes visible through the marketing of militarized technologies and, in *Hated in the Nation*, through the use of social media. Additionally, I will use Tung-Hui Hu's work on hacktivists to illustrate how hacktivism often helps neoliberal governments in strengthening their surveillance systems instead of exposing these systems. This theory is reflected in *Hated in the Nation* through Scholes' terrorist act. Through this analysis, I hope to expose the neoliberal nature of targeting and hacktivism while highlighting the ability of popular culture to help us understand such complicated mechanisms.

In her article "Precision Targets: GPS and the Militarization of U.S. Consumer Identity," Kaplan explores how US citizens have become militarized consumers through their use of different technologies. She illustrates this through the military history of the Geographic Information Systems (GIS), geodemography (people-based geographical data), and the global positioning system (GPS). Firstly, she describes GIS as "the primary model of data collection, sorting, and storage in use for over thirty years."⁵ GIS is a product of the 1960s, which was an important starting point for military consumerism, during which the term 'military-industrial-complex' was introduced by President Eisenhower and Malcolm Moos, his speechwriter.⁶ The military-industrial-complex represents the strong collaboration between the weapon industry, the military, and the US government. Kaplan explains that the emergence of GIS "required computer research, geo-mapping, photography, and satellite programs – a process that involved academic, government, military and commercial participation."⁷ GIS thus embodies the military-industrial complex because its emergence was partly dependent on military technologies and funding. Secondly, there is geodemography, which is "the use of the computer to identify and map subsets of the US population by zip code and neighborhood," which facilitated the "practice of so-called target-marketing, a geographically based form of classifying neighborhoods through subsets of demographic information."⁸ However, since geodemography depends on data collected by GIS, it shares the same military roots. Lastly, Kaplan discusses the military history of GPS. She explains: "GPS originated as a military technology – a system of satellites launched by the US Department of Defense in the early 1970s – that offered precise ground locations for both defensive and offensive purposes."⁹ In the end, GIS, geodemography, and GPS all have roots in military technology, while, especially in the case of GPS, most users are unaware of this fact.

In addition to other satellite technologies, the American military first used GPS during the Persian Gulf War. Kaplan explains: “Shifting the scale of airpower to ‘space power,’ GPS and other satellite systems aided both air and ground forces, enhancing conventional aerial surveillance to offer a network of image-based mapping and navigation.”¹⁰ By the use of GPS and other satellites, the US military expanded its surveillance system to such an extent that it could attack without ever having seen the target. In the domestic sphere, the satellite technologies did not only generate faster television broadcasting, but also promoted the use of smart bombs that could precisely hit a target while also limiting civilian casualties. However, while American news networks mainly showed the use of these smart bombs, a lot of regular bombs were still being used, and the smart bombs still did not always hit the right targets.¹¹ Because of the overwhelming broadcasting of smart bombs within the domestic sphere, Kaplan explains, “the coverage of the Persian Gulf war the U.S. public watched an extended commercial for GPS.”¹² As a result of the use of these military technologies in the domestic sphere, Americans have thus become militarized consumers.

All of Kaplan’s mentioned technologies are represented in “Hated in the Nation.” GIS, for example, can be found in the technological framework used to overview all the different orchestrated hives of Granular’s ADIs. In this scene, Sjoberg shows Parke and Colson where all the different hives are based on a large screen. Parke mentions: “It is like air traffic control.”¹³ Additionally, in the same scene, geodemography is also used by Colson to identify if there is a hive near Jo Powers’ house by searching for her postcode. Lastly, GPS plays a large role in the episode. When Colson and Sjoberg find a file that Scholes installed on a drive they found, Colson finds that it contains IMEI numbers. She explains: “Every phone, every device has a unique, an IMEI number. It tethers it to a unique user. (...) [Scholes] hoovered up their ID from GCHQ by the looks of it. That backdoor worked both ways, it seems.”¹⁴ Colson refers to the backdoor the government installed on the ADIs to collect the private information of their citizens. The information the ADIs collected was put through to GCHQ, which is a British intelligence agency that is supposed to collect information in support of law enforcement. Scholes hacked the ADIs and could therefore access the information GCHQ collected, including private IMEI numbers. Because Scholes collected that information, he could use GPS to locate each individual user that joined the Game of Consequences with the ADIs. The usage of these militarized technologies in “Hated in the Nation” thus manifests the characters as militarized consumers while simultaneously establishing them as victims of these technologies.

Aside from the characters being depicted as militarized consumers, their use of technology represents the notion of military and consumer targeting. After the introduction of GPS to the American public during the Persian Gulf War, the technology quickly became part of their daily lives. Kaplan writes: “For North Americans, the marketing of this novel technology emphasized personal empowerment and self-knowledge linked to speed and precision (save time, increase efficiency, avoid getting lost).”¹⁵ However, she argues, many people were, and continue to be, unaware of the military history of the technology and how using GPS contributes to a surveillance network. Kaplan explains that “the digitalization of information about yourself that you provide voluntarily to enhance your ‘lifestyle’ also brings

you into networks of surveillance. Who you are, geographically, is a target – of marketers, governments, identity thieves, hackers, and so on.”¹⁶ Thus, by using technologies that seem innocent, users have become complicit in their own targeting. Furthermore, Kaplan explains:

[T]echnoscience and its networks produce target subjects through discourses of precise scales and sites of identity. Yet even as these modes of identification promise greater flexibility and pleasure through the proliferation of ‘choices’ among myriad specificities, they also militarize and thus habituate citizen/consumers to a continual state of war understood as virtual engagement.¹⁷

In other words, citizens have become militarized consumers by passively using technology. This is illustrated by what Colson says in the episode: “These [smartphones] absorb who we are. They know everything about us.”¹⁸ While some of these technologies might seem to increase the user’s freedom, they make them part of a militarized system of targeting.

“Hated in the Nation” thus illustrates the process of militarized targeting through the metaphor of the Game of Consequences. By placing a target on the heads of social media users, the episode reflects the real-life targeting that happens when consumers use their electronic devices. When the Chancellor of Britain, Tom Pickering, becomes the most tagged person in the Game of Consequences, he literally states: “Speaking as a marked man [...]” referring to the target on his head.¹⁹ In this way, the use of technology in the episode reflects a neoliberal ideology; the episode critiques the concept of consumer targeting on social media through its literal depiction of targets on social media through the Game of Consequences. By actively engaging with social media, users voluntarily share private information that gets used for target marketing. Consequently, the militarized consumers are encouraged to buy as many things as possible on the free market.

Besides the neoliberal ideology reflected in the players of the game, the act of terrorism itself also brings to light the underlying motives of neoliberalism. Former network engineer and media scholar Tung-Hui Hu, author of *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (2015), builds on Kaplan’s idea of the militarized consumer in the chapter “Seeing the Cloud of Data” of his book. He states: “To use the cloud is to willingly put on an electronic collar; it is to fuse our hunt for data without identities as marketing prospects. In short, in an environment where all data are needles in petabyte-sized haystacks, we are both the targets of others and targeters ourselves.”²⁰ In this chapter, Hu explores the role of consumers in the surveillance state through so-called hacktivists. Because consumers are mobilized,

‘war as big data’ produces the subject position of a user, that is, a subject that actively participates in securing the system as a whole. [...] When users are responsible for selecting privacy settings, making disaster recovery backups, and even flagging suspicious behavior online, security becomes an everyday responsibility.²¹

In other words, consumers have become active participants in security systems. Hu explores this further through the example of hacktivists who use technological tools to expose security

leaks in the systems of governments or large corporations to encourage social change, as creating awareness surrounding data mining. However, while hacktivists often think they are opposing governmental systems of surveillance, Hu points out that “the sousveillers and the regime they seem to oppose actively share a set of tactics as well as a common belief: namely, that in order to effect change one must actively engage as a user.”²² Hacktivists are, in fact, enforcing the idea of economic neoliberalism by actively engaging with surveillance technologies. Hu states: “NSA director Keith Alexander concluded his DEF CON speech on ‘shared values’ by arguing that hacker participation in Internet security ‘would help us with our economic growth. This would be huge for our country.’”²³ In other words, not only are the governmental agencies thankful for the services hacktivists provide for them, but they are also actors in the economic growth in the technological industry, enforcing instead of disrupting neoliberal market ideologies.

Besides Scholes critiquing contemporary social media trends like cancel culture with his *Game of Consequences*, he also exposes the surveillance systems implemented by the government through the ADIs. Hu states:

Though we tend to think of our security and marketing as separate ideas, government agencies openly purchase information from private-sector marketing databases, such as flight records and credit data, in order to track dissidents, criminals, and provocateurs online and then arrest, deport, and torture them.²⁴

This is exactly what happens in “Hated in the Nation.” The National Crime Agency uses catching criminals as an excuse for the surveillance technology implemented in the ADIs. Li states: “We tracked suspects for weeks in ways they couldn’t dream of. We prevented bombings, mass shootings.”²⁵ By hacking the ADIs to execute his terrorist attack, Scholes exposes the nationwide surveillance that the government authorized on its population. However, while one might think this would contribute to a governmental collapse, it seems like there is no true ideological critique towards the surveillance technologies used. This is especially prominent at the end of the episode. Instead of taking down the British government for facilitating the hack of Scholes in the first place, the episode ends with Colson chasing down Scholes on a secret mission conducted by Parke and Colson themselves in an unspecified country.²⁶ Even though we do see Parke driving through a crowd with protest signs with slogans like “#DeathTo Granular” and “ADIs: We Want The Truth!,” these protesters seem to direct themselves at Granular instead of the government.²⁷ There is, therefore, also a big chance that the public does not know yet about the governmental surveillance, even though this is something that Scholes brought to light through his extreme form of hacktivism.

Either way, “Hated in the Nation” reflects Hu’s argument that hacktivism enforces neoliberal market ideologies. While Scholes exposes nationwide surveillance, in the end, the focus of the episode was on Scholes’ act of terrorism and his individual blame, rather than the system that facilitated the hack in the first place. The ending of the episode implies that the government is the final winner, having been exposed to one of the flaws in their

surveillance system by Scholes. As a result, they can update future forms of surveillance technology to an even better version. In this way, Scholes' act and its reception reflect the neoliberal market ideology that enforces the government's use of surveillance technologies. Moreover, both the US military and Scholes show a disregard for civilian casualties within their targeting. Instead of exposing the frightening results of the technological revolution, Scholes has enforced the neoliberal market ideology by helping to improve the technological industry.

"Hated in the Nation" provides a dystopian framework to think about the implications of neoliberal market ideology within contemporary technology. The militarized consumer as introduced by Caren Kaplan helps us to understand the history of our technologies, while also providing a framework for understanding targeting as a neoliberal concept. Additionally, Tung-Hui Hu's analysis of hacktivism as an enforcer of neoliberal market ideology puts the proposed critique in "Hated in the Nation" into another perspective. Instead of focusing on the government and its ideology as the facilitator of Scholes' terrorist attack, there is a focus on the individual actor. It is important to analyze dystopian television series like *Black Mirror* because they can help to make us think critically about the use of technology in our daily lives. Hopefully, episodes like this will inspire their viewers to take real-life action towards the dystopian reality of surveillance technologies, like grassroots organized protests or boycotting the companies that use our data for surveillance purposes.

Notes

¹ *Black Mirror*, season 3, episode 6, "Hated in the Nation," directed by James Hawes, aired October 21, 2016, Netflix.

² Terence McSweeney and Stuart Joy, *Through the Black Mirror: Deconstructing the Side Effects of the Digital Age* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 181.

³ *Black Mirror*, "Hated in the Nation," 57:08.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:09:03.

⁵ Caren Kaplan, "Precision Targets: GPS and the Militarization of U.S. Consumer Identity," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2006): 694.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 694.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 695.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 694.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 696.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 702.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 705.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Black Mirror*, "Hated in the Nation," 34:10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:15:44.

¹⁵ Kaplan, 697.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 706.

¹⁸ *Black Mirror*, "Hated in the Nation," 12:13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:02:23.

²⁰ Tung-Hui Hu, *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), 111.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

²² *Ibid.*, 114-115.

²³ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁵ *Black Mirror*, "Hated in the Nation," 58:15.

²⁶ Ibid., 1:26:39.

²⁷ Ibid., 1:25:30.

Patriarchal Capitalism and the Gendered Experience of Crisis

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This paper was written for the course Crises of the Republic: Politics and Culture in the 21st Century United States in the MA program in American Studies

In *The German Ideology*, philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels write that “Communism is for us not a ‘state of affairs’ which is to be established, an ‘ideal’ to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the ‘real’ movement which abolished the present state of things.”¹ Communism is thus not presented as an alternative state of affairs, like socialism is to liberalism, but as the total abolition of contemporary affairs. To Marx and Engels, this was the only solution to capitalism’s excesses. The idea of the total disruption of contemporary society as a harbinger for a new societal order is frequently explored in popular media through crisis narratives. Writers express their interpretation of this idea through various genres and formats.

The notion of crisis can be incredibly instrumental in abolishing the old and heralding the new. According to historian Reinhart Koselleck, the term crisis has been used as a philosophy of history from the second half of the eighteenth century forward. Prior to that, the term had always been used in the medical context of deadly illnesses or with a religious connotation linked to concepts as ‘last judgement’ and the ‘apocalypse’.² The use of the term crisis has since evolved and came to be used as a mode to perceive history by forming ideas about future goals and interpreting current situations. A crisis became a point in time where a rift was created between the past and an envisioned future. In line with this shift, anthropologist Janet Roitman has described crisis as “a non-locus from which one claims access to history and knowledge of history.”³ The individual or group of people declaring a crisis grant themselves a sense of authority in judging the norm and the deviation thereof. With the declaration of a crisis, an actor observes the situation at hand and simultaneously declares that it is not the way it ought to be.

A crisis is also a call for change and action: a universal understanding that something is not right and needs to be fixed. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben has argued that crises can thereby legitimize a ‘state of exception’: a situation in which rights can be encroached on by claim of the pursuit of the greater good. Agamben is especially concerned with the state of exception in the political context where nations increasingly lay power of authority and decision making in the hands of the executive power in crisis situations. Crisis can thus lead to situations where the government, self-determination, territory, and commitments of a nation are “seriously and immediately threatened and the regular functioning of the constitutional public powers (...) interrupted.”⁴ The state of exception designates a person or government the power and voice of authority and legality and allows for the demonstration of exceptional and erratic behavior. Agamben argues that the basis for the state of exception lies

in the idea that “necessity has no law” as judgement concerning the existence of a crisis resolves the question of legality of the action taken.⁵

This paper analyzes how gender informs different approaches to this state of exception in crisis narratives. Crisis narratives written by men featuring male protagonists generally adhere to Agamben’s theory of the state of exception as a justifying concept for exceptional behavior. However, this does not seem to be the case for crisis narratives written by women featuring female protagonists. Female protagonists do not experience this legitimization of exceptional behavior and are reprimanded, told to keep quiet, and not taken seriously. This paper seeks to add nuance to the understanding of the state of exception and argues that men and women describe and are written to experience times of crisis differently. The male protagonist in crisis narratives written by men is legitimized to act when the oppression he experiences reaches a certain breaking point. He then becomes the central figure in declaring a crisis for a larger audience and is justified in retaliating against the oppressors with violence. Crisis narratives written by women tend to be more contemplative about individual roles in crises. There is no underlying assumption of actions being legitimized when the protagonist has suffered enough. Rather, female writers, and thus their protagonists, contemplate whether acting is the right course of action at all.

I will demonstrate this thesis through six cultural texts. For the male writers and protagonists these are Todd Phillips’ *Joker* (2019), Boots Riley’s *Sorry To Bother You* (2018), and Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (2017) and for the female writers and protagonists these are: Kitty Green’s *The Assistant* (2019), Bonnie Jo Campbell’s *Mothers Tell Your Daughters* (2015), and Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014). The differences between these narratives will be explained using a Marxist reading of gender roles.

The movie *Joker* (2019) is the origin story of ‘Batman’ villain Arthur Fleck, a social outcast with aspirations to become a famous stand-up comedian. He leads an impoverished life, living in his mother’s house as he tries to get by as a party clown. Fleck is frequently the subject of harassment and bullying, especially aimed at his laughing disorder. Life for Fleck in Gotham City is dreary and he gradually bottles up his resentment towards the world. Throughout the narrative, he shows increasingly more violent behavior as the world mistreats him. He murders three men on the subway for bullying him, but feels legitimized as he “killed those guys because they were awful. Everybody is awful these days. It's enough to make anyone crazy.”⁶ His lack of remorse is portrayed as the result of his own tough life, made clear by phrases such as: “Ugh, why is everybody so upset about these guys? If it was me dying on the sidewalk you'd walk right over me! I pass you every day and you don't notice me!”⁷ The movie climaxes when Fleck is a featured guest on a talk show. He believes he has been granted his big break into stardom by virtue of a video of his stand-up comedy going viral. However, Fleck finds out he has actually been made the laughing stock once again. He snaps and yells at the host: “What do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him and treats him like trash? You get what you fuckin' deserve!” before shooting him in the head.⁸ As the talk show is broadcast live, the news of Fleck’s deed spreads quickly and rioting citizens dressed in Fleck’s distinctive clown-attire take to the streets. The rioters free him from

the police car that was supposed to take him away and Fleck finds himself surrounded by a mob of cheering admirers.

Sorry to Bother You (2018) is an absurdist social satire about a man named Cassius “Cash” Green, who starts a riot against his employer after finding out that he is involved in a scheme to enslave the whole world. Green’s need for money leads him to accept a job offer at a telemarketing company. He soon learns he can make sales faster when using a ‘White voice’ instead of his own. This discovery leads him to rise through the ranks of the telemarketing company quickly propelled by his many sales. Green is promoted to the top floor and soon finds out the horrible truth about the half-human/half-horse monstrosities his employer is creating to carry out slave labor. The movie climaxes when Green decides to protest at a picket fence, and rallies other people to join him in storming his employer’s house. The city is in complete disarray as the mob of protesters and horse-human hybrids cause chaos, vandalize property, and overpower the police. As the movie ends, Green is reunited with his idealist girlfriend seemingly as a reward for his courageous behavior.

In race-based horror movie *Get Out* (2017), Chris Washington is held hostage by his girlfriends’ family who want to transplant his brain to make use of his body. The movie follows Washington, a Black man, and his White girlfriend Rose as he visits her parents’ house for the first time. The viewer is alerted that something sinister is underneath the surface throughout Washington’s increasingly more unsettling encounters with his in-laws and their maid and gardener. As it turns out, their maid and gardener are actually the grandparents of the family living in the bodies of two hypnotized Black people. Washington finds out he is about to befall the same fate when his mother-in-law tries to hypnotize him into a state of “heightened suggestibility.”⁹ However, when his in-laws want to commence the brain transplant procedure it turns out that Washington was not hypnotized at all. He was able to block the hypnosis by stuffing his ears with furniture padding. At the movie’s climax, Washington murders every one of his in-laws present at the house and is driven off into freedom by a friend.

In all three movies, the protagonists react to crisis with violence, murder, and rioting, and all end with police sirens, terror, and dead bodies. Their actions are directly causal to the declaration of the crisis on a larger scale as they become the ones who decide when it is justified to retaliate. Therefore, the men express little remorse for their actions. The viewer is supposed to sympathize with them based on their peril and root for them as they break away from their oppression by any means possible. The three men all claim a sense of authority in declaring a crisis in line with the previously established definition. Their crises are individual observations of situations based on a personal judgement of normalcy and its deviation. The narrative in cultural texts written by men featuring male protagonists is centered on the journey to the breaking point: the state of exception in which the characters’ behavior is legitimized by the oppression they have experienced leading up to it. Arthur Fleck in *Joker*, Cassius Green in *Sorry To Bother You*, and Chris Washington in *Get Out* are all men who experience oppression, either classist, financial, racial, or a combination of them. The screen time is largely used to show how the protagonists are bullied, threatened, and humiliated culminating into the climax at the end of the movies. The oppression Fleck,

Green, and Washington experience is used as moral justification for their actions later when they retaliate against the world.

In contrast, the narrative in cultural texts written by women featuring female protagonists is centered on the exploration of moral and long-term implications of acting in crises. *The Assistant* (2019) is a movie chronicling a day in the life of Jane as the personal assistant to a Harvey Weinstein-esque boss. Jane becomes increasingly aware of her boss abusing his powers as a movie executive to coerce women into having sex with him. Her discomfort with the insidious abuse grows as she moves through her daily routine. The viewer follows her struggle as she questions how to help the women without jeopardizing her own career. She tries to report it to HR but is told she is better off keeping quiet as voicing the injustice will only result in her losing her job. Jane is aware of her own volatile position and is subject to abuse and objectification herself. In one phone call, her boss informs her: “I’m not gonna yell at you. Am I yelling? No. Because you’re not someone even worthy of that. (...) So, let me ask, do you want to keep this job?”¹⁰ The HR employee lets her know she does not have to worry about her boss’s harassment as she is “not his type.”¹¹ Eventually she decides to do nothing, and the narrative turns into her complacency in the crisis.

Mothers Tell Your Daughters (2015), a series of fictional short stories by Bonnie Jo Campbell, features mostly female protagonists that are living in lower-class rural realities and frequently experience sexual and domestic abuse. Sometimes they stand up for themselves and on other occasions they do not. The common thread in the stories is the considerations the women make before acting. One woman contemplates the things she will lose when she leaves her man: “Pity the slug with no house on her back, no camping trailer in which to hide — she is all sex and no safety.”¹² Leaving an abusive relationship is terrifying to her as she is dependent on her husband for her security and having a roof over her head. If she leaves the one dangerous situation, she might just end up in another possibly more volatile situation. Another protagonist fears nobody listening to her or believing her if she speaks up. A third feels guilt about being partially to blame for her sexual abuse by enjoying sex and male attention. Most stories end by the abused women finding solace in the small things in life: food, art, soft fabrics, or the company of people around them.

In *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), Claudia Rankine expresses her personal experiences as a woman of color through a series of lyric essays. She chronicles how she often struggles with whether she should act when she is confronted with (micro)aggressions or whether it is better to keep quiet. She feels responsibility and disappointment “in the sense that no amount of visibility will alter the ways in which one is perceived.”¹³ She concludes that keeping quiet and creating a different persona to help dissociate when facing racist injustices is the most viable coping mechanism. The book ends with the protagonist answering the question “Did you win?” with “It wasn’t a match (...) It was a lesson.”¹⁴ The protagonist knows that fighting her oppression is not a battle to be won, but a lesson in how to cope with its presence in her life.

Something all three stories have in common is the coping mechanisms the women find that help them live with the burden of oppression. Jane finds her moments of peace in frequent phone calls with her parents. She does not tell them about the abuse, but the calls

do give her a coping mechanism to face her work situation until she can leave for another job. One of Campbell's characters says: "Those men took me by surprise, but I never looked back, never stopped singing love songs, never longed for a time before men."¹⁵ Neglected gardens, familial bonds, gingham curtains and peanut-butter frosted cookies: all are things the protagonists use to deal with the burden of continuing to live in their abusive circumstances. Rankine describes how someone's hurtful words ran like puke down her blouse, she hated what she felt but she decided to keep it to herself. "You pull yourself to standing, soon enough the blouse is rinsed, it's another week, the blouse is beneath your sweater, against your skin, and you smell good."¹⁶ Aside from contemplating acting in an instance of crisis, the female protagonists also find ways to cope with the decision they have made to do nothing and bear the weight of the oppression.

In these cultural texts, the female protagonists respond to their oppression with contemplation, and the crises in the narratives are constituted by an ongoing slew of oppression. The women's actions and experiences are not central to the larger crisis, but are examples of individual stories. Jane in *The Assistant*, multiple female protagonists in the short stories of *Mothers Tell Your Daughters*, and Rankine in her personal poems in *Citizen* all experience classist and financial oppression as well, combined with gender-based discrimination. As opposed to the aforementioned male protagonists, whose actions are legitimized by their peril by default, these female protagonists question whether acting is the right thing to do. The actual crisis is not always explicit in these narratives and sometimes the characters decide to do nothing at all. Never do the protagonists become celebrated heroes like in the male protagonist cultural texts nor are they taken seriously when deciding to speak up. The reader is supposed to sympathize with the protagonists through their steadfastness in the face of peril: their weighing of their options and the decision to carry a burden. The idea of a 'state of exception' legitimizing exceptional behavior is tried and tested carefully by the protagonists, but they are harshly reprimanded when they voice their concerns. They have no authority in declaring a crisis and the men around them encourage them to keep their mouth shut. The women voicing their discomfort are not celebrated nor seen as heroic. Instead, the protagonists are accused of rocking the boat and overexaggerating their stories.

An explanation for this gendered gap in crisis narratives can be found in the theory that men and women experience the world differently due to their expected roles in society, many of which are shaped by capitalist structures and processes. According to sociologist Martha E. Gimenez, characteristics assigned to men and women "reflect the social formation within which they emerge as social agents."¹⁷ A fundamental factor for social relations in capitalist societies is the dominant mode of production which determines the social organization and economic foundations of reproduction.¹⁸ Capitalism relies on the exploitation of labor and this mode of production, and the hegemony of private ownership as an indicator of achievement has shaped gender relations accordingly.¹⁹

Historically, men have been tasked with production while women have been tasked with reproduction and support.²⁰ This meant that women depended on men for access to the means of production. Men were designated to be workers, selling their physical labor to those who own the means of production. However, this also required the organization of physical

and social lives of women, who had to stay at home and ensure men were fed and clothed and a new generation of employees was raised.²¹ The availability of material goods determined survival rates, and adjusting to lives of good servitude gave a better guarantee at people's access to them. In this situation, the role of women has been subordinated to that of men, as they have been the ones with access to the means of production. Any woman who wanted to challenge her role as a servant of the working class would quickly find that the threat of starvation is fairly coercive. As such, gender inequality is a byproduct of historical conditions and becomes quantifiable through capitalist circumstances, such as unequal pay, unequal access to education and labor, domestic violence, segregated employment, and underrepresentation in positions of power.²²

Unfortunately, gendered expectations have not dissipated completely in contemporary society, despite women's increased presence on the work floor. They are now expected to perform jobs with less career perspective and a lower wage than men.²³ This leaves women in an impossible split between low-wage unskilled labor, co-dependency on men to be able to pay the bills on account of a gender wage gap. This is often combined with the expectation of still running life at home and taking care of the next generation. This split likely explains why women in cultural texts are more contemplative before deciding to act. Contemporary patriarchal society rests on the male domination of public life as men still occupy comfortable majorities in politics and market industries and have shaped social institutions like economics, religion, ideology, and politics into what they are today.²⁴

Unlike the 'state of exception' theorized by Agamben, women's behavior in crisis situations is not legitimized. They are reprimanded and told to keep quiet or face repercussions, because it might not be in a woman's favor to rock the boat and retaliate against her oppressors from a position of dependence. The female protagonists in the cultural texts analyzed prior weigh whether it is in their benefit to speak up or whether it would be a better option in the long run to learn how to live with the oppression. The exploitation of a woman's labor by men is seen as natural because the value of her labor goes directly into enabling men to increase the value of theirs.²⁵ Women often carry out the socially necessary productive labor that capitalism finds unprofitable and rely on men's wages to survive. Women thus have a double dependency on the men with access to capital, as well as the men who own the capital. This double dependency could explain why women are more contemplative when depicted in crisis narratives.

The cultural texts analyzed in this paper are all examples of crisis narratives, but analysis has shown how male and female writers approach the topic of crisis in their stories differently. Male writers tend to create stories featuring male protagonists in which the legitimizing factor of the 'state of exception' is a precondition for the actions of the main character. The stories are largely about the oppression and injustices the men experience until, right before the end of the story, they decide to retaliate against their oppressors. This results in the audience rooting for male characters as they commit vandalism, beat up, and kill the people who have mistreated them. The protagonists show little to no contemplation

over their actions and the repercussions in the long run. The stories end with the character standing amidst the chaos they caused, celebrated as a hero.

Female writers, on the other hand, write stories that precede this legitimizing factor of the ‘state of exception’. They leave much more room for complex feelings of contemplation and guilt, and the exploration of which things do transcend the boundaries of crisis and ease the burden of oppression. The female protagonists seem to experience a lot more internal conflict and throughout their stories they are forced to ponder whether they should feel guilty, if they should speak up, and how they can continue living under the circumstances without being bothered too much. All female protagonists have intimate experiences with music, food, art, and relationships in ways that cushion their oppressive reality and helps gather strength to carry the burden.

The stories by male writers center around a single presupposition: when an individual is treated unjustly, they have a right to rebel in any manner possible. The stories by female writers center about the exploration of that presupposition: what the definition is of unjust and which means are legitimate forms of rebellion. Fleck, Green, and Washington are celebrated for their heroism they show, but Jane, Campbell’s protagonists, and Rankine are reprimanded when they try to challenge the system. They are told it is better to keep quiet and learn to cope with the oppression they experience. The female writers show how action-taking is much more complicated for women who have a more dependent position in the world than men.

The idea of the ‘state of exception’ as a legitimizing factor in crisis is thus not a universal, but a specifically masculine conception of the term. As is apparent in Koselleck, Roitman, and Agamben’s theories, the declaration of a crisis indicates the authority a person has to perceive a situation, defines what the norm is and to what extent the current situation deviates from it, and subsequently makes a large plea for change or action. Agamben’s concept of a ‘state of exception’ being a legitimizing factor for subsequent behavior is true in the male context, but has a different effect in stories where women face crises situations. The idea that erratic and exceptional behavior is justified by the ‘state of exception’ as part of a crisis is therefore not an established fact for women. The ‘state of exception’ could thus be classified as a masculine concept and should be given nuanced consideration in a female context. Women are often placed in more volatile and dependent positions than men, where they must consider the repercussions more carefully should they dare challenge the system.

Notes

¹ As quoted by Joshua Clover in “Transition: The End of the Debate,” *American Studies* 62.4 (2017): 541.

² Reinhart Koselleck, “Crisis,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67.2 (2006): 370.

³ Janet Roitman, “Crisis,” *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, <http://www.politicalconcepts.org/issue1/crisis/>.

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶ Todd Phillips, director, *Joker*, Warner Bros, 2019.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Jordan Peele, director, *Get Out*, Universal Pictures, 2017.

¹⁰ Kitty Green, director, *The Assistant*, Bleecker Street, 2019.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

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- ¹² Bonnie Jo Campbell, *Mothers Tell Your Daughters* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2016), 125.
- ¹³ Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 30.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.
- ¹⁵ Campbell, 78.
- ¹⁶ Rankine, 14.
- ¹⁷ Martha E. Gimenez, "Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited," *Science & Society* 69.1 (2005): 14.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ¹⁹ Gimenez, 19.
- ²⁰ Carol A. Brown, "Patriarchal Capitalism and the Female-Headed Family," *Social Scientist* 4 (1975): 29.
- ²¹ Dahlström and Rita Liljeström, 4.
- ²² Gimenez, 16.
- ²³ Shiloh Whitney, "Byproductive Labor: A Feminist Theory of Affective Labor Beyond the Productive-Reproductive Distinction," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44.6 (2018): 640.
- ²⁴ Edmund Dahlström and Rita Liljeström, "The Patriarchal Heritage and the Working-Class Women," *Acta Sociologica* 26.1 (1983): 7.
- ²⁵ Brown, 29.

Book Review

The Atlantic Realists: Empire and International Political Thought Between Germany and the United States

Matthew Specter (Stanford University Press, 2022)

Paul Brennan | Roosevelt Institute for American Studies / Leiden University

This book review was written independently for the Netherlands American Studies Review

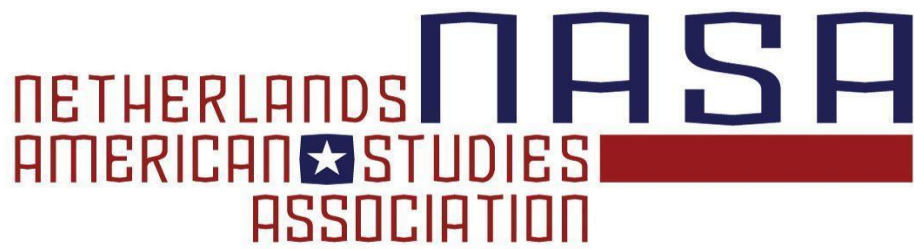
"The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must," spoke the Athenian historian Thucydides over two millennia ago. And hence was coined a key adage that inspired a centuries-spanning tradition of political writing that continues to thrive within the realist school of International Relations (IR). Or, at least, that is what the official history of the latter would have you believe. For as Matthew Specter convincingly argues in his intellectual history, *The Atlantic Realists: Empire and International Political Thought Between Germany and the United States* (2022), the roots of the realist school can be more plausibly sourced to the turn of the twentieth century. And in that era of great power competition and the pursuit of empire, Specter specifically locates the origins of this tradition as emerging from within those two upstart powers of the era: Germany and the United States.

The Atlantic Realists demonstrates that, as both Germany and United States pursued their own imperialist projects, each gave rise to an influential set of thinkers and writers who began to reimagine the international realm in ways conducive to the ambitions of their respective polities. Specter highlights the importance that the geopolitical writings of figures like Alfred Thayer Mahan, Friedrich Ratzel, Karl Haushofer, and Isaiah Bowman represented to the later development of postwar IR realism. Specter argues that it was the suspected (and often quite plausible) association of such geopolitical thinkers and writings with the horrors of Nazi German imperialism that necessitated the construction of an alternative and less tainted tradition. In doing, as Specter asserts, self-identified postwar thinkers such as George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau "turned realism from a European varietal of empire-talk into the global common sense of the international realm."¹

While the argument Specter presents is certainly persuasive, he could have strengthened it by more thoroughly tracing the tangible and intellectual connections between the differing thinkers and ideas discussed. For throughout the book, Specter tends to focus more upon the conceptual and discursive resemblances between the various thinkers and their work, rather than the interpersonal or institutional ties between them. Nonetheless, *The Atlantic realists* represents a very timely warning to be wary of claims made in the name of realism that characterize the international realm as forever fated to be defined by power relations and conflict.

Notes

¹ Matthew G. Specter, *The Atlantic realists: Empire and international political thought between Germany and the United States* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2022), 17.



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Students can submit either **papers (2000-5000 words)** or **book reviews (350-400 words)**. Papers may be based on a thesis, as long as they are shortened to meet the word limit.

All submissions must meet the following requirements:

- Submissions must include the author's **name, university, the title of the course and program** it was written for (specifying BA/MA/PhD), and the **year** it was written.
- Texts must meet the **word count** mentioned above, references included.
- All authors must use **Chicago Style with endnotes (!)** for citations. If you are unfamiliar with this style, please consult www.chicagomanualofstyle.org before submitting your paper.
- Documents must be submitted in Word format (**.doc or .docx**).
- Texts must be written in **American English**. Please check your text for spelling and grammar before submitting.

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