



DIALOGUE

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*



Reinterpretation:

Situating Culture from Pedagogy to Politics

INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal focused on the intersection of popular culture and pedagogy. While some open-access journals charge a publication fee for authors to submit, *Dialogue* is committed to creating and maintaining a scholarly journal that is accessible to all—meaning that there is no charge for either the author or the reader.

The Journal is interested in contributions that offer theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and historical examinations of popular culture, including interdisciplinary discussions and those which examine the connections between American and international cultures. In addition to analyses provided by contributed articles, the Journal also encourages submissions for guest editions, interviews, and reviews of books, films, conferences, music, and technology.

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Anna S. CohenMiller is a qualitative methodologist who examines issues of social justice and equity in education broadly, with a focus on gender, pedagogical practices, and popular culture representations. She received her PhD in *Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching* and MA in *Bicultural-Bilingual Studies* from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Since 2011, she has been involved with the SWPACA in developing *Dialogue* and then as an Executive Team member. Currently, Dr. CohenMiller works as an Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan. Select publications include “Creating a Participatory Arts-Based Online Focus Group: Highlighting the Transition from DocMama to Motherscholar” (2017) and “Visual Arts Methods in Phenomenology” (2018).

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Robert (Rob) Galin is Associate Professor of English and Communications at the University of New Mexico's Gallup campus. Rob is editor of the campus literary journal, *Red Mesa Review*. He has published poetry, creative non-fiction articles, fiction, and academic work in a variety of media. Galin also has a thirty-plus-year career in print and electronic journalism as writer/editor, including such credits as Associated Press, The Denver Post, Rocky Mountain News, public radio, etc. In 2013 he was a First Place co-winner for Beat Reporting from Colorado Associated Press Editors and Reporters.

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Kelli Bippert earned her bachelors of science in education, masters in literacy education, and Ph.D. in *Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching* from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Dr. Bippert taught grades 4 through 8 for fifteen years in elementary and middle schools in the San Antonio area. During this time, she served as reading specialist, designing and implementing instruction for adolescents identified as struggling readers and writers, often utilizing popular media to support the acquisition and support of literacy skills.

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Karina A. Vado is a FEF McKnight Doctoral Fellow, and a Ph.D. candidate and instructor in the Department of English at the University of Florida. Her primary areas of research and teaching are in African-American and Latinx/Chicanx cultural studies, science fiction studies, science and technology studies, utopian studies, and critical (mixed) race and gender studies. At UF, she serves as Senior Coordinator of PODEMOS, an academic success and professionalization initiative for first-year Hispanic-Latinx students offered by Hispanic-Latino Affairs. Karina also served as the inaugural intern for “SF@UF,” a collaborative and interdisciplinary digital project seeking to improve the visibility and usability of UF's diverse holdings in science fiction (SF), fantasy, and utopian studies.

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Assem Amantay holds a MA in Multilingual Education from the Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University. She received her BA in Public Administration and Public Policy at Michigan State University (USA) under the Bolashaq Presidential Scholarship of Kazakhstan. Assem worked for four-year years in higher education management. She also is an author and a reviewer of the NUGSE Research in Education (2016-2017). Assem is an English teacher with research interests in multiliteracies, literacy education, family engagement, language revitalization, and language teacher education. She is currently an independent researcher and Family Engagement Coordinator at a private educational center.

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Reinterpretations of popular culture and pedagogy

We are happy to announce our latest issue, “Reinterpretation: Situating Culture from Pedagogy to Politics.” In this sixth year of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, we have a set of five articles that speak to the range of popular culture studies. Across the articles, the topics showcase the varied ways in which we can reconsider and (re)interpret how we conceptualize culture.

First, Allison Rank discusses the interconnection between teaching and current political issues in “Scarlett O’Hara, Solomon Northrup, and Ta-Nehisi Coates: Helping Students Grasp the Relationship between Popular Culture and Contemporary Racial Politics.” Jesse Weiner then draws a connection between historical and contemporary modes of poetry to address concepts of gender and sexuality in “Every Time I Write a Rhyme / These People Think It’s a Crime’: Persona Problems in Catullus and Eminem.” Our issue continues with Emily Hoffman’s “Making the Case for Teaching Character Change in Complex TV: *The Closer* and *Major Crimes*.” In this article, Hoffman describes how Jason Mittell’s 2015 book, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* can be applied in a semester-long undergraduate course to analyze “long-term, meaningful character growth.” Jason Tatlock’s article, “Human Sacrifice and Propaganda in Popular Discourse: More Than Morbid Curiosity,” describes a broad historical analysis of ethnocentrism, imperialism, and expense to “demonstrate(s) both the antiquity of such propagandistic goals and their relevancy to recent portrayals of human sacrifice in film.” The issue concludes with, Kathy Merlock Jackson and Terrance Lindvall, who detail the development of an interdisciplinary course on *Silence*. Through an examination of multiple popular culture media texts, in “Studying Silence in Popular Culture,” Merlock Jackson and Lindvall highlight “characteristics of introversion and extraversion” while exploring the “role of silence in the modern world.”

In addition to the full-length articles, we are pleased to share three short online articles:

- *Musing on Pedagogy* by Bridget Goodman, on *YouTube and Linguistic Variation*;
- *Book Review* by Nataliya Shpylova-Saeed and Timothy D. Saeed, *Engaging Interdisciplinary Conversations*, which reviews Emily Petermann’s *The Musical Novel: Imitation of Musical Structure, Performance, and Reception in Contemporary Fiction*, and
- *Film Review* by Kelly Salsbery and Anne Collins Smith, *Groupthink in the Cave: A New Perspective on The Matrix*

Thank you to our peer reviewers, Robert Galin (Interim Managing Editor), Kelli Bippert (Educational Resources Editor), Karina Vado (Book Reviews Editor), Douglas CohenMiller (Graphic Designer), and Lynnea Chapman King (Advisory Board), for the production of this issue.

From the five articles to the short articles addressing pedagogy, books, and films, we hope you will see new avenues of understanding popular culture and pedagogy through reinterpreting and reconsidering culture through new lenses. We encourage you to dig deep into your thinking and practice and share your unique insights for a future issue.

Anna S. CohenMiller
Editor-in-Chief

Scarlett O'Hara, Solomon Northrup, and Ta-Nehisi Coates: Helping Students Grasp the Relationship between Popular Culture and Contemporary Racial Politics

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ABSTRACT

The post-racial perspective of many millennial college students can make it challenging for faculty to engage students in serious conversations about race in America and the relationships among popular culture, political culture, and race-conscious policies. This article outlines a three-week unit from a course entitled Popular Culture and Politics that uses *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *12 Years a Slave* (2013) along with academic and popular articles to walk students through three interconnected concepts: (1) the conflicting images of slavery as a system in American political history; (2) the role of popular culture in constructing and disseminating those images; and (3) the connections between the cultural understanding of America's racial history and the contemporary political landscape. This piece provides an overview of the objectives of each section of the unit, including summaries of readings, sample discussion questions, and a summative assignment—all of which can be adapted for a variety of disciplines.

Keywords: Political Culture, Ideology, Reparations, *Gone with the Wind*, *12 Years a Slave*

As a professor of American politics, I struggle to help students understand the role of race in American politics, both historically and today. Many of them express a view of race and racism as a problem of America's past addressed by the Civil Rights Movement. Popular culture provides a valuable resource for instructors seeking to introduce students—particularly at predominately white institutions—to a reading of American politics that regards race as a central component of American political development. Moreover, the images presented in popular media provide students an opportunity to grapple with conflicting versions of American history as well as the implications of the dominance of particular renderings. In this article, I review a unit developed as part of an upper division Political Science course entitled Popular Culture and Politics. The three-week unit draws on the films *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *12 Years a Slave* (2013) as well as academic and popular writing to walk students through three interconnected concepts: (1) the conflicting images of slavery as a system in American political history; (2) the role of popular culture in constructing and disseminating those images; and (3) the connections between the cultural understanding of America's racial history and the contemporary political landscape. At the close of the unit, students read Ta-Nehisi Coates' "The Case for Reparations" and debate how the images of slavery that dominate popular imagination influence the public's willingness to consider policies such as reparations. These texts expose students to the constructed nature of our perceptions of slavery as an institution, provide specific sites for working through different racial ideologies, and serve as a platform for considering how cultural images impact policy making. Ultimately, the curriculum addresses two pedagogical goals common to a number of disciplines. Students gain an understanding of three concepts—construction, ideology, and the relationship between culture and politics—which can then be applied beyond the specific topic of race. At the same time, however, the focus on America's racial past and present challenges students to critically examine their own perceptions of race and racial ideologies.

Before outlining the course, I discuss the challenges of planning curriculum that engages the current college population regarding race. I explain why I have chosen to use these films out of the multitude available on the topic of race in American politics and offer a detailed description of the three-week unit in question, including reading assignments and discussion questions along with the summative assignment for this section of the course. I close with some reflections derived from my experiences teaching this unit.

Race and the College Classroom

Many students enter college without the necessary historical knowledge to contextualize contemporary race relations, let alone discuss policies such as reparations or anti-mass incarceration activism (Okun; Shuster). Despite the wealth of evidence regarding the South's active rejection of Reconstruction, the North's retreat from enforcing Reconstruction policies, and the political and economic terror of the post-bellum era, Steven Sawchuk points out that "Americans in general have a shaky grasp of Civil War history and an even worse understanding of the Reconstruction."¹

Along with the lack of historical knowledge, contemporary students enter classrooms steeped in two racial ideologies—colorblindness and post-racialism. A racial ideology structures the "common sense" realities about race "that provide, at a non-conscious level, baselines for judging what is normal, moral, and legitimate in the world" (Haney-Lopez 808). Typified by the refrain "I don't see color," colorblindness posits that neither public policy nor individuals should recognize race and often casts references to race as the problem (Bonilla-Silva; Gallagher; Guinier and Torres; Neville). Post-racialism recognizes a "legacy of racial mistreatment" but suggests that racism in the current era is best understood "as individual bias and bigotry," thus relegating

1) Scholars in political science and history have produced monograph-length works assessing the reasons for and consequences of the failure of Reconstruction. Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* offers an in-depth history of the Reconstruction Era. For analysis linking the failures of Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement see Philip A. Klinker with Rogers A. Smith's *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* and Richard Velelly's *The Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement*.

systemic mistreatment based on race to the past (Haney-Lopez 826). Millennial students have grown up in a world steeped in post-racial proclamations from the media, a "social landscape dominated by colorblind racism," and a culture that sees 'real' racism as firmly located in the "de jure white supremacy" of the past (Mueller 173).

Faculty in a number of fields have developed methods to give students the tools they need to interrogate the validity and consequences of these two common racial ideologies. Examples include teaching whiteness through hip-hop videos (Stein), introducing students to social topics through popular song lyrics (Martinez), researching their family's racial autobiography (McKinney; Mueller), adapting the rules of Monopoly to show the lasting impacts of structural inequalities (Stout, Kretschmer, and Stout), and exposing students to America's racial history through popular films (Slaner and Clyne; Kinney; Loewen).

Teal Rothschild points out that "'talking race' in the classroom needs to be tailored to the specific identities of students as well as to the specific social institutions in which they are enrolled" (33). Rothschild's insight highlights the need for instructors to think carefully about the characteristics of their classrooms, their students, and their own perceived racial identity when preparing and deploying lesson plans or activities that focus on 'talking race.' I am a white instructor teaching at a predominately white institution located in central New York. My classes rarely include more than one or two students of color. The area where I teach—hard hit by the loss of domestic factory jobs as well as the current opiate and heroin crises—draws many white students whose family experiences may make it difficult to see their whiteness as a privilege. Over the last three years, I have discovered that starting the conversation with historical—rather than contemporary—conditions increases my students' willingness to grapple with the role of race in American politics. When students learn about convict lease labor, the rise of the white primary, and early twentieth century race riots, it deepens their historical knowledge of events and policies relevant to a specific course while also creating a new context for classroom conversations about contemporary politics.² In addition to the broader historical context, I want students to understand how popular constructions of slavery and Reconstruction contribute to cultural perceptions of history and thus to the way Americans view policy options. To demonstrate how cultural perceptions change over time as well as how popular culture produces and is produced by ideological content, I show two films that offer dramatically different presentations of American slavery: *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *12 Years a Slave* (2013).

Gone with the Wind* and *12 Years a Slave

Based on Margaret Miller's 1936 best-selling novel of the same name, David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind* (GWTW) received critical and popular acclaim. The film centers on Scarlett O'Hara's experiences from the Civil War's onset through the initial stages of Reconstruction. Scarlett functions as a cipher for the South itself: mistreated by freed slaves and scalawag whites and determined to stand up against Northern oppression (Briley 460). Along with *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Gone with the Wind* "played a crucial role in formulating popular perceptions and misperceptions of Reconstruction" as well as supplying images of how 'good blacks' behaved both during and after the Civil War (Briley 454). The lasting popularity of the film allowed it to shape "the nation's perception of Reconstruction from a white Southern perspective" (Briley 464).

I juxtapose GWTW with the 2013 Best Picture Oscar winner *12 Years a Slave* (12YAS). Based on a slave narrative of the same name published in 1853, the film follows Solomon Northrup from his comfortable life as free man in New York through his kidnapping, sale into slavery, and ownership by three different slave masters. If Selznick's approach to *Gone with the Wind* perpetuated a myth about the institution of slavery

2) I have found Klinkner and Smith's work particularly useful for introducing students to these topics. In addition, Sam Pollard's documentary *Slavery by Another Name* (2012; based on Douglas A. Blackmon's 2008 book of the same name) offers a straightforward look at the creation and implications of convict lease labor in the postbellum era.

and experience of Reconstruction, director Steve McQueen's approach in *12 Years a Slave* seeks to puncture those myths protecting white Americans from the realities of chattel slavery. Despite the substantial number of films made about slavery, the institution itself traditionally serves as a jumping off point for stories focused on the emancipators rather than the enslaved (Morris). *12YAS* focuses on "the day-to-day workings of the system, the management of the human chattel, and the close-to-the-bone contacts between master and slave" (Doherty 8).

Ultimately, *Gone with the Wind* and *12 Years a Slave* offer two distinct renderings of slavery as an institution that structures behavior, bodies, and landscapes. As a result, viewing the films in conjunction with one another creates opportunities for students to discuss how popular culture texts contribute to understandings of history. For the remainder of the article, I focus on the three sections that comprise the unit entitled America's Peculiar Institution: Mythologizing the Past, Post-Racism, and A New Lens. I review the objective of each section as well as how I hope it challenges students and prepares them for the next phase of the unit. While I developed this material for a political science class, the content reflects concerns shared by a variety of disciplines, most notably sociology, history, and American studies. Indeed, the assigned readings come from these fields as well as political science. With slight changes in emphasis, instructors can adapt the presented material to fit their discipline's perspective on interactions among popular culture, race, ideology, and the state. For a summary of each reading as well as sample discussion questions, see Tables 1-3. For a complete outline of the viewing and reading schedule as well as class session objectives, see Table 4.

America's Peculiar Institution

I begin by asking students to create a timeline of African American history from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement from memory. This activity shows where the class stands in terms of historical knowledge. I then ask them to consider the outsized role of popular culture on perceptions of race and racism. Most of my students report coming from racially homogenous (white) communities and spending their daily lives interacting predominately with others of the same race. Occasionally students suggest that their knowledge of race in America is limited to what they learned in school and see on television or in the movies. I tell the students upfront that our goal is to think about how cultural representations of slavery influence discussions about race.

I also prepare the class for the violent nature of the unit. The readings and films expose students to images of physical and sexual assaults as well as racial slurs. I invite students to prioritize self-care while challenging them to engage the material: if a conversation becomes overwhelming, students may step out and follow up with me after class. I encourage students to raise questions even if they are unsure of the appropriate language to use and extend the presumption of good intention to one another during challenging discussions. While I have designed this curriculum for a predominately white institution, I regularly have one or two students of color in my class. I email each of these students separately to reiterate the invitation for self-care and let them know they are welcome (but under no obligation) to contact me at any time if they feel I or a student have handled a conversation poorly.³

SECTION 1: MYTHOLOGIZING THE PAST

The first section, Mythologizing the Past, takes two course periods. In the first, we begin watching *GWTW*, which students finish on their own. During the second period, we discuss the film and the four

3) For an extended discussion of how instructors can support students of color during classroom discussions about race and racism, see Simpson, Jennifer S., Angelique Causey, and Levon Williams. "'I Would Want You to Understand It': Students' Perspectives on Addressing Race in the Classroom." *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, doi:10.1080/17475750701265274.

assigned readings. The assigned readings provide students a language to interpret the film in relation to politics, destabilize their understanding of racial stereotypes, highlight the cultural conditions that led to the production and popularity of *GWTW*, and underscore the continued presence of *GWTW*'s vision of slavery in American life. For summaries of each reading as well as reading and film application questions, see Table 1.

I have found that the reticence students often show in discussing race disappears when discussing *GWTW*. Popular culture produced over eighty years ago seems to provide a place for criticism that fits within students' colorblind/post-racial framework as the film's nostalgia for slavery can be justified as that of a less enlightened America. In addition, the assigned readings help students master the language needed to develop and express their criticisms of the film. Most notably, a short piece from Stuart Hall entitled "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media" offers a simple definition of ideology, links the concept to race, and introduces the phrase "grammar of race" to refer to racial stereotypes and related themes that reoccur over time (83). This basic framework is enough to help students begin organizing their thoughts. Two additional pieces, the first chapter of Micki McElya's *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* and Gerald Wood's "From *The Clansman* and *Birth of a Nation* to *Gone with the Wind*: The Loss of American Innocence," introduce students to the supposedly comforting and nostalgic images of slavery provided to white Americans struggling to adapt to industrialization, urbanization, and political cynicism during the early twentieth-century.

The final reading for this section, Ellen Bresler Rockmore's "How Texas Teaches History" criticizes a 2015 social studies textbook released by McGraw-Hill Education for grammatical choices that obscure the reality of slavery. Sentences about masters introducing slaves to Christianity and slaves telling folk tales have clear agentic subjects, while those reflecting the reality of chattel slavery—beatings, brandings, and family separation—all happen to slaves without an agent in sight. This piece provides two benefits to the class. First, it sparks their imagination about the ways in which contemporary Americans, intentionally or not, downplay the severity of slavery. Second, it provides students their first exposure to a refrain I will issue over and over during class discussion: slavery did not just happen. The capture, auction, field labor, and reproductive labor of slaves occurred because white Americans, individually and collectively, captured, bought and sold, whipped, and raped slaves. It is intellectually dishonest to present slavery—within popular culture, classroom discussion, or college papers—in a way that obscures this reality. At the end of this section, students should have developed a level of comfort in identifying and talking about the grammar of race and the stereotyping of black characters along with knowledge of the role played by nostalgia (rather than history) in constructing lasting cultural images of slavery.

Table 1: Mythologizing the Past

Summary	Sample Questions
<p>In “The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media,” Hall defines ideology and explains how ideology functions both generally and within the media. He also introduces the phrase ‘grammar of race’ to refer to the stereotypes of people of color (the slave figure, native, and clown) and the characteristics (ambivalence and primitivism) that reflect the ideology of a particular time.</p>	<p>A Reading Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What are the three characteristics of ideologies? 2) What are the components of the grammar of race? 3) Can you think of additional stereotypical characters that would fit within this grammar of race? <p>Application to Films:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is the grammar of race presented in <i>GWTW</i>? 2) How does <i>12YAS</i> upset this grammar of race? 3) How does Hall’s description of primitivism feature in <i>GWTW</i>? In <i>12YAS</i>?
<p>In the first chapter of <i>Clinging to Mammy</i>, McElya outlines the history of the Aunt Jemima brand and the broader reimagining of the history of slavery that took place a generation after the Civil War. Portrayed by a woman named Nancy Green and first unveiled at the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, the mammy figure of Aunt Jemima drew on white nostalgia for the supposed convenience and comfort provided by slavery to sell instant pancake mix to northern and southern audiences.</p>	<p>Reading Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Why did the R.T. Davis Milling Company choose a slave as the brand for their instant pancake mix? 2) How is the mammy figure constructed and consumed according to McElya? 3) How does the person of Nancy Green disappear into the brand of Aunt Jemima? <p>Application to Films:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How does the character of Mammy in <i>GWTW</i> reflect the qualities of Aunt Jemima? 2) How does <i>GWTW</i> reflect a similar nostalgia to that which drove Aunt Jemima’s popularity? 3) Is there a mammy figure in <i>12YAS</i>? If no, why might Northrup’s experience and thus McQueen’s film exclude this character?
<p>In “From <i>The Clansman</i> and <i>Birth of a Nation</i> to <i>Gone with the Wind</i>: The Loss of American Innocence,” Wood contrasts the book and film versions of <i>GWTW</i> as well as the previous generation’s popular book <i>The Clansman</i> and its film adaptation <i>Birth of a Nation</i>. Wood argues that all four texts use family melodrama to frame American politics and suggests that Selznick’s adaptation of <i>GWTW</i> evidences a deep nostalgia for the antebellum south that reflects the cynicism and disillusion that plagued the post-World War I, post-Great Depression America.</p>	<p>Reading Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Why does Wood call <i>GWTW</i> an American myth? 2) How do domestic themes and setting increase the appeal of <i>GWTW</i> for audiences? 3) How does the film version of <i>GWTW</i> reflect the political conditions in which it was created? <p>Application to Films:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How does <i>GWTW</i> convey a sense of nostalgia in its narrative? Art direction? 2) What is <i>GWTW</i> nostalgic for? 3) How does this nostalgia effectively mythologize American history? 4) What leverage does Selznick get out of presenting the film as a family melodrama?

<p>In "How Texas Teaches History," Rockmore criticizes a 2015 social studies textbook released by McGraw-Hill Education for using grammar that obscures the realities of slavery. Sentences about masters introducing slaves to Christianity and slaves telling folk tales have clear agentic subjects while those reflecting the reality of chattel slavery—beating, branding, family separation—all happened to slaves at the hands of unknown, unidentified actors.</p>	<p>Reading Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Rockmore claims that grammar can be a moral choice. Do you agree? Why or why not? <p>Application to Films:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How does the concept of present/missing agents apply to the presentation of slavery in <i>GWTW</i>? In <i>12YAS</i>? 2) How can you protect yourself against the 'missing agent' problem in your own writing about these films?
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SECTION 2: POST-RACISM

The second section, Post-Racism, takes one course period. To prepare students to consider the differences in the racial ideology of the time that produced *12 Years a Slave* as well as their own racial ideology, I assign Ian Haney-Lopez' "Is the Post in Post-Racial the Blind in Colorblind?" The piece challenges students to consider that contemporary media has its own racial ideology and grammar of race and that each change over time. Haney-Lopez analyzes the history and implications of the mid-to-late twentieth century's dominant racial ideologies: colorblindness and post-racialism. Importantly, he considers the way in which both racial frames contribute to the rise of mass incarceration and argues that post-racialism cannot address some policy challenges. After working through the content of the article itself, I ask students to use Haney-Lopez' framework for deconstructing racial ideologies to develop their own model of the racial ideology present in *GWTW*. At the end of this section, the students have a deeper understanding of contemporary ideologies of race and a better ability to assess their own approach to race as fitting within a racial ideology. It also sparks their imagination about how the "common sense" racial ideology of a given time impacts policy-making.

Table 2: Post-Racism

Summary	Sample Questions
<p>In "Is the Post in Post-Racial the Blind in Colorblind?" Haney-Lopez analyzes the history and implications of the two dominant racial ideologies: colorblindness and post-racism. He argues that while post-racism recognizes race as a socially constructed category that plays a significant role in American history, it simultaneously embraces the central tenet of colorblindness which treats race as irrelevant for modern decision-making.</p>	<p>Reading Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is Haney-Lopez' definition of ideology? 2) Explain the history and implications of the two competing ideologies of race outlined by Haney-Lopez. 3) How does each framework answer the three key questions of racial ideology? 4) Given that the ideology of race in <i>GWTW</i> is neither colorblind nor post-race, what would it be? Hint: How do you think <i>GWTW</i> answers the three key questions of racial ideology? 5) Why did we read this piece?

SECTION 3: A NEW LENS

Students enter the third section with an understanding of the cultural moment that produced *12YAS* and a language for discussing the film itself. The final section, A New Lens, requires three course periods. I begin the fourth class with a discussion of Wesley Morris' "The Song of Solomon" which offers an in-depth review of *12YAS* including a discussion of its declaratory style and its focus on the inner workings of chattel

slavery. Students spend the first part of this class period using *Morris* along with their notes from Wood and Hall to create categories to use when comparing *GWTW* and *12YAS*. While I occasionally begin *12YAS* in this class, I always allow students to choose to watch this visceral, often brutal film in its entirety without being surrounded by classmates. Students finish the film on their own by the fifth class. During that session, we complete the chart comparing and contrasting *GWTW* and *12YAS*. While there are a number of entry points for comparing these two films, I find the following two the most illustrative of the value of the juxtaposition.

The straightforward, sparse style of *12YAS* throws into relief Wood's claim that *GWTW* subsumes slavery into a romantic melodrama. The students readily note differences in the camerawork and scoring. Indeed, I have learned that the cinematography of *12YAS* disturbs students who claim McQueen lingers too long on the brutality of slavery. Their discomfort provides an opening to discuss why they find it to be 'too long,' what lies behind that sentiment, and what the lengthy, wide shots allow McQueen to convey. The most notable example occurs almost an hour into the film. While working on a plantation owned by Mr. Ford, Northrup chaffs under his still-new identity and attracts the attention of the plantation's white carpenter, John Tibeats. When he moves to whip Northrup, Northrup quickly gains the upper hand and begins beating Tibeats. The plantation overseer interrupts Tibeats' attempt to hang Northrup to protect Ford's investment. He leaves Northrup roped to the tree, balancing on his toes while plantation life—slaves complete their tasks, the mistress stares out from her ornate porch—continues and day turns to dusk with only diegetic sound. In these two minutes, McQueen lays bare the banal nature of slavery's brutality. Moreover, the continuation of domestic life suggests that the brutality of slavery is a feature of genteel plantation life, not a disruption of it. *GWTW* views slavery as a feature of Southern gentility with brutality stemming from the Civil War and Reconstruction. Prior to the end of slavery, the O'Hara family lived comfortably with the support of loved house slaves who dote on Scarlett. Civil War and Reconstruction remove these slaves from the protection of the O'Hara family while looters desecrate Tara.

The films also provide an opportunity to assess the supposed primitivism of people of color that Hall notes as a key component of the grammar of race. Selznick represents the primitivism of African Americans and thus the need for slavery to protect both whites and blacks through a scene where two men attack Scarlett as she drives through a shanty town occupied by freedmen and poor whites. Big Sam, a former Tara slave, interrupts the attack and returns to Tara announcing "I've had enough of them carpetbaggers!" The plantation home provides safety and comfort for whites and blacks alike. *12YAS* inverts this presentation of primitivism again through a presentation of brutality. After cutting Northrup down, Ford sells him to Mr. Epps who first appears on screen preaching to his slaves about the Biblical justification for punishing any disobedience with 40, 100, or 150 lashes. He drunkenly demands his slaves participate in late night dance parties for his amusement while his wife seethes over the attention he pays to a slave named Patsy whom he rapes regularly. Epps' drunken, violent, sexual, and predatory behavior stands in stark contrast to Northrup's stoic, disciplined actions marking the slave master as primitive. The willingness of Ford, a seemingly thoughtful man aware of Northrup's history, to not only ignore this information but sell Northrup to Epps combined with Epps' reliance on the Bible to justify slavery invites the viewer to see the institution of slavery itself as one that encourages primitive behavior.

While the students have been watching the film and reading short pieces, they have also been working their way through Ta-Nehisi Coates' "A Case for Reparations." A 2014 cover story for *The Atlantic*, the piece challenges readers to consider reparations in the context of a history of racially-based violence and dispossession. Students read this piece along with one from Alyssa Rosenberg, popular culture critic for *The Washington Post*. Her article asks the question that drives this unit: Would white Americans be more open to reparations if the cultural narrative they drew on to understand slavery reflected the institution as it is presented in *12YAS* rather than in *GWTW*? We spend some time reviewing Coates' piece—largely filled with a

history of government sponsored or permitted racist practices that the students have never heard of—but spend most of our time interrogating Rosenberg's claim. My objective in this section is not to convince students that Coates is correct in calling for slavery reparations. Rather, reading the piece provides specific information to use in considering his call as well as Rosenberg's. At the end of this section, students display an understanding of how popular culture affects the policy making environment by offering images that contribute to what citizens and law makers believe about our history. Moreover, they learn to identify how beliefs about history may influence our understanding of what fellow citizens may deserve.

Table 3: A New Lens

Summary	Sample Questions
In "The Song of Solomon," Morris argues that McQueen's declaratory style, evidenced in the limited scoring and camera work, combined with the narrative perspective from writer John Ridley results in a film that reveals the power and privilege that underscore chattel slavery. Morris emphasizes the unique nature of this film given the tendency of films about racism to focus on the role of good whites and America's progress toward equality.	<p>Application to Films:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Drawing on Morris' review as well as Hall and Wood, what should we pay attention to in order to analyze <i>12YAS</i>? 2) How does <i>GWTW</i> compare on each of these points?
In "A Case for Reparations," Coates argues that America's position in the global economy stems from 250 years of government policies that created wealth at the expense of black labor, families, and bodies while offering whites economic and political protections unavailable to African Americans. Reparations offer an opportunity for the nation to face squarely the consequences of these policies for both white and black families. Coates explains the implications of specific policies, outlines the prevalence of extralegal, often violent enforcement of racial codes, and draws on academic research to make his case.	<p>Reading Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Coates locates slavery as the first stage of an ongoing process to impede the ability of African Americans to build social and economic capital. Trace this process. 2) What is the relationship between slavery and American wealth? 3) How does the Jim Crow history offered by Coates add to your knowledge of Jim Crow laws? 4) Explain what Coates means in the following lines. Do you agree or disagree? Why? <p style="padding-left: 40px;">A) "When we think of white supremacy we picture Colored Only signs, but we should picture pirate flags."</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">B) "More than any single check cut to any African American, the payment of reparation would represent America's maturation out of the childhood myth of its innocence into a wisdom worthy of its founders."</p> <p>Application to Films:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How do <i>GWTW</i> and <i>12YAS</i> represent the relationship between slavery and capitalism?

In “Culture Change and Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “The Case for Reparations,”” Rosenberg considers the way in which America’s cultural landscape, one in which <i>GWTW</i> is second only to the Bible in terms of favorite books, influences the (un)willingness of white Americans to seriously grapple with the history outlined by Coates.	Given the experience of watching these two films combined with the texts you have read, do you agree with Rosenberg’s claim?
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Summative Assignment

The summative assignment for this unit is a three-page paper that addresses an incredibly broad prompt:

Drawing on course material, offer an argument about the production of ideology within a media text from this unit.

I instruct students to draw on a minimum of one reading assignment and one popular culture text and offer a small, well-supported claim. I give students this prompt on the first day of the unit and encourage them to use class discussions to brainstorm and test out possible arguments. I also highlight potential paper topics as they arise and push students to ground their analysis of the film in the readings, thus helping them develop a sense of the type and amount of evidence a claim might require. The broad nature of this prompt allows students to engage in a topic within the film(s) that has particularly appealed to them, be it the intersection of race and gender, slavery as an institution, the intersection of slavery with class, religion, or immigration, etc. Over the years, students have produced insightful papers on these topics and more.

CONCLUSION

The unit outlined here introduces students to a valuable set of concepts that can be discussed with more or less complexity based on students’ knowledge and interests. To the first point, the unit exposes students to the constructed nature of our perceptions of slavery as an institution, provides specific sites for working through different racial ideologies, and serves as a platform for considering how cultural images impact policy making. All three concepts—popular culture, ideology, and the relationship between culture and policy—challenge students to identify and interrogate the role of race in American politics as well as their own racial ideology. To the second point, these films provide opportunities for analyzing how American slavery intersected with gender, class, religion, and regionalism. The broad nature of the summative paper encourages students to bring their personal interests to bear on their interpretations. When a student displays a desire to delve into a relevant but off-syllabus topic, I can easily incorporate it into our discussions without sacrificing the cohesion provided by the three-week structure.

Many instructors, myself included, seek out openings to help students understand how race and racism function from the perspective of a particular academic discipline. Doing so requires breaking through the post-racial ideology that typifies the position of many millennials. The unit presented here challenges students to consider the relationship among popular culture, ideology, and policy as well as the connection between their own understanding of America’s racial history and the contemporary politics.

Table 4: America’s Peculiar Institution Unit Overview

Class Session	Assigned Readings/Viewings	Class Objective
Mythologizing the Past—Class 1	“The Whites of Their Eyes” (Hall); <i>Clinging to Mammy</i> —Chapter 1 (McElya)	Watch first part of <i>GWTW</i> .

Mythologizing the Past—Class 2	“Loss of American Innocence” (Wood); “How Texas Teaches History” (Rockmore); finish <i>GWTW</i>	Review all four readings in relation to <i>GWTW</i> . Class discussion draws out how <i>GWTW</i> creates a specific image of the South (options for discussion include the presentation of capitalism, the institution of slavery, Reconstruction policy, freed slaves, and heritage).
Post-Racism—Class 3	“Is the Post in Post-Racial the Blind in Colorblind?” (Haney-Lopez)	Review the contemporary racial ideologies and their relationship to policy-making.
A New Lens—Class 4	“The Song of Solomon” (Morris); Begin “The Case for Reparations” (Coates)	Draw on Morris, Hall, and Wood to create points of comparison for analyzing the presentation of slavery and racial ideology more broadly in each film. Begin watching <i>12YAS</i> .
A New Lens—Class 5	Continue “The Case for Reparations” (Coates); finish <i>12YAS</i>	Compare and contrast <i>12YAS</i> and <i>GWTW</i> using the points established in the previous class period. Class discussion should draw out comparisons on the grammar of race, representation of primitivism, use of domestic scenes, style (melodramatic v. declaratory), camera work, score, narrative focus, nostalgia.
A New Lens—Class 6	Finish “The Case for Reparations” (Coates); “Culture Change and Ta-Nehisi Coates’s A Case for Reparations” (Rosenberg)	Consider Coates’ definition of and call for reparations in relationship to Rosenberg’s central claim that the political landscape for reparations policy would look different if the entrenched cultural view of slavery reflected the images presented in <i>12YAS</i> rather than those in <i>GWTW</i> .

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"Every Time I Write a Rhyme / These People Think It's a Crime": Persona Problems in Catullus and Eminem

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ABSTRACT

This essay interprets Eminem's song, "Criminal" (2000, *The Marshall Mathers LP*, Track 18), as a Catullan project in establishing distance between the poet and poetic persona, accomplished through Catullan invective. Drawing upon pedagogical experience, I argue that Catullus (a Roman poet of the 1st Century BCE) and Eminem use analogous rhetorical tactics and structures to challenge accusations (real or imagined) of poor character stemming from their poetry. Catullus and Eminem vociferously articulate a separation of art from artist, using common transgressive poetics. Each poet disavows his own self-constructed stance of authenticity with similar threats of violence and postures of hyper-masculine dominance. In so doing, Catullus and Eminem challenge interpretative practices they elsewhere seem to assume and even encourage. Finally, I suggest that the programmatic poems of Catullus and Eminem construct similar readerly personae and that, ultimately, this confluence suggests not only a common poetics but also common discursive strategies in ancient and modern audiences.

Keywords: Catullus, Eminem, hip hop, sexuality and gender studies, transgressive poetry, poetic personae, classical reception studies, poetics

I. INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, I taught an intensive three-week seminar entitled "From Homer to Hip Hop" (a title I borrowed from Daniel Banks' essay by the same name). A group of twenty-three advanced undergraduate students and I studied ancient Greek and Roman poetry and contemporary rap music alongside one another for three hours a day, five days a week. It was a lot of fun, and my students were truly excellent. The nuanced analyses they performed and the connections they drew between ancient and modern poetics through such lenses as oral culture, gender, race, class, politics, violence, and intertextuality were almost unswervingly impressive. There was, however, one noteworthy exception: the very notions of literary personae and poetic masks presented major conceptual challenges in the classroom, even though we devoted an entire class period to the topic early in course. My students consistently fell back upon biographical interpretations of hip hop and struggled to separate rap from rapper, although they appeared perfectly capable of performing this discursive activity with first-person, seemingly confessional ancient poets like Archilochus, Sappho, Catullus, Sulpicia, Horace, and Juvenal. When pressed to explain what accounted for this difference, students answered that they knew fewer biographical details about ancient poets than modern rappers and were thus ill-equipped to evaluate autobiographical authenticity in the classical material. The logical inference to be drawn is that, were Sappho and Juvenal *their* celebrities, these students would have relapsed into the same biographical lines of interpretation they brought to bear on hip hop.

Why were my students so spellbound by authenticity, and why did they struggle so much to distinguish art from artist and literary convention from biographical reality? How might the pairing of classical poetry with rap music illuminate the rhetorical strategies by which both ancient and modern poets construct their poetic personae, especially in satiric verse? And what might this pairing teach modern audiences about the discursive approaches they apply to texts in multiple media and genres?

Addressing these questions, Ralph Rosen and Donald Marks demonstrate commonalities between ancient satiric verse and transgressive rap music, while Rosen and Victoria Baines develop these observations further with a case study of the Roman poet Juvenal's *Satires* and "The Way I Am," a song by Eminem (a controversial rap star and Alexander Severus doppelgänger). Rosen and Baines show that the satiric programs of both Juvenal and Eminem require a rhetorical stance of autobiographical authenticity from the poetic persona and that each poet constructs his persona through a highly stylized, *indignatio*-driven compulsion to spontaneous composition. In short, despite the obvious cultural and temporal gaps between Juvenal and Eminem, and perhaps also a perceived aesthetic divide between "high" and "low" or "popular" culture, Juvenal and Eminem share a common satiric poetics that extends far back to antiquity.¹

Building on the work of Rosen, Baines, and Marks, I here reexamine Eminem's construction of his poetic persona in relation to Latin poetry. This essay interprets Eminem's hit song, "Criminal" (2000, *The Marshall Mathers LP*, Track 18), as a Catullan project in establishing distance between the poet and poetic persona, accomplished through Catullan invective.² Much as Rosen and Baines argue of Eminem's relationship with Juvenal, Catullus, and Eminem "draw on a common poetics, especially when it comes to their strategies for presenting the satirical self and for constructing a very specific relationship with their audiences" (105). While Catullus does not write satire in its strict generic definition, much of his insult poetry can at least be understood to be satiric. Charles Martin describes Catullus as "both satirist and lyricist" (xiv), and the same is, of course, true of Eminem.³

My intent, however, is not to rehash the studies of Rosen, Marks, and Baines using different poems and songs; their convincing arguments hardly demand the presentation of additional supporting evidence. Rather, I wish to analyze two programmatic and transgressive poems that abdicate the rhetorical foundations on which their satire depends. I show that Eminem's "Criminal" negates the stance of authenticity for which Rosen and Baines argue and that the song's program to dismantle the imagined conflation of the poet with his

poetic persona maps neatly onto the strategies of Catullus 16.

Eminem's "Criminal" is one of his most transgressive songs, and Catullus 16 is a poem so infamously explicit in its vulgarity that, "until recently, English as forthright as the Latin could never be printed" (Winter 257; Hexter 276-77). In ways that remind us of contemporary debates over transgressive lyrics in hip hop, Latin invective poetry and its sexual imagery have long invited censorship as "too gross for our present notions of propriety" (Williams 289). So it is that Karl Harrington reads Poem 16 as a marker of "human depravity" containing "unspeakable things," while offering a "hardly tenable ... lame defense" of its own "indefensibly risqué" obscenity (83-84; one can only imagine what Harrington might say of Eminem). In addition to its remarkable capacity to maintain shock value for two millennia, Catullus 16 stands out as an important piece of literary criticism, vociferously articulating a separation of art from artist. As Donald Lateiner observes, Catullus' programmatic Poem 16 is "the earliest protest we have against the biographical fallacy, the confusion of the poet and his poetry's *persona*" (16; Batsone). Eminem's "Criminal" is similarly a program piece, which undermines the rapper's own rhetorical self. These are two poems that speak directly to the interpretive strategies my students displayed in the classroom, strategies which the poetry of Catullus and Eminem seems to assume and elsewhere even to encourage.

Catullus and Eminem use analogous rhetorical tactics and structures to challenge accusations (real or imagined) of poor character stemming from their poetry. Each poet disavows his own self-constructed stance of authenticity with similar threats of violence and postures of hyper-masculine dominance. Finally, I suggest that the programmatic poems of Catullus and Eminem construct similar readerly personae and that, ultimately, this confluence suggests not only a common poetics but also common discursive strategies in ancient and modern audiences. The stakes of authorial personae our understanding of them are high. These stakes extend beyond the specific genres of Latin invective and hip hop to bigger questions of how we approach, recognize, and interpret art, as well as to issues of censorship and to moral—even legal—questions concerning the relationships between artists and their creative output. Thus, I conclude by turning to a recent trend in jurisprudence, in which transgressive lyrics have been used as confessional inculpatory evidence to prosecute their authors for actual crimes.

Fair warning: this essay contains explicit lyrics.

II. THE "I'S OF THE POETS

As Rosen and Baines have shown of Juvenal's *Satires* and Eminem's "The Way I Am," the satiric programs of Eminem and Catullus feature "a continual interplay between claims of artless spontaneity, highly self-conscious poeticizing, and oscillating postures of abjection and arrogance" (113).⁴ Even though "Criminal" and Catullus 16 are stylized poems, composed in meter and premeditatedly given material preservation for release in conventional formats to a broad audience, the transgressive poetics of both Eminem and Catullus place the poet himself at the center of his poetry and depend on generic postures of immediacy, indignation, spontaneity, and authenticity.

These strategies are on display in "Criminal"'s second verse, an "apologetic program" in which the song's narrator claims autobiographical stimuli—both natural and external—compel him to write his indignant poetry.⁵

The mother did drugs, hard liquor, cigarettes and speed

The baby came out, disfigured ligaments, indeed

It was a seed who would grow up just as crazy as she

Don't dare make fun of that baby, 'cause that baby was me
I'm a criminal, an animal caged who turned crazed
But how the fuck you supposed to grow up when you weren't raised?
So as I got older and I got a lot taller
My dick shrunk smaller, but my balls got larger
I drink malt liquor to fuck you up quicker
Than you'd wanna fuck me up for saying the word *****
My morals went (*pffft*) when the president got oral
Sex in his Oval Office on top of his desk off his own employee
Now, don't ignore me, you won't avoid me
You can't miss me: I'm white, blonde-haired, and my nose is pointy
I'm the bad guy who makes fun of people that die
In plane crashes and laughs as long as it ain't happened to him
Slim Shady, I'm as crazy as Eminem and Kim combined

As Rosen and Marks write of Greek and Roman poetic tendencies, Eminem ostensibly feels "compelled to adopt a didactic explanation of the more offensive elements of [his] work" (905). The rapper places himself at the center of his poetry and invokes his own autobiography to justify his authentic compulsion to write the sorts of verses he does. (The artist blames his mother, and Kim was Eminem's wife at the time.) The title of Eminem's album, *The Martial Mathers LP*, reinforces this notion that we are listening to the authentic reflections of the artist, because the title is eponymous with Eminem's legal name and followed *The Slim Shady LP*, which is explicitly named after a trickster alter ego.⁶

This stance of authenticity is indicative of Eminem's work. Marcia Alesan Dawkins argues that "Eminem uses additional alter egos to increase the distance between himself and his art, which is another dimension of his aura." (Dawkins invokes Walter Benjamin's definition of "aura" as the distance between a work of art and its audience.) Despite this technique of distancing via personae, Dawkins recognizes that Eminem's art postures an authentic unity of poet and poetry: Eminem "and his publicity team mechanically reproduce the aura, tether it to his personae and market art and artist as one fixed commodity." In her analysis of Eminem's music video for the song, "The Real Slim Shady," Dawkins holds that the "video suggests that Eminem's art only emerges when his authenticity is threatened ... Eminem, artist and his artistry, remains one unique unit." For Dawkins, this stance of authenticity is essential to "Eminem, a brand consisting of artist and his product, exhibits an aura that cannot be separated from its packaging. The packaging emphasizes Eminem's uniqueness, that he and his art are one" (Dawkins 470-73; Benjamin).

Catullus 16 relies upon these same postures of authenticity and immediacy by directly addressing the poet's alleged critics by name:

Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo,

Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
qui me ex versiculis meis putastis,
quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.
nam castum esse decet pium poetam 5
ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est;
qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,
si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici,
et quod pruriat incitare possunt,
non dico pueris, sed his pilosis 10
qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos.
vos, quod milia multa basiorum
legistis, male me marem putatis?
pedicabo ego et irrumabo.⁷

I will sodomize you and fuck you in the mouth,
cocksucker Aurelius and butt-boy Furius,
who thought me unchaste from my little verses,
because they are a little soft.

For it is right that the pious poet himself be chaste,
but his little verses need not be;
verses which then have wit and charm,
if they are a little soft and salacious
and can incite a lustful itch,

I don't mean in boys, but in those hairy old men
who can't get their cocks up.

You, because you've read about my many thousand
you think me unmanly?

I will sodomize you and fuck you in the mouth.

As he does here with Aurelius and Furius, Catullus frequently names himself and many of his associates

and addressees throughout his poetic corpus. As a result, while they have been tempered in recent decades, biographical approaches to Catullus have been and remain ever-present. Poem 16 alleges an audience deeply enmeshed in this approach—the poem's narrator suggests that Aurelius and Furius accuse Catullus of unmanliness "because you've read about my many thousands of kisses" (*quod milia multa basiorum / legistis*, 12-13), likely in reference to the Lesbia poems 5 and 7, although it is also possible that Catullus refers here to the Juventius poems.⁸ As Rosen and Marks suggest of gangsta rap and other forms of subjective poetry, the poetry of Catullus and Eminem "insists on the pretense that the 'I' of its lyrics is the actual poet."⁹

Catullus' satiric elements depend not only upon a charade of authenticity but also upon a stance of spontaneity. Catullus' poems brim with imperatives, vocatives, and threats of poetic harangues, implying an unmediated stream of off-the-cuff verse. For example:

quare aut hendecasyllabos trecentos / exspecta, aut mihi linteum remitte (Catullus 12.10-11)

Therefore, either expect three-hundred haranguing verses, or give me back my napkin.

And the more transgressive:

quare desine, dum licet pudico, / ne finem facias, sed irrumatus (Catullus 21.12-13).

Therefore, stop [pursuing my boy] while you still can chastely, lest you accomplish your goal, but with a dick in your mouth.

This feigned spontaneity and heavy use of colloquialism effect a stance of authenticity, and Kenneth Quinn describes Catullus' style as "the Latin of conversation ... a literary idiom that preserves the illusion of the poet's ordinary speaking voice" (*The Poems*, xxvii). As Charles Martin outlines in the preface to his *Catullus*, Catullus appeals "to us by virtue of his passion, his wit, and the *immediacy* with which he delivers both to us." For Martin, this immediacy gives the "popular" impression of "unimpeded spontaneity" (xiii, my own emphasis).

III. PERSONA PROBLEMS AND THE INVECTIVE OF MANHOOD

As Roland Mayer writes generally of Latin poets, "they clearly felt that a good number of their readers would take the poems to be true statements about their own lives" (66). With respect to Catullus and his literary milieu, Mayer argues that the ancients, including Catullus, were fundamentally incapable of conceiving of a literary persona in a way that disassociated the poet's life from his art (67).¹⁰ Thus, Diskin Clay suggests that it is "a hard won distinction" in modern classical scholarship "that there is a difference between the poet *of* a poem and the poet *in* a poem" (17). Nevertheless, Catullus and Eminem abdicate their own constructions of narratological authenticity.

Lines 3-4 of Catullus 16 accuse Furius and Aurelius of being irresponsible readers: "You thought *me* indecent because of my little verses, because they are a little effeminate and unchaste." Catullus explains: "For the pious poet himself should be chaste, but his little verses need not be" (5-6). Given the generic and aesthetic distances between Catullus' neoteric poetry and Eminem's transgressive hip hop, *mollitia* (softness or effeminacy) is not the specific charge from which Eminem attempts to distance himself in the lyrics of "Criminal." (I would argue, however, that the specter of "softness" lurks ever-present behind Eminem's construction of gender; see Keller "Shady Agonistes.") Nevertheless, Eminem proposes a similar distinction between art and life, expressing frustration that this differentiation needs to be made at all. "Criminal" opens with the poem:

A lot of people ask me stupid fuckin' questions
 A lot of people think that what I say on a record
 Or what I talk about on a record
 That I actually do in real life or that I believe in it
 Or if I say that I wanna kill somebody
 That I'm actually gonna do it or that I believe in it

Shortly thereafter in the song's first verse, Eminem rhetorically muses, "How many records you expecting to sell / After your second LP sends you directly to jail?" Later in the song, Eminem quips, "Cause every time I write a rhyme / These people think it's a crime / ... I guess I'm a criminal!" Catullus 16 and "Criminal" each present themselves as direct responses to critics who take offense to violent, vulgar, and/or sensuous poetry. Tying these lines of Catullus and Eminem together is the concern, perhaps even frustration, that their own stances of spontaneity and authenticity have been too successful; audiences are allegedly failing to separate the poet from his poetry.

Rosen and Baines note that "the conceit ... that satirists should worry about legal recrimination for their work" was a classical satiric convention even before Juvenal. Eminem here taps into a "common satirical stance in which the poet simultaneously aggrandizes and restrains himself ('my satire is so incredibly effective that I can't really say it without fear of the law ...') (113n17). Especially in light of these commonplace generic postures, it is remarkable that Catullus and Eminem reject their own self-created stances of authenticity. Catullus and Eminem respond to their detractors with explicit disavowals of autobiographical lines of interpretation and each dares his critics to censure (and censor?) him yet again.¹¹ Much like Catullus' infamous '*Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*' (lines 1 and 14), Eminem employs a ring composition of transgressive yet ludic threats of violence.¹² Eminem's proem continues. "Well, shit, if you believe that, Then I'll kill you / You know why? 'Cause I'm a criminal!"

Like Catullus, the rapper presents himself as a vindictive, dangerous person who should not be crossed and he presents his violent threat in direct address to his targeted critics. This self-presentation and its ironies are further developed later in the song with an interlude/skit in which Eminem pretends to rob a bank, ostensibly shooting the teller in the process:

[Robber] Aight look, just go up in that motherfucker, get the motherfucking money,
 and get the fuck up outta there
 [Eminem] Alright
 [Robber] I'll be right here waiting on you
 [Eminem] Aight
 [Robber] Yo, Em
 [Eminem] What?!!
 [Robber] Don't kill nobody this time
 [Eminem] Awwright ... god damn, this motherfucker gets on my fuckin' nerves!
 [*whistling*] How you doin'?

[Teller] Hi, how can I help you?

[Eminem] Yeah I need to make a withdrawal

[Teller] Okay

[Eminem] Put the fucking money in the bag, bitch, and I won't kill you!

[Teller] What? Oh my God, don't kill me!

[Eminem] I'm not gonna kill you, bitch, quit looking around

[Teller] Don't kill me! I've got two kids at home don't kill me!

[Eminem] I said I'm not gonna fucking kill you

[Teller]: Don't kill me!

[Eminem]: Hurry the fuck up! [*Gunshot*] Thank you!

The scene plays out as something of an initiation scene, not only into hard crime but also into shift genre of satire. Despite his assertions of criminality for the song's previous three and a half minutes, Eminem assumes the role of the naïf, the inexperienced criminal told not to do anything stupid like kill someone (which he does in a moment of panic). Just before the skit, Eminem suggests that Dr. Dre, another transgressive hip hop artist and a mentor to Eminem, was mistaken to allow him to play with guns:

Oh, that's Dre with an AK to his face

Don't make me kill him too and spray his brains all over the place

I told you, Dre, you should've kept that thang put away

I guess that'll teach you not to let me play with it, eh?

Eminem's fictive crime and his artistry are explicitly constructed in intricate relationships with generic antecedents. At every step, Eminem abdicates morality in his self-presentation of unconstrained spontaneity, yet reminds us that he is a lyricist trained by and participating in a rich literary tradition.

"Criminal"'s last verse antagonistically concludes:

You motherfuckin' chickens ain't brave enough

To say the stuff I say, so just tape it shut

Shit, half the shit I say, I just make it up

To make you mad, so kiss my white naked ass

And if it's not a rapper that I make it as

I'ma be a fuckin' rapist in a Jason mask

Like Catullus, Eminem couples his parting shot with rearticulated frustration with the conflation of poet with poetic persona and he disavows the genuineness of his insult poetry. "Half the shit I say, I just make it up" reiterates that we take Eminem's self-presentation and satiric lampoons as authentic and autobiographical

at our own peril.¹³ Moreover, the line illustrates the challenges inherent in such a discursive approach; if Eminem fictionalizes half of his lyrics, the implication is that half *are* authentic presentations of self. But which are which and how can the listener distinguish with absolute confidence? This challenge is borne out through Eminem's vocal intonation throughout the song. Eminem's loud, growling overemphasis of the word "criminal" evokes a menacing, threatening self-identification even as it calls attention to the irony implied by the statement.

In light of these ontological uncertainties, "just tape it shut" attempts to silence critics, recalling the imposed silence implied by Catullus' *irrumabo*.¹⁴ Also like Catullus 16, "Criminal" closes with a threat of sexual violence and forced penetration. Eminem here recalls Catullus' Priapic pose, which adopts "the brutal, violent attitude of Priapus toward" detractors "subject to rape."¹⁵ James Uden suggests that Catullus adopts this Priapic pose satirically, and the same is true of Eminem: both poems use their Priapic stances to represent a "farcically boorish and unsophisticated" sexuality (2). Much like "Criminal"'s threat of physical violence in the proem, the final two lines join this threat of rape to the lyrical art of the poem itself. This strategy mirrors Catullus' invective in Poem 16, and the yoking of Priapic satire to metaliterary reflections on poetry is hardly haphazard.

Uden argues (5):

What gives Priapic poetry its double edge here is that its native tendency towards artistically self-conscious impersonation makes it a perfect generic form for critique, in that it encourages its audience to perceive a disjunction between the narrative *ego* and the poet himself. When Catullus "impersonates Priapus," he is less assuming Priapus' hyperphallicism for himself than exploiting Priapus' own generic propensity for self-critique.

If "Criminal"'s threat of rape is both satiric and embedded within programmatic statements about the rapper's own lyrics and their reception, Uden's analysis of Catullus extends to Eminem. As disturbing as the imagery of "Criminal"'s final threat of rape might be, the Jason mask doubly underscores the fantastic elements of the threats. Jason is, of course, an iconic fictional character of horror films and the mask projects theatricality; becoming the criminal the speaker claims to be would involve the assumption of yet another dramatic persona and poetic mask.

Similar to Eminem's use of the second person, Catullus' use of the vocative case places the reader in the position of the victim.¹⁶ These threats challenge imagined audiences to distinguish whether these threats represent the voice of the poet himself or that of a fictionalized persona within the poem. Since each poet pairs the rejection of autobiographical authenticity with the sort of threats that drew criticism in the first place, these songs playfully challenge readers to perform the precise discursive activity in which they have allegedly failed: to evaluate and recognize a poetic mask.

Satiric though they both may be, Eminem's threat of rape at the close of "Criminal" recalls Catullus' ever-so-Roman mandate to show masculine dominance through sexual penetration in lines 1 and 14. Catullus claims Aurelius and Furius charge him with unmanliness, since, "writing such soft stuff, Catullus must be soft himself, and sexually effeminate" (Wiseman 123; Parker 53). As Holt Parker observes, Catullus threatens the sexual penetration of his critics and thereby offers "*proof* of his status as a *vir*, a manly man" (55, emphasis as original). Catullus and Eminem each couple their threats of violence with vituperative slurs aimed at emasculating detractors: Catullus calls Aurelius and Furius *pathicus* and *cinaedus* respectively, while the first full verse of "Criminal" is a homophobic, slander-laden rant, which queers those who would project the offensive content of Eminem's music onto the artist himself:

My words are like a dagger with a jagged edge

That'll stab you in the head, whether you're a fag or lez

Or a homosex, hermaph or a trans-a-vest

Pants or dress, hate fags? The answer's yes

Homophobic? Nah, you're just heterophobic

These verses are among the more controversial of Eminem's expansive corpus. As offensive as these sexual and gendered slurs are, they nevertheless map neatly onto Catullus' poetic structure, context, and language. Like Catullus' *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*, Eminem's slurs occur at the outset of the rapper's program to divest the poet's person from that projected in his poetry. And, like Catullus 16, Eminem's transgressive language is immersed in the poetics of manhood.

Despite the myriad differences between our own contemporary constructions of sexual identity and those of Catullus' Rome, we can observe some essential congruence: Catullus' *pathicus* and *cinaedus* are vulgar slurs, used to emasculate by projecting deviant, unmanly sexuality. (We might loosely translate each of these words as "fag," since each obscene term insults a man for sexual preferences and desires deemed aberrant and non-masculine.) After all, reminds Parker, Roman "men attacked their enemies as *cinaedi*," men who desire to be penetrated (62). And if we continue to read Poem 16 as a ring composition, these emasculating insults pair with the poem's penultimate line: *male me marem putatis?* You, *pathicus* Aurelius and *cinaedus* Furius, you think *me* unmanly? Eminem's homophobic slurs function similarly to Catullus' in a heteronormative genre in which the construction of masculinity is dominated by an obsessive mandate to project "hardness."¹⁷ As Heidi Lewis points out, the hip hop culture in which Eminem participates has, historically, been dominated by a "heteropatriarchal ... sexual politics" in which sex is conceived as a "unilateral transaction during which men receive while women give, as opposed to a multidirectional experience between consenting partners" (291). Eminem's hyper-masculine stance recalls Catullus' defense against the charge of *mollitia* (softness) and, ultimately, Eminem's invective poetics remain similarly gendered to those of Catullus.

Thus, we see two poems, separated by a vast temporal, cultural, and generic space, which bring similar transgressive literary strategies to bear on similar contexts. "Criminal" exhibits the same two features which Amy Richlin argues are "common in [Catullus'] Priapic poetry: it threatens a man characterized as effeminate ... and it identifies the threatened punishment with the poem itself" (156). Catullus and Eminem each step outside their poetic postures of authenticity to demand that the poet and poetic persona not be conflated, and that, if their poetry is sometimes lewd, lascivious, vulgar, and/or violent, these highly stylized poems should not be read to reflect the unadulterated personal views or lifestyles of the author. Each poet does this in verses set within ring compositions of shocking sexually violent threats and emasculating, queering slurs targeting alleged critics. This suggests that the poetics of vituperation have not changed so much in the past two millennia.

IV. CARMEN AS ERROR?

But what of audiences and our discursive strategies? If two poets undermine the stances of authenticity upon which their work depends, we ought to ask how and why these poets write similar program poems, imagining similar readers. According to Clay, "it is obvious ... that most ancient readers regarded poetry as autobiographical ... and confessional," and the advent of the theory of the literary persona around the early twentieth century "seems to have dawned as a new day in modern critical discourse" (10, 17).¹⁸ In Clay's reading, "Furius and Aurelius have committed the same grievous fault that almost all readers of poetry committed throughout antiquity," and the radical distinction made by Catullus is a "distinction that was

unavailable” to Roman readers (33). Significantly, this Roman inability to recognize fictive personae in first-person confessional and/or transgressive poetry is generically specific since, as W. Martin Bloomer shows, the presentation of fictive personae (*fictio personae*) played a crucial role in Roman rhetorical education.¹⁹ Mayer therefore draws a contrast between ancient and contemporary readers, asserting that “few if any Greek and Roman readers were capable of conceiving of the persona in the terms now common to modern critics” (55). But if so much has changed in our abilities to read rhetorical personae, what do we make of Eminem’s 21st century revival of seemingly archaic *readerly* personae?

To this end, I return to my pedagogical anecdote to offer a few thoughts on what the pairing of Catullus with Eminem might have to say about audiences. My particular students, who struggled so much to step outside of biographical interpretations of hip hop were not an anomaly, as numerous analyses of hip hop audiences show. Over the course of our discussions, two problematic reading strategies became apparent in the approach my students brought to hip hop and the poetic persona with near unanimity. I propose that perhaps there is more continuity between ancient and modern reading strategies than we might like to admit. I therefore suggest two interrelated trends in the discursive strategies contemporary audiences bring to bear on hip hop.

The first is epistemological. There is a widely held view that rap artists who are perceived to write and sing about their own lived experiences have more *gravitas* than those who do not. Applied to the pervasive themes and subject matter of much mainstream hip hop, this means that artists who come from and participate in the communities and lifestyles they sing about are perceived to be both more authentic and qualitatively better than their counterparts who do not, irrespective of talent or message. Bakari Kitwana puts it succinctly: “A ... hip-hop truth is that artists rap about what they know, generally their own life experiences—the more true to life, the better in the eyes of fans” (154). This valuing of authenticity is present in other art forms and genres but perhaps not with the same intensity as hip hop. Focusing on poverty as a prerequisite for credibility, Keller suggests that the degree to which hip hop demands authenticity from its artists is a defining feature of the genre’s discursive culture (“Shady Agonistes” 15):

Perhaps more than any other segment of the popular music industry, the artist needs authenticity; there must be a connection between the rapper’s personal background and the social complaint that constitutes his/her lyrics.

The resolute credence that the poet and poetic persona are one (or at least should be) is essential to how many hip hop fans, including my students, understand the genre. Rachel E. Sullivan, for instance, suggests that while hip hop fans differ along racial lines as to how they understand themselves relating to the genre, there is broad consensus among fans that hip hop does represent reality.²⁰ Greg Dimitriadis understands hip hop as a means through which “young people perform their own realities” (13). Hip hop artists thus affect a sort of theatrical realism. As Clarence Lusane argues, “to their legions of fans, the legitimacy of gangsta rappers is conditioned on the real troubles that they find themselves in” (86).²¹ Indeed, Michael Eric Dyson insists (158):

The genius of hip-hop is that its adherents convince each other—and judging by the attacks it receives, those outside its ranks—that its devices are meant immediately to disclose the truth of life through reportage. In truth, hip-hoppers construct narrative conventions and develop artistic norms through repeated practice and citation.

In short, the generic norms of hip hop seem to require a stance of autobiographical authenticity and this demand to represent reality is made, at least in part, by the audience.

The second connected trend is that popular audiences remain limited in their capacity to distinguish between the poet and the poetic persona unless the persona is too manifestly and outrageously fictional to be ignored. Unless the rapper performs under an alter ego whose character is publicly understood to be fictitious

(Rick Ross was my students' favorite example; in ancient poetry, Ovid's adoption of mythological female personae in his *Heroides* provides an analogue), my students struggled to accept the plain existence of poetic personae. This is despite the obvious fact that most rappers, including Eminem, perform under pseudonyms, and it runs counter to Rosen and Marks' analysis of literary form in hip hop (898):

Gangsta rappers so routinely call attention to their participation in a tradition, through formal devices, poetic tropes, and the construction of elaborate relationships with rival or antecedent poets, that there can be no question about their desire to confound their alleged autobiographical pretenses and to play to a sophisticated audience that understands the dynamics of poetic fictionality.

Sophisticated audiences *do* struggle to understand the dynamics of poetic fictionality. The pretense of the transgressive poetic "I" continues to disguise the markers of poetic discourse and to confound autobiographical reality with poetic fiction. Just as ancient Roman audiences struggled to recognize poetic masks in poetry despite rhetorical training in *fictio personae*, contemporary audiences well-acquainted with poetic personae often struggle to apply this training to the hip hop genre. Thus, if Eminem and other rappers produce songs filled with misogynistic violent fantasies, yet also release tracks calling for the increased respect of women, my students were predisposed to interpret this contrast not as the presentation of different poetic personae and voices, but instead biographically, as if each of these polarities represented the artist's own deeply personal and ever-evolving perspectives on gender. Clay's evaluation that "the ancient critics of 'Classical' poetry must now seem almost Romantic in their assumption that a poet can be read by his, or more rarely her, poetry" (9) might just as well describe my students as "readers" of hip hop.

As Dawkins observes, "Eminem's discourse and personae do not paint a picture of Marshall Mathers. Rather, they paint a picture of who Marshall Mathers wants his audience to believe and buy into who he is" (474). However, this narratological stance of authenticity remains both powerful and convincing to popular audiences. In the classroom this presents pedagogical challenges; in the courtroom this presents dangerous sociological concerns, since there is a disconcerting and growing trend of using rap lyrics as legal evidence to prosecute actual crimes. Commenting on Department of Justice training documents that call for prosecutors to use rap lyrics "to exploit the defendant's true personality," Andrea Dennis observes (1-2):

The prosecutor may cast defendant-authored music lyrics as an autobiographical depiction of actual events, hence permitting the lyrics to be treated as inculpatory statements or a confession. Relatedly, the music lyrics may be offered as evidence of the defendant's intent, knowledge, motive, or identity respecting the crime charged.

In practice, rap lyrics admitted as confessional evidence have contributed to numerous convictions, lengthy jail sentences, and at least one death sentence (Kubrin and Nielson; Hirsch).

Perhaps because of the genre's transgressive content, its stances of authenticity and immediacy, and, as Dennis suggests, because of its relative newness as an art form, hip hop audiences often fail to apply the discursive strategies they bring to bear on other literary forms.²² Dennis remarks (20):

Similar to other art forms, rap lyrics have their own artistic or poetic conventions. The use of these conventions is commonly understood in more traditional arts such as fiction writing and poetry. Their utility is not, however, as well understood in the context of rap music lyrics.

Against this contextual backdrop, Eminem's protest that "every time I write a rhyme / these people think it's a crime" acquires new poignancy and conjures an Ovidian present in which the boundary between *carmen et error* ("a poem and a mistake," Ov., *Tristia* 2.207) threatens to evaporate. Collectively, adoring fans and

vitriolic opponents of hip hop alike become cast as modern Furii and Aurelii, failing to perform our roles as readers with appropriate nuance. Like ancient readers, popular audiences still struggle to separate poet from poetry, at least when it comes to hip hop. Perhaps Catullus 16 has something resonant and relevant to say not only to students of classics but also to contemporary discursive communities, especially those who would use song lyrics as confessional evidence to prosecute a crime.

“Criminal” is now nearly twenty years old, and words like “fag” are, hopefully, well on their way to becoming as obsolete and antiquated as Catullus’ *cinaedus*. However, the poetics of aggressive masculinity and, more importantly, difficulties among readers in identifying poetic masks remain current in our contemporary present. In the final analysis, Catullus and Eminem express similar frustrations and imagine their audiences as struggling to separate art from artist. These confluences point towards a common poetics, as well as the possibility of shared interpretive limitations for both ancient and modern audiences.

NOTES

1. Rosen and Baines 127. As Rosen and Marks have acknowledged, hip hop has often been denied “serious investigation of its poetic provenance” because “the transgressive and counter hegemonic stance of gangsta rap has become so threatening” and because “its origins as a complex poetic form with deep roots in a variety of literary and ritual traditions have, for the most part, been neglected or obscured” (897). As Roland Mayer notes, Juvenal has himself experienced periods of debased reception, in which he was maligned as a mere rhetorician, not a poet. More recent exploration of classical filiations in hip hop include Banks; Padilla Peralta. The bibliography on popular literature and modernism’s “Great Divide” between “high” and “low” culture is massive. See Greenberg; Adorno; Huyssen; Scholes.
2. “Criminal”’s album, *The Marshall Mathers LP*, won a 2001 Grammy Award for Best Rap Album and, to date, has sold over 11,000,000 copies in the United States and more than 32,000,000 copies worldwide.
3. In reading aspects of Catullus’ *oeuvre* as satiric, I follow also Neudling 186n13; Rankin 121. Amy Richlin relates Poem 16 to the satiric dialogue (147). Rosen and Baines note Catullus’ iambi as precursors to Juvenal’s satire (113). James Keller suggests that with *The Marshall Mathers LP*, “Eminem evolved into a lovable villain whose clownish violence cannot be taken seriously, but whose social commentary occasionally strikes a direct hit at the heart of the American establishment, his satire holding a particular appeal for adolescents” (“God Sent Me,” paragraph 8).
4. As Keller notes (“Shady Agonistes” 22), drawing upon Kristeva (10-12), Eminem oscillates between adopting postures that attack and demonize others and postures which position himself (or at least his alter ego) as abject.
5. Rosen and Baines 114-15. Rosen and Baines note that Eminem claims that he is “constitutionally predisposed to engage in satire,” but also, inconsistently, implies “that he requires *external* stimulation to turn him into the most successful satirist possible.”
6. On Slim Shady as trickster, who participates in ancient literary and dramatic traditions, see Keller (“God Sent Me”).
7. For the text of Catullus, I use Mynors. All translations are my own.
8. Mayer 76. For an alternate view, see Quinn (*Catullan Revolution* 79): “Catullus’ disclaimer, so often quoted in Poem 16 on the difference between poetry and reality refers, probably, to this sort of poetry and not, as it is almost ludicrous to suppose, to the Lesbia poem, Poem 5.” Thomson suggests *milia multa basiorum* refers to Poem 48, not 5 and 7 (250).
9. Rosen and Marks 897. On this pretense in Catullus, see also Wray 6.
10. Mayer’s analysis of Poem 16 is compelling but ultimately at odds with my reading of the poem, which

follows Clay, Batstone, and Lateiner.

11. Rosen and Baines point towards Eminem's disavowal of his authenticity by acknowledging the profoundly ambiguous refrain of "The Way I Am" (123-25): "Cause I am whatever you say I am / If I wasn't, then why would you say I am?" These lyrics open themselves to an ironic interpretation: that Eminem is not actually who he says he is, let alone who his audience claims him to be. Nevertheless, Rosen and Baines ultimately insist "on the autobiographical authenticity of the work."
12. On the playfulness of these verses, see Martin 67-80; Lateiner 16-17.
13. As Rosen and Baines note of "The Way I Am," "the fact that Eminem describes his output as 'shit' plays on the trope of satire as substandard and nugatory" (115n20), thereby offering up still another connection with Catullus' charming and polished (1.1-2) yet diminutive *libellus* ("little book," 1.1) of *nugae* ("trifles," 1.4).
14. On *irrumare* as imposed silence, see Stevens 77; Richlin 149.
15. Richlin 145. Keller: "When Eminem ... threatens violence in order to humiliate ... and ensure ... submission he engages in behavior that is symptomatic of what R. W. Connell defines as 'masculine protest'" ("Shady Agonistes," 13). On Catullus and manhood, see also Wray.
16. Richlin 147: "... the reader finds himself in the position of the victim; the reader is simultaneously confronted with the vocative case, which identifies him with the victim ..." It is worth noting that in antiquity all reading was spoken out loud, so, even while situated as victims, readers would have simultaneously performed as the aggressive poet, speaking aloud the first person *ego*.
17. On hardness and the construction of masculinity in hip-hop, see Byron Hurt's documentary, *Hip-Hop: Beyond the Beats and Rhymes* (2006). On hardness in Catullus, see especially Manwell.
18. Both Clay and Mayer (56) locate Ezra Pound's *Personae* (1909) as a foundational moment in the modern conception of the poetic persona.
19. On *fictio personae*, see also Quintilian 9.29ff.
20. Sullivan suggests that black audiences tend to identify with this reality as their own, while white audiences approach hip hop more as a voyeuristic glimpse into different and unfamiliar life experiences.
21. Imani Perry argues that "many artists themselves encourage such a stance," though, "like any realist movement in art, hip hop realism is filled with metaphors and metonyms" and other generic conventions (39-40).
22. Despite its relative newness as a genre, hip hop's musical, transgressive, and satiric elements have deep roots in much older African and African American traditions. See, for example, Banks; Sylvan; Dallam 84.

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Making the Case for Teaching Character Change in Complex TV: *The Closer* and *Major Crimes*

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ABSTRACT:

Jason Mittell's 2015 book *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* offers enough material to sustain a semester-long undergraduate course. Because of its approachability and students' interest in discussing characters, his chapter devoted to viewers' parasocial relationships and characters' potential for change is among the most teachable. However, teaching complex television that relies on intensely serialized story elements can make choosing televisual texts for study and discussion challenging. Therefore, series that skew episodic yet still incorporate serial elements, like police procedurals, can prove to be a practical alternative for classroom study. This article describes how using the interrelated police procedurals *The Closer* and *Major Crimes*, offers a rare opportunity to analyze long-term, meaningful character growth through the character of Captain Sharon Raydor. Key scenes across the two series demonstrate the unusual process of transforming Sharon Raydor from a one-dimensional antagonist on *The Closer* to a dynamic protagonist on *Major Crimes*. This transformation directly engages students with foundational terminology from Mittell's chapter, such as *alignment*, *access*, *attachment*, and *allegiance*. Moreover, it allows them to weigh the evolution of Sharon Raydor against the four types of character change Mittell describes. The article shows how this can be effectively accomplished by viewing one full episode from each series plus an isolated scene from an intervening episode of *The Closer*.

Key Words: Complex TV, *The Closer*, *Major Crimes*, characters, change, parasocial relationships, police procedurals, gender

Because it analyzes a variety of shows, addresses the business of the television industry and its impact on storytelling, considers viewers' perceptions of televisual stories and the impact of online fan communities, explores the proliferation of show-related paratexts, and identifies significant trends in recent television storytelling, Jason Mittell's book *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* provides an excellent blueprint for a semester-long television studies course. (Indeed, as I learned while teaching such a class, there is likely enough material to sustain two rigorous semesters.) Mine was an upper-division English elective populated primarily with English majors, some of whom were pursuing a film/television studies minor. While many of the students had taken other film studies classes, television studies coursework was a new offering in my department at the time, so students were largely unfamiliar with the specific demands and idiosyncrasies of crafting "complex TV" narratives. From a teaching standpoint, one of the fruitful chapters proved to be Chapter 4, "Characters." In this chapter, Mittell focuses on the one-sided parasocial relationships viewers develop with fictional television characters and how those relationships might be leveraged to facilitate character change. As someone who regularly teaches creative writing, effective character development is a regular topic in my classes, yet this was a new opportunity to consider how factors such as time (a narrative presented in installments over many years), actor performance, editing, sound, and even *mise-en-scène* impact television character development. To illustrate Mittell's theories, I relied on TNT's police procedural *The Closer*, about Brenda Leigh Johnson (Kyra Sedgwick), an Atlanta transplant who takes over the LAPD's Major Crimes division, and its spinoff/sequel *Major Crimes*. What made these series valuable was the unusual evolution of one character, Captain Sharon Raydor (Mary McDonnell). By studying three episodes across the two series my students were able to chart the arguably unprecedented and largely organic transformation of Sharon Raydor from flat, unsympathetic antagonist of *The Closer* to sympathetic, multi-dimensional protagonist on *Major Crimes*.

Why *The Closer* and *Major Crimes*? Because Mittell's analysis of particular shows and episodes is so often thorough and compelling, I wanted them to apply his concepts to other shows, instead of inviting them to parrot Mittell's readings either in their writings or class discussion. The challenge of planning and teaching a course devoted to complex TV is its very complexity; its hybrid status as both episodic and serial. For example, Mittell often returns to *Lost* to illustrate key terms and concepts, but with its intricate mythology, large cast of characters, call-backs, Easter eggs, and multiple timelines, cherry-picking a few episodes or assigning a small block of consecutive episodes seemed of limited value. In essence, *Lost* seemed too serialized. *The Closer* and *Major Crimes* are both quintessential examples of complex TV. Despite some multi-episode and multi-season plot arcs, they skew toward the episodic with a focus on a "case of the week" that typically gets resolved by episode's end. The more dominant episodic elements made it easier to focus on only those episodes and scenes that most intensely highlighted Sharon's evolution. I could, therefore, introduce students to *The Closer* through an episode that did not air until its fifth season.

To address complex TV's potential for depicting character change, Mittell uses a set of relatively straightforward terms, largely borrowed and slightly adapted from the film theorist Murray Smith. The success of Sharon Raydor's transformation can be better understood through the application of those terms, namely *alignment* (*attachment* + *access*) and *allegiance*. "Alignment," Mittell says, "consists of two key elements: *attachment* in which we follow the experiences of particular characters and *access* to subjective interior states of emotions, thought processes, and morality" (129). Allegiance, meanwhile, is "the moral evaluation of aligned characters such that we find ourselves sympathetic to their beliefs and thus emotionally invested in their stories" (134).

Although I was teaching a television studies course, this close reading of the two shows could prove useful in a screenwriting/scriptwriting class; a theory-based class, given Mittell's strong theoretical underpinning; or even in a fiction workshop as a brief departure from the traditional workshop and a way to

encourage student writers to think more critically about how they craft their own characters. The concepts might even be adapted to a composition course that emphasizes the reading of visual texts. Regardless of the course subject, popular television shows like these are, as Henry Giroux says, “attractive cultural texts for students because they [are] not entirely contaminated by the logic of formal schooling” (3). Although Giroux is speaking specifically of film and singles it out as being of superior pedagogical value, the boundary between film and television is becoming increasingly permeable. (Julia Roberts stars in the recently released Amazon series *Homecoming* while South Korean auteur Park Chan-wook directed the 2018 miniseries *The Little Drummer Girl* that aired on BBC One and AMC to name but two examples.) Now seems an appropriate time to acknowledge that televisual texts offer the same benefits. They, too, are “a visual technology that functions as a powerful teaching machine that intentionally tries to influence the production of meaning, subject positions, identities, and experience” (6). Robin Redmon Wright has shown in her study of *The Avengers*’ impact on British women that television characters can powerfully influence viewers’ behaviors and attitudes. Helping students understand how television writers, directors, actors, etc. shape these parasocial relationships to produce specific viewer responses is time well spent in any classroom context.

The “For Further Exploration” sections concluding each episode discussion provide ways of extending or adapting this analysis, if I had had more class time available, or if I used it in a context other than television studies. In some cases, they pose questions included on the handout I provided to my students, while in others they introduce areas of relevant inquiry that organically entered our class discussion.

Below I have outlined my ways of approaching significant scenes from *The Closer* and *Major Crimes* in order to stimulate connections to Mittell’s Chapter 4. Students were given a handout with just these questions and no episode information. We then discussed the questions after viewing each individual episode or scene. They had read Mittell’s chapter prior to our screening and discussion, and we reviewed the chapter-specific terminology covered in this article as well. These are the episodes/scenes and results of the discussions:

THE CLOSER SEASON 5, EPISODE 3: “RED TAPE”

Episode Summary: Sergeant Gabriel and Commander Russell Taylor are enjoying an after-work drink at a bar only to be interrupted by the sound of gunfire outside. The two rush to the scene, and when someone fires at Gabriel, he fires back, critically wounding a young man named Erik Whitner. In addition, there is a dead body at the scene. These circumstances lead to the introduction of Sharon Raydor, a captain in the Force Investigative Division, the equivalent of internal affairs. She and Chief Johnson spar over which investigation takes priority—FID’s into Gabriel’s actions or Major Crimes’s into the dead body.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK:

What are some similarities you noticed between Brenda Leigh Johnson and Sharon Raydor?

The entire episode functions as an extended exercise in compare/contrast, so after students viewed the episode in its entirety this was an important step in preparing to discuss Mittell’s terminology and concepts. My students had no trouble generating a list that included the following:

- Both are attractive, middle-aged women played by recognizable actresses.
- Both have achieved a high rank within the historically male sphere of the Los Angeles Police Department.
- Both project aggressive personalities enhanced by a thorough knowledge of the law and police protocol.
- Both doggedly pursue justice for victims.

SCENE #1: SHARON RAYDOR ARRIVES AT THE CRIME SCENE

Q: Given all of their similarities, why are we inclined to root for and like Brenda more than Sharon even though

Brenda actively bends or subverts the rules in ways we should find troubling for someone in law enforcement? (At one point in the episode Brenda threatens, manipulates, and intimidates Erik Whitner while he is in the hospital.) In other words, if Sharon occupies the moral high ground, why do we almost immediately decide we do not want her to “win” the episode’s ensuing power struggle?

DISCUSSION: The first place the handout asked students to look for a potential answer was Mittell’s discussion of alignment. Both of its components, attachment and access, relate to point of view. The dominant point of view in any episode of *The Closer* belongs, naturally, to Brenda. However, she does not immediately appear in “Red Tape.” In her absence we experience events from the perspective—or, we are attached to—Sergeant Gabriel and other familiar members of Brenda’s team who are invested in Gabriel’s personal and professional wellbeing. Gabriel serves as Brenda’s initial surrogate. Regular viewers of *The Closer* have spent four full seasons and part of a fifth attached to Gabriel, and while first time viewers, like some in my class, will have only been attached to him for a few minutes, that attachment carries meaning because during that brief time he has been shown responding bravely to a violent situation while off duty. He has put himself at risk to protect the innocent people on the street and inside the bar. Point of view/attachment remains with Brenda’s team when Detectives Provenza and Flynn arrive on the scene. It is from their perspective that viewers first encounter Captain Sharon Raydor.

Sharon Raydor enters the story as a disembodied voice that emerges from a black screen. The voice is a dictatorial monotone assigning tasks to officers at the crime scene. When Flynn speaks to her after the camera has allowed us to see her, she is brusque:

FLYNN: Well, we were wondering if, while you’re investigating the shooting of a scumbag suspect, we might be able to look into the actual murder.

PROVENZA: Chief Johnson won’t be happy with the evidence just deteriorating—

SHARON: This isn’t Chief Johnson’s crime scene, so I wouldn’t worry about it, gentlemen. Officer-involved shootings are my jurisdiction, not Major Crimes.

PROVENZA: That dead body over there is ours.

SHARON: Not tonight.

Sharon inflects these last two words with a particularly dismissive and condescending tone. Immediately following the exchange, Commander Taylor attempts to defuse the increasingly tense situation, but Raydor cuts him off to enumerate protocols he appears to have violated at the crime scene, asking “why the sergeant who pulled the trigger was permitted to leave the scene after he’d been drinking while you were with him, which makes you a percipient witness.” Before he can respond, she asks him which hospital the victim has been taken to. She raises her voice to ask about the hospital, and once she has gotten an answer, she appears to roll her eyes.

Based on our discussion and the handouts I collected, students recognized that because the episode opens at the bar with viewers attached to Gabriel and Taylor, and we continued to be attached to them during the shooting and experienced it “first hand” we are “on their side,” so to speak. Therefore, when Sharon shows up and abrasively takes control, we find her off-putting and, more importantly, a threat to those we have been attached to, especially Gabriel.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:

- Explore the relationship between Sharon Raydor and the typical portrayal of Internal Affairs personnel on television police procedurals. If students do not have any examples to contribute from their personal viewing histories, the TV Tropes website has a lengthy Internal Affairs entry that is worth sharing.
- Consider how Sharon's name stacks the deck against her before we even really know her. What are the definitions of "raid" and "raider"? How do they contribute to our first impression of the character?

SCENE #2: SHARON MEETS SERGEANT GABRIEL AND BRENDA

Q: Despite numerous similarities between Brenda and Sharon, what differences between the two women does this scene highlight? How do they determine our level of allegiance to them?

Q: How does Mary McDonnell's portrayal of Sharon Raydor shape our access and allegiance to the character? How does this combine with the scene's editing and use of camera distance to solidify our instincts to feel an allegiance to Brenda and her team rather than Sharon?

DISCUSSION: Brenda arrives at a hospital to speak to a distraught Gabriel. Her first words convey concern, asking Gabriel if he is okay. Gabriel volunteers to Brenda that he "may have made a mistake here" by not reading the victim/murderer Erik Whitner his rights. Brenda reassures him: "That's okay...That's not a mistake." A lack of evidence at the scene, in particular no bullet marks or gun, prompts Brenda to add that "[a]s far as FID is concerned, you were not fired upon, and you shot an unarmed man," making Sharon's lack of caring and surplus of suspicion a trait that defines her. The exchange rounds out a recurring aspect of the Brenda/Sharon contrast: Brenda cares about people, while Sharon, as was evident at the crime scene, seemingly does not.

In my experience, when discussing character in television or film, students tend to focus on the content of a character's dialogue and that character's actions. Once Sharon enters the frame, this scene offers a valuable opportunity to illustrate how those crucial elements can be enhanced by the choices of actors, directors, and editors in ways that deepen our understanding of characters. There is something excessively aggressive about Sharon Raydor, an acutely abrasive petulance magnified by her naked assertions of authority. How does Mary McDonnell accomplish this? As we began addressing the issue of her performance, we revisited Mittell's observation that "[t]elevision characters derive from collaborations between the actors who portray them and the writers and producers who devise their actions and dialogue" (119).

In this scene, Raydor meets Gabriel for the first time, and rather than greet him in a professional manner, she chooses to chastise him for his conduct: "As a sergeant, I would expect you to be familiar with the rules and regulations surrounding the use of your firearm." Gabriel replies, "And you would be correct." "Then why," Sharon continues, "did you disregard LAPD policy and leave the scene of your action?" When studying this exchange, I asked students to focus on McDonnell's voice. Speaking these lines, her voice has a staccato, almost robotic quality that accentuates the apparent inhumanity of her character. Sharon's voice never wavers as she orders Gabriel to immediately take a breathalyzer test, taunting him by suggesting that maybe his lawyer should explain to him "the consequences for not doing as I ask." Raydor hardly gives Gabriel enough time to react before following up with, "Do you need help with the word 'immediately'?" Sharon is raising valid concerns about Gabriel and Taylor's actions at the crime scene, but those questions are effectively drowned out by the way she presents them. Asking students how they think Sharon feels about Gabriel, Taylor, and the whole of Major Crimes, is likely to elicit answers focusing on contempt, condescension, and superiority. Did her apparent feelings match those of my students? Hardly. This disconnect speaks directly to *allegiance*. Although Mittell associates allegiance with morality, Sharon's behavior here demonstrates that

morality involves more than what is right under the law. It extends to the old, simple concept of the golden rule. Morality, then, becomes muddled with emotions. Students felt badly for Gabriel because he was subjected to Sharon's combative style after having already endured a stressful situation outside the bar. They could not support her otherwise admirable quest to determine whether or not Gabriel abused his authority.

Meanwhile, Brenda stands at the edge of the frame. Although she is not directly involved in the conversation, the camera occasionally cuts to her in a medium close-up. To solidify students' understanding of access, this is an excellent moment to pause to ask what they believe she is thinking while she watches. The camera captures her with a wide-eyed expression, a combination of alarm and amazement. Her expression confirms that Gabriel could very well be in trouble if Sharon is in charge of his fate. The goal is to help students realize that Sharon's characterization, and our decision to withhold our allegiance, is heavily influenced by this access to Brenda.

When Brenda finally speaks, the scene again magnifies the contrast between her and Sharon. Brenda does not match Sharon's tone or reveal her disgust. Instead, she reverts to her well-practiced Southern politeness: "Captain Raydor, it is so nice to finally meet you." Sharon does not reciprocate. The tension between the two women intensifies. Each expresses her priorities—Brenda for the officer under her command, Sharon for "an unarmed civilian sprayed by bullets." Sharon warns Brenda that she should be careful of who she sympathizes with in this case. In a rejoinder that will thrill viewers already eager for Sharon to experience some degree of comeuppance, Brenda plays her trump card, catching Raydor in the act of not following the rules. It is a delicious reversal given everything we've seen. Brenda tacks on her title, "Chief," to the end of Raydor's warning, then repeats the whole sentence back to her, "Chief" included. Raydor responds with an incredulous, "Excuse me?" Brenda goes on to add, "You are a Captain and a subordinate officer, and you will remember that when addressing me. Do I make myself clear, Captain?"

And here we have another point of intersection linking Sharon and Brenda. Brenda also pairs aggressiveness with excessiveness. Only in Brenda's case, her aggressive behaviors are shot through with her excessive Southern politeness and femininity, best embodied in her trademark phrase, a cloying "thank you" that punctuates many of her sentences. Those students who were already familiar with *The Closer* readily imitated Kyra Sedgwick's enunciation without prompting from me and cited this as an aspect of Brenda's personality they found endearing. Often, Brenda's behavioral excess gets played for gentle comedic effect whereas Sharon Raydor's serves as a warning to not get on her bad side.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:

- Ask students how the scene uses wardrobe to further enhance the differences between Sharon and Brenda and shape our perceptions of them. Brenda wears a carnation pink coat, unbuttoned and untied, and a floral pink skirt. Both reinforce her femininity and, perhaps, her Southernness. Conversely, Sharon wears a black coat that is buttoned and tightly belted.
- Show a contrasting clip of Mary McDonnell to illustrate her exaggerated performance. A brief, effective example would be her only scene in the film *Margin Call*, in which she plays the understanding ex-wife of Kevin Spacey's character.
- Reshow Brenda's entrance in her subsequent visit to the crime scene that begins with her admonishing one of Sharon's subordinates. Why are we likely to find *this* power play highly entertaining? Is Brenda parodying herself? Is she parodying Sharon? Both? Regardless, it clearly illustrates Brenda's excesses being played for comedic effect.

SCENE #3: BRENDA SAYS GOODBYE TO KITTY

Q: The subplot dealing with the impending death of Brenda's cat, Kitty, could have presumably happened in any episode, yet the writers chose to pair it with this case and the new character of Sharon Raydor. Why do

you think that is?

Q: Why is it important that the episodes begins and ends with scenes set in Brenda's home?

DISCUSSION: The episode's "Kitty" plot is the one my students wanted to discuss most urgently. In fact, we ended up starting with this scene and working backwards through the rest of the episode. It is this scene that illuminated for them just how far the episode goes out of its way to emphasize Brenda's compassion and devotion to those she cares about, whether it be Gabriel or her pet. The episode begins with her trying to hide Kitty's deteriorating health from her husband, Fritz, an FBI agent. Later, she tries to put off dealing with Kitty's condition when Fritz calls her at work. While Fritz tries to convince her that euthanizing Kitty is the most loving thing they can do for her, tears well up in her eyes. "I can't do it. I can't do it," she replies. Before returning to work she has to take a moment to compose herself. As these scenes remind us, Brenda is capable of great vulnerability, great depths of feeling. She is also capable of revelatory self-awareness. Brenda's return home to tell Fritz the doctor is on the way to put Kitty down, as well as her final private goodbye and declaration of love for Kitty, directly follows Sharon's final appearance in the episode, a meeting with Brenda and Gabriel in Brenda's office that confirms Gabriel's innocence. Tensions have ebbed, but they have by no means ceased. With Brenda once again deploying her Southern politeness, this time to offset what must be interpreted as sarcasm at some level, she tells Sharon, "I have learned a great deal from your single-minded approach." At home Brenda reveals that when it comes to Kitty she has been guilty of the same singlemindedness. She admits to Fritz that she has only been thinking about herself.

In television shows primarily set in workplaces, scenes that extend attachment to protagonists' homes offer special opportunities for access. Throughout the episode, Brenda makes a great effort to maintain a professional façade despite the emotional toll Kitty's health takes on her. However, viewers are allowed to share this intimate moment with her when the façade cracks. After verbally sparring with Sharon on multiple occasions, Brenda is bereft of words. All she can say is "My poor, poor, poor, poor, poor, poor Kitty." That is all she needs to say to convey her devastation. Our access to her feels total, and my students found it to be a deeply affecting scene, one that, in retrospect, actually hardened their negative attitudes toward Sharon. The episode concludes by reiterating that Sharon's mindset, and, by extension, Sharon herself, is not to be modeled or admired. Despite being on the right side of the law, the final scene tells us, she embodies the opposite of what is reasonable and humane, firmly entrenching her in the role of rival/antagonist.

THE CLOSER SEASON 7, EPISODE 19 "LAST RITES"

Episode Summary: Brenda and her team investigate the murder of a priest, but her tactics anger not only the Catholic Church, but Chief Pope, who threatens her with disciplinary action for ignoring his orders.

SCENE 1: SHARON COUNSELS BRENDA

The dynamic between Brenda and Sharon has evolved over the nearly two seasons that have elapsed since "Red Tape." In this scene, the two women sit across from one another at Brenda's desk, and though Brenda is animated and frustrated, that frustration is not personally aimed at Sharon. They are cooperating, "trying to reopen dialogue with the archdiocese," without any of the rancor that defined their earliest interactions. Throughout the scene Sharon naturally advocates for prudent actions that follow the LAPD's rules while considering the tremendous power and influence of the Catholic Church. What's remarkable is not the purely professional aspect of the conversation but the more personal turn it takes when the tensions between Brenda and her superior, Chief Pope, come to the forefront. My students saw an entirely different Sharon Raydor

here. Rather than act as an adversary, she takes on a new set of roles when the conversation turns, and she begins to focus on how she thinks Brenda should manage Chief Pope's fragile male ego. For the duration of the scene Sharon serves as an adviser, confidant, and potential mediator squarely on Brenda's side. What's more remarkable still is that Sharon is willing to sidestep, or at least delay, the rules by convincing Pope not to sign a formal complaint he has written up on what he perceives to be Brenda's insubordination. "[I]f you can't keep relations friendly," she advises, "you need to keep them smart." Rather than scoff at the advice, Brenda asks for Sharon to elaborate, to tell her what would be smart in her situation, and Sharon obliges. They become two like-minded, career-oriented women strategizing ways to effectively deal with male-dominated institutions without compromising their own hard-earned power, a theme present since *The Closer's* first episode.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:

- This scene is an ideal place to revisit Mary McDonnell's portrayal of Sharon. In particular, how does her speaking voice in this scene compare to "Red Tape"? Does the apparent change function as a form of access to Sharon?
- Is Sharon's wardrobe changing also? If so, why would that matter?

MAJOR CRIMES SEASON 1, EPISODE 1 "RELOADED"

Episode Summary: Following Brenda's resignation in *The Closer's* series finale, Sharon takes over Brenda's team to figure out who murdered one of the men presumed to be part of a gang robbing grocery stores, killed while sitting in the back of a squad car. Meanwhile, Sharon tries to placate and protect an at-risk youth, Rusty Beck, the star witness in Brenda's last case.

SCENE #1: SHARON IS INTRODUCED AS BRENDA'S REPLACEMENT

Q: How does Sharon's demeanor here compare to that in "Red Tape"?

Q: With which character(s) is your allegiance strongest? Is it the same at the beginning of the scene as at the end?

DISCUSSION: Sharon Raydor does not enter the episode until more than eight minutes have elapsed in "Reloaded." Just as in "Red Tape" she arrives at a crime scene where she is unwanted. The episode introduces her by intercutting shots of Commander Taylor acquainting her with the crime scene, while Provenza, Fitz, Tao, and Flynn discuss the theory that a grocery store has been robbed by men with military training. The point of view for these shots corresponds to that of someone standing beside them, listening to them talk. They don't notice Sharon yet, but the camera and the viewer does. However, the camera and the viewer are too far away to hear Taylor and Sharon's conversation. Filming and editing her arrival this way heightens tension, making the viewer anxious for the moment Sharon's presence becomes known to everyone else. Viewers of *The Closer* know that once it does, the team will react negatively. In fact, Provenza's behavior when he learns from Commander Taylor that she is now his ranking officer mirrors Sharon's when she first meets Sergeant Gabriel in "Red Tape." He asserts his authority and condescendingly questions Sharon's intelligence: "There are a couple of things you don't seem to understand. One is that I am the incident commander, and the other is English. Because I've said it twice." But Sharon now occupies Brenda's role. Rather than retaliate or counter by asserting her new status, she listens, nods, and at one point, even smiles. Like Brenda, she counters hostility with politeness and deference. "I told you we should have waited," she says to Commander Taylor, knowing she would be received coldly. Because she obviously wanted to avoid an unpleasant exchange like the one she has endured with Provenza, the viewers' attitudes soften. Unlike her earliest appearances on *The Closer*, we

see Sharon's sensitivity and self-awareness. My students read this as the first step in repositioning Sharon as an underdog we can't help but root for, yet it does this by straining a long-standing allegiance with a character like Provenza. In essence, the scene dares viewers to switch sides.

SCENES #2 AND #3: FLYNN CONFRONTS SHARON/SHARON STRIKES A PLEA BARGAIN

Q: What role does Sharon play in both of these scenes?

Q: How are they important to her repositioning as a protagonist rather than antagonist?

In a conversation with Detective Flynn outside the medical examiner's office, Sharon can't recall the name of the man whose murder they are investigating. "When working homicide, it's good to know your victims by name," Flynn tells her, giving her an elementary lesson in compassionate police work. Despite encouraging progress, Sharon remains self-centered. She still struggles to connect to others on an emotional level. Flynn goes on to eviscerate her, blaming her for the trouble they are having making progress in the case. In particular, he blames her for a rule requiring suspects to remain at a crime scene if shots are fired. Students cited this as a moment that strengthened their view of her as an underdog as it seems unlikely that she alone is responsible for this quirky piece of protocol that directly led to the victim's murder.

Her response marks the turning point in the case and in Sharon's transformation from antagonist to sympathetic protagonist. Again, she refrains from a combative reply. She calmly leads Flynn to begin to connect the elusive dots as she reasons aloud that the killer would have to have an insider's knowledge of the LAPD to take advantage of this obscure piece of protocol. Crucially, the scene shows Sharon, who has been met with resistance from Brenda's team at every turn, contributing an insightful piece of reasoning as well as collaborating with Flynn to determine that it must be another detective's son, himself a veteran, feeding the gang sensitive police information. From this point forward the case accelerates toward its resolution.

The plea bargain scene with Larry Miller, the detective's son, continues to highlight her growing ability to modulate and manage her tone and demeanor. The prosecutors and Miller's lawyer dominate the scene, but when she does enter the conversation, she plays the role of the good cop in contrast to Sanchez who plays the bad cop. In response to Miller shouting "no" and flinging papers off the conference table in protest, Sharon addresses Miller in a low, calm, almost maternal voice as she tries to sell him on the generous deal the DA's office has offered. "Let me give you some perspective, Greg," she says, "because none of us is happy with this situation, but you are the only one with options here, and they're very easy to understand." Importantly, as in the earlier scene with Flynn outside the medical examiner's office, Sharon succeeds. Thanks to her firm but maternal approach, Miller accepts the deal.

SCENE #4: FRITZ COLLECTS BRENDA'S CANDY

Q: How does this seemingly throwaway scene make allegiance with Sharon more possible?

A: Despite its brevity, my students believed this to be one of the episode's most important scenes. As Fritz scoops the stash of candy from the drawer of Brenda's old desk into a paper bag, he tells Sharon, "Good job today." As someone intimately connected to Brenda both personally and professionally, we can assume that Brenda herself would share Fritz's assessment. If we don't want to go quite that far, we could alternatively assume that because Brenda trusts Fritz personally and professionally, we can trust Fritz here as well. His words signal to viewers that they and the familiar members of Brenda's team are in good hands. Viewers can feel confident in establishing an allegiance with Sharon from this point forward and accept her as protagonist/heroine.

SCENE #5: SHARON AND RUSTY AT HOME

Q: How does this scene compare to the final scene of “Red Tape”?

Q: How does this scene represent the culmination of Sharon’s change? Using Mittell’s terminology, what type of change does it illustrate?

Q: Why does this scene strengthen our allegiance to Sharon?

DISCUSSION: Perhaps more than any of her words or actions, this glimpse of Sharon’s private life solidifies her as the protagonist of *Major Crimes*. The plea deal scene with Miller and the end of the scene with Fritz, in which she takes a foil-wrapped snack cake from the drawer and tucks it into Rusty’s knapsack, work together as a pivot toward this scene, and, more importantly, the dominant domestic plot that will define Sharon for the duration of the series—her and Rusty’s gradual progress toward a loving mother-son relationship.

Sharon assures Rusty that she won’t be put off by his hostile attitude because she has already raised two teenagers and has “a tremendous capacity for ingratitude.” Meanwhile, Rusty has no use for the snack cake, Sharon’s first maternal gesture towards him. It is a minor misstep on Sharon’s part. That, however, pales in comparison to the misstep that follows. Wary of his new living arrangements, he asks what they will call each other. At first, she attempts to make a joke of her no-nonsense reputation, saying he should call her Captain Raydor. Rather than soften toward her, he doubles down: “Oh, well, maybe that’s why you live alone with a spare bedroom.” As my students pointed out, Rusty becomes the latest male to bully Sharon, this time in her own home. Any possible co-existence seems to shatter when Sharon says he can call her by her first name. That sounds fair, but Rusty thinks she has made a cruel and tasteless joke because Sharon is also his wayward mother’s name. In Rusty’s eyes, this is an unforgivable betrayal, one that highlights some of Sharon’s familiar faults. She has proven true Rusty’s claim from an earlier scene that the LAPD is full of liars because she claimed to be actively searching for his mother while trying to solve the case of the week. She demonstrates her familiar single-mindedness at its worst, the collateral damage being Rusty’s nascent desire to trust an adult. In addition, she has failed to fully internalize Flynn’s earlier lesson about the importance of names. She has not yet allowed herself to truly empathize with Rusty and the daunting circumstances he faces. This revelation about Rusty’s mother’s name also betrays the jokey, light-hearted manner she adopted to connect with him. The pretense of familiarity becomes the joke, leaving Sharon with proverbial egg on her face. Her plea of “I’m making a good faith effort. I am” is too little too late for Rusty, yet it is exactly what the viewer needs to hear.

Sharon has tried and failed, and the realization of that failure hits her as soon as Rusty leaves the room. Here is this episode’s equivalent of the attachment and access achieved in the final scene of “Red Tape.” Sharon’s shoulders fall, her eyes close, and she lowers herself onto the sofa, succumbing to what must be physical and emotional exhaustion. She leans back and shakes her head, presumably disappointed in herself for the mistakes she’s made. It is the viewers’ most uninhibited glimpse of Sharon Raydor to date. A few moments before, she had said, “Rusty, I just got this job yesterday. Give me a chance to catch up.” Even without the explicit reminder, the fact that she has dealt with so many disparate challenges on the first day of a new job helped nudge students to her side. She may have botched the execution, but her intentions toward Rusty are noble and refreshingly selfless, allowing viewers to feel a mounting allegiance. My students, despite understanding Rusty’s jaded attitude, genuinely felt sorry for Sharon while watching this scene and felt she deserved better because she is clearly trying. In their eyes, the former bully did not deserve the “punishment” Rusty dishes out. They recognized her as a character during what Mittell calls a *character transformation*,

“a gradual shift of morality, attitudes, and sense of self that manifests itself in altered actions and long-term repercussions” (141). What makes Sharon Raydor realistic and an unexpectedly compelling protagonist is that she remains a work in progress at the end of the episode. By not letting her get everything right at work and at home, the writers make her more sympathetic. We have come alongside her at the moment when her evolution is accelerating, and it is the one-step-forward-two-steps-back quality of the evolution that endears her to us in unanticipated ways.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:

- Comparing Brenda’s change at the end of “Red Tape” and Sharon’s change across multiple episodes in a creative writing workshop’s discussion of the perceived tyranny of the epiphany in fiction could be a useful supplement to texts like Charles Baxter’s “Against Epiphanies” and Jim Shepard’s “I Know Myself Real Well. That’s the Problem.” I would contend that Brenda’s change, unlike Sharon’s, feels more like Mittell’s *character education*, an epiphany of sorts that “is commonly seen in the smaller scale of an individual episode” (138).
- To what degree is our growing allegiance to Sharon influenced by her display of more traditionally feminine attitudes and behaviors? Students could debate whether or not they think TNT and the show’s writers made a deliberate effort to make Sharon more like Brenda to ensure fans of *The Closer* watched *Major Crimes*.

This in-class activity achieved its goal: to help students identify Mittell’s terminology and ideas about complex TV characterization on screen. The unanimity of their reactions to Brenda and Sharon both verbally and in writing demonstrated the effectiveness with which both series constructed viewers’ parasocial relationships with their protagonists. The activity was also intended as a bridge from their reading of Mittell to an essay assignment on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s 2011 miniseries, *The Slap*, which asked them to apply terms and concepts from Mittell in a thesis-driven reading of *The Slap*’s unconventional approach to character development and point of view. (Each episode is presented from a different character’s point of view and those characters may or may not play a major role in the other episodes.) Overall, the essays successfully utilized Mittell’s Chapter 4 to support students’ readings of *The Slap* and was possible thanks to the preparatory work done with *The Closer* and *Major Crimes*.

For those uncertain about the value of using televisual texts outside of television studies, they appear to be gaining a foothold in other disciplines within the English Department, especially creative writing. I recently experienced some of the most productive fiction workshop discussions ever in a class that used Benjamin Percy’s *Thrill Me: Essays on Fiction* as one of its two primary texts. Percy makes frequent use of film (like *Jaws*) and television (like *Game of Thrones*) examples alongside literary ones. They loved relating examples from their own viewing history to Percy’s craft essays. Similarly, Sandra Scofield’s *The Scene Book* includes exercises that ask readers to closely examine their favorite film and television scenes to better understand scene structure in short stories and novels. Television and film texts can offer an immediate common ground between students who are streaming and binge-watching the latest Netflix content, and teachers can use this shared literacy as a starting point for conversations on all facets of narrative and literary analysis.

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Human Sacrifice and Propaganda in Popular Media: More Than Morbid Curiosity

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ABSTRACT:

Representations of human sacrifice, whether based upon real or fictitious events, powerfully demonstrate societal norms and fascinations related to the acceptability of slaying humans for religious or national interests, particularly given the divisive and bloody nature of the topic. Readers of eye-witness accounts, newspaper reports, and historical narratives, and viewers of cinematic productions, war posters, and political cartoons come face to face with the beliefs and agendas of the creators of popular media. Such sources represent the slaying of victims in sacred rituals, as individuals attempt to demarcate societal boundaries along the etic/emic spectrum, be they commentaries on their own cultures or on contemporary foreigners. Those who write about or portray human sacrifice have, in several instances, done so with propagandistic aims related to ethnocentrism, imperialism, and a perceived religious superiority that transfer the topic beyond the realm of mere morbid curiosity to justify forms of dominance like territorial conquest, militarism, and slavery. Moving from the ancient world to contemporary cinema, this study demonstrates both the antiquity of such propagandistic goals and their relevancy to recent portrayals of human sacrifice in film. While *Apocalypto* (2007) and *The Wicker Man* (1973) align closely with the historical examples presented, especially in relation to the issue of a perceived Christian ascendancy, *The Purge* (2013) largely diverges from them. *The Purge* counters a dominant American ideal that sacrifice for the state is valuable and accentuates the need to protect ethnic minorities from oppression.

Keywords: human sacrifice, ethnocentrism, imperialism, religious superiority, propaganda, *sati*, India, West Africa, Rome, Meso-America, United States, *Apocalypto*, *The Wicker Man*, and *The Purge*.

Human sacrifice is an act of extreme piety that defies the logic of outsiders, who categorize it as murderous, barbarous, and irreligious. For the uninitiated, the rite is not only felonious, but it is antiquated and unenlightened.¹ Practitioners, conversely, regard it as valid, effective, and necessary. Human sacrifice, for them, is both sanctioned and sacred. It has been performed for diverse reasons from burying people as attendants for deceased societal elites to killing victims in order to avert military conquest to slaying children in fulfillment of vows to burning widows on behalf of deceased husbands to much more. At the most basic level, human sacrifice is a ritualized killing intent on affecting such entities as deities, spiritual powers, and deceased humans. Opinions about the legitimacy of any slaying are always filtered through an individual's societal context. Thus, what one person considers sacrificial, another may view as homicidal.²

Human sacrifice has long fascinated audiences and spectators, many of whom have been enticed by morbid curiosity to become peripheral participants in a practice that they may or may not view as legitimate. Propagandistic sacrificial imagery is very ancient. Egyptian monarchs, for example, decorated their temples with sacrificial or sacrifice-like conquest scenes in which the Egyptian ruler holds a bound victim in one hand and a weapon in the other that is menacingly positioned to dispatch the victim, typically in the presence of a deity. The general populace would have been familiar with such smiting images. According to Schulman, the motif was "found on a plethora of different kinds of lesser objects, royal and non-royal alike, ranging from scarabs, pectorals, and other types of jewelry, to weapons, artists' sketches, and stelae" (Schulman 8). The motif propagates the exploits of divine-kings and conveys the image of military might. Even the 1st CE Emperor of Rome, Domitian, could not help but to have himself depicted as such a conquering pharaoh on the walls of an Egyptian temple in Esna (Hollof). He thereby participated in an ancient tradition of artistic propaganda related to conquest; in doing so, Domitian demonstrated to the Egyptians that Rome stood victorious and that the emperor was the rightful pharaoh.

Julius Caesar employed different sacrificial imagery, i.e., the Celtic rite of burning humans in wicker men, as part of his efforts to strengthen his position in Rome during the last decades of the Republic; his propagandistic work serves as the starting point for this article's analysis, which culminates with a treatment of contemporary cinematography that emphasizes the propagandistic implications of *The Purge*. In a *New York Times* review of James DeMonaco's film, *The Purge*, Dargis notes the movie's association with human sacrifice and connects the production to other popular works, such as "The Lottery" and *The Hunger Games* (Dargis). While the film provides simplistic sacrificial correlations, such as a religious-styled service towards the end of the film, *The Purge* still falls in line with other literary, artistic, and cinematic productions that incorporate sacrificial (or sacrifice-like) practices in order to align readers or viewers to the perspectives espoused by the creators. *The Purge* does not represent an isolated case and it will be discussed in conjunction with the films *Apocalypse* and *The Wicker Man*, demonstrating that the latter films correlate with earlier propagandistic works from modernity and antiquity by valorizing the dominance of Christian sacrificial ideals against localized expressions of human sacrifice. *The Purge*, however, runs counter to imperialism and ethnic domination to comment on race relations in the United States and on the loss of lives for nationalistic purposes. Thus, in addition to the employment of human sacrificial language and/or representations in propaganda related to the politics of imperialism, the motif is also connected to explicit or implicit ethnocentric and religious goals. Such categories are not mutually exclusive, however, given that the topic of human sacrifice can function to further religious views of superiority, ethnocentric ideals, and political objectives like imperialism in a single

1) I wish to thank Ella Howard, Lynnette Porter, and the anonymous reviewers of this study for providing valuable comments on earlier versions of this article. Any errors or shortcomings are my own. I would also like to acknowledge my students who have provided valuable input on the topic of human sacrifice over the years. It is because of them, particularly Francis Boes, that I came to recognize the existence of a secularized concept of human sacrifice that relates to dying for nationalistic interests.

2) See Tatlock ("How in Ancient Times" 1 ff) for more information on matters addressed in this paragraph.

source. Creators, moreover, may capitalize upon morbid curiosity, blood-lust, or shock-value in order to gain support for a given agenda.

As for popular media, the issue is more complicated in the ancient world than for the contemporary sphere due to the lower number of people who could read and write and the slower spread of data in antiquity. Information is currently available in a variety of easily accessible media in an interconnected web of source sharing. Even the once formidable barrier of needing to understand a foreign language is more readily mitigated today with automated translations. Indeed, there is such a significant amount of data available to the general population that people are being trained in information literacy in order to better process the overwhelming amount of material. Reading and writing skills were less common in ancient times than they are today, and accessibility to popular written and visual material was more limited. The dichotomy between elite and popular material was more sharply defined in premodern days than it is now, and it is such a dichotomy between the elite and non-elite that Toner uses to designate the popular culture of ancient Rome. Ancient popular culture, for Toner, constituted a subordinated and unofficial part of society. It was the culture of the masses (1). The designation between non-elite and elite culture can be applied to other ancient groups as well, but it should be remembered that overlap did occur. Elites and non-elites have always shared aspects of culture, and the same is true today, particularly due to the easy accessibility of media in this current age. Hence, it is unnecessary to restrict the concept of popular media solely to sources directed towards non-elites. As referenced below, Caesar's war narratives were known by people other than his peers and a letter written by Cortes to the Spanish crown received wide circulation.

Human Sacrifice in Ancient Propaganda: A Roman Example

In ancient times, the Romans were concerned about human sacrifice, both within Roman society and beyond it. They acted in an official capacity to establish a law intent on stopping immolation amongst themselves. On this matter, Schultz provides a translation of what Pliny the Elder had to say in *Natural History* 30.4 (12): "it cannot be overestimated how much is owed to the Romans, who did away with those monstrous rites in which it was considered the greatest religious scruple to kill a man." The Senate's actions to make human immolation illegal, which Pliny the Elder discusses shortly before this passage (*Natural History* 30.3), may reflect an attempt to re-conceptualize Romanness in contrast to the sacrificial practices of their enemies. First century BCE writing addressed human sacrifice among the Gauls (i.e., the Celts living in the region of modern France), which is also the time frame in which one finds the initial accusations concerning human sacrifice among the inhabitants of Carthage (i.e., the Phoenicians or Punic people situated in modern Tunisia).³ Human sacrifice, so it is argued, became an identifier of wrongful and non-Roman religiosity (Orlin 196-97). With this in mind, one can be suspicious of Roman texts that may incorporate the sacrificial practices of the "other," but such caution need not result automatically in rejecting the veracity of human sacrifice accounts by outsiders. For the purposes of this study, the truthfulness of propagandistic claims makes little difference because the perception (not reality) of human sacrifice is of utmost concern here.⁴

Regardless of his accuracy in recounting his time among the Celts, Caesar helped popularize Gallic human sacrifice in his work on Gaul (*The Gallic War* 6.16), and it is possible that Caesar addressed the topic

3) Regarding ancient Tunisia, one can see a tendency among certain scholars and leaders to paint a more positive picture of their ancestors. Some have refused to accept the perspective that the Carthaginians practiced child sacrifice—tour guides are even taught to deny that it occurred. A positive emphasis on the past has been motivated in part by a governmental reaction against political Islamists, who have emphasized Carthaginian immolation in an effort to contrast Tunisia's past with the advancements ushered in under Islam (Higgins).

4) Implicit in Garnand's analysis of Greco-Roman sources on human sacrifice among foreigners is the argument that the sources point to the practice of child sacrifice among the Phoenicians (or Punic people) because of the typical manner by which the Greco-Roman authors wrote about foreign sacrifice. The writers tended to identify the sacrifice of the elderly, prisoners of war, and foreigners among people living at the periphery of the Greek and Roman world; yet, the additional accusation of child sacrifice is leveled at the Phoenicians, which potentially points to the existence of this form of sacrifice among them due to the relative uniqueness of the accusation.

as a means of justifying his subjugating activities in the region or as a way to induce a negative emotional response within his audience.⁵ Caesar's self-interest was served by "seeing the Celts demonised as human-sacrificing savages" (Koven 9) and his work should be considered propagandistic (Barlow 158). Caesar may have specifically tailored his propaganda to garner favor among the general Roman populace in his internecine conflict at home. Historical writing was a form of public entertainment during the days of the late Republic and Caesar's work was ostensibly read in the hearing of a general audience, with books 5-6 purposefully composed to regain Rome's confidence in him (Wiseman 4-7).

One of the passages from Caesar's *The Gallic War* that was purportedly read to the general Roman populace describes human sacrifice.⁶ In speaking about his foes, Caesar explains that the Gauls (or Celts) were a particularly religious group, resorting to human sacrificial vows or human sacrifices in the face of peril, significant sickness, and warfare. Human sacrifice was both an individualized and state affair. Of the latter type, the wicker man sacrifices are perhaps the best known. Caesar describes the rite as follows in *The Gallic War* 6.16 (127-28):

Some of them use huge images of the gods, and fill their limbs, which are woven from wicker, with living people. When these images are set on fire the people inside are engulfed in flames and killed. They believe that the gods are more pleased by such punishment when it is inflicted upon those who are caught engaged in theft or robbery or other crimes; but if there is a lack of people of this kind, they will even stoop to punishing the guiltless.

One can detect a degree of negativity in the account, as the end of the quotation demonstrates by its derogatory description that the Gauls "stoop" to include innocent sacrificial victims. Romans would have been interested in Caesar's portrayal of wicker man sacrifice as a representation of how their enemy (or the "other") lived.⁷ The Romans are characteristically known as having possessed a keen interest in violent spectacles, most notably, their fascination with gladiatorial affairs, a form of popular violence. Ancient Romans would also have appreciated the idea of ritually and spectacularly killing the guilty since they did so in conjunction with triumphal celebrations, which may have included human sacrifice (Futrell 190-91). Thus, some Romans may not have endorsed the Gallic sacrificial practice, but many Romans could have appreciated the intention behind it.

Beyond mere appreciation, a passage from Livy (22.57.6) supports the idea that some Romans endorsed human sacrifice. Livy, however, thought that an incident in which foreigners were sacrificed was antithetical to Roman religiosity, noting that it had been done "in a least Roman rite" (Várhelyi 284). Plutarch recognized the hypocrisy embodied by Roman imperial interests in terms of their reaction to human sacrifice. Thus, Plutarch's *Roman Questions* reads (125):

When the Romans learned that the people called Bletonessii, a barbarian tribe, had sacrificed a man to the gods, why did they send for the tribal rulers with intent to punish them, but, when it was made plain that they had done thus in accordance with a certain custom, why did the Romans set them at liberty, but forbid the practice for the future? Yet they themselves, not many years before, had buried alive two men and two women, two of them Greeks, two Gauls, in the place called the Forum Boarium.

For Plutarch, the Romans acted in a duplicitous manner in attacking a religious practice of outsiders while

5) Cunliffe raises both possibilities, but indicates that Caesar provided his account without infusing it with ethical criticism (80).

6) For a discussion of the debate surrounding Caesar's audience and skepticism of Wiseman's reconstruction, see Riggsby (12-14).

7) Wicker man sacrifice was not of interest solely to citizens of Rome, inasmuch as it has fascinated modern audiences, too, such as the 1973 film discussed later in this article.

having recently engaged in the same behavior in their home city, which is where the Forum Boarium was located. Still, the example demonstrates how human sacrifice can be considered as essentially a foreign practice even among a group that had considered it valid. One can see here as well the notion of imperialism and the outlawing of sacrificial practices deemed unacceptable by the dominating group. Plutarch was, therefore, correct in accusing the Romans of duplicate behavior: human sacrifice was practiced by the Romans at times, but when they encountered the rite among neighboring groups, they suppressed it (cf. Schultz 20). This is reminiscent of the relationship between Christianity, western imperialism, and human sacrifice found in modern propaganda.

Human Sacrifice in Modern Propaganda: Examples from India, Africa, and the Americas

Later Europeans regarded sacrifice as something outside of their cultural purview and used immolation as a means of justifying conquest or at least to underpin their imperialistic, ethnocentric, and religious views of superiority. In fact, the same empire that regarded the prohibition of *sati* (widow sacrifice by fire or burial) as a necessity and as a reflection of enlightened ideals was itself closely intertwined with a religious world view based upon human sacrifice, that is, Christianity (Copland).⁸ The foundational human sacrifice of Christianity is that of Jesus Christ, whose death by Roman crucifixion is regarded as a singular event not requiring any additional sacrifices, as noted in the Christian New Testament (Heb. 10.1-18). Hence, imperialists espousing a Christian worldview could both recognize the validity of a human sacrifice while rejecting all other ones; Cortes, who will be treated below, corresponds to such a description and the issue is found in *Apocalypso* as well. Christian imperialists have shared with Romans both the acceptance and denunciation of human sacrifice, utilizing it as a practice that helped define “otherness” and to support the suppression of conquered peoples. As Plutarch rightly observed, this points to hypocrisy by the dominating group. There is a perceived ethnocentric and spiritual superiority that affects how people from different cultures are viewed.

There are additional examples of social groups that have espoused negative and positive views of the practice, but such perspectives are not always based upon ethnocentrism and concerns of religious ascendancy. Legislators in South Asia and Africa designated human sacrifice as an illegal practice over a hundred years ago. Some of the laws in India and West Africa are directly linked to European influence;⁹ yet, internal societal debate has occurred, such as the one that arose in India about the acceptability of the practice from the standpoint of what is considered “civilized” or religiously mandated. In the publication *India Abroad*, a popular news source claiming to be the voice of the Indian American community,¹⁰ one finds a view on *sati* that accepts its occurrence within Hinduism, but argues that Hindu society must move past the practice (Raman 17). The writer seeks to persuade the reader with the following:¹¹

Not all the apologetics in the world can erase the fact that very often in Hindu society (as elsewhere) women have been subjugated, treated shabbily and considered as inferior beings. Sati is merely one of its more atrocious and vicious expressions. Many in the course of India's long history have condemned it: Banabhatta, Akbar, Guru Amar Das, and Ram Mohun Roy, to mention but a few.

We must resist the temptation to explain away such evils or pretend they have nothing to do with (former) Hindu world views. It is not through computers and more television

8) While it is a contentious matter, Copland argues successfully that imperialism and Christian missionary efforts were intertwined in the work conducted in India during the period in which *sati* was outlawed (1051-52).

9) On India, see elsewhere in this article; for Africa, consult Ollennu (22-23).

10) According to the publication's webpage (www.indiaabroad.com), *India Abroad* is the most popular embodiment of the Indian-American perspective.

11) Others have regarded *sati* as archaic or uncivilized (Verma; Daiya).

sets that we will enter the modern age, but through a bold vision that will not hesitate to condemn and correct sectarian hatreds, social injustices, and dark-age superstitions without being defensive about their religious associations, while still retaining the many grand and glorious elements in our traditions.

The British long considered such a perspective to be in line with a more “enlightened” Hindu worldview, a view that was expressed by such officials as a British Ambassador to the United States (Bryce 21) and a Governor General of India (Bentinck). Efforts were made to gain popular support in the imperial homeland for an end to *sati* sacrifice (cf. Peggs iii), as the title of a publication prepared by a former missionary to India, James Peggs, indicates: *The Suttees’ Cry to Britain; Containing Extracts from Essays Published in India and Parliamentary Papers on the Burning of Hindoo Widows: Shewing that the Rite is not an Integral Part of the Religion of the Hindoos, But a Horrid Custom, Opposed to the Institutes of Menu, And a Violation of Every Principle of Justice and Humanity: Respectfully Submitted to the Consideration of All Who Are Interested in the Welfare of British India; And Soliciting the Interference of the British Government, and of the Honourable the Court of Directors of the Honourable East India Company, To Suppress This Suicidal Practice* (1827). Within the book, one finds pro-Christian, anti-Hindu, and ethnocentric statements (22-25). The quotation just cited from *India Abroad* demonstrates a similar purpose as Pegg’s book, but it was written decades after colonial rule ended in the mid-20th century and reflects an internal debate regarding the acceptability of *sati*-sacrifice in independent India; for their part, the British did ban the practice. The post-colonial debate revolved around the case of Roop Kanwar, a young widow from Deorala, India, whose sacrifice resulted in new legislation against the practice, i.e., *The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987*. Officially, therefore, this type of human sacrifice was placed outside the boundaries of what many considered to be acceptable 20th century Indian behavior. The Women and Media Committee (“Trial by Fire”), furthermore, reports that Roop Kanwar had, in fact, been murdered and explains that a widow does not truly participate in an act of *sati*, despite any feelings that she is an autonomous actor, inasmuch as the alleged volunteer is ultimately acting out the norms of a domineering society. As journalists, the Committee members were seeking to sway public opinion on the illegitimacy of the practice. The journalists denounced *sati* based upon a 20th century understanding of gender inequity and, therefore, sought to counter patriarchal traditions. Their views correlate to those espoused by Raman above that as a society develops in modernity, it must discontinue religious practices deemed hurtful. Yet, as discussed elsewhere (Tatlock, “Debating the Legitimacy”), rather than view *sati* through the lens of what is perceived as a progressive morality, it has been argued that the ancient and foundational Hindu scriptures, the Vedas, never mandated *sati* in the first place. There is, therefore, another side to the debate that does not pit antiquity against modernity in a manner exterior to the Hindu belief system but addresses the issue of *sati* from within the core religious traditions.

In addition to *sati*, the British also focused their efforts on ending another Indian sacrificial rite regarded as inappropriate and they used the existence of human sacrifice to justify the application of force against the Kond there, as seen in Campbell’s work (105-123). The book, which was mindful of a general readership (3), bears a title that betrays its ethnocentrism: *A Personal Narrative of Thirteen Years Service amongst the Wild Tribes of Khondistan for the Suppression of Human Sacrifice*. When reflecting upon the causes for the successful suppression of the practice, which he considered to be a reason to congratulate Christendom, Campbell notes that it was not on moral grounds that the Kond capitulated but upon the firm foundation of Britain’s determination to impose the government’s will. Regarding morality, Campbell did not believe that it was the place of the government to preach the Christian Gospel, but he had a desire that it be delivered to the Kond (130-32), whom he calls “poor savages” (132). Campbell’s work can, therefore, be considered as a popular medium conveying an insular perspective on religious rites, other people groups, and militarism. As such, it fully embodies the heart of this study that human sacrifice is often found in propagandistic representations

infused with ethnocentrism, imperialism, and views of religious superiority. Christian sentiments were intertwined with British imperialism to such an extent that even if Campbell thought that his government should not proselytize, he still recognized the need to stamp out practices of human sacrifice that did not align with Christianity.

As with the Kond, the empire-builders also utilized the practice of human sacrifice to validate war against the people of Benin in West Africa at the end of the 19th century; the existence of sacrifice in Benin and British imperialism found expression in popular media of the time, such as in the *Illustrated Missionary News* (Hill).¹² An intelligence officer, who took part in the 1897 Benin Expedition, wrote an account of the conflict called *Benin: The City of Blood*, which was published to reach a general audience (Coombes 21). The first chapter of Bacon's work opens (13):

Truly has Benin been called The City of Blood. Its history is one long record of savagery of the most debased kind. In the earlier part of this century, when it was the centre of the slave trade, human suffering must here have reached its most acute form, but it is doubtful if even then the wanton sacrifice of life could have exceeded that of more recent times. Nothing that can be called religion exists within its limits, only paganism of the most unenlightened description, with certain rites and observances, which, from their ferocious cruelty, have caused Benin to be the capital of superstitious idolatry and barbarity for more than a hundred miles inland.

Bacon's derogatory description espouses an ethnocentric perspective that relegated Benin to the uncivilized world and diminished its religiosity to that which existed outside the confines of established religion. Bacon further explains that "the culmination of their magic and atrocities" was human sacrifice (14). Indeed, he later recounts that the first sign that they were getting close to the main city was that the expeditionary force encountered a human sacrifice, which, according to their guide, was performed to keep "the white man coming farther" (79). After seeing an additional victim nearby, Bacon indicates that one of the soldiers commented: "It is just about time someone did visit this place" (80). Such a statement reflects the British perspective on the need to conquer Benin, and this was in addition to the political justification that British emissaries had been killed earlier that year (cf. Bacon 15-18).¹³ The incorporation of popular forms of media afforded non-specialists with opportunities to access information with which they could form opinions about the legitimacy of British imperialism; descriptions of human sacrifice bolstered imperial efforts by validating the presence of British forces in a foreign land just like in the case of India.

A particularly egregious form of European imperialism in West Africa is represented by the transatlantic slave trade, and human sacrifice is evident in the media surrounding it. One proponent, for instance, argues for the advantages of slave trading as follows (Postlethwayt 4-5; emphasis original):

Besides, the *Negro-Princes* in *Africa*, 'tis well known, are in perpetual War with each other; and since before they had this Method of disposing of their Prisoners of War to Christian Merchants, they were wont not only to be applied to inhuman Sacrifices, but to extream Torture and Barbarity, their Transplantation must certainly be a Melioration of their Condition; provided living in a civilized Christian Country, is better than living among Savages: Nay, if Life be preferable to Torment and cruel Death, their State cannot, with any Colour of Reason, be presumed to be worsted.

The speaker, Malachy Postlethwayt, has been described as the Royal African Company's "chief propagandist"

12) For more on the coverage provided by illustrated press, see Coombes (11-22).

13) Bacon (14-15) demonstrates the view that the lack of what was perceived as "civilization" resulted from the isolation of Benin from contact with Caucasians. This is very reminiscent of Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*.

and “a leading apologist” on the issue of transatlantic slavery during the middle of the 18th century (Brown 88). An additional apologist writes that “the house of bondage, strictly speaking, may be called a land of freedom to them” (Norris 160) because most of the slaves from Africa would have died as prisoners of war or criminals. The latter view is from the work of Robert Norris, who is regarded as “one of the last great advocates” for British slave trading and “a man who continued to be puzzled and irritated by the abolitionists’ association of enslavement with suffering and unhappiness” (Gikandi 190). Both the views of Norris and Postlethwayt are just examples of the types of pro-slavery perspectives being promoted, and they reflect ethnocentric biases steeped in assumed cultural superiorities. Postlethwayt’s propaganda, at least, was based upon the understanding that slavery was preferable to the perceived human sacrifices being practiced in Africa, and such a justification was popular (Law 54 and n. 6). Importantly, Postlethwayt infused his argument with a strong sense of Christian superiority to contrast African human sacrifice to the benefits slaves would have in pro-Christian countries. While it is not explicit, it is possible that Postlethwayt regarded one key benefit to be access for slaves to the Christian message. Postlethwayt would most likely have praised the conversion of African slaves to Christianity, which would have potentially resulted in some exchanging one sacrificial religion for another.

As with West Africa and India, European imperialism and accounts of indigenous human sacrifice characterize early conquest in the Americas, and sources point to Christian proselytizing. In one of Cortes’ letters, for instance, he explains the steps he took to convert the Aztec by replacing their objects of veneration with those of Christianity, by cleansing temples of sacrificial blood, and by demanding the cessation of human sacrifice (Cortes 260-62). This letter, which was sent to the monarchy, received a very popular reception, as Elizabeth Wright explains: “[it] ranks as one of the first international news events of the sixteenth century that played out in the medium of print” (714). According to Smith, Spanish conquest accounts skewed representations to bring themselves glory and to justify what they did. Cortes was particularly egregious in this regard and attempted to provide a rationalization for his behavior through representing his enemies as “barbarians” requiring salvation and civilization (15). Cortes, moreover, exploited the practice of human sacrifice in a propagandistic manner in order to validate his brutality; not only was human sacrifice important as a point of justification for Spanish actions, but so, too, was the notion that Cortes was seeking to convert Amerinds to Christianity (McLynn 182). While Cortes’ intended audience may have been the monarchy in the letter referenced here, the spread of his narrative beyond the walls of the palace would have impacted more general sentiments about not only his enterprise, but also regarding people in the Americas. Europeans living so far away from the New World would have been at the mercy of propagandistic accounts because they lacked the firsthand experience to verify or to condemn narratives. For some, an account like that of Cortes would have fit into preexisting ideas about the “barbarous” nature of the “other.” British popular accounts about India and Africa would have corresponded to such ideas, too, garnering support for imperialism and for conversion to Christianity.

The era of the Spanish-American War (the turn of the 20th century), witnessed the growth of American imperialism (Elizalde 219); popular sentiments at the time linked war to human sacrifice, but in a manner unlike the examples discussed above. In her book *From Liberation to Conquest: The Visual and Popular Cultures of the Spanish-American War of 1898*, Miller discusses how Rev. Franke potentially noticed the similarities between the crucifixion of Jesus and the death of an American sailor as seen in a political cartoon called “And a Nation Mourned” by Charles Bush about the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Cuba in 1898, which Franke displayed for his congregants when speaking about the destruction. According to Miller, moreover, “Franke was among many religious leaders to connect the national mission of avenging the *Maine* and liberating Cuba to Christian values of compassion, duty, and self-sacrifice” (77). Such a conceptualization of human sacrifice may have been built upon the Christian ideal of following in the steps of the Christian messiah to give one’s

life for others (cf. Matt. 16; John 15), but it reflects a commonly held view that is still prevalent that the nation itself is worthy of human sacrifice. The dedication of book about American troops involved in the Spanish-American War and related matters states: “in memory of the heroic dead, who offered up their lives upon the altar of their country” (Prentiss iii). Similar sentiments have continued to be espoused, as reflected by the words of Abell in relation to World War II (15-16):

I looked down into the water to see the rusting hulk of the USS *Arizona*, perhaps for the first time in my adult life the thought of real human sacrifice hit me square in the face. Directly below lay the remains of more than eleven hundred US navy men who sacrificed their lives doing their duty and serving their country in the cause of human freedom around the world. Then a more staggering thought took hold of me—more than four hundred thousand Americans sacrificed their lives from 1941-45. As time passed and my inspiration grew, my thoughts about sacrifice expanded even further. What about the whole of American history? Sacrifices were made throughout our country’s history—not just during World War II.

It is important to consider that Abell does not portray the deaths of American service personnel in terms of symbolic loss, but in the sense of actual sacrificial victimization. He is not articulating a form of human sacrifice that is figurative. Abell’s message does not recognize a distinction between sacrifice, a term historically contextualized in religious rites, and tragic, heroic death that results from the sphere of secular warfare (9-10). Nevertheless, Abell, as well as American society more broadly, reflects a secularized understanding of sacrifice that has come to reside in the American psyche.

The government of the United States has worked to influence society in recognizing military loss as a secularized form of human sacrifice, a fact that is evident in war propaganda. Abell reflected upon the sacrifice of Americans during World War II. During that era, a poster was prepared that reads: “You talk of sacrifice... he *knew* the meaning of sacrifice!” “Powers of Persuasion”; emphasis original). This caption was chosen to accompany the image of a soldier hanging lifeless upon a barbed-wire fence. Behind him one can see a bright red sun, ostensibly representing Japan, the very nation responsible for the deaths of the sailors aboard the U.S.S. *Arizona* mentioned by Abell. This is merely coincidental—Abell makes no reference to the poster—but he is the product of a society steeped in the popular understanding that warfare leads to the sacrifice of Americans.

Former President Obama’s statements at a 2014 commencement ceremony of the West Point military academy further demonstrate the importance of sacrificial conceptualizations in relation to U.S. military personnel. He explains that “[i]t is a particularly useful time for America to reflect on those who’ve sacrificed so much for our freedom, a few days after Memorial Day. You are the first class to graduate since 9/11 who may not be sent into combat in Iraq or Afghanistan” (Obama). Prior to these statements, the president calls upon the audience to honor those veterans who were in attendance, as well as the military members and their families linked to deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq. President Obama’s comments about sacrifice are contextualized in a discussion of lives lost and services given on behalf of the nation. Thus, the president represents human sacrifice both as an act of dying and as an act of service. What is more, the manner in which the word “sacrifice” appears in four places in the address allows one to infer that the recent President of the United States considers sacrifice to be an act of self-denial that can, but does not always involve death. Such are the general connotations attached to the concept of sacrifice in American culture.

In the cinematic treatment that follows, American sacrificial sentiments will be discussed through the lens of *The Purge*, which provides a negative social commentary on notions of national sacrifice, imperialism, and race relations. *Apocalypto* and *The Wicker Man*, conversely, reflect ideals that bolster imperialism and

they inherently portray the appropriateness of Christianity and its understanding of human sacrifice as the superior form of the rite. The films, then, align with or diverge from the key concepts found in the foregoing historical analysis of popular media. The major points articulated thus far revolve around the propagandistic representation of human sacrifice as an aberrant practice found among the “other” in relation to the beliefs of the group involved in conquering or dominating foreigners. Such portrayals are infused with ethnocentric, imperialistic, and religious views of perceived ascendancy that support justifications of war and suppression. There is, of course, a level of hypocrisy in these perspectives, given that there is a history of human sacrifice in the cultures denouncing the practice elsewhere. The Romans were guilty of this, as were Christian imperialists.

Human Sacrifice in Recent Fictional Propaganda: Cinematic Examples

Starting with the Americas, Yelle correctly suggests that a pro-colonial and pro-Christian view is propagated by Mel Gibson’s retelling of the demise of the Mayan civilization in his *Apocalypto* (2007). Considering both *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and *Apocalypto*, Yelle indicates that the films present a contrast between the sacrifice of Jesus and the cruel Mayan practices (83, 88). One need not view the two films in a comparative light to consider that *Apocalypto* promotes a pro-European and pro-Christian view, given the nature of the protagonist’s journey in the film. The main character, Jaguar Paw,¹⁴ is captured early in the film and taken to a Mayan city where a sacrificial scene occurs that is very reminiscent of the Aztec human sacrifices performed to rejuvenate the sun. Yet, instead of becoming a victim, Jaguar Paw escapes the sacrificial and blood-thirsty Mayans and is pursued back to his home area, where his salvation comes at a beach upon which Columbus and other Europeans are coming ashore—the Mayans are too shocked to continue pursuing their prey. Because of the interference of the Europeans, Jaguar Paw survives and is able to return to his family. Both militarism and religion are emphasized in the film through Gibson’s depiction of Columbus’ landing party to Mayan territory in 1502: in addition to armed men, a Christian monk is prominently displayed in a position behind a cross. The Europeans represent the final end of the Mayan civilization that brought about its own demise; such a conclusion is tied to the opening of the film, which displays a quotation from Durant that it is only possible to conquer a mighty civilization after that society experiences internal ruin (Gibson).

The film represents Mayan culture as particularly blood-thirsty, with the implication that such brutality was a significant factor leading to the civilization’s end; this is contrasted with the salvific sacrifice represented by the crucifixion imagery. Viewers are led to the conclusion that Christian Europeans saved the day by their arrival, which uncritically propagates the belief that western imperialism ushered in a positive chapter in Amerind history. Human sacrifice is portrayed in the film as a sign of ruinous Mayan behavior that is juxtaposed with the heroic representation of Christianity. Thus, Yelle is right in the assessment that Gibson places Christian human sacrifice in stark contrast to Mayan practices, but Freidel accuses Gibson of misrepresenting the antagonists in the film by his portrayal of the urban Maya as exhibiting a lust for blood. Freidel indicates, for instance, that large-scale human sacrifice was not typical and that non-elites were atypical victims in Mayan society (38-40). Freidel explains, moreover, that “[t]he purely savage killing fields of *Apocalypto* are alien to the Maya world” (40). One critic goes so far as to characterize the film as having a thin veneer of authenticity, while resurrecting many cinematic clichés about earlier societies, such as limiting “primitive” people to the role of “savage barbarian” or “noble savage” (Richardson 226-27).¹⁵ For an unsuspecting audience, the film bolsters the broader narrative that diminishes the rights of Amerinds. Contemporary society in the United States is still deeply entrenched in a paradigm that relegates Amerinds to the displaced status of the “other.”

The types of ethnocentrism, imperialism, and religious superiority found in the historical examples

14) Jaguar Paw is played by Rudy Youngblood, an actor of Amerind descent (“Rudy Youngblood”).

15) Given this article’s emphasis on imperialism, the reader may find Richardson’s assessment of *Apocalypto*’s mental imperialism worthy of consideration (227-228).

discussed above correlate well with Gibson's *Apocalypto*. Cortes' propaganda associated with Spanish interests in the Americas is not that different from the film, for instance, in its negative assessment of Amerinds and the positive depiction of Christianity. For both Cortes and Gibson, Christianity was triumphant. That religion is not overtly victorious in the 1973 version of *The Wicker Man*, but Christianity ultimately appears in a positive light. The film is set on a Scottish island, and the Christian figure, a police officer named Sergeant Howie, who is sacrificed at the culmination of the film, has a faith infused with colonial aspirations for the island to fall under mainland authority. When Howie is burned alive by the islanders, he spends his final moments preaching, singing, and praying (M. Wright 80, 83-84, 92). The victim's adherence to a high-church-like Christianity can be regarded as strengthening the view that the film purposefully presents "parallels between the islanders' mystical understanding of Howie's body and blood as a sacrifice on their behalf, and his faith in Jesus' atoning death" (M. Wright 84; emphasis original). Even if such parallels are purposeful, the Christian victim is still conquered. The film, which uses Celtic religiosity like the wicker man motif, is contextualized in the era when Celtic heritage started to be a point of fascination in contemporary society (M. Wright 92-93).¹⁶ Koven (2, 4, 9-10) analyzes the trajectory that led from Caesar's representation of the Celts through James Frazer (*The Golden Bough*) to *The Wicker Man* movie, and observes that the fictional Celtic world of the film, which was intended to be a true reflection of past paganism, influenced modern Pagans, who have sought to reconstruct that world at the Burning Man and Wickerman festivals. The former festival, which is based on ten core principles,¹⁷ has grown from very humble beginnings in 1986 to an event drawing in nearly 70,000 participants in 2015 (Burning Man, "Timeline"); the latter, which is a musical event that has been held about half as many times, began in 2001 and is situated in Scotland ("Brief History"), thereby giving it a stronger connection to the film than the other festival. Koven suggests, moreover, that the film engenders a colonialist perspective of the "other," and that the creators did not critically read their source material, namely, Frazer, as well as his use of Caesar, when they sought to re-create an authentic Celtic environment (2, 4, 9-10). Melanie Wright discusses, but was not convinced by the perspective that the movie reflects Scottish nationalism (93);¹⁸ nevertheless, it can be said that the protagonist has a colonizing faith in the film and that "[w]hen he speaks of Scotland as a 'Christian country' this is always in the context of a desire to assert the authority of the mainland over the island community" (84). Because Howie dies as a pagan sacrifice, *The Wicker Man* superficially promotes a perceived Celtic religion over Christianity, but the victim's faith leaves a more positive impression upon the viewer than what comes across as the sordid and murderous beliefs of the islanders. Howie models the crucified Jesus by his piety in the face of wrongful assault. Given that his faith is imperialistic, his death punctuates the need for outside interference to tame the island. *The Wicker Man*, therefore, lines up with the views of British conquerors like Campbell and Bacon, who perceived of a need for British intervention in the face of what were viewed as nefarious human sacrifices. For the British Empire at the time, such sacrifices were positioned in contrast to Christian ideals. The film's indiscriminate use of Caesar's propagandistic account of Celtic sacrifice may have encouraged the negative representations of the islanders and, thereby, unwittingly endorsed Roman ethnocentrism, too.

The Purge (2013) demonstrates cultural divides and propagandistic aims reflected in popular expressions of human sacrifice, but in ways dissimilar to the other films; it also shows the power of blood-lust

16) On colonialism and *The Wicker Man*, see Koven (9).

17) The principles are radical inclusion, gifting, decommodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation, and immediacy. These concepts are intended to reflect the culture of Burning Man as it has matured over the years, rather than serving as mandates for practice (Burning Man, "Ten Principles").

18) Whether or not Scottish nationalism was intentionally addressed in *The Wicker Man* is debatable, but the film apparently struck a nationalistic chord for the creator of *Darklands* (1996). According to Martin-Jones, *Darklands* is an updated version of *The Wicker Man* that addresses Welsh independence. Martin-Jones, moreover, comments that horror movies serve as able conduits for addressing nationalistic interests in peripheral areas with Celtic heritage during the process of devolution (128).

in a contemporary audience and speaks to current nationalistic sentiments. In this instance, the blood-thirsty desires of movie-goers gave the *The Purge* a \$36.4 million successful first weekend, earning it the spotlight as the highest producing opening for a rated-R horror movie in history, with the exception of horror remakes or sequels (Mendelson). The success of its opening weekend reflects a current fascination with blood, gore, alternative realities, and non-conforming religiosity; recently Universal Orlando staged, but quickly pulled, a human sacrifice re-enactment as part of its Halloween Horror Nights (Kubersky). This likely disappointed some attendees in this era of mass desensitization to violence. American culture is constantly bombarded by violent imagery in news reports about real events, but fictional violence dominates the entertainment industry from life-like simulated killings in popular games like *Call of Duty* to major film franchises like *The Purge*, just released its fourth installment about how it all began. It is not coincidental that the movie opened on July 4, a day to celebrate patriotism ("The First Purge").

The Purge is about maintaining law and order by providing a release for societal hostilities. The film is set in a United States of America in which patriotism has become the new religion and members of society are given one night a year to do anything they want without fear of judicial restraint or accountability. The intention is to provide an outlet for pent-up aggression so that it does not spill out elsewhere. Those familiar with sacrificial theory might recognize such a notion as reflected in the writings of Girard, who proposed that human sacrifice serves as a social catharsis by which members of a group vent their wrath upon a human scapegoat. Girard is known for his focus on the Greek ritual participant called the *pharmakos* (a scapegoat figure), who was taken around a city to absorb societal ills before being driven out to carry the problems away (Girard). Despite the correlation, DeMonaco did not draw the concept from Girard; instead, the idea came from his wife, who, in exasperation from experiencing road rage commented that individuals should be allowed to commit one free murder per year (Blumhouse Productions). One of the near victims of murder or sacrifice in *The Purge* is an African-American man, who is hunted by a group of wealthy, white young adults. Concerning the topics of ethnocentrism/racism and propaganda, interviews with the lead actor, Ethan Hawke, reveal that the propagandistic goal of the film was to promote anti-violence in a gun-toting American culture consumed with violence and the right of self-protection that can lead to the wrongful death of minorities. Hawke explicitly noted that audience members who fail to recognize the parallels between the hunting of an African-American man in a gated neighborhood and the then recent slaying of Trayvon Martin in Florida miss out on the primary message of the film (Labrecque; Esquivel). Thus, *The Purge* utilizes the practice of human sacrifice to spark an internal debate about racial profiling, as well as the prevalence of gun violence in the United States. Through human sacrifice, the film attempts to address the issue of "othering" to demonstrate the fallacious and injurious nature of categorizing societal members based upon skin tone. In attempting to shift societal views, *The Purge* corresponds, in part, to the deliberations within Indian society concerning the continuation of *sati*-sacrifice; but the film is unlike the propagandistic accounts of the British, who used guns to suppress sacrifice and were deeply entrenched in the imperialistic enterprise. *The Purge* was created to entertain, make money, and to provide some social commentary, but there is a more subtle message in the film that was not noted by Hawke as the primary theme.

The Purge provides a secondary critique of modern America by its negative portrayal of a very popular conceptualization of human sacrifice, that is, losing one's life for nationalism. Near the end of the film, the neighbors of the family who provide safe-haven against the mob of vicious youths attempt to perform a patriotic sacrificial rite, and this is portrayed unfavorably. *The Purge* provides a commentary on the legitimacy of sacrificing U.S. citizens for nationalistic interests; therefore, viewers can perceive the film as a critique not only of gun violence against minorities living in the United States, but also of American sponsored violence in foreign wars. The film came to screens in this era of extensive American involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts that can be viewed as imperialistic. In this way, *The Purge* could be seen as unlike *Apocalypto* and *The*

Wicker Man by reflecting negatively upon imperialism. The movie also contrasts perspectives espoused, for instance, during the era of the Spanish-American war that the nation is worthy of human sacrifice.

Concluding Remarks

Human sacrifice, as this study demonstrates, serves as an important subject for social commentary, be it directed at contemporary neighbors, past societies, or one's own social group. It is a polarizing topic used to demarcate cultural insiders from "barbarous" outsiders. Such demarcations function both contemporarily and chronologically, given that cultural groups distinguish themselves from their neighbors by citing abhorrent foreign practices and from their pasts by denouncing the impropriety of their ancestors. Sacrificial imagery is, therefore, steeped in ethnocentric conceptualizations that exist along the etic/emic dynamic to characterize the "other" as complicit in immoral, irreligious, or brutal rites, even if that "other" corresponds to one's ancestors. For imperialistic enterprises, human sacrifice inhabits the category of those deplorable practices that deserve foreign intervention and validate conquest. From the standpoint of propaganda, human sacrifice can be used to advance such political goals, as well as to promote ethnocentric ideals and to further religious agendas. In short, human sacrifice in popular material moves beyond the rite's ability to feed curiosities by furthering propagandistic aims both in historical and fictional settings. The propagandistic aims associated with domination in the Americas, West Africa, and India particularly demonstrate imperialism infused with ethnocentric and religious views of cultural superiority especially related to Christianity, a faith built upon a human sacrifice but a tradition that does not accept the legitimacy of such immolation in other religions. Human sacrifice is relegated to the realm of the irreligious or unenlightened, and it serves as a basis for justifying conquest. If a person of the indigenous culture holds an anti-human sacrifice view, then that individual can be evaluated by the conquerors as holding to an enlightened perspective. Domination of the "other" is not solely connected to colonial expansion, however, as the transatlantic slave trade evinces. A propagandist could go so far as to promote the practice of slavery as a means of rescuing people from human sacrifice. The additional advantage, so it was argued, was that the enslaved could inhabit land regarded as culturally and religiously superior, i.e., Christian lands. From the standpoint of nationalism, human sacrifice is able not only to motivate action against other societies based upon a negative representation of human sacrifice as an external threat to be stamped out, but it can also inspire the use of armed force based upon a positive portrayal of it as an internal ideal to be emulated for the sake of nationalism. Indeed, any form of human sacrifice would be viewed in a positive light by those recognizing its legitimacy. Thus, one person's pious act can be denounced by another as an abomination. Such a distinction between the justified and unjustified loss of human life normally falls along the etic/emic line, in which those from within tend to promote the practice in contrast to the denunciations of outsiders.

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Studying Silence in Popular Culture

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ABSTRACT

This article explains the impetus for and execution of a team-taught, interdisciplinary class in silence using popular culture materials and practices, such as silent film, music, meditation, and mime. The course identifies individuals as possessing characteristics of introversion and extraversion and explores the role of silence in the modern world, incorporating the following: (1) Foundations for the Study of Silence, (2) The History of Silence, (3) The Role of Silence in Spirituality, Creativity and Reflection, (4) Silence in Communication Study, (5) Silent Film and Silence in Film, (6) The Role of Silence in a Highly Technological, Mediated World, and (7) Student Research Presentations. The class made students aware of the media-rich environment in which they live as well as the choices they have to seek quiet.

Key Words: Popular Culture, Silence, Quiet, Introversion, Extraversion, Spirituality, Creativity, Silent Film, Meditation, Mime, Interdisciplinary, Undergraduate Teaching, Higher Education, Curriculum Development

Hello, darkness, my old friend
 I've come to talk to you again
 Because a vision softly creeping
 Left its seeds while I was sleeping
 And the vision that was planted
 In my brain still remains
 Within the sound of silence
 —“The Sound of Silence”
 Simon and Garfunkel

Silent night, holy night
 All is calm, all is bright
 —“Silent Night”
 Popular Christmas Carol

Silence is golden.
 —Traditional Proverb

In grappling with the fast-paced technological changes of the eighteenth century, Scottish essayist Robert Carlyle paused to reflect upon what he termed the “Worship of Silence.” The phenomenon captured the bearded sage’s sacred respect for restraint in speech until “thought has silently matured itself; to hold one’s tongue till some meaning lie behind to set it wagging.” Out of silence great things fashion themselves, emerging “full formed and majestic into the daylight of Life” (Carlyle, *Works* 174). More than mere prudence in communication, more than a word spoken in season, and especially relevant for this age of regrettably sent premature tweets, this doctrine expressed the notion that silence, defined simply as the conflation of quiet and aloneness, provides the very womb out of which all great things are born.

Impetus for a Course on Silence

While classical culture took the need for silence as a given, contemporary culture does not. In the twenty-first century, digital media and the ubiquity of smart phones have transformed the modern world, creating unlimited opportunities for entertainment and personal connections but rendering silence almost obsolete. Silence thus became the *modus operandi* for a course, questioning Carlyle’s dictum that “Under all speech that is good for anything there lies a silence that is better” (Carlyle, *Characteristics* 190). Looking at the noisy inanity of the world, Carlyle recognized keenly how foundational and essential is silence, but do others share this view today? Students in a senior seminar class in communication at Virginia Wesleyan University (a wooded setting in a suburban environment) set out to study the nature, value, and functions of silence. The interdisciplinary course drew on both classics and popular culture in order to investigate how people understand and interpret silence. This course was inspired by a survey research project on the role of silence in Virginia Wesleyan University students’ lives that revealed that silence, defined as the conflation of quiet and solitude, has no place in many students’ routines, as technology makes it much easier and more expected to connect rather than to disconnect (Lane 17). This realization led to a discussion on what silence is, what it provides, how it relates to various disciplines, and whether or not it is necessary or desirable. Can one experience deep thought, reflection, creativity, and spirituality in a culture devoid of silence? Is our highly-connected society losing the capacity and need for silence? Susan Cain’s book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking* (2012) became a best-seller, and even in the twenty-first century, two movies, *The Artist* (2011), a silent film, and *Hugo* (2011), about the silent film era, were nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture; *The Artist* won. Do these accolades suggest a collective yearning to preserve silence or a nostalgic

affirmation that silence is no longer part of our world? Does one value most not what one has but what one has lost?

A team-taught course at the junior/senior undergraduate level, offered by two professors with specializations media studies, popular culture, religious studies, and communication, set out to address these questions. Communication 411: Silence in Media and Culture continued the dialogue triggered by the previous class by offering an in-depth look at silence in media (especially film), culture, and modern life, and as a metaphor for many things, including spirituality and death. By approaching the phenomenon from multiple perspectives—including sociological, philosophical, psychological, historical, religious, literary, musical, theatrical, rhetorical, and cinematic—students attempted to better understand the dimensions and roles of silence. Is silence something present or something absent? What is its meaning? Why is it or is it not necessary? The topic provided a springboard for student research projects analyzing selected popular culture texts and prompted the kinds of discussions that form the basis of the liberal arts.

Course Description and Objectives

Structured thematically and linearly, this course offered weekly lectures, discussions, guest speakers, films, activities, and other media presentations on the topic of silence. Its dominant pedagogical approaches included the Socratic Method and experiential learning. The latter is particularly appropriate to provide hands-on experiences in a course heavily weighted with researching and writing assignments. The course began with silence as a manifestation of the inability to hear and speak, and of the definition of silence as a complex and positive phenomenon, not just as an absence of speech or noise. Writing in the last century, Max Picard argued that “when language ceases, Silence begins. But it does not begin *because* language ceases. The absence of language simply makes the presence of silence more apparent” (Picard, *The World of Science* 15).

The course progressed through an understanding and appreciation of silence in history, literature, religion and spirituality, creativity, music, theatre, painting, film, and communication, and concluded with silence as a choice that fewer people in the modern technological world are willing and able to make. It required students to recalibrate and listen to silence, and the course syllabus issued a warning:

In order to study silence, you must experience it, and for some of you will be excruciating. But try your best. In the long run, you should be able to pull together the disparate threads of this class into a meaningful and cohesive fabric and produce a quality research paper.

Instructors identified the following objectives:

1. To understand and define the nature and functions of silence in history, culture and media
2. To understand the diachronic role of silence in life, thought, communication, and relationships
3. To identify, analyze, and critically evaluate key media texts addressing silence
4. To investigate the relationship between silence and reflection, creativity, and spirituality
5. To gain appreciation for the attributes of introverts and extraverts
6. To understand how silence functions in literature, film, music, theatre and the arts
7. To understand the rhetorical and metaphoric uses of silence
8. To develop skills in research, analysis, discussion, writing, and oral presentation
9. To write a substantive critical research paper on some dimension of silence and culture

Course Required Readings

Two texts on silence provided a basis for the course. The first, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking* by Susan Cain, characterizes introversion and extraversion in American culture and explores American society's preference for and privileging of the latter; it became a best seller, acknowledging

the sheer pervasiveness and feelings of those who self-identify as introverts. Cain's February 2012 distillation of the book in a Ted Talk reached nearly 14.1 million views. Such attention thrust the book into the public limelight, making it a topic for discussion on television and radio talk shows and online forums. The juxtaposition of an introverted female professor and an extroverted male professor made for a provocative contrast in the classroom, as the female would gently elicit volunteer responses from the class in nurturing, organic ways, and the male would directly call on students, spurring them to move out of their comfort zones. The pairing enabled students to clearly differentiate concepts in Cain's text. The second work, Colum Kenny's *The Power of Silence: Silent Communication in Daily Life* served a more conceptual analysis of the ways in which silence influences history, culture, and the human soul.

These books, along with Jane Stokes's *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies* (2003), provided a framework for the course. In addition, students read weekly selections from a Course Handbook prepared by the instructors that offered interdisciplinary approaches to the study of silence in media and communication. Sample readings included Leland Person's "Hester's Revenge" on the symbolism of silence and how speech was "suppressed from without and repressed from within" in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*; "The Upside of Being an Introvert (and Why Extroverts Are Overrated)," a *Time* magazine cover story by Bryan Walsh; "10 Things to Know about Silence in Communication" by Susan Dunn; "The 8 Types of Silence: How to Improve Communication when People Aren't Talking" in *Silent Counseling* by Eric Klein; and excerpts from Ikuko Nakane's book, *Silence in Intercultural Communication* and George Prochnik's *In Pursuit of Silence: Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise*. These and other selections provoked discussion. One particular debate arose from Robert Heath's article "A Time for Silence: Booker T. Washington in Atlanta" about when the time is ripe or strategic for speech or action. As the book of *Ecclesiastes* declared (and the Byrds sang): "there is a time to speak and a time to be silent." The wisdom is knowing what time it is.

Background Readings

The professors relied upon readings classic and contemporary, scholarly and popular on silence to chart directions for the class. From the rules of silence among monastic traditions of ascetics and monks in the early Christian era, particularly of the Eastern Orthodox Church, through the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short story "Silver Blaze" (in which the dog that didn't bark in the night provided the vital clue for solving a mystery of a theft, as the villain who stole the racehorse was someone the dog knew), they sought various venues and expressions that opened up the diversity of material on silence. Other bits of literature provoked discussion about the advantages and problems of silence, such as the character of Gratiano from pop culture celebrity William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, who spouts doubt about the value of silence: "Silence is only commendable / In a neat's [cow's] tongue dried and a maid not vendible" (marketable) (1.1.111-112).

Cheryl Glenn's *Unspoken: Rhetoric of Silence* opened up intercultural aspects (e.g. silence of Native Americans among Navajo, Hopi, Pueblo, and Apache), dealing with both the forms of silence and its diverse communication functions. Glenn also focuses upon "engendering silence," investigating how silence relates to systems of power (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, age, etc.) with case studies of silencing women from "Anita Hill" to "Clinton's women." She connects the silence of Protestant reformer Anne Askew's appeal to a "rhetoric of silence" to biblical foundations and strategies of remaining quiet, even in the face of torture. Glenn concludes with a fascinating chapter on "the circulation of silence as a creative or ethical resource within the college classroom" (Glenn 150-162).

Course Assignments

Because the class satisfied the college's writing across-the-curriculum requirement, student writing assignments dominated. The first assignment, due the second week of class, was a collaborative annotated bibliography in MLA style with at least thirty books, chapters, or scholarly articles on silence. The preparation

of this list, worth five percent of the grade, enabled students to work together and get to know one another and culminated in a general list of sources that the entire class would reference for the rest of the semester.

This bibliography provided a starting point for a short research paper analyzing silence as a theme or device in a film, television show, song, or other popular culture text not covered in class. In an approximately three-to-five-page paper, plus a works-cited page that included at least six articles, books, or reviews, students delved into ways that silence functioned physically, rhetorically, and metaphorically in their chosen texts. This was worth ten percent of the grade.

In lieu of taking a midterm exam, each student selected a different book or substantive article from the class bibliography and came prepared to answer questions about it in an in-class essay. This was worth fifteen percent of the grade.

These three preliminary assignments prepared students for their major writing project, which consisted of various parts. First, students submitted research paper proposals of approximately five-hundred words, outlining the topic of study, reason for its importance, and thesis. This paper, along with a short, informal presentation to the class, was worth ten percent of the grade. Two weeks later, students submitted an annotated bibliography in MLA Style with at least twenty-five sources on their specific media text or topic. This was worth ten percent of the grade. A rough draft was optional, and during the last two weeks of the semester, students submitted final, polished twenty-page research papers and presented their work to the class in panels of four. The papers accounted for thirty percent of the grade and the presentation for ten percent.

The class culminated with a comprehensive essay final on silence in media and culture, covering readings, discussions, films, activities, and presentations, worth twenty percent of the grade.

Course Outline

The semester-long course was divided into following six sections: (1) Foundations for the Study of Silence, (2) The Role of Silence in Spirituality, Creativity and Reflection, (3) Silence in Communication Study; (4) Silent Film and Silence in Film, (5) The Role of Silence in a Highly Technological, Mediated World, and (6) Student Research Presentations.

Foundations for the Study of Silence

The first two weeks of this class centered on the question of definitions of silence and why one should study it in the twenty-first century. Kenny's *The Power of Silence* inaugurated the discussion, with his first three chapters outlining the phenomenon throughout history, exploring the thoughts of characters from Saint Teresa of Avila to Ralph Waldo Emerson. One of the most fascinating areas was the intercultural aspect of silence, with Asian cultures honoring silence as a sign of humility and respect. Also, Susan Cain opens up an understanding of the silence of introverts in a world of extraverts. According to Cain, most people have characteristics of both, but while introverts need quiet to refuel, extroverts get their energy from groups and stimulation. This became a running theme in the class as students worked through Cain's book, covering roughly a chapter per week. Cain also noted that introversion is not the same as shyness; however, introverts prefer deeper conversations with another person or a small intimate group while extraverts thrive on less in-depth talk with many people in a lively party setting.

To capture the cacophony of modern life and suggest whether students thrive more on quiet or chaos, the class watched, or suffered through, *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) (85 min.), an experimental film directed by Godfrey Reggio with music by Philip Glass. The film's title means "life out of balance," and the jarring images and sounds of the film jolt the viewer. Beginning with this extreme example, the class set out to study

ideological parameters. Students were challenged to reflect upon dimensions of silence and their antitheses, as follows:

Dualities in the Study of Silence

Silence	Sound
Quiet	Noise
Solitude	Community
Isolated	Connected
Alone	Accompanied
Deep Thought	Superficiality
Deep Reading	Skimming
Reflection	Spontaneity
Writing	Speaking
Disconnect	Connect
The absence of sound	The absence of silence
Inability to hear (deafness)	Inability <i>not</i> to hear (Cacophony of modern life)
Silence as sign of closeness (words need not be spoken)	Silence as sign of isolation (nothing to say)
Silence as love and support (physical presence, smile, touch)	Speaking as love and support (proclamations, cheers)
Contemplative religion	Celebratory religion

From here, the class turned to the condition of deafness, or the inability to hear. Students watched *The Miracle Worker* (1962) (106 min.), a film with Patty Duke and Anne Bancroft which told the story of the deaf, blind, and mute child, Helen Keller, and her teacher, Annie Sullivan, who penetrated her world of silence by teaching her sign language. Duke won an Academy Award for best supporting actress for her role as the brilliant but unruly child who is frustrated by her inability to hear or see.

The second week of the class, student read excerpts from *Walden Pond*, and a colleague from philosophy gave a guest lecture titled “Philosophers from Aristotle to Thoreau” and discussed silence and nature. “Silence,” Thoreau opined, “is of various depths and fertility, like soil. Now, it is a Sahara, where men perish of hunger and thirst; now a fertile bottom or a prairie of the west.” The guest professor showed an original film, *Walden Pond*, ironically contrasting Thoreau’s solitary experience with the Walden Pond of today filled with loud tourists tied to their technology.

A weekend assignment involved a field trip to the Edgar Cayce Association for Research and Enlightenment in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where students attended a free meditation class and then walked the outdoor labyrinth designed to mirror some of the sacred spirals and meandering patterns in nature. Cayce (1877-1945) was a popular and controversial twentieth-century psychic known as the “sleeping prophet.” He went into trans-like states to discover cures, psychic practices, and universal truths, and his followers maintain a facility at the Virginia Beach Oceanfront that archives his papers and promotes his alternative-lifestyle teachings through education, activities, and services. A quiet refuge in the midst of a busy tourist area (when the Navy jets were soaring over), the Edgar Cayce center encouraged students to slow down and appreciate solitude. The students’ practice of silence (sans phones) seemed unnatural at first, but soon quickened their senses of other sounds, as the center is near Seashore State Park, a quiet National Historic Landmark where trails lead one through bald cypress swamps, lagoons, and the maritime forest, an alternative site for the

sensory exercise of silence. Here students were able to experience the silence of space as well, as the solitude of the location opened up an opportunity to escape the crowded bustle of their everyday lives.

The Role of Silence in Spirituality, Creativity, and Reflection

The next phase of the course addressed the roles that silence plays in one's inner life. Continuing discussion from the Edgar Cayce visit the week before, the class entertained readings on meditation and spirituality and watched *Into Great Silence* (2005) (162 min.). This documentary by filmmaker Philip Groning, the antithesis of *Koyaanisqatsi*, examines the daily life and rituals of an ascetic sect of Carthusian monks who occupy the Grande Chartreuse, an isolated monastery high in the French Alps. The film runs nearly three hours and contains no voiceover, score, or archival footage. Using no crew or artificial lighting, Groning spent six months alone in the monastery, which almost never permits visitors, in order to capture the lives of monks who lack communication with the outside world. He spent two and a half years editing his footage. The film provoked a lively class discussion, and students remarked that they would not have been able to sit through such a long, soundless piece just a few weeks earlier.

Into Great Silence juxtaposed nicely with a missive from Pope Benedict XVI, who in 2012 offered a word on silence for the 46th World Communications Day, reminding his followers that "God's silence prolongs his earlier words. In these moments of darkness, He speaks through the mystery of His silence" (*Verbum Domini* 21). Pope Benedict pointed to the fact that our language always proves inadequate and "must make room for silent contemplation;" thus, Word and silence together teaches one that "learning to communicate is learning to listen and contemplate as well as speak." *Into Great Silence* proved to be a strategic entry for the class to read and discuss the final chapters of Kenny's *The Power of Silence*, which addresses silence in the arts, media, music, therapy, and spirituality and religion.

Few artistic works demonstrate the ambiguity of silence as much as Martin Scorsese's *Silence* (2016). As students read *The Atlantic* article by Emma Green, "Martin Scorsese's Radical Act of Turning Theology into Art" (December 21, 2016), they wrestled with both the aesthetic beauty of silence and the horrific repression of religious speech with its heart-wrenching spirituality.

The following week the class entered this realm of creativity and the arts. Students read an excerpt from *How Creativity Works* by Jonah Lehrer, which states that insights happen in times of quiet when the mind is at ease (31). A professor in the music department came to speak on silence in music and creativity, emphasizing that MRIs indicate that when silence occurs in music (and life), brains are activated and have time to digest. Silence enables other things to be revealed as significant. In particular, the professor noted how silence figures in musical compositions, and she brought with her musicians to demonstrate by playing Haydn's "Piano Trio." The musicians also performed John Cage's 4'33"--a totally silent piece in which musicians sit quietly with their instruments-- which became the composer's best known work. James Pritchett, in an essay written for the catalog of a 2009 exhibition at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona titled "John Cage and Experimental Art: The Anarchy of Silence," explains the impact of 4'33":

The piece can be difficult for audiences. . . . Sitting quietly for any length of time is not something to which people are accustomed in Western culture in general, much less in a concert hall setting. That tensions will arise, with controversy and notoriety following, is only natural. Confronted with the silence, in a setting we cannot control, and where we do not expect this kind of event, we might have any of a number of responses: we might desire for it to be over, or desire for more interesting sounds to listen to, or we might feel frightened, insulted, pensive, cultured, baffled, doubtful, bored, agitated, tickled, sleepy, attentive, philosophical, or, because we "get it," a bit smug.

The students in class discussed their expectations for musical performance and their reactions to this

surprising, thought-provoking piece, and how it stimulated both discomfort and contemplation.

Paintings at the Chrysler Museum (e.g. Hudson River School painter **Jasper Francis Cropsey's** *The Old Mill*, 1876 and Gustave Doré's *The Neophyte*, 1868) invited a brief silent season of contemplative wonder, as one listened to the great works of art. In *Signs*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains, "language speaks, and the voices of painting are the voices of silence" (81). Words take us out of the realm of silence, but paintings invite the opportunity to be reabsorbed into silence. Paintings seep into our vision and then seize and captivate our imagination.

Silence in Communication Study

Although this course was interdisciplinary, it was offered under the rubric of communication and thus included disciplinary theory involving silence. Readings over the next weeks, including excerpts from Edward Hall's *The Silent Language*, addressed nonverbal communication. As a class activity, a mime came to perform and conducted a participatory class, focusing on how information and emotions are conveyed without words. In the exquisite Bergsonian tradition of Marcel Marceau, Red Skelton, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, and the Blue Man Group, students themselves experienced practicing the art of nonverbal expression.

Another pertinent communication theory, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence Theory, recounts the tendency of people to remain silent when they believe that their views are in the minority on a particular subject. A reason for this, Noelle-Neumann argues, is that they fear isolation.

Intercultural approaches provided lenses for studying silence in the popular culture of other national groups. In his *Silence in Intercultural Communication* Ikuko Nakane explores the various roles and meanings of silence among various cultural groups, contrasting the eloquent west of Australia and the silent east of Japan. For Asian cultures, silence frequently connotes politeness. The Japanese celebrate what they call *ishin denshin* ("heart to heart communication"), suggesting that they might experience semi-telepathic communication, with an intuitive grasp of another person's feelings, culminating in the communication of *ittaikan* ("feeling of oneness"). The ritual of a tea ceremony as a disciplined practice of silence brought not only *ittaikan*, but also suspended the busy care of everyday life. Kyoko Murakami's "The art of dialogic silence in the way of tea" offered students a perspective on the quiet routines as a means to contemplation and peace. It was director Martin Scorsese's previously discussed film version of Shusaku Endo's *Silence*, a story of faith, doubt, and suffering, that explores such a possibility of peace within a cauldron of chaos. Anthropological studies of ethnicity and silence have raised additional questions. For example, the contrast between "loud black girls" and "quiet Asian boys" both looks at identity construction and challenges stereotypes. Sibel Tatar and others have also demonstrated how non-native English-speaking students are frequently judged negatively for their silence, while they may be wary, cautious, or reflective in the context of garrulous native speakers.

Finishing up the first half of the semester, the class also wrote a midterm essay and watched Mel Brooks' *Silent Movie* (1976) (86 min.), a welcome and silly respite from solemn topics and the examination. However, it conveniently led to the subsequent section.

Silent Film and Silence in Film

Over the next several classes students presented and discussed their proposals for research and submitted bibliographies, and the class continued to explore silent films by comparing early examples with contemporary ones. Two questions guided our discussions. First, how do silent films communicate? Second, how do sound films strategically use silence to evoke mood, establish character, or challenge its spectators to see more keenly. Students watched *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928) (69 min.) and read an essay titled "The Keaton Quiet," in which Walter Kerr calls the deadpan-faced Keaton the most silent of all the silent comedians. They also saw Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931) (89 min.), a silent film predicated on the fact that a young blind woman misinterprets the slam of the door of a grand automobile so as to think that a tramp is, in fact, a rich

man. These silent classics contrasted with more current silent films, *Hugo* (2011) (126 min.) and *The Artist* (2011) (100 min.), sparking the class to suggest reasons why a film about the silent age and a silent film achieved popularity in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

The class also watched two classic silent dramas starring Lillian Gish, *Broken Blossoms* (1919) (107 min.), directed by D.W. Griffith (in class), and *The Scarlet Letter* (1926) (115 min.), directed by Victor Sjöström (out of class). In the latter film students were directed to identify three kinds of silence, as captured through the three central characters. The students had already been exposed to silent films in previous classes, and most had developed, albeit slowly, an appreciation of them. They were gaining, though, the ability to speak about early cinema with a greater awareness of the relationship between silence and narrative technique.

In contrast, students were then invited to explore the tactical use of silence to create suspense in films like Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien* ("In space, no one can hear you scream.") and *A Quiet Place* (John Krasinski, 2018), in conjunction with Ann Hornaday's April 19, 2018 article in *The Washington Post* on why "*A Quiet Place* reminds us of the power possible in silence on screen." UCLA Professor Daniel Blumstein noted that horror films provide a higher than expected number of non-linear sounds, abrupt shifts up and down in pitch, which range "from the sort of distorted notes that come from a hi-fi cranked up too high, to the squeal produced by blowing too hard into a trumpet or the screech of a cat." But these non-linear sounds, rooted in animal screams under duress, are made more piercing when they follow moments of complete silence. The silence is the platform for fear-inducing sounds.

The Role of Silence in a Technological, Highly Mediated World

The final weeks of instruction centered on the dearth of silence in modern life and ways to accommodate this. Popular articles, such as Neil Swidey's "The End of Alone" in *The Boston Globe* and Claudia Wallis's cover story of "The Multitasking Generation" in *Time*, and books, such as Sherry Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, express the ubiquity of connectedness, rendering quiet and aloneness almost obsolete. The class took a field trip to a local tea room, where the owner gave a talk on tea's calming effects and served teas known for their herbal qualities to quiet the mind and body. Another invited speaker related her experiences as a Quaker and discussed "quietism." The Quaker Friends make silence an integral part of their meetings and, as the speaker related, value moments of quiet reflection, especially in a modern, mediated world. This discussion prompted one student to recall the Jewish tradition of sitting *shiva*, staying quietly with the bereaved during a time of mourning. The class also came to the realization that quiet in a relationship can mean lack of communication when two people have grown apart and have nothing to say to one another or it polar opposite: total communion between those of like minds who do not need words to convey meaning and feeling.

Student Research Presentations

During the final weeks of the semester, students submitted their final papers and shared their findings with the class in twenty-minute class presentations, which were attended and evaluated by not only the two instructors, but also three additional members of the Communication Department. The students had applied Venn diagrams to circle in on a relevant and personalized topic. As expected, their topics covered a wide range, including sports figures, social issues, film, television, and music. One student wrote on the Simon and Garfunkel song "The Sound of Silence," offering a substantive and novel interpretation. A campus athlete looked at meditation as a technique for coaches to prepare players for games in a paper titled "Coaching with Zen." Several students chose film topics, including "The Role of Deaf Characters in Film," "Silence in the Films of Stanley Kubrick," "M. Night Shyamalan and Silence/Introversion through Film," and "Chaplin's Gags." An adult student with an elementary school age daughter with autism found the class eye-opening: her daughter was taunted for being quiet while those bullying her were regarded normal. This student wrote the top paper

in the class, “Silence in Autism: The Deficit of Communication and Noise Sensitivity,” on ways of making autistic children who shy away from over stimulation part of the class so they can learn more effectively.

The course ended with a self-reflective essay final, consisting of a single question: In this class, we have followed many disparate threads regarding silence. How do they connect? Using various materials from the class, explain how your conceptions of silence and your practice of it have been affected.

Pedagogy and Assessment

The course aimed at helping students to learn to hear with their eyes, to catch glimpses and whispers of the visual world that too often they overlooked. In the practices of the Socratic Method and experiential learning, students were able to internalize their learning. Their minds were not stuffed with too much information that they could not chew or digest. Silence offered pauses to reflect after busy, noisy days. Indirect learning allowed for serendipitous discovery. While lecturing did occur, key moments of learning occurred within opportunities to contemplate.

Students were also invited to understand the nature of silence in their own education. Some saw silence as a defense mechanism, being in a context that they perceived as oppressive or judgmental. Some were simply shy and introverted; others bored or disengaged. Some educational scholars argue that certain marginalized people are *silenced*, as in Paulo Freire’s description of oppressed people in “a culture of silence.” Others, however, viewed their silence as strategic, adhering to the Proverb that “even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues” (17:28).

Teachers could employ silence, as Huey-li Li points out, “as an indispensable disciplinary act that aims at establishing an ordered milieu for effective teaching and learning” or as a means to “simply allow time for reflection on teaching and learning” (Li, “Silences,” 157). It is the latter that fosters creativity and imagination, allowing time for reflection on a theme to blossom into fruition. Students and teachers alike can come to see that even, as Gregory Bateson points out, a non-message is also a message. Silence tells us something. They learn that one cannot not communicate.

Angelo Caranfa argues convincingly that silence is the very foundation of learning, as a means toward self-knowledge. Her position is that no discourse can awaken “self-knowledge” as Socratic learning, complemented by experience, leads to “an inner state of silence necessary for mental, moral, and spiritual growth of the human self.” She points to four benefits of such pedagogy. Education grounded in silence not only teaches students to think critically, but also “to see and to feel the whole of things.” It offers complementary forms of knowing, *savoir*—to know about something—and *connaitre*—to know something directly by taste or experience. Such is the medieval double epistemology of Contemplation and Enjoyment.

Second, with silence, teaching does not become a mechanical routine,” of merely rote learning. Third, silence opens up the joy of teaching. For Caranfa, “teaching is a joyous activity” because every time we enter the classroom we constantly create and recreate ourselves through a communion with the self that we do not know, that we have yet to bring into being.” Finally, silence fosters the creative nature of students, freeing students for spontaneity in their quest for understanding. The focus of the classroom in this model is listening, which alone renders us attentive to the *silent voices* of our spoken words. This works in a practical way in a classroom model of reading and writing, where the shift of learning moves to the student, as reading and writing invite a conversation with “the silent self and with the silent other.” Students thus acquire not only critical skills, but complementary creative and contemplative skills, stemming from this aesthetic of silence.

Students were also challenged to develop habits of seeing and hearing (and then thinking and writing) with disciplined care. Silence itself can enable a lazy student to remain lazy, but a focus upon the meditation of a clear idea, a person could regulate his or her own noise and find an auditory Sabbath or holy time set apart.

Assessment in this course took three forms. First, students were challenged to connect the readings and the experiences of silence in a media-saturated world. Second, their final research papers and presentations,

evaluated by several faculty members, demonstrated how well students succeeded at research, writing, and critical thinking on the complex topic of silence. The final component, a self-reflective essay, assessed by the class's instructors, determined how well students have absorbed course content so as to be aware of the applications to their own lives. In some cases, students found their quests for silence validated, affecting their behavior. Unfortunately, others quickly attached their iPhones to their ears as soon as they finished writing.

Reflections on a Word

In *Silence in Media and Culture*, students explored a single word—silence—in all its permutations in popular culture and media. They experienced quiet places and learned through discussion developed through intense questioning. Although the class was offered in a communication department, it could easily fit in interdisciplinary studies or any number of disciplines and works well as a team-taught course. The course made students aware of the history of silence and the media-rich environment in which they live, as well as the choices they have to seek quiet. Most students in the class identified as introverts, even though their personalities suggested otherwise, and appreciated Susan Cain's argument and readable text. The popular book provided entry for more scholarly readings on their chosen research topics. Students also appreciated the wide range of popular culture areas that the course addressed: classic film, modern film, documentary, mime and nonverbal communication, music, meditation and new age philosophy, tea drinking, spirituality, disability, and others. Silence in the modern world may be becoming endangered, but as this class shows, it remains an intriguing idea for study.

NOTES

1. Robin Patric Clair's *Organizing Silence: A World of Possibilities* (State University of New York Press, 1998) offered insights onto the organizational and political structures of silence, such as our classroom itself, questioning how dominant groups silence marginalized others in society and how these groups lose their voices.
2. Heath, Robert "A Time for Silence: Booker T. Washington in Atlanta" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 64 (1978), 385-99
3. See Merton, Thomas *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and a Writer* (HarperOne, 1997) and Doyle, Sir Arthur *Silver Blaze* (Creative Education, 1990)
4. Glenn, Cheryl *Unspoken: Rhetoric of Silence* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2004) See also her edited volume (with Krista Ratcliffe) *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2011) with its special section on Praxes; and George Kalamaras looks at silence as a mode of knowing in his *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension: Symbolic Form in the Rhetoric of Silence* (State University of New York Press, 1994)
5. *Ibid.* xiii. cf 150-162.
6. Mary Reda's *Between Speaking and Silence: A Study of Quiet Students* (State University of New York Press, 2009) initiates a discussion for students on why certain students do not engage in the classroom.
7. See Arden Neisser's classic *The Other Side of Silence: Sign Language and the Deaf Community in America* (Gallaudet University Press, 1990); an alternative film was *Johnny Belinda* (Jean Negulesco, 1948), in which Jane Wyman won an Academy Award for Best Actress, especially for a scene where she signed the Lord's Prayer.
8. Such an exploration has been articulated as well by the meditations of Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast's *The Way of Silence: Engaging the Sacred in Daily Life* (Franciscan Media, 2016), Scott Bruce's *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Gunilla Norris' *Inviting Silence: Universal Principles of Meditation* (Bluebridge, 2004).

For Professor Steven Emmanuel, the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard had pointed to the persuasive silent art of the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, in which the birds of the air and the lilies of the field silently taught one how to be grateful and kvetch; likewise, Ralph Waldo Emerson could see a farm as a mute gospel.

9. See Interview with Philip Groning <https://zeitgeistfilms.com/media/films/91/intogreatsilence.presskit.pdf> (Accessed June 9, 2016)
10. Ross, Maggie *Silence: A User's Guide* (Cascade Books, 2014) points to steps of contemplation practiced by monks and celebrated by Bishop Desmond Tutu.
11. In his satiric *The Screwtape Letters*, British author C. S. Lewis's devil railed against both music and silence. Detesting them both, he sounded like Nietzsche demanding "Noise—Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless, and virile—Noise which alone defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples, and impossible desires. We will make the whole universe a noise in the end." (HarperOne, 2013), 120
12. Salome Voegelin provides a sonic sensibility and an aesthetic of audio design in her *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2010); Another curious cultural phenomenon is addressed in Malcolm Quantrill and Bruce Webb's *The Culture of Silence: Architecture's Fifth Dimension* (Texas A&M Pres, 1998) exploring the environmental impact of modernist architecture (especially Scandinavian) on noise and silence.
13. Cage, John *Silence: Lectures and Writings 50th Anniversary* (Wesleyan, 2011); An alternative aspect of silence and music can be found in David Steindl-Rast's *Music of Silence: A Sacred Journey through the Hours of the Day* (Ulysses Press, 2001), where he seeks to capture the sacred rhythms in each canonical hour of the day (e.g. matin, terce, vigil, etc.)
14. See Claude Kipnis's *The Mime Book* (Meriwether, 1988) and Richmond Shepard's *Mime, The Technique of Silence: An Illustrated Workbook* (Drama Publishers, 1979)
15. See also editors Wolfgang Donsbach, Charles Salmon, and Yariv Tsfati's *The Spiral of Silence: New Perspectives on Communication and Public Opinion* (Routledge, 2013)
16. See Nakane, Ikuko *Silence in Intercultural Communication: Perceptions and Performance* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007) See also his "Silence and politeness in intercultural communication in university seminars" *Journal of Pragmatics* 38: 11 (October 2006), 1811-1835
17. Murakami, Kyoko. "The art of dialogic silence in the way of tea: rethinking space and time for contemplation" *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (March 9, 2018) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13527258.2018.1448881> (Accessed July 11, 2018)
18. See Mark Dennis and Darren Middleton's *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shusaku Endo's Classic Novel* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015)
19. Lei, Joy L. "(Un)Necessary Toughness?: Those 'Loud Black Girls' and Those 'Quiet Asian Boys'" *Anthropology and Education* 34: 2 (June 2003), 158-181
20. Tatar, Sibel "Why Keep Silent? The Classroom Participation Experiences of Non-native-English-speaking Students" *Language and Intercultural Communication* 5: 3-4 (2005), 284-293
21. See Walter Kerr's *The Silent Clowns* (Knopf, 1979) where he calls the deadpan faced Keaton the most silent of the silent film comedians; Samuel Beckett's *Film* (1965), a silent experimental film with Buster Keaton, took the class in a surreal self-reflexive direction.
22. See chapter five of "Film, TV, and Music" in Clum Kenny's *The Power of Silence: Silent Communication in Daily Life* (Karnac Books, 2011). Des O'Rawe's article, "The great secret: silence, cinema and modernism" (*Screen* 47: 4, 2006, pp 395-405) looks at critical writings addressing the expressive functions of silence within sound cinema.

23. Leland Person Jr. astutely pointed out what happened to each character when they kept quiet. "A ban on silence lies on everyone...speech is suppressed from without and repressed from within." In the silence of the text, gaps occurs. Silences happen, which enrich the mystery and pathos of the narrative. "Hester's Revenge: The Power of Silence in *The Scarlet Letter*" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 43: 4 (March 1989), 465-483
24. See also Adam Jaworski's *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (Sage Publishers, 1992) for further work in media studies and politics. A fun digression is Robert Entman's *Scandal and Silence: Media Responses to Presidential Misconduct* (Polity, 2012) surveying case studies (from 1988 through 2008) in which silence was abused by media outlets.
25. See Quaker Rachel Muers's *Keeping God's Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004)
26. See Bateson, Gregory *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Jason Aronson, 1987)
27. Caranfa, Angelo "Silence as the Foundation of Learning" *Educational Theory* 54: 2 (April 30, 2004), 211-230

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