

The background image is a wide-angle photograph of a coastal scene. In the foreground, there is a sandy beach littered with numerous dark, jagged rocks of various sizes. Beyond the rocks, the beach stretches out towards the water. The ocean is a deep blue, meeting a bright blue sky filled with large, fluffy white clouds. In the far distance, a range of low mountains or hills is visible on the horizon.

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WITH AMERICAN STUDIES INTERNATIONAL

Articles

"Follow the Scale of the Earth": Robert Smithson
and Globalization
By Morten Hansen 7

Cruelty and Violence in the Borderlands:
Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant*
By Cara Anne Kinally 29

The Racialization of the Student-Athlete
By Joseph Darda 57

AMSJ Blog Essays

Introduction to AMSJ Blog Essays:
"What's in a Name?"
By Nishani Frazier 87

Confronting Uncomfortable History: Contested
Memorials on the American Landscape
By Adrienne Chudzinski 91

Queering the Library: Naming the Subject Is an Act of Power
By Margaret Breidenbaugh 99

"Let Knowledge Serve the City"
*Restrictions Apply
By Martín Alberto Gonzalez 105

Review Essays

Relationality, Mutuality, Collaboration:
Relational Approaches to Race and Empire
By Ashvin R. Kini 111

The Long Catalog of Horrors: Racial Capitalism
from Slavery to Mass Incarceration
By David Karjanen 123

Book Reviews

*The Rise of Corporate Feminism: Women
in the American Office, 1960-1990*
by Allison Elias
Reviewed by **Jennifer L. Pierce** 161

*The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us
and How to Build Better Lives*
by Jonathan Malesic
Reviewed by **Carrie Lane** 165

*Radical Secrecy: The Ends of Transparency
in Datafied America*
by Clare Birchall
Reviewed by **Candace White** 167

<i>Myth America: Historians Take On the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past</i> by Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, eds. Reviewed by Bobby Cervantes	169
<i>The Sense of Brown</i> by Jose Esteban Muñoz Reviewed by Roberto C. Orozco	171
List of Contributors	173

“Follow the Scale of the Earth”: Robert Smithson and Globalization

Morten Hansen

Sooner or later the artist is implicated or devoured by politics without even trying. My “position” is one of sinking into awareness of global squalor and futility. *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*¹

To posterity, the name of Robert Smithson will always be associated with the art form he helped bring into being, namely that of land art—or “earthworks” as he preferred to call them.² More broadly, Smithson, whose most famous work, *The Spiral Jetty*, by some accounts is the most important American work of art of the last 150 years,³ can be seen as the embodiment and at least partial inspiration behind several trends that are still very much prevalent in the contemporary world of fine arts on a global scale. These include site-specificity; the turn toward industrial and natural materials, such as rocks and dirt; and an immanent critique of the institutions that sustain the art world although the latter has by now become almost completely co-opted by the very institutions supposedly under critique. Smithson is, of course, not solely responsible for all these movements and trends, but his artistic practice and perhaps especially his extensive writings contribute to the vocabulary with which we discuss art today. Not without reason is he the artist whose name is most frequently invoked by both artists and curators in Ruben Östlund’s 2017 Palme D’or–winning film *The Square*, which satirizes the contemporary art world. Whereas nobody would dispute the global

8 Morten Hansen

reach of Smithson's influence, there is another, more elemental way in which he should be considered a global artist. I argue that Smithson's work should be seen as fundamentally global rather than as the work of a quintessentially American artist that eventually made it to the world stage. The potentials and aporias that haunt what has come to be called globalization animated Smithson's entire body of work from his earliest sculptural work through most of his writing to his final gigantic earthworks. This aspect of Smithson's work has largely gone unnoticed despite the huge and nearly constant interest in his work from scholars and artists in the nearly five decades since his death. Throughout his oeuvre, I contend, Smithson time and again returned to some of the same questions that animate present-day historical, philosophical, and political discussion of the interconnectedness of the planet. Through his investigations of media, his meditations on landscape and space, and his implicit rejection of a national frame of reference for his art, Smithson's practice in many ways situates him closer to our twenty-first century present than to his own time.

The broad scholarly consensus regarding Robert Smithson, with which I am also in accord, sees him as a playful uprooter of nearly any stable category, a kind of poststructuralist *avant la lettre* (or, really, *pendant la lettre* as Smithson was working concurrently with the first wave of French poststructuralists).⁴ It is curious, then, that the national perspective remains so prevalent among Smithson scholars, who seem more than happy to follow Smithson in destabilizing the subject, language, nature of perception, and Immanuel Kant's a priori intuitions but seemingly draw the line at questioning the nation state.⁵ One reason for this blind spot might be disciplinary boundaries (most Smithson scholars are art historians specializing in American art), yet this focus on Smithson's Americanness has occluded what is arguably one of the most important aspects of his work. If we take globalization to mean the gradual integration of the world, the potential interconnection between any and every person, idea, particle of capital, pathogen, and point on the earth's surface rather than simply the increase in international trade to which it is sometimes reduced, we can begin to see its relevance to Smithson's uncontainable artistic practice.⁶ To be globalized is to be connected to people, places, and things not in our immediate vicinity—in other words, to be constantly mediated—and Smithson, perhaps more than any other artist of his time, devoted his writings and works of art to a relentless explicit and implicit exploration of this condition.⁷

To understand Smithson's characteristic use of media, the best place to start is probably the famous opening of his 1968 article "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," the closest Smithson ever got to writing a manifesto:

The earth's surface and the figments of the mind have a way of disintegrating into discrete regions of art. Various agents, both fictional and real, somehow trade places with each other—one cannot avoid muddy thinking when it comes to earth projects, or what I will call "abstract geology." One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallizations break apart into deposits of gritty reason. Vast moving faculties occur in this geological miasma, and they move in the most physical way. This movement seems motionless, yet it crushes the landscape of logic under glacial reveries. This slow flowage makes one conscious of the turbidity of thinking. Slump, debris slides, avalanches all take place within the cracking limits of the brain.⁸

The constant switch between abstract and material referents in passages such as these (as when Smithson has "ideas decompose into stones") confuse the conventional ways we distinguish between mind and matter and between the fictional and the real. Geology is not simply a metaphor for the mind nor vice versa; rather, Smithson presents them as part of the same field of reality and possibility, somehow, as he puts it, trading places with each other. Each of the "various agents" populating Smithson's ontology (or "geological miasma") forge connections with each other across and between differences of kind and scale, endlessly mediating one another.

Media, then, in this context, should not be understood chiefly as referring to the materials of which Smithson makes use although Smithson undoubtedly was a significant early multimedia artist, helping to expand the notion of what can make up a work of art to include things such as rocks, sand, and broken glass. Instead, Smithson's writings and earthworks conjure up complex systems or environments of mediation, ultimately pointing to the whole planet itself as the real context for his work. References to this idiosyncratic globalization occur throughout Smithson's texts as when he told an interviewer in 1970 about a series of his works that they "incorporate not just the abstract spaces, but the raw material aspects. If you pile something up, all you are faced with is a pile of materials. If you follow the scale of the earth, everything is miniscale. The idea was to set up the scale."⁹ As some scholars note, it is hardly a coincidence that Smithson is discussing "the scale of the earth" during the decade when astronauts, cosmonauts, animals, and man-made devices were launched into orbit; landed on the moon; and perhaps

most crucially, brought back the first photographs of planet earth taken from space, producing one of the most iconic visual representations of the world as a unified totality.¹⁰ As I show, Smithson's work was global in many senses, but perhaps never more than in his insistence that his material, his medium, the true context for his art, was earth—thus, his preference of the moniker “earthworks” rather than “land art,” favoring the dual connotations of earth as planet and as material over the more stable, limited, and national horizons of meaning conjured up by the word “land.”

In many ways Smithson pioneered this expansive understanding of media, simultaneously abstract and material, and according to which, anything—whether ideas and words or rocks and crystals—can be made to function as a medium for anything else. To be sure, Smithson took his inspiration from the then-emergent discipline of media studies as can be seen from the numerous references scattered throughout his writings to the work of Marshall McLuhan in particular. However, at the time, no scholar of media operated with as expansive a concept of media as Smithson's. Indeed, media studies has only recently begun to catch up, as it were, with Smithson's conception of what media can be. Of particular note here is the work of a scholar such as John Durham Peters, who in *The Marvelous Clouds* argues for an expanded concept of media that covers not just technologically produced and unidirectional mass media, such as television and newspapers, but anything conforming to the original meaning of the word “medium” as “an element, environment, or vehicle in the middle of things.”¹¹ Rather than discrete technologies, Durham argues, media are almost always parts of vast environments of relation. For Durham, the development of the internet, in particular, has alerted us to the multidirectionality and totalizing potentials of media in general.¹² Although naturally unaware of the internet and other recent media developments, Smithson foreshadows this movement from broadcast media and geopolitical unipolarity or bipolarity toward the more chaotic globalized world of media and politics in which media and mediated are part and parcel of one another.

The difference that still exists between Smithson's philosophy of media and much of contemporary media studies can be seen in the fact that approaches such as those of Peters still think of media as an intermediary term between a human subject and something else, whether human or nonhuman. These approaches still build on Marshall McLuhan's classic insight—one of the founding axioms of media studies—that media should be understood as “any extension of ourselves,”¹³ whereas Smithson often seems determined to deemphasize or even eliminate the human component in his conception of mediation. As he writes in “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects,”

The manifestations of technology are at times less "extensions" of man (Marshall McLuhan's anthropomorphism), than they are aggregates of elements. Even the most advanced tools and machines are made of the raw matter of the earth.¹⁴

Foregrounding the material, often geological components of media, Smithson's media do not so much work to justify the ways of the world to man, but rather make up a complex environment in which the human element plays a part, to be sure, but one that is largely incidental.

The only philosophy of media that attempts to follow Smithson all the way past McLuhan's anthropomorphisms is the one espoused in Jussi Parikka's *Geology of Media*, mapping out "the weird intersections of earth materials and entangled times."¹⁵ In one of Smithson's earliest texts, the 1966 essay "The Crystal Land," we get a sense of this idiosyncratic sensibility in a description of the landscape of Northern New Jersey:

Most of the houses are painted white, but many are painted petal pink, frosted mint, buttercup, fudge, rose beige, antique green, Cape Cod brown, lilac, and so on. The highways crisscross through the towns and become man-made geological networks of concrete. In fact, the entire landscape has a mineral presence. From the shiny chrome diners to glass windows of shopping centers, a sense of the crystalline prevails.¹⁶

In descriptions such as these, which can be found throughout Smithson's writings, the human element is viewed through a geological lens rather than the other way around. In one sense, what interests Smithson is what later generations of geologists and other earth scientists have named the Anthropocene—the geological era named after the impact humans have had on the crust of the earth as well as the planet's atmosphere—yet unlike most scholars who invoke this term, Smithson seems uninterested in describing how humans managed to alter, if not critically ruin, the planet and what might be done to alter this state of affairs.¹⁷ Rather, the perspective Smithson employs on the Anthropocene "man-made geological networks" seems to come *from* the earth rather than being directed *toward* it. As Gary Shapiro notes, Smithson's "abstract geology" changes the implicit grammar of the name of the academic discipline: rather than a discourse about earth, for Smithson, the term "geology" comes to mean the earth's own discourse—Gaia's *logos*.¹⁸

If his reliance on this philosophy of media, his interest in the earth as opposed to mere land, and his references to the abstract geology of what would come to be named the Anthropocene give us cause

to classify Smithson as an artist with a keen interest in what we in the twenty-first century call “the global,” his artistic practice also, in fundamental ways, turns away from the national and often nationalistic implications of several artistic traditions of which he is often thought to be part. Although few deny that Smithson’s contemporary influence over the world of visual art manifests itself on a global scale, he is still considered a quintessentially American artist. Not only did Smithson live in the United States, through his work, writings, and influences, he is also associated with American locales from the art galleries of Manhattan and New Jersey’s Pine Barrens to the deserts of the American west.¹⁹ There is nothing surprising, then, in the fact that art historians have, by and large, seen Smithson’s practice as part of a tradition within American arts and letters invested in the places, landscapes, and scenery of the United States. Nevertheless, I contend Smithson’s work does not fit as neatly within this American tradition of landscape art as we might expect. To see Smithson’s unique approach to the landscape, let us turn to his most famous work, *The Spiral Jetty*.

As even the most casual observer of twentieth-century art history knows, *The Spiral Jetty* is a 1,500-foot-long spiral constructed of black rock, salt crystals, and earth jutting out into the Great Salt Lake at Rozel Point in Utah. This is, however, only part of the story. *The Spiral Jetty* is also a film of that same name, also from 1970, as well as an essay from *Artforum* from 1972. Despite its renown, very few people have actually seen Smithson’s earthwork; not only is it located in the middle of the desert far away from any human habitation or properly paved roads—let alone cities with art museums—it is also frequently submerged in the lake and disappeared from sight. Shortly after its construction in 1970, the water level of the Great Salt Lake rose and swallowed up the jetty. It has since reappeared and resubmerged numerous times. If *The Spiral Jetty* is still one of the most famous American works of art made in the last fifty years, this is mainly due to mediated representations of it, including photographs and anecdotes about visits to its physical location (what Smithson referred to as its “site”) as well as Smithson’s own essay and film. The work *The Spiral Jetty* can be said to encompass all of this. As Gary Shapiro writes, “There is no primary, authentic object (the spiral) to which the film and the essay are merely ancillary.”²⁰ Earthwork, film, and article all form part of a vast network or, even better, a spiral of text and context, words and rocks, matter and ideas in a constant state of erosion, partially submerged, and embedded in its context, broken down, and encrusted with other matter.

In the essay “The Spiral Jetty,” Smithson writes the following about finding the site for the earthwork and the process of its conception:



Approaching the dry Spiral Jetty on June 18th, 2018. Photo by Matthew Kowal.

As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizon only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty. No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence. My dialectics of site and nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the mainland oscillated with waves and pulsations, and the lake remained rock still. The shore of the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into a fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored in the shape of a spiral.²¹

At first sight, this comes across as something like an origin story for the earthwork. The artist has traveled out into the wilderness, and once there, overwhelmed by its sublime grandeur, he receives a vision. The desert landscape, the heat of the sun, and the arid salt lake together conspire to suggest in the mind of the perceptive (or perhaps delirious)

artist the idea of a giant spiral, which he then proceeds to construct. On this reading, Smithson himself is something like a medium between the landscape and the earthwork, the means by which the landscape expresses itself, communicating what Smithson often called his "oceanic" experiences in strange peripheral spaces back to the galleries and art journals of Manhattan like some psychedelic desert father. There is almost a sense of inevitability about the construction and placement of *The Spiral Jetty* as if the earthwork were simply the result of some natural process in which the artist played no more crucial a role than the salt crystals, chemical constitution of salt water, rocks, and all the other parts of the landscape.

This notion of the landscape speaking through the artist, however, only constitutes one layer of meaning in *The Spiral Jetty*. Throughout the essay and the film, Smithson repeatedly sets up such origin narratives for the work only to move on to others, methodically invalidating the notion that it is even possible to pinpoint one single source or foundation, not just for a work of art, but for anything at all. Even in the passage quoted above, we can see how alternative narratives to the landscape mastering the artist begin to accrue as when Smithson mentions his dialectic of site and nonsite, which is to say, the theoretical underpinnings behind some of his earlier works. Readers familiar with Smithson's earlier artistic practice would also be aware of his career-long fascination with spirals,²² complicating the notion that the earthwork somehow emanated from the landscape on its own with Smithson as an empty mediating vessel.

The complexity does not stop here. In the film *The Spiral Jetty*, Smithson relates the old myth (which was not dispelled until the 1870s) that a giant whirlpool existed in the middle of the Great Salt Lake, connecting the lake with the Pacific Ocean more than 500 miles away. Other possible reference points suggested by Smithson include Chris Marker's 1962 science fiction film *La Jetée*, artworks by Constantin Brancusi, and texts by James Joyce and Samuel Beckett as well as the form of the human ear. On the next page of the essay after the preceding quote, Smithson writes,

...each cubic salt crystal echoes the Spiral Jetty in terms of the crystal's molecular lattice. Growth in a crystal advances around a dislocation point, in the manner of a screw. The Spiral Jetty could be considered one layer within the spiraling crystal lattice, magnified trillions of times.²³

With logic such as this, it becomes difficult to distinguish not just between inside and outside, origin and endpoint, but also between media

and what is being mediated. Just as any fact or piece of matter could potentially form part of the work, each potential part can be conceived of as a medium for another part; there is no node in the network comprising *The Spiral Jetty* that could not be conceived of as a medium for some other node. The earthwork, rocks, dirt, and salt crystals in the shape of a spiral can be seen as a medium for the landscape surrounding it, which, in turn, can be seen as the medium for an essay or any number of other endlessly multiplying spirals whether real or imagined. *The Spiral Jetty* as a work of art is not representational in the usual sense in which an artist expresses their impression of an external phenomena. Rather, *The Spiral Jetty* itself constitutes a physical part of the landscape just as the landscape genuinely partakes of the work of art.

In trying to grasp the work in its entirety and deciding what constitutes the medium versus the message (to invoke another McLuhan adage that does not quite capture Smithson's implicit philosophy of media), viewers might almost feel as if they are replicating the disorientated sunstroked experience Smithson evokes in his description of the site.²⁴ Moreover, like the growing layer of salt crystals encrusted on the earthwork, the growing discourse about *The Spiral Jetty* represents additions to a potentially infinite work.

This aspect of Smithson's work can also help explain the curious attention to space we find in his works and writings and his antipathy to the word and concept of "place." From Smithson's perspective, the term "place," like many other terms he tended to avoid (such as "land" or the metaphors from evolutionary biology so dear to many art historians),²⁵ serves to hide and suppress an originary confusion. "Place" gains this sense of coherence through its association with—which is to say, its subordination to—human consciousness. As the human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan defines it, "[p]laces are centers of felt value," in opposition to the freedom and anxiety that characterize "space," "place's" opposite.²⁶ The term "site," on the other hand, which, as Edward Casey notes, gained prominence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is defined in a general sense by relative positions, "the way that things are situated vis-à-vis one another,"²⁷ a conception of space Casey characterizes as "the *relative global*."²⁸ In other words, while retaining the specificity of place, "site" is a spatial term evacuated of its immediate relation to human feeling and perception and defined by its mediations.

This sense of place is one that also characterizes globalization. As the geographer Doreen Massey notes, globalization gives rise to a

...questioning of the notion of places simply as settled, enclosed and internally coherent...and its replacement or supplementation by a concept of place as a meeting-

place, the location of the intersections of particular bundles of activity spaces, of connections and interrelations, of influences and movements.²⁹

This formulation precisely describes Smithson's conception of space. The mediation of the site in Smithson does not create an absence, but rather a conglomeration of different conceptions of that particular space. It is not the case that the many different mediations take the place of a more immediate and authentic feeling of a place as, say, with a person too engulfed in a cell phone to realize where they are. Rather, by jettisoning a certain understanding of place—namely, a discrete, unified, and enclosed space that is predominantly and ultimately defined by a given person's sense or feeling—Smithson's practice gives rise to other and possibly more constructive and authentic understandings of a space. Smithson's implicit critique of the concept of place seems to be exactly this: the feeling that creates the place as such is itself a mediation, one that is usually allowed to dominate all others and one that (perhaps because it feels natural and immediate) obscures other kinds of mediation, especially ones grounded in the actual material circumstances of the space.

As so often with Smithson, the main antagonist seems to be Immanuel Kant. As mentioned, Smithson often referred to the experience of the site using the term "oceanic,"³⁰ a concept originally described by Sigmund Freud in *Civilizations and its Discontents* but more recently deployed by the Austrian art historian Anton Ehrenzweig, a perennial Smithson favorite,³¹ who uses it to describe the way that modern artists supposedly attempt to break down the barrier between the self and the world and thereby circumvent the Kantian pure intuitions (*Anschauungen*) of space and time. In his 1967 book *The Hidden Order of Art*, Ehrenzweig claims,

As we reach the deepest oceanic levels of dedifferentiation the boundaries between the inside and outside world melt away and we feel engulfed and trapped inside the work of art. ...The deepest oceanic experience, however, dissolves space and time itself, which are the very modes by which our reason works.³²

Leaving aside for the moment the accuracy of Ehrenzweig's use of Freud's term to describe the psychic processes of artists and viewers of art, we can see why this theory would be so attractive to Smithson: Moving beyond the constraints imposed on the world by human consciousness, it allows for a closer approximation to the world in itself if we want to stay within Kantian terminology or, to use more recent

examples, something like Jacques Lacan's order of the Real³³ or even what the twenty-first century philosopher Quentin Meillassoux, another contemporary Smithsonian thinker with his own brand of abstract geology, calls the "Great Outdoors."³⁴

Smithson's insistence on the mediated conception of space constitutes one of the most important global aspects of his work, and it demonstrates the way in which we should think of him as a global artist. One of the axioms of his work is that globality, the potential interconnection of the whole earth, forms the true context of the work and any other aspect, including human consciousness or nationality, must necessarily be secondary. This sets his work at odds not just with other American artists of his generation, but with a whole long tradition of American arts and letters that might be said to include such different artists as Thomas Cole, Henry David Thoreau, Jack Kerouac, John Ford, and Terrence Malick.

I use the term "tradition" here in a very loose sense. Indeed, it is perhaps only by contrasting the approach these artists have taken to the representation of the American landscape with that of Smithson that any kind of unity between these highly dissimilar perspectives can be discerned. Again, a rejection of Kantian categories constitutes the crux of his theoretical approach, and elucidating this rejection clarifies both the semi-obscure consensus that binds together the loose tradition of American landscape art as well as Smithson's withdrawal from it. On the face of it, Smithson's artistic practice seems closely related to the Kantian sublime with its notion of a natural world that exceeds our capacity to make sense of it, yet Smithson's rejection of the primacy of human consciousness changes the equation in important ways. As Lytle Shaw writes in his analysis of *The Spiral Jetty*,

No longer the overwhelming threat that generates a new sense and measure of the human (and, therefore, allows new modes of expression of that humanity), sublimity becomes, rather, that which confounds the legibility of the human as a category. Smithson thus moves toward a kind of dynamic sublimity stripped of its recuperative humanist payoff."³⁵

Shaw alludes to Kant's assertion that the natural sublime ultimately functions to reaffirm reason's conceptual mastery over nature.³⁶ The artistic equivalent of this can be found in traditional representations of a sublime nature that, at least in its American iterations, not only yields a humanist payoff, but also a nationalist one.

To take an example from what might be thought of as the center of the canon of American landscape art, the Hudson Valley School painters

represent the American landscape as imposing and sublime in ways that ostensibly resemble Smithson's practice. However, as several scholars note, to these painters, the represented landscapes, however awe-inspiring, align with human cognition along Kantian lines.³⁷ The sublime landscapes appear overwhelming, yet the aesthetic representation of this sublimity suggests a certain kind of mastery, a "superiority over nature" as Kant puts it, which, in turn, perpetuates the American nationalist myth of settler-colonialism expressed in the nineteenth-century idea of manifest destiny.³⁸ In fact, the conceit insinuates that the landscape gains its nationalist potency through its sublimity: By forcing the artist and viewer to expand their faculties of mental and artistic representation of the sublime, the landscape itself seems to lend Americans the very power needed to appropriate it.

The aesthetic association between nature and nation pervades much of American arts and letters. As Jedediah Purdy notes, the word "nature" derives from the Latin word for birth, "natal," which also gives us the words "native," "nation," and "nationalism."³⁹ We can find examples of this dynamic at least as far back as Thomas Jefferson's obsession, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, with proving that the bones found in Big Bone Lick in Kentucky belonged to mammoths and this proved that America did not, as the French naturalist Buffon claimed, have a degenerative climate.⁴⁰ The urgency with which Jefferson pursued this question can perhaps best be explained by the postrevolutionary fervor by which, as Stanley Heeden writes, "American nationalism soon came to be expressed by the relics of the mammoth in the New World's unspoiled landscape."⁴¹ The dynamic by which a sublime natural phenomenon is represented and mastered and, in turn, interpolated into a nationalist myth might be said to be one of the foundations of American exceptionalism.

Smithson disavowed this tradition both implicitly in his artistic practice and explicitly as when he stated in an interview that

...a kind of "virgin" beauty was established in the early days of this country and most people who don't look too hard tend to see the world through postcards and calendars and so that that affects their idea of what they think nature should be rather than what it is.⁴²

The idea of ascribing virginity to a landscape manifests the Kantian anthropomorphism that Smithson tried so hard to avoid. The perhaps inadvertent but nevertheless unmistakable effect of Smithson's reduction of human consciousness in the representation of landscapes is an abdication from the nationalist foundations of most artistic engagements with the American landscape.

We can even find echoes of this logic within what would come to be called American Studies. In his influential study of the frontier in American history, Frederick Jackson Turner writes,

The wilderness masters the colonist. ...at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness...⁴³

We see here again the same Kantian dynamic: the American wilderness, for all its sublime power, eventually yields to the colonialist in a dialectical process and becomes part of a mythical national regeneration. We find the same intense engagement with the American landscape as the key to understanding the national character in such scholars as Perry Miller, Leo Marx, Henry Nash Smith, and Richard Slotkin.⁴⁴ For all their differences, these scholars saw the American landscape as a specific and particular national resource, a resource that influenced or even, as in Turner, forged a specific American character qualitatively different than its European counterparts. Especially in the decades after the Second World War, as the discipline of American Studies came into its own and found institutional support in universities across the United States, these conceptions of American nationalism became linked to an American exceptionalism inflected by the Cold War.

Here, it should be noted that, despite Smithson's renunciation of a certain brand of American nationalism, he shares the implicitly anti-Indigenous attitude of large parts of the nationalist tradition from which he otherwise deviates. Although often mentioning the significance of Indigenous peoples to the kinds of spaces he chose for his sites, Native Americans are often relegated to the past. This is perhaps most obvious in his work "Incidents of Mirror-Travels in the Yucatan," which uses Maya-cosmology as one of the mediations of the Mexican landscape yet fails to acknowledge any still existing Indigenous people, thus contributing to the myth of the "vanishing Indian."⁴⁵ This aspect of Smithson's practice can't simply be explained away by referencing his diminution of the human aspect of space, but rather, in my view, represents a significant shortcoming when it comes to the mapping of all possible mediations of a given space and, thus, a failure to achieve the truly global scale that Smithson's works strive to achieve.

The global aspect of Smithson's practice also sheds new light on his most famous aesthetic feud, against the influential school of postwar American art criticism that proclaimed the purity and grace

of each artistic medium, exemplified by the critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. This enmity is well-trodden ground in Smithson scholarship.⁴⁶ Indeed, not even a casual reader of Smithson's writing can avoid the sometimes rancorous, often very funny invectives against Greenberg and particularly Fried. This disagreement, one of the by-now-classic generational feuds in American art and art criticism, ostensibly revolves around the questions of media specificity, aesthetic experience, and the viewer.⁴⁷ Smithson was far from the only artist of his generation who sought to fight back against what was perceived as a too strictly defined modernism of Greenberg and Fried. However, even as he agreed with the implicit and explicit responses of such artists as Donald Judd and Robert Morris, there was a particular idiosyncratic and political valence to Smithson's rejoinders to Greenberg and Fried that tends to fly under the radar.

Several scholars note that the seemingly purely formal and apolitical stakes of Greenberg's writing of the 1940s and 1950s conceal a political agenda. As Serge Guilbaut notes in his *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, American art of this period "could be politicized only if it was apolitical."⁴⁸ We might see an example of this dynamic in Greenberg's 1948 article "The Decline of Cubism," in which he writes that "the conclusion forces itself, much to our own surprise, that the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power."⁴⁹ However surprised Greenberg might have claimed to be, as Frances Stonor Saunders shows, it was a development that powerful forces within American society were more than eager to help along in an effort to use American culture as a cudgel in Cold War geopolitics, chiefly among them the then-nascent CIA, with which Greenberg was loosely affiliated.⁵⁰ The abstract expressionist painters, in particular, were seen as perfect examples of an unfettered individual freedom without any overt political references (or "free enterprise painting" as Nelson Rockefeller, the director of the Museum of Modern Art referred to it),⁵¹ which paradoxically made them the perfect political weapon in the cultural cold war.

Greenberg's distaste for artists who sought not just to introduce new artistic media and, thus, dissolve the boundaries between the different art forms, but perhaps even more, who took up the credo from the historical avant-garde of breaking down the barriers between art and life was taken up by Fried in the 1960s. In the 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood," Fried fulminated against what he called the "theatricality" of contemporary artists, including Tony Smith and Robert Morris, who deviated from established artistic media and the media auto-critique prescribed by Greenberg.⁵² Fried is appalled at Morris's suggestion that

the work of art amounts to not just the object of the artwork but rather "the entire situation," a phrase that, as Fried correctly but not without a note of alarm, notes "means exactly that: *all* of it—including, it seems, the beholder *body*."⁵³ Fried's almost explicit theology of modernist art—according to which "presentness is grace,"⁵⁴ as he famously declares in the essay's last sentence—serves to keep at bay any commingling of art and world and, thus, to maintain the sphere of art as separate, individual, and apolitical. This theology also holds that true media-specific modernist art transcends both its own objecthood as well as the spectator's subjecthood. According to Fried, viewing a painting by, say, Jackson Pollock or Mark Rothko, means that you transcend yourself, your surroundings, and your "situation," a kind of individualized sublimity with a humanist—or perhaps even divine—payoff, to use Shaw's terms.

As Fred Moten argues, Fried's invectives against theatricality are meant to maintain a separation between the work of art and "the world of things" to keep at bay what Moten names as "a field in which the human and the (disorderly) thing are precisely, pathologically, theatrically indistinct."⁵⁵ This field is Smithson's as well; his refusal to stay within the boundaries of discrete artistic media amounts to a refusal to achieve Fried's grace of presentness. As is also true of many other artists of his generation, Smithson was interested in involving as many aspects as possible in his artworks. However, where the minimal artists wanted to involve the material aspects of the artwork and the body of the spectator, Smithson went further in creating works that, as I argue, ultimately sought to invoke the whole globe as their context.

Whereas it is true that Smithson never brought up what we might call the nationalist propaganda aspects of Greenberg's and Fried's injunctions to create transcendent art (aspects that, as with Greenberg's involvement with the CIA, in any case, did not become fully uncovered until later), Smithson's repudiation of these injunctions was not as abstract and apolitical as they might appear. The belief in the individual, transcendent experience implied a kind of human mastery of the world, the corollary to which, as Greenberg was keenly aware, was the investiture of the United States as the world leader of art, industry, and politics. In explaining what he called his nonsites, a series of works he created in the years leading up to the construction of *The Spiral Jetty* consisting of different representations of a remote site, Smithson once remarked,

The site is a place where a piece should be but isn't. The piece that should be there is now somewhere else, usually in a room. Actually everything that's of any importance takes place outside the room. But the room reminds us of the limitations of our condition.⁵⁶

We recognize the play of mediation that would reach even higher levels of complexity in mature works such as *The Spiral Jetty*, here phrased in the language of inadequacy: Something important is taking place elsewhere; the spectator is in the wrong place; the site where things are really happening is in the Utahan desert, the jungles of the Yucatan peninsula, or the postindustrial wastelands of New Jersey.⁵⁷ The complex meditation on centers and peripheries and the play of mediation between them in Smithson's abstract geology works, I contend, counter a certain narrative of American global power: not to claim that America is not the dominant global superpower, but to refuse to conform to a triumphalist if partly obscured nationalist status quo that takes American global dominance as the natural state of things.

Nowhere is this dynamic clearer than in Smithson's attack on the Kantian underpinnings of the tradition of American landscape aesthetics: the notion that human consciousness can master the sublimity of the natural world and that this should undergird an American exceptionalism that propels a continued American continental and global expansion. In other words, the notion that, in seeing the American landscape, the settler colonialist, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous words from the last page of *The Great Gatsby*, comes "face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."⁵⁸ But why, Smithson's artistic practice invites us to ask, would that necessarily be true? Why wouldn't nature routinely exceed our faculties, and why would the American landscape be more sublime than any other?

Rather than a fundamentally national outlook that starts with the United States and then looks outward, Smithson's artistic practice invites an always already decentered worldview, one that contemplates both our own position within an unstable and immense global totality as well as the many processes of mediation that makes such contemplation possible in the first place. It can be argued (and, indeed, this seems to be the implicit argument underlying much Smithson scholarship) that, like the Western movie, the hamburger, or rock 'n' roll, Smithson represents something uniquely American that happened to spread across the world alongside other American cultural productions simultaneously with and perhaps even somehow causally connected to America's role as the world's leading superpower. Nevertheless, whereas there is nothing necessarily contradictory in such a national perspective, it risks disregarding some of the most important aspects of Smithson's works and thoughts—just like, incidentally, it overlooks important aspects of the global popularity of ostensibly American film, cuisine, and popular music.

Beneath the seemingly apolitical coffee table-book surface of Robert Smithson's art, then, lies an artistic practice that, by its use of the concept of media and its refusal to engage with an inherited national

framework, not only registers the early conceptual frameworks of what would come to be called globalization, but also points to the potential for an expanded conception of what political art can be. To be sure, politics for Smithson plays a different role than it does in what we usually think of as "political art," most conspicuously in the reduction of the human in favor of questions of geology and mediation, toward a more general understanding of politics as the interplay, mediation, and clash between human and nonhuman forces. But what else could a politics of the global Anthropocene be?

Notes

1. Robert Smithson, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 152.

2. As he recounts in his article "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (Smithson, *Collected Writings*, 68), Smithson took this phrase from a mass-market science fiction novel by Brian W. Aldiss.

3. cf. Nico Israel, "At the End of the Jetty," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 20, no. 1 (2011), 3.

4. The number of readings pairing Smithson's works and writings with continental philosophy are legion; see, for instance, Craig Owens's "Earthwords" (*October* 10 [1979], 120-30), which applies the philosophy of Walter Benjamin (and to a lesser extent that of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes) to Smithson's oeuvre, and Gary Shapiro's *Earthwards* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), which takes an approach inspired by the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and Martin Heidegger.

5. The one exception to this rule is Nico Israel, who has a keen eye for the transnational and geopolitical nature of Smithson's practice.

6. The secondary literature on globalization is vast. For a good introduction to the many different ways that concept has been employed, see Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Peterson's *Globalization. A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

7. Discussions of Smithson's use of media in a general sense and his use of novel artistic media in particular are prevalent in the secondary literature. (See, for instance, Ann Reynolds's *Robert Smithson: Learning From New Jersey and Elsewhere* [Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003] 43-5 and 100-21, and Ron Graziani's *Robert Smithson and the American Landscape* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 39-47 and 79-85.) However, with the possible exception of Jussi Parikka's *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015)—to which I return in the following—no sustained discussion of Smithson's idiosyncratic use of the term and the concept of media exists.

8. *Collected Writings*, 100.

9. "Interview with Robert Smithson/Paul Toner," *Collected Writings*, 234.

10. Benjamin H. Bratton makes this connection in *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015) 85-6. For a discussion of the way satellite images of the earth helped usher in a new wave of culturally mediated globalization, see Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the*

Televisual (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 2-20 and passim.

11. John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 46.

12. Ibid., 5 and passim.

13. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2003), 19.

14. *Collected Writings*, 100-01.

15. Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 137. Parikka himself acknowledges the debt to Smithson, going so far as to see him as the progenitor of what amounts to a wholly original yet mostly unrealized school of media studies. As Parikka writes, "From our current twenty-first century perspective approximately fifty years later, it starts an imaginary alternative media theoretical lineage that does not include necessarily McLuhan, Kittler, and the likes in its story but materials, metals, waste, and chemistry" (5).

16. *Collected Writings*, 8.

17. This is also why Smithson was critical of the incipient environmental movement, which although it attempted to be global in scope, was far too anthropocentric for Smithson's taste (for more on this, see Graziani, 110-11). For a reading of Smithson's practice that focuses on the correspondence between his writing and the concept of the Anthropocene, see Susan Ballard and Liz Linden's "Spiral Jetty, Geoaesthetics, and Art: Writing the Anthropocene" (*The Anthropocene Review* 6, no. 1-2, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2053019619839443>).

18. Gary Shapiro, *Earthwards* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 161.

19. Smithson did create a few works outside of the United States: most notably *Incidents of Mirror Travels in the Yucatan* from 1969, *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* from 1971, and *Hotel Palenque* from 1973. As these works (situated in or originating from in Mexico, the Netherlands, and Mexico, respectively) show, Smithson's practice could easily travel outside of his native country.

20. *Earthwards*, 7.

21. *Collected Writings*, 146.

22. See, for instance, his earlier work, *Aerial Map-Proposal for Dallas-Forth Worth Regional Airport*.

23. *Collected Writings*, 147.

24. As Rosalind E. Krauss writes in one of the classic readings of *The Spiral Jetty*, "The experience of the work is one of continually being decentered." *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), 82.

25. Smithson's distaste for using the vocabulary of biological evolution to describe art is evident in much of his writing. In the article "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space," for instance, he writes, "The study of anatomy since the Renaissance lead to a notion of art in terms of biology. Although anatomy is rarely taught in our art schools, the metaphors of anatomical and biological science linger in the minds of some of our most abstract artists. ...Biological science has since the nineteenth century infused in most people's minds an unconscious faith in 'creative evolution.'" *Collected Writings*, 35-6.

26. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 4.

27. Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 167.

28. *Ibid.*, 382, emphasis in original.

29. Doreen Massey, "The Conceptualization of Place," in *A Place in the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 58-9.

30. See, for instance, in the interview "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson/Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp," in which Smithson states, "There's a central focus point which is the non-site; the site is the unfocused fringe where your mind loses its boundaries and a sense of the oceanic pervades, as it were. I like the idea of quiet catastrophes taking place." *Collected Writings*, 249.

31. References to Ehrenzweig and especially to his central concept of dedifferentiation are legion in Smithson's writing. See, for instance, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," in which Smithson writes, "Michael Fried's shock at Smith's experiences shows that the critic's sense of limit cannot risk the rhythm of dedifferentiation that swings between 'oceanic' fragmentation and strong determinants." *Collected Writings*, 103.

32. Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art* (London: Phoenix Press, 1967) 119-20.

33. As William B. Parsons argues in *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), the oceanic feeling and mystical experience form an important component of Lacan's concepts of jouissance and the Real (134).

34. In his 2006 book *After Finitude* (New York: Verso, 2009), Meillassoux attempts to move beyond what he argues is the "the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant...that of *correlation*. By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (5, emphasis in original). In contrast to this, Meillassoux writes, "For it could be that contemporary philosophers have lost the great outdoors, the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory—of being entirely elsewhere" (7). The impetus for the book, as Meillassoux describes it, is the idea of the petrified fossil as a trace of something that existed before the advent of human consciousness.

35. Lytle Shaw, *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2013), 202.

36. In Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), the concept of "dynamic sublime" describes the feeling that "the irresistibility of [nature's] power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of nature and a superiority over nature...whereby the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion to the feeling of reason's superiority" (§28, 145), whereas Smithson's sublime, as Shaw points out, lacks this anthropomorphism and the perceived human mastery.

37. This is, naturally, a simplification of a rich and variegated intellectual tradition. However, scholars broadly agree that, despite their important innovations and differences among themselves, American nineteenth-century artists, writers, and philosophers with an interest in nature and wilderness from Thomas Cole, the painters of the Hudson school, and the transcendentalists (an artistic movement whose Kantianism is evident in its name) broadly employed and further developed Kantian categories in the aesthetics and implicit and explicit philosophies of nature. See, for instance, Nicholas L. Guardino's *Aesthetic Transcendentalism in Emerson, Peirce, and Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Painting* (New York: Lexington Books, 2017), xvii-xxiii and 37-58.

38. Guardiano has a version of this argument when he writes of the Hudson School that they helped "shape the American zeitgeist. Through their works they conveyed their admiration of nature as a spiritual entity of rich beauty to other fellow Americans, and a new interest in nature precipitated into such effects as the settlement of the frontier." *Aesthetic Transcendentalism*, 28.

39. Jedediah Purdy, *This Land is Our Land* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

40. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1788), 60.

41. Stanley Heeden, *Big Bone Lick: The Cradle of American Paleontology* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 65.

42. "Conversation in Salt Lake City/Gianni Pettena," *Collected Writings*, 298.

43. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), 61.

44. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); and Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973). For an early history of the first decades of American Studies, see Gene Wise's "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," *American Quarterly*, 31, no. 3 (1979): 293-337.

45. Elizabeth Deen Miller convincingly argues this point in her dissertation "The U.S. Imagination of Maya Ruins: Critical Reflections on Art and Architecture, 1839-1972" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2018), 112-64.

46. See, for instance, Pamela M. Lee's *Chronophobia* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 43-54, and Ann Reynolds's *Robert Smithson. Learning From New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 31-76 and 89-91.

47. Greenberg's self-professed Kantian theory of media holds that each art form, to be considered modern, should preoccupy itself with an immanent critique of its individual and specific media. See especially the essay "Towards a Newer Laocoon" in *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 23-47, and "Modernist Painting" in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 4* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 85-93.

48. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 190.

49. Clement Greenberg: *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 2* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 215.

50. Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 252-78.

51. See *The Cultural Cold War*, 258.

52. There are important differences between Fried's position and that of his mentor Greenberg; however, they are on the same page when it comes to their distaste for artists who operate outside of established artistic media, such as painting and sculpture.

53. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 155, emphasis Fried's.

54. "Art and Objecthood," 168.

55. Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 167.

56. *Collected Writings*, 250.

57. As Reynolds (15-76) argues, this aspect of Smithson's work can be traced all the way back to some of his earliest sculptural works, the so-called Alogons, which, by manipulating the perspectives and sizes of the sculpture, work to make spectators question their own position in the gallery room.

58. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2013), 180.

Cruelty and Violence in the Borderlands: Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant*

Cara Anne Kinnally

Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu's (2015) Oscar-winning film *The Revenant* fictionalizes the true-life story of frontiersman Hugh Glass and his struggle to survive after being severely mauled by a grizzly bear and left for dead, without a gun or any other weapons, in the wilderness of U.S.-controlled northern Louisiana Territory (present-day South Dakota) in 1823.¹ Like other westerns, the film builds up the myth of the self-sufficient, resourceful, and bold mountain man of U.S. folklore, here instantiated by the character of Glass.² Glass is unequivocally the hero and the focus of the film. But *The Revenant* differs from more paradigmatic western films, which often celebrated westward expansion as a civilizing force that opposed the "savage" wilderness of the frontier, by instead critiquing many parts of this process.³ When compared to the historical archive of documents related to Glass's life and Michael Punke's novel *The Revenant: A Novel of Revenge* (2002), on which the film is loosely based, Iñárritu's version of Glass's life story deviates in important ways. Only in the film, for example, does Glass marry a Pawnee woman and have a son with her. Only in the film does Glass murder a military officer in order to defend his son during an attack on the Pawnee village in which they live. And only in the film do we see the kidnapping and rape of a Sahnish (Arikara)⁴ woman, which provokes the Sahnish to violently resist the incursion of white men into the region.⁵ These changes highlight the violence involved in modern nation-building,

including ethnic genocide, dispossession, forced displacement, sexual violence, exploitation of natural resources, and the establishment of the geopolitical and ethnoracial borders that helped to create a national “us” and an othered “them” and that disrupt Indigenous communities that do not adhere to these imposed new borders.

Íñárritu’s choice to make these and other changes to Glass’s life story—to make Glass’s relationship with the Indigenous communities in the region a central focus of the film—turns viewers’ eyes, if only momentarily, to the margins of the settler nation-state and the Indigenous peoples who lived there during a foundational moment in U.S. history: the so-called exploration and settlement of the West, a process in which emergent capitalist enterprises, namely, fur trapping, were heavily involved, with the support of the U.S. government. In portraying a key period in U.S. nation formation, while simultaneously highlighting the violence against Indigenous communities that characterized that period, the film explores how the subalternization of certain people and groups is a product of modern capitalist nation-state formation. In this sense, the film comments on the contested construction of geopolitical, linguistic, racial, and cultural borders, the lasting implications of the construction of such borders, and how modern nation-states—and their borders—are built on and through physical and epistemological violence and colonization.

I thus begin by examining *The Revenant* as a border film by exploring how the film creates a space of geopolitical ambiguity and cultural, racial, and linguistic mixing—all traits broadly associated with the idea of a borderland. However, as I will subsequently discuss, the film emphasizes not only the existence of this borderland but also the processes by which the modern U.S. nation-state creates borderlands and border dwellers. This process is characterized by and realized through cruelty and violence, which, according to Latin American cultural critic Jean Franco, are co-opted, rationalized, and openly embraced by nation-states as necessary methods that will ultimately help to create a cohesive and “modern” nation. I end by considering the transnational aspects of Íñárritu’s cinematic oeuvre as a whole and explore what it might mean to understand Íñárritu himself as a type of border crosser, as other critics have suggested. While recent research on Íñárritu tends to examine him solely in the context of international and independent art house cinema or U.S. film history, to do so means to ignore the important ways in which his present-day work is connected to his past films and influenced by his development within the Mexican film industry. Reading *The Revenant* within Mexican as well as U.S. film history thus offers a more nuanced perspective on how Íñárritu is influenced by and immersed within both Mexican and U.S. culture. I will discuss how Íñárritu’s use of certain formulae of both the western genre and what historian Dominique

Brégent-Heald identifies as “borderland films” undercut some of the larger and more radical decolonial potentials of the film. Ultimately, despite its attempts to represent the complexities of settler colonialism and the violence inherent to colonization, *The Revenant* remains a settler film that privileges the point of view of white settlers in the film and the experiences of white audiences in the theater.

A revenant is a person who comes back from the dead—a zombie-like figure who returns to the world of the living. In this manner, the film itself is also a revenant, raising questions from the past about xenophobia, racism, white nationalism, and imperialism that continue to live on and haunt the United States in the twenty-first century. In considering the impact of this film on present-day audiences, this article interprets *The Revenant* as a commentary as much about the present and future of the United States as about its past. I examine the film not for its historical accuracy but for the ways it retells history, which have implications for how we talk about history, the nation, and national identity in the present.

The Revenant as Border Film

In her now classic *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999), Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa explored and described the significance of borders and borderlands:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal.” (25, emphasis in the original)

Anzaldúa deliberately reclaims these stigmatized, denigrated, and ostracized categories of identification as sources of resistance, power, and productive creativity. Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking work highlights that borders and borderlands are not just physical spaces or geopolitical regions. They are also socially constructed and discursive spaces that highlight immense disparities and define the limits of belonging.

The very first scenes of *The Revenant* show a space strikingly similar to Anzaldúa’s descriptions. The first images show Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio), the main character in the film, together with his Pawnee wife (Grace Dove) and their young son, who is smiling broadly. Glass’s first

words, however, whispered hoarsely in Pawnee in a voice-over, "It's okay, son. ... I know you want this to be over," jar with these happy images, warning viewers of what is to come. Only a few seconds later, a white man in a military uniform burns a Pawnee earthen house while Glass's son appears in the foreground, looking directly at the camera. The young boy's expression is blank, emotionless, seemingly in shock. His hair is tousled, and his face is dirty, with the suggestion of burn marks on his cheeks. This is followed by an image of Glass cradling his son amidst the burning wreckage of what appears to be an entire Pawnee village. "As long as you can still grab a breath, you fight. You breathe. ... Keep breathing," Glass says in another voice-over in Pawnee. In these brief, dream-like first scenes of the film, we see the annihilation of the village and the fracturing of Glass's family.

Shortly after these first scenes, we are in the present of the film's narrative. It is 1823, in unorganized Louisiana territory, and another scene of horror awaits us: bloody beaver carcasses, stripped of their pelts, litter the scene. This is the campsite of an outfit of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. The general destruction of the environment—dead animals, felled trees, land stripped of its vegetation, smoke and ash—is coupled with a sense of tension and imminent danger. Captain Henry (Domhnall Gleeson), the leader of this fur-trapping company, urges his men to work quickly and finish preparing their last haul of beaver pelts. Only a few minutes later, Sahnish warriors rain down flaming arrows on the unprepared trappers and begin a seemingly merciless massacre. The film shows the chaos of the attack in gory detail as Henry's men struggle to make it to the boat and escape. Later, we learn that thirty-three of the men in the trapping party have been killed. The small party of about ten men who escape, including Glass and his now teenage son, Hawk (Forrest Goodluck), flee down the river as smoke curls in the air and vultures circle over the remnants of their now completely destroyed campsite. However, as the scene closes, the camera shifts to the Sahnish perspective as it shows them wailing in grief over their own dead. From their dialogue, we learn that the attack was motivated not by the desire to steal beaver pelts, as proposed by men in Glass's group, but by the search for chief's daughter, Powaga (Melaw Nakehk'o), who has been kidnapped by white men, thus "making clear that what has motivated the attack is not warlike aggression (as camera work at the beginning of the attack suggests), but the search for a lost child," a theme that finds its double in Glass's loss of his own son later in the film (Tierney, 2018, 164).

These first scenes of the film situate viewers in a geopolitical and cultural space of transition that echoes classic definitions and descriptions of frontiers and borderlands, including that of Anzaldúa: violence is rampant, ambiguity reigns, and imposed, unnatural boundaries upend communities. For example, from the perspective of Western

settlers, fur trappers, and other agents of national expansion, the film takes place in an undefined geopolitical territory or space in transition. The fur trappers are in U.S. territory officially defined as unorganized territory, which means that the U.S. government had only transient control.⁶ These sorts of territories had only vaguely drawn boundaries “that were never intended as definitive borders at all” (Hubbard, 2014, 123). Furthermore, Canadians and U.S. Americans had long disputed who had the rights to the northern parts of the Louisiana Territory as well as the rights to trap there.⁷ From the perspective of white settlers, which is the perspective privileged in the film, it is a space of blurry and porous boundaries, not tightly controlled by any government.

It was at least in part the geopolitical ambiguity of the unorganized territories of the West—the uncertainty of settler/national boundaries or sometimes simply the refusal to acknowledge national boundaries as well as the lack of governing bodies to restrict movement across regional and national boundaries—that encouraged white trappers to move into the territory during this time period. Trappers were attracted to the so-called frontier because for many of them it represented the potential for various types of freedom: economic independence, self-determination, unrestricted movement, and liberation from (some) restrictive social, moral, and political systems of rule. In reality, this potential, especially for economic independence and self-determination, remained unrealized for the vast majority of fur trappers.⁸ Yet the geopolitical ambiguity of the territory is what attracted and permitted the incursion of these fur trappers into the terrain, and this is what sets the scene for the film and for Glass’s story. Of course, to understand the land in this fashion relies on a denial of the past and present inhabitation of the land by Indigenous communities and their accompanying rights to it and privileges and legitimates Western invention and imposition of geopolitical boundaries.

As in Anzaldúa’s borderlands, multiple communities, cultures, and languages also converge in this space. Just in the first two scenes described above, Pawnee and Sahnish speak in their native languages, and white and Black fur trappers speak in English. Later in the film, there are also French-speaking traders in the area, and other Indigenous communities are mentioned as presences in the region, although they never appear on-screen. Glass and his son perhaps best represent the mixture of cultures, national identities, and languages that are in the process of transformation. His son is half Pawnee and half white, and Glass and his son speak in both English and Pawnee to one another. Later, other multilingual characters appear, such as the Sahnish chief Elk Dog (Duane Howard), who also understands French. Indeed, although it is important to once again note that the film privileges the perspective of white settlers by making Glass the hero, it also shows some of the ways in which both Indigenous and white settler cultures and ways of life are

being transformed through the interactions among white settlers and Indigenous communities in this context.

As is obvious from the very first scenes of the film, there is the constant threat and use of physical violence in the encounters between the different communities and groups in this territory. The battle scene that initiates the film is a fictionalization of an actual conflict between Sahnish and fur traders led by William H. Ashley. This bloody clash was the start of (what would eventually be called) the Arikara War, which included U.S. military intervention on behalf of Ashley's Rocky Mountain Fur Company. In fact, this was the first significant military confrontation between the U.S. Army and a Western Plains Indigenous community.⁹ Historians have also understood this specific altercation as symbolically important, as it marked a "turning point in Arikara relations" with whites (Parks, 2001, 367), with the Sahnish (Arikara) acquiring "a reputation for being hostile and treacherous to Whites" as a result (367)—a denomination we should rightly question and criticize but that nonetheless speaks to a change in the view and treatment of the Sahnish on the part of the U.S. government as well as white traders.¹⁰ While sources written by white settlers and fur traders from the period disagreed on the cause of the altercation between the Sahnish and the fur traders,¹¹ however, the film is clear: the kidnapping of Powaga, the chief's daughter, sets the entire narrative of the film in motion, once again emphasizing the violence that is an essential component of the encounter between communities and cultures. The Sahnish attack the fur trappers because they are searching for Powaga and know she has been kidnapped by white men. Later, we see she is held captive and raped by French traders. This is important because, as Franco (2013) suggests, sexual violence is one of the most powerful forms of violence, as it is both a form of torture and a symbolic weapon; it is therefore a declaration of extreme authority (15). When used as a mass weapon against an entire community, sexual crimes work to incite terror not only in the women being raped but also in the community to which those women belong. Mass rape, as Franco explains, is "a social warning to everyone, an act of power, and discipline, a sign of masculine, brutal, natural, social and political power, and an invasion of the public space" (16–17).

The inclusion of Powaga is an interesting deviation from the novel, in which no such character appears and there is no mention of rape as a provocation for the conflict between the Sahnish and the fur traders. At first glance, it seems a bit closer to contemporary Sahnish memory of the battle, which explains that the conflict was initiated when "a member of the Ashley expedition snuck into the Arikara villages looking for women" (Yellow Bird, 2017, 386).¹² But importantly, Iñárritu's portrayal also deviates from this history of the event by displacing the sexual violence onto the French traders. Glass and his group of fur traders are

therefore portrayed as innocent and unsuspecting victims of a case of mistaken identity and a seemingly undeserved and brutal attack. In fact, in the film, Glass even helps to rescue Powaga from the French traders, thus further cementing his virtue. Powaga's kidnapping and rape represent the physical violence that was part of the colonization of the Americas and reveal how such violence was also used as a symbolic weapon against Indigenous communities. But the emphasis on Glass's innocence reinforces the representation of Glass as the unblemished hero savior, a point I will return to and discuss in greater detail later.

There are other sorts of dangers that lurk in this borderland besides just physical and symbolic violence, however. It appears, for example, that the humanity of many white characters is threatened with collapse in this terrain. This threat makes itself apparent when these characters cease to recognize and value the lives of their fellow human beings or fail to acknowledge other people as human beings. After Glass is mauled by a grizzly bear, for example, Captain Henry, the leader of the now decimated fur-trapping party, decides that the group cannot continue with Glass so incapacitated, so he leaves him behind with two fellow white trappers, John Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy) and Jim Bridger (Will Poulter), as well as Glass's son, Hawk, with the orders that they are to care for Glass "until the end" and give him a Christian burial. Fitzgerald, the film's clear antagonist, grows restless when Glass continues to cling to life and attempts to kill him so they can pack up and move on. When Hawk discovers Fitzgerald in the act, Fitzgerald then murders Hawk instead. As his son dies, Glass helplessly looks on, frothing in rage but unable to move or even talk due to his injuries. Fitzgerald then convinces Bridger that they must leave Glass behind, telling him (falsely) that Arikara are about to attack their camp; Fitzgerald argues that their lives are worth more than that of Glass, who they both assume will die anyway. For the two and a half hours that the film lasts, we watch Glass grunt his way through the stunningly beautiful wilderness, facing obstacle after obstacle: his mangled body is thrown through raging white water on the frigid river, and he plummets off a high cliff, endures blizzards and freezing temperatures, and narrowly escapes several close encounters with hostile Sahnish. He also faces the limits of his own humanity and the existential threat of becoming nonhuman. He literally digs himself out of his own grave (where he was thrown by Fitzgerald) and then lumbers his way to Fort Kiowa, wearing the fur of the dead grizzly for warmth and almost transforming into an animal himself along the way. On the edge of starvation, he tears apart a raw fish and, at one point, a raw buffalo liver with his bare teeth. Like an animal, he is unable to speak beyond guttural groans because of a deep gash to his throat. Thus, the human/nonhuman divide emerges as one more borderland that Glass must negotiate and traverse.

Iñárritu situates his viewers in the first scenes in a geopolitical,

linguistic, and cultural borderland while also emphasizing the destruction that accompanies the creation of a nation-state and its associated territorial possessions. But it is also a temporal threshold in U.S. history that defined the nation and its boundaries. The fact that *Iñárritu* uses the first scenes of the film to highlight the environmental destruction of the fur trappers and the violence (military, psychological, environmental, and sexual) that accompanied them, for example, is significant because the fur trade played a major role in the settlement and expansion of the United States and in the establishment of its boundaries (Dolin, 2010, xvi). It also paved the way for a complete cultural and economic transformation of the region. The real-life Andrew Henry, who appears as the captain of Glass's group in the film, helped lay the groundwork, along with his partner William H. Ashley, for the commercial exploitation of the region through the development of the rendezvous system, in which fur trappers "stayed in or near the Rockies year round and met each summer at predetermined locations to sell their furs and purchase supplies from company representatives" (226).¹³ The fur trade thereby represents an emergent capitalism and its associated notions of private property ownership and resource extraction.¹⁴ Furthermore, as we also see in the film, these private capitalist ventures were supported, often militarily, by the U.S. government.

In *The Revenant*, we therefore witness a key moment in U.S. history, on the verge of a radical change in how white settlers and capitalists, with the support of the U.S. government, would come to understand nature and the land as resources to be exploited until exhaustion. Trappers, for example, would eventually hunt the beaver to near extinction.¹⁵ The establishment of the fur trade and especially of the rendezvous system also signaled a cultural change, as white trappers now remained in the region year-round and began to make their home there. These "mountain men," as they were frequently called, traded and interacted with Indigenous communities and often married and had children with Indigenous women, thus forever altering Indigenous cultures and communities (Dolin, 2010, 228). Where trappers went, so-called settlers soon followed, bringing other sorts of violence against Indigenous communities. It is important to also note that these changes were not one-sided, and the "growth of a mutual dependency between Indian and European trader[s] at the economic level could not help but engender a significant cultural exchange as well" (Van Kirk, 1980, 3).¹⁶ Glass's union with a Pawnee woman, for example, is symbolically important, as it represents what was happening in the region at this time, as Indigenous communities and white settlers became more and more intertwined through the spread of the fur trade, which relied on both force/violence (as discussed above) and intercultural exchange and intermarriage.¹⁷ Indeed, as historians have shown, intermarriage, primarily between

Indigenous women and white men, was “not only a result of the scarcity of European women, but also an integral part of the fur trade. Based, as the trade was, on a commodity exchange between two culturally distinct groups of people, it engendered a mutually dependent economic relationship” (Ens and Sawchuk, 2015, 44).¹⁸

Íñárritu’s portrayal of this foundational moment in the fur trade, one of the early attempts by the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to establish a presence in the region, emphasizes that this is not only a geopolitical borderland but also a temporally situated one: a moment of economic, political, and cultural transformation. These first two scenes of the film highlight the interconnectedness of military forces into the area (the burning of the Pawnee village by a white man in a military uniform) and economic and cultural forces in the area (the trappers, their exploitation of the land, and the sexual violence aimed at Indigenous communities as well as Indigenous dispossession of lands and resources).¹⁹ However, they also reveal one of the larger themes of the film: that this is depicting not only “Westward expansion” but also a new and distinctly *modern* form of colonialism. As historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) has shown, “The form of colonialism that the Indigenous peoples of North American have experienced was modern from the beginning: the expansion of European corporations, backed by government armies, into foreign areas, with subsequent appropriation of lands and resources” (6). Íñárritu thus uses the first scenes of his film to underscore the intimate connections between the nation-state, emergent private capitalist enterprises, exploitation, dispossession, and genocide.

As my discussion demonstrates, *The Revenant* presents us with a borderland in multiple senses. It is a geopolitical buffer zone, literally unorganized territory that was still somewhat geopolitically ambiguous for settlers in 1823. It is a zone of cultural, linguistic, and racial contact and hybridity, represented most clearly through Glass’s son, who is bilingual and biracial. In essence, *The Revenant* puts on display a space of violent discord that makes its characters question not only the humanity of others but also their own humanity. And the film takes place during a watershed moment that marks a moment of immense cultural, economic, psychological, political, and epistemological change and violence for Indigenous communities. The characters therefore appear to be in a border-like space that is geopolitically ambiguous and economically and culturally in a process of transition. The supposed “openness” of this space—again, only from the perspective of white settlers—has often been understood in the popular imagination in the United States as permitting and fostering economic and individual freedom (at least for white men). However, in these scenes, the film questions this romanticized and historically inaccurate image of the frontier through its focus on the massive losses of life—both Indigenous

and white, both human and animal—that were an essential part of the fur trade and Westward expansion.²⁰

Łńárritu's focus on the destruction and violence that accompanied the fur trade and its agents calls our attention to the ways in which the fur trade, a critical force in U.S. expansion, also helped to create and establish boundaries. The film goes back to this moment in U.S. history in order to show how the fur trade, as an agent of the modern, imperialist nation-state, was not pushing against borders but in fact established these borders and defined the communities that lived within them as "border dwellers." In other words, as I will explore next, *The Revenant* not only takes place in a borderland but also shows how borders were and are made: through the violence of the modern nation-state.

Cruel Borderlands

In her recent book *Cruel Modernity*, Latin American cultural critic Jean Franco (2013) ponders how the quest for the modern nation-state, contrary to popular narratives of nation formation, enabled and instituted—rather than counteracted—cruelty and violence. The nation-state, she argues, has established itself as a cohesive and distinctly modern entity by simultaneously working to distinguish itself and its citizenry from the groups, communities, and individuals whom it does not consider part of the nation—those who are made to not belong because they are supposedly neither modern nor civilized. In other words, Franco shows that barbarism, savagery, and cruelty are neither premodern nor antithetical to civilization and modernity; they are a product of modernity. As Franco discusses, modernity and the quest for the modern nation-state have authorized state-sponsored violence and the creation of communities that do not receive the social, political, and economic tools that will allow them to thrive as full human beings and as full members of the settler nation-state. This is what she calls the "cruelty" of modernity: the nation-state actively creates marginalized communities, initiates programs of violence against those communities that deprive them of the resources they need in order to be part of the modern nation, and then blames, criminalizes, and punishes those communities, often violently, for not being part of the "modern" nation.

In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler (2016) similarly discusses exactly how we recognize—or fail to recognize—living human beings as lives that are grievable and thus livable. According to Butler, not all lives are understood or portrayed as equally deserving of protection from destruction and violence, or what she calls "precarious life":

[P]recisely because each body finds itself potentially threatened by others who are, by definition, precarious as well, forms of domination follow. ... [T]he shared

condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations, of lives that are not quite lives, cast as “destructible” and “ungrievable.” Such populations are “lose-able,” or can be forfeited, precisely because they are framed as being already lost or forfeited; they are cast as threats to human life as we know it rather than as living populations in need of protection from illegitimate state violence, famine, or pandemics. Consequently, when such lives are lost they are not grievable, since, in the twisted logic that rationalizes their death, the loss of such populations is deemed necessary to protect the lives of “the living.” (31)

As both Franco and Butler show, the modern nation-state depends on the creation of this “other,” this “nonlife,” in order to define itself and those it considers its citizens, through contrast, as modern, civilized, and fully functioning members of its community who are deserving of protection and who are grievable and, therefore, valued and valuable lives.

While Franco focuses specifically on the Latin American context, *The Revenant* highlights how the modern nation-state of the United States is similarly founded on a relationship of cruelty and the creation of the barbarian “other” as well as the “benevolent civilizer.” In doing so, the film prompts viewers to question how violence and cruelty have been used and justified by the nation-state and how the modern nation-state has created, not reacted against, borders that differentiate between “us” and “them,” between “civilized” and “savage,” between “modern” and “barbaric,” and between grievable lives and ungrievable nonlives. Indeed, this is what borders do: they make visible the disparities and inequities that are integral—not antithetical—to modern nation formation. It is precisely in the spaces in which diverse communities come into contact with one another—borders and borderlands—that these inequities are most visible and palpable.

In the film, for example, the close relationship between Glass and Hawk invites viewers to consider how some lives become defined as (potential) citizens, while others are defined as nonlives, as perpetual border dwellers who can never live within or become part of the nation. In showing how these identities are constructed, however, the film also reveals the fragility of these dichotomies. Borders need to be enforced only if there is uncertainty about those borders, if the line between communities or nations and between “us” and “them” is unstable or not immediately obvious or intuitive. It is important to note once again that Iñárritu chose to make the relationship between Glass and Hawk a focus

of the film. This is a major change from both Punke's novel, in which Glass does not even have a son, and an earlier version of the screenplay, in which Glass's son is already dead when the film begins (Smith, 2016). *Íñárritu's* decision to focus on this father-son relationship brings to the forefront a questioning of the ways in which border dwellers—that is, those who exist outside of or on the extreme fringes of the national community—become understood and defined by the nation-state as nonlives and in contrast to other lives that are valued, valuable, and included unambiguously as part of the nation-state.

From the very beginning of the film, Glass and Hawk appear as sorts of border dwellers in Anzaldúa's terms—the "half dead," the "half-breed," "the queer, the troublesome"—who make us question the processes by which one becomes defined as such (Anzaldúa, 1999, 25). Glass is, of course, literally the half dead: he emerges from his own grave with half-rotted flesh, staggering his way back to the land of the living. But Glass and Hawk are also border dwellers in other senses. Glass, we learn further along in the film, had lived in a Pawnee village, adapted to their culture, learned the language, and married a Pawnee woman. Glass and Hawk, as previously mentioned, speak in both English and Pawnee to one another in the film. They are both culturally mixed and, in the case of Hawk, biracial. Hawk and Glass are marked from the very beginning of the film as different and as suspicious because of their connections to more than one culture and community. After the fight with the Sahnish, for example, Fitzgerald questions Glass's loyalty to the white trappers because it is rumored (and we see it is true) that Glass killed a white U.S. Army lieutenant during the attack on the Pawnee village. Fitzgerald taunts him: "Is that what you did? Shot one of your own to save this little dog right here?," referring to Hawk. When Hawk tries to defend his father, a fight ensues, and Glass reprimands his son, reminding him that he needs to learn to keep his mouth shut and be "invisible" in order to survive in the white man's world. "They just see the color of your face," he yells at his son. Glass's remarks to his son make clear how his son's Pawnee parentage will mark him as a dangerous "other"—and thus more vulnerable and precarious—in the white man's world. Fitzgerald's comments demonstrate a certain level of recognition that Hawk is "living" (a dog, after all, is a living animal), yet they also register the fact Hawk's life is not valued or valuable or not recognizable as grievable in the same way as that of a white man. Glass's remarks similarly indicate that Hawk's only choice is to be invisible and to be "unrecognized" as a fully valued and valuable life because, if visible, he is only understood by men like Fitzgerald then as also disposable. Hawk's Indigeneity, even when mixed with whiteness, makes him unrecognizable. But Glass—and maybe even Fitzgerald himself—is also on uncertain footing.

Like Anzaldúa's border dwellers, Glass and Hawk (and even Fitzgerald) trouble the supposedly clear binaries between "us" and "them" that a border seeks to establish and maintain. How is it that Glass, for example, might be transformed, through exposure to Indigenous culture and language, into a dangerous "other," as Fitzgerald suggests, but Hawk can never seemingly be transformed into a non-"savage," can never be part of Fitzgerald's "us"? Is this difference defined culturally? Biologically? Legally? How can two men from the very same family have such different limitations to their identity? The film shows that some borders are porous, but only for certain people. Glass, for example, is doubly dangerous not only because he can pass between "us" and "them" but also because, in doing so, he reveals that the differences between "us" and "them" are not very stable. This racial delineation is what Fitzgerald seems to be questioning and also trying to establish when he asks how Glass could choose to kill "one of his own"—white people—over his son, who is not, using Fitzgerald's logic, "one of his own." Fitzgerald works to establish a biological racial dichotomy that will distinguish himself (also a border dweller) just as much as Glass as part of the same (white) group, in contrast with those who are not white. His questioning of Glass's own racial or cultural loyalties thereby highlights how whiteness is in the process of being defined, always relying on a contrast to non-whiteness or racialized otherness. Fitzgerald's comment emphasizes how Glass, even when he is almost literally transformed into a wild animal, as previously mentioned, is able to cross that border, which is permeable for him, and come back to being a fully valued (white) human life. For others, however, that border is not open or porous. Glass's son, for example, will always be seen by men like Fitzgerald as dwelling on the side of the nonhuman; he will always be on the level of a not fully valued life.

Hawk's mixed parentage is significant because it ultimately brings up questions about national and communal belonging for culturally and/or racially mixed groups and the limits of whiteness and citizenship. And indeed, it is worth noting that the early decades of the nineteenth century were a period of transformation in the ways in which racial identities, especially for people of mixed Indigenous and European parentage, would come to be understood in the United States (Ens and Sawchuk, 2015, 20–21). By the late 1820s, U.S.-American "attitudes towards Indians and the 'mixed-bloods' [those of both Indigenous and European heritage] shifted from a positive belief in their capabilities and potential for civilization to one of reservation and finally to discouragement over their lack of progress" (21). And by mid-century, the prevailing attitude in U.S.-American culture was that if someone possessed some Indigenous blood, he or she was unambiguously Indigenous and therefore uncivilized and uncivilizable (22). In other words, this was a period during which it

was being decided not only who was Indigenous but also who was white and how to understand those people and communities who are mixed race as different than white communities. We see these ideas being articulated in the film. Hawk is defined in contrast to Glass, who, even though he may traverse social, racial, and cultural boundaries, ultimately is still permitted to be “one of us.” Glass’s whiteness remains intact and is brought into focus even more when contrasted with his own son’s *lack* of whiteness. The movie thereby dramatizes the development of a clear boundary between whiteness and Indigeneity and of the place of both white border dwellers (like Glass and Fitzgerald) and racially ambiguous border dwellers (like Hawk) in the world created by the new nation-state. Race and racism are another product of colonization and the border building inherent to modern nation-state formation.

Through its questioning of the racial and cultural liminality of Glass and Hawk, the film emphasizes the ways in which borderlands—geopolitical as well as social, cultural, and racial—become defined as spaces of savagery and barbarism, always in contrast with white American “civilization.” The film also highlights, however, how this supposed lack of civilization in Indigenous communities is manufactured *by* and not the antithesis to the modern nation-state. The violence of the Sahnish, for example, is shown in the film to be the direct result of the territorial encroachment of white men. In fact, the film shows that the U.S. nation-state was never intended to support or include the Indigenous communities as meaningful actors in the first place; its success is instead dependent on the *exclusion* of Indigenous peoples from its community. For example, the fur trappers exploit the land for beaver pelts. Sahnish then use the beaver pelts taken from the fur trappers to trade with the Frenchmen for horses so that they can continue to search for Powaga, who, unbeknownst to the Sahnish, is actually being held captive by the very French traders with whom they are trading. The game, in other words, is rigged from the start. The Sahnish’s motivation to trade with the Frenchmen is driven by a need artificially created and controlled by the Frenchmen: they kidnapped Powaga, which makes the Sahnish need to trade with them to get horses to search for her, but there is no hope of finding her since the Frenchmen already have her, thus indefinitely prolonging this trade circle. The French traders provoke Sahnish into violence, profit off the beaver pelts that the Sahnish take from the fur trappers, and, in the process, create the means by which the Sahnish become defined as brutal and violent since they are the ones attacking the fur trappers and supposedly stealing the pelts (even though the beaver pelts are natural resources to which Sahnish should have legal rights). The Sahnish serve only to transmit goods within this emergent capitalist system from one group of white men to the next, without ever profiting themselves, by offering their own bodies, not to mention the

natural resources of their lands, as collateral for a loan that will never be delivered. In the eyes of the white men, the Sahnish's resistance to this invasion of their land and communities simply justifies further violence against and subjugation of the Sahnish. If they do not fight back, they lose everything—the goods that are stolen, the natural resources that are destroyed, their culture, and their future existence itself (represented through the kidnapped Powaga, daughter of Elk Dog and metaphorically serving as the future generations of Sahnish). And if they do fight back, as we see in the film and as happened in real life, they risk losing what political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1994) called the “right to have rights”—that is, they become defined as antithetical to the new nation-state and therefore lose their very right to have any rights at all within the new system. As mentioned earlier, the real-life confrontation between Sahnish and fur trappers that inspired the film led to the Sahnish being labeled “hostile” and therefore deserving of violent intervention and subjugation by the U.S. military. This, in its most essential form, is what Franco calls “cruel modernity.”

In this way, the film shows how certain communities are not included as part of the modern nation-state. But more profoundly, it shows that the modern nation-state cannot be formed without also creating groups that exist only to be excluded from the nation. In order for these capitalist enterprises to be successful, for example, they depend on the exploitation of natural resources, which in turn relies on the elimination (including removal or simply denial of the existence) of Indigenous communities and/or a disavowal of the rights of Indigenous communities to these resources. As a metonym for U.S. colonization, these interactions between white men and Sahnish represent a dark truth about U.S. history and, more broadly, settler colonialism: the goal of settler colonialism is the elimination, not incorporation, of Indigenous populations. Furthermore, the project of settler colonialism “is not limited to governmental policy but rather involves all kinds of agencies, voluntary militias, and the settlers themselves acting on their own” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, 10). By situating *The Revenant* in such a pivotal moment in U.S. and American history and one in which it is not primarily the military but rather private capitalist enterprises and individual settlers who work as agents of U.S. settler colonialism, Iñárritu highlights the numerous methods by which settler colonialism works to institutionalize violence over both Indigenous people and the land. It is significant, for example, that he introduces the character of Powaga because her kidnapping and rape illustrate how settler colonialism “requires violence or the threat of violence to attain its goals” (8). While we do see examples of military violence in the film (the burning of the Pawnee village and the murder of Glass's wife, for example), Iñárritu's decision to portray Powaga's kidnapping as a catalyst for most of the violence in the film emphasizes

how other forces are also involved in and dependent on the masculinist violence of settler colonialism.

Mexican Film and the Limits of Hollywood Westerns

Glass's somewhat ambiguous position between cultures mirrors Iñárritu's own circumstances, as another border crosser of sorts, formed by both Mexican and U.S. cultures and film industries. Although originally from Mexico, Iñárritu now resides primarily in the United States, and most of his more recent films were produced by specialty houses within Hollywood studios; *The Revenant* was his first film with a major studio, Twentieth Century Fox (Tierney, 2018, 165). Nonetheless, many of his films, even those made primarily in English and for international audiences and Hollywood, such as *21 Grams* (2003) and *Babel* (2006),²¹ still speak from a place of difference within the United States and Hollywood, as they problematize the stability of national borders and the divisions between the so-called First World and Third World (Tierney, 2009, 103). Iñárritu enjoys an international renown that is largely unprecedented for a Mexican filmmaker, with the noted exceptions of directors Alfonso Cuarón and Guillermo del Toro, together dubbed the "three amigos," or "tres mosqueteros," for their international revitalization of Mexican film (Shaw, 2013, 3). Like Cuarón and del Toro, Iñárritu has not abandoned his Mexican roots but rather worked to create connections between Mexican and U.S. cinemas by providing continued support for other Mexican filmmakers and by using his international fame to work as an advocate and ambassador for the Mexican film industry (2). As Shaw (2013) shows in her in-depth study of the oeuvre of all three directors, Iñárritu, Cuarón, and del Toro have continually "crossed linguistic, national, and generic borders, cutting through traditional divisions created by [national] film markets" (2).

The Revenant should be understood as a product of both Hollywood and the Mexican film industry and one that works to appeal to a broad international audience by engaging with multiple cinematic genres and eschewing more revolutionary political messages. Iñárritu's international success can be understood as part of a larger trend in late twentieth-century Latin American cinema in which films, many of which were transnational productions, were geared toward not only national audiences but also, maybe even primarily in many cases, international audiences.²² Indeed, as Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez (2016) explains, while cultural nationalism was still prevalent in many Latin American films of the 1990s, the broader "tendency was for filmmakers to create transnational products through casting, setting, narrative, and aesthetic choices that facilitate the films' marketing to international audiences and help satisfy the differing economic and political interests of the coproducing parties" (247). Iñárritu's films are no exception. In his earlier

films made in Mexico, such as *Amores perros* (2000), Iñárritu capitalized on the changing Mexican film production market, making savvy use of both private funding (in the past, Mexican film had been financed largely by the Mexican government) and carefully designed marketing, working to appeal both to international film festivals and “to the culture of consumption that overtook Mexican culture in the neoliberal period” (Sánchez Prado, 2014, 173). Sánchez Prado (2014) argues that Iñárritu’s early successes were in fact made possible by the erosion of political imperatives in Mexican film during the neoliberal era (176).

A large part of Iñárritu’s success comes from his ability to create films that can be understood in diverse ways for audiences in different locales and contexts, appealing to both local and international audiences and in this sense “traveling” easily across borders. *The Revenant*, for example, garnered huge box office revenues and critical acclaim not only in North America but also across the globe.²³ But, as Sánchez Prado explains, Iñárritu’s successes in Mexico and now as a “global auteur” have also come from his ability to toe the line “between progressive cultural forms and conservative political ideologies,” thereby appealing to elite intellectuals and progressives at international film festivals as well as more conservative middle to upper classes (the main theatergoing audience in Mexico in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries) (173). Sánchez Prado asserts that the success of *Amores perros*, Iñárritu’s first big international hit, for example, is in part due to the “ideological undecidability of the film, which allows for plausible readings in different parts of the ideological spectrum” (175), thereby appealing to both a more conservative middle-class audience as well as attendees at international film festivals who were searching for political redemption in so-called Third World cinema (178). In other words, Iñárritu’s films made in Mexico, such as *Amores perros*, became successful in part because of their ambiguity, especially concerning political content (or lack thereof). *The Revenant* continues this proclivity. Part of the international success of the film, I suggest, is due to the fact that it engages with multiple cinematic genres and is influenced by multiple national cinematic contexts. As I will discuss, his engagement with classic Hollywood genres ultimately undermines (or at the very least dilutes) many of the more decolonial political messages I have already highlighted in the film.

The Revenant shares much in common with the western (a point I will return to momentarily),²⁴ but I am especially interested in the commonalities it has with what Dominique Brégent-Heald (2015) terms “borderland films,” a subgenre of the western that emerged in the United States in the early twentieth century. Such films were set “in the northern or southern perimeters of the United States” (3). The setting for such films was chosen purposefully, Brégent-Heald contends, because “it offered a

dynamic narrative and visual device through which to articulate notions of crossing, transition, and in-betweenness" (3). The setting could change the content of the film as well as the ways in which viewers understood it because borderland settings "functioned as sites for intercultural encounters and social (racial and gendered) interactions, as zones of human and animal mobility, and for transboundary commerce and trade" (3). Moreover, the frontier setting conveyed "the complex processes revolving around the creation and/or maintenance of boundaries, demarcations, and divisions between the land and its people" (3). The borderland film's setting is also essential because it "created complex and paradoxical spaces to explore the social constructions of nation, race, and gender in North America's borderland regions but ultimately expressed broader anxieties over maintaining gendered, racial and national boundaries during the early twentieth century" (3). Borderland or frontier settings thus "provided a diegetic space to explore the various tensions and contradictions occurring within the American cinema and North American society and culture at a particular historic moment" (5). Such understanding of these spaces as "borderlands" of course relies on and privileges a white settler perspective, and the description of borderlands as spaces of anxiety regrading national, ethnic, and gender boundaries assumes an audience that will identify more closely with a white settler perspective.

Brégent-Heald (2015) also emphasizes that borderland films were politically flexible.²⁵ Filmmakers chose borderland spaces, which were ubiquitously portrayed as permeable, open, ambiguous, and "wild," in order to question national boundaries—the limits of masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and civilization—but also, quite often, in order to ultimately reinforce those same boundaries (14). Borderland films could thus be used for a variety of political purposes and social commentaries, as they both "reinforced and challenged the dominant myths about Mexico and Canada, as well as the borders each nation shares with the United States" (9).

Similar to the films discussed by Brégent-Heald, *The Revenant's* setting is essential to understanding the film and its deeper commentaries. The film, for example, uses the borderland setting in order to explore tensions about the creation of the nation, the boundaries of citizenship, and the history of exclusion that is foundational to the modern U.S. nation. In this sense, *The Revenant* is as much about the present as the past—about how national (U.S.) identity has been imagined and defined and the lasting legacy of those flawed imaginings. But perhaps even more important, the film, like those discussed by Brégent-Heald, is ultimately politically ambiguous. For example, Lléárritu's reliance on (or at the very least engagement with) classic frontier mythology—most notably the white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cis-gendered male hero who is also

independent and resourceful and lives outside the confines of an unjust or corrupt society while adhering to his own (better) moral compass—allows for this flexibility. On the one hand, Iñárritu's choice to make this a narrative in which Glass is driven to revenge his son's murder places Indigenous genocide at the forefront of the film. But on the other hand, the film is ultimately still told from the white man's perspective, with little screen time devoted to individual Indigenous characters (they are almost always in groups), little development of Indigenous characters, and no deep exploration of the culture and history of the Pawnee or Sahnish (the two Indigenous communities represented in the film). It is emblematic that the film was billed as featuring DiCaprio and Hardy. Furthermore, the film recycles two trite and problematic themes in U.S. culture: the white man as enlightened avenger of Indigenous genocide and Indigenous communities as a part of the U.S.-American past, not present or future, with the death of his son. The Indigenous American—and his inevitable elimination—comes to represent not Indigenous history and culture but the triumph of the hero and the nation, defined as *not* Indigenous but white. As Armando José Prats (2002) explains in his study of what he calls the "Indian Western," Indigenous characters are present in such films only to be rendered *absent* (2), thus reinforcing the image of the white man as the torchbearer of true American culture and justice.²⁶ *The Revenant* replicates this pattern. As Mary Louise Pratt (2017) summarizes, the "movie itself is a revenant, replaying an exhausted white man frontier fantasy in an ecology that is rapidly dissolving as the planet warms" (G169).

If, as Brégent-Heald (2015) persuasively argues, one of the central purposes of borderland films is to actually explore the tensions and contradictions in the present-day North American society in which the film is *made* (not set) (5), then the depictions of Glass and Fitzgerald might be understood as reflecting, perhaps unwittingly, a significant contradiction in the twenty-first-century United States: while many white U.S. Americans might harshly criticize individual racists (like Fitzgerald) or isolated cases of blatant racism, they remain largely silent on the much larger and more profound questions of systemic racism and colonialism. Similarly, the film depicts racism as an aberration of "heroic" Americans (Glass could not be overtly racist and also the hero) and largely overlooks Glass's own complicity in the project of U.S. settler colonialism as part of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Iñárritu's choice to portray Glass as a non-racist white man who embraces Pawnee culture and seeks revenge against the blatantly racist Fitzgerald sustains the belief that "true" Americans, like the cultured non-Indigenous audience members who presumably sympathize with Glass, were (and are) non-racist egalitarians. Fitzgerald does serve as a counterpoint, but Glass's ability to seemingly overcome racism and prejudice makes it seem like racism

is an individual choice—and one that “true” U.S. Americans, like Glass, have always rejected. The film thereby masks the systemic ways in which racism and colonialism worked and continue to work in the United States.

In sum, *The Revenant*, like many of Iñárritu’s earlier films—products of Mexico’s neoliberal era that were geared at broader markets—continues to be a similarly politically ambiguous film that ultimately satiates non-Indigenous viewers without making them think too deeply about their own complicity in systemic forms of oppression and inequality. This ambiguity makes it appealing to conservative white audiences who wish to simply participate in a consumer culture (supposedly) void of politics (or perhaps, in the United States, even celebrate their “heritage,” represented by Glass and DiCaprio) and also to intellectuals and art house moviegoers who want to see something more revolutionary in Iñárritu’s supposed revitalization of the western genre. When we consider Iñárritu’s film as a product not only of Hollywood but also of the neoliberal era in Mexico, we can see how Iñárritu is a savvy border crosser, working within multiple genres, appealing to diverse audiences, and ultimately avoiding more revolutionary political content precisely so that the film will appeal to multiple audiences in different national contexts. The film, in other words, gestures toward and engages with but ultimately stops short of the sort of more radical decolonial thinking that Anzaldúa does in *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

Anzaldúa roots her discussion of borderlands in the physical space of the U.S.-Mexico border, but her work has been understood primarily as an exploration of identity, especially as her work contributes to anti-racist, feminist, and queer discussions and theorizations of identity and the self. However, more recent scholarship seeks to understand her writings as speaking to much broader decolonial or anticolonial concerns. AnaLouise Keating (2005), for example, explores Anzaldúa’s ideas about *nepantla*—a Nahuatl term Anzaldúa uses to indicate “temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of liminality and potential transformation”—as a philosophy of alliance-building and coalition building centered around social justice (1). According to Keating, Anzaldúa’s discussion of *nepantla* and *nepantleras* is more than just an exploration of identity; it also offers instructions for how to enact change in the world and how to be an activist for social justice through alliance building (7–8). Michael Hames-García (2000) similarly explores how Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands/*la frontera* might be understood as a forward-looking alternative to nationalism—and, specifically for Anzaldúa, an alternative to Chicano cultural nationalism (103); the ramifications of her philosophical interventions thus move beyond questions of personal identity and the geopolitical context of the U.S.-Mexico borderland (104). As both Keating and Hames-García elucidate, Anzaldúa’s work can be understood as a questioning of stable

national imaginaries but also as a philosophical blueprint for activism that moves beyond national boundaries, nationalist concepts of territoriality and gatekeeping, and national(ist) mythologies and that works to bridge communities and move toward social justice for a variety of diverse but sometimes unconnected communities. Anzaldúa's work on borderlands is thus simultaneously a decolonial philosophical text, a call to decolonial action, and an enactment of that philosophy and action in its own pages, as it works to decolonize Western-centric ways of knowing, writing, and thinking.

While *The Revenant* certainly questions many national(ized) mythologies, ultimately it falls short of the more profound decolonial action and thinking that we see in Anzaldúa, or what influential Latin American cultural theorist Walter D. Mignolo (2000) calls *border knowledge* or *border thinking*—knowledge “conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system” (11). Border knowledge, he explains, absorbs and displaces “hegemonic forms of knowledge into the perspective of the subaltern” (12). It makes visible the existence of forms of knowledge that are alternatives to those forms of Western-centric knowledge produced in and through colonialism and also reveals the ways in which alternative forms of knowledge from the margins of the “modern” world have been subalternized and, often, deemed as non-knowledge through the processes of colonization. According to Mignolo, border thinking becomes an essential epistemology “to delink and decolonize knowledge and, in the process, to build decolonial histories, restoring the dignity that the Western idea of universal history took away from millions of people” (x). *The Revenant*, in contrast, ultimately reinscribes the story within dominant Western-centric history, ways of storytelling (the western film genre, for example), and, thus, epistemologies. The frontier in *The Revenant* remains, as in a frontier western,²⁷ a mythical place of “rebirth” for Glass (and the audience); in one scene, Glass even literally appears to be “birthed” from a dead horse carcass, wriggling out naked, headfirst, from between folds of pink flesh. The frontier similarly continues to be represented as a place that generates the frontiersman, the archetypically heroic white man who, as the enlightened avenger of Indigenous genocide, is once again exceptional and superior (to the racist French traders, for example). And the image of the frontier as a space of hypermasculine violence persists, erasing (through the death of Glass's wife, who appears in the film only in blurry flashbacks) the important role that women, particularly Indigenous women, played in the development of the fur trade and in the new communities and circuits of economic and cultural exchange that were developing in the early nineteenth century in this region.

At the very end of the film, after a lengthy, grunt-filled, and bloody confrontation with Fitzgerald, Glass finally gets the upper hand and has

the chance to avenge his son's death. As Glass, his eyes bulging, chokes his nemesis, Fitzgerald recognizes his end is coming and remarks to Glass: "You came all this way just for your revenge, huh? Well you enjoy it, Glass, 'cause there ain't nothin' gonna bring your boy back." Fitzgerald's words seem to have the desired effect. Instead of finishing him off, Glass pushes Fitzgerald's body into the stream, and we see him float a few hundred feet downstream, only to be picked up by the Sahnish, who are waiting to kill him. The ending displaces the violence onto the Sahnish, while the audience, I believe, is cajoled into admiring how Glass is able to preserve his humanity—that is, his refusal to ultimately commit murder signals his return to "civilization" after his confrontation with the "wild." By making the Sahnish the enactor of the vengeance that the audience craves, the film re-enshrines the civilized, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, male savior at the center of U.S. history.

Even if there is a critique of the inherent cruelty of nation-state formation and border building in the film, as I have discussed here, the film's celebration of Glass once again undermines much of that potential criticism because the audience ultimately applauds his triumph, which is really the triumph of "civilization." The film certainly laments the violence of colonialism and its effects on Indigenous communities, but two of the clearest representations of such violence, the death of his wife and son, are already part of the past. Glass's wife is already dead when the film starts, and Hawk dies soon after. The film focuses not on their lives but on how their deaths haunt him. Seen in this light, Fitzgerald's final words to Glass, "ain't nothin' gonna bring your boy back," seem to hold a double meaning. The film asks Glass (and the audience) to accept Hawk's death—and the colonial history that it represents—as already over and done. Yet, as the works of Anzaldúa, Mignolo, Dunbar-Ortiz, and many others make clear, colonialism is neither a single event nor solely a state-sponsored military endeavor relegated to the past; it is an entire way of viewing and understanding the world that persists into our present.

Like Glass's gnarled body, racism, xenophobia, and nativism are also revenants, continually brought back from the dead, constantly revived. Iñárritu's film might be understood as an attempt to remake the western and revive the genre—his own sort of metacinematic revenant, perhaps. He does in many respects provoke careful viewers to rethink U.S. history, and the ways in which border making, genocide, environmental destruction, and colonialism have been not only present in the United States but also essential for its foundation. He engages with the processes of settler colonialism and the construction of borderlands and how these narratives inform our understandings of U.S. history. But ultimately, the colonialist narrative of the white savior still shines through. The heroic white man, inheritor of an Indigenous past (but not future), remains the focus and the perspective with which viewers are led to

identify. The film therefore highlights how even in challenging settler colonialism and Euro-centric forms of knowledge, we often unwittingly replicate those same forms by continuing to work within them. This, perhaps, is the final revenant in the film: the enduring colonial legacies that continue to stagger back to life, time after time.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, I use the terms "America" and "American" to refer to all of the Americas, not just the United States of America. I use the term "U.S." or "U.S.-American" as adjectives when referring to the United States and "U.S. Americans" to refer to its citizens. I use the specific names of the Native nations and the names they use for self-identification among their people whenever possible and appropriate but also use the term "Indigenous" when speaking about broader experiences and the connections between various Native communities. I avoid excessive use of quotation marks around such words as "settlers," "explorers," "modern," "civilized," "barbaric," and so on, unless specifically seeking to emphasize the constructed and artificial nature of these categories, but I urge readers to nonetheless recognize the problematic nature of such Euro-centric terms.

2. According to historian Eric Jay Dolin (2010), two stereotypes or images of the mountain man dominate history and popular culture. The first is the romantic hero, a man "who ventured boldly and even joyfully into the uncharted wilderness, and who relied on his strength, resourcefulness, and courage to confront and in many cases surmount manifold obstacles" (252). The second also emphasizes the mountain man's bravery and adventurousness but sees him as someone who has rejected civilization (252). It was commonly believed, according to Dolin, that such a type of renegade had "abandoned all moral constraints to pursue a licentious, lawless life, which physically and mentally transformed him into little more than a savage" (252).

3. According to film studies critic Edward Buscombe (1996), one of the defining characteristics of the western film genre is that it is set on the frontier, which is portrayed as "the dividing line between white civilization and its opposite, 'savagery'" (286). This struggle between civilization and savagery is the main conflict of the traditional western film, and the endings frequently celebrate the "triumph" of civilization, even if some also lament the supposedly necessary losses of Indigenous lives and cultures (286).

4. "Arikara" is the term used throughout the film and in much of the history of this time period. However, "Sahnish," meaning "the original people from whom all other tribes sprang," is the term used among the community to refer to themselves and the preferred term of identification (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, 2023). Accordingly, I use "Sahnish," the preferred term, throughout this article.

5. In an interview with *Script* magazine, the original screenwriter for the film, Mark L. Smith, states that Iñárritu was heavily involved in the rewriting of *The Revenant* and initiated and had the final say on many of the significant plot changes from what appears in Punke's novel and in the historical record. Smith notes that Iñárritu "added personal thematic aspects that meant a lot to him... [such as] the clash of cultures between the Native Americans and the trappers." The biggest change, however, according to Smith, had to do with Glass's son. In

the original screenplay, Glass's son dies before the film begins, and in the novel, Glass does not have a son.

6. An "unorganized" territory means that it had no territorial government that functioned systematically on a day-to-day basis. See Hubbard (2014, chapter 5) for a history and discussion of the evolution of geopolitical boundaries of the territories and states that would eventually come to form the United States of America.

7. See Dolin (2010, chapters 11 and 12) and Meinig (1993, chapter 4) for more information on the complexity of the negotiation over the border between Canada and the United States as well as the rights for traders and settlers to move across national borders.

8. For example, this potential freedom remained unrealized for the "hired trapper," who was paid a set wage and outfitted by the fur company but in return had to bring as many pelts as possible to his employer, thereby remaining essentially an indentured servant to the fur-trapping companies for whom he worked (Dolin, 2010, 227). Even those who were not hired trappers found it difficult to get ahead, as those who were outfitted by the fur companies but who did not receive a wage from them were often forced to sell their pelts solely to that company and at a price set by the company (227). Those truly "free" trappers, who outfitted themselves and enjoyed complete freedom to trap wherever they wanted and sell the pelts wherever and to whomever they desired, often struggled to make a living as a trapper as well. At the "rendezvous," a yearly gathering organized by the fur companies during which time the fur trappers could sell their pelts and buy goods, trappers were often enticed into spending far more on whiskey, women, and goods sold at exorbitantly inflated prices set by the fur companies than they could make selling their pelts, thereby locking many men into a system of debt (226–29).

9. See Nester (2001) for more detailed history of the confrontation and the significance of the Arikara War as the first significant military confrontation between the U.S. military and a Western Plains Indigenous community.

10. See Yellow Bird (2017, 390–91) and Krause (2018, 370–72) for a discussion of problematic Euro-centric framing of the Sahnish as "hostile" by both whites from that time period as well as more contemporary white historians.

11. It should be noted that even very biased sources seemed to agree that the Sahnish attack on the fur traders was not a complete surprise to the fur trappers (as depicted in the film), as interactions had been tense even before this battle. See Krause (2018, 368–70) for a discussion of this uncertainty regarding the cause of the conflict in Euro-American, ethnocentric histories of the conflict and for a discussion of how even more contemporary historians and anthropologists have disregarded Sahnish sources and relied on biased, unreliable, and ethnocentric Euro-American sources for their understanding of the causes of the conflict between Ashley's outfit and the Sahnish.

12. Historians and anthropologists agree that a man in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company (Glass's group in the film) most likely did indeed provoke the attack through some sort of sexual wrongdoing or misunderstanding with a Sahnish woman. Krause explains that "the most probable immediate cause [of the conflict] was, as the Arikara claim, a misunderstanding of the custom of wife lending as a form of hospitality" (368). This is supported by other anthropologists and

historians, such as Nester (2001, 140–41), as well as by the Sahnish themselves (Yellow Bird, 2017, 386). There may have been other factors contributing to the conflict as well (see Nester, 2001, 135–40).

13. See also Meinig (1993, 71) for a brief discussion of the importance of the rendezvous system.

14. For example, see Goetzmann's (1966) discussion of mountain men as "expectant capitalists" (106–8).

15. See Dolin (2010, chapter 14) for further discussion of the devastation of the beaver population in the U.S. West during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

16. For more on the complex relationships of power and cultural and economic exchange that accompanied marriages between Europeans and Indigenous women (or women of mixed Indigenous and European heritage), see Van Kirk (1980, 28–52).

17. The Métis community was formed in large part through the commingling of whites and Indigenous communities, forming their own new and unique community and culture. As Michel Hogue (2015) explains, Métis "were marked by their distinctive language, dress, artistic traditions, and religious practices, by their occupational identities as key players in the fur and provisions trade, and by their expansive kinship networks" (3–4). While the Métis played a key role in the fur trade and represent many of the ways in which the fur trade brought diverse communities together, the film does not represent this community in the film.

18. As Ens and Sawchuk (2015) further explain, Indigenous women played a key role in the development and establishment of the fur trade industry and, through intermarriage, in their own changing Indigenous communities: "Fur traders wintering in the Indian country found that marriage to an Indian woman not only cemented trade ties, but also provided the trader with a much-needed source of labour. The Indian woman familiarized the fur trader with the customs and language of her tribe and performed important domestic tasks, such as providing him with moccasins, snowshoes, canoes, dressed furs, and food. In return, the Indian woman increased her prestige, as she became a source of technology and goods for her band" (44–45).

19. As historian William H. Goetzmann (1966) succinctly explained, "The triumph of the American fur trade was thus self-consciously seen as the triumph of American enterprise itself, and with it automatically came settlement, and, it was assumed, sooner or later—and this was important—the dominion of free economic and political institutions" (108).

20. Fur trappers themselves were also largely understood as disposable bodies. Dolin (2010), for example, notes the astonishing death rates in this profession (252).

21. *21 Grams* and *Babel* were produced by independent film companies but distributed through specialty houses belonging to major Hollywood studios. *21 Grams* was distributed by Focus Features, which is owned by Universal Pictures. *Babel* was distributed by Paramount Vantage, a label of Paramount Pictures. In addition, both star major Hollywood actors, including Sean Penn, Naomi Watts, Brad Pitt, and Cate Blanchett.

22. See Noble's (2005, 93–94) brief discussion of this phenomenon. See also García Canclini (1997), which similarly laments the potential collapse of

regional Latin American film but also discusses the transnational aspects and potentials of twenty-first-century Latin American film.

23. See Lincoln (2016).

24. *The Revenant* has largely been understood by film critics in the United States, for example, as an engagement with or attempt to revitalize the western. For examples of criticism of the film as a western, see Lawrenson (2016), Zacharek (2016), or Murray (2016).

25. Many film critics would also argue that even the more traditional Hollywood western has always been more complex than is often assumed. For example, see Carter (2014, 4–6) for a discussion of the complexity of the western and the difficulties and dangers in trying to classify westerns into certain categories (“classical,” “revisionist,” etc.).

26. Prats (2002) explores the invisibility of the “Indian” in “Indian western” films. Indian westerns, he argues, “keep the Indian all but invisible, yet it must still ‘present’ him somehow—and with a purpose. It makes him *present* so that it may render him *absent*. Moreover, the conqueror must produce an Other whose destruction is not only assured but justified. The Indian’s absence is inevitable, foregone” (2, emphasis in the original).

27. A frontier western relates the “mythical narrative that portrays the historical frontier in the United States as the birthplace of American exceptionalism and superiority (Anderson, 1995, 19). Dolores Tierney (2018) also has an interesting reading of the film as a revisionist western, arguing that it “takes a revisionist position towards the history of the American West” by highlighting the imperialistic dimensions of “western expansion” (164).

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The Racialization of the Student-Athlete

Joseph Darda

Ivory Christian didn't feel like a student. The star middle linebacker for the 1988 Permian High School football team of Odessa, Texas, which Buzz Bissinger immortalized in the book *Friday Night Lights*, arrived on the campus of Texas Christian University with an athletic scholarship and plans to major in business. The only member of his high school class to earn a coveted Division I football scholarship, Christian quickly rose up the TCU depth chart in his first year, making big plays off the bench against Texas A&M before earning starts against Southern Mississippi and North Texas rival Southern Methodist. He had proven himself on the field, but when Bissinger checked in on him at the end of his first semester, Christian expressed misgivings about his place on the overwhelmingly white Fort Worth campus, 300 miles east of his West Texas hometown. The first person in his Black working-class family to attend college, he stood out. "When he looked around the campus the only blacks he saw were athletes, and sports seemed to be their only reason for being at the school," Bissinger wrote of his post-book interview with Christian. "And sometimes, it often felt as if he wasn't playing football so much as working at it, getting up every day at six to make study hall, then going to practices and meetings from two in the afternoon to six-thirty in the evening."¹

Bissinger had portrayed Christian as the most "ambivalent" of the Permian High stars. The introspective linebacker didn't buy into the rah-rah atmosphere surrounding the team he co-captained. "Let the

other players dream their foolish dreams about getting recruited by a big-time school," he thought.² Christian didn't fantasize about playing in the NFL. He wanted to be a Baptist pastor, having converted—after dreaming of a "tiny light" at the end of a long, narrow tunnel—early in high school. Christian swore off alcohol. He never cursed. He preached at Rose of Sharon Missionary Baptist, his pastor introducing him as "the reverend Ivory Christian." Bissinger often noticed him reading the Bible at his locker before games and at halftime. Ahead of his senior season at Permian, Christian contemplated quitting football. He worried that it conflicted with his faith and with his desire to one day earn a doctorate in theology. He dreamed of congregants addressing him as "Dr. Christian." He consulted his pastor, who told him to stick with the sport. "If playing football can get you to college, if playing football can get you an education, then play football," the pastor said.³ Christian took his advice, and TCU came calling.

Christian never earned a degree in business or a doctorate in theology. He never became the pastor of the largest Baptist church in California, as he had once imagined his future. He hurt his knee in his sophomore season and dropped to third string. He and his position coach butted heads and, fed up with sitting on the bench, he quit. Two decades earlier, the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) had made athletic scholarships contingent on continuing participation, so Christian, whose father drove a truck for a living, lost his scholarship and had to leave TCU.⁴ (Athletic scholarships had also, since their formal inception in 1956, excluded recipients from need-based aid.)⁵ He eventually earned an associate's degree at Odessa College, but the irony wasn't lost on Christian that college football hadn't facilitated but undermined his education.⁶ The campus culture and the structure of his scholarship—the structure of all athletic scholarships—sent him the message that he didn't belong, that he didn't entirely deserve to be there. His services no longer needed on the football field, the university showed him the door.

Most readers of *Friday Night Lights* or fans of the 2004 film adaptation remember not the ambivalence of Ivory Christian but the tragedy of Boobie Miles, the star running back of the Permian Panthers who, due to a knee injury, never played for one of the premier college programs that had aggressively recruited him as a rising senior. Gregarious and fearless on the field, Miles, who had spent time in a foster home before his uncle took him in, had received interest from, among others, LSU, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, and UCLA. Texas A&M had sent him twenty-three separate letters praising his play and selling him on a future in College Station. When his leg got caught underneath him at a preseason scrimmage and another player fell on it, he came away limping. He had, he would later learn, torn his ACL. Bissinger observed

student managers removing Miles's pads for him, stripping him of "all the accoutrements" that made him "look a little like Robo Cop" on the field until he "looked like what he was—an eighteen-year-old kid who was scared to death."⁷ When the director Peter Berg adapted the book, he elevated that drama further with a scene in which the injured Miles cries on his uncle's shoulder after clearing out his locker: "Now what we gonna do? I can't do nothing else but play football."⁸ The rapper Big K.R.I.T. wrote a song titled "Hometown Hero" about Miles. Numerous professional football players, including current Carolina Panthers running back Miles Sanders, have been nicknamed "Boobie" after him. "Of all the themes raised in the book," Bissinger later acknowledged, "the tragedy of Boobie Miles is the most important, and the most enduring, one."⁹

Christian's experience at TCU raises questions about the "tragedy" of Miles's career. What constitutes the tragedy? That Miles didn't get to join his teammate in a system that would have enticed him with the privileges of a four-year education and yet simultaneously denied him those privileges? If Bissinger had written a college sequel to *Friday Night Lights*, it would have been the tragedy not of Boobie Miles but of Ivory Christian, not the player who didn't make it but the one who did.

College sports have long functioned to mark the difference between being on campus and belonging there. At TCU, Christian could see the difference. He was there, sure. He was enrolled. He was celebrated even. But he also felt like he'd been handed not a membership but a guest pass. For the first fifty years of its history, the NCAA enforced the principle of amateurism, a principle borrowed from the British tradition of the sporting gentleman who competed for moral edification and nothing more. Instituted at the height of Jim Crow, amateurism primarily functioned to police the class composition of the white student body. Any excessively gifted or competitive athlete could not be a gentleman. Any working-class student was suspected of being a recruited athlete—a hired hand, a ringer. In 1956, the NCAA formally established the athletic scholarship under the banner of the "student-athlete." Introduced amid the mass integration of football and basketball, the concept of the student-athlete primarily functioned to police the racial composition of the integrating student body. Any scholarship athlete was suspected of being academically unqualified. Any Black student was assumed to be a scholarship athlete. For a time, southern universities used athletic scholarships to keep their football and basketball squads white by recruiting the best white athletes from the North. Then they, like their northern peers, used them to dictate the terms of a slow, uneven integration.

Looking around TCU's tree-lined, buff-brick campus, Christian wondered whether he felt out of place as a Black student among white classmates or as a student-athlete among nonathletes. In the public

imagination, the two identities had, over the preceding decades, blurred. (White student-athletes at predominantly white universities could, we might say, pass as nonathletes.) College sports offered then, and offer now, a way of talking about class, race, gender, and belonging on campus without disturbing our faith in educational merit and the inequalities it justifies. A broader historical framework than that typically offered in accounts of labor exploitation in college sports is necessary to appreciate the flexible racialization of the student-athlete so that, as conservatives and liberals unite in questioning athlete admissions, we might better understand whose interests, whose educations, are at stake this time and the next. It may be Ivory Christian's, and it may not.

Since the civil rights era, sociologists of sport have sought to temper sports industry propaganda. Sports partisans are fond of citing Martin Luther King's congratulatory remarks to Jackie Robinson on the occasion of his 1962 induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame: "He was a sit-inner before the sit-ins, a freedom rider before the freedom rides."¹⁰ Sports are, for them, always leading the way toward a better, brighter, more just American future. It is perhaps for this reason that sociologists have forcefully argued that sports are not exceptional, that they simply reflect their social contexts. Tired of hearing endlessly repeated stories of racial "breakthroughs," Harry Edwards insisted that sports were not "a rose flourishing in the middle of a wasteland" but "part and parcel of that wasteland."¹¹ In setting out his influential "Program for a Sociology of Sport," Pierre Bourdieu reminded us that "the space of sports is not a self-contained universe."¹² For Billy Hawkins, more recently, the Black college athlete is best understood as living in the shadow of slavery, hoeing the modern equivalent of "cotton and tobacco fields," now in helmet and pads.¹³ Edwards, Bourdieu, Hawkins, and other sociologists want the study of sports to be more, well, sociological. Sports are, for some, a cure; for others, a symptom. But they can also—as the formative, post-civil rights stretch from the late 1960s to the early 1990s demonstrates—play a role in constituting and stabilizing the racial order. They can, as Ben Carrington argues, reproduce race.¹⁴ We ought to, as the historian Brenda Elsey suggests, approach them as "'what really happens' rather than as a byproduct of something else."¹⁵

Athletic racialization can be difficult to see because sports mostly operate at the mediating level of the organization or institution, not the interpersonal level (of the sports partisan) or the state level (of the sociologist of race). It is organizations, constituting and constituted by racial processes, that, the critical race theorist Victor Ray argues, "magnify the power and depth of racial projects and are a primary terrain of racial contestation."¹⁶ They make and fortify racial structure and ideology, binding one to the other. The NCAA, the athletic conference, and the university itself are prime examples of what Ray calls "racialized organizations." Taken

from an organizational perspective, sports are something less than a cure and something more than a symptom. They are a pivotal pathway of racialization. They distribute resources along racial lines (and sometimes move and make those lines) and then justify that distribution. Just ask the student-athlete. Just ask Ivory Christian.

When Bissinger visited Christian in Odessa in 2015, he discovered that the former football star, now in his mid-forties, maintained a small shrine to his playing days at Permian High, including a framed photograph of himself from Bissinger's book, seated on the bench and looking out at the field, his helmet off and sweat running down his face. Nowhere in the house did he find evidence of Christian's brief college career.

"That's it?" Christian asked Bissinger, when the author stood to leave.

"That's it."¹⁷

Amateurs, Student-Athletes, and Dumb Jocks

TCU recruited Ivory Christian as a student-athlete, a variation on the founding ideal of the NCAA: the amateur. Formed in 1906 in response to public alarm over injuries and on-field deaths in college football, the NCAA, then the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, rapidly reorganized itself around the principle of amateurism and a commitment to the level playing field. At the fourth annual meeting of the association, in 1909, R. Tait McKenzie, a professor of physical education at the University of Pennsylvania, took it upon himself to provide a "Chronicle of the Amateur Spirit" for the assembled university presidents, athletic directors, and coaches. He told the story of the rise of athletics in ancient Greece, which, in his version of events, culminated and collapsed in the Roman era with the arrival of "a class of useless professional athletes hippodroming about the country, an unathletic nation, and a degraded sport." Professionalism had corrupted Roman athletics, and perhaps even brought down the Roman Empire, and the association must not, McKenzie counseled, let the fate of the ancients befall the modern campus. It must "restore the sport to those for whom it was designed, the regular student body."¹⁸ It could not have hired hands hippodroming among the better classes.

The football powerhouses of the time, including Penn, nodded in agreement and then, with the support of deep-pocketed boosters, continued recruiting athletes to campus. Since the first Harvard-Yale boat race in 1852, college athletes have received "financial favors," the sports historian Ronald Smith writes. College athletics have "never been truly amateur."¹⁹ R. Tait McKenzie could preach against the perils of professionalism, but his association had no regulatory power and no budget. It subscribed to the principle of "home rule," calling on universities and colleges to regulate themselves, which meant that

some did and most—the schools that wanted to win games and alumni contributions—did not.

The NCAA didn't attempt to overturn home rule until 1948, when, enjoying its first revenue from the new national collegiate basketball tournament, it adopted "principles for the conduct of intercollegiate athletics" or, as the association branded them, the "sanity codes." The Southeastern Conference had authorized the awarding of full athletic scholarships in 1935, and the Big Ten, which didn't openly allow athletic scholarships, protested, raising concerns not about amateurism but about its member schools' ability to compete against a semiprofessionalized Alabama or LSU. The sanity codes required that universities admit athletes on the same basis as other students, placed restrictions on off-campus recruiting, limited aid to tuition and fees, and prohibited booster clubs and other external agencies from assisting athletes. The sanity codes didn't last. When seven schools (the "sinful seven") refused to comply, the NCAA leadership couldn't muster the votes to ban them, and the sanity codes died.

Into that regulatory vacuum stepped Walter Byers, a thirty-year-old former sportswriter whom the NCAA hired in 1951 as its first full-time executive director. Byers, difficult to miss in toupee and cowboy boots, knew what he was up against. "To say we were the police is a large exaggeration," he later wrote. "Our task more closely resembled that of study hall monitors maintaining some semblance of order within a rambunctious college family."²⁰ But Byers recognized the opportunity in scandal. When the defending national champion University of Kentucky basketball team got caught in a point-shaving scheme, the new NCAA head assembled an ad hoc infractions board and hit Kentucky with a one-year ban. It was, Byers later admitted, a bluff. The NCAA didn't have the authority to penalize the university. But the UK administration accepted the ban, against legendary coach Adolph Rupp's objection, and Byers had his mandate.

Byers served as the executive director of the NCAA until his retirement in 1988, as TCU recruited middle linebacker Ivory Christian out of Odessa, Texas. He made his most lasting contribution to college athletics in 1956, when he subtly shifted the NCAA's philosophy from the ideal of the amateur to the responsibilities of the student-athlete. In 1950, Congress introduced the Unrelated Business Income Tax, targeting tax-exempt organizations (churches, universities) that engaged in side hustles unrelated to their tax-exempt purpose. Did a college football team constitute an educational or a commercial enterprise? Did it deserve tax-exempt status? In 1955, the widow of Ray Dennison, a right guard for the Fort Lewis A&M Aggies of Durango, Colorado, who had died in an on-field collision, filed a claim for death benefits with the Colorado Industrial Commission under the Workmen's Compensation

Act. Had Dennison been an employee of the college? Had he died on the job? Byers had his answers ready. "We crafted the term *student-athlete*, and soon it was embedded in all NCAA rules and interpretations as a mandated substitute for such words as players and athletes," he wrote in his 1995 memoir *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, a kind of mea culpa for the sins of the NCAA under his leadership.²¹ Byers knew that he had to fend off the "dreaded notion" of the college athlete as an employee; it jeopardized the NCAA's tax-exempt status and emerging profit model.²² But he also couldn't afford to minimize the athlete's participation in intercollegiate sports to a mere extracurricular activity. The college athlete had to be something less than an employee and something more than a student at play. A year after Dennison's death, Byers amended the NCAA constitution, reorganizing it around the concept of the student-athlete, which allowed athletic departments to emphasize the student's responsibilities one day and the athlete's the next.²³ College football teams retained their tax-exempt status. Dennison's widow lost her case. Universities and colleges couldn't offer scholarships to promising football or basketball players, but they could offer them to prospective student-athletes, who, until 1956, hadn't existed.²⁴

Although Byers, with taxes and state industrial commissions on his mind, invented the term *student-athlete* to situate sports within the academic sphere of the university, it formalized the college athlete's status on campus as a not-quite student. Whereas the sanity codes had attempted to minimize the difference between athletes and nonathletes, the reforms of 1956 had the opposite effect, sanctioning the athletic scholarship at a national level and establishing a separate path to admission. Gail Bederman, Ben Carrington, and other historians and sociologists of race and gender trace the idea of the dumb jock to the career of Jack Johnson, whose reign as heavyweight boxing champion from 1908 to 1915 threatened white men's sense of racial superiority and led them to disassociate intellectual from physical ability.²⁵ If a man could fight, as Johnson could, then he couldn't think. If he could think, then he couldn't fight. White men attributed to themselves the "manly" qualities of rationality and sophistication and attributed to white immigrant and Black men, whom they often fetishized, the "masculine" qualities of aggression and virility. The invention of the student-athlete, who arrived on campus through an alternative admissions process that privileged physicality, gave institutional form to the idea of the dumb jock. It set the athlete at the periphery of the university, a celebrated symbol of the school but not quite of it—a strong body, an empty mind.

But the student-athlete was not, at first, Black—quite the opposite. The greatest resistance to the sanity codes and other attempts to rein in athletic scholarships came from the Southern, Southwest, and Southeastern Conferences, which remained segregated at the birth of

the student-athlete in 1956. Unwilling to recruit Black players in their own states, southern teams used athletic scholarships to incentivize the best white players in the North to leave home and suit up for the Alabama Crimson Tide, the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets, and the TCU Horned Frogs. "The South wanted to use the grant-in-aid to plunder the rich resources of white athletes in other parts of the country," Byers acknowledged.²⁶ The implementation of the sanity codes led the three major southern conferences to consider seceding from the NCAA, a threat that has drawn more than a few comparisons to the Battle of Fort Sumter.²⁷ The southern conferences welcomed the NCAA's decision to allow athletic scholarships in 1956 because it allowed them to remain competitive with a gradually integrating Big Ten without opening their doors to the Black players who had made neighboring HBCU squads some of the best in the nation. The invention of the student-athlete appeased the South and perhaps slowed the integration of college athletics. If TCU professors assumed that Ivory Christian played football because of his race, as Christian suspected they did, their predecessors in the 1950s might have assumed the same thing about a big-shouldered white student from out of state—another mercenary, they might have guessed, brought in from the North to throw, catch, tackle, and uphold Jim Crow.

But not everyone embraced the shift from amateurism to the code of the student-athlete. In 1945, the presidents of eight private East Coast universities and colleges signed an agreement requiring that football players "be truly representative of the student body and not composed of a group of specially recruited and trained athletes."²⁸ In 1952, they signed a second agreement eliminating spring football practice and banning participation in end-of-year bowl games. A third agreement in 1954, which formally established the Ivy League, reaffirmed the presidents' opposition to athletic scholarships and extended the restrictions to all intercollegiate sports. Ivy League institutions "do not award athletic scholarships or subscribe to the concept of the 'student athlete,'" Robert Goheen, the president of Princeton, later wrote in a memo to the NCAA, protesting the implementation of separate admissions standards for recruited athletes.²⁹ Ivy League performance in football and basketball fell off a cliff after the presidents' agreements of the 1940s and 1950s. Although critics pointed out that the league prohibited athletic scholarships in name only, with some member institutions continuing to operate as if they belonged to the Big Ten or SEC, the formation of the Ivy League from a declared opposition to athletic scholarships reinforced the idea that academics and big-time sports did not mix, that to succeed at one meant giving up the other. Princeton did not enroll jocks because jocks by definition lacked the intelligence and scholarly priorities of

the Princeton man. Many have pushed back on this bifurcation. The philosopher Grant Farred situates Muhammad Ali and other athletes within the tradition of what he calls, adapting Antonio Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, the "vernacular intellectual."³⁰ But the image of the dumb jock has persisted.

Southern universities used the concept of the student-athlete to keep their athletic departments white. Eastern universities used it to maintain their elite status. The term functioned as a dividing line between the deserving and the undeserving. Who belonged on the football field? In the classroom? Who could wear the crimson of Alabama? Of Harvard? Scouring the country for light-skinned talent, Alabama enrolled white jocks, elevating them to something more than students. Harvard declared them dumb, nonstudents, trespassers on campus. Then Black athletes arrived in Tuscaloosa.

The Revolt against the Black Athlete

If the term *student-athlete* cast the white jock as a not-quite student, it situated the Black football or basketball player as something less. A Black athlete, Harry Edwards wrote in his field-making 1969 study *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, "finds that his equals are not his white teammates, but the basketballs, baseballs, jockey straps, and other forms of property and equipment—all of which, like him, are important and vital to sports." The recruitment of Black athletes to predominantly white institutions in the 1960s did not constitute justice but, he concluded, "the modern-day equivalent of the slave trade."³¹ Edwards discovered this himself at San Jose State College, where, one of just a few dozen Black students on a campus of more than 24,000, he starred at center for the basketball team and broke the school record in the discus. But sports also, he realized, offered a lever of power. In 1967, Edwards, then a lecturer at his alma mater, led a boycott of the opening football game, which San Jose State had contracted to host under a \$12,000 breach of contract clause.³² The college was forced to cancel the game, and Edwards formed, with San Jose State sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the Olympic Project for Human Rights.

What Edwards declared a revolt Walter Byers considered a riot. "Higher education's critical shortcomings of today," he wrote in his 1995 memoir, "took root during the riots of the 1960s, when more than a few college presidents surrendered academic and campus social standards to the lowest common denominator among the faculties and students." The NCAA and athletic departments perceived the radicalization of the Black athlete as an existential threat to college sports. Although he denied that his resistance to athlete demands in the late 1960s had anything to do with the changing racial profile of the top programs ("I

do not believe now, anymore than I did then, that the renewed search in the 1960s for an academic standard was the work of white racists"), Byers couldn't argue with the timeline.³³ The second that predominantly white institutions sought the services of more than one or two Black athletes at a time, the NCAA rewrote the rulebook and redefined the student-athlete. It transformed student-athletes into what the sports historian Michael Oriard calls "athlete-students" and what Harry Edwards described as athletic department property.³⁴

The NCAA launched a revolt against the Black athlete as Edwards challenged the San Jose State administration and then the International Olympic Committee. From 1956 to the mid-1960s, when intercollegiate athletics remained the almost exclusive province of white men, the athletic scholarship held greater value than most academic scholarships. The NCAA barred universities from canceling a recruited athlete's scholarship for failure to participate, and many schools guaranteed four years of comped tuition and housing. The white jock might have carried a stigma in the classroom, but he also didn't have to be a jock. He could quit without penalty. Then, in 1967, the year that the first Black player suited up for an SEC football team, the NCAA decided to devalue the athletic scholarship. At the annual convention at the Sheraton-Lincoln Hotel in Houston, Dick Clausen, the athletic director of the University of Arizona and a former football coach, took the floor to introduce a "new interpretation" of NCAA policy that would allow universities to cancel athletic scholarships when athletes quit the teams that recruited them or "misrepresented" their abilities (meaning hid an injury). Clausen's interpretation, which gave the lie to the fiction of the student-athlete, passed with a vote of 214 to 13.³⁵ Student-athletes thereafter had to continually earn their place at a university on the field. Clausen didn't acknowledge race as a factor in the decision. Neither did Byers, who later admitted that "the stepped-up college recruitment of black athletes was a sensitive issue that we preferred not to discuss in public."³⁶ But, after 1967, many of the vaunted perks of the athletic scholarship belonged to a white past.

The next year, Jack Olsen, a senior editor at *Sports Illustrated* and the author of an authorized biography of Muhammad Ali, punctured the myth of the benevolent athletic department in his five-part series "The Black Athlete." "The cliché that sports has been good to the Negro has been accepted by black and white, liberal and conservative, intellectual and red-neck," Olsen wrote. But his investigation detailed a constrained, isolating college experience almost tyrannically governed by the white coach, who served as the Black athlete's academic adviser, dorm monitor, and stingy benefactor. When he asked one former college football player what his athletic career had given him, the man answered, "Well, let's see

... At the University of New Mexico I got a sweater. At Cameron State College in Oklahoma I got a blanket. At Southwestern State I got a jacket and a blanket."³⁷ Olsen concluded that, far from the leading edge of the struggle to integrate national life, as some athletic directors and coaches described them, intercollegiate sports had conscripted Black athletic labor without altering their white "ethics and folkways."³⁸

Olsen's series set off alarm bells at the NCAA for how it showcased what he called, a year before Edwards's iconic book, "a revolt by the black athlete against the framework and attitudes of American sport" and for the sheer number of Black athletes, current and former, willing to speak with him on the record and criticize administrators and coaches. Football players at the University of Washington told Olsen that what their coaches called "The Husky Way" amounted to "The White Way."³⁹ Black players at the University of Kansas detailed a system of position stacking that ensured that white teammates didn't have to compete for their starting positions. One athlete shared a letter in which his coach had described his behavior as an "animal response" and informed him, "I am giving you a scholarship and that is more than plenty, and you still have to prove your worth."⁴⁰ The athletic directors and coaches who sat for interviews with Olsen, reciting the usual clichés about not seeing color and instilling an ethic of hard work and perseverance in young men, appeared out of touch at best when quoted alongside athletes declaring them bullies and bigots.

The NCAA, alarmed at the open defiance of its authority, took action. At the 1969 convention in downtown Los Angeles, David Swank, legal counsel to the University of Oklahoma, proposed an additional revision to the association's financial aid policy allowing athletic departments to terminate the scholarships of athletes who committed acts of "manifest disobedience."⁴¹ Charles Henry of historically Black Grambling College, first to speak, asked, "Is this legislation the result of articles that appeared in *Sports Illustrated* last summer?" No one answered his question. He then asked whether an athlete's choice to wear an afro could constitute disobedience under the proposed rule change. Could athletes lose their scholarships for a haircut? (They could, it turned out, as subsequent events at Oregon State showed.) Henry continued: "If the coaches told these boys not to be interviewed, is this freedom of speech under the First Amendment or construed to be disruptive action under the interpretation that we are asked to adopt?"⁴² Swank responded by suggesting that an athlete could always go to the NCAA Council (to himself, that is) to report abuse. The chairman of the Athletic Council at the University of Louisville interjected that it disappointed him to see the discussion "degenerate in terms of color and race," and, with Henry outnumbered, Swank's measure passed with a two-thirds majority.⁴³ The

New York Times headline the next day stated plainly what Swank and his allies refused to admit: "College Athletes Who Protest to Face Loss of Financial Aid."⁴⁴

After a sit-in at the University of Texas at El Paso in 1967, an athletic department administrator had suggested limiting the recruitment of Black athletes to one or two "stars like O. J. Simpson," as Olsen recounted—an unrealistic plan if UTEP had any hope of remaining competitive in football, basketball, and track and field.⁴⁵ After 1969, the UTEP athletic department didn't have to forfeit Black talent to curb Black protest. The NCAA had furnished it with the tools to run a counterinsurgency.

Coaches undertook their own media offensive that year. They found a sympathetic ear with Olsen's colleague at *Sports Illustrated* John Underwood, who, in the three-part series "The Desperate Coach," depicted them as besieged defenders of self-sacrifice and order on campuses overrun by hippies and Black radicals. "In the privacy of their offices, over breakfast in strange towns, wherever two or three coaches get together, they talk about The Problem," Underwood wrote.⁴⁶ A basketball coach at a small college in Pittsburgh whose players had demanded his firing explained, "It probably originated as a black problem, but today it's not race. It's all types."⁴⁷ The integration of college sports had caused a wider athlete rebellion—The Problem, as Underwood called it—and now even formerly compliant white football and basketball players considered the rule-setting coach a kind of "neo-fascistic racist."⁴⁸ One coach after another bemoaned how their players diverged from the masculine ideal of their youth, contrasting the clean-shaven white stars of another time with the sideburned Black stars now giving them hell. The new, integrated generation lacked restraint, the coaches said, telling Underwood how their players refused to cut their hair, wear a tie, and listen to them. One thought his indulged in sex and drugs ("half of them have probably tried pot").⁴⁹ Black athletes had, the desperate coach suggested, given their white teammates a lesson in gender and sexual unruliness, an unruliness that needed to be reined in, policed. The future of sports as the great teacher of men depended on it. Most of the coaches who spoke to Underwood didn't want their name used in the story, Underwood reported, for fear of reprisal from their athletes. Something, he thought, had to be done.

Underwood didn't buy the myth of the amateur. He recognized college football and basketball players as semi-professionals and thought they should behave accordingly, respecting the authority of the coach as employees did their employers, albeit without pay. He applauded the NCAA policy revision allowing athletic departments to cut the scholarships of rebellious athletes but also wondered whether it could possibly be enough. Out of fear for their jobs, coaches now bent

to what Underwood called “the Irritational Act, the Superdemander, the Double Standard.”⁵⁰ Could a coach still be a coach? he wondered. Had university administrations that had once backed the uncompromising coach surrendered to the revolt of the Black athlete? Underwood’s series encouraged readers to wax nostalgic for a time when athletes played by the rules, never complained, and put team before self—a nostalgia that, as the critical race studies scholar David Leonard observes, equates leadership, resilience, and self-sacrifice with whiteness, with the all-white teams of leather helmets and Jim Crow.⁵¹ College sports weren’t what they used to be, the coaches said, letting Underwood’s readers fill in the rest.

Yet, for all their color-blind posturing, NCAA leaders, athletic directors, and coaches welcomed a certain version of athletic racial politics. The revolt of the Black athlete had risen alongside and inspired a wider athletic revolution of women, athletes with disabilities, and student antiwar protestors. This gathering storm stirred fears that Black male athletes alone could not. It represented a demand not just for racial justice in sports but for a total remaking of sporting culture. Challenges to the politics of race were less threatening to these men, as the sociologist Douglas Hartmann puts it, than challenges to the politics of sports.⁵² A revolt of the Black athlete they could, with occasional affirmations of equality and inclusion, weather; a revolt of all athletes would be more difficult to contain and absorb. To ward off the latter, the former would have to be tamped down.

The NCAA’s 1969 rule change still required ADs and coaches to accuse athletes of “manifest disobedience” to terminate their scholarships—a move that few, as Underwood noted in his series, wanted to risk making. In 1973, the association made things easier on Underwood’s desperate coach. At the convention at the Palmer House in Chicago’s Loop, Wade Stinson, the athletic director of the University of Kansas, proposed limiting all scholarships to one-year renewable grants. Other ADs had introduced similar proposals as far back as 1965 without success. Allowing athletic departments that kind of discretion, the NCAA knew, exposed the system to accusations of pay-for-play professionalism. But Stinson’s proposal won approval in Chicago without effort—no discussion, no opposition, a quick show of hands.⁵³ “It took less than 90 seconds,” Byers remembered years later, condemning the policy change, a policy change he supported at the time, as a “major extension of NCAA cartel authority.”⁵⁴ It might have lent greater authority to the NCAA, but mostly it empowered member athletic departments to get rid of athletes without having to cut them. They could thereafter just not renew the scholarship of an athlete who had ceased to produce yards or buckets or who had spoken out against racial injustice in the locker

room or on campus. The student-athlete, for a brief time the beneficiary of a full ride, now had to play, couldn't speak, and still faced the threat of dismissal at the end of every year. Byers might have "crafted" the term *student-athlete* in 1956, but the NCAA reinvented it amid the revolt of the Black athlete.

The racialization of the student-athlete as Black wildly misrepresented the demographics of the athletic department, where white athletes continued to predominate in non-revenue-producing sports. Transcripts of the policy debates at the NCAA conventions of the late 1960s and early 1970s make it clear that everyone was talking about a relatively narrow segment of college athletes. ADs were not especially concerned about tennis players quitting their squads or speaking out against university administrations. Some white athletes in non-revenue-producing sports got caught in the web of new restrictive policies, but most benefited from the racial shift, enjoying some of the perks of the money brought in by the football and basketball teams—better training facilities and dining plans, nicer gear, more comfortable travel accommodations—while being held up as the true ideal of the scholar-athlete. Ray, the critical race theorist, describes racialized organizations as structures that limit or amplify the agency of different groups through unequal access to institutional resources.⁵⁵ As the NCAA and the athletic department moved to limit the agency of Black athletes, by limiting the security of their scholarships and their freedom of speech, they amplified the agency of white middle- and upper-class athletes in non-revenue-producing sports by redirecting the resources produced by increasingly Black football and basketball squads to them. The student-athlete had been, for a short time, raced white. With the racialization of the student-athlete as Black, white college athletes were freed to return to an earlier model of campus sporting culture. They became, once again, amateurs—the opposite of the professionalized student-athlete. They received additional privileges without needing them. They competed for moral edification, for the love of the game, for the sport of it. The second racialization of the student-athlete had restored the white amateur.

Reform Talk

The revolt of the Black athlete was one among many. Women, athletes with disabilities, and student antiwar protestors had undertaken their own, related campaigns to transform sports on campus. The Bay Area activist Jack Scott hoped that, collectively, these independent revolts might coalesce into a revolution, into what he called "athletics for athletes." Scott, a friend of Harry Edwards, with whom he founded the Oakland-based Institute for the Study of Sport, discerned two

dominant traditions in college athletics: the Spartan tradition of sports as preparation for military service and the British tradition of sports as a means of developing character. He envisioned another way, a sporting culture defined by the needs of athletes rather than administrators, coaches, and fans. It wasn't entirely clear what this would look like. "A program of athletics for athletes cannot be outlined in specific detail," he wrote in his 1971 book *The Athletic Revolution*, "for the one thing it would not be is a preconceived system established in advance by a single individual."⁵⁶ His program would be democratic and highly malleable so that each new generation of athletes might make of it what they want. The NCAA, athletic conferences, and university administrations didn't want a revolution. They didn't even particularly want reform. What they were willing to offer was a discussion of possible reform.

After the NCAA moved to a one-year renewable scholarship model, George Hanford, the executive vice president of the College Board, secured grants from the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation to research the possibility of a study of college sports—not a study itself but, as the title of his 1974 report announced, *An Inquiry into the Need for and Feasibility of a National Study of Intercollegiate Athletics*. (He found a study needed and feasible.) Hanford, who had earned all-American honors in lacrosse at Harvard, questioned whom amateurism served. "The erstwhile coal mining sons of Pennsylvania and their modern counterparts from the black ghettos of urban America or the ice rinks of Canada can well ask," he wrote, "whether amateurism, a privilege of the well-to-do, is consistent with the principle of equality of opportunity."⁵⁷ He was not persuaded by the NCAA's magnanimous posture toward Black athletes and enlisted Roscoe Brown, a professor of education at New York University and a former Tuskegee airman, to lead a task force on issues facing Black athletes at predominantly white and historically Black colleges and universities. Brown's task force found "considerable evidence" of anti-Black discrimination in athletic departments, including "inadequate education programs, lack of tutoring, failure of Black athletes to receive degrees in similar proportion to their white counterparts, inequitable treatment concerning financial aid, summer jobs, and jobs for wives, position stacking, playing quotas, social isolation, limitations on dress, political expression, and dating practice"—and more. In the final report, Hanford directed readers to the appendix containing the task force's findings: "Appendix D should be read in its entirety!"⁵⁸ But the American Council on Education, which published the report, circulated it without the appendices, in the interest, it said, of "timeliness and economy."⁵⁹ Few ever read Brown's paper, and neither the Carnegie Corporation nor the ACE agreed to fund the study Hanford proposed.

In his appendix, Brown addressed the imminent expansion of women's athletics and wondered aloud, as few others had, what it might mean in "the special case of Black women." Would the "more general women's campaign," he asked, meet their needs?⁶⁰ In 1972, Congress had enacted Title IX, which prohibited gender-based discrimination in all educational programs and activities receiving federal assistance, including—as much as the NCAA and most university athletic departments didn't want to admit it—sports. The *Washington Post* declared it a "revolution."⁶¹ Walter Byers called it the "possible doom of intercollegiate sports."⁶² Supporters of the law quoted the sociologist David Riesman, who had observed that "the road to the board room leads through the locker room."⁶³ More opportunities for women in sports could, they hoped, lead to more opportunities in the workplace. But Title IX, as the historian Amira Rose Davis and others have documented, served some more than others. The implementation of the law undercut women's athletic programs at historically Black colleges and universities, including the celebrated track and field squads at Tennessee State and the Tuskegee Institute, which had long awarded athletic scholarships to women. Predominantly white institutions recruited the best Black athletes to their campuses while, as Brown had feared, leaving Black administrators and coaches behind.⁶⁴ Once "the torchbearers for women's sports," in Davis's words, HBCUs struggled to compete, and Black women athletes who enrolled at PWIs encountered athletic departments that had, in the wake of integration, hollowed out the athletic scholarship and placed constraints on athletes' speech.⁶⁵ The revolt against the Black athlete had stymied their revolution.

The architects of Title IX borrowed the law's framework from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, using the struggle against racial discrimination as a model for combatting gender discrimination. Some had, in fact, proposed simply amending Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to include "sex" rather than enacting separate legislation.⁶⁶ The analogy to race left an imprint on the law and cropped up everywhere in conversations around it. Of the 1973 tennis match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, one educator remarked, "I think women felt about Billie Jean beating Riggs the way blacks felt after Joe Louis beat Jim Braddock."⁶⁷ The analogy facilitated Title IX, situating the law in a tradition of legible discrimination and redress, but also obscured how gender interacted with race, suggesting that the former was "like" the latter, not entangled with it. If the NCAA policy changes of the time imagined the Black athlete as male, the implementation of Title IX imagined the female athlete as white.

The analogy to the plight of Black male athletes also helped set women's sports on a path in which the commercial success of men's football and basketball programs was the aspiration and the measure of

progress. Whether this was the best path for women's college sports—compelling cases have been made for and against—it had the undoubted effect of pitting men's programs against women's in a seemingly zero-sum struggle for resources and exposure. The NCAA, conferences, universities, and their corporate and media partners built a multi-billion-dollar industry by taking full advantage of the uncompensated labor of football and basketball players, most of them young Black men. Flush with new cash, athletic departments grew to include more non-revenue-producing sports, many of them women's—all increasingly embracing a commercial model that made them more expensive to operate but rarely profitable. The result: major-conference athletic departments made a lot of money but spent even more. Calls to pay men's football and basketball teams ran up against calls to operate women's teams more like them, and all demands faced the reality of athletic department budgets that had, in true university fashion, tipped into the red.

This was (and still is) thorny and complicated terrain, so it isn't surprising that most reformers chose to address big-time men's sports in isolation, arguing that the pursuit of profit in football and basketball contradicted the mission of higher education. But no university administration wanted to forfeit surging athletic department revenue or cross football-obsessed alumni, so most reform efforts got redirected from questions of capital and labor to the punishment of athletes for poor academic performance. After abandoning Hanford's inquiry in 1974, the American Council on Education got back into the reform game in 1982, forming an ad hoc committee on intercollegiate athletics that, under the leadership of the presidents of Harvard and the University of North Carolina, proposed stricter academic requirements for the admission of first-year athletes, including the establishment of minimum SAT and ACT test scores. The NCAA adopted the committee's recommendations as Proposition 48 at the 1983 convention and scheduled it for implementation in 1986.

Representatives from HBCUs, whom the ACE had not consulted in developing the proposal, balked, calling the move "discriminatory and patently racist."⁶⁸ One HBCU president observed that establishing "arbitrary SAT and ACT cutoff scores" targeted "low-income and minority-group families" that already faced high barriers to entry.⁶⁹ The chancellor of North Carolina A&T State put it even more directly: "The bottom line ultimately is apparently one of the color of a majority of the kids who take the floor as a 'final four' or the omnipotency of the combatants in the Cotton Bowl."⁷⁰ Did Prop 48 constitute an effort to reform the structure of college sports, he seemed to ask, or to control the young Black people dominating the most high-profile events?

The NCAA met the criticism with a study. In 1987, it commissioned the American Institutes for Research to compile a series of reports,

including *The Experiences of Black Intercollegiate Athletes at NCAA Division I Institutions*, which found, to no one's surprise, that Black students were underrepresented on DI campuses (4 percent) and in non-revenue-producing sports (8 percent) but vastly overrepresented in football and men's and women's basketball. It found that 82 percent of Black football and basketball players considered earning a college degree "of the greatest importance" but that many arrived less prepared and with fewer resources than their white classmates and that most faced greater demands on their time from coaches than their white teammates.⁷¹ The report also acknowledged, five years too late, "why some have raised concerns about Proposition 48": the new SAT and ACT minimums affected more than half of all Black football and basketball players.⁷² White athletes in non-revenue-producing sports, who were far more likely to come from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, went mostly unaffected by Prop 48, and their superior academic performance seemed to entitle them, in the eyes of administrators and the public, to the spoils of their revenue-producing peers' commercial success. The white rower received kudos and a new boathouse.

The findings of the American Institutes of Research didn't stop the NCAA from further tightening the screws on Black athletes. Prop 48 had allowed "partial qualifiers" (athletes who met either the grade-point average or the test-score minimum but not both) to enter college on athletic scholarship but not compete as first-year students. Prop 42, which the NCAA adopted at the 1989 convention, eliminated scholarships for partial qualifiers. Georgetown basketball coach John Thompson, one of the few major-conference Black head coaches at the time, walked off the floor before a game in protest. "What Proposition 42 did was accept [the] inequality [in the education system] and compound it," he later said. "By imposing a centralized test on kids who did not receive a centralized education, the NCAA judged disadvantaged kids by the results of the privileged."⁷³ Under Prop 42, Boobie Miles, had he not injured his knee before the Permian Panthers 1988 season, wouldn't have been able to accept a scholarship from one of the DI programs recruiting him. Miles was a partial qualifier. After Thompson's protest, the NCAA backed down on Prop 42, but it continued to redirect the blame for one ugly scandal after another from itself and university administrations to academically struggling athletes. Reforming academic standards for working-class and poor athletes saved it from reforming much of anything else.

The NCAA introduced Props 42 and 48 on the heels of the association's 1981 decision to add women's championships. Byers and the NCAA had lobbied Congress to exclude men's football and basketball from the jurisdiction of Title IX and, when it failed to persuade Washington, fought the implementation of the law in court. For years, the executive director had described Title IX in interviews as potentially ruinous to

college athletics. In 1981, he reversed course, calling the association's decision to host women's championships "a historical commitment by the NCAA to enhance opportunities for women."⁷⁴ An authorized history of the organization published that year suggested that the NCAA had been advocating for gender equality in sports ahead of the 1972 law ("the first notable action [by the NCAA toward gender equality] actually takes place *before* passage of Title IX").⁷⁵ Perhaps Byers had read the writing on the wall. Or perhaps he worried about competition from the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, which had governed women's sports in the NCAA's absence (and which folded in 1984). But the association also found some utility in the law, using it to fend off demands that it invest resources in facilitating the academic success of Black athletes and working-class and poor athletes who, without a full athletic scholarship, had nothing to fall back on. We can't assist Black and brown male athletes, it could claim, because of the cost of women's programs; we can't build women's programs because of the needs of Black and brown male athletes. Byers had discovered, or stumbled upon, the strategy that Scott had warned against in *The Athletic Revolution*: he had isolated one revolt from another, leaving them "fighting among themselves" for supposedly maxed-out resources.⁷⁶ Whatever his motivation, the NCAA executive director found that the language of crisis, of the possible doom of intercollegiate sports, kept costs down.

The Criminalization of the Student-Athlete

Byers had plenty of help identifying crises. In 1986, University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias, the second overall pick in that year's NBA draft, died of a cocaine overdose in his dormitory. Maryland and other universities responded with increased policing on campus, policing that identified Black athletes as an "at-risk" population corrupting university life.⁷⁷ "The offenses committed by athletes against people and property cast a shadow across American campuses," *Sports Illustrated* declared.⁷⁸ "One does not have the civil rights to take drugs," Jesse Jackson said in a news conference in Washington, DC, after Bias's death. Jackson called on universities and colleges to step up their drug enforcement policies, to take "responsibility in this war against drugs."⁷⁹

The media response to Bias's death framed the Black athlete as not just out of place in higher education but a menace to the groves of academe. Occurring at the height of the Reagan administration's war on drugs, his death attracted calls for greater drug enforcement on college campuses. Secretary of Education William Bennett urged college presidents to adopt hardline antidrug policies. Have academics "become so 'sophisticated,'" he asked in a speech to the Heritage Foundation, "that they have forgotten their elementary duties and responsibilities[?]"⁸⁰ Nancy Reagan contributed an op-ed to the *Washington Post* in which

she blamed “naive” university leaders who “deny that students could get any kind of drug they wanted on campus” for Bias’s death. The first lady, maintaining the color-blind posture of her husband’s administration, did not mention Bias’s race, and the paper ran her op-ed under the too-perfect title “The Need for Intolerance.”⁸¹ A University of Maryland task force recommended randomized drug testing for athletes. The response to Bias’s death built support for the passage of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which enacted new mandatory minimums for possession charges and encouraged the public, as the historian Theresa Runstedtler writes, to imagine the Black college athlete as representing a “racialized threat of contamination,” a vector of illicit substances and behavior, on the white campus.⁸²

Politicians described Bias not as Black but as a young man with all the potential in the world. It wasn’t his race, they seemed to say, but something about the way he embodied his gender that had led him to overdose that night in the UMD dorms. In her op-ed, Reagan offered two cautionary tales: Bias and Don Rogers, a safety for the Cleveland Browns who had also died of a cocaine overdose that summer. Bias and Rogers, two young Black men, had failed to cultivate the “personal, moral responsibility” that might have, the first lady suggested, saved them.⁸³ Another, more constrained form of masculinity—the masculinity of her husband, the movie cowboy—was nowhere to be found on the basketball courts and football fields of 1986. Reagan and her allies in the war on drugs contributed to the gendered racialization of Black athletes that cast Black men and women as excessively masculine, an excess that accounted for and discounted their success and that necessitated bodily policing. When the psychologist Joanna Bunker Rohrbaugh asked in 1979, “How can a woman be feminine and a ‘jock’?,” she observed that female athletes faced greater gender stigma in basketball and track and field than in swimming and gymnastics.⁸⁴ She didn’t acknowledge that the former sports had higher rates of participation among Black women and girls. How can a woman be feminine and a jock? Through a contrast with Black women, who, like Bias and Rogers, found their gender, as an instrument of racialization, constantly on trial in the movement to reform college sports.

If conservatives found in Bias’s death a case for new draconian drug laws, liberals discovered in it a need for educational reform. Bias, it turned out, had failed three courses that spring and withdrawn from two more. Four of his teammates had flunked multiple classes after the end of the basketball season. The *New York Times* declared it “The Scandal behind the Tragedy.” “The present corrupt standards,” the editorial board wrote, “can ruin young lives as quickly as cocaine.”⁸⁵ The *San Francisco Chronicle* described drugs as “the immediate cause of the tragedy” and a failure to educate as the deeper, hidden culprit in the overdose death.⁸⁶

A *Washington Post* reporter called it, more optimistically, a “golden opportunity” for reform.⁸⁷ Conservatives wanted to police Black athletes’ bodies, subjecting them to mandatory drug tests. Liberals wanted to police their academic preparedness and progress, bringing into question whether Black athletes belonged on campus at all. Everyone could agree that Len Bias had died of too much freedom.

Calls for reform got even louder in 1987, when the NCAA hit Southern Methodist with the first-ever “death penalty,” suspending the program for an entire season, after multiple recruiting violations. With the cooperation of university trustees and coaches, including two-time Texas governor Bill Clements, boosters had operated a slush fund of some \$400,000 with which they had incentivized recruits and paid active players. The SMU squad that Ivory Christian faced in his first season, hobbled from a long absence and the loss of every scholarship player from the 1986 team, could barely compete, finishing 0–8 in conference play. News media, while eager to slam a big-name politician like Clements, mostly blamed athletes for prizing wins and pro contracts above classes and degrees. In an article titled “The Stench of College Sports,” the *New York Times* asked, “Why not let the athletes have their fun and glory? Because they are tainting not just amateurism but serious education.”⁸⁸ Reformers—conservatives and liberals, insiders and outsiders—blamed football and basketball players, the most visible representatives of college sports, for the corruption and poor academic performance of athletic departments, which, as Christian discovered at TCU, amounted to blaming athletes for their own exploitation.

Bias’s death coupled with the player payment scandal at SMU and a flood of recruiting violations at other major programs led the Knight Foundation to form its high-profile Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. The commission included fourteen current and former university presidents and four corporate CEOs. The Knight Foundation almost never failed to describe it in press releases as a “blue-ribbon” panel. After two years and \$3 million, the commission delivered its 1991 report *Keeping Faith with the Student-Athlete*, in which it recommended greater presidential control of intercollegiate athletics to achieve three goals: academic integrity, financial integrity, and independent certification (the “one-plus-three” model).⁸⁹ Although the report directed a few words of criticism at the corporate structure of the contemporary athletic department—suggesting a need for caps on coaches’ salaries, season length, and practice time—it didn’t venture far from the usual reform talk. The commission defined what it, echoing John Underwood, called “the problem” as a growing gulf between big-time football and basketball and the academic life of the university. Football and basketball, the only majority Black sports, had to be brought into line, it suggested, praising the controversial Prop 48 as having “served intercollegiate athletics well.”

"It is time to build on and extend its success," the report concluded.⁹⁰ The Knight Commission earned glowing reviews from the press, which scarcely mentioned the incredible self-interest on display (university presidents advocating for more presidential power) or questioned the binary opposition it assumed between commercial, corrupt sports (raced Black in the public imagination) and noncommercial, pure academe (raced white).

The commission ultimately served the NCAA well by providing another center of gravity, and institutional authority, in the reform debate. The "confederated" structure of the NCAA has always been, as Hartmann observes, one of its strengths, allowing it to avoid taking full responsibility for systemic failures while partially absorbing oppositional forces at the conference and university levels.⁹¹ The commission's report, which the NCAA neither wholly embraced nor rejected, gave the impression that the college sports establishment, understood by most as synonymous with the NCAA, had begun to take action. The association got to be institution and agitator.

Though dominated by university administrators, the Knight Commission did include one man from Washington: second-term congressman Tom McMillen, who had played eleven seasons in the NBA before retiring to run for office in Maryland's 4th District and who, at six-foot-eleven, remains the tallest person to have ever served in Congress. A moderate Democrat, McMillen joined four other ex-professional athletes in Congress: Bill Bradley, Jim Bunning, Jack Kemp, and Mo Udall. *Sports Illustrated* nicknamed them "The Jock Caucus" in a 1987 group profile, which included a photo of the lawmakers standing in a row on the stairs of the Capitol Building, wearing suits and ties, their hands in their pockets.⁹² Five white men, three of them former basketball players, the Jock Caucus didn't look anything like the athletic departments and professional leagues of the day, but that didn't stop them from weighing in on the state of sports on campus.

McMillen, a Rhodes Scholar out of the University of Maryland, where he had played under Len Bias's future coach Lefty Driesell, published a book timed to his 1992 reelection campaign in which he presented his own college career as the good old days and a model for what the Knight Commission recommendations might achieve if implemented. "Unfortunately, not everyone is learning the same beneficial lessons [about teamwork, discipline, and desire] that I did," McMillen wrote in *Out of Bounds*, calling on university leaders to "rescue sports from their corrupting influences and return the games to their proper perspective."⁹³ The book, which did not get McMillen reelected, included an image of him seated on a bench at Oxford with a sweater over his shoulders and a book open in his lap. His point was hard to miss: he had done college right; the basketball stars of 1992, most of them Black, many of them

poor—not that McMillen, the son of a dentist, considered the difference meaningful—were doing it wrong. He blamed Black college athletes for harboring “dangerously delusional” dreams of professional sports careers at higher rates than their white teammates and defenders of “marginal students” who, in fighting test-score minimums, acted as “apologists for failure” and surrendered to “the mediocrity of our present system.”⁹⁴ Where, he and the Knight Foundation asked, had the Tom McMillens, their philosophy books in hand on some pastoral campus, gone?

The NCAA thought it might find them, the ideal amateurs, in women’s sports. In 1992, it appointed a fifteen-member task force to make recommendations for achieving “gender equity” in college athletics. A survey had found that, twenty years after Title IX, men’s teams still received 70 percent of athletic scholarships, 77 percent of athletic department operating budgets, and 83 percent of recruiting funds. The task force defined the goal—gender equity—as a future in which “the participants in both men’s and women’s sports programs would accept as fair and equitable the overall program of the other gender.” The final report of the Gender Equity Task Force recommended that the NCAA invest in what it called “emerging sports.” It advised that member universities and colleges be incentivized to increase programming in and scholarships for archery, badminton, bowling, crew, ice hockey, squash, synchronized swimming, team handball, and water polo.⁹⁵ The report included a bullet-pointed list of criteria that the task force had used in formulating its recommendations. The seventh bullet point read simply, “Consider racial equity.”⁹⁶ If the demographics of the sports for which it advocated are any indication, the task force considered racial equity and then decided against it. When the Women’s Sports Foundation later released the report *Title IX and Race in Intercollegiate Sport*, it reached the uncritical conclusion that, while “there is a pattern of racial inequality in most NCAA sports,” Title IX had raised all boats.⁹⁷ Invest in gender equity, and resources will trickle down from the archery range and the squash court, where the amateur spirit of the upper class was alive and well.

Sportswriters gave little attention to women’s sports, but they investigated the men’s football and basketball scandals of the 1980s with a self-seriousness new to the sports media business. “The whole tenor of sports journalism changed,” broadcaster Verne Lundquist, who reported on SMU for the Dallas ABC affiliate, remembered of the time.⁹⁸ A younger generation of sportswriters decided that they’d rather be Woodward and Bernstein than Grantland Rice, and college sports offered plenty of material for muckraking. Rick Telander, who played college football at Northwestern and joined *Sports Illustrated* in 1973, at the height of the Watergate scandal, epitomized this new investigative

approach. His reporting on the labor exploitation, unfettered spending, and physical abuse of major college football programs culminated in 1989 with *The Hundred Yard Lie*, a “diatribe,” he admitted, against the sport he had once played.⁹⁹ Telander recognized that, while the individual missteps of star athletes might make better headlines, the real story lay in the class distinction inherent in the concept of the student-athlete, which structured the entire enterprise. Telander’s solution: spin off college football and basketball programs into age-group pro leagues. NCAA reformers and the Knight Commission proposed raising academic standards; Telander proposed eliminating academics and simply paying players for their labor. The trouble with the NCAA and the Knight Commission’s proposal was that it entailed excluding some of the most visible Black students from campus. The trouble with Telander’s was that it also entailed removing some of the most visible Black students from campus, even if with a paycheck as compensation. The NCAA, the Knight Commission, and Telander assume that the athletic department can be reformed in isolation from the university, but it can’t. It shapes public perceptions not just about who should profit from athletic labor but also who deserves a spot in the classroom.¹⁰⁰

Far from damaging the NCAA or big-money athletic departments, the reform talk of the 1980s might have saved them from actual reform by giving the wider public the sense that someone must be doing something to change the system. “The NCAA has traveled a long road on gender equity,” the association could claim in an official history a few years later, “and a similar distance on minority issues.”¹⁰¹ What else could have come of so many studies, commissions, and investigations?

At TCU, Ivory Christian encountered twenty years of reform that had transformed the student-athlete from a white northern on a southern campus to a Black student on a white campus. Christian is now in his fifties, and the student-athlete appears ready for another turn. In 2019, federal prosecutors charged fifty people, including Hollywood celebrities and business leaders, in connection with a far-reaching scheme to place the children of wealthy parents at some of the top universities and colleges in the country. The investigation, which the Justice Department called Operation Varsity Blues, revealed that some of the parents, with the help of an unscrupulous college preparatory entrepreneur named Rick Singer, had manipulated the system by which institutions use alternative criteria for the admission of recruited athletes. Singer had, in some cases, photoshopped the faces of applicants onto images of actual prep athletes. The sports tended to be those associated with the wealthy and the white (sailing, tennis, water polo), giving the nation a different image of who inhabits the contemporary athletic department than that encountered on ESPN.

Singer described athlete admissions as a “side door” to an elite education. “There is a front door of getting in where a student just does it on their own, and then there’s a back door where people go to institutional advancement and make large donations,” he explained to prosecutors. Singer sought another option and found one, he said, in sports.¹⁰² Public outrage at first concentrated on Singer and his clients but then gradually shifted to that athletic side door. Why does it exist? And who does it serve? It’s a question we’ve asked before. It’s a question through which higher education has long distinguished between being on campus and belonging there.

We should not be surprised, then, that as the Supreme Court prepared to strike down affirmative action in higher education, public scrutiny settled on Harvard’s admission of ALDC students—recruited athletes, legacies, dean’s interest list (often donors’ children), and children of faculty and staff—with an emphasis on an “A” that now summons the image of a blue-blooded squash player. The college athlete, long raced Black in the public imagination has, for some, turned white again. Perhaps this is a positive development—a move toward recognizing the actual composition and beneficiaries of the athletic department. But the timing of this seeming revelation about the actual racial and class profile of the student-athlete should make us wonder. It arrives packaged with anti-affirmative action lawsuits and at the very moment that some college athletes, many of them young men and women of color, are finally—thanks to name, image, and likeness deals—reaping some of the financial rewards of their labor. The longer history of college sports suggest that we should be wary of whose interests are being expressed in this new and evolving racialization of the student-athlete.

Notes

1. H. G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*, 1st ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990), 349.

2. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 1st ed., 10.

3. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 1st ed., 114, 115, 116.

4. See Howard W. Chudacoff, *Changing the Playbook: How Power, Profit, and Politics Transformed College Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 107–10; National Collegiate Athletic Association, *Proceedings of the 61st Annual Convention of the National Collegiate Athletic Association* (Kansas City, MO: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1967); and Michael Oriard, *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 133–40.

5. The sociologists Allen Sack and Ellen Staurowsky observe that “need-based aid would have allowed athletes to place educational priorities over those of sports without fear of losing financial aid.” It would have allowed Christian to complete his education at TCU after leaving the team. *College Athletes for Hire: The Evolution and Legacy of the NCAA’s Amateur Myth* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 84.

6. H. G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Hachette, 2015), 403–5.
7. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 1st ed., 57.
8. *Friday Night Lights*, directed by Peter Berg (Universal Pictures, 2004).
9. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 25th anniversary ed., 394.
10. Martin Luther King Jr., “Hall of Famer,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 4, 1962.
11. Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 34.
12. Pierre Bourdieu, “Program for a Sociology of Sport,” trans. John MacAloon and Alan D. Savage, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5, no. 2 (1988): 155.
13. Billy Hawkins, *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 14.
14. See Ben Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), 3.
15. Brenda Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 1.
16. Victor Ray, “A Theory of Racialized Organizations,” *American Sociological Review* 84, no. 1 (2019): 30.
17. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 25th anniversary ed., 405.
18. R. Tait McKenzie, “The Chronicle of the Amateur Spirit,” in *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Convention of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States* (New York: Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, 1909), 50, 54.
19. Ronald A. Smith, *The Myth of the Amateur: A History of College Athletic Scholarships* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 1.
20. Walter Byers, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct: Exploiting College Athletes*, with Charles Hammer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 1.
21. Byers, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, 69.
22. Byers, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, 69.
23. In his widely discussed 2011 *Atlantic* article “The Shame of College Sports,” the journalist Taylor Branch describes *student-athlete* as “deliberately ambiguous” and as the NCAA’s “signature term, repeated constantly in and out of courtrooms.” “The Shame of College Sports,” *Atlantic*, October 2011, 88. See also National Collegiate Athletic Association, Constitution of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, in *1955–1956 Yearbook of the National Collegiate Athletic Association* (Kansas City, MO: National Collegiate Athletic Association), 1956, 3–13.
24. For more on the political pressures facing Byers and the NCAA in the 1950s, see Smith, *Myth of the Amateur*, 147–59.
25. See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8–10, 41–42; and Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics*, 76–82.
26. Byers, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, 68.
27. See, for example, Sack and Staurowsky, *College Athletes for Hire*, 45.

28. "Ivy Group Agreement," November 20, 1945, Alfred Whitney Griswold Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, box 38, folder 340.
29. Robert F. Goheen to Everett D. Barnes and the Council of the NCAA, memorandum, April 13, 1966, Records of the President's Office: William H. Elkins, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Maryland Libraries, box 566, "National Collegiate Athletics Association, General File, 1966" folder.
30. Grant Farred, *What's My Name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 22.
31. Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 16, 13.
32. Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 44.
33. Byers, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, 149, 157.
34. Oriard, *Bowled Over*, 130.
35. National Collegiate Athletic Association, *Proceedings of the 61st Annual Convention*, 121, 122. Unconcerned with upholding the principle of amateurism, Clausen admitted that his interpretation of the phrase "voluntarily renders himself ineligible" derived from that applied to professional contracts (122).
36. Byers, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, 155.
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40. Quoted in Olsen, "Pride and Prejudice," 24.
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49. Underwood, "Desperate Coach," 76.
50. John Underwood, "Concessions—and Lies," *Sports Illustrated*, September 8, 1969, 31.
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52. See Douglas Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 205.
53. See National Collegiate Athletic Association, *Proceedings of the 67th Annual Convention of the National Collegiate Athletic Association* (Shawnee Mission, KS: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1973), 123.

54. Byers, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, 164.
55. See Ray, "Theory of Racialized Organizations," 35.
56. Jack Scott, *The Athletic Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1971), 213.
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59. Roger W. Heyns, cover letter to *An Inquiry into the Need for and Feasibility of a National Study of Intercollegiate Athletics* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1974).
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Introduction to AMSJ Blog Essays "What's in a Name?"

Nishani Frazier

Since August of last year, *Dialogues: Blog of the American Studies Journal* has published original short-form essays that comment on culture, politics, academia, archives, technology, and much more. Several pieces speak to this specific moment via one of our themed series: On Teaching, On Writing, Protest Poetics, and Artist Scholar. Contributions have come from educators, researchers, librarians, archivists, artists, practitioners of digital humanities and social sciences, and community activists; each presenting historically specific yet expansive dialogues informed by the multi-pronged issues that continue to be central to American studies. As part of AMSJ's 2023 summer issue, the Editors are happy to include three blog essays reflecting the theme of the power of naming and identity.

Naming is an important practice in the African American community and in African American Studies. As a people denied the right to name oneself during enslavement, the personal freedom of identifying oneself and one's family was an incredible statement of the power of self-assertion. Naming practices in the Black community changed again during the 1960s as a mechanism of asserting connections, genealogy, and memory links to Africa and African culture. The arrival of Black Studies concretized Black epistemological practices of naming into a discipline in which naming played a pivotal role in asserting counter narratives, outlining historical experiences, and defining the ways and means by which to understand the Black experience.

As a Black studies scholar, naming is one of the most important practices in the Black community, and it's quickly recognized when seen through the experiences and eyes of other vulnerable communities. These three essays from the *American Studies Journal Blog* are varied perspectives on the act of naming: naming as a contentious power struggle over memorialized public spaces; naming as an assertion of identity within information sciences; and a bodacious critique of academia's formulaic script in the name of a community and a people.

Adrienne Chudzinski writes in "Confronting Uncomfortable History: Emmett Till and Contested Memorials on the American Landscape," that the remaining historical structure connected to Emmett Till's lynching is left in a deliberate state of decay. Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy, was murdered in Money Mississippi by Roy Bryant. His killing was precipitated by an incident in the Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market, in which Bryant's wife wrongly accused Till of harassment. Till's lynching is widely argued to be a key precipitator of the American civil rights movement. However, this major historical edifice is in a state of decay due to conflict between heritage groups who wish to name the location as the source for Till's death, and its owners who refuse to acknowledge the building and instead received funds to preserve the next door "old-timey" gas station. Chudzinski argues that the fight is not just about two buildings, but naming the things we hold valuable among our nation's memorial landscape.

Martin Gonzalez struggles not with the naming of sites, but with academia's ambivalence to scholars who write in the name of their community. "'Let Knowledge Serve the City': *Restrictions Apply" argues that the university focus on the journal as the appropriate mechanism for scholarly endeavors, negatively impacts both his scholarship and his obligations to serve the community. Working in and writing about community spaces requires a different approach to scholarly writing, which the university struggles to comprehend. Gonzalez argues that not all intellectual production finds expression in peer-reviewed mediums. Most importantly, universities must avoid extraction from vulnerable communities that serve its purposes but not the people themselves. It is crucial to create academic works which allow the people we study to also participate and see themselves in the work we produce.

Margaret Breidenbaugh contends that the act of naming the library subject is an act of power. Libraries depend on catalog terminology to define objects, ideas, events, and peoples. However, queer communities struggle with the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), and its tendency to construct and name based on bias and anachronistic definitions. Breidenbaugh chronicles efforts to reorient categorization systems by activist librarians, in order to facilitate shared power between the library and queer communities to ensure that queer people can name themselves. The larger argument in "Queering the Library: Naming the

Subject Is an Act of Power,” is that queer librarians must challenge the LCSH system to ensure respectful representation of queer people. Collaboration is a necessary component to transform library catalogs into appropriate reflections of queer identity.

In sum, Chudzinski insists we struggle with a contentious of memorialization in an atmosphere where a community refuses to name a national shame. Or, does property possession endow the owner with the rights to bury the history? Gonzalez debates the dualism that drives scholars to question: must they serve the expectations of the university or the needs of his community? He persuasively argues, in the name of his community, against academic value systems and structures which hinder their accessibility and comprehension. Finally, Breidenbaugh posits that long held systems of categorization can to determine and define the subject. Instead, the subject, queer communities, must define and name their own identities.

These three pieces ask us to think deeply about our intellectual assumptions and embedded presumptions about space, scholarly responsibilities, and identification and identity. In multiple ways, these authors have challenged us to ask ourselves, what’s in a name?

And they answer,
the power to speak truth—about one’s space, one’s community, and
one’s self.

Confronting Uncomfortable History: Contested Memorials on the American Landscape

Adrienne Chudzinski

Americans are engaged in a persistent pathological debate over the nation's core values and identity. Though the Constitution espouses a commitment to the liberal ideals of freedom, democracy, and human equality, these principles never applied universally. From the United States' founding, national dialogue vacillated over the scale and scope of American citizenship. Many laud the ideals of freedom and equality, yet an equally vocal contingent believe these values are best protected through exclusionary laws and policies aimed at limiting civil and human rights. This contestation over American ideals and identity bleeds into a larger romantic narrative of the American people and their past—or more precisely, a mythology—that accentuates the extraordinary nature of the American nation and its belief in the liberal ideals of freedom and human equality.

However, this mythos becomes a public battle in contemporary politics as parents and politicians fight over the lessons that teachers may impart in their classrooms. Yet these power struggles over history education are not limited to classrooms or the halls of Congress—in fact, they are perhaps most visible or “invisible” on the nation's memorial landscape. The lynching of Emmett Till embodies the clearest contestation over U.S. memory and space—particularly because the story of his murder challenges patriotic notions of progress and equality. It recasts American idyllic notions of itself into a confrontation with the violent consequences of a deeply-entrenched racism that continues to plague the nation.

Memorials, at their most basic level, are a form of remembrance that remind the living of the past. Nevertheless, these towering statues and commemorative markers should not be mistaken for passive or static forms of remembrance. National monuments and memorials are inherently political as they serve as a physical reminder of, and testament to, a specific set of societal values—which may or may not embody those enshrined in the Constitution. To fully assess memorialization in the United States, it is also important to consider not only visible monuments but also, conspicuous absences on the landscape—people, places, or events that are shrouded in silence. Neglecting or muting the related narratives effectively preserves the mythos by obscuring the fact that national values and individual experiences often fail to align. The October 28, 2022 nation-wide release of Chionyne Chukwo's *Till* offered modern audiences an opportunity to confront this memorialized history in a cinematic setting. Nevertheless, the absence of a public monument in honor of the "sacrificial lamb" of the Civil Rights Movement is telling.

The crux of Till's story is set in Money, Mississippi and specifically, at the grocery store in which he allegedly made inappropriate remarks to Carolyn Bryant before her husband and brother-in-law kidnapped and murdered the Chicago teen. Though the site features an understated plaque that pays tribute to the history of the space, its memorialization is, nonetheless, mired in controversy.

In 1955, the town Money was home to Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market, a small shop run by Roy Bryant and his wife Carolyn. On August 24th of that year, Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old from Chicago, ventured into the store with his cousins and their friends to purchase candy and other small food items after working in the fields all day. Unaware, or perhaps, doubtful of the severe level of racial intolerance in the South, Till allegedly made inappropriate, flirtatious comments—perhaps even going as far as letting out a "wolf whistle"—directed at Carolyn while in the store. When her husband, Roy, heard about the incident several days later, he, his half-brother J.W. Milam, and quite probably several others, kidnapped Till from his uncle Moses Wright's home in the middle of the night. The men tortured Till for several hours before ultimately murdering him and dumping his body in the Tallahatchie river. In a case that made national headlines, Bryant and Milam were tried, and summarily acquitted for their crimes.

For many, the lynching of Emmett Till marked the start of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Nevertheless, it took over fifty years for the state of Mississippi to memorialize the teen. In May 2011, the Mississippi Development Authority announced plans to create the Mississippi Freedom Trail. Later that month, the state held a dedication ceremony at the first stop on the tour: Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market. Though the store now has a historical marker out front, the building has slowly deteriorated over time. In 2005, the Mississippi Heritage Trust placed Bryant's Grocery

store at the top of their list of the “10 Most Endangered Historic Places” in the state.¹ Now, all that remains is the bare skeleton of a building covered in overgrown vines.

Though there is much interest from various civil rights groups in preserving the former grocery store, all efforts to restore and memorialize the space have been thwarted by the current owners, siblings Annette Morgan, Harold Ray Tribble, and Martin Tribble. The family claims to be interested in preserving the historic site, but they are unwilling to start the restoration process or to sell the building for a fair price. Though the store—or more likely, the land it sits upon—is only worth a few thousand dollars, the family refuses to sell it for anything less than \$4 million—a startlingly high price for some, but a bargain compared to the \$40 million they originally wanted for the decrepit structure.²

Nevertheless, Harold Tribble maintains, “We want to restore it. . . It’s a part of history, and it’s about to fall down. We’ve got all the signs, the cash registers, the shelves.”³ While Bryant’s Grocery holds important symbolic meaning for many Americans, it also holds a special personal meaning to the Tribble siblings as their father, Ray, served on the jury of men that acquitted Bryant and Milam of Tills’ murder in 1955. Given this connection, it is certainly possible that the family has no desire to preserve the building and would indeed prefer it if the space—and along with it, their family’s connection to the vile crime—faded into oblivion.

Yet the family’s inaction continues to frustrate those who want to preserve the space. Sherron Wright, the great niece of Moses Wright, has characterized the Tribble family’s continued ownership of the property as “a hostage situation.” She explained, “They’re saying, ‘We’re going to hold this building hostage, and once it crumbles, it’s no good to nobody.’”⁴ President of the Emmett Till Justice Campaign, Alvin Sykes agrees. They are “holding history hostage,” he contends, “They are demanding a ransom that no one can afford, ensuring that one of the nation’s most important civil rights sites will soon lie in ruins.”⁵

Though the Mississippi Freedom Trail memorial plaque remains outside of the store, it was defaced in 2017 in a manner that covered, and thereby erased, its text and images. According to the Mississippi Development Authority, “The Emmett Till marker is the only Mississippi Freedom Trail marker damaged in the history of the trail.”⁶ Though this is the only Freedom Trail marker that has been the target of erasure and animosity, other memorial markers related to Till have suffered a similar fate.

In 2008, the Emmett Till Memorial Commission (ETMC) created the Tallahatchie Civil Rights Driving Tour, which features twelve sites associated with Till’s murder. Each stop on the tour is marked with a memorial sign that details its historical significance. Within months of its installation, the sign marking the “River Site,” where Till’s corpse was located, was stolen and later found in the river. The ETMC replaced the sign and

shortly thereafter, it “was riddled with 317 bullet holes.”⁷ The third marker captured national attention in 2019 when an image of three University of Mississippi students brandishing a shotgun and an AR-15 in front of the memorial sign was posted on social media.⁸ The ETMC took down the sign, which was marred by ten bullet holes, and replaced it with a new bullet-proof marker. The second “River Site” marker now resides at the National Museum of American History and was featured in a 2021 exhibit titled *Reckoning with Remembrance: History, Injustice, and the Murder of Emmett Till*.⁹ The Smithsonian’s willingness to accept and display this sign demonstrates the important function of memory and remembrance in the larger story of Till and the Black Freedom Struggle. For those wishing to erase Till’s story from the landscape, these commemorative signs and sites serve as inconvenient reminders of the national attention that accompanied his lynching and the incomplete struggle for racial equality.

Just as the national battle for racial justice and freedom is ongoing, so too is the fight for control over the memory and memorialization of Emmett Till. Perhaps this is why so many would like to see care and attention paid to the physical building in which Till’s devastating story ultimately began. Unfortunately for all those who seek memorialization of Till at Bryant’s Grocery, it is the right of the Tribble family to let the story fall into disarray as it is indeed private property.¹⁰ And while the family’s behavior in this case is aggravating (especially considering that they applied for, and received, a Mississippi Civil Rights Historic Sites grant to restore the gas station that is adjacent, but otherwise unrelated, to the grocery store), it is illustrative of larger problems of memorialization in a country plagued by contested national values.

Given persistent debates surrounding national ideals, and the level of discord about the types of stories that should be included in history books, it is unsurprising that the memorial landscape in the United States is controversial and chaotic. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, 377 Confederate memorials have been removed from public spaces in the United States.¹¹ Though Americans may debate the future of these discarded monuments, their removal from public view limits their influence on the national mythos of progress and unity. Expelling Confederate memorials without offering further interpretation or explanation at the site allows Americans to ignore the illiberal impulses that led to their erection in the first place.

Avoiding memorialization of Till in Money has an analogous function. On both the memorial landscape and in historical narratives, a constant tension exists between presence and absence; that which is included in contrast to that which is silenced, forgotten, or ignored. The national mythos relies on these lapses in order to contain or erase the most sordid actions and inclinations of the American people. In its rise, the mythos softened and silenced episodes of trauma and cruelty that threatened the

notion of American exceptionalism—narratives that exposed the United States' deeply embedded roots of violence and intolerance.

In 1955, Till's story made national headlines and startled many into action. With renewed attention from the film *Till* and recent efforts to locate and try the surviving perpetrators in this crime, it seemed it might have the potential to do so again. Unfortunately, one of the few remaining opportunities for justice in the Till case was lost with the death of Carolyn Bryant Donham in April 2023. Recall Bryant Donham's central role in the case as she accused Till of accosting and making such inappropriate remarks toward her that her husband and brother-in-law were spurred to murderous action. While only the men were tried for this crime, many have pointed to the pivotal part that the then Mrs. Bryant played, not only as a witness in court but also, by possibly identifying Till for the men on the evening of the abduction and lynching. For many, it is obvious that Carolyn Bryant Donham is implicated in Till's lynching. This is exacerbated by the fact that in an interview with historian Timothy B. Tyson, she recanted her testimony and admitted that she lied about her interaction with Till.¹² Several years after Tyson published his revelation in *The Blood of Emmett Till*, an unserved warrant for Carolyn Bryant's arrest in the 1955 murder investigation was found among old files in a courthouse in Leflore County, Mississippi.¹³ Demanding an arrest be made, activists looked in vain for Bryant Donham in North Carolina, her last known location. Upon her death, it was revealed that Bryant Donham had been living in Westlake, Louisiana.

The death of Carolyn Bryant Donham marked the final opportunity for justice in Till's lynching. And though her passing adds salt to the unhealed wounds surrounding his death, there is merit in reconsidering the larger narrative that features the evil actions of just a few key figures in this case. Far more people than Carolyn Bryant Donham, Roy Bryant, an J.W. Milam are responsible for Till's murder and the subsequent miscarriage of justice in his case. As Tyson points out, "What this narrative keeps us from seeing is the monstrous social order that cared nothing for the life of Emmett Till nor thousands more like him. Neither the federal government nor the government of Mississippi did anything to prevent or punish this murder. Condemning what Donham did is easier than confronting what America was — and is."¹⁴ Considering the contentious nature of remembrance of Till, this sentiment rings true. Though national museums enshrine relics from Till's death, including the casket in which he was buried, the public landscapes surrounding this case are marked by controversy and discord. From a dilapidated grocery store to bullet-riddled commemorative markers, public memory of Emmett Till is unsettled and incomplete. In order to resolve this tension, Americans must confront this uncomfortable narrative and the landscapes that accompany it, and restore them to the larger story of the nation's past.

Notes

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Queering the Library: Naming the Subject Is an Act of Power

Margaret Breidenbaugh



"We didn't know at the time that we were questioning our gender. We just knew that this felt right. There wasn't all this terminology, all this labeling—you know what I mean?"

Major

In her 1998 oral history interview, a Black transgender woman known as "Major" recounted her experience of 1950s "queen" culture in Chicago. The word "transgender" was not in common use until the 1970s, but Major's testimony demonstrates that queer people have long known that we do not conform to societal norms. (*A note on positionality: I say "we" because I identify as queer; I am a White, cisgender, pansexual, polyromantic person.*)

Major's testimony demonstrates a broader set of issues in the queer community: what do we call ourselves, what should others call us, and who decides which, if any, terms are authoritative? How do we as a society respond to changes in what terminology is acceptable? Many people are surprised to learn that the information profession also has a contentious history when it comes to what to call queer people.

Queer in the Library

Imagine you could travel back in time to look for resources about queer people in library catalogs. Until the late 1970s, if you wanted to find information about homosexuality, you would have to have used the search term "Sexual perversion." Prior to mid-2016, any library catalog searches for "asexuality" would only have led you to resources about asexual reproduction in plants. Queer or not, the central problem remains that no person wants to be pathologized as perverse or classified as non-human.

Why do we need appropriate library catalog terminology, and who comes up with it? The formal terms that librarians use to describe resources (e.g., books, films) are called subject headings, which collectively make up controlled vocabularies. The most widely used such vocabulary is LCSH, short for Library of Congress Subject Headings. First published in 1909, LCSH governs how users find information in library catalogs the world over, and no wonder: subject searches optimize the research phase by collocating all materials on a given subject. For example, a subject search for "structural engineering" retrieves electronic records for every item in a given catalog *about* structural engineering, even if the book is *titled* something seemingly unrelated like "A Bridge to Nowhere." But for all of its benefits, LCSH is a product of bias, rooted in time and place, rife with outdated, exclusionary terms. People are not bridges, and the fight for accurate and respectful representation of queer people in the library catalog is far from over.

Critical Cataloging Then and Now

The so-called critical cataloging movement emerged in the 1970s in direct response to problematic terminology in LCSH. Sanford Berman's *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Headings Concerning People* (1971), was foundational to this movement:

[The Library of Congress] list can only 'satisfy' parochial, jingoistic Europeans and North Americans, white-hued, at least nominally Christian (and preferably Protestant) in faith, comfortably situated in the middle- and higher-income brackets, largely domiciled in suburbia, fundamentally loyal to the Established Order, and heavily imbued with the transcendent, incomparable glory of Western civilization.

While Berman advocated for changes to formal knowledge organization systems like LCSH, calling out the biases and power belonging to catalogers in dominant cultures. Others took additional steps and created alternative systems such as the *Homosaurus* ("an international LGBTQ+ linked data vocabulary") to de-center cis- and heteronormativity in cataloging. Both approaches have value, and librarians working in alternative and formal systems should collaborate to improve queer representation in subject headings. In 2022, we created a community to do just that.

Collaborative Activism: The Gender and Sexuality SACO Funnel

In June 2022, during a virtual cataloging meeting, I heard Michelle Cronquist (she/her), Special Collections Cataloger at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Staci Ross (she/her), Cataloging/Metadata Librarian at the University of Pittsburgh, talk about co-chairing a group called the *African American SACO Funnel*. SACO stands for the *Subject Authority Cooperative Program*, a Library of Congress initiative that encourages catalogers to "funnel" their expertise into suggesting changes to LCSH. You do not have to pay anything to become a funnel, and any number of libraries may combine their resources, time, and energies into completely autonomous projects. As I listened to Cronquist and Ross talk about their successful petition to the Library of Congress to change "Blacks" to "Black people," I wondered if other historically marginalized groups had their own funnels. Maya Espersen (she/they), Cataloging Coordinator at Aurora (Colorado) Public Library, shared in this curiosity, noting in the meeting chat that there was not a queer funnel. I jumped into action.

Within two weeks, I had organized a virtual meeting of thirty-six attendees, and I began consulting with Cronquist, Violet Fox of the *Cataloging Lab*, *Homosaurus* Editorial Board Member B. M. Watson, and others about their work. Today our mailing list has grown to include some sixty librarians across Canada and the United States. Collectively we are the Gender and Sexuality SACO Funnel, and our co-chairs are myself, Espersen, and Adam

Our



ENTS

THE PLAYERS
by **James and Joyce Kilmer**
 7:30pm - 9:30pm
 Tickets: \$10 - \$15
 Reservations: 1-800-828-1188
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...and by the way, the only restaurant that supports the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Society is San Francisco

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University of Washington Libraries (2007). The Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, in consultation with other stakeholders, has developed a Queer Meta-Map. Current projects include a reproductive rights research project, which is a good ground for numerous

funnel proposals) and a proposal to change the dehumanizing heading "Gays" to the more humanizing "Gay people" (a massive undertaking affecting hundreds of subject headings).

Conclusion

Library subject headings are here for the foreseeable future, but it must reflect humanizing language that challenges the pathologizing of queer communities. Controlled vocabulary, while allowing users to identify multiple resources for one subject, reflects a monolithic, cis- and hetero-normative point of view. As long as LCSH dominates library catalogs, librarians interested in queer representation must collaborate across formal and alternative knowledge organization systems to advocate for corrections, deletions, and additions, keeping in mind that today's correction might be tomorrow's pejorative. The work is never finished, and we keep fighting.

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**"Let Knowledge Serve the City"
*Restrictions Apply**

Martín Alberto Gonzalez



Photo courtesy of Author

I am currently a professor at a university whose motto is “Let Knowledge Serve the City.” In fact, the university library has a fund specifically designated to pay for article processing publication charges for professors who want to publish open access scholarship (meaning available to readers at no cost). Ironically, my recent request for financial support to make my counterstory published as an open access article in a top-tier journal was denied because the university already pays a subscription fee to the journal that accepted my work. “It’s like double dipping,” a university librarian explained to me, unsolicitedly. To put it simply, we, as university affiliated personnel, get access to such journals through the university library database. But not everyone does. In other words, the *city* doesn’t. My family and friends do not have access. The Youth of Color and Communities of Color who I write my stories for do not have access. The same People of Color who have historically and systematically been excluded from higher education do not have access. This rejection reminded me of one my biggest critiques of academia—the *inaccessibility* of scholarly work. Such rejection was unsurprising because higher education is designed to not give access to knowledge to communities like my own.

I pride myself in producing research that is *accessible* to my city Oxnard, California—a predominantly low-income city filled with beautiful Brown people—and communities alike. What I mean by *accessible* is that my research, for the most part, is relatively easy to read, understand, comprehend, engage with, and more importantly, obtain. I do this by writing stories as research. Storytelling is my research method. For example, I interview Latinx students about their educational experiences dealing with racism, white supremacy, and other systems of oppression, and then I write stories using their responses. I write the stories like how I would speak to my family and friends I grew up with. So, best believe they are filled with jokes, music lyrics, food references, Spanish, y mucho mas. To keep it real, my stories be hittin’.

The reason why I write stories as research is because as a first-generation Xicano university student, I was required to read traditionally written research articles in my classes. These research articles were dense and inaccessible to me. I was unable to understand them and relate to them. Reading them was discouraging, intimidating, and made me feel as if I don’t know anything. Traditionally written research articles are oftentimes filled with academic jargon that is *inaccessible* to my community, and other Communities of Color who have been historically excluded from higher education. To be honest, no vale la pena to spend an excessive amount of time to write a very lengthy paper that would not be read by my family and community, not necessarily because they cannot read, but because traditionally written research articles are structured and written in a way that is uninviting to those who are not in academia. Fortunately, when I was a doctoral student, I came across and became a student of

critical race theory (CRT) counter-storytelling.¹ So, in the tradition of CRT counter-storytelling, I write my research findings through stories, literally.

When I decided to dedicate myself to the difficult and readily contested task of doing stories as research, I made a promise to myself to try my best to also make my stories easy to obtain physically. I purposefully self-published a book in English and Spanish with stories of social (in)justices to show up to local parks and community events to give away FREE copies of my books to kids and community members without any publisher telling me I can't do that. Every time kids ask me how many books I have sold, I tell them I am prouder of how many books I have given away. When a couple teachers in Oxnard deemed my young adult book as "not school-aged appropriate" because of its emphasis on social justice, I wrote and published a bilingual children's book that talks about the importance of retaining our cultura at a young age. I literally spent over 20 hours in a



Oxnard kid receiving a free signed copy of my children's book during a community book giveaway event in 2020. Photo courtesy of Author.

studio with friends who played voice actors to record my audiobook and uploaded it on YouTube, so that folks can listen to it for FREE. In numerous instances, I have commissioned local Oxnard artists to create illustrations out of my stories of social justice and printed those illustrations as posters and coloring books to give out to the community for FREE to ensure my community has visual representations of my stories. All this to say, I genuinely try my best to make sure scholarship is *accessible*, across multiple aspects. For me, writing stories is not enough. I must tell stories in different formats to reach broader audiences.

I have recently encountered the unfortunate truth my mentors warned me about when I was a doctoral student. The process of publishing stories as research in academic journals is extremely difficult and frustrating. As an early career faculty member, I have received feedback from “peers” via the peer-review publication process questioning the validity and credibility of my stories as research. Feedback such as, “it’s imperative that the author insert some academic jargon,” “I think for our audience, a traditional [format] is the more appropriate route,” or “I am not sure if the author is utilizing a writing genre that the journal recognizes or accepts” are commonplace critiques about my work. I have learned to respond and address such remarks during my revisions. Despite these denigrating comments, I have stayed true to myself and have been persistent and intentional about where I submit my stories for publication. Such an approach to publishing has been worthwhile and my work has been appreciated and published by numerous academic peer-reviewed journals (*Association of Mexican American Educators*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, *Writers: Craft & Context*, and *Journal of Latinos and Education*).

Obviously, this piece encourages broader conversations about the exclusion of knowledge via expensive, unnecessary journal subscriptions and uninviting styles of writing. I wrote this piece to challenge academic scholars to strive for *accessibility* in their scholarly work. What are the limitations of writing solely to an academic audience? For researchers who are researching historically marginalized and excluded People, Students, and Communities of Color, what does it mean to publish scholarship that is *inaccessible* to those whom you are writing about? How can “Knowledge Serve the City,” if the city literally doesn’t have access to the knowledge available in the university library database? I hope this piece is a call to action for universities to encourage, support, reward, and institutionalize resources for scholars who are committed to doing publicly engaged scholarship and want their work to be obtainable by and *accessible* for non-academic communities.



Oxnard youth holding their signed copies of my book they received for free during a book fair in 2019. Photo courtesy of Author.

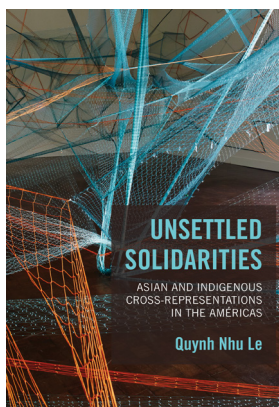
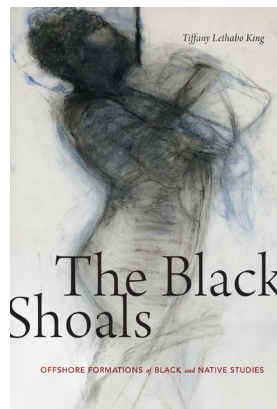
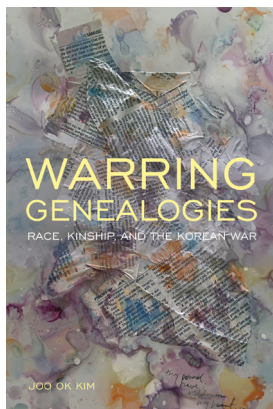
Accessibility to knowledge can change lives, literally. It did for me. I write and tell stories because I am hopeful that my stories can change the lives of others, too, especially la gente de Oxnard. Once I gained the knowledge of how systems of oppression like white supremacy, colorism, toxic masculinity, anti-Blackness, homophobia, ableism, and capitalism negatively impact my daily life, I challenged myself to become a better person and to disrupt those ideologies and practices. That was only possible through the CRT counterstories I read that were assigned to me as research articles in courses I took with Faculty of Color who are committed to challenging the idea that only some styles of writing "count" as research. Don't ever get it twisted: Our experiences produce knowledge, and our stories are research.

Notes

1. For more information about critical race theory (CRT) counter-storytelling, see Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research" *Qualitative Inquiry* 8 No. 1 (2002): 23–44.

Relationality, Mutuality, Collaboration: Relational Approaches to Race and Empire

Ashvin R. Kini



WARRING GENEALOGIES: Race, Kinship and the Korean War. By Joo Ok Kim. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2022.

THE BLACK SHOALS: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies. By Tiffany Lethabo King. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2019.

UNSETTLED SOLIDARITIES: Asian and Indigenous Cross-Representations in the Américas. By Quynh Nhu Le. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2019.

SOUNDS FROM THE OTHER SIDE: Afro-South Asian Collaborations in Black Popular Music. By Elliott H. Powell. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2020.

In the introduction to their groundbreaking 2011 edited collection *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson argue that ethnic studies scholarship is in need of new ways of thinking and theorizing race comparatively. Noting the limits of identitarian models of comparative race studies—wherein the racialization of different groups is conceptualized as discrete, equivalent, and thus comparable—Hong and Ferguson turn to women of color feminisms and queer of color critique to make legible alternative forms of comparison. “Women of color feminism and queer of color critique,” they write, “reveal the ways in which racialized communities are not homogeneous but instead have always policed and preserved the difference between those who are able to conform to categories of normativity, respectability and value, and those who are forcibly excluded from such categories.”¹ The comparative analytics offered by women of color feminisms and queer of color critique are grounded not in a politics of similarity, in which racialized groups find common cause within a shared history of common oppression. Rather, the intersectional and relational frameworks emergent in these fields speak to the foundational role of difference, both between and among racialized communities, not only in the construction of dominant racial power but also in the critical and resistant forms of antiracist, anti-imperial, and feminist coalitional politics. Rather than conceptualizing processes of racialization only and primarily in relation to whiteness, relational frameworks, as noted by Daniel Martinez HoSang and Natalia Molina, “consider the racialization and formation of subordinated groups in relation to one another... mak[ing] visible the connections among such subordinated groups and the logic that underpins the forms of inclusion and dispossession they face.”² The four monographs discussed here each take up this work by foregrounding intersectional analyses of race, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy to reveal the ways that differently

racialized and colonized groups may find common cause in struggles against white supremacy and U.S. military colonialism.

In *Sounds from the Other Side: Afro-South Asian Collaborations in Black Popular Music*, Elliott Powell argues that African American musical engagements with South Asian and South Asian diasporic musical traditions constitute an important site of Black queer cultural politics. Moving from the 1960s to the present and engaging jazz, funk, and hip hop, Powell's monograph offers a fascinating "Afro-South Asian genealogy of sound" (4). As Powell rightly notes, the dominant approach to thinking about the influence of South Asian musical traditions on Western popular music often centers the work of white musicians (think Madonna or The Beatles) and tends to subsume Afro-South Asian collaborations into a framework of cultural appropriation. Refusing that subsumption of Black American aesthetics within a broader—and whiter—frame, Powell asks "What happens when we consider Black musicians' South Asian explorations as distinct from those of their white Western counterparts?" (3). Examining works by John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Rick James, Outkast, Truth Hurts, Missy Elliot, Timbaland, and Beyoncé, Powell convincingly argues that Black American engagements with South Asian musics constitute something much more complicated (and more interesting) than the current discourse on cultural appropriation would suggest. Indeed, in these Afro-South Asian "entanglements of sound," Powell finds moments of Black queer and Black feminist political possibility as well as sonic theorizations of transnational and cross-racial solidarities.

Powell's centering of Black queer and Black feminist politics marks an important intervention into Afro-Asian studies by focusing on cultural collaborations and exchange that are often marginalized by the implicit heteronormativity and masculinism of the field. As Vanita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar have argued, much of the historical scholarship on Afro-Asian political formations has focused on the relationships of the most public and visible male figures, such as King and Gandhi, or historical examples and cultural representations of cross-racial heterosexual intimacy such as W. E. B. Du Bois's *Dark Princess*. As such, not only have the experiences of women and LGBTQ subjects been marginalized within Afro-Asian studies, but the politics of solidarity offered by this work has largely ignored the significance of women of color and queer of color conceptions of solidarity and coalition through difference.³ Building on Reddy and Sudhakar's work, Powell listens for what he calls "the other side of things," those minor, ephemeral, and tangential musical exchanges and engagements that render "Afro-South Asian collaborative performances as sites of queer of color formation and possibility" (8). Listening to and for "the other side of things" thus constitutes a counterdiscourse to the heteromasculinism of dominant Afro-Asian studies, which makes legible the "strange affinities" that Hong

and Ferguson call for. Such an approach does not depend on the queer identity of the musicians at hand but rather constitutes a queer of color reading practice that can productively articulate the queer potential of Afro-South Asian sound. Routing Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* through the figure of James Baldwin, for example, Powell refuses the conventional separation of Coltrane's interest in Indian music from his politics and finds instead utopic, anti-imperialist, and nonnormative Black queer possibility embedded in Coltrane's engagements with Indian spirituality and music. Similarly, in Miles Davis's *On the Corner*, Powell theorizes what he calls the "corner politics" of Davis's collaborations with Indian percussionist Badal Roy that reveal the intersectional workings of race, gender, class, and sexuality that marginalize Black queer masculinities from Black Power movements.

Elaborating on Black queer masculinities in funk and hip hop, Powell considers the Black aesthetic figures of Rick James's "freak" and OutKast's "alien." Commenting specifically on James's 1986 album *The Flag* (which employs South Asian instrumentation) and OutKast's 1996 album *ATLiens* (in which Andre 3000 adopts a hybrid Afro-South Asian sartorial style), Powell notes that the freak and the alien are important cultural figures that transgress the systems of gendered racialization and middle-class respectability that unevenly marginalize Black Americans and South Asian Americans in the context of 1980s and 1990s racial capitalism. On songs like "Freak Flag," "Free to Be Me," and "Funk in America/Silly Little Man" and in the Pan-Africanist aesthetics of the album's cover art and James's persona, Powell locates in the figure of the freak an intersectional and anti-identitarian analytic that queers the history of Afro-Asian anticolonial coalition signified by the 1955 Bandung conference. In juxtaposing James's queer freak with OutKast's Afro-futurist alien, Powell offers a genealogy of Black queer critique that is always attuned to nonnormative and transgressive forms of Black masculinity and the relational politics of race they make legible. For example, Andre 3000's donning of the turban in the promotional materials and liner notes of *ATLiens* queers the history of Black Southern men wearing turbans to pass as South Asian during the era of Jim Crow apartheid: "Andre's turban amplifies and rescripts his Blackness. The turban becomes part of Andre's alternative and Afro-futurist Black expression. It is an imaging that, via the turban, queerly resonates with South Asianness in order to express Black masculinity differently" (92).

In one of the strongest chapters of *Sounds from the Other Side* Powell revisits Truth Hurts's iconic 2002 single "Addictive," featuring a verse by Rakim and a sample from Bappi Lahiri's "Thoda Resham Lagta Hai," sung by the prolific playback singer of Hindi cinema Lata Mangeshkar. Part of a slew of U.S. pop, R&B, and hip-hop songs that sampled Bollywood music in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the song and its attendant music video

are often read as a prime example of issues of copyright and cultural appropriation as well as part of the resurgence of Orientalism that has characterized the post-9/11 "war on terror." Without discounting these readings, Powell focuses instead on the ways that "Addictive" reveals the braided politics of gender and sexual respectability in discourses of diasporic Blackness and Hindu nationalism. Reframing the song within an Afro-Asian feminist politics of sexual pleasure "brings together the historical and moralistic silencing of Black and South Asian women's sexuality in US and South Asian popular culture... [and] creates a space from which Black and South Asian female sexual pleasure can be imagined, expressed and experienced (108). Brilliantly reading Truth Hurts's track and video alongside and in conversation with the actress Aruna Irani's original *mujra* dance performance of "Thoda Resham Lagta Hai" from the 1981 Hindi film *Jyoti*, Powell constructs a transnational queer archive of sound and image that makes legible the disavowed pleasures of Afro-Asian women's sexuality and reorients the heteromascularity of dominant Afro-Asian studies. In so doing, Powell demonstrates how attention to "the other side of things," is a vital analytic for intersectional queer and feminist critique.

Building on this notion of constructing and reading alternative archives of gendered racialization and queerness, Joo Ok Kim's *Warring Genealogies: Race, Kinship and the Korean War* reads across archives of Asian American and Latinx cultural production in a beautiful and necessary critique of Cold War kinship and U.S. national identity. "The Korean War has interrupted our senses of kinship," Kim writes in the introduction, "crafting it into a series of proxies: familial, epistemological, spatial" (3). Critically interrogating these proxy forms of kinship formed out of U.S. militarism in Asia queers knowledge of the Korean War and unsettles the ways in which white supremacy has mobilized normative kinship for its own sustenance and preservation. As such, Kim curates a unique archive of Korean War knowledges that includes dominant U.S. Cold War historiography, archives of white supremacy, carcerality and militarism, Chicano cultural production and oral histories, and Asian American literature to "collectively theorize cultural memories of the Korean War as a site of knowledge production through which understandings of race and kinship are renovated" (19). Kim's queer curatorial practice in assembling the archive of *Warring Genealogies* speaks to what Gayatri Gopinath has theorized as an ethics of curatorial care, "reveal[ing]... the co-implication and radical relationality of seemingly disparate racial formations, geographies, temporalities."⁴ Indeed, throughout *Warring Genealogies*, Kim carefully attends to the ways that cultural production mediates violent histories of white supremacy, heteropatriarchal kinship, U.S. militarism, imperial war, and Cold War knowledge formations. The interdisciplinary focus of the text

foregrounds the “limitations and possibilities of disciplinary conditions binding Asian American and Latinx studies” (19). Powerfully challenging the empirical and positivist frames that dominate area studies and that shore up white supremacy and U.S. imperialism, *Warring Genealogies* instead figures the Korean War as a problem of knowledge. Employing critical feminist and anti-imperial analytics, Kim reads across archives of Asian American and Latinx scholarship and cultural forms to reveal the processes by which knowledge of the Korean War is contained and disciplined. As such, cultural production becomes a significant site of cultural memory, or as Lisa Lowe eloquently argues in *Immigrant Acts*, “an alternative site where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulation.”⁵ In her engagement with Susan Choi’s novel *The Foreign Student*, for example, Kim reads the novel as troubling the formation of official historical knowledges of the Korean War through the institutionalization of Korean area studies and in the funding of the Center for the Study of the Korean War by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. As a site of countermemory, *The Foreign Student* reveals the “tension between the imperatives of Cold War knowledge production and the memories that exceed such a regime of knowledge” (107).

Warring Genealogies offers compelling readings of the ways that discourses of kinship serve as proxy for both the shoring up of the white national family and normative conceptions of U.S. national identity as well as the critique of the racial contradictions of U.S. militarism and carcerality. In chapter 1, for example, Kim focuses on the case of white prisoners caged at the U.S. penitentiary Leavenworth who collectively adopted a young Korean boy, Bok Nam Om, in 1954. Documented in the Leavenworth prison publication *The New Era*, the proxy adoption of Bok Nam Om functions as the means for the prisoners to discursively reclaim citizenship and civil life in the form of normative kinship. Positioned as the unlikely “fathers” to Bok Nam Om, the prisoners assert their belonging to the U.S. nation despite the fact that that same national formation has facilitated their civil death and expulsion through incarceration. As Kim argues, the Leavenworth prisoners’ contingent access to what Cheryl Harris has termed “whiteness as property” to claim belonging to the U.S. nation “is mirrored by the fact that GIs, like prisoners, remain legally demarcated as property of the state” (51). Their participation in the post-WWII boom of sponsoring Asian orphans as well as segregated blood drives for military GIs in Asia and claims to rightful participation as GIs reveal the contradictions of normative kinship, military service, and U.S. national identity.

As a text attentive to the relational dynamics of imperial racial formations, *Warring Genealogies* foregrounds Chicano/a literature as a crucial but often forgotten archive with which to theorize a forgotten

war. Kim approaches Chicano/a cultural production through a “queer utopian hermeneutic” (drawing from José Muñoz, Sandra K. Soto, and others) that challenges Cold War area studies knowledge formations and epistemologies. Attending to “a minor Korean War corpus within Chicano/a cultural production” that emerges across various cultural forms—including literature, drama, poetry, and corridos—enables a critical consideration of “both the direct impact of the war on Chicana/o families and the provisional, queer longings for alternative and proxy kinships” (53). For example, in beautiful readings of works by Rolando Hinojosa and Luis Valdez, Kim finds critiques of U.S. exceptionalist discourses that frame the United States as a benevolent savior rather than a white supremacist imperial power. “These narratives,” argues Kim, “offer unique theorizations of Asian-Latino kinship emerging from the war, devising new intimacies that exceed state-sanctioned formations of marriage, family and inheritance” (21). In addition to proxy forms of kinship, *Warring Genealogies* also offers a stunning transnational and transpacific critique of the circuits of U.S. militarism in the construction of U.S. racial formations. Reading the military mystery novels of Martín Limón, Kim demonstrates how Limón’s reworking of the hard-boiled detective genre “binds East LA, Itaewon and Tongduchon as interconnected sites of war, poverty and gendered racial exploitation that inspire a critique of state power” (79). These transpacific spatial imaginaries enable new forms of comparative and relational analyses of race outside the bounds of U.S. nationalist discourses of home, belonging, and kinship.

Also moving beyond the frame of the nation, Quynh Nhu Le’s *Unsettled Solidarities: Asian and Indigenous Cross-Representations in the Américas* is an ambitious study of Asian and Indigenous relationalities. Drawing on an archive that includes twentieth-century literary works by Simon Ortiz, Joy Kogawa, Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Marmon Silko, Greg Sarris, Maxine Hong Kingston, and others, Le’s book speaks to settler knowledge formations that both obscure and connect histories of imperial violence. Working within a hemispheric framework allows Le to challenge ongoing investments in national inclusion through rights and citizenship as well as expand the scope of thinking about colonialism and racial projects in the Americas beyond the United States and Canada. In critically examining literary encounters between hemispheric Asian and Indigenous communities, *Unsettled Solidarities* ambitiously critiques multiple colonial histories in the region, including British, Spanish, and Portuguese.

According to Le, the study of Asian American and Indigenous literatures speaks to the differential ways that Asian migrants and Indigenous peoples are situated within settler societies: “These two communities have both been central—yet differently positioned—targets of liberal assimilation and inclusion projects, which have

gained increasing fuel since the mid-twentieth century" (3). In taking up these questions of Asian-Indigenous relation, *Unsettled Solidarities* necessarily offers novel insights into the politics of comparison in ethnic studies, feminist studies, and Indigenous studies. In conversation with a range of scholarly interventions, including Lisa Lowe's "intimacies of four continents," Jodi Byrd's "cacophony of empire," and Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick Ferguson's "strange affinities," Le's comparative and relational analysis of hemispheric Asian and Indigenous literary communities seeks to imagine forms of solidarity that refuse to collude (intentionally or not) with the logics of settler colonialism and liberal inclusion projects.⁶

Le compellingly challenges the liberal logics of inclusion and equal rights, frameworks that legitimize the settler state by obfuscating the foundational violence of settler colonialism. In looking at the literary encounters of Asian and Indigenous communities, Le seeks to "trace the liberal logics from which different social justice movements interrelate" [in order to] "examine how these narratives work through these tensions to imagine different forms of connections and ethical relationships that are attentive to the asymmetries of violences and liberal beneficence produced by settler colonialism" (4). Le offers the critical frame of "settler racial hegemonies" to describe the "liberal logics out of which settler, alien and Indigenous communities come to participate in the reproduction of settlement and empire across the Américas" (12). "Settler racial" as a modifier speaks to the ways that racial and colonial processes in the Americas are connected but not reducible to each other.

Of particular interest is Le's theorization of "settler racial tense," a concept that describes spatial and temporal "grammatical structure" of settler colonialism, which confines Indigenous peoples within an ever-distant past in the trope of the vanishing Indian as precursor to modernity and the Asian alien as displaced from space and time. In addition to this spatiotemporal focus, "settler racial tense" also names the affective registers through which we may access those incommensurate histories of race and colonialism that liberalism attempts to "resolve" through equality and inclusion. In this way, "settler racial tense" names the *tensions* inherent to settler colonialism, both the tensions between Asian and Indigenous communities wrought by their uneven and differentiated encounters with liberalism as well as the tensions, anxieties, and instabilities that structure the settler state.

The theoretical and political import of "settler racial tense" is fully realized in Le's discussion of redress and reconciliation movements in Canada. This chapter explores the politics of public apology and national reconciliation, particularly in terms of how the Canadian state uses the public apology and national regret to supposedly account for historical injustices while ignoring the ongoing settler colonial formation

of Canada itself. Reading two formal apologies in a comparative frame—the September 1988 parliamentary apology “to those of Japanese ancestry interned in Canada during World War II” and the 2008 “House of Commons Apology to Inuit, Métis and First Nations Peoples for Residential Schools” (59)—Le identifies affect and emotion as foundational to the settler state’s self-narration and temporality. These public apologies and public declarations of regret do the work of conscripting Asian and Indigenous movements for redress within the purview of the state to contain the justice claims brought by these communities, as well as the attendant emotions of anger, sadness, and grief, ultimately situating them within a temporal logic of national progress. As such, the Canadian state appropriates, contains, and neutralizes the pain, anger, and justice struggles of Nikkei and Aboriginal communities to legitimize the continuity of the settler state, thereby buttressing its own power. Importantly Le argues that when read together, the public apologies demonstrate the uneven incorporation of Asian and Indigenous subjects within the Canadian national imaginary. Refusing to concede redress movements and their attendant affects to the Canadian state, Le critically juxtaposes her analysis of the two public apologies with close readings Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan* and Marie Clement’s play *Burning Vision*. Le finds value in the excess of emotion and affect in both of these texts that ultimately offer an alternative temporality to that proffered by the Canadian state. In other words, if the state sees its formal declarations of apology and regret as the “resolution” to histories of settler colonial violence, *Obasan* and *Burning Vision*, in their respective representations of Asian-Indigenous relation, each invokes alternative temporalities such that redress has no endpoint, and certainly not a resolution through discourses of national progress. The politics of redress then requires ongoing critical and ethical interrogation of the enduring structures of settler violence.

Finally, in *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, Tiffany Lethabo King offers a bold reformulation of relational analyses of race and colonialism in Black studies and Native studies. The shoal—the area just offshore where land and shallow water converge, causing a slowdown in water’s movement—serves as the dominant structuring metaphor of the text. As an alternative to comparative frameworks that take as given the discreteness of the objects under comparison, “the shoal functions as a space of liminality, indeterminacy, and location of suture between two hermeneutical frames that have conventionally been understood as sealed off from each other (4). Through readings of an array of cultural objects, modes of performance, and theoretical texts—including archival maps, literature, film, visual art, and scholarship by Sylvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers, Haunani-Kay Trask, Audre Lorde, Kim TallBear, Saidiya Hartman, and Frank Wilderson—King

finds new ways of engaging theoretical, political, and ethical questions in Black and Native studies that disrupt, slow down, and indeed *shoal* the dominance of white settler colonial studies and its investments in liberal humanism.

Conquest is a key theoretical frame in *The Black Shoals*. For example, King brilliantly reads the 2015 defacement and tagging of the Christopher Columbus statue at the North End waterfront in Boston as an instantiation of the shared grammar of conquest in Black and Native critiques of humanism. Splattered with red paint (signifying blood) and tagged with the words “Black Lives Matter,” the defacement of the Columbus statue generated confusion among the public “that evinced an inability to make the connection between Black death and Black rage and Columbus” (38). These forms of historical amnesia are rooted in the politics of white settler colonialism, which erases the history of African enslavement from narratives of conquest and settlement. Drawing from Wynter and Spillers, King reframes the historical timeline of conquest such that its inauguration begins not with 1492, but with the arrival of the Portuguese in western Africa in the 1440s. Such a historical reorientation is essential for understanding the linkages between slavery and genocide that are occluded in the framework of white settler colonial studies. “Conquest as a grammar and a frame from which to think,” argues King, “makes it possible to register the always already intersectional violence of anti-Blackness, slavery and its afterlife, and genocide at the same time” (68). Although Native and Black studies centralize conquest, genocide, and death as the foundational conditions of possibility for the construction of the Human, King argues that the emergence of white settler colonial studies (primarily from Australia in the figures of Patrick Wolfe, Lorenzo Veracini, and Edward Cavanaugh) displaced these concerns to instead focus on the subjectivity of the white settler and their relationship to land. As such, the framework of white settler colonialism and the settler’s relation to land cannot account for the genocidal violence of liberal humanism. As King argues the “focus on terra nullius and land [in white settler discourses] disappears the settler’s relationship to violence and the intricate and violent processes of the human’s self-making” (68–69). Drawing on the work of performance studies scholar Diana Taylor, King reads the defacement of the Columbus statue as a critical form of Black performance that intervenes in the discursive erasure of anti-Black violence in white settler colonial discourse. The red paint resembling blood and the text of Black Lives Matter animate the foundational dehumanization of Black and Native bodies in the construction of the conquistador as the Human.

In foregrounding conquest as a central historical and political grammar of Black and Native studies, King also elaborates a critique of the contemporary discourses of coalition and solidarity. Countering the

easy yoking together of nonwhite communities under the categories “people of color” or “BIPOC,” King’s reorients our understanding of relationality through an engagement with Audre Lorde’s erotics of care. Expanding on Lorde’s notion of the erotic in “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic and Power” and “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” King defines the erotic as a space of undoing central to decolonial projects: “The power of the erotic is its capacity to take one into the space of chaos, where it can radically disorient one. Disorientation forces new vantage points on people, as well as different perspectives and desires that make space for other people’s desires and pleasure” (145).

Reading scenes of Black-Native erotic encounter and love in Julie Dash’s film *Daughters of the Dust*, its literary sequel of the same name, and Tiya Miles’s historical novel *The Cherokee Rose*, King looks specifically for these moments of erotic chaos and disorientation. In thus centralizing the role of the erotic in articulating alternate understandings of self and community within the logics of conquest, King highlights the ways that conventional framings of coalition traffic in abstractions rather than the material encounter between racialized, colonized, and dehumanized bodies. The erotic, by foregrounding “who people choose to love, have sex with/fuck, build a life with, and bring into the work toward a decolonial future,” carries with it an ethics of mutuality and care that is always oriented toward imagining and building alternative Black and Native futures (148).

I end with King’s critique of coalition because of the way it powerfully shoals overly celebratory invocations of solidarity. The relational analyses of race and colonialism undertaken by Powell, Kim, Le, and King offer us critical tools with which to imagine the interrelatedness and co-implication of the racial groups we find ourselves in and remind us that solidarity is not and should never be “easy.” Given the long histories of colonial and white supremacist violence that are the conditions of possibility for our precarious present, it is ever more imperative that any articulation of solidarity, coalition, and affinity move beyond simple declarations of sameness or common “humanity.” Indeed, the stakes are higher than ever for those committed to decolonization and liberation to “become fluent in each others’ histories,” as M. Jacqui Alexander so eloquently put it: “We would have to unlearn an impulse that allows mythologies about each other to replace knowing about one another. We would need to cultivate a way of knowing in which we direct our social, cultural, psychic, and spiritually marked attention on each other. We cannot afford to cease yearning for each others’ company.”⁷ Elliott Powell, Joo Ok Kim, Quynh Nhu Le, and Tiffany Lethabo King have generously offered us critical modes and methods of doing this work.

Notes

1. Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

2. Daniel Martinez HoSang and Natalia Molina, "Introduction: Toward a Relational Consciousness of Race," in *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method and Practice*, ed. Daniel Martinez HoSang, Natalia Molina, and Ramón A. Gutiérrez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 2.

3. See Vanita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar, "Introduction: Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations," *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 14, no. 3 (2018): 1–3.

4. Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 4.

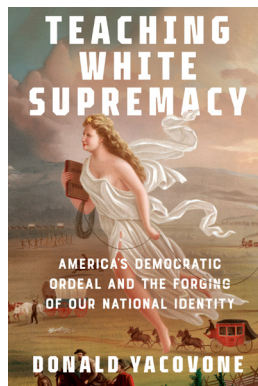
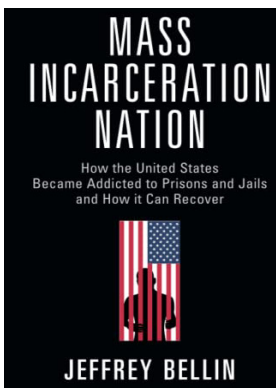
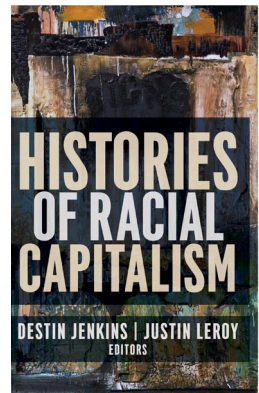
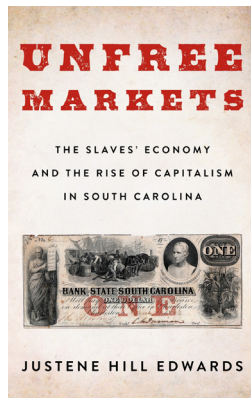
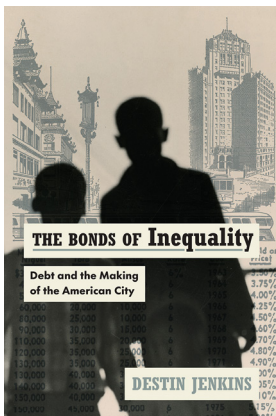
5. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996), 6.

6. See Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), and Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

7. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 269.

The Long Catalog of Horrors: Racial Capitalism from Slavery to Mass Incarceration

David Karjanen



MASS INCARCERATION NATION: How the United States Became Addicted to Prisons and Jails and How It Can Recover. By Jeffrey Bellin. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2023.

UNFREE MARKETS: The Slaves Economy and the Rise of Capitalism in South Carolina. By Justene Hill Edwards. New York: Columbia University Press. 2021.

THE BONDS OF INEQUALITY: Debt and the Making of the American City. By Destin Jenkins. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2021.

HISTORIES OF RACIAL CAPITALISM. Edited by Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy. New York: Columbia University Press. 2021.

TEACHING WHITE SUPREMACY: America's Democratic Ordeal and the Forging of Our National Identity. By Donald Yacovone. New York: Pantheon. 2022.

Putting Racial Capitalism in Context

Scholarly works require context to fully appreciate and understand them and their significance. I write this, in 2023, just over one mile from the site where George Floyd was murdered. In the aftermath of that violence, millions of Americans, and people all over the world, began and continued important conversations about racism, police violence, and the long legacy of racial inequality in the United States. Many of those conversations have been productive and pushed open new ways of thinking, awareness, advocating police reforms, and improving racial equity. There has also been denial and a doubling down of both rhetoric and legislation to prevent those conversations from happening. Increasing book bans in America largely target issues related to LGBTQ+ themes and content and issues related to racism and the history of racism in the United States, and people of color more broadly, as documented by PEN America.¹ Hundreds of books have been targeted for bans and/or removal from schools and libraries, including native, Latinx, and Asian authors and some of the most salient and important works by African American authors: *Go Tell it on the Mountain* by James Baldwin, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, and *The Undeclared* by Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson. It is striking that *The Undeclared*, a Caldecott and Coretta Scott King honored illustrated children's book, which the introduction proclaims "is a love letter to America. To Black America. To the grit, passion, and perseverance of our greatest artists, athletes, and activists. To the dreamers. To the strength and bravery of everyday people caught in the web of history" (from the jacket), with inspirational illustrations of courage and determination, would face bans and challenges. It speaks volumes that there are those who seek to deny

young people access to their own inspirational history of survival and success, simply because they are black.

In public education, scholarship of race and gender and sexuality, and of speaking of inequality more broadly, has come under increased censorship. Notably, Florida recently targeted the Advanced Placement course in African American studies, with the Florida Department of Education rejecting the initial version of the course deeming that it “lacks educational value and is contrary to Florida law.”² The revised version of the accepted course omits debates about reparations and a host of scholars from Black feminist, African American, and gender studies, including Black Queer studies, as well as discussions of Black Lives Matter, intersectionality, and police violence. Moreover, it appears that the College Board apparently changed the content by taking political concerns into consideration, but bypassing the faculty on the development and curriculum committees. For instance, Black conservatives were added to the course, but historically important Black feminist and LGBTQ+-allied groups such as the Combahee River Collective were removed.³ As Robin Kelly observed, removing scholars such as bell hooks downplays issues like police violence and mass incarceration from the curriculum and that “This is deeper than an AP course. This is about eliminating any discussion that might be critical of the United States of America, which is a dangerous thing for democracy.”⁴

We can add to this preemptive legislative efforts to prevent *any* discussion of issues related to teaching racism, sexism, or other forms of discrimination when looking at the wording of proposed bans on classroom language for K-12 and higher education. In Wisconsin, for instance, Chuck Wichgers, state representative from the 83rd District, proposed a sweeping list of words to ban from public education. Included were *Critical Race Theory, social emotional learning, diversity, equity, and inclusion, culturally responsive teaching, critical ethnic studies, critical self-awareness, cultural hegemony, implicit and explicit bias, institutional oppression, cultural competence, restorative justice, representation and inclusion, structural racism, systemic bias, White privilege, Whiteness, and woke*, among many others, a list too long to reproduce.⁵

It is within this context that scholars working on these issues not only must continue undeterred, but that we must speak of their work more widely, continuing the mandate of scholarship to speak openly and honestly about our human past and present. The books assembled in this review essay accomplish this. They are disparate in topic and methodology and discipline, but provide, in their totality, an especially thorough picture of what is widely discussed as racial capitalism—the ways that racial hierarchy, in particular the processes of racial inequality, work with and through capitalist development and its evolution, continuing to reproduce both economic class and racial and gendered inequalities as a part and parcel of capitalism itself.

This work has already grown significantly; from the original formulation of *Black Marxism* by Cedric Robinson,⁶ published in 1983, other scholars have been connected to, and engaged with, the various debates related to the concept of racial capitalism. We can include both past and current scholars in various fields, many of whom play a prominent role in the books reviewed here: C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, Eric Williams, Oliver C. Cox, Walter Rodney, Angela Davis, Manning Marable, Barbara Fields, Robin Kelly, and others. This work is a vital trajectory of analysis examining a range of questions critical to American studies: How does racial formation relate to capitalist development? What is the role of racism in the history of capitalism in America? Is capitalism necessarily or inherently racial? How do race and economics relate in the past and present? What are the relationships between race and other systems integral to capitalism's operations, such as gender, sexuality, and class?

Much of this work connects to, but should have more sustained engagement with, some of the essential works in American studies and Critical Ethnic Studies, which bring intersectional analyses to bear on our understanding of capitalism in relation to ideology, race, gender, and class, and the politics of difference. Roderick Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, Chandan Reddy's *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State*, and Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, among other works, have, over the past twenty years, generated vital new areas of intersectional scholarship that helps us understand the dynamic and highly complex social, cultural, and political dimensions of racial capitalism.⁷ Connecting these works is one of the vital aspects of intersectionality and interdisciplinary scholarship. We see continuities and discontinuities, overlaps and connections, that, left in their own disciplinary silos, never become fully illuminated and understood. Speaking truth to power often demands that we bring different perspectives together, because the operations of inequality, discrimination, and violence often go unseen, precisely because they cannot be seen from just a single perspective. Two quotes from the books reviewed here, juxtaposed, illustrate this point.

In *Unfree Markets: The Slaves' Economy and the Rise of Capitalism in South Carolina*, Justine Hill Edwards describes the account of John Andrew Jackson with the following gruesome details:

On one occasion there was a sale of slaves ... a man came to the auction to purchase a slave girl he fixed on ... one who pleased him, and took her into a neighboring barn, and stripped her stark naked for the purpose of examining her as he would a horse previous to buying her. The father and mother of the girl were looking through the window and keyhole at various crevices with many other slaves who saw all that passed. He ultimately purchased her for his own vile purposes, and when he had several children by her, sold both her and her children." (156)

Meanwhile, Donald Yacovone, in *Teaching White Supremacy: America's Democratic Ordeal and the Forging of Our National Identity*, a deeply researched analysis of how history books in the United States have taught about race and slavery, shows that throughout American history, instruction from grammar schools to universities relentlessly characterized slavery as a benevolent institution. It was seen as an "enjoyable time and a gift to those Africans who had been lucky enough to be brought to the United States" (237). These positive narratives of slavery were widespread, propagated by whites in the South and the North, and have a long and deep past, as Edwards often describes, as a way for whites to normalize even the most horrific acts of human bondage and violence as part of willful delusion, which was repackaged as propaganda and then rendered official, authoritative, history in educational systems across the United States through textbooks and scholarship.

Slavery and Racial Capitalism

Unfree Markets: The Slaves Economy and the Rise of Capitalism in South Carolina by Justine Hill Edwards is an insightful, historical account of informal economic practices outside of plantation economies, by slaves themselves. It centers enslaved men, children, and women in our narratives of understanding South Carolina slavery. It focuses deeply on everyday lives and economic practices in particular, through a rich combing of archival data and materials. This work shows the agency of slaves, despite being in the most horrific circumstances of bondage and violence. It also importantly connects how this agency, and resistance to the degradation and violence of enslavement, was a means of creating social and economic spaces, including entrepreneurship and market relationships, which cut across racial and class lines. Rather than provide opportunities for South Carolina's enslaved to gain their freedom, however, these extraordinary efforts, in multiple ways, merely reinforced South Carolina's plantation economy, and we can assume more broadly across the United States the economy of slavery and white supremacy.

It is notable that Edwards centers the complex ways that the economic lives of enslaved people intersected, and indeed undergirded, much of the South's plantation economies, and the growth of American capitalism more broadly. They worked in public markets selling food and other handmade goods, producing what historians have broadly described as "the slaves' economy." As such, the slaves' economy interacted with the plantation economy. Enslaved people bought and sold items and goods to anyone willing to engage with them economically. They hustled, negotiated, and borrowed with travelers on country roads; they earned wages for labor outside of their daily plantation work; they negotiated with their enslavers and white employees for money they were owed. From an anthropological perspective much of what we see in Edwards's

fine-grained account would be called the domestic mode of household production, small-scale garden plots that men and women worked in after sundown when they had worked all day in the fields. This was agency, but also backbreaking, and actually engendered tighter integration into the plantation economy.

As with any complex reading of history, particularly understanding slavery in the South, we see that although patterns emerge, there is great diversity in social economic and cultural practices. Edwards points out that from the very earliest days of Africans arriving in the American colonies there were negotiations between slavers and the enslaved. In fact, throughout the colonial era commodity exchange and independent work were part and parcel of how slaves filled their own subsistence needs, but also those of white colonists. Thus, enslaved people's entrepreneurial activities form an indelible aspect of South Carolina's culture of slavery from its earliest colonial history. Edwards emphasizes that not only enslaved people but white colonists, and slavers in particular, sought to ensure that slaves' colonial era networks of entrepreneurship and enterprise could flourish. It was, we could say in a very straightforward Marxian way, a means of predatory capital ensuring the reproduction of a highly exploited labor force.

Enslaved people's direct engagement with the plantation economy, as both consumers and sellers of goods, occurred in concert with economic expansion. This growth increased dramatically beginning in the 1760s, particularly with the expansion of rice production. Intensified production and scale in planter economies made the informal work even more important. Slavers became keenly aware that enslaved people's networks of economic enterprise were important in the success of functioning plantations. One slave holder understood that if enslaved Africans used some of their free time toward activities that relieved him of "the sole responsibility of provisioning his slaves ... then enslaved Africans' commodity exchange could exist in tandem with other forms of slave control" (40). This externalization of the cost of reproducing the labor power of slaves through their own self-provision, while at the same time a force for enrichment and agency on their part, helped to further the system of capital accumulation and the expansion of the plantation economy—features that are precisely where the framework of racial capitalism has great heuristic value.

By the time of the American Revolution, the establishment of both formal and informal economic activities by slaves was widespread across South Carolina's economy, particularly in urban areas such as Charleston. Throughout the Revolutionary War and afterwards, the economic activities of those in bondage not only continued but in many ways expanded, helping to support many of the challenges that the war-based economy faced. Enterprising slaves traded and bartered, hiring out their time for compensation, and establishing themselves more firmly as entrepreneurial

agents within their municipalities. There was greater public acceptance of this economic activity, despite some criticisms and fear from unpropertied, lower-class whites, who saw such work as an economic threat. There were concerns among whites that this would lead to greater freedoms, but as Edwards points out, it exposed many more slaves to violence and exploitation as "independent work" became more closely tied to the white-dominated economy. Slaves seeking work off plantations were thus bound in an economic relationship structured around the use of enslaved people as labor in a deeply repressive labor market. Skills in mechanical trades became in the words of some "interest-bearing capital meaning an investment that generated a continuous stream of profits" (50), and slave owners sought to hire out labor for various forms of work. This work, by the late nineteenth century, proved to be so lucrative for hires and slavers that the practice began to draw the ire of poor whites. They argued that by hiring skilled bonds people, enslaved people's eagerness for money threatened their own employment and economic prospects.

Edwards's account also relates South Carolina's history to global economic processes. Global demand for short staple cotton and the shift in South Carolina's crops produced dramatic changes in the condition of plantations and slaves. The widespread adoption of short staple cotton production and technological advancements such as the cotton gin brought a huge hitherto non commercialized swath of South Carolina's land and population into its booming export economy. During this period the experience of slaves continued to change, as moving into cotton production not only saw entrepreneurship expand, but with imports in a wider range of goods within the economy, and using time off for their own household production, bondsmen and women transformed goods that they had at their disposal: everything from hickory trees for baskets and horse collars made from corn husks, to earning money from what they worked on home plots to buy a range of goods, from sugar and molasses to coffee and rum, and, in the winter, warmer and linen clothing from enslavers.

This does not mean that this was an emerging bourgeois consumer class or entrepreneurial class; the violence of slavery still persisted. According to one historical account, an enslaved man spent his free time working to provide clothing for his children and his wife and went without shoes for many years, instead creating moccasins for himself out of tree bark (74). As the cotton economy expanded and plantation economies shifted into new geographic areas, so did networks of trade that became more and more biracial and connected. As biracial networks of exchange continued to expand, so did calls to regulate them out of growing fear that the entire slave economy would be destabilized by the economic improvements and activities of those in bondage. After political debate and some violence, very limited legislative changes were made to rein in

these economic activities, limited because they were already so integral to the economy.

As slaves' commercial activities expanded and more and more formally recognized commercial activity grew, white suspicions of enslaved people's commercial savvy fueled conspiratorial thinking. Fears grew that slaves would soon rebel or traffic and illicit contraband such as liquor. Others argued that with alcohol and money, slaves would become violent and this would encourage crime and licentiousness. Growing opposition to slaves' entrepreneurialism demanded an end to the "evils of negro trading" (158). Vocal groups of whites were strongly opposed to enslaved people with access to money and property, expressing these in the pre- and post-Revolutionary War periods, but reaching a zenith with the deeply disturbing controversy surrounding Denmark Vesey, who it was claimed sought to overthrow the government and was arrested and executed along with dozens of others. This event exposed white anxieties about slaves' economic activities, produced growing political violence, and was directly tied to the slaves' economy gaining greater access to money and in some cases property (105).

There were two main fears coming out of this economic activity that caused whites in South Carolina to push back: one was the greater mobility that slaves gained through their economic empowerment, the second the threat of direct competition and fears of ultimately toppling the slavery system and plantation economy itself. This directly threatened whites' key source of hegemony and economic power. The plantation economy and its power structure, however, was not monolithic, in part because the persistence of slave's trade converged with the interests of merchants and storekeepers and the white middle class. Elites in the white plantation class were not as concerned, but poor whites were, giving rise to poor whites' backlash to slave economies.

In the final analysis, Edwards argues, if success equates to economic freedom in market activity, then enslaved people did not attain either. She writes:

Even though bonds people earned small amounts of money and obtained material goods, these were not successes ... simply having the *ability* to earn money and act as consumers did not free enslaved people ... the slaves' economy remained a visible aspect of South Carolina's culture of slavery *because* enslaved people could not buy themselves out of slavery." (189)

In the detailed account Edwards provides, we can see not just how race, class, and gender all serve to reproduce the plantation economies, and bolster the very institutions of slavery, but also how racial capitalism itself shifts and evolves, but yet constantly, and indeed, increasingly, evolves with ideologies of racial difference. These relationships of racialized think-

ing and the development and expansion of racial capitalism cannot be underestimated, and Daniel Yacovone shows these very ideologies were particularly well developed in the antebellum South, but then reproduced as authoritative knowledge throughout American history.

Narrating the Past

In *Teaching White Supremacy America's Democratic Ordeal and the Forging of Our National Identity*, Daniel Yacovone shows that the past and present history of white supremacy in America has important roots in the ways that education and textbooks have represented our racial past. This is a deeply researched account of how, in Yacovone's terms, white supremacy as an ideology gets translated and handed down through time. As he observes, "Slavery ... did not require racism to thrive. As a power relationship, it was an ancient institution, whose benefits readily justified its means" (5). Racism, however, did require a massive intellectual edifice, developed, propagated, and handed down over generations. Yacovone traces the genealogy of racial thinking and hierarchy to the earliest days of the colonial era, connecting the notions of racial inferiority to religious and cultural ideas as well as legal practice.

It was clear, Yacovone points out, that prior to North American colonization, Europeans had no clear opinion on the nature of African peoples. Historical accounts described African kingdoms such as Timbuktu as well ordered and prosperous, Africans living in European capitals, some highly educated, multilingual, free, and employed, as intellectuals. The century of African slave trade prior to English colonization created in the minds of white settlers an association of Africans with slavery but did not provide a justification for it. Such an ideological framework had to arrive later, when the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century codified white supremacists' assumptions that were already developing in the colonies. Within this intellectual crucible, "natural" hierarchies of racial superiority were wed to emergent fields such as physiology, medicine, and anthropology, giving racism the intellectual heft it needed to justify itself more broadly in society. What cemented ideas not only of racial hierarchy, but white supremacy, was promulgated in some of the highest intellectual spheres in the American colonies. This was further tied to growing violence within the practice of slavery itself—any Black man convicted of raping a white woman would suffer castration, but a white man raping a Black woman would suffer no punishment—and miscegenation laws and everyday violence further added empirical fuel that white supremacy was not just "natural" but a moral imperative. Daniel Webster, Horace Mann, and other notables, Yacovone writes, all promoted fundamental ideas of racial hierarchy that undergird the ideology of white supremacy and promoted the idea that slavery and plantation economies were "natural," immutable, and justified.

Throughout this deep reading of American texts, among them works by a number of internationally recognized intellectuals, we see the striking insertion of racist thinking. John H. Van Evrie, is particularly notable. His nineteenth-century publications denigrated people of African origin in the extreme. His best-known book, *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination*, shows his justification of the planter economy. Van Evrie was not an ill-educated hack, but a respected medical doctor, promoting racism through scientific evidence. The author of several books arguing ideas of scientific racism for public audiences, he states in the preface that "even when both white and negro become so debauched, degraded, and sinful as to equalize and harmonize together ... with individuals who mate and mix their blood, their progeny become sterile, diseased, rotten and within a certain time, utterly perish from the earth" (vi). Later addressing the reader of the book he adds: "social and political equality, as in Mexico and other South American States, results in a mixture of blood, destruction of all good society, and utter impossibility of all stable government, and finally the extinction of both races."⁸ This text, published in 1870, argued through abhorrent racial theories that anyone of African origin was actually a sub-species of human, more akin to apes and not capable of being on equal footing as whites. Bellin points out that this type of work, seeing Africans as a "subspecies," was "essential for creating nineteenth-century American democracy and an enduring white identity" (134).

Throughout the nineteenth century, we see that in different strands of narrating American history, the periods of colonialism, slavery, and race become more divergent and diverse. Conflicts with Native Americans show up in texts and different approaches to slavery, and with the abolitionist movement, contrarian history books opened up new lines of heated debate. But even with new voices emerging, the standard themes remained the same. Slavery was not an evil, Africans were not entirely human, or at least not the same species. As one anti-abolitionist textbook described, "the South had modified and 'softened' slavery. ... The North should recognize the South's efforts at improving the 'colored race' ... and that no 'slaves' existed in the South, only servants. Southerners did not own black humans, just their 'time'" (112).

From the late 1860s onwards, the emancipationist challenge was part of the shifting debate about national identity and history. More texts described freed slaves as heroic Union soldiers. Reconstruction was discussed and debated. Prejudice against freed people was repudiated in widely used texts and pamphlets. Within this context, newspaper editors and more literary outlets such as *The Nation*, among others, saw advocates for abolition challenge ideas of white supremacy and promoted ideas of universal rights to ensure "moral unity and moral order" (130). By 1891, the shift became significant enough that Southern Black schools no longer had to rely on white-authored textbooks.

As the twentieth century unfolded, Yacovane documents that a small but emerging list of books began to have more accurate, detailed examinations of slavery. For the first time, slavery was depicted as an economic system that enriched the plantation class in the South and some rich industrialists in the North. Of course, these were the slim minority. Most textbooks remained staunchly Southern in orientation—decrying abolition, depicting John Brown as “crazed,” and promoting narratives of Black inferiority. With the emergence of Jim Crow, the rise in prominence of the Ku Klux Klan, and the spread of eugenics, including anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism and conspiracy theories in American society, textbooks ran the gamut from reinforcing racist thinking to reproducing narratives of savages needing the benevolence of whites to bring them into civilization. The period from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century saw revolutions in thought that also spurred new racist ideologies in textbooks. Racial ideas from anthropology and biology among other fields, as well as a growing sense of solidarity and racial identity being pushed among white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, put new strains of racial supremacy into public debate.

Yacovane shows that the eugenics movement that permeated American society in different ways throughout the 1920s forged a cultural background for history education over the next forty-five years, with influential academics such as Ellsworth Huntington and Edward Ross, and the racist and eugenicist writings of others, combined with an reenergized Ku Klux Klan. This all produced an array of educators determined to forward the idea that Black people “represented alien and inferior beings, if not designed by God and nature, for the institution of slavery” and make that a widely accepted idea in American society. Furthermore, schoolbooks at all grade levels, with few exceptions, continued to reaffirm these ideas in classrooms across the United States. “Few changes were made in textbooks that characterize slavery as anything other than a relatively happy, peaceful, and quiet process of labor in the American South” (248). As a 1951 textbook described, “slaves did much to make their own life enjoyable” (248), and other texts declared that after Reconstruction “Black and White had been able to settle down on a peaceful basis” and that “Blacks, who possessed ‘no civilization’ comparable to whites, could then progress” (265).

We see this same narrative at the highest levels of government and promulgated in prestigious universities. “How many White civilizations,” stated Newton D. Baker, Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of War, “could have dared to receive so many wild savages, who were practically uncaged animals, and spread them around ... passes human comprehension. What has been done for the Negro in 100 years is an unparalleled achievement” (237). Furthermore, textbooks were quick to point out that not only had slaves benefited from their very bondage, but that whites actually bore

the heaviest burden of slavery. Former Princeton University professor and president of the American Historical Association Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker lamented that slavery was *tragic for its impact on poor whites*, which in his mind, forced many to flee to the North and left others behind in the South to live in poverty because they could not compete with slave labor. Similarly, a textbook in print from 1922 until 1941 stated that the White Man's Burden was shown to be "beyond any doubt" and that not only was the devastation of slavery reportedly born by whites, particularly in the South, but that people of African descent existed outside of the "real America as an ancillary almost historical footnote," their very lives erased in some sort of parallel existence (238). Other texts argued that descendants of slaves and Africans actually lived better than Northern factory workers and were "properly fed clothed and sheltered in fairly comfortable homes," and as another text described, that without question "it was better for the Negro to be a civilized slave than to be a Savage in the jungles of Africa" (239).

After the Second World War, the sanitizing of history not only encompassed the lives of slaves in the United States but their passage from Africa as well, and imposed a staggering historical narrative, suggesting that slavery was the best thing to happen to Africans. Textbooks describe slaves arriving to American shores with life that *improved*, with accommodations that were better than in Africa, and that the slave was "content and economically necessary because without slave labor rice and cotton production would have been impossible" (241). These accounts were part of the ideological justification of slavery in the American colonial, but also postcolonial, context. In other words, slavery and its justification continued right through the Civil Rights movement in official textbooks and scholarly publications.

It is gratifying to see Yacovane connect this long production of racial narratives about America's past with two very real social political and economic processes throughout history, such as in Detroit during the 1930s when a white developer actually constructed an eight-mile wall (referenced by the film *8 Mile*) to separate a Black community from a new, all-white neighborhood. This was a neighborhood that the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) at first refused to help fund *because of* its proximity to African-Americans. This analysis shows the inseparability between the legacy of narratives about the social and cultural pathology seen to be "natural" to those of African origin, and the justifications for whites using police power and state violence to enforce systemic inequalities such as residential segregation via institutions such as the FHA. This is part of the overall point put forward by Yacovane: that the racist narratives dispensed throughout American culture contributed to conditions of state-sponsored segregation, such as redlining African-American populations into ghettos and adopting restrictive housing covenants precisely

to prevent the integration of white neighborhoods, at the urging of not just white homeowners, but the entire financial and real estate apparatus supporting economic growth and development, from mortgage lenders and brokers to developers to real estate agents and white community organizers. He documents, for instance, that through and after the Second World War, white Detroiters protested and then attacked new housing constructed specifically for blacks because whites saw such efforts as dangerous social and economic threats merely by their proximity and economic improvement. Additionally, he points out that even as Indigenous people were showing up in textbooks, their inferiority was being narrated, retroactively long after the displacement and extermination of native peoples across the South and West, justifying the horrors of racial capitalism's accumulation by dispossession through settler colonialism.

There is, however, a redemptive element to this disparaging story, the Niagara Movement. The Niagara Movement, the African American civil rights organization founded in 1905 and led by W. E. B. Du Bois and Boston's radical publisher William Monroe, placed education as central to the long struggle for civil rights and equality. Du Bois sought not only to improve education, but to broadly transform American historical memory. As Yacovane puts it, the Niagara Movement's original members pushed for better textbooks *and* expanding access to higher education as part and parcel of the social movement to transform education and society. Led by Harvard's Albert Bushnell Hart as well as Carter G. Woodson, they were among a growing number of African American intellectuals who were focused on education and reforms. This shows that the progression of accurate and nuanced historical analysis and classroom education occurred very unevenly. Some parts of the country benefited, even in the deep South, while others languished with decades old, inaccurate, ideological texts and lesson plans.

The depth and breadth of Yacovane's text is laudable. It presents an encyclopedic amount of rich material to understand not only how the American colonial slave system spurred the racist and eugenicist ideologies that still circulate today, but also the justifications for racial capitalism, which also resonate today. When the Bell Curve debate erupted in the 1990s, there were clear connections between that set of arguments about race and intelligence and the implications for social policy, as there were in the days of Reconstruction, ones that we can trace genealogically all the way back to the very beginnings of white supremacist thinking. It is vital to have analyses such as Yacovane's, bringing together texts over time, to connect to the justification and circulation of narratives about race in American society. It is striking that over time so many shockingly unsupported and unscientific ideas not only endured but continue to circulate to this day. This is a reminder that, even within ostensibly race-neutral institutions of education, including higher education, state offices, and

federal agencies, in the name of scientific research and sound evidence, such racist and eugenicist ideas persisted, and their legacy is with us today.

Reading Yacovone's account of the systemic, staggering, and widespread devaluation of people of African origin and descent in the Americas, as well as native and Indigenous people, as well as connecting those historical threads through the public policies of various federal and state agencies and laws, ties together the racial ideologies undergirding slavery with Jim Crow, segregation, and white supremacy. In short, redlining, predatory lending, and white-only homeowners associations, among other actions, are all part and parcel of racial capitalism, but importantly predicated upon an already centuries-old set of cultural and ideological narratives framing Black bodies, people of color, and non-whites more broadly as subordinate by nature and God. This makes reading studies of the racial politics and cultural wars over financial capital and urban planning more salient as a window into the complex ways that racial capitalism not only operates but also transforms over time.

Histories of Racial Capitalism

All of this makes Dustin Jenkins and Justin Leroy's edited collection *Histories of Racial Capitalism* so welcome. The chapters in this volume provide new, diverse, and theoretical challenges to the much needed debate about racial capitalism over time. In the forward Angela P. Harris points out that there has always been a blind spot for race at the intersection of economics and legal scholarship. In contrast, she notes that race is everywhere in law, but appears in legal doctrine through a recognition paradigm that assumes that the problem of white supremacy is simply exclusion, when in fact it is far more complicated (ix). Antidiscrimination law assumes that institutions can be held to account and are otherwise race blind and that remedies under antidiscrimination law or aimed at forestalling economic redistribution are a possibility. Harris points out that the conventional thinking has typically been to allow legal rules and institutions to operate in the service of economic efficiency, which translated into ostensibly race-neutral economic ideas such as cost benefit analysis, and undergirded by conservative ideas, represents markets in race-neutral terms. This is critical to feeding neoliberal thinking and has marginalized critical racial scholarship in economics and the law (x). Here the conceptual gaps of the intersection of legal and economic scholarship pave the way for a type of merger between contemporary neoliberalism and racialized capitalism. It is this context within which the volume provides important contributions in showing how racial formation is interwoven with capitalist development and class formation but also institutional power the law and state formation within American history.

Jenkins and Leroy note in their introduction that the concept of racial capitalism is vital for understanding both race and racial formation, but

also capitalism itself, but beyond in some ways Cedric Robinson's path-breaking work. We now see that there is heterogeneity within capitalism itself, as well as racial formation, and now more than ever, we need studies integrating the subtle and complex ways that both systems interact. This is, Jenkins and Leroy note, not just an epistemology, but a way of seeing, a methodology, that asks practitioners to "Question the structuring idioms themes and subjects in the study of capitalism in the present and suggest future oriented analysis which does not reduce our methods to a race first or class first approach" and towards social justice, but rather their integration (10). The chapters in *Histories of Racial Capitalism* document a complex range of new historical insights into racial capitalism's transformation over time, as well as provide new areas for future research. There are theoretical innovations, and new empirical findings, as well as new connections between often hitherto disparate topics.

K-Sue Park's chapter on race, financial innovation, and colonization documents how the development of the legal concept of foreclosure on property during the colonial period was central to the dynamic relationship between race and economic growth in the seventeenth century. These novel practices of foreclosure were used to expropriate through legal means lands that were held by native nations. This is a process deviated from an older English tradition of legal practice of protecting families from land loss due to the nonpayment of debts. The transformation in the colonies was to forge a new mechanism for Indigenous dispossession. Racial capitalism and debt creation combined with the ownership of land was used to pave the way for settler colonialism and for the broader incorporation of Indigenous lands into America's earliest capitalist development. This practice helped inaugurate a two-tiered economy, one based on different treatment for different racially demarcated groups. For several decades colonists reserved it for use only with native borrowers. In short, there was an apartheid-like economy during the early colonial period and persisting afterwards designed specifically to dispossess native people of land, and as Park describes, this racially delimited practice functions as a test for practice that would become widespread across colonial society more broadly in the late seventeenth century.

The British parliament passed an act sanctioning the practice between whites across the British Empire. The test case in colonial America became a mechanism to use financial leverage and the law to pave the way for predatory accumulation. Moreover, this practice has significance because it questions fundamental ideas about the role of race in constituting markets and economic practices and the law. These practices that racially bifurcated the colonial economy advanced the development of not just the new framework of colonization, but also the development of racial ideology in tandem with it. In other words, racial formation and capital formation occurred hand in hand; one system of accumulation by

dispossession and predation (capitalism) was legitimated by the formation of racial ideologies justifying such practices (colonization) and catalyzed by the application of new financial and legal mechanisms (mortgage foreclosure). Debt creation was central for the production of both of these. Debt acted on both native people and their homelands, dispossessing the former of the latter, while subordinating the people and converting their lands into capital and then later in the eighteenth century into a critical means of credit formation. The entire history of colonial capitalism and settler colonialism therefore relied upon the particularly racist and targeted predatory systems of accumulation that allowed for the later credit markets and capital formation into the eighteenth and then later the nineteenth century as America grew and industrialized.

Mishal Khan's contribution takes up the issue of Indian labor within the context of empire, arguing that after slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, a proliferation of racial discourses grew as colonial agents constructed elaborate taxonomies of peoples to create differentially valued persons. Colonial governments were vociferously measuring and orienting as Khan puts it "in grand comparative projects of imperial knowledge production" to produce new racial and ethnic taxonomies of persons (85). The critical intervention here is to ask how new forms of bonded labor could be engendered through the very vocabulary of freedom and abolition of slavery—how to keep people indentured, while they were supposedly free. This is precisely what the British Empire sought to do and accomplished, by creating all sorts of different categories of personhood that were racialized labor so that then they could be slotted into the hierarchical system of capitalist development within the colonial project.

Additionally, within the Indian context racial capitalism was integrated into new forms of financial innovation so that in the wake of abolishing debt bondage emerged, and indeed was furthered by, a demarcated vocabulary of freedom based on racial hierarchy and in particular the category of coolie labor. These constructs of the nineteenth century produced the Indian coolie, a subject who was deemed free, and able to enter contracts, but penalized for breach of contract. Thus, formerly free labor in the Indian countryside was filtered through ideas of difference racially as well as ideas of inferiority but then wedded to continued cycles of capitalist exploitation in the British Empire through the continued bondedness of specific types of labor.

Similarly Allan E. S. Lumba traces the forces of racial capitalism in the context of the U.S. colonies of the Philippines and Hawaii. His analysis shows how that racial capitalism analytically provides a bridge between transpacific and transatlantic studies by focusing on the centrality of labor, and the ways that the production of surplus and its distribution were permeated by racial hierarchies and colonial management. Colonial administrations realized that racialized capital accumulation was impos-

sible according to Lumba, without militarized and deeply administrative bureaucracies to promote dispossession. As he points out, the extraordinarily violent militarization of settler colonialism was also constitutive with the everyday quotidian violence of settlers and settler colonial policy through civil administration. This analysis focuses squarely on the material conditions made possible by different U.S. colonialisms, both settler and extractive, that remain to this day central to racial capitalism's economies of dispossession, and to which I would add predatory accumulation.

Manu Karuka's contribution provides an important conceptual turn by focusing on imperialism and its connections to racial capitalism and capitalist development in the United States, through an analysis of transit infrastructure and the movement of agricultural and mining goods. Noting that W. E. B Du Bois argued that the history of the Southern Pacific Railroad was also simultaneously a history of not just industry but a privileged monopoly and an "orgy of theft" (134), the Southern Transcontinental Railroad line in the United States not only provides an important instrument for the development of industrial capitalist growth centered on mining and agriculture, but also illuminates the contradictions between free land and free labor. In this case, the U.S. Army and financial capital merged imperial power and empire with the state, with the interests of industrial capital to settle and extract the American Southwest. It is in this context that land was at the heart of the problem of property and freed slaves. As Du Bois articulated, land was the most pressing problem freed people faced—it was fundamental; allowing former slaves access to land was seen as a mechanism of economic self-determination. This was of course opposed by the planter oligarchy to restrict the majority of Blacks to the position of landless workers, proletarianizing them.

It is within this context that the development of railroads, mining, shipping, and interconnecting them all throughout the Southwest helped fuel America's growth and industrialization. Throughout this process labor proletarianized from the South and imported from China to work on the railroads, appropriated through prisons and convict work from the penitentiaries, and coerced or welcomed from Indigenous areas as well as those of Mexican origin were all central in supplying workers. Combined with the use of the U.S. military to enforce land appropriation, this all led to what can be described as a new "feudalism" (154). By the late nineteenth-century capitalist elites such as Jay Gould succeeded in consolidating the Southwestern rail network, having steered the region to being laid waste through colonial violence, military occupation, and the abrogation of treaties.

Shauna Sweeney explores how gender is integral to how race and capitalism produced new ideological categories of persons. With a focus on Black women's spiritual practices and heretical acts of resistance in the face of racial capitalism's Black genocide, she draws on the history

of Atlantic Maroons healers and Black female abolitionists and freedom fighters to show agency within the darkest historical contexts. This is a welcome contribution that not only illuminates women's history within slavery, as well as the important historical dimensions of human spirituality, but talks about acts of resistance and agency similar to Justene Hill Edwards's work as part and parcel of the reproduction of the entire system of racial capitalism. It further underscores how slavery was not a monolith, but rather was filled with acts of resistance that sometimes pushed against, and other times merely reinforced, the prevailing political and economic systems. This chapter is both empirical and theoretical and connects the present to the past, including the gendered ways that Black women are victimized by the carceral state both as targets of punitive policies and violence as well as caregivers.

Sweeney offers new ways to think about the gendering of racial capitalism's forms of violence and state power. As Sweeney points out, racist discourses about Black women that emerged in slavery account in part for the enduring image of the pathological Black family. From the earliest days of slavery through textbooks all the way through to the Moynihan report and onward through today, the pathologization of Black women has been at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, alongside fear and state power. Echoing other research, Sweeney points out that nuclear families were not the natural choice for enslaved people, but proslavery ideologues cited the fracturing of enslaved kinship networks caused by slavery as evidence that they lacked familial bonds. Runaway slave advertisements and court proceedings suggest that enslaved people ran with and to family, however, contradicting the paranoid discourses of owners (60).

In addition to kinship ties, racial capitalism's discourses during slavery showed how gender and political economy intersect: through concerns about the socially reproductive functions of women. As Sweeney points out, although the British abolition of the slave trade began to stifle imports of enslaved Africans to colonies such as Jamaica, enslaved women's reproductive capacities took on even greater importance. The British parliament promoted ameliorative policies in its colonies that centered on women's childbearing, and even British abolitionists anxiously debated the capacity of Black women to steward families, underscoring the paradoxical and delusional contradictions within the racial and gendered hierarchies of colonization itself. These were rooted in the contradictory ideas of, first, how to demonize women and pathologize their kinship and interpersonal relations, while also demanding that they continue to work within the horrific confines of bondage, and to reproduce offspring and raise children to serve as the next generation of exploited labor.

We see in these fine-grained and detailed historical analyses ways to fill in some of the gaps that have been widely discussed and debated in terms of race and racial formation within the work of Marx and Foucault,

two figures that are central to these scholarly examinations of racial capitalism. From Foucault, the power of surveillance and of governmentality and the management of populations, as well as the construction of categories of races and hierarchical systems of differentially valued labor. From Marx, the manifestation not only of colonialism and slavery but also its transformation to racial capitalism by relying on global labor supplies, goods, and extraction and dispossession for capital accumulation. As Rosa Luxemburg documented in her magisterial work on imperialism, *The Accumulation of Capital*, the role of colonial populations and the colonies being integrated through the commodification of labor, and the production of private property, ultimately produces global capitalism, as is widely documented, a racialized and gendered system.⁹

On more theoretical notes, Ryan Cecil Jobson's and Justin Leroy's contributions ask us to rethink categories and concepts central to our understanding of racial capitalism. Leroy's chapter challenges the binary logic of slavery and versus freedom. Inspired by Black thinkers who lived through and challenged slavery, Leroy questions our basic understandings of historical change over time, its narration, and the moral urgency of abolition. He problematizes both conventional history and inserting moral and ethical frameworks into an understanding of historical facts without a full account of their accurate representation and context. In this way, racial capitalism is far more than a theoretical framework; it is a historical process and structure continuing to evolve as capitalism itself evolves. It is also a specific philosophy of history and a response to an overly strict periodization that limits our historical understanding of past social, economic, and political processes.

How should we reconcile the relationship between Blackness and the philosophy of history? How should we, if one is a historian of color or trying to illuminate the perspective of those people of color who experienced discrimination, slavery, and other historical facts, respond to the very Eurocentric episteme of historical knowledge and understanding? Pointing to the limitations of conventional historical accounts, Leroy argues that the foundational exclusions of Blacks and slaves, and others at the margins of traditional historical analysis, demand that we transform the very philosophy of what history means. This is in part a work of critical theory, producing new analytics and new ways of thinking where our conventional historical analysis falls short. Citing Sadia Hartman and the concept of the "afterlife of slavery" to describe the ways that Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and political arithmetic that were forged centuries ago suggests a formulation that we need a different, counterintuitive relationship between past and present, slavery and freedom (173). The notion of this afterlife is an interruption of progressive historical time; things are supposed to live and die, but they do not go away so easily.

Leroy proposes theoretically that racial capitalism is how race natu-

realizes the tensions inherent to capitalism's logic of forward progress, while, as he reminds us, violent dispossessions are inherent to capital accumulation and operate by leveraging intensifying and creating racial distinctions (180). There are ways that violence is done to Black people that are written into history, just as surely as there is a violence to the ease with which they are written out of it (181). Our mandate is very serious and challenging; it demands that we not only see the past in the present, but are constantly aware of how our efforts to think through historical analysis and see connections are complex, often contradictory, while at the same time being part of a greater totality of capitalism and global forces.

Taking up the challenge to narrate the past and the present, Dustin Jenkins's chapter looks at how racial capitalism as a system continued to transform during and after the Civil War, by looking at the role of municipal finance and debt in the South. In particular, he documents how New South boosters mobilized optimistic narratives, in fact, propaganda, about the past to mobilize bond buyers. This work shows important dimensions not only of slavery and capitalism, but how they are connected to Jim Crow and the present, and the development of financial capital itself. There is a very clear contradiction within our understanding of these historical processes as Jenkins asks: how do we explain the reproduction of racial capitalism, including its constitutive elements of racial governance and the entanglements of racial differentiation and accumulation, while at the same time we have to appreciate emancipation and the transformation of the legal system where trade and market activities are now available more broadly to formerly enslaved individuals? In short, how the maintaining of bondage and indebtedness without the legal structure of slavery becomes a postwar imperative for racialized capital in the United States.

As he describes, modern forms of indebtedness recreate conditions of bondage dependence and discipline, and although none of this was necessarily new, there was a new proliferation of debt of all sorts of different types for agrarian and sharecropping after the Civil War; foreign, state, and local debt issuance helped pave the way for the historical continuities and replications of racial capitalism from the 1870s through the 1920s. In this period, which Jenkins refers to as "Imperial Jim Crow," government debt is critical to the rise of new modes of racial capital accumulation. It channels finance capital, and future and present streams of wealth and accumulation, through the leveraging of future revenue streams to pay off the present-day debt. It is a means to pay for the infrastructure that capital requires to expand, and it helps transform areas such as the South with new industries and new markets, all of which requires a significant amount of investment to realize the conditions necessary for capital accumulation.

The postbellum South faced heavy debt, and in particular municipal debt problems mounted, while at the same time debt was necessary to rebuild and catalyze industrialization. Southern cities addressed these

fiscal challenges with prison labor and retrenchment, including chain gang labor and reducing payments on their debt obligations. This produced a conflict with bondholders, resulting in the broader development of municipal bondholder power over time, along with the growth of commercial banking and financial institutions. Focusing on the municipal bond politics of Mobile, Alabama, and the importance of municipal bond sales for the city, we see how problems of the 1870s, which scared bondholders and prospective buyers—because of federal intervention, Black political power, and threats to white elite rule—were propagandized over, restoring the confidence in bond buyers. The paranoid work of films such as *The Birth of a Nation* and Ku Klux Klan propaganda had to be smoothed over by assurances that Blacks, despite being critical as a source of labor, and powering Mobile's increasingly important port, would be economically and politically controlled, denying them voting rights and political power. Similar patterns repeated in the 1920s, and as states and Southern cities defaulted more often and sooner, propaganda was required to assure investors that the bonds were in good hands of whites and growing industry, not illiterate Blacks and profligate agitators. Jenkins points out that despite the centrality of Black labor throughout the histories of racial capitalism, there is also a marginalization, and the anonymity and detached nature of finance helps foster that. Finance helps obscure the essential nature of Black labor, further illustrating how race helps capitalism overcome some of its own contradictions to continued accumulation.

Ryan Cecil Jobson's chapter is a theoretical interrogation of Marx and conventional political economy, as well as Andreas Malm's important work on fossil capital,¹⁰ via W. E. B. Du Bois and an analysis of the period of reconstruction. Following Marx that accumulated labor is what constitutes capital over time—that capital is dead labor that lives on year after year—Jobson shows how Du Bois's analysis provides a means of understanding of how prior accumulations of labor that "consolidated the spoils of plantation slavery in the form of capital and machine" allowed fossil capital to flourish when coal and steam power began to assume centrality to industrialization (218). The contribution here is not to simply reiterate that slavery is central to the rise of industrial capitalism globally, but rather that with the terrible end of Reconstruction, the potential for true democracy in America not only faded, but the ability of capital to maintain control of labor, racially divided, and repressed through violence and the suppression of Black voters, persevered. Moreover, as Du Bois describes, Black workers generated the surplus value congealed in the developing economy, which served as the foundation of the new economic system of Reconstruction, fossil fuel and intensive natural resource extraction, and industrialization. As Jobson states, "The enslavement of African people constituted the broadest effort to consolidate stores of energy under private ownership" (226), an idea that should remind us that the

private ownership of energy “necessitates extractive violence” (226). It is an important reminder of the centrality of labor, from plantation slavery to extractive industries, that drives the creation of surplus value and cycles of accumulation, and as we see here, the important connection to extracting fossil fuels, the energy that drives American industrialization.

Finally, Pedro A. Regalado provides important insights into the ways that Latin American immigrants have adopted and promoted a type of racial capitalism, in part through immigrant/ethnic entrepreneurship, thereby promoting market relations as a means for their own upward economic mobility, and also by insulating themselves against the critique from wider society of being impoverished, immigrant, urban communities. This chapter serves to highlight how heterogeneous the construct and empirical manifestations of racial capitalism can be, and how different populations’ different trajectories of historical engagement with American capitalist development can produce varied outcomes. Immediately, one is struck by how different the role of finance and financial capital can be for different ethnic/racial communities. Regalado describes the importance of Banco Popular, a New York-based financial institution with close ties to the immigrant community from Latin America that has been central to the evolution of immigrant capital formation and entrepreneurship. Contrast that experience with the well-established history of predatory lending and financial instruments targeting Blacks in the United States for decades, through to today.

Regalado focuses our attention on not just Puerto Rican immigration and transnational financial companies such as Banco Popular, started in Puerto Rico in the nineteenth century, but also on the more contemporary period of American immigrant history and capitalist development. In particular, his analysis is from the 1960s onward. It provides a striking foil to the ways that financial institutions have served, for so many years, as systems of debtor bondage and predatory economic activities towards Black and Native Americans. That is not to say that immigrants from all over the world have not been the subject of exploitative business practices in the U.S. economy, but the case that Regalado focuses on provides a counterpoint. In the 1970s, prominent business leaders from Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban backgrounds worked in the Nixon administration and established “Hispanic” business people as reliable partners in public-private alliances that grew during the 1970s (236). This influence was notable in that Cabinet-level programs were implemented, working with federal agencies such as the Small Business Administration and the newly established Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE), which both generated thousands of loans and sent significant federal spending towards non-white business ownership. The OMBE even played a role in establishing eleven new Latinx-owned banks and thirteen Latinx-owned savings and loans (237).

Following the sociopolitical development of the Puerto Rican community and Latinx immigrants in New York City through the 1980s, we find that continued economic growth and opportunities expanded. This reflects research on intergenerational economic mobility among immigrants, where the second and third generations tend to do better overall. What is distinctive, however, are the particular politics of New York City; business leaders sought more influence over city government and more input on needed services, improving schools, and addressing crime concerns, while hearings were held and meetings with high-level officials in then Mayor Ed Koch's office. The results were disappointing, as the mayor's Hispanic Affairs commission empowered local elite businesspeople to undertake various actions and recommendations but only held hearings. The limits of the Latinx business leadership were clear, but adopting recommendations also would upend wealthy Latinx community public-private partnerships. Thus, as Regalado concludes, acceptable Latinx governance required *not* advocating for community investment, let alone dealing with the capitalist roots of social inequality in New York City.

The Bonds of Inequality

Destin Jenkins's *The Bonds of Inequality: Debt and the Making of the American City* is a striking work of scholarship. It has, at the time of this writing, won several awards, and deservedly so. It is the type of intersectional and interdisciplinary scholarship that does not neatly fit within extant paradigms; indeed, it creates new ones. By linking together local, regional, and national politics particularly around issues of race, with the bond market, and the rise of financialization, with urban planning and local and regional politics, and with a broader connection to the sweep of American history, this volume ties together hitherto disconnected aspects of racial capitalism. It is also notable for the exhaustive material that is brought into the historical analysis. Archival material, textual material from the media, first and secondhand accounts, immense amounts of data about financing bonds, the bond market, geographic information, urban planning materials—all of it is pieced together to present the type of story and scholarly analysis that otherwise would never be able to come to fruition without the effort. The payoff is rewarding.

Jenkins begins with an account of the hugely significant role that municipal finance plays, particularly the bond market, in local economic development and city planning. To put it bluntly, what cities and regions build, how they decide to build, whom it gets built for, to the benefit of whom and to the detriment of others, and why it gets built are ultimately political decisions that cities, rating agencies, investors, and others make. These are also, as Jenkins describes, very clearly wrapped up in, and in part constitutive of, economic and racial and ethnic polarization that has cemented itself within urban America. When we think of racial capitalism

as a system for the differential production and reproduction of capital, as well as systems of racial formation, which go hand in hand with a broader pattern of exploitation, research pointing to the role of something seemingly as banal as municipal finance and the bond market is precisely the type of innovative historical research that we need. This is the type of work that allows us to see the fine-grained mechanisms of racial capitalism functioning invisibly within the very quotidian bureaucratic systems of social governance.

The reason for the relative invisibility of this shadow system of economic polarization and inequality is that it has roots all the way back to the post–Second World War era of municipal bonds, credit rating agencies, and the rise of technocratic professionals who served as experts between buyers and bonds. These are not the conventional areas where scholars have looked for racial polarization and inequality. Far from neutral in capitalism’s hierarchical structure, this technocratic elite insisted on being the moral bearer of valuing different cities’ opportunities and prospects. They demanded that city officials provide financial and policy information and demanded concessions and conditions for the rating of bonds. This study, which focuses on San Francisco, shows that the city’s technocrats relied on information brokers increasingly in the post–Second World War era because they concluded that doing so was essential to capturing the attention of investors and trying to get the best rates for their bond sales.

City officers were also urged to create a barrier as much as possible between the world of municipal debt and democratic input. In other words, although the residents of cities will ultimately be those required to pay back the bonds, municipal leaders in their relationships with bond rating agencies and other technocrats sought to reduce democratic oversight on how bonds would be structured, which ones would be levied, and what the terms were. In other words, something that should be a wellspring for the promotion of economic development, urban revitalization, and the spreading of important social institutions for greater civic engagement, democracy, and opportunity became a mechanism for its anathema: polarization and funneling economic development programs toward white elites, often wealthy homeowners. Meanwhile, there was the consistent failure to invest in precisely some of the critically important infrastructural areas that growing cities such as San Francisco needed—notably in lower income communities and communities of color.

This complex politics and finance of Whiteness produced an asymmetrical dependence where urban economic development and revitalization required ever more disconnection between those being governed, and those selling bonds, and how the proceeds from those bonds would be spent in the city of San Francisco. This is in part due to the fact that San Francisco adopted, like many other cities, a postwar economic development framework of chasing FIRE industries: Finance, Insurance, and

Real Estate. These are sectors that would improve office construction economic growth and serve to promote San Francisco as a regional or national administrative and financial center. The use of public debt was central to this. Thus, Jenkins describes that the New Deal was remade at the municipal level into a racial welfare state that afforded more benefits, protections, and access points to white Americans than non-whites. When bond referenda extended white rights into the realm of consumption and revamped San Francisco's arts and entertainment offerings, it was in order to attract tourists and white suburbanites through public transportation, parking, and other amenities. Using municipal redevelopment and finance was to promote the interest of already well-off whites and suburbanites and FIRE industries, while neglecting other aspects of San Francisco's racially polarized urban space (69).

The ways that municipal debt was used to subsidize entertainment districts, office towers, and other amenities for attracting white, affluent consumers to the city also meant that urban renewal was used to displace people of color and the poor. What we see in San Francisco is that the imperatives of the bond market directly encouraged the formation of middle- and upper-income housing in San Francisco as racially exclusionary (110). Postwar gentrification was directly tied to the terms of municipal debt. Bondholders and rating agencies demanded that new housing, commercial development, and amenities for white consumers were built because these were seen to be sufficient to pay creditors, which in turn fed to a privileging of those very tenants who were deemed less risky, that is, to say whites, and those who were higher income. As interest rates ballooned, however, there became even greater pressure on the San Francisco redevelopment agency and the city to chase after these highly prized targets for generating revenue and the ability to encourage even further bond levies. Referencing James Baldwin's observation that "Negro removal" had something to do with money, Jenkins demonstrates how that "something" was tied to municipal debt to realize "the economic value of Whiteness" (110).

By the 1960s, a confluence of factors undermined the standard municipal debt system that cities relied on. Growing activism particularly from civil rights groups was considered detrimental to creditworthiness by outlets such as the *Daily Bond Buyer* and other influential publications. By the mid-1960s, workers along with white middle-class residents, two of the significant beneficiaries of infrastructural investment in Whiteness in the postwar era and highly dependable voting blocks, were starting to challenge the unequal system of public debt that enriched some at the expense of the few. Progressive populism demanded that debt be issued for long-term interests and for all San Francisco, not just developers or bankers. Minorities posed not only political but legal challenges, but with the rise of Black power and increasing pressure on redevelopment agen-

cies in city government, these further pushed bond rating agencies and financial experts as well as city officials to respond by calling for even more revenue-generating projects, while at the same time squelching democratic calls for other public goods. The efforts fell short, however. As Jenkins describes, the market forces that used debt to promote racial inequality eventually secured what they needed to maintain the bond sales and the bond market; once the debt and development of the city were cast, there was limited turning back. The discipline of finance capital, and, hence, another dimension of racial capitalism, was enmeshed in the concrete and steel of the city.

From Debt to Mass Incarceration

Jeffery Bellin's *Mass Incarceration Nation: How the United States Became Addicted to Prisons and Jails and How It Can Recover*, is a welcome addition to research on not just mass incarceration in America, but on the policies, politics, and practices of the criminal justice system and policing. As important differentials exist racially regarding the effects of mass incarceration, this is a useful text for understanding the long reach of racial injustice and racial capitalism over different historical periods. Because incarceration has important effects on labor and the differential valuation of persons (ex-con, felon, deviant, etc.) it relates directly to how people are shaped and shifted into different categories of personhood based on different types of value—are you a good person to hire if you are a former felon? Can you be trusted with handling cash or people's private information? What does having a criminal record, the amount of time served, and so forth do to one's chances in life and what they are allowed to do, or not do, after incarceration? There are striking racial differences in mass incarceration. Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly five times the rate of white Americans, and nationally, one in eighty-one Black adults in the U.S. is serving time in state prison, with Wisconsin leading the nation in Black imprisonment rates; one of every thirty-six Black Wisconsinites is in prison.¹¹

Jeffery Bellin is the Mills E. Godwin Jr. Professor at William and Mary Law School and also an attorney with years of experience serving as a prosecutor in Washington, D.C. He draws on this experience to marshal both concrete examples from legal practice, combined with a broad sweep of data to illuminate the complexities of America's criminal justice system. What is most helpful is the experience-near and data-driven account of decision making at different levels, from policing to judicial decision making, that impact outcomes like sentencing and parole. Having such a data-driven and clearly written approach is ideal, because it avoids criticisms of a lack of objectivity and reinforces much of our already existing understanding of the problems of mass incarceration, but also draws out new connections. Bellin's assessment, in brief, is that a number of pieces

in the criminal justice process have worked together to create mass incarceration. There is not a single factor driving the mechanisms that spurred America to become “addicted to prisons and jails,” but rather multiple pieces working in concert, part political, part cultural, part economic, and part simply as a matter of practice.

Despite all of the politicization of crime, Bellin’s discussion provides a very objective and sobering tour through the data and trends that produced such widespread incarceration. Rising crime rates lead to more media coverage, which leads to more public outrage, which leads to harsher laws and harsher sentencing guidelines among both Democrats and Republicans as they each seeks to one up each other on being tough on crime. Ironically, much of the stiffening of penalties and laws occurred in the 1990s, precisely when crime rates actually began to *drop*, showing a disconnect between public attitudes and politics and the underlying reality and statistics. Another factor that pushed for greater rates of incarceration was that the wave of political energy around crime was followed by legislation pushing for more punishment and less rehabilitation. It is abundantly clear that mass incarceration was not the product of creating new offenses, but rather remaking the system so that people who are convicted of existing crimes spend more time in prison. This is a stark shift prior to the 1970s wherein the correctional system focused more on rehabilitation, but by the 1990s the sentiment had shifted dramatically toward more punishment.

This led to a real paradox: the narratives of mass incarceration in the United States, on the one hand, produced more criminal laws, tougher sentencing, greater enforcement, stronger police tactics, and so forth, which should not have, on the other hand, led to such large prison populations, if there was indeed any deterrent effect. Following this, crime should become less attractive, and that should lead to less crime and shrinking prison populations. That is not what happened. This means that there is a well-established history contradicting the idea that harsh sentencing deters crime.

Bellin focuses on not just the statistics and processes of the criminal justice system and mass incarceration, but also racial and ethnic differences of these systems in the United States. The data are unequivocal: mass incarceration has widely different impacts on different racial groups, being particularly stark for Black Americans. Blacks make up 12 percent of the U.S. population but a third of the prison population; as Bellin points out, “while this disproportion ultimately stems from the country’s legacy of slavery and discrimination the precise role that race plays is complex and varies based on context” (77). Referencing Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, he agrees that the characterization of a system of racialized social control was created by exploiting the vulnerabilities and racial resentments of poor and people of color as well as whites, where

discrimination in employment, housing, and education was legal, where people were denied the right to vote, and so forth.¹² As a result, 90 percent of those who have been to prison for drug offenses in many states are Black or Latino, yet the system of mass incarceration of communities of color has always been explained in race-neutral terms, thus giving rise to what Alexander calls the New Jim Crow, a racialized and class structured system, more akin to a caste system than traditional racial hierarchies.

Bellin includes important material to supplement Alexander's account, however, specifically the design and functioning of parts of the broader system: both the criminal justice system and the criminal legal system. One important distinction between the two is that in what he describes as the criminal legal system, officials enjoy a high degree of discretion, and that is precisely where we would expect unwarranted biases to appear in determining the outcomes of legal cases. We see racial biases, therefore, throughout the system. Blacks make up over 50 percent of state inmates convicted of drug crimes, yet there is little evidence of any racial differences in drug offending compared to whites. Bellin points to the National Research Council findings showing that the prevalence of drug use is only slightly higher among Blacks than whites for some illicit drugs, and lower for others, a difference that is not statistically significant. Furthermore, he points out that there is very little evidence, when all drug types are considered, that Blacks sell drugs more often than whites (82). Despite this, Blacks are incarcerated for illegal drugs at a far higher rate. One explanation commonly put forward is eminently practical: that this occurs because whites are not arrested nearly as often, because they consume and deal the drugs behind closed doors, whereas Blacks' dealing occurs in public or semipublic areas—on the streets or open air drug markets—and they are prosecuted more thoroughly. Even if we accept this theory, it is not, as Bellin argues, a justification for when police recognize that they will face less resistance making drug arrests in poor urban neighborhoods as opposed to college campuses or private high schools; in doing so, they are bowing to the class and race biases that infect society generally and reinforce the racial biases in the entire system (82). This type of process not only furthers the racial disparities and is unjust, but it also perpetuates a "race-neutral" stance toward drug crime, when it is, in fact, not race neutral at all.

We also see that law enforcement itself has wide discretionary powers, and this alters racial outcomes in the criminal justice system. To illustrate the point, Bellin cites the Department of Justice's federal investigation into policing in Ferguson, Missouri, after the killing of Black teenager Michael Brown. This report uncovered the extreme lengths to which Ferguson's focus on revenue, rather than public safety, was partly to blame. Ferguson used law enforcement as a revenue-generating arm, fining, arresting, and ultimately incarcerating residents and targeted Blacks

in the process. As the Department of Justice explained, data collected by the Ferguson Police Department show that Blacks form the vast majority of their enforcement activity—85 percent of vehicle stops, 90 percent of citations, and 93 percent of arrests—despite comprising 67 percent of the population (82–83). Blacks were found to be more than twice as likely as white drivers to be searched during vehicle stops, even when controlling for non-race-based variables such as the reason for the stop, and are found in possession of contraband 26 percent *less often* than white drivers (83). This suggests that officers use race as a factor when determining whether to search. Blacks were also found to be far more likely to be cited and arrested following a vehicular stop, regardless of the reason for the police action. Finally, the Department of Justice report found that jaywalking charges were almost exclusively filed against Blacks (95 percent), and 94 percent of “failure to comply” arrests were also Black.

Bellin also discusses the mechanics of mass incarceration. For legal scholars this will be useful for the detailed practices through which greater policing and greater enforcement happens, and how these lead to more and different types of arrests over time. This was a process since the 1970s of broadening what were once traditional police functions without penalties into a new set of crimes that were far more likely to penalize offenders with jail and prison. Like the other statistical data marshaled, arrests for crimes such as robbery and burglary largely track crime rates, dropping in the 1990s or staying flat, but arrests for crimes such as aggravated assault and drugs dramatically increasing, and staying high even while overall crime rates plummeted. These trends were matched by staggering increases in drug arrests, and yet this wasn’t because of more drug use, statistically speaking, based on public health data. Police in fact were both trying to get tougher on violence and engaged in a war on drugs, while the more difficult cases to prosecute, such as aggravated assault, burglary, and robbery, took on less significance.

A further issue that Bellin highlights is that within the entire criminal justice system, among all the areas of discretion, and therefore subjective decision making by a person, are the actions of judges. Judges have discretion over whether to sentence someone to time served, parole, or incarceration, among other options. Data since the 1970s across crime types show that not only were more people sentenced to prison, that is to say, were more likely to be sentenced for crimes that previously did not result in incarceration, but were sent away for longer periods as well. The statistics are staggering: since 1980 the United States saw an increase of over 1,000 percent in the number of people in state and federal prisons and jail for drug law violations alone (122).

The final chapter looks at prison reform and the deincarceration movement. The push for prison reform is not new, but Bellin describes as urgent and more necessary specific policies to tackle the trends of

mass incarceration. Mass incarceration reform, Bellin argues, can be accomplished in a very straightforward way. Reversing the trends described can be done through legislative action and changes in the behavior of different human elements of the entire criminal justice system from policing to prosecution to sentencing. In broad terms, reducing the federal government's decades-long focus on drugs, weapons, and criminal immigration enforcement would do much to reverse the trends. In this way the Department of Justice would return to its central mission, which is to focus on cases that are beyond the ability of the states to prosecute.

Decriminalization is another important component, and we have seen this particularly with minor drug offenses and with the change in the legal status of marijuana, for instance, but this does not mean that the government gives up on the underlying social problems, it simply means that it abandons incarceration as the solution to those problems. Bellin notes that this might be objectionable if there was any evidence that incarceration helped to solve the very serious problems of weapons-related violence, drug activity, and violations of immigration law, but there is no real compelling evidence that criminal punishment is making much of a difference or is better than rehabilitation. Rather, prevention and addressing the broader economic problems of inequality have widely been found to be far more effective ways to prevent crime. The latter is in part where this type of work in criminal justice and history overlaps with research on racial capitalism.

Squeezing Blood from a Stone

A number of enduring themes and findings tie these works together, despite their methodological, topical, theoretical, and empirical differences. I want to begin by highlighting an important theoretical and empirical point: that when discussing racial capitalism there is a centrality to labor, specifically racialized labor. Without labor, without racialized labor, and gendered labor as well, in complex, interacting ways, there is no capitalism. From slavery through to the present, bodies, literally, have been used for capital accumulation: from the damage to coal miners' lungs, the rape of African women and subsequent sale of their offspring, to the backbreaking work in the fields—bodies, labor, are at the foundation of the production of value for capital.

The system of social reproduction, including informal work, domestic production, and formations of state power and governmentality, such as medical care and public health, all serve specific needs and roles to reproduce the conditions necessary for labor to survive. In this way, systems of governmentality, state power, the carceral state, and their racial and gendered dimensions are all part and parcel of the operations and spread of global racial capitalism over time. In new and ever-changing ways, we see how durable the reduction of bodies to essentially the needs of capital can become.

The New York Times reported that in September of 2015, a judge in Perry County, Alabama, Marvin Wiggins, addressed the courtroom filled with people owing municipal fines. He wished them good morning and stated that “for your consideration there’s a blood drive outside; if you don’t have any money, go out there and give blood and bring in a receipt indicating you gave blood.”¹³ Judge Wiggins stated that “...the sheriff was ready to arrest those who did not want to give blood or could not afford to pay off their fees and fines and urged those to take advantage of a mobile blood bank parked outside the courthouse, bring the receipt proving that they had donated at least a pint of blood and offenders would receive a \$100 credit towards their fines. Offenders would not have fines waived but receive a credit. Judge Wiggins is Black, but in this case, these actions of state power to literally tap peoples’ bodies for extracting value are part and parcel of the broader system of state power related to racial capitalism that seeks to extract value even when people appear to not have any to provide.

Judge Wiggins was not simply attempting to provide a means for people to pay fines, however. Rather, his efforts were also part of the multi-billion dollar blood plasma industry in the United States, which targets the poor to sell their plasma, and especially targets people of color, and seeks to increase Black and Latino donations. Plasma centers proliferate in communities of color, along the U.S.–Mexico border and in other parts of the country that are less white.¹⁴ Meanwhile, in *Unfree Markets*, Edwards points out that enslaved people understood the marketplace very well in human, corporeal terms. For children it was a site of trauma, where slave traders forcefully separated them and slave families, and people being shackled often stripped nude, humiliated, and auctioned off to the highest bidder seeking to extract as much capital from their bodies as humanly possible. As mentioned above, the racial violence also meant sexual violence; the sale, rape, and reproduction of human beings had multiple motivations, but one ultimate, end result: labor for the economic system.

This is a critical theme of the research on racial capitalism, the use of bodies as both field labor and socially reproductive labor. To connect the historical genealogy, Destin Jenkins reminds us that within the plantation households, enslaved Black women nursed the babies of white women, and that through the “appropriation of their breast milk and the nutritive and maternal care,” Black women’s biological capacities were further commodified and harnessed to the growth of racial capitalism (205). Those who do not fit within the appropriate confines of racial capitalism face debt bondage, incarceration, or the opportunity to sell bodily fluids to pay for municipal fees, tapped to allow cash-strapped governments to target the poor and people of color by commodifying the only thing that they have of value for racial capital: blood. If poor people’s bodies are not of any value to capital as labor, or as consumers, or to the state for paying fines and fees,

then the appropriation of their own bodies appears the next logical step.

Similarly, we cannot divorce these very corporeal, racialized practices of biopower and capital accumulation from neoliberal variations in capitalism—the undermining of the public sector, the predatory use of policing to generate revenues by arresting, detaining, and incarcerating poor people, particularly, as we have seen from Department of Justice reports, poor people of color.

In *Carceral Capitalism* Jackie Wang describes how municipal finance and the political economy of fees and fines disproportionately affects the poor and typically areas where the poor are also people of color.¹⁵ In New Orleans for instance, in a state that has the highest incarceration rate in the country by a significant margin, fines and fees against individuals' accounts for two-thirds of the public defender system's budget. At the same time, Louisiana spends nearly 3.5 billion dollars a year to investigate, arrest, prosecute, adjudicate, and incarcerate its citizens, but less than 2 percent of that amount is spent on providing legal defense for indigent individuals (158). In New Orleans the majority of funds for public defense is derived from fines for traffic offenses, and those offenses being primarily from poor people themselves. Additional fees are levied to fund the criminal justice system on the backs of those accused in the form of court fees. Public defense in New Orleans requires that people pay \$40 for representation and an additional \$45 if they plead guilty or found guilty. This egregious targeting of the poor to fund their own defense produces results echoed by Bellin, in that perverse incentives pervade the criminal justice system and its processes. Given that Louisiana's budget is organized such that the New Orleans Public Defender's Office must depend heavily on fines of criminal proceedings, this revenue stream simultaneously creates a higher demand for public defenders, and the end result is a highly inefficient, clogged, and ineffective court system that is unable to provide adequate representation for poor people, who are in turn then used to generate more revenue. This is one reason why Louisiana has indeed the highest rate of incarceration and exoneration for wrongful convictions (158). And in Louisiana, Blacks have been incarcerated at a rate more than double that of whites. The state's population is roughly 62 percent white and 33 percent Black, but those numbers nearly flip behind bars, where 34 percent of inmates are white and 64 percent Black. These trends line up with the racial disparities Bellin and other scholars describe regarding the growth of mass incarceration.

It should not be surprising, then, that in 2017 the United States Commission on Civil Rights held a briefing and release of a report that targeted fines and fees against communities of color finding widespread abuse by municipalities and law enforcement of using fees and fines to target the poor and the most vulnerable least able to defend themselves in courts as a means of predatory revenue generation.¹⁶ It found that this violated

the Equal Protection Clause and Due Process Clause in the Constitution, and furthermore found that municipalities target poor and communities of color specifically for fines and fees. Included was evidence that for-profit debt collection, which is part and parcel of the system, increased financial burdens on the poor, and that the lack of waivers and adequate community service options exacerbated the already devastating problem of fines and fees on those who have been targeted, and that this disproportionately affects people of color.

I include these examples because this is the type of state power, welded with policing and neoliberal capitalism, that is racialized. It is all part and parcel of the same system, ostensibly in the name of “race-neutral” criminal justice, which is anything but race-neutral. It is racially polarizing and contributes to the broader, durable structures of inequality across racial and class divides in America, precisely by mechanisms that appear or should be neutral with regard to race. Again, in this historical moment, such scholarship is vital.

From slavery and Jim Crow through municipal finance and the racial contours of publicly financed economic development, and throughout the history of the development of American capitalism, the role of race figures not just prominently, but integrally. To say that race and racial inequality are omnipresent in the development and continued transformation of American capitalism and society is not just an understatement, but a reminder that the economic—ostensibly culturally neutral institutions such as markets, finance, and debt—are anything but culturally neutral. From bond markets and credit rating agencies to the use of law, its interpretation, policing, and incarceration, and throughout the history of American economic development and the spread and transformation of capitalism.

Regimes of Racial and Gendered Accumulation

Writing in her *Washington Post* column, Danielle Allen describes the laudable work of herself and others on the Educating for American Democracy Roadmap, a project funded across the Trump and Biden administrations by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Education Department. It has the goal of working across the political spectrum to develop new history and civics education guidelines for K-12 instruction in American schools. Allen describes how there have been disagreements, the very first over “whether we were educating young people for a democracy or a republic. “Those advocating ‘democracy’ cared about universal inclusion, participation and popular sovereignty”—typically political perspectives of the political left—while those advocating “‘republic’ cared about order, structure, constitutionalism and rule of law”—typically associated with political perspectives of the right.¹⁷ Rather than being neutral, universal terms, however, scholarship on race and racial capitalism more broadly highlights the precise problem of the implicit bias

and politics of ostensibly universalizing norms such as “order,” “structure,” “constitutionalism,” and the “rule of law.”

From the past through the present, these are the very terms through which the most egregious of human practices and institutions have operated. This is precisely the point of Critical Race Theory: that the law, order, and rule of constitutional orders themselves are what has allowed the worst excesses of racial capitalism and colonization to propagate throughout different periods of capitalist development in the Americas. Indigenous Americans experienced dispossession through settler colonialism and legal means, such as the use of foreclosure and treaties, and if they did not, then the U.S. military was dispatched to enforce dispossession through violence. It was Thomas Jefferson who developed a detailed, three-part plan for the elimination of Indigenous people: moving from outright warfare to bribery—that is, using fraud and legal chicanery to deprive native people of their lands, imposing on native nations a narrow vision of land and agriculture that was devoid of spiritual and ecological significance, and then using federal trading posts for the expansion of native consumption and debt. Thus, the rising demands of speculators, planters, and settlers who dominated territorial and state governments turned federal treaties into mere plays for obtaining and colonizing more land.¹⁸

Slaves in the United States were forcibly conscripted via slavery and experienced predatory accumulation: forced labor conscription into the racial capitalism of America’s past, a legacy that still shapes our economy and politics today. All of this was done under the aegis of law, order, structure, and even Christian morality. As Yacovane documents, textbooks about racial hierarchy often referenced God’s having created the different races, and therefore whites were not only “naturally” superior but ordained by God to be such. The demands for “law and order” have always been central to Jim Crow and the New Jim Crow. It is through policing, municipal finance, urban planning, and the ostensibly “race-neutral” social institution of “markets” where we find, study after study, that the ideas of order, institutions, and the rule of law and constitutionality are anything but race and, we can add, gender neutral. Instead, these universal norms are entirely rife with some of the worst kinds of racialized and gendered practices, embedded and wedded to the very institutions that are meant to promote equality and inclusion. Moreover, it is the strategic use of these terms within a broader system of strategic essentialisms that is deployed to claim race and gender neutrality, while simultaneously erasing the very racial and gendered essentialisms inherent within how law and order operate in capitalism itself. It is a means for the racial and gendered hierarchies to try and erase their own ideological foundations and claim universality and color-blindness.

The scholarship highlighted here is just a small sampling of the growing body of work illustrating the need to continue to question our historical

past and challenging present. One of the dimensions that is central to all of these works is gender, and relatedly sexuality and the politics of both difference and sameness. Although Edward's book includes a focus on women's roles in South Carolina's slave's economy, gender and sexuality, indeed the role of women, are not an analytic focus. We can extend this gap back to Cedric Robinson's work, where, similarly, women are indeed included in the analysis, and even a critique of Marx's "perfunctory comments on women and children in Capital, where he suggest they constitute part of the reserve army employed episodically to retard the falling rate of profit,"¹⁹ and Robinson provides the welcome critique that Marx "consigned race, gender, culture, and history to the dustbin," and although aware of the role women and children held in the workforce, Marx still relegated them to the "imagined abyss" of precapitalist systems of accumulation.²⁰ This is not to criticize Robinson, nor the work more broadly related to how we understand racial capitalism as lacking in a more coherent, focused analysis of how gender and sexuality relate to processes of racial formation, of the politics of difference, and of capitalist accumulation. That work has been ongoing, particularly within interdisciplinary and intersectional work within and across American studies and Critical Ethnic studies; from *Queer of Color Critique* and *Women of Color Feminism*, Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson point out severe limitations within nationalist and identity-based forms of collectivity, and even with decolonization, comparative models of national identity tend to homogenize and overlook diversity and heterogeneity, thereby reproducing some of the very racial and gendered formations of bourgeois nationalist methodology.²¹ *Queer of Color Critique* and *Women of Color Feminism* have been two of the most important analytics through which scholars understand, critique, and illuminate the ways that racial formation, gender and sexuality, and capital accumulation all operate in different, often diverse ways, over time, while still maintaining relatively durable, yet transposable, cultural hegemonies undergirding contemporary neoliberalism and postcolonial global racial capitalism.

Furthering both the established lineage of debates about racial capitalism, with critical ethnic studies, is a vital area for future research. In *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival*, Gargi Bhattacharyya connects not just gender and sexual identities with social reproduction and capital formation, but also the related topics of ecology, finance, and globalization of markets.²² Taken together, the work in Critical Ethnic Studies, on the subject of racial capitalism, and *Women of Color Feminism* and *Queer of Color Critique* provide far more questions, far more new avenues for research to pursue, and opportunities for uncovering the deep, historical connections, and also the transformations taking place as our institutions, politics, and economies change.

Notes

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Book Review

THE RISE OF CORPORATE FEMINISM: Women in the American Office, 1960-1990. By Allison Elias. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

When the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) first opened its doors in 1965, over a thousand complaints about sex discrimination from women across the country poured into its office. In their letters, this term encompassed a multitude of experiences—low pay in feminized jobs, lack of respect, sexual harassment, lack of childcare, safety on the job, barriers to promotion, no leave for pregnancy, and inadequate bathroom facilities. By the early 1970s, the under-staffed agency narrowed its definition of the term to focus on industry-wide statistical analyses of women's access to and inclusion within male-dominated jobs. As historian Katherine Turk argues in her award-winning book, *Equality on Trial: Gender and Rights in the Modern Workplace*, this "narrow definition" of discrimination sought to increase women's access to "men's jobs" and/or equalize their wages in these positions. This definition benefited white, middle-class women moving into predominantly male occupations such as management and, at the same time, failed to address the problems women working in feminized occupations faced—low wages and lack of career ladders. Historian Allison Elias's excellent new book also recognizes that secretaries were left behind in feminist efforts to transform the effects of sex segregation between 1960 and 1990, but she provides a different lens on this historical process by examining the work corporations were prompted to do to comply with affirmative action guidelines. In her argument, both the second wave women's movement and corporations advanced women with college degrees into management positions and, at the same time, unintentionally reinforced the segregation of women without degrees in dead-end, low paid secretarial work. By placing clerical work at the center of her analysis, Elias's finely crafted, historical account not only charts how

this bifurcated result came about, but also spotlights the moments when possibilities for more equitable feminist outcomes existed.

Elias begins by examining the training manuals of secretarial schools in the 1950s and 1960s where women were encouraged to be feminine, yet ambitious helpmates to their male bosses. By the mid-1960s, feminists critiqued this understanding of secretarial work. For some, because low-paid secretarial included demeaning practices such as "serving" men, it was a job to avoid. If men didn't have to learn how to type, why should women, Gloria Steinem asked graduates at Smith College's 1971 commencement address. Of course, being able to "opt out" of this feminized occupation pointed to the differences between privileged women who were educated and had professional aspirations and working-class women who did not. By contrast, the National Organization for Women (NOW) pursued women's access to male dominated jobs *and* worked to improve the status and pay of women in feminized occupations. Other workplace feminists like Karen Nussbaum, one of the founders of *9to5*, focused on economic justice for secretaries calling for better wages and respect for their work.

Significantly, clerical and professional paths to gender equity did not have to be antithetical. In chapter 3 on the publishing industry, Elias finds that in the first half of the twentieth Century Ivy League educated women began their careers in clerical positions, while men with the same degrees moved out of these positions to become editors. With the passage of EEO law, publishers were required to do work to incorporate women into higher level positions. When publishers failed to do so, secretaries and women editors united in protest. In 1974, together they waged a strike against Harper & Row in New York. Their demands included job descriptions and job postings as well as 20 percent raises and better health benefits. Given the increased public attention, there hadn't been a strike in the publishing industry in 50 years, as well as the fact that employees in 12 other publishing houses across the city struck in solidarity, "Harper executives wanted to negotiate as quickly as possible." (74). The final agreement attempted to address the demands of professional and clerical workers including not only raises, but internal job postings and greater transparency in hiring and promotions. Because most hires in the past had been made through the old-boy network, requiring job postings, equitable hiring practices, and better pay for clericals were enormous changes. Ultimately, this alliance between secretaries and professional women came to an end when Human Resources management came to the fore in the late 70s and focused only on the concerns of professional women.

In chapter 4 on the banking industry, Elias shows how secretaries and professional women leveraged affirmative action policy to gain a wide range of benefits. That changed in 1971 when the Department of Labor under President Richard Nixon issued Revised Order No. 4 which

required federal contractors to “correct the underutilization of women in previously restricted job categories” (p. 106). The Order compelled employers to conduct audits of their workforce and the local population, devise numerical targets, and endeavor to establish statistical parity between the percentages of women in the surrounding metropolitan area and those in male dominated job categories. Once the Order went into practice, corporations paid little attention to the mobility of secretaries into management positions. Overrepresentation in a feminized occupation did not trigger an underutilization analysis. Once again, women’s access to and inclusion in male dominated management positions took precedence.

Elias’ book helps us to understand why secretarial work has remained a highly feminized occupation over time and how the individualistic strategies for success found in corporate feminist treatises that celebrate meritocracy are compatible with capitalism. Women in high level corporate positions like Sheryl Sandberg not only celebrate individualism but urge women to adjust to the world of work (or “lean in”), and denounce the very federal regulations (i.e., affirmative action and antidiscrimination law) that got them into male-dominated fields in the first place. In outlining how corporations let clerical workers down, this outstanding book highlights a tension in gender equity that persists to this day, a tension between “career” women’s emphasis on individualistic meritocracy and labor feminism’s focus on organizing.

My only quibble is with the book’s title which is a bit of a misnomer. Rather than explaining the rise of corporate feminism, it provides a complex argument about how corporations, federal underutilization analyses that relied upon the EEOC’s “narrow definition” of sex discrimination, and some feminists *failed* to bring about economic justice for clerical workers. Further, as Elias demonstrates, the “rise” of corporate feminism was not inevitable; feminist strategies along the way benefited both secretaries and professional women. How policy makers and feminists failed secretaries might be a more accurate as a title, but it may not serve the publisher’s indebtedness to capitalism.

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Book Review

THE END OF BURNOUT: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives. By Jonathan Malesic. Oakland: University of California Press. 2022.

Jonathan Malesic's *The End of Burnout* adds to the recent flood of books on burnout, overwhelm, and the problems with work. A former theology professor who left a tenured position after his own experience with burnout, Malesic incorporates his story into this overview of the history and psychology of burnout.

In Part I, "Burnout Culture," Malesic contends that although we've "been having the same conversation about burnout for 50 years" (61), we still don't know exactly what burnout is and who is experiencing it because there's no consensus on how to define or diagnose it. He connects burnout to other "cultural diseases" such as acedia, melancholia, and neurasthenia, explaining that while the feeling of burnout is not new, our framework for understanding it varies across time and place. Although informative, Malesic's tendency to leap across centuries and subjects—from medieval theologians to 19th century physicians to 1970s psychologists in less than ten pages—makes for an at times disjointed read.

Malesic defines burnout as the "experience of being pulled between expectation and reality at work" (2). Citing Americans' long-standing tendency to transform labor into a spiritual enterprise, or calling, Malesic argues that "In the wrong conditions ... this culturally-enforced enthusiasm for work causes burnout" (122). This definition fits Malesic's own disenchantment with the gap between the life of a professor as he imagined it and the reality of the labor involved. It is less helpful in explaining the sort of low-paid, insecure, unrewarding work that burns people out regardless of the expectations they bring to the job. This is less a critique of Malesic's ideas than the perhaps inevitable outcome of trying to generalize across the dramatically different jobs, lives, and experiences of over a hundred million US workers.

Malesic makes a compelling case for why so many jobs have gotten so much worse over the last half century, pointing to the combined effects of a “shift of risk from capital to labor” and the move “from an economy dominated by manufacturing to one dominated by services” (93). Workers across a range of fields are now expected to perform emotionally demanding work in increasingly poor conditions. For women and workers of color, experiences of burnout are exacerbated by gender and racial discrimination. Malesic thus characterizes burnout as a cultural problem, not an individual one, whose solutions lie not in workers making different choices but in dismantling “the inhumane ethical and economic system that causes burnout in the first place” (11). A necessary step in that direction, he states, is for Americans to realize that work is not, nor should it be, what gives our lives purpose and to “devote less of ourselves to our jobs, improve our labor conditions, and value those of us who do not work for pay” (2).

Part II features people whose lives involve work but do not center on it, including Benedictine monks, sports enthusiasts, poets and artists, and people living with chronic health conditions. This section includes an ode to Malesic’s long-ago job as a parking lot attendant and the engaging tale of a group of New Mexico monks who started a successful web design business then abandoned it when the work got in the way of praying, studying, and taking meals together. Overviews of Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 thoughts on labor and capital and the well-trodden story of Thoreau’s time in Walden Woods felt less relevant to contemporary conversations around burnout. I certainly concur with Malesic’s contention that dignity should not center on work, although his claim that “we assess people’s value by their jobs and demean anyone who doesn’t work” (168) feels overstated, especially in the post-pandemic era.

Malesic rightly argues that humans need and deserve community, connection, and recognition and that jobs should offer higher pay, better schedules, and more support. He is less clear on how to get there from here. He calls for “new policies that enable jobs to meet the dignity of those who perform them” (223) but mentions only a more reliable health care system (to help burnout-prone medical workers) and more generous unemployment benefits (as a step in the direction of a universal basic income). Malesic’s call for solidarity, which he defines as “compassion on the societal scale” (226), is a noble one. But having mostly ignored the deep divides between different types of work and groups of workers, he also sidesteps the many entrenched barriers to collective efforts. These qualms aside, I share Malesic’s optimism that work can and must be re-made, because we all have better things to do than work.

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Book Review

RADICAL SECRECY: THE ENDS OF TRANSPARENCY IN DATAFIED AMERICA. By Clare Birchall. University of Minnesota Press, 2021.

The book raises important questions about what kind of data citizens should share with governments, and how transparent about data collection and use governments should be with citizens. The central argument seems to be a call for greater transparency surrounding data collected by nation-states, even though the author concedes that all governments require a degree of secrecy to protect them from other governments. However, the arguments for and against secrecy and transparency set up a false choice with no real resolution. It is simply not possible for a government to be fully transparent and secure at the same time. What is available to a government's own citizens is, in effect, available to the world and thus a threat to a nation's security. The book argues that nation-states have monopolized secrecy and seems to buy into a conspiracy of covert surveillance of citizens without offering real evidence.

The strength of this book is the extensive literature that is covered in each chapter. A weakness is that for the most part, the reviews of literature read like a collection of facts with no coherent line of reasoning. For example, chapter 5 covers extensive literature about the concept of "secret", which leaves readers with interesting food for thought, but also pondering the purpose of the chapter, which is more semantics than substance and only tangentially connected to the problem of the secretive collection of citizens' data by governments. Chapter 2 offers examples of openness (or lack thereof) from the administrations of recent U.S. presidents but provides no central thesis about what the reader should conclude from the examples.

Government surveillance for political agendas should be the least of our worries. Chapter 4, the most interesting chapter in the book, addresses the issue of surveillance through use of social media and other online activities. The author acknowledges that the business models of giant

social media corporations rely on opaque algorithms and data extraction obscured by complex and hard-to-find user agreements, but fails to mention the political polarization and disruption of democratic processes that recommendation algorithms have caused, which is far more detrimental than any harm caused by democratic governments. We no doubt live in the era of surveillance capitalism, as the book suggests, but capitalism exists in the private sector and is not a direct function of governments. Why do we accept widespread corporate surveillance while protesting the fraction of data collection done on the part of the government?

Overall, the book is dense and the line of reasoning often is hard to follow. The arguments and counter arguments for and against governmental secrecy and transparency often cancel each other and leave the reader pondering the point of making the arguments. After reading the book, re-reading the introduction and conclusion, it is still unclear what central point the author sought to make. It is an intellectual exercise without a conclusive argument or resolution.

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Book Review

MYTH AMERICA: Historians Take On the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past. By Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, eds. New York: Basic Books. 2023.

The “great enemy of truth is not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest,” John F. Kennedy said in 1962, “but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.” No single part of American life has been unscathed by widespread lies and myths, but our contemporary moment is exceptional. To understand why, *MYTH AMERICA* brings historical research and analysis to bear on some of the most pervasive falsehoods from the nation’s founding to its recent history, linking their sometimes centuries-long legacies to current political, economic, and social clashes.

Edited by Princeton history professors Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, *MYTH AMERICA* is a collection that seeks to confront the “deceptions and distortions” that flowed from the Trump administration, which the editors consider a distinct fact-free source (1). American lies did not begin there, of course. Kruse and Zelizer credit the proliferation of many ahistorical national myths to the emergence of a mighty right-wing media ecosystem and the present-day Republican Party’s submission to it—two related currents that allowed the forty-fifth president and his aides to spew lies unapologetically from the White House.

In 20 concise essays, leading historians of the United States cut through the noise on a diverse set of subjects that have long fueled Americans’ prejudices and antipathies, from insurrection to confederate monuments. Each one is a highly readable and significant addition suitable for undergraduate reading assignments in the vein of the much-used *Keywords* series published by New York University Press. The collection’s themes are also smartly drawn from today’s prominent media headlines and political debates, and their appropriate diversity has already attracted a wide readership for this *New York Times* bestseller.

The collection somewhat follows a chronological historical sweep, starting with David A. Bell on American exceptionalism and Akhil Reed Amar on founding myths, and moves through the civil rights and feminist politics of the twentieth century. One of the most timely and rousing contributions is Carol Anderson's examination of the widespread voter fraud myth and so-called election integrity in the nineteenth century to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment's ban on racial disenfranchisement. Politicians and operatives from then to now have "camouflaged their discriminatory intent" with "race-neutral language" and spurious calls for honest government, writes Anderson, an Emory University historian (300). She also shows how Americans became accustomed to Republicans' claims of stolen elections in the mid-to-late twentieth century, and thus allowed the voter fraud myth to flourish as an enormous threat to U.S. democracy, such as it is. In another striking essay, Yale historian Elizabeth Hinton argues that violence perpetuated by police more often "inflamed community violence," not the other way around, as generations of U.S. politicians have claimed (238). Hinton historicizes cops' use of tear gas as a primary weapon of community control in the twentieth century, which bipartisan lawmakers saw as a more effective and less harmful weapon than billy clubs and bullets. With more frequency, police turned tear gas—a weapon initially devised for war and colonization—on urban Black communities during and after the 1960s. This American form of riot control, seen recently in the protests following George Floyd's murder, supports the myth that policing is the solution to social problems, Hinton concludes.

Other essays include Erika Lee on immigration, Geraldo Cadava on the U.S.-Mexico border, Lawrence B. Glickman on white backlash, and Daniel Immerwahr on U.S. imperialism. As Kruse and Zelizer note, other damaging myths have and will continue to capture Americans' imaginations and drive their politics. While not mentioned in the text, so-called "stand your ground" laws, which disproportionately endanger Black and brown Americans in public, and attacks on trans people are rooted in similar myths about the nation's racial and social hierarchy. Tragically, many more volumes like MYTH AMERICA will have to be written in the future.

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Book Review

THE SENSE OF BROWN. By Jose Esteban Muñoz. Durham, Duke University Press, 2020.

In *The Sense of Brown*, Muñoz articulates brownness as “brown people...who are rendered brown by their personal and familial participations in South-to-North migrations patterns” (p. 3) and as everyday gestures of people who are brown by their performativity that challenges whiteness as a majoritarian cultural logic. Throughout the book, the reader is able to feel the intimacy of Muñoz’s thinking in the renderings presented that challenge one to think beyond identitarian subject positions of brownness and to engage the affect tied to a way of being brown. Furthermore, each of the chapters intimately ties the concept of brownness to queerness as both affective excessiveness of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual performativities of Latinidad. As an example, Muñoz invites us to understand the limitations of terms such as Latino/a, similar to Hispanic, that have historically been used to present a communal group identity within the social and political constructs of the United States. Similarly, the editor’s note the shift in group identity discourses since Muñoz’s departure from Latino/a, and/or Hispanic, to most recent identity terms such as Latinx and Latine that are marked with an assumed inclusion of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual subject positions. What Muñoz’s work does in this book, similar to his 2009 text *Cruising Utopia*, is to imagine the possibilities in brown and queer world makings that center the social political realities of queer people of color?

Each chapter in the book is able to stand on its own in relation to what Muñoz constitutes as an affect of brownness, rather than a feeling, that is both historically situated and “that a subject feels in [themselves] or recognizes in others (p. 40). I also find it important to highlight some of the chapters to capture the way this affect of brownness is taken up in several artistic performances by challenging the U.S. nationalistic affect rooted

in whiteness. In chapters three and nine, we are brought into the world of Cuban memory and affect through *cubania*, what Muñoz defines as “of Cubanness as a way of being in the world” (p. 24) in the performances of Nilo Cruz’s *Two Sisters and a Piano* and Tania Bruguera’s *The Burden of Guilt*. In these two chapters Muñoz attempts to have the reader feel the tensions, contradictions, and dichotomies of the Cuban binary of those within the U.S. landscape and those on the island of Cuba, and more specifically, understand the desires and longings that exist with each other in imagining a different world alongside those who are invested in maintaining the state and its existing system. Similarly, this affect of memory and imagining is read and felt in chapter seven through Luis Alfaro’s *Cuerpo Politizado* and the reverberance of a dream not achieved in each of the segments of this performance as it relates to Latino affect, more specifically, Los Angeles Chicano affect. Throughout the book, there is a consistent reimagining of agency that artist’s embody in their performances and use to render white affect as inconspicuous to the sense of brown.

As a Jotería Studies scholar, I find myself reflecting on the ways Muñoz builds on Chicana/Latina and Black Feminisms as the foundation of his interpretations of the many performances that he takes us with throughout the book. The vivid descriptions of acts of excessiveness and details that one might miss in the performances that challenge the social and political constructs of imperialism and capitalism in the artist’s assertion of brownness and queerness is thoughtfully constructed in the critique. Additionally, there is an agentic practice that Muñoz inserts into his critique and interpretation of the artist and their performance/s. Simultaneously, as the reader, one feels the multiple forms of affect that Muñoz describes such as guilt, shame, freedom, and liberation while at the same time remembering that this is not disconnected from the realities of harm and violence experienced by queers of color, and people of color, broadly, at the hands of racism, queer and trans antagonism, and capitalism. Ultimately, *The Sense of Brown* captures Muñoz’s call to think about brownness and queerness as “*una manera de ser*”, a way of being, and as importantly, *una manera de sentir*, a way of feeling.

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174 Contributors

scholar-activist, he takes pride in telling stories that challenge stereotypes and empower his community and communities alike. He is regularly invited to K-12 schools as a guest speaker, and even has a TEDx talk titled, "Boxnard," which is available on YouTube. His next book, *Why You Always So Political?*, will be published Summer 2023 and documents the experiences and resiliencies of Mexican students in higher education.

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