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Welcome

to the seventh 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 2023 issue, you will find eight carefully selected pieces that reflect the topical diversity and interdisciplinary nature of our field in the Netherlands. Our contributors cover a variety of issues, ranging from the US' 'reverse course' policy toward Japan to a critique of the conventional crisis narrative in Philipp Meyer's *American Rust*, and from the linkages between environmental justice and racial justice to an exploration of 'white Christian nationalism.' These papers were written by students in different stages of their higher education, ranging from the early stages of their bachelor's to the final stages of their master's.

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.

Christine Mertens
Editor-in-Chief

On behalf of the Editorial Board
Stijn Berendsen
Elske Frentz
Job Wester
Pip van der Zanden

Academic Coordinator
Dr. William Michael Schmidli

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A Communist Threat?
Historiographical Essay on the motivations behind the 'reverse course' of the US occupation of Japan

Kirsten Soer | Leiden University
This paper was written for the course Major Issues in American History and Culture for the MA program in North American Studies

In the wake of the Second World War, the United States (US) occupied Japan from 1945 until 1952. Initially, the occupational government SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers) focused on the demilitarization of Japan. This was in accordance with the Initial Postsurrender Policy that sought "to ensure that Japan [would] not again become a menace to the US or the peace and security of the world" and "to bring about the establishment of a peaceful and responsible government."[1] SCAP's policies aimed to limit the influence of militarists through disarmament, by purging militarists from government, and by censoring pro-militarist media. Additionally, SCAP intended to enhance the political power of working-class Japanese vis-à-vis the landowners and industrialists, by imposing land reforms, increasing labor rights, and partitioning Japan's industrial combines, which functioned as oligopolies, or *zaibatsu.*

By the late 1940s, however, SCAP's focus shifted from demilitarization and empowering the working-class to strengthening Japan's economy. Accordingly, it increased its support for right-wing and conservative actors in Japanese society, including those associated with the war.[2] Charges were dropped against figures who were previously arrested for war crimes, while Japan's pro-union left was subjected to anticommunist purges.[3] Moreover, after the Korean war erupted in 1950, US officials "elevated the rebuilding of the Japanese military to a paramount goal."[4] This led them to provide the training and resources that helped the newly established National Police Reserve evolve into the Self Defense Forces that remain Japan's military until today. These changes in policy were soon dubbed the "reverse course" by Japanese media and elicited questions as to why the occupational government had changed its postwar policy.[5]

Scholars have debated the factors that contributed to the reverse course, which became noticeable during the late 1940s and intensified after the onset of the Korean War. For long, the dominant view has been that the reverse course was driven by Cold War considerations, for instance, "the desire to strengthen Japan as an anti-communist bulwark" in an economic and military sense.[6] More recently, however, scholars, such as historian Hajimu Masuda, have argued that the effect of the Cold War on the reverse course has been overstated. Masuda, for instance, observes that the anti-communist purges, known as Red Purges, were utilized to legitimize the firing of difficult employees and push political adversaries out of labor unions, by framing them as communist sympathizers.[7] Other historians, such as John Dower and Jennifer Miller, appear to be more interested in the structure, ideology, and practices of the occupational government, than in the question whether the reverse course was motivated by Cold War concerns. Emphasizing the importance of policymakers' beliefs about race and culture, they observe that

SCAP policies stemmed from fears that the Japanese were predisposed to embrace subversive ideologies, such as the autocratic militarism of the recent war.

This essay examines and compares Michael Schaller's *The American Occupation of Japan*, Miller's *Cold War Democracy*, Masuda's *Cold War Crucible*, and Dower's *Embracing Defeat*, to assess scholarly perspectives. This essay analyzes these works because of the distinct approaches they take to the US occupation of Japan, which indicates a shift in the field of occupation studies. Schaller's work from 1987, for instance, is representative of the era's focus on the global Cold War. It examines the US occupation of Japan in order to explain subsequent US policies towards Asia. Therefore, Schaller focuses on US policymakers and asserts that economic and military concerns encouraged a new approach towards the reconstruction of Japan. More recent scholarship, however, emphasizes the importance of developments within Japan to the reverse course. This is partially facilitated by scholars' increased use of Japanese-language sources. Miller and Dower, for instance, argue that occupation officials feared the eruption of a communist revolution in Japan, based on their beliefs about Japanese society. In *Embracing Defeat* (1999), Dower observes that SCAP officials worried that the Japanese might be predisposed to embrace extreme ideologies. Miller, subsequently, argues that officials' preoccupation with Japanese citizens' psychology informed both pre- and post-reverse course policies. Hence, she suggests some continuity, despite changes in geopolitics. Finally, Masuda is even more apprehensive to ascribe occupation policies to geopolitical concerns. He argues that the reverse course partially resulted from the personal ambitions of those involved.

This essay examines and compares the aforementioned research to reveal how the global Cold War context— which once appeared to sufficiently explain US foreign policy —has increasingly taken a backseat in scholarship on the US occupation of Japan. The considerations that more recent scholars emphasize instead, suggest that an exclusive focus on geostrategic concerns obfuscates the reality of policymaking, as ideologies and personal considerations affect decisions to remilitarize and to strengthen or obstruct economies too.

Exploring the international context of the reverse course, Schaller focuses on American officials and the people with whom they negotiated. He reveals that near the end of the Second World War, many of Japan's traditional conservatives - wartime moderates who were opposed to extreme militarism - and American diplomats feared that communism would take root in Japan, either through interference of the Soviets or Chinese communists, or via a "leftist revolution."[8] The traditional conservatives, Schaller observes, were often called 'moderates' or 'liberals' by American officials and played an important role in setting the postwar agenda. They had organized themselves as early as 1941 in the YOHANSEN group and hoped for a negotiated peace. They "considered the war an unwinnable blunder likely to bring revolution in its wake."[9] Resenting the expanded power of the military and fearing a popular revolt aimed at the old elite, they favored the US as the sole occupying power of postwar Japan and postulated that Japan

"could be allowed to rejoin the Asian-Pacific community," after the country had been "disarmed, democratized, and economically reformed."[10]

In light of these considerations, a future alliance between the US and Japan against communism in the Pacific region appeared to be within the realm of possibility, even as they fought in the Pacific. Based on his correspondence with Japanese conservatives, American Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew told President Harry S. Truman that "the US must offer some concessions to Tokyo, especially assurances that a postwar occupation would avoid any program of revolutionary change."[11] Secretary of War Henry Stimson was also willing to negotiate with Japanese conservatives after the war. He conveyed that Japan "was not led solely by mad fanatics," but that it "had been a responsible great power," before militarists seized control.[12] During the war, American policymakers were seriously concerned about the spread of communism in the Pacific. Therefore, they were receptive to the recommendations of Japanese conservatives, who were hoping for occupation policies in their favor.

However, Japan's sudden, dramatic change from responsible governance to wartime militarism had been cause for concern amongst American officials. Dower discusses these officials' subsequent shift in perception regarding Japan's national character. He observes that the Japanese were depicted in American war media as "children, savages, sadists, madmen, or robots."[13] Consequently, Dower argues, America's aim to transform Japan into a responsible, non-threatening, democratic power, necessitated a re-branding of the Japanese as sensible people capable of governance. Therefore, SCAP officials adopted the research of wartime behavioral scientists, who had recently concluded that "the Japanese national character was pendulum-like, capable of swinging from one extreme to another — and consequently, capable of shifting from fanatical militarism to some form of qualified democracy."[14]

This thesis, however, also implied that Japan could easily abandon democracy when swayed by another ideology such as communism. Moreover, while the pendulum thesis dispelled the myth that the Japanese were inherently incapable of sensible democratic governance, it did not negate the belief that they were inclined to follow authority. Whereas Dower argues that the pendulum thesis reinforced stereotypes characterizing the Japanese as an "obedient herd," Schaller suggests that the Japanese's alleged inclination to follow authority was likely reinforced by Japanese officials, who sought the "retention of the emperor as the only safeguard against Japan's conversion to communism."[15]

Miller argues that American officials hoped to prevent Japan's embrace of undesirable ideologies by carefully fostering a democratic mindset through democratic institutions and propaganda.[16] She argues that concerns about the Japanese mindset pervaded occupation policies from the onset. Building on Dower's argument that American officials perceived Japanese citizens as inclined to follow authority, Miller argues that occupation officials aimed to instill democratic values in the Japanese population in order to decrease their susceptibility to subversive ideologies.[17] Miller emphasizes that economic considerations and global Cold War developments alone are insufficient to explain the reverse course. Instead, she argues that

American officials' conception of "democratization as a psychological process" was central to the bewildering transformation of the early Cold War, building on Dower's assertion that reform required a reinterpretation of the Japanese.[18]

Scholars debate why General Douglas MacArthur — head of SCAP and known as 'SCAP' himself — exuded confidence that his agency would remake Japan's mentalities.[19] In his pioneering analysis, Schaller, argues that MacArthur presented himself as the sole democratizer of the Japanese because of his political ambitions. He emphasizes that MacArthur could do so, because he had appointed acquaintances from the Philippines and the Pacific campaigns as high-level administrators in Tokyo.[20] Moreover, Schaller notes that the general faced little scrutiny, as most American officials, citizens, and press agents were more concerned with the Chinese Civil War, than with the reconstruction Japan, before 1950.[21] Reflecting her interest in ideas about democratization, Miller adds to Schaller's view that MacArthur's announcements of "new victories in taming and spiritually transforming a warrior race" not only served his political ambitions, but also exemplified his belief in "democratization as a psychological process."[22] Masuda, however, is reticent to ascribe MacArthur's actions to ideology. He sides with Schaller, arguing that MacArthur often implemented reforms that he believed to be popular in the US, because of his presidential ambitions.[23]

Masuda's work explores how factors unrelated to anticommunism affected Cold War politics (including the reverse course). He notes that fear of communism had been part of political discourse since the Russian Revolution of 1917, but that many of the events interpreted as the result of the Cold War were not regarded as such at the time, but "might have had far more diverse local and historical roots."[24] Masuda, therefore, proposes to reinterpret some events of the late 1940s and early 1950s that are commonly known as "*effects* of the Cold War," as factors that may have strengthened the notion that the Cold War was a reality, but were motivated by considerations unrelated to the ideological conflict.[25]

Accordingly, Masuda argues that policies were motivated by officials' personal ambitions. For instance, he emphasizes that MacArthur had little reason to stick with New Deal-type reforms, after the losses of New Deal officials in the 1946 US midterms.[26] Similarly, SCAP staff members found "that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find a job upon returning to Washington, [if] they were labeled too New Dealish." Some of them, consequently, became less willing to implement progressive reforms. Others left the agency altogether.[27] Dower observes that this exacerbated SCAP's rightward turn, since these employees were generally "replaced by more conservative technocrats."[28] Hence, American officials' personal considerations and the unforeseen consequences of their actions may have furthered the reverse course, in addition to the fear of communist subversion.

A key turning point in the historiography is MacArthur's cancellation of the February 1, 1947 labor strike. Masuda argues that rising criticism of labor activism in the US encouraged MacArthur to cancel the Japanese labor strike, as he still wanted to run for President at that time.[29] Miller and Dower, conversely, argue that this early "sign of an impending shift in

occupation policy" reflected SCAP's concerns about events within Japan.[30] Initially, SCAP had encouraged labor activism through the release of communist political prisoners and the enactment of the Labor Union Law in December 1945. By 1947, however, expansive labor activism had become increasingly difficult to control. This encouraged SCAP to place restrictions on leftist unionists' freedom of speech and their ability to organize —democratic freedoms that SCAP's own policies had recently granted. Therefore, Miller and Dower argue that while the crackdown on labor activism reflected criticism of labor activism in the US, SCAP officials' concerns about the scale of protests in Japan also affected policy changes.[31]

Miller additionally argues that reverse course policies were implemented with the same objective as those that had preceded them: to retain control over the mind and behavior of Japanese citizens.[32] She emphasizes that rural land reforms and the Labor Union Law encouraged agricultural and industrial laborers' democratic participation. American officials had hoped that the embrace of democratic values would ultimately protect them against a potential (re-)embrace of subversive ideologies, such as the wartime autocratic militarism.[33] However, as Cold War tensions rose, planners increasingly began to perceive communism as an existential threat looming over the minds of Japanese citizens, allowing anticommunist measures to take precedence over antimilitarist ones.[34]

Therefore, Miller argues, the reverse course can be interpreted as a continuation of strategy, i.e., protecting the Japanese mind against subversive thinking, wherein the main antagonist gradually changed. Put differently, whereas policymakers had initially feared that "feudal warlords" would continue to "exploit alleged Japanese immaturity, emotionalism, misguided loyalty, and lack of individualism," they increasingly worried that communists would do so instead.[35] Consequently, occupation officials sought to disrupt the influence of communist voices through censorship, limits on labor activism, and purges of alleged communists from the public sphere.[36]

These later developments raise the question why earlier SCAP policies encouraged the labor activism that officials would soon abhor. Schaller suggests that SCAP officials could initially focus on the demilitarization of the country because they disregarded the possibility that Japan would become indispensable to US military operations. He argues that "the potential Soviet threat, the impact of China's civil war, or the nationalist uprisings in Southeast Asia" all had little impact on early occupation policies.[37] Consequently, Schaller suggests that the reverse course's remilitarization and economic restructuring can largely be attributed to American officials' reevaluation of Cold War power struggle in Asia, which intensified from 1947 onwards, as more and more Asian nations embraced communism.[38]

SCAP's earliest economic policies indicated that American officials had overlooked Japan's potential to become their most important ally in Asia. For instance, they initially proposed that Japan would pay reparations to the nations that it had occupied. Schaller argues that these reparations were intended not only as a punitive measure, but also to reinvigorate the economies of other Asian countries, to propel "Eastern Asia [toward] political stability and

peaceful progress."[39] Moreover, Schaller notes that Edwin Pauley of the Reparations Committee advised in 1946 that Japan should not be allowed to recover to a "form which will allow her [...] to secure an advantage over her neighbors."[40]

The first to warn SCAP against the communist threat, Schaller argues, were Japanese conservatives with whom Americans cooperated for reform implementations. While these conservatives mostly welcomed the militarists' decline, they did so because they expected it to be good for business. Accordingly, they warned of war between Russia and the West and advised their former enemies to rebuild Japan for use against communist powers.[41] However, the Reparations Committee's report had advised SCAP to "transfer basic industries to China and Southeast Asia" and "attack monopoly [...] to break the political stranglehold of the [industrial] combines [i.e. Japan's oligopolies, the *zaibatsu*]."[42]

SCAP's chief economic expert Colonel Raymond C. Kramer opposed this view. He feared that Japan would become "an albatross around [the US'] necks," if it's economy faltered.[43] MacArthur, meanwhile, insisted that Soviet sponsored "underground communist agitation" formed a greater threat to Japan, than militarists and fanatic nationalists.[44] However, by arguing to rebuild Japan's industry and reinstall the country as a leader in Asia, Kramer and MacArthur contradicted the formal position of the US in 1946.

Schaller identifies January 1947 as the beginning of the reorientation of American policy towards Asia. At this time, George C. Marshall left China to become Secretary of State. Schaller observes that Marshall was "vehemently opposed to any large aid program" to Chinese nationalists, whose corruption and brutality appalled him.[45] Moreover, he believed that a communist victory in the Chinese Civil War "did not directly threaten vital American security interests in Asia."[46] His determination signified the end of US commitment to China's nationalist government as their most important Asian ally and made room for renewed interest of the State Department in financial aid to Europe and Japan.[47]

This was encouraged by American officials, who openly criticized policy towards Germany and Japan by 1947. They contended that long-term humanitarian aid to the occupied nations would stifle prosperity among their neighbors and drain American resources. Furthermore, Navy Secretary James Forrestal argued that "complete economic collapse" threatened to occur in Japan, unless "hope of recovery" was granted to its citizens.[48] By this time, most American officials were convinced that social and economic chaos made countries vulnerable to Soviet influence. Additionally, policymakers were increasingly worried that humanitarian aid to the destitute occupied nations might become too expensive. This, Schaller argues, enticed them to permanently shift from reparations towards the economic rehabilitation of Japan.[49]

Rehabilitation was part of a larger plan to boost the economies of US allies depending on American aid. Its creators envisioned the establishment of three interdependent zones of industrial power, aligned against the Soviet Union.[50] These zones would take "advantage of efficiencies resulting from large-scale enterprises as well as from their concentrated power to

develop new markets and cheap sources of raw materials."[51] Consequently, dissolving Japan's industrial combines and purging their (often militarist or ultranationalist) leaders seemed incompatible with American interests.[52] Hence, according to Schaller, the decision to rebuild the industrial base which had allowed Japan to dominate its neighbors during war was partially informed by the US' economic interests.

Additionally, the perceived need to increase economic prosperity in Japan was intensified by the ideological threat the Soviet Union posed. By late 1947, Schaller argues, many American planners no longer considered "the Red Army the initial or greatest challenge to global security," but rather "identified the internal economic, psychological, and political weakness of Europe and Japan as the factors that most endangered the non-communist world."[53] Japan's economic recovery, therefore, was desirable not only because it would reduce demand of American resources, but also because it would stabilize Japan's society, safeguarding it from a communist revolution.[54]

The goal of strengthening Japan's economy enticed SCAP officials to cooperate more closely with Japanese conservatives, who supported the concentration of industrial power needed for economic growth. This shift in allegiances coincided with SCAP officials' increased apprehension about the conservatives' left-wing adversaries. Miller, therefore, argues that cooperation with Japanese conservatives was not only motivated by financial and geopolitical concerns, but also by concerns about the growth of the Japanese Communist Party and the labor movement.[55] Hence, whereas Schaller suggests that SCAP officials' increased cooperation with Japanese conservatives was primarily motivated by the US' new vision for the global economy, Miller emphasizes that acute concerns about the mindsets and ideologies of Japanese citizens and politicians informed the shift in allegiances too.

Similarly, the remilitarization of Japan can be explained by the perceived importance of instilling the 'correct' democratic beliefs in the Japanese mind. Miller concedes that the National Police Reserve (NPR), which would develop into the Self Defense Forces, was meant to guarantee Japan's security after the American occupation soldiers had left for the Korean War. Additionally, she argues that the creation of the forces was motivated by "a shared American and Japanese belief that Japan required more robust internal security mechanisms against communist infiltration."[56] Both of these considerations involved the military function of the Japanese forces against a potential invasion by foreign communists.

However, Miller adds to these more geostrategic considerations that American policymakers expected the NPR to produce the kind of citizens who would "create a physically, ideologically, and psychologically 'sound' democracy."[57] This demonstrates policymakers' continued commitment to instill a democratic mindset in Japan's population. Miller emphasizes that the decision to remilitarize Japan reflected ideological shifts in the US about the military's function to protect democracy. She argues that Americans had previously been suspicious of military power, but that civilian- and military leaders of the postwar era increasingly believed "that military defense capabilities would provide [...] societies with the confidence, vigor, and

leadership—the capabilities and mentalities—necessary to combat internal and external communist threats."[58]

The decision to remilitarize Japan was relatively controversial amongst Japanese citizens. Miller observes that "intellectuals and left-leaning activists, warned it would destroy the country's new and cherished democracy."[59] Some right-wing politicians, however, "celebrated rearmament as necessary to fostering Japanese independence and reviving Japan's national spirit."[60] After intense debates, Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida accepted MacArthur's proposition to establish the NPR. However, he opposed pressure to expand it, fearing that this might encourage the resurrection of wartime militarism or foster the social instability he believed to be conducive to communist aggression.[61]

Nevertheless, the establishment of the NPR increased opportunities for right-wing leaders to further challenge SCAP's early reforms. Miller argues that they recognized that building a new security apparatus might accelerate the US' decision to allow wartime political leaders, who been subjected to the anti-militarist purges, to return to politics. Former military officers, moreover, utilized rearmament advocacy as a means to "reenter public life with the goal of resurrecting traditional values."[62] Hence, Miller argues, rearmament not only served American and Japanese officials' desire to ward off communist influences, but also the desire of right-wing Japanese politicians to further their careers and promote the traditional values lost after the war.[63]

Masuda similarly argues that the reverse course was not only encouraged by US officials' Cold War concerns, but also by the preferences of the Japanese. Unlike Dower, who notes that many Japanese citizens had initially welcomed reforms counteracting wartime norms and practices, Masuda emphasizes that some of these reforms seemed abnormal to Japan's elderly and rural population, who together made up the majority.[64] Consequently, the reverse course, according to Masuda, "can be seen as a reflection of an emerging conservative backlash at both elite and grassroots levels in the chaotic postwar period."[65] Masuda supports his analysis that Japanese citizens were not primarily motivated by a fear of communism, noting that Japanese conservatives used "anti-communist language to achieve domestic and personal goals," because they had discovered that "this strategy was effective in slowing down [...] [SCAP's] reform policies."[66]

According to Masuda, even the Red Purge, which was officially intended to remove alleged communists from positions of power and influence, cannot entirely be attributed to anti-communist sentiments. He observes that SCAP official Robert Amis argued that Japan's labor unions supported the purge more than SCAP. Masuda suggests that this might be true, since "American officers experienced being ignored and used by Japanese actors," over the course of the purge.[67] Moreover, Masuda emphasizes that the Red Purge not only affected communists, but was utilized by local actors to dismiss various kinds of people.[68]

For instance, when company leaders conducted purges, they often targeted employees whom they considered 'uncooperative'.[69] Additionally, competing factions within labor unions sometimes utilized the Red Purge to sideline their adversaries.[70] Finally, Masuda argues that

Japanese protests against the purge were mostly muted because of considerations unrelated to anti-communism, including a desire of Japanese conservatives to silence disagreements in order to create domestic tranquility. Therefore, Masuda stresses that the Red Purge might be better explained as "conservative backlash" among the Japanese population, rather than as a result of the Cold War.[71]

While the threat of a communist revolution might have been overstated, as Masuda argues, Miller suggests that SCAP officials took it very seriously. She explores their efforts to change Japan's psychology in hopes of preventing an embrace of communism. One of Miller's main arguments is that American planners were convinced that fostering a democratic mindset or 'spirit' in the Japanese was crucial to protect the "peace, stability, and security in Asia and across the globe."[72] Consequently, she argues, even reforms that established democratic institutions and promoted freedom of speech were intended to alter the Japanese's psychology.

According to Miller, the reverse course was not caused by an unprecedented emphasis on fostering appropriate mindsets, but rather the result of postwar planners' fear that the recently enhanced democratic freedoms would encourage "subversive and communist thinking."[73] This enticed policymakers to permit an increasingly narrow version of democracy to flourish in Japan and place "pacifism, neutrality, and more radical visions of political and economic equality [...] outside the democratic sphere."[74] Miller emphasizes that SCAP's early postwar policies reflected a conviction that both democracy and its competitors could only thrive, if supported by corresponding mindsets and mentalities. Because of this conviction, Miller argues, Japan's reconstruction would not only entail disarmament, but also a remaking of the culture, politics, and social patterns that had facilitated the war.[75]

Hence, a microscopic focus on Japan's society and the subversive ideologies it potentially fostered became central to SCAP's policies from the onset of the occupation. Early postwar reforms not only served to diffuse power, but also to introduce "a new conception of individual rights" that would reconstruct "the Japanese psyche in a more individualist bent."[76] Similarly, some policymakers' intention to abolish the Japanese military, Miller argues, served to protect the Japanese psyche against its potential influence.[77] As Cold War tensions rose, American officials reevaluated which forces they considered to be endangering Japan's newly founded democratic mindset. This, Miller argues, led them to replace militarism with communism as the biggest threat to Japan's democracy, encouraging them to change course.[78]

In conclusion, scholars discussed in this essay approach the reverse course in distinct ways. Whereas Schaller largely focuses on the economic and military considerations of American foreign policy officials, Miller focuses on SCAP officials' efforts to instill democratic and anti-communist ideals in Japan's society. Both of them stress the importance of anticommunism to the reverse course. They differ, however, in their portrayals of US officials' skepticism towards the Japanese. Schaller, namely, argues that US officials tended to trust Japan's traditional conservatives' ability to maintain a functioning democracy. Miller, on the other hand,

emphasizes their apprehension about Japan's national character, arguing that they feared that its alleged propensity towards ideological extremism would compromise democratization efforts.

Masuda warns against overstating the effect of considerations related to global and domestic communism on the reverse course. He argues that it was at least partially motivated by American officials' personal ambitions and by Japanese citizens' professional disputes and desire for domestic tranquility. Accordingly, Masuda complements Schaller's and Miller's respective emphasis on international and national developments by predominantly focusing on the local developments facilitating the reverse course. These local developments reveal the importance of personal considerations to the reverse course, instead of the context of the global Cold War and US officials' reservations about Japan's national character.

Dower largely focusses on developments within Japan, as Miller does. His analysis of US officials' theories about the Japanese's psychology, support her argument that these officials were apprehensive about Japan's compatibility with democracy. Additionally, Miller and Dower emphasize that SCAP officials were anxious about the widespread labor activism that prior reforms had legitimized. They argue that this aided SCAP's decision to limit the right to protest. Additionally, Dower's work overlaps with Masuda's, when he argues that SCAP officials' personal ambitions (to find employment in the US or, in MacArthur's case, to become the next US president) discouraged them from implementing 'New-Dealish' policies after the US mid-term elections of 1946 had indicated that such policies had fallen out of favor.

Notes

[1] John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the wake of World War II* (New York: Norton/The New Press, 1999), 74-77; Jennifer M. Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 28.
[2] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 525.
[3] Ibid., *525-526, 433-438*.
[4] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 71-72.
[5] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 526.
[6] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 8.
[7] Hajimu Masuda, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 234-238.
[8] Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5-6.
[9] Ibid., 5.
[10] Ibid., 7; Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 530-532.
[11] Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 10.
[12] Ibid., 11.
[13] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 213-214.
[14] Ibid., 218-219.
[15] Ibid., 219; Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 10, 15-17.
[16] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 4-5.
[17] Ibid., 3-12.
[18] Ibid., 28.
[19] Ibid. 39.
[20] Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 28.
[21] Ibid., 21-22.
[22] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 22-24.

[23] Masuda, *Cold War Crucible*, 26.

[24] Ibid., 3-4.

[25] Ibid., 4-5.

[26] Ibid., 26; Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 220.

[27] Masuda, *Cold War Crucible*, 30, 32.

[28] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 432.

[29] Masuda, *Cold War Crucible*, 28-29.

[30] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 50.

[31] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 267-273; Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 48-50.

[32] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 56.

[33] Ibid. 49-51.

[34] Ibid., 51.

[35] Ibid., 51-52.

[36] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 432-438; Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 52.

[37] Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 6.

[38] Ibid., 25-26.

[39] Ibid. 35.

[40] Ibid., 35.

[41] Ibid., 37.

[42] Ibid., 36-38.

[43] Ibid., 67.

[44] Ibid., 68.

[45] Ibid., 72-73.

[46] Ibid., 72.

[47] Ibid., 88-89.

[48] Ibid., 78.

[49] Ibid., 78-80.

[50] Ibid., 83.

[51] Ibid., 83.

[52] Ibid., 83-85; Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 534-535, 540-541.

[53] Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 87-88.

[54] Ibid., 91.

[55] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 6, 56-58.

[56] Ibid., 71-72, cf. 88-89.

[57] Ibid., 72, 90.

[58] Ibid., 73.

[59] Ibid., 91.

[60] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 526-527; Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 91.

[61] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 96.

[62] Ibid., 92.

[63] Ibid., 97.

[64] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 225-273.

[65] Masuda, *Cold War Crucible*, 33-35.

[66] Ibid., 36-37.

[67] Ibid., 233-234.

[68] Ibid., 234.

[69] Ibid., 236.

[70] Ibid., 234-238.

[71] Ibid., 238-243.

[72] Miller, *Cold War Democracy*, 3, 7-12.

[73] Ibid., 4.

[74] Ibid., 4, 28.

[75] Ibid., 28-30.

[76] Ibid., 32, 35.

[77] Ibid., 35-36.

[78] Ibid., 51-52.

Crisis Subverted:
Crisis and Utopia in Philipp Meyer's *American Rust*

Jorrit Lettinga | University of Groningen
This paper was written for the course Crises of the Republic: Politics and Culture in the 21st Century United States for the RMA Arts, Media and Literary Studies

The proliferation of crisis declarations in contemporary politics and public discourse has led to the creation of a veritable 'genre' of crisis in American literature.[1] Literary works of this kind use the idea of crisis to narratively frame their respective portrayals of American society, depicting a society in a perceived historical state of exception, such as the post-9/11 'national security crisis' or the 2008 'financial crisis.' From a critical historical and philosophical perspective, however, the notion of crisis and crisis declarations is inherently faulty and ideologically compromised. A crisis declaration implies an unattainable transcendent perspective on history, which reduces longer historical developments and processes to a single critical event. It can even entirely obscure the causes leading up to the perceived crisis.[2] As a framing device, crisis becomes an ideological tool that distorts our view of both past and present by abstracting singular moments of crisis from centuries-long hegemonic regimes of oppression.[3] Any work of literature that employs a crisis narrative can consequently reinforce an ahistorical and ideological perspective, and is itself symptomatic of contemporary America's political and cultural proclivity towards understanding its modern history as permeated by crisis.[4]

One recurring crisis narrative is related to the historically high levels of unemployment that resulted from the process of deindustrialization in the United States (US). In political and cultural discourse, the large-scale relocation of labor-intensive American manufacturing overseas during the 1980s, which resulted in a dramatic loss of labor opportunities and impoverishment, is often presented as a crisis of deindustrialization.[5] Large areas which had hitherto depended on industrial manufacturing work, such as the American Northeast and Midwest, suddenly experienced soaring unemployment numbers, with disastrous consequences. By conceiving of this sequence of events as a crisis, however, the socio-economic impact of neoliberalism (also dubbed by historian Robert Brenner as the "long downturn") is effectively obscured.[6] Instead, these developments can help illuminate how deindustrialization was a necessary consequence of the destructive tendencies of capitalism.[7]   The novel *American Rust* (2009) by the American writer Phillip Meyer explores the social and economic realities of living in a rural town in America's 'Rust Belt.' the region in the American Northeast and Midwest that suffered the bulk of post-industrial decline. In this short essay, I will analyze this novel through the lens of crisis. Although *American Rust* depicts an America in decline and ostensibly frames the closing of the fictional town's steel mill as a catalyst for crisis, it critiques the conventional crisis narrative by embedding socio-economic developments in the global history of capitalism and its impact on

the United States in the late twentieth century. In what can be read as an implicit critique of neoliberalism, *American Rust* consequently offers an imaginary of a post-industrial American utopia, in which the forces of nature have triumphed over the forces of capital. By analyzing how the notion of crisis features in this particular novel, this essay thus contributes to existing debates in American Studies and other critical humanistic fields about the idea of crisis as a narrative and ideological gesture, as well as its historical significance.[8]

Although the novel only mentions the term 'crisis' once, *American Rust*'s characters are going through difficult times. The novel is set in a fictional small town in modern-day rural Pennsylvania called Buell, whose steel mill was shut down several decades' past. It portrays the town's working-class inhabitants against the backdrop of a deadly accident. Characters repeatedly express their resentment about their situation, as well as nostalgia for the past , in which the mill was still open and there were still sufficient job opportunities. "It was impossible to wrap your head around the idea that a place could be destroyed so quickly," reflects Grace, one of the novel's narrators. "Things had been lean... but the mills just kept laying people off... there was not a single job to be had."[9] One of the victims of the steel mill's layoffs, the reader learns, was Grace's husband. At first glance, then, it seems like *American Rust* sets up a crisis narrative. One event, the shutdown of the local steel mill, is singled out as the cause of present disastrous circumstances. The characters are nostalgic for a better past, which is distinguished from the present by that singular critical event. These elements are crucial for a 'crisis narrative' to the extent that this kind of narrative requires a break between the past without crisis and the present moment.[10]

However, this paper argues that the way in which the novel deploys this initial crisis framework actually sets up a critique of the distortive potential of crisis. The inherent problem of a crisis narrative is that it becomes a distortive gesture, reducing long-term developments and ongoing 'critical' circumstances into a single crisis. This is mostly a problem of a philosophical and historical nature (with limited relevance for literary studies), but from a historical materialist (i.e., a critical Marxist) perspective the idea of crisis becomes a powerful ideological tool. The implied singularity and uniqueness of the period of crisis establishes the past as one without decline or corruption, rendering invisible what philosopher Walter Benjamin referred to as an ongoing "tradition of the oppressed."[11] Put differently, a crisis narrative inevitably obscures many of the material and economic developments that contributed to the present moment. This makes it seem like the precarious reality of the American working class, for example, is somehow only a feature of a short-term crisis. Historian Sherry Lee Linkon has similarly argued that terms such as 'post-Fordist' and 'postindustrial' posit a break with the past that obscures how the material and affective conditions of deindustrialization still dominate the lived reality of the working class in regions such as the Rust Belt.[12] The benchmark of a true crisis narrative, then, is to what extent it uses a crisis to sever the link between the period of crisis and the economic and material developments that preceded it.[13]

In the novel this link is decidedly not severed. Although the shutdown of Buell's local steel mill has clearly had disastrous consequences for the town's working class, the novel does not place this event outside of its broader historical (and material) context. *American Rust*'s characters appear remarkably aware of the economic and material developments in the US that led to the decline of Buell. The disillusioned Henry English is critical of President Reagan's neoliberal policies of the 1980s, which "disembedded" the market from government influence.[14] He also expresses resentment about the fact that "welfare states" such as Germany and Sweden are still producing steel, as he was made to be skeptical of the potential of those states by American neoliberal rhetoric.[15] Grace has similar criticisms. Her husband worked at a barge-making plant for a brief moment, even before those jobs were relocated abroad: "most ships and barges were now made in Korea, where the government owned all the industry."[16] Grace highlights, in other words, the large-scale privatization symptomatic of laissez-faire neoliberalism that contributed significantly to the decline of the Rust Belt. In another telling example, Grace's son, Billy Poe, recalls how he lost a car race to an opponent driving a Japanese car. Billy initially took the lead, but then his Chevrolet Camaro broke down. "That was a lesson, he decided, McGreevy's Japanese car, it had only won because it hadn't destroyed itself. They knew what they were doing, the Japanese."[17] I would argue that this passage can be read as a metaphor for the economic administration of the United States versus that of Japan. During the 1980s the increased deregulation of US industry left the lives of many working-class laborers in shambles. Japanese industry, on the other hand, which had not experienced deregulation had not "destroyed itself."[18] The novel thus displays a keen awareness of the historical and material causes of the deindustrialization crisis.

American Rust does not just subvert the conventional crisis narrative by engaging with relevant historical and economic developments that preceded the decline of Buell, it contains traces of a critique of capitalism itself. Poe's recounting of his American-made car breaking down, for example, is phrased as the car "destroying itself."[19] This phrasing echoes the traditional historical materialist claim that the teleological end of capitalism as a mode of production is, to put it crudely, that it shall destroy itself. By alienating the labor force to such a degree that it revolts against the capitalists, the structural contradictions of capitalism produce the bourgeoisie's "own gravediggers."[20] In another instance we hear from Lee, Isaac's sister, who had been admitted to Yale allowing her to escape from Buell. Lee makes a statement that appears to have been taken straight from a textbook on historical materialism: "there was something particularly American about it – blaming yourself for bad luck – that resistance to seeing your life as affected by social forces, a tendency to attribute larger problems to individual behavior. The ugly reverse of the American Dream."[21] In this instance, Lee effectively describes the basic historical materialist principle that the social forces that affect our lives are material and economic realities, caused by developments in the capitalist mode of production.

More importantly, Lee displays an understanding of the fact that these social forces are obscured by ideological narratives such as crisis, and by another conspicuous and pervasive

mythological topos, the American Dream. *American Rust* critiques the notion of seeing one's possibilities as the result of one's own actions, instead of considering them as part of a material reality that is created by unequal power relations inherent to capitalism. At first glance, however, the novel ostensibly expresses skepticism towards understanding the end of capitalism as being brought about by the working classes rising up and seizing the means of production. Lee recounts how her former teacher had "told Lee he'd bring socialism to the mills... But there had never been any revolution, not anything close, a hundred and fifty thousand people lost their jobs but they had all gone quietly."[22] One could argue that this passage is a comment on the futility of organized resistance against the ruling classes, or that it seeks to point out the naivety of the teacher who thinks such resistance is easy or even possible. However, I would argue that this passage must be read as a critique of ideologies such as crisis and the American Dream, which render this resistance difficult.[23] The point that is effectively made here, then, is that there was never any successful organized resistance against shutting down Buell's mill, because the working classes have been made to think that their possibilities are created solely by their own choices.

American Rust does not deny the possibility of an end to capitalism. In fact, *American Rust* appears to envision the possibility of an American utopia as a post-capitalist society, a society in which hunter-gatherers are successful breadwinners and nature has reclaimed what had been industrialized. This utopian possibility becomes most clearly manifested in the character of Poe, who exists at the peripheries of capitalism and finds success and happiness only when outside this sphere. Poe is at his best when he is out hunting for game in the Valley, where he can fend for himself. In fact, his stomach cannot endure fast food, or any food of indeterminate origin.[24] Poe is the character who feels most at home in the Valley, and he is also the most optimistic about its future: "The Valley was recovering. Only it would never be what it had been and that was the trouble... But things were improving in different ways... the land going back to its natural state."[25] It is clear what an American utopia would be for Poe, then: a return to the land in its natural state, in which Poe himself would be at the top of the food chain.

Poe is not the only character who comments on the Valley's natural beauty and its potential, however. *American Rust* is full of references to the beauty of the Valley's lush forests, creeks, and overgrown ruined mills, which is in sharp juxtaposition to the general grim reality of life in Buell. Local sheriff Harris finds the ruins of a former car factory that have been overgrown with vines pleasant and sees "nature assimilating man's work."[26] Grace notes that the animals "are about the only ones that seemed to be doing well."[27] Poe's friend Isaac, who is desperate to leave Buell, recognizes the peaceful scene in front of him as he sees his father in a chair on the porch, looking out over the rolling hills of the Valley.[28] "No wonder you're always feeling guilty," Isaac contemplates.[29] *American Rust* repeatedly references the primitive character of the Valley and aspirations of a return to hunting and gathering.[30] As a recurring theme, the focus on the natural richness and beauty of the Valley, as opposed to the material poverty of Buell, imbues the narrative with a sense of hope and possibility. This supports a reading of *American Rust* as

envisioning an American utopia in which the rust has been completely overgrown with foliage and in which goods are not produced for the reproduction of capital but, only for sustenance.

When sheriff Harris visits Buell's local bar the Dead End, he notes that "the Dead End was one of the few bars that had remained open the entire time since the mill had closed, and the joke was it hadn't been cleaned since before the mill had opened."[31] This is an appropriate metaphor for how *American Rust* treats the idea of crisis in the context of deindustrialization. Rather than presenting the decline of Buell as the result of a singular crisis, it understands that exploitation has been part and parcel of the reality of capitalism in the US. The novel does not obscure this reality by treating the closing of Buell's steel mill as the sole catalyst for the town's decline. Instead, it rightfully identifies complex economic and political developments such as the Long Downturn of the 1970s, and the triumph of neoliberalism as having made significant contributions to the economic collapse of the Rust Belt. Additionally, the novel critiques capitalism, by situating the idea of an idealistic, utopian America firmly outside the realm of for-profit production. Instead, it is within the Valley's natural richness and beauty that it locates true possibility and hope. Just as the Dead End bar had been dirty and grimy before the mill had closed down, so too had exploitation and displacement of the working class already been a core element of the capitalist mode of production, long before that perceived moment of crisis. *American Rust* is well aware of this. Most of all, however, the novel illustrates just how fruitful the notion of crisis is as a critical concept for American Cultural Studies: at once illuminating and obscuring, crisis is everywhere, and cultural critics will have to reckon with it one way or another.

Notes

[1] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Books, 2011), 7.

[2] Janet Roitman, "Crisis," *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon* (2012), https://www.politicalconcepts.org/roitman-crisis/.

[3] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the History of Philosophy," in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 257.

[4] Janet Roitman, "Crisis."

[5] Annie McClanahan, "Industry Culture: Labor and Technology in Marxist Critical Theory," in *After Marx: Literature, Theory, and Value in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Colleen Kye and Christopher Nealon (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 200.

[6] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (London: Verso, 2005).

[7] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Electric Book Company, 2000), 16.

[8] See, for example: Robert C. Evans (ed.), *Critical Insights: Literature in Times of Crisis* (Hackensack: Salem Press, 2021); Matthew W. Seeger and Timothy L. Sellnow, *Narratives of Crisis: Telling Stories of Ruin and Renewal* (Redwood: Stanford University Press, 2016); Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half Life of Deindustrialization: Working Class Writing About Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2018).

[9] Philipp Meyer, *American Rust* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 43-44.

[10] Matthew W. Seeger and Timothy L. Sellnow, *Narratives of Crisis: Telling Stories of Ruin and Renewal* (Redwood: Stanford University Press, 2016), 13.

[11] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the History of Philosophy," 257.

[12] Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2018), 5.

[13] Matthew W. Seeger and Timothy L. Sellnow, *Narratives of Crisis*, 13.
[14] Philipp Meyer, *American Rust*, 347-348.
[15] Ibid., 347-348.
[16] Ibid., 44.
[17] Ibid., 94.
[18] Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 120.
[19] Philipp Meyer, *American Rust,* 94.
[20] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 25.
[21] Philipp Meyer, *American Rust*, 229-230.
[22] Ibid., 229.
[23] Ibid., 229-230.
[24] Ibid., 98.
[25] Ibid., 97.
[26] Ibid., 53.
[27] Ibid., 43.
[28] Ibid., 35.
[29] Ibid., 35.
[30] Ibid., 8.
[31] Ibid., 273.

Overcoming the Past by Reimagining History:
Adapting the Novel by Use of the Slave Narrative and Magic Realism in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*

Romy Metz | University of Amsterdam
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The Underground Railroad (2016), written by Colson Whitehead, falls in a long line of slave literature and magic realist novels. These genres all carry implications, either due to their prejudiced origins or due to abolitionist or postcolonial imperatives. However, Whitehead manages to recognize the traditions of the medium and genre, while also carving out a new place in the canon for his own objective. *The Underground Railroad* uses slave narratives and magic realism in order to appropriate the white, bourgeois tradition of the novel. The medium recalls a tradition of oppression due to its individualistic and humanist origins , and by writing a novel Whitehead canonically places his story about the plight of a slave between stories of her figurative oppressors in a medium that is created to glorify her subjugators. His use of traditionally Black narrative structures and tropes reconstruct the novel into an apt medium for his reimagined history of slavery in *The Underground Railroad*. At the same time, the novel rejects the superimposed responsibility of slave narratives to evoke sympathy or educate its readership. Whitehead is able to combine both slave narratives and the literary genre of magic realism to serve his imperative to write a novel about slavery without the burden of having to educate or empathize.

In this article, I will first explain the problem with the novel as a medium. I will subsequently analyze Whitehead's use of the slave narrative and magic realism and assess their place in literary tradition, as well as how he adapts the form of his novel to in order to reject the problematic history of the medium. Lastly, I will show how his use of form aligns with his objective for the novel to refuse the implied social duty of slave narratives to educate and invoke empathy. While scholars have previously explored the comparison of *The Underground Railroad* to slave narratives, as well as Whitehead's use of magic realism, this paper will combine these two literary genres.[1] In doing so, I argue that the objective of the novel can be found in the combination of the Black literary genre of slave narratives and the postcolonial magic realism with the traditionally exclusionary novel. As a result, the author is able to create a literary work about slavery that is a worthy representation of Black history in America yet refuses to educate readers about it.

The problem with the novel as a medium stems from its history. The very first novel written in the English language is generally agreed to be Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Professor of English Brett C. McInelly explains that present-day readers perceive *Robinson*

Crusoe (1719) "as the prototypical colonial novel."[2] Scholars have agreed that the core element of a novel is the story of an "ordinary" individual, with great emphasis on their inner life. [3] Subsequent authors have since taken Defoe's novel as an exemplar, shaping the novel into an inherently white, bourgeois tradition. While scholars such as Julia-Sun-Joo Lee have pointed to the influence of slave narratives on classic novels, this impact often remains overshadowed by the canons. Also, because the novel is founded from the humanist tradition, it can borrow or steal themes and form but its roots will lie with individualism. The novel and the humanist tradition both stress the importance of the individual and human potentiality. [4] However, Humanism in the fabric of the novel exposes the problem in a postcolonial world: the ideas of autonomy and mastery which undergird individual agency in the humanist tradition do not apply to oppressed peoples. [5]

This individualism that the humanist tradition of the novel encourages, tended to imply the glorification of the white upper middle-class. Literary critic Walter Benjamin explains in his essay "The Storyteller" that "the birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual," and "[the novel] encountered in the evolving middle class those elements which were favorable to its flowering."[6] Because of the historically established position of the middle class individual in the novel, the success of the novel as a medium and the middle-class individual are intertwined. Due to this relationship, it is almost impossible to use the medium without evoking the canonical subjects that contributed to the rise of the genre. But it is important to consider what it means to be this "ordinary" individual that the novel celebrates. In the case for *Robinson Crusoe*, its main character is a white man who acquires ownership of an enslaved person. So, to copy the elements of the novel as first laid out by *Robinson Crusoe* and subsequently by other middle-class individual main character novels, is to copy elements that are founded in order to glorify this group.

The study of post-colonialism has explored what it means for contemporary writers of historically oppressed minorities to 'write back' against this tradition. Many writers have considered it to be problematic to write about the oppressed in the language and medium of the oppressors. Author Ngugi wa Thiong'o explains the problem of the oppressor's language to be that of glorification and degradation.[7] The master's language is imposed upon the oppressed and is established as the language of intelligence and power. By contrast, the language of the oppressed is established as the language for speaking, but not for expressing intelligent ideas. Frantz Fanon explains in his influential work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), the importance of language of the oppressor upon the oppressed. He claims to speak or write in a language means to "assume a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization".[8] As such, by writing or speaking in the language or medium of historically oppressors, means to participate in this culture that has succeeded in being oppressive. Post-colonial authors such as Chinua Achebe, Lorde Audre, as well as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, have all concerned themselves with this important issue. This problem is no different for Whitehead. Thus, in order to use the form of the novel, adaptation is necessary

before the novel can serve as the instrument for Whitehead to stand opposite to and not in line with this oppressive tradition.

In order to combat this problem, Whitehead largely adapts the structure of a slave narrative for the plot of his story. A slave narrative is an autobiographical text written by a former slave often describing the journey of the author from enslavement to freedom. The eventual collection of slave narratives is substantial, with Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Tubman, and Josiah Henson among some of the most recognizable authors of the genre. The context in which slave narratives arose are indicative to their form. Professor of English Charles H. Nichols, that "Slave narratives were, to a large extent, propagated by abolitionists who edited, promoted and distributed them after 1836."[9] The imperative of the slave narratives were therefore intertwined with the objectives of the abolitionist movement. According to professor of African-American Studies Francis Smith Foster, narratives were not only used because of their autobiographical truth but also to spread the abolitionist message. [10] This purpose dictates the form of the literary tradition, as it was extremely important that the narratives were descriptive. It was equally important that the narratives were cohesive with other narratives, as each story would legitimize other narratives through creating a literary framework of shared experiences.[11] The individuality of the author was therefore not of importance; the narratives gained credibility due to their numbers. As the abolitionist cause was intertwined with the production of these narratives and the accounts were published and substantially edited by white abolitionists, scholars have questioned the authenticity of slave narratives. [12]

The plot of *The Underground Railroad* at times closely resembles the slave narrative of Frederick Douglass. The novel is about a young slave girl named Cora, who runs away from her enslaver. She escapes by way of an actual reimagined underground railroad as opposed to the historical figurative railroad, a network of routes and houses runaway slaves encountered in their escape from enslavement in antebellum America. Cora flees throughout the novel from a slave hunter who is determined to return her to her owner. Frederick Douglass is another famous author of a slave narrative and an inspiration to Colson Whitehead. The author even thanks Douglass in his acknowledgements: "Thanks to (...) Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, obviously," underlining the undisputed influence of this specific narrative on his novel.[13] Douglass was a former slave and devoted abolitionist who documented his experiences of enslavement and became an important figurehead of the abolitionist movement.[14]

The plotline of his archetypal *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845)* shares similarities with *The Underground Railroad*. Douglass introduces himself by way of his parentage, which is traditional within the slave narrative. The narrator in *The Underground Railroad* does the same thing, starting the novel with the story of Ajarry, the grandmother of Cora, the protagonist. Later in the novel, Cora herself is introduced and just like the very first page of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, the problem with the birthday of a slave is mentioned. Frederick Douglass writes: "I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday."[15] *The Underground Railroad* repeats this sentiment: "Everybody

knew niggers didn't have birthdays."[16] Thus, from the outset of the story, Whitehead aligns his plot with that of the slave narrative, echoing the start of the traditional plotlines of the genre.

Additionally, the general plot of the slave narrative, as well as that of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *The Underground Railroad*, explicitly describes the physical punishments that were doled out on the plantation. For example, Cora witnesses a beating of a young boy and decides to jump in-between the cane and the boy: "She had seen men hung from trees left for buzzards and crows. Women carved open to the bone with the cat-o'-nine-tails. (...) Feet cut off to prevent escape and hands cut off to stop theft."[17] Authors of slave narratives were encouraged to provide a detailed description of the atrocities on the plantation in order to create a canon of abuse. This canon was needed to legitimize the abolitionist cause, as a canon of these descriptions would prove the pattern of abuse by the slave masters and evoke sympathy amongst its readers.[18] The more detailed descriptions of accounts of abuse were published, the more validated the abolitionist cause would become, as these accounts would gain credibility due to their prevalence. The subjectivity of the accounts would morph into fact as the canon grew. Language and literary scholar James Olney describes the sensation of reading these texts as being confronted with not "a sense of uniqueness but of overwhelming *sameness.*[19] Consequently, the list Whitehead provides in his novel, adheres to this "requirement." Not only does the summation of these acts serve this purpose, but his unembellished language to describe the acts refuse to veil the horror of the atrocities, which is in line with the purpose of this plot point for the slave narrative to expand the canon of abuse for the abolitionist cause.

Subsequently, the slave narrative structure would then describe the escape of the slave and all their tribulations. Mirroring the events in Douglass' narrative, Cora decides to leave when her master dies and the property of her master transferred onto his brother: "[s]he had not been his and now she was his. Or she had always been his and just now knew it."[20] Douglass has the same realization that his servitude is transferrable and not situational, and therefore inescapable unless he acts. This realization comes when he is transferred upon yet another master: "I began to want to live upon free land as well as with Freeland; and I was no longer content, therefore, to live with him or any other slaveholder."[21] The novel continues to follow her journey to freedom, much like the slave narrative does, proving how Whitehead is concerned with his plot mirroring the chronological structure of the slave narrative.

Another important part of the slave narrative structure is the discovery and mastering of reading and writing. For Douglass, this discovery meant his understanding of the importance of freedom, as well as the means to survive as a free man. In the antebellum period, slaveholding states prohibited the enslaved from learning to read and write.[22] These efforts to prevent the enslaved from gaining literacy served as a means to control every aspect the slave's body and mind.[23] As such, the ability of slaves to read the Bible or abolitionist texts subverted the domination of the slave owners.[24]

The importance of slave literacy is echoed throughout *The Underground Railroad.* Firstly, the idea to escape comes from Caesar, a slave who can read. Then Caesar and Cora

discuss their escape plan in a school, which is itself a symbol for learning to read, and Cora starts to learn how to read and continues this journey in stages throughout the novel, owning her first book at the end: "[t]he Almanac had a strange, soapy smell and made a cracking noise like fire as she turned the pages. She'd never been the first person to open a book."[25] Cora starts her journey with being unable to read, and the novel ends with her having read the contents of a complete library. Considering the importance of the ability to read to the main character, which is represented in how her journey to freedom is intertwined with her learning to read, shows how Whitehead adopts this significant requirement of the traditional slave narrative into his novel.

Not only does *The Underground Railroad* prove to be a neo-slave narrative due to its plot and content, by mirroring certain aspects of slave narratives the novel shows its awareness of the genre. This intertextuality is important for a slave narrative. According to Sarah Meer, Professor of Nineteenth-century Literature, slave narratives are not merely historical sources, but also literary text because of their intertextuality., She explains that "[t]he narratives make allusions, borrow phrases, and use quotations to attest to their access to a shared culture."[26] Another example of intertextuality is found in the sixth chapter of *The Underground Railroad*. In the chapter "North Carolina," Cora is forced to reside to an attic in order to evade the "night riders." There night riders are the enforcers of the separatist regime and getting caught would mean that Cora would be violently detained and hanged. Michel Feith, Professor of American Literature, argues that this is not only a reference to another slave narrative but also to a piece of modern war-literature. The depiction of Cora hiding in an attic from enforcers of an inhumane discriminatory regime reminds us both of Harriet Jacobs' account *incidents in the life of a slave girl* sheltering in her grandmothers attic to avoid slave hunters but also of Anne Frank, who spent her wartime years in the attic hiding from the Nazi's and wrote about this in her famous diary. [27] With these examples of intertextuality by way of using the slave narrative as well as other pieces of literature, the novel positions itself even more firmly amongst the literary tradition of the slave narrative.

This intertextuality in *The Underground Railroad* is not only found in continued gesturing towards the slave narrative, but also in its use of magic realism. Whitehead explains: "I went back and reread '100 Years of Solitude,' and it made me think about what it would be like if I didn't turn the dial up to 10, but kept the fantasy much more matter-of-fact."[28] Magic realism is mostly associated with Latin American novels such as the quintessential magical realist novel *100 Years of Solitude*, written by Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez. While the genre entails many tropes and themes, it generally is concerned with "the nature of reality and its representation" while at the same time resisting "the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism."[29] As Lois Parkinson Zamora, Professor of English, History and Wendy B. Faris, Professor of English and Comparative Literature ,explain, the fundamentality of magic realist texts lies in the blurring of lines between binaries, such as the real and imaginary, gender, or the self and the other.[30] With the establishment of these wide ranging elements and the stressed importance of blurring bounds, novels that engage with these themes prove an

awareness of the overarching genre of magical realism. The importance of specifically Márquez' novel also shows us Whitehead's awareness of the postcolonial literary tradition of 'writing back'. This is because Márquez uses magic realism to make a political statement against colonialism, which goes hand in hand with other postcolonial issues such as the problem of the medium of the novel as discussed previously.[31]

In the case of *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead is mainly blurring the lines between real and imaginary. Magic realism in the novel is most prominently discernable when considering its portrayal of the underground railroad itself. The underground railroad in the novel is not a network of communication and places to help slaves escape, but an actual physical system of tunnels, trains, and stations running throughout the United States. The mystical element does not only derive from the railroad being reimagined as a place for actual transportation, but also to its origins and scope, which are merely alluded to: "[t]he tunnel pulled at her. How many hands had it required to make this place? And the tunnels beyond, wherever and how far they led?"[32] This physical representation of the railroad interacts with multiple forces at work in the novel. It shows intertextuality by incorporating magic realism, blurring the lines between real and imaginary, meeting the literary criteria of intertextuality of slave narratives as previously laid out by Sarah Meer.

Magic realism also interacts with the slave narrative when considering a veiled part in Douglass' narrative. This is where Whitehead supplements to the narrative he continuously interacts with. In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass writes about his escape: "How I did so, -- what means I adopted, --what direction I travelled, and by what mode of conveyance, --I must leave unexplained."[33] This can be explained as his narrative was published when slavery was still legal, and a detailed description of his escape could endanger the people who helped him. However, even in his later publications, when slavery was abolished and his accomplices would not be endangered by the revelation of details, he remains prudent with particulars. As author and essayist Caille Millner writes about his escape by train and boat: "[t]he explanation calls up as many questions as it answers: (...) How did Douglass know the train and ship schedules? Douglass keeps his secrets."[34] These secrets leave an absence in the narratives of many slaves that Whitehead now foregrounds in *The Underground Railroad*. The novel mostly depicts Cora's journey to freedom and concretizes her escape by way of an actualized railroad. In the process, Whitehead assesses a canonical hole in the black literary tradition and uses magical realism to supplement and reimagine this part of history.

Colson Whitehead's concern with history and reimagining it becomes more evident when considering his concern with historical and factual accuracy. His research consisted of reading many slave narratives, both written and oral, and the close readings of the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs in order to interweave the actual voices of former slaves into the novel, as well as to ensure historic accuracy.[35] However, Whitehead does not seek to write an historically accurate novel. His departure from very realist scenes is interrupted by magical elements as the genre previously discussed suggests. This suspension between highly

realist and intermittently surreal reveal the intention of the novel. Binaries hang in suspense in the novel, both realism and magical elements, the European bourgeois tradition of the novel and the Black literary traditions These techniques are used to serve the imperative not to educate or convince but rather let the novel speak for itself. The novel is not trying to educate, by being exclusively factually accurate, or to evoke sympathy as the purpose of the traditional slave narrative mostly was. Whitehead sets out to write a novel that does neither, he writes a novel that rejects its supposed societal duty. His imperative is to avoid creating literature that should educate or evoke sympathy, as that would prove the audience to be alienated from the subject matter. Whitehead's commitment to the slave narrative, both as a narrative structure and as historical sources for the novel create an authenticity, though his use of magic realism keeps the novel from being educational.

Whitehead's imperative is not evident from the outset, as his choice of medium and narrative structure both carry social implications. The novel being historically tainted with oppression, while the slave narrative historically served to invoke sympathy in order to abolish slavery. But with the adjustments Whitehead has made to these literary products, *The Underground Railroad* transcends the supposed responsibility to cater to an audience that is removed from the subject matter. Whitehead's response to the matter of race and the education and representation of race in his novel is as follows: "I'm not a representative of blackness, and I'm not a healer."[36] His refusal to adopt this role is not only evident in his adaptation of the novel and the slave narrative, but also in the absence of overly emotional interpretations of the book. Gabriella Friedman explains the historical obligation imposed on the slave narrative, stating that "historical fiction generally and the neo-slave narrative particularly both have long-standing links with Harriet Beecher Stowe's injunction to 'feel right.'"[37] To "Feel Right" was Stowe's "call to feel compassion and love" that was intended to create sympathy amongst her Northern American readers for the African American people in slavery and was a "passionate outcry" against the institution of slavery. [38]

Fieldman argues that Whitehead refuses to engage with sentimental historicizing: "[t]his mode of historicizing rests on the assumption that feeling the weight of history and entering shared states of feeling with historical actors necessarily inspires ethical action in the service of social justice."[39] Whitehead refuses this label by using the detached third-person narrator, rather than a first-person perspective. This detached third-person narration combined with the lack of outward expression of emotion by the protagonist refuses the reader insight into her mind and emphasizes her interiority. This interiority is mostly noticeable when the scene in the book is presumably highly emotional, however the scene cuts off when Cora would show any outward emotion. When she receives her first book, it is suggested that this is a monumental moment for her, but the chapter stops right after she receives the book. The same tactic is used when Cora finally allows herself to feel safe and dreams about perhaps having a family one day with Royal, a freeborn operator of the railroad, with whom Cora begins a romantic relationship. But this relationship will not blossom, as Royal dies shortly after giving Cora a book. No grief is shown

afterwards, but we can only imagine the impact this would have on her emotionally; to imagine is exactly what we need to do, in order to pierce through the seemingly superficial Cora.

By distancing the reader from the characters' emotions, *The Underground Railroad* forces its audience to read between the lines. It refuses to cater to an audience that requires excessive explanation, historical accuracy, or ethical inspiration, because the audiences that require these things are far removed from the subject matter by either class or race. While the previous audiences of novels and slave narratives were white upper-class citizens, *The Underground Railroad* signals that this genre is not necessarily exclusively for them. Whitehead uses language, form, and content to balance the real found in authentic slave narratives and the surreal represented in the reimagined underground railroad. He also balances traditionally white tradition of the novel and traditionally Black literary tradition of the slave narrative and in doing do, creates a novel that stands both on its own and in a long line of literary heritage. Because of this, the language of the master has now been levelled and appropriated. It perhaps signals a time for change. The literary traditions Whitehead uses are still malleable and adaptable, therefore the supposed moral responsibility placed on the author in the genre of slave literature needs to transcend, too. If the master's language can be levelled with the slave's imperative, should not the reader and author share the moral responsibility of having to "feel right"? *The Underground Railroad's* tactics have drawn a line in the sand and invite the readers to meet in the middle. It is now up to us to do the rest.

Notes

[1] "Anti-Narratives of Slavery in Colson Whitehead's The Underground Railroad" by Carra Glatt, "Continuing Conjure: African-Based Spiritual Traditions in Colson Whitehead's The Underground Railroad and Jesmyn Ward's Sing, Unburied, Sing" by James Mellis, "Unsentimental Historicizing: The Neo-Slave Narrative Tradition and the Refusal of Feeling," by Gabriella Friedman, "Tracking the Slave Narrative in Colson Whitehead's: The Underground Railroad (2016)" by Michel Feith,

[2] Brett C. McInelly, "Expanding Empires, Expanding Selves: Colonialism, the Novel, and 'Robinson Crusoe,'" *Studies in the Novel* 35, no. 1 (2003): 1.

[3] John Mullan, "The Rise of the Novel," *British Library,* 21 June, 2018, https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/the-rise-of-the-novel.

[4] Paul Sheehan, "Introduction: The Anthropometric Turn," in *Modernism, Narrative, and Humanism,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 2-5.

[5] Ibid., 6.

[6] Vilashini Cooppan, "The Novel as Genre" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel,* ed. Eric Bulson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 30.

[7] Steve Paulson, "Never Write In The Language Of The Colonizer," *Wisconsin Public Radio,* March 20, 2021, https://www.wpr.org/never-write-language-colonizer

[8] Frantz Fanon, "Chapter One: The Black Man and Language," in *Black Skin, White Masks.* Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), 1.

[9] Charles H. Nichols, "Who Read the Slave Narratives?" *The Phylon Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1959): 149.

[10] Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 3-4.

[11] John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo,* no. 32 (1987): 495.

[12] Ibid., 496.

[13] Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad,* 315.

[14] Important works on his life and abolitionist activities have been written by David W. Blight, James Oakes and many more esteemed scholars.

[15] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Documenting the American South, 1999), 1, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html.

[16] Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 2018), 11.

[17] Ibid., 34.

[18] Paula von Gleich, *The Black Border and Fugitive Narration in Black American Literature*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2022, 72.

[19] James Olney, "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," *Callaloo*, no. 20 (1984): 46.

[20] Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, 48.

[21] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* 83.

[22] Carliss Maddox, " Literacy By Any Means Necessary: The History of Anti-Literacy Laws in the U.S," Oakland Literacy Coalition, January 12, 2022, https://oaklandliteracycoalition.org/literacy-by-any-means-necessary-the-history-of-anti-literacy-laws-in-the-u-s/#:~:text=Anti%2Dliteracy%20laws%20made%20it,color%20to%20read%20or%20write.

[23] Heather Andrea Williams, "In Secret Places: Acquiring Literacy in Slave Communities," in *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press,7.

[24] Ibid.,7.

[25] Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, 257.

[26] Sarah Meer, "Slave Narratives as Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Slavery in American Literature*, ed. Ezra Tawil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 74.

[27] Michel Feith, "Tracking the Slave Narrative in Colson Whitehead's: The Underground Railroad (2016)," *Revue Française D'études Américaines* 157, no.4 (2019): 149.

[28] Jennifer Schuessler, "Colson Whitehead on Slavery, Success and Writing the Novel That Really Scared Him," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/books/colson-whitehead-on-slavery-success-and-writing-the-novel-that-really-scared-him.html.

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Mustanir Ahmad, and Ayaz Afsar, "Magical Realism, Social Protest and Anti-Colonial Sentiments in One Hundred Years of Solitude," *Asian journal of Latin American studies* 27, no. 2 (2014), 2.

[32] Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, 70.

[33] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* 107.

[34] Caille Millner, "The Slave Narrative," in *A New Literary History of America,* eds. Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021), 249.

[35] Schuessler, "Colson Whitehead on Slavery, Success and Writing the Novel That Really Scared Him."

[36] Ibid.

[37] Gabriella Friedman, "Unsentimental Historicizing: The Neo-Slave Narrative Tradition and the Refusal of Feeling," *American Literature* 35, no.1 (2021): 115.

[38] Kevin Pelletier, "David Walker, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the Logic of Sentimental Terror," African American review 46, no. 2/3 (2013): 255–269.

[39] Ibid., 117.

"America was born a Christian nation":
The US Radical Right, the Christian Right, and the Ideology of (White) Christian Nationalism

Victoria Gelfert | University of Amsterdam
This paper was written for the course "The Changing Politics of Gender & Sexuality in Times of De-Democratization" for the MSc in Political Science

"No greater thing could come to our land today than a revival of the spirit of religion – a revival that would sweep through the homes of the nation and stir the hearts of men and women of all faiths to a reassertion of their belief in God and their dedication to His will for themselves and for their world. I doubt if there is any problem – social, political or economic – that would not melt away before the fire of such a spiritual awakening."[1]

– Franklin D. Roosevelt, 23 February 1936

The unprecedented events of January 6, 2021, marked a turning point in American political life, demonstrating the fragility and threatened state of democracy in the United States. In an attempt to prevent Congress from formalizing the victory of President-elect Joe Biden, supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol following the latter's claims that the election had been unjustly 'stolen'. Among this violent, anti-institutional mob were not only Trump adherents and people waiving Confederate flags, but also people with signs bearing crosses and messages like "Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President" as well as other Christian symbols and rhetoric.[2] According to one observer, the January 6 crowd was a heterogenous mix of Republicans and evangelicals marching side by side with QAnon cultists and hardcore white nationalists, with someone waving "a 'Jesus Saves' banner, while another sported a 'Camp Auschwitz' hoodie."[3] In the aftermath of the Capitol riots, numerous media outlets commented on these seemingly contradictory public displays of religion alongside (white) nationalism and other imagery associated with the radical right, alleging that January 6 revealed the pervasiveness of an ideology denoted as 'Christian nationalism.'[4] Ever since, high-ranking Republican politicians like Florida governor Ron DeSantis and Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene (GA) have publicly used rhetoric alluding to the same idea or even self-identified as 'Christian nationalist.'

What does this newly prominent concept of 'Christian nationalism', often also referred to as 'white Christian nationalism', entail, and how does it relate to the US Christian right and radical right? Existing literature has mainly focused on what Christian nationalism is, how it emerged, who embodies it, and its visibility in American public and political life, as well as its links to political polarization, violence, authoritarianism, racism, and voter suppression.[5] This paper contributes to this body of scholarship by looking at the ideological linkages between certain religious groups associated with the Christian right and extreme-right movements. It is argued that anti-gender attitudes as well as the ideology and cultural framework of (white) Christian nationalism unite various actors, ranging from church leaders

to Christian right organizations like the Alliance Defending Freedom to far-right politicians to well-known hate groups such as the Proud Boys. Drawing on a variety of media sources, reports, and scholarly articles, these groups will be described alongside an exploration of the concept of (white) Christian nationalism and its main features. Moreover, this paper argues that both Christian right and far-right actors use this ideology to gain political momentum and move into mainstream American politics in order to implement their conservative agenda. Fighting against policy issues such as abortion and rights for the LGBTQI+ community, they contribute to democratic backsliding in the name of God and patriotism.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's introductory pronouncement of "a revival of the spirit of religion" makes clear that the idea of religion playing an important role in American government and public life is not new. In recent years, however, conservative individuals and groups pushing for the spread of Christianity have rapidly gained visibility in mainstream politics, particularly since the presidency of Donald Trump. Such efforts are not exclusively led by the Christian right, although this group is particularly vocal in its advocacy of a prominent role for religion in all aspects of social and political life.[6] An active force in American politics for over four decades, the Christian right is defined as "the modern social movement focused on morally and socially conservative public policy in the American context."[7] The US Christian right comprises people and organizations from different denominational backgrounds, but primarily draws support from conservative white evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics.[8] It is known in particular for its grassroots activism and conservative politics on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, LGBTQI+ rights, euthanasia, and contraception, as well as for its support of religious institutions in government and of faith-based education and practices in schools.[9]

The Christian right focuses its rhetoric and symbols on children and the heteronormative family, using a narrative of threat – both personal and cultural – to mobilize citizens into political activity.[10] This is supported by the organizational, financial, and intellectual resources of churches and other religious organizations.[11] Well-known faces behind the US Christian right movement include Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Robert Grant, and Paul Weyrich. Major organizations associated with the Christian right that are currently active are for instance the Alliance Defending Freedom, the American Family Association, and the Family Research Council, all of which are designated hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center.[12] The visibility, resources, and power of these leaders and organizations allow the Christian right to promote its ideas and exert wide-reaching influence, pushing its agenda into mainstream media and politics.

Apart from the classification as hate groups, what do the US Christian right and radical-right movements have in common that could have prompted them to protest side by side on January 6, 2021? Commonly, the labels 'radical right', 'extreme right' and 'far-right' are used to describe a broad array of right-wing political, social, and religious movements whose beliefs go beyond mainstream conservatism.[13] One of the two main ideological strands within the radical right is white nativism and white supremacy, which is espoused by sub-movements like the alt right and neo-Nazis. Another form is anti-government extremism, which drives

militias and other extremist organizations such as the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, and the Three Percenter movement.[14] The extreme right also encompasses several single-issue movements with extreme political views on narrower issues such as abortion, immigration, racial minority rights, and LGBTQI+ rights.[15] Historian Mark Pitcavage notes that the tradition of extreme right activism in the United States goes back to the pre-Civil War era; more recently, there have been numerous manifestations of the extreme right.[16] An example is the John Birch Society, which was "founded in the thick of the Cold War to fight communists and preach small government," and whose ideas have been described as increasingly influential on contemporary Republican politics after its comeback in the 2010s.[17]

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of the radical right, with individuals and organizations promoting anti-immigrant, nativist, and anti-government views moving more and more into mainstream political discourse and arenas. An example of this is the election of Republican politicians using far-right conspiracy theories and stereotypes to appeal to voters, such as US House of Representatives member Marjorie Taylor Greene. She has publicly proclaimed that "Muslims do not belong in government," and believes Black people "are held slaves to the Democratic Party."[18] Moreover, she has called George Soros, a Jewish Democratic megadonor, a "Nazi" and has stated that she would feel "proud" to see a Confederate monument if she were Black because it represents progress made since the Civil War era.[19] A fervent supporter of former president Donald Trump, Taylor Greene has expressed her belief in the notion that "[t]he most mistreated group of people in the United States today are White males" and that "[t]here is an Islamic invasion into our government offices right now." These claims feed into radical-right narratives of a threat.[20] While Taylor Greene certainly cannot be said to represent all of the Republican Party as many of her colleagues have openly distanced themselves from her and have denounced her hateful rhetoric, she embodies an extreme right-wing segment of the electorate that, empowered by the election of Trump, has become an increasingly vocal force in American political life.[21]

The growing visibility of extreme-right movements in US politics culminated in the insurrection of January 6, 2021, where many far-right groups were present and engaged in violence. Academics and journalists have argued that the Capitol riots forcibly moved not only the pervasiveness of extreme-right ideologies into the center of attention of the American public mind and media, but also exposed the current of Christian nationalism in US politics that, until then, "was invisible to most Americans."[22] Christian nationalism, which encompasses many of the ideas of the radical right and the Christian right, can be described as a political ideology and cultural framework that seeks to merge American and Christian identities, demanding for a privileged position of Christianity in society and the abolition of the separation of church and state.[23] Christian nationalism is based on the mythological belief that the United States was founded as a Christian nation destined to fulfill God's purposes on earth, as well as on the conviction that conservative Christians and white people are the most oppressed groups in American society.[24]

Leading scholars Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry suggest in their book *Taking America Back for God* that Christian nationalism goes beyond the mere recognition of religious heritage and thus should not be equated with Christianity or evangelicalism itself.

Instead, proponents of Christian nationalism seek the preservation of an old social order in which everyone recognizes their 'proper' place in society – which, for non-Christians, non-whites, immigrants, and women, is the bottom of the hierarchy.[25] The term 'white Christian nationalism' espouses these same principles but is generally used to acknowledge more explicitly the overlap of Christian nationalist ideology with racism and white supremacy.[26] In their newly published book *The Flag and the Cross*, sociologists Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry assert that the story at the base of white Christian nationalism features white conservative Christians, "usually native-born men," as its heroes who must defend the country from the "un-American" influence of racial, religious, and cultural outsiders who bring about cultural degradation and "conspire to take what is ours."[27] Since the United States cannot be a white Christian nation and a multiracial democracy at the same time, the ideology of white Christian nationalism poses a serious threat to American democracy. This is all the more true because political scientists have recently revealed that its adherents are more likely to support what they perceive as "righteous violence to defend (their) freedom and maintain social (and racial) order."[28]

Arguably, it is this kind of spirit that motivated the political violence of January 6, 2021, and brought together various groups, demonstrating the unifying potential of a (white) Christian nationalist narrative about America. Since Christian nationalism draws on beliefs of both the Christian right, primarily regarding the need for a center role of Christianity in all aspects of social and political life, and on radical-right nativist ideas about hierarchies of power and prosperity, the ideology can appeal to adherents of both movements. A political vision of what America *should* be, Christian nationalism intersects with socially conservative aims and evokes nostalgia for a nation that has "come back to basics, back to values, back to morality, ... and back to patriotism," as Moral Majority leader Rev. Jerry Falwell once put it.[29] Aligning love for the country with the necessity to go back to how it (allegedly) used to be is not new. Trump's 'Make America Great Again' campaign is a prime example, having proven highly successful in speaking to those who feel threatened or left behind by demographic, generational, and cultural shifts in the United States. Christian nationalism takes this story further, touting the fusion of American and Christian identities to re-shape the present social order as a comprehensive solution to society's ills, making only white conservative Christians 'true Americans'. This way, the authoritarian politics of Christian nationalism become a means of protection against the villains of change and pluralism, creating an 'us vs. them' divisionary narrative of the US, all under the name of God and patriotism.

Considering its mainstream popularity, propagating the ideology of Christian nationalism bears great political potential. An October 2022 poll revealed that almost half of the American population believes that the US should be a 'Christian nation', with 60% of survey respondents agreeing with the statement that the Founding Fathers intended for America to be a Christian country.[30] Radical-right and Christian-right leaders alike have recognized the possible political gain to be made from blending religion and patriotism in their appeals to voters, infusing right-wing politics with explicitly religious fervor.[31] According to *The New York Times*, religious figures are increasingly injecting themselves into right-wing politics, with more and more believers "importing their worship of God, with all its

intensity, emotion and ambitions, to their political life."[32] At a Trump rally in Michigan in April 2022, a local evangelist for instance opened the event with a prayer that stated "'Father in heaven, we firmly believe that Donald Trump is the current and true president of the United States'," echoing the widespread Republican lie about the 2020 election being 'stolen' and praying "in Jesus' name" for the victory of Republican over Democratic candidates.[33] Other Christian leaders have openly talked about the ideology of Christian nationalism, like Rod Martin, one of the founders of the Conservative Baptist Network, at a 2022 conference in Memphis: "Let's demonize patriotism by calling it nationalism and associating that with Hitler. Ah, now let's call it White nationalism. Then we'll call it Christian nationalist so we'll make it sound like you are the ayatollah. It is all designed to demonize you."[34] This emotionalized denunciation of objections to Christian nationalism as a political strategy of the Democratic Party mirrors rhetoric frequently used by Republicans, exemplifying how far-right tropes are increasingly being adopted in the pulpit. In a time when white Christians are nearing minority status – estimates predict that less than half of the US population could identify as Christian by 2045 – the embrace of white Christian nationalism and appeals to the duty of 'real Americans' to be Christians offer religious leaders the opportunity to mobilize a wider, thus far non-explicitly religious group of citizens, resulting in the expansion of churches' power and influence on American politics.[35]

Right-wing politicians, meanwhile, have also increasingly assumed the mantle of Christian nationalism to appeal to their electorate. This is a strategy with lots of political potential, considering that 81% of those who self-identify as white, evangelical or born-again Christians voted for Trump in 2016.[36] Some far-right politicians like Marjorie Taylor Greene have straightforwardly embraced the label of 'Christian nationalist', calling all her critics "the godless left" who "hate America, . . . hate God, and . . . hate us."[37] She has also urged her followers to be proud of Christian nationalism to fight "globalists," the "border crisis" and "lies about gender."[38] Others are less explicit in their language yet allude to the same ideas. Republican governor Ron DeSantis of Florida, who recently announced his candidacy for the 2024 presidential elections, routinely employs biblical rhetoric to deliver messages to conservatives, for instance, that his supporters should "[p]ut on the full armor of God. Stand firm against the left's schemes. You will face flaming arrows, but if you have the shield of faith, you will overcome them."[39] This reference to Ephesians 6 replaces the "devil" with "the left", using war imagery and the monumental dichotomy of good and evil to galvanize supporters.[40] Given that both DeSantis and Taylor Greene were successful in their bids for re-election in 2022, this strategic use of religion implying that 'true Americans' must be Christians – and 'true Christians' must support the Republican Party – seems to speak to their constituency, demonstrating the potency of Christian nationalist rhetoric.

DeSantis attempts to portray himself as a fighter for the expansion of the place of religion in public life. For instance, through his endorsement of the introduction of mandatory prayer in public schools and by sponsoring civics training sessions for teachers claiming that "[f]ounders expected religion to be promoted because they believed it to be essential to civic virtue."[41] These efforts are crucial, DeSantis asserts, because "[w]e have the responsibility to make sure that the students that come out of our school system understand

what it means to be an American. They need to understand that our rights come from God, not from the government."[42]

A staunch defender of the heteronormative family, DeSantis has additionally identified himself as a leader in the broader religious fight for morality, condemning the "wokeness" of Democrats supporting LGBTQI+ rights.[43] DeSantis' story about the imposition of a "gender agenda" on "the people" thereby is a common tactic used by the radical and populist right that scholars have said allows them to join forces with religious conservatives.[44] Claiming that Democrats' "woke ideology functions as a religion" with the goal of imposing their values and "world view to the exclusion of the rest of us," DeSantis has justified the passage of highly controversial laws like the restriction of Medicaid insurance coverage for gender-affirming treatments for transgender people as well as the so-called 'Don't Say Gay' bill, which prohibits instruction related to gender identity and sexual orientation in early school grades.[45] These policy efforts and rhetoric combining patriotism with faith and the protection of children appear to resonate with his electorate. Having won the 2022 gubernatorial race in a landslide, recent polls for the upcoming presidential elections now show DeSantis capturing 25 percent of Republican voters, which is less than former President Trump but still far ahead of the rest of the GOP primary competitors.[46] This exemplifies how the use of Christian nationalist tropes not only allows politicians to justify their positions and appeal to voters, but, in consequence, also gives them the political power and momentum to move forward their conservative agenda, leading to a backsliding on democratic rights.

This backsliding, defined as "destabilization or even a reversal in the direction of democratic development", becomes particularly obvious when looking at the arena of gender and sexuality.[47] Apart from the developments in Florida described the United States has experienced a rollback of legal protections for gender and queer rights in recent years. Sophie Bjork-James, an anthropologist specialized in the Christian right and white nationalism, argues that 'white Christian America' is defined largely through heterosexuality and opposing LGBTQI+ rights. She highlights how the Trump administration wove evangelicals' concerns into politics, "seeking to ban transgender individuals from serving in the military, failing to acknowledge Pride month, nominating federal judges with anti-LGBT records, and supporting religious freedom claims that allow for Christians to discriminate based on perceived sexual orientation." [48] In return for the political support of Christian-right leaders and voters, Trump was willing to implement legislation and appoint conservative judges. Driven by their Christian worldviews, those same judges are now scaling back statutes protecting racial equality and gender rights.[49]

An obvious example is the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the US Supreme Court, which had guaranteed the federal right to abortion for almost fifty years. The Court's 2022 landmark decision was the result of a decades-long lobbying effort in which the Christian right played a leading role and was celebrated by the latter as not just a political victory, but a spiritual one.[50] As a reward for making possible the achievement of this major goal and to ensure that state governments would continue to fight against abortion, Christian right leaders invoked religion to call on their constituencies to support Republican candidates. Al Mohler, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky,

bluntly warned in September 2022 that Christians who do not "vote the right way" are "unfaithful," indicating that the only "right way" is to always vote against abortion, same-sex marriage, and gay and transgender rights.[51] Mohler declared that "[w]e are at a time of war", with nothing less than unborn human life, human dignity, the sanctity of marriage, the integrity of the family, and the soul of the nation as a whole being at stake, blending religious arguments with standard Republican tropes.[52] Blurring the line between church and state, this condemnation of those who do not vote Republican as un-Christian illustrates the pervasiveness of Christian nationalist ideas in churches and right-wing politics alike as well as its anti-democratic implications. These remarks thus highlight what Christian nationalism truly is: a political strategy and tool to gain and maximize power, utilized by actors both on the radical and the Christian right.

The battles against abortion, gender equality, and LGBTQI+ rights thereby perfectly encapsulate the relationship between the Christian right and radical right. Finding common ground in the defense of children and the heteronormative family, both movements frame the fight against changing norms of gender and sexuality as a holy crusade that is fundamentally Christian *and* American at the same time. Since those supporting gender and minority rights embody all that is going wrong in America in the eyes of the Christian and radical right, they view it as the duty of 'real Americans' to defend traditional values and hierarchies in the face of cultural, social, and political change. Spinning a narrative of threat, both the Christian right and the radical right exploit this sentiment, using white Christian nationalist tropes to appeal to their constituencies. The frequent use of Christian nationalist rhetoric by prominent right-wing politicians like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Ron DeSantis thereby not only legitimizes the ideology but also moves it into mainstream American politics. Having recognized the wide resonance of religious-nationalist ideas and thus the potential of Christian nationalism for political gain, policymakers (and religious leaders) participate in and fuel a Christian nationalist discourse that relies on an 'us vs. them' dichotomy, vilifying all those who are 'un-Christian' and/or 'un-American'. Christian nationalism thereby almost becomes more than a mere *ideology*, acting as an *identity* its adherents can cling to, uniting actors of different backgrounds. Proponents of white Christian nationalism, meanwhile, contribute to democratic backsliding as their increased power allows them to push their own ideological and political agendas in the name of God and patriotism, resulting in a scaling back on gender and minority rights. Considering that the race for the 2024 election has only just begun, it will be interesting to see how Christian nationalism features in the campaigns of Trump, DeSantis, and other Republican candidates. Their competition also raises the question of what will happen to the Christian right and the radical right: will they continue to unite as these candidates are finding themselves on opposing sides in the election? Regardless of how the situation develops, it is reasonable to expect that this is not the last time we will be confronted with Christian nationalist tropes and those who promote them.

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Deconstructing the American Militainment Hero in *Spec Ops: The Line*

Sjors Petrus Johannes van den Besselaar | Radboud University Nijmegen
This paper is based on a thesis written for the MA program in Transatlantic Studies: History, Culture and Politics

"The US military does not condone the killing of unarmed combatants. But this isn't real, so why should you care?"

- Loading screen in *Spec Ops: The Line*

This paper is inspired by the author's experiences growing up as an avid video game player in Europe. In the post-9/11 era, games that allow players to assume the role of a soldier were abundant. They are part of a broader trend of 'militainment' media—entertainment that features armed forces in a celebratory light. Since the protagonists of these games are commonly either American or working alongside the American military, they inevitably affect the player's perceptions of what the United States and Americans are like. In my case, that perception was that they are prone to violence and have a heroic self-image. Now picture such a game where halfway through, the American protagonist commits several war crimes and spends the remainder of the plot wrestling with trauma, guilt, and cognitive dissonance as his mind unravels. This is what players of the game *Spec Ops: The Line* by German studio Yager Development experience.[1]

This paper analyzes the narratives present in *The Line* to identify the portrayal of American military interventionism in a post-9/11 context. Particular attention is paid to the game's meta-critiques pertaining the enjoyment of violence in the military shooter game genre, the ways in which violence is typically justified in these games' narratives, and the depiction of the relationship between trauma and violence. The final subsection will link these themes back to the main topic of conceptualizing a link between 'America' and 'violence.'[2] The analysis employs relevant literature from the fields of American cultural studies and games studies for this purpose as well as papers on American national trauma.

The intent of this paper is to build upon the analyses presented by media critic Martha Bayles in her seminal work *Through a Screen Darkly*. Bayles argues that American-made television, movies, and popular music have a profound effect on how worldwide audiences picture America and that this has had a significant negative impact on the US's reputation since the end of the Cold War.[3] Bayles's analysis is sparse when it comes to video games or media produced outside the US, however; a gap this paper helps fill. *The Line* was chosen as a topic of analysis not only because of its remarkably self-critical approach to militainment games, but also because it is an excellent example of the transnational practices of modern media production and the game industry in particular. It has a German development team, American writers and publishers, as well as one American and one French director.

The Line's plot follows US Army Captain Martin Walker's journey through desert storm-struck Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. Walker commands Delta Squad (consisting of himself, Lieutenant Adams, and Staff Sergeant Lugo) and is sent to ascertain the situation in Dubai and locate survivors after the US army loses contact with Colonel John Konrad in the city. Konrad was in command of the so-called "Damned" 33rd Battalion, which was returning home from Afghanistan when the storms trapped them in Dubai. Walker soon discovers that the 33rd's attempt at keeping order went awry as he encounters horror after horror in the ruined city, prompting him to stray from his original orders as he becomes involved in the madness that has consumed Dubai. The story is closely based on the 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad as well as its most famous movie adaptation *Apocalypse Now*.[45] Whereas *Apocalypse Now* superimposes the novella's critiques of imperialism onto the Vietnam War, *The Line* instead recontextualizes the narrative for American military interventions in the Middle East.

The game critiques the post-9/11 rise of militainment media.[6] It is particularly critical of narratives of heroism in war and the way military-themed action games use these narratives to paint their violent content as simultaneously fun and morally just. As one of *The Line*'s loading screens sardonically asserts, "[t]o kill for yourself is murder. To kill for your government is heroic. To kill for entertainment is harmless."[7]

The Line disguises itself as a typical instance of a militainment game, which entails adhering to a superficial degree of realism. This means that its depictions of hyperviolence—a deliberate exaggeration of violent content for the sake of spectacle—are less stylized than non-militainment hyperviolent games. The primary hyperviolent game design elements are those present in virtually any shooter game: Walker and his squad kill scores of enemies stretched across numerous skirmishes over several hours of gameplay. The game also features an 'execution' mechanic for finishing off fallen enemies wherein Walker stomps on an enemy's head or shoots them in the chest at close range. Delta Squad recovers from the most grievous of injuries in short order, ensuring they are always ready for more violence.

The game employs remediation for its music to call the player's attention to the role of soundtrack in the gaming experience. Remediation refers to the incorporation or emulation of one medium within another medium. This comes in the form of Radioman, an ex-journalist who acts as the 33rd battalion's leader in Konrad's absence. As his nickname suggests, he behaves more like a radio DJ than a commander, broadcasting sarcastically cheerful 'news' and commentary as well as music to the 33rd's troops, Dubai's citizens, and Delta Squad. Walker's squad picks up his broadcast not long after arriving in Dubai, at which point they discover that the 33rd is rogue and hostile under Radioman's direction. Not long after, Walker discovers the 33rd 'processing' refugees in response to the insurgency. Radioman announces to the refugees over the speakers that he feels no pity towards them since they chose to resist the 33rd's occupation of the city, before playing "Bad Vibrations" by The Black Angels to, in his words, "play [the refugees] off stage."[89]

Much of the game's soundtrack is diegetic licensed music. This means that music is being played within the narrative, so both the player and the characters can hear it. Delta Squad Sergeant Lugo points this out near the start of the game to ensure the player realizes

this diegetic element when "Hush" by Deep Purple cheerfully blares from speakers while Delta Squad routs a group of Emirati insurgents.[10] The presence of this mood-setting music serves to lull the player into a state of complacency. The suggestion is that this is a typical action game to be uncritically enjoyed like any other. The only hint to indicate otherwise is that characters like Radioman explicitly employ music to suppress their conscience, creating a parallel between the antagonist's behavior and the player's experience. That suggestion combined with the insurgents' faceless appearance and lack of English speech, which others and thereby dehumanizes them in the player's eyes, creates an illusion of moral security. There is no expectation to acknowledge these enemies as anything more than targets. However, as media scholar Brendan Keogh argues in his analysis of *The Line*, the game eventually subverts that expectation by replacing the insurgents with American soldiers, disrupting the othering of the game's enemies.[11]

Delta Squad decides not to wait and see what 'processing' the refugees entails and opens fire, killing all the 33rd's soldiers as well as destroying the refugees' shelter from the storms. The scene establishes Radioman and the 33rd as remorseless, who appear more concerned with setting the proper mood for the situation than alleviating the human suffering it involves. This scene is an early instance of a recurring narrative theme in which the righteousness that Americans like Walker and Radioman profess is contrasted against the callousness of their actions. Compare this portrayal to, for instance, documentary filmmaker Michael Moore's depiction of US troops in the Iraq War as callous by alternating footage of Iraqi civilian victims with snippets of interviews with American soldiers.[12] The soldiers express little remorse while describing the 'rush' of combat and how listening to intense music amplifies it.

The apparent urge to use music to stifle empathy and make war fun is something that predates video games, as the game alludes to in a later scene. Radioman unleashes a helicopter on Delta Squad while blasting "Dies Irae" by Giuseppe Verdi, paralleling Lt. Col. Kilgore in *Apocalypse Now* famously playing "Ride of the Valkyries" by Richard Wagner as his helicopters rain napalm on a village. Radioman merrily hums along as the helicopter hails bullets and missiles, and Lugo cannot help but shout "I love this song!" even as he runs for his life.[13]

Media scholar Matthew Thomas Payne describes how games are entertaining because they offer escapism, while also deriving meaning from a perceived realism. He argues that "the entertainment industry purposefully conflates the war game's ability to render photorealistic graphics and surround sound with broader notions of experiential realism."[14] Fellow media scholars Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin describe such audiovisual realism as a form of immediacy in their theory of remediation. Immediacy refers to when a mediated work attempts to 'disappear'—that is, making the audience temporarily forget that they are experiencing a mediation of reality. That immediacy is further enhanced by a game's responsiveness to the player's interactions.[15] *The Line* disguises itself as such a militainment game, mimicking how these games offer a shallow sense of 'audiovisual' realism in its early chapters. Kristine Jørgensen notes, however, that players can discover hidden clues of a more complex narrative in this early stage.[16] For instance, Walker finds a doll in the environment

and deduces that there are still families present in the city, which he chooses to conceal from his compatriots to spare their conscience. Jørgensen has learned that these clues encourage players to read the game's narratives more closely and to distrust what they have been led to believe. She remarks that *The Line* is dedicated not just to audiovisual realism but also social realism (i.e., the 'experiental' realism Payne mentioned): it simulates the psychological experiences of those who live through these events. She calls the effect this has on players "positive discomfort," as it allows players to emotionally connect their own experience with the experiences of people in an actual warzone.[17]

  The Line does lessen its critiques of enjoying militainment games somewhat in one of the game's latter chapters. As Delta Squad finally storms Radioman's tower, Radioman tries to make Walker (and the player) feel guilty by reminding them that his guards have names, loved ones, dreams, hobbies—but he soon admits that he barely knows them either, let alone cares about them. He then sarcastically drawls, "[that soldier] had a wife and kids! Won't someone PLEASE think of the children?! (...) Ah geez, where's all this violence coming from, man? Is it the video games? I bet it's the video games..."[18] Radioman ridicules moral alarmism about violent games, lambasting it as a distraction from the realities of war and the actual causes of violence. For all its criticism, *The Line* is not an anti-video game, or even an anti-action game—merely a commentary on how these games are enjoyed.

  Next to discuss is how the game comments on the justification of violence in militainment games. Walker's original orders were to briefly scout Dubai, look for survivors, and then report back immediately. He soon begins to deviate from those orders, but his motives for doing so constantly shift. Early on, Delta Squad runs into a hostage situation in the wreckage of a downed passenger plane (note the symbolism of this scenario in a post-9/11 context). When they fail to rescue the captive American soldier from the insurgents, they decide to move further into Dubai to find out what happened to the 33rd, assured by the thought that saving American lives from "these people" outweighs any order.[19] However, they discover that the 33rd has gone rogue and is brutally controlling Dubai. Walker's motive promptly changes; now it is the people of Dubai who need saving from the 33rd. When Adams begins to question Walker's habit of prolonging their mission past its original parameters, Walker replies, "[t]his isn't about finding Konrad anymore. It's about doing what's right."[20]

  This behavior pattern culminates in the game's most infamous scene. Delta Squad intervenes too late to save CIA Agent Gould from being tortured to death by the 33rd. With his last breath, Gould beseeches them to capture a 33rd outpost called 'the Gate.' Upon arriving there, Delta discovers that the area is overrun with 33rd soldiers. They spot a mortar cannon loaded with white phosphorus rounds nearby and briefly debate whether to use it. Lugo argues against it by noting that "there's always a choice," while Walker retorts that "there's really not."[21] They discover why Gould wanted to seize the Gate only after bombing the area: the 33rd were gathering civilians there to stage an evacuation, who have now perished in agony due to Walker's orders.

  The scene marks a moral point-of-no-return. Walker and his men are no longer heroes or even antiheroes. What is interesting is that the player is also implicated through the layered use of remediation, immediacy, and hypermediation—the inverse of immediacy,

where a work calls attention to and thereby reveals its own techniques of mediation[22]. The game employs remediation by having the player view the world through an overhead infrared camera, in which enemies are represented as little white shapes. This imitates tools of war used in real life. Keogh notes in his analysis of this scene that real-life weapon systems increasingly resemble video games as well, observing that "[d]rone controls are shaped like PlayStation controllers for pilots that have grown up bombing distant villages all their life."[23] The game also employs hypermediation, as the player can see Walker's reflection on the screen and hear the screams of the people they are bombing, reminding them of the infrared camera's mediation of their perception. Lastly, immediacy is employed since the player sees Walker's reflection in place of where their own would be. He is staring at a screen and gratifyingly erasing the abstracted representations of people he sees on it, just as they are. Hence, Walker's actions become the player's actions. He is guided by the player's hand, even if there was never a choice for them to take a different course of action. Keogh raises the controversial notion that there actually was a choice: not to play. He argues, however, that the game is not trying to alienate players. Instead, it forces them to acknowledge that, like Walker, they willingly ventured into a situation where they would supposedly have no choice but to commit atrocities; the player through their partaking in militainment games, and Walker by not leaving Dubai when he was supposed to.[24]

This technique of 'implicating' the audience predates games. Cultural critic and historian Richard Slotkin refers to a 1970 article in *Life* magazine about the 1968 Mỹ Lai Massacre in Vietnam which had readers "vicariously enter the event and become witnesses to a crime; and to the extent that we see ourselves crouching and witnessing with Haeberle, we too are implicated in the massacre."[25] He describes this as a moral point-of-no-return: "At this point it can no longer be denied that the troops have 'crossed over.' Instead of protecting women and children from 'the horror,' they have themselves *become* 'the horror.'"[26] This act of 'crossing over' is in fact what the game's title is referring to: in one of the game's endings, Konrad tells Walker, "[h]ome? We can't go home. There's a line men like us have to cross. If we're lucky, we do what's necessary, then we die."[27]

Delta Squad encounters CIA Agent Riggs in the game's latter half, who leads the Emirati insurgency. Riggs acts as a foil to Walker, being similarly pragmatic and ruthless in his goal of stopping the 33rd. He convinces Walker to aid him in a plan to steal the city's only remaining water reserves, arguing that this will force the 33rd to surrender—but when cornered, Riggs destroys the reserves instead, dooming everyone in the city. He argues that his actions are necessary, and therefore right: if any witnesses remained of what the 33rd did during their occupation of Dubai, it would ruin the US's international reputation and unite the entire Middle East against them in all-out war. Walker recognizes Riggs's delusional villainy, but still fails to reflect on his own behavior as he marches onward.

Various American characters—Walker, Riggs, Konrad—repeatedly echo the sentiment that "there is no difference between what is right and what is necessary."[28] The same phrase also appears on one of the game's loading screens shortly following the white phosphorus scene showing Walker staring down into an abyss, which reflects a famous Friedrich Nietzsche quote: "He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a

monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee."[29] The American characters are willing to justify any decision they make as a necessary moral compromise, but in so doing they cross the titular line and, in Slotkin's words, "*become* 'the horror.'"[30]

As the game progresses, the traumatic events Walker experiences take a toll on his sanity. This is evident in voice actor Nolan North's performance: near the beginning, Walker speaks with the consummate professionalism expected of a militainment protagonist, shouting "hostile down!" "target neutralized!" or "he's done!" with a level, neutral voice when killing someone. By the end, Walker snarls "kill is fucking confirmed!" or "got the fucker!" while barking at his subordinates that "I want him DEAD!" as he trudges through Dubai's ruins, caked in blood and sand.[31] As Payne describes, Walker at first emulates the easily identifiable protagonists of militainment games, but that identifiability gradually decreases as Walker's appearance, mental state, and morality deteriorate.[32]

The setting, too, contributes much to this theme of deterioration. Payne describes that the ruined Dubai is not what players have come to expect from militainment games, as it is filled with the "opulence of Western civilization: a TV studio, an aquatic coliseum, luxury hotels and spas, an aquarium, etc."[33] It is not just Dubai that is crumbling, but the image of America as the champion of Western liberalism. This is most apparent on the game's title screen. The image of a tattered, upside-down American flag flying over the desolate ruins of Dubai as a deteriorated recording of Jimi Hendrix's "Star-Spangled Banner" plays leaves little room for doubt.[34] The title screen becomes even more desolate as the player progresses through the story, driving home that this is not a story of redemption.

Payne furthermore points out a scene in which Delta Squad discovers a mass grave where the bodies of executed 33rd soldiers with cloth hoods over their heads are posed in front of bloodied American flags. He remarks that these bring to mind real-life traumatic imagery such as the torture inflicted upon Iraqi prisoners of Abu Ghraib, or the experiences of American P.O.W.s in Hỏa Lò Prison during the Vietnam War.[35] *The Line* is engaged with what Americanist Udo Hebel describes as interpictorial clusters, which refers to an 'interplay' of historically charged photographic images.[36] By evoking the powerful imagery of these horrific real-life events that players may recognize, *The Line* establishes itself as more than just a shocking fictional story; it is about real trauma as well.

Walker also begins to experience more and more hallucinations as time goes by, prompting the player to question his reliability as a focal character. Likewise, Walker increasingly views Konrad as villainous as his own body count grows. He initially assumes that Konrad is not involved with the 33rd going rogue based on his prior deployments alongside him in Afghanistan. After the white phosphorus scene, however, he responds to Lugo's indignant remarks that "[t]here's nothing good about what happened out there, Lugo—but our hand was forced. And I know by who… (…) It's Konrad. He did it. All of it."[37] From this point onwards, he begins hearing and seeing Konrad everywhere.

After Riggs's plan ends in more disaster, Walker entertains the idea of using Radioman's broadcast to stage another evacuation. Once he finally holds the microphone in his hands, however, he instead vows revenge against Konrad and the 33rd. On his way out, he

steals a Black Hawk helicopter from the 33ʳᵈ and uses it to needlessly destroy Radioman's tower, giddily expressing his desire to send a warning to his enemies about the violence he intends to exact on them. This portrayal reflects sociologist Neil Smelser's assertions about how, in broad strokes, American culture typically abhors aggression, except in situations where "one is picked on, pushed around, or taken advantage of."[38] Walker feels that Konrad manipulated him, and he must pay for it. The scene also matches Smelser's observations about "the centrality of responsibility and guilt in trauma."[39] Walker's immediate response to experiencing trauma is to establish who is responsible and to embark on a quest to punish him.

By the time Walker finally reaches Konrad's quarters, Lugo and Adams have both died. He finds Konrad painting a familiar-looking picture of the white phosphorus victims as they burned—something only Walker could recognize. When he confronts him, he learns the awful truth: Konrad has been dead since the beginning, and Walker has been hallucinating his continued role in the game's events because he could not live with his own actions. The loading screens foreshadow this twist by telling the player that "[c]ognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable feeling caused by holding two conflicting ideas simultaneously."[40] Walker's heroic self-perception conflicted with the reality that he is a mass murderer, leading to his descent into delusion. Every time Walker tried to be a hero, it only caused more death and despair, deepening his psychological need to redeem himself by killing the villain responsible for it all. In the end, the player gets to make the final decision: Who is to be held accountable for the events in Dubai? Walker, or his imaginary Konrad?

The Line is more a "shooter about shooters" than it is about America.[41] However, these topics are inextricably linked. Bayles notes that the gritty, realistic shooter genre is commonly perceived as American, just as more stylized, cartoonish aesthetics are associated with Japanese productions[42]. Indeed, *The Line* cannot help but touch upon themes of American military interventionism while critiquing militainment games. The setting of a crumbling Dubai is not so much a portrayal of the real Dubai as it is a reflection of Walker's failing grasp on his sanity and his situation. Payne argues that both the game's setting and its narrative themes are "allegorical proxies for the social and psychological costs of American militarism."[43]

That cost becomes apparent at the scene of Lugo's death. A helicopter crash near the end of the game leaves him separated from Walker and Adams, unable to fend for himself due to a broken arm. He hides from the 33ʳᵈ in a refugee camp, but when the Dubai locals realize that he is one of the hated Americans, they lynch him. As Walker futilely performs CPR, Adams begs him for permission to kill the refugees in revenge. It is up to the player to choose whether to engage in such senseless vengeance; the option to nonlethally disperse the crowd by shooting in the air or at the ground exists but is not explicitly spelled out. Lugo was the most morally conscientious and emotive of the squad as well as their only translator. His death hence marks the end of any pretense of helping the locals.

Games have played a significant role in the processing of personal and national trauma related to 9/11. Henry Lowood observes that the attacks of September 11 were soon followed by an influx of independently made web games and user-made modifications to

existing games through which players expressed their grief—be it in the form collective mourning in multiplayer games or through the repetitive killing of representations of terrorists.[44] Lowood argues that this behavior is a response to an experienced lack of agency in real life:

> A post on the AllSpark.net forum (Mighty Quasar, 2001) on 11 September voiced the motivation behind such virtual agency as news sources reported a fourth passenger aircraft heading towards Washington, DC: 'DAMMIT. Why can't I have superpowers? Just one day, that's all I ask.' Like nearly everyone else, gamers felt helpless.[45]

Whether their developers and producers were cognizant of it or not, militainment games perfectly supplied this post-9/11 demand for "virtual agency" that Lowood describes. For minutes or hours per session, the player becomes a highly trained Spec Ops soldier who can survive any firefight despite being outnumbered, and who can make the world right again by shooting the bad guy. The powerlessness and the anxiety experienced post-9/11 are answered with catharsis; the player has the 'superpowers' to save the day now. This fantasy is hidden behind a veneer of realism formed by audiovisual fidelity, without having to portray the nastier aspects of war.[46] That is why it is so poignant when Konrad shatters Walker's and the player's delusions: "You're no savior. Your talents lie elsewhere. (...) The truth, Walker, is that you're here because you wanted to feel like something you're not: a hero."[47] It is more than just calling out the player's power trip: it is a wake-up call, back to a painful reality where the player is no hero or super soldier, and they cannot make the world's problems go away by shooting at them.

Still, despite *The Line*'s unwillingness to pander to the player's wishes, it does offer one point of consolation. When Walker finally admits to the reality of what he has done and, in his final moment of emotional vulnerability, whispers "I didn't mean to hurt anybody," Konrad tells him, "[n]o one ever does."[48] His tone is dismissive—he will not let Walker absolve himself of responsibility with good intentions—but not contrary or sarcastic. People do not really want to hurt each other at heart, Walker and the player included. Indeed, despite everything that went wrong in Dubai, all of the story's characters meant well by their actions.

Well-intentioned or not, however, the Americans in *The Line* only seem capable of solving issues through violence. As Adams summarizes their plan of approach in an early chapter, "shoot first, ask questions later—got it."[49] First Konrad and the 33rd brutally instate martial law in a foreign city, then the CIA attempts to retake control by instigating an insurgency, and finally Delta Squad carves a path of destruction through Dubai. Americans versus Americans versus Americans, and the Emirati people are caught in the crossfire every time. The citizens of Dubai grow to despise Americans, and no wonder.

The scene of Lugo's death, finally, represents the total breakdown of American heroism in the context of interventionism in the Middle East. The audience is left to reflect

on the fact that the characters you play as are not heroes, and the player is certainly not one for pursuing a delusional power fantasy alongside them. All that remains, then, is a pointless cycle of violence in the name of hollow notions of justice, for one's country... or simply for entertainment. *The Line* thereby fulfills the same role for a 21ˢᵗ century generation of gamers who have experienced the War on Terror as its inspiration *Apocalypse Now* for moviegoing audiences following the Vietnam War. This fallen image of the American savior complex is foreshadowed early in the story by a stencil art players can find on the walls of Dubai's ruins. It is an iconographic interpictorial cluster depicting a desecrated Lady Liberty, draped in an American flag without any stars and brandishing an AK-47. The implied message is that the US has betrayed any notion of championing liberty, justice, or democracy when it chose to violently impose itself on the Middle East, and that it therefore should no longer be uncritically presumed to be a force of good. This encourages players to critically examine narratives of American heroism they have encountered in other militainment media.

Notes

[1] Cory Davis and Francois Coulon, dir., *Spec Ops: The Line* (2K Games, 2012), video game.

[2] This paper is adapted from a chapter of the author's MA thesis, which seeks to investigate how hyperviolent video games made by non-American studios could shape outside perspectives on America in a post-9/11 world.

[33] Martha Bayles, *Through a Screen Darkly: Popular Culture, Public Diplomacy, and America's Image Abroad* (London: Yale University Press, 2014), 4-6, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm16x.3.

[4] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Edinburgh: Blackwood's Magazine, 1899).

[5] Francis Ford Coppola, dir., *Apocalypse Now* (United Artists, 1979), Film.

[6] Matthew T. Payne, "War Bytes: The Critique of Militainment in *Spec Ops: The Line*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 31, no. 4 (2014): 265.

[7] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[8] The Black Angels, "Bad Vibrations," recorded 2010, Track 1 on *Phosphene Dream*, Blue Horizon.

[9] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[10] Deep Purple, "Hush," recorded 1968, Track 2 on *Shades of Deep Purple*, Parlophone.

[11] Brendan Keogh, *Killing is Harmless: A Critical Reading of Spec Ops: The Line* (Stolen Projects, 2012), 22-23.

[12] Michael Moore, dir., *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Dog Eat Dog Films and Fellowship Adventure Group, 2004), documentary film.

[13] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[14] Payne, "War Bytes," 267.

[15] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 29-30.

[16] Kristine Jørgensen, "The Positive Discomfort of *Spec Ops: The Line*," *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 16, no. 2 (2016).

[17] Ibid.

[18] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 33-34.

[23] Keogh, *Killing is Harmless*, 77.

[24] Ibid., 79.

[25] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 584.

[26] Ibid., 585.

[27] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[28] Ibid.

[29] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1886), 69.

[30] Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 584.

[31] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[32] Payne, "War Bytes," 272.

[33] Ibid., 271.

[34] Jimi Hendrix, "The Star-Spangled Banner," recorded 1970, Track 1, side 6 on *Woodstock: Music from the Original Soundtrack and More*, Cotillion.

[35] Payne, "War Bytes," 271-272.

[36] Udo J. Hebel, "'American' Pictures and (Trans-) National Iconographies: Mapping Interpictorial Clusters in American Studies," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 404.

[37] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[38] Neil J. Smelser, "September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma," In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., 264-282 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 271.

[39] Ibid., 282.

[40] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[41] Keogh, *Killing is Harmless*, 4.

[42] Bayles, *Through a Screen Darkly*, 61-62.

[43] Payne, "War Bytes," 271.

[44] Henry Lowood, "Impotence and Agency: Computer Games as a Post-9/11 Battlefield," In *Computer Games as a Sociocultural Phenomenon*, edited by Andreas Jahn-Sudmann and Ralf Stockmann, 78-86 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 79-80.

[45] Ibid., 86.

[46] Payne, "War Bytes," 267.

[47] *Spec Ops: The Line.*

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

Musical Minimalism:
A Uniquely American Form of Art Music

Simone Westblom | University of Amsterdam
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One of the most striking examples of early minimalist music is *4'33"* by John Cage. Composed in 1952, it consists of three movements comprised of nothing but a single, long pause. In other words, it is an entirely silent piece of music, its beginning and end often marked by the musician's closing the piano lid or putting away the bow, as it can be performed with several different instruments.[1] *4'33"* encompasses Cage's idea that any auditory experience can constitute music. Cage commented after its premiere that "There's no such thing as silence," noting that the venue was filled with different sounds, coming from both the audience and the weather outside.[2] *4'33"* illustrates the dynamic between what can be called noise and sound; we can think of noise as what composers Aaron Cassidy and Aaron Eindbond explain as "the building blocks ... that might constitute a composition," which have been isolated and taken "out of their 'natural surroundings'" and repositioned within a musical context.[3] Seen this way, noise, perhaps generally thought of as unwanted sound, is always present in music although it can be more or less pronounced. Cage noted that duration is the most fundamental feature of all music, and the only shared element of sound and silence, thus making silence an integral part of composition.[4] This notion influenced many later musicians who began toying with the idea of compositions consisting of unintentional sounds. While Cage was an experimental composer and pieces containing long pauses or partial silence had been composed before, *4'33"* inspired the early minimalist composers and embodied many of the characteristics that the genre would later embrace and develop.[5]

Minimalism then, as it stood out in the 1960s and the 1970s, is a form of art music that uses very limited musical materials. Its most significant features include repetitious patterns and beats, consonant harmony, and reiteration of musical themes or phrases, resulting in trance-like music that lacks narrative or culmination. Originated in the United States during the early 1960s, musical minimalism was first developed by the composers La Monte Young and Terry Riley and later expanded on by Steve Reich and Philip Glass, perhaps the most representative and well-known composers of the style.[6] Minimalism has many influences, ranging from West African drumming and Indian raga to 13th- and 20th-century European music.[7] Nevertheless, I argue that minimalism is a uniquely American form of art music. It also draws upon American precursors like John Cage and bebop musicians such as John Coltrane and Charlie Parker. Rather than simply being a mixture of these different styles or, like the majority of Western musical styles, simply a successor to European classical music, minimalism is the first form of art music developed almost entirely by American composers. Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* (1978) and Philip Glass's *Music in Twelve Parts* (1974) are two of the most representative works of this genre, combining some of the most

prominent elements of minimalist music. These two compositions exemplify both its non-Western influences and its unique innovations and musical contributions. In *Minimalists* (2008), music scholar K. Robert Schwarz has traced the influence of minimalism to European and non-Western music. This paper will expand upon this subject and highlight some of the many uniquely American features of minimalism that are not to be found in any other part of the world. Furthermore, it is the first genuinely new form of art music, with its own tradition, to come from America. First, however, this paper will focus on the music of La Monte Young and Terry Riley – the main precursors of Reich and Glass - to offer an understanding of the emergence of minimalism and the various influences that helped shape it. In what way do these composers draw on existing musical traditions and how do they contribute to an entirely new one that is wholly American?

One of the early minimalists, Young, who was born in Idaho, was profoundly affected by the atonal and serial compositions of Arnold Schoenberg and his disciple Anton Webern. In Webern's pieces, "sound and silence seem of equal importance, and the hushed dynamics, the transparent textures, and the extremely brief time-frames all lend the music a proto-minimalist aura," as Schwarz explains.[8] However, Webern was reacting to "the late-Romantic angst of Schoenberg's Vienna" and distilled his music into something much more rational and rarefied. Young, on the other hand, was mainly influenced by the idea of music lacking climax and directionality.[9] He even stated that the majority of Western music before the 13th century had been guided by these two factors, noting that stasis, which means a lack of climax and directionality, had been a point of structure prior to movement.[10] Schwarz has also drawn attention to the journey Young made to Darmstadt, Germany, in 1959, to a musical school in which new sound technology was explored, and which many renowned composers visited.[11] However, Young was less influenced by European modernist composers such as the renowned German Karlheinz Stockhausen or the French Pierre Boulez and more intrigued by the American John Cage who was discussed at the school.[12] Although Young had never heard any of Cage's compositions, he was struck by Cage's philosophy that music could be made up of any kind of sound. Young incorporated this idea into his music, using chairs and tables to create a scraping sound in *Poem for Tables, Chairs, Benches, Etc.* (1960). Rather than following the beaten path first trod by the 20th century composers in Vienna or Darmstadt, Young took another direction which greatly influenced his contemporary Terry Riley.

Riley was mesmerized by Young's music: "It was like being in a time capsule and floating out in space somewhere and waiting for the next event to happen. And I enjoyed that kind of waiting. It was probably my first introduction to a Zen-like approach to the present."[13] However, rather than adopting the same Zen-like approach of Young, Riley turned to jazz legends such as John Coltrane for inspiration.[14] Moreover, while Young kept to stasis as a form of structure, Riley became drawn towards repetition, frequently experimenting with loops of tape recordings consisting of speech and piano playing, among others, some distorted and some not.[15] In other words, Young's music has more of a droning sound that contains long, sustained notes, rather than changing it up the way Riley does. Riley compared

the sensation of the repetitive sound to that of psychedelic drugs, which had become popular around the 1960s in America, and commented that it "was changing our concept of how time passes, and what you actually hear in the music."[16] Riley was also exposed to the non-Western music of Ravi Shankar when traveling around Europe and Africa, remarking that "this is the way music should be played."[17] Nevertheless, the impact of Shankar's music itself was not very deep; it was rather the philosophy of music occupying a space more accessible than that of the concert stage that affected him. Riley's composition *In C* (1968), consists of 53 short numbered musical phrases, or sentences to use a linguistic explanation, which are repeated a number of times by each musician performing it. It is accompanied by a constant pulsating of eight notes on the piano's top C, and was the first commercial success of minimalism that successfully struck a chord with the critics who thought it was "absorbing, exciting, and moving."[18]

While Schwarz, who has written one of the first and foremost accounts of these musicians, has focused on the European and non-Western influences on Young and Riley, in reality, the composers both denounced many of them in pursuit of a direction of their own. Young's fascination with the Zen-like sensation of stasis as a form of structure and Riley's musical experiences in Africa were an introduction to a new way of thinking about music rather than imitating or repeating what they heard. While Young may have been influenced by the atonalism and serialism that Webern composed more than any of the other minimalists, he also departs from them in a very radical way. Serialism, which was widely used in composition during the 1950s and 1960s, is music that builds on atonalism – music that does not have a tonal center, in contrast to many compositions before the 20th century. One of his first works, *Trio for Strings* (1958), is indeed a serial work. However, it discards both melody and rhythmic pulse and separates the chords with silence, bringing forth a unique composition that had no equivalent in Western music. Riley also took the less-traveled path and experimented mainly with technology, recording both pre-made music and sounds, repeating them over and over in a so-called time-lag accumulator. *In C* is more inspired by jazz, as it requires the musicians to listen and respond to one another in a very improvisational way. *In C* also turned against atonality, effectively reestablishing tonality as a force to be once again reckoned with within composition, in opposition to European music at the time.

One of the most influential minimalist composers, Steve Reich, also began his career by exploring 20th century European composers like Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Debussy, and Bartók. He, like Young and Riley, came into contact with the musicians of the Darmstadt school. Reich was initially drawn towards Luciano Berio, a less doctrinal serialist who also experimented with tape recordings, and focused on the twelve-tone technique of Schoenberg together with him.[19] The twelve-tone technique was widely used during this time and its basic premise is that all twelve notes of the chromatic scale have to be played. In addition, none of them can occur a second time until the other eleven notes have been played, with a few exceptions. Serialism, in its turn, is a way of ordering all musical elements, and is like an extension of the twelve-tone technique that also includes parameters such as tone length,

articulation, and dynamics. However, Reich quickly dismissed serialism as irrelevant to the environment in which he lived in New York:

> Stockhausen, Berio, and Boulez were portraying in very honest terms what it was like to pick up the pieces of a bombed-out continent after World War II ... But for some Americans in 1948 or 1958 or 1968 – in the real context of tail-fins, Chuck Berry, and millions of burgers sold – to pretend that instead we're really going to have the dark-brown angst of Vienna is a lie, a musical lie.[20]

Reich also commented that it was "ill-informed" to ignore the enormous influence of American jazz and rock-and-roll upon minimalism, thus taking a stance against the sort of music that Europe was preoccupied with.[21] Instead, like Riley, he turned to experimental tape recordings. His first composition, *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), consists of two identical tape recordings of a black preacher saying, "It's gonna rain!" As the two recordings keep playing the same phrase repeatedly, they gradually fall out of sync with each other, a technique Reich would later name "phasing," which was inspired mainly by Riley's *In C.*

Philip Glass, although contemporary with Young, Riley, and Reich, was in his early years detached from the New York scene from which minimalism emerged. He too received lessons in atonal composition, but quickly dismissed these. Instead, he went on to study with the famous French composition teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris, who held up Monteverdi and Mozart as models.[22] Glass also got the opportunity to transcribe the music of Ravi Shankar into Western notation for a movie that was being filmed at the time. Indian music, being structured according to a different rhythmic principle from the West, creates the impression of "a steady stream of rhythmic pulses" instead of the short time-values of Western music.[23] More notably than any of the other minimalist composers, Glass incorporated this repetitive feature into his own music. After having traveled around India for four months, Glass eventually headed back home where he attended some of Reich's concerts. This became the starting point for Glass's minimalistic works. In these, he drastically simplified his compositional style and developed his "trademark additive process," a technique in which a short motive of only a few notes is repeated over and over and gradually changes over a period of time by adding or removing a note in the phrase.[24] His early works, *Strung Out* (1967) and *Two Pages* (1968) for example, are more extreme than any other minimalist work in lacking harmony entirely. Glass, like Reich, would compose music for his own band which played "portable, rock-style electric organs and amplified winds," thus taking a step closer to rock-and-roll and jazz.[25] While Glass had gathered a following of devoted listeners in New York by 1970, Europe proved to be a much tougher crowd. During a performance in Italy in 1972 "the festival's director ... walked out during the performance, and someone else tried to cut the power supply."[26]

Reich and Glass had European teachers who initially exercised a great influence upon them.[27] However, they both came to dismiss the learnings of these in pursuit of a more radical compositional style that largely deviates from the European development of classical music. Reich expressed this divergence most vehemently in philosophical and historical terms, and

Glass through his complete disregard for rhythm, tempo, and dynamics. This turn wholly rejected the goal-oriented, linear development of Western music. Glass even went on to write *Music in Fifths* (1969) as "a sort of teasing homage to Boulanger ... written entirely in parallel fifths, a cardinal sin in the traditional counterpoint his teacher so carefully instructed."[28] Counterpoint is an important compositional technique to keep in mind. It weaves together two or more independent, melodic lines so that they complement each other. Counterpoint is a common feature of the European classical tradition, making *Music in Fifths* a strong statement against it. In a similar manner, Reich would write a string-orchestra piece that departed from the teachings of Berio and resembled tonal music rather than atonal. This was another compositional sin during a time when European composers had largely agreed that there was nothing left to achieve with tonality. And although they both traveled around North Africa and India, gathering experience and exploring future influences, they never succumbed to a purely imitative mode of composing or tried to Americanize what they heard. Instead, they composed music using their own sound that was "constructed in the light of ... knowledge of non-Western structures," thus creating something entirely new.[29] In his interview with Strickland, Reich commented that "I find alien instruments, timbres, tuning, scales, modes, fascinating – but they're precisely the elements I don't want to touch with a ten-foot pole!"[30] Furthermore, Reich's phasing technique and Glass's additive process were musical innovations that had never been heard of or used before in any part of the world. Much of their influence and inspiration when it came to these technical solutions, which became their trademarks, were derived from earlier minimalists such as Young and Riley. Moreover, by 1970, both Reich's and Glass's music had diverged from the musical tradition and trend in Europe so much that those influences were hardly discernible. They also had their own groups, Steve Reich and Musicians and the Philip Glass Ensemble, a practice that differed from working with orchestral institutions. Their bands were important in the development of their music, as compositions became a shared matter that was explored and experimented with in different ways in groups. This characteristic is also closer to the American tradition of jazz groups and rock-and-roll bands, in contrast to the image of the composer as a lone Romantic genius that still dominated European music.

Music for 18 Musicians was Reich's first commercial success and a landmark in his development as a composer.[31] While his previous compositions had been made of barely detectible sounds and processes, meant to enchant the listeners, *Music for 18 Musicians* marks the beginning of a more obvious and out-in-the-open style of composing. Reich expanded his band to include a variety of new instruments: violins, cellos, pianos, marimbas, xylophones, metallophones, and marimbas, alongside four female singers. The composition begins with a cycle of eleven chords that increase and decrease in volume in a pulsating manner. After their introduction, the musicians play the first chord accompanied by pianos and marimbas; a piece that lasts for roughly 4 minutes and is succeeded by the second chord around which Reich creates another small piece. This process is repeated until all of the eleven chords have been covered, rounding off with the opening chord as a sort of epilogue. *Music for 18 Musicians* has a larger structure that is easily perceptible to most listeners, but it also contains smaller musical processes within the pieces which add density to the

composition. As with his other compositions, the musicians rely on their memory and perform it without any conductor, in contrast to the European tradition.

Like Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians,* Glass's composition *Music in Twelve Parts* is a landmark that indicates the beginning of a less reductive minimalism and a more commercially viable one. Minimalism frequently borrowed from popular music and its own influence on other genres "radiated outward in the eighties and nineties, to the point where you could walk into any hip boutique or hotel lounge and … hear some distant … cousin of Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*," as music critic Alex Ross notes.[32] *Music in Twelve Parts* consists of twelve musical lines, two for each instrument, and twelve pieces or parts, as the title suggests. Some pieces connect with each other with one piece fading into the next, while others stand by themselves; some of them are reminiscent of Glass's earlier reductive works, and some are denser and more contrapuntal. *Music in Twelve Parts* is, in effect, almost a summation of all of Glass's different compositional techniques. However, it also transcends them, as the last piece consists of a twelve-tone theme, which is sung by a soprano voice, of which Glass commented: "I had broken the rules of modernism and so I thought it was time to break some of my own rules."[33] Unlike *Music for 18 Musicians*, Glass's composition lasts for over three hours and has a much more subtle structure. It develops very slowly and has long periods in which nothing seems to happen. An attentive listener, however, may notice that its patterns transform and progress continuously throughout the composition, although barely perceptibly.

There is no denying the fact that musical styles such as Indian raga and West-African drumming have had a considerable effect on both Reich and Glass, and that they paved the way for a new way of thinking about art music in America. But most of all, they provided a way out of European modernism, which in their minds had become outdated by the time of the late 1960s, especially in America. Reich's comment that it was impossible to pick up the tired torch that was the "dark-brown angst of Vienna" is particularly illuminating in this matter. It is important, however, to remember the impact of earlier minimalists such as Young and Riley upon Reich and Glass as they are part of the red thread of influences that led up to the peak of minimalism. Cage's *4'33"*, for instance, had a great impact on Young, without whom there would be no minimalism. The improvisational jazz of Coltrane and Parker, and the rock-and-roll music of the 1950s and 1960s, were also contributors that affected the way Reich and Glass structured and performed their music. It also marked the rejection of otherwise common features of European classical music such as the orchestra and the conductor. Furthermore, it is a blend of both "popular" and "high" culture, mixing elements from the world of classical music and pop, thus creating a unique blend of seemingly incompatible genres. Their greatest contribution was perhaps their open approach to a range of different musical styles and their willingness to discover and learn the many ways in which music can be constructed. Although minimalism is profoundly entangled with its musical predecessors, drawing inspirations from non-Western music and rejecting the European tradition, it is unique in that it dares to explore and combine elements from different parts of the world. It synthesizes the old into something new, something of its own,

which can only be called American. *Music for 18 Musicians* and *Music in Twelve Parts* simultaneously toy with and reject their musical predecessors and thus create a musical style that has no equivalent in any other part of the world than America.

Notes

[1] See William Marx, "John Cage's 4'33"," Joel Hochberg, uploaded on December 15, 2010, YouTube Video, https://youtu.be/JTEFKFiXSx4 for solo piano and Berliner Philharmoniker, "John Cage: 4'33" / Petrenko · Berliner Philharmoniker," Berliner Philharmoniker, uploaded on November 3, 2020, YouTube video, https://youtu.be/AWVUp12XPpU for orchestra.

[2] Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with John Cage* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 70.

[3] Aaron Cassidy and Aaron Einbond, *Noise in and as music* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield, 2013), 6-7.

[4] Richard Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music: Volume 5* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 56.

[5] Alphonse Allais's *Funeral March for the Obsequies of a Deaf Man* (1897) and Yves Klein's *Monotone-Silence Symphony* (1949) are two examples.

[6] There are several minimalist composers, but these are generally regarded as the most representative of the genre. See Brent Heisinger, "American Minimalism in the 1980s," *American Music* 7, no. 4. (1989): 430-447, doi.org/10.2307/3051914 and Edward Strickland, *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 106.

[7] Steve Reich, in particular, was fascinated by West African drumming, and La Monte Young by 13th century music. See K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists: 20th Century Composers* (London: Phaidon, 2008), 23; 71.

[8] Ibid., 22.

[9] Ibid, 22: Edward Strickland, *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 57-59.

[10] Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 23.

[11] Ibid., 28-29.

[12] Strickland, *American Composers*, 58.

[13] Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 28.

[14] Strickland, *American Composers*, 115; 118.

[15] Ibid., 111-112.

[16] Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 35.

[17] Ibid., 36.

[18] Ibid., 43.

[19] Ibid., 56.

[20] Strickland, *American Composers*, 46.

[21] Cole Cagne and Tracy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 309.

[22] Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 114.

[23] Ibid., 116-117.

[24] Ibid., 120.

[25] Ibid., 122.

[26] Ibid., 125.

[27] Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 542; 548.

[28] Tim Page, "Two Pages / Contrary Motion / Music in Fifths / Music in Similar Motion: Notes," Philip Glass, accessed March 2, 2023, http://philipglass.com/recordings/two_pages/.

[29] Steve Reich, "A Composer Looks East," *The New York Times*, September 2, 1973, accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/1973/09/02/archives/a-composer-looks-east.html.

[30] Strickland, *American Composers*, 43.

[31] When *Music for 18 Musicians* was released, it sold more than 20,000 copies in a year. Reich became the first contemporary composer to sell out Carnegie Hall and received an increasing number of commissions from Europe. See Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 82.

[32] Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, 517.

[33] Richard Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass. Essays, Interviews, Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 98.

The Importance of Conflating Race with Environment: 'Discriminatory Carelessness' and its Role in Climate Change Policies Today

Niek Schilperoord | Leiden University
This paper was written as part of an internship at the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies

Climate change and the global warming it ushers in have detrimental effects on the environment. While the world is alarmed by this oncoming catastrophe, certain areas are affected more than others. Western nations - generally considered to be the main actors in fueling global warming - suffer much less than nations in the Global South like Pakistan, Bangladesh, South Africa, or the Caribbean.[1] Although these nations contribute far less to climate change, they bear the brunt of the effects.[2] At the same time, one can note an absence of urgency of Western nations to alleviate the global problems caused by climate change. Within nations, there also are racial disparities between those who contribute to climate change and those who are affected by it. This lack of urgency and the need to help others worldwide has historical precedent and can be traced back to colonialism and racist attitudes.[3]

Although the academic field of environmental justice has generated fruitful discourse and research, the intersection of race and environment still remains largely obscured in public debates on climate change.[4] According to scholars Anna Kaijser and Annica Kronsell, the incorporation of intersectionality within these debates can illuminate complex systems of power relations.[5] Furthermore, it allows scholars and policymakers to reach a better understanding of the social and political conditions for climate governance.[6] Though not every environmental change coincides with racial injustice, it frequently exacerbates the already disastrous effects of environmental change. Racial injustice is the systematic unfair treatment of certain racialized and ethnic groups, resulting in inequitable opportunities and outcomes for all.[7] Daphina Misiedjan, researcher at the International Institute for Social Studies Erasmus argues that environmental change such as climate change is further exacerbated through "discriminatory carelessness," which refers to the deliberate discriminatory ignorance of problems that are far away or that are not of concern of those in a position of power.[8] As a result, the environmental concerns of indigenous and marginalized groups have received little attention, a process which professor of sociology Lisa Sun-Hee Park has defined as "omitted environmentalism."[9]

This introductory paper on environmental justice (EJ) demonstrates the intersection between racial injustice and environmental issues in a global context. First, the paper traces the evolvement of the EJ movement from a movement which focused strictly on the preservation of nature to a social movement concerned with how vectors of inequality affect the environmental conditions of poor and marginalized communities. Secondly, the absence of intersectionality surrounding climate change discussions will be examined. The paper then addresses instances of 'discriminatory carelessness' in the United States and South Africa to

highlight how poor communities and communities of color are disproportionally affected by environmental racism and climate change as a result of significant structural inequalities created by long history of unequal power relations. From here the paper considers how inadequate governance response to climate change in the Dutch Caribbean reinforces racial injustice. In doing so, the paper aims to shed light on the untold stories of those marginalized impacted by climate change, while simultaneously highlighting existing power relations.

For long, US Environmentalism has been considered as an extension of the historic conservation movement.[10] This movement, with its origins in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, consisted of elite conservationists who moved against unchecked industrialization and urbanization, and advocated for wilderness protection during the Progressive Era of American politics (1896-1917).[11] Champions of this movement, like President Theodore Roosevelt, were motivated by their love for and their recognition of the need to preserve the wilderness. The conservation movement helped establish the first US national parks and reserves, and take important steps in improving sanitation, such as the disposal of waste.[12] Ellen Griffith Spears, Environmental History Professor at the University of Alabama, has pointed out that while the movement was era-defining and important, it failed to consider the existence of human-made environments in their definition of the 'environment.' By essentially equating 'environment' with 'wilderness,' the conservationist movement failed to identify and recognize key participants in the movement, such as workers, people of color, and women.[13] As a result of the disregard for the diverse roots of environmental reform, few social issues were tackled.

The Second World War and post-war years severely altered the way in which human activity impacted the environment, which saw a long period of economic expansion and technological development coinciding with industrious warfare. During this period, US corporations gained more access to global markets and resources.[14] The rapid expansion in the use of chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides in manufacturing and industrial agriculture contributed to environmental pollution and health hazards in communities. This led to social outrage and grassroot activist action. More importantly, however, was the onset of the Atomic Age from 1945 onwards and the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union (1942-1987). According to Spears, the nuclear age led to the revisioning of relationships between humans, science, and nature. Atrocities such as the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki coincided with the high militarization and state-subsidization of patterns of energy. Consequently, an international human rights agenda developed in opposition to these changes.[15] The emerging protest culture in the US during the 1960s further contributed to the surge in popularity of the environmental social movement. Political liberalism, counterculture radicalism, and feminism helped spread the message of the political urgency of EJ. For instance through the protests against toxic waste in Love Canal during the late 70s, the North Carolina PCB Protest of 1982, and the emergence of organizations such as Greenpeace in 1971.[16]

These significant changes during the 60's and 70's culminated in a significant break in the 1980s, when environmentalism was recast by Environmental Justice (EJ) activists who drew attention to racial and class inequalities, the unequal implications of pollution, and the lack of social services and agency in low-income communities and communities of color.[17] This broader scope of social justice environmentalism invigorated a deeper understanding of environmental activism and its interpretation.

Nowadays, the EJ movement mostly revolves around the urgency of combating climate change and intersectionality, drawing attention to how factors of race, class, and gender affect people's susceptibility to climate change and environmental hazards. Despite this recent and growing acknowledgement of the links between climate change and other vectors of inequality, the intersection of race and environment has received little attention outside of academic debates. According to Leon Sealey-Huggins, public discussions around climate change neglect concerns of social justice and are framed in reductionist technical terms.[18] Huggins attributes the failure to consider social justice to practices of racism belonging to the global social order, and the fact that climate change has only relatively recently become a matter of mainstream concern.[19] The connections between climate change, structural racism and development are thus less well established. To draw attention to the intersection between race and environment worldwide, this paper will now highlight instances in the United States and South Africa which concern discriminatory attitudes and policies towards (environmental) space. In the US, 'discriminatory carelessness' manifests itself in redlining - the classification of certain Black neighborhoods as an investment risk.[20] In the case of South Africa, the government has played and continues to play a role in the exacerbating the environmental effects of drought experienced by poor, Black communities through water privatization.[21]

Throughout US history, environmental and racial issues are often interconnected. One clear example is redlining, which still has lasting effects on the socio-economic landscape. Redlining is a discriminatory practice, often racial, in which (financial) services are withheld from neighborhoods that are classified as an "investment hazard." As a result, federal mortgage lending is withheld and investors are discouraged from making investments in those neighborhoods, which often have a significant number of racial and ethnic minorities and low-income households. According to historian Kenneth T. Jackson, the incorporation of race and ethnicity in real-estate appraisal has its origins not just in the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) established by the New Deal (1933), but also in the 1920s during which redlining practices were federally implemented under American economist Homer Hoyt. Before the establishment of the HOLC, prominent authors of real-estate appraising texts were already advising other appraisers to "pay particular attention" to "undesirable" socio-economic elements and the influx of "certain ethnic groups" causing a price decline.[22] The HOLC applied this notion on an unprecedented scale with the help of local realtors and banks, marking city blocks with one of the four ratings: A being the highest, D the lowest. Grade A areas were described as new, homogeneous, and "in demand as residential locations in good times and bad."[23] By contrast,

Grade D neighborhoods were areas where decline (which can be found in Grade C areas) already occurred and which were not "worth" the reinvestment.[24] The demographic of these D blocks were usually home to Black communities.[25] The labeling of these regions as "hazardous" caused and exacerbated further racial segregation and urban decay of these regions.[26] The HOLC initially intended to indiscriminately support distressed homeowners and banks nationwide, and it financed around a million loans. However, the calculation and grading of mortgage risk that came with the HOLC practices initiated the process of redlining.

The restrictions imposed on the environment of Black people in the US were not new developments. The institution of slavery exploited and imposed restrictions on Black bodies and their environment. Enslaved labor meant the near-total (social) immobilization of African Americans, confining enslaved persons to their plantations and/or urban household.[27] After Emancipation, Jim Crow laws sought to segregate Black and white Americans in the American South. Millions of African Americans fled the Jim Crow South to escape racial violence and find economic and educational opportunities in the North during the Great Migration and Second Great Migration , settling in newly booming cities.[28] White landowners and legislators in the North and Midwest responded with restrictive loan policies, racial curfews and local zoning laws to prevent free African Americans from moving into white neighborhoods, forcing African Americans to live in certain areas. These restrictive laws provided the foundation for redlining in later years.[29]

Redlining leads to a lack of and impaired access to amenities in the form of denial of credit (e.g., mortgage guarantees) and insurance, healthcare. The practice also enhances the risk that certain racial and ethnic communities suffer from pollution, since zones that are not attracting investments are often considered as unavoidable 'sacrifice zones' for the dumping of toxic waste.[30] The ecological impact of redlining should not be underestimated as historically redlined neighborhoods have a lack of greenspace, worse air and water quality, elevated risk of disease, and higher heat island rates. Heat islands are urbanized areas that experience higher temperatures than outlying areas such as forests and water bodies due to the high absorption and re-emittance of the sun's heat structures like buildings and roads.[31] This rise in temperatures that heat islands experience are amplified because of global warming.[32] The root cause of this ecological impact - structural racism – has contributed to a substantial gap in generational wealth between white and Black communities, with the latter being barred from creating their own socio-economic institutions and generating capital.[33]

It can be argued that the D regions are simply classified because of their urban decay. Yet, the element of racism becomes evident when we consider the example of Lincoln Terrace, Missouri, originally built in 1927.[34] This district venture originally was intended for white middle-class families, but the project was unsuccessful. Even though the houses were new and of good quality, the HOLC classified the district as 'D' in 1940 when white people fled the abandoned project and Black families started moving in at a reduced price.[35] The HOLC claimed that the houses had "little or no value today, having suffered a tremendous decline in values due to the

colored element now controlling the district."[36] Any Black presence, whether it be large or small, was a blatant concern to the HOLC. Jackson argues that both homeowners and financial institutions were concerned that property values would decrease if Black residents were allowed to live in predominantly white areas. As such, the HOLC reflects a hardline racial segregationist attitude in their real estate appraisal systems and maps.[37] The HOLC and its real estate maps played a key role in the policies and practices they helped establish, marking the eventual social and ecological impact of decades of structural racism.[38]

The history of redlining, as well as how it has impacted present-day Black communities through zoning, urban renewal, and highway development, has undeniable importance in illuminating the interaction between race and environment. Cities such as Detroit and Flint in Michigan with large African American, Latinx, and Native American communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards as a result of redlining, zoning, real estate practices. The disproportionate exposure to environmental problems like lead poising and air pollution of zip codes with large low-income communities and communities of color contribute to health issues, such as learning and behavior disabilities of children.[39] So far, residents have little faith in the government to address their concerns, which has dismissed grievances of citizens and has downplayed allegations of racial discrimination in order to prevent civil unrest. Moreover, it took the Obama administration three years to declare a national emergency following the discovery of the lead contamination in Flint in 2014. As a result, water remained unsafe to consume in the city for a long time.

In response to the lack of action from government agencies, grassroots organizations such as Flint Rising have sprung up in Flint. Flint Rising is a coalition of community organizations with an extensive network of progressive and political labor groups. Starting from canvassing around the neighborhood and hosting town meetings, Flint Rising transformed into a political pressure powerhouse over time.[40] Due to their extensive network, the organization was able to work together with state-level lobbying groups to apply significant federal pressure. All the while, they remained dedicated to telling the stories of those unheard. Take the example of Nakiya Wakes, a single Black mother living below the poverty line, whose dramatic story got elevated by Flint Rising. Wakes and her children suffered from rashes, hair loss, behavioral problems, but most importantly, Wakes experienced two miscarriages as a result of water contamination.[41] Flint Rising took her story and amplified it, arranging speaking opportunities and media coverage. Flint Rising not only created opportunities for Wakes to speak, but also it trained her *how* to speak.[42] In this way, Flint Rising gave literal voice to those unheard.

The connection between race and environment can also be found in South Africa, which experiences a water shortage crisis. The effects of drought from climate change in the country are exacerbated by racial water disparities. Black South Africans have a longstanding cultural tradition of tending to local rivers, pertaining to 'living water' which generate life forces and are used by Nguni diviners in healing practices.[43] This tradition has severely been hindered through Apartheid policies and post-Apartheid policies since the accessibility to water has been

institutionalized. When the African National Congress (ANC) gained power in 1994, water was recognized as an "indivisible national asset."[44] While the initial mandate was to ensure that natural resources like water would be accessible to and controlled by all citizens irrespective of race or class, the new South African government soon abandoned this mission to pursue water policies with a neo-liberal approach in order to receive drought relief money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and to attract future investments. Rather than guaranteeing everyone's access to water, the government decreased grants and subsidies to local municipalities and city councils and supported the development of financial instruments for privatized delivery and access.[45]

As a result of water privatization, the burden fell largely on the public to finance South Africa's water infrastructure, which in turn led to a dramatic increase of the price of water. The public were forced to pay the full cost of water and sanitation infrastructure while 'high-end' users (i.e. wealthy communities and corporations) only paid low-cost bills. The privatization particularly affected low-income Black communities. Because these communities had difficulty paying high water bills, millions of people - in an act of 'discriminatory carelessness' – were cut off from water supply. In turn, this exacerbated the spread of cholera.[46] Author and activist Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh, argues that a self-replicating vestige of Apartheid can be found in the privatized, decentralized, and South-African state today.[47] Given the role of racial discrimination in water privatization, this privatization has been dubbed the "New Apartheid."

Although the US and South Africa have different environmental and racial histories, similarities between the US and South Africa are visible in the comparison of the lack of amenities due to redlining and toxic pollution and the lack of access to water and sanitation infrastructure due to (Neo)Apartheid policies. Both issues stem from 'discriminatory carelessness' and structural racism established through policies years ago which remain embedded in society. While race is the defining factor here, it is also important to consider the role of capital. Both redlining and water privatization were intended to generate money elsewhere by withholding costly amenities and allocating money into the 'right hands' – those of corporations and affluent white communities – thereby contributing to a racialized wealth gap.[48]

Historical injustices and the current climate crisis collide in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which is home to a predominant population of people of African descent. Inequalities were inherent to the building of empire and industrialization of colonial societies in the Caribbean, where wealth generated by the labor of enslaved Africans was taken away by imperial elites. When slavery gradually abolished in the Caribbean during the second half of the nineteenth century, the extraction of wealth from slavery and colonialism resulted in an uneven playing that continues to plague and obstruct economic and institutional development to this day.[49] Climate change has made the Caribbean region particularly vulnerable to natural disasters due to its geographic position and limitations in mitigation as a result from economic despair and a lack to resources.[50] Meanwhile, the European part of the Netherlands – the largest polluter – has made little progress in reducing the damages resulting from climate change or

assistance in measures taken to withstand extreme weather.[51] Moreover, the Caribbean part has not been included in the climate goals proposed by the Netherlands, leaving them out of the agreement. According to Misiedjan, the exemption of the Caribbean Netherlands from climate agreements stems from two factors: the lack of capacity in relation to implementation legislation needed to tackle climate change agreements and the lack of political influence concerning the topic of climate change.[52] As a consequence of the Dutch government's failure to take the necessary steps to minimize and protect the Caribbean part of the Kingdom against environmental hazards, the major African-descended population in the region who are working to overcome legacy of colonialism and slavery are now left especially vulnerable to climate change.

In response, civic initiatives are pushing for more equitable climate management. In May, 2023, residents of Bonaire - a 'special municipality' within the Kingdom– issued a letter with Greenpeace demanding the Dutch government to protect them from the destructive consequences of climate change, which are already being experienced on the island.[53] Moreover, the residents demand the government to reduce C02 emissions. As Bonaire is not equipped with sufficient financial and managerial instruments to protect itself, the island has difficulty in adapting to rising sea levels and heavy storms.[54] As such, these activists argue the Dutch government is accountable to pursue climate justice.

'Discriminatory carelessness' is as prevalent today as it was in the past, as evident by the lack of urgency on the political agenda of Western countries to address and resolve the climate-related issues that plague countries in the Global South the most.[55] The United Nations has been calling on wealthy nations to fund worldwide climate mitigation and adaption efforts in the Global South. Moreover, in late 2021, the UN passed a resolution recognizing clean, healthy, and sustainable environments as human rights.[56] While this is an important development, the current global climate policy framework is still primarily structured in favor of countries that are part of the Global North.[57] The COVID-19 pandemic, moreover, has contributed to a downward shift in climate action funding in these countries.[58] Due to declining government revenue and the need to reallocate funds toward health or social services, Global North and South countries have both reduced spending on climate action.[59] This is disadvantageous to the appropriate action needed to secure global warming temperatures under '1,5 degrees Celsius´ in order to maintain a livable environment for countries within the Global South.[60]

As this paper has demonstrated, colonialism and racism have impacted and still impact climate change and climate governance to this today. The lack of urgency and the inability to mitigate the effects of climate change mirror the historical disregard for Black and indigenous life. The disproportionate effects of climate change on communities of color are not limited to national context or boundaries. An analysis of instances of 'discriminatory carelessness' in the US, South Africa, and the Dutch Caribbean demonstrates the many links between environmental injustice and racial injustice around the globe.[61] A broader understanding of the

intersection between both types of injustices is critical to solving both; it is impossible to tackle climate injustice without addressing racial injustice.

Notes

[1] Kasia Paprocki, *Threatening Dystopias: The Global Politics of Climate Change Adaption in Bangladesh* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 4.

[2] Olumide Abimbola, Joshua Kwesi Aikins, Tselane Makhesi-Wilkinson and Erin Roberts, '"Racism and Climate (In)Justice: How Racism and Colonialism shape the Climate Crisis and Climate Action,'" Framing Paper for *Heinrich Böll Stiftung Washington DC* (2021), 17-18.

[3] Leon Sealey-Huggins, '""The Climate Crisis Is A Racist Crisis': Structural Racism, Inequality And Climate Change.'" In: Azeezat Johnson, Remi Joseph-Salisbury and Beth Kamunge, (eds.) *The Fire Now: Anti-Racist Scholarship in Times of Explicit Racial Violence* (London: Zed Books, 2018), 100-101.

[4] Kevin J. O'Brien, '"Climate Change and Intersectionality: Christian Ethics, White Supremacy, and Atmospheric Defilement,'" *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 40, no.2 (2020), 327.

[5] Intersectionality "aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it," such as race, gender, and sex. See: Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattynama, '"Intersectionality,'" *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no.3 (2006), 187.

[6] Anna Kaijser and Annica Kronsell, '"Climate change through the lens of intersectionality,'" *Environmental Politics* 23, no.3 (2014), 418, 428.

[7] NEA Center for Social Justice, "Racial Justice in Education: Key Terms and Definitions," *National Education Association*, January 2021, https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/racial-justice-education-key-terms-and.

[8] Daphina Misiedjan, "Separate but Equal in the Protection against Climate Change?" (Lecture at the Environmental Justice in US History Conference, Roosevelt Institute for American Studies, Middelburg, October 13, 2022).

[9] "Tracing the Omitted: Environmentalism and the Uses of Race in Environmental History," Panel by Sara Fingal, Lisa Sun-Hee Park, Traci Voyles, and Stevie Raymond Ruiz, *American Society for Environmental History*, Riverside California, March 16, 2018, referenced in Ellen G. Spears, *Rethinking the American Environmental Movement post-1945 (New York: Routledge, 2020)*, 8.

[10] Spears, *Rethinking the Environmental Movement*, 2.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.; Ellen H. Richards, '"Conservation by sanitation; disposal of waste (including a laboratory guide for sanitary engineers), *Library of Congress: The Evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850-1920*, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field(DOCID+@lit(anrvgvg48div7)).

[13] Spears, *Rethinking the Environmental Movement*, 3.

[14] Ibid., 7.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 119-121, 139-141, 110.

[17] Ibid., 3.

[18] Sealey-Huggins, '""The Climate Crisis,'" 100.

[19] Ibid., 100, 102.

[20] Spears, *Rethinking the Environmental Movement,* 7-8.

[21] "Turning the tide of water privatization – the rise of the new municipal movement," *Rapid Transition Alliance*, 28 January 2019, https://rapidtransition.org/stories/turning-the-tide-of-water-privatization-the-rise-of-the-new-municipal-movement/.

[22] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 198.

[23] Kenneth T. Jackson, '"Race, Ethnicity and Real Estate Appraisal: The Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration,'" *Journal of Urban History* 6, no. 4 (1980), 423.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

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[27] Mark Fiege and William Cronon, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 102.

[28] Egede, '"Modern Day Consequences,"' 1534.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Kaufman, "'Confronting Environmental Racism,'" 1; Racism and Climate (In)Justice Framing, 7.

[31] Heat Island Effect, *Environmental Protection Agency*, last accessed June 11 2023, https://www.epa.gov/heatislands#:~:text=Heat%20islands%20are%20urbanized%20areas,as%20forests%20and%20water%20bodies, EPA.

[32] Urban Heat Management and the Legacy of Redlining, 445.

[33] Sam Osoro, Tatjana Meschede, Thomas Shapiro, "'The Roots of the Widening Racial Wealth Gap: Explaining the Black-White Economic Divide,'" *Institute on Assets and Social Policy* (2013), 3.

[34] Jackson, "Race, Ethnicity and Real Estate Appraisal,'" 425.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 436.

[38] Kaufman, "'Confronting Environmental Racism,'" 1.

[39] Spears, *Rethinking the Environmental Movement,* 216.

[40] Pauli, *Flint Fights Back*, 234-235.

[41] Ibid., 238-239.

[42] Ibid., 239.

[43] Penelope S. Bernard, ""Living Water" in Nguni Healing Traditions, South Africa,'" *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 17, no. 2 (2013), 147.

[44] Briana Creeley, "Water For All? An Examination of Water Scarcity and Privatization in South Africa," *World Mind* 5, no. 3 (2020), https://www.theworldmind.org/home/2020/4/11/water-for-all-an-examination-of-water-scarcity-and-privatization-in-south-africa.

[45] Dale T. McKinley, "The Struggle Against Water Privatisation in South Africa," in *Reclaiming Public Water, eds.* Belén Balanyá and Brid Brennan (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2005), 182.

[46] McKinley, "'The Struggle Against Water Privatisation,'" 184.

[47] Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh, *The New Apartheid* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021).

[48] Osoro, "'The Roots of the Widening Racial Wealth Gap,'" 1-2.

[49] "The Legacy of Slavery in the Caribbean and the Journey Towards Justice," UN Chronicle, March 24, 2022, https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/legacy-slavery-caribbean-and-journey-towards-justice

[50] Sealey-Huggins, '""The Climate Crisis,"' 107; Barry W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 286 Het; Gert Oostindie, *paradijs overzee. De 'Nederlandse' Caraïben en Nederland* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2000), 286, 300-303.

[51] Daphina Misiedjan, "'Separate but Equal in the Protection against Climate Change?: The Legal Framework of Climate Justice for the Caribbean Part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands,'" *The Geographical Journal* (2023), 8-9.

[52] Ibid., 4.

[53] Maarten de Zeeuw, "Klimaatzaak Tegen Nederlandse Staat Om Gevolgen Klimaatcrisis Op Bonaire," *Greenpeace*, 11 May 2023, https://www.greenpeace.org/nl/klimaatverandering/klimaatrechtvaardigheid/57843/klimaatzaak-tegen-nederlandse-staat-om-gevolgen-klimaatcrisis-op-bonaire/.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Paprocki, *Threatening Dystopias*, 4-5.

[56] UNEP, "Landmark UN resolution confirms healthy environment is a human right," last accessed May 12, 2023, https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/landmark-un-resolution-confirms-healthy-environment-human-right.

[57] Abimbola, '"Racism and Climate (In)Justice: How Racism and Colonialism shape the Climate Crisis and Climate Action,'" 6.

[58] Bhanvi Satija and Jennifer Rigby, "WHO declares end to COVID global health emergency," last accessed May 11, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-is-no-longer-global-health-emergency-who-2023-05-05/.

[59] "Session 1: Using national climate finance tracking to drive increased policy ambition, improved climate finance reporting and mobilization of resources," Panel moderated by Tom Beloe, *Climate Policy Initiative,* January 21, 2021.

[60] Sealey-Huggins, '""The Climate Crisis,"' 103.

[61] Due to being limited to a compact argument, this article has not even delved into other global instances of environmental racism, such as the racist environmental treatment indigenous groups face around the world, the dumping of million tons of e-waste in the Global South, or the "Cancer Alley" of Louisiana consisting of approximately 150 oil refineries, plastic plants, and chemical facilities polluting the air.

Big Brother Batman is Watching You:
The (Mis)use of Surveillance systems in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*

Mente van den Bosch | University of Groningen
This paper was written for the course Domestic Cultures of Imperialism of the MA program in North American Studies

"Beautiful, isn't it?" asks Batman (Christian Bale) to his arms inventor Lucius Fox (Morgan Freeman), while Fox looks surprised at the city-wide monitoring system that Batman had created in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008). Fox answers by acknowledging that it is indeed "beautiful", but also "unethical", and more importantly: "dangerous."

This conversation between Batman and Fox has been interpreted many times in academic discourse. According to English professor Todd McGowan, Batman's use of surveillance is a way in which Nolan wants to show the audience the criminality of the exception to the law that Batman had seized, albeit a necessary seizure.[1] Law professor John Ip has agreed with McGowan, arguing that this conversation can be interpreted as a criticism of the Bush Administration's War on Terror by showing the link between Batman's surveillance system and the National Security Agency's (NSA) practices during Bush's presidency.[2] Professor of Political Science Rodger A. Payne has argued for the same, stating that "the film itself is arguably a critical reflection on the conduct of the war on terror."[3] Professor of Philosophy Mohamad Al-Hakim has shown the complete dialogue between Batman and Fox and has argued that the exchange revealed "much in terms of the recognition of the wrongfulness of violating privacy rights in the interest of capturing the Joker."[4] English professor Youngjeen Choe, also completely displaying the conversation, has linked the monitoring system to the Bush administration's rise in surveillance.[5]

In their analysis of the film, these scholars only use the spoken dialogue of the two characters when discussing the conversation, either through quotes or the complete transcript. They treat the dialogue as a text to be interpreted, thereby neglecting to consider that directors try to relay messages through auditory and visual means. Through an analysis of the visual and auditory effects in the discussion scene between Fox and Batman, this article shows that Nolan tries to encourage the audience to question the existence of surveillance systems.

This essay is structured as follows: first, the film is summarized, focusing mostly on the events leading up to the conversation between Fox and Batman. Some subplots, like District Attorney Harvey Dent's character development, are either mentioned briefly or altogether omitted. This section is followed by an examination of Batman's vigilante practices and existing interpretations of the Fox-Batman scene. The last part of this essay offers an analysis of the discussion scene.

Batman, alter ego of billionaire Bruce Wayne, successfully protects Gotham City from criminals in Nolan's *The Dark Knight* by hurting mob leaders financially and preventing smaller crimes. The mob heads decide to entrust their wealth to money launderer Lau (Chin Han), who hides it and flees to Hong Kong, fearing prosecution. After Lau's departure, the Joker (Heath Ledger), approaches the mob with an offer to kill Batman for half their wealth. Lau, in Hong Kong, is eventually captured by Batman, who hands him over to police Lieutenant Gordon (Gary Oldman) and District Attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart) for interrogation, enabling them to prosecute Gotham's mob leaders. As a consequence, the crime lords decide to accept the Joker's offer to kill Batman. The Joker in turn starts a campaign of violence and chaos. First, he targets people linked to the crime bosses' prosecution, while later he dares Batman to unmask himself by threatening escalation. Batman apprehends the Joker during his attempt to kill Harvey Dent, imprisoning him in the Gotham Police building. But the Joker had planned this: Dent and his lover Rachel Dawes (Maggie Gyllenhaal) were captured earlier and hidden in two locations, surrounded by explosives. Batman is given a choice of whom to save. Batman saves Dent, while the Joker at the same time escapes imprisonment. The Joker escalates further, blowing up a hospital, and instilling mass panic. Batman now turns to extreme measures to find the Joker, creating a surveillance system that uses phone microphones to sonar scan Gotham in order to pinpoint the Joker's location. At the end of the movie, Batman successfully apprehends the Joker through Fox's help in controlling the surveillance system, after which Fox destroys the system.

The Dark Knight was released in 2008, during a period of increasing surveillance in the United States. During George W. Bush's presidency, the NSA was secretly authorized to eavesdrop on American citizens and foreigners alike, without judicial approval.[6] This violated the Fourth Amendment's clauses that gave protection against "unreasonable searches and seizures" and forced government officials to get a warrant from a judge.[7] Secondly, the NSA violated the Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) of 1985, which gave "privacy protection to electronic communications", a later amendment in 1994 also extended this protection to cordless telephones.[8] In response to 9/11, Congress quickly passed the USA PATRIOT Act, which stripped away many privacy protections of the ECPA law and provided increased authority to government agencies to conduct extensive monitoring of individuals.[9] A later amendment to the ECPA law, known as the Pen Register Act (2001), allowed law enforcement to intercept "dialing, routing, addressing, or signaling information", which led to almost unrestrained monitoring of electronic devices to prevent terrorist attacks.[10] More than 10 years after NSA's surveillance program came into existence, a New York Court ruled the mass collection of telephone data illegal.[11]

In *The Dark Knight*, Batman takes on the mantle of a vigilante to protect Gotham from criminals and more importantly, the terrorist called the Joker. District Attorney Dent asks the public in a press conference: "Should we give in to this *terrorist's* demands?"[12] The Joker's

behavior reflects this nomenclature; according to John Ip, he is a "terrorist figure who intimidates, threatens and inflicts violence and mayhem upon a civilian population", giving the film deservingly a "distinctly post-9/11 aesthetic."[13] Film scholar Stephen Prince agrees, calling the Joker an "anarchic terrorist bombing Gotham City", stating that his "unprovoked attacks" resonates with "evocations of 9/11 and its shattering aftermath."[14] Rodger Payne also sees a terrorist in the Joker, saying that his tactics and tools mirror real-life terrorists.[15] In this case, the Joker uses low-quality recordings of innocent *Gothamites* reading messages to the broader public, and then executes them.[16] The Joker's portrayal as a terrorist taps into the audience's fear of terrorism in the post-9/11 era, making them understand the necessity of Batman's actions.

Batman ignores the law on numerous occasions, and oftentimes without the knowledge of government officials. According to District Attorney Joshuah Lisk, our world also has vigilantes who assist the police, who are in this case "private citizens" who act "with a purpose to prevent crime" within the boundaries of the law.[17] But Batman's methods make it clear that he sees the law as inadequate because it cannot deliver true justice, a view shared by Ltd. Gordon. For example, when Joker was in the police's custody, the police allowed Batman to interrogate him. During Joker's interrogation, Batman was conducting police procedure, and can in some aspects be seen as a state actor.[18] However, most of the time, Batman is operating on his own, not on police advice or orders. Because the government has a general lack of knowledge about Batman's actions, he is not a state actor but rather a private citizen, who claimed an exceptional position in Gotham by acting as a law enforcer while simultaneously being above the law.

Batman's exceptional role in Gotham has been linked to the Bush administration's "extralegal exception" needed to stop terrorists.[19] Post 9/11, President Bush created the impression that the normal rule of law would be insufficient to safeguard the American populace and therefore an exceptional position outside the law was needed.[20] The Bush administration in the years following 9/11 frightened the population with propaganda into supporting an invasion of Iraq.[21] Although Batman and Bush share a similarity in their use of extensive surveillance systems, Batman is different because he acknowledges that he went too far. At the end of the movie, the monitoring machine is destroyed by Fox, with the approval of Batman. While in the United States, surveillance increased as the War on Terror progressed.[22]

In *The Dark Knight*, Batman's exceptionalism acts in accordance with the degree of the perceived threat to society. Meaning that Batman solely judges what measures are appropriate for what threat. Where does he stop? He started by beating up criminals and followed this up with torture, but refuses to kill.[23] As McGowan has stated in *The Hero's Form of Appearance*: "in an epoch when the inadequacy of the law is evident, the need for the heroic exception becomes even more pronounced, but the danger of the exception has also never been more apparent."[24] Although Batman claims to be an enforcer of justice, doing what the police cannot do, he "governs Gotham" in some form "through his vigilantism."[25] Batman's exceptional position is a problem, for in a just system, no one should wield this power without any form of supervision. As Roman satirist Juvenal said: "but who is going to guard the guards themselves?"[26]

In Nolan's *The Dark Knight,* Lucius Fox acts as this guardian. When Batman's measures against crime escalate too much, Fox is not afraid to state his disapproval. Batman's surveillance system uses millions of telephones, thereby violating the privacy of *Gothamites.* This monitoring system completely "erases the idea of private space within Gotham."[27] Both Fox and Batman show that they view this monitoring system as immoral; Fox by challenging Batman's use, and Batman by making a fail-safe that self-destructs the machine after the name "Lucius Fox" is typed in. Batman clearly had no intention of using the device again after finding the Joker but still deemed it necessary to develop it.[28] Fox's discussion with Batman shows that they both recognize the wrongfulness of a violation of privacy, even if it would greatly speed up the process of capturing the Joker. In this discussion, Fox acts as the "honest voice of conscience to Batman"; he exposes "the unethical aspect of Batman's intention to justify an improper and wrong method for his goal."[29] Fox rightfully fears that Batman could turn to totalitarianism, by having the absolute power to monitor all of Gotham through an "omniscient surveillance system."[30]

If Batman's surveillance system existed in our world, it would have breached the ECPA law by intercepting audio from wireless phones. This breach of privacy can, however, through far-fetched reasoning, be argued as lawful. Here the "third-party doctrine" comes into play, a doctrine that applies when an "individual 'voluntarily' discloses information to a third party."[31] By doing so, the individual "no longer has a reasonable expectation of privacy in the disclosed information."[32]The 'voluntary' disclosure means that in this case, you have a choice: "either disclose those cell phone data and your cell phone locations to the service providers and cell towers" or you simply "refrain from using a cell phone.[33] This form of consent is a form of coerced consent because the consumer does not really have a choice in the matter. Wayne Enterprises, Batman's company that made the surveillance system, could through this third-party doctrine legally obtain the information from Gotham's cell towers. What complicates the matter is the question of whether Wayne Enterprises holds a monopoly on cellphone services in Gotham. If they do not, Batman has no legal access to them, meaning that if Batman obtained phone information from outside his company, he did this through illegal means.

The monitoring system is introduced to us when Lucius Fox hears from a secretary at Wayne Enterprises that "someone" broke into the Research and Development department.[34] Fox decides to check it out. Two guards in tuxedos both scan their security passes at the same time, opening a metal door, hinting to us that this department is guarded well. Fox walks into a long and wide room, at the end of the room stands a machine with blue-black blinking screens with some chairs in front. The "someone" who broke in, is nowhere to be seen. During   the walk toward the monitor, quiet music starts to play, building suspense. This tune is described by music theorist Mark Richards as a "threat theme" and will be playing in the background of the upcoming scene.[35] According to Richards, the tune wavers from a D note to a C# note, and back. This C# is not a note that is normally part of the chords in this theme, therefore acting as a "dissonant note in need of resolution."[36] This gives the music throughout the scene a troubled and unsettling effect. This feeling reoccurs throughout the second half of the movie and can be

interpreted "as a musical analog to the strain on Batman's (and others') moral constitution," according to music theorist Steven Rahn.[37] The function of the tune is to prepare the audience for the upcoming discussion between Fox and Batman. Fox stops walking, standing several meters in front of the machine. We cannot see his face or his expression, he stands looking up to the machine, arms hanging by his side, waiting for the inevitable entrance of Batman who has some explaining to do. We are, just like Fox, left in suspense: what is this machine? The music is quiet, almost unnoticeable. Batman appears behind the monitors, embedded in the dark. "Beautiful, isn't it?" he asks Fox, while the monitors show sonar-like motions. Fox, as well as the audience, can only see Batman's jaw, and, upon further inspection, also the reflection of light into his eyes. Being in the dark fits his *modus operandi*, as this makes him a difficult target to hit at night. Here, however, Batman's position in the dark is a reflection of Nolan's intention to show the audience that what Batman is saying is morally wrong: why else would he be hiding? At the same time, the small reflection of light in Batman's eyes combined with the human jaw in complete view, gives the audience hope that Batman is not completely lost to the power this surveillance machine grants.

The camera pans to Fox. "Beautiful. Unethical," he says while he looks from right to left, appearing concerned. When "unethical" is worded, the camera switches to Batman, hinting that Batman's practices are unethical. Batman starts to walk from behind the monitors toward Fox. "Dangerous", Fox continues, as Batman is still in view. Clearly pointing to Batman as the dangerous person here. The camera switches back to Fox, saying: "You've turned every phone in the city into a microphone." It is notable to mention that most dialogues used in *The Dark Knight* were not recorded in a studio, as is common, instead, Nolan used the on-set recordings of the actors.[38] Nolan's choice to forgo post-production recordings, instead relying on the sound team to make the soundscape of this movie, adds a layer of realism to the movie.

The camera switches to the monitors, around 6 are in full view while others are half-shown. On the monitors, we see the sonars at work: white circular lines are scanning rooms, thereby revealing the contours of people. In the background, we hear a rhythmic and repeating sound, resembling the swooshing of the wind. This sound is an auditory representation of the sonars at work; its pace is almost in unison with the sonars we see on the monitors. Batman, unseen and in his gravelly-whisper voice, explains that it is "a high-frequency generator receiver." Fox continues his dialogue in disbelief, and ignores Batman's comment, by saying: "You took my sonar concept and applied it to every phone in the city." Batman now approaches Fox by stepping into the light, or out of the dark. He is ready to face Fox. Fox continues: "With half the city feeding you sonar, you can image all of Gotham." Fox curls his lip and shows his disapproval with a small shake of his head, saying: "this is wrong." The camera turns back to Batman, standing in front of the monitors, one side of his face covered by the dark. He says: "I've got to find this man, Lucius", while his face holds a stern look. He is trying to explain to Fox that this machine can be justified if you have the right goal. Batman is defending his machine, by words

but also through his presence. His positioning is between Fox and his machine, as if he is physically defending it from Fox.

Fox now turns away from the monitors, to look at Batman, asking him: "At what cost?" Fox's face shows a mix of concern and disapproval, he is clearly unhappy with the way Batman uses technology that originated from his ideas. During these first moments, the background music is slowly getting louder but remains quiet to not overshadow the dialogue. According to music composer Vasco Hexel, the music here is purposefully quiet to allow the audience to focus on the spoken dialogue, while also adding emotion to the scene.[39] The spoken dialogue shows how Fox acts as Batman's conscience, while at the same time, the visuals support this: Fox stands in more light than Batman. Batman's left side is in the dark, while Fox's right side is in the light. Their faces reflect a conscience in battle, left versus right, dark versus light, or ethical versus unethical.

Batman tries to persuade Fox to join the dark side. He defends the machine, saying: "The database is null-key encrypted. It can only be accessed by one person." Batman knows that this machine is dangerous in the wrong hands, he can imagine what mayhem and damage this could cause if someone else gained access to it. But Batman's defense is flawed, as Fox's arguments are pointing to the fact that this machine should not exist at all. Batman tries to reason that the right goal, combined with the right person handling it, makes it worth the cost. Meanwhile, Fox looks away at the monitors and says, "this is too much power for one person." The camera remains on Fox, while we hear Batman say, "That's why I gave it to you." Fox's face starts to show surprise, as Batman's comments was unexpected.

Batman sees himself as unfit to use the machine and trusts Fox with near-unlimited power. Fox quickly recovers from Batman's gift and states that "spying on thirty million people" is not part of his job description. Fox finally draws a line. He first knowingly accepted that his gadgets could help Batman, but now he sees that his inventions resulted in Batman exerting too much power over Gotham. By reminding Batman that Gotham has thirty million citizens, he points to the scale of wrongdoing. Is it worth violating the privacy of thirty million people, just to find one man? Even if this man is a terrorist?

Batman shows Fox how to use the machine, by putting a USB stick into the monitor with an audio sample of the Joker. The moment the Joker "talks within range of any phone in the city", his position can be triangulated. Batman now allows Fox to get close to the machine, he feels that Fox is almost nudged into helping him. Fox looks concerned at Batman but is persuaded: "I'll help you this one time. But consider this my resignation." Fox understands the purpose of the machine, but he will not compromise his morals forever: "As long as this machine is at Wayne Enterprises, I won't be." He checkmates Batman with this sentence, knowing that Batman cannot play vigilante without his toys. Batman accepts Fox's terms: "When you're finished ... type in your name." Now the background song is at its loudest, expressing a release of tension after building up for several minutes. When Batman walks out of frame, leaving Fox standing near the machine, we hear the last notes of the song, creating a sense of relief.

After a violent end-fight, the Joker is finally apprehended. The machine has fulfilled its purpose, and moments after the fight with Joker, we see Fox's hands type the destruction code on a keyboard.[40] The camera switches to Fox, who happily sees how the machine is destroying itself. This scene, in contrast to the discussion prior, is recorded and portrayed in IMAX instead of conventional screen width. Instead of a black line under and on top of the movie, the screen is now completely filled. According to Professor of Film Studies Aylish Wood, IMAX gives filmmakers the capacity to mediate their desires to expand the story and its presentation.[41] Throughout the movie, Nolan mostly makes use of IMAX for landscape scenes and action sequences.[42] Professor of Film and Media Studies Allison Whitney adds to this, that IMAX can also denote "moments of character revelation" by facilitating "moments of contemplation."[43] In this case, the audience experiences Fox's revelation that he can successfully guide Batman to prevent him from exerting too much power over Gotham.

Fox's upper body, and more notably his face, is portrayed in full width across the screen, adding a feeling of realness. According to Whitney, Nolan uses IMAX "for more calming purposes", after psychologically intense scenes.[44] The intense scenes before, first the discussion and later the fight with Joker, make it so this scene feel calming. Fox, still in IMAX, smiles while the surveillance system destroys itself. Fox's facial expression shows Nolan's thoughts about extensive surveillance machines: destroying them is right.

In conclusion, Nolan's *The Dark Knight* can be seen as a critique of the Bush administration's extensive use of surveillance systems in the War on Terror, while simultaneously encouraging the audience to question the existence of extensive surveillance systems. An enormous threat to Gotham society is introduced in the form of the Joker, whose campaign of violence and mayhem evokes memories of real-life terrorists. Nolan's portrayal of the Joker as a terrorist helps the audience step into Batman's mind: how far would you go if you had the money, means, and willpower to stop terrorists? Batman's reliance on torture, to find this murdering psychopath, is almost excused by the feeling of danger the Joker evokes. Moreover, when torture proves to be ineffective, the logical step is to take even harsher measures. Batman's position as an exceptional private citizen is only more justified by the constant threat the Joker poses, this makes the audience stop questioning whether Batman should go this far. Instead, the audience wants Batman to succeed, to save innocent *Gothamites*. Batman's surveillance system would not be, at first, questioned. Its existence is justified by the threat the Joker poses. Even though this system breaks many privacy laws, its use feels justified because we know its purpose. Here Nolan intervenes, by letting Fox question Batman's authority. Fox's arguments against the surveillance machine are supported by tension-creating background music, adding a feeling of importance to this scene. At the same time, Nolan's deliberate placement of the actors in certain light makes the audience understand that Batman's rhetoric is at best flawed. Fox's strong arguments make the audience question Batman's actions: does the privacy of millions weigh against the goal of capturing the Joker? Fox reminds the

audience that everybody who exerts power over a population should be held accountable. Even if we can empathize with the hard decisions they had to make. But at some point, power has to be questioned. Although the dialogue alone could convince audience members to question the surveillance system, Nolan's attention to lightning, music, actor placement, and usage of IMAX strengthen his message: unlimited surveillance should be questioned.

Notes

[1] Todd McGowan, "The Hero's Form of Appearance: The Necessary Darkness of the Dark Knight," in *The Fictional Christopher Nolan* (Austin, USA: University of Texas Press, 2012), 123.

[2] John Ip, "The Dark Knight's War on Terrorism," *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* 9.1 (September 1, 2011): 221.

[3] Rodger A. Payne, "The Dark Knight and the National Security State" (Images of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism, Austin, November 14, 2014), 17.

[4] Mohamad Al-Hakim, "The Retributive Knight," in *Politics in Gotham The Batman Universe and Political Thought*, ed. Damien K. Picariello (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 152.

[5] Youngjeen Choe, "Darker Than Night: The Joker as a Symptom of the War on Terror in The Dark Knight,"

미국학 34, no. 1 (2011): 25.

[6] William C. Banks, "The Death of FISA Symposium - 9/11 Five Years On: A Look at the Global Response to Terrorism," *Minnesota Law Review* 91, no. 5 (2006-2007): 1254.

[7] Chris Anglim, Gretchen Nobahar, and Jane E Kirtley, *Privacy Rights in the Digital Age* (Amenia, USA: Grey House Publishing, 2016), 1221.

[8] Anglim, Nobahar, and Kirtley, 153–54.

[9] Ibidem, 164–65 & 474.

[10] Ibidem, 164.

[11] Charlie Savage and Jonathan Weisman, "N.S.A. Collection of Bulk Call Data Is Ruled Illegal," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2015, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/08/us/nsa-phone-records-collection-ruled-illegal-by-appeals-court.html.

[12] My own italics.

[13] Ip, "The Dark Knight's War on Terrorism," 213.

[14] Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 286–87, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/prin14870.

[15] Payne, "The Dark Knight and the National Security State," 17.

[16] *Gothamites* is another term for citizens residing in Gotham.

[17] Joshuah Lisk, "Is Batman a State Actor: The Dark Knight's Relationship with the Gotham City Police Department and the Fourth Amendment Implications Comment," *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 64, no. 3 (2014 2013): 1437–38.

[18] Lisk, "Is Batman a State Actor," 1426–28.

[19] McGowan, "The Hero's Form of Appearance: The Necessary Darkness of the Dark Knight," 125.

[20] Ibidem, 130.

[21] Larry Hartenian, *George W Bush Administration Propaganda for an Invasion of Iraq: The Absence of Evidence* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 4, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003095576, 1 & 362-3.

[22] McGowan, "The Hero's Form of Appearance: The Necessary Darkness of the Dark Knight," 131.

[23] Lou Anders, "Two of a Kind Can the Team Behind BatmanBegins Capture the Essence of the Joker?," in *Batman Unauthorized: Vigilantes, Jokers, and Heroes in Gotham City*, ed. Dennis O'Neil (BenBella Books, Inc., 2008), 25.

[24] McGowan, "The Hero's Form of Appearance: The Necessary Darkness of the Dark Knight," 130.

[25] Ian J. Drake and Matthew B. Lloyd, "Batman the Noble Dog: The Costs of Spiritedness for the Individual and Society," in *Politics in Gotham The Batman Universe and Political Thought*, ed. Damien K. Picariello (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 76.

[26] Drake and Lloyd, 76.

[27] McGowan, "The Hero's Form of Appearance: The Necessary Darkness of the Dark Knight," 130.

[28] Payne, "The Dark Knight and the National Security State," 18.

[29] Choe, "Darker Than Night," 35.

[30] Ibidem.

[31] Anglim, Nobahar, and Kirtley, *Privacy Rights in the Digital Age*, 93.

[32] Ibidem.

[33] Ibidem.

[34] This scene starts around 1:53:50.

[35] Mark Richards, "Musical Themes in the Dark Knight Trilogy, Part 3 of 6: The Dark Knight – Film Music Notes," *Film Music Notes* (blog), accessed January 13, 2023, https://filmmusicnotes.com/2012/12/26/musical-themes-in-the-dark-knight-trilogy-part-3-the-dark-knight/.

[36] Ibidem.

[37] Steven Rahn, "Motivic Transformation in the Dark Knight Trilogy (2005–2012)," *Music and the Moving Image* 12, no. 2 (2019): 48, https://doi.org/10.5406/musimoviimag.12.2.0040.

[38] Vasco Hexel, *50 Movie Music Moments* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 66, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003280897.

[39] Vasco Hexel, *Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard's The Dark Knight: A Film Score Guide* (Lanham, MD, USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 96.

[40] This scene starts around 2:23:00.

[41] Aylish Wood, "Intangible Spaces: Three-Dimensional Technology in Hugo and IMAX in The Dark Knight," *Convergence* 21, no. 2 (May 1, 2015): 176, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856513501414.

[42] Allison Whitney, "Cinephilia Writ Large: IMAX in Christopher Nolan's The Dark Knight and The Dark Knight Rises," in *The Cinema of Christopher Nolan: Imagining the Impossible* (Columbia University Press, 2015), 34, https://doi.org/10.7312/furb17396.

[43] Ibidem.

[44] Whitney, 36.
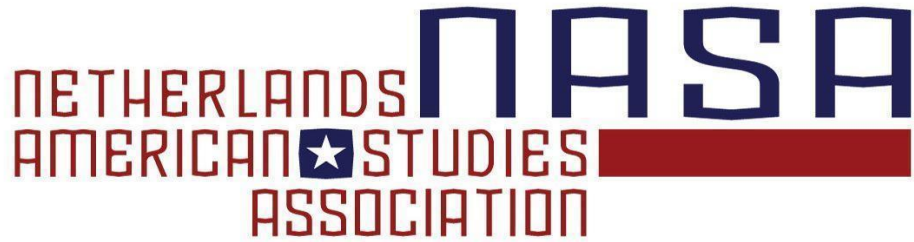
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