

# REDISCOVERING

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*Rediscovering LA* is a collection of final project essays written by English 698D students at California State University, Northridge, in the spring semester of 2015.

We would like to extend a special thanks to Stalin R. Usher II for his beautiful original artwork, to Vana Derohanessian and the Cover Committee for their striking graphic design work, to Azure Star Glover and the Upload Committee for their excellent work compiling and formatting the collection, and to all the students of English 698D for their hard work and collaborative spirit.

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# Introduction

Sandra Stanley  
and English 698D

It has become a commonplace convention to describe Los Angeles as a city of paradox. In his classic *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, Carey McWilliams describes LA as a “paradoxical land”; in *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis entitles one of his chapters “Sunshine or Noir?”; and in *Land of Smoke and Mirrors* Vincent Brook begins his book with a litany of contradictory appellations for the slippery metropolis. From its very inception, Los Angeles has had an elusive and illusive history, leading some to argue that the very history of the city is based on forgetting (Klein). For the writers of this collection, Los Angeles is a city of multiple representations, and in their essays, the writers, who are specialists in English Studies, primarily examine Los Angeles as a discursive site, echoing Kevin McNamara’s assertion that Los Angeles is a “city made of words”(1). However, for these essayists, who are all Angelenos, Los Angeles is also a very physical and material city, for they drive the city’s crowded freeways, worry about its water shortage, and wonder about the city’s economic and social future. The representations that these writers explore—whether William Faulkner’s “golden land” or Nathanael West’s apocalyptic nightmare—have real material consequences for them.

The collection began as a class project, in which each writer first selected a topic on Los Angeles. For some of these authors, their choices originated as personal choices, inspired by personal experiences: worrying about a son with an outlaw love for graffiti, chatting with relatives that worked in the aerospace or entertainment industry, living in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, advocating for environmental issues, or working as educators. The writers then examined their topics through their specific fields of specialization, either literary studies or rhetoric and composition. This collection does not pretend to be exhaustive; rather, the authors write about an eclectic and rich vision

of Los Angeles—one that reflects the intersection of their lived experiences and academic lives.

### **City of Dreams/Hyperreal LA**

Edward Soja notes that Los Angeles is almost synonymous with the metropolis of dreams and myths, from Hollywood's manufacturing of fantasies to SimCity's construction of hyperreality. Exploring a hyperreal LA, Wafa Azeem's essay begins our collection with the classic paradoxical description of Los Angeles: a city that at once embodies a vision of utopic promise as well as dystopic destruction. In her essay "From Magical Milieu to Destructive Denizens," Azeem examines the shift that occurs in the way LA is depicted in two Young Adult novels: Francesca Block's *Weetzie Bat* and Marie Lu's *Legend*. In her 1989 novel, Block, through her young protagonist Weetzie, celebrates Los Angeles as a magical postmodern landscape, while roughly two decades later, Lu portrays LA as a militarized and post-apocalyptic police state. For Azeem, this shift is reflective of the larger national shift that the country has undergone in the intervening years, in which, as Lu suggests, a post 9/11 atmosphere haunts the city. Drawing from both Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacra and Michel Foucault's concept of the panopticon, Azeem argues that both visions of Los Angeles are generated by a hyperreality.

Michael Dunbar, in his essay "From Bradbury to Butler: Los Angeles Science Fiction and the Aerospace Industry," redefines the traditional utopian/dystopian dialectic of Los Angeles in terms of technological optimism and pessimism. While Los Angeles has been conceived of as a hyperreal science fiction space itself, Dunbar notes that little has been made of Los Angeles as the site of production for both hard science and science fiction. Dunbar examines the oft-neglected history of the aerospace industry in Los Angeles as reflected through the lens of two works of science fiction written by Los Angeles-based authors: Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) and Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* (1993). Each written at key moments in this history, *The Martian Chronicles* during the advent of the Cold War and Space Race and *The Parable of the Sower* during the decline of the industry's presence in the region, these

works are cultural expressions of the aerospace industry's impact on Los Angeles and its identity. Los Angeles's unique relationship to the aerospace industry thus not only impacted the city's identity but also produced a unique form of science fiction that specifically addressed the concerns of its representation.

Kim Lewis directly addresses the popular vision of Hollywood as a site of illusion in her essay "The Hyper-façade of Hollywood." Lewis explores key phases contributing to the eventual outsourcing of Hollywood in the twentieth century—changes that include the technological revolution from silence to sound, the demise of the Studio system, and the skyrocketing cost of labor and production. Examining two entertainment films-- *Singin' in the Rain* and *The Player*—Lewis argues that each film reflects a stage in Hollywood's runaway production. *Singin' in the Rain*, set in 1927, focuses on the entertainment industry moving from silence to sound, while *The Player* showcases the corrupt world of Hollywood in the 1990s, a world in which filmmakers, affected by the increasing cost of production, all too often treat film not as an art, but as a formula-driven commodity. Lewis ultimately argues that Hollywood has become merely a symbol of the past, with the hyper-façade hiding the truth: that the film entertainment is dying in Hollywood.

In contrast to Lewis, Azure Star Glover, who focuses upon animation in Hollywood, argues that Hollywood is not dying, but continually re-creating itself by appropriating new material. Noting that there is a dearth of scholarship regarding the rise and influence of independent, or so-called "indie," animation, Glover, in her essay "Cartoons and Counterculture," explores three examples of animation, from the foundations of Disney, to the rise of televised cartoons, to the proliferation of YouTube animations on the Internet. As such, Glover analyzes the rhetoric of films as in Disney's *Snow White*, modern cartoons such as *The Simpsons*, and indie animated shorts such as "Narwhals." In tracing the evolution of the rhetoric of cartoons created and produced in Hollywood, Glover questions if indie animation is, in fact, independent and asserts that mainstream studios are quick to appropriate any indie trend, even commodifying that trend as seen in Sprint's commercialized use of "Narwhals." Despite doomsayer's

proclamations concerning the death of mainstream Hollywood, Glover asserts that the inexorable machine of Hollywood will survive.

### **Waste and Renewal**

David Ulin has argued that “the story of Los Angeles has always been, on the most basic level, the story of the interaction between civilization and nature” (xvi). In her essay “From Concrete River to Urban Oasis,” Nami Hayashi Olgin argues that that interaction has often had dire consequences for nature. Examining the history of the Los Angeles River, Olgin notes that early in the twentieth century, the once lush river was pumped dry by the growing urban population, and later in the 1930s when storm waters filled the neglected river and it dangerously overflowed, the Army Corp of Engineers took action and poured concrete in the river and channelized it, effectively subduing the river. Ultimately, conservationists lobbied for the restoration of the river, and the city developed a master plan to revitalize the waterway. Examining key documents, Olgin analyzes the rhetoric embedded in these works, tracing the discursive history of the Los Angeles River from a rhetoric of loss, to a rhetoric of threat, to a rhetoric of renewal. However, in examining the current master plan, with its promise of transforming various sites along the river into an urban oasis, Olgin argues that the master plan appropriates the language of environmentalism as a means to mask economic opportunism.

While Olgin examines the precarious discursive history of Los Angeles’s waterways, Evelyn Giebler focuses upon the concrete highways of the city. Drawing from affective and spatial theories, Giebler first briefly examines Los Angeles’s creation and development of its freeway system, and then analyzes the affects produced by such a space in two Los Angeles novels: Joan Didion’s *Play It As It Lays* and Helena Maria Viramontes’s *Their Dogs Came with Them*. Nigel Thrift, in his essay “Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect,” explores the politics of affect and the role of those politics in the “life of the city” (57). While Didion, writing in the early 1970s, regarded the freeway as a form of “secular communion,” Viramontes, writing over thirty years hence, examines the 1960s constructions of freeways through the downtown Chicano communities as a sign of social inequity, leaving the community with a

fractured sense of identity. For Giebler, Los Angeles's physical space is closely interrelated to the citizenry's view of its affective space, creating, in Thrift's words, a spatial politics of affect.

For Jessica Grosh, Los Angeles's very attitude towards its waste is also reflective of a spatial politics of affect, ironically based on a utopic desire to purge filth from the body politic. In "Waste Management in La-la Land," Grosh examines not only the complex history of waste management in Los Angeles County, but also the language that surrounds this process. Authors Aldous Huxley and Mary Douglas have noted that society's very dialogue with dirt often reflects society's fears and anxieties. Drawing from this dialogue with dirt, Grosh argues that there are three main methods that LA uses to motivate its residents to be responsible for their waste: the rhetoric of purity and cleanliness, of fear or danger, and of education or information. She looks at historical changes in waste treatment and in the naming of said practices, like the evolution of the name of the Hyperion Treatment Plant. Her detailed analysis of various newspaper headlines, signs, and campaigns within LA reveals that their language obfuscates the processes and results of waste management within the county.

### **Outlaws and Dudes**

Los Angeles has been famous for those who have been engaged in countercultural practices, from the surfing bum, to the slacker, to the outlaw graffiti artist. For Reyner Banham, the vision of the Southern California surfer is synonymous with a "fantasy of innocence"—"a cult of private and harmless gratification" (111). However, in his essay, "The Rhetoric of Surf," Steve Florian also notes the ways that surfers are emblematic of rebellion by not only challenging social norms, but also repurposing language and images to retain some sense of identity and agency for themselves. These surfers are creating a counterculture on the beach that rejects the real world culture of the work-a-day, nine-to-five, middle class aspirational existence. Florian argues that Hollywood-generated surf movies as well as surfing texts have inculcated language and images particular to the surfing culture of the 1950s, through the 1970s, into the zeitgeist of popular culture, reaching its peak in the 1980s. The

semantic shift of language to suit the purpose of the culture industry, as well as the burgeoning surf industry, is generated in its purest form by the surfers that are active in the culture of surfing: both industries benefit from the commodification of selling surf culture and the beach-as-a-lifestyle to the uninitiated masses.

Jonathan Straight scrutinizes the very boundaries of law in his essay “LA Pro-Marijuana Films and Their Subversive Language.” Straight explores Los Angeles through three marijuana films, as well as the legal history of this restricted crop. In 1996, Los Angeles passed Proposition 215, also known as the Compassionate Use Act, legalizing marijuana for medical use. Straight notes that film and media have significantly shaped the public perception of marijuana. In fact, he notes that the 1936 *Reefer Madness* served as a misleading, but effective anti-marijuana propaganda film. One year later, the government would pass the Marijuana Tax Act, effectively criminalizing marijuana. In the intervening years, the public continued to debate about the use of marijuana, which became a countercultural symbol of rebellion in the 1960s. Straight notes that films such as the 1978 *Up in Smoke*, the 1995 *Friday*, and the 2008 *Pineapple Express* all use a subversive form of humor to challenge the public perception of marijuana use. He argues that these parodic depictions not only influenced public perceptions of the drug, but also influenced the legal shift concerning marijuana use as well.

In her essay “The Art of Graffiti as Inner-City Communication and as a Means of Public Literacy” Ligia Lesko examines the outlaw art of graffiti. Although graffiti art has often been associated with vandalism and gang activity, artists, community activists and scholars have come to recognize the artistic contribution of this street art, as well as its importance as a means of expression for members of Los Angeles’s subculture. Lesko traces the development of Los Angeles graffiti through several venues: as a legacy of hobo art, as a Los Angeles translation of New York counterculture art, as an East Los Angeles artistic and communal expression, as an expression of Malibu art and skateboard culture, and as hybrid communal arena where graffiti artists transcend local and communal identities in order to share their art. Lesko argues that this “wall talk” has

become a means of establishing a communicative art that has become fundamental to the identity of Los Angeles.

### **South Central—Dominant and Counter Narratives**

The editors of *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* note that many tourists flock to Los Angeles to see a manufactured dream city, but LA also embodies multiple sites often hidden from the tourist—places where a history of struggle concerning racial and social inequities has been enacted. Our next three writers are directly interested in the counter narratives of struggle that is also part of LA's identity.

Focusing upon the world of South Central in the 1930s, Jennifer Sanchez argues that the boosteristic promise of Los Angeles early in the twentieth century proved all too ephemeral. Thousands of blacks, fleeing from the repressive Jim Crow laws that controlled the South, hoped LA would become their city of opportunity. Central Avenue, during this time, became synonymous with artistic creation, leaving some to wonder if Los Angeles could enact its own western Harlem Renaissance—a means in which blacks could creatively reinvent themselves. In her essay, Sanchez analyzes Arna Bontemps's *God Sends Sunday* and Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, demonstrating how both authors capture the pervasive racial tensions and social anxieties in South Central. Sanchez notes that both these men, influenced by their own personal history, reinforced and challenged the master narratives of their time.

Directly examining the interchange between competing narratives, Emily Olson analyzes the way local Los Angeles newspapers have covered three of the major protest movements in Los Angeles history: the 1965 Watts rebellion, the 1992 Rodney King uprising, and the 2014 Ferguson-inspired protests. When protesters and police clash, the media often narrates the events to the public, giving the media power to shape how the public views various protest movements. Existing research proves that the media has a tremendous impact on the public's perception of protesters and can shape whether the public accepts them as legitimate or illegitimate. In her essay, Olson examines the *Los Angeles Times*, a highly circulated mainstream newspaper, and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a smaller African American newspaper. She analyzes the genre

elements of each article, along with the rhetoric used to describe protesters, in order to examine the underlying ideology of each newspaper. She argues that the *Los Angeles Times* tended to maintain an ideology that supported the status quo, often depicting protesters as disruptors of the social order, even as criminals. The *Sentinel*, in contrast, tended toward a community ideology; the articles focused on underlying causes for the community's frustrations, which lends legitimacy to the protest movement.

In "How Fashion Shaped the Counter Narrative of Blacks in South Central Los Angeles," Sherece Usher explores the complex narratives and counter narratives at play in fashion. Theorists such as Georg Simmel and Roland Barthes have argued that clothing is a cultural marker of individual and group identity. For Usher, fashion can act as both a hegemonic and subversive force. Usher argues that a fashion counter narrative is being created in the neighborhoods of South Central. In his article, "Considering Counter Narratives," Michael Bamberg states, "Narratives provide the possibility of a format that has become the privileged way of fashioning self and identity," as well as a means to challenge that privilege. As powerful cultural narratives are codified, those opposing those narratives form counter narratives. For Bamberg, this can often be a fluid process, for as master narratives are created, counter narratives are formed, allowing for a process that is potentially liberating and emancipating (361-362). In South Central, a number of young Black youths have used fashion to create their own counter narratives; however, as Bamberg has noted, this process is a fluid one, and cultural narratives are ever-changing and, at times, easily co-opted by the very powers that is being challenged.

### **Diverse Voices/The Global Village**

It is a truism to describe Los Angeles as a global village, a multi-lingual city of immigrants. The first two writers in this section teach in the public school system and are aware of the complexities of representations, for both teachers and students. Our last two writers ponder the role of cultural identity in the context of Los Angeles's hybrid and richly multi-ethnic political and social body.

In his essay, Bernie Sapir acknowledges there is a debate going on in this country concerning the role of public schools, which are facing a number of economic and social challenges. While public school representatives—such as the Los Angeles public school teachers--would agree for reform efforts that would garner greater funds being allocated to the school system, others—including Republican George Bush and Democratic Barack Obama--argue that the increase of charter schools and a voucher system is a better resolution. Sapir argues that part of this debate has been shaped on the federal level and this federal rhetoric has influenced not only the public, but also popular culture. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell, issued the *Nation at Risk* Report (*NAR*), not only putting public education under scrutiny, but also adopting rhetoric critical of the public education system. Subsequent federal educational policies have adopted its ideology, beginning with President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind* Law (*NCLB*), followed by President Obama's Race To The Top Program (*RTTT*). Sapir argues that these federal educational policies influence Americans' perspective of public education, and these presidential mandates' impact is acutely evident in the Los Angeles Greater Metropolis's school system, where the UTLA—the United Teachers of Los Angeles—has been the target of the public's angst. Furthermore, he observes that the federal language and perceptions have seeped into popular culture, noting how two Los Angeles education films, *Stand and Deliver*, 1988, *Freedom Writers*, 2007, and the educational documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, 2010, are emblematic of this perspective, and, in fact, effectively feed into the *zeitgeist* generated from these reports' rhetoric and ideologies.

While Sapir analyzes the representations of Los Angeles teachers, Ellen Moreh explores representations of students labeled as English learners. Moreh notes that the Los Angeles Unified School District, home to the largest English learner population, attempts to provide various programs to enable English learners to acquire Academic English; however, some of these very programs may make students feel that they are less capable than their fellow students. Moreh examines the depictions of the student population from the well-known education film, *Stand and Deliver*, and analyzes some of the issues of language and representation that the film raises. Although she realizes

that some commentators have critiqued the film for perpetuating stereotypes, she argues that the film enacts a complex understanding of linguistic power as demonstrated by the students. In her analysis, Moreh argues that the English learners in the film can manipulate both the dominant academic language as well as their heritage language—articulating an empowering knowledge of a hybrid discourse. Moreh notes that students have the power to both adopt and signif(y) upon the dominant discourses of the educational system, thus, transforming the very labels that may have once limited them.

In her essay, Vana Derohanessian explores cultural representations of Armenian Americans living in Los Angeles. Although Armenian Americans have lived in Los Angeles in significant numbers since the 1960s, they have not been a highly visible population, that is, until recently, with the popularity of the television reality show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. As such, American popular culture is distributing their images as representative of Armenian Americans from Los Angeles, to the dismay of a number of Armenian Los Angelenos who do not believe that the Kardashians, who are so closely associated with American capitalism and privilege, represent the traditional narratives associated with the community—one emphasizing a cultural memory of genocide and traditional religious and social values. Yet, Derohanessian argues that this year, 2015, the hundred year anniversary of the Armenian genocide, offers a fascinating opportunity to analyze the way that these two narratives may intertwine, for the Kardashians, visiting Armenia and chastising Turkey for its refusal to recognize the genocide, have appropriated the language of history and memory so closely tied to the cultural representations of Armenian Americans.

Finally, Stephanie Lim, in her essay “At the Intersection of Deaf and Asian American Performativity,” explores two particular theatre groups important to LA: East West Players produces shows that place Asian American playwrights and actors front and center, and Deaf West Theatre stages productions featuring both deaf and hearing actors together. While scholars have studied these two theatres’ productions individually, no research currently exists exploring both companies as functioning together within the larger, national theatre movement towards diversity. Significantly,

Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren notes that the Deaf community perceives itself as a cultural minority (423), and both the Asian American community and Deaf community struggle with issues of identity, representation, and silence. Both theatres staged a stark version of the same show—*Pippin*—in 2008 and 2009, turning a Broadway production originally set in the Middle Ages into very modern and relevant re-appropriations. Although the choice in source material seems coincidental at first, a closer examination reveals that both the Asian American and Deaf communities have struggled with experiences that have marginalized their community. Lim argues that the Deaf West Theatre's and East West Players' adaptations of *Pippin* are reflective not only of LA's cultural diversity but also of the challenges that the Deaf and Asian American communities were—and still are—facing today. In addition, a study of these two versions of *Pippin* provides an understanding of how intentional musical adaptations disrupt and subvert current notions of national privilege and identity in America.

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# From Magic Milieu to Destructive Denizens: Examining Socio-Historical Shifts within Representations of Los Angeles in YA Literature

Wafa Azeem

Francesca Lia Block and Marie Lu deftly construct two vibrantly distinct depictions of Los Angeles in their novels *Weetzie Bat* (1989) and *Legend* (2011). Both natives of LA, the two authors offer markedly different views of a city that has come to symbolize a vast array of mythic ideas from stardom and renewal to corruption and deception. Written for a young adult audience, the two stories communicate the trials and tribulations of teenagers and the anxiety that comes from growing up and living in an urban setting. *Weetzie Bat* follows Weetzie, a quirky high schooler, as she tries to find a place of her own in a city that is magical and dark and beautiful. Weetzie befriends Dirk, a young man who shares her nontraditional lifestyle, falls in love with My Secret Agent Lover Man, and starts an alternative family with these adventurous characters. Although the novel deals with troubling topics such as sex, drugs, and the AIDS epidemic, Los Angeles is depicted as a fantastic and postmodern landscape that the characters navigate with magical ease. In stark contrast, Lu's *Legend* tells the apocalyptic story of June and Day. June is a fifteen-year old prodigy tasked with finding the fifteen year-old criminal Day. Set in the backdrop of a dystopic Los Angeles, the story articulates the anxiety and paranoia that comes from living in a militant state. The two novels, emerging twenty years apart from each other, mirrors a shift in its representation of Los Angeles from a magic reality to an apocalyptic dystopia. I argue that this shift reflects a change in the literary landscape of Young Adult (YA) literature.

These two distinctive novels in YA literature, Block's *Weetzie Bat* and Lu's *Legend*, illustrate the utopic and dystopic visions with which Los Angeles has long been associated. Los Angeles is a city both idealized and maligned. Critics have applauded

LA for being a city of culture all the while decrying that it is nothing but a “tinsletown.” Block presents an almost magical version of the City of Angels, where fantasy and reality blur together. In Block’s award winning story, Weetzie embraces the hyper-stylized version of LA, using the city’s heterotopic space as a place to find herself and construct an identity as colorful as the city itself. In direct contrast, Lu paints a militarized and disease-ridden vision of the city, where an authoritarian government controls its population within a surveillance state. This paper examines the shift from the fantastic to the gritty “reality” presented in the two tales, arguing both novels depict the city as a “hyperreal” space. Los Angeles is a city created by signs and symbols. The sensational and sentimental descriptions of the city, as well as the militaristic portrayals, become a part of the hyperreal truth, where postmodern uncertainty destabilizes the landscape.

In addition, I would argue that the shift in the two works also highlights what Kerry Mallan has described as “an Age of Security . . . a post 9/11 surveillance culture [that] testifies to a new set of anxieties about how we relate the present to the past and to the new future” (4). This paranoia and need to always be on guard after the attack on September 11<sup>th</sup> manifests itself in current YA literature. Scholars such as Sara Schwebel have also noted the importance of 9/11, asserting, “YA dystopias are a post-9/11 phenomenon in the United States” (204). In fact, in an interview I conducted with *Legend* author, Marie Lu, she explained, “The U.S. is such a warrior nation and after 9/11 it has become more so. The division between the country in the book was inspired by how our two political parties are just so extreme and do not like each other. It’s just a world of opposites now” (Lu). With post 9/11 anxieties resonating within current dystopic YA fiction, it is easier to understand the literary shift from a magical realist landscape to a post-apocalyptic terrain.

I turn to Michael Cart for a brief survey of Young Adult literature to illustrate the shift in ideological representations that appear in *Weetzie Bat* and *Legend*. Though described as “inherently slippery and amorphous,” YA literature is clearly tied to an emergent youth culture (Cart 5). However familiar and popular this genre is now, YA literature has a short, but interesting history. Cart sees Young Adult literature transforming from early columns such as “Boy Dates Girl” (1936) to general escapist

novels such as *Hi There*, *High School!* and *First Love*—works which functioned as a means of socializing young people who are no longer children but not quite adults. Cart notes, however, that the genre takes on a darker tone in the 1970s with works such as *The Chocolate War* (1974). A tale about a young boy named Jerry Renault, who refuses to conform to his Catholic School's mob mentality, *The Chocolate War* reflects an era permeated by the anxieties evoked by the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, which raised questions about obeying imperialistic authorities that may be unjustly excluding others based on racial, sexual, or national difference. Cart contends that Cormier's novel "disturbed the comfortable universe of both adolescents and the adults who continued to protect their tender sensibilities," allowing "not all endings of novels and real lives are happy ones" (29). In the succeeding 1980s and 1990s, he noticed that along with the dark turn of tales, there was also an emergence of magical realism. Now fantastical stories contained grim topics. The most popular series illustrating this phenomenon is the *Harry Potter* series.

*Harry Potter* caused a reading revolution, cataclysmic for Young Adult novels. The tale situates the adolescent anxieties of growing up within a magical realm, allowing readers to both identify with the characters, while escaping the hardships of everyday life. Cart posits, "In the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, worldwide economic distress, and the specter of global warming, this invitation to escape has surely become increasingly attractive and the group accepting it, ever larger" (102). Amidst the escape into fantasy, Cart also notes that there was an interesting increase in dystopic novels. After *Harry Potter's* fame, which showcased how lucrative YA novels can be, similar novels started emerging. Books like *Twilight* and *Divergent* met with great success, launching profitable franchises with devoted fan bases. But as Cart acknowledges, the turn to dystopic novels reflects the anxiety of an America feeling both under threat from external forces and under an increasingly panoptic gaze.

*Weetzie Bat* and *Legend* follow Cart's explanatory arc of the YA trend. Proclaimed a "postmodern fairytale," Block's 1980s story about an eccentric young woman in love with the city she lives in resonated among a whole generation. *Weetzie*

*Bat*, and the books that follow the series, highlights the magical realism of Los Angeles, where “happily ever after” means “the land of skating hamburgers and flying toupees and Jah Love blonde Indians” (30). In contrast to Block, Lu paints a dystopic future where a militarized Los Angeles divides its citizens. With a class system established, citizens are categorized by their scores for “The Trial,” an equivalent to the modern-day SAT. So why the change? As Mallan and Cart recognize, growing up in a post 9/11 world, an Age of Security, has affected the way young adult readers view their surroundings and people in authority. In such an era, Murphy argues that for young people “important self-esteem and self-actualization values become less important and their survival and safety values become more important,” resulting in adolescents who have become increasingly suspicious of their surroundings (Murphy). Very much a story about self-discovery and acceptance, *Weetzie Bat* depicts introspective characters who achieve self-fulfillment through internalized conflicts and revelations. In contrast, *Legend’s* characters fight external forces of corruption, defending beleaguered communities against an oppressive government and unethical officials. Lu’s novel “invites idealistic teens to examine the logical consequences of illogical human behavior and [to] consider how their own actions—or failures to act—might affect the future of the planet and humanity” (Cart 103). However different, though, the novels both display the tension through the hyperreal landscape of the city.

The name Los Angeles evokes both a surreal wonderland and a gritty urban city. Stories and media associate places such as Hollywood and Beverly Hills with wealth and privilege while linking areas like Skid Row and Compton with poverty and distress. Lu notes, “LA, in general, feels very dystopian to me because there’s no zoning. You really see it in Downtown, especially now because it’s been so gentrified. So you see these beautiful restaurants and shops and literally right next to it is Skid Row. That was originally what inspired *Legend* in the first place—this hugely opposite, this world of opposites. LA has a lot of that” (Lu). Nevertheless, despite these social and economic disparities, the city still evokes a sense of wonder and inexplicable allure, although we might suspect that this wonder is all a facade. As Mike Davis elucidates, “[T]his essentially deracinated city has become the world capital of an immense Culture

Industry, which since the 1920s has imported myriads of the most talented writers, filmmakers, artists, and visionaries,” but it is also a place where “truly indigenous intellectual history seems a barren shelf” (17). So how can a city both be a capital of Culture, yet also be cultureless? The theory of LA as a simulacrum helps in exploring this issue.

As Jean Baudrillard observes, in his seminal work “The Precession of Simulacra,” the city is “the map that precedes the territory” (1557). Baudrillard explains that the hyperreal exists when the image or sign of a place comes to represent and define the place. In this case, the signs and landmarks of Los Angeles become the city, where there is nothing “real” that remains behind the sign. Thus, this place becomes a hyperreal space where there is both tangible physicality and ungraspable content. It is “a place where extremes come together in a recombinant whirl,” a place too irresistible to let go of (Soja 3). Baudrillard’s concept of the hyperreal manifest in the two novels this paper examines: *Weetzie Bat* and *Legend*. The two texts portray an exaggerated version of LA that reflects Cart’s YA trend, depicting not only a changing national environment but also a shift in predominant concerns, from personal growth to national safety concerns.

Although not the only Young Adult novel to take place in Los Angeles, *Weetzie Bat* is one of the most popular. Written in 1989, the novel traces the journey of young Weetzie as she traverses through the city, finding friendship and love. An outsider who resides on the edge of society, Weetzie befriends Dirk and Duck, falls in love with My Secret Agent Lover Man, with whom she has a child. All of this takes place in an Edenic, nostalgic world of Los Angeles. In the opening pages of the book, Weetzie Bat expresses her particular view of Los Angeles:

The reason Weetzie Bat hated high school was because no one understood. They did not even realize where they were living. They didn’t care that Marilyn’s prints were practically in their backyard at Graumann’s [sic]; that you could buy tomahawks and plastic palm tree wallets at Farmer’s Market, and the wildest, cheapest cheese and bean and hot dog and pastrami burritos at Oki Dogs; that the waitresses wore skates at the

Jetson-style Tiny Naylor's; that there was a fountain that turned the tropical soda-pop colors, and a canyon where Jim Morrison and Houdini used to live. (3)

The first sentence places Weetzie on the outskirts of her high school community. Mesmerized by Los Angeles's old school charms, she becomes an outcast within a group of students who cannot appreciate the magic of the city. In this opening passage of the novel, the narrator paints a portrait of LA as nostalgic but whimsical, merging iconic landscapes with the touristy aspect of the city. Block's novel accepts and embraces the dichotomy of Los Angeles, where "a peculiar bundle of emotional extremes are attached to our images of LA. . . . There is nothing like it, yet it is not outrageous to say that everywhere is becoming increasingly like LA" (Soja 3). By remembering and idealizing a Los Angeles of the past, Block transforms the urban city into a Shangri-La.

However, to say that Los Angeles is simply a utopia in Block's novel would be both inaccurate and one-dimensional. As Jan Susina asserts, "To make sense of her characters, the reader needs to accept Block's postmodern version of Los Angeles as a paradoxical literary landscape that embraces both the . . . text as fantasy and . . . as [an] accurate reproduction of reality" (191). LA then becomes the hyperreal city combining the exaggerated urban descriptions and making them real. In a similar vein, Leslie Ann and Witt Salley argue that Block's utopic vision of LA as both "imaginary" and "real" cannot be reached except through her novel (85). For the Salleys, then, Los Angeles becomes a city that is only attainable through the imagination. Although I agree with these scholar's observations of the novel, I would like to further maintain that more than just a simulacrum, Block's LA becomes a Foucauldian heterotopia, a heterogeneous site that simultaneously contains incompatible spaces—material and immaterial, physical and mental, sameness and otherness. The juxtaposition of mythical figures such as Marilyn Monroe, Jim Morrison, and Houdini alongside with the concrete figures of Grauman's theater and the Farmer's Market, connote a sense of placeful placelessness. The contrasting images portray a nonhegemonic vision of Los Angeles that defies binary views of the city and instead brings the two together.

In order to better understand the blurring of the real and imaginary in the novel, it would be prudent to give insight into the author's Los Angeles. Block's home represents the physical space in reality that reappears in the fictional world of Weetzie Bat. I look to Block's and Grandma Fifi's home as an example where lines of reality and the imaginary become blurred. When describing first visiting Block, Sonja Bolle states, "A visitor to Francesca Lia Block's house might be forgiven for confusing fantasy with reality. Entering through a white picket fence in a well-kept residential Los Angeles neighborhood and looking up the curving brick path lined with roses to a house festooned with tiny white Christmas lights in the middle of July, even the most casual Block reader . . . will be reminded of Grandma Fifi's cottage" (1). Bolle likens Block's habitation to something fantastical, a fairyland of sorts, a concrete space echoing the magic of reality. The author's actual residence reverberates within the novel, with the portrayal of Grandma Fifi's Hollywood cottage. Fifi's house has "fairy-tale" roofs and "roses and lemon trees in the garden" and is filled with "plaster Jesus statues, glass butterfly statues" (20). The dichotomy of the Edenic exterior, with the constructed, concrete interior reflects a "postmodern" mode of living—rejecting a world of imposed orders and grand narratives and embracing a playful and destabilized existence. The adjacency of Block's real life with the fictional representation of Los Angeles echoes Foucault's notion of the heterotopia. Foucault likens the heterotopic space to the space within a mirror where "when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (4). In this sense, Los Angeles transforms into a space both tangibly lived in and completely outside of reach. Block's home is like the physical body that Foucault places before the mirror, while Grandma Fifi's house is the reflection in the mirror. Both are present, but out of reach. However, rather than experiencing a sense of fear and fragmentation, *Weetzie Bat* and Block embrace the separation and the postmodern existence.

For Weetzie and Block, Los Angeles evolves into a utopic, heterotopic simulacrum. It is real and unreal. It is a place of contradictions that must be embraced. When communicating her desire to have a baby with My Secret Agent Lover Man,

Weetzie notes, “Beneath the sign the city was only lights, safe and sparkling, like the Hollywood in ‘Hollywood in Miniature’ on Hollywood Boulevard. It didn’t look like any of the things that My Secret Agent Lover Man was talking about” (34). The novel itself is highly conscious of the various perceptions of the idealized city, but makes no attempts to resolve the divide. In one scene the Hollywood sign transforms into the heart of Los Angeles all the while maintaining the façade of the city. The representation of Los Angeles as a small figure demonstrates the illusive reality of Los Angeles. The miniature, though just a replica of Los Angeles, mirrors the city’s intangibility. Though there is a physical space, LA’s reality remains out of grasp. This particular description illustrates Baudrillard’s idea of the simulacrum where “genetic miniaturization is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models—and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times” (1557). With its many different meanings and representations, the Hollywood sign then becomes a signifier for the Los Angeles experience, both empty behind the structure but connoting an infinite amount of meanings.

Moreover, the novel is quite aware of the dark, grittiness of Los Angeles. It is hyper conscious of the detrimental effects of living in an idealized Hollywood. Charlie Bat, Weetzie’s father, serves as the prime example of what it means to not embrace the LA lifestyle. A New York native, he comes to Hollywood to follow his dream of being a screenwriter, but instead he works as a special effects man, “making cities and then making them crumble” (13). This description of Charlie’s job represents his own experience with LA, where the city highlights the beauty and magic of the possibilities allotted to him, but also crushes his dreams, when he cannot actualize them. Shortly after failing at his dreams, Charlie leaves for New York, only returning to visit Weetzie. When Weetzie visits Charlie on the east coast and sees that he’s not doing well, she beseeches him to come home where “we have fairy tale houses, pancakes at Duke’s, and dinners at the Tick Tock Tea Room” (57). In response, Charlie answers, “I can’t be in that city. Everything’s an illusion; that’s the whole thing about it—illusion, imitation, a mirage. Pagodas and palaces and skies, blondes and stars. It makes me too sad. It’s like having a good dream. You know you’re going to have to wake up” (58). Here Charlie

illustrates the deep-rooted fear and anxiety of living in a heterotopic simulacrum, where nothing is “real.” Charlie’s description of LA contrast with Weetzie’s vision, where she depicts her home as “hot and cool, glam and slam, rich and trashy, devils and angels, Los Angeles” (15). Weetzie, rather than crumbling under the weight of this postmodern vision, survives and thrives, thus the novel acknowledges and celebrates the decentralized reality of postmodernity. Weetzie and Charlie’s journey through Los Angeles emphasizes the notion that one can go after their own dreams, construct their own space and identity within the space. Of course, with Charlie, he realizes he cannot exist in such a space, but the novel does give him a chance to try. But regardless of Charlie’s outcome, the novel focuses on the experiences of self-actualization and an embracing of the others in this postmodern landscape.

Subsequently, despite the contrasting images, the city turns into a utopia for Weetzie and her friends. As Clare Archer-Lean describes it, “utopian programs are defined by closure. We might simplify closure...to a radical breach with the known whereby the utopia is independent, self-sufficient, and conscious: a total vision for how life may be lived” (3). More than the utopia, the LA space transforms into the heterotopia of deviation, where “individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm” find solace and comfort. Weetzie offers an alternative lifestyle to those her peers in high school are living. Weetzie falls in love with My Secret Agent Lover Man, while Dirk falls in love with Duck. They all live together in a cottage that Dirk’s grandmother Fifi left them. In addition, this motley crew raises two babies together. Although they do not characterize the traditional family, the characters represent an alternative and loving family unit where being the “other” figure is embraced and celebrated. By being this intersectional space, Los Angeles allows for others to experiment and discover who they are, without judgment or fear. In talking of the city, Block states, “I think that's what is great about L.A. in general—we can all just blossom like these weird little poison weeds that turn into this beautiful thing” (1). Thus, the novel’s characters navigate a postmodern landscape that allows for ways of living that may not completely be classified as “normal.”

The end of the novel produces a sense of closure, where everyone lives the proverbial “happily ever after,” that gives the novel a sense of utopic closure. Moreover, despite having to deal with issues such as AIDS and teenage pregnancies, the characters overcome their hardships, thus embracing the postmodern fairy tale. Block describes the experiences in the book: “In the effort to conquer our fear, we may thrust ourselves alone into a smaller version of that world—a violent concert, a threatening sexual encounter, a riot—and feel that having survived we are more in control of our destiny” (1). In a time period where youth ranked self-respect, family security, true friendship, and freedom as their top values, *Weetzie Bat* illustrates this by embracing the postmodern anxieties, rather than shrinking from them. As Weetzie states,

Love and disease are both like electricity. They are always there—you can’t see or smell or hear, touch, or taste them, but you know they are there like a current in the air. . . . We can choose to plug into the love current instead. And she looked around the table at Dirk and Duck and My Secret Agent Lover Man and Cherokee and Witch Baby—all of them lit up and golden like a wreath of lights. I don’t know about happily ever after . . . but I know about happily. (70)

With its evidently happy ending, *Weetzie Bat* exemplifies the optimism and vibrancy of a time not centered upon hyper surveillance and paranoia. So how has the representation and society changed since the attack on 9/11? As Foucault remarks, “In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates” (*Of Other Spaces* 9) and that is exactly what we see occur in Marie Lu’s *Legend*. In a marked shift, *Legend* portrays a post-apocalyptic vision of Los Angeles. Set in a dystopic future, the story follows fifteen year old June and Day. America has now been split into the Republic and the Colonies, where both factions are at war with each other. June is a young woman born into the elite, groomed to work in the military. Day comes from a lower class family and is a wanted criminal. The story follows June’s hunt to capture Day, since she believes he killed her brother. The story presents Los Angeles as highly militarized and in ruins. Set predominantly in downtown LA, the novel depicts a world gone wrong. The narrator describes Los Angeles in stark

binary oppositions. As noted earlier, Lu was inspired to write her novel by her dystopic vision of LA as a place of opposites, where an impoverished Skid Row is situated next to gentrified areas of privilege. Here, as with Block's and Grandma Fifi's homes, Lu's reality and the fiction of her stories blur together, creating a dystopic simulacrum.

The reader is introduced to the novel through Day's point of view. He shares how "at least twice a month, I see my Wanted poster flashed on the JumboTrons scattered throughout downtown Los Angeles. It looks out of place up there. Most of the pictures on the screens are of happy things" (1). Already, within the first page of the book, the text sets up a dystopic future. In this regard, "the source of the dystopian world here lies in the relationship between the present and the future. Dystopias are evident in futures significantly worse than the hoped for or expected" (Archer-Lean 6). A sinister air surrounds the Republic's advertisements for Los Angeles: "smiling children standing under a bright blue sky" of an apocalyptic world of ruins (1). The city's residents now live in a surveillance society, where even the skies and smiles are regulated. From the first moment, the book establishes Day as an "other" figure, wanted by the government. This, of course, seems a little suspicious, considering he is only fifteen years old. However, this paranoia is highly reflective of the militarized era of Day's society, a Foucauldian panoptic vision of the future. In this surveillance society every citizen must be monitored and regulated. The postmodern unease emerges, not from a destabilized institution, but from an institution with too much control. As Marie Lu articulates, "The U.S. is such a warrior nation. No one has ever complained about the violence in the books. Everyone complains about the sex and the love because that's somehow more dangerous than the bombs. Nobody is calling me out that people get massacred in these books. That's more disturbing to me. That's what I thought I was going to get into trouble for" (Lu). The representation of Los Angeles as a fortress city reflects the growing anxieties that emerged after the attack on 9/11, where citizens voluntarily relinquished personal freedom for high security.

Not only do the JumboTrons circulate propaganda, but they are also a means by which the authoritarian government controls its citizens. As Foucault articulates in his work *Discipline and Punish*, "We should admit rather that power produces knowledge . . .

. that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (550). The JumboTrons transform into avenues in which the government controls what information is disseminated to the masses. There are grids of power, specific sections in which appointed individuals must reside. Day transcends these rules by living on the fringes of society.

There is tight regulation over all aspects of a civilian’s life, most citizens having their futures predetermined based on class and race. In her article, “Everything You Do: Young Adult Fiction and Surveillance in an Age of Security,” Kerry Mallan examines the power relationship between a subject and its government and asserts, “The protagonists are viewed by the State or its enforcers as ‘other’ because of their difference and actions, which are contrary to the collective ethics and ideologies of the State” (6). In the novel, the reader learns that Day is a wanted criminal because he escaped a labor camp. He was sent to the labor campus because he seemingly received a low score on the Trial, a SAT-like test that determines where one will be placed in society. In actuality, he earned a perfect score, achieved only by one other individual: June. Day, a slum kid, defies the social rules that categorize him as inferior to his peers. Aware of his predicament, he states,

The Republic has no idea what I look like. They don’t seem to know much of *anything* about me, except that I’m young and that when they run my fingertips they don’t find a match in their databases. That’s why they hate me, why I’m not the most *dangerous* criminal in the country, but the most *wanted*. I make them look bad. (2)

The Republic is a society who maintains control and power through knowledge, much as Foucault theorizes. Though the Republic may think otherwise, in Foucauldian terms, no one owns power for power runs through everything (561). Thus, power becomes a tangible entity in the form of knowledge. There is power permeating in all aspects of life. Those who are aware of the manifestation of power, and those who create the knowledge with which to influence others, affect the nature of that power. Thus, power is

not something earned by class or birth, but through knowledge. In this sense, that the government has no concrete information against Day makes them essentially powerless, for knowledge leads to power. This is why Day is such a dangerous figure in the novel; he questions the ideologies and views that the present society stands for and runs on.

To better understand this mutual suspicion between teenagers and the government, it is important to look at the effects that the attack on The World Trade Centers and Twin Towers had. As Mallan states, quoting from Zygmunt Bauman, “A crisis of agency occurs when there has been an erosion of trust, in that governmental systems no longer serve the people, and so other ways of being proactive and political need to be found” (4). The “erosion of trust” stems from the attack on US ground and the US’s response to the invasion. Seemingly skeptical of Bush’s ideas of the war on terror, youth were still very much concerned with the idea of national security and safety. In their experiment, “9/11 Impact on Teenage Values,” Edward Murphy et. al. found that teenage values shifted from the interior to the exterior. Before, the top five teenage values were self-respect, family security, true friendship, freedom, and health” (414). Consequently, after the 9/11 attack, values shifted to “freedom, world peace, family security, self-respect, true friendship” (414). Murphy et al. also saw that this was a time that national security registered in the youth’s mind. Prior to this, in times of crisis, young adults would worry about world peace, where they cared about conflicts rather than national security. The 9/11 attack brought violence to the homeland for most citizens. The trauma of the attack echoes within the world of *Legend*.

As a dystopic novel, *Legend* presents Los Angeles in ruins, reflecting the lack of faith in institutions and the government. At one point, June remarks,

I can’t believe how filthy the streets are here. Probably even worse than the dilapidated outskirts of Los Angeles. The ground sits low against the water (not unlike the other poor sectors, which all seem to look the same), so that whenever there’s a storm, the lake probably floods all the streets lining the shore with dirty, sewage-contaminated water. Every building is

faded, crumbling, and pockmarked—except, of course, the police headquarters. (96)

June's vision of Los Angeles—with the land constantly ravished by floods and human turmoil—is not Weetzie's view of LA. What's so striking about this passage is that amid the destruction, the city is still highly guarded. The only thing unblemished by the ruins is the police headquarters. Lu's version of LA echoes Mike Davis's concerns: "In cities like Los Angeles, on the bad edge of postmodernity, one observes an unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture, and the police apparatus into a single, comprehensive security effort" (224). The constant surveillance of the city echoes Davis's image of "Fortress LA." The high police activity demonstrates the ever-present anxiety of the "other"—a fear that especially reemerged after the attack on 9/11. The catastrophic event produced a shift from worrying about internal struggles and instead projected those outwards. This version of the hyperreal, dystopic LA demonstrates the distrust and fear engendered in an Age of Security.

The representation of Los Angeles as a whole can be viewed as the Foucauldian regulated subject. The beginning of the novel establishes that there is a disease that plagues the inhabitants of the lower slums. Throughout the novel, Day's sole mission is to acquire an antidote that will save his brother. But looking largely at LA as a sickly body, where buildings are dilapidated and waters are contaminated, allows us to see just how the government retains control. Foucault asserts, "The plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies—this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city" (553). The vision of the utopic landscape becomes perverted into a place of desolation. The ideal emerges from control: in this case, "power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (549). In this sense, Los Angeles has been marked and ravaged by war, transforming into a hyperreal entity, no longer recognizable. When a young Day finds a quarter, he remarks to his mother, "See the name? United States. It was *real*" (233). The city becomes an echo of what it used to be, both real and unreal.

Los Angeles is a city at war with the Colonies. Familiar landmarks get deconstructed into ruins. Los Angeles becomes an industrialized warzone, where Jumbotron, always on, regardless of power shortages, display the latest warnings about floods and quarantines. A few are about the Patriots—this time for another bombing in Sacramento that killed half a dozen soldiers. A few cadets, eleven-years-olds with yellow stripes on their sleeves, linger on the steps outside an academy, the old and worn *Walt Disney Concert Hall* letters almost completely faded. Several other military jeeps cross our intersection, and I see the blank faces of their soldiers. (39)

This image, particularly of the Walt Disney Concert Hall, demonstrates the extent to which this dystopic vision of LA has become militarized. A building once used for the arts and entertainment is now an academy for soldiers. This version of LA is also heterotopic because “the heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (6). This particular representation illustrates the anxiety of the fear of the future of LA. No longer is control or power centered within the individual. The novel gives hope to an alternate reality, when the novel ends with both June and Day forming an alliance, both based on emotion and politics. The two set off to San Francisco to aid the rebel alliance set to dismantle the hegemonic government.

Young Adult literature has a rich history, reaching diverse audiences. *Weetzie Bat* and *Legend* reveal two alternative visions of LA: a postmodern, heterotopic city and a post-apocalyptic dystopia. The two works reflect the changing socio-political environment for young adults, who now live in a surveillance age precipitated by the watershed moment: 9/11. Though both stories deal with very real markers in LA, the symbols become just that—symbols—leaving one to wonder whether LA can ever truly be defined.

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# From Bradbury to Butler: Los Angeles Science Fiction and the Aerospace Industry

Michael Dunbar

Los Angeles is famous, and infamous, for many things—the Hollywood movie industry and Skid Row, surfing and smog, freeways and traffic, palm trees and urban sprawl. But while the city is often conceived of as a science fiction space itself, as a utopia or dystopia, so far little has been made of the fact that Los Angeles has also been the *site of production* of both hard science and science fiction, and even less of the relationship between the two. The Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society is the oldest active science fiction club in the world, and the city has been home to many prominent writers of the science fiction genre. Los Angeles was also home to the aerospace industry for almost a century. Moreover, science fiction and aerospace share a long, but under-recognized, history in Los Angeles, one that is reflected in the works of Ray Bradbury and Octavia Butler.

Although Los Angeles's relationship with the aerospace industry dates back to almost the turn of the century, it was during World War II that it truly became the aerospace capital of the world. In his essay, "The Urban and Environmental Legacies of the Air Industry," Wade Graham notes that "by 1940 aircraft manufacturers employed more people in Southern California than any other industry; by 1941 nearly half the region's manufacturing jobs were in the air business and 13,000 new industrial workers arrived in Los Angeles every month" (250). This trend continued in the post-war period, as the air industry rebounded from a decline in military demand for traditional aircraft by transforming itself into the aerospace industry, producing missiles, satellites, and space craft, to meet the needs of the Cold War. In "Lost in Aerospace," J.D. Waldie notes that "by 1965, fifteen of the twenty-five largest aerospace companies in the nation were concentrated in California. Most of them were in Los Angeles County" (38). Such a concentration had significant consequences on the region, impacting its economy,

politics, urban development, and even geographical make-up. Graham argues that the aerospace industry was drawn to California not due to advantages such as temperate weather as is commonly believed, but despite its disadvantages, primarily because of “the availability of a nearly endless supply of open land for building manufacturing and testing facilities, ancillary businesses, and worker housing, allowing the industry to create its own urban forms, including entire communities, from the drawing board” (248). The aerospace industry’s need for open land away from urban centers and the housing needs of its ever increasing workforce played a major role in the now notorious layout of Los Angeles County. Graham continues, “The postwar Los Angeles that emerged was a regional city, with its nodes sown from the principal aircraft plants and grown into surrounding purpose-built communities . . . linked by an emerging system of freeways—again, primed by federal funding—and serviced by regional shopping centers surrounded by enormous surface parking lots built by developers” (252). Los Angeles as it is known today, as a decentralized city covered in concrete, dissected by freeways, and surrounded by ever-sprawling suburbs, owes its make-up in large part to the aerospace industry.

The presence of the aerospace industry in the region had an equally significant impact on the region’s culture. While the 2012 publication *Blue Sky Metropolis: The Aerospace Century in Southern California* signals an emerging critical interest in the role of the aerospace industry in the development of the region and includes, among other topics, an examination of its promotion of Cold War consensus culture and its relationship to the Hollywood film industry, there has so far been little critical work on the relationship between the aerospace industry and science fiction literature produced in Los Angeles. The works of Ray Bradbury and Octavia Butler are representative of the science fiction produced in Los Angeles during the emergence and eventual decline of the aerospace industry as a dominant force in the region. While the careers of both authors overlap, the works of each belong to distinct periods in the history of the science fiction genre.

Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles* was published in 1950 and was groundbreaking at the time because of its use of space travel (via technology that would

not be invented for another decade) and the colonization of Mars as a metaphor for the hopes and fears middle-class Americans entering the Atomic Age, whose technologies both promised a better, or at least more convenient, future and threatened nuclear destruction. The novel was also influential to those working in the aerospace industry, who sought to make Bradbury's fiction a reality. In his biography of Bradbury, *The Bradbury Chronicles*, Sam Weller recounts when Bradbury visited the Johnson Space Center to meet the astronauts who would shortly be travelling to the moon as part of the Apollo missions (the technology for which was manufactured in Downey, CA). He writes, "When someone in the room announced that Ray Bradbury was present—Ray Bradbury, the author—at least half of the astronauts looked up, alert, scanning the room excitedly. . . . As young dreamers with imaginations fixed squarely on the stars, many of them credited Ray, and specifically *The Martian Chronicles*, as an early inspiration" (276-77). *The Martian Chronicles* is still considered one of the most prominent examples of what is called the "Golden Age" of science fiction, whose era dated from the late 1930s to the late 1950s and which saw the cultural emergence of science fiction from pulp magazines to a literary genre in its own right. This era was defined by the fact that industries like aerospace were increasingly turning science fiction into scientific reality and was thus characterized by a focus on human interaction with and achievement through advanced technologies rather than the technology itself.

Octavia Butler, whose *Parable of the Sower* was published in 1993, has been associated with the Afrofuturism movement, which is characterized by examinations of race and gender issues through the lens of science fiction. In contrast to *The Martian Chronicles*, *Parable of the Sower* focuses on the ramifications of rampant technological development on those who are left behind. *The Martian Chronicles* promotes individual heroism and transcendence through technological agency and responsibility, while *Parable of the Sower* depicts the survival of communities that lack such agency, are denied transcendence, and suffer the consequences of technological irresponsibility. If Bradbury and his era of science fiction can be represented as the exploration of the new frontiers of space and technology, Butler's work is an examination of those who remain grounded on Earth.

The works of Bradbury and Butler are representative not only of different periods in the history of the development of science fiction as a genre, but also of Los Angeles's history as well. Their respective novels, produced over forty years apart, can be viewed as bookends to the "space" era of the aerospace industry in Los Angeles, each providing a unique chronological perspective of Los Angeles during the Cold War: Bradbury looking forward from the beginning of the Cold War, and Butler looking back from its conclusion. *The Martian Chronicles* came out at a time when rocket ships were only an idea, when the aerospace industry was just beginning to transition from the production of airplanes for the recently-ended Second World War to the rocket and missile technology needed for a nascent Cold War. *Parable of the Sower* was published after man had been to the Moon and came back, and at a time of high racial tension in Los Angeles, which had exploded in the Los Angeles Riots just a year before the book's publication. These tensions had been exacerbated by the end of the Cold War, which saw the rapid decline of the region's aerospace industry, whose workforce consequently suffered massive layoffs. Graham writes, "The next South Los Angeles riots, in 1992, also roughly coincided with a wave of white flight, and crucially, with the post-Cold War defense contradiction. Beginning in 1989, tens of thousands of defense jobs were eliminated in the region. . . . By 1992, more than seven hundred manufacturing plants left or expanded outside the state. Between 1988 and 1993, 800,000 California jobs vanished, half from Los Angeles County" (263-64). While their novels ostensibly take place in the future, Bradbury and Butler were heavily informed by what was happening in their own times. Their works reflect the ways the emergence, subsequent domination, and eventual decline of the aerospace industry transformed the social, political, and cultural landscape of Los Angeles, and they bear witness to the hopes and eventual disillusionment of the region's promised future under the aerospace industry's influence.

The aerospace industry emerged in and promoted a culture of technological optimism in Los Angeles. However, this faith in technology-based industries like aerospace to provide a never-ending supply of jobs and transform the city into a utopian "Tomorrowland" was underlined by a politically and economically conservative culture. In *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, Mike Davis outlines the early

history of what would become the aerospace industry, focusing on the founding of Cal Tech as the hub of the region's "technostructure" and the progenitor of the aerospace industry (55). In doing so, Davis connects aerospace with another of Southern California's (in)famous trends: "boosterism." The city's political and social elite wooed the aerospace industry to the region with promises of cheap land in exchange for the technological development and manufacturing jobs the aerospace industry would provide. However, Davis also shows that the aerospace industry, even in its earliest manifestations, carried with it the "reactionary" ideologies of its supporters, including anti-unionism and racism. He references "Cal Tech's chief booster" Robert A. Millikan's claim that the marriage of the business interests of the boosters with science-based industries like aerospace would reproduce "Aryan supremacy on the shores of the Pacific" (56). Davis's history of the aerospace industry in Los Angeles, while brief, is instrumental in demonstrating that from its very inception, the technological optimism and faith in the aerospace industry promoted by the boosters went hand-in-hand with the region's political, economic, and cultural conservatism.

Peter Westwick, in his introduction to *Blue Sky Metropolis*, expands on both the dual influence of the aerospace industry's presence in Los Angeles and its cultural impact. Like Davis, he cites the region's boosterism as a major force behind the aerospace's move to Southern California, pointing out that the industry was supported by almost all of the region's most influential individuals and institutions, including "newspaper publishers, real-estate developers, and Hollywood moguls," as well as local universities (3). However, Westwick notes that these groups were also instrumental in creating the myth that the aerospace industry would turn the region into a technological utopia, as well as in reinforcing the region's conservative politics and culture. He adds, "[I]n its resistance to unions, its welcoming of Aviation Oakies, and its adaptation to the Cold War defense industry and its security regime, Southern California aerospace both drew on and encouraged conservative political tendencies" (6). The aerospace industry flourished in Los Angeles due in large part to the city's open-shop policies and anti-union sentiments. The industry also found in Los Angeles a culture compliant with the Cold War's demands for security, secrecy, and even paranoia. The aerospace industry's

impact on Southern California was so pervasive that it even skewed the region's religious make-up by drawing massive migrations of Southern Protestants to the region looking for manufacturing jobs. While the boosters saw such conservatism as essential to the creation of the Los Angeles tomorrow, it ultimately denied this utopian dream to many of those who were expected to build it. Waldie speaks to the contrasting expectations and realities of those working in the aerospace industry when he writes, "They'd been told that the future would be sleek, edged in shining chrome, protectively enclosing like the cockpit of a jet fighter, and armed for confrontation with the Soviet Union and its allies. (How a grid of suburban streets, blue-collar lives, and boxy houses would have fit into that future was never made entirely clear)" (37). Therefore, from its very beginning in Los Angeles until its almost complete withdrawal from the region, there were always two sides, two narratives, that defined the aerospace industry: its liberating promise of a better tomorrow and the confining reality of its conservative practices. And just like Los Angeles itself, the beautiful mirage of its promise masked the harshness of its reality. Mihir Pandya, in his essay "Stealth Airplanes and Cold War Southern California," uses stealth as a fitting metaphor for this duality shared by the aerospace industry and Los Angeles, writing,

Stealth—by definition, an invisible presence—serves as a useful icon of the Cold War aerospace industry in Los Angeles, which seemed absent and present at the same time. . . . Secrecy fostered two cities laminated to each other, one seen and the other unseen. The resulting alignments and misalignments—places where the secret operated quietly, and others where it became public—shaped the city. One of the ways in which this double consciousness is most routinely captured is in the ways Los Angeles plays itself. Los Angeles as a cultural imaginary reveals its fractured character in its films and its fictions: of power hidden underneath the surface, of violence coupled with fine weather. This union of purity and danger, which so regularly reappears in and as Los Angeles, was also a central trope that helped mask one of the largest knowledge production and manufacturing efforts during the Cold War. (118)

As Pandya shows, in addition to the aerospace industry's impact on the city's economy, politics, and urban development, it permeated various aspects of Los Angeles culture. Moreover, this influence was not limited to film and fiction, but includes other forms of entertainment, religion, and even architecture. He also indicates that the cultural impact of the aerospace industry, like its socio-economic impact, was also, perhaps necessarily, dualistic. The aerospace industry promoted what Westwick calls a "culture of expansive imagination and entrepreneurialism" (3). In describing this culture, he borrows Davis's "sunshine"/"noir" language but challenges the utopian/dystopian dichotomy that is typically used to define Los Angeles, claiming that the aerospace industry simultaneously contained aspects of both. In the final line of his introduction, Westwick, writes, "The builders of the Blue Sky Metropolis sought to slip the surly bonds of Earth, and transcend the failings and foibles of modern society. But aerospace was also, after all, a human enterprise, ever grounded in the realities and complexities of history" (11). The attempt to escape from and the gravitational draw back towards the historical realities of Los Angeles is the central tension in the works of Bradbury and Butler. Although Westwick does not specifically examine science fiction literature produced in Los Angeles, among those whom he lists as "visionaries" of the aerospace industry's ideology is Ray Bradbury. Butler is not mentioned, either as a visionary of technological futurism or as one of its critics, but she would certainly fall into the latter category. Both Bradbury's and Butler's novels address the dual nature of the aerospace industry's social and cultural influence on Los Angeles. Bradbury addresses the technological optimism associated with the emergence of the aerospace industry, while Butler critiques the consequences of its conservatism. *The Martian Chronicles* can be read as narrative about the region's dream of a space-age future, while *Parable of the Sower* can be read as a narrative about what happened after it woke up to its present reality.

*The Martian Chronicles* is as much about Southern California as it is about Mars, but to understand the influence of the region on the novel, one must first understand the influence of the region on its author. Ray Bradbury moved to Southern California from the Midwest in 1934. As with many Midwest transplants, he came lured by the promise

of economic opportunity. As Michael Ziser argues in his essay, “Living with Speculative Infrastructures: Reading Our Present Dilemmas in Science Fiction’s Past,” the Southern California region at this time was host to a disproportionately large number of prominent science fiction writers (28). However, Ziser cites technological fascination as well as economic opportunity in accounting for this migration of science fiction writers—Bradbury among them—to Southern California. Bradbury’s career as a science fiction writer took off just as the airplane industry underwent its metamorphosis into the aerospace industry. He and other science fiction writers in Los Angeles witnessed the transformation and rapid growth of the aerospace industry first hand, and could not help but note that the consequent and unprecedented development of the region eerily resembled their own science fiction worlds. As Ziser puts it, “For sci-fi writers, teasing out the implications of an era in which entire new civilizations could be conjured almost from nothing through astonishing feats of engineering and capital was a form of realism. They were writing an eyewitness account of what was the most radical landscape-scale engineering project in the history of the world” (28). Whole cities sprang up as if overnight, in order to meet the insatiable demands of the aerospace industry, particularly housing for its ever-growing workforce.

Meanwhile, Bradbury was forging personal connections with the aerospace industry. While in Los Angeles, Bradbury became an influential member of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS). Weller recounts that during Bradbury’s time with LASFS, many scientist would be invited as guest speakers to present on their area of expertise. John “Jack” Parsons, who would become the co-founder of the Jet Propulsion Laboratories—an institution integral to the aerospace industry’s decision to locate in Southern California—was among those invited. Weller writes, “Parsons...gave a lecture on space travel well before the technology existed” (85). Moreover, Davis notes that in addition to being a practicing occultist, Parsons was “a devoted science fiction fan who attended meetings of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society to hear writers talk about their books” (59). Among others associated with LASFS were L. Ron Hubbard, the pulp science fiction writer turned founder of Scientology, and Robert L. Heinlein, a Californian and science fiction writer known for his libertarian political views.

Through LASFS, Bradbury was introduced to both the emerging science of the aerospace industry, as well as some of its more unorthodox elements, and was able to contribute to an ongoing dialogue between science and science fiction.

Bradbury's work reflects both the fascination and uneasiness of a Midwesterner who suddenly finds himself thrust into the unknown world of the metropolis. Rather than write about the adventure and romance of space exploration and conquest as science fiction writers of the earlier pulp era did, Bradbury, especially in his work *The Martian Chronicles*, focused on the struggle to maintain traditional social relations in the wake of momentous changes due to technological progress. This short story collection is paradoxically at once progressive and regressive, hailing a brand new future increasingly defined by technology while nostalgically holding on to the social relations and cultural traditions of the past. While the stories of *The Martian Chronicles* take place mostly on Mars, they can be read as tales about the expansion of postwar Southern California suburbia. Ziser writes, "No writer of the period takes as many pains as Bradbury in detailing the material and psychological consequences of the explosion of residential construction in California after World War II" (29). According to Westwick, between the decades preceding and following the publication of *The Martian Chronicles*, the population of the Southern California would double, in large part due to the influx of workers to fill the needs of the growing aerospace industry. Graham adds that by the mid-1950s, "55 percent of manufacturing jobs in Los Angeles County were in aerospace" (261). Furthermore, in 1950, the same year *The Martian Chronicles* was published, the biggest housing development in America was being planned and built in Los Angeles County to meet the voracious housing needs of the aerospace industry's workforce: "Platted on 3,500 acres of farmland, Lakewood would comprise 17,500 houses, each 1,100 square feet. . . . Private developers secured \$100 million in federal mortgage financing to fund a full-scale industrial assembly line to build houses: at full tilt, it produced one hundred a day, five hundred a week; construction was finished in three years. . . . When the sales office opened, 25, 000 people were waiting" (Graham 257). *The Martian Chronicles* reflects both the awe of new technologies to access—or in

terms of real-estate development, build—new worlds, and a growing concern about those technologies passing by the very people whose lives they are meant to improve.

*The Martian Chronicles* is made up of a series of vignettes, roughly divided into three sections, about the exploration, colonization, and almost complete abandonment of Mars by humans, who treat Mars as a frontier. In the short vignette titled “The Settlers,” Bradbury writes about the first people to settle on Mars: “And when the state of Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, or Montana vanished into cloud seas, and, doubly, when the United States shrank to a misted island and the entire planet Earth became a muddy baseball tossed away, then you were alone, wandering in the meadows of space, on your way to a place you couldn’t imagine” (75). These individuals, mostly white, middle-class men from the Midwest, resemble not only Bradbury himself, but also those who migrated to California looking for manufacturing jobs in the aerospace industry. For them, Los Angeles, not Mars, was the place they couldn’t imagine. Moreover, the settlers regard the Martian frontier as a place of escape. Bradbury continues, “There was a reason for each man. They were leaving bad wives or bad jobs or bad towns; they were coming to find something or leave something or get something, to dig up something or bury something or leave something alone. They were coming with small dreams or large dreams or none at all” (75). Here, Bradbury expresses the belief that the Martian frontier will offer a new start. In both its audience and its appeal, Bradbury’s Martian frontier resembles developing suburbs of 1950s Los Angeles. Like the frontier, the suburbs are located on the outskirts of the city, often acting as a buffer between civilization and the wilderness beyond. As Graham’s article points out, the aerospace industry contributed to the sprawling development of Los Angeles due to its need to escape the restrictions of cramped urban and residential areas, as well as its mostly white workforce’s desire to isolate themselves from “undesirables.” He writes, “Separateness was at the core of the raison d’être of Lakewood and places like it: even if in twentieth-century Southern California people left the central city following jobs in industry, the movement away from the city was no less a flight from something—not the industry city, as it had been in the East, but other people, especially certain kinds of other people” (Graham 258). *The Martian Chronicles* reflects what was going on in

Bradbury's own backyard and the desires of his neighbors to escape their backyards. The suburbs define the farthest edge of the city, and as they sprawl outward, they continually redefine the parameters of the city. Bradbury expresses this desire and movement in the terms of a frontier, but not a Western frontier, civilization having already reached the geographical conclusion of that progression. Instead he substitutes the "high" frontier of space and Mars for the "low" frontier of the West. Reflecting but reorienting Los Angeles's lateral expansion, *The Martian Chronicles* posits a movement upward—in order to "slip the surly bonds of Earth, and transcend the failings and foibles of modern society" as Westwick puts it—toward a "final" frontier and another planet whose surface visually resembles the desert landscapes in which new suburban housing developments were popping up. This historical lateral expansion of Los Angeles was in large part made possible by the same technology that made the vertical journey possible in *The Martian Chronicles*, technology produced by the aerospace industry.

The development of Mars, like the development of the Los Angeles suburbs, express the paradoxical desire not only to retain older cultural values, but also to escape their historical consequences. Technology, in particular aerospace technology, offered the at first imaginative and then eventually real possibility of such an escape via space travel to new worlds on which new societies could be planted on virgin landscape. Carl Abbott, in his essay "Homesteading on the Extraterrestrial Frontier" expands on the frontier themes found in *The Martian Chronicles*. He also views Bradbury's work as a juxtaposition of Bradbury's Midwestern childhood and values against his experiences of "the postwar age of galloping technological change" in Southern California (270). Abbott argues that the central theme of *The Martian Chronicles* is the desire to escape the problems of modern society via a new ("high") frontier, and the fallout of the confrontation between middle-class American values with that new frontier (240-241). He thus considers it a "homesteading" narrative, whose focus is on "rugged individualism" and "scientific progress" in the face of the challenges of frontier existence (244). This is echoed in the first section of *The Martian Chronicles*, full of vignettes of expeditions made up of mostly military men to Mars—reflecting the

servicemen who returned after the Second World War to settle in the suburbs of Los Angeles. Only the humans who come to Mars in *The Martian Chronicles* discover that they are not the first ones there. The Martians in the novel function similarly to other native populations in both historical and fictional accounts of colonization. They act as foils to highlight the value system of the colonizer. This is literally the case in “The Third Expedition.” In this vignette, the crew of an expedition to Mars meets its demise by being lulled into a false sense of security by the presence of a small Midwestern town on Mars, which in reality is a trap set by the Martians. Bradbury writes, “Well, what would the best weapon be that a Martian could use against Earth Men with atomic weapons? The answer was interesting. Telepathy, hypnosis, memory, and imagination” (47). The fate of the crew foreshadows the subsequent development and eventual abandonment of Mars by humans. What draws humanity to Mars is a desire to escape Earth and its institutions. But what draws humanity back to Earth are those same institutions.

The struggle between freedom and familiarity continues in a series of vignettes about the colonization of Mars. In a scene from “The Night Meeting,” an old man explains to a young passerby that he came to Mars because it is different. He says, “We’ve got to forget Earth and how things were. We’ve got to look at what we’re in here, and how *different* it is. I get a hell of a lot of fun out of just the weather here. It’s *Martian* weather” (81). Significantly, the old man gives the same reason for coming to Mars as many did for coming to California: the weather. But the old man’s statement is ironic, in part because he has come all the way to Mars only to be a gas station attendant. Furthermore, this vignette is preceded and followed by two vignettes that describe the transformation of the Martian landscape into “home.” In “The Locusts” Bradbury writes, “And from the rockets ran men with hammers in their hands to beat the strange world into a shape that was familiar to the eye, to bludgeon away all the strangeness . . . they hammered up frame cottages. . . . And when the carpenters had hurried on, the women came in with flowerpots and chintz and pans and set up a kitchen clamor to cover the silence that Mars made . . .” (80-81). In a vignette following “The Night Meeting,” called “Interim,” Bradbury describes the result of the carpenters’ industriousness from the

previous section, writing, “It was as if, in many ways, a great earthquake had shaken loose the roots and cellars of an Iowa town, and then, in an instant, a whirlwind twister of Oz-like proportions had carried the entire town off to Mars to set it down without a bump . . .” (108). Again, Bradbury’s language, in its allusion to the *Wizard of Oz* and the Hollywood film industry, connects Mars back to Los Angeles. The new Martian homes are even built out of California redwoods. The humans who colonize Mars make the Martians’ original mirage a reality. They do not heed the old man when he advises, “Enjoy it. Don’t ask it to be nothing else but what it is” (82). Rather than an escape from Earth, Mars becomes its reproduction.

Eventually the pull of those entrenched cultural values that reproduce themselves on Mars drive most of the humans who come to Mars back to Earth. In “The Luggage Store,” a priest and luggage salesman discuss the news of imminent war on Earth. The luggage salesman tells the priest, “It’s a funny thing, Father, but yes, I think we’ll all go back. I know, we came up here to get away from things—politics, the atom bomb, war, pressure groups, prejudice, laws—I know. But it’s still home there” (Bradbury 153). However, *The Martian Chronicles* does not end with the return of all humans to Earth. Despite the fact that Bradbury strongly challenges the Martian frontier’s ability to act as an escape and refuge from earthly failures and despite the fact that Earth is completely destroyed by nuclear warfare by the end of the novel, *The Martian Chronicles* ends on a note of hope. Humanity lives on through two families that escape, with the use of hidden-away rocket ships, back to Mars. Only, this time, they erase everything that makes them human. The father has brought with him documents from Earth, which he uses to start a fire. With them, Bradbury writes, “All the laws and beliefs of Earth were burnt into small hot ashes which soon would be carried off in a wind” (203). The father promises his children to show them Martians and points to their reflections in the water of a Martian canal. Therefore, for Bradbury, there does seem to be the possibility for transformation through a frontier made possible by technology. Ultimately, though, it is not the technology itself that offers hope, but how it is used. Likewise, it is not just the presence of a frontier that offers renewal, but what one brings to that frontier.

In contrast to the emphasis on individual determination in “homesteading” science fiction like *The Martian Chronicles*, Abbott cites “terraforming” science fiction, “[t]he big questions of [which] have to do with public purpose and public action: What goals are worthy of the state? How can the costs and benefits of economic change be fairly allocated? How can large-scale action be sustained over time?” (242). These novels shift the focus from the individual to the community and take on a more socially conscious and active tone. Abbott also historicizes them, linking terraforming science fiction to the era of social revolution and fragmentation between the 1960s and 1970s during which they were popularized (251). This era of science fiction was influential to Butler’s work, especially because it brought gender and race issues to the forefront of the genre’s concerns, and Abbott explicitly although briefly mentions Butler as being a part of the “terraforming” tradition. The writers of this tradition, rather than conceptualize the frontier as a single location of escape, recontextualize it as a space defined by “the convergence of multiple peoples arriving from every direction, the conquest of indigenous peoples and the landscape itself, the dominant role of capitalism, the conservation of cultural norms carried from Europe, eastern America, and other homelands, and the determining power of communities rather than individuals” (Abbott 244). *Parable of the Sower* expresses such an understanding of the “high” frontier of space exploration by showing the consequences of what has happened when a society ignores the realities of the aerospace industry in exchange for its promise of a better future. Butler’s novel presents the apocalyptic landscape of a Los Angeles where that promise has failed.

At first glance, Bradbury’s and Butler’s works seem in complete opposition. However, there are continuities between the two. *The Martian Chronicles* and *Parable of the Sower* are formally similar. *The Martian Chronicles* is written in brief vignettes; *Parable of the Sower* is a series of diary entries written by the protagonist. Both address their historical moment in the guise of a projected future. In Bradbury’s novel, postwar Southern California is transplanted to Mars, while in Butler’s novel, Los Angeles has become an economically and racially divided dystopia made up of isolated gated communities surrounded by a sea of chaotic violence. However, the fact that *The*

*Martian Chronicles* takes place on another planet entirely is indicative of the novel's at least partial embrace of the desires of frontier ideology. Jerry Phillips, in his essay "The Intuition of the Future: Utopia and Catastrophe in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*," argues that *Parable of the Sower* is so grounded in historical reality that it "produces a shock of familiarity rather than estrangement" (quoting Potts 302). While both *The Martian Chronicles* and *Parable of the Sower* take place in ostensibly unfamiliar settings, Bradbury's novel makes Mars feel familiar through its characters' continuing to adhere to their middle-class values. Butler takes what should be completely alienating, a Los Angeles cityscape so war-torn as to be almost unrecognizable, and makes it feel familiar by showing that her fractured urban image is logically connected to the current historical trends happening in the city's present reality.

The dystopian Los Angeles found in *Parable of the Sower* is in part the exaggerated but nevertheless logical outcome of the region's dependence on the aerospace industry: its boom and bust economic cycles which led to mass layoffs as the industry's presence in the region declined, its contributions to suburban sprawl, and its disastrous environmental impact. Anita Seth, in her article "Los Angeles Aircraft Workers and the Consolidation of Cold War Politics," argues that entrenched racism was another legacy of the aerospace industry: "African Americans seeking employment in the war industries at the time faced multiple barriers, from racism within management and unions, to the ineffectiveness of federal mechanisms to enforce nondiscrimination laws, to prohibitions against training in particular skill areas" (88). Such racism, whose origins can be traced back to the Aryan dreams of Millikan, was not only confined to the factory floors of the aerospace industry. The large suburban developments that housed the industry's workforce were also racially exclusive.

These racist housing practices are embodied in the "privatopias" of the gated communities in *Parable of the Sower*. They represent the dark side of the idyllic, if somewhat boring, suburbs of Bradbury's work. As Graham points out, such "privatopias," and the isolationism they encouraged, were products of the housing boom generated by the aerospace industry in Southern California. He writes, "There was a nowhere-ness, a randomness of place in new suburbs whose existence had been

ordained only by the blueprints of developers, architects, and government bureaucrats” and cites Waldie’s description of “the miniaturization of the world within the unchanging grid, of how each house became ‘its own enchanted island’ in a sea of others, and how, as islanders, ‘the extent of our concern’ reached only the immediate tract, or the block, or, as residents aged, to the houses they could see from their own” (Graham 257-58). In Butler’s imagined Los Angeles, only those with private property are able to afford security. The walls of the fortified neighborhoods are used to keep those inside safe, by keeping those outside out. Graham delineates the consequences of white flight from urban centers to the suburbs that was spurred on by the growth of the aerospace industry. He writes, “With this outmigration came a growing alienation from the Los Angeles left behind: in the mainstream imagination, Los Angeles began to take on a dystopian image . . . in which a militarized, mostly white police force armed with the home-grown technologies of the aerospace industry patrols the streets and skies of a chaotic, violent, mostly black and Latino inner city—the ‘carceral city’ in Davis’s words, the ‘militarized technopolis’ in Soja’s” (Graham 264). The extrapolated future of *Parable of the Sower*, then, is not that far off from the reality of Butler’s Los Angeles. Moreover, the novel shows the violent consequences of such racist practices.

Phillip writes of the futuristic setting Butler’s novel: “In 2024, patterns of race and class dominance have hardened to the point where they have genocidal implications—others are those I must kill” (305). The aerospace industry, because it profited from the Cold War through government funding and military contracts, was instrumental in the continuance of the Cold War ideology of “us” versus “them.” However, even when the Cold War ended, its legacy of division remained; only the definitions of “us” and “them” changed. The enemy abroad became the enemy at home as international tensions were replaced with domestic tensions drawn along racial lines. The withdrawal of the aerospace industry from the region left large groups of the unemployed who were both bitter at its failed promise of a better future but still indoctrinated by the conservative and divisive ideology upon which that promise was based. Waldie writes of the grim series of layoffs: “The managers at Douglas had nothing else to offer, least of all the meaning of their work, until the work evaporated in the rounds of layoffs that cut the Douglas

workforce by nearly 30,000 between 1990 and 1994. . . . Tomorrow, it turned out, didn't reveal much difference between their clipboards and Riley's rivet tool" (Waldie 42). The situation is similarly dire in *Parable of the Sower*. The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Lauren Olamina, reflects, "There are fewer and fewer jobs among us, more of us being born, more kids growing up with nothing to look forward to. One way or another, we'll all be poor some day. The adults say things will get better, but they never have" (13). Even though these layoffs impacted both factory workers and management, and black and white Angelenos alike, they only furthered class and racial tensions. Besides Butler's novel, the film *Falling Down*, which came out just a year after *Parable of the Sower* was published, memorably portrays the decline in the aerospace industry and its devastating effects on its workers. Graham describes the movie like so: "a white, suburban aerospace engineer laid off from his job who, stuck in traffic, leaves his car on the Hollywood Freeway and wanders through a third-world Los Angeles populated by Latino gangsters, Korean shopkeepers, and white supremacists, and descends into a maddened rampage of violence that ends in his death in the Pacific Ocean" (264-65). Unsurprisingly, the film is tinged with racial tension. That same racial tension, as well as the third-world landscape, is also found in *Parable of the Sower*. Lauren narrates, "The Garfield and the Balters are white, and the rest of us are black. That can be dangerous these days. On the street, people are expected to fear and hate everyone but their own kind, but with all of us armed and watchful, people stared, but they left us alone. Our neighborhood is too small for us to play those kinds of games" (31). Here, Butler is able to capture how economic hardship, such as that created by the withdrawal of the aerospace industry from Southern California, impacted communities across color lines, while at the same time reified divisions along color lines.

In contrast to the dystopian setting of *Parable of the Sower*, defined by racial and economic divisions, is Lauren's "hyperempathy," which causes her to completely feel the pleasure and pain of others. While she at first views it as a burden, it ultimately leads her to create a new religion, called "Earthseed." Already in contrast to the frontier individualism of *The Martian Chronicles*, both Lauren's ability and the religion she founds based on it point toward the communal values embodied in "terraforming"

science fiction. After her biological family is murdered by invaders into the gated community where she lives at the beginning of the novel, she establishes a new family through her religion, creating a commune called "Acorn." Phillips points out that the agricultural language of Lauren's religion and commune are similar to the utopian language of the frontier: "One sows as one reaps, which is to say, conscious human activity is the key force in determining social evolution" (307). The language is reminiscent of a vignette of *The Martian Chronicles* called "The Green Morning," in which Bradbury retells the Johnny Appleseed myth as a Martian legend. However, in the story, Bradbury's protagonist Benjamin Driscoll describes his plan to plant trees with antagonistic language. The narrator observes, "That would be his job, to fight against the very thing that might prevent his staying here. He would have a private horticultural war with Mars" (78). Human agency causes the Martian landscape to blossom into a green paradise, but likewise, the characters of *Parable of the Sower* are reaping the consequences of such agency. The human agency that built an entirely new civilization on another planet is the same that has left Los Angeles in a pile of rubble.

In Butler's novel, the characters' opinions of the still existing Moon and Mars programs also reflect the failure of faith in individual determination. Lauren narrates, "That's what the space program is about these days, at least for politicians. Hey, we can run a space station, a station on the moon, and soon, a colony on Mars. That proves we're still a great, forward-looking, powerful nation, right?" (18). By voicing such a critique, Butler challenges frontier ideology by showing that at its core, it is not a means of true transformation or renewal, but, as Bradbury feared, simply a rearticulating of the same old fears from which civilization is running away. Moreover, for those left behind, it is a monumental waste of resources. Lauren continues, "People here in the neighborhood are saying she had no business going to Mars, anyways. All that money wasted on another crazy space trip when so many people here on earth can't afford water, food, or shelter" (15). Such sentiments have historical echoes in Los Angeles, especially during the 1980s under the Reagan Administration, whose "Reaganomics" cut government spending on welfare, healthcare, and public education programs, while simultaneously investing heavily in the aerospace industry due to the potential military

applications of its technologies. However, unlike the other characters in *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren still holds out hope in such endeavors. She confesses, “Maybe I’ll be more like Alicia Leal, the astronaut. Like her, I believe in something that I think my dying, denying, backward-looking people need” (22). Significantly, however, Lauren doesn’t go to Mars to create a new world. She plants her utopian dream in the very ruins of her old world. While Phillips argues that Lauren’s new utopian enterprise falls short in radically transforming the economic relations of society—the community still relies on commodity exchange and private property and protects it with violence when necessary—it is able to transcend cultural determinism and classification for her community consists of a diversity of races (309). Ultimately, Lauren is not a hero, but a survivor. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* presents a means of survival against the same social concerns, the products of technological progression, from which Bradbury’s characters desire to escape.

The difference in their responses to the same issues in large part has to do with the different periods in which they were writing. *The Martian Chronicles* was published at the end of the Second World War and on the cusp of the Cold War and space age, and the work, consequently, reflects this historical moment’s complex relationship to technological advancements that produced both the means to make life increasingly free, safe, and comfortable, and the means to utterly wipe it out. The wars and mass extinctions that dot the timeline of the book are reminiscent of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that occurred just five years prior to the book’s publication and prophesy the arms race and doctrine of “mutually assured destruction (MAD)” of the Cold War. Despite the complete destruction that the earth undergoes in *The Martian Chronicles*, the idea that technology gives us the means to run away from such destruction and just start over in another place is at its heart the frontier dream, which implicitly suggests an anxiety about the current state of society. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, however, was published in 1993, after the promises and threats (although not consequences) of the atomic age had dissipated and the aerospace industry had all but abandoned the Southern California region. The characters that the novel follows are equally abandoned, as if they missed the rockets of Bradbury’s Martian expeditions.

There is no dream of escape for these characters, at least not by technological means. They have to remain and face the world that has been left to them. Hence, Butler's novel, while set in the future, is less "futuristic" in the sense that technology can offer any kind of solution to modern social issues. Instead it is a sobering reflection on how technological progress has only exacerbated these underlining social issues, and that the fear in Bradbury's work of "all of the technological achievements...intended to insulate human beings from the environment . . . becom[ing] just another implacable form of indifference to human well-being" has come to pass and will continue to come to pass, unless, as Ziser puts it, we "consider trading in less effective forms of California dreaming in favor of speculatively rearranging the state's material layout and getting on with the next phase of the shared delusion that will be twenty-first-century California" (34). For almost a century, Southern California's defining myths were built upon the economic promises of the aerospace industry to build a technologically advanced and therefore better future. As Butler's novel shows, this myth needs to be rewritten to account for the harsh material realities it produced. What Butler does, by producing a Los Angeles nightmare, is deconstruct the original dream, and suggest the need for a new one based not only on material layout, as Ziser suggests, but also on a social system that embraces racial diversity.

Another key to the differences between Bradbury and Butler's approaches to Los Angeles science fiction stems from their relationship to the region itself. As already related, Bradbury was not a native of Los Angeles, but moved from the Midwest to the city at a young age. Butler was a Los Angeles native. As J. Scott Bryson writes in his essay, "Los Angeles Literature: Exiles, Natives, and (Mis)Representation," natives can offer a unique perspective on the region because they have grown up in the midst of its myths—usually created by outsider perspectives—and are somewhat inoculated from them by their daily experiences (710). They experience firsthand the incongruities of what is said about the region and the actual experience of living in it. Moreover, this perspective allows them to not only see, but also, through that vision, more adequately address the underlying issues at play in the city, including as Bryson lists, "racial and class-based discrimination; ecocatastrophe; an embracing of cultural and ethnic

identities and backgrounds; the blurring of national, geographic, cultural, moral, and ethnic boundaries; and immigration and naturalization issues” (711). Hence, while both writers address what Westwick calls the “imperial expansion and domestic collapse” of the region under the influence of the aerospace industry, we see that Bradbury’s alarm and fascination at Southern California’s technological progression is colored by a frontier myth that has more to do with his Midwestern upbringing than it does with Southern California itself. Therefore, while it would be unfair to characterize Bradbury’s novel as ignoring these concerns, according to Bryson’s argument, it is fair to say that the overlaying of an externally constructed mythology on his representation of the region blinds him to some of its most important social concerns. Butler, in contrast, acknowledges this external myth but transcends it by contrasting it against actual, historical concerns. Her understanding of the history of class and race relations in Los Angeles, exasperated by racist hiring practices and the mass layoffs that characterized the aerospace industry in the decade preceding the publication of *The Parable of the Sower*, bleeds into her novel. In this way, the novel is an extrapolation of these trends and the “personal resentments” described by Westwick and depicted in *Falling Down* that these trends created (Westwick 9). Her work is a response to the failure of the aerospace industry to live up to its promises, both economic and social. No utopia was ever created, either here or on any other planet. Instead, what is left is an eerily realistic portrayal of the future of a city that is already here.

For all their differences, however, each author speaks to the issues at the heart of trying to define Los Angeles and the role of its aerospace industry. While the dynamic of dystopia/utopia certainly plays a role in both writers’ works, neither one directly aligns with a “sunshine” or “noir” narrative. Instead, *The Martian Chronicles* and *Parable of the Sower* capture the interplay between the external myths overlaid on the landscape of the region and the social-historical realities beneath them. So after all, Westwick is correct in identifying the impact of the aerospace industry on the region’s cultural development as a vertical relation. Perhaps it can be said, as Bradbury so eloquently put it, that the myths of Los Angeles are like those “too-far” stars, and perhaps we, despite our technological relations, are still “too soon from the cave.”

Of all places, it seems fitting that Los Angeles should be the place where science and science fiction met. But what is the historical significance of these two examples of a specially Angeleno science fiction, now both decades old? And ultimately, why are they important to the history of the aerospace industry in the region? As Peter J. Westwick points out in his introduction to *Blue Sky Metropolis*, the infrastructure of the aerospace industry, the physical places in which it once existed, are now quickly disappearing, being torn down or reappropriated. Moreover, its history and cultural memory, preserved more through private memoir than official public history due to Cold War paranoia and secrecy, is also fading, as the generation of those who lived it pass away. We are quickly losing the material histories of its impact and are only being left with intangible myths. As Los Angeles continues to change, this important part of its history is increasingly at risk of being lost. The science fiction literature produced during the aerospace industry's emergence and prominence in Los Angeles offers a vital venue in which this history can be recaptured. Both early science fiction literature produced in Los Angeles like Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, and later science fiction works produced by an increasingly influential group of native writers like Butler, give us the means to more firmly delineate the myth from the material world that produces that myth. The science fiction of Bradbury and Butler, not only points us toward prospective futures, but also challenges us to reflect on our city's past, lest like Bradbury's humans on Mars, in our drive to transcend our earthly limitations, we simply recreate them anew.

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# The Hyper-façade of Hollywood: *Singing in the Rain*, *The Player*, and Runaway Productions

Kimberly Lewis

Known to many as tinsel-town, Hollywood has long been a place known for its glamour. From its initial creation in the early 1900s, Hollywood has been the bedazzled section of Los Angeles County, drawing in millions of tourists every year. The names of large production studios like Universal, Paramount, MGM, and Warner have inspired numerous hopefuls to move to California, eager to make their mark in the world of film and television. But few know the truth behind the scenes. Television production is at an all-time high in California (“Production Incentive Map”), but the film industry is in danger of extinction. Part of this dilemma is due to the outsourcing of production in the entertainment industry, otherwise known as runaway production, which is threatening the world of film entertainment. Scholars, such as Chris Lukinbeal, Greg Elmer and Mike Gasher, have critiqued the negative effects of runaway production on Hollywood—a process that has lasted for more than 100 years.

The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) defines runaway production as “those productions ‘which are developed and are intended for release/exhibition or television broadcast in the U.S., but are actually filmed in another location [outside the US]” (Lukinbeal 338). The title runaway production calls into question the “complexity and hints at the stakes involved. In the United States, and especially in California, [runaway production] clearly suggest[s] something lamentable: a flight, a loss, an escape—fugitive film shoots making off with millions of dollars and thousands of jobs that rightly belong to Californians” (Elmer and Gasher 2). Production types are vast, ranging from film, to independent production, to television. For the sake of this paper, I will be focusing on the film industry, specifically from the 1920s through the 1990s, and analyzing two films: the 1952 musical comedy *Singin’ in the Rain*, directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, and the 1992 satirical film *The Player*, directed by Robert

Altman. *Singin' in the Rain* is set in the midst of the shift from silent film to “talkies” while *The Player* showcases the world of Hollywood and the effects of economic pressures on the film industry. Both films I will be analyzing are not runaway productions themselves but rather reveal the effects of runaway production on the film industry at certain times in history. *Singin' in the Rain* and *The Player* serve as examples of times when technological advances in the film industry brought down a system of control and gave way to a new, expanded Hollywood as well as when economic factors gained jurisdiction over the artistic view. The power of Hollywood film is often tied to formulas, placing more artistic films in a precarious economic position in an increasingly profit-driven industry. The old idea of Hollywood, a center of entertainment and extravagant delight, has become a façade.

According to Lukinbeal, a shift in Hollywood has been occurring for over a century, with runaway production contributing to key changes in Los Angeles. Lukinbeal argues that there have been three waves of runaway productions: the shift from east to west, the demise of the Studio System, and the economic hardships of the 1990s. However, I argue that Lukinbeal is missing a key element to the threat runaway production poses on Hollywood: the changes in technology in the 1920s.

### **History of Runaway Productions**

There are two sides to runaway production: creative and economic. The creative aspect deals with productions leaving California because of issues in the setting of a story that “cannot be duplicated for other creative considerations” (Lukinbeal 339). Basically, if a production needs a certain setting that cannot be duplicated in a studio then it will move filming to a proper location. With the rise in computer generated technology the need to move productions now has a lot more to do with cost. However, as one studio executive, with over forty years of experience in the entertainment industry, noted, films like *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are unusual exceptions to the runaway production issue because Peter Jackson wrote the script for the scenery around him; normally it is the other way around (Anonymous). The economic side of runaway production deals with productions that leave LA County for monetary reasons,

such as tax incentives or cheaper production costs. This source also claims that with cheaper costs for labor, production, and even post-production, studios are turning to these more cost efficient methods in hopes of gaining a better profit after the movie is released (Anonymous).

Ironically, the first stage of Lukinbeal's runaway production brought the film industry to California. Influenced by the creative and economic aspects of runaway production, the American Film industry traveled from the east coast to the west coast in the early 1900s. The film industry started on the east coast, in New Jersey and New York (Lukinbeal 340), but soon came to California. Not only is the weather in California ideal, with lots of sunshine for better production, but also the film industry discovered that filming on open land could be much cheaper than renting a stuffy and poorly lit studio back east. Referring to this move as the first wave of runaway production, Lukinbeal claims that, aside from the sunshine, the popularity of the Western genre was another major influence for this geographical shift, although I suspect that the early Western could also have easily been made in the stuffy studio back east. He also asserts that there were two more waves of runaway production: the second being the demise of the Studio System in the 1940s and the third being in the 1990s, when studios expanded outward to multiple markets (340-41).

Lukinbeal is correct about the second wave being caused, at least in part, by the demise of the Studio System. The Studio System refers to the commodification of actors, when the studios "owned" actors through contracts, with each contract being seven years long. Contracts favored the studios, with actors having little control over their personal lives or careers; production choices were determined by the studio, not the actor, and actors could even be "rented out" to other studios for a fee (DiNello). Not only was this difficult for the actors, who could lose their job if they did not make the studio enough money and who could not control which films they worked on, but it was discouraging for smaller studios trying to compete in the entertainment industry (DiNello). The Majors (MGM, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Warner Brothers, RKO Radio Pictures, and Paramount) not only had control of the star actors but also had jurisdiction over the entertainment business (DiNello). With the passing of the Paramount Act in 1948, the

Studio System disintegrated. The Paramount Act restructured the world of Hollywood, declaring an “antitrust ruling [which] forced the Majors to get out of the film exhibition business and [ . . . ] the movie business lost half of its market between 1946 and 1956” (Elmer and Gasher 7). Without a monopoly, the Majors faced increased expenses, including the cost of back lot production; thus, the Majors resorted to outsourcing. LA and the Majors still remained the “core” of the industry however (Lukinbeal 341). While I agree with most of Lukinbeal’s statements, I argue that the second wave of runaway production was also seriously affected by the changing technology.

In the 1920s the Vitaphone talking picture was introduced to the world of cinema. Twenty years before the Paramount Act, the introduction of talking movies started a major change for the world of cinema—affecting big and small studios. While they still could not obtain major actors for their films because of the Studio System, smaller studios benefited from this rise in new technology, for they, gaining greater autonomy over the production of their films, could set up in warehouses all across the country. In 1952 Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen introduced the world to what would be one of the most famous musicals of all time: *Singin’ in the Rain*. This film showed the transition movies made from silence to sound, mixing in real life trends with fictional narratives. Set in 1927, the film follows the movie’s main character and movie star Don Lockwood, his co-star Lina Lamont, his best friend Cosmo Brown, and his love interest, Kathy Selden, as they traverse the world of Hollywood film just as a key shift in technology is occurring.

### **Technology Shifts: Silence to Sound in *Singin’ in the Rain* and the Demise of the Studio System**

From the start of *Singin’ in the Rain*, the so-called glamour of Hollywood is highlighted. Opening with the view of Grauman’s Chinese Theater, famous for movie stars’ hand and foot prints being ever immortalized in cement, the film depicts Hollywood Boulevard lit up with spotlights, cars, and a giant sign announcing the premier of a movie called *The Royal Rascal*. The names Lockwood and Lamont can be seen in large letters above the film’s title, giving the audience an indication of who is

most important in the scene to come. A news reporter, Dora Bailey, announces the stars as their cars pull up in front of the theater. From the pretty flapper girl on the arm of a so-called “forever bachelor” to the exotic Olga and the Baron, “married two months already but still happy as newlyweds,” the stereotypes of Hollywood actors and actresses are showcased. Not only is this scene a commentary on the importance of those who earn the studios big money, but it also reveals the criteria to become one of those big moneymakers. From the parade of Hollywood’s most famous people, we see how the film industry appeals to the audience’s desire for scandal (the flapper girl and the forever bachelor) and the exoticized Other (the foreigners Olga and the Baron). The scene also represents the “typical Hollywood movie premier,” with its searchlights in the sky to crowds of adoring fans screaming for attention from the Hollywood celebrities.

When Lockwood and Lamont finally appear, the audience is dazzled with the story of Lockwood’s rise to fame. But Lockwood’s story, full of “dignity, always dignity,” is anything but dignifying. While Lockwood claims to have gone to the finest dance and music schools, those watching the film see clips of Lockwood and his best friend, Cosmo Brown, singing in bars as kids and performing in county fairs. This whole sequence significantly connects Lockwood’s upbringing with the façade of Hollywood glamour, as the film parodies the movie industry’s reliance on illusions and its ability to sell those illusions. Lockwood understands the importance of maintaining that façade in order to succeed in the Hollywood spotlight.

Not only does the movie start with the Hollywood façade but it revolves around another pretense: silence and sound. When R.F. Simpson, executive producer for Monumental Pictures, first shows the Vitaphone to his guests at the after-party for *The Royal Rascal*, it is mocked. Simpson declares that he has something to show everyone “that’ll give you a lot of laughs.” Reactions to this talkie demonstration range from “it’s just a toy” to “it’s a scream” to “it’s vulgar.” When asked if he thinks it will be a hit, Simpson responds with “I doubt it.” The film satirizes the characters’ narrow vision, while also pointing out that the younger generation is more receptive to change than the nay-saying older generation. However, the audience learns that Warner Brothers has just bought the rights and is making the first talking picture, *The Jazz Singer*. In actuality,

*The Jazz Singer* is a real film that was introduced to the world in 1927. Basing *Singin' in the Rain* on the historical change represented by *The Jazz Singer*, Kelly and Donen wanted to be authentic to the time while also showing the impact talkies had, demonstrating how this new technology transformed motion pictures. While some resisted the idea, there were others who thought it "a scream." In addition, with this new technology, an increasing number of smaller studios could produce movies, as long as they had the right equipment. The popularity of talkies drove the industry into a new era.

The film then transitions to a scene in which Lockwood, looking deep in thought and slightly upset, walks through a stage on the studio lot. Since the movies were all still silent films at the time, multiple movies could be made on the same stage. First, Lockwood passes by a jungle scene where "savages" are dancing around a smoky pot. Next he passes what appears to be a crowd at a football game, complete with "snow" falling on their heads, then he goes by a Western train fight with the damsel inside the "train car," and finally he arrives onto the set of his newest film *The Dueling Cavalier*, which is in the midst of production. Since the films being produced at the time were all silent, the actors did not need to worry about any sound interfering with the shootings. This type of filming changed after the talkies gained popularity, for each film would now need its own stage because of the audio recordings taking place on set. Not only was the term "quiet on the set" coined during this era, but it also began a new way of producing films (Anonymous). Any noise, either from the outside world or from inside the stage, had to be muted. Thus studios had to spend more money to make stages for each movie, and all stages needed to be soundproofed to drown out any noise. The cost of doing this type of building and remodeling was significant but necessary because those who did not "jump on the talkie bandwagon" would be shut down for good (Anonymous).

The studios' incessant worrying about budgets for films rose exponentially after profits from *The Jazz Singer* started coming in; other studios realized that they faced a potential catastrophe if they only produced silent films. In a significant scene, Simpson shuts down production to get the talkie equipment installed. An energetic and heated conversation ensues between Simpson and Lockwood:

SIMPSON. All the studios are jumping on the bandwagon. All the theaters are putting in sound equipment. We don't wanna be left out of it.

LOCKWOOD. We don't know anything about this gadget!

SIMPSON. What do you have to know? It's a picture. You do what you always did. You just add talking to it. Don, believe me, it'll be a sensation. Lamont and Lockwood—they talk!

The scene fades to the headlines of *Variety*, the go-to Hollywood entertainment publication: "Revolution in Hollywood" with the subheadings "Profit Clean-Up Seen for Sound" and "Key Cities Hail 'Glad Tidings' News Of Coming Novelty in Film" and "Studios Converts To Talkies: 'Mad Scramble' On For Sound." A montage then starts of various pictures being made with sound, very representative of the 1920s style. The talkie revolution has officially started. Everyone wants to see the talking pictures. The change in technology has created a new genre for film production. No longer can actors just look the part, they must speak, and this presents a problem for the stars of *The Dueling Cavalier*.

Before *The Jazz Singer* becomes a big hit, the movie highlights a scene in which Lockwood and Lamont are on set being filmed for *The Dueling Cavalier*, and the two are acting out a love scene; however, appearances can be deceiving, as we have discussed earlier. In reality, the two are trading insults while the camera is rolling. Since there is no sound, all they have to do is look the part, adding to the Hollywood façade. The scene reminds the audience of the artificial roles of the actors and actresses, even Lockwood himself, at the beginning of the movie. After Simpson decides to make *The Dueling Cavalier* the first Monumental Picture with sound, the men realize that Lamont's voice will destroy the artifice of Lamont being a "perfect woman." The public believes she is a wonderful actress so they deem that she "naturally" has a beautiful voice to match her lovely face because "she's so refined." But those who work with Lamont know better. Not only is Lamont's voice high pitched, but also from a linguistic viewpoint, she speaks with a working class Brooklyn accent, rather than an elite British inflection.

The public judges individuals, be they movie stars or politicians, by their speech, deeming some speech more socially acceptable than others. A Southern accent versus

a British accent affects the popularity of a person (Bartelt). This is why diction coaches are brought in to work with Lockwood and Lamont. Lockwood has no problem with his elocution lessons—he is the “dignified” star after all. Lamont, in contrast, not only has to deal with her whiny voice but her inability to master round and softened speech patterns, using hardened tones such as “c-a-n-t” with a long “a.” The invention of talking pictures could mean the end of Lamont’s acting career.

Brown suggests that Lamont lip sync to another person’s voice, and through this deception, they keep the façade of Hollywood alive. Kathy Selden, Lockwood’s love interest, becomes Lamont’s voice so all Lamont has to do is pretend to be speaking. Selden is able to pronounce the words precisely and her tone is much like Lockwood’s. While it is never shown that she is going to a diction coach, the audience understands that she is now being trained in elocution rather than Lamont. Interestingly enough, in an interview, Debbie Reynolds revealed the meta-textual elements at work in the film; according to the actress, who played Selden, her singing voice was actually dubbed by Jean Hagen, who played Lamont. So the façade of Selden singing for Lamont is doubly false, or becomes a hyper-façade, because Hagen is really singing for Reynolds who is supposed to be signing for Hagen (wasittoyoutoo).

The lie of whose voice is on screen is further perpetuated when Lamont learns that Selden is going to get film credit for dubbing her voice. To save her reputation Lamont goes to the papers and gives exclusive interviews, spreading the news of Simpson’s excitement over her first all-singing, all-dancing picture. Despite the Studio System’s power, Lamont has control over her own publicity, which she reveals to Simpson after he learns of her scheme. If he reveals that Selden is dubbing Lamont’s voice, it could be “detrimental” to Lamont’s career and “[she could] sue [Simpson] for the whole studio.” When Selden says she will not act as Lamont’s voice, Lamont retorts, “You’ve got a five year contract honey, you’ll do as R.F. says.” Here, Lamont refers to the Studio System’s hold on actors. Selden, having signed a contract with the studio, must follow orders or be forced to quit. After Lamont gives a horrendous thank-you speech to the audience, who yell for Lamont to sing, Lockwood tells Selden that she has to sing for Lamont: “It’s the only way.” Selden goes behind the closed curtain and is

given a microphone to sing "Singing in the Rain." This meta-textual element is repeated at the end of the film when Lockwood and Selden are standing in front of a billboard with the movie *Singin' in the Rain* on it. Part way through the song, Lockwood, Brown, and Simpson open the curtains to reveal the façade. Amidst the laughter Brown runs to take Selden's place. It is only then that Lamont runs off stage, humiliated.

When Lockwood threatens to quit and Lamont says "good riddance," Simpson finally intercedes. He tells her that Lockwood is just as big of a star as she is and he, R.F. Simpson, is still the head of the studio. Making matters worse for herself, Lamont yells at Simpson, saying, "Oh you're the big mister producer. Always running things, running me. From now on, as far as I'm concerned, I'm running things." Lamont misunderstands her place within the power structure of the Hollywood Studio System. Simply because she controls her own publicity, Lamont feels she has the right to blackmail her executive producer and get away unharmed. In reality, the studio, and in this case Simpson, has the power to destroy Lamont's career. While not wanting to fire one of his biggest stars and a beloved actress, Simpson chooses to exercise his power. Since he did not tell the papers about the voice changes, Simpson is not held responsible for Lamont's presumably ruined career after her blunder on stage. She challenges the Studio System and loses. Actors do not defy the Studio System unless they wanted to be unemployed.

The voice of Lamont in this scene does not match the face on screen, just as earlier in the movie the words of Lockwood do not match the flashback images presented to the audience. The façade within the film projects this notion that the film, itself, is a lie (Ewing 15), thus creating a hyper-facade. Instead of the thriving business that the entertainment industry is thought to be, the changing forces of runaway production in Hollywood will shape the true face behind Hollywood's mask. Although the movie perpetuates the glamour of the entertainment world, it also allows for the mask to disappear, so that viewers can see a bleaker reality. While *Singin' in the Rain* has to do with the second wave of runaway production and changing technology, *The Player* has to do with the third wave: a time when studios were expanding their markets to include DVD sales, toys, and games and were being bought out by larger companies.

### **The Decline of Art and the Rise in Economics in *The Player***

The passing of the Paramount Act left the film industry devastated. The pressure to secure finances led the giants of Hollywood to “externaliz[e] . . . both pre-production and production functions (Elmer and Gasher 7). Lukinbeal argues that the third wave of runaway production has to do the change of ownership in the 1990s, when studios expanded outward to multiple markets (341). This was when the Majors started investing in more than just television and film, including video games and toys. According to authors Susan Christopherson and Michael Stroper a major change occurred from the 1950s to the 1980s:

Between 1950 and 1973, only 60 percent of total productions starts by American film companies were located in the United States. By the 1980s, Hollywood had a “split locational patten,” with pre-production and post-production world concentrated in the greater Los Angeles area and production activity scattered all over the globe. Moviemaking had become a “transactions-intensive industry.” (310-16)

This means that from the ‘50s to the ‘80s a significant amount of work in the film industry itself was being outsourced. With the Major studios becoming facades for film production, the independent studios thrived. The problems with runaway production only increased from the ‘80s to the ‘90s. As such it is in the 1990s that the next major phase of runaway production occurs. Robert Altman’s film *The Player* demonstrates the effects runaway production had on Hollywood. The film is about a man named Griffin Mills who is a studio executive, working at an unnamed studio whose slogan is “Movies: Now More Than Ever,” who is sent death threats from a writer via fax and post cards. Mills ends up killing the writer he believed was sending him the threats, only to learn it was the wrong person. By the end of the film, after various adventures with the police and botched romances, Mills is a happily married man who gets away with murder.

Not only is this movie a satire about Hollywood but it also has the audience rooting for Mills, who is really just an unpleasant man in power. The opening scene takes place on the back lot of a studio, and Mills is being pitched scripts in his office.

The audience hears a lot of famous names mentioned in conversations, showing the interconnections of people in the industry, and in each sales pitch, writers use movies of the past to try and describe a new movie script, i.e. “it’s a cross between *Out of Africa* meets *Pretty Woman*.” By using the previously known Hollywood hits, the writers who are pitching their new ideas draw on the past big moneymaker movies to encourage Mills to create their film. The economic reality for the studios is that a movie must sell well in order to be worth making.

As the opening credits pan across the screen, the audience is given a chance to overhear various conversations that mention how little job security there is “now-a-days”, how “changes are being made” in every studio, and how people are moving from studio to studio just to find work. In one specific conversation, we hear that Mills might be getting replaced because he is not making the studio enough money. While the Studio System was abolished in 1948, there are still remnants at play in the entertainment world; like the stars of old, actors and writers still sign exclusive contracts with one studio, and unless an employee, be it an actor, actress, writer, or producer, makes the studio enough money then that individual gets fired. Simply having the Paramount Act abolish the Studio System did not necessarily get rid of the entire concept of the system; it simply challenged the Studio’s monopoly. Clearly, by evidence of this scene, remnants of the Studio System still survive almost fifty years later.

A significant scene in the film is also a brief scene, depicting an iconic Hollywood red carpet event. There is a fading shift in scenes to a movie premiere, where a news reporter is heard saying “anyone who is anyone is there tonight,” as images of movie stars walk down the entrance to the theater. The voice goes on to say how “Hollywood loves its three G’s: the glamorous glitz of a gala.” This scene echoes the first scene in *Singin’ in the Rain* with the lineup of movie stars, though in the other film the stars were fictional (Olga and the Baron) and in this scene they are real (Cher, Julia Roberts, etc.). Despite presenting a variety of stars in “regular life” without fancy dress or runway lights, the film also offers the audience the dazzle of Hollywood, as if reminding viewers “look— *this* is the real Hollywood.” Showing off the “glamorous glitz” of Hollywood, the

actresses in beautiful gowns, and the image of the red carpet at this movie premier all serve as meta-images to reinforce the extravagant façade of Hollywood life.

Cut to halfway through the movie and Mills is seen sitting at a table by a pool. He is waiting for his blackmailer to meet him but instead is confronted by two men who want to pitch him a script. One of the men, Tom Oakley, pitches his idea of an idealistic District Attorney who wants to challenge white privilege and to defend the disempowered. He continues to describe the storyline: the D.A. judges a case where a white husband dies and his white wife is convicted and sentenced to death in the gas chamber; however, the D.A. falls in love with the wife, tries to get her out of prison, but she dies anyhow. When Mills shows his confusion, Oakley explains that this movie will have no stars, “because this film is just too damned important to risk being overwhelmed by personality. That’s fine for action movies but this is special; we want real people here.” Oakley suggests that his art house film has “real” people, while the Hollywood formula film relies upon facades. Oakley continues, saying that “this isn’t even an American film. There are no stars, no pat-happy endings” and she dies because “that’s reality. The innocent die.” A year later, after the movie is a big hit, audiences see that everything Oakley said was a lie. Bruce Willis is the D.A. and Julia Roberts is the wife, and instead of dying she gets saved at the last minute by Willis. When confronted about these changes by another employee who liked his first pitch, Oakley simply states, “People hated the other ending. So we changed it and now they love it. That’s reality.” The “reality” of the Hollywood film industry is that what sells is what gets made. Hollywood perpetuates the façade of “real life”, but primarily provides examples of formula-driven plots. The purpose behind the façade is to create the necessity of the lie. Hollywood’s façade has to exist. But it has been taken too far. The façade has removed the beauty of the film art and its connection to humanity.

This scene is an explicit example of the juxtaposition between an art house film and a Hollywood film. Hollywood takes the art of filmmaking and reduces it down to an equation. To make a good movie Mills says you need to mix certain ingredients: “[a dash of] suspense, laughter, violence, hope, [a spoonful of] heart, nudity, sex, and happy endings. But mostly happy endings.” In order for a movie to make money it must

follow the pattern. Oakley's artistic work is reduced to a formula for moneymaking movies; he conforms to the façade of Hollywood and creative runaway production, not only showing the power of Hollywood but also the necessity of maintaining the illusion to preserve the industry. By the time Oakley is seen at the viewing of his film, with all the changes in play, he is comfortable with the idea that the film "must be changed." Oakley stands in stark contrast to the writer who is threatening Mills. The reason Mills was on the roof in the first place was to confront his blackmailer. Instead he is met with another writer who wants a movie made. In Oakley's case, the artist is replaced with a writer willing to conform to the system. Mills, being the executive producer, is the one that kills writers, both literally and figuratively, and diminishes art to fit into the Hollywood film recipe. He is also the symbol for the elusive power in Hollywood. His job as executive producer at the studio depends on picking movies that make money, but he also has the power of the studio behind him to reject the artists trying to create those movies.

As with all movies, the audience knows that this film is based on fiction. But is it really? With all the remarks it makes about Hollywood, how close do the accusations come to the truth of the industry? The pitch to Mills at the very end of the film calls into question everything the audience has seen. If the film pitched is the movie the audience just watched then does this mean that the movie is based on truth? No, because then it would have that written in the titles somewhere. But it could be based on a half-truth. Though, perhaps that is what the director, Robert Altman, wanted to say about the industry in the first place (CloudCuckooCountry). Some critics even believed at the time that Altman, disgusted with the commercialized film business, planned that his movie would be his final "screw you" to the industry (CloudCuckooCountry). Combine Altman's potential hidden, or not so hidden, remark about the industry with the opening scene, where the slate claps down to mark the camera, in the beginning of the film, and *The Player* starts to make more sense. The film reveals the lies of the industry in more ways than one. The hyper-façade of Hollywood is shown heavily in the film because of this play on fiction and reality. Since the movie is presented as a work of fiction from the beginning then it can be assumed that the topics of interest, the conversations of take-overs and job losses and cover-ups of potentially horrible crimes, are just false. But by

revealing the pitch for a movie called *The Player* with the exact plot the audience just watched, the film then confirms the dark vision of Hollywood in the film. The desperate voices of artists are cut off and recreated in the Hollywood voice of glitz and glamour.

### **Runaway Production and Hollywood Now**

When asked about the top runaway production spots today, my studio executive source broke it down from cities, to states, to countries. The top cities that offer the best incentives, for both production and post-production, are Vancouver and London. In British Columbia both regional and distant productions are up by six percent and resident labor jobs are up thirty-three percent (“Production Incentive Map”). States that sit in on the top of runaway production include Louisiana, Georgia, and New York, with the top countries ranging from Canada to Britain, across Europe from New Zealand to Wales (Anonymous). Comparatively, Louisiana provides a thirty percent tax credit incentive, and filmmakers only need to spend \$300k or less on a film to be considered to receive said credit. Likewise, Georgia and New York offer a twenty to thirty-five percent tax credit incentive, and filmmakers need to spend only \$500k to receive it. Alternatively, California is only able to give tax credit for television or mini-series production, and those productions must spend at minimum one million U.S. dollars. Add to that the fact that there is no annual cap for Louisiana and Georgia, a \$420 million cap per calendar year for New York, but a \$330 million cap per fiscal year for California (7/1-6/30), it is no wonder that the Hollywood of today is dwindling (“Production Incentive Map”). There are a few films being made in California still, but there are little to no incentives for productions to stay.

A lot of the Majors’ stages today are full but with television production; there are very few films being produced on the back lots, partly of because of the money. If it is cheaper to fly to a location then that is what will be done (Anonymous). And if other states and countries offer cheaper production costs, then it makes sense for producers and directors to go elsewhere. At the same time, my source brought up the point that if producers film in other states, they are also helping the economy of those states. While

this may be true, the production that is being so generously given to other states is taking away from jobs and money in California.

Some argue that the film industry will never really leave Hollywood (Anonymous). Hollywood remains the birthplace of the Majors, which will supposedly never move primary locations. Hollywood is “the core, the bones of the industry [that] will stay [in California]”, just as it has done since it came from the east in the early 1900s (Anonymous). However, the Majors are becoming names only in the film industry. They may thrive on television but “by 1998, 27 percent of U.S.-developed film and television productions and 45 percent of U.S.-developed television movies were shot outside of Hollywood, primarily to take advantage of cost savings and tax concessions” (Elmer and Gasher 2). This number has only grown; “in 2000, export receipts totaled \$8.85 billion US compared to domestic earning of \$7.55 billion US.” (15). Allen J. Scott argues that, while runaway production can be helpful to smaller companies and countries trying to stay afloat in the world of film production, Hollywood may lose its position as the center of entrainment. “For the moment, the Hollywood motion-picture industry remains unmatched in its commercial rigor and market reach. If the history of other formerly triumphant industrial juggernauts—from Manchester to Detroit—is any guide, however, the continued leadership of Hollywood is by no means automatically assured” (Allen).

In 2014, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti helped to pass the AB 1839 bill that allows for better tax incentives for those keeping television production in California. The bill, which was signed into law in September 2014, also did away with the old lottery system for tax incentives, which placed all television and film productions into a drawing to see how much money would be offered toward only a handful of projects (Verrier). By drawing attention to the issue of runaway production in media, I hope that the residents of California will learn about the economic and artistic importance of this issue.

Lukinbeal argues that “recent U.S. media attention on the outsourcing of American jobs, combined with the overall increase in film production has made runaway production a major economic and emotional issue for many Americans” (344). However, passing a bill to give tax incentives for the film industry raises other political questions: if you provide the incentive for one industry (film), why not provide it for others? (Anonymous).

Supporters of the film industry hope that the passage of this television bill signals that the next step will be tax incentives for the film industry. Major film production means a return of revenue and jobs that Californians are becoming desperate to obtain.

## Conclusion

Lukinbeal outlines three historical phases of runaway production—from the film companies moving west, to the demise of the Studio System, to the expansion of the film market—noting that creative and economic factors significantly helped to shape this history. However, both movies show how intertwined the creative and economic aspects of runaway production really are: *Singin' in the Rain* emphasizes changes in technology while *The Player* focuses on the profit-drive nature of the film industry. In addition, they both constantly reference the façades of Hollywood.

Just as lies were told and revealed to audiences in *Singin' in the Rain*, so too are the lies of Hollywood revealed in *The Player*. Ironically, each film follows Mills's pattern of what makes a good movie, but both works also achieved critical success. Both films expose the Hollywood dream factory—revealing not only the economic choices made by the studio, whether it is making a silent film into a talkie or changing the very fabric of a movie to get more gross income out of it, but also the economic and creative illusions behind the Hollywood façade. Hollywood continues to face economic, creative, and technological challenges. The impact of technology on the economics of filming continues today, with the newest digital technologies influencing a variety of productions in the entertainment world. Movies are being outsourced to other countries more than to other states for better incentives. The *Los Angeles Times* ran a story in 2002 about the nominees for the Academy Awards Best Picture and “lament[ed] that fact that of the five Best Picture nominees [ . . . ] not a single frame . . . was shot within 2,000 miles of the show-business capital. For that matter, not a full film's worth of scenes among them was shot in the United States (Bates). Like the rising curtain that reveals Selden as the double for Lamont's voice in *Singin' in the Rain*, the curtain needs to be opened on the truth behind Hollywood's film production.

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# Cartoons & Counterculture

Azure Star Glover

## Introduction

Entertainment media is one of the United States' most lucrative and influential exports, and Hollywood, in Los Angeles County, California, has historically been the locus of such media's production. While much study has been done on the subject of film and the connection between Hollywood and Los Angeles as a whole, there exists less scholarship on the topic of animated Hollywood productions, even less on the topic of changing rhetoric in animated features, and a dearth of information regarding the rise and influence of independent, so-called "indie" animation. This paper aims to synthesize scholarship on and close reading of the rhetoric of early Disney animated films such as *Snow White* and more modern cartoon television series such as *The Simpsons* with that of recently popular independently-created cartoon features such as "Narwhals," with the goal of tracing the evolution of the rhetoric of cartoons created and produced in Hollywood and their corresponding reflection of Los Angeles culture.

## Hollywood and Animation

In a 2012 report commissioned by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, The Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation acknowledged that "[f]or many people, the words Los Angeles and Hollywood are synonymous with entertainment" ("The Entertainment Industry" 1), and with good reason: Los Angeles's year-round fair weather first attracted live-action filmmakers in the early 1900s, and filming-friendly Hollywood slowly grew into a Mecca of entertainment media production. In 2011, the entertainment industry accounted for "nearly 5% of the 3.3 million private sector wage and salary professionals and other independent contract workers," generating over \$120 billion in annual revenue (8.4% of Los Angeles County's 2011 estimated annual Gross County Product), making this "one of the largest industries in the country" ("The

Entertainment Industry” 2). Also in 2011, entertainment industry-related employment accounted for approximately 17.6% of Los Angeles County’s “non-farm wage and salary jobs” (25). Certainly, the Hollywood mystique is also a well-known cultural export, spawning such international imitators as Hollywood North, Bollywood, and Nollywood. Hollywood and its exports are crucial to the success and popularity of Los Angeles as a whole.

In *Hollywood for Historians*, Andrew Dawson argues that Hollywood is “woven into the fabric of American culture and society,” and therefore “represents or embodies many of the themes that political historians identify as central to the study of modern societies.” Dawson further states that “the [entertainment] industry is a strategic component of the US economy, a significant employer of labour in southern California, Canada and Western Europe, and a major component of world trade” (3). Indeed, animation accounts for a significant portion of Hollywood’s economic value as a whole. Current figures are difficult to quantify, but in 2004 Ted Tschang and Andrea Goldstein reported in “Production and Political Economy in the Animation Industry: Why Insourcing and Outsourcing Occur” that revenue from animation was approaching \$50 billion worldwide (2). In 2004, \$15 million was considered to be a low budget for an animated feature film, and the budgets for “A list” features often exceeded \$100 million. A single episode of an animated television series cost \$250,000 on the low end, and up to \$1.5 million for popular series, such as *The Simpsons* (5). With the introduction of new media, however, Hollywood’s currently established big-six studios (Warner Bros. Entertainment, The Walt Disney Studios, NBC-Universal, Columbia TriStar Motion Picture Group, Fox Filmed Entertainment, and the Paramount Motion Pictures Group) may seem to no longer form a secure oligopoly of animated media production. With recent technological advancements, it has become quite easy for even individuals to produce and distribute “cartoons” of all sorts, although such “amateur” pieces have yet to be seen by the broader public as anything but, at best, a diversion and, at worst, a waste of time. However, this paper intends to prove that Hollywood animation has and will continue to reflect Los Angeles’s social and economic landscape. While indie animations can—very rarely—be lucrative for the original creator, even the most popular

*independent* animated Internet series usually cost little to produce (compared to productions financed by one of the Big Six), but have estimated earnings in the low hundred thousands per series, total—not annually (Amidi). Unsurprisingly, there is usually a direct correlation between the cost and revenue of animated media: more expensive animated pieces generally have greater economic returns, likely due in part to marketing budgets. Despite current fears that the recent trend toward independent, online-only, Peer-to-Peer (P2P) animation threatens to dismantle traditional Hollywood production methods, thereby threatening Los Angeles’s economic climate, the current “Internet Age” is simply representative of the existing oligarchies’ most recent appropriation of current trends. The dissemination of new cartoons via the platform of the Internet has an impact on the evolution of cartoon rhetoric, but not the way in which such rhetoric is used to attract financial success.

### **Background and Methodology**

This paper avoids study of the broader category of “media,” and even “film,” in favor of “animation,” for several reasons. First, the wider category of “media” is truly immense, and examining the scope of independent creation is a task for a much more ambitious project. While live-action film and animation are quite similar in some respects (and mainstream studios produce both), it is difficult to designate a demarcation between categories of live-action P2P video. Any individual with a computer and Internet access can create and share live-action video content, but not all of this content qualifies as entertainment media. A quick glance at the front page of YouTube, the most popular P2P video sharing platform, reveals a plethora of amateur music videos, tutorials, and video blogs, each of which constitute a separate category of video media. Sometimes, the purpose of such live-action videos is unclear. Animated media requires a greater investment of time and a different skill set, and its permutations are easier to distinguish and quantify.

Second, economic limitations make it difficult for P2P creators of live-action video to generate content of the same caliber as big studios, and, in contrast, individual animated creations can be compared on a more level field. Many indie producers of live-

action video have limited access to video-recording equipment; many, in fact, primarily use cameras built into other devices, such as cellular phones and laptops. While the standard of commercial video equipment is rapidly improving, independent filmmakers and small studios simply cannot afford the same standard or amount of equipment available to the big studios, and the end product of the latter is easily distinguishable from the former. Conversely, commercial digital animation software is comparatively affordable. For example, “Narwhals,” a popular indie cartoon, was made using Adobe Flash. A monthly subscription for Adobe Flash is available to individuals for less than fifty dollars per month (“Adobe”). Flash is the same program used for major television cartoons such as Hasbro’s *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* and Cartoon Network’s *Foster’s Home for Imaginary Friends*, both economically successful and popular properties, employing well-known mainstream talent and spawning mass-produced merchandise. Although individuals without access to big studio resources would need to invest a great deal of time into each project, the necessary production materials still pose a relatively low investment cost. Many individuals are then able, presumably, to create and present animation at a comparable quality with big-budget productions. Although these individuals and small studios lack other important resources available to bigger studios, the ability to create an indistinguishable end product does allow for a somewhat more fair comparison between indie and mainstream animation. In addition, the higher quality of these creators’ end product makes them more competitive in the market and, therefore, more likely to gain attention from the mainstream public (and, often, major corporations), which is a crucial factor when examining the impact of their rhetoric.

Finally, as previously examined, animation is simply a different artistic vehicle than live action film, with its own “toolbox” of rhetorical devices. In her 2010 article “Animation: The New Performance,” Teri Silvio situates animation as a wholly different performance than theater and on-screen acting. By definition, animation requires that artists give the appearance of life to lifeless objects, from traditional or digital images to lumps of clay. Silvio posits that the kind of projection necessary to achieve animation’s illusion sets the form wholly apart from live action (427). Silvio also notes that, because

of this projection, “animated characters ‘belong’ to fans in a different way than embodied human stars like Marilyn Monroe or Mick Jagger” (428); fans of animation see their favorite characters as autonomous beings with “lives” (428) outside of their media representation. Sherry Ortner, argues that indie media—and by extension independently created animations—“embod[ies] the valuation of art over money” and true passion, of creating art for art’s sake, establishing a stronger connection between creator and product and product and viewer (6, 9). Therefore, independent animated media possesses a uniquely powerful position in entertainment. Because the media is animated, the audience is invited to participate in the creation of this illusion of life, claiming ownership; additionally, the creator/media/audience bond is further strengthened if the media is independently created and therefore more intimate.

### **Animation as Art**

Despite the common public perception of animation as “cartoons for children,” trends in Hollywood animation often influence or at least are indicative of broader trends in Los Angeles County and the United States as a whole. Indeed, recent scholarship has made much of animation as an art form. In *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde*, Esther Leslie supports the existing argument that animation is as worthy of literary attention as any other art form; specifically, she posits that animation may be best examined via modernist critical theory. For example, *Fantasmagorie*, a French animated short made in 1908 and considered one of the very first examples of animation, uses rough line work to portray a surreal dreamscape in which a figure morphs and changes, sometimes violently but without any serious effect. In reference to *Fantasmagorie*, Leslie insists, “From the very first, animation, self-reflexive and unmasking, establishes a circuit of life and destruction. Animation, the giving of life, battles with annihilation, and always overcomes, always reasserts the principle of motion, of continuation and renewal” (2). As the field of animation developed, “experimenting artists found that cartoons touched on many things that they too wished to explore: abstraction, forceful outlines, geometric forms and flatness, questioning of space and time and logic—that is to say, a consciousness of space that

is not geographical but graphic, and time as non-linear but convoluted” (19). When audio/visual innovation allowed for cartoons to be set to sound, cartooning became further set apart from other art forms because “with its frame-by-frame fully controllable structure, the links between sound and image could be drawn so tightly that a symbiosis, a perfect rhythmic synchronization, could occur” (Leslie 26-27). Dawson further expounds on film’s importance in general (animation included) by pointing out that the motion picture industry is able to and does deal with issues of “class, race, gender, and the cultures of authority and resistance” and therefore “has immense cultural, political and economic power. It acts as an important ideological force in its own right while also being a barometer of important political and cultural trends” (Dawson 3). It must, therefore, be worthwhile to examine *what* trends Hollywood media reflects.

### **Textual Analysis**

I will also focus my attention on cartoons produced after 1928 and are, therefore, able to make use of audio production linked to their visual images. Though this audio/visual technology had been used previously, the first method of linking sound to animation was made truly popular by Walt Disney’s short, “Steamboat Willie.” The technology soon became known as “Mickey Mousing” because of this relationship (Leslie 28). Of sound techniques, Eric Walter White, defender of animation as art, observes, “The important discovery made by Walt Disney . . . concerns the unexpected relations that exist between visual and aural phenomena” (qtd. in Leslie 30). Disney’s early shorts established a relationship between sound and moving picture that we still expect today: “For instance, when a stream of bubbles appears on the screen, Mickey will almost certainly prick them with a pin, and as they explode they will play a tune in which the frequency of the wave-vibration of each note will be inversely proportional to the size of the bubbles” (qtd. in Leslie 30). These and similar early cartoons were rough, still setting the ground rules for what animation could do and what audiences should expect. Since the medium was so new, most cartoons were experimental, bearing some semblance with the surrealism of *Fantasmagorie* from decades previous. These

cartoons were also not explicitly designed to appeal to children; rather, they were a new and interesting amusement for people of all ages (Leslie).

The first big shift in animation design came with the great depression of the 1930s, and Disney was at the forefront of this change, just as it was with the introduction of audio. Walt Disney and his brother, Roy, invested all of their savings into Disney Brothers Co. (the original name of Disney Studios). As the economy worsened, the studio had to find some way to keep afloat. In a bid to gain more revenue, the studio made changes to their animation style and the design of their lead character, Mickey Mouse. Leslie concurs that “it might have been the merchandising, and a toy market to exploit, that compelled Mickey mouse to become cuter, more toy-like” (31). The characters’ lines became rounder, less jagged, and their movements became less severe. There was a general softening of not only the appearance but also the behavior of animated characters. In addition, cartoons began to become “a vehicle for good behavior—at the Saturday afternoon Mickey Mouse Clubs, children learnt how to cross the street, wash behind their ears and respect their elders. Children were formed into conformist adults” (Leslie 31). This shift toward appealing to parents and the accompanying merchandising revenue helped to usher in the Golden Age of animation, which included such classic animated films as *Snow White* (1937), an early Disney Studios success story, becoming not only an economic triumph but also a vehicle for socializing the next generation of children.

When making *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Walt Disney devoted great time, effort, and money to developing exactly the aesthetic he desired. With painstakingly created watercolor backgrounds and more than three million individually inked and colored acetate sheets, as well as a full orchestra’s jovial musical score, *Snow White* was produced at the cost of a million and a half dollars (“Making of”). While the cost seemed outrageous to Disney’s contemporaries and during production the project was often referred to a “Disney’s Folly,” the end result was a smoothly animated, brightly colored, artfully scored masterpiece, quickly earning \$416 million at the box office. The character of Snow White is characterized as “warm” and “human” (“Making of”) due to her smooth, slow, dreamlike movements, made possible by the sheer

number of cel frames devoted to bringing her to life. Presumably, the film's cheerful score, bright colors, and dreamlike beauty—as well as its “happily ever” sanitized ending, in direct defiance of the more gruesome fairytale on which it was based, was inspired by Disney's recognition that the public wanted to be made to feel safe and secure—against the economic threat of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the military unease abroad. Themes of danger are included in the film, as when Snow White runs through the dark forest, seemingly pursued by ghosts and demons, and when the evil queen makes herself into an ugly old hag and poisons the titular character. However, the evil queen is defeated in the end, and the enemies in the dark forest turn out to be friendly animals—Snow White's ability to communicate with the animals and receive assistance from them with household chores was so iconic that it is now a trope in popular culture signifying a traditionally idealized female character who reinforces conventional expectations, transforming domestic drudgery into a joyful act as she awaits her prince. Even any possible element of sexuality is avoided, despite the story's several potentially sexual elements: the Dwarfs are made comfortingly round, small, and cartoonishly sexless; the prince who awakens Snow White with “True Love's Kiss” is also nonthreateningly feminine, with large, round eyes, long lashes, and red lips. The kiss, an important plot point, is presented with a complete absence of sexual tension, administered by the prince as one might kiss a child, rather than a lover. This film was so successful because it inspired awe due to the sheer amount of work and the novelty of what it accomplishes as the first feature-length cel-animated film, while reinforcing the social norms of its time and, therefore, winning the public's favor.

Around this same time period, cartoons also began to take on a more conscious political ideology. Films “moved to the centre of political power as government turned to it for support during the profound economic crisis of the 1930s . . . and World War Two” (Dawson 9) a position which they, arguably, still function in to some extent; even today's animated characters, whose voice actors are never on-screen, may spout rhetoric which live-action stars would find too radical. In the post-war years, the studio system was undermined by the “ideological straitjacket of anti-communism” and new competition from the adoption of television—by 1955, half of all American households owned a TV

set (Dawson 9). Studios also lost their centralized workforce as people moved from the inner city, where the studios were located, into suburbs. Thus began “The New Hollywood,” in which studios combined with other producers to form multimedia corporations “with global reach” (Dawson 9).

Cartoons for television in the 1950s often followed Disney’s lead, producing family-friendly cartoons featuring characters who exhibited idealized, often prescriptive behavior. However, the spirit of experimentation and subversion never truly died. For example, *Looney Tunes/Merry Melodies* (1930-69), produced by Warner Bros., featured “safe,” unobjectionable material alongside more subversive images such as cross-dressing (a technique often employed, and apparently enjoyed, by Bugs Bunny), drug use, and violence, including the use of firearms. In the 1960s and 1970s, Hanna-Barbera’s cartoons such as *The Flintstones* and *Scooby-Doo* appealed to adult audiences with a mix of social commentary, pop culture jokes, and postmodern undertones. Many cartoons produced between the 1950s and 1980s snuck in similar subversive concepts and in-jokes to appeal to adult audiences without becoming too overtly subversive for children. Of course, there have always been cartoons made for a strictly adult audience, such as the film *Red Hot Riding Hood* in 1943, the *Wait Till Your Father Gets Home* series in the 1970s, and the *Beavis and Butthead* series in the 1990s. Perhaps because of their subversive nature or their limited audience, these cartoons are invariably less popular than those intended for a wider audience.

*The Simpsons*, boasting an impressive twenty-six seasons so far, is one of the most successful animated television series to come out of the 1990s. *The Simpsons* began in 1989 as a series of crudely-drawn, low-budget shorts on *The Tracey Ullman Show* (“America’s First Family”), and audiences quickly responded to the show’s offbeat, sarcastic humor. The show resonated with audiences because it showed a family that wasn’t perfect—one that was, in fact, far from perfect. Homer, the patriarch of the family, started out as a clumsy, angry oaf who would physically strangle his ten-year-old scamp of a son. This violence might have been frightening if not for the completely unrealistic representation of the figures: all characters are made up of simple, geometric shapes with thick black lines and completely round, white eyes. Most

of the characters are a bright, unnatural yellow. Although the characters are often portrayed as in danger, enacting violence, and even—sometimes—dying, their cartoonish appearance and acts are treated farcically, rather than realistically.

This is, perhaps, why *The Simpsons* was able to “push the envelope” as it did (and, to a lesser extent when compared to other, more recent cartoons, still does). Homer works in a nuclear plant and is exploited by his greedy, ancient boss—a satirical Marxist commentary of the state of the working class. Issues of education are often highlighted as Bart and his sister, Lisa, navigate an elementary school in the midst of a perpetual budget crisis, led by a spineless “mama’s boy” principal and a handful of apathetic teachers, who are often shown smoking, drinking, and bemoaning their lot in life. Authority figures are also often portrayed in a negative light: church officials are uncaring, the police are inept, and politicians are corrupt.

The TV industry’s financial distress in the late 1990s led to the bankruptcy of many large networks, which consequently affected the animation industry (Tschang). When the studios economically rebounded, it was under new ownership. For example, Paramount merged with Viacom, Warners merged with Time Inc., Sony bought Columbia (which was previously owned by Coca-Cola), and Universal changed hands several times before finally being bought by Comcast in 2011. Animation work that was already outsourced to relatively expensive countries like the Philippines was moved to countries with cheaper labor, like China and India (Tschang 13). Although subversive independent properties like *Beavis and Butt-head* continued to thrive during this time of financial uncertainty, big studios backed noticeably tamer cartoons, once again prioritizing citizenship and family values, with the exception of some more daring properties like *Animaniacs*, no doubt emboldened by executive producer Stephen Spielberg’s popularity. During this time, *The Simpsons* slowly continued to build a following and its budget continued to rise, leading to more sophisticated animation techniques that still sought to preserve the original cartoonishness of the series.

The animation industry began to rebound in the early 2000s, and this financial windfall brought with it more adventurous and risqué programming, such as those found on Cartoon Network’s *Adult Swim*. Still, today’s large animation-producing studios are

owned by even larger corporations, which by necessity are somewhat restrictive of their production content. As with Disney's move toward commercialization during the Great Depression, today's economic climate and the risk-adverse tendencies of financing powers, as well as the broad reach of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) censorship powers, do place limits on the content of animated films.

Consequently, one might think that the uncensored reality of the Internet's P2P content delivery system would allow for extravagantly subversive and shocking content. In the face of many more risqué modern cartoon programming, recent seasons of *The Simpsons* seem comparatively tame: Homer has become more befuddled and less angry, celebrities continue to make campy cameos, and audiences have gotten used to the once bold tactics with which the show used to tackle controversial topics.

### **Indie “vs.” Mainstream**

The phenomena of indie animation is yet another trend in the ever-transforming history of animation. My interest in the P2P network is limited strictly to the creation, content, and position of so-called “indie” animated media. Independent live-action films have long been a component of media production and the Hollywood process, and indeed many previously “indie” production houses have found success and joined together to form the current Hollywood studio oligarchy. It is useful, then, although difficult, to define indie media and animated indie media, in particular. In “Against Hollywood: American independent film as a critical cultural movement,” Sherry B. Ortner defines independent film as “the antithesis of a Hollywood studio film”—Hollywood films, she says, differ from indie films in that they are “very expensive,” geared toward “entertainment” rather than creating a thought-provoking piece, and politically conservative; in addition, they make use of “fantasy and illusion,” rather than being “highly realist” like indie films, and generally have “happy endings” (2). She further states that indie films should take risks, “embody a ‘personal vision,’” be independently funded, and “embody the ‘valuation of art over money’” (6), but the main difference between studio and indie films is embodied in a single buzzword: “passion” (9). It certainly does seem that, in our society's collective consciousness, indie media

production of all kinds (including, for example, indie live action or animated film, graphic art, such as that from uncommissioned artists or creators of underground or web-based comics, independent writers, such as bloggers and non-commercial columnists, independent musicians, and theater and other performance art) is associated with the idea of “passion,” of creating art for the art’s sake. Conversely, mainstream production of these same artistic genres is labeled “commercial,” a “sell-out,” or even “greedy.”

In *Hollywood Drive: What it Takes to Break In, Hang In & Make it in the Entertainment Industry*, Eve Light Honthaner offers advice to those aspiring to a career in entertainment media. She concurs with Ortner that “indies” are “very different from traditional studio films” in that they “invariably have smaller crews and shorter schedules and are generally financed by private investors, *although some are funded by major studios operating under indie banners*” (Honthaner, emphasis mine). Emanuel Levy’s *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film* acknowledges that 1980s “industry forces such as the Creative Artists Agency (CAA) or Twentieth Century-Fox” would consider working with “fringe players” (independents) as “unthinkable”— independent modes of production would be a threat to the established studios. By 1999, though, CAA represented “indie cinema’s guru David Lynch, and Fox established a division, Fox Searchlight, to produce artistic movies.” Further, “The big agencies now have officers who specialize in indies. The William Morris Agency recently restructured its independent film division, which has its own logo and is autonomous, with the goal of boosting the agency’s status in the independent world” (Levy). These so-called “independent” studios, backed by larger conglomerates, are often what popular culture thinks of and refers to as “indie” producers: big studios offer their “independent” subsidiaries the starting capital necessary to create higher-quality films, as well as advertising resources and a system of support for dealing with legal issues, such as union rules. Honthaner states:

At one time, being independent always meant low budget, and low budget almost always meant non-union, but now that the unions and guilds are offering low-budget (and low-low-budget) agreements, more indies are becoming signatory. These low-budget agreements allow producers to pay

union and guild members lower salaries while preserving their pension, health and welfare benefits. (Honthaner)

The Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Arts (SAG-AFTRA) Union does indeed have provisions for independent productions, including the Ultra Low Budget agreement Honthaner referenced. However, SAGindie, an ancillary branch of SAG-AFTRA, makes it clear that the Ultra Low agreement “is not intended for pictures produced for television broadcast, cable use, video/DVD markets or otherwise produced primarily for commercial exploitation” and can never be applied to animated media. This means that any production house wishing to make any revenue and work within union rules must have enough starting capital to pay talent and other labor costs upfront. Animated films are in a special category and, therefore, cannot be produced via the Ultra Low agreement, even if producers do not intend to make a profit or broadcast via mainstream channels.

The 2014 SAG-AFTRA Animation Agreements included modest pay and benefit raises for union members involved with animation production. They also established a residual system from free on-demand viewing of union-sanctioned productions. However, no minimum rate was established for New Media productions; such rates are to be “individually bargained” as long as they fall below a certain budget threshold. Such thresholds vary, but average around \$25,000 per minute (SAG-AFTRA). The union dictates that standard television rates would apply to mainstream productions disseminated via Subscriber Video on Demand (SVOD), such as Netflix. However, “made for new media” programming, such as Netflix original series, need only pay residuals if their budget is high enough. Productions disseminated on P2P platforms such as YouTube have yet to ever exceed the budget thresholds established by the union, and no residuals are paid “unless the program is a derivative of another television or theatrical picture.” The union admits, “Currently, there are no high budget SVOD animated programs in production. However, with the increase in these types of programs, it is possible that budget breaks may be met and the newly bargained provisions will apply over the term of the contract” (SAG-AFTRA). While these restrictions allow individuals to create animated media and disseminate it via P2P

platforms without repercussions, the rules also encourage big studios to create so-called “independent” tributaries to take advantage of union allowances. This may well be the reason why so many popular “independent” animated films on YouTube and other P2P platforms are actually backed by big studios from the beginning, and individual producers who start out successful are often absorbed by the mainstream. This somewhat insidious modus operandi proves that the P2P method of transmission the Internet offers, once feared as a threat to traditional production methods, has actually become relatively simple for big studios to appropriate.

### **Current Trends**

In today’s “digital age,” and with the increasing influence of the Internet as a distribution platform alternative to theatrical release and television broadcasting, the entertainment industry appears to be changing. For example:

Content may originate as a feature length movie, but is now distributed across a range of platforms. The production of content has changed as well. Digital imaging is displacing film in the production of movies while lines are being blurred between such related industries as movie production, electronic computer games, and other entertainment media.

These changes have transformed the entertainment industry, while at the same time transforming the local economy. (“The Entertainment Industry”)

Despite these changes, mainstream Hollywood is coping and adapting. In “Hollywood Versus the Internet: the media and entertainment industries in a digital and networked economy,” written in 2006, Andrew Currah states that Hollywood’s entertainment industry is ruled by six major corporate entities: Walt Disney Co. (Walt Disney Studios), News Corporation (20th Century Fox), Viacom (Paramount Pictures), Sony Corp. (Sony Pictures), NBC-Universal (Universal Studios), and Time Warner (Warner Bros. and New Line Cinema) (440-41). The entertainment studio components of these corporations, he says, “have increasingly functioned as gatekeepers (rather than film factories), which control access to the finances required to produce, market and distribute films (and related spin-off products) in major markets around the world.” Currah argues that, like all

oligopolists, these studios “neglect” and “marginalize emerging markets” such as the Internet, which seems to “threaten the status quo” (440); therefore, he sees the Internet as a force for “bringing about a dramatic increase in consumer choice and a relative decline in centralized oligopolistic control in [entertainment] markets” (Currah 443). While this may have been the case in 2006, the Big Six’s current use of the Internet’s P2P abilities suggests a mainstream adaptation, rather than an independent revolution. As I will show, it is not actually possible to categorize true “indie” media as any kind of threat against the Hollywood “mainstream.”

It is true that indie animated media is often created without the restrictions of the larger and therefore more cautious Hollywood studio oligopoly. Large studios have a greater economic investment than P2P creators, and the stakes are higher; it’s easier for P2P creators to take risks when generating original content. Obviously, common themes in indie media of all kinds are humor and shock value; Cartoon Hangover, one popular “indie” YouTube channel, boasts the tagline “Too \_\_\_ for TV,” inviting the audience to imagine any number of reasons why these cartoons would be inappropriate for wider public consumption. There are, certainly, violent, pornographic, and otherwise extreme indie animations, but the most popular—including those produced by Cartoon Hangover—seem to be relatively benign. Indie animated films and shorts are not relegated to the Internet because of content restrictions alone; many indie films are completely innocuous, and, as previously shown, mainstream cartoons have a long history of “pushing the envelope.” Purposely subversive and boundary-testing cartoons such as *Southpark* and *The Simpsons* have been on modern mainstream airwaves for quite some time. In addition, even the presumed freedom of “indie” status does not allow for just any content: Levy acknowledges that the “typical indie-type film costs the equivalent of ‘pocket change’ to Warners, Disney, or Paramount,” but, as production values increase, “their executives become more frugal” (Levy). Popular franchises solicit increased capital and, therefore, greater oversight from the parent company.

There exists today a wealth of so-called indie animated media distributed primarily or exclusively via the Internet on a free-to-watch basis. However, if American “independent” animated media, aside from the other definitions of “indie,” is simply

animated media not produced and disseminated by the main Hollywood studio oligopoly, then popular and successful examples of truly independent animated media are rare. The nature of the P2P platform allows for unfiltered content production, and the risks taken by P2P creators often do not resonate with wider audiences. Still, such risks do sometimes bring rewards, which is why mainstream Hollywood studios are increasingly making use of the traditionally indie platform of the Internet, masking their mainstream status by creating small subsidiaries of themselves to reap all the benefits of the indie creative world while still having access to big-studio funding. Today, truly “independent” animators—animators who create and distribute work on their own—find it more difficult to gain exposure; the popularity of indie Internet cartoons has attracted many first-time creators, but few are able to keep a persistent online presence without support.

For example, a recent “indie” studio “winner” as far as exposure and success is certainly Cartoon Hangover, as mentioned previously. This “studio” is a “television channel” created for and distributed on YouTube. While it presents itself as an indie studio, Cartoon Hangover was created by Frederator Studios, which was founded in 1998 and which has produced such popular syndicated cartoons as *The Fairly Oddparents* and *Chalkzone*, which were bought by Nickelodeon (parent company Paramount). Frederator Studios is also the creative force behind *Adventure Time*, which continues to be a lucrative franchise for Cartoon Network (Warner Bros.). Despite its connection to Frederator studios, a commercial, mainstream studio, Cartoon Hangover appears to remain true to its “indie” roots—for now. Individual creators gain the financial support of Frederator Studios, but retain creative control of their properties, such as Pendleton Ward’s *Bravest Warriors* and Natasha Allegri’s *Bee and Puppycat*. However, Frederator Studios is currently partnering with Sony Pictures Animation to create Go! Cartoons, which will meld with Cartoon Hangover in the summer of 2015. The direct influence of the commercial studio giant, Sony, may mean changes for Cartoon Hangover’s indie ethos, but it’s doubtful that Sony would want to claim ownership of Cartoon Hangover’s more controversial series, such as James Kochalka’s

*Superfuckers*. Mainstream media may absorb new “edgy” trends quickly, but there’s only so much that the wider audience can be deemed ready for.

Cartoon Hangover was connected to Frederator Studios from the beginning, but even individuals don’t seem to be able to remain truly independent once they’ve found a lucrative audience. One example is Jason Steele’s story. He created “Charlie the Unicorn,” a short dark comedy, as a flash animation test and uploaded it to Newgrounds, a popular online video and gaming community, in 2005. “Charlie the Unicorn” soon became so popular that Steele formed his own studio, FilmCow, and began producing fan-demanded “Charlie the Unicorn” sequels. He has uploaded many other shorts, but his most popular recent series is “Llamas With Hats,” another darkly sarcastic comedy, this time featuring talking llamas. While FilmCow remains Steele’s personal studio, he’s partnered with retail chain Hot Topic to produce and disseminate “Charlie the Unicorn” and “Llamas with Hats” merchandise. While Hot Topic may not be directly connected to the Hollywood studio oligopoly, its main merchandising partners include such studio giants as Disney and Dream Works. Hot Topic, while a private company owned by Sycamore Partners, has business agreements at least tangentially connected to all of the Big Six studios.

For another example, in 2002 Jonti Picking and Chris Vick began uploading episodes of the very popular *Weebl and Bob*, a simple flash cartoon in which egg-shaped characters rant nonsensically (and, in the earlier episodes, sometimes inaudibly) about pie. Picking and Vick stayed independent for several years, until the end of *Weebl and Bob* in 2005. Picking later joined with Sarah Darling to form Jelly Penguin Studio, producer of cartoons accompanied by such viral earworms as “Badger,” “Amazing Horse,” and “Narwhals,” the rights to which were recently bought by Sprint for a new advertising campaign. The original “Narwhals” cartoon was uploaded to YouTube in 2009. Like “Badger” and “Amazing Horse,” it quickly became popular. Like many indie or indie-appropriate animated features, “Narwhals” appeals to the current public’s short attention span with garish color, figures made up of simple shapes with thick black lines to delineate them from the background, and, perhaps most importantly, repetitive movement and sound. The original “Narwhals” is only a few minutes long and features

several of the titular animals enacting the content of a short, simple, and irritatingly catchy jingle: “Narwhals, narwhals / swimming through the ocean / causing a commotion / because they are so awesome.” Later stanzas have the narwhals fighting polar bears, inventing the shish kabob, and saving a fisherman from Cthulhu, Lovecraft’s elder god, all against rave-style flashing colored lights and enacted with very simple animation processes in Adobe Flash.

Like most trends, “Narwhals” and similar videos were quickly forgotten, but when the first Sprint commercial featuring “Narwhals” aired in early 2015, the hashtag #Narwhals immediately began trending on Twitter, as denizens of the Internet either celebrated the return of a favorite meme or bemoaned the resurgence of a hated earworm. In the commercial, though, only the first section of the song is used, presumably because later verses include a reference to male genitalia. Sprint, as a large company with connections to Sony, was likely adverse to taking too much of a risk, but still benefits from “Narwhal’s” indie cred as a creation of Jonti Picking’s, who is either living the dream of indie creators everywhere by finding a lucrative market for his creation or becoming a massive “sellout” by working with a big studio.

Though some indie cartoons started by individuals without studio backing, such as “Narwhals,” do become popular, their appeal and popularity has not gone unnoticed by Hollywood’s studio oligarchy. These studios, in an effort to eke out the competition and wishing to make a profit, quietly move to overtake new creators before they gain enough popularity to become too powerful. Mainstream studios are not blind to trends. Once concepts are tested and found lucrative in the P2P market, the Hollywood oligopoly happily absorbs these properties. The problem with pitting indie-created media against mainstream media is that Hollywood seems to inevitably be more successful (both economically and in popularity) than any indie creator may hope to be. In addition, even marginally successful “indie” properties often are or become connected to one of the major Hollywood studios; there is no true “indie” success—there is only the inexorable machine of Hollywood: it evolves, but its power remains concentrated in an oligopoly system.

**Conclusion**

Further research is required into the rhetorical significance of the somewhat scandalous relationship between so-called “indie” producers of animated media and major mainstream Hollywood studios, as well as the continually evolving rhetoric of mainstream and “indie” cartoons in response to current events and shifting trends. The point, I believe, is that the physical space of Hollywood remains crucial for media production, for it is not only the physical and cultural space of creative media production, but also the home of many of the major studios. The rhetoric of products of Hollywood will continue to reflect the shifting ideologies of this location and disseminate these concepts throughout the world.

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# From the “Concrete River” to an “Urban Oasis”: An Analysis of the Appropriation of Environmental Language in the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan

Nami Hayashi Olgin

New York, Boston, Paris, Tokyo and Los Angeles—each has one distinct river running through the city flowing into a bay. A Google search on the rivers in those cities generates strikingly identical images: boats cruising down a waterway, couples strolling on the river bank or other aesthetically pleasing scenes where the river is the center of the landscape—except in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles River (the LA River)—named after the city itself—stands as a mere remnant in a rapidly urbanized semi-desert city and has been described by Los Angeles writer Luis Rodriguez as a “Concrete River.” As such, it no longer fits the conventional image of a river often imagined as a symbol of freedom and renewal. Instead, the waterless LA River is a target of ridicule. Scott Bryson, in his essay “Surf, Sagebrush, and Cement Rivers: Reimagining Nature in Los Angeles,” writes: “[The river’s] very existence has become the butt of many a local joke: Mark Twain once said that he had fallen into a California river and ‘come out all dusty’” (169). If Twain shared this jest with present-day Angelenos, most would ask, “What river?” This response represents the locals’ understanding of the river in general as “the once meandering and bifurcating river . . . has been turned into a large concrete ditch taking an almost straight course from the valley to the ocean . . .” (Browne & Keil 173).

This “dusty concrete river,” however, is now about to be transformed by the city that aims to revitalize it and improve its surroundings. Subtitled “Our River, Our Future,” The City’s Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (LARRMP) touts the project as an effort to “Green the Neighborhoods.” Drawing from such language as community building to sustainability, the plan appropriates multiple social discourses popular in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the city’s website designated specifically for the revitalization plan, Mayor Eric Garcetti, after reflecting on the history of the river, states: “We now value

[the river] for its potential to reconnect neighborhoods, revitalize communities, and reemerge as a cherished natural and cultural resource” (*lariver.org*). The images in the master plan’s graphic composites portray a river with running water situated in a lush landscape complete with people immersed in the natural setting—a total transformation from its current appearance as a concrete river. Aesthetically pleasing as the images may be, they also implicitly project sizable expenses such an ambitious plan would require for Los Angeles. In fact, the river revitalization has now ballooned to a billion dollar multifaceted project. Traditionally a plan with this monetary commitment tends to elicit a certain level of criticism, but the critics are strikingly absent at this point because in part, I would argue, that the master plan has co-opted the language of environmentalism, using such words as “nature” and “greening” to promote its agenda. The master plan, however, raises more questions that need to be addressed and answered. How did this forgotten river turned flood channel become so important to Los Angeles? Will the revitalized river truly benefit both the river and humans as a project that translates promising environmental concepts into tangible programs? Treating the LA River’s revitalization as a case study, this essay attempts to examine historical discursive shifts in the description of the river from a nostalgic symbol of loss, to a potential threat, to a vision of renewal. It will also closely analyze the master plan’s language as it reflects the trends in the nation’s environmental movement.

### **The Loss of the River**

Contemporary views of the LA River are often shaped by a discourse of loss. For instance, Patt Morrison, in her book *Rio L.A.: Tales from the Los Angeles River*, describes, with nostalgia, the indigenous people’s life by the LA River during the pre-European era: “As the modern city depends on the freeway, the ancient one depended on the river. The water fed the creatures that fed the Gabrieleño [the name given by the Spanish settlers to the Tongva people]. . . . In its shallows grew the brush to build huts and sweat lodges . . . where warriors purified themselves” (38). River historian Blake Gumprecht describes the river’s distant past: “[S]o lush was this landscape and so unusual was it in the dry country that the river was a focus of settlement long before the

first white man set foot in the area” (2). Morrison continues: “[On] August 2, 1769, . . . the Spanish came crashing out of the brush and thickets to the east” (40) and “[they] REGARDED THE RIVER . . . something in need of civilizing” (45). Browne and Keil see this invasion as a “[reflection] of a tradition of colonization and hegemony of European values” (173). The process of civilization meant the river’s undergoing intervention, exploitation, and manipulation of nature by humans as a result of industrialization. In Los Angeles, the river was pumped dry to meet the needs of the rapidly growing population. An Edenic image of the river began to dissipate as its surrounding environment saw the loss of nature.

With its water source stripped, the once vital LA River became useless and neglected until it reminded humans of the consequence of urbanization. Heavy storms have never been the norm in Los Angeles but when it happened, the river caused catastrophic floods because much of the surfaces in Los Angeles had become impermeable as a result of urban sprawl. The river’s wrath was depicted in literary works; according to Bryson, “LA authors have made frequent symbolic use of the river, sensing in it a modern-day Greek myth about a whimsical and powerful water god shackled by humanity and its technology” (170). With the river’s threatening propensity to flooding, the city sought to “tame” the river to avoid further damage to the city’s infrastructure and human lives. Thus the work by the Army Corps of Engineers—pouring concrete in the river, widening and altering its waterways—to channelize the river began. For the city, the channelization was perceived as a human engineering triumph over nature. In his book *Reinventing Los Angeles: Nature and Community in the Global City*, Robert Gottlieb states that “the new mission” was defined as “a declaration of war on the river” (141). Similarly, Morrison speaks of the “combat metaphor” in the local media: “The Corps, the paper trumpeted, was acting with ‘the typical, clearly defined exactness and certainty with which Uncle Sam’s Army engineers prepare against any enemy’” (74). The enemy, the LA River, was configured to be of service to Angelenos for the coming years. Now “areas surrounding the river became fenced off, a forbidden territory that effectively belonged to the engineering agencies,” who saw it as “the river [they] built” (Gottlieb 141). In his authoritative accounts of the Los Angeles River’s

history— “*The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*” —Gumprecht declares that “nothing symbolizes the role of human beings in changing the face of the earth more than the exploitation and transformation of the Los Angeles River” (3).

The Western world, as Benjamin Kline explains in his book, *First Along the River*, philosophically assumed the human right to dominate nature. Throughout history, humans have manipulated, managed, and controlled nature by the advancement of science and technology, prioritizing human needs. Gottlieb observes how the word “nature” has multiple significations, citing Raymond Williams’s argument: “Nature is the most complex word in the English language. . . . Nature is not just in the eye of the beholder but also in the language used to describe what one sees” (20). As the Corps was taming the river, Los Angeles was also undergoing a process of urban development, in which nature—undeveloped land—was seen as a commodity with economic potential. Thus, whether land or river, the city made nature subservient to human needs in order to preserve the life style of urban cities.

The public, failing to be stewards of the environment, simply lost the river—now a concrete flood channel and dumping ground. People tend either to ignore the unseemly or to “hide it from view with cinder block walls and tall shrubs” (Gumprecht 3). The loss of the LA River was made apparent in many ways through social discourses. Hollywood films perpetuated the public’s negative or indifferent attitude toward the river from the ways in which the river was “featured.” From the drag race scene in *Grease* to the big rig car chase in *Terminator 2*, Gottlieb explains that the LA River has represented an isolating, dangerous and hostile place (158). Politicians made no excuse about being indifferent to or ignorant about the river; in fact, Bryson notes that the river is “often used as a metaphor for city leaders’ historic myopia and mismanagement” (169), and rightly so. A state assembly member once publicly suggested the idea that “the river, much of it channelized . . . could serve as a ‘bargain freeway’” (Gottlieb 143) to ease the traffic. Another senior government official was not aware that the river ran through his town until he was asked about it (Gumprecht 1). The combination of its altered appearance, the degraded “ruins,” and the negative images helped plant the idea of the loss of the river in people’s consciousness, and if people speak of the river they typically regard it

with nostalgia. With many world-famous attractions in Los Angeles, many citizens and policy makers forgot the river; however, the emerging grassroots environmentalist movement would act as a catalyst to bring back its past.

### **The Revitalization Movement**

Although the LA River seemed to have disappeared, it did not. In certain areas where the river bottom was not paved, its water has been nourishing local fauna and flora. Locals, seeing this proof of green life, were inspired to restore the river's natural characteristics and bring back the lost wilderness along the river. Among them was a poet and activist Lewis MacAdams, and although he was not an engineer, landscape architect, biologist, or city planner, he proved significant in constructing the river's revitalization plan. MacAdams attempted to awaken the public through his artistic expressions both as an artist and poet. His effort led to the "fledgling movement to green the river" (Gumprecht 250) and culminated in the formation of "Friends of the Los Angeles River or FoLAR" in 1986. Personifying the river, MacAdams wrote: "The scene (the downtown area of the LA River) was a latter-day urban hell. We asked the river if we could speak for it in the human realm. We did not hear it say no, and that was how Friends of the Los Angeles River began" (Gumprecht 252). In her article "Remaking American Environmentalism: On the banks of L.A. River," Jennifer Price describes how officials perceived their restoration plan: "The city commits no interest or money to the idea, and the new group . . . [FoLAR] is mostly dismissed as a quixotic bunch of wide-eyed tree-huggers" (561). Simultaneously, *the Los Angeles Times* writer Dick Roraback had been humorously writing a third-person journal account depicting the LA River in its entire 51 miles corridor and the people by the river. His amusing narratives as an "Explorer" worked to awaken the public to the consequences of environmental degradation. The series began with:

Shall we gather at the river, [sic] The beautiful, beautiful river, Gather with the saints at the river [sic] That flows by the throne of God. — Ancient hymn

In Long Beach, they go with the flow. On no other stretch of the alleged Los Angeles River do more people gather to frolic on its shores, test its tepid trickle, slither on its slime.

Saints they may be, appearances to the contrary. Or at least saintlets: For the young, rivers, even fake ones, have an irresistible allure. (Roraback)

According to Gumprecht, “the series was extremely popular and opened the eyes of more than a few Angelenos to the river in their midst” (254). The popularity is attributable to the fact that environmentalism has effected a shift in how humans related to nature.

With the publication of the consciousness-altering *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson in the 1960s and the inauguration of Earth Day in 1970, environmentalism was on its way to become a mainstream ideology. It was, at the beginning, an effort largely dominated by national organizations such as the Sierra Club to protect pristine wilderness and endangered species through political advocacy. Eventually, the movement became localized and grassroots movements started emerging. In their article “How to Save the Earth: The Greening of Instrumental Discourse,” M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer describe how people had begun to yearn for what they lost—“environmental amenities—good and plentiful water, clean air . . . [and they had reached a] “fearful recognition: The industrial system that feathered the nest threatened to foul it as well” (387). FoLAR’s restoration movement gave many Los Angeles environmentalists a cause to support. Underlining FoLAR’s action and approach is the nature-first philosophy, which was embodied in MacAdams’s following statement: “When the yellow-billed cuckoo is singing in the sycamores’ . . . ‘our work will be done” (Gumprecht 256).

MacAdams’s statement reflects nature’s elevated status and his yearning to return to an idealized past, a restoration to a natural world. FoLAR’s nature first principle coincided with a national trend. With an increasing number of consumers drawn to “all natural” products, their stance created a synergy with people who began to lament the destruction of nature. FoLAR began to increase its membership to the extent that its voice and influence reached the minds of policy makers. Mayor Tom Bradley created

the Los Angeles River Task Force following his pledge to “make the river one of the top priorities of his fifth term” (Gumprecht 275) in 1989. With the increasing number and variety of advocates for river renewal, Gumprecht states that “the priorities of revitalization efforts have taken on a decidedly more mainstream flavor . . . evolv[ing] into a campaign to embellish its edges” (293). Furthermore, FoLAR and the municipal engineering agencies faced “‘discourse battles’ . . . pitting the language of river renewal against the sixty year history of flood control . . .” (Gottlieb 148). In illuminating their fundamental differences, Gumprecht describes verbal exchanges that took place between MacAdams and the head of Los Angeles County Public Works who kept referring to the river as the flood control channel. In each instant, “MacAdmas interrupted and interjected the word ‘river’” (298). Eventually, the level of their disagreements subsided, but FoLAR still remains committed to restoring the river while the revitalization plan communicates the importance of the river as a flood channel.

Despite the ideological differences, Price claims, “[The] campaign to bring [the river] back to life has quickly become the most ambitious, well-funded, and widely supported vision to revitalize the quality and equality of life in Los Angeles” (542). FoLAR drafted a restoration plan; the Los Angeles City Council established a new Ad Hoc Committee on the LA River; and, eventually, the city’s Revitalization Master Plan was adopted in 2007. In 2014, as the peak outcome of the river restoration effort, the city announced a major victory celebrating the Army Corps of Engineers’ adopting more elaborated restoration plan with an increased budget as a result of the city’s lobbying efforts. Quoting the Mayor, the *Los Angeles Times* reported: “If all goes according to plan, [Garcetti] said, ‘we might begin to see some funding allocated for this effort next year, and jackhammers on concrete not long after that’” (Sahagun). Humans who took away the river’s life are giving back its life in the form of “an urban oasis for recreation and an inviting locale for new commercial and residential development” (Sahagun). With the long history of urban sprawl through the development of housing, freeways and public transit systems, that the river restoration became the city’s project alone is significant as Bryson explains, “The terms *urban and nature* have been set up in our cultural imagination as opposites that necessarily deny each other” (167).

This is not the first time, however, that someone attempted to restore the river, transforming the language of opposition between nature and city into a discourse of co-existence. In 1930 urban designers Frederick Law Olmstead Jr. and Harland Bartholomew submitted the legendary plan to build parks and greenways along the LA River in their attempt to incorporate nature into the city landscape. Influential city critic “Mike Davis praises the program as ‘heroic’, ‘a stinging critique of the giddy twenties’, an ‘elegant design’ developed with ‘considerable acuity’” (Young 337). Their plan failed to capture the policy makers’ attention partly because their “non-engineering” approach did not sufficiently address the danger of flooding. Mainly, the population perceived nature as untamed wilderness as Gottlieb states, “Urban places had long been considered the antithesis of the natural” (26). The public deemed parks and greenery along the river in urbanized Los Angeles as unnecessary. Moreover, at that time, Gumprecht explains, “[The river] was rarely [viewed] as an asset or a thing of beauty, as something to be saved. . . . [It] was an occasional hazard that had to be contained” (270). The untimely plan then resurfaced three quarters of a century later and now meets the new environmentally-minded audience who wants to free the river from its concrete encasement.

### **Green to Sustainability**

The impact of the first Earth Day in 1970 was so great that almost twenty years later, it even changed the political climate. Republican George Bush claimed himself an environmentalist; Killingsworth and Palmer articulate its significance: “He has created a noteworthy moment in rhetorical history by certifying environmentalist values as a valid component of the presidential ethos” (388). Referring to an event to mark the twenty year anniversary of Earth Day, Kline’s observation foreshadows what environmentalism was to become in the twenty-first century: “The event triggered a frenzy of corporate green marketing and was heralded as the beginning of another green decade. . . . For many environmentalists, the movement had become diluted by its own popularity, becoming trendy and corporate . . .” (109). Price’s following passage illuminates this dilution:

At this very moment, we are smack in the midst of an eco-frenzy without precedent. Environmentalism is in fact going mainstream as never before. It's impossible to open up the *Los Angeles Times* or *New York Times*, or *Vogue* or *Entertainment Weekly*—or to turn on the TV—without finding out that another someone or something has gone green, or organic, or carbon-free, or lower-footprint, or LEED-certified: Wal-Mart, some major oil companies, furniture, cosmetics, downtown L.A., Santa Monica, the Oscars, yoga mats, Trader Joe's, the car wash, UCLA, business in America. (539)

The public has become more receptive to green rhetoric. Recycling has become the norm; more hybrid cars are seen on the road; the popularity of organic food is soaring; and the term “ecology” or the prefix “eco” has become a household word.

A recent addition to the green rhetoric is the word sustainability. The word and its adjective and adverb modifiers, sustainable and sustainably, have become the most trendy environmental words used to signify one's, company's, school's and government's commitment to promoting the wellbeing of Mother Earth. In fact, a trade journal, *Advertising Age*, selected the word as “one of the Jargoniest Jargon” in 2010 claiming that “[it is] a good concept gone bad by mis- and overuse. It's come to be a squishy, feel-good catchall for doing the right thing.” Many consumer products come with the “sustainability label” such as “sustainably raised/fished,” “sustainably managed/produced,” or “sustainable packaging.” If asked to explain the term, many would turn to Wikipedia for a definition and application to society because of the word's nebulous nature. As the majority of the word's appearances take place in the environmental context, one could discern the word signifies a certain requirement for actions or programs to be deemed environmental but there are few documents that explicitly describe the practical application of the concept. The word's role appears to be primarily to produce legitimacy in the environmental discourse; thus, its definition can remain vague. In the US Environmental Protection Agency's website sustainability is defined in the following manner:

Sustainability is based on a simple principle: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations. (*epa.gov*)

Even the government’s agency’s definition leaves much ambiguity that is open for different interpretations. In the case of the LA River, one could even interpret the words as suggesting that after the river’s channelization, “humans and nature” have been in productive “harmony,” as the human engineering mitigated the natural danger and made the creation of the megalopolis possible. Because of a lack of its clear definition and its increased popularity, social entities—particularly government and business—have begun to add the word in their literature in communicating with constituents or consumers to suggest their institutions are socially responsible. Doug King, in his article “Why the Word ‘Sustainability’ Should be Banned,” criticizes the word as corrupted and meaningless: “We have reached the point of ‘Sustainability Accounting.’ Rather than recognising that all human activity has impacts and taking responsibility for them, sustainability accounting uses a limited set of performance indicators which can obscure the real issues.” King indicates that institutions such as corporations are really interested in linking the concept of sustainability to economic development; put another way, the word “sustainability” is used as if economic development creates sustainability, which is presented as an undefined goal in the environmental rhetoric but which, ironically, gives the rhetoric substance. Indeed the Master Plan insinuates the importance of economic development but the rhetoric of sustainability veils that core objectivity. Gottlieb explains, “Much of the sustainability discourse relied on a combination of technology and market forces in the pursuit of ‘ecological modernization’ strategies to achieve a state of sustainable development” (23-24). According to Browne and Keil, “Ecological modernization has now become somewhat of a catchphrase for a wide variety of scholarly approaches, policy processes, and green politics to overcome perceived environment-economy contradictions” (163).

### **The Revitalization Master Plan**

Unlike many rivers in other urban cities in the nation and the world, the LA River has almost disappeared from the city's landscape for more than a quarter of a century; now the city wants to bring it back to the center and they reveal their reasons for doing so. In their RFP (Request for Proposal) descriptions, the city states that it wishes to hire agencies that would "make the Los Angeles River a 'front door' to the City, and support a multitude of civic joint activities." Attractive promotional visuals resemble the scenery of other typical cities that are built around their rivers as a central aesthetic point marked by a river-front development. The first goals stated in the plan is to "establish environmentally sensitive urban design guidelines, land use guidelines, and development guidelines for the River zone that will create economic development opportunities to enhance and improve River-adjacent communities by providing open space, housing, retail spaces such as restaurants and cafes, educational facilities, and places for other public institutions" (LARRMP). Clearly, the ultimate goal is economic development with environmental improvements as a facilitator to that goal. In appearance, the riverfront development would satisfy the needs of not only humans but also nature, perhaps improving the river's health itself. But again the city officials state that one of the aims of the planning process is to leverage economic development after listing a series of environmental benefits. Furthermore, under the heading of "Foster Economic Development," it reads: "A revitalized river corridor is a local and regional destination; and as such can contribute to the economic vitality of the city and the region. River projects should encourage and enhance appropriate sustainable economic development, adding value to underutilized areas and communities" (LARRMP). Traditionally, Gottlieb states, "The concept of 'economic benefits' implicitly assumed increasing real estate values" (168). Aside from the role as the city's flood channel, the LA River is expected to be a value-adding element in the city's economic development for "sustainability." In the master plan, the word repeatedly appears as if both the reader and writer shared the same definition of this undefined environmental jargon.

In the “Welcome” section the Mayor states, “The L.A. River and its watershed are central to making Los Angeles a *sustainable* city, and thousands of Angelenos have rallied to support its restoration.” Later, the master plan references the phrase “a catalyst for a *sustainable* environment” (*lariver.org*). In the revitalization master plan, under the heading “Capture Community Opportunities,” it reads: “Now the people of Los Angeles have the opportunity to enjoy the River as a safe, accessible, healthy and *sustainable* . . . place.” Along with other easily understood adjectives such as “safe, accessible and healthy,” the word “sustainable” modifies the noun “place.” In another section called “Creating Value: The Benefits of Revitalization,” the plan promises its readers that it will provide “opportunities to engage in development that leads to an improved natural environment while attracting investment that leads to new jobs, increased property values and . . . *sustainable* growth.” It also has a section under the heading, “*Sustainable* Economics,” that ends with “design standards and guidelines for development within the proposed River Improvement Overlay . . . will be established to support the Plan, so that reinvestment may occur in an environmentally-sensitive and *sustainable* manner” (LARRMP). Each version of the word “sustainability” mentioned appears to be primarily symbolic with little substance.

In his article “A New Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Development,” Yosef Jabareen, drawing from several scholarly sources, demonstrates the term’s problematic ambiguity:

That there is disagreement over what should be sustained (Redclift, 1993; Sachs, 1999, p. 25; Satterthwaite, 1996, p. 32); that the concept is unclear in terms of emotional commitment (Solow, 1992); and that it “remains a confused topic” (Redclift, 1994, p. 17), “fraught with contradictions” (Redclift, 1987). There is no general agreement on how the concept should be translated into practice (Berke and Conroy, 2000) . . . [and] sustainable development is primarily symbolic rhetoric, with competing interests each redefining it to suit their own political agendas . . . (Andrews, 1997). (180)

Outlining a theoretical and conceptual understanding of the word and recognizing that “a clear tension between the goals of economic development and environmental protection” exists (182), Jabareen concludes that “the concept of equity represents the social aspects of SD (sustainability development). It encompasses different concepts such as environmental, social and economic justice, social equity, quality of life, freedom, democracy, participation and empowerment. Broadly, sustainability is seen as a matter of distributional equity, about sharing the capacity for well-being between current and future generations of people” (188). If this is the meaning of sustainability in the revitalization plan, then the LA River could truly bring together communities who are separated from one another by the freeways and the concrete flood channel that act as dividing lines; it could help realize Price’s ideal principle of not simply “managing” nature, but finding an equitable way to do so (553). Price is optimistic about the revitalization effort for the effect it could have on not just the community but environmentalism as an ideology. Price states: “What more perfect, symbolically resonant icon could we possibly find for an environmentalism that pays close attention to how equitably and sustainably we use nature in our everyday lives” (549). But a newly built residential complex named “RiverPark” which is beyond the reach of the income demographics of the surrounding neighborhood does not fulfill the promise of equity. The owners of this “housing development” are expanding to build additional condominiums and apartments along the master plan’s prioritized eleven-mile stretch along the river. With the prospect of commercial facilities stated in the developer’s brochure, the city definitely would capture “economic opportunities” as indicated in the master plan. Gottlieb states: “Part of the motivation continued to be driven by the recognition that river redevelopment enhance[s] the value of river front properties, both residential and commercial, with the potential for a rapid jump in property value and a transformation through gentrification of the adjacent neighborhood” (166). Indeed, though not prominently heard, these concerns are being raised by several voices. *The Los Angeles Times* reports: “However, environmentalists and communities along the river, many of them working-class, have raised concerns that development interests will take over the process. They fear that public access and environmental concerns will be

subsumed beneath a desire to give wealthier Angelenos pleasant places to live, work and shop” (Sahagun). The sentiment expressed by the potentially affected communities contradicts the Master Plan’s grand guiding principles: “Our River presents opportunities to revitalize our neighborhoods . . . to bring nature to people, and to enhance our quality of life” (LARRMP). Would the plan connect people beyond racial and socio-economic divisions under the one banner of “our neighborhoods”? Referring to the failed 1930s Olmstead/Bartholomew greenery proposal in his article “Moral Order, Language and the Failure of the 1930 Recreation Plan for Los Angeles County,” Terence Young observes that although Americans have espoused the ideal—“the American myth of a nation where society is a spontaneous, organic community occupying a relatively homogeneous space”—in reality, the nation has had hierarchical “social-spatial divisions” (343). Nearly 100 years later, the divisions have not disappeared.

In a way, the revitalization and massive one billion dollar river restoration projects are seen as a solution to reconcile the social and spatial division with the revitalized river’s power to bind otherwise separated communities together as positively reported in the local media. The master plan includes success stories of other cities that have revitalized their respective river and implies that the city could follow their steps without considering the complexity of a megalopolis like Los Angeles. In that particular section, the plan states that “these cities have transformed their rivers into assets for their communities. These projects have invigorated tourism, created a better quality of life for residents, and helped produce vibrant economies” (LARRMP). Perceiving nature as an asset means to, in Browne and Keil’s words, “[integrate] nature into the paradigm of development by commodifications of environment” (168). There is always a potential for environmental degradation from increased “vibrancy” in tourism and an economy which will negate the idealized notion of sustainability as presented in Jabareen’s theory and communicated in Price’s aspiration for using the river in a sustainable way. Under the guise of the hyped sustainability rhetoric in an era of heightened environmental awareness, this multifaceted project could be another way for Los Angeles to capture economic opportunities, capitalizing on nature’s aesthetics.

This river restoration/revitalization project is expected to take a few decades or more for completion. We can only hope that the city along with other governmental agencies will abide by the values promoted in the master plan: “Environmental Responsibility” and “Social and Geographic Equity”—in order to bring back the lost memories of the beauty that the Los Angeles River once had.

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# Navigating Affective Space: Representations of Los Angeles and the Freeway in Helena María Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came with Them* and Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays*.

Evelyn Giebler

What does the study of a city entail? Is it mere geography and history? Can it be translated into the study of literature? Would it be a novel, a play, a poem? All? None? Can a city such as Los Angeles be studied through literature? What would such a study reveal? At the intersection of literary studies and geography studies lies a mutual plane: physical socially constructed space. And social construction of our physical space creates wide ranging implications, including the creation of an affective politics, as Nigel Thrift argues in his article “Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect.” Thus, critic Reyner Banham, in his *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, and Edward Soja, in both *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, and *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization*, champion a spatial turn within literary criticism that emphasizes the importance of analyzing physical space in relation to social space. Soja describes that “the spatial turn springs to a significant degree from a focus on urban spatial causality, the explanatory power associated with socially produced urban space” (*My LA* 176). According to Thrift, more emphasis should be placed on how physical space affects individuals, both emotionally and physically—both individually and communally. In my essay, I propose to examine the intersection of literary, urban, and affective studies by examining one of the central tropes of the Los Angeles urban landscape—the freeway. Specifically for the city of Los Angeles and LA authors Joan Didion and Helena María Viramontes, the intersection between literary studies and geography studies become manifest by examining the development and use of the Los Angeles freeway system.

One cannot imagine Los Angeles without also recognizing the freeway: a multidimensional and multi-representational mechanism essential to the functioning of

the city and its citizens. To understand the affective and social power that the idea of the freeway inspires in Angelenos, we need look no further than the massive atmosphere of panic in 2011 with the temporary closure of the Interstate 405 freeway for construction, known as “Carmageddon.” In 2011, with the freeway’s temporary closure, numerous television and radio news broadcasting stations instituted mass affective manipulation—panic and anxiety to name two—by repeatedly surmising and forecasting complete and utter chaos, stopping just shy of advertising the end of the world as Angelenos knew it. Yet at the same time these media outlets laid bare not only their ability to emotionally manipulate the population, but also the extent and nature of the community’s dependent relationship on such a system. For by the year 2011 Los Angeles had already long since adopted, embraced, and transitioned into an automobile driven community environment. To move freely in and around LA requires use and access to this system. Knowing how to drive, having access to an automobile, and having the ability to navigate around LA provides a sense of agency through freedom of movement. The word agency, here (and for the rest of this article), serves to represent and incorporate these aspects of movement and freedom. And ready and continuing participation only perpetuates use of such a system.

What lies underneath this media coverage but receives remarkably less animated attention is the multifaceted effect that the initial freeway construction had and continues to have on the use of both physical and social space in LA. By examining literary representations of the freeway and the authors and characters response to that freeway, I propose, in Thrift’s words, to explore a spatial politics of affect. How does the space of the city transform, contain, and even entrap individuals? Specifically, use of space refers to an individual’s movement in and around their city. This movement pertains to how an individual is able to navigate and the degrees of freedom involved in that movement, pertaining to both the physical landscape, and the surrounding social community. Through analyzing representations of the city of Los Angeles and the freeway in Joan Didion’s *Play it As it Lays*, and in Helena María Viramontes’s *Their Dogs Came with Them*, I will examine how the freeway becomes a powerful trope for

both freedom and entrapment, affecting the residents of the city of Los Angeles and the freeway—both literally and figuratively.

Most recently, critics have read Didion's 1970s novel in the context of feminist discourse and the genre of the Hollywood novel. They depict Didion's main character Maria as a frustrated actress, trapped by gender discrimination and listlessly pursuing her fading American Dream. Chip Rhodes in his article, *The Hollywood Novel: Gender and Lacanian Tragedy in Joan Didion's Play It As It Lays*, argues that "as one reads the brief, anecdotal chapters that mix first- and third-person narration, a main character doesn't emerge—and that is exactly the point. "Maria Wyeth' is an absence . . . there isn't any continuous subjectivity . . . or any 'meaning' to be assigned to her life . . ." (133). For Rhodes, Maria struggles mainly against a dominantly male-privileged industry in which her existence is both trivialized and marginalized. And critic K Edington's article, *The Hollywood Novel: American Dream, Apocalyptic Vision*, addresses the naturalistic forces behind the back drop of Didion's Los Angeles, reporting "destruction and impending death form a backdrop for *Play It as It Lays*: earthquakes, mud slides, storms, Santa Ann winds, brush fires, and nuclear tests replace the magnificent California landscape as setting" (67). These critics fail to address how space—specifically the Los Angeles freeway system—reflects Maria's struggle for a sense of agency through movement. For Didion, who regarded driving on the freeway as a form of "rapture," the LA freeways offer Maria freedom of movement.

For Maria freeway space is the only space where she acquires, asserts and maintains any sense of agency. The ideal purpose of the freeway, by design and implantation, is to allow commuters to move—rapidly and without obstruction. By associating Maria's search for and experience of agency with an unobstructed freeway, Didion is suggesting that, like the freeway, this search is both mobile and fluid. Although many argue that Maria is simply traveling and going "nowhere," I argue Maria's search is an existential one, in which the journey becomes just as important as the destination. Didion, who was writing her novel in the late 1960s, situates Maria in the context of both a stifling patriarchal world and a feminist revolution, in which women were exploring the nature of their identity in the context of an ever-changing world of social norms.

Although critics have tended to highlight the ways that Maria is trapped by her social and spatial environment, I think it is also important to examine Maria's search for agency against the LA landscape, in which she attempts to "keep on playing."

In her 2007 novel, Helena María Viramontes looks back on a Los Angeles that existed in an environment of antagonism and violence, a narrative of a community left scarred and mutilated by the construction of freeways slicing through their Los Angeles neighborhoods. Focusing upon the lives of several young Chicanas and Chicanos growing up in East Los Angeles, Viramontes highlights how the very decision of where to build freeways becomes an issue of social justice. In her novel, agency becomes the privilege of the few, while impoverished East LA families such as Ermila Zumaya's are forced to navigate a barely recognizable space they once referred to as home. Several critics discuss Viramontes's use of freeway imagery in terms of its social symbolism.

Dale Pattison, in his article "Trauma and the 710: The New Metropolis in Helena María Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came with Them*," discusses how trauma functions in the novel. He posits, "One of the chief concerns for Viramontes and her characters is the possibility of confronting trauma in a city under constant transformation, where construction and growth are continually erasing important sites of cultural and social production" (122). Alicia Muñoz states that Viramontes "challenges the necessity of the freeways by recognizing the contradictions inherent in their construction. She takes the well-used and positive metaphor of freeways as arteries and exposes the negative side" (28). In my essay, I explore the "contradictions inherent in their [the freeways] construction." In *Play It as It Lays*, Didion writes about her traumatized heroine Maria finding solace and agency in driving freeways during the era of its rapid growth, while Viramontes views the freeway as a source of trauma for a community, rather than a source of spiritual and psychological comfort. Thus, the literary representation of the freeway, in the context of spatial and affective theory, becomes both an expression of individual freedom and a colonizing depiction of social containment.

The historical background of the city's freeway system—its design and implementation—is one of many catalysts of the multiple and contradictory representations of Los Angeles. This history begins, like many histories, before the city

knew it was in the process of becoming—before the city of Los Angeles knew it was a city. The history of Los Angeles's freeway system and developing relationship with movement is detailed below. This growing relationship with movement, as depicted in the creation, function, and maintenance of a freeway system, vividly portrays the disjointed and haphazard appropriation, transformation, and destruction of physical space that engenders an environment of anxiety beneath the Los Angeles backdrop of each novel.

In spite of housing the world's largest interurban railway operation, as well as an urban streetcar system, Los Angeles as a city would still succumb to the automobile lifestyle. Author David Brodsky, in his book, *LA Freeway, An Appreciative Essay*, outlines the extensive freeway history of Los Angeles. Brodsky's history begins with the existing railway and streetcar systems, and how they actually helped fuel the process of suburbanization that seemed to go hand-in-hand with the automobile. Population in the cities "grew, new suburban communities were opened, and the metropolis began to take shape, not according to any plan but rather at the subdivider's discretion" (132). Electric rail companies were originally "responsible for construction and maintenance of many of the streets and highways needed to make automobile transport practical" (80-3). About ten percent of the streetcar revenues were allotted to these projects. But, full capacity and accommodation limitations of the railway and streetcar systems, resulting from rapid population growth in the city and surrounding suburban areas, strained the system.

In 1915 Los Angeles County housed roughly 750,000 residents—around 55,000 of whom owned private cars. Only three years later, in 1918, vehicle registration jumped to around 110,000 and by 1924 rose above 440,000. During the 1920s, the development of transcontinental highways brought more people and more traffic. This decade saw a population growth of more than 1.25 million people, many of whom had benefited from the new mass-produced and low-priced automobile, which became the primary mode of urban and suburban transportation in Los Angeles. This decade also saw a real estate explosion along with the creation and extension of roads and highways. Later, industrial expansion in Los Angeles would begin around 1940, and with

World War II and the opening of new oil fields, as well as increasing automobile production, a soaring population led to suburbanization in Los Angeles—making the city “a vital center of the postwar business boom” (109) around 1950. Within two decades “the population of Los Angeles and Orange Counties increased by 1.4 million in the 1940s and by 2.3 million in the 1950s, more than doubling the number of residents” (109). It seemed nearly impossible to support the transportation needs of such a rapidly growing population.

Unlike today, private parties assumed responsibility for any aspect of preparation for the automobile. Opening, paving, and widening any roads only concerned property owners or subdividers, and their own private community counsels and interests. The properties benefitting from the new roads assumed the full cost. In 1909, however, the local government “began to assume the responsibility for road construction, when a \$3.5 million bond issue was approved by the County Board of Supervisors” (84). The next year, California as a state also began to allocate funds for highway construction as well. Such street planning processes, and an additional 500 more miles of roadway built between 1904 and 1914 was ill conceived, as these roads were not designed to keep up with the continuing population growth in and around the city. In retrospect “a further benefit of early construction was that future development would conform to the structural order defined by the freeway, resulting in a better-integrated urban landscape” (130).

Los Angeles’s downtown became nearly impossible to navigate. Public regulation of traffic first began when, still in 1920, a ban on daytime parking in the downtown area prevented any parking on the streets. This ban, however, lasted only nine days after receiving marked opposition from local business workers and drivers. Three years later, the County of Los Angeles together with the newly organized Traffic Commission of the City hired a few renowned city planners to address the traffic problems. Their report entailed a massive plan and vision for the development of the city—not just a street map. These planners attempted to address the major developing metropolitan space before the space solidified, in hopes of ensuring a smooth transition with detailed steps. Their goal was to “create order in a street layout that was perceived as uncoordinated and chaotic” (85).

Attempting to alleviate the chaos, city planners instituted a systematic definition and study of traffic in general. This meant differentiating roads based on function and different types of traffic and automobiles, resulting in “three basic classes: major thoroughfares, parkways and boulevards, and minor streets.” The first category would continue to “dominate traffic plans” but distinctions between the first and second categories largely consisted in [the parkways and boulevards having] “scenic and pleasure values” (87). The use of these roads would be limited to passenger vehicles. Many of these proposed parkways, thoroughfares—the city plan in general, has never been fully completed.

The state legislature, in 1947, passed a compromise measure known as “the Collier-Burns Highway Act, [which] was designed to bring in new revenues for extensive highway construction by increasing the state gas tax and introducing several new highway-related taxes to be collected by the state, all of which were to be paid into a special highway tax fund” (115). This act fueled freeway building and provided the resources to do it. During this, and the next decade, the major freeway system that we are currently familiar with was born and the first complete freeway, named Arroyo Seco (which began in 1938) and an extension, was finally completed in 1953. Later, in 1956 with the launch of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, “the San Diego, Golden State, Santa Monica, San Bernardino, Foothill, and San Gabriel River freeways were all built under the program” (116). Some previously established highway routes were “adopted piecemeal as freeways by the California Highway Commission . . . a semi-independent appointed body . . . empowered to select specific routes for state highways” (119), and roughly 12,000 miles of highways were reclassified as state freeways.

Cent by cent, gas taxes increased in order to fund the advancing freeway system. Major construction on freeways began in the 1950s, with emphasis placed on routes going downtown. By the 1960s, those main routes were finished but in 1963 the gas tax rose to seven cents, to further funding. Also during the 1960s, additional expenses “of aesthetic landscaping and environmental protection, plus higher

compensation to displaced homeowners and businesses, all aimed at appeasing opposition, began to escalate construction costs” (120).

Thus began the decline of the freeway era. Some freeway plans met with community opposition, and any attempt to increase taxes for revenues were defeated. All that remains of the former freeway and highway departments is Caltrans: the California Department of Transportation, whose “basic purpose is to keep the existing system running” (120). Nearly two hundred miles of the original master freeway plan may never be built, and only about thirty miles have any chance of being approved. The miles that have been built, according to Brodsky, “will retain their central place in Los Angeles . . . [for] the freeway’s dominance in both the economic and the psychological geography can only increase” (140).

The dramatic and unforeseen consequences of freeway construction, highlighted above, rest in the ‘psychological geography’ that Brodsky mentions at the close of his study. Although Brodsky does not fully address the psychology of the affective nature of space, it is impossible to ignore the ramifications of building and constructing urban spaces in regard to this psychology. In his *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, Banham asks, “How then to bridge this gap of comparability. One can most properly begin by learning the local language; and the language of design, architecture, and urbanism in Los Angeles is the language of movement” (Banham, 5). The language of movement portrayed in Joan Didion’s and Helena María Viramontes’s novels articulates agency, on the one hand, and containment, on the other.

Joan Didion, in her novel *Play It As It Lays*, addresses the psychology of geography as well by positioning the novel’s characters as part of the larger social and political environment of 1960s Los Angeles. Maria is a disenchanted and out of work actress struggling to establish her identity and agency against the backdrop of a patriarchal society, shifting under the pressure of a growing feminist movement. Both Rhodes and Edington view Maria as dominated by the men in her life and caught in the illusive myth of Hollywood and the American Dream. Although I see Maria as limited by her social and economic environment, I agree that Didion’s division of the freeway reframes Maria’s deterministic end; she is not doomed to madness and death. A

transplant to Los Angeles, Maria is constantly moving: originally from Reno, Nevada, she moves to Silver Wells, then to New York to further her acting career, and, then after the death of her parents, to Los Angeles, where she meets Carter Lang, her future husband. Although she does have one main residence, a home, Maria never truly feels settled. She constantly travels back and forth between her Los Angeles home, an apartment she rents, Las Vegas, and the homes of friends and random lovers. At a party “in May she left not with the choreographer who had brought her but with an actor she had never before met” (152). These movements portray Maria as mobile, but a woman without direction. The most powerful sense of agency that Maria experiences is when she is driving on the freeway:

She dressed every morning with a greater sense of purpose than she had felt in some time, a cotton skirt, a jersey, sandals she could kick off when she wanted the touch of the accelerator. . . . [I]t was essential (to pause was to throw herself into unspeakable peril) that she be on the freeway by ten o'clock. Not somewhere on Hollywood Boulevard . . . but actually on the freeway. If she was not she lost the day's rhythm, its precariously imposed momentum. Once she was on the freeway and had maneuvered her way to a fast lane she turned on the radio at high volume as she drove. She drove the San Diego to the Harbor, the Harbor up to the Hollywood, the Hollywood to the Golden State, the Santa Monica, the Santa Ana, the Pasadena, the Ventura. She drove it as a riverman runs a river, every day more attuned to its currents, its deceptions, and just as a riverman feels the pull of the rapids in the lull between sleeping and waking, so Maria lay at night in the still of Beverly Hills and saw the great signs soar overhead at seventy miles an hour, *Normandie*  $\frac{1}{4}$  *Vermont*  $\frac{3}{4}$  *Harbor Fwy* I. Again and again she returned to an intricate stretch just south of the interchange where successful passage from the Hollywood onto the Harbor required a diagonal move across four lanes of traffic. On the afternoon she finally did it without once braking or losing the beat on the radio she was exhilarated, and that night slept dreamlessly. (15-16)

Navigating and controlling her own vehicle, Maria has ostensible control over everything in a temporary, contained environment. She controls the radio, the speed, and the direction of the car, whether or not she even wears shoes while driving. But most importantly, mastering the skills involved in freeway driving offers Maria the most acute sense of agency. As Banham points out, for Maria, like many Angelenos, “the actual experience of driving on the freeways prints itself deeply on the conscious mind and unthinking reflexes. As you acquire the special skills involved, the Los Angeles freeways become a special way of being alive” (196).

Yet, even though she expresses agency through her movements between spaces, Maria maintains little agency in other aspects of her life. Her waning career, forced abortion, and ultimate institutionalization all demonstrate major instances where Maria is able to express very little individual will. Carter, Maria’s ex-husband and the father of their child Kate, forces Maria into having an abortion. When Maria resists, “I’m not sure I want to do that,” Carter threatens her, “All right, don’t do it. Go ahead and have this kid . . . and I’ll take Kate” (54). Maria may appear to have agency, but her only actual option is to do what Carter demands. Maria does not want to give up her daughter Kate and so she only has one option.

Through these seemingly contradictory representations of female agency, Didion addresses one of the social-political struggles of 1960s Los Angeles: the shifting roles and gender equality that women confronted. In this cultural moment, Didion captures not only a woman, but also a society in crisis. In a world that offers her little meaning, Maria, part of a 1960s lost generation, looks to the order and freedom of the freeway as a means of attaining a “secular communion.” Banham recalls his experience witnessing a communal aspect freeway driving:

As the car in front turned down the off-ramp of the San Diego freeway, the girl beside the driver pulled down . . . the mirror . . . to tidy her hair. Only when I had seen a couple more incidents of the same kind did I catch their import: that coming off the freeway is coming in from outdoors . . . the] journey in Los Angeles does not end so much at the door of one’s destination as at the off-ramp of the freeway. (195)

When Maria exits the freeway she relinquishes her agency. Movement, for Didion, represents the nature of a continuous battle for female agency. Positioning Maria as acquiring agency while driving on the freeway, even if the agency and the driving is temporary, signifies the need for not only Maria's agency and movement, but also a larger movement that will garner greater social agency for women collectively. By situating Maria in a psychological institution at the close of the novel, Didion portrays institutions and socially oppressive norms as very real obstacles for Maria and other women. Didion does warn her readers that Maria must still assert her will even in the space of the automobile, for tellingly Maria's mother commits suicide through a car accident. Maria wants a different fate for herself and Kate. At the end of the novel, motivated by her lover for her daughter—the next generation—Maria is committed to “keep on playing,” creating meaning out of her existential mobility. As Banham states, “As you acquire the special skills involved, the Los Angeles freeways become a special way of being alive” (196).

Viramontes, in her novel *Their Dogs Came With Them*, also addresses the psychological geography that Brodsky only briefly mentions. Like Didion, Viramontes also uses freeway imagery and politically charged social environments to tell her story of Los Angeles. In this novel the freeway, however, divides a once communal urban space, creating feelings of fracture, loss, fear, anger and violence. Writing in 2007, Viramontes reflects on the urban space of East Los Angeles during the devastating construction of multiple freeways through a community. Her novel follows several families, the Zumaya family, Tranquilina and her mother and father, as well as Turtle and her brother. The opening of the novel begins by describing and animating the impending fear of freeway construction: “The earthmovers, Grandmother Zumaya had called them; the bulldozers had started from very far away and slowly arrived on First Street, their muzzles like sharpened metal teeth making way for the freeway” (6). The freeway is posed in forward motion, while halting the movement of the community—and nothing can stop its arrival.

Once arrived, the freeways disrupt and fracture the space. Tranquilina and her mother experience the existence of the freeway not as Didion's symbol of agency, but

as a spatial and communal impediment. The Highway Commission instead appropriated the space and community in East LA, destroying and then repurposing the land, making it unfamiliar and fracturing any sense of community rooted in the urban space:

The two women struggled through the rain in a maze of unfamiliar streets. Whole residential blocks had been gutted since their departure, and they soon discovered that Kern Street abruptly dead-ended, forcing them to retrace their trail. The streets Mama remembered had once connected to other arteries of the city, rolling up and down hills, and in and out of neighborhoods where neighbors of different nationalities intersected with one another. To the west, La Pelota Panaderia on Soto Street crossed Canter's Koshers Deli on Brooklyn Avenue, which crossed Pol's Chinese Kitchen on Pacific Boulevard to the east. But now the freeways amputated the streets into stumped dead ends, and the lives of the neighbors itched like phantom limbs in Mama's memory: la Senora Ybarra's tobacco smell and deep raspy voice; the Gomez father's garden of tomatoes; Eugenio's pennies taped on envelopes for their ministry; Old Refugia, who had two goats living in her cluttered backyard and who took the goats to graze at the edge of the Chinese cemetery before opening hours. (32-33)

The freeways have violently fractured, diminished, and restricted movement through city space, but more than that, they have fractured Tranquilina's and her mother's consciousness of space and the interaction between multiple nationalities that comprise the entire community. The result is disconnection from space, restricted agency, and ultimately violence.

The close of the novel ends with extreme violence, as Ermila Zumaya's cousin Nacho is ruthlessly murdered by a fellow community member, Turtle. Violence between community members demonstrates the core of Viramontes question: "Why? the woman asked Turtle, and kept asking" (324). The freeway becomes a symbol for a larger social injustice that fosters a sense of helplessness and frustration that ultimately materializes as violence between members of the community. Continuing this violence is tragic, senseless, and only leaves Viramontes's question palpably unanswered: "why? Turtle

forgot why. Turtle didn't know why. She didn't make the rules. Why? . . . Why? Go ask another" (324). Unless violence, both in the novel and in the urban community of LA, ends there will always be "another." Amid such violence and struggle, Viramontes suggests that the true victims of freeway construction are the members of a marginalized community, forced to live under a system that denies them access to freedom and movement. Except for Tranquilina, "no one, not the sharp shooters, the cabdrivers . . . not one of them, in all their glorious hallucinatory gawking, knew who the victims were, who the perpetrators were" (325). Tranquilina, who represents a spiritual center in Viramontes's novel, desires to unify and heal a fractured community, and she realizes that community must first seek empowerment and agency. Yelling at the authorities, she cries, "We're not dogs," and she disobeys their demands, refusing to yield—saying "no" to an oppressive hegemony that includes both the police, unjust laws, and even the city planning commission that dictated the construction of the freeways through East LA. For Viramontes, this process begins by ending violence within the community and through reclaiming and re-envisioning a space of support and nonviolence.

Joan Didion and Helena María Viramontes contextualize and humanize the complex and significant relationship between space, constructed space, community, community members, movement and agency. Edward Soja in his *Thirdspace*, emphasizes the critical nature of analyzing all perceptions of space. Urban space, for Banham, directly affects our self-perception in relation to our space, which in turn affects how we move through and inhabit physical urban space. For Soja, urban space is a socially constructed environment. Soja has envisioned Los Angeles in multiple ways, from a global cosmopolis to a hyperreal simcity, from a carcereal fortified city to a city of increasing social injustice. He poses the question "What, then, is *critical* spatial thinking?" (*My LA* 175). And to address this question, he derived three methodologies with which space may be reimagined:

First as empirically defined perceived space, which emphasized "things in space," . . . conceived space or representations of space, which emphasized thoughts about space, ideologies and imageries; and finally

the most unconventional and creative notion of *lived space*, which combine[s] the previous two spaces but contained much more that is never completely knowable. (*My LA* 177)

Didion and Viramontes embody the combination of these three consciousnesses in their novels, as readers are subjected to all aspects of the characters' interactions in the space of Los Angeles. For Soja, and evident in Didion's and Viramontes's novels, thirdspace is a harrowing attempt at a boundary-less study between geography studies and literary studies:

*Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. Anything which fragments Thirdspace into separate specialized knowledges or exclusive domains . . . destroys its meaning and openness. (*Thirdspace* 57)

Yet Soja posits "from a *Thirdspace* perspective, no space is completely knowable; there is always something that is hidden, beyond any analytical point of view, shrouded in impenetrable mystery" (*My LA* 177). For Soja, a thirdspace analyses may appropriately end by asking another question. Through *My Los Angeles*, Soja attempts to personalize and identify sources of the struggles, social and political, that urban communities are facing. For Didion and Viramontes, this question involves how social politics affects space.

Nigel Thrift, in his article "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect," addresses this question by identifying the human capacity for affect as a new and unrecognized source of exploration. He posits that affect, for urban landscapes, are a "vital element of cities" (57). Part of the essential nature of affect, importantly, has also become political. As proof Thrift takes for example the "marshaling of aggression through various forms of military trainings such as drill . . . [which] may appear to many to be an extreme example"; he, however, thinks, "it is illustrative of a tendency towards the greater and greater engineering of affect" (64). Little concrete attention to this

politics has been addressed, Thrift states, in part because of the divide between the institutions of science and humanities. For too long this divide has persisted, resulting in an unrecognized form of exploitation, but now these two “‘traditions’ have become mixed up, most specially in experiments in thinking about the politics of encountering the spaces of cities which we are only at the start of laying out and working with” (75). Now more than ever, a topography and geography of urban landscapes should be mapped and analyzed by using affective capacity as a critical point of intersection.

Thrift admits that recognizing a relationship between space and affect is not new and rather obvious. He positions himself in a conversation between urban studies and literary affect theory. Within theories of affect he sees major critical debates vacillate between affect as simply another term for emotion, or affect as defined by psychoanalytic or psychobiological terms. Debate also continues as to where those emotions come from and what or whom they can affect. Thrift sees in these multi-sided and numerous arguments, that the turn to affect still demands attention. The turn to spatial inquiry, like the affective turn, signals an interest in the dialectics of embodiment. In combining the two studies, Thrift envisions space as both physical and mental, in that a person must occupy and collectively navigate both physical space and a mental space simultaneously. For Thrift, urban studies must include recognition of affective space as constituting the fundamental operations of urban space:

Affect has always, of course, been a constant of urban experience, now affect is more and more likely to be actively engineered with the result that it is becoming something more akin to the networks of pipes and cables that are of such importance in providing the basic mechanics and root textures of urban life. (58)

The ability to manipulate the affective environment of urban space occurs through networks similar to the systems of pipes and cables for a city. Among the affects that Didion and Viramontes address are agency and entrapment. Their novels demonstrate the circular nature of the affective environment. Space is built—constructed upon, which in turn creates affects within an individual in regard to the space, which further changes the social-political environment.

The history and development of Los Angeles's freeway system created an environment with paradoxical implications. For some Angelenos this topographical landscape engendered violence and entrapment, while for others, the freeways promoted agency and movement. For authors such as Viramontes and Didion, and the urban landscape of Los Angeles, these processes of movement beg for attention. Viramontes, on the one hand, demonstrates that the freeway, although designed for movement, actually impedes movement and devastates the functioning of community and communal collective behavior. Didion, on the other hand, focuses on the metaphorical movement both of the physical body and of senses of agency, along these channels. It is clear that LA will continue to provide an affective environment of movement. By examining movement as it pertains to real physical urban space that is humanized and portrayed through literary genres we may better form questions to address the nature of a new affective politics and how that politics functions in an urban community.

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# Waste Management in La-la Land: An Analysis of the Loaded Words Surrounding Sanitation in the City of Angels

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Reminiscing about Los Angeles's past might make one conjure up idyllic images of sunshine, beaches, palm tree-lined streets, celebrities in sunglasses and sunhats, and other cinema-like scenes for which the county is known. And yet, Los Angeles is a microcosm that has a complex and conflicted history, and when we use a proverbial magnifying glass to examine this city, we discover details and secrets about the community that has been rapidly growing since 1850, when it was incorporated as a municipality of California. There are innumerable factors that keep a city productive and functioning, and not least of all is something we'd rather ignore: the management of waste and trash. According to various city websites<sup>1</sup>, LA seems to have this management of waste all under control in its current state. Trash is collected and dealt with, sewage is treated and disposed of, storm drains carry water to the ocean (and preferably not other hazardous materials), and there are numerous recycling programs. This well-oiled machine of waste management in LA County went through a process that took many decades to reform and perfect, with the guidance and efforts of many citizens and city planners. It's not presumptuous to assume that many LA residents are unfamiliar with the county's history surrounding waste management and sanitation, either because it's something they'd rather not think about, or because the system seems function smoothly and, therefore, doesn't require their attention. The latter is something we take for granted, as early LA residents were often plagued by the faulty sewer or sanitation systems or in some cases, the lack thereof. When famous author and philosopher Aldous Huxley toured an LA beach in the early 1900s<sup>2</sup>, the scene he and his friends found was a far cry from what we experience today. For one, he describes the beach as free from children and sunbathers, a fact that Huxley feels to be

a “blissful surprise!” (149). But this idyllic scene soon turns sour by his sudden realization:

At our feet, and as far as the eye could reach in all directions, the sand was covered in small whitish objects, like dead caterpillars. Recognition dawned. The dead caterpillars were made of rubber and had once been contraceptives. . . . But we were in California, not the Lake District. The scale was American, the figures astronomical. Ten million saw I at a glance. Ten million emblems and mementos of Modern Love. (149-50)

It didn't take long before Huxley and his companions discovered a smell that explained the strange contents on the beach: “Offshore from this noble beach was the outfall through which Los Angeles discharged, raw and untreated, the contents of its sewers” (150). These excerpts, from Huxley's 1952 essay “Hyperion to a Satyr,” induct us not only to the changing nature of waste and sanitation within LA County, but also to the discussion of filth and dirt that often arises with the topic. As we shall see, Huxley's ideas offer readers a springboard on the topic of waste and dirt. While this topic led Huxley to write about the differing historical notions of dirt, the essay brings us closer to discovering the specific connotations and implications behind the language of waste management in Los Angeles.

As a physical and social body, Los Angeles is extremely complex, and not only for the fact that it stretches across 4,000 square miles and includes over nine million residents<sup>3</sup>. Its literal and figurative constructions are varied and convoluted. The physical aspects of removing waste has included building sewers, transporting trash, and instituting recycling. As waste management changed over the decades, LA was also busy building a reputation as a place of opportunity and wealth, while simultaneously having impoverished areas like Skid Row. It has been lovingly referred to as The City of Angels, but has also been called La-la Land<sup>4</sup> and HeLLA. La-la Land in particular creates the notion that residents, corporations or businesses, and tourists of LA have their head in the clouds. In fact, in 2011 the *Oxford English Dictionary* directly linked the phrase with LA: with capital letters the word refers to Los Angeles, and frequently has overtones of a “state of being out of touch with reality; a (notional) place

characterized by blissful unawareness, self-absorption, fantasy, etc.” (oed.com). All too often the residents of LA have chosen to be unaware about the story of waste control within LA county—that is, until a specific concern assaults their senses. My brief review of the evolution of waste management will touch on this fact and detail the different phases of waste management that Los Angeles has gone through. I will then go on to analyze the language that frames the implementation of waste management practices in the city, some of the newspaper headlines that have led up to these changes, and the signs that remind and reprimand citizens after certain laws have been passed. All of these factors make the discussion of waste digestible and palatable to residents, who are ultimately the ones in charge of approving city funding and actions. I argue that by using the language of purity, fear or danger, as well as the discourse of education and science, LA impels its residents to be responsible for the waste they leave behind.

In practice, making residents deal with their trash and bodily waste proves to be a formidable challenge. There are numerous reasons for why this may be, such as personal disgust or laziness, and the reasons vary from person to person. But in the literature of waste management, whether tangible and technical or theoretical in nature, we see a strong human reaction of aversion to waste. The desire to ignore what is right before us because of its unsavory nature has been discussed by scholars and theorists for centuries, and more recently has been given a specific name: the abject. Julia Kristeva is perhaps the most well-known modern critic of the concept of the abject, and in her 1980 work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva asserts that the abject is a subversive force: "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (15). According to Dino Felluga, the abject "refers to the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other." This reaction can be caused by viewing extreme or subtle things, like an injury or a corpse, like shit or sewage, or even the "skin that forms on the surface of warm milk" (Felluga). Being confronted with our own waste breaks down the separation we like to keep from it, and challenges the assumption that we as individuals

are clean and healthy, infallible and invulnerable, living and not dying. Author Pamela K. Gilbert argues that the notion of filth produced by the human body “always evokes death,” which explains our severe reaction to it (qtd. in Cohen 82). While this sentiment is reductive and doesn't allow room for simple disgust unrelated to death, it does hold merit in the sphere of waste management. For example, when food rots and becomes inedible, it is undergoing a change similar to death. When humans “use the facilities,” the waste produced can lead to sickness or death if not properly purged. And we cannot escape the fact that a landfill represents a kind of grave, in the sense that waste is buried with the intention of being entombed forever. Trash and waste has the power to horrify people or subconsciously evoke thoughts of death; therefore, a city must work hard to get residents to confront their waste and deal with it.

We can understand why humans react negatively to dirt and filth, but we should also address how and why we deal with them despite our feelings of abjection. The work of author and social anthropologist Mary Douglas sheds a great deal of light on this inquiry. Her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* situates the idea of dirt and filth within the context of society and its need for classifications. As a structuralist, Douglas believes that a concept must be understood in relation to the larger scheme of things, and this provides an appropriate backdrop for viewing waste management in LA. After all, the change and growth of a more effective waste management system is all about the structuring and restructuring of landscapes and mindsets, and the connections in between. In her introduction, Douglas discusses primitive cultures and their ideas of hygiene and dirt, and asserts that our concepts of purity must be informed in part by the study of comparative religions. While much of the book discusses bodily pollution and defilement<sup>5</sup>, her insight is easily applied to urban and environmental pollution, and the concept of filth in general. She explains, “As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder . . . Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment” (2). In the last one hundred years alone, LA County's ideals about cleanliness and filth have changed, and very different ideas about appropriate and inappropriate ways of dealing with waste have

existed. We can therefore see waste management as not just a reaction to filth that is inherently dangerous and disease-causing, but also a way to create order in a disorganized mass of people. Kristeva's ideas about the abject also overlap into this idea of order and organization: it “represents the threat that meaning is breaking down . . . The abject has to do with 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules’” (Felluga). Since filth disrupts our notions of order, we must work hard to reestablish a system of control—the result is an elaborate waste management system. Douglas believes that “ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience” (4). Waste management, then, has the larger task of imposing a system on Los Angeles, which would otherwise be an “untidy experience.” More specifically, Douglas's words directly relate to the intricate aspects of waste management. As residents, we must *separate* our trash between yard waste, recycling, and regular trash. We *purify* our homes and our streets from sewage and refuse that would otherwise remain in our backyards or homes. All items that can be recycled are *demarcated* by special codes and signs so that we know how to deal with them. And finally, residents are punished if they do not adhere to the laws of the county or state. Residents are not only punished legally, but may also be considered a pariah if they refuse to deal with waste in a socially acceptable manner. In this case, the human desire to uphold the social norm (and shun those who do not) further facilitates the existence and efficacy of waste management in a city.

But the social norm has never been a static idea, and both Douglas and Huxley discuss how notions of dirt and cleanliness have changed over time. Huxley explains that, during the Middle Ages, dirt “seemed natural and proper,” and “in fact was everywhere” (154). As was commonly the mindset of Christian societies, humans were considered filthy by nature and born into sin, and so attempting to be clean would almost be blasphemous (Huxley 153). In modern society we consider dirt to be an unnatural problem or at least a flaw that must be remedied, but this has not always been the case. Douglas sees this shift and connects it to religion and science: “There are two notable differences between our contemporary European ideas of defilement and those,

say, of primitive cultures. One is that dirt avoidance for us is a matter of hygiene or aesthetics and is not related to our religion. . . . The second difference is that our idea of dirt is dominated by the knowledge of pathogenic organisms” (35). This excerpt sheds light on the history of sanitation in Los Angeles and other modern cities. In the past, sewage was drained into ditches or holes and often lingered in the street. But as our scientific understanding of diseases grew, we came to recognize that proper sanitation must be implemented for our own safety. Thanks to scientific knowledge and modern facilities like waste treatment plants, humans can now rise above notions of inherited filth, whether they be religious or scientific in nature.

Before I address the historical specifics of trash and sanitation in LA, I want to mention some of its predecessors and some of the factors that make the city unique. Waste management is, of course, not exclusive to LA County. By the time the city had a need for better sewers and trash removal, there were other major cities that had been dealing with waste management for decades, and these cities helped set a precedence for LA. In the United States, New York was one of these cities, with major reforms in street clean up and sewers beginning in the 1890s (Humes 37). Paris and London were building elaborate sewer systems by the 1840s, although both began building sewers long before that period (Sklar 15). Predating both of these cities, Rome constructed the first sewer systems, dating back to 500 B.C. (Sklar 14). Despite this available wealth of knowledge, Los Angeles took years to implement and then perfect a sewer system and waste management solution (it wasn't until the 1950s that the faulty sewer system was fixed). There are several factors that complicated the implementation of waste management: specifically, LA's rapid growth, its extensive urban sprawl, its location along the Pacific Ocean, and its various environmental problems (like drought, flash floods, and earthquakes). The population of LA doubled between 1930 and 1960, from one million to over two million residents (dof.ca.gov). For any city to deal with this influx of humans and their waste would be a challenge. Additionally, LA is noticeably spread out and disjointed. This is partially due to extensive farm lands in the county being converted into housing developments over the years. New York City has a much larger population, but their streets and buildings are right on top of each other, facilitating

sewer connections that are closer and easier to manage. LA is quite the opposite; over the years, sewer systems had to be extended miles to link up different communities, and then the city had to find somewhere to deposit the waste. It is common that cities near bodies of water dump their sewage into them. While land-locked cities more often use processed sewage for fertilizer or irrigation, cities like LA, Chicago, and Cleveland have dumped their waste into rivers, lakes, and oceans in the hope that currents will whisk waste away. For decades, the Thames River in London was rendered undrinkable and an assault on the senses due to the untreated waste dumped into it. LA's solution was to utilize the LA River for a short time; after that, waste was dumped directly into the Pacific Ocean. The ocean is one geographical factor that influences the city's waste management, and other environmental factors play a role as well. While dry weather poses its own set of problems, in the past, winter-time flash floods often overwhelmed drains and pipes. And while it is not often mentioned in history books, the numerous earthquakes in Southern California certainly affect sewer pipes, causing damages and breaks in the lines. In the midst of these factors that caused ongoing concerns about the city's filth, LA has been known to the world as the glamorous location of Tinseltown. New residents flooded the city while tourists wished they were residents, all while LA struggled to deal with their consumer trash, food remnants, and bodily waste. The following explains this history and addresses the question—how do we see fear and loathing (and often times their opposites) transposed onto the language of waste management?

Since there have been many different phases of waste management in Los Angeles County, I find it easiest to address each shift in turn, while simultaneously analyzing the language that surrounds the particular change. In all, there are seven major shifts in the treatment of waste in LA, which I address as follows: cesspools, early sewers, Hyperion and treatment, incinerators, landfills, environmentalism and recycling, and zero waste. These span almost 150 years of history, as cesspools were primarily used in the late 1800s, while the concept of zero waste is still being discussed and addressed today in 2015. The following details the history of these different phases, and considers the language used to affect change along the way.

### **Dealing with Bodily Waste in the Early Years: Cesspools and Sewage Pipes**

The first two phases of waste management in LA are closely related, as they often existed simultaneously, and so I address them together. In general, sewage had been plaguing the city since it was a small village with only sixteen hundred residents (Sklar 19). Anna Sklar's book *Brown Acres* details the years between 1850 and 2008, and describes how LA residents reluctantly but eventually implemented better methods to deal with what happens after we flush our toilets. Her book's subtitle, "An Intimate History of the Los Angeles Sewers," gently reminds and teases readers that their waste is something they'd rather not discuss. On one level, her book is an "intimate history" because it describes in detail the troubles of the "privy" that residents and city officials had to endure before they had good sewer systems. But her book is also "intimate" because it deals with the waste that occurs behind closed and locked doors. It is private and personal, and even in today's world of exposés and the acceptance of individuals who flaunt a tell-all lifestyle, our waste is something that most people are reluctant to discuss.

Late in the nineteenth century, waste from homes was often drained into cesspools or septic tanks, and occasionally siphoned into ditches or the LA River. The latter two methods were not seen as proper or advantageous specifically because they made sickness and foul odors more common. Returning bodily waste to the earth seems natural and simple, especially when it's being buried underground and out of sight, which is why so many homes used cesspools for so long. Unfortunately, even well-made cesspools often emanated bad smells, and occasionally they leaked and contaminated water supplies. Other methods were desired to rid communities of bodily waste, not first of which were sewer pipes. Many planners and citizens preferred that waste be diverted to farms for irrigation and fertilizer, as this seemed like a more resourceful and natural method. In fact, an 1888 guidebook for Southern California "cast a rosy glow on the city's sewage disposal" and explained that the sewage is taken to orchards, gardens, or vineyards where it is "plowed under and thus covered in earth, the best-known disinfectant" (29). In this excerpt we see a threefold desire for waste

management that reflected sentiments of the time—to bury and ignore, to repurpose, and to purify. Tilling waste into soil fulfills our desire to bury our filth, so we are able to forget it ever existed. But this act also repurposes our waste into something useful and better—fertilizer that nurtures the crops we eat that in turn help us thrive. Lastly, the act of returning waste to the soil disinfects it, and so ultimately our waste is rendered pure and useful, while still being conveniently hidden or transformed. The method of using wastewater for crop irrigation makes sense for a region that is often plagued by drought, but it proved to be an overly simplistic remedy that never became truly popular. Considering what we now know about contamination and diseases, we're probably better off not using this method. Initially, cesspools and farm irrigation seemed like natural solutions for the abundance of LA's waste, but these remedies couldn't accommodate the growing city.

While some sewers pipes did exist, storm drains were more common in the city, although these were easily overloaded during rainstorms in the winter. In 1886 the city council requested a “combined sewage outfall,” which would drain storm water and sewage directly into the ocean (Sklar 24). The word *outfall* would be used for decades to describe the sewage that was dumped untreated into the Pacific Ocean, and the use of this word reveals the attempt to sanitize the name and real nature of what sewage pipes contain. This solution was not a popular one, as people feared that beaches would be contaminated; it was, however, the best solution that could be found at the time. Unfortunately, when sewer pipes were first built, they were constructed of wood and brick that had very short lives before becoming damaged and leaking into streets. This wasn't the only problem—*Brown Acres* reveals the ongoing tug-of-war battle between LA residents who could not be bothered by waste management and the city officials who so desperately tried to create a better system. Because residents refused to spend money on sewer pipes and treatment plants, LA County had to get creative. What resulted were public notifications like signs, newspaper articles, and even a movie.

In the early twentieth century, dealing with waste became a public and social issue, and people were motivated to act to avoid health related and fiscal

consequences. LA residents needed to be prodded to take responsibility for their own waste, whether that meant voting for funding, or more personal responsibilities like cleaning up litter. These pleas often came in the form of newspaper articles or public postings, and early sewage was so problematic that the city even felt the need to make a film. *Brown Acres* mentions this gem called “The Film with an Odor” which was produced by the motion picture industry in an attempt to get Angelenos to vote for “a new outfall and treatment plant” (Sklar 64). Sadly, this film from 1922 does not seem to exist any longer, but an advertisement for it from the *Holly Leaves* magazine does. The creation of this film, which showed images of sewage spilling onto streets, forever links Hollywood to the waste created by its residents. One could even say, whether in reference to movies containing lewd topics or that of waste management, all manner of *filth* comes out of Hollywood.

The magazine advertisement for “The Film with an Odor” is perhaps the best example of how differing concepts of purity and disease converge in the literature of waste management. The film attempted to get Angelenos to vote for sewer funding, and played in local theaters and even at the Hollywood Bowl. The following is an excerpt of what was printed on a full-page ad of the magazine:

### **Health vs. Dollars**

Authorities fear epidemic from dangerous sewage condition.

**New Sewage Disposal Plan** approved by world's most expert sanitary authorities and engineers.

**Vote “YES”**

On the \$12,000,000 Bond Issue at  
PRIMARY ELECTION, AUG. 29

Plan for sewage disposal provides for future growth of city.

Los Angeles has made ample provisions for water, power and transportation.

### **Why Not for Sewage?**

Sewage runs KNEE DEEP in some CITY STREETS in winter

The city's health and prosperity are at stake

**Vote “YES”**

See that film—

**“The Film With an Odor”**

It exposes the terrible menace. It explains the plan. It's showing at local theaters.

*New Sewage Disposal Plan Is a City-Wide Project*

Indorsed and supported by—

The Community Development Association . . .

Many other organizations know the danger must be conquered

**Vote “YES”**

AT PRIMARY ELECTION, AUG 29

**SAVE LOS ANGELES**

This ad makes use of a large bold font to emphasize what was most important for residents to notice and remember. Immediately we see that *health* should take precedence over money—this was the main issue, as residents were reluctant to vote for fear of an increase in taxes. The ad then details specifically what will be done, and asks why LA has neglected dealing with its sewage. Presumably, this question makes residents feel guilt for their ignorance in the past, or at least makes them question why something was not done sooner. The ad also instills fear into residents with visuals like sewage running “knee deep” in the streets, which is a “terrible menace.” Finally, the ad attempts to uplift residents, directly implying that their actions to vote “yes” can “save Los Angeles.” With this implication, residents can become at least a socially conscious community, and individually, a savior or hero figure. In this ad, representatives of LA used a variety of strategies—educating and informing its audience, threatening the reader with the danger of disease, and finally foregrounding uplifting imagery to compel residents to vote. Thanks to their efforts the Bond was passed, but it would take many similar campaigns to motivate taxpayers to spend their money on sanitation in the future.

Very often, the officials imply that if the public does not tend to its waste, they must bear the dangerous consequence: the literal threat of disease. Because danger is a concept that is often tied to a sense of timeliness or immediacy, the signs that imply danger or fear are often simple and short, in order to better facilitate comprehension and

action. Using a variety of media—such as newspapers, billboards or bus stop advertisements, and posted signs—officials often communicated a heightened sense of danger to control the community’s behavior. While some newspaper headlines and government sign postings are simply informational, there are many others that invoke threat by their words or implications. In the 1940s and 1950s when sewage was spilling onto beaches, the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* ran articles entitled “SEWER SCOURGE MAY CLOSE CITY BEACHES” and “Beach Quarantine Extended Into Santa Monica City Area” (*Los Angeles Times Archives*<sup>6</sup>). At the time, government-issued signs were posted on beaches, reading:

CAUTION  
This Water is RAW SEWAGE  
and DANGEROUS To Health  
STAY AWAY FROM SAME  
AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

and also:

DANGER  
IT IS UNLAWFUL TO  
SWIM OR BATHE IN THESE SEWAGE  
CONTAMINATED WATERS  
BY ORDER OF HEALTH COMM. (Sklar 164-165)

Note the use of capital letters in the first sign that emphasize the most important aspects of the message. Both signs use the word danger (or *dangerous*) in an attempt to scare potential beach-goers away. Even when residents are not in immediate danger of disease, government postings reveal what should or should not be done about waste. On many open country roads in the county, the government posts “No dumping” signs in an attempt to curb littering. Because landfills charge people to deposit waste in them, many people, ignoring their social responsibility, leave trash on the sides of the road. Near drains and manhole covers can be seen the reminders that these pipes lead to the ocean.



*Photo courtesy of Jessica Grosh*

Some of these paintings include pictures of dolphins, but in this particular image we see the skeleton of a fish, implying their death if we dump hazardous waste into drains. These signs serve not only as reminders that our actions have long term effects on the environment, but in some cases warn us that legal action can be taken against us if we dispose of waste improperly. Another example are signs on LA highways that warn about littering fines, which can range from \$100 to \$1000. Because people may throw trash out of their car windows, legal and monetary threat is necessary to motivate them to responsibly deal with their trash.

### **Treatment of Waste: The Hyperion Plant**

While the extensive sewers that were being built across Los Angeles relieved many local and county-wide waste issues, a new problem was becoming apparent. Angelenos were dumping raw sewage into the ocean, making beaches odoriferous and sometimes unusable. Some people regarded this action as acceptable practice, while others felt that it might still be done without any consequences. One engineering expert urged that sewage simply be released at high tide because “foul waters are taken out by the receding tide and so thoroughly dispersed and diluted, that they soon become unnoticeable” (Sklar 28). But city planners had no intention (nor the ability) to hold back

waste to be released only at certain times of day, and most agreed that something must be done to process the waste before it was drained into the ocean. It wasn't until 1925 that the Hyperion Treatment Plant was opened on the coast of the Santa Monica Bay, and initially the plant simply “screened” the waste (Sklar 2). This might sound more elaborate than it really was—in reality the waste was passed through large pipes with screens over them, and solid wastes were buried under sand dunes on site while the rest was dumped directly into the ocean. This process was an improvement in sewage treatment at the time, but quite obviously the oceans and beaches were still being noticeably polluted. Sanitation treatment plants, more tastefully dubbed “wastewater facilities” or “water reclamation plants” are much more common now, and in Los Angeles there are currently four such facilities. These plants serve as LA's kidneys, rigorously processing waste before it is disposed.

When the language of fear or danger is not utilized, the words chosen to describe the processes and tools used in waste management as well as the result of these efforts are often uplifting and positive, inspiring visions of perfection and cleanliness. Officials carefully choose names, as names help residents disassociate services from their real duties. In Huxley's essay, he discusses and commends the “Hyperion Activated Sludge Plant” (151), known to us today simply as the Hyperion Treatment Plant. This name change must have been intentional, and provides a perfect example of “blending,” a word I use to reflect the attempt to neutralize filthy services and objects. Even the original name of the Plant contained phrasing that euphemistically glossed over the truth. Sludge may be defined as dirt or mud, but at Hyperion, it literally referred to the feces, urine, and other unmentionables or objects that came down the drains to their plant. In *Brown Acres*, Sklar discusses the name of the plant, and specifically its mythological origins: Hyperion was the Greek god who was “father to the sun and moon” (48). This lofty image is subverted by the fact that Hyperion was the son of Uranus, which is “an unfortunate—but humorously appropriate—homonym of 'urine' and 'anus’” (Sklar 49). Referencing Greek mythology continues to be a popular choice for those in the business of filth, and during the spring of 2015 I spotted a dump truck bearing the logo “Athens Services” just a few blocks from California State University,

Northridge. With these words one imagines a dump truck that flies off to Athens, the city named for Athena and home to Greek mythology, cleanly deposits its contents and then proceeds to relax on Mount Olympus with the gods. I'm embellishing a bit, to be sure, but it's no exaggeration to say that those in charge of marketing waste management want their product to be seen as clean and beneficial.

The Hyperion Treatment Plant was the solution for waste disposal that the city wanted, but it took many years to improve and perfect the work they did there. After years of faulty sewers and problems, the *LA Times* posted the following on its front page in 1949: "HUGE HYPERION SEWER LINE IN SERVICE AT LAST" (LATA). The fact that this line was improved "at last" reveals the frustration and struggle that occurred before it was fixed. And, truth be told, untreated waste was occasionally dumped into the ocean well into the 1980s, due to problems like plant shutdowns or broken pipes. It took the diligent work of Dorothy Green and her organization Heal the Bay to bring this issue to light and fight for the polluted beaches and diseased marine life (Sklar 172). Thanks to Heal the Bay, residents were made aware of ongoing pollution, and as a result, Hyperion was impelled to deal with its negligence. Because of the cooperation of community activists and modern facilities like the Hyperion Treatment Plant, Angelenos can "effectively modify the abjection of [their] predestined condition," and rise above notions of filth and disease (Huxley 163).

### **Taking out the Trash: Our Desire to Burn or Bury**

We have not yet discussed the other main function of waste management: how the city deals with common objects like paper, clothing, and food remnants that residents deem unnecessary and must subsequently be discarded. On this topic of trash I'm indebted to Edward Humes's history of waste and garbage in the book *Garbology*. He references Los Angeles many times throughout this book and extensively in the chapter entitled "Piggeries and Burn Piles: An American Trash Genesis." In New York and the East Coast in general, turning trash into pork was extremely popular before dump trucks became the norm. Trash would be taken to pig farms on the outskirts of town, and the resulting pork would later be sold within the city.

It sounds like a fairly reasonable solution, but piggeries waned in popularity once more was learned about disease and food contamination. Piggeries never gained popularity in LA which, as Humes states, “became more enamored of trash incineration than almost any city in America” (41). Residents, businesses, and factories burned most of their trash, which led to a terrible smog that predated the pollution caused by the exhaust from cars and industrial fumes. In 1903 the “choking haze” was becoming a problem, and yet Angelenos continued to burn their trash during WWII and up into the 1950s (Humes 48). Incinerators themselves were dubbed “Smokey Joe,” a quaint name that anthropomorphized trash bins. Trash burning is dirty, smelly, and dangerous, and since residents were encouraged by the government to do so for many decades, it makes sense that the receptacle for burning was given an unassuming and almost benevolent name.

In the language of waste management we have seen ties to purity and perfection in regards to bodily waste, but this is also the case with incineration. Sludge came to be known as “wastewater,” another example of naming that attempts to neutralize its abject nature. When “wastewater” came to be processed and reused rather than draining it directly into the ocean, the city officials dubbed the facilities “purification plants” (Sklar 56). Purification has a long history of connection to both inanimate objects as well as human beings. Suggesting perfection and ideal goodness, the word, in regards to waste treatment, implies that the purified waste would be clean or even potable. The act of burning consumes and transforms complex objects into simple ash, which is free of foul odors and easier to manage. Even though fires give off smoke, the implication of purity must have still been forefront in the minds of residents and city officials, as fire has longstanding significance. In the Old and New Testament, fire is a powerful and recurring image that refines and purifies. In mythology, the phoenix is reborn and lives again after it is consumed in fire. And perhaps because of these archetypal associations regarding fire, Angelenos believed for decades that incineration was the easiest and purest way to get rid of bothersome and disgusting trash. When smoke and smog became ever-present in the city, the government was forced to find another solution for trash. In 1954 the *Times* declared “BACK-YARD INCINERATOR BAN DECREED BY

COUNTY,” but it took many years for the ban to really become effective. Landfills, dumps, and hauling services grew out of the ashes of incineration, as it were.

In April of 1957, after numerous false starts and delays, trash burning was banned in LA County and the *Times* notified residents with the headline: “City Rubbish Collection to Start Monday” (LATA). Curbside trash collection slowly replaced incineration, but the city struggled to contend with all the trash that had been previously burned up by businesses and residents<sup>7</sup>. Many small dumps existed around the city, but as the city grew officials had to find distant locations or better methods of compacting trash to accommodate the growing population. Puente Hills, located in East Los Angeles, is the landfill that Humes spends much of his time discussing. Since its creation in the 1950s, Puente Hills Landfill has taken in 130 million tons of trash (Humes 20). Due to neighborhood complaints and its near-full capacity, Puente Hills was supposed to be shut down in 1993 and again in 2003, and was not closed until 2013 (Humes 91). Eventually, Puente Hills will be repurposed into roadways or natural preserves, but it must always be maintained to some extent. As landfills are filled, pipes are connected and laid within the trash to let gases escape, and these pipes must be maintained indefinitely. Despite the illusion that trash within the ground is cleaner and leads to actual decomposition, in actuality “landfills are forever” (Humes 94).

When addressing the linguistic nature of the word *landfill*, we see a simple compound word that means *to fill up the land*. But as I mentioned earlier, there are deeper implications associated with burying trash. The act of burying trash within the ground is strikingly similar to how many humans deal with their dead. The difference is that we do not love our trash, while we supposedly do love the people we bury. The symbolic act may be similar though—once individuals entomb their trash or loved ones, many assume they are *done* with them, and they cease to be involved in their lives. This is, of course, a simplification, as many loved ones affect those that survive them long after their deaths. As I noted earlier, the act of burial may be emblematic, as Douglas suggests, of the need to control and to re-establish order, burying and repressing “death” and the “abject.” In order to neutralize the notion of filth that surrounds landfills, these locations often have innocuous names. Many bear the name of the street or

canyon they reside on, like the Lopez Canyon Landfill. Other names attempt to invoke natural symbols of renewal, like the Sunshine Canyon Landfill in Sylmar, where one imagines the hills are filled with light and sunshine, and not garbage. As space for trash became more limited and we realized the finite nature of our resources, Angelenos began to show concern for the environment and our wastefulness. This ushered in a new phase of waste management in LA County.

### **Looking to the Future: Recycling and Zero Waste**

We cannot look at the history of waste management in Los Angeles without addressing recycling, though it is a facet that is still undergoing development. Although it might seem like a recent trend, recycling is by no means a modern concept. Long ago, rags and worn fishing nets were combined with natural items and other components to make paper (Strong 28). In 1904 aluminum cans were recycled in some large cities, and yet it wasn't until 1970 that the first "Earth Day" introduced America to the necessity of recycling. In the 1980s individual cities and states began to implement specific laws about recycling. In California, plastic bag thickness is regulated, newsprint must contain a percentage of recycled paper, and every county is responsible for creating a "task force at five-year intervals to assist in the development of community source reduction and recycling" (Strong 111). As was the case with sewer pipes, the development of recycling has been complicated by urban sprawl. There is no single company that serves the LA County; many different companies provide trash pick-up for various neighborhoods, and each company has their own set of regulations for what can be discarded or recycled.

In the 1970s and '80s the nation was acknowledging the ways we were being wasteful and destructive, and we considered what our future might look like if we continued to squander our resources. During this time, there were many headlines about the environment and what reforms were needed in order to protect it, and yet a search for recycling in the *Times* database yields few results. In 1984 the headline "EPA Proposes New Rules for Recycled Waste" declares that the community was thinking about recycling, and that the government was attempting to regulate it. While sewage

problems and trash burning tangibly (and negatively) affect the environment of Los Angeles, LA residents may regard the incentive to recycle as less perceptible and immediate to their everyday lives. Due to this fact, recycling has not garnered as much attention as other waste management issues in LA County.

When viewed as a whole body or organism, LA seems to have conflicting opinions about recycling. While LA County has numerous recycling centers, individual recycling plans vary from street to street, and even lot to lot. Most single-family homes are now provided with street-side recycling pick-up, but this has been slow to come and didn't take place everywhere at once. Some apartment complexes provide recycle bins, while many do not. Some businesses in LA County recycle their wasted glass and plastic, but most do not. All this to say that, while other cities like San Francisco or Portland have forced their residents to be conscious of their trash and waste, LA is content to make mandates haphazardly, depending on the individual community and their sentiments. The plastic bag ban is an example of this. LA County has made it clear that reusable bags are better for the environment, but as of 2015, only thirteen cities within the county have any bag restrictions in place ([dpw.lacounty.gov](http://dpw.lacounty.gov)). If San Francisco and Portland had a slogan that reflected their waste management mentality it would probably be "Take care of your shit!" while LA's would be more like "Don't make waves man—recycle if it's convenient for you."

Recycling, repurposing, and reusing are acts that ultimately will influence Los Angeles's future. Angelenos are often motivated to recycle by the fear that we will use up the earth's resources and then simply throw the remnants away in landfills, which are already inundated with trash. LA views recycling as a necessary act and has used two main methods to encourage residents to recycle, attempting to socialize the community. First, the county has installed receptacles for recycling at many public and private locations and signs that identify these bins. Second, LA has used many kid-friendly recycling campaigns; this method makes recycling an approachable and accessible topic for children and adults alike. Since the 1980s the topic of recycling has been seen on many kid-friendly shows, from cartoons to mega-hits like *Full House*. The federal government has instituted such campaigns as Keep America Beautiful, which appeals

to the language of patriotism and nationalism, and the even the socially conscious mascot Woodsy the Owl encourages children to “Give a hoot—don't pollute!” Both of these campaigns utilize imperatives that do more than encourage readers to be mindful of the environment, for they claim “this must be done!” In Los Angeles we see similar methods that encourage recycling. At the LA Zoo many of the trash cans bear a cute painting of a raccoon that implores, “Please recycle.” Since 2003, Mr. Recycle and Robo Blue have been mascots of the Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation. Both are blue robots (Robo Blue is basically a waste bin with a face put on it) that can be seen on city websites or at the Bureau's functions or open houses. Mr. Recycle urges, “Don't just stand there; recycle something” ([lacitysan.org](http://lacitysan.org)). This statement promotes a pro-active mentality, while also insinuating that residents that fail to recycle are lazy. The benefit of kid-friendly advertising is threefold: it provides an enjoyable diversion for children at events, it encourages the younger generation to be environmentally responsible (perhaps more-so than their parents), and it reminds parents and adults about recycling in a non-threatening way.

If being irresponsible with waste warrants moral judgment, then being responsible for waste may warrant praise and acceptance. According to Humes, recycling “has long served as a balm and a penance—a way of making it ok to waste” (139). Here, recycling is equated to a healing substance that covers and calms a wound, while “penance” has religious connotations that imply self-punishment and repentance. These words reveal the deeper emotional connection that humans have to recycling. It is not enough to recognize that recycling exists, and then to do it. Instead, there are feelings of guilt or shame tied to recycling, and perhaps these are the emotions that compel some people to recycle at all.

Los Angeles County is actively encouraging residents to reduce, reuse, and recycle, but it doesn't end there. The County is currently entertaining a Zero Waste plan that would eliminate the need to use landfills altogether. In 2013, a Zero Waste Progress Report was created by the UCLA Engineering Extension; the report proposes to achieve zero waste in landfills by 2025. As the report explains:

Waste policy in California has been landfill-centric for many years. Growing concerns about the environment and conservation, however, have led to seeking policies that divert some, and eventually all, waste away from landfills. The State of California's Integrated Waste Management Act of 1989 mandated that each city achieve a 25% diversion rate of waste from landfill by the year 1995 and a 50% diversion rate by the year 2000. Waste can be diverted from a landfill through waste reduction, recycling, composting, and other technologies that beneficially use the materials found in solid waste. . . . [T]he City adopted a new goal of "Zero Waste" by the year 2025. (forester.net 7)

This will be a formidable task to achieve in LA, especially considering that the few cities with long-standing waste reform, which are close to achieving zero waste, still struggle to do so. While a zero waste policy is a commendable goal that reduces physical waste, it has deeper implications that relate to the human desire for control and purity. The concept of zero waste is an attempt not only to erase the trash and filth that surrounds us, but also to neutralize what we wish to ignore, to repress the abject. Looking back at the phases of waste management in LA, we can surmise that the shift from dumping raw sewage to treating it shows an effort to purify the oceans, while the banning of incinerators also demonstrate the desire to purify the air that was choked with smog and smoke. Recycling and zero waste are still in progress, and these methods symbolize the desire to purify the land and control what goes into it and what comes out of it. Both acts look to the future of the County and its residents and attempt to rein in the waste and negligence that occurs in such a vast city. If zero waste is someday realized, LA will be seen as a forward-looking city that has managed to control and purify the environment, and, symbolically, the people inside of it.

The study of waste management in Los Angeles County reveals an underlying contradiction—the sentiments presented by language are sometimes at odds with reality. It is true that, thanks to modern sanitation, we now live in a city where "practically everybody can afford the luxury of not being disgusting" (Huxley 159). However, this is not because we are in actuality not disgusting, but because the implementation of

sanitation has cleanly removed our waste from our sphere of recognition. As I have mentioned, this erasure is both a physical and discursive act, for the language—especially the use of names—surrounding waste management attempts to metaphorically expunge the very filth that disturbs us. In addressing this issue of naming, I am reminded of a certain playwright and poet who said, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” This Shakespearian reference suggests that the name of something is an artificial convention that does not alter what it references. This is true not only of a fragrant rose, but also of other *fragrant* but less appealing things. A landfill by any other name is still a landfill, and still smells like the decaying refuse found within. By any other name, waste management still represents the trash and bodily waste that must be dealt with within a city, and yet the language surrounding waste management and its documents seem to imply the opposite. Waste treatment plants or landfills are named to imply beauty, sunshine, and cleanliness in an attempt to make waste management palatable to residents. Other times, the imagery of disease and the language of fear are used in the rhetoric of waste management to impel residents to act. But once votes are in and bonds are passed, LA would like us to believe that our “shit don’t stank.” To put it another way, I reference the words of archeologist turned modern trash excavator William Rathje: “People forget, they cover, they kid themselves, they lie. But their trash always tells the truth” (qtd. In Humes 129). When placed before us, our trash does tell the truth about what we consume, what we value, and what we waste—and yet our trash and waste are so rarely exposed before us. In summation, our trash may tell the truth, but the discourse and rhetoric around it obfuscates the processes and the results of waste management.

## Notes

1. To name a few, there is the LA City Sanitation website ([san.lacity.org](http://san.lacity.org)), [LASewers.org](http://LASewers.org), and the Department of Water and Power website ([dpw.lacounty.gov](http://dpw.lacounty.gov)). All of these sites present a professional and informative look that implies or outright states that the organizations are capable and responsible for their department within the city.
2. There is no way to know the exact date of Huxley's stroll along the beach. The essay was published in 1952, but the article was published many years after the incident. The year can be estimated to be 1939, since it was "[a] few months before the outbreak of the Second World War" (149).
3. These figures are for LA County specifically.
4. The phrase has also been written as Lalaland, or La-La Land, with possible other permutations.
5. Her book discusses not just religious defilement, but secular defilement as well.
6. Though less common today, some homes in LA County still use septic tanks. It wasn't until 1990 that my own grandparents (residents of the County) hooked their house up to the sewer line and had their septic tank filled in.
7. From here on, I will refer to this citation as LATA.
8. In 1959, two years after the incineration ban, the *Times* ran the headline "Rubbish Disposal Becomes Major Issue In Los Angeles."

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# The Rhetoric of Surf: A Lexical and Archetypal Migration of Los Angeles Counterculture into Popular Culture

Steve Florian

*[Y]oung men in trunks, and young girls in little more, with bronzed, unselfconscious bodies . . . they seemed to walk along the rim of the world as though they and their kind alone inhabited it . . . and they turn into precursors of a new race not yet seen on the earth: of men and women without age, beautiful as gods and goddesses, with the minds of infants.*

William Faulkner, *Golden Land*

For William Faulkner, the “young . . . bronzed, unselfconscious bodies” lying on the beach and dipping in the surf epitomized his vision of the golden land of Los Angeles. While Los Angeles is a hub for the production of culture—most notably Hollywood—it is also historically responsible for producing much of both the verbal and visual aspects of surf culture. The epicenter for this production exists on the edge of Los Angeles County in the beach community of Malibu. From the surfers who inhabit Malibu’s Surfrider Beach, to the Hollywood productions that film surf-themed movies, to the novels that depict the world of Gidget and Moondoggie, these notions of beach life have permeated the worlds far beyond this idyllic beachside locale.

In this essay I will argue that the Hollywood generated surf movies as well as surfing texts have inculcated language and images particular to the surfing culture of the 1950s, through the 1970s, into the zeitgeist of popular culture, reaching its peak in the 1980s. The semantic shift of language to suit the purpose of the culture industry, as well as the burgeoning surf industry, is generated in its purest form by the surfers that are active in the culture of surfing: both industries benefit from the commodification of selling surf culture and the beach-as-a-lifestyle to the uninitiated masses.

Many of the inhabitants of 1950s post World War II Los Angeles were ready for a culture that could be easily consumed and surfing culture would provide a veritable feast. Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, in their 1947 essay “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” highlight the power, as well as the numbing effect, of the culture industry in recreating everyday life that can be easily consumed by average Americans, including such cultural products as “film, radio, and magazines” (94). Horkheimer and Adorno pessimistically observe, “Culture today is infecting everything with sameness” (94). I argue that the surf culture in Los Angeles, in its earliest phase, operated in direct opposition to the stultifying effects of the “Culture Industry” by not only rejecting cultural norms, but also repurposing language and images to retain some sense of identity and agency for themselves. They created a counterculture on the beach that rejected the real world culture of the work-a-day, nine-to-five, middle class aspirational existence. According to surf historian Matt Warshaw, Surfers already had a history of distancing themselves from mainstream society . . . [and] the trend intensified after the war . . . [for] surfing wasn’t so much a refuge from society as an alternate universe. And because California during those crucial postwar years was also birthing modern American pop culture, that alternate universe was in short order broadcast around the globe. (96)

Much of the literature, film, and texts made about surfing were generated relative to consumer demand. The producers of surf related media infiltrated the surf culture to extract authentic vocabulary and style to then be replicated in their literature and movies. These texts, which targeted teenagers and young adults, both male and female alike, were not limited strictly to the Los Angeles region but were disseminated to a global audience.

Popular surf culture brought the “exotic” to Southern California, mostly by World War II veterans returning to Los Angeles from the Territory of Hawaii and bringing commodified remnants of the Hawaiian culture with them, most notably the Aloha shirt. According to Elizabeth Traube in her essay, “*The Popular*” in *American Culture*, “Because exoticism is not an inherent attribute of certain cultures but a discursive

operation, nothing prevents its transposition from foreign to domestic phenomena” (129). Adopting the surfing fundamentals, as well as the language and rituals of the Hawaiian surfers, Malibu surfers quickly appropriated and localized the Hawaiian world of beach and surf, creating a Los Angeles surf identity that was based on what Californians regarded as the exotic Other.

The *Gidget* franchise was most responsible for the popularization of surfing culture, but it has also been lambasted for the creation of the commercialization of surfing culture. *Gidget, The Little Girl with Big Ideas*, the 1957 novel by Frederick Kohner—about his beach loving teenage daughter, Kathy Kohner—was then turned into the 1959 movie *Gidget*, which was then turned into the 1965 *Gidget* television series. Many credit *Gidget*, in its myriad forms, as the prime mover that brought surfing culture into the American mainstream. According to Warshaw, when the novel *Gidget* first arrived on bookstore shelves, “It earned reasonably good notices . . . made the West Coast best-seller lists, (out performing Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, which came out a few weeks earlier), and eventually sold more than a half million copies” (158). This novel, movie, and television series would set in motion the production of the new, youth-based identity of post war Los Angeles: Southern California as the prosperous pop culture capital of America. Kohner’s novel took the countercultural allure of surfing and placed it squarely in the laps of teenage America, stretching the beach all the way to middle America and beyond. *Gidget* made it possible for every American girl to find her own Moondoggie without necessarily having access to the beach.

The *Gidget* novels and films supplement the American lexicon with words and phrases such as shoot the curl and surf bum. Arguably Kahuna, an appropriated Hawaiian term, is the expression from *Gidget* that has had the greatest reach and influence throughout American culture. In the movie *Gidget* the Great Kahuna is both the authority as well as the anti-authority—the kahuna and the surf bum. Kahuna connotes a person in authority or someone whose influence is primary to those around him, while the surf bum retains its lexical significance as a metaphor for someone who abdicates his or her societal responsibilities in favor of hedonistic pursuits. According to Serge Kahili King, the Hawaiian definition of kahuna is either “a caretaker . . . a person

with a profession,” or a “priest or healer,” depending on the source of the definition (huna.org). The Kahuna character does not necessarily fit any of these definitions, but more likely he is the surf bum who has appropriated the debased Americanized version of a kahuna as a great leader. This appropriation is reminiscent of the imperialistic machinations that allowed for the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, showing little regard for ancient Hawaiian culture and language.

At the same time, the Americanization of the term Kahuna also democratizes the term. In terms of visual rhetoric, some of the more compelling images in the movie *Gidget* are the surfing scenes in which the only surfers on the beach and in the water are the acolytes of the Great Kahuna—Moondoggie and his pals. The striking fact is that in every surfing scene everyone in the group shares the same wave. The proprietary concept of “my wave” has not yet permeated this Edenic enclave. If the Great Kahuna adhered to his true Hawaiian identity, his followers would not be allowed to share this wave with him as it would violate the ancient Hawaiian cultural norm of surfing as the sport of kings. *Gidget’s* Great Kahuna/surf bum, though an architecturally flawed character, embodies a paradox: he is both a democratic member of the elite and someone occupying the margins of society—the surf bum, a character that will become deeply embedded in the American lexicon as well as the American psyche.

Next to the Great Kahuna, *Gidget’s* name (the conflation of girl and midget) also becomes a significant cultural signifier. *Gidget* is a seemingly innocuous, innocent teenage girl from the San Fernando Valley, high atop the Los Angeles basin. Initially, she seems to exercise little female agency. *Gidget* looks and acts the part of the stereotypical good girl until she is bitten by the surfing bug. *Gidget* then spends her free time hanging around the beach with older boys and men not necessarily because of post-adolescent sexual desire, but because she feels the clarion call of the surf and the sea. *Gidget* seems instinctually to know that the liminal space where the beach meets the ocean is a Rubicon of sorts, a threshold that once crossed can never again be uncrossed. It is, for this teenage girl from Los Angeles, her escape from paternalism that permeates her temporal world. If she can successfully paddle out to the line up and pull

into a wave and surf, she will transcend the conservative constraints of 1950s America. To cross this Rubicon, she must negotiate the fraternal gauntlet that is Moondoggie and his beach cohort. There is an uncomfortable coarseness to their hazing of Gidget, but she endures this trial with her dignity intact and earns her place in the surf lineup: this then transforms Gidget from the good-girl, reflecting 1950s gender norms, into a subversive icon. In the essay *Surfing the Other: Ideology on the Beach*, R. L. Rutsky raises the notion that the rhetoric of the beach movies of the 1960s are light, yet subversive at their core: “Thus, the beach is represented as a place of freedom, where the responsibilities of work, school, and marriage are temporarily suspended in favor of the playful hedonism of parties, surfing, teenage sexuality, and romantic flings” (14). While the obvious victory for Gidget is that she can surf her favorite beach with her male companions unmolested, she has also gained power over her new constituency, who regard her with respect. While she does not demand her place in the lineup through force or coercion, her role seems preordained in some manner, as other Southern California teenagers follow her lead to the beach. Her character has magically transcended the fourth wall of the silver screen and influenced a generation of adolescents to embrace all that it means to be a surfer. Gidget quite innocently markets surfing as a lifestyle choice—hedonism as an attainable and viable option.

The most pronounced challenge to the influence of Gidget and her crew will come from Miki Dora, the most famous Malibu surfer of the 1950s and 1960s. Dora was one of the first surfers to realize the power and allure of the rhetorical strategies engendered in the surf culture. Dora’s disillusionment with Hollywood’s commodification of surfing consumes his ideology, and he becomes somewhat of a Jeremiah—a modern doomsday prophet for the sport of surfing. He clearly understood the problematic paradigm shift caused by the publication of Kohner’s *Gidget*. For Dora and his predecessors, the surfing world prior to *Gidget* was the true counterculture, an existential challenge to America’s capitalistic dream, not Kohner’s sock hop in the sand.

Many categorize Miki Dora as the antitheses of Gidget, but they are not dissimilar in some respects, as he and Gidget began surfing at about the same age. Warshaw notes, “Dora did not become a full-time surfer until 1950, at age fifteen . . .” (118).

Where these two surfing icons begin to diverge is in their nicknames. Gidget is certainly a patronizing name for a young girl, paternalistically relegating this diminutive female character into the realm of the female subaltern. Miki Dora's main nickname "da Cat" is meant to highlight his fanciful footwork and hotdogging abilities on the surfboard, as well as lionize him as the premier surfer at Malibu.

With the influx of new *Gidget*-inspired surfers flooding the beach at Malibu, Dora's territorial instinct began to take shape in his declaration of "my wave" strategy to keep anyone from infringing on his surfing paradise. Dora was protective of his surfing sanctuary of Malibu and fought back with moral indignation. The concept of "my wave" began to create a rhizomatic propagation—by way of Dora's public rants—that resonated throughout the surf world and that invoked proprietary rights to the waves at local surf breaks. In 1980 a Malibu-based band, *The Surf Punks*, released their second album titled *My Beach*, which included the popular song, "My Wave." This lyric from the song became the unofficial anthem for surf localism:

This is my wave baby  
 Don't cut me off  
 Dropping down left  
 Eat the rocks  
 . . . . .  
 My waves baby  
 Gonna break your face  
 Go back to the valley  
 And don't come back

These first two stanzas are emblematic of Miki Dora's dystopian visions of the surf scene at Malibu and give evidence that the rhetoric of Dora's crusade has taken on a life beyond its creator's personal cause.

While promoting his role as a rebel and iconoclast, Dora had proclaimed a dim future for surfing. Stecyk and Kampion in *Dora Lives* relate a story from a *Surfer Magazine* article called "Surfing Stuntman" where Dora is questioned about his "ruthless" attitude on the waves at Malibu. Dora responds: "Actually, these guys (other

surfers) are thieves and they are stealing my waves. If I get it first, it belongs to me” (62). This was the beginning of localism in Southern California and his “my wave” attitude not only permeated other breaks in the region, but also remained in the surfing zeitgeist, instituted by surfers to protect their perceived proprietary rights to their local surf break.

Although many viewed Dora’s rants as bluster meant for media consumption, others argued that his rants were a legitimate concern. Dora is challenging any historical or present power that undermines his personal freedom to surf. Dora on Gidget and Malibu:

My only regret is that I did not torch Gidget’s palm-frond love shack . . . with all of the cast and crew inside. What a glorious imu oven it would have made. We could have had a kamaaina luau with Hollywood long pig as the main course. The Hawaiians ate Captain Cook; it is unfortunate that the rest of us at Malibu learned so little from these gallant combatants.

(51)

For Dora, not unlike Gidget, the liminal space between the beach and the ocean is also a Rubicon, but in his case he embodied the qualities of Julius Caesar, felling the intruding surfers as if they were the reincarnation of Pompey’s army. Dora adopted this role as self-proclaimed lawgiver, for he regarded surfing as his constitutional right, part of his rightful quest for “the pursuit of happiness.” Stecyk and Kampion offer a lucid assessment of Dora’s angst through his vitriolic rhetoric in defense of Malibu as a sacred space:

He brought theatre and a sense of cinema to the sand. He surfed seriously but with an easy grin, was mean as an assassin, but seemed also sensitive and hurt by it all—the ending of his era . . . the loss of Malibu to the clutter of the mindless masses that brimmed over from the San Fernando Valley and crowded his perfect waves with their inane stupidity and crass ignorance. (9)

Dora did not mellow with age as he clung to his righteous anger well into the later years of his life. In the 1990 documentary directed by Bill Delaney, *Surfers*, Miki Dora shares his view of surfing as a palliative cure for the quotidian routine:

My whole life is this wave I drop into, pull up into it, and shoot for my life. Behind me all this shit goes over my back: the screaming parents, teachers, police, priests, politicians, kneeboarders, windsurfers—they're all going over the falls into the reef. And I'm shooting for my life. And when it starts to close out, I pull out, catch another wave, and do the same goddamn thing again. (*Surfers*)

Dora's response to the past as well as present invasions of Malibu loosely resembles St. Augustine's *Just War Theory*. With his "my wave" tactics, Dora employs, through aggressive verbal rhetoric, two of Augustine's four main criteria—Just Cause (a wrong has been committed to which war is the appropriate response) and Right Intention (the response is proportional to the cause)—in his attempt to send these interlopers back home.

Dora's surf discourse, especially his "my wave" philosophy with its exceptionalist ideology, permeates the language of other surfing groups. In Tom Wolfe's 1968 collection of essays, *The Pumphouse Gang*, he recounts his time spent with the cocky, young surfing cadre of famed Windansea beach in La Jolla, California in the self-same titled essay "The Pumphouse Gang." This essay reflects on the difference in rhetoric among various surfing locales, especially in regard to the Malibu surfers. To characterize this San Diego surfing site, Wolfe features some of the local Windansea surfers and notes their use of the word "panther" and "mee-duh" to describe themselves, saying it back and forth to each other, repeating the words often: "The black panther has black feet...black panther...pan-thuh...mee-duh" (19). At first glance this seems to be childish, nonsensical banter. There is no real explanation by Wolfe as to why these surfers are referring to themselves as "panthers" but it is interesting to note that the surf rhetoric in this case is employed to persuade the intended audience of their animalistic prowess on the beach, as opposed to in the water. The word mee-duh is meant to be an intimidating reference to a somewhat purposeless, secret organization known as the

Mac Meda Destruction Company, instigated by surfers Jack Macpherson and Bob Rakestraw. According to the Mac Meda website, “Rakestraw...[was] commonly known as Bob, and to his friends as “Meda”, after a word he used as a swear word” (macmedadestruction.com). The word “mee-duh” functions without a true meaning, except for the fact that it is meant to unsettle and annoy anyone in its path. This crew of Windansea surfers appear to be using their rhetorical strategies as a weapon—as linguistic self-aggrandizement, a puffing up of feathers, a trumpeting of exceptionalism, but also as an act of subversion to upend and agitate cultural norms of polite society and against anyone who intrudes on their beach.

In a later example in the 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*, Robert Duvall’s iconic character Colonel Kilgore, echoes not only Dora’s Augustinian principles and “my wave” ideology, but also the language of Gidget’s Great Kahuna/surf bum. Kilgore is a leader of men, a hawkish warrior, but more importantly—a surf bum. During an extremely violent battle where the goal is to take possession from the Viet Cong an excellent point break that Kilgore would like to surf, the Colonel finds that he has a famous Southern California surfer—Lance Johnson—in his midst. Colonel Kilgore orders one of his surfing soldiers to ignore the battle in front of him and go out into the water and surf. Kilgore states to the reluctant soldier: “You either surf or fight” (*Apocalypse Now*). In a later scene Kilgore responds to one of his soldier’s remonstrance that it’s too dangerous to surf because this point break belongs to Charlie, even though there are no Viet Cong in the water surfing. Kilgore famously upbraids the soldier: “Charlie don’t surf!” (*Apocalypse Now*). This is a now popular, often-repeated, catch-all phrase that indicates that the quest—certainly for Kilgore— is greater than the seemingly paltry reality of the present moment. “Charlie don’t surf!” is a post-colonial edict, a fiat of imperialistic superiority that exemplifies, in a compact phrase, all of the tenets embodied in the idea of American exceptionalism, embodied by Dora’s “my wave” surfing ideology.

By the time that the 1978 iconic surf film *Big Wednesday* was shown in American theaters, the idealistic Malibu surfing era was already coming to a close. *Big Wednesday* is the moody antitheses of the early surf movie *Gidget* in many respects, but both share a similar impact on popular culture through the use of verbal and visual

rhetoric. *Big Wednesday*, a nostalgic redux of the surfing culture, written by Dennis Aaberg and John Milius and anchored by its three main characters—Matt Johnson, Jack Barlow, and Leroy Smith—was expected to be a financial success at the box office during its original run, but failed miserably. Movie critic Pauline Kael contends that Milius, the blustering director, misfired: “The surprise is not that Mr. Milius has made such a resoundingly awful film, but rather that he's made a bland one” (nytimes.com). Kael then begins to focus on the language of the characters of *Big Wednesday*, first landing on the word “radical” as having a negative connotation in the movie. Matt offers the word radical as a challenge to his friend Jack to inspire camaraderie through action: “. . . come on, summer's almost over. Let's get radical” (*Big Wednesday*). Matt's version of the word radical is a call to adventure, an opportunity to create a definitive moment in their collective lives. Matt's semantic shift in definition for radical is idiomatic for the Southern California surfer, but through the vehicle of film it will filter through the vernacular of whatever discourse communities participate in the viewing of *Big Wednesday*. The popular language in surf culture is, in many instances, a repurposing of words in an organic attempt to reify a concept that may actually defy a semantic definition, or in some instances a creation of original phrases to introduce a concept. For example, the character of Leroy, aka “The Masochist,” foregrounds the proprietary concept of “my wave” in his aggressive tactics to keep others off his choice of waves, echoing Miki Dora's primary concept.

While it may be true that Milius missed the mark somewhat, *Big Wednesday* went on to become a cult classic and certainly one of the most influential surf films of all time. The title of the movie has transcended its function and made its way into the lexicon of popular culture as a metaphor for a heroic cultural experience. The term *Big Wednesday* is often used in surf parlance to describe a very big swell, but it also connotes something else: a paradigm shift for those who choose to participate in the epic surfing event.

*Gidget* is often lambasted for the commercialization of surfing culture—and interestingly enough, *Big Wednesday* is attempting to rectify this degrading of the sport by portraying its three heroes as idealistic soul surfers. *Big Wednesday* fails in its

rescue of surfing's spiritual purity because, ironically, it becomes the next vehicle for the commodification of the surf industry. In its own defense, the *Big Wednesday* script does address the issue of the problematic commercialization of the surf culture but it offers no judgment on, nor prescribes a cure for its capitalist ailments: it merely illuminates the inherent commodity fetish in the artifacts of surf culture.

If *Big Wednesday* acts as a watershed movie for surfing discourse, the 1982 movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* demonstrates the ways that surf rhetoric undergoes a series of transformations. Sean Penn portrays the character Jeff Spicoli as a high school version of the Great Kahuna/surf bum. While Spicoli may appear on the surface as a pot-smoking ne'er-do-well, he is a leader of men—in terms of his surfer buddies—and he sets the ideology and rhetorical strategies for his cohort. The line most often attributed to Jeff Spicoli is his response to the notion that he should get a job: “All I need is some tasty waves, a cool buzz, and I’m fine!” (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*). This becomes the mantra of the modern surf bum or anyone who just wants to “tune out” for a while, refusing to become a working cog in the capitalist machine. It is also possible to credit Jeff Spicoli with popularizing the surfing jargon “gnarly,” and for breathing new life into the words “bitchin” and “bogus.”

A paradigmatic piece of visual rhetoric displayed by Jeff Spicoli is the still popular black and white checkerboard slip-on Vans shoe. While this may have simply been a costuming choice for the character, these shoes have become synonymous with Spicoli and with the recursive reality of all that he embodies as the surf bum. While this particular shoe existed before Spicoli, this shoe has turned into a cultural artifact—an instantaneous declaration by the wearer that he or she has embraced, in some manner large or small, the qualities of Jeff Spicoli. Even now, to invoke the name Jeff Spicoli is to label someone as the ultimate slacker and surf bum. What is learned about Spicoli by the end of the film is that when he applies himself, he can achieve (per his successful prom night meeting with Mr. Hand), that he lives by a strict code of the beach, and that he can be heroic when called upon. This last trait is evidenced by his foiling of a robbery in progress at the convenience store, in which he accidentally distracts the perpetrator while Brad Hamilton throws hot coffee in the robber's face. In reality Spicoli saves the

day, but in an altruistic gesture, he gives total credit to Brad by yelling: “All right Hamilton!” (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*). This is a selfless act that does not go unnoticed by Brad Hamilton, but appears to go unnoticed by the public at large.

The word dude, often uttered by Jeff Spicoli and his stoner friends, is perhaps the most popular word that is associated with surf culture. According to the Urban Dictionary, the first definitions offered are the following: “A word that americans [sic] use to address each other, . . . [p]articularly stoners, surfers and skaters,” also “The Universal Pronoun,” as well as an adjective as an “expression of emphasis, amazement, or awe” (urbandictionary.com).

In terms of philology, the origins of dude are a bit nebulous, but the word dude is presumed to be an American invention. According to Seth Lerer, in his essay, “Hello, Dude: Philology, Performance, and Technology in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*,” the word dude first appears in literature in Mark Twain's 1889 novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. According to Lerer, “The word *dude* was picked up in the early 1880s to define the new dandy of that movement. But it had appeared earlier, in the late 1870s, to emblemize the fancy or fastidious man of the city” (482). Lerer relates that even Mark Twain has shifted the definition of dude to suit his metaphorical needs: “For Twain, the knights of Arthur's kingdom are the ‘iron dudes,’ creatures of posturing and dress-up” (482). He is creating a new version of a dude in the questing knight—someone who is historically shown to be heroic—but in Twain's case, he has labeled the knights buffoonish. The “iron dude” does not retain the social aloofness of the dude in its 1883 iteration. Certainly, by the time the word dude reaches the 1960s in America, it connotes some form of a countercultural hippie figure, and then transforms into Spicoli's 1980s surfing dude, and shifts again three decades later when it furthers the paradigm of dudeness in Joel and Ethan Coen's iconic 1998 movie, *The Big Lebowski*. Jeffrey Lebowski, aka The Dude, it seems, is the ultimate slacker. While The Dude is a bowler and not a surfer, he embodies many of the qualities of his logical predecessor, Jeff Spicoli, diverging only in the respect that The Dude prefers a “beverage” to a bong hit. All these examples demonstrate the semantic shifts of words

and the influential power of discourse communities to transform the meanings of signifiers.

Oddly, it is just as the surfer-as-a-lifestyle commercialization emerges in the late 1980s that the generating of new surf language begins to fade from popularity. According to Matt Warshaw, “By the mid-eighties, the second surf boom was on . . . it was bigger than the *Gidget*-launched craze of the sixties, and it lasted until 1990 when it crashed with a familiar abruptness” (387). Surf companies were ramping up their products and production to commodify surfing to a level previously unknown to the sport. In the beginning, surfing belonged to a select few that were perceptive enough to appreciate its natural charms: now surfers would be used to sell the sport as a lifestyle for those millions of people who have no access to the beach.

The surf industry’s marketing machine effectively usurped and appropriated surf discourse in order to commodify the beach lifestyle. For example, the Gotcha brand surf wear line would embrace the territorial rhetoric espoused by surfers, suggesting that the Gotcha brand made the surf wear consumer appear to be “local.” Gotcha instituted its 1980s marketing campaign with a two-part ad using a “loser” of some iteration in the first image with the caption, “If You Don’t Surf, Don’t Start.” The second image juxtaposed with the first image is of a Gotcha team rider with the caption, “If You Surf, Never Stop” (Warshaw 390). This is an obvious homage to the Miki Dora “my wave” ideology as well as a brilliant, shame-based promotional tactic to sell clothes by giving the consumer the ability to subvert the “locals only” ethos only through purchasing their brand of clothes—or more importantly, purchasing the lifestyle. Dora’s “my wave” rhetoric was initiated as a preservation tactic but has now been appropriated as a capitalist tool. It would be interesting to know if Dora would view this as one more incursion on his paradise or if he would applaud the marketing team at Gotcha for figuring out an interesting ploy to further manipulate the surf interlopers from the San Fernando Valley and beyond.

The 1980s surf-wear industry deftly recognized that the rhetoric and principles of surfing was not dissimilar to the world of skateboarding and that it was also a burgeoning market, prime for exploitation. The language and ideology of surfing blended

seamlessly with the world of skateboarding and brought the beach to the landlocked in a way that made the *Gidget* phenomenon seem minor in comparison:

Skateboarding borrowed from surfing and built upon the foundations of its water-born equivalent while inventing itself in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, during its second generation of popularity and as equipment evolved, skateboarders took to riding empty pools, drainage ditches, and the giant concrete pipes of water irrigation projects. (*Beautiful Losers*, 129)

Skateboarding substituted concrete and wooden surfaces for waves in the parts of the world where waves are nonexistent. If the surf breaks are either overcrowded or unavailable, skateboarding is the means to replicate the riding of waves on any surface available or imaginable: skateboarding is a natural progression from surfing both physically and linguistically. Much of the language and performance of surfing permeates the skateboarding culture. In the 2002 documentary film *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, director Stacy Peralta and writer Craig Stecyk reveal the connection of skateboarding to surfing with their homage to Hawaiian surfer Larry Bertlemann. Peralta notes that the ethos that informed the rhetoric of the Z-Boys' skateboarding style was taken from a Hal Jenson surfing movie called *Super Session* starring Bertlemann. Zephyr team rider Bob Biniak states in the movie: "We used to skate this place Bicknell hill (next to the beach in Santa Monica) . . . looking at the surf doing cutbacks like we were riding a wave" (*Dogtown and Z-Boys*). Peggy Oki, another Zephyr team rider, refers to Larry Bertlemann's tight cutbacks—during which he would slide his hand along the wave—in relation to skateboarding Bicknell hill: "We'd work on our Berts" (*Dogtown and Z-Boys*). The Zephyr team skaters created a skateboarding maneuver, named after a progressive Hawaiian surfer—one they learned about from a surf movie they saw at the Santa Monica Civic Center—that would permeate newly formed skateboarding magazines and ultimately have a national reach.

The goal of *Big Wednesday* was to attempt to portray the idyllic life of the soul surfer, someone only interested in surfing for the sake of surfing, by connecting to nature through the riding of waves. The triumvirate of Matt, Jack, and Leroy tried to hold on to the youthful aspects of surfing for as long as they could. Artist and filmmaker

Thomas Campbell is currently making this same argument—through his art and his surf films—that the concept of the soul surfer is, perhaps, surfing’s highest ideal.

Campbell’s 2009 surf movie, *The Present* is an homage to Bruce Brown’s 1966 surf classic *The Endless Summer*. *The Endless Summer* was intended to be an anti-establishment rejection of the localism prevalent in surfing at the time in that it promoted the journey over result-oriented, proprietary behavior. This movie depicts the journey that the soul surfer must participate in: a surfing grail quest to find a wave as perfect as Malibu somewhere else in the world. In *The Present*, Campbell takes a stand against localism, the commercialization of surfing, as well as the focus on specialization, in terms of what kind of surfboard a person should ride and how that shape or style of board cements one’s identity as a surfer.

In *The Present*, surfers Alex Knost and Michel Junod travel to Africa in suit and tie with surfboard under arm, emulating Robert August and Mike Hyson in *The Endless Summer*. Campbell narrates his movies and in this narration he introduces new words to the surfing lexicon. He refers to those riding longboards in his movie as “wave sliders and loggers,” and he describes their globetrotting surf trip as “a logging adventure” because of the shape of the older 1950s to late 1960s-style heavily glassed, longer surfboards (*The Present*).

A surfer who appears often in Campbell’s movies is longboard sensation Joel Tudor. Tudor is a stylemaster on the waves, but he is keenly aware of the Southern California surfers who have articulated the past ideology for the sport. In an interview, Tudor relates that Miki Dora is a primary ideologue for him. Miki represents the “lifestyle side” as well as his anti-commercialism beliefs (*The Present*). These younger surfers like Joel Tudor have not only embraced the physical elements and limitations of surfing’s golden years but they are also generating lexical shifts that bring new language to the surf culture that begin to bridge the past with the present. Campbell is attempting, in *The Present*, to return surfers to that time and place of the surfing Eden, to a place where there was a purity to surfing that is untainted by the promotion of surf contests and rampant, soul crushing commercialization. Campbell is attempting to put the bite

back into the surfing apple by bringing the past into the present. His movies are a refiguring of the rhetoric of surf and what it could ideally mean to be a surfer.

Be assured, there will always be an audience for the quixotic waterman as long as people are fascinated by the allure of surfing and the language of its counterculture rebellion. Miki Dora was the recipient of many nicknames but the one that might be most accurate is “The Black Knight.” Dora, in many respects, shares some qualities with the knight errant Don Quixote, but he is also the admixture of King Arthur, Lancelot, The Fisher King, and Galahad combined. The Sandra Dee version of Gidget is interestingly heroic—not as Guinevere—but perhaps in the vein of a latter-day Joan of Arc, as she uses her surfboard as a sword and her persuasive charms as a shield.

The language and rhetoric of surf culture serves an important purpose in American culture: it allows its audience to connect with their inner rogue without having to journey alone into the darkest part of the forest—or the sea—to begin their personal quests. The surfing anti-hero provides the template and the language, offering the world an alternative to the traditional heroic.

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# The Subversive and Dynamic Language and Actions of LA Cannabis Films: *Up in Smoke*, *Friday*, and *Pineapple Express*

Jonathan Straight

Marijuana, also known as cannabis, has had a long history in California. In the last thirty-five years, law enforcement has regarded possession of marijuana in multiple ways: as a felony punishable by imprisonment, as a misdemeanor, as a medical necessity. Although according to federal law marijuana is illegal under the federal Controlled Substance Act, states such as California have enacted their own statutes concerning marijuana. Early in the twentieth century, since the 1907 Poison Act, a number of local and state legislative regulations have steadily increased the penalties for the possession of marijuana in California, treating possession as a felony. However, since the seventies, there has been a steady push in the state to decriminalize the possession of marijuana, and in 1975, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 95 making possession of small amounts of marijuana a civil misdemeanor, rather than a criminal offence. In 1996, California passed Proposition 215, also known as the Compassionate Use Act, legalizing marijuana for medical use. In 2010, California passed State Bill 1449, reducing the penalty for up to one ounce of marijuana possession from a misdemeanor to an infraction.

What has changed during this time? I argue that legislators and voters have been influenced by the changing depiction of marijuana from a dangerous drug to a restricted substance, such as tobacco. One of the ways, we have witnessed this shift is through popular culture, specifically in comical marijuana films. Films such as the 1978 *Up in Smoke*, the 1995 *Friday*, and the 2008 *Pineapple Express* all use a subversive form of humor to challenge the public perception of marijuana use. I argue that these parodic depictions not only influenced public perceptions of the drug, but also influenced the legal shift concerning marijuana use as well.

One of the earliest films of the 20<sup>th</sup> century addressing the subject of marijuana, *Reefer Madness* (1936) portrays marijuana in a negative light. Threatening dire consequences, *Reefer Madness* in its trailer states that marijuana is a “deadly menace,” “a burning weed with its roots in hell,” a “viscous plant,” and if one partakes in its pleasures it can lead to “violence,” “murder,” and “suicide” (*Reefer Madness*). *Reefer Madness*, with its many negative stereotypes, helped to shape public perception concerning the use of marijuana. Only a year after the film’s released, according to David F. Musto M.D., “the anti-marihuana law of 1937 was largely the federal government’s response to political pressure from enforcement agencies and other alarmed groups who feared the use and spread of marihuana by ‘Mexicans’” (par 1). *Reefer Madness* created a fear within Americans that marijuana is a dangerous narcotic that will destroy the next generation of Americans.

Rhetorically, the film’s message also tied marijuana and its use with security issues. After *Reefer Madness*’s debuted in 1936, people witnessed an increased level of security for the next two decades towards marijuana use: “Most contemporary accounts of marijuana policy argue that the ‘reefer madness’ period in the 1930s brought draconian laws that included the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 and a number of state laws” (Nicholas par 1). The *Reefer Madness* film helped to influence federal and state governments to take up laws opposing the legalization of marijuana. In the succeeding decades, federal and state laws became increasingly punitive, and in the 1950s offenders faced increased jail sentences. The 1960s—the Age of Woodstock—saw increased usage of marijuana as a countercultural sign of resistance, and in the 1970s, California witnessed increased legal actions taken to decriminalize marijuana.

The 1978 film *Up in Smoke*, featuring Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong, challenges existing marijuana stereotypes created from the film *Reefer Madness*. In the film *Reefer Madness*, a young adult after being handed a marijuana cigarette and after smoking the whole thing, drives fast and reckless, running a red light and in turn killing a pedestrian. Cannabis is portrayed in the film as a drug that makes one do irresponsible things such as speeding and running red lights, potentially hurting oneself or others. However in the film *Up in Smoke*, Cheech and Chong smoke a cartoonishly large

marijuana joint while driving. They end up driving slower than the posted speed limit to the point where they come to a complete stop. Cheech asks Tommy Chong, “Hey man, am I driving okay?” to which Tommy Chong replies, “I think we’re parked man” (*Up in Smoke*). Marijuana is not the performance enhancing drug portrayed in the film *Reefer Madness*. According to Melinda Ratini, a doctor of osteopathic medicine, one of the physical effects of marijuana is a “slowed reaction time” (par 8). Therefore, it is highly unlikely for the young adult in *Reefer Madness* to be speeding. Transforming this scene, Cheech and Chong enact this “slowed reaction time” with comic exaggeration, coming to a complete stop; in this comic moment, they appear to be innocent fools, not a threatening menace.

While *Reefer Madness* essentially tells a morality tale of a young generation destroying itself, *Up in Smoke* focuses upon two pot-smoking protagonists who miraculously escape prosecution and even death. In the beginning of the film, Chong is approached by his father urging Chong to “get a job” (*Up in Smoke*). His father gives him an ultimatum: unless his son becomes a mature and accountable adult, he will be sent to an authoritarian military school. Like the parents in *Reefer Madness*, Chong’s father fears that his child may never mature into a responsible young adult because of his ties to marijuana. *Up in Smoke* transforms *Reefer Madness*’ accounts of irresponsible young adults into farce by creating hyper-irresponsible characters such as Cheech and Chong. In the opening scene, Cheech urinates in the laundry basket because he has mistaken it for the toilette. Rather than obey his father, a symbol of authority, Chong goes in search of marijuana and meets his fellow pot smoker, Cheech. While in *Reefer Madness*, marijuana is regarded as an evil, Cheech and Chong regard it as their quest. In fact, by the end of the movie, these two farcical characters are rewarded with a music contract, rather than the death and destruction promised by *Reefer Madness*.

In a sly way, *Up in Smoke* also addresses the xenophobic fear embedded in the Anti-Marihuana law of 1937 (i.e. Americans “[fear] the use and spread of marihuana by ‘Mexicans’”). First of all, both the protagonists are people of color: Cheech is of Mexican descent and Chong is of Asian descent. Second, the two bumbling characters travel to

Mexico, and in their attempt to cross back in the United States, they unknowingly smuggle a large cargo van made entirely out of marijuana (Musto), comically acting out the American fear of the “spread of marijuana by Mexicans.” They are easily able to transport the shaggy green bus at the border, for the inept authorities believe that a group of nuns are the culprits to what should be a major marijuana bust. Cheech and Chong, unaware that they are essentially “felons” transporting drugs into the United States, parody the fear of drugs being transported by criminals south of the border. In truth, Cheech and Chong are both ethnic American characters, and while they transport a large amount of cannabis into the United States, they do so because of the authorities’ dysfunctional attitudes. And because two bumbling and fumbling users of marijuana, such as Cheech and Chong, are able to transport several tons of cannabis across the border, the film satirizes the legal forces, such as the police and the border patrol, as well as the effectiveness of earlier laws such as the 1937 Anti-Marijuana Law, as well as the marijuana laws of the 1970s.

In the 1970s, there were a number of debates concerning marijuana, some arguing that marijuana was a dangerous drug, while others argued that it should be decriminalized. In 1971 Richard Nixon enforced the War on Drugs. However what is interesting to note is that in 1972, “[t]he Shafer Commission recommends that cannabis should be decriminalized for personal use; and that personal cultivation be allowed along with small transfers for no profit” (“Marijuana Law Reform Timeline”). Unfortunately, Nixon and the US Congress rejected the recommendations of the Shafer Commission. In 1976, two years prior to the release of *Up in Smoke*, “Jimmy Carter endorsed the Shafer Commission’s findings and sent a statement to Congress on August 3 asking them to decriminalize cannabis possession in America for adults” (“Marijuana Law Reform Timeline”). Already America is starting to see a positive shift towards the negative widespread views of marijuana. I argue that this shift is in part reflected in films such as *Up in Smoke*.

In fact, *Up in Smoke* also displays the complicity of law enforcement. Instead of engaging in “a war of drugs,” law officers are ineptly attempting to enforce ant-marijuana laws, or passively participating in smoking marijuana, or actively complicit in the sale of

narcotics. In one scene, a pedestrian and a police officer, both of whom are non-smokers of marijuana, are found eating hot dogs after accidentally inhaling some cannabis smoke. Rather than acting violently, they simply voraciously eat hot dogs; *Up in Smoke* is showing its audience how non-violent and, even harmless, marijuana really is. When the inept border patrol completely miss the real smugglers and accuse the nuns of transporting marijuana, the filmmakers are parodying a “drug bust,” showing how innocent people can be in danger of being punished—not by the criminals, but by law enforcement. Finally, one of the police officers, Gloria, actually sells confiscated drugs. Again the film blurs the lines between what is legal or illegal. In turn, in the 1970s, citizens are witnessing this debate in the public arena.

The 1995 *Friday* film featuring Ice Cube, known in the film as Craig, portrays marijuana as a recreational substance. Smokey, Craig’s friend and a pothead in the film, addresses Craig and says, “I know that you don’t smoke weed. I know this. But I’m gonna get you high today, because it’s Friday. You ain’t got no job, and you ain’t got shit to do” (*Friday*). Smokey, a dealer of marijuana for the supplier Big Worm, actually smokes more of his consignment than he sells. For Smokey, marijuana is a substance to enjoy and smoke, especially, during a day when there is nothing to do. By 1995, viewers have a much different attitude concerning marijuana from earlier times. Even in the 1960s, the audience witnessed the early signs of a shift in public perception. In 1968 and 1969, “appellate courts’ challenges to the 1937 *Reefer Madness* anti-cannabis laws force the federal government to create a Controlled Substance Act and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in 1970” (“Marijuana Law Reform Timeline”). As we saw with the 1970s *Up in Smoke* decades, the public debates about marijuana were reflected in the legal debates and the changing laws. During the 1980s, the county of Los Angeles instituted Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) programs. Founded in 1983 “as part of a joint effort between the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to ‘break the generational cycle of drug abuse, related criminal activity, and arrest’” (“Is the D.A.R.E. Program good for America’s Kids (K-12)?”). Thus, this debate continued, as the public, as we saw in earlier decades, seemed to be especially concerned with how marijuana was affecting

young people. What is interesting to note is that the *Friday* film precedes in a year's time the ground breaking legislation within the state of California allowing for the medicinal use of marijuana: Proposition 215, which passed in 1996. Such films as *Friday* reflect differing views of cannabis—for instance, as a recreational drug—but it also satirically points to the socio-political issues of race and class that are also part of the marijuana debate.

*Friday* begins with Craig's father berating his son for not completing his chores, and then while his father is in the bathroom, he demands that his son comes in and bombards him, chastising him for losing his job and for not being a working responsible adult. Both *Up in Smoke* and *Friday* begin with fathers, as figures of authorities, complaining that their sons have not matured into adulthood because they cannot hold steady employment. In contrast to Chong, Craig is not a habitual marijuana user—in fact, he was just fired from his job, ironically, on his day off. The habitual user in the film is Smokey, who tells Craig that he needs to relax and recreationally enjoy his stash.

The question of marijuana used as a recreational drug has long been debated in California. In an interview with Barack Obama and Barbara Walters, Walters asks Obama the following question: "Do you think marijuana should be legalized?"

(Kerlikowske) Obama in addressing the legalization of marijuana responds,

"Well, I wouldn't go that far. But what I think is that, at this point, Washington and Colorado, you've seen the voters speak on this issue. And as it is, the federal government has a lot to do when it comes to criminal prosecutions. It does not make sense from a prioritization point of view for us to focus on recreational drug users in a state that has already said that under state law that's legal"

(Kerlikowske)

In *Friday*, however, the idea of marijuana as a personal recreational drug is only one aspect of the film, for it also parodically deals with danger of drug dealers in the community. In the movie, the clear and present danger comes from the aggressive drug dealer known as Big Worm, to whom Smokey owes money. While *Reefer Madness* emphasizes the effects of the potent "dangerous menace" of marijuana on young people and their ability to judge, *Friday* focuses upon a contrasting danger: the threat in the

community surrounding the use of cannabis. In *Reefer Madness*, youths become violent after smoking marijuana even almost to the point of violent insanity. A young woman takes her life by jumping out a window, and a young adult male is framed with the shooting of his sister only within minutes of smoking marijuana. *Reefer Madness* highlights the individual and familial cost, while *Friday* focuses upon the neighborhood, emphasizing that the actions of one person may affect the entire community. In *Friday*, Smokey and Craig are shot at with machine guns from several people in a black van. The cause for the aggression is because they owe the drug dealer Big Worm two hundred dollars. *Friday* demonstrates the present danger two recreational cannabis smokers encounter—especially in terms of the violence generated around the illegal drug.

The film also emphasizes the socio-economic situation in which the two stoner buddies find themselves. Not only are Craig and Smokey unemployed, but the film's director, F. Gary Gray, depicts the neighborhood struggling with urban issues. In *Friday*, there is never enough food or money to go around, reflecting the lower economic living conditions in this small African American Los Angeles-based suburb. In the morning, Craig is seen trying to fix himself up a bowl of cereal; however, there is no milk. Money seems to always be a problem within the film as well. Smokey's mother asks him to get her cigarettes and she only gives him a dollar. Everything seems to be broken down and to not work to its full potential. For instance, Smokey's automobile is always popping and hissing, and it can never come to a full complete stop. Perhaps Gray, though parody, is suggesting that the neighborhood is "broken down" through outside neglect, although certain members of the community are committed to work to their full potential—although not all of them have the right direction.

In his comedy, Gray highlights the interrelationship of the two friends with the life of the community, especially the criminal life. Within the span of 16 hours—less than a day—Craig and Smokey encounter Big Worm, who threatens to kill them both unless they pay him the \$200 owed him; Smokey is forced by Deebo, the community bully, to break into a local home to steal some money and jewelry; and both Craig and Smokey are threatened with guns. In the end, Craig stands up to Deebo and knocks him out, and

Smokey then takes the stolen cash to pay back Big Worm. In a final scene, Smokey states that he plans to go into rehab, comically echoing the morality lessons of *Reefer Madness*; however, he then announces he was “bullshittin’” and lights up a joint, subverting the fundamental ideology of the 1936 film.

Through humor, Gray reminds us that drug use and crime may be intertwined in the complex debate concerning marijuana during this time. In addition, issues of race and class are also significant. Such groups as the Drug Policy Alliance have noted that while drug use is comparable across racial lines, people of color are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated. Although *Friday* desires to make its audience laugh, the film also portrays urban areas that suffer from diminished resources and inequitable laws and enforcement systems.

The 2008 film *Pineapple Express* directly deals with the issues concerning the legalization of marijuana. The film opens in 1937 in black and white a year after the release of *Reefer Madness*. The opening of *Pineapple Express* is subversively alluding to the 1936 film. Director David Gordon Green of *Pineapple Express* strategically places the time period of the film to contrast it with *Reefer Madness*. The film then pans to an underground top secret research bunker in the desert: Private Miller smokes cannabis, known as “item nine” in the film, in an airtight room. He is asked the question, “When you think of your superiors what emotions do you feel?” (*Pineapple Express*). Because Miller is unable to give an affirmative answer to the question and mocks his authorities by making drum and trumpet sounds as they are speaking, General Bratt reaches a final conclusion for item nine by shouting in the phone “illegal” (*Pineapple Express*). The black and white scene in the beginning of *Pineapple Express* subversively mimics the black and white film *Reefer Madness*. This first scene highlights the 1937 fear and cultural frustration concerning cannabis, especially as the authoritarian military fears that this “item nine” will lead to a break down in social order.

The black and white scene then switches to color with a shot of a pot smoking Dale Denton, the protagonist, driving in his car. Although Chong and Craig were both lectured by their fathers in the opening scenes, the authoritarian military takes the place of the father figure. All three protagonists use marijuana as a means to deal with social

authorities and social norms. In fact, Dale, the main character, and his drug dealer Saul are depicted as perpetual adolescents. Dale, played by Seth Rogen, is even dating a high school student. Early in the movie, Dale and Seth meet and discuss Saul's grandmother and euthanasia, but Dale prefers not to talk about the serious topic of death. Before Dale leaves, Saul asks him if he would like to smoke a cross joint with him. The cross suggests a religious symbol, and for some marijuana smokers, smoking marijuana can be a religious experience. For Saul and Dale, that is exactly what they experience. Their spirits are lifted; they part; and, they continue throughout their day. Here, the director Green alludes to both death and life, associating marijuana as a secular means to an everyday religious paradise.

During the opening credits, the film depicts Dale conversing with a radio talk host, while driving and smoking cannabis. Speaking with great conviction, Dale argues that he will lose faith in humanity if marijuana is not legal in the next five years (*Pineapple Express*). He continues to argue the weakness of the current system of the buying and selling of cannabis by saying, "All this current system is doing is putting money in the hands of criminals and it's making ordinary people like you and me deal with those criminals" (*Pineapple Express*). His statements ironically foreshadow, in fact, the violent events to come. What is interesting to note is that the film takes place in Los Angeles: a place where marijuana is legal for medicinal use, yet Dale purchases marijuana from a drug dealer. I argue that the reason he purchases marijuana from a drug dealer is because he is using it not for medicinal purpose, but for recreational purposes. However purchasing marijuana from a drug dealer also sheds light upon the many millions of Americans who have to do this if they want to smoke marijuana for recreational purposes.

Like *Up in Smoke* and *Friday*, *Pineapple Express* highlights the world of the marijuana user intersecting with the criminal world. Green especially depicts a number of scenes of disturbing physical violence. The first scene occurs when Dale, as process server, visits the drug lord Ted Jones, who with a corrupt police officer kills a member of a rival drug ring. Ironically, Dale's job—as a process server of legal documents—gets him into a situation where he is witnessing a criminal act. Later, Dale and Saul visit Red

the drug dealer. Dale and Saul approach Red and ask him if anybody has been looking for Dale because Dale witnessed a murder. Red replies with, “uh-un” meaning no he has not been approached by anyone looking for Dale (*Pineapple Express*). However, Dale and Saul quickly realize that Red is lying and for about the next two and a half minutes a violent physical brawl occurs.

As we saw in *Up in Smoke* and *Friday*, the director and screenwriters have blurred the lines between what is legal and illegal. Although in 2008, medical marijuana had been legalized, recreational marijuana was still illegal. Steven M. Graves author of “Cannabis City: Medical Marijuana Landscapes in Los Angeles,” notes that this ambiguity between what is legal and illegal gets perpetuated in multiple ways. Analyzing a medical marijuana building in Venice, California, he states, “The open-air Victorian building and the purple sign emblazoned with the word ‘Kush,’ a slang term used by recreational users of marijuana, clearly contradict proclamations of the clinical administration of medical care” (5). Graves notices a shift that medical marijuana dispensaries are going through, catering to recreational users because of the language of the sign. The shift that Graves talks about has also been encouraged by safety issues. As we see in *Pineapple Express*’s violent scenes, danger is much more likely when dealing with drug dealers and criminalized marijuana, rather than clinics and legalized marijuana.

The blurring of the division between what is legal and illegal is especially highlighted in the final scenes. The corrupt police officer, played by Rosie Perez, joins forces with Ted, the drug lord, and his henchmen to track down Dale and Saul. The film, as we have seen earlier, depicts the “law” complicit with the criminal. The last scenes in *Pineapple Express* are very violent. Saul is captured and held hostage by Ted, while Dale enlists Red’s help to free his friend. The final shots of the movie include multiple factions descending on Ted’s barn, with gunfire and explosions galore. In the end, Dale, Saul, and Red survive, while both the drug lord and the corrupt police officer are killed. Although *Pineapple Express* is humorously depicting these characters’ adventures, they offer a message to the viewer—if one can’t distinguish between the law and the criminal, are current laws on legal and illegal marijuana so clearly distinguishable?

In *Pineapple Express*, the director and screenwriters use multiple stereotypes to communicate their amusing narrative, and, intriguingly, the three surviving characters—the drug dealers and users—end up being the heroes. How the filmmakers use stereotypes is especially interesting. Saul especially plays the comedic fool, perpetuating stereotypes of marijuana smokers. When Saul and Dale are stranded and need a ride, they attempt to hitchhike. Saul takes his thumb and sticks it out of the zipper pocket in his pants so that it looks like his penis is suspended outside of his pants. Clearly, Saul provides the comedic relief within the film. Later in the film, he is seen running down an alley and he jumps into a dumpster. He is hiding from some people that are chasing him and he does not want to get out. Dale tells him that the location of the dumpster is not a good place to hide, so they continue running from the people that are chasing them. In these scenes, Saul appears child-like and innocent. Rather than using the stereotype of a vicious drug dealer, the director deflates those threatening stereotypes, choosing the innocent stoner stereotype instead.

In all three of the films, the directors and screenwriters perpetuate the stoner character, and this vision of the marijuana user, although a stereotype, has become iconic. Ideologically, this type has actually combatted the stereotype of the crazed and dangerous marijuana user of *Reefer Madness*. By making the marijuana user appear adolescent and immature, the filmmakers have also created characters who appear simply dysfunctional and no longer a threat to the social order. In actuality, to try and define what a marijuana smoker would look like and how he would act is difficult because cannabis smokers come from all walks of life: grandmothers, fathers, sons, daughters, teachers, police officers, construction workers, and the list can be endless. But for the filmmakers, the stoner image is especially non-threatening to such figures as General Bratt, and, perhaps, to the world of lawmakers, as well.

Finally, *Pineapple Express* is a unique film in that it has two kinds of messages: one is the celebration and glorification of marijuana. The second questions the first message. Dale realizes that he gets into a lot of trouble during the course of a day because of his consumption of marijuana and his relationship to Saul his drug dealer. Dale says, “You are my drug dealer. There’s one reason we know each other. I like the

drugs you sell. That's it. If you didn't sell those drugs, I would have no idea who you were, and I would look fantastic right now" (*Pineapple Express*). Dale realizes that the drugs (cannabis) he likes are partly responsible for his problems. Thus, while the audience is sympathetic to the plight of the protagonist, the viewer also sees his limits.

In the end, despite the competing ideologies in the film, I argue that marijuana films such as *Pineapple Express* have helped to alter the perceptions of the American public--within the United States, the state of California, and Los Angeles County. Recently in December of 2014, Congress ended the federal government's ban on medical marijuana. Republican Representative Dana Rohrabacher of Costa Mesa notes that the measure's approval represents "the first time in decades that the federal government has curtailed its oppressive prohibition of marijuana" (Halper par 7). Films such as *Pineapple Express* may very well have helped to re-shape cultural attitudes of "the current system."

*Up in Smoke*, *Friday*, and *Pineapple Express* all challenge the stereotypes of marijuana perpetuated by such movies as *Reefer Madness*. Each film subversively disputes the power of such punitive laws as the Anti-Marijuana law of 1937, by depicting marijuana protagonists who appear more innocent than threatening. All three films provide both subversive and subtle messages that deal with marijuana in Los Angeles. The films may have created a counter culture that is more accepting of marijuana as a legal substance within the county of Los Angeles. At times the message is implicit and at other times it is more explicit, but the film's message is both subversive and clear: to legalize marijuana.

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# The Art of Graffiti as Inner-City Communication and as a means of Public Literacy

Ligia Lesko

## **Graffiti and the City Los Angeles**

A city such as Los Angeles, as a material site and a representational construction, has undergone a continuous cycle of expansion, demolition, and re-development. Cities are both a literal and a figurative formation, representing a geographic, social and economic collective. Often economic and political groups with vested interests in maintaining the status quo decide to promote their vision of the city. In her essay, "Who Has the Street-smarts? The Role of Emotion in Co-Creating the City," Janet McGaw states that the city "plays a role in the development of people's social identity and body image through the different representations of the body within the city: and the city's form and structure encourage social conformity and can similarly create social marginalization" (67). The rise of graffiti art in the 1970s challenges this status quo. Although this graffiti art has often been associated with vandalism and gang activity, artists, community activists and scholars have come to recognize the artistic contribution of this street art, as well as its importance as a means of expression for members of Los Angeles's subculture. This "wall talk" has become a means of establishing a communicative art that has become fundamental to the identity of Los Angeles.

## **Where it all began**

What does the word graffiti mean? The word graffiti comes from the Italian word *graffiato* which means scratched. Art historians believe this word was coined because it comes from the idea of early artists scratching etchings on walls with sharp objects. In Klingman, Pearlman, and Shalev's essay, "Graffiti: A Creative Means of Youth Coping with Collective Trauma," graffiti is described as "virtually anything that is drawn, painted,

etched, scratched, or scribbled on any surface visible to the public.” Klingman et al. continue to point out that graffiti “has been variously characterized as ‘folk epigraphy,’ a form of artistic expression and temporary art form,” enacting a form of “discontinuous communicative strategy through which people may engage in visual dialogue, relying neither on face-to-face interaction nor on the necessary knowledge of the writer’s identity” (Klingman et al. 299). Wall art has had a long history from the early cave dweller’s first scratched etchings on walls to Romans writing political statements addressed to the citizens of Rome. As Henry Chalfant and James Prigoff, authors of *Spraycan Art*, remind us, we do not realize how long graffiti has been around. Prigoff also gives examples of how “graffiti was [also] uncovered in Pompeii when the lava was chipped away” after the city was entombed by ash from the volcanoes. He also notes that the “Spanish conquistadors left their names on Inscription Rock outside of Gallup, New Mexico. Frenchmen scratched their names on the walls of Angkor Wat in Cambodia.” Graffiti also has the power to communicate and to affect the actions of its audience. In 1940, a man named Jack Kilroy drew his famous logo “Kilroy was here” to mark his completed tour of duty with a “funny face” that appears over the wall. Later, this wall art was “co-opted by GIs all over the world,” becoming a symbol for a rite of passage. Prigoff observes that graffiti has been and is a very important visual communicative device that has been used and discussed for years.



According to Robert Deitch in his book, *The History of Graffiti Art in Los Angeles*, graffiti art began in New York in the 1970s. As the debates concerning the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement continued to cause a collective tension within the communities of New York, many artists wanted to find a creative and communal way of

expressing their frustrations and deep-rooted resentments. After all, many artistic movements have occurred during political unrest. In the 1970s, the United States was involved in “economical and political expansion,” struggling with such issues as the oil embargo and the continuing debate over the Vietnam War. Disappointed with the “reality of America” the artists began engaging in “antiauthoritarian art forms” such as graffiti and punk rock. Graffiti art encouraged the view that everyone could be an artist, and why not? It appeared as if the world was their canvas. A few of these artists were not just painters but inner-city communicators that left their messages or wall poetry on the streets of major cities as a means of expressing their culture and ethnicity and a means of unifying the community. As a means of communication, graffiti art spoke to a wider public. Graffiti became an important means for groups to establish their communicative identity through art.

Although many scholars argue that graffiti art began in New York, other critics believe that a form of graffiti art was well at work in Los Angeles as early as the 1900s. This type of graffiti is not well documented or even regarded by some as a category of graffiti culture; however, it plays an important part in the foundation of graffiti art in Los Angeles: hobo art. As far back as the 1900s, hobos had been leaving secret codes on trains and in train stations. Hobos began riding trains traveling across the country at the start of the twentieth century and through the Great Depression. Many of these nomadic wanderers would leave comments—a language of survival—for each other, cautioning fellow travelers as to what dangers may lurk ahead. This was also an exclusive language that was used by the “brotherhood of the freight train riders” as they were called and used to keep the population of roaming workers fed and working.

These etchings and drawings left an impression on graffiti artists of Los Angeles. In Joe Linton’s article, “Hundred Year Old Hobo Graffiti,” he writes about the etchings he found on the walls along the Los Angeles River: “On the underside of a bridge along the L. A. River somewhere in the heart of Los Angeles, there’s some very impressive hobo graffiti. It’s not written in spray paint, just chalk and charcoal. It was written by hobos nearly a hundred years ago.” Linton first saw this hobo art while leading a tour with a professor from Pitzer College, Susan Phillips, who as an expert in graffiti, pointed out

the hobo graffiti along the walls of the Los Angeles River. Luckily, these graffiti etchings have been preserved because of their location, situated out of reach of people and floodwaters, although still remaining visible to the naked eye.

The hobo graffiti tradition lives on and has become one of the most sought after art subcultures in Los Angeles. The hobo art community, which in Los Angeles is now known as the freight graffiti art community, has made quite an impact on the street graffiti artists. The graffiti art community embraces the artwork done by the freight graffiti community, and they have shown their enthusiasm by holding shows of artwork that is so lovingly painted on cold steel. An early form of tagging, the signs indicating the “hobo was here” are now considered art.

However, most scholars continue to regard New York, which became an “open air gallery” for graffiti artists, as the starting point for contemporary graffiti. In his article, “Discourse on Difference: Street Art/Graffiti Youth,” Rafferty sees graffiti as an “outright assault on urban architecture” that originated in New York: “The identity of an individual or gang was established by ‘getting up’ a signature in as many places as possible around town without getting caught” (77). These artists began to communicate with one another through tags, drawings, and concrete poetry on walls, buildings and doorways without much concern with the aesthetics of the urban architecture. The subway system became an “artistic link” between neighborhoods in New York City, spreading to the concrete walls all over New York. Eventually this “spray can art” would arrive in Los Angeles.

One of the early exporters of New York graffiti to Los Angeles was the 1981 music video “Rapture” produced by Chris Stecin and Debby Harry of “Blondie.” This video “Rapture” featured LEE Quiñones and Fab 5 Freddy spray painting in the background, which was inspiring to artists all around the world. This was the first American pop song to feature rapping and the first rap-inclusive video to be broadcasted on MTV. LA artist Mister Cartoon talks about how this video was his introduction to “wild style graffiti” (Deitch 11). Mister Cartoon says this began his graffiti art experience, for he saw how graffiti was becoming a part of the hip-hop movement. Watching Debby Harry’s video of “Rapture” as a graffiti artist, Mister Cartoon saw LEE

painting the wall behind Harry as she sang in the video, and Mister Cartoon immediately identified with LEE and his vision of combining hip hop and graffiti into a new art form. This new art form allowed him to find his place within a place, his art within the dance (Deitch 11).

### **The Art and Techniques of Graffiti**

Before looking at contemporary Los Angeles graffiti art, we must first have a better understanding of the language of graffiti. In attempting to categorize graffiti art, some critics describe wall art as a form of vandalized art that is used to communicate a subculture's individual and communal identity. Klingman et al. state that graffiti art "may also be regarded as a mode of communication with others that allows personal expression while behaving in an unconventional way and changing the environment" as we see it. Klingman et al. also feel that graffiti art is a form of negotiating with the environment, exercising some mastery or control within urban societal conventions. The techniques of these highly communicative slabs of concrete are indeed mysterious for most of us, so how do they do it?

Tagging is the most widespread type of graffiti that has been inscribed on the walls, buses, and trains of the urban environment, and every year it gains popularity. Alex Alonso states, in his essay "Urban Graffiti on the City Landscape," that tagging is considered a stylized signature that a writer marks on the environment. In Los Angeles, tagging transformed into more sophisticated pieces of art, and an increasing number of these marks began to appear on the walls of the city. By the late 1980s graffiti became a public issue in Los Angeles with many forms of signage by local graffiti artists and some by artists from other cities. Taking anywhere from one hour to one week to complete, some pieces of graffiti became highly personalized and showed the artist's distinctive style. Taggers started to become part of what is known in graffiti jargon as members of a "crew." As these graffiti writers became more active, the artists would begin to paint larger projects, which included themselves, as the graffiti writer, taggers and a larger crew. Some bombers (the "throw-up" artist) would also join and by this time

these artists would be working on a production that could reasonably take up to a week to produce (Grody 18).

According to Steve Grody, “shout-outs” are the names of crew members, other crews, respected writers, girlfriends, or whomever else the writer or crew wants to greet. He says that these names are usually very decipherable and may be written inside or around the piece. The signature of the writer or writers is usually more prominent, stands out more vividly than any of the regular shout-outs and is accompanied by the crew or crews of which the writer is a member. Sometimes the entire roster of a particular crew is listed by the side of a piece and is referred to as a “roll call.” Some writers numbered their pieces, but this practice declined, as many writers were suspected of pumping up their numbers (Grody 68).

“Piecing” is yet another form of graffiti found in Los Angeles and marked by the hip hop era. According to Alonzo, this stylized letter writing shows how the graffiti artist is able to control the spray can and focus on not only the precision letter writing but also the artistic dexterity, understanding how to skillfully handle an aerosol paint can. As a tagger begins to gain recognition by his signature, he’ll eventually become known as a master “piecer,” demonstrating his artistic ability of style and technique.

How do graffiti artists put up such large pieces of art with such dimensional accuracy? There are three dominant factors that affect the construction of such a piece: the actual size of the available concrete piece, the natural reach of the writer, and the amount of working time that is available for the artist to complete the piece. If an entire wall is available and the artist has the permission of the owner then the whole wall will be used. There are also illegal whole wall productions that are done on walls that are in obscure locations. When a whole wall production begins the artist will mark out the space that each artist will use to work on his or her piece of art. Each artist also contributes background figures and cityscape scenes that will tie in with the production visually. The beginning outline and the scale of the artist’s work is usually done by the “natural range” of the writer’s arm to make one letter with the rest of the work to proceed from there. Sometimes standing on a box or an empty five-gallon container helps the artist reach the higher spots.

The dangers of graffiti art and becoming an exceptional tagger go hand in hand when embarking on the job of becoming a tagger. Alonso recounts that taggers are also inspired to continue their exploits because of the rebellious nature of their actions. The graffiti artists continually challenge the normative values of popular culture by figuring out how they can change or defy social norms and how to conquer them. For example, Alonso notes that graffiti artists have to confront such challenges as the barbed wire that is found around freeway and expressway signs, finding ways to circumvent these barriers. Alonso emphasizes that tagging can be dangerous; one tagger in an effort to complete a tag fell 100 feet from a freeway overpass while he tried to write his tag in a very inaccessible place. In his essay, "Whatever Happened to the Graffiti Art Movement?," Lyon Powers notes that a tagger would receive special recognition if his tag were displayed where it would be difficult to reach. Because of the competitive nature of tagging, the experienced graffiti artist wants to be identified with the specific logo or signature. Although the general population may view tagging as an illegal and a narcissistic mode of expression, it actually is a part of the complex subculture of street art with its own category of fashion, music, and art.

### **Los Angeles and the Art of Graffiti**

In terms of demographics, Los Angeles is the second most populated city in the United States. Los Angeles attracts graffiti artists from all over the world because here graffiti art becomes an all season endeavor, for Los Angeles's warm climate allows artists to work year round. According to Robert "Wisk" Alva and Robert "Relax" Reiling, the "root of all graffiti" in Los Angeles "stems from local gang graffiti." At one point, Los Angeles tried to suppress these artists by banning the sale of spray paint, legislating new laws against graffiti artists, and going so far as to suspend drivers licenses to those who were issued tickets for posting graffiti art. In time, however, this art opened the eyes of many Angelenos, and these bright, colorful, and subversive pictures would change the graffiti world forever.

### ***Cholo* gang graffiti**

Graffiti art in Los Angeles was inspired not only by hip hop and music videos but also by the vision of artists, such as Chaz Bojorquez, who were part of the *cholo* gang graffiti movement of East Los Angeles (Deitch). It did not take long for graffiti art to emerge on the West Coast as the *cholo* gang tags began to appear on the walls of Los Angeles. Deitch writes that in the postwar period, pachuco culture developed into the cholo gangs of the 1960s. Derived from the Aztec word *zolotl*, meaning “dog,” the word cholo had been used in the United States as a derogatory term describing a person of Mexican heritage, but in the 1960s, Mexican American activists reclaimed the term—along with Chicano—for themselves, transforming an ethnic slur into a badge of pride. Cholo gang members, such as the pachuco, emphasized the creation of a uniquely Chicano youth culture based around the streets of Los Angeles (Deitch 146).

While graffiti art exploded in New York, Chaz Bojorquez was “building on *cholo* gang graffiti to invent a new artistic language” that brought the culture of his community to a larger arena in the city of Los Angeles. Bojorquez grew up in Highland Park, East of Los Angeles. He created a “graffiti icon” that was adopted by the “local gang, the Avenues.” In an interview, Bojorquez states that graffiti in Los Angeles goes back as far as the 1930s when the shoeshine boys would mark their spots on the street by writing their names on the wall. Bojorquez also states that he knows of tags down by the Los Angeles River that date back to the 1940s, painted with sticks and tar that could be the signs made by the hobos that had passed through Los Angeles but nonetheless are still visible (Deitch 146). Bojorquez explains that the graffiti he made was mostly cultural. He said that this is what is unique about Los Angeles and that the artists that bring their culture into their art. He explains that *cholo* culture expresses his Mexican American heritage; however, *cholo* is also a subculture of the West Coast, and Bojorquez uses the materials that are also part of Los Angeles. For instance, he and his crew write in the lettering that the *Los Angeles Times* uses, the Old English type, for this lettering has the look of prestige, and this lettering, according to Bojorquez, reflects their style: “well that it’s our strength” (Deitch 147).

Bojorquez, in recounting the history of his *cholo* graffiti, explains that Chicano gangs were originally formed for protection in response to racism. He says that when people think of Los Angeles gangs they often think of drugs and violence but the Chicano gangs were more about taking pride in their neighborhoods. In 1943, when the Zoot Suit riots occurred, many in the community angrily responded to this targeted racism, creating the groundwork for the *cholo* culture. Graffiti, says Bojorquez is a way to identify his ethnicity and identity saying, “This is our Latino territory.” Recognizing the political implications of graffiti, he states that when we see a wall in the neighborhood tagged by an individual gang, we can regard that graffiti as a complaint, but when we see a lot of tags one after another, Bojorquez remarks, “That is a petition” (Deitch 147).



Photo of Chas Bojorquez taken by Salvador Rojas for Grafflicks care of [blog.grafflicks.com](http://blog.grafflicks.com)

In his book, *Graffiti L.A.*, Grody describes the work of a well-known Los Angeles graffiti artist named Revok, noting how he was influenced by the *cholo* graffiti art he saw as a young teen. Revok remembers that *cholo* graffiti had bold, hard, super-high-

contrast letters, just black on white or grey, Old English letters that had a really forceful, egotistical, dark, intimidating presence. According to Revok, these letters that the *cholo* graffiti artists painted had a “bad-ass, kick-your-head-in, you-don’t-want-to-fuck-with-us presence”; “the big gang blocks, the thick hard black lines” is in the subconscious of all LA graffiti writers. The “subliminal message” the graffiti artist created with the angles, shapes, colors and boldness has become unique to Los Angeles (Grody 44). Los Angeles has its own style.



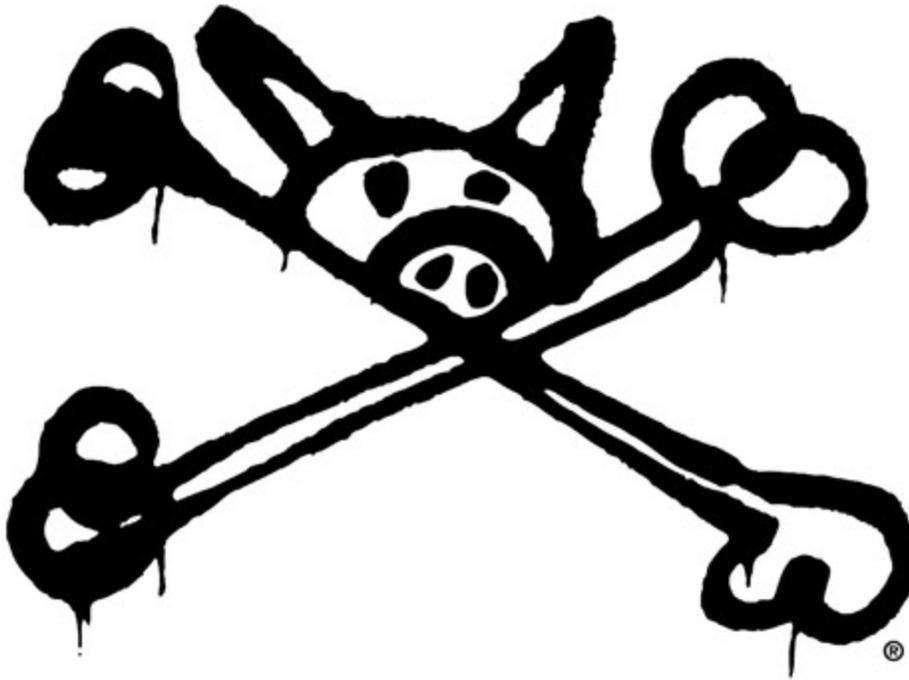
Revok photo from puregraffiti.com

According to Grody, by the mid-1980s territorial disputes began to break out among writers and crews over various areas on the East Side of Los Angeles,

particularly over the Belmont Tunnel. It is interesting to point out that the first crews to paint the tunnel claimed ownership of the area by closely monitoring anyone who wished to paint there. "Prime," an East Los Angeles graffiti artist, insisted that writers ask for permission and show detailed sketches of their work before painting on the walls. As anonymous graffiti artists were beginning to penetrate the East Side, conflicts with neighborhood gangs were becoming an issue. By 1986, many active gang members started to think about affiliating with non-gang graffiti crews, motivated by the idea of a "less violent, less constrained, but more expressive lifestyle." These desertions, Grody states, threatened East Side gangs, who occasionally reacted with violence. As a result, graffiti activities were severely curtailed on the East Side. Some graffiti writers traveled to the West Side yard, Motor and National also referred to as "Motor Yard," to find a place to paint in relative peace (Grody 24).

### **Venice, California**

Graffiti art was spreading throughout Los Angeles, as evidenced by the paintings on subways, freeway over passes and on open concrete walls. While *cholo* graffiti was mainly focused in East Los Angeles, in the 1990s, graffiti art would also become an important part of the art scene in Venice, California. Venice was a hot spot for graffiti artists, and a key innovator of Venice style graffiti was Craig R. Stecyk III. Like Chaz Bojorquez, Stecyk attempted to create his own innovative artistic language. In his art, Stecyk brought four different movements together: surf, graffiti, hip hop and skateboarding. Stecyk created the famous "rat bone" tag that arose on the walls of Venice and jumpstarted another revolutionary and popular movement: the "artist-skater community." Stecyk believes in the words of Andy Warhol who says, "Art is anything you can get away with" (Surfer mag.) and proves that by tagging his "rat bone" tag throughout Venice and Santa Monica.



Rat Bone Tag by Craig R. Stecyk III

Deitch states that Venice in the 1990s was dubbed “the most popular place to paint.” Many famous painters from all over the country infiltrated Venice, hoping to leave their legacy on the walls of the Venice Pavilion also known as the “Graffiti Pit.” The “Graffiti Pit” was the best known place to paint. Painters from all over the world came to use the walls of this coastal town to imprint their style and color on the walls of Venice. Not only did the community of Venice admire the works of the artists but these walls were continually used in many movies and TV shows giving what the graffiti artists wanted most: exposure.



Grasp graffiti at Venice Beach, California

### **Murphy's Ranch**

Interestingly enough, graffiti art has also been represented on the backdrop of one of the most beautiful areas of Los Angeles. Murphy's Ranch, located two miles deep in the Santa Monica Mountains, is in a wealthy area of Pacific Palisades. The property originally was owned by Winona and Norman Stephens, who believed that at the conclusion of WWII, the Germans were going to invade the United States and take over the country. Desiring to have a self-sustaining compound and community, the Stephens built a power station, a machine shed, a massive water tank and a stable to house their livestock. The Stephens eventually abandoned both their dreams and the house, which later turned into an artist's colony. Soon the artists were also asked to leave the property and now it is owned by the city of Los Angeles. Graffiti art has completely taken over the ranch and the buildings are covered in bright "bubble art" and signs of many graffiti artists. Spray cans are thrown all over the ground as one can visualize the artists working to create bright, colorful, productions and "thrown ups" as personal and individual pieces of artwork overtake this compound. What began on

Stephens Ranch as a fascist rebellion against the United States government became, ironically, a way of connecting and centralizing artists from all over Los Angeles, creating a communal form of art that united many groups of artists from Los Angeles.

In their book, *The History of Los Angeles Graffiti Art*, Robert Alva and Robert Reiling talk about the “First Era” which begins with their discussion of graffiti art in the year 1983. During this period, a few teenagers discovered a new way to communicate with each other outside the “civilian world” known as Los Angeles. Alva and Reiling explain how teenagers came from all different areas of Los Angeles and different social and economic backgrounds and found a way not only to express their artistic flair but also to “escape the dangerous elements” of their neighborhoods. As Alva and Reiling state, some of these artists had exchanged gangs for crews and guns for spray cans. Because this was a new way of communicating with the city within the city, these pioneers were willing to do what it took to understand this new art form, which was in its infancy. For some of these First Era teens, Murphy’s Ranch provided a space where they could paint without the feeling of competition but rather a feeling of unity and accomplishment. Feeling a sense of community, the artists that came to Murphy’s Ranch desired to express their artistic ability in a place they regarded as a safe environment to communicate their artistic emotion. Ironic as it seems, although Murphy’s Ranch initially began as the Stephens’ fascistic dream, it eventually became a place of artistic harmony.



Photo by Jamie Martin/Creative Commons

Graffiti art began as a communicative form of artistic expression and has continued to communicate in many ways through wall art in Los Angeles. Graffiti artists feel a desperate need to communicate through tags, drawings, and concrete poetry on walls and doorways. The significant paintings and individual tags that began as distinctive styles on New York subway cars transformed into LA wall talk in the hands of artists from the East Los Angeles, to Venice, to the Santa Monica Mountains and back again. This graffiti has connected a city and created a “common outlaw culture.” The communication between artist and observer only becomes stronger as the artist sharpens his or her skill to become a master at graffiti art, and the observer becomes more informed about that art.



to better “understand the world of visual language.” I hope I have been able to open that world for you. As Grody states, graffiti artists are always “pushing the envelope,” and the best graffiti artists are always striving for more, whether trying to refine how he or she renders a cloud of bubbles surrounding a piece or a radical new letterform. He also believes that these artists’ creative achievements are often picked up and absorbed not only by Los Angeles artists, but also by the international graffiti community that strives to stay informed of current trends through personal connections, magazines, and the Internet (Grody 156).

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# The New Negro in Los Angeles: Representations of Identity in Bontemps's *God Sends Sunday* and Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go*

Jennifer Sanchez

Constructions of identity were an important aspect of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement of the 1920s that sought to empower the black community through its representations of the New Negro in literature and art. In the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, black writers captured the ongoing struggles that hindered the black community from progressing and gaining equality, as well as the internal conflicts over issues of identity that plagued them. They debated over the role of the New Negro, and for many, such as Alain Locke, the New Negro stood in contrast to the Old Negro and embraced his racial identity, refusing to submit to the oppression *and* oppressor of the dominant culture. For others, such as Wallace Thurman, the New Negro simply reconstructed another black image that became subsumed in a white establishment system of black types. Henry Louis Gates notes that the trope of the New Negro represented “a bold and audacious act of language, signifying the will to power, to dare to recreate a race by renaming it, despite the dubiousness of the venture” (4). During this time, key activists and writers of the movement centered their attention on finding a way that the black community and New Negro identity could be represented in an empowering manner.

The Harlem Renaissance gained momentum in 1923, when black social worker and editor of the *Opportunity* Charles S. Johnson argued that “racist art and literature undergirded the Jim Crow system of racial segregation and discrimination,” and that jokes, news articles, film and other mediums, “helped to build up and crystallize a fictitious being unlike any Negro” (Tyler 3). Johnson urged that in order for blacks to overcome and expunge misrepresentations, they, including their white allies, needed to

develop an ideology in their literature to mobilize the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance (3).

Prominent writer of the Harlem Renaissance W. E. B. Du Bois reached out to black writers and encouraged them to produce “credible literature that would gain them recognition in the family of man” (10) as a form of attacking the stereotypes and misrepresentations of blacks that white media and literature perpetuated. During the time, Du Bois made use of his politically rooted journal *The Crisis* to publish writers who eventually became staples in the movement: Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Arna Bontemps, and—much later—Chester Himes. *The Crisis* published pro-black articles, poems, and brief literature that emphasized a stronger black community, as well as politically inclined shorts that encouraged the community to grow more active.

In the late 1920s, as the Harlem Renaissance lost its momentum due to the stock market crash, thousands took part in the Great Migration seeking better employment and living opportunities out West. During this time, a similar political and literary movement attempted to emerge in Los Angeles when the literary society of the Ink Slingers formed with the help of Johnson. Influenced by writers of the Harlem Renaissance, the Ink Slingers—made up of editors and writers for black journals, members of the NAACP and Urban League Association, and local politicians—served to represent the black community in Los Angeles but remained unrecognized despite their pervasive influence. Their primary goal was to inspire other activists into fighting the negative stereotypes that Hollywood and the media consistently reproduced (Tyler 36). The archetypal representations of blacks in the media were not only detrimental to the black community, but it recycled and perpetuated negative images of blacks that contributed to the already prevalent racism in Los Angeles.

While most scholars draw their attention to the race relations and emerging jazz culture in Central Avenue, what remains understudied is the literature that emerged from the 1920s to the 1940s that captures the conflicting images of black representation explored by black writers living in South Central—specifically, Arna Bontemps and Chester Himes. Although Los Angeles—including South Central—promised a site of

renewal for its incoming residents, black writers found that this city of images sought to replicate past stereotypes of blackness. Bontemps's *God Sends Sunday* and Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* explore the internal conflicts that residents and transplants of South Central experienced, especially concerning representations of race and class. Bontemps's and Himes's works, which both merge biography and fiction, reflect their personal experiences in the area of South Central. Each of their experiences is crucial to understand in order to demonstrate how the environment affected each writer and how their novels are a manifestation of the representations of identity they each wish to reclaim. It is also important to consider the question of how the black individual and community are represented in literature, a question that created fiery disputes among writers during the start of the Harlem Renaissance. Even though Bontemps and Himes did not share similar experiences in South Central, their works depict the space and its emerging culture and demonstrate the authors' experiences and attempts in reclaiming their black identity in an environment that often undermined those attempts.

Early in the twentieth century, Los Angeles, including Central Avenue and the surrounding area of South Central, was falsely advertised as a safe haven and land of opportunity. Because Hollywood was growing, city officials advertised Los Angeles as "the cradle of industrial freedom" (Sides 23), a city where blacks could find not only employment in such areas as manufacturing and entertainment, but also housing. However, the rumors of Los Angeles being a place of renewal and opportunity were deceptive since the city was no stranger to employment and residential discrimination. Following the release of *Birth of a Nation*, racism in Los Angeles during the 1920s was rampant, and the re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan helped in intimidating and threatening minorities from moving into white neighborhoods, creating segregated communities of blacks, Mexicans, Japanese (later), and Italians (Sides 18). During the 1930s and 1940s, before and during World War II when Japanese residents were sent to internment camps and the black community populated Little Tokyo, racial tensions and racial restrictions further increased, making it difficult for members of the community to achieve social mobility.

During the 1940s, the overcrowding of blacks in Los Angeles during a time of racial tensions only worsened the issue, especially when white residents resented the black migrants who occupied the affordable housing in the residential areas not officially segregated (Itagaki 68). Los Angeles was undergoing a demographic transformation after the removal of 94,000 Japanese Americans (66), as well as experiencing increased racial tensions between whites, Mexicans, and Filipinos after the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. After the Japanese residents were forcefully removed from Little Tokyo, black migrants began to occupy the area due to the affordable market. Because of this, black migrants were then forced into a similar experience that the Japanese American endured prior to their internment camps. The living conditions in Little Tokyo were deplorable and overcrowded, and black migrants who could not afford to live in the Central Avenue area settled in Little Tokyo.

The literatures of Bontemps and Himes capture the racial tensions and segregation that consumed South Central during this time. Fleeing from the pervasive racism in the South, Midwest, and areas in the East, blacks, believing that Los Angeles would offer them increased prospects, struggled to maintain or reconstruct their identity upon discovering that Jim Crow laws were still in effect. With white supremacy reemerging in Los Angeles, migrants became aware of the de facto segregated areas in which they were permitted. Additionally, tensions between blacks were strong as existing black residents expressed concern over the boisterous and aggressive newcomers from “utterly repressive communities” in the South who “often availed themselves of their new freedoms and made their presence known to both whites and blacks” (Sides 50). Influenced by class prejudice, the existing residents believed that the migrants had to adapt to black bourgeois values (50).

Both Bontemps and Himes address the complexities in Los Angeles through the lens of their personal experiences. While Bontemps’s protagonists reflect Bontemps’s desires to reconnect with the black community by exploring a part of his past he did not experience, Himes’s protagonists reflect the inescapable racism that black migrants discovered upon moving to Los Angeles. For Bontemps, however, reclaiming his black

identity meant working with the ideas and stereotypes of Southern black culture and the black community in South Central.

*Bontemps and Uncle Buddy*

Bontemps was born in Louisiana, but his family relocated in Watts in 1905 where he had a privileged upbringing. His father had a vision for his family which was “to live comfortably as an American man, pure and simple, without any racial qualifier attached to his identity,” a view that emphasized “race solidarity [which] actually undermined the possibility of living in a colorblind society” (Flamming, *Bound* 65). Bontemps’s father’s vision led to isolating his family from the black community, for “[to] the white world, [Bontemps and his sister] were black children; but within the parameters of the black community, they were outsiders. They were middle class in both income and outlook, but they were not part of the black middle class that was trying to remake the city” (*Bound* 64). Bontemps was educated in public schools, attended a white private boarding school, graduated from Pacific Union College, and later attended UCLA (Canaday 163). Despite his isolation from the black community, Bontemps developed an interest in the black literature published in *The Crisis*, later submitting some of his own poetry and winning an award for one of his first poems.

Bontemps relocated to Harlem in 1924 and continued to produce poetry until finally publishing *God Sends Sunday* in 1931. The novel represents Bontemps’s attempt to recreate the black identity he was not able to construct as a child. Basing his protagonist on his Uncle Buddy Ward, Bontemps writes about Lil Augie, a boy from the rural South who finds employment as a successful jockey. Augie’s success as a jockey eventually starts to ruin him, for although his acquired wealth and reputation affirm his self-worth, he develops a scornful opinion of those blacks who are darker than he is. His streak of luck, however, ends when he loses all of his wealth and possessions, and embarks on a twelve-year journey, meandering around the South before settling in Mudtown.

After publishing *God Sends Sunday*, Bontemps relocated to the South and immersed himself in the culture his father isolated him from during his childhood. In “Why I Returned,” an autobiographical essay published thirty-four years after the

release of *God Sends Sunday*, Bontemps attempts to explain his father's actions. While living in Louisiana, his father had a threatening encounter with two white men, and this encounter frightened Bontemps's father to such an extent that he decided to remove his children from the black community to avoid the discrimination and harassment that the community repeatedly endured. Upon Bontemps and his family moving to Watts, living in a predominantly white neighborhood and attending white boarding schools, Bontemps's father cautioned him to not "[act] colored," forcing him to assimilate into white society and abandon the little that was left of his Southern roots (325). In contrast to Bontemps's father, Uncle Buddy embodied the Southern culture, for Buddy was fascinated with multiple Southern narratives, including, according to Bontemps, "dialect stories, preacher stories, ghost stories, slave and master stories. [Buddy] half-believed in signs and charms and mumbo-jumbo, and he believed wholeheartedly in ghosts" (325).

For Bontemps, Uncle Buddy represented his idea of a black culture and community, his *heritage*. He explains in his essay that his desire to recoup his black culture would prove beneficial, for it exposed him to a great side of the culture his father deemed "baneful":

In their opposing attitudes towards roots my father and my great uncle made me aware of a conflict in which every educated American Negro, and some who are not educated, must somehow take sides. By implication at least, one group advocates embracing the riches of the folk heritage; their opposites demand a clean break with the past and all it represents. Had I not gone home summers and hobnobbed with Negroes, I would have finished college without knowing that any Negro other than Paul Laurence Dunbar ever wrote a poem. I would have come out imagining that the story of the Negro could be told in two short paragraphs: a statement about jungle people in Africa and an equally brief account of the slavery issue in American history. (326)

It was through his association with other blacks that Bontemps started to form a social construct of race that inspired him to learn more about himself as a black man, but also

about how assimilated members of the black community, such as his father, trivialized the black experience in an attempt to disconnect from the black community and reconstruct an identity in accordance to white standards. By discovering the existing conflicts and learning more about black writers, Bontemps familiarized himself with other leading writers of the emerging Harlem Renaissance with whom he would later collaborate.

### **God Sends Sunday**

In an attempt to present a Southern character, Bontemps draws from his uncle, as well as stereotypes of the South: defamatory language, dialogue between characters presented in a “molasses-thick dialect . . . that might be misconstrued as a mocking caricature” (Flamming “The New Negro” 74), and stereotypical characters that were associated with “The Old Time Negro.” Even when the novel’s setting shifts to Augie’s arrival in Los Angeles, Bontemps depicts the black community no differently than he portrays black Southerners. Augie, a Southerner, lives in New Orleans and St. Louis before relocating to Mudtown, a town situated on the outskirts of Watts. The novel received a harsh critique from Du Bois who called it “a profound disappointment,” and Bontemps a “race hater.” Bontemps’s reaction to the critique, however, showed that he was not trying to present a negative depiction of the black community. Instead, he was attempting to preserve it, “to save Negro Americans from their ongoing loss of Negro-ness” because “[he] felt they still possessed what he had lost growing up out West—a culture linked to primitivism, an enduring tie to an African past, an undeniable sense of self” (Flamming 72).

In Part Two of the novel, when Augie arrives to Mudtown, a rural area on the outskirts of Watts in South Central, the narrator describes the town similarly to areas of the South and the primitive nature that Bontemps strived to preserve:

The small group in Mudtown was exceptional. Here, removed from the influences of white folks, they did not acquire the inhibitions of their city brother. Mudtown was like a tiny section of the deep south literally transplanted: Throughout the warm summer days old toothless men sat in

front of the little grocery store on boxes, chewing the stems of cob pipes, recalling the 'Mancipation, the actual beginning of their race. Women cooked over fireplaces in the yards and boiled their clothes in heavy iron kettles. (119)

The narrative describes the town as an extension of the South. The residents appear unsophisticated and, as presented later in the novel, primitive. Mudtown does not interest Augie, and he scornfully dismisses those who live there. Despite having lost nearly all his wealth, Augie arrives with a sense of entitlement and attempts to present himself in a regal fashion by repeatedly wearing his Prince Albert suit around town while scornfully judging others. This section of the novel appears to be Bontemps's reconstruction of how his Uncle Buddy was received upon arriving in Los Angeles. Since Bontemps did not live on the side of town populated by Southern migrants, farms and its animals, he bases his construction of Mudtown on what he overheard as a young adult. However, his illustrations of the characters and setting, as those previously presented, come off as an exaggerated form of what the space really was.

Several of the characters represent archetypal characters of the South. In an attempt to construct his characters as transplants of the South, Bontemps reductively portrays the women in the text as animalistic while he describes the men as drunkards and violent. The women possess mammy-like descriptions—"Women with thick hips, monstrous breasts, and glossy black skin stood on the doorsteps with brooms in their hands, their heads tied with red bandannas" (46)—or attributes that connect them to the primitive sense Bontemps was aiming to capture. The prevalence of the "other" in the omniscient narrative illustrates characters as foreign entities or undesirable: "strange mulatto children," "the young savages," "unlovely black girl," "plug-ugly girl," "[a] huge black woman with a flat, ugly face." By reducing them to stereotypes and othering them, he depicts how blacks were outcasts in society and treated as objects rather than individuals.

Augie's character, despite having been molded from Bontemps's uncle and his stories of the South, is a complex character who attempts to separate himself from the lower-class blacks while not entirely detaching himself from the community. Upon

arriving to Mudtown, Augie holds on to his pompous manners by wanting to appear as though he still has the wealth he lost prior to leaving the South. He parades himself in a worn out frock suit, a reminder of his past in the South, and looks at others with contempt.

Augie is unable to reinvent himself in Mudtown, for he never fits in with the black community because of the tension he both encounters and provokes. However, the end of the novel implies that Augie has a better chance at starting over outside of Mudtown. Augie realizes that Mudtown is not the place for him and decides to go away in a direction that was “new and strange” (193). Augie leaves Mudtown with nothing but his accordion since he leaves his belongings as Tisha chases him out of town. Augie leaves his former self, his Prince Albert suit included, behind in Mudtown and hops on a train to Tijuana with nothing but his accordion, ready to find a life with the possibility of being a jockey once again, demonstrating that there are greater, more attainable opportunities outside of Mudtown.

By writing *God Sends Sunday* and focusing on a part of the South he had never experienced, as well as a part of Watts from which he was isolated, Bontemps works with the ideas, the stereotypes of the South, attempting to capture a sense of what it would have been like had his family stayed in Louisiana. Because a large part of the black community that arrived in South Central arrived with hopes of starting anew, they detached themselves from the Southern culture and instead created a new kind of community that did not exist in the South. When writing about Mudtown, Bontemps is then attempting to recoup a part of his part by how he represents the black culture and community.

#### *Himes and his racial hurt*

Like Bontemps, Himes grew up in a privileged middle-class home that encouraged him to dissociate himself from the black community, but he later rebelled against his mother’s elitist upbringing by attempting to recreate his missing black identity. As Hilton Als explains, “[Himes] wanted to be a ‘real man,’ which is to say a black man—one who, instead of living pressed up against the glass wall that separates him from everything he desires (white women, fast cars, a big slice of the American pie),

shatters it” (qtd. in *If He Hollers* viii). In Los Angeles, however, Himes felt he was unable to shatter that glass wall, for his very environment separated him from what he desired.

Himes, a former Cleveland resident, illustrates his experience in Los Angeles in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* by addressing the racial prejudices and racial tensions within South Central more explicitly. Himes immerses himself in the Los Angeles culture of the 1940s and illustrates how the prevalence of racism damaged individuals who were trying to reconstruct their lives in the West, for his protagonist is “almost paralyzed by the racial conditions caused by wartime hysteria and nativism against [the Japanese]” (Itagaki 65). Additionally, Himes addresses the racial tensions triggered by the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. With the occurrence of World War II and the Zoot Suit Riots, Keith Wilhite explains how “[questions] of identity, nationalism, and the limits of government to police its own citizens prove central to both Himes’ response to the riots and his conception of L.A.’s wartime geography” (123). Wilhite posits that these events trigger the fear in the novel’s protagonist, Robert “Bob” Jones, in addition to raising legitimate questions about safety and racial identity. By addressing the issues present in Los Angeles in the 1940s, Himes not only highlights the heterogeneity of a multi-racial city, but also exposes the oppressive monologic views that attempted to marginalize minorities rather than unify them (125).

In *If He Hollers*, Himes illustrates the inequities and Jim Crow laws in effect in places of employment, especially for dockworkers. Although there is a war abroad, Himes understands that his protagonist is fighting his own war of racial discrimination in a Los Angeles that was “in the midst of a racial and ethnic transformation that threatened to reverse the previous ‘Anglo-cizing’ of Los Angeles” (Wilhite 131). Additionally, Himes incorporates biographical material in his novel, for he, like his protagonist, was lured to Los Angeles by the city’s boosteristic promises only to confront the damaging effects of racial prejudice.

In his autobiography, *The Quality of Hurt*, Himes describes the damage, the “hurt” that Los Angeles caused and indicates that *If He Hollers* is an accumulation of those racial hurts (75):

Los Angeles hurt me racially as much as any city I have ever known—much more than any city I remember from the South. It was the lying hypocrisy that hurt me. Black people were treated much the same as they were in an industrial city of the South. They were Jim-Crowed in housing, in employment, in public accommodations, such as hotels and restaurants. . . . [Under] the mental corrosion of race prejudice in Los Angeles I had become bitter and saturated with hate. . . . I was thirty-one and whole when I went to Los Angeles and thirty-five and shattered when I left to go to New York. (73-76)

Throughout his autobiography, Himes recalls the hurts he experienced by means of rejection, repression, and racism. Despite possessing the required skills and experience, Himes could not find stable employment in this city of “lying hypocrisy.” The employment limitations started affecting Himes on a much deeper level when his personal insecurities began to affect his marriage, eventually leading to his moving to Harlem in an attempt to start anew. Rather than shattering the glass wall in Los Angeles, Himes discovers that the city shatters him instead, leaving him bitter; however, Himes, through his fiction, transforms his bitterness into art, using his protagonist to confront the city which harmed him.

*If He Hollers Let Him Go* was Himes’s way of addressing not only the pervasive prejudice endemic to the South Central area, but also the tensions and violence occurring within the black community. As a response to his own experiences, Himes was critical of blacks who often ignored the racial violence that repeatedly erupted in the community, choosing accommodation over resistance. Itagaki explains:

[Himes] expands on this brief irony and creates a protagonist who resists the settlement and stasis possibly achieved by overlooking racism. In search of economic mobility and social respectability, those from the black bourgeoisie such as the Harrisons have reinterpreted settlement as exclusion of and disdain for the working classes, the other black migrants and other races; it is a redefinition forged in racist and classist terms. (70)

In his novel *Himes* criticizes the hypocrisy of the black middle-class of Los Angeles during the 1940s while satirizing their dedicated efforts to assimilate and recreate themselves as white through economic mobility. The Harrisons represent the black bourgeois that wish to separate themselves from the working-class blacks (Wilhite 134) while praising whites for granting middle-class blacks their level of success and wealth. In choosing to accommodate to the white establishment, they pay a cost—cutting their ties with their blackness. By immersing themselves in the white community, however, the Harrisons have difficulty in understanding the black struggle. Troubled by the hypocrisy he finds in black communities, Himes depicts the prejudices of assimilated blacks, as shown through the Harrisons' relationship with Bob, who courts Alice, their fair-skinned daughter who fears being recognized as black.

Bob, a Los Angeles transplant from Cleveland, works in the industrial sector as a crew leader at Atlas Ship, and he repeatedly experiences a blinding rage and near-paralyzing fear when confronted with race related issues or racism, as well as the idea of being drafted. His fears is a direct response to both his social anxieties about the war and the uncertainty, “the racial handicap” (3), he lives with every day in Los Angeles. His racial handicap continuously interferes with his daily routine, his relationship with Alice, and his ability to work because it produces a blinding anger that results in violence, physical and verbal. Bob's violent responses are dangerous because they make him even more vulnerable in a social environment controlled by inescapable white laws. Bob shows awareness for his surroundings, but also an awareness of the fear and racism that he must either conform to or ignore, but never challenge (4). When Alice confronts Bob about his anxieties, she labels it as a “staggering inferiority complex, amounting to a fixation” (92) that could turn him insane if he “[continued] his brooding about white people” (95). However, Alice and her family's approach to Bob's situation is problematic, since they speak from a white perspective, advocating assimilation and recognition of the efforts white have put into accepting blacks as equals (52).

In relocating from Cleveland, Bob had hoped to reconstruct his life, but the racism he encounters in Los Angeles makes his dreams increasingly difficult to achieve. He finds himself in a world of “nodal points and sequestered territories which dark-

skinned men like [Bob] pass though at their own peril” (Wilhite 134). His ongoing anxieties about the military stem from witnessing how the war was affecting part of the Los Angeles population. When Ben, one of Bob’s crew members, discusses the Army, he presents an argument that resembles the struggle that Bob endures daily:

Every time a coloured man gets in the Army he’s fighting against himself. Of course there isn’t anything else he can do. If he refuses to go they send him to the pen. But if he does go and take what they put on him, and then fight so he can keep on taking it, he’s a cowardly son of a bitch. . . . Any time a Negro says he believes in democracy but won’t die to enforce it—I say he’s a coward. (121)

Ben’s statement demonstrates the struggle that black men faced upon going to war, for they would be fighting for an elusive democracy, an equality that was out of their reach or their control. Regardless of their participation, black men would have very little to gain from fighting in the war. For Bob, he is at constant war with himself in trying to preserve his blackness while trying to find acceptance for being black. Despite his efforts and personal wars, he loses in the end to a white woman who frames him for rape, and he later enlists in the Army in order to escape those false prison charges. As Itagaki claims, Bob ends up as the “[embodiment of] the multiple locations and perspectives of the silenced minorities in Los Angeles; ultimately, he is transformed into the hunted racial body of America himself” (75). In the end, Bob loses the battle against whites and must continue to fight a war against them and himself. He remains as a “hunted racial body” even in the Army, for he will endure the racism embedded in the U.S. military even as he is fighting against racism abroad.

In *The Quality of Hurt*, Himes writes that he did not serve in WWII, but from what he was able to gather from others, learned that “race prejudice was rampant in an armed forces dedicated to fight against racism in other parts of the world” (74). By ending the novel with Bob joining the Army, he presents the ongoing and pervasive nature of racism. Given that Himes experienced further racism after leaving Los Angeles for Harlem, Bob’s fate demonstrates the indeterminable end of racism that affects

blacks throughout the United States. In Los Angeles, however, the rampant racism affected Himes in ways that made his stay in the city short, lasting only four years.

## **Conclusion**

Even though the Harlem Renaissance movement attempted to create a fixed ideology for black writers to follow and apply to their texts failed, it created a diverse platform for black writers to capture their black experience or yearnings for wanting to be more involved in the black community and culture. Representations of the Los Angeles communities in Bontemps's and Himes's novels demonstrate the detrimental effects that the false advertisement of Los Angeles and segregation had on the black community during the 1920s-40s. While South Central, specifically Central Avenue, was glorified as being a place of opportunity and tolerance, the realities that are illustrated in Bontemps's and Himes's work reveal the actual struggles that blacks encountered and how racism in Los Angeles complicated the intentions that many had upon moving to the west: reinventing themselves.

Through the works of Bontemps and Himes, South Central Los Angeles is presented as an extended representation of the Harlem Renaissance by how both writers challenged and redefined the notions of representation. In their literature, Bontemps and Himes illustrate how institutional racism and colorism claimed the identities of black migrants and black residents of Los Angeles. Additionally, both writers demonstrate the effect that various forms of racism and institutions had on them personally. *God Sends Sunday* and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* are a reflection of Bontemps's and Himes's journey, for they depict how each writer, along with his protagonist, is affected by his surroundings.

Although he was not exposed to the blatant racism that prevailed in the area during the time, Bontemps depicts the residential segregation and tensions within the black migrant communities in his novel. Augie, shaped by colorist prejudices, treats blacks with condescension and contempt, reflecting, rather than resisting white attitudes. In the end of the novel, however, as Augie is chased out of town and he loses his belongings, the reader hopes that Augie will symbolically be able to reinvent himself

outside of Mudtown, outside of Los Angeles, once he leaves his past behind. In the case of Bontemps, this scene is reminiscent of how he attempted to explore his black identity upon leaving Los Angeles.

Bontemps's journey to reclaim his black identity began when he decided to pursue writing and surround himself with other black writers of the Harlem Renaissance attempting to do the same. However, *God Sends Sunday* was Bontemps's first major attempt in recovering a past that he did not experience because it really influenced Bontemps to immerse himself further in the community he had experienced only through writing, literature, and folk tales. The primitivism he applies to the characters in his novel demonstrate Bontemps's efforts by how he bases it on stories he recalls from Uncle Buddy. By trying to recoup his sense of racial identity, Bontemps addresses the complexities of the black communities in the South and in Los Angeles to demonstrate the complicated nature of reclaiming an identity that carries various representations.

The racist environment in Los Angeles affected Himes, whose pride rested on his labeling of himself as a black man. Thinking he could escape the intolerance in the Midwest in Los Angeles, Himes quickly learned that he could not pursue a career in screenwriting because of discriminatory hiring practices against blacks. This event led to a series of disappointments, hurting and racially handicapping Himes. Observing the inequalities that existed at the time, Himes captures the hostility that prevailed in South Central communities by drawing attention to the hypocrisy that destroyed ties between blacks and whites. He draws his attention to the classist and colorist leanings that divided a community and damaged individuals.

Himes, who considered *If He Hollers Let Him Go* as a protest novel responding to the Jim Crow environment of South Central draws attention to the personal battles that minority transplants encountered daily. Like Himes, Bob arrives in South Central only to find a modern form of slavery and naiveté among blacks, as well as the pervasive Jim Crow laws that kept him from being at ease. In the end, Himes echoes the pain Los Angeles inflicted on him through Bob, who becomes a representation of all others who suffered before him. Himes draws his attention to the various tropes that emphasized institutional racism and critiques the legacy of the resulting anger that made it

impossible to reclaim his black identity in a city that created racial division and a loss of racial identity.

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# The Rhetoric of Protests in Los Angeles Local News 1965-2014

Emily Olson

Los Angeles is a diverse city made up of many minority communities; however, LA's rich diversity may also be the source of its periodic conflicts. LA has a long history of dissent with some of the major protest movements taking place in LA's African American communities. One of the most infamous in our nation's history took place in LA in 1965, when the city erupted into chaos during a period often referred to as the Watts riots or Watts rebellion. Almost thirty years later, in 1992, LA was once again the scene of a rebellion that received national news coverage. This occurred in the aftermath of the acquittal of the officers accused in the beating of Rodney King. It has been over twenty years since the 1992 rebellion, and recently LA has experienced additional civil unrest. In 2014 protesters marched the streets of LA once more, this time to protest police shootings. Each of these protests was a reaction to some kind of conflict between white police officers and young black men. With each protest in the city, the Los Angeles Police Department is called to the scene, at times resulting in conflicts that may end in violence. When police and protesters collide, the media often narrates the events to the public. This paper seeks to analyze the rhetoric of two local Los Angeles newspapers: the *Los Angeles Times*, a widely circulated newspaper, and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a smaller newspaper with a targeted African American readership. In this analysis, I will look at the language used to characterize protesters and the framing of the articles during three major LA uprisings: the 1965 Watts rebellion, the 1992 uprising, and the recent 2014 protests. By analyzing the rhetoric used in the three protest movements, I aim to better understand the underlying ideology of each newspaper. Although my study reveals that the *Los Angeles Times* tends to reify the status quo, there have also been examples of the *Times* reporter questioning the prevailing social views. The *Los Angeles Sentinel*, however, consistently gives credence

to the grievances of the African American community, providing greater context for each incident.

While not many scholars have examined the work of the smaller *Sentinel*, a long history of scholars have documented and analyzed the journalism of the *Los Angeles Times*. Mike Davis, who negatively portrays the newspaper and its history in *City of Quartz*, is critical of much of the *Times* coverage of issues taking place in minority communities. Davis criticizes the newspaper's 1975 retrospective assessment of the Watts uprising; quoting a reporter who described the black community as a dying "Black ghetto," Davis describes the *Times* as out of touch: "Seen from a perspective fifteen years further on, it is clear that the *Times*, and other contemporary observers, did not fully appreciate the complexity of what was happening in South Central Los Angeles" (302). For Davis, the *Times* is a mega cooperate machine crushing smaller newspapers in its path—a "Goliath, which, before anti-trust laws prevented it from doing so, routinely squashed competition by buying up smaller regional newspapers" (139). Tracking the evolution of the *Times* and its efforts to stay in power, Davis marks the newspaper's conscious shift in the 1960s toward liberalism in order to appeal to the market of college-educated readers. Davis follows the *Times* through to its contemporary struggles to maintain its liberal audience, while also capitalizing on readers in more affluent communities (140). This struggle for a broader readership could influence the way the *Times* frames its coverage of protest movements. However, it is important to note that the *Times* was twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize for spot coverage of LA's major riots, once for the 1965 Watts rebellion and again for the 1992 uprising. The Pulitzer Prize was awarded for "balanced" and "comprehensive" coverage (Shaw). Clearly not everyone shares Mike Davis's perspective; the Pulitzer Prize shows that the *Times* is widely respected within the journalistic community. Despite the Pulitzer's recognition, other scholars have been critical of the *Times* coverage of race relations in LA. In an analysis of the *Times* ten year anniversary coverage of the 1992 uprising, Jane L. Twomey criticizes the newspaper's efforts to use the memories of the "riots" to support current hegemonic hierarchies by using memories of the past to explain away the city's current economic and social issues. Twomey claims that in multiple articles the

*Times* creates a narrative about Korean-Black racial tensions in order to support the city's current power structure: "framing current race relations in the city as the result of Korean-Black animosity, white social and economic interests would be protected" (90). Both of these scholars argue that its corporate interests influence the *Times* and that its coverage ultimately serves to uphold the status quo in the city, which is White hegemony.

### **The Media Influence on Public Perception**

Many scholars have documented the influence the news media has on public perception (e.g. Allen et al.; Dower & Zawilski). We often think of news media as a neutral force merely delivering facts about events to an audience; however, research suggests that the media does much more than that, transmitting and reinforcing cultural norms of the dominant ideology for its audience. According to one study of media consumption, research indicates that the media serves as a tool for socializing groups, noting that media becomes "an important tool of cultural transmission that [is] employed by corporations and the state to teach individuals about the hegemonic values of the state, interpersonal relationships, individual and collective identities, and the identities of 'the other(s)'" (Dowler and Zawalski 195). This indicates that the media is not a neutral purveyor of information, but rather a powerful force in shaping citizens' views and beliefs.

Often, the media transmits ideology through the framing of a news story. Framing can be the news angle used to give context to a story, often referred to as the "spin" on the story (Campbell et al. 164). According to Barbara Barnett, framing may also refer to the organization of a story: what elements are emphasized, and how the news story/article makes sense of a series of events (18). Research of political news coverage has indicated that framing in or out of a larger context can influence the audience's views greatly; an issue may be presented as a single isolated episode, or it may be discussed as a part of a larger social issue (Allen et al. 507). The framing can reinforce stereotypes and dominant ideologies and privilege certain groups and their

agendas (Barnett 18). Thus, the media creates public “knowledge” through the framing of a news story.

In the case of articles and reports specifically about protests, existing research indicates that the news media routinely sways public perception of protesters as positive or negative; the way the media chooses to frame protests is often the deciding factor in whether the public views a protest as legitimate or illegitimate (Campbell et al. 163). Public support is important to a protest movement because in order to enact real social change, the movement must have mass public support. According to Ana, López, and Munguía, television news reports of the attack on marchers in Selma, Alabama in 1965, “reversed national opinion and eroded political opposition to the Voting Rights Act” (70). The video footage of police beating peaceful marchers in Selma was so shocking to the national audience, it garnered support for the movement. While their example depicts the protesters as heroic, all too often, according to Ana, López, and Munguía, protesters have been vilified. The media’s choice of what to include and what to leave out influences the public’s acceptance or rejection of a protest movement.

Past analyses have indicated that local news has a particularly strong impact on public perception. Local news remains the dominant media source for Americans, with a much larger total audience than that of national news (Allen et al. 507). Local news is particularly important to the community it serves, as it has a significant impact on citizens’ political views. According to Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckman, local news focuses predominantly on crime and violence because it makes for low cost, entertaining news (758). Local crime news tends to reinforce minority stereotypes among white viewers who live in homogenous white neighborhoods, but the same news has little influence on the views of those living in heterogeneous neighborhoods (Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckman 770). Therefore, the media may indoctrinate white viewers, who do not have regular physical contact with minorities, into believing stereotypes because they have little real life experience to use as a frame of reference. Other studies have suggested that the media is responsible for the framing of minority stereotypes on prime-time news (Ana, López, and Munguía 70). While not every protest is related to race, many protests emerge from within marginalized, often minority-

dominant communities. These studies suggest that if protesters are framed as perpetrators of social disorder or even criminals, viewers who have little contact with that community are likely to absorb those stereotypes into their ideology. This makes the news coverage particularly important to protest movements, which rely on public support outside of their immediate community in order to enact policy changes. This impact would be of particular importance in an ethnically diverse city such as Los Angeles, which is home to many different minority groups.

### **Parameters of the Study**

While some studies have looked at national news coverage of protests in Los Angeles, few have focused on the local newspaper coverage (Ana, López, and Munguía; Campbell et al.). In examining print media, I have been able to access archives dating back to the 1965 Watts rebellion from two local newspapers: the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. The *Los Angeles Times* has been in existence since 1881 and is one of the nation's most widely circulated papers, with an audience of 4.1 million readers weekly; also, as of 2006, 61% of those daily readers were white ("Circulation and Readership"). The *Los Angeles Sentinel* is a weekly newspaper and a self-described African American paper that "puts emphasis on issues concerning the African-American community and its readers" (*Los Angeles Sentinel*). The *Sentinel* was founded in 1933 and currently has more than 125,000 readers. I specifically choose these two newspapers because, first, they have both been in existence for all three events I will focus on, and second, they have two very different audiences. The *Times* is a mainstream newspaper, whereas the *Sentinel* is a smaller paper that specifically serves a minority community. The three protests I am analyzing are conflicts largely between Los Angeles's African American community and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD); therefore, looking at an African American newspaper provides a unique opportunity to analyze differences in coverage when compared to the more mainstream *Times*.

I chose to conduct a qualitative textual analysis and a genre analysis to look at patterns in framing, narrative, and other rhetorical functions of the text. While

newspaper articles convey most of the narrative through the body of the paragraph, the title accompanying the article also has an important function; it draws in the reader's interest and informs the reader about the article's topic. These are important elements to analyze because they give the reader the first impression of the story and can be tools to transmit the underlying ideological framework at play. Within the journalism genre, writers often follow several conventions, revealing the rhetorical strategies shaping an article. In addition to the title, articles will contain a lead sentence at the very beginning. The purpose of the lead is to grab the reader's attention, explain the main point of the story, and include the basic facts such as: who, what, when, where (Cappon 23). Through a genre analysis, this paper seeks to examine what ideologies are reinforced in the various articles reviewed.

### **Research Criteria**

To examine the rhetoric of the two local newspapers, I selected articles covering each of the three protests. I created a few criteria when selecting articles. First, the articles had to appear in the local editions of each newspaper; second, they had to directly report on actions taking place during the protests (I was interested in the direct coverage of the protests). The third criteria I chose were to limit my analysis to articles that were published within two weeks of the initial event because I wanted to analyze the immediacy of the journalistic response.

### **Findings**

#### 1965 Watts Rebellion

The Watts rebellion remains one of Los Angeles's, and the nation's, most iconic uprisings. It started on August 11, 1965 when a young black man, Marquette Frye, was pulled over by highway patrol on suspicion of drunk driving (Upton and Rucker 367). Sources conflict on what exactly took place between the two officers and Frye, but it is clear that as the incident with Frye and his family took place, a crowd began to form; at one point, the officers called for back up. The crowd began throwing rocks and bottles at police; the situation got out of the officer's control and soon hundreds of residents of

Watts were openly challenging law enforcement (Saul 149). Before long, California's National Guard was called in to put an end to the unrest. Many members of the Watts community claimed police brutality was to blame, while law enforcement laid blame on a small group of disobedient citizens within the black community. By analyzing the news coverage from the days following the riots, we can see how our view of history is shaped through the rhetoric and framing the media uses. In my analysis of the Watts rebellion, I found that the two newspapers had startling differences in framing. Rhetorically, the papers make two very different arguments about the protests, representing fundamentally different ideologies.

In my analysis of the *Times*, beginning with the titles used, I found that the articles fitting my criteria focused heavily on the violence and destruction caused by the riots. One such title emphasizes the loss of life the rebellion caused and connects that violence to race: "Negro Riots Rage on: Death Toll 25: 21,000 Troops, Police Wage Guerrilla War: 8 p.m. Curfew Invoked" (Berman). This militaristic rhetoric appears throughout the *Times* coverage. Following this pattern, the leads tend to invoke war imagery. Within the journalism genre, the lead is meant to state the article's main point; thus, it would seem that the *Times* considers the damage to property and the racial makeup of the rioters to be the most significant fact about them. For example, one article leads with the following description: "The guerrilla war of south Los Angeles claimed its 25th victim Saturday night as bands of armed Negro looters took to the streets and snipers defied the efforts of 21,000 national guardsmen and law officers to bring peace to the area" (Berman). The rhetoric is reminiscent of 1960s Vietnam War coverage, pitting one side as the protectors of civil order, and the other as an enemy force. The use of language such as, "bands of Negro looters," brings to mind the image of an enemy force. The war rhetoric emphasizes racial tensions and property destructions, generating images of an unstoppable enemy in the minds of readers. The articles also employ the same militaristic rhetoric in the body of many of the articles. Frequently the crowds were labeled "Negro rioters," "Negro mobs," or "Negro youths" as in this example: "Rioters were reportedly firing guns at policemen and civilians as bands of Negro youths and adults roamed the turbulent neighborhoods" (McCurdy and

Berman). The use of the term “bands” of protesters is reminiscent of guerrilla warfare, where the enemy is not one unified army, but is hiding everywhere. The rebellion is frequently described as an unstoppable force: “Violence was mushrooming out over an ever-increasing area of the city Thursday night” (Hartt). These *Times* articles all refer to the uprising as a “riot,” which is rhetorically significant because the word riot connotes violence and vandalism. The framing of the stories focuses on the violence and connects it to race, creating an association between the black community and violence. In all these articles, only one, “Anatomy of a Riot: Minor Incident Ignited Violence” (Davis), explains what started the unrest. This article does explain the police arrest of the Frye brothers, which ignited the community uprising; however, the article, as its title suggests, treats the uprising as a gross overreaction to a minor incident. While this may very well have been the case, this article and the other *Times* articles fail to place the crowd’s frustration in a larger context or explain that the incident may have been a part of a pattern. These articles seem to fall into the category of sensationalized news. While the information may be accurately reported, it seems as though its focus is on shock value rather than information.

While all the *Times* articles fall into the more sensationalist crime-reporting genre, the *Sentinel* articles do not fall into any one easily identifiable genre. The articles cover a variety of topics related to the rebellion. Beginning with the titles, my research found that none of the 1965 *Sentinel* articles focus on the destruction. Two of the article’s titles call attention to factors responsible for sparking the rebellion—one title focuses on the initial police incident involving the Frye brothers: “Watts Brothers Tell Incident That Triggered Riot” (*Los Angeles Sentinel*). The article goes on to describe the incident that triggered the uprising. Told almost entirely from the brothers’ perspective, it focuses on the direct start of the riot; the entire article covers the Frye brothers’ story about their arrest, which turned violent. The family and the community are the central focus of the article. Another article title addresses an underlying issue that was a possible cause of the unrest: “Poverty: An Underlying Factor” (Lane). The article describes in detail how poverty influenced the rioters: “Besides the ever-stated pangs of anger which have been long smoldering in some areas of the Los Angeles Negro community against the police

department, there is another underlying spark behind the riots which shook this city to its foundations. That hidden factor is poverty” (Lane). Here, the rebellion is framed as the product of a long standing issue, not the outcome of one incident between police and an African American motorist.

Similar to the articles from the *Times*, the *Sentinel* uses the word “riot” to describe the rebellion; however, in contrast to the *Times*, the emphasis is not on the destruction, but rather on the reasons for the rioters’ actions. These titles are less shocking than the *Times* titles because their focus is not on the vast size of the riot or how many were killed. Like the titles, the leads do not center on one consistent topic; they tend to concentrate on different possible causes. One article leads with a criticism of LAPD’s handling of the riot: “Chief William H. Parker and his Los Angeles Police Department can take lessons from Chief William J. Mooney and his Long Beach Police Department on how to quell a riot, how to save lives, and how to project an image conducive to soothing the rage of a minority group” (Pleasant). This lead contains clear criticism of the LAPD’s handling of the rebellion and gives specific details of what the department needs to work on. By claiming the LAPD could learn from Long Beach Police Department’s interactions with a minority community, the lead implies the LAPD does not interact well with the African American community. These articles provide different possible causes for why the rebellion started in the first place. The articles also tend to explore possible reasons for the riot, rather than employing the war/destruction framing used in the body of the *Times* articles, though the *Sentinel* articles do also mention violence and looting. The *Sentinel* articles cover a variety of issues. I found that all the articles manage to frame the rebellion in a different way; they give a variety of possible causes for the rebellion, none of which are mutually exclusive. Given the *Sentinel*’s commitment to serving the African American community, who were the most affected by the rebellion, it is no surprise that the articles covering it would want to give readers some context for what they were experiencing. These residents would likely crave information on the status of the rebellion and the causes behind the rebellion, rather than the destruction, which they would have been able to see for themselves as it was taking place in mostly African American communities.

After comparing the various components of the *Times* and the *Sentinel* coverage of the 1965 uprising, I came to the conclusion that the *Times* articles tend to fit well into the genre of crime news, which is common to local news (Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckman). The war rhetoric and the emphasis on property destruction and violence reinforced a black/white binary, whereas the *Sentinel* articles emphasized the grievances of the African American community. Therefore, the *Sentinel* articles do not fit the genre of crime reporting that is so prevalent in local news. The difference in reporting style and genre at the two papers signals a difference in ideology. Given the time period, with the civil rights movement taking place, the issues of the day likely influenced both organizations. The *Times* ideology supports the status quo through the law and order ideology they project and the descriptions of the protesters as an enemy force, depicting them as enemies to civil order. The *Sentinel*, in contrast, projects a community ideology; the paper focuses on the reasons for the rebellion, emphasizing a need for change in the community.

### 1992 Uprising

Fast forward almost thirty years, and Los Angeles found itself in the midst of another major rebellion, which, like the Watts rebellion, was also ignited by an incident between an African American motorist and a LAPD officer. The “riots,” as they are commonly referred to, began April 29, 1992 following the court case in which a Simi Valley jury declared a verdict of not guilty in the case of the officers involved in Rodney King’s beating (Saul 156). What made this verdict particularly outrageous to many in the community was the fact that the beating had been captured on videotape (Upton and Rucker 377). Unlike the Watts case, the video evidence created more widespread support throughout LA for King to be viewed as a victim. Aside from anger over the verdict, scholars argue that other issues contributed to the unrest, such as a history of racial profiling and the use of excessive force by the LAPD (Upton and Rucker 377). There was also high unemployment in Los Angeles’s black communities: “Reaganomics hit the lower-class areas of Los Angeles hard, especially the demographic of young black men” (Upton and Rucker 377). Most scholars agree that the uprising was not

caused by the jury verdict alone, but that multiple factors created a perfect storm of unrest within the community, and the Rodney King verdict merely acted as the spark that ignited the uprising (Upton and Rucker; Saul).

In many ways, the *Times* and *Sentinel* articles from the 1992 uprising following the jury decision in the beating of Rodney King adhere to the same patterns as the coverage from the 1965 uprising. I discovered that many of the 1992 *Times* articles used similar framing methods as they did in the 1965 articles, but there were also important differences. My research found that many of the article titles focus on the looting, arson, and violence following the not guilty verdict, such as “Looting and Fires Ravage L.A. 23 Dead, 572 Injured; 1,000 Blazes Reported Unrest: Troops Begin Deployment and a Dusk-to-Dawn Curfew is Clamped in the Second Day of Violence” (Braxton and Newton). Again, war rhetoric is at play, with the use of the words “troops” and the death toll prominently featured. This article emphasizes the violence, damage, and police action to deter the rioting. The leads also tend to focus on the chaos the city experienced. Most leads mention violence, rioting, fires, or looting: “At the height of the recent riots, when fires were raging uncontrolled and looters were taking just about whatever struck their fancy, merchants throughout Los Angeles raced to preserve what they could of their piece of the American dream” (Lazzareschi). The rhetoric used to depict the threat to local businesses, which was also a prominent feature in the *Times* 1965 articles, portrays the protesters as attacking capitalism itself. The reference to the protesters stealing the “American dream” frames them as un-American. Most of the *Times* leads create a criminal-versus-victim binary in the leads: while it is correct that starting fires and looting are criminal acts, coverage of the reasons why the community felt the need to riot might make protesters seem less deviant. Given the leads of the *Times* articles, it is no surprise that the body of most the articles focus heavily on the violence and looting. The content of most of the articles is restricted to descriptions of property damage and violence, highlighting sentences such as, “At least three people from South Los Angeles County died in the violence” (Blume) and “Downtown, a racially mixed group of protesters massed outside Parker Center, eventually hurling rocks and setting fire to a small kiosk” (Lacey and Hubler). The *Times* sensationalizes the protests

when the coverage focuses so heavily on the physical damage caused by the uprising; however, unlike the 1965 coverage, in which all the articles fit into the crime news genre, the *Times* does offer some articles that provide greater context for the uprising.

While most of the articles offer very little change from the 1965 collection, there are a few articles that don't fall into the pattern. One article titled, "Verdicts Greeted with Outrage and Disbelief Reaction: Many Cite Videotape of Beating and Ask How Jury Could Acquit Officers. A Few Voice Satisfaction" (Wallace and Ferrell), ties the emotion felt in L.A. to the trial. The mention of the video of the beating gives a broader perspective to protesters' frustrations. Giving a more comprehensive background makes the uprising more understandable, garnering greater sympathy from the readers. Another article leads by connecting the trial to the national issue of police brutality: "Four Los Angeles police officers won acquittals Wednesday in their trial for the beating of black motorist Rodney G. King, igniting renewed outrage over a racially charged case that had triggered a national debate on police brutality" (Serrano and Wilkinson). Here, by using the phrase "renewed outrage," the reporters make it clear that this is not an isolated incident, but that it is part of a nationwide issue that existed before the trial verdicts. The articles that do not fit the crime news genre contain varied reactions from the community. The article goes on to focus on the jury decision and describes some of the issues surrounding the trial, including the almost all-white jury and the secrecy during the trial (Serrano and Wilkinson). The increased variation in coverage may be due to the fact that the Rodney King case included video evidence of the beating, and the tape created more public support than the Frye case had in 1965. This meant the public support stretched beyond the African American community and created more widespread outrage throughout LA.

The *Sentinel*, as with its 1965 coverage, offers more diverse subject matter and viewpoints in its coverage of the 1992 uprising. One article title focuses on the financial cost of the damage caused by looting: "Inglewood Reports \$10 Million in Damages Due to Recent Rioting." LA residents reading these titles would know that Inglewood is a predominantly lower income African American community. Concentrating on that community is logical considering the *Sentinel's* target audience is predominately African

American. The *Sentinel* also highlights positive actions during the rebellion within the minority community; for example one article is titled: "Truck Driver's Beating Shows Mob Cruelty; Rescue Shows Kindness." By concentrating on those who remained peaceful, the reporter sets them in contrast to the rioters and shows that not all protests were violent. Peace and violence are contrasted with one another, creating a more complex picture of the community by showing the mixed reactions of individuals. The leads also create a mixed picture of the riots. The leads focus less on the violence; the destruction to the city is mentioned, but in connection to outrage over the trial outcome: "The large, chanting crowd stood by shouting, 'Rodney King, Rodney King, Rodney King,' as they overturned a police car on the downtown urban street not far from City Hall" (Dungee). Like the titles of these articles, the leads have a tendency to focus more on how the community has been affected and what the grievances of the community are. The articles tend to provide context for the uprising. Most of the articles mention the Rodney King case: "And last Wednesday they marched into the East Ventura County Courthouse and delivered what many are calling a stunning blow to a dwindling belief in the American justice system (Shifflett). The articles mention violence and looting, but most provide background on the frustration the community felt: "This sense of futility has been mounting for years in South Central as the recession has taken its toll and as case after case against police and LA's citizenry who commit crimes against Blacks have ended with little justice for African-Americans" (Mitchell). These articles do not fit the genre of local crime news because they tend to provide a more comprehensive view of the violence and destruction by linking it to underlying causes.

Compared to the coverage from 1965, the *Sentinel's* news coverage remains relatively unchanged. The paper continues to report on a variety of possible causes for the uprising and focuses on the effect on the local African American communities. While the *Sentinel* remained consistent, the *Times* coverage changed somewhat over the years. Many of the articles continue to sensationalize the violence and destruction, but some of the articles provide a more comprehensive view of the community's reactions. With the African American communities in LA facing high unemployment, the *Sentinel's* focus on the context and underlying reasons for the uprising supports its community

ideology. Just as in 1965, the *Sentinel* seeks to support and improve the lives of the community of which they are a part. The *Times* has a less consistent ideology. For the most part, these articles fit within the law and order ideology, yet some of the articles do present a more complex and multifaceted view of the issues. This is likely because of the cross-section of public support in the Rodney King case, as well as a shared understanding of the socioeconomic inequalities many minority communities were facing at the time. In contrast, in the more recent 2014 protests, which were in reaction to a grand jury decision outside of LA, there was much less community support for the protesters within LA. In this recent case, most LA residents were far removed from whatever the socioeconomic situation is in Ferguson, Missouri, where the incident took place, and there was no videotape to provide evidence. These factors seem to have influenced the way the *Times* reported on the LA protests that were held in reaction to Ferguson.

#### 2014 Protests

In November 2014, L.A. found itself experiencing yet another massive protest linked to a jury decision involving a young black man and a white police officer. This case was different than the 1965 and 1992 uprisings in that the trial and incident were not based in LA. However, there had been several similar shootings around the country, including one in LA, during the same time period. The protests were sparked by the decision of a grand jury in Ferguson, Missouri, not to indict a Ferguson police officer in the shooting death of Michael Brown, an unarmed, black 18-year-old man (Bihm). The announcement led to protests in Ferguson and around the nation, including several in Los Angeles, California.

Many of the *Times* articles had titles that centered on the LAPD's actions, such as "183 Arrested During Ferguson Protest in Downtown L.A." (Winton et al.) and "The Protests in L.A.; Patient to a Point; LAPD Officers Have Given Activists a Wide Berth – Until a Line is Crossed. Then Come Mass Arrests" (Jennings, Mejia, and Goldenstein). The arrests of the activists and the LAPD's actions are the main angles presented in these titles. Rhetorically, these titles discredit the ethos of the protest movement by

connecting them with the arrests. The lead in each of the 2014 *Times* articles tends to focus on the large number of protesters present. The lead is meant to state the article's main point, so then it would seem that the *Times* considers the size of the protests to be the most significant fact about them. For example, one journalist reports: "Jasmyne Cannick blended into the throng of protesters as they reached 7th and Figueroa streets, the crowd swelling to several hundred" (Stevens and Ceasar). Some of the articles do include mention of the Ferguson decision in the lead, but only after some description of the protest's size, such as: "Hundreds of people marched in downtown Los Angeles on Wednesday afternoon, the third day of protests against a Missouri grand jury's decision not to indict a Ferguson police officer for the fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager" (Mejia et al.). The emphasis on the number of protesters shows that there is support for the protests, but it also makes the protesters seem more threatening. While several of the articles mention that most of the protesters were peaceful, the focus is on the protest's disruption of social order, including citing the road closures and the few protesters who were violent. The articles describe the protesters as disorderly; they frequently mention the use of obscenities from the crowd and each contains mention of the specific number of arrests at each protest. Conversely, the LAPD is framed as upholding social order: "The crowd began to dwindle, as police thwarted attempts to block the freeway and intersections" (Jennings, Mejia, and Goldenstein). Police actions are described as necessary and measured. The article emphasizes the disruption of social order and largely frames the protests as isolated issues, as there is very little context given to connect it to a national issue. The writers make no effort to connect the protests in Los Angeles to the national discussion of racial inequality or police shootings.

In contrast to the *Times* coverage, the *Sentinel* articles tend to focus on the shootings that motivated the protests and frame them as part of a national crisis. For example, one title is "Protesters Rally Against Police Shootings in Los Angeles and the Nation" (*City News Service*), and another is "Violence Erupts after Michael Brown Announcement" (Bihm). Though violence is mentioned in the second title, it is closely linked to the grand jury decision. Following this pattern, the *Sentinel* leads contain

specific details about the officer-involved shootings, which are the motivation for the protests. Bearing in mind the standards of the genre, these leads indicate that the *Sentinel* considers the shootings to be the main focus of their articles. For example, one article leads with: “Violence and protests erupted across the nation this week after the announcement that no probable cause exists: to file any indictments against officer Darren Wilson for any crimes related to the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown” (Bihm). Here the specifics of the case and the victim are the central focus. In the *Sentinel* articles, the emphasis is consistently on the reasons for the protests, and less on the actual events of the protests. Roughly half of each article is spent explaining the details of the police shootings that ultimately inspired both protests. Little time is spent on police and protester conflicts; only one sentence mentions the actual protest march: “About 7:30 pm Pacific time, protesters made their way down Crenshaw Boulevard, in a peaceful demonstration denouncing the verdict” (Bihm). It makes brief mention of a few citations issued by police, but does not describe any other police presence. The *Sentinel* articles are heavily framed within the context of a broader, national issue. The emphasis is not on conflicts that arose during protests, but on the larger issue of police shootings of young, unarmed black men.

There remains a strong contrast between the *Times* and *Sentinel* coverage in the recent Ferguson protests. The *Times* coverage continues to predominantly focus on violence and destruction, which places the articles into the crime news genre. The *Sentinel*, in contrast, has a tendency to place more stress on the reasons for the protesters’ actions, while sidelining the issue of destruction caused by the demonstrators. Again, the two papers communicate dramatically different ideologies while covering the same events. As in 1965, the *Times* has a consistent law and order ideology, supporting the cultural hegemony. The *Times* depicts protesters as dangerous criminals, which delegitimizes their cause; the *Times* has a much broader readership to appeal to, and with the Ferguson grand jury decision being removed from the local community, it is likely that there was not much understanding of those events among their readership. The *Sentinel* must appeal to the African American communities, who clearly felt a connection and could relate to what those in Ferguson were experiencing.

This may have influenced the way each newspaper chose to frame their coverage. As in previous protest coverage, the *Sentinel* focuses on what is happening in their community. Their ideology projects a need for change by highlighting the national issue of police shootings because it is an issue that their readership cares about. The *Times* readership may not have the same fears, or rather, is more concerned with the local destruction to property or inconvenience caused by the protests.

## Conclusions

Newspapers consider themselves to have an editorial perspective, but they also see themselves as seeking the truth. Both the *Times* and the *Sentinel* provide factual coverage of events, but they communicate different truths. Through the framing of each story, the choice of emphasis, and use of rhetoric, they tell different narratives of the same events. It is clear that the articles not only employ different rhetorical strategies, but also reflect different ideologies. While the articles do represent somewhat of a shift over time, the *Times* articles from all three periods tend to reinforce the dominant social ideology of law and social order. For the most part, they fit well within the genre of crime reporting. My analysis found consistent emphasis on violence and property destruction; the articles tend to sensationalize the protests with vivid details of violent acts or crowd damage and looting of businesses. Throughout the *Times* articles, protesters are framed as causing social unrest, while law enforcement is portrayed as enforcing social order; this is accomplished through the war rhetoric the *Times* often employs when describing protesters. When a reporter fails to provide a comprehensive picture of the issues behind the protests, the reader has no context for the protesters' actions, and so their actions seem illegitimate and disruptive. In contrast, the *Sentinel* promotes what I would term a community ideology, specifically within the African American collective. Therefore, the articles frame the protests as a part of a larger movement. In each case, throughout the years, they focus heavily on providing context for the protests, so that it is very clear why the protests are happening. While the *Sentinel* articles often condemn the violence, they also give some legitimacy to the protesters' grievances by explaining why the community is frustrated and what issues led up to the uprisings. By providing a

reason for their anger, the protesters seem less like common criminals, and more like participants in a social movement. After analyzing the ideologies from each newspaper, I would argue that the main differences are likely due to the newspapers' attempts to appeal to their two distinctive constituencies, resulting in the more mainstream *Times* supporting the current cultural hegemony, whereas the *Sentinel* raises the social issues that may subvert that legacy. Both newspapers are clearly committed to telling the truth, but that truth is also shaped by the focus on their readerships.

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# Fashion Signs: How Fashion Shaped the Counter Narrative of Blacks in South Central Los Angeles

Sherece Usher

With over ten million residents living in Los Angeles County, Los Angeles has become a global melting pot with its diverse inhabitants coming from all over the world; thus, the city is not only a physical location but also a discursive site of intersecting cultural narratives. Morteza Dehghani and Sonya Sachveda note that cultural narratives have a significant effect on the shaping a cultural identity. In their essay, “The Role of Cultural Narratives in Moral Decision Making,” Dehghani et al. observe,

Great Cultural narratives such as those contained in most religious text or in folk stories can deeply imprint our long-term memory, whether or not we ever encounter these situations in real life. It is not implausible to think that those values seep into our beings and affect our reasoning.

Thus, Dehghani et al. speak to the power of cultural narratives that can “seep into our beings.” Theorists such as Georg Simmel and Roland Barthes have highlighted the importance of fashion and clothing as an important marker of culture. Los Angeles, known for its beachwear, Hollywood fashionista commentators, and clothing districts, lays claim to being one of the fashion capitals of the world—a key creator of cultural narratives that has proven to be influential and, for some, even hegemonic. After all, many have regarded fashion as synonymous with high fashion, a signifier for the privileged and the elite. Fashion, however, can also act as a subversive force, challenging dominant cultural narratives.

In my essay, I argue that a fashion counter narrative is being created in the neighborhoods of South Central. In his article, “Considering Counter Narratives,” Michael Bamberg states, “Narratives provide the possibility of a format that has become the privileged way of fashioning self and identity, at least in ‘modern times,’ which is open to a certain fluidity, to improvisation, and to the design of alternatives” (354). As

powerful cultural narratives are codified, those opposing those narratives form counter narratives. For Bamberg, this can often be a fluid process, for as master narratives are created, counter narratives are formed, allowing for a process that is potentially liberating and emancipating (361-62). In South Central, a number of young Black youths have used fashion to create their own counter narratives; however, as Bamberg has noted, this process is a fluid one, and, as we will see, cultural narratives are ever-changing and, at times, easily co-opted by the very powers that are being challenged.

### **Fashion as Sign**

The world is comprised of multiple signs: signs of significance, signs of reassurance, and signs of approval or disapproval. Early on, the linguist Ferdinand Saussure argued that language is built upon a system of signs that are composed of two parts: a signifier and a signified, the form and the concept. Other theorists have taken Saussure's ideas and applied them to multiple semiotic systems, noting that signs can take many different forms, including words, images, sets of objects, and, even, fashion.

In the text *Defining Visual Rhetoric*, Charles Hill credits Roland Barthes with being a key theorist translating Saussure's theory of signification from a linguistic sign to multiple signs. He states, "Quite literally, these objects conveyed the meaning of their lives. Rather than depict reality accurately, or even impressionistically, the creator assembles and arranges "blocks of meaning" so that the description becomes yet another meaning. Rather than reveal truth or provide understanding, the poem or the image offers yet another meaning" (Hill 17). Barthes demonstrates that signs—whether verbal or visual—constitute a code and system that various communities use to create meaning. How we create and read signs can have significant social consequences. People may make life and death decisions based simply on how they interpret someone's body language, tone of voice, and gesture. For instance, in the South Central Black community, clothing and dress play a significant role in the creation of signs. Clothing can signify a person's background, the wearer's economic identity, or,

even, an individual's territorial identity. In the Black community fashion itself tells a communal story, despite the multiple representations of fashion itself.

While many may not agree with the power of fashion, fashion itself can exercise power over any social group. Discussing the significance of fashion in her article "Dressed to Kill," Young Kim describes fashion as "a domain in which self-perception and taste manifest, where the desires for beauty and consumption materialize; it is also a contested ground where social hierarchy is articulated through individual spontaneity and state control" (Kim 160). In his text "Philosophy of Fashion," Georg Simmel has argued "fashions are always class fashions, by the fact that the fashions of the higher strata of society distinguish themselves from those of the lower strata, and are abandoned by the former at the moment when the latter begin to appropriate them" (564). Although I agree with Simmel that fashion engages in a hegemonic norming process that might force individuals to assimilate and lose their sense of individuality, I also argue that the power relationships enacted between social classes can be far more complex. For instance, large fashion names like Chanel, Moschino, DKNY and Philip Lim often promote an exclusive image, encouraging groups to adopt their label—conforming to their social message. However, we can also see that groups can refuse to adhere to such normative class coding. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, young black youth rebelled against such labels and created what has now become known as hip hop or street fashion. Ironically, as a response, "high fashion" attempted to emulate, rather than separate itself from, street fashion. When the cultural narrative of high fashion is threatened, designers may appropriate key elements of the counter narrative fashion and incorporate them in their design as their own, ultimately changing the symbolic meaning of these fashion signs. Barnard states,

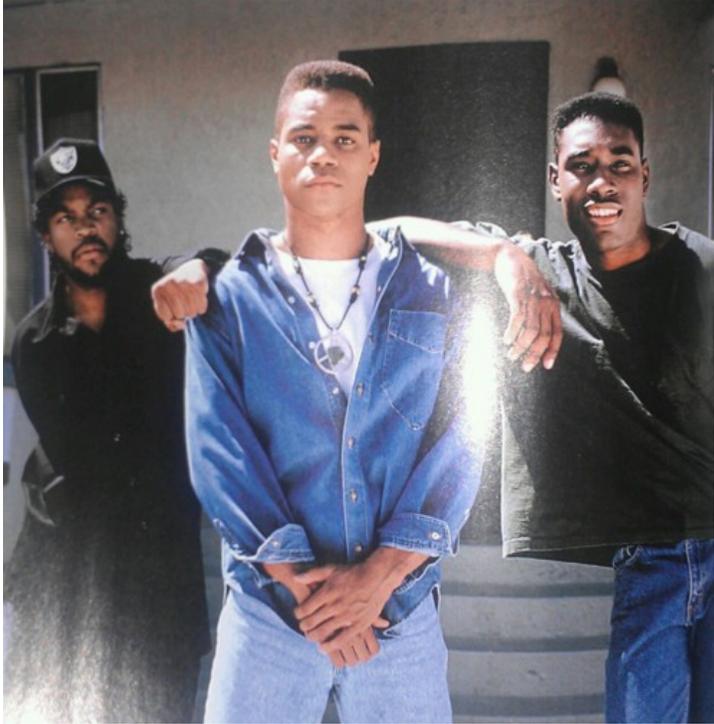
There is a further complication to this situation that should be pointed out here. It is that, being a continually moving battle, the working of hegemony does not stop with punk's or hip hop's challenge. Punk- and hip hop-inspired or related fashions may be found in any high street. Chanel took the gold ropes and incorporated them into catwalk fashion in 1991 and Tommy Hilfiger used Coolio, Raekwon, and Sean Combs as models in the

mid-1990s. The dominant classes and dominant ideologies have recuperated the objects and items and the meanings of the objects and items. The trappings of punk and hip hop have become or have been made into commodities and, some would say, if it was ever upset, the balance of power has been truly reestablished in the favor of the dominant classes.

Fashion often walks a fine line between inspiration and cultural appropriation. While Hip Hop artists aimed to resist high-end fashion, the same fashion moguls intentionally incorporated this “rebellious” fashion in order to gain capital and a new audience. Fashion can engage in a battle of ideologies, where fashion is the visual display of this argument. Marginalized groups may use fashion as a sign to exhibit resistance; however, by incorporating the fashion pieces into haute couture fashion, key labels ultimately alter the symbolic meaning of these clothing, undermining and even destroying its original power.

### **South Central**

I would argue that one of the trends occurring in South Central that demonstrates the social dynamics and complexities of fashion is the 1990s retro fashion movement. In examining this movement, I will demonstrate the ways that the young wearers of this fashion may navigate between the master narratives and counter narratives of fashion. Storeowners, such as Sam Snapson who owns an online retail store specifically selling vintage clothing, have noted that 1990s vintage fashion has become so popular that the market for vintage 1990s wear has grown immensely. Young black adolescents who have embraced the retro trend dress in chambray shirts, tapered denim, jerseys, and snapback baseball caps. These articles of clothing are very reminiscent of the fashion of the 1990s, inspired by then popular movies like *Boyz N The Hood* and photographs of major rap groups such as NWA, who included such rappers as Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, DJ Yella, MC Ren and Eazy E. Watching old movies and the images that are re-circulated by the media, many young Black millennials have become inspired by these icons and, in turn, emulate their style. But the question still remains: Why are the youth of South



Central emulating and reclaiming this cultural memory? I argue that this trend is both reflective of a desire for community and desire for economic and material success.

### **Fashion and Cultural Memory**

The 1991 film *Boyz N the Hood*, written and directed by John Singleton, is set in the '90s in South Central Los Angeles and follows the fortunes of a group of young Blacks: Tre, Doughboy and

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Ricky. Struggling to escape the life of violence and drugs, Tre and Ricky dream of attending college; while others, like Doughboy, are caught up in the violence that is endemic to the neighborhood. In this film, these characters are exposed to gang violence, police brutality, and issues of poverty. Although some scholars have argued that films like *Boyz N the Hood* perpetuate stereotypes, the conditions depicted in the movie resonate with youth who live in an area that is still plagued with unemployment and high crime rates. For instance, in one scene, we see how Tre, played by Cuba Gooding Jr., is trapped by the master narratives imposed by the very institutions that should protect him: the law. In this scene a black officer, who should understand the ways that blacks are entrapped by stereotypes, brutalizes him, after pulling Tre and Ricky over. Dressed in the homogenizing uniform of the law, the officer only sees Tre and Ricky's race and clothes, which identify them with the "hood." The officer places a gun to Tre's throat and states, "You think you tough. You tough huh? Oh you scared now, I like that. That's why I took this job. I hate lil' motherfuckas like you. Lil niggas ain't shit. You think you tough huh. Ill blow yo head off with this Smith and Weston, couldn't do shit. How you feel now?" (*Boyz N The Hood*). Here Tre is twice brutalized by master

narratives, first by the officer assuming he must be a gang member, rather than an aspiring college student, and second by the same officer, dressed in the uniform of power, asserting that he regards Tre's life as meaningless and has the power to destroy him with impunity. With the recent killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Oscar Grant, we see the continuing power of master narratives that not only marginalize black youth, but also has the very power to destroy them

Some critics of *Boyz N The Hood* have expressed concern that the film perpetuates the very stereotypes from which young Black men are diligently trying to free themselves. In the film, the three main characters, Tre, Doughboy and Ricky, all are representatives of marginalized Black young men caught in difficult social and economic environments. For example Doughboy and Ricky are two brothers coming from a single parent household. Doughboy, who becomes a member of the Crips, has multiple altercations with law enforcement. Ricky, the favored son, is both a star football player, with a commitment to USC, and a teen parent. Finally there is Tre, who happens to be the only character with a positive father figure and who manages to survive the harsh realities of South Central Los Angeles in the 1990s with the help of his father. Although these narratives may reflect the lives of young men from a number of marginalized groups, these are also common stereotypes of Black men perpetuated by the media. Expressing her own concern with the social representations of black men, Charlene Register states,

Here, as the black male assumes the passive, victimized role, he represents a castrated figure that can no longer serve as a threat to white males. Given that this image of black males is grossly distorted in view of their preeminence in the popular culture, such representations are understandably disturbing and dangerous (338).

Nevertheless, Register also asserts that *Boyz N The Hood* has an underlying message of brotherhood and camaraderie, for in analyzing how the film displays this sense of community, she states,

As representations of youthful black male camaraderie, these films collectively foreground the black male athlete and his tragic

circumstances, exploring inner city life and its influences on the fate of the black male and displacing onto a young black male victim the larger sociopolitical dilemma of crime, poverty, and disenfranchisement (334).

Regeester acknowledges the harsh circumstances these Black men are placed in, recognizing, however, that the film is a story of Black brotherhood. After Ricky becomes a victim of gang violence, Doughboy avenges his brother, knowing that he, in turn, will be killed. In the end, Tre assures a sorrowful Doughboy that he "still got one brother left." In a world in which Black men are marginalized and murdered, the young men have to rely upon each other. The film does not have a happy ending, but it does depict a reality that many young people in South Central can understand. According to a 2012 *New York Times* article, by Jennifer Medina, "In Years Since the Riots, a Changed Complexion in South Central," she writes,

South Los Angeles still faces the same kind of economic troubles it did 20 years ago: unemployment is high, and those who are able to secure a job typically earn little more than minimum wage. Empty lots dot the streets, a stubborn reminder of the broken promises to rebuild the area after buildings were burned and razed in 1992.

Unfortunately the same problems that once plagued South Central in the 1990s remain an issue for the community today. The film captures this crisis, as Doughboy states, "Either they don't know, don't show, or don't care about what's going on in the hood." But at the same time, it emphasizes a story about brotherhood. By reclaiming these cultural memories through fashion, a number of the youth are preserving the memories of the past highlighted in the themes of the film—where young boys grew up to become as close as brothers, sharing a special bond that could not be broken. In addition, these youth are identifying with a larger group: a sense of the communal self.

James Harris of *Complex* magazine named the film *Boyz N The Hood* one of the most stylish movies in his article, "The 25 Most Stylish Movies of All Time." Harris explains that his team chose this list objectively; the team "[fo]cused on more contemporary color pictures that continue to influence style today, and placing precedent on archetypes, transnational symbols, and films often overlooked by less

capable list writers.” Further clarifying why they chose *Boyz N the Hood* for their number twelve spot, Harris states, “This film not only showcased the struggles and triumphs of everyday life in Black America, but also the style that would influence a generation.”

The innovative 1990s retro fashion trend in South Central reflects various cultural themes derived from, as Harris suggests, “archetypes, transnational symbols, and films.” While not all members of this community are adhering to this fashion trend, many young blacks of South Central Los Angeles are choosing to wear this culturally identifiable style, consisting of Retro Jordan shoes or Nikes, crew tee or crewneck hoodie, and a snapback baseball cap. As I argued earlier, part of the rationale for this trend is the desire to establish a sense of community in a world that, as echoed in the film *Boyz N the Hood*, “ain’t no fairytale.”

Although it is difficult to associate a trend with any specific text, Dilia López-Gydosh and Joseph Hancock, in their essay, “American Men and Identity: Contemporary African-American and Latino Style,” discuss several issues with defining a trend and associating it with a cultural group:

Helen Bradley Foster contends that while the clothing of American blacks has traditionally been clustered into one style, it possesses many unique looks and qualities that reflect the dichotomy between American and African. She also argues that while African Americans have traditionally “adopted the prevailing cultural dress of each period, their style often sets them apart.” (16-17)

Although many are wary of associating a certain style with an ethnic group, out of fear of homogenizing the group, Lopez-Gydosh and Hancock observe that there is and have been distinct styles that have been associated with the Black community. I agree and add that although the 1990s retro trend is only one of many contemporary trends in the South Central community, many of the youth of South Central Los Angeles have become so involved with emulating this style that they have begun to hunt for vintage clothing of this era. Vintage eBay shop owner Samuel Snapson searches for 1990s vintage clothing on a regular basis, and because of the high demand he is able to sell his products at an exponential rate. Snapson sells vintage snapbacks, windbreaker

jackets, and other 1990s vintage items with prices spanning from \$25.00 to \$500.00, depending on the rarity of the item. Snapson's customers range from young teens to famous celebrities, such as veteran rapper Fabolous. Snapson's eBay store is currently selling a deadstock (no longer available in stores or retailers) 1991 *Boyz N The Hood* snapback for 119.99, and the average price for a typical snapback is \$25.00-\$30.00.

Although the rarity of these objects makes them desirable, these artifacts are also cultural artifacts—carrying with them whole systems of signification. This 1990s retro trend has become so popular in South Central that it represents more than simply a style choice. The Black adolescents of the South Central community, who are adhering to this trend, are in essence creating a fashion counter narrative against the current narratives set in place. Although fashion, establishing its own signs of power and prestige, can be hegemonic, especially in conjunction with the Black community, the counter narrative in place shows that Black fashion can also display their own signifiers—signs of community, brotherhood/sisterhood, and innovation within a community. In choosing to emulate the style of the characters in the film of *Boyz N The Hood*, fashion wearers are making a choice to select a clothing style associated with the South Central community. Thus, the community itself is creating the fashion that then is moving out of the community and into the fashion world. The fashion counter narrative, in its own way, gives power to the community, as the clothing represents not the world of fashion moguls but the world that reflects the wearer's cultural concerns and memories.

Although I've been examining the 1990s retro fashion specifically inspired by the film *Boyz N The Hood*, another key aspect of the 1990s inspired fashion is sneakerwear, and one of the most popular shoes happens to be the Air Jordan. As reflected in the film *Boyz N The Hood*, Nikes and Air Jordans were the most popular shoes worn during this time period. Currently, these shoes are in high demand, particularly in South Central Los Angeles. Air Jordans, which were released in 1990s, have a cult like customer base in Los Angeles. Journalist Michael Livingston II's article "The Culture Examined: The Air Jordan Phenomenon" compares this event to the Holy Pilgrimage to Mecca. He states,

Every year, young men and women travel in packs to Foot Lockers and DTLRs across the county for the newest release of the Air Jordan Retro shoes. This year, it was the Jordan XI Concorde, sold at retailers for \$180. Though not a holy place, these outlets hold the Holy Grail for shoe collectors: Retro Jordans.

The Jordan Brand rereleased the Jordan shoes with the exact same design as the original 1990s release, with minor changes as the Retro Jordan collection. Livingston adds,

The Air Jordans' phenomenon is found in their exclusiveness and their mystique. They are proud to own shoes that have been released before—and will undoubtedly be rereleased again in the future. The same Jordan XI that were released in 1995 are the same as the ones released in 2001 and 2011; only difference is the color. What doesn't differ is the color of the people stampeding, stabbing and shooting each other for the sneakers.

At each release of the Retro Jordans, the sneakers are sold out within the first couple of days. Due to the high number of consumers versus the limited stock of the sneakers, customers know that the shoes are sold on a "first come first serve" basis. Often, customers participate in "camp outs" for these sneakers, bringing blankets and tents and sitting, sometimes for days, in order to



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ensure that they will be among the few to purchase their Retro Air Jordans.

In South Central, on a Jordan Release date, one can expect to see lines wrapped around stores like Millennium Shoe Store, and several other shoe stores in the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza. The process of attaining these highly coveted shoes have become increasingly difficult as many have implemented a lottery system in order to combat the ever growing issues surrounding the camp out. Consumers must fill out a lottery ticket form and enter a random drawing; if selected the customer then is allowed to stand in a line of hundreds and, depending on availability, are able to purchase the shoes.

While many may not understand this desire to obtain these new sneakers, rapper Wale highlights the significance of shoes in the Black community in his song “The White Shoes.” According to the song’s lyrics, white shoes can empower the wearer: “Take this good advice/ Cause they’re gonna judge your life/ Say we can’t always be fly/ We gon’ be good long as them sneakers white” (Wale). Wale explains the significance of having new shoes in the Black community in his lyrics as he highlights the ironic advice he receives one day as someone explains to him that despite all the obstacles he faces as a Black person, he will do fine in his community as long as his sneakers are white, signifying clean or new.

Wale suggests that the white sneaker, or the expensive sneaker, shows status in the Black community. But inevitably, he also foregrounds a central irony: how can young people afford to buy these expensive white shoes, or, in the case of 1990s retro fashion—Air Jordans. Slyly, Wale notes how most of these shoes are attained. Wale states, “Free lunch for everyone, Income was very uh/ On the second and 16<sup>th</sup> everyone would have everyone 1.” Wale observes how most people coveting these shoes are living below the poverty lines, as they qualify for the free lunch program, which only is available to those who make under 20,000 dollars a year. Wale also states that despite poverty, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> (dates that most welfare recipients receive their aid) if these white shoes were released, these families would undoubtedly purchase these shoes. Wale suggests that these sneakers are more than fashion to some, but instead an ironic symbol of wealth among those in poverty. The individual wearer may be communicating,

“Although I am poor, I am not as poor as you, so I matter a bit more, even if it is just by a foot.”

While attaining these costly shoes may be a sign for material status, these shoes are also signifiers of Michael Jordan’s athletic prowess, reflecting his glory days as a star athlete. Michael Jordan is essentially a success story and his shoes are emblematic of this period of his extraordinary achievements. Livingston posits,

Another reason for the brand’s popularity is the popularity of the name: Michael Jordan. Each Retro Jordan shoe released tells a story related to the career of Michael Jordan. Jordan wore the XI during the Chicago Bulls’ 72-win championship season of 1995-1996. He has shoes dedicated to significant moments in his career: The Shot in Cleveland, the 1984 playoffs where he scored a playoff record 63 points against Larry Bird’s Celtics, and 6 NBA Championships. Everyone wanted to be like Mike, and to be like Mike meant buying his shoes. It didn’t matter if the shoes didn’t help one jump higher or play better. You just had to have them.

Essentially, Livingstone is arguing that Retro Jordan shoes are part of Michael Jordan’s mythology—to buy and wear his shoes is to participate in this mythos. Although it has been twenty years since Michael Jordan’s heyday, his social and economic status has yet to fade as he is still considered one of the best basketball players ever. In addition to his athletic mythos, Michael Jordan is also a capitalistic success story—through his hard work and determination, he reaped economic and social success. Thus, purchasers of his shoes may desire to identify and even emulate Jordan, allowing them also to identify with a retro Jordan in his prime. His shoes demand a cost, and for some, even a sacrifice, but his wearers literally can “buy” both Michael Jordan’s athletic myth and capitalistic American dream.

The 1990s retro fashion movement in South Central Los Angeles has allowed Black youth to use fashion as a means of creating counter narratives that give insights to the life of their community. However, as stated previously, the creation of narratives and counter narratives are so fluid, allowing for constant change and creation of new narratives. As soon as fashion houses appropriate a fashion counter narrative and

subsume it back into the master narrative, they alter the original sign system, transforming empowerment into appropriation, community into commodity, and cultural memory into a homogenized identity. In “American Men and Identity: Contemporary African-American and Latino Style,” López-Gydos and Hancock observe:

American fashions came from Europe until the 1950s; however, black styles began to inspire the fashions of white American dress as well. Many items from both Latino and black style have been adopted as mass fashion, including sneakers that minority athletes have worn first, doo rags made popular by African Americans and Latinos during the late 1960s, Yamamoto Kansai sweaters (also known as Bill Cosby sweaters), and hip-hop and reggaeton apparel (17).

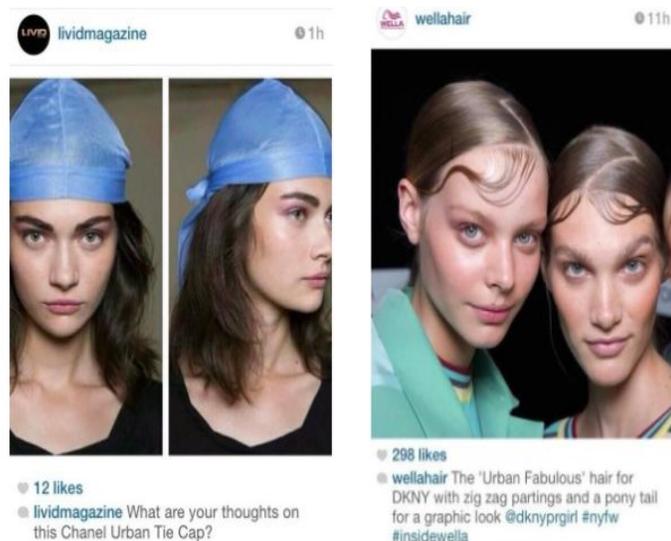
As Bamberg suggests, the sign system in both narratives and counter narratives are ever fluid. While some may be emulating the 1990s retro fashion as seen in *Boyz n The Hood*, others may simply be engaging in this trend to create a sense of community. By wearing this clothing, individuals in a community become identified with one another and in a sense the clothing of this trend becomes a sign for that group. However, what happens to the counter narrative

when it no longer is associated with its creator? Despite the creation of a counter narrative, larger fashion moguls have found ways to incorporate Black style into mainstream fashion.

Consequently, these styles are transformed into a larger trend,

and the 1990s retro trend may no longer represent the community

within South Central Los Angeles, but, instead, is transformed into a headlining piece of



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the SS 15 Chanel catalog or a mass-produced item, placed on the sales rack. Major urban clothing store like Urban Outfitters, noticing the popularity of the 1990s retro styles, have begun to sell these Black fashions in their stores. West Coast personalities such as Tupac, rap group NWA, and various other “hood idols” are placed on these t-shirts and sold for \$28.00. Not only have major fashion corporations appropriated a Black urban trend, but they have also sold the very “hood” that Doughboy observed that no one outside the “hood” cared about—that is, until it could be commodified. Thus, what was once deemed “ghetto,” has been usurped and coined “urban chic.” Recently, items associated with Black culture—“durags” and “baby hairs” showed up on the runway of DKNY and were praised as high fashion. In the Black community “durags” or wave caps are worn at night to keep hair well groomed; however Black men and women began to wear these pieces as a fashion statement, deconstructing the boundaries between public and private. This risky and innovative style became very popular in the Black Community and was highlighted in South Central LA, but the mainstream fashion world dismissed the trend. However, now that Chanel has placed these head wraps on the runway, it has been deemed acceptable. Blogger Arielle Newton of Blackmillenials discusses this issue as she states,

You think that sporty “Urban Tie Cap,” will sell for \$1 like a du-rag does? Nope. And when the person foolish enough to fork over \$50 for a du-rag places that trendy fashion statement on their heads, so comes an aura of elitism that will only (and inevitably) fuel even more prejudice against the people who typically wear them. That’s right. Black men. Which leads me to my next point. How often have Black and Brown bodies been demonized for their appearance? Black men who wear ~~du-rags~~ Urban Tie Caps are thugs, Black women with ~~gelled baby hairs~~ Urban Fabulous hair are ratchet bitches.

Newton expresses her frustration with the mainstream fashion industry and how these forces commandeer Black style. With money and privilege, these major fashion corporations have taken a community’s counter narrative and morphed it into the master narrative. Essentially Black culture has become just another trend during Fashion Week.

Through the analyzing the 1990s retro fashion trend, I have examined how fashion has played the role in the creation of a counter narrative for some of the youth in South Central today. Through fashion we are able to see a trend emerge, inspired by well-known films and figures of the 1990s. These clothing styles have become signs of community, as the youth have been able to use fashion to forge a group identity. By drawing upon cultural memories and personas that resonate with a community, fashion can speak to a community's shared experience and aspirations—whether they are embodied in the tragedy of *Boyz N the Hood* or the athletic and capitalistic success narrative of Michael Jordan. Despite the master narrative's ability to take these figures and appropriate this trend as their own, the impact remains: even if for a moment in time, the youth in South Central were able to create a narrative that displayed their truth, for their community and the world to see. While these fashion signs are not true of all Black people of South Central Los Angeles, it creates a story true for many and gives hope to those who wish their truths to be heard.

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# Los Angeles Education Films and the Rhetoric of *Nation at Risk*, *No Child Left Behind*, and *Race To The Top*

Bernie Sapir

The perception of Los Angeles's public school system reflects the predominant way our populace views public schools—negatively. Urban schools, such as the Los Angeles Unified School District, acknowledge that public education is struggling with key problems: high dropout rates, overworked teachers, and underperforming students. At the same time, public school teachers and administrators are attempting to accomplish more and more with less and less resources. While public school representatives—such as the Los Angeles public school teachers—would argue for reform efforts that would garner greater funds being allocated to the school system, others—including Republican George Bush and Democrat Barack Obama—argue that the increase of charter schools and a voucher system is a better resolution. I argue that part of this debate has been shaped on the federal level, and this federal rhetoric has influenced not only the public, but also popular culture.

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education, Terrel H. Bell, alarmed the American public with the *Nation at Risk* Report (*NAR*), putting our educational system under scrutiny and adopting rhetoric critical of the public education system. Subsequent federal educational policies have adopted its ideology, beginning with President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind* Law (*NCLB*) followed by President Obama's *Race To The Top* Program (*RTTT*). This paper argues that these federal educational policies influence Americans' perspectives of public education, and these presidential mandates' impact is acutely evident in the Los Angeles Greater Metropolis's school system, where the UTLA—the United Teachers of Los Angeles—has been the target of the public's angst. Furthermore, this paper illustrates how two Los Angeles education films, *Stand and Deliver* (1988) and *Freedom Writers* (2007), and the educational documentary, *Waiting for Superman* (2010), are emblematic of this

perspective and, in fact, effectively feed into the *zeitgeist* generated from these reports' rhetoric and ideologies.

### **The Rhetoric of Presidential Mandates**

Ironically, President Reagan's purpose for generating the *Nation at Risk* was to reduce federal spending on education by downsizing the Department of Education; however, it created just the opposite effect: the federal government has since become even more involved. Holly G. McIntush, in her 2000 article "Defining Education: The Rhetorical Enactment of Ideology in a Nation at Risk," underscores this irony in relating Terrel H. Bell's revelation that the report's findings—that our educational system was in serious decline—was contrary to the optimistic results of the report he had anticipated (420). Americans have continued to perceive the state of education in the U.S. pessimistically ever since. The salient message of these reports argue that our school system is in trouble, our teachers lack pedagogic direction, and our students are losing to the competition abroad; consequently, the reports call for more standardized testing for students in order to measure and evaluate teachers and for much more choice for privatization, vouchers, and charter schools, with those federal funds displacing hitherto funds for public schools.

Accordingly, President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind*, signed into law by President Bush in 2002, and President Barack Obama's *Race To The Top*, enacted in 2009, have perpetuated the federal government's increasing involvement in what used to be primarily the states' domain regarding educational policies. They have reacted to the *NAR* commission's statement "that America's schools were in crisis, and that reform was absolutely essential" (McIntush 420) with a number of changes. The *NAR* has had far-reaching impact and would eventually become the catalyst creating legislation to increase the number of private schools and voucher systems. Thus, the federal government has since increased their top-down involvement with the states' educational systems, influencing their testing, standards, and pedagogy.

Diane Ravitch, a noted education scholar and former Assistant Secretary of Education for President George H.W. Bush (Ravitch 5), outlines her thesis for her 2013

seminal book on education, *Reign of Error*, by commenting, “In this book, I show that schools are in crisis because of persistent orchestrated attacks on them and their teachers and principals, and attacks on the very principle of public responsibility for the public education. These attacks create a false sense of crisis and serve the interests of those who want to privatize the public schools” (x). Explaining her statement, she writes, “The transfer of public funds to private management and the creation of thousands of deregulated, unsupervised, and unaccountable schools have opened the public coffers to profiteering, fraud, and exploitation by large and small entrepreneurs” (4).

The public’s angst concerning public schools, in fact, can be traced back to the very rhetoric enacted in the presidential mandates. The *NAR* Report uses crisis-laden language infused with the Cold War rhetoric of its time. The Cold War priority and ideology of “national preparedness” is deeply embedded throughout the report, which draws upon a pathos-driven argument, appealing to the public’s fears and anxieties. For instance, shortly after the *NAR*’s Introduction, the report warns, “Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.” To put this in the context of its time, other industrialized nations, such as Japan, were emerging as having a technological edge over the United States, manifested, for example, by their manufacturing of gasoline efficient automobiles and their advances in electronics. Thus, the *NAR* Report emphasizes the importance of education in the context of the strength of our national economy. Further, our Cold War adversary, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R), still loomed large in our foreign policy and military defense policies—as the U.S. still regarded them as our main rival, especially under President Reagan’s administration at the time (it was not until 1991 that the U.S.S.R. would dissolve).

Thus invoking patriotic rhetoric, the *NAR* declares that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” and states that “if an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.” This heightened rhetorical style, drawing from the metaphor of war, unsettled Americans, and our media

responded accordingly by plastering it on “the front page of almost every major newspaper. . . . Similarly, the evening news of the three major networks featured the release of the Report as the lead story” (McIntush 420). Appealing to national fear, the report warns, “We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge.” For Americans who lived during the height of the Cold War tensions during the 1950s and 1960s, the successful Russian launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 sent shockwaves through the American populace because the U.S. had not accomplished that feat yet, and the government urgently demanded increased efforts in the aerospace industry in a rush to compete in the space age.

Departing from heretofore public satisfaction with public education, *NAR* advocates school choice and market competition, which “will result in schools either improving or shutting down. . . . [T]he good schools will indeed get better; however, many of the poor (in both senses of the word) schools will just get poorer” (McIntush 437). Three decades later the *NAR* Report continues to reverberate. Case in point: Chicago and Washington D.C.’s former education chancellors, Arne Duncan and Michelle Rhee, respectively, have gone the “New Reformist” route, closing dozens of public schools and firing their employees, including their teachers and principals. Insightfully, Paige Hermansen points out because of the nature of the rhetoric and the sentiment evoked in the presidential report, not to embrace the *NAR* is virtually unpatriotic, even now, three decades later. Hence, she points out that the “authors argue, the United States is jeopardizing its economic and political dominance in the global economy, ‘committing an act of unthinking unilateral educational disarmament’” (527-28). In this vein of thought the *NAR* successfully sends the message that “a poor education system is literally imperiling national security” (527-528). Hermansen further expounds, “This strategy helped charter school advocates establish moral exigency for their agenda of freeing education from oppressive bureaucratic oversight” (528), thus affecting perceptions of public schools and consequently funding.

One of the examples of the federal rhetoric influencing the public’s perception of the public schools has been the reshaping of the depiction of its representatives: public school teachers. When the LAUSD governing board sought to abolish teachers’ tenure

and take away seniority rights, public sentiment overwhelmingly supported the governing board. On the front page of the April 11, 2015 edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, the newspaper asserted, “Voters take a dim view of teacher tenure. Job protection comes too quickly, they say, and performance trumps seniority” (Blume1, 8). In the *LA Times* language, tenure is not viewed as a means to protect teachers from inequitable treatment; rather, teachers appear to be simply protecting their jobs. Moreover, performance and seniority is constructed as a binary, as though the two work in opposition rather than in tandem with one another. Even though the judicial branch of the California state government ruled in 2014 to abolish tenure by virtue of Judge Rolf Treu’s ruling in the “Vergara Trial” (Hundertmark 3), the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) and the California Teachers Association are optimistic this decision will be reversed in an appeal (Hundertmark 3). They argue that if the “Vergara” verdict is not overruled the impact will be sharply felt by many Los Angeles public school teachers. Furthermore, to paraphrase CFT President Pechthalt: What message does this send to new teachers who eventually put in a lot of years, gain valuable experience, and then find themselves as having no more security than when they had first started as a novice teacher? In their message, CFT and CTA argue that “performance” is in fact based on the work acquired through “seniority,” as they equate “valuable experience with “security,” not merely “job protection.”

The *NAR* Report has served as the foundation for President George W. Bush’s *NCLB*, which instituted increased standardized testing that not only evaluates teachers but determines whether public schools can remain independent, penalizing schools that do not meet *NCLB*’s threshold scores. The very title of President Bush’s Act—*No Child Left Behind*—suggests an urgency, echoing the language of a soldier’s promise that he will not leave his comrade behind. The title seems even more urgent, as it focuses upon the family unit—the vulnerable child. However, the Act’s answer to this crisis emphasizes standardization—as the individual child now will be viewed as part of an “assessed” bureaucracy. In an ironic play on the *NCLB* title, Deborah Meier and George Wood, in their 2004 book, *Many Children Left Behind*, discuss some of the inherent pitfalls with *NCLB* such as underfunding, restrictive definitions of teacher qualification,

and the effects of subgroups. For instance, “By some estimates the current requests for funding *NLCB* from the administration fall as much as \$12 billion short of requirement of the legislation” (Meier x). Furthermore, under its timetable “demands that disabled and limited English proficient students reach proficiency set those students and their teachers up for failure. Clearly some students simply cannot pass the tests required to demonstrate proficiency and yet no provision is made for alternatives” (xi). Linda Darling-Hamond posits that “a new study in California concluded that the chances that a school would be designated as failing increased in proportion to the number of demographic groups served by the school” (Meier 5). George Wood points out that “there is growing evidence that virtually all the effects of the tactics used to raise test scores have been negative. This includes the pushing out, retention, and dropping out of students who do not test well; the narrowing of the curriculum and classroom practices; and the limiting of the school experience” (Meier 35-6). Even Erin Gruwell, the protagonist in *Freedom Writers*, whose teaching methods serve as a positive paradigm shift for New Reformers, writes in her 2007 book, *Teach With Your Heart* (where she describes her experience teaching at Wilson High School), about “a movement in education that emphasized test scores over teaching. In fact, I’d been taught how to ‘teach to the test’ rather than to the student. In this test culture I was afraid teachers would lose their passion and creativity and become too rigid” (33). Gruwell juxtaposes the words “passion and creativity” against the “test culture” that attempts to “standardize” students.

Presently, the federally mandated legislation of President Obama’s *RTTT* incorporates the Common Core standards and free market-competition in education, vouchers, and privatization—all of which is heavily influenced by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Diane Ravitch posits that “the most unexpected supporter of corporate reform was President Barack Obama. Educators enthusiastically supported Obama, expecting that he would eliminate the noxious policies of President’s Bush’s No Child Left Behind” (28). However, when President Obama chose Arne Duncan as Secretary of Education in 2009—the same man who a few years prior in Chicago perpetuated a scorched earth policy regarding its public schools by closing dozens—

educators braced themselves. Ravitch states, “There was very little difference between *RTTT* and *NCLB*. . . . At the same time that the president was lamenting ‘teaching to the test,’ his own policies made it necessary to teach to the test or be fired” (28-29).

Similar to the appealing title of President Bush’s Act, President Obama’s—*Race To The Top*—also suggests an urgency, echoing the language of a sports team’s manager encouraging his athletes to win, which no sports fan would argue against. However, the Act’s answer to the problems facing education emphasizes funding to the winners, while the schools that do not win are penalized and thus lose federal funding. Kenneth J. Saltman fears that this “educational system that rejects the egalitarian aspirations of the Civil Rights movement and the Great Society . . . has yet to be named as ‘the new market bureaucracy’” (Gorlewski 66). Notwithstanding the ideology, from my perspective as a LAUSD high school English teacher, President Obama’s *RTTT*’s Common Core Standards are a good inclusion in his educational policy. For instance, there have been some positive offspring developed such as *Springboard*, a neat pedagogical method that students have embraced. However, there are drawbacks inherent in other aspects of his policies that hurt public schools, such as the march to privatize. Additionally, the discourse and rhetoric of his policy leans steeply to a competition-based system akin to a capitalistic free-market competition system where issues of economic inequality arise. Susan Ohanian, accordingly, alludes to an educational reporter:

Glen Ford, at the *Black Agenda Report* has seen the writing on the wall for years. He warned that the goal of corporate education reform is to turn teaching into a service industry. . . . Ford points out that “Teachers are the biggest obstacle in the way of corporate educational coup, which is why the billionaires, eagerly assisted by their servants in the Obama administration, have made demonization and eventual destruction of teachers’ unions their top priority.” (Gorlewski 111)

## Education Films

To see how federal legislation has shaped the population's thinking, we need not look further than two iconic and popular Los Angeles education films. The 1988 film, *Stand and Deliver*, feeds into the *NAR* ideology. The film, which opened in the theaters a few years after the *NAR* Report, also plays to the theme and backstory of a broken school system consisting predominantly of unenthusiastic and ineffective teachers, save one. Ironically, the *NAR* Report compassionately admonishes Americans that "this unity, however, can be achieved only if we avoid the unproductive tendency of some to search for scapegoats among victims, such as the beleaguered teacher." Ramon Menendez, the director and cowriter of the screenplay portrays the school system as a formidable antagonist.

The film follows the narrative arc of the heroic individual; in this specific case, it takes a truly superhuman work ethic of, for lack of a better word, a "zealously" dedicated math teacher, Jaime Escalante, a Bolivian expatriate, to surmount institutional obstacles. The backdrop of this story takes place in the early 1980s and is based on a true story, whereupon an "exceptional teacher at a poor public school built a calculus program rivaled by only a handful of exclusive academies" (Jesness 1). He has a work ethic that is second to none in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and he even teaches, for example, on the day after he has suffered a heart attack. He makes a formidable and remarkable protagonist. Yet, the film invokes a disturbing question: why is he alone capable of teaching, motivating, and compassionately persuading his students?

The circumstances embedded in the film imply that he is unique in the Los Angeles Unified School District at what he accomplishes at Garfield High School with his Hispanic *barrio* students; in the film version his underachievers become overachievers and do the near impossible and pass the Calculus Advanced Placement test within just two years from having not known how to add fractions. However, Jerry Jesness, in his article "Stand and Deliver Revisited" (and who co-authored *Standing and Delivering* with Henry Gradillas—Jaime Escalante's principal during his most productive years) informs us "the reality was far different. It took 10 years to bring Escalante's

program to peak success. He didn't even teach his first calculus course until he had been at Garfield for several years. His basic math students from his early years were not the same students who later passed the A.P. calculus test" (2). These are the facts: in 1982, eighteen of Escalante's students passed the Calculus Advanced Placement Test; in 1983—thirty-one; 1984—sixty-three; 1985—seventy-seven; 1986—seventy-eight; and they peaked in 1987—eighty-seven passed (*Stand and Deliver*). Thus, the film, for the purpose of enhancing the drama of its narrative, reinforces a public perception that the individual, with a self-sacrificing vision, can enact change much quicker than the slow-moving system.

In order for the students to achieve those unprecedented results however Mr. Escalante trains his students for succeeding in standardized tests—Calculus Advanced Placement—which he terms as the “equalizer” that will inevitably make them valuable in a market system. In this case the individual transforms the system through his class. Moreover, this film reflects the binary opposition of the individual versus the system. Escalante's unique and individual success makes the other teachers implicitly underachievers—foils, who represent the antithesis of his valiant work ethic; they are by default the less talented and less dedicated teachers of the Los Angeles Unified School District, a disabling system.

Actually, when Mr. Escalante comes to Garfield High School on his first day, he is supposed to teach computer classes. He is shortly informed, however, that he will teach math instead. The Math chair, Raquel Ortega informs him, “We don't have any computers. We were supposed to get them last year” (*Stand and Deliver*). On the second day a gangbanger persona student enters class and immediately tries to intimidate Escalante by rhetorically asking him, “Who's calling the shots *esse?*” (*Stand and Deliver*). Evidently, this does not intimidate nor dissuade Mr. Escalante because growing up he had faced tougher situations in his home country—Bolivia—and had a reputation for being a tough and very intelligent kid (Schraff). In fact his experience growing up there makes him more empathetic to his students at Garfield:

The fact that Jaime was frequently in trouble in school made him sympathetic towards troublemaking students when he later met them as a

teacher. As an adult, he confessed to preferring to teach students who had disciplinary problems because he could identify with them. "I understand those kids," he said. "I was suspended more than five times from junior high." (Schraff 26)

Mr. Escalante soon gets control of his classes by employing his empathy, work ethic, dedication, and at times endearingly calling his Hispanic students *burros* (small donkeys) when he wants to get across a difficult point. Some of the methods Escalante uses to succeed in his teaching have been challenged by some. For instance, he refers to Angel, one of his troubled students but who indicates potential, as "Net-head" on one occasion, and in fact later restrains him from joining a fight by twisting his arm and pushing Angel's head against a steel pole. When Angel's troublesome friend disrespects Escalante he reestablishes control of the situation by whispering in his ear, "I'll break your neck like a toothpick" (*Stand and Deliver*). At one point he pokes fun at a student who is inattentive and gives the wrong answer by telling her she'll be "pregnant and barefoot" soon. Although some argue that Escalante is using a rhetoric to enhance a sense of community among his students, other argue that Escalante's language may be reinforcing the very stereotypes that he is combatting. Still others may wonder, is he invoking the social perceptions that his students are all too aware of and implicitly challenging them to change those perceptions through education?

At a math faculty meeting, the principal, Mr. Molina, informs the school teachers that they are fighting not to lose their accreditation status. At one points, the department chair, Raquel Ortega posits, "You can't teach algorithms to illiterates" (*Stand and Deliver*). She subsequently states, "These people come to us with barely a seventh grade education. There isn't a teacher in this room who isn't doing possibly all he can," whereupon Escalante disagrees and utters, "I'm not." Ms. Ortega, misconstruing Escalante's intent, states, "I'm sure Mr. Escalante has good intensions. But he has only been here a few months." Then Escalante distinguishes himself from the status quo by stating, "students will rise to the level of expectations, Mr. Molina." Molina, the principal, asks, "What are you saying Mr. Escalante?" whereupon Escalante answers with his

favorite word and credo: “*Ganas*,” the Spanish for desire. Back in the classroom, Escalante implores, “The only thing I ask from you is *ganas*” (*Stand and Deliver*).

In the film, at a subsequent math department meeting, Escalante announces, “I want to teach calculus next year.” Mr. Molina laughs, not to make fun of Escalante but because he thinks Escalante is joking. When Escalante assures him and Ms. Ortega that he is serious, Ms. Ortega emphatically tells them, “That’s ridiculous! They haven’t had trigonometry or math analysis.” Thus Ms. Ortega reflects the stagnant school system that resists progressive change that the *NAR* Report asks for and that Mr. Escalante demands. Escalante gives them an ultimatum: “I teach calculus or have a good day.” Molina is impressed and quickly valorizes Escalante’s idea and tacitly approves it: “You really think you can make this fly?” Ms. Ortega, who represents the status quo experienced but jaded teacher, an obstacle to progress who hinders reform, exclaims, “Well! A man can walk in here and dictate his own terms in my department; I think there is no reason for me to continue as department chair” and gets up to leave; while Mathew, the other math teacher tells her, “Raquel, don’t take this personally.” In her closing remarks on this matter, she admonishes Escalante: “I’m thinking about those kids. If they try and don’t succeed it’ll shatter the little self-confidence that they have. Their types don’t bounce back! Have a good day” (*Stand and Deliver*), and proceeds to walk out.

During the course of the film, Escalante successfully confronts a student’s parents (to allow her to continue with his calculus program rather than being forced to work in her family’s restaurant), teaches many hours before and after school, continues with the calculus program during the summer (several hours a day in a steaming hot non-air-conditioned room), and virtually requires his students to adhere to his standards and make similar sacrifices as he to reach his higher expectations. When they successfully pass the Calculus Advanced Placement test, he fights the Educational Testing Service (ETS) who accuses the class of cheating. (Jay Mathews, Escalante’s biographer and an education journalist for the *Washington Post* later confirms in a 2013 *Washington Post* blog article that in fact ten students did cheat on one question but they

all got it wrong anyways and nevertheless all passed the retest except two students who opted not to retest [1]).

Finally, in the throes of the AP calculus cheating controversy and the accusations by ETS, Mr. Molina and Ms. Ortega are skeptical of the students' honesty, and when Mr. Escalante asks Ms. Ortega, "Do you think that the students cheated?" she cynically replies, "Mr. Escalante, you put these kids under an awful lot of pressure. They would have gone any lengths to please you." Mr. Escalante, not satisfied with her answer, retorts, "You didn't answer my question?" After Ms. Ortega virtually implicates them in cheating by comparing them to defendants in a courtroom who deceptively claim their innocence, she concludes, "Don't you?" (Believe they are guilty too?). Escalante leaves abruptly and angrily retorts, "Yep! I know what you mean!" (*Stand and Deliver*).

The conversation between Ms. Ortega, who views the students negatively, and Mr. Escalante implies that there is something wrong with Los Angeles's school system, as represented by Ms. Ortega, a defender of the status quo. Furthermore, the Educational Testing System's representatives epitomize the prejudice and low expectations ostensibly endemic in the Los Angeles Unified School District's bureaucracy. Regarding the film's portrayal of Mr. Escalante's ostensible achievement with these students in an extremely short time, Jesness claims, "Unfortunately, too many students and teachers learned the wrong lesson from the movie (2), as it "took 10 years [not two years in the movie version] to bring Escalante's program to peak success" (3) and further expounds:

*The Stand and Deliver* message, the touch of a master could bring unmotivated students from arithmetic to calculus in a single year, was preached in schools throughout the nation. While the film did a great service to education by showing what students from disadvantaged backgrounds can achieve in demanding classes, the Hollywood fiction had at least one negative side effect. By showing students moving from fractions to calculus in a single year, it gave the false impression that students can neglect their studies for several years and then be redeemed by a few months of hard work.

This Hollywood message had a pernicious effect on teacher training. The lessons of Escalante's patience and hard work in building his program, especially his attention to the classes that fed into calculus, were largely ignored in the faculty workshops and college education classes that routinely showed *Stand and Deliver* to their students. To the pedagogues, how Escalante succeeded mattered less than the mere fact that he succeeded. They were happy to cheer Escalante the icon; they were less interested in learning from Escalante the teacher. They were like physicians getting excited about a colleague who can cure cancer without wanting to know how to replicate it. (3)

The other iconic LA education film, *Freedom Writers*, opened in theaters in 2007 during the *NCLB* period and also portrays the mainstream teachers as the antithesis and foil to the one exceptional teacher, epitomized in the young and excellent English teacher, Ms. Erin Gruwell. Thus, as with *Stand and Deliver*, the film perpetuates binary oppositions, pitting the individual against the system. Just as Ramon Menendez's *Stand and Deliver* creates this binary opposition, Richard Lagravaense does likewise with *Freedom Writers*.

Ms. Gruwell is an atypical, super-exemplary, beginning English teacher who has noble intent and, in fact, achieves extraordinary success with her predominantly impoverished, gang-affiliated, and never properly motivated students. For the very first time, they have a teacher who really cares about them and sacrifices her discretionary time to support them. As the movie evolves, the students come to believe in her honesty and teaching ability. However, the veteran English Department Chair, Margaret Campbell, who has great influence with the school's principal, does everything in her power to subvert Ms. Gruwell's aspirations, such as preventing her from taking literature books out of the text book room for her students who, according to Ms. Campbell, will "not read them and only mark them up badly."

Later Ms. Campbell becomes vexed when she learns that Ms. Gruwell spends her own money in order to buy her students books. More infuriating to Ms. Campbell is when she learns Dr. Cohn, the district superintendent, at Ms. Gruwell's behest, has

given her permission to buy and give these books to her students. As with Mr. Escalante, Ms. Gruwell sacrifices her discretionary time, thinks creatively, inspires her students to overachieve, and will challenge the system when she must. Prior to resorting to asking for Mr. Cohn's help, Ms. Gruwell unsuccessfully confides in the Distinguished English Honors Class teacher, Brian Gelford, about her attempt to have her students read books like *The Diary of Ann Frank* and *Romeo and Juliet*, whereupon he reacts derisively to her "ludicrous outlook" and sarcastically makes a racist remark concerning her minority students. Meanwhile, because Ms. Campbell has great influence with the principal, Ms. Gruwell's only recourse is to go above their heads, which she successfully does in her meeting with Mr. Cohn.

The film's DVD advertises on its cover that "this movie is based on a true story"; however, the film's ideology strikingly feeds into the negative concerns of Los Angelenos—that Los Angeles's school system needs repair and that tenured teachers, as Ms. Campbell and Mr. Gelford exemplify, are impediments to progress, just as Ms. Ortega and ETS are in *Stand and Deliver*. In particular, these veteran teachers are deleterious to students of lower socioeconomic standings, specifically minorities.

This beginning conversation of Ms. Gruwell's first day foreshadows the imminent conflict between the two teachers and also invokes the challenges of teaching bussed-in-minority students. From day one Ms. Gruwell's rambunctious group are constantly on the verge of fighting, and on her first day one of the unimpressed students saliently comments, "I give this bitch a week." Ms. Gruwell enthusiastically expresses her undaunted idealism for teaching these students and feels highly motivated to transform their lives. This worries her department chair to the extent that Ms. Campbell has second thoughts about hiring her. By her facial expression and incredulous reaction towards Ms. Gruwell's idealism, as well as her already imposed restrictions on her new teacher's curriculum, the stage is set for their battle of ideas. When Ms. Campbell admires Ms. Gruwell's pearls in their initial meeting, Ms. Gruwell comments that her father, a former 1960s civil rights activist, gave them to her. Campbell then cautions Gruwell not "to wear them [pearls] in class" (*Freedom Writers*), suggesting that the

students may steal the pearls. While Gruwell associates the pearls with her idealistic father, Campbell cynically regards the pearls as a symbol for Gruwell's naiveté.

Later, when she meets Brian Gelford, he encourages her to "put your time in a few years, you'll be able to teach juniors. They're a pleasure. By then, most of your kids will be gone anyway . . . eventually, they just stop coming." When Ms. Gruwell optimistically retorts, "Well, if I do my job, they might be lining up at the door. Right?" Mr. Gelford responds with a slight smirk, "Yeah. *Nice pearls,*" (*Freedom Writers*) reiterating Campbell's skeptical views. As in *Stand and Deliver*, film viewers conjecture why there are not any dedicated and enthusiastic teachers portrayed in this film other than the lone reformer?

However, as a result of her strenuous efforts, she succeeds in motivating her students to buy into her idealism and see her selflessness, accept her, and thereby become receptive to her pedagogical methods, which are untraditional, but very effective. Later, when Ms. Campbell refuses Ms. Gruwell's request for class sets of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and/or *Romeo and Juliet*, only offering her an elementary school type versions of Shakespeare's play, Miss Gruwell recognizes that when the students get these versions, "They know no one thinks they're smart enough for real books." After Miss Campbell insists, "I don't have the budget to buy new books every semester," her novice teacher responds, "Is there someone else I can speak to about this?" After an awkward moment, a visibly surprised Ms. Campbell abruptly explains that only she and the principal have the authority to buy books "to make these decisions without having to do go to the Board, who have bigger problems to solve," and angrily asks Ms. Gruwell, "Do you understand how it works now? You can't make someone want an education. The best you can do is try to get them to obey, to learn discipline." Subsequently, Miss Gruwell tries to get Brian Gelford's support: "Since you know Margaret better than I do, if I could just get some backup from you. I really think the stories like *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Romeo and Juliet* that they'd be so great for them, and she doesn't seem to understand that they could relate to these stories." Mr. Gelford sarcastically responds, "I mean, Anne Frank, Rodney King. They're almost

interchangeable” (*Freedom Writers*). Mr. Gelford then expresses his contempt for the students and his contempt for Miss Gruwell’s “naiveté”:

MR. GELFORD: God, listen to what you are saying. How dare you compare them to Anne Frank? They don’t hide. They drive around in the open with automatic weapons. I’m the one living in fear. I can’t walk out my door at night.

MS. GRUWELL: And you blame these kids?

MR. GELFORD: This was an A-list school before they came here. And look what they turned it into!

Elaine Haglund, in her 1998 article, “What’s right with education? Erin Gruwell’s reconnecting the disconnected,” reflects that “Erin Gruwell . . . has accomplished in the first four years of her career something that most drawn-out and costly educational reform initiatives failed to do” (2). Haglund further advocates the following: “One beginning step that is currently being considered is for Erin to inaugurate a charter high school that would attract teachers interested in designing an entire high school modeled on her pilot project that would then serve as a laboratory campus for teachers-in-training” (8). Hence, Haglund, subscribing to the language of the federal mandates, suggests that separation from the public system is the solution.

Although *Freedom Writers* and *Stand and Deliver* are regarded as successful educational films, they, in fact, may exacerbate the negative public perception of Los Angeles’s schools. Interestingly enough, however, the ideology of the two films do not always converge. While Escalante achieves success through standardized testing reflective of the ideology of Bush’s *No Child Left Behind*, Gruwell, who achieves success with methods such as interpersonal interaction and intimate journal writing, actually challenges the language of standardization. Thus, we can see how these films may both represent as well as contest the language of the federal mandates.

On the throes of the negative sentiment for LA mainstream teachers that these entertaining films may evoke, Davis Guggenheim’s 2010 documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, also contributes to this negative sentiment. This documentary basically asks its audience, “Why do so many urban public schools do such a bad job—and what can

be done to help kids trapped in them?” (Hermansen 512). Propagating the perception that public school teachers as “inept and uncaring,” the documentary advocates the growth of charter schools. In Los Angeles, the trend of charter schools is immense, as Jose Cole-Gutierrez, the Los Angeles Director of Charter Schools states on the LAUSD Charter School Website (<http://achieve.lauds.net/charter>): “LAUSD has become the largest district charter school authorizer in the nation, with about 250 independent and affiliated charter schools serving over 130,000 students.”

In her 2014 article, “‘There Was No One Coming with Enough Power to Save Us’: Waiting for ‘Superman’ and the Rhetoric of the New Education Documentary,” Paige Hermansen states, “Central to the narrative of public education’s decline are fears about the United States in the global economy and the ability of our students to compete with students from other countries” (527). She notes that Davis Guggenheim’s documentary successfully tapped into that fear, and, thus, “its argument for charter schools appealed to a broad and politically diverse audience” (Hermansen Abstract). The documentary follows a few elementary and middle school students during the course of a year and highlights their trials and tribulations concerning their negative experiences with public schools. Near the end of the film, the students and the parents try ardently to escape the public schools to enroll into charter schools, which the documentary sets up as their solution; however, since there are not many spaces, students must be selected by lottery. Near the end of the documentary, the viewers discover that only two of the documentary’s students are accepted. Hence, we witness pure joy from the winning students’ families, and pure despondency from those families whose children are not chosen and must, therefore, remain in the dreaded public school systems.

In Diane Ravitch’s most recent book, published in 2013, titled *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools*, she contests *Waiting for Superman’s* depiction of the state of public schools as “broken” and “obsolete.” Moreover, she mathematically illustrates that *NAR*, *NCLB*, and *RTTP* have their math wrong and that, indeed, public schools have not deteriorated—“Test Scores are the highest point ever recorded [in public schools]” (44-62). New Reformers believe that bad schools are a result of bad teachers rather than impoverished socio-economic

conditions. I have previously illustrated how two films feed into this New Reformers' ideology. However, the education documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, intensifies the rhetoric to a higher level.

Daisy, one of the students depicted in *Waiting for Superman*, wants to get into a charter middle school. She tells Guggenheim, the moderator, that she wants to go to medical school. She and her family live in Boyle Heights, a low socio-economic area of Los Angeles. The documentary highlights terrible public school conditions, and Daisy's mother expresses she and her husband desperately want an alternative—as in fact do all the other parents in the film. The scene depicts Stevens Middle School, the school Daisy would enter at the end of the semester, as having “only 13% of the students who will be proficient” in major subjects when they graduate. Next, the camera focuses on Roosevelt High School, the high school Daisy would attend after middle school, which Guggenheim states “is one of the worst performing schools in Los Angeles. Only 57% will graduate.” Guggenheim refers to Roosevelt High School as a “drop-out factory.” Then the scene shifts to another Los Angeles high school whose principal, Steve Barr, maintains that “out of the last 60,000 students to enter this school, 40,000 students did not graduate.”

Guggenheim tells the audience, “For generations failing schools blamed failing neighborhoods but ‘reformers’ feel just the opposite that neighborhoods fail because of failing schools.” The problematic Daisy scenario is repeated with all the other students in their respective cities. Educational journalist Jay Mathews discloses to Guggenheim that if we fired all the bad teachers, or 5%, then the United States would jump back to first place in the world's education ratings. While Mathews offers this claim, a computer monitor behind him reflects a statistical graph, which evidently implies that his claim is supported by mathematical facts; however, neither he nor Guggenheim ever reveal how this statement is mathematically or statistically supported. Next, Guggenheim presents teachers' unions as the number one obstacle for firing “bad” teachers and, hence, improving education. Guggenheim presents the teachers' unions as virtually an omnipotent force not having the students' best interests in mind. Consequently, the film's salient message advocates that until the teachers unions are weakened and

teachers' tenure and seniority are abolished, public schools will suffer and, therefore, the best alternative is charter schools.

Although both Hermansen and Ravitch acknowledge that Guggenheim's film addresses serious educational concerns (Hermansen 513), they warn that Guggenheim's film has serious flaws. For example, Ravitch notes, "NAEP [National Assessment of Educational Progress] data show beyond question that test scores in reading and math have improved for almost every group of students over the past two decades" (53). She also argues that the reformers' slogan of "choice" for schools is really a choice for more private charter schools whose main proponents are from corporate interests. She acknowledges the irony: "The corporate reform movement has co-opted [*pure*] progressive themes and language in the service of radical purposes. Advocating for privatization of public education is [however] deeply reactionary" (22).

These films' representations of public schools reinforce the ideology underpinning *NAR*, *NCLB*, and *RTTT*. The cumulative impact of these federal educational ideologies and the media sources that transmit them quite effectively to a consternated public greatly contribute to the educational *zeitgeist* of our times and, in particular, to the negative image of LAUSD with an emphasis on their teachers and union. Ravitch warns, "Disabling or eliminating teachers' unions removes the strongest voice in each state to advocate for public education and to fight crippling budget cuts" (22).

The underlining message of these reports argue that our school system is in trouble, our teachers lack pedagogical direction, and our students are losing to the competition abroad; additionally, their message has been reinforced in the popular Los Angeles's education films, *Stand and Deliver*, *Freedom Writers*, and the documentary, *Waiting for Superman*. While being praised as inspirational educational films, nonetheless, they acutely feed into the critical rhetoric of our educational systems. It's important that we analyze the rhetorical power of the multiple discourses embedded in the debates concerning education to better understand the educational challenges we face.

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# Power and Ownership through Language: Students in LAUSD and *Stand and Deliver*

Ellen Moreh

Los Angeles is home to over a hundred different languages and cultures whose inhabitants are always learning and adopting customs from each other. Many Angelenos pride themselves on the city's diversity but may not consciously realize that, unfortunately, diversity may also engender a cultural and linguistic hierarchy that puts certain groups at an advantage over others. In order to confront this hierarchy, the members of marginalized groups have implemented different strategies: some may choose to assimilate into the dominant group, others may adopt tactics of linguistic and cultural resistance, or others may learn to maneuver the intricacies of a hybrid culture. According to some scholars, adhering to standards of a certain language will bring access to opportunities and success in a world where languages are placed on a hierarchal scale. Others argue that groups should resist a linguistic hegemony and demand space for other languages.

Postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon recognized what a powerful tool language truly is—it has both oppressive and transformative possibilities. Fanon observes, “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture” (25). If speakers of a minority language and members of a minority culture learn the language of the dominant group—those with power—then, according to Jose Medina, “speakers become disproportionately empowered and disempowered”—for some gain “linguistic capital,” while others are further marginalized (343-44). This has been a long point of debate with teachers and scholars of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), who have attempted to implement programs to serve minorities in the dominant discourse. In his work *Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains how a minority subject can learn the dominant language and make it his own precisely, but at the same time he can re-signify the dominant language, subverting its meaning. An intentional and “profound

disruption at the level of the signifier” (Gates 47) occurs where the speaker is playing with the language to challenge its native speakers, gaining power and control. Rafael Perez-Torres, a Chicano Studies scholar, argues that as a result of history, Chicano people have a hybrid identity and a hybrid discourse:

The body of the mestizo is one created and dissolved, one that changes function and significance as it moves through different systems of exchange. The voice of the mestizo speaks another language, a language in creation, a language suspended—yes—between English and Spanish. But the voice of the mestizo also sounds the depths of cultural transformation, tests the limits of social configurations, articulates the formation of culture in transition. It changes register and pitch depending on where and why it speaks, to whom and which systems of power it addresses. The voice of the mestizo sounds that which, finally, speaks an agency otherwise ever silenced. (182)

The hybrid individual gains power through his hybridity—a combination of different cultures and languages. In the LAUSD, those of any culture, the Chicano culture included, who may not be proficient in Standard Academic English (SAE) are considered to be “English learners” by governmental and educational systems. While some scholars argue that adoption of the dominant language by the English learner will bring empowerment, others are concerned that enforcing this adoption will inevitably reinforce the hierarchy.

In examining Ramon Menendez’s iconic film, *Stand and Deliver*, I am exploring the power of hybrid and dominant discourses. The film, with its plot based on the true story of Jaime Escalante, reflects the student population of many public schools all throughout Los Angeles whose members are native or primary speakers of Spanish attempting to break into the dominant world of Standard Academic English. The film depicts the struggles the students endure while adopting the standard language. Although some have argued that the film reinforces stereotypes of the Chicano culture, others have argued that the story of Escalante and his students provides helpful insights into the uses of alternative pedagogies and that the film offers one reality of Los

Angeles's students and their relationship to language. In the film, the students of Garfield High School are considered disadvantaged English Learners, like the ones in the LAUSD, and they are portrayed as individuals who know the system and have learned to rhetorically work their way through, claiming ownership as a result. Drawing from Gates's idea of signifyin(g) and Perez-Torres's idea of the mestizo hybrid language, I argue that the film illuminates the way students rhetorically move through the language hierarchy to disrupt the social constructions that have negatively impacted them. English learners have both the ability and the drive to gain power through the adoption and application of the dominant language; being double voiced may even give them an advantage over individuals who were already speakers of the dominant language. In the process of adopting the dominant language, students realize that it is not a better language than their heritage language, but one that, in Medina's words, has "linguistic capital." The combination of their dominant language and heritage language, with the hybridity of their language skills, empowers them to maneuver through the hierarchal system of languages. *Stand and Deliver* is an accessible lens to view the rhetoric mestizo students, who are simultaneously English learners, use to empower themselves and adopt the skills they need to prosper.

### **The Debate Concerning the English Learner Program**

The former superintendent of the LAUSD, John Deasy, speaks for the district in the English Learner Master Plan: "In LAUSD we value and promote 21<sup>st</sup>-century College and career ready knowledge and skills, as well as multilingual and multicultural proficiencies that bestow real advantages in today's complex, interconnected world." According to officials, the district's students need to adopt the dominant language to ensure an advantageous future, rather than falling into a disadvantaged one. The LAUSD reports serving more than 640,000 students of 93 different languages, 80% of which come from families whose socioeconomic status is low enough to qualify for free or reduced lunch prices. The makeup of this underprivileged student population is predominantly Latino, as Latino students are the largest ethnic minority group in the district. Al Ramirez and Dick Carpenter report in their article, "Challenging Assumptions

About the Achievement Gap,” that “on average, Latino students tend to be poorer, attend more segregated schools, and live in urban areas” while they simultaneously “account for the largest number of students served in programs of English-language acquisition” (600). Thus, being the second largest public school district in the United States, LAUSD has attempted to close the achievement gap and support students whose native language is not Standard English.

The English Learner program was created to assist students who need to develop the academic language and skills necessary to have access to the same opportunities as their counterparts. This student population is approximately 30% of LAUSD’s overall student population, students who are more likely to drop out of school due to struggles their English Only speaking counterparts do not have. Monica Garcia, the president of this district-wide initiative to aid all students, monolingual or bilingual, is not a newcomer to public schools; she argues for the need of such a program because of her firsthand experiences. In the program’s master plan, she believes “all students can master the language of school, the language of college and career readiness, and ultimately the language of power” (i). And while these students may need the extra support to succeed past high school, many of Garcia’s opponents argue that the program, an extension of the English as a Second Language classroom or a remedial classroom, hinders the students’ capabilities because not only are the EL students placed in separate classrooms, but they often feel stigmatized because they equate the “English learner” label with inability and ignorance. Although this is not the program’s intention, it is an inevitable result, which discourages the students from being active and committed students. It is important to highlight that both sides care about their students, who perhaps just need a chance to prove their potential.

Before analyzing *Stand and Deliver*, let us look at the eligibility requirements for LAUSD’s English Learner program, the enrollment process, several critics of the program, and obstacles that are inevitable and inherent in the program’s structure. The English Learner program, revised in 2010, is an intricate and evidence-based plan to ensure success among this specific student population. Generally, students fall into one of two categories: the first are second language learners of English and the second are

native speakers of English. The first group encompasses students who are newer to the country than others and are posed with the dual task of learning an entire new language and learning content specific to disciplines in that new language. The other group lacks academic language skills that form the new Common Core State Standards. Students at the various levels all enter the program in one of two ways. When joining LAUSD, all parents must fill out a Home Language Survey (HLS) answering four questions:

1. What language did the student learn when he or she first began to talk?
2. What language does this student most frequently use at home?
3. What language do you use most frequently to speak to this student?
4. Which language is most often used by the adults at home?

The answers parents provide to these questions then elicit a label of either “English Only” or “Possible English Learner.” The program’s master plan does admit to placing the most value on the fourth question, raising even more objections from numerous parents and critics. If the student falls into the latter category, then he must take the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to test his level of English proficiency (“English Learner Master Plan” 5-6). If the student passes the test, then he/she is now reclassified. But if he/she does not pass with a score specific to the current grade level, then the student is immersed in a program that could, according to opponents of the plan, be more detrimental than helpful.

Annie Gilbertson calls attention to the harm the English Learner program can inflict on students in her article, “LA schools: California ‘English learner’ tests incorrectly label bilingual kids.” She follows the story of a bilingual 9-year old whose father is Hawaiian and mother is Mexican-American; neither she nor her parents view her as an English learner but she was indoctrinated into the program without the parents’ full knowledge. The student was reportedly taken out of class to be given individual lessons, missing crucial instruction time in disciplines such as science, without showing any productive results. Gilbertson calls the program’s intentions into question, stating that “new California funding laws give more money to districts with more English learners and other high needs students,” and then following that assertion with statements such as “L.A. Unified tested twice as many kindergartners as the year before and more than

four times as many as were tested in 2010.” In a logical way, she rhetorically presents the information to sway readers to see the negative aspects of the program, thus, reducing support in the overall community. Moreover, she provides a set of sample CELDT questions for her readers to perform, further critiquing the program in favor of abolishing the program, or at least changing the program’s requirement into more clear and defined ones.

Gilbertson is not the only one to question the program; Ramirez and Carpenter also examine and call into question the practices of the program. After a student is labeled an English learner, the student is then enrolled in the correlating class he needs as extra support. From their studies, Ramirez and Carpenter “have found that the ‘achievement gap’ between Latino and white students may be a ‘phantom gap’ derived from the practice of lumping all non-white students into a single comparison group” (600). There are many issues with generalizing so widely; some students do need the extra sheltered support, while others do not. Many of the students in the EL program are not just “lumped” or “thrown” together but paired or grouped with others who also need an environment focusing on only language skills. To complete the program, each student must meet all the requirements to reclassify into mainstream English classes. There are three requirements the student must pass simultaneously, which makes reclassification difficult and even impossible for some students—especially those who have given up, frustrated by the program’s negative labels. Furthermore, Gilbertson cites several studies showing that “the longer these studies stay in the program, the wider the achievement gap grows between them and their mainstreamed peers.”

Even though many people are not in favor of the English Learner program, it is important to note that the District is attempting to address an issue commonly found in the educational realm as a whole. Peter Elbow, renowned professor, teacher, writer, and pedagogical theorist, believes in empowering students of non-privileged Englishes by teaching them the privileged, Standard English present in colleges and high-paying careers. His essay, “Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond ‘Mistakes,’ ‘Bad English,’ and ‘Wrong Language,’” tackles the idea of separate classroom, stereotypes, and pedagogical practices for English Learners all while addressing the harmful and

beneficial effects of being labeled an English Learner. While he does recognize a need for adopting Standard English, he does not believe it is “inherently better than other dialects.” He also argues that students “can’t have success in most college courses and most job situations without writing that conforms to the conventions of the SWE [Standard Written English]” (651). The reality of such a class, one that physically removes an English Learner from mainstream classrooms, can, as Elbow notes, be problematic: “segregation on the basis of surface features of language can result in segregation on the basis of race and class” (648-649), thus creating doubt among the general population about English Learners and among students themselves about their own capabilities. Ramirez and Carpenter’s research resulted in information validating this doubt; when “turning to school-based variables, some researchers conclude that school segregation significantly affects the academic achievement of minority students” (601), leading them to call for the desegregation of students with various language skills.

The LAUSD has recognized and responded to issues with the English Learner program, and with time allowing for trial and error, the program might be able to work out its flaws. It is an intricate plan that seemingly caters to the different types of English Learners ranging from those completely new to the language, to those who only need to master academic English. If we momentarily put the theoretical ideas aside and look at the plan’s implementation in schools district wide, we can see how difficult the plan is to monitor. While, the LAUSD recognizes that English learners are capable of great success, the stereotype of English Learners unfairly suggests that this is a population of students who are either willfully ignorant or incapable of success. According to LAUSD’s Spring 2015 Language Census Report, 94% of English Learners are Spanish speakers while 82 other languages account for the remainder 6%. Because of the large number of Spanish speakers within the program, the students are often treated as a group rather than as individuals. Ramirez and Carpenter believe “it would be a mistake to assume that all Latino students have similar needs or require the same type of education” (600) and they could not be more correct. In one Long-Term English Learner (LTEL) classroom, whether it is the “lower level” or the more “advanced curriculum” being

taught, there are different types of English learners present in the same physical space accompanied by the same single teacher. Every person, regardless of the content or skill that is the aim of study, learns in different ways. The multitude of teaching techniques, if appealing, can empower students to learn how to find a voice aside from their academic English voice, but this will only be successful for students who have developed the knowledge needed to move through languages. In his essay, “Composition Studies and ESL Writing: A Disciplinary Division of Labor,” Paul Kei Matsuda emphasizes the “need for writing instructors to become more sensitive to the unique needs of ESL writers” (674). And while he, too, is correct, how can one teacher cater to the multiple and sensitive needs of students who have lost hope in their own abilities in a seemingly never ending program? Each student comes with a metaphorical backpack—conventionally viewed as baggage, which connotes a negative effect—consisting of factors that shape the student such as age, gender, cultural background, family history, education, and personal experiences.

Jane Echevarria raises one possible solution to the consistent issue educators have of wanting to help each student. She pushes for teachers to display fidelity to the curriculum the district creates in “Did They Get It? The Role of Fidelity in Teaching English Learners.” She and her colleagues note that there is a direct relationship between teacher implementation of strategies and student achievement advocating for teachers to faithfully follow the program. The research they reviewed includes pre-made lesson plans, critical thinking questions, vocabulary and exercises, and even “fidelity checklists” that are to be passed down from the district to local individual classrooms. And while some practices are universal for all students, all practices are not universal methods, especially for English learners. A group of students might positively respond to one strategy while another group of students become more confused and vice versa. Moreover, even in a mainstream class where language diversities are not as apparent, teachers alter their lessons and the difficulty level of assignments to each student population. Therefore, how is one general plan, realistically speaking, supposed to be “unique” to each English learner when, individually, the students’ problem areas lie in different areas?

### **The Empowerment of Students in *Stand and Deliver***

Although *Stand and Deliver* has been critiqued as unfairly depicting the educational system, others have praised Escalante in isolation from the film. Ilene S. Goldman informs us that some film reviewers described the film as a “fairy tale” because the events in the film did not reflect the representations of the current student population as represented in the news coverage of the time (84). This visual text, which is based on a true story, allows us to analyze the film to explore the way teachers and students employ hybrid discourses. Although the film version of Jaime Escalante, his teaching, and his students is not true to every detail of the real life version, the storyline and the film’s message are close enough for theorists, teachers, administrators, students, and others to consider the film, *Stand and Deliver*, as a source for examining the desire, drive, and determination that exists among English Learners. The film recognizes true potential held by Latino English Learners while addressing and dispelling stereotypes of these students’ abilities.

Echevarria argues that in order for students to soar past those limitations that hold them back, they need teachers who follow the curriculum set by the district or program creators. Jaime Escalante, a Bolivian, who, like many of his students, was bilingual, takes a different approach than the one suggested by the school system. Instead of showing fidelity toward the curriculum or plan the school has set, he follows a different path. Quitting his second job, he devotes himself to teaching math at Garfield High School where he encounters students who have been passed along in the system and those who have become resistant to education as a whole. Escalante is able to reach his students and help them succeed because “he is comfortable both in the barrio and in the system” (Goldman 85). He recognizes that his specific student population is not one that can be catered to by a standard curriculum that has been created; Escalante’s students need to understand that more is rightfully expected of them. Although the school judges his Chicano students in terms of their lower socioeconomic status and academic achievement levels, Escalante, challenging the system’s limiting vision for the students, decides to quiz the students on a daily basis, fights to teach an

Advanced Placement Calculus class at the school, and prepares his students during summer school to ensure their success.

Escalante understands that underperforming students may challenge the system's homogenizing view of them. According to Paul Matsuda in his article, "The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition," many classrooms at the university level are created with the image of an ideal student in mind—a middle class Caucasian student who holds the language skills of academic English. Arguing that such a view is a common flaw found in freshmen university courses, Matsuda believes that we should not homogenize students. Although he understands that universities often have an image of a hypothetical student in mind, such an approach can be detrimental "when [the image] inaccurately represents the actual student population in the classroom to the extent that it inhibits the teacher's ability to recognize and address the presence of differences" (639). Student populations are different based on geography, but more often than not, they are linguistically diverse and contain students who are not native English speakers. Escalante knows his population in terms of culture and language skills while also recognizing what his students need in order to move up the ladder of success: education. Labeling math as "the great equalizer" in a society of hierarchies, Escalante puts in all of his effort, going above and beyond his job description as well as the traditional idea people have of teachers, to give his students access to educational resources. Matsuda warns that "the myth of linguistic homogeneity—the tacit and widespread acceptance of the dominant image of composition students as native speakers of a privileged variety of English" poses problems for English learners who have not been adequately prepared for a curriculum that does not provide extra support to those in need (638). Even though Escalante was not an English or composition teacher, his students were English learners who, if not for enrolling in his class, would have been destined to fail to continue with higher education. He teaches them to navigate through the system with the universal language of math, hence his belief of the discipline being "the great equalizer."

The students in the film enact a sort of "rags to riches" fantasy, but they gain educational capital rather than money. Each student finds a way to rhetorically move

through the social constructions placed onto him, finally breaking free of stereotypes. The students in Garfield High are part of a Title I school meaning that the population as a whole is at an economic disadvantage, with Physical Education teachers teaching Algebra, and students coming from homes that lack the ideal support one needs and wishes for to achieve a higher education. Factors such as “family income, the number of parents in the home, the number of algebra units taken, the level of parent involvement, and the level of English-language skills are significant predictors of academic achievement for Latino students” (Ramirez and Carpenter 602). The students of Garfield High reflect the multiple functions of language by representing the diversity of English Learners in the LAUSD; some are native English speakers but lack the academic language skills necessary for success at different levels, while others are immigrants who have become fully immersed in a new language and culture. Breaking free from these “home-based” and “school-based” barriers, the students—Guadalupe Escobar, Ana Delgado, Rafaela Fuentes, Frank “Pancho” Garcia, and Angel “Nethead” Guzman—prove, that together and individually, they can challenge the stereotypes attached to being an English learner and achieve great success.

Elbow and Perez-Torres both stress the importance of appealing to a hybrid identity—one that has been repressed, marginalized, or suppressed in some way to engender the idea that language disruption is needed for individual and collective empowerment. Mr. Escalante decides to do this by relating himself and his studies to the dominant and academically prestigious “language” of mathematics. On the second day of school, Mr. Escalante entertains the class with his witty personality and engaging lesson. The culture of English Learners is quite different from that of the traditional student and Escalante, being an “outsider” himself, recognizes the separation. He finds multiple ways to relate to the students that day and helps them see connections and relevancy to real world usage. Embedding a rhetoric of communal humor into his pedagogy, Escalante helps his students to identify with him, creating a comfortable learning environment—one of the goals outlined in the EL Master Plan. Comparing positive and negative numbers to filling and emptying a hole at the beach, Escalante explains numbers in analogies that interest his students. Escalante points out to his

students that the conceptual zero was first conceived by their Mayan ancestors; this knowledge makes them feel empowered and motivated. Escalante uses these rhetorical strategies to enhance his students' learning. "There may indeed be deep links between language, thinking, culture, and identity, but links are not chains," but even so, "a culture does not consist of just one way of thinking" (Elbow 655). Appealing to his student's cultural history in the classroom, Escalante opens doors to new interests, thus allowing his students to better absorb new content. The "links" Elbow mentions allows each student to make the connections he/she needs for the desire, or "ganas," to surface.

Historical events, although not as obvious as one might think, do alter the way a person carries him/herself and the thought processes one has. The process of becoming a person of hybrid identity or mestizo is known as "mestizaje," which "embodies the struggle for power, place, and personhood arising from histories of violence and resistance" (Perez-Torres 166). After a staff meeting concerning the school's upcoming accreditation review, Escalante decides to make his students step up to the line with daily quizzes. He tells them that they already have "two strikes" against them—their names and complexion—which signify to some people that they have less knowledge and are capable of producing less than they actually can. Ramirez and Carpenter believe that the "overgeneralized policies and practices" of districts in general, speculate that "all students with Spanish surnames need English-language acquisition classes" (600). This type of belief perpetuates negative stereotypes concerning the intelligence and skill set of Latino students. Escalante then rhetorically appeals to them by giving them the solution to this problem: math. If we observe the behavior of the students in the class, we clearly see that they are surprised—they neither believe in the value of math nor believe they can master it. Escalante uses this moment to disrupt the cycle that math belongs to the elite and not to disadvantaged, underperforming students. Escalante understands that math is not just another subject to learn and master; math is signified as power, as something to adopt as his/her own as an enabler in the globalized world of hierarchies. Escalante supports his students by showing his students through words and actions that he believes in them, and he wants

to help them beat a system that does not have faith in them. The students are ready to be challenged to meet the high expectations he sets for them.

In any institution, including a school, a power structure exists among its staff as well as those who seek services from the institution. In the case of education and schooling, administrators, teachers, and students often find themselves in a hierarchal relationship to each other, with students too often at the bottom. Escalante is soon introduced to Raquel Ortega, the Mathematics Department Chair, who throughout the film doubts the students' abilities several times. At a meeting about accreditation issues, Ortega stereotypes the students by labeling them as "illiterates." Mike Rose, a well-known teacher and writer, discusses disadvantaged writers and their origins in "Narrowing the Mind and Page: Remedial Writers and Cognitive Reductionism." When Ortega compares the students to illiterates, she is ideologically determining the destiny of each student, even if she does not realize the consequences of her words. Rose points out that "literacy is too intertwined with schooling and urbanization, with economics, politics, and religion to be able to isolate it" (351); thus, when Ortega refers to the students as "illiterates" she is also projecting the potential downward spiral of their futures. When Escalante wants to teach his students calculus and believes they can dedicate themselves to Summer school, Ortega, noting the low self esteem common to many English Learners, insults them by questioning their characters: "These aren't the types to, uh, bounce back." Her tone and hesitation before muttering the last two words speak to her lack of belief in the students as she feels they cannot handle failure and are not resilient. She does not believe in them here and again later in the film, when she boldly implies that the students are guilty of cheating on their exams because they were too upset to let Mr. Escalante down. When administrators or teachers doubt their own student population, especially a segment of that population that is a minority—in this case the EL population—then they not only acknowledge the widespread nature of these stereotypes, but also perpetuate them. These are students who haven't succeeded academically; therefore, it is easy for others to believe they would cheat in order to be what they wish to be. Rose notes that some believe that this type of thinking creates a division between the staff who "are literate, left-hemisphere, field-independent,

etc., and underprepared students [who] are oral, right-hemispheric, and field dependent,” further demonstrating “the conceptual limits of such labeling” (356-57). Here Rose is highlighting the underlying belief that administrators and students have different thought processes, and while I would agree that labeling is detrimental, I would challenge even this form of categorization.

Certain moments can be discouraging for students who are marginalized by the privileged culture or language. However, as Gates suggests, these moments can also be empowering moments, in which the individual can disrupt the system. After devoting their time and effort to working with Escalante, the 18 AP Calculus students all pass the test but are then accused of cheating on the AP Calculus test by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Each student receives a letter by mail stating the suspicious circumstances surrounding the exam. While sitting on the field bleachers discussing the letter, some of the students do not understand the real import of this official letter written in Standard Academic English, “the written language of power and prestige” (Elbow 641). A student asks Escalante to translate what the letter says into vernacular English. Another student, rightfully frustrated and upset, remarks that the testing service thinks that they are too stupid to even cheat correctly, bringing the stereotypes of English learners to light. This scene only confirms how Ortega, and other teachers and administrators with her mindset, views English learners: these are students who look for the easy way out instead of working hard and are so obtuse they cannot even succeed. In doubting the students’ intelligence, the administrators are perpetuating negative stereotypes. Even when the students have surpassed all odds, barriers, and challenges, they are questioned and must find the desire in themselves to keep fighting past the traditional hierarchal structure that bars them from truly advancing. One type of person is not better than another type of person, similarly one language is not better than another, and one ethnicity is not better than another. They are merely different from each other. According to Elbow, Academic Standard English just “happened to be the dialect of the region that became economically and politically dominant” (Elbow 663).

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) decides to investigate into the ordeal, and the ETS representatives clearly share Ortega’s attitude. During an interrogation-like

scene, one of the ETS men tries to convince the group of students to admit they cheated. To appeal to the group, he decides to relate to them, a rhetorical strategy we have seen Escalante employ as well: “I come from this neighborhood. I know that sometimes we’re tempted to take shortcuts.” He generalizes and assumes that students from an economically struggling area will resort to negative behavior. Made out to be a criminal, Angel responds by making the accusers look like fools. Playing upon their false assumptions, he tells them that he got the test in advance from the mailman, murdered him, and left his body to decompose in his locker. Then, he raises his arms in the position a person would offer to be handcuffed, as if serious about the “crime” he says he committed. Angel understands what the stance signifies here by way of signifyin(g), where the “most important defining features of Signifyin(g) are ‘indirect intent’ and metaphorical reference” (Gates 85). In addition to this act of linguistic defiance, Angel points his fists directly at the ETS representative, who reads the words “fuck you” across Angel’s knuckles. This type of signifyin(g) “connotes the play of language—both spoken and body language—drawn upon to name something figuratively” (Gates 69). Angel is fed up with the accusations of being viewed as a cheat and a failure after he had mastered the system that had repressed him for so long and thus “the voice of the mestizo emerge[d] as the articulation of an empowered and empowering ethnic identity” (Perez-Torres 166). This English learner, someone who in the beginning of the film would be considered a gangster or “cholo” by other Latinos, has learned the system and can manipulate it to adhere to his specific rhetoric—not the dominant rhetoric and conventional meaning attached to his actions. Employing these tactics, Angel is engaged in the double voiced discourse that empowers him; he responds with subversive humor as a coping mechanism, signifyin(g) by “engag[ing] in certain rhetorical games” (Gates 48). He disrupts the ETS personnel’s notion of what his actions traditionally mean in this act of frustrated resistance. In the end, Escalante’s students are vindicated as they retake the exam and all pass the AP Calculus exam once more.

Escalante empowers the students by teaching them to access the system while simultaneously accepting who they are and being proud of their characters as well. Peter Elbow labels a student’s first language or heritage language—if it is not English—

as his/her “mother tongue” and weighs it with the same value as Standard English (643). An important question arises from his work: how does a teacher give students access to a hegemonic language without forcing them to abandon their mother tongue? Gates could provide some insight how to do so through signification, which “has been aptly described by Mikhail Bakhtin as [being] double-voiced” (Gates 50). To be successful in a world of multiple languages that are placed on a hierarchal scale, students should have access to different voices and dialects, affirming and owning the rich possibilities of a multilingual environment. The students of Garfield High learn to do just this: they learn how to take the signification of a word or act and re-signify it to make it their own.

If we communicate the trust and belief we have in our students to our students, then we will help empower them. Elbow brings to light the fact that “there is extensive research about how people in different cultures argue and persuade and present ideas differently,” revealing that “culture is linked with language, rhetoric, thinking, and even modes of identity” (653). The students in *Stand and Deliver* are able to transform what was once unattainable and alien to them into something that is familiar and empowering. Allowing English learners the space they need to develop their identities and find alternative ways to master the system instead of constructing a system to master them will prove to be beneficial. The English learner program, or any educational program or initiative put into place, is not a one-size-fits all plan; each individual student is unique and responds to things differently in any given circumstance. It is virtually impossible to create a plan or lesson that will teach everyone. English learners must continue to battle limiting labels but with guidance, acceptance, and understanding, they will prove these stereotypical labels wrong and soar past the expectations set for them.

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# Seeking the Next Saroyan: Cultural Representations of Armenian Americans of Los Angeles

Vana Derohanessian

Though the specific timeline of the multicultural history of Los Angeles might be debated, Los Angeles's role as a center for people of varying races and ethnicities is rarely called into question. Aside from contributing to traditional cultural products like food, music, and fashion, a variety of ethnic and racial groups—including African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Jewish Americans—have had an active role in the producing such popular cultural products as television and film in Los Angeles, sometimes to the delight, but sometimes to the dismay of people from their very communities. For more recent immigrant communities, like the Armenian Americans in Los Angeles, their anxiety regarding cultural representation may manifest itself through ethnic self-policing. Armenian Americans have lived in Los Angeles in significant numbers since the 1960s and have had a more obscured ethnic representation by way of literature, television, and film than other ethnic groups. Recently, however, with the rise in popularity of the television reality show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, one example of Armenian American life has become very visible. In this paper, I will examine the ways in which *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* has become the new cultural text that is produced, distributed, and consumed by an American public who view the Kardashians as representatives of Armenian Americans from Los Angeles and how such a representation has become a source of friction for Armenian Los Angelenos.

It's estimated that over eight million Armenian people live in diaspora, with one million of those people living in Los Angeles, making Los Angeles home to the largest Armenian community in America. Much has been written about the Armenian Genocide of 1915. However, a detailed explication of a visual text that is not based strictly on memoirs is much more infrequent. Different ethnic groups such as African Americans,

Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans of Los Angeles have produced contemporary literature that is reflective of the specific experience a minority ethnic group has in a multicultural city. A majority of the literary cultural production that comes from the Armenian diaspora comes in the form of memoirs and oral histories that stemmed from the displacement of Armenians from Armenia. Some Armenian Americans have asked, “Where are our contemporary tales that represent the Armenian experience in America?” Recently, Armenian Americans like author William Saroyan, former California governor George Deukmejian, former all-time winningest college basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian, or even the infamous physician Jack Kevorkian have been eclipsed by reality television’s Kardashians. Armenians who live in Los Angeles (particularly the Armenian population that has grown dramatically over the past three decades in the San Fernando Valley) are concerned about the pervasive cultural representatives they find in visual texts and on television, specifically in *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, because of what the community sees as negative ethnic stereotyping.

When writing about texts regarding the Armenian American experience and how it’s represented to a consumer culture, it’s important to expand upon what Armenian American literature looks like today. Many books written about Armenians in America are memoirs, with a few earning critical acclaim for their superb level of writing. Peter Balakian published *Black Dog of Fate*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller, and more recently, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America’s Response*. In 2012, Chris Bohjalian’s *The Sandcastle Girls*, a fictional account of a young aid worker who helps Armenians in Syria at the time of the Genocide, was also a *New York Times* bestseller. All of these texts utilized archival documents or eyewitness accounts as part of their central source material, as do a myriad of other Armenian American authors. And while *The Sandcastle Girls* is told from a present-day American narrator’s perspective, the narrative tone for most of the other works about the Genocide is intentionally meant to preserve a historically accurate voice. The Armenian Genocide has been central to the community’s cultural memory and identity, and the fear of forgetting this history is woven through Armenian American non-fiction and fiction alike.

With this threat constantly on the horizon, the focus in these narratives has remained the Genocide.

The fear of forgetting the Armenian Genocide is engrained in the minds of the Armenian diasporic community from a very young age. Turkey's denial of the events of 1915 has withstood the recognition of several European countries, including France, which acknowledge the events as genocide. In his 2012 book *The Holocaust and the Armenian Case in Comparative Perspective*, Turkish historian Yucel Guclu contends that Armenians have long associated the Genocide, or "case" as he refers to it, with the Holocaust as a vilifying rhetorical strategy unfounded in fact and devised to demonize the Ottoman Turks.

The term "genocide" was coined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and has a special meaning. It is defined not only by the characteristic of mass death, but by the characteristic of mass death caused intentionally by the policies and actions of a state, with the expressed purpose of wiping out a national, ethnographic, religious or other group. There are only a small handful of mass deaths in all of history that have been deemed, by consensus, a genocide. The tragedy of the Armenians is not one of those events.

Guclu goes on to say that the Armenian case, though not genocide, was a tragedy suffered not only by Armenians, but also by Greeks and Assyrians in his attempt to assuage the reader and gloss over the institutional, systematic deaths of Christian peoples that was well-documented and photographed by human rights ambassadors. When colonizers attempt to distract and defend their actions as legitimate wartime casualties, the colonized are left to suffer the losses of life and land, and are tasked with passing down their traumatic narrative to future generations in order to preserve what remains of their ethnic identity. The Armenian population has been continually marginalized by sustained Turkish colonial practices. Bedrosian, in her introduction to her collection of critical articles about Armenian American writers titled *The Magical Pine Ring: Armenian /American Literature*, notes,

To this day, the Turk casts a dense shadow over the Armenian psyche and the collective memory. Coming to terms with how and why is beyond

the scope of this study, but as a figure in the story Armenians tell about themselves, the Turk might fill every circle in their *Inferno*, and some not yet charted. (17)

The shadow that Bedrosian acknowledges is one that invades the identity of most Armenian Americans. There are still living survivors of the Genocide, and many Armenians who immigrated to America are either directly related to a survivor or are caring for a survivor presently.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth details the connection between trauma and history.

The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life. . . . The crisis at the core of many traumatic narratives—as I show concretely in my readings of Freud, Duras, and Lacan—often emerges, indeed, as an urgent question; Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it? At the core of these stories, I would suggest, is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival. . . . it is the inextricability of the story of one's life from the story of a death, an impossible and necessary double telling, that constitutes their historical witness. (16)

The crisis of death and life following the Armenian Genocide shapes the Armenian American identity and deals with the trauma by preserving what remains of cultural organizations. This shared trauma guarantees, to some extent, unity in the community and prevents the loss of cultural identity. The community cannot bear the death of their identity, and the resulting homogenous identity of the hard-working, burdened immigrant often does not allow heterogeneity in cultural representation.

Much like the descendants of Holocaust survivors, Armenian Americans not only lost their political and intellectual leaders, friends, and family, they also lost their money,

property, and—most significantly for the diasporic community—their homeland. The shadow cast on the Armenian American psyche is not insignificant. Turkey absorbed Western Armenia, and unlike Germany, has made no reparations. Levon Abrahamian, in *Armenian Identity in a Changing World*, contrasts the Jewish and Armenian diasporas.

The Jews lost their homeland after losing statehood, while the Armenians only lost statehood, and even this was in a sense substituted by the institute of religion. Only the Armenians of Western Armenia lost their homeland like the Jews, but here too there is a considerable difference between the two types of diaspora. All this brings us back to the problem of the homeland, which seems to be the crucial characteristic of the Armenian diaspora. (326)

Indeed, the loss of homeland for Armenians, regardless of whether they descended from either the East or West, was catastrophic. Fractured families relied on the church and schools to preserve the sense of homeland when they settled in countries like Lebanon, Syria, Greece, and France. And so the personal stories that detail how Turkey subjected them to such trauma are told often and are filled with familial pathos, as the shadow looms over Armenian American psyches, homes and schools.

There are close to a dozen Armenian private schools scattered in and around Los Angeles (concentrated in the San Fernando Valley) that serve the cultural and sometimes religious needs of the Armenian American community. In addition to learning the Armenian language, children from 1<sup>st</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade take Armenian History, and for some parish schools, religion courses. The mission statement for A.G.B.U. MDS, one of the larger Armenian schools in the Los Angeles area with a potential capacity of 950 students, reflects this desire to maintain a coherent ethnic identity. The school expects students to

Become individuals aware of their Armenian cultural heritage who: have acquired a basic knowledge of Armenian language, literature, and history; have developed an appreciation for Armenian culture and their identity;

are prepared to contribute to Armenian community life and their historic homeland. (A.G.B.U.)

Children from ages three to eighteen are taught Armenian history and the importance of remembering the horrifying, traumatic experiences of their grandparents and great-grandparents in an effort to shape their social conscience. A vast majority of Armenian American children from Los Angeles attend one of these schools at some point in their lives, either as full-time students or as students who attend these private schools on weekends for cultural edification. Kindergarteners are taught songs chronicling the pain and suffering of their ancestors. Middle schoolers are assigned books like Adam Bagdassarian's *Forgotten Fire* by and David Kheridian's *The Road From Home: A True Story of Courage, Survival and Hope* that discuss first-hand accounts of the human rights violations that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century such as torture, rape, and murder. High schoolers watch films like the 1982 full length feature *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, which tells the story of an Armenian village that fought against Turkish insurgents. Nearly all read at least one work from William Saroyan, most likely *My Name is Aram*. Saroyan's seminal collection of short stories follows a young Armenian American boy growing up in Central California's San Joaquin Valley. To put it in perspective, Saroyan's *My Name is Aram* is as much a cultural touchstone to Armenian Americans as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to Americans from multiple backgrounds.

William Saroyan captured the feeling of being without a homeland in his writing. He was born in Fresno, California in 1908 as Armenians were being displaced from their home country by the Ottoman Turks. Fresno at the time was an immigrant town, home to Chinese, Irish, Jewish, Japanese and Mexican peoples, in addition to an influx of Armenians who moved before the worst days of the Genocide began. Saroyan describes the dichotomy of Armenian-ness and American-ness in his work *Antranik of Armenian*. His narrator says,

The nation is lost. The strong nations of the world are jumping with new problems. To hell with the whole God damn mess, I said. I'm no Armenian. I'm an American. Well the truth is I am both and neither. I love Armenia

and I love America and I belong to both, but I am only this: an inhabitant of the earth, and so are you, whoever you are. I tried to forget Armenia but I couldn't do it. My birthplace was California, but I couldn't forget Armenia, so what is one's country? . . . Well, I do not know for sure, but I know it is all these things as remembrance in the blood. (38-39)

It is ironic that although many Armenian Americans have embraced such literary cultural representations as found in Saroyan's novels, the representation that is most well-known is the television representation of the Kardashians family. Indeed, the power of popular culture has helped Jewish Americans cope with the trauma that colonized peoples struggle with generations after the initial trauma takes place. But of the two competing Armenian American narratives, the story of the privileged Kardashians has eclipsed Saroyan's community-approved narrative.

Like many immigrant communities, Armenians found refuge in America out of necessity. For decades after 1915, members of the Armenian intelligentsia and community leaders held fast to the idea that the diaspora would one day return to Armenia. Armenia was under Soviet Russian rule for a large part of the twentieth century, and the living conditions in former Soviet-ruled Armenia were undesirable. The diaspora became more assimilated. "Once diasporas are established," Denise Aghanian writes in *The Armenian Diaspora: Cohesion and Fracture*, "they become intimately shaped by the host country's dominant ideology, political system, socio-economic structure, cultural traditions and domestic foreign policies" (5). Even now, as Syrian-Armenians have returned to Armenia because of conflict in Syria, these Syrian-Armenians vow to return to Syria when the political climate is more stable. Though the Armenian government is eager to welcome these Armenians back to the homeland, stories of organized-crime syndicates threatening the livelihoods of entrepreneurs have forced those re-entering Armenia to find yet another country to call home. The Armenian diaspora boasts millions of Armenians, more than reside in the country of Armenia, and has engaged a number of strategies to ensure the community's preservation, even a form of communal self-policing.

Outlining diasporic identities in her work, Aghanian states,

Diaspora identities are those that are constantly reproducing themselves through difference. As such each Diaspora community has modified its way of life, blending elements from its heritage with elements of the mainstream. The use of English in the Armenian Apostolic Church is a clear example. Even so, within their travels and hyphenated identities there are more complex markers of identity. This means keeping any values and customs from other groups. By the use of transnational strategies, which exposes them to many cultures, Diasporas are in an advantageous position to pick and choose characteristics. (177)

Because of the unique hybridity of diasporic identities, the tendency to select and control cultural characteristics is a practical inevitability for Armenian Americans. Political, cultural, and religious leaders in the Armenian American diaspora have a heightened awareness when it comes to the threat of assimilation and the fear of forgetting, and thus they have consciously positioned the Genocide as a shared cultural memory in order to keep the community intact. These leaders desire to preserve homogeneity and to maintain cultural values in the diasporic community, and any representations of Armenian American-ness that is not approved becomes a threat of its own kind.

Much of the discourse that surrounds the Armenian diaspora, which is estimated to be anywhere from five to ten million strong, is informed by the Armenian Genocide. During and after the Genocide of 1915, Armenians scattered to countries like Lebanon, Iran, Greece, and Iraq to find a safe place to raise their families. Around the mid-twentieth century, when conflicts arose in the countries where they sought refuge, Armenians came in droves to America. So many Armenian Americans have had the distinct experience of being doubly-displaced, bringing with them their Armenian heritage as well as the customs and traditions of their adopted, temporary homelands. No doubt the multitude of Armenian diasporas have contributed to the difficulty of finding a single, codifying ethnic representation of Armenian American-ness, as it is impossible to say that a Lebanese Armenian American's experience is similar to an Iranian Armenian American's experience. The double displacement proves how successful the

Ottoman Turks were in making conversations about ethnic representation by the colonized increasingly difficult.

Armenian Americans have often produced literature that reflects this inheritance of anxieties and fears, and Armenian American scholars have tended to focus their analysis on this powerful historical memory. Although there is increasing work done of such authors as Saroyan, Armenian American scholars have all but ignored the emerging cultural narrative of the Kardashians. Over two decades ago, research about Armenian American cultural products in Los Angeles would yield results about food, dance, and music, mostly from parochial private communities, schools, and churches. Certainly, Armenian Americans from Los Angeles have published works of fiction and non-fiction. The city's educational institutions reflect the population's concerns with preserving Armenian culture. UCLA and USC, in addition to CSU Northridge and CSU Fresno, house extensive Armenian Studies programs. USC's Shoah Foundation, which says it "is dedicated to making audio-visual interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides a compelling voice for education and action," frequently works with scholars and survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Though the Kardashians have sold millions of copies of print periodical publications, Armenian American scholarly publications, such as the *Journal of Armenian Studies*, have yet to address their growing cultural significance as a kind of Armenian American text. With the emergence of third and fourth generation Armenian Americans, scholars should consider not only the lingering trauma of the Genocide as a shaper of community identity, but also more heterogeneous notions of the Armenian American identity—including the Kardashians.

When discussing colonialism in academia, scholars often cite European colonial powers that at one time dominated places like the Americas, India, and beyond. But as Ania Loomba states in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, colonialism is not exclusive to the Europeans. In fact, "it has been a recurrent and widespread feature of human history" (8). Loomba points out "the Ottoman Empire, which began as a minor Islamic principality in what is now Western Turkey, extended itself over most of Asia Minor and the Balkans." If the Ottoman Turks are the colonizers and the Armenians the colonized,

the struggle to find Armenian ethnic representation for the colonized might sound more familiar. Gayatri Spivak has delved into what British colonization and eventual withdrawal have done to India and Hong Kong, but for the Armenian diaspora, the colonization is ongoing. Where England has seceded from colonies and relinquished subsequent reign, and Germany has made reparations to the Jewish people, Turkey remains resolute in rejecting the label of “Armenian Genocide,” and still controls much of the land that the Ottomans claimed from Armenia starting in the late nineteenth century. Turkey declares that any Turk “who explicitly insults being a Turk, the Republic or the Turkish Grand National Assembly, shall be imposed to a penalty of imprisonment for a term of six months to three years” (Miles). The government did so in the case of Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk. Pamuk’s crime was detailed in a Swiss newspaper in February 2005. “Thirty thousand Kurds and a million Armenians were killed in these lands and nobody but me dares to talk about it,” Pamuk said. The public outcry in his homeland of Turkey was extreme; copies of Pamuk’s books were burned at rallies. Clearly, in attempting to control and punish Pamuk, the Turks are attempting to police, and, even, colonize one of their own. However, I must ask, in what ways has the Armenian American leadership engaged in its form of self-policing when they perceive that a threat is being generated not from the outside, but from within the community?

*Keeping Up with the Kardashians* follows the blended Kardashian-Jenner family as they run their clothing stores, travel the world for paid appearances and vacations, get married and divorced, and raise children and grandchildren in the affluent Los Angeles suburb of Calabasas. Among the producers of the show is Kris Jenner, the matriarch of the Kardashian family and architect of their widespread fame and fortune. As such, each episode of the show depicts the family as an all-American family struggling with personal flaws and family conflicts, but all through a lens of privilege. Scenes in a given hour-long episode jump from images of Los Angeles traffic and the Downtown Los Angeles cityscape at night, to footage of the Pacific Ocean from Malibu and private airplanes as they take off. Though the show is technically a reality show, there is no doubt that through the practice of lighting, makeup, and editing, the show is crafted to present to the viewer a specifically benign glimpse into the world of Kourtney,

Kim and Khloe Kardashian, as they are the fulcrum upon which the show is balanced. Cameramen, along with lighting crews and makeup artists, are portrayed as being omnipresent as the sisters attend press conferences, go to restaurants, and lounge around their respective homes.

In addition to its representation of a blended family (Kris Jenner was married to and divorced from prominent Armenian lawyer Robert Kardashian before the show was created), the show attempts to and has succeeded in capitalizing off of the exotic-sounding last name Kardashian. The title of the show seeks to normalize the family's Armenian last name as it is mixed into the idiom "keeping up with the Joneses," a phrase which speaks to the preoccupation middle and upper class Americans have with maintaining the same level of financial and social standing as their neighbors. Before 2007, the Kardashians were known to be Los Angeles area socialites that came from an affluent family, but they had not yet attained the level of celebrity and wealth that they have today. Despite their elite social standing, the Kardashians have often been criticized precisely because of their privilege. For Armenian Americans, the Kardashians' narrative of financial privilege is clearly distinguished from the suffering immigrant narrative found in Saroyan's works.

The Kardashian family has succeeded in parlaying the American public's fascination with cultural representations of immigrants and the generations that stem from them, partly because of their Othered last name, and partly because of their physical attributes. Though the sisters are only half Armenian, they embody many physical traits that are identified with the Armenian community: Armenian women are perceived to be full-figured with long dark hair, large dark eyes, and tan skin. Public opinion would attribute the success of the show, spanning over ten seasons, to the notorious sex tape that featured Kim Kardashian. When the video continued to circulate (despite the lack of Kim's consent in publicizing the video) due to the advent of the internet, Kris Jenner secured a distribution deal for the video with an adult film production company. To some in the Armenian community, the Kardashians' meteoric rise to stardom as a result of the video is problematic, and they, as well as other Americans, have criticized the family and their resultant fame.

In a traditionally patriarchal Armenian society, Armenian women are expected to lead private and sexually modest lives, and the various Armenian churches, which are scattered throughout Los Angeles County, enforce these social norms. It is not uncommon for Armenian parents to avoid discussions of sexuality in public spaces, though when those conversations do arise, more often than not, the conversation is in private and serves to warn and enforce, not to encourage and inform. The American military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy on sexuality is not dissimilar to the stance the Armenian community takes on human sexuality. So the Kardashian situation is particularly interesting, because the family, namely the matriarch Kris, not only acknowledged Kim's video, which after all was already leaked to the populace, but also gained agency by controlling a portion of the video's distribution and profiting from it. The brilliance of the Kardashian brand of public relations and marketing lies in the classically American narrative of redemption—the idea that everyone deserves a second chance. With their matching exotic looks and moniker, the Kardashian family has positioned themselves in American pop culture as a dysfunctional family, rising from the ashes of the sex tape to move past the sexual taboo of public displays of fornication and onto commodification of their ethnic identity with business ventures that include clothing stores, magazine covers, club appearances, books, perfumes, and a combined social media following that totals somewhere in the hundreds of millions.

From the outset, the Kardashian sisters have made their late father Robert and his emphasis on maintaining the girls' Armenian American identity part of their narrative. In season one of *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, the sisters watch home videos their father filmed. The first words the viewer hears from Robert as he watches his very young daughters play together are, "Let's see, can you girls speak Armenian?" (IMDb). Clearly, the Kardashian patriarch wanted his daughters to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage identity. These issues related to cultural identity continued long after he passed away in 2004. On a 2012 episode of *Khloe and Lamar*, one of several spin-offs of *Keeping Up*, Khloe Kardashian struggles with the idea of her professional basketball player husband playing for a Turkish basketball league. "The Armenian Genocide is such a controversial and very sensitive issue because the Turkish and

Armenian people disagree about the facts of what actually happened”, Khloe says. “I know how strongly the Armenians feel about the Genocide, and how it’s never been recognized. At the same time, I do not hold today’s generation of people accountable.” (*Khloe and Lamar*) Khloe is echoing the same concerns that most Armenian Americans have in obtaining Turkey’s recognition of the Genocide. Much of the episode is devoted to Khloe’s anxiety about approaching her husband about the Armenian Genocide and her family history. She discusses living in Turkey with her younger brother Rob, and he seems doubtful. “Imagine what it’s going to be like,” he says. Kim, her older sister, also urges Khloe to weigh her options. “Just be careful. I don’t think you understand. . . . When I did the cover of *Cosmo* International, Turkey picked it up and I got a lot of backlash for it.” Kim is warning Khloe about the cultural strictures that are in place when Armenians are affiliated with Turks. Khloe and Lamar have raised questions of ethnic identity on a familial and national level, and Kim recognizes the significance of this moment—they have inherited not only an Armenian name, but a whole system of significations associated with their Armenian American identity.

Kim is also referring specifically to a magazine cover of her published in Turkey during the month of April. In response to the criticism she received, Kim took to her blog to express her frustrations.

*Cosmopolitan* magazine has a number of international editions all around the world that run in various territories, and when I did this shoot for the international covers I had no idea that Turkey was planning to run my story on their cover THIS month, considering Genocide Remembrance Day is this month. My Armenian heritage means a lot to me and I’ve been brought up to be incredibly proud of my family’s background and culture so as an Armenian American woman it is a huge honor for me to be on the first ever Armenian *Cosmopolitan*.

Clearly, there are public relations concerns with celebrity personalities of the Kardashians’ caliber, but aside from the awareness of her audience, Kim is a testament to the dominant issues that are important to Armenian Americans. Even though the Kardashians, and other Los Angeleno Armenians, are several generations removed

from the Genocide, the latest generation is still tasked with carrying on the tragic stories and trauma until the country of Turkey acknowledges that the Genocide took place. Even though Kim had no precise way of knowing when and where a publishing conglomerate like *Cosmopolitan* would run her cover story, she is held accountable for her cover of *Cosmopolitan* in Turkey; clearly, she feels her actions are being policed by Armenian American expectations. In a nod to traditional Armenian values and her communal responsibility, Khloe turns for advice to her closest Armenian relative, her father's brother, who says he was upset when he heard about their possible move to Turkey and reminds Khloe of the massacre that has yet to be recognized by the Turkish government. Here, her uncle fulfills not only the role of her dead father, but also the role of the community's patriarchs. Finally, Khloe brings up her discomfort with the situation to her husband, and they decide to no longer entertain the option of moving to Turkey. Khloe clearly privileges the communal choice over her immediate familial issues, thus proving the power of the trauma narrative that has been sustained even for Armenian American generations far removed from the Genocide.

The popularity of the Kardashian Armenian American narrative has coincided with the popularity of Armenian television broadcast in America. *USArmenia* boasts a constant line-up of Armenian news programming, Armenian soap operas, and Armenian game shows. Recently, the network aired a reality television show about Armenian Americans called *Glendale Life*. *Glendale Life* differs from *Keeping Up* and its spinoffs because the show is produced by Armenian producers for Armenian audiences. Sharing many of the voyeuristic qualities of reality television programs like MTV's *Jersey Shore*, the show chronicles the lives of a handful of young Armenian Americans residing in Glendale, California as they date, party, and quarrel with one another. Over the past decade, shows like *Jersey Shore* have been attracting key demographics and garnering high television ratings. The Instagram account for *Glendale Life* purports that the show "presents the luxurious lifestyles of beautiful Armenian women and handsome Armenian men" (Instagram). Indeed, a typical episode of *Glendale Life* depicts young men and women of Glendale as they get plastic surgery, buy luxury cars and goods, and drink in excess as the cameras roll. The fundamental difference between the two shows,

however, lies in its intended audience. *Keeping up with the Kardashians* is broadcast nationally in the United States on cable television, while *Glendale Life*, whose characters code switch between the Armenian and English languages, is broadcast on the Armenian television station *USArmenia*. For a vocal portion of the diaspora, it was one thing for American television to produce and promote an Armenian American representation that they might object to, but for Armenian television to perpetuate a similar objectionable representation was too much for some to bear.

When filming for *Glendale Life* began in early 2014, a group of Armenian Americans was outraged and started a Facebook page and petitioned *USArmenia* to cease production of the show. Even the local news station NBC4 had picked up the story, titling it “Critics Slam ‘Glendale Life’ Reality Show for Perpetuating Armenian Stereotypes” (NBC4). Members of the Armenian community were the primary critics of the show, and they felt so passionately about the show as being detrimental to the Armenian cultural image that they launched a change.org campaign. Using multiple social media platforms, organizers of the campaign sent letters to the Armenian television station *USArmenia*, stating,

[We] implore you on behalf of all Armenians who wish to uphold our heritage, maintain our cultural beliefs and standards and pay homage to our rich history, help us STOP this show from airing. We have fought too long and too hard to be seen as more than what the media has portrayed us being to allow for the bottom to completely fall out with such a disgraceful depiction of Armenians.

The campaign proved unsuccessful, the show aired, and the show has over 34,000 followers on Instagram. The campaign was successful, however, in demonstrating the significant numbers of concerned Armenian American diaspora willing to participate in ethnic self-policing, as well as the numbers who continued to enjoy the voyeuristic gaze into the lives of other representative Armenian American cultural images.

Before the former Soviet Union allowed exit visas to America, and before the Lebanese-Israeli conflict pushed the diaspora further West, Jack Antreassian described a similar sentiment to that of many Armenians leaving comments on *YouTube* videos for

*Keeping Up with the Kardashians* and *Glendale Life*. In “The Armenian in America,” Antreassian writes,

Three things leap out of a jumble of virtues we customarily flaunt, I suppose, as principal features of our image as we would like others to see it: Armenians are the first Christian nation; Armenians were massacred by the Turks; and Armenians are always self-reliant and law-abiding, rarely recorded on welfare rolls and police blotters. . . . We are inordinately sensitive about our community life, owing perhaps to our subconscious sense of its inadequacy. We are unable to bring ourselves to criticize the church, any of our organizations, any of our political parties, any of our leading community figures. The inevitable result is a sort of creeping stagnation, in which major energies of the community are dissipated, denied as they are the drive and concern of an involved citizenry. (253)

Because their church, political parties, and community leaders are the last remaining semblances of their ethnic identity, to criticize them would leave the Armenian American alone, robbed of a unifying identity twice. Armenian Americans are aware of the power of marketing and brand-awareness, and many desire that the image that is marketed to American audiences be pristine and idealized rather than flawed. Ethnic dissention must be sacrificed for community cohesion.

Antreassian’s argument helps explain why the Armenian community reacts so quickly when the most famous Armenian American is no longer a political leader or community figure, but celebrities like Kim Kardashian and her family. The prevalence of the Kardashian narrative, as well as the absence of critical discussion that surrounds this half-Armenian, half-American family, may indicate that Armenians might need to consider multiple narratives of representations. Because of the Kardashians, Armenians and Armenian causes have gained a larger place in the American social conscience, though not necessarily in the way that garners the community’s support. Though many Armenian Americans may be uncomfortable with the spectacle of the Kardashians as emblematic of excess and wealth, the Kardashians offer a facet of what it is to be Armenian American, even if it may not be a complete cultural image that gains approval

from the community leaders. Armenian Americans of Los Angeles should realize that the idea of controlling the Armenian cultural representation to the point of fabrication and obfuscation is in fact detrimental to that representation, not beneficial. This desire to monitor a community's cultural representation, however, is not an exclusively Armenian problem.

For instance, ABC has drawn ire from its television audience with the advent of their show *Fresh off the Boat*, about Eddie Huang's Taiwanese-Chinese-American family moving to Florida. Some viewers have asked if the show is simply perpetuating offensive stereotypes of Asian Americans as characters "fresh off the boat." *The New York Times*' Dwight Garner writes Huang's book is "a surprisingly sophisticated memoir about race and assimilation in America." Huang is a member of an ethnic group presenting his life as he is often comically sandwiched between immigrant parents and American society and expressing frustration at the caricaturing of Chinese immigrants, precisely as he is attempting to portray his family as fully developed characters. Constance Wu, one of the stars of *Fresh off the Boat*, reaffirms Huang's beliefs about ethnic groups portrayed on television in an interview with *Time* magazine.

We shouldn't be a voice for all Asians. We are such a varied group that there's no one show that can be like, "This is what Asian America looks like!" But we're given that burden because we're so rarely represented. If you see Tina Fey on television, you're not like, "All white women are like Tina Fey." Yet people are like, "Oh Jessica Huang's not like *my* mother, but this show is supposed to be about Asians, so shouldn't she be like my mother?" I understand the burden, because the history of our representation on TV is very sparse. (Feeney)

Similar to other immigrant populations in the United States, the Armenian American population hails from countries all around the world. In addition to their Armenian heritage, the diaspora has absorbed the languages and traditions of their adopted countries (Iran, Lebanon, Syria) their families fled to after the Genocide. Like other underrepresented groups in the media, Armenian Americans are especially sensitive to the images that are portrayed in social media and on television. Because there are so

few representatives, the community feels a greater need to craft those representative images for public consumption.

The Kardashians have been criticized not only by the Armenian American community, but also by the wider American public because of the very things that have made them such a pervasive cultural presence: fame and fortune. The Kardashians are notorious for being “famous for being famous,” and, thus, some have argued they have no particular skill set or vocation deemed valuable by communities that respect more traditional labor. For a people that, historically, have prided themselves on the highly specialized work of various craftsmen and agrarians (farmers, jewelers, entrepreneurs), this is a significant point of contention. In fact, the name Kardashian implies that somewhere in their ancestry, the family occupation was stone carving (“kar dash” means “stone carver”). They also exist outside of the trifecta of untouchable subjects that Antreassian pointed out: the Kardashians, until very recently, were not directly affiliated with any Armenian churches, political parties, or community figures. Perhaps, the Kardashians have become a symbolic target for a frustrated, colonized diaspora. But the famous family makes public statements often in an attempt to quell any backlash they receive from Armenian Americans. While Saroyan depicts the trauma-based narrative of the Armenian American, the Kardashians’ narrative is founded on popular, capitalist-based success. When comparing the two dominant Armenian American representations and narratives, I argue that both narratives have a place in the larger social narrative of the community, and the Kardashians have even found a way to intersect the two cultural stories.

In January of 2015, the Kardashians issued a statement revealing their intentions to visit Armenia for the first time in the year that marks the hundredth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

The Kardashian sisters have taken over half the globe to date. Next stop: Armenia . . . The sisters have always culturally identified with their Armenian roots, annually paying tribute to victims of the Armenian Genocide, which occurred in what is now modern-day Turkey, and otherwise proudly recognizing their heritage. Kim has also spoken out

about the plight of Syrian Armenians caught up in the ongoing civil war in Syria. (*E!News*)

2015 marks the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. Many Armenians across the world have launched campaigns to gather, march, and educate the world about the Turkish denial. 2015 marks a paradigmatic shift, for Armenian Americans—through figures such as the Kardashians—have gained a highly visible platform that allows them to give voice to their cultural narratives of shared suffering. In April 2015, Kim and Khloe Kardashian, along with Kim’s husband, rapper Kanye West and her young daughter North, visited Armenia. They were greeted throughout their visit by throngs of people. Kim and Khloe took to Instagram (and to the millions who follow them) to announce their visit to Armenia and raise awareness about the Genocide.

Armenia we are here!!!! We are so grateful to be here and start this journey of a lifetime! Thank you to everyone who greeted us! I can’t wait to explore our country and have some yummy food!

#MyDadAndGrandParentsWouldBeSoProud. . . . My husband and daughter came to Armenia as well to see my heritage and learn about my ancestors! (Instagram)

The question of returning to Armenia is one that is often posed to members of the diaspora. The Armenian community expects that its members will visit the homeland at least once in their lifetime, and the Kardashians are no exception. In this moment, the Kardashians are merging the traditional narratives of shared trauma with their contemporary narratives. Acknowledging her heritage, Kim paid homage to her Armenian American father and grandparents, and then toured the various historical and cultural sites that are symbolic markers for the diasporic community. In their journey to Armenia, Kim and Khloe became representations of Armenian American-ness, even though they operate outside of the big three organizations that Antreassian highlighted (political parties, church, and cultural clubs). Their visit to the homeland came at a pivotal moment: the Armenian Genocide Centennial. For the Armenian American community this historical commemoration served a political purpose: to demand that Turkey admit its role in the Genocide, a word the country even refuses to acknowledge.

In this way, the Kardashians are using their fame as a means of bringing a repressed narrative onto the world stage.

Upon their return from Armenia, and on April 24 2015, the day of remembrance for the Armenian Genocide centennial, Kim authored an article for *Time* magazine about the legacy she inherited from her father.

We were told that when a lot of Armenians moved, they took the *-ian* off their names in fear that they would be killed. “Whatever your girls do, never change your last name—it’s Kardashian,” he would say. . . . So many people have come to me and said, “I had no idea there was a genocide.” . . . We have this spotlight to bring attention to it, so why would we just sit back? . . . I would like President Obama to use the word *genocide*. It’s very disappointing he hasn’t used it as President. . . . There’s a purple centennial pin that everyone wears to commemorate the genocide. Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan gave me his when I met him. Purple is my daughter’s favorite color, so she wants to wear it every single day. When she gets older, I will explain to her the real meaning behind it. I’m half Armenian, but I grew up with a [sic] such a strong sense of my Armenian identity, and I want my daughter to have the same. (Kardashian)

In her article, Kim is engaging in writing a counter narrative—challenging not only ongoing political narratives, but also her own popularly perceived image as a spectacle of privilege. Although her meeting with the Armenian Prime Minister could be seen as a result of her fame, she highlights the trauma that haunts the lives of all Armenian Americans, as well as her commitment to preserve that shared story for her daughter. Here, Kim effectively merges the narrative of the past with a narrative of the present and future.

Although Kim Kardashian does not conform to traditional patriarchal expectations of the Armenian community, I argue that she is part of the rich cultural repository that represents an increasingly heterogeneous community, and more scholars need to turn their attention to the ways that multiple representations are enacted in the community. As we have seen, in a shifting globalized society, the Kardashians demonstrate the

ways that narratives of trauma may merge with narratives of cultural visibility, that narratives of the past may merge with narratives of the present and future. In *Armenian-North American Literature*, Lorne Shirinian writes, “Armenian diaspora culture is alive and vital and only needs recognition of the possibilities of innovation, innovation that embraces tradition and change, the past and the present, the old and the new” (51). In embracing new cultural representations, the Armenian American diaspora may finally be able to embrace a more complex understanding of what it could mean to be Armenian American.

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# At the Intersection of Deaf and Asian American Performativity in Los Angeles: Deaf West Theatre's and East West Players' Adaptations of *Pippin*

Stephanie Lim

Los Angeles has a rich history of community-based theatre, with various groups and programs that emphasize the diverse and multifaceted nature of the city and its inhabitants, such as Center Theatre Group's Latino Theatre Initiative, which provides a space for Latino artists and audiences, Celebration Theatre, which creatively explores gay and lesbian culture, and Cornerstone Theatre, which has produced joint performances with employees from the Los Angeles Public Library, the Los Angeles Police Department, and the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Linnell 61). Los Angeles Theatre Center's Artistic Director Jose Luis Valenzuela notes that Los Angeles is "the most exciting city in the country, so our theater has to reflect that" (Valle 46), and Colony Theatre's Costume Designer Sherry Linnell remarks how the many types of theatres in Los Angeles "are representative of a lively multi-cultural environment" (60). As further proof, East West Players and Deaf West Theatre, both founded near Hollywood in 1965 and 1991 respectively, have long been staples to the unique and complex character of the Los Angeles theatre scene: East West Players is known for producing shows that place Asian American playwrights and actors front and center, and Deaf West Theatre is known for staging productions featuring both deaf and hearing actors on stage together. These two theatre groups collectively and quite closely "mirror Los Angeles' changing ethnic landscape" (Goodman 93), with heavily-populated Asian American enclaves like Monterey Park and Arcadia scattered throughout Southern California, as well as one of the largest deaf student populations in the United States attending California State University, Northridge. While both East West Players and Deaf West Theatre ostensibly have little in common besides their regional proximity, they have both challenged and continue to challenge the national

theatre scene by attempting to make the theatre experience accessible to groups of people who have been historically marginalized by society, for audience members and actors alike. Furthermore, scholars such as Harlan Lane and Tobin Siebers have argued that the “Deaf world” identifies itself as a minority culture, thus producing a rhetorical and political intersection between Deaf studies and minority studies. By using non-traditional casting for what were once traditionally-casted shows, both the East West and Deaf West theatre companies have revised the source material that they choose to perform, challenging so-called norms and raising questions about socially constructed and performative identities.

While many scholars have studied these two theatres’ productions individually, no research currently exists exploring both companies as functioning together within the larger, national theatre movement towards diversity. However, regardless of which company’s production is being explored, scholarship has found that the shows, by creatively interrogating the very concept of “normal,” establish counter narratives within the works themselves, effectively subverting existing social orders by way of race and physical faculty. This particular influence that both Deaf West and East West have demonstrates not only a strong association between the two groups but also how successfully both groups have brought new life to the theatre. Significantly, both companies also staged stark versions of the same show: the 1972 Tony-award winning musical *Pippin*, which tells the coming-of-age story of a young prince—East West in May 2008 and Deaf West in January 2009. Although the choice in source material may seem coincidental at first, a closer examination reveals that both the Asian American and Deaf communities<sup>2</sup> have struggled with experiences that marginalize their respective communities; after all, not until the mid-20th century did both communities begin to forge a collective political voice in society, and the coming-of-age story depicted in *Pippin* echoes this similar struggle for identity. Thus, by conducting on-site archival research and interviews with cast and crew, and by exploring the cultural conditions within which these LA-based productions were mounted, I argue that Deaf West Theatre’s and East West Players’ adaptations of *Pippin* are reflective not only of LA’s cultural diversity but also of the challenges that the Deaf and Asian American

communities were—and still are—facing today. In addition, a study of these two versions of *Pippin* will provide an understanding of how musical adaptations intentionally disrupt and subvert current notions of national privilege and identity in the United States.

### **The Intersection of Deaf and Asian American Discourses**

The discourse surrounding, and often times defining, both Deaf and Asian American identities within the United States has produced a distinctive intersection between the two communities. Shaped by the social justice movements of the 1960s in the United States, both Deaf and Asian American studies have “challenged so-called neutral norms concerning the valuation of bodies marked by signs of difference” (Stanley et al. 75); after all, physical (dis)ability and racial difference have historically been markers of inferiority. In the years since, the nation has continually recognized the growing need to address the educational, social, and legal concerns of these historically marginalized communities.

The juncture between Deaf and racial minority identities has been of particular interest to scholars over the last few decades, since the Deaf community resists classifying deafness as a disease and instead categorizes itself as a cultural minority. Specifically, many scholars have begun to note the parallel ways in which both Deaf and Asian American identities are socially constructed categories. Douglas Baynton observes that deafness is simultaneously a cultural construction and physical phenomenon marked by difference, much as racial groups are, and, including deafness within the academic context of disability studies, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder consider “disability, like gender, sexuality, and race, as a constructed category,” situating disability within multicultural studies (1). Most significantly, Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren specifically notes that “deaf theatre has more in common with multicultural theatres, those which seek to redress cultural inequities driven by efforts to suppress linguistic difference” (423), an intersection of performativity that is of particular interest here.

There is also a common theme of existence, or inexistence, for both Deaf and Asian American identities. Stanley et al. note that “the disabled body is often described

as incomplete, damaged, or deficient,” while the Asian American body has similarly been viewed historically as “somehow distinct from a nativist white identity and ‘lacking’ American-ness” (77). Both the Deaf and Asian American communities have thus struggled with the perception that they are “less than” the normative American corporeal body or that they do not meet the standards of normative American identity. That is to say, Deaf identities or bodies, like Asian American identities and bodies, are considered “incomplete” by societal standards and in legal rhetoric.

That Deaf and Asian American identities are often recognized as not measuring up fully to normative identities demonstrates too a strong political intersection between the two minority communities, which have both faced issues of social injustice and inequity. Disability theorist Tobin Siebers observes that “the emerging field of disability studies defines disability not as an individual defect but as the product of social injustice, one that requires not the cure or elimination of the defective person but significant changes in the social and built environment” (3). Similarly, Cynthia Wu comments that “disability” is not used as a term to mean an impairment in function but that it demonstrates, rather, a clear demarcation between the “modes of embodiment and the social and material environment in which that embodiment occurs” (6-7)—that is, whether racial or physical, disability is not based on the ostensible ableness of the person but on the way that person is treated by the rest of society, a judgment made in relation to normative society.

### *On Silence*

Notions of silence continually permeate both the Deaf and Asian American communities. Rhetorician Darsie Bowden acknowledges that the act of silence is often devalued when perceived within the dominant discourse and context of power, wherein the more powerful voice eventually “silences” another in order to gain control; however, presenting an alternate interpretation, Bowden argues that silence also “has a value, because silence presumes listening, hearing, thinking, caring, and embracing” (234), symbolizing qualities traditionally understood as feminine. Challenging the view of silence as a sign of weakness and submission, the adaptations of *Pippin* take Bowden’s

feminine idea of silence one step further: silence indeed has value, but not in the passive way Bowden describes. Silence, in the Deaf West and East West versions of *Pippin*, contains action and is thus not “silence” at all, at least not in the traditional sense. Silence is, rather, an active, even aggressive, act of power. Linguist Evelyn McClave observes that, for Deaf individuals, “silence is not really silence at all”—for someone fluent in ASL, “silence” is not about aural noise. While verbal speech and music may halt on stage, sign language can continue as a physical speech act for the cast, which is exactly what happens during pivotal moments in Deaf West Theatre’s productions of *Big River* and *Pippin*. For those who can understand ASL, the scene and song continue in these moments, whether or not there is anything auditory happening. Silence can thus be a powerful and central act in and of itself.

As further evidence concerning the purposeful and active power of silence, the University of California, San Diego presented an exhibition featuring work by four deaf artists in early 2015, entitled “LOUD silence.” Appearing at first as a contradiction in terms, the exhibition “offers viewers the opportunity to consider definitions of sound, voice, and notions of silence at the intersection of both deaf and hearing cultures” as well as the unique occasion to

explore how the binary of loudness and silence might be transformed in politicized ways through their own specificities, similarities and differences in relationship to communication and language. The stereotypical view of the deaf experience is that they live a life of total silence, where they retain little to no concept of sound. On the contrary, as spelled out in “The Meaning of Sound” by UC San Diego social sciences dean Carol Padden and professor of communication Tom Humphries (in the 1988 book “Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture”), deaf people actually know a lot about sound, and sound informs and inhabits their world just as much as the next person. (Ramsey)

While many may believe that deaf individuals cannot possibly comprehend the notion of sound, “the Deaf have a strong understanding and connection to sound and voice,” and “those who have full hearing can appreciate the value and meaning of silence versus

the absence of sound” (Ramsey). This on-going argument regarding Deaf culture, as well as the notions surrounding sound and silence, is one that informs Deaf West Theatre’s adaptation of *Pippin* and Deaf West Theatre in general. For many, it comes as a shock to learn that deaf individuals can take part in a performance normally reserved for hearing actors; that is, music, in and of itself, is considered an act in which only those with the ability to hear and vocalize can participate. Deaf West’s *Pippin* challenges these stereotypes not only by staging scenes and songs that seamlessly integrate both ASL and English at once but also by channeling deaf and hearing characteristics in the title character.

Asian American notions of silence also contain a sense of purpose and meaning. For Asian American communities, silence is normally understood as a culturally symbolic action, representing respect, particularly as it pertains to expected social behavior. King-Kok Cheung explains in *Articulate Silences* that, in the United States, “silence is generally looked upon as passive,” but “in China and Japan it traditionally signals pensiveness, vigilance, or grace” (127). Valerie Pang likewise notes in her article on Asian American silence and communication that “silence can be a powerful and a profound method of communication . . . some Asian Americans believe that silence does not show reticence, but rather denotes respectful and caring action” (183-84). For East West Players, however, it seems that *Pippin* is an attempt to challenge those more traditional, expected acts of silence, both through the use of anime and hip-hop, two cultural outlets which are normally known for their vitality and vibrancy. In the same way that Deaf West Theatre metaphorically demonstrates Pippin’s search for his voice, so too does East West Players symbolically embody Asian America’s search for voice and identity.

### **(Re)Reading Deaf West’s and East West’s Pippin**

Done traditionally, *Pippin*, a musical set in the early Middle Ages, uses 1970s style pop music to propel the narrative forward. The title character Pippin is a young prince on a quest to find meaning and fulfillment in life—because “When you’re extraordinary / You gotta do extraordinary things” (“Extraordinary”)—and audiences

witness Pippin take on various pursuits, such as becoming a soldier and going to war, partaking in various sexual encounters, and leading a revolution to fight tyranny, going so far as to murder his own father, the King. What Pippin finds out in the end, however, is that one can actually find meaning and fulfillment in the ordinary, perhaps echoing the ending of Voltaire's famous picaresque tale, *Candide*—that “we must cultivate our garden.”

The show's seemingly simple message and “long ago” setting have allowed for dramatically different adaptations over the years, many of which have taken place in Southern California. Besides Deaf West's and East West's versions, LA theatre reviewer Steven Stanley recalls that “[UCLA's] Reprise [Theatre Company] did it sexy and Chicago-esque some years back”; “Simi Valley Cultural Arts Center revival set Pippin in the world of ‘Steampunk Carnivale’” and San Diego's LGBT Diversions Theater placed Pippin in a post-apocalyptic Blade Runneresque world while using a hard rock sound. Many recent productions of *Pippin* have even incorporated an adaptation that crosses gender lines: while Ben Vereen was the original Leading Player on Broadway, the 2013 Broadway and 2014 national tour productions feature female Leading Players. That Deaf West Theatre and East West Players recently chose to adapt *Pippin* fits neatly within the multidimensional nature of theatre in LA.

Although *Pippin*'s libretto remains unchanged for both Deaf West Theatre and East West Players' productions, numerous scenes within *Pippin* can and should be re-read and re-analyzed with their particular cultural contexts in mind, particularly as their respective changes pertain to issues of voice, identity, and power within the Deaf and Asian American communities. Furthermore, while cast members from both Deaf West's and East West Players' versions have commented that the creative decisions made for their respective productions did not necessarily change the meaning of the show, the adaptations diverge significantly from the original in terms of staging and casting, artistic choices that do alter the larger implications normally found within *Pippin*.

*Deaf West Theatre's Pippin*

Deaf West's version of the musical utilized two actors for the role of Pippin—a deaf actor and a hearing actor, each portraying two sides of a singular character. As with all of their productions, all dialogue and songs utilize ASL and voiced English simultaneously; in the show, “we never really acknowledged that characters were deaf, because they weren't. We were living in a world where everybody knew sign language magically” (Buchwald). That said, cast members besides the two Pippins were either fluent in ASL or learned it as part of the choreography, and a few characters besides Pippin, such as Pippin's father Charles, were also double-cast with deaf and hearing actors.

The most striking element that this rendering generated is an overt focus on Pippin's search for his voice and identity, a quest that leads to his subsequent power and agency and also mirrors the challenges that the Deaf community still faces today. Voice, identity, and power are also topics of debate in the realm of composition studies, and they can be applied to Deaf West's and East West's versions of *Pippin* as well. While composition theorists like Walker Gibson believe there is no such thing as an authentic voice (but rather, that voice is a unique creation for any given rhetorical situation, much like performance) (3-4), Peter Elbow argues that voice is not only “the main source of power” but one's “only source of power” (6-7), and, as I argued earlier, that power can also be found in the “voice of silence.” Elbow's particular argument can be readily applied to the character of Pippin in Deaf West's version, whose identity and power are found in his literal dual-identity, most specifically as it affects the ending of the show. In the first part of the original Broadway production's ending, the Leading Player and his troupe suggest that Pippin perform the ultimate finale, a “completely perfect act,” and sacrifice himself, literally by way of jumping into a fire in order to solidify his existence as an extraordinary individual. Pippin eventually refuses, deciding that his ordinary life with his love Catherine is, in fact, more satisfying than the various pursuits—however exhilarating—he attempted, and he is subsequently stripped of his costumes, as the music stops and the stage is left bare. In Deaf West's production, Pippin resists the wishes of the troupe as usual, but instead of keeping the dual-identity

of Pippin intact and simply stripping the two of their costumes, the Pippins are actually separated from each other—the hearing Pippin is physically carried out of the building by members of the ensemble; his subsequent screams of pain and agony can be heard from the outer lobby area, implying that the hearing Pippin is being tortured. The deaf Pippin is simultaneously left “voiceless,” unable to communicate with or sing to the audience at first, until he finally decides to sign the lyrics to a previous song; Catherine begins to sing for him, as the hearing Pippin did previously, and the two—along with Catherine’s son—eventually exit together. In this powerful and definitive action, Pippin is shown as finding his voice, though not in the normative sense of voice—that is, not a verbalized voice. This Pippin subverts the stereotypical notion that deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals have no voice, as Pippin defines himself as a Deaf character who is not only content with his ordinary life but also able to exist without his “hearing” half. The notion that “anything you can do, I can do better” rings especially true for the Deaf community in this final scene. Dr. I. King Jordan, who became the first deaf president of Gallaudet university because of the Deaf President Now (DPN) movement, recalls a crucial moment during a press conference, in which his abilities as a Deaf individual were called into question: “I remember one reporter asking me if I really believed that being deaf was not an obstacle to success in life. I looked the guy in the eye and told him that ‘deaf people can do anything hearing people can do, except hear’” (“I. King Jordan”). *Pippin*, as done by Deaf West Theatre, is thus an attempt to shatter the long-standing stereotype that deafness is a limitation to success in life and is also accordingly a demonstration of voice, power, and identity.

Nonetheless, the final moment in *Pippin*, as it relates to voice and power, is not without further complication: after Pippin and Catherine have completely exited the stage, Theo—Catherine’s young son—stays behind and begins playing with the props; he soon decides to “take over” the role of Pippin by singing the “Finale” lyrics himself and is immediately joined by the troupe, who seemingly begin to mentor and teach the child to eventually perform the finale. Traditionally, this scene can be interpreted as the next generation’s inability to resist the temptation of being an extraordinary individual. In Deaf West’s version, Theo is alone and signing the lyrics, joined on stage by the troupe

soon after, as is customary; however, the hearing Pippin specifically comes back on stage, waving to the young boy and simultaneously singing the words that Theo is signing (as was done for the deaf Pippin previously), a powerful final scene suggesting that individuals with both decipherable language *and* audible speech are welcome into a non-exclusionary community, a communal world in which individuals are not excluded or silenced and where audism does not exist. (I pause to recall here that the deaf Pippin also is joined by a singing Catherine before the two exit). This ending could alternatively be read as a showing that everyone has a voice, but that it is a matter of how one's voice is found and used—the deaf Pippin finds his identity by using his voice, through ASL, to express himself, thus gaining agency and power. Deaf West's *Pippin* director Jeff Calhoun reminds audiences that “the message of the play is that [Pippin] is trying to find his true voice. We can give him that chance in a way the original couldn't because we can personify the metaphor” (Wada). That said, the battle won by the DPN movement and the increased opportunities that the American with Disabilities Act created for the Deaf community seem to go hand in hand with the fact that Deaf West's Pippin is fighting to be heard by those around him and at the same time seeking an inclusive community. Importantly, Bowden suggests that the “discourse of power seems to be one in which a person uses his voice to promote himself and his ideas and win over or dominate other voices. For one voice to speak, another must be silenced or somehow incorporated” (234). Because the character of Pippin in Deaf West's adaptation gains control over his own voice in the end, the narrative of the show does actually “silence” the voices around Pippin rather than silencing Pippin himself; however, in this act, Pippin does not dominate other voices, but instead he finds an inclusive space for his “loud silence” to be heard. The character of Pippin thus succeeds in subverting normative ideology.

### *East West Player's Pippin*

In East West Players' rendition, all characters were cast with Asian American actors, and the creative team chose to meld together anime aesthetics with hip-hop music and dance. Costumes and sets were given a vibrant and vivid feel and look, and

every song in the show was rewritten in a hip-hop style. One character in particular, Pippin's grandmother, normally played by a woman, was instead portrayed by an older Asian American man in drag, typifying an old geisha. Moreover, sword and spear routines were interspersed during songs, "frequent background projections of Samurai era paintings" were shown, "and the warring soldiers use[d] traditional martial arts moves in their combat" (Stanley).

Like Deaf West's version, voice, identity, and power are underlying topics found within East West Players' adaptation of *Pippin* but are issues wrought with complications as well. Since all of the characters are played by actors of Asian descent, East West Players symbolically and aesthetically depicts an Asian American longing for voice in society. One may pause here and ask, is the use of anime, hip-hop, and a geisha not merely playing into stereotypical Asian American representations? The complexity of the Asian American identity is no doubt complicated by these elements, but I contend that the show, and East West Players itself, is both reifying and re-signifying traditional ideas of Asian American identity. Zachary Pincus-Roth remarks that "[t]he melding of anime and hip-hop into *Pippin* fits the pan-cultural attitude [director Tim] Dang observes among young people at East West"—as Dang recognizes, "A lot of the younger audiences, the younger performers, don't want to be defined by race anymore. They're not necessarily Asian anymore, or African American or Latino. . . . They're this urban, metropolitan, cosmopolitan kind of generation" (Pincus-Roth). Reflecting this complex challenge to traditional modes of identity, East West Players breaks away from prior notions of silence and disrupts the originally "silenced" identity and character of Asian Americans by embracing and subverting stereotypes at once.

The use of anime, typically understood as an "Asian" cultural artifact specifically derived from the Japanese culture, allows for a very visually surreal version of *Pippin*, embracing and challenging Asian American representations and stereotypes simultaneously. Anime, "a style of animation originating in Japan that is characterized by stark colorful graphics depicting vibrant characters in action-filled plots often with fantastic or futuristic themes" ("Anime"), is a lively medium "often used to tell complex, dark stories" ("Japan Finds Films"), and the entire East West Players production is told

through this visual vehicle, with characters often “perched on platforms to evoke anime’s unpredictable camera angles” (Pincus-Roth). Pincus-Roth observes that the choice to posit *Pippin* within the visual genre of anime is actually not surprising considering that “[a]nachronisms and young men on quests are frequent traits of anime,” and Dang even instructed the cast “to mimic the cool, understated style of anime.” Dang explains, “We thought that everything that we do onstage has to be dead serious, as if it’s life or death. . . . There’s a lot less ‘Ta da!’” (Pincus-Roth). Marcus Choi, who took on the role of East West’s Leading Player, also notes how “War of Science,” a song in which Pippin is taught the history and rules of war, specifically utilizes anime as a form of story-telling in an almost cartoonish manner. Thus, in using anime as the medium through which to tell the story, East West Players’ adaptation compels audiences to look beyond the normal limitations of a traditionally produced *Pippin*.

One such limitation that East West Players disrupts is that of gender; while Pippin’s grandmother, Berthe, is traditionally cast as an older female actress, East West Players casts the role with an older male actor in drag. As a way of bringing light to the geisha stereotype—that is, the stereotype that posits Asian women as being submissive and passive—East West Players exploits the stereotype for its own benefit. Pippin’s wise grandmother is a geisha, one “trained to entertain men with singing, conversation, etc.” (“Geisha”), but “she” is also being played by a man, a creative choice which makes, in reality, a mockery of such stereotypes and at the same time creates a counter narrative or a new voice for Asian American men and women.

Finally, in their use of hip-hop music, East West Players may appear to be misappropriating music conventionally understood as African American. In actuality, however, by changing from pop to hip-hop, East West Players is attempting to foreground discourses of power and voice as they pertain to Asian American identity. Cross-cultural studies have long been investigating the influence of African American hip-hop culture on the Asian American community, most specifically as a space of combatting previously prescribed notions of silence. Nitasha Sharma, a scholar who writes on both Asian American and African American cultures, views hip-hop “as a potential place of alliance” in a nation still faced with tremendous conflicting politics

(Roach). Scott Crossley also notes that hip-hop as a genre was originally used to give a “voice” to those who were otherwise powerless and marginalized in society. *East West Players* thus appropriates hip-hop music in this fashion to symbolize Pippin’s coming-of-age attitude and desire to break away from tradition. Such a view of hip-hop has also been reflected in contemporary sitcoms such as *Fresh Off the Boat*, in which the young protagonist remarks that “if you were an outsider, hip-hop was your anthem” (“Pilot”), and in *Black-ish*, in which characters joke that hip-hop is no longer a “black man’s go-to” having been taken over by Asians (“Pilot”). Asian American rappers, in particular, have been charged with culturally-misappropriating hip-hop; however, numerous scholars have also posited hip-hop as a “social space” that “bears the potential to facilitate meaningful cross-racial exchange” (Woo ii), and Christina Lee’s article on *Fresh Off the Boat* notes that “[h]ip-hop is black music, through and through, but it’s also largely the only music that speaks directly to racial minorities, black and otherwise.” Therefore, while it is true that hip-hop began as an African American identity marker, its positive objectives and influence have reached beyond its original cultural confines.

While the re-envisioning of the show’s score entirely in the genre of hip-hop seems to acquiesce to the stereotype that Asians have simply (mis-)appropriated African American music, *East West Players* appropriates hip-hop music in their version as a way of symbolizing Pippin’s coming-of-age attitude—Pippin is not just a young man on the search for an identity but, for *East West Players*, a young man on a search to become more than the identity others have assigned to him. Dang notes that the change from pop to hip-hop music was not an arbitrary decision: “Bob Fosse’s choreography is very sexy; it deals with a lot of isolation of body parts—lots of shoulders, lots of hips, lots of knees and all that. I see that correlation in hip-hop” (Pincus-Roth). Dang’s use of hip-hop, then, is not necessarily tied to the ideology of race but to the visual language of dance. Hip-hop allows for *East West Players*’ Pippin to metaphorically find an identity, different from the one generated by the traditional production with its 1970s pop score. In fact, Asian Americans in the production are seen as taking on a new voice—something that thus frees Pippin from the older generation’s antiquated ways of thinking.

*Confronting Social Issues & Ideology In Pippin: The Generation Gap(s)*

From a cultural-ideological standpoint, positioning Pippin within an all-Asian American environment or Deaf environment accentuates the complex relationships both cultures may have with authority figures, both familial and social. In the musical, this idea is foregrounded by the role of King Charles, who is not only Pippin's father but also representative of dominant authority. One scene in particular—in which Pippin kills his father and takes the crown—requires further analysis in regard to both Deaf West's and East West Players' adaptations. In his director's guide *From Assassins to West Side Story*, Scott Miller explores the multitude of references to the sun in *Pippin*, suggesting that “the use of sunrise and sunset is symbolic of beginning and ending, life and death” which “ties the whole show together. If everything goes as Leading Players [sic] plans, *Pippin* the musical will encompass Pippin's entire life, from his birth to his death in a fiery suicide in the finale” (197). Most specifically, Miller's brief analysis highlights the scene in which Pippin the son (and “sun”) murders his own father to become king, which is a metaphorical “new beginning” (or sunrise) for Pippin; “Charles, as sunset, is at the end of his reign” (197). This metaphorical ending/beginning is a particularly poignant point for both Asian American and Deaf communities.

Children both within the Deaf community and Asian immigrant populations have struggled to navigate the generation gap, “a broad term that generally describes the conflict in ideologies between older generations and younger ones” (Lai). For Asian Americans in particular, Lai observes,

The most common perception of the generation gap involves immigrant parents and their U.S.-born children, but taking into account the fluidity of Asian American identity, nationality alone does not influence interpersonal relationships within families. Rather, the beliefs and ideologies that individuals absorb from living in the United States and other countries gives a transnational perspective on the generation gap.

If the audience keeps this intergenerational conflict in mind, the death of the old and the crowning of the new played out within East West's *Pippin* becomes much more poignant

and racially metaphorical. In a special issue on first- versus second-generation problems, Pyong Gap Min and Kyeyoung Park note, “Ethnic identity is usually hidden in childhood, but often emerges in young adulthood. . . . Second generation Asian American identities are multiple, fluid, and heterogeneous, as well as gendered, classed, racialized and ethnicized” (x). Min Zhou goes on to explain in his article that “immigrant children and children of immigrant parentage lack meaningful connections to their ‘old’ world” (2). For East West’s Pippin, it is not so much that he finds conflict with the old world, but, like a traditionally-cast Pippin, he finds issue with his father’s old ways of thinking. In the production, the death of King Charles at the hands of Pippin is symbolic not only of a simple regime change and “new beginning” as in a traditionally-cast production, but it is also a metaphorical display of how a second-generation Asian American child can confront the rule of first-generation ideology. Along with the action on stage, the music that the show utilizes overall can be also understood as metaphorically challenging the “old world.”

Unlike the Asian American generational gap, the generation gap issue in regard to Deaf culture is much more complex, which problematizes the same murder and revolution scene in Deaf West’s *Pippin*. Distinct from the racialized generation gap, the gap between generations for Deaf culture is due to the fact that two hearing parents can give birth to a deaf or hard-of-hearing child; “Like the blind and others with individual physical differences, [Deaf people’s] difference is not in most cases passed on to their children” (Baynton 3) and, in fact, 90% of Deaf children “have hearing parents who are unable to effectively model the spoken language for most of them” (Lane, “Construction” 80). Hearing parents thus find it necessary to learn ASL in order to communicate with their children but can also choose to exclude their children from conversations. However, since all characters in *Pippin* are treated as if they are fluent in ASL and in English, King Charles is not a hearing-only parent to Pippin. Rather, he has a dual-identity and, as such, is deaf *and* hearing himself, navigating the same space that Pippin does, thus complicating the generational gap issue. Nonetheless, this is not the first time Deaf West Theatre has attempted to incorporate the idea of the generation gap: in their 2014 production of *Spring Awakening*, “the deaf Wendla comes from

hearing parents, so that the show's beginning—in which Wendla asks her mother where babies come from ('Mama, who bore me')—presents an even steeper barrier to communication. Not only does her mother struggle emotionally with explaining sex; she also has difficulty with the sign language" (Buchwald). Because Deaf West's Pippin and King Charles are both deaf and hearing simultaneously, the standard analysis of the scene does not seem to deal with the issue of destroying any generational gap in terms of deafness or hearing. Mirroring the conflicts in a traditionally produced *Pippin*, Deaf West's Pippin's inability to communicate with his father comes from having different ideals than he does; killing the king is a new beginning, but not any more so than a traditional reading of the scene.

The murder of King Charles is nevertheless further complicated by the very fact that Charles does not stay dead. Instead, as in traditional productions, Pippin finds that he cannot handle the responsibility and power that comes with kingship and, therefore, asks for his knife back; the Leading Player, as he or she is wont to do, allows Pippin's wish to come true—Charles comes back to life and takes back the crown, and the King's "second-reign" begins with him cheerfully yelling "denied!" to all of the nobles and peasants. This reversal of Charles's death seems at first contradictory to both the Deaf and Asian American ideologies expressed up until now. However, in both Deaf West's and East West's adaptations, the return of Charles seems to reflect the reality of their world as is; that is to say, Pippin is brought back to the world in which he lives in, where normative authority is still in power. For Pippin, the return of the King also illustrates that one is never truly free of the past and that characters—Deaf, Asian American, and otherwise—continue to be haunted by their lineages and histories.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Much as Viet Thanh Nguyen argues in *Race and Resistance: Literature & Politics in Asian America*, East West Players' and Deaf West Theatre's adaptations of *Pippin* both resist and accommodate sociopolitical issues surrounding the Asian American and Deaf cultures; that is, the productions both challenge and reflect sociopolitical attitudes towards and of Asian American and Deaf identities. Instead of presenting the cultures

and their respective identities and bodies as one-dimensional, the shows choose to problematize the topics instead. These particular, complex constructions of normativity and performativity demonstrate that “society’s goal should not be to conform the ‘othered’ body into the normative [society], but to find ways to transform disabling environments” (Stanley et al. 81). In the same way, the goal of musical theatre should not be to place those who are historically othered by society into normative spaces but to challenge and break down those normative spaces, thereby enabling a more broadened theatrical experience for audience members. Theatre as both a venue and an outlet of expression should not limit the involvement/experience for Deaf and/or Asian American bodies but, instead, find ways to include, embrace, and give meaning to those bodies, both on stage and off.

With a traditionally staged production of *Pippin* touring across the United States today, it is important to understand the unique work that theatres in LA have done with the show. These adaptations of *Pippin* produced by East West Players and Deaf West Theatre give voice to both Deaf and Asian American cultures and communities. By way of adapting older material, these two regional theatres accentuate the stories and struggles of Deaf and Asian American individuals and communities in a way that reshapes, subverts, and disrupts national notions of Deaf and Asian American identities.

### Notes

1. In her article on the historical overlap of Deaf and disability studies, Carol Padden comments that "deaf people see themselves an odd fit in disability studies" (508) and, in fact, many Deaf individuals resist the "disability" label altogether. However, I draw from the academic discourses of both Deaf and disability studies, for like Padden, I believe that the convergence of these two studies—both which emphasize the social construction of identity--can be helpful, as long as we respect the distinctive histories of each community. Like Harlan Lane, I regard the Deaf individual as "a member of a linguistic and cultural minority with distinctive mores, attitudes, and values" ("Do Deaf People" 368).
2. The uppercase "Deaf" is consciously and conscientiously used, based upon American Sign Language specialist Douglas Baynton's elucidation that there is a "common practice of using the lowercase deaf when referring to the audiological condition, and the uppercase Deaf when referring to the Deaf community and its members" (12).

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