Among the Pines

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Dr. Carrie Wastal, Director

Edited by Marion E. Wilson, Ph.D.

Associate Director, Muir College Writing Program

"Between every two pines there is a doorway to a new world"

—John Muir

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Each essay is introduced by a brief note

from the student's instructor.

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MCWP 40

Bruno Oliveira Fogaca

Nominated by Ricky Novaes de Oliveira

Chidiebere Agunanne

Nominated by Caroline Petronis

Francisco J. Montes

Nominated by Carolina Montejo

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"Bruno's paper demonstrates the intricacies of an original argument applied onto a synthesis of relevant sources. In the second to last paragraph, the writer brings in a key example from the book that initially appears to be out of place— how does an act of violent racial terror support an argument about technologic privatization? The writer responds to this objection with a sophisticated conclusion paragraph that ties together all of the essay's reasoning into a succinct statement: we must act now instead of waiting for disaster to strike."
– Ricky Novaes de Oliveira

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The Dangers of the Privatization of Information and Popularization of Social Media

By Bruno Oliveira Fogaca

In the modern world, technology is ubiquitous, and its globalization has opened innumerable opportunities for people to access information easier than ever before. However, with these opportunities, the rapid spread and evolution of technology also brings challenges concerning its regulation, especially regarding its relationship with the collection, organization, and disclosure of information. This complex and challenging relationship is explored by Safiya Umoja Noble, professor of Gender Studies, African American Studies, and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, professor and chair in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri. On the one hand, Noble, in *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism,* focuses on biases behind algorithms and search engines and how they can influence access to information. On the other hand, Behm-Morawitz, in "Media Use and the Development of Racial and Ethnic Identities," examines the relationship between media and ethnic and racial identities, introducing key terms to consider when discussing this relationship. Despite the different focuses on the issue, Noble and Behm-Morawitz expose the dangers technology can create by providing inaccurate and oppressive representations of marginalized groups. Furthermore, these inaccurate representations are only one of the consequences of the privatization of information by big companies in the digital realm. Companies weaponize information for their profit, not caring about how this utilization may hurt their consumers as long as it does not harm their profitability and credibility.

Although some progress has been made, transparency is still a significant problem, as companies are not subject to enough regulations to provide users with a safe space. This lack of regulations comes from these digital giants hiding behind the discourse of free speech to justify their misleading use of information and disrespect for privacy. In this essay, I will argue that the increasing privatization of information by big companies only causes more difficulties for governments in regulating the use and propagation of personal and public information, leading to insecurity and manipulation of users. The popularization of social media platforms that promote a personal and catered approach to the content they display to each user has made algorithms more powerful than ever before, repeatedly reinforcing the user's beliefs without them even realizing it, which could lead to harmful actions motivated by these reinforced biases.

Before diving into the theme of media influence over people's behavior and identity, it is necessary to be familiar with some terms, which are introduced and developed by Behm-Morawitz in her article. Priming is one of the core concepts presented in the article, which consists of a cognitive stimulus causing a response to another stimulus through an unconscious pathway (Behm-Morawitz 5). One example is when Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro spread misinformation on his social media about COVID-19 and vaccines during the pandemic, affecting how a considerable part of the population viewed the matter. Related to priming is another term, spreading activation, which says that a certain stimulus can activate related cognitions (Behm-Morawitz 5). This can be exemplified by how a racist person consuming racist content can lead to the activation of distorted views about other minorities. Cultivation theory explains how the consequences of media use can accumulate over time, influencing one's perception (Behm-Morawitz 6). For instance, people who consume content that portrays racial microaggressions as usual are more likely to adopt those attitudes. Applying these terms is essential to understanding the consequences of technology on its users and how it gets there.

Technology has changed so rapidly that it leaves no breaks for us to stop and analyze a specific aspect, as any narrow analysis will be outdated in the blink of an eye. Still, when a pattern is globalized and repeated over the evolution of technology, it is essential to step back and see what contributes to the existence of such patterns. The internet has been a ubiquitous source of information for decades. Noble mentions that reports from 2005 and 2012 expose that 59% of Americans used a search engine every day, and the tendency is that this percentage is

much higher now. The expression "Google it" became a synonym for finding out the meaning of something. The ubiquity of this expression is a clear example of how privatization allows marketing and branding to increase the popularization of these companies. Furthermore, since Noble started writing *Algorithms of Oppression*, Google has improved its algorithm after popular pressure to do so (Noble 181). However, it is vital to acknowledge that although Google is still the dominant search engine, social media platforms have been increasing as a source of not only entertainment but also information, especially for teenagers and young adults. Nowadays, it is common to hear people of those age groups sharing information with others and mentioning TikTok as the source. The increasing reliance on social media as an educational source creates a space for exchanging information that requires no verification or proof of reliability. It opens doors for people to report fake facts and lace information with their own opinions without getting any consequences, influencing users who are not warned of the dubious nature of what they consume.

The opportunity to share and consume information freely on these platforms could appear as a global democratization of information and knowledge. Many people now have access to all the information they want in the palm of their hands. The omnipresence of access to the internet diminishes the disparity between who has it and who does not, but it does not solve the power dynamics related to oppressed and marginalized identities (Noble 161). The mere distribution of technology does not consider the root of the lack of access in the first place, as these people live in disadvantaged conditions that will continue to affect all other areas of their lives, even with internet access. Also, the representation of marginalized identities shown by algorithms is defined by most people. This takes any power away from the minorities in controlling their own representations in the digital world (Noble 16). People in positions of power often translate their biases when using search engines and engaging in social media content. The algorithms will then regurgitate this type of content to the users, creating a loop. Considering spreading activation as a factor, the biases might even extend to other areas of one's brain, bringing up other prejudices. If technology keeps feeding us biased information, that brings us to the question: Is it itself biased?

When perceiving this question, it is necessary to consider that every technology, hardware, or software, is developed by a person or group of people. Noble presents the point of view from data scientist Cathy O'Neil that systems that may seem neutral were developed

through the choices of human beings, who all make mistakes even when unintentionally. Therefore, they incorporate many of their prejudices and biases into the products they are developing, and their tendency is to favor the rich and dismiss the poor (Noble 27). Even though algorithms and software are based on mathematics and computer science, which in theory should be free of bias, the people who develop them choose how they will incorporate those concepts when building these systems, which makes it impossible for them to be completely neutral. Human beings are not neutral and will always have biases. However, the issue with these platforms is that algorithms are designed not to offer content that could make people reflect on these biases but instead content that reinforces them.

Keeping in mind the non-neutrality of technology and the nature of these algorithms, it is evident that big technology companies controlling the mass flow and storage of information is not a good idea. Technology companies hire people from universities that offer no academic ways of learning about the history of oppression in media representations and societal structures (Noble 70). Therefore, the incoming workers are already prone to influence the algorithms and software with their biases. The bigger the monopoly of a company, the bigger the risk that a particular bias or prejudice in the algorithm will lead to exponential damage to the representation and identity of people from marginalized groups. Furthermore, these companies create digital identities for users based on their content preferences, which are decided by their searches and engagement with different topics. These identities are simplistic and do not consider the intersectionality of people and the interaction between their identities. They are fragmented, and each piece is exploited separately by the algorithm. This fragmentation can create a conflict between internal identities through spread activation, as people are fed with content targeted at each of their identities singularly, affecting how they view their other ones. Even if the public tries to fight back at these corporations and systems, they have mechanisms to protect themselves from it.

Commercial enterprises such as Google are shielded by free speech when they use the same practices as public organizations (Noble 143). This shielding extends to social media platforms, whose leaders are often called for hearings by the government nowadays but, in the end, suffer no real consequences. Free speech discourse is frequently used to justify the lack of censorship over oppressive and prejudicial material. These platforms are keen to protect the

rights of the oppressors but are less eager to protect the oppressed as long as it does not affect their reputability. They use offensive and fake content in their favor to generate the maximum amount of clicks, likes, comments, and reposts. The controversy surrounding this type of content interests social media representatives, who profit from the engagement promoted by these topics. While this mechanism continues working without any regulation or supervision, it will stay in place as the money keeps flowing.

Further protection from the allegations and, consequently, potential harm for users is the lack of transparency big corporations have about how they handle the usage and distribution of personal information, which happens on different scales. The lack of disclaimers when showing offensive or false information is one example of these organizations' disinterest in communicating their clear intentions and mechanisms to users. They not only hide the power dynamics related to race, gender, and sexuality, but they preserve them (Noble 155). A simple warning or disclaimer could let users know they are about to consume sensitive content. However, such protections for the user would lead to less engagement with the platforms, which is outside their interest. On a bigger scale, the way these organizations handle the user's information is never revealed until a disaster occurs. A significant example of this situation was the data breach from Meta, formerly known as Facebook, whose name change is also a result of the backlash received after this incident. Although it did result in a fine for the company and brought more attention to the issue, the fact that we had to wait for such a massive event like this to happen to result in awareness around the subject points to the lack of surveillance around these platforms while these things are happening under the surface, outside of the public eye, just asking for the next episode to happen.

To understand why these companies, have such protections and liberties and what they want to achieve, it is necessary to understand the underlying ideology that guides it all: neoliberalism. This controversial ideology promotes individual freedom through privatization, removing power from the public. Neoliberalism promotes "personal creativity, contribution, and participation, as if these engagements are not interconnected to broader labor practices of systemic and structural exclusion" (Noble 64). The promotion of a feeling of freedom creates an illusion of an equal opportunity for personal and individual expression. However, in doing so, the ideology invalidates the connection between the possibility for expression and the systems of

power that take place. The people who hold power will always have a stronger say and expression, while the oppressed remain excluded and voiceless.

Nowadays, the focus has shifted from Google to social media platforms. Just like search engines, social media platforms are funded by advertising. Therefore, they intrinsically favor the interests of the advertisers over those of the consumers (Noble 41). This means that even though the users have the illusion that the content is being catered for them to have a better experience on the app, the actual reason is that assuring a longer time in the app means that these platforms can throw more advertisements on their way. Furthermore, those advertisements are carefully selected based on the digital identity created by the user, which carries inaccuracies mentioned earlier. These platforms have teams of psychologists behind them to ensure every aspect of the design is favorable and harness the users' attention for profitability. It is easy to blame users for giving social media too much attention or engagement and failing to change their behavior. However, through advanced psychological techniques implemented in these platforms, consumers are constantly hurt without even being aware of the damage it is causing them. One of the techniques is taking advantage of priming, purposefully eliciting stimuli that will lead to desired responses by the users.

What makes the problem even worse is that these cognitive effects can lead to actions motivated by the biases and prejudices built over time. A significant case of this instance is the white nationalist Dylann Roof, who performed a "racist terrorist attack," killing numerous black people at an African American Christian church (Noble 110). Over time, he had been consuming information from sources such as the Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC), which he thought could be trusted but was full of biases and prejudice (Noble 111-112). The harmful effect of this constant consumption of biased information is closely related to cultivation theory as the constant exposition of this content builds up in the perpetrator's mind, leading to a hate crime influenced by these ideas. Thus, it is possible to see that these effects are not only in the field of ideas but materialize into harmful consequences.

The possibility of biased ideals materializing into actions demands regulations to prevent such events from happening and protect the population from the often-unnoticeable damage that consuming content that is infused with negative biases toward marginalized groups causes over time. Public bodies do not have the legislation needed to confront these companies, which hold

as much power or even more than the government. The digital world bears many aspects that differentiate it from the physical one, and these differences require supervision that is conscious of the factors involved and the potential consequences of the misuse of technology for exploiting users' information and biases for profit. The gap between the evolution of technology and the legislation concerning it, combined with the protection private companies have, allows social media platforms and their representatives to operate in the shadows, frequently without responding to their actions until it is too late. We should not need to wait for the next Dylann Roof or data breach to shine a light on the ambiguous practices of advertisement-guided platforms that weaponize information for profit, as it should be a constant task to achieve prevention instead of a late remedy.

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"Chidiebere did a great job on this paper – her main claim was original, her argument was coherent and convincing, and her paper was the 'complete package.'" – Caroline Petronis

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Racial Colorblindness: Barrier to Addressing Algorithmic Biases

By Chidiebere Agunanne

In today's digital age, many individuals in the tech industry perceive racial colorblindness as a marker of progress. However, this perspective prompts the question: Does it genuinely acknowledge the equality of all races, or does it disregard the historical impact of race in the dehumanization and marginalization of communities? As search algorithms gain prominence in society, algorithm creators must establish frameworks that mitigate inherent biases in algorithm design. Many within the tech industry have adopted a racially colorblind approach when creating algorithms, if adhering to this outlook means one has completed one's role in creating an algorithm void of any personal biases that may influence the process. However, such an outlook does not account for contextual biases, incomplete data representation, or societal biases, biases on which the algorithm is trained and are created by the user rather than the programmer. In Safiya Umoja Noble's book *Algorithms of Oppression*, Noble scrutinizes widely used search engines, notably Google, revealing their persistent reinforcement of minority stereotypes and their commercialization. Through this examination, Noble unveils the biased nature of search engines, which are often regarded as reliable tools. Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, delves into the ramifications of these biased search engines in her article, "Media Use and the Development of Racial and Ethnic Identities," illuminating how portrayals of minorities in search engines and other media platforms shape the self-perception of these communities. The acceptance of racial colorblindness among employees of technology companies presents a barrier to address systemic biases in technology by using the principle of equality to avoid making real change. Such negligence perpetuates social oppression against racial minorities, hindering any efforts to develop technology that produces equitable and inclusive environments.

To understand the term racial colorblindness, it is necessary to define it in a way that captures its multiple facets and implications, particularly within the context of technology. The idea of racial colorblindness stems from the post-racial ideology suggesting that because "racial disparities no longer exist" the need for algorithms that differentiate between certain racial groups is superfluous, thus there is no reason for one to create frameworks that create such distinctions (Noble 168). Noble describes racial colorblindness in sociological terms as "the use of racial information" without the presence of any classifications or distinctions (168). By Noble's definition, racial colorblindness indicates the presence of racially biased data within an algorithm but the absence of a methodology or framework to acknowledge or avoid such biases. Within the principle of racial colorblindness programmers treat biased data as any other type of data, avoiding coding language that favors or specifically identifies a certain group of people.

Racial colorblindness hinders algorithmic advancement by failing to recognize and address the role systemic biases play in the identity of a racial group. Research that highlights the role of colorblind attitudes on social network sites "shows that those who report higher racial colorblind attitudes" were "more likely to be White and more likely to condone or not be bothered by derogatory racial images viewed" (Noble 168). The very ideology of racial colorblindness is built upon is the denial that racial orders still have ramifications today. The outcomes of the research demonstrate such ideology as those who have this outlook do not view the derogatory image as problematic because in a world where everyone is equal a mere image is not enough to belittle a group of people. Believers in this ideology therefore downplay the significance such images pose to the communities and their potential harm. This is how the "colorblind ideology" operates in Silicon Valley: by denying the existence of racial hierarchies and disregarding contributions from non-white individuals (Noble 108). The notion of being racially colorblind ignores the factor race plays in the history of racial groups resulting in the inability to address the institutionalized prejudices and preferences that have been engraved in the culture of the United States as well as many other white-dominated countries for centuries. Through the denial of the significant factor of race, programmers fail to adequately identify and mitigate systemic biases within their algorithm and system, perpetuating inequalities and reinforcing existing power structures.

The effects of racial colorblindness within algorithms are evident in search results that sexualize minorities or depict them with demeaning stereotypes. One example that highlights the

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sexualization of minority groups is when "black girl" is searched on Google, it yields results containing pornographic keywords like "pussy" and "sex," as noted by Noble (66). But rather than attributing blame to the algorithm, Noble points to "the lack of people with knowledge of the sordid history of racism and sexism working in the Silicon Valley" expressing that without such people products are designed without careful analysis about their potential impact on a diverse group of people (66). Noble's accusatory assertion demonstrates the effects of racial colorblindness on search results as it shows that the history of racism and sexism needs to be accounted for to create equitable search results. In the example above, it is evident that the absence of acknowledging history creates algorithms that actively sexualize marginalized groups due to their historical oppression. It suggests that a lack of awareness or acknowledgment of this history can lead to blind spots in the design process, resulting in algorithms that perpetuate or exacerbate existing inequalities. Additionally, it becomes apparent that without such diverse perspectives and historical awareness, algorithms may not undergo thorough analysis regarding their potential impacts on diverse user groups. This parallels a racially colorblind attitude in algorithms because just like disregarding the impact of historical racism and sexism leads to algorithms perpetuating harmful stereotypes and biases, neglecting to acknowledge these factors also leads to algorithms that continue the perpetuation of stereotypes and biases.

In mobile applications, racial colorblindness is evident in platforms like Yelp, which avoid using racially exclusive keywords in their search algorithms. Noble illustrates this through the experience of a woman named Kandis, who operates the only African American hair salon in a white neighborhood. Despite initially being drawn to Yelp's free advertising, Kandis soon faced pressure to pay for higher search rankings. When she refused, the algorithm systematically pushed her salon down the search results, prioritizing white-owned businesses instead. This biased algorithm consistently favored white businesses over Kandis's salon whenever racially exclusive keywords like "African American," "Black," "relaxer," or "natural" were used in searches (176). Noble further analyzes Kandis's interaction with Yelp saying:

> [She] was the only black hairdresser in a white area and yet she had so little ability to impact the algorithm, and when she tried, the company subverted her ability to be racially, and gender recognized—a type of recognition that is essential to her success as a business owner. The attempts at implementing a colorblind algorithm in lieu of human

decision making has tremendous consequences. In the case of Kandis, what the algorithm says and refuses to say about her identity and the identity of her customers has a real social and economic impact (Noble 179).

Using the example of Kandis, it becomes evident why having an algorithm that recognizes color is crucial. In a society where black individuals are a minority, there is a necessity for racially inclusive keywords. These keywords facilitate access to services provided by individuals who comprehend their experiences within the same racial group. Take, for instance, specific keywords like "black hair," which may be misconstrued by those outside the racial group as solely referring to hair color, overlooking its significance within the community, where it often denotes hair texture (Noble 177). As denoted by the example it is not always feasible for individuals from different racial groups to fully understand and meet the needs of others. Kandis's example highlights how the insistence on colorblind algorithms disregards the lived experiences and identities of individuals, leading to algorithms that fail to cater to users of color, exacerbating the access gap between white businesses and businesses owned by people of color.

Due to the pervasive influence of technology, a racially colorblind framework in coding algorithms contributes significantly to the marginalization and discrimination experienced by certain communities. Contemporarily, algorithms are held upon a high pedestal, they are revered for their ability to process vast amounts of data, make complex decisions, and optimize various domains. However, because algorithms are constantly relied upon their validity is often unchallenged. Data scientist Cathy O'Neil recognizes the influence of algorithms in her book *Weapons of Math Destruction* explaining that even when algorithms are tainted with human biases and prejudice they are considered "beyond dispute or appeal" (Noble 27). This perception of infallibility elevates them to be "all knowing" shaping the information consumed by individuals, resulting in the punishment of the poor and oppressed in society (Noble 27). While O'Neil addresses instances of human biases tainting algorithms the same logic can be applied with racial colorblindness since disregarding a bias is considered a bias. Nevertheless, O'Neil's insight underscores a critical aspect: algorithms are frequently seen as unquestionable authorities, which makes users more susceptible to believing social biases the algorithm relays. Within the realm of technology, a racially colorblind framework in coding algorithms significantly contributes to the perpetuation of social inequalities and biases experienced by certain

communities. This approach fails to acknowledge the existence of inequality, perpetuating systemic biases under the guise of impartiality and fairness.

Coupled with the prevalent influence of algorithms, the inherent trust placed in algorithms leads to a distorted portrayal of the individuals they impact, compounding the issue of marginalization further. Behm-Morawitz examines algorithmic representation of racial groups saying, stereotypical media portrayals of minority groups influence judgments about real-world individuals within those groups, guiding social behavior and interactions (Behm-Morawitz 3). Similarly to the media, algorithms hold the power to shape how individuals feel about certain groups of people. Especially since individuals often assume that whatever algorithms spread on the internet are true, algorithms can craft an individual's judgment about a group of people. This is how racial colorblindness contributes to the marginalization of groups; in the principle to not see color, programmers do not acknowledge the role that systemic biases play in perpetuating inequalities; thus, reluctance impacts the information algorithms spread oftentimes resulting in overgeneralization of racial groups and an individual's skewed perception of such racial groups.

The problem of racial colorblindness does not only pertain to those creating the algorithms but also to the sales and marketing professionals who help in the advertising of the algorithm to users. These individuals bear a significant responsibility because they must grasp the potential impact of the algorithms they are promoting on various demographic groups. Understanding this impact is crucial for accurately advertising the reliability and effectiveness of the product. Consider the example of the mass shooting at the "Mother" Emanuel African Episcopal Church by Dylan Roof. In his manifesto, Roof revealed that he searched "black on white crime" on Google and received misleading results suggesting that black violence against white individuals was a crisis (Noble 111). The fact that Rook turned to Google for information highlights his perception of Google as a credible source. This perception is partly shaped by Google's advertising, which positions it as a reliable source of information. The scenario underscores the importance sales and marketing professionals play in shaping public perceptions and behaviors. These tech employees must be free of such a racially colorblind perception because they must recognize how their product might produce unintentional biases. Unlike programmers, advertising personnel do not have access to the code behind algorithms; instead, they interact with the final product. This perspective allows them to view the algorithm from the

user's standpoint. Consequently, they can identify potential ways in which an algorithm might perpetuate biases. They bear the responsibility of accurately and responsibly reflecting Google's reputation, ensuring that the algorithms they promote do not reinforce harmful stereotypes or biases.

Despite the presence of algorithms for decades, there has not been a solution that addresses the problem it contemporarily has with biased search results. The reason that such biases continue stems from Silicon Valley's rampant denial about the impact its technologies have on racialized people (Noble 60). This denial inhibits the development of solutions to mitigate biases in algorithms. By refusing to admit the negative impact of technology on racial minorities, Silicon Valley perpetuates a cycle of inaction and perpetuation of biases. Programmers working within Silicon Valley often assume they are not part of the problem. This mindset further exacerbates the issue, as it absolves individuals of responsibility and perpetuates a culture of complacency. Without recognizing their role in perpetuating biases, programmers are unlikely to actively seek solutions or make efforts to mitigate the impact of their algorithms on marginalized communities. To effectively address biases in algorithms, Silicon Valley must confront its culture of denial and recognize the role of technology in perpetuating racial stereotypes and biases. This acknowledgment is the first step towards developing meaningful solutions and creating a more equitable technological landscape. Only by facing the problem head-on can progress be made toward creating algorithms that are truly fair and unbiased.

Understanding that technology companies create a barrier to inclusivity and equitability when they adopt a racially colorblind perspective is important, so individuals do not create skewed perceptions about themselves, or other minority groups based on the algorithms these companies create. Behm-Morawitz highlights the impact of technology on individuals' perceptions, in a study by L.M. Ward, reflecting that "African American high school students who identified with popular media characters of color had higher self-esteem" (Behm-Morawitz 4). The findings underscore the power of media representation in shaping individuals' confidence and self-perception. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the limitations inherent in algorithms to prevent individuals from deriving their sense of identity or worth solely from algorithmic depictions. It must be recognized that these representations do not dictate an individual's essence or role models. The same applies to an individual's perception of other minority groups, the media shapes our behavior within social groups and guides how we should treat members of

differing social groups (Behm-Morawitz 3). As demonstrated by the Dylann Roof shooting it is highly likely that individuals can create skewed interpretations about a group of people leading to hostile attitudes. Thus, comprehending that algorithmic outcomes may not consistently promote equity and inclusivity urge individuals to delve deeper into investigating differing racial communities, fostering a more authentic and representative perspective

       In conclusion, the pervasive acceptance of racial colorblindness within technology companies poses a significant obstacle to effectively tackling systemic biases inherent in technology. By adhering to the principle of equality to circumvent meaningful change, these companies inadvertently perpetuate social oppression against racial minorities. This neglectful approach not only undermines efforts to address existing inequalities but also impedes progress toward the development of technology that fosters genuinely equitable and inclusive environments. To truly advance toward a more just and inclusive future, technology companies must confront and actively dismantle systemic biases rather than resort to superficial measures that only serve to maintain the status quo.

<div align="center">Works Cited</div>

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"Francisco's essay did an excellent job of considering the audience, analyzing the evidence, and providing insightful subclaims that built off each other with a clear and logical structure. The depth of his argument and commitment to the drafting process resulted in a comprehensive view of new technologies under capitalism." – Carolina Montejo

The New Monopolies

By Francisco J. Montes

The United States economic system is shaped and influenced by capitalist aspects where corporations' rule. For the last four decades, how we inform ourselves and communicate with others has rapidly increased as technology has evolved. However, the concern over how easy it is to corrupt the information we are exposed to prevails. As corporations seek to increase their power and money, their role to control certain aspects of our society increases, which poses a threat to specific communities. Shaped by the U.S. capitalist system, corporations and companies exert a strong influence on digital spaces, including technology and media, which causes the aggravation of social injustices for minorities. These profit-oriented beliefs are the leading cause for such communities to suffer detrimental effects due to the reinforcement of stereotypes and biases embodied in such spaces. Due to corporations' strong influence over algorithms and media narratives, the global community, and more prominently, disadvantaged groups, lose power over their identities and fall into a power imbalance caused by profit-driven motives.

The control exerted by corporations on the internet, such as in search engines, is concerning because it conveys a solidified power that allows corporations to decide what, how, and where information is presented. In her book *Algorithms of Oppression*, Safiya Noble, a professor at UCLA, argues that such power from these corporations does not manifest unintentionally but is driven by a profit motive of power and money. Noble explains that about 66.2% of the search engine market belonged to Google in 2012 (35). This demonstrates the magnitude of Google's power and continuing hold on search engines, a dominant tool of the internet used to manipulate media narratives for their benefit. Just as powerful as their influence is, this influence hints at Google's relationship with power and profit. Similarly, Noble illustrates the way Google's

algorithms uphold issues regarding race, sex, or homophobia as there are no limitations on such derogatory topics yet continue to protest their inability to remove such content if no laws are preventing it (42). This proves how Google utilizes its power to allow the formation and fomentation of harmful and controversial content in its forums due to the profitability that this attention from users will create. On the one hand, Google's interest in removing content arises from unlawful content categorized by certain nations. Therefore, it depicts the double standard and unethical perspective of Google only to limit content that will jeopardize itself and subject it to legal punishments while allowing other types of detrimental content as long as they generate revenue for the company. On the other hand, this immoral and unethical perspective extends to how they organize the content they expose their users to. According to Noble, most search engines, including Google, prioritize their properties while blocking their competitors (56). It is essential to highlight this behavior since most users think of search engines as legitimate sources of information. Therefore, it becomes an issue as users seek to expand their knowledge when looking for information but find themselves with narratives manipulated by companies such as Google.

The ethical issue of corporations operating without moral or ethical values surprised those who used such companies to find credible information. From here, an added issue arises regarding data privacy. How well does the media keep information and data private? People might believe that users' data is private. However, this does not exclude using users' data activity for profit motives. Noble demonstrates that corporations such as Google and Verizon were actively collecting and storing private records of users (156). The data privacy dilemmas strengthen the idea of companies exerting great power on media to the point that they utilize users' search data to personalize future advertisements and information they seek to interact with, all without users' consent. Why do search engine companies keep records of user's activity in the first place? Their profit-oriented models urge them to utilize this information to their advantage at the expense of their users' knowledge. These exploitative actions resonate with their power and dominance in the digital world. This behavior is characteristic of a cruel and unethical hegemonic structure. The hegemonic structure of corporations in the digital market refers to the dominance of a select few companies that control key technologies, platforms, and resources. These corporations wield significant influence over various aspects of digital spaces,

including content dissemination, advertising, and data management. This concentration of power enables them to shape the digital landscape according to their interests and priorities.

Profit-driven content prioritizes information influenced by individuals, groups, and companies in power. Noble depicts how the internet is organized to favor the elites and companies with money to prioritize their content or sites (156). By doing so, search engines profit by selling prioritized content to their users. This is a direct example of how mediated content is highly profitable to search engine corporations. Monopolies in online information represent a significant threat to democracy and societal well-being, embodying a politically corrupt junction of power, influence, and control. These tech giants wield immense power over the flow of information, manipulating algorithms to prioritize certain content and stifle competition, thereby shaping public discourse, limiting diverse perspectives, and oppressing racial groups. With these corporations controlling the flow of information and shaping public opinions, there is a risk of undermining democratic principles such as freedom of expression and diversity of viewpoints. The result of this economic model on the internet makes information easily influenced by monopolies that can corrupt information because there is only one way of searching for information. Noble explains that research has found that Google redirects users to mainstream corporate news conglomerates when looking for political data (48). This demonstrates Google's relationship with website users; if website customers pay for their content, Google collects its share and depicts this content to users intentionally without the users' awareness. Google allows for the prioritization of such content if they are making revenue from advertising this content. Likewise, this also reinforces the power of corporations to manage media content, as shown here, which can have economic and political effects. On a political aspect, the impact of mediated content in political elections is concerning and a threat to democracy. The power of influencing and shaping users' political perspectives with this mediated content is very alarming.

Moreover, in "Media Use and the Development of Racial Ethnic Identities," Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz discusses the concept of "priming" as the exposure to a stimulus that elicits a response that is automatic and subconscious (6). In a mediated narrative aspect, it is shown that when there is media exposure of information containing messages from racial/ethnic groups, stereotypes about that group are activated. This is a direct result of the media shaping users' perceptions of society. Priming then becomes a tool corporations can use to exploit

commercially. This tool is then used on the internet or in search engines so that perspectives and beliefs are shaped by actively exposing users to this mediated content. Therefore, these users will adopt the information through this repeated exposure.

In addition, Google has a tool called "AdWords;" this system allows customers to set a maximum amount of money to spend towards advertising their content (Noble 68). This tool creates a system where only the wealthy can buy such sponsorships for their content. This often leads to users meeting these dominant perspectives of individuals from a higher socioeconomic status. Greater exposure to these ideals can influence perspective and change behavior because of search engines' power and controlling influence.

Mediated content that is racist is very profitable, and it causes such content to increase rapidly in these media platforms created by technology because they are attracting the interest of the majority, not of those that result in being marginalized (Noble 58). Commercial search engines, including Google, support the commercialized identity of women through enormous amounts of profit-driven imperatives displayed in information and economic policies (Noble 33). Under capitalism, companies in digital spaces highlight content that generates the most revenue, often at the expense of minorities. Driven by such profit, companies design algorithms that prioritize content and ads that generate more revenue regardless of its harmful effects on the users such as people of color, illustrated in the racialization of black women by Noble. Overall, this mediated content by profit-oriented companies exerts a strong influence in technology and media spaces, and such influence is highly destructive for minorities as it reinforces stereotypes and biases, creating an atmosphere of social injustice.

Examining how algorithmic bias in technology can influence economic opportunities and perpetuate social inequality is crucial for aggravators of social injustices. When search engine algorithms prioritize businesses with more significant financial resources or online visibility, they disadvantage smaller firms, including those owned by marginalized individuals or communities. By presenting decontextualized representations that prioritize white dominant perspectives, search engines perpetuate stereotypes about marginalized communities. This reinforcement of stereotypes contributes to the stigmatization and marginalization of these groups, further entrenching social inequalities. This limited representation reinforces their marginalization and prevents them from participating in online discourse and shaping narratives

about their identities and histories. In addition, the lack of diversity contributes to the perpetuation of systemic inequalities and oppression in digital spaces. The content published by those with wealth often misrepresents the identity of others, such as other racial groups. Their wrongful and mistaken label reinforces bias, prejudice, and stereotypes, which are later portrayed in search engines. For example, Noble shares that when searching for "Black Girls" on the internet, the results were from pornographic content to stereotypical and biased representations of Black women (Noble 86). Such misrepresentation harms the consumer as it affects their racial identity and feelings about themselves. In the same way, users who encounter this mediated information about their racial groups can experience psychologically harmful effects.

Similarly, by allowing such misrepresentation of marginalized communities, the user's attitude towards the groups being misrepresented can hinder the values, beliefs, and morals they hold. In other words, the perception of marginalized groups is targeted detrimentally by these mediated content from algorithms. Noble also highlights instances where users search depicted sexist ideals and the pornification of women (Noble 143). The widespread availability and consumption of pornographic content, eased by corporate-controlled media platforms, contribute to the normalization of the objectification of women. When women are consistently portrayed as sexual objects for male consumption, it shapes societal attitudes and perceptions of women, reinforcing gender inequalities and contributing to the marginalization of women in society. The controlled media narrative by corporations surrounding pornography allows for the objectification and exploitation of women, presenting it as entertainment or fantasy instead of acknowledging the real-world contributions to women's rights and dignity. By perpetuating these harmful representations, corporate-owned pornography reinforces societal attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the oppression of women. In her article, Behm-Morawitz presents this idea of corporate-controlled media, as she illustrates that "categorization" of social groups poses a threat to an individual's perception of those groups (7). The media plays a significant role in shaping these mental categories by presenting portrayals and narratives about different social groups. When media representations are created, they can contribute to a more informed understanding of diverse identities and experiences. However, when media representations are erroneous or based on stereotypes, they have detrimental effects on those marginalized communities being misrepresented. Overall, this supports the assertion that capitalist incentives

within technology companies drive the development of biased algorithms, which in turn worsen social injustices for minorities by perpetuating stereotypes, biases, and systemic inequalities.

Both sources aim to bring awareness to corporations ruling the media and technology sphere. This is also illustrated to provide a solution, such as Noble's idea in her book: increasing diversity in tech or transparency in how algorithms are created will decide how they work with the public. Similarly, while the argument made by Behm-Morawitz does not explicitly allude to a more diverse workforce in these companies, it does hint to its audience that the necessity for a more representative media though diversity in this creative workforce is necessary even if it results in the decline of profit for these commercial companies. Even if companies want to profit from such media content, better inclusion and diversity in digital spaces are crucial for ensuring fair and accurate representation across various dimensions, including race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and more. When digital spaces lack diversity, they often reflect and perpetuate existing societal biases and inequalities, marginalizing certain groups and amplifying the voices of others. By actively promoting inclusion and diversity, digital spaces can more accurately reflect the richness and complexity of human experiences, perspectives, and identities.

Non-commercial search engines, while not driven by direct profit motives like commercial ones, can still be subject to content prioritization, especially in product searches. Like commercial search engines, non-commercial ones use algorithms to rank and display search results. These algorithms may inadvertently favor products or businesses with superb online visibility or popularity, influencing brand recognition, marketing budgets, and social influence. As recounted in the book "Algorithms of Oppression," convicted killer Dylan Roof turned to the internet, more specifically search engines, to seek information about the killing of Trayvon Martin, which led him to white supremacist, anti-Jewish, and other harmful websites (Noble 112). Roof's exposure to extremist content on the internet played a significant role in shaping his racial identity and worldview. This would not be a reality if corporations had not corrupted the content. As a result, products from dominant or privileged groups may be disproportionately represented in search results, perpetuating inequalities, and reinforcing existing power dynamics.

In conclusion, as big companies grow and focus on making more money, they start to control distinct parts of our society, which can be a problem for different communities. In the U.S., These companies have enough power over digital things like technology and media, and

that can make life more challenging for minorities. Corporations' control over mediated content antagonizes communities as they manipulate information for profit. As many more individuals rely on search engines and media for information, it is easier to deceive users with false narratives that actively shape their perspectives. Monopolies use this to their advantage to maintain their digital world dominance and their highly profitable market. If the government lacks efforts to integrate stronger regulation on corporations' influence on digital spaces, their power can rise and succeed that of the actual government. This results in the centralization of power that disqualifies and oppresses groups, leaving them marginalized.

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MCWP 50

Alexander Perez Howell
Nominated by Jason Barulis

Connor Larmer
Nominated by Vincent Pham

Harshitha Palacharla
Nominated by Haydee Smith

Karina Fong
Nominated by Kelly Silva

Magnolia Hyon
Nominated by Laurie Nies

Matt Fan
Nominated by Michael Morshed

"In addition to displaying a sophisticated grasp of the way in which both cultural and economic forces influence the Navajo response to various energy proposals, Alex deftly synthesizes evidence in his body paragraphs. As a result, not only are Alex's subclaims well supported but he is able to devote considerable space to analysis." – Jason Bartulis

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Navajo Energy: How the *Diné* Philosophy of Life Impedes Renewable Energy Development

By Alexander Perez Howell

Of the various extant issues encountered by the Navajo Nation, the role of local energy development proves to be one of the most salient and contested. Critical in the analysis of Navajo energy development is the influence of cultural perspectives, which, in addition to political and economic ideologies, holds a prominent role in determining Navajo energy outcomes. More broadly, regarding the myriad challenges faced contemporarily, few have garnered greater support to overcome within the public domain, through the promotion of renewable energy, than climate change. However, in the United States, support to advance renewable energy is not ubiquitous. Nowhere is this, and the contested nature of renewable energy development, made more evident than within the Navajo Nation, in which the nation's long history of economic reliance on fossil fuels challenges contemporary attempts to transition towards renewable energy (Curley, "A Failed Green Future" 59).

Despite this reliance, a long-overlooked, yet prominent, factor in the obstruction of Navajo renewable energy (RE) development emerges in the form of *Diné* (Navajo) cultural structures. *Diné* culture is a complex and extensive intra-tribal construct that integrates polytheistic beliefs, traditional rites, and philosophical values about the land and employment to form a guiding philosophy of life and moral economy opposed to RE development (Curley, "T'áá Hwó Ají T'éego" 72-73; Vangee 19). This philosophy of life or *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) following Dr. Nez Vangee—an indigenous scholar and *Diné* tribeswoman—is the "nature of *Diné* existence, an embodiment of *Diné* paradigm" which governs "[relationships with] and living in harmony with the natural world" (27, 29). Put differently, this philosophy is

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the central axis of the *Diné* way of life, their relationship with the *Dinétah*—the ancestral Navajo homeland—and with nature. In providing the underlying framework for *Diné* society, this philosophy leads to numerous emergent, and indeed disagreeing, cultural ideologies that converge to obstruct RE development. Thus, although political and economic factors, such as the tribal government's reliance on coal revenues, certainly impede Navajo RE development, *Diné* culture proves to be the most significant hindrance to the development of green energy within the Navajo Nation due to the land-sustaining values of SNBH, the influence of culturally-linked employment beliefs, the renewal of extensive woodcutting traditions, *Diné* creationist mythologies, and Navajo cultural rites' high natural resource requirements. Collectively, these traditions have led to the failure of Navajo energy projects and RE transition attempts. Therefore, leaving the *Diné* cultural impact on RE development unacknowledged will further attempts to halt local RE projects and extend the deleterious effects of climate change.

In following SNBH, *Diné* tribespeople ascribe to the traditions of *hozhó* and *k'é* which encourage environmental stewardship and underline the importance of the relationship between humanity and nature. However, these traditions decisively impede local RE development as they exacerbate pollution concerns surrounding green energy projects, promote local ecosystem health, and highlight the sacrality of life (Necefer et al. 4, 8; Vangee v, 29, 64). As referenced by Vangee, the tradition of *hozhó* regards life as sacred and furthers the importance of living in harmony with nature (34, 127). Notedly, however, commercial RE development requires vast, and often ecosystem-harming, land allotments, and thereby situates itself in opposition to these central *Diné* traditions by potentially degrading natural environments, and thus, as underlined in a study by Dr. Len Necefer—a Navajo Nation scholar, and *Diné* tribesman—et al., provokes cultural reservations against green energy in accordance with these traditions (4, 8). These reservations, therefore, highlight how *Diné* cultural values and philosophies lead to significant opposition against RE development, as far as this development may cause land deterioration and the decline of local ecosystems, violating the sacred nature of life following *hozhó* and *k'é*. As these philosophies are in direct opposition with commercial energy, they indicate more broadly that *Diné* cultural structures crucially hinder local RE development and allow us to conceptualize Navajo green energy as primarily obstructed by cultural structures. By recognizing the detrimental effects of *Diné* culture on local RE development, we may develop methodologies by

which Navajo cultural values can be accommodated, such as through smaller, less-ecologically harmful RE developments, to achieve both a successful transition towards green energy and combat climate change.

While the values of *hozhó* and *k'é* are certainly influential in determining *Diné* perceptions of RE development, some may assuredly argue that greater opposition to green energy emerges historically from energy corporations past failures to adequately reclaim land. As noted by Kathy Hall—an indigenous scholar and sociologist—in her analysis of Black Mesa coal mining, coal development during the height of the Navajo coal industry often destroyed and subsequently failed to restore local ecosystems while simultaneously displacing numerous *Diné* tribespeople (51-52, 56-57). Thus, as past energy developments have degraded local ecosystems and significantly harmed *Diné* lifestyle, it may be concluded that historical environmental trauma is the predominant motivation for this widespread *Diné* opposition to RE development.

Although Navajo preservationist ideologies are certainly influenced by historical land reclamation failures, these ideas are more deeply rooted in *Diné* cultural beliefs and values in accordance with SNBH such as *hozhó* and *k'é* (Vangee 17, 19, 34). As pointed out by Vangee, SNBH is a near-ubiquitous cultural ideology that renders the land sacred through the tradition of *iina*, promotes environmental conservation, and serves as the quintessential worldview of *Diné* tribespeople (19-20, 27, 58, 64). As SNBH affirms the sacrality of the land to *Diné* individuals, it is evident that opposition due to land reclamation failures is therefore largely motivated by these failures' violation of environmentally based cultural values in accordance with SNBH. It is illogical to conclude that reservations against local RE development are reactions to historical land reclamation failures individually, but they are the byproducts of infractions upon *Diné* cultural values. Overall, the extensive nature of SNBH in conjunction with its promotion of environmental stewardship renders cultural values a significantly more potent influence in the development of reservations against green energy, conclusively elucidating that *Diné* culture is the primary impediment to Navajo RE development (Vangee 56, 157).

The sacrality of the land, however, is not the exclusive impeding force against Navajo green energy development. *Diné* cultural perspectives further hinder RE development through the connection of tribal health to SNBH and the natural world. As pointed out by Vangee, *Diné* tribespeople adhere strongly to the belief that SNBH, including its values of environmental stewardship, is directly correlated to Navajo physical and mental health (27). This belief is

echoed by *Diné* testimony, in which the negative environmental effects of damming, a requisite process in hydroelectric power generation, are perceived to increase the illness incidence of *Diné* tribespeople due to their violation of *hozhó* and *k'é* (Necefer et al. 8). Conjunctionally, these perspectives highlight how *Diné* culture attributes Navajo health both to SNBH and to the health of the local environment, and therefore impedes widespread RE development as, through its harm to local ecosystems, it is perceived to threaten tribal health. It is evident, therefore, that *Diné* culture establishes critical opposition to local RE development and often does so without additional influence, hence being the most significant obstruction to green energy within the Navajo Nation. Ultimately, recognizing the influence of cultural beliefs on RE development not only allows us to determine the most significant factor halting the development of Navajo green energy, but would allow us to formulate frameworks by which these beliefs could be accommodated by RE projects, bolstering green energy development and ameliorating Navajo energy sovereignty.

While the value of the land is sustained by *Diné* cultural philosophies, this value emerges from the *Diné* creation myth which further elucidates the importance of the natural world. As the *Diné* creation myth provides the cultural framework by which nature is established as significant and must be maintained, it consequently impedes Navajo RE development, as it renders wildlife sacred, promotes animal care, and bolsters environment-sustaining cultural practices. Following Vangee, the *Diné* creation myth elucidates that discontent with the Fourth World, the First Man sent the original people into the Fifth World (Earth), with these individuals choosing Mountain Lion or Wolf to lead them. This choice transformed the first people into either animals or modern humans based on their decision, thus revealing the sacredness attributed to animals, following *Diné* religious beliefs, given their status as having once been individuals (24-25). The sacrality attributed to animals manifests itself philosophically in SNBH through the tradition of *iina*, which promotes the value of nature and animal care, and in the cultural rite of grazing (Pasqualetti et al. 891; Vangee 64). Grazing rights, as noted by Dr. Martin J. Pasqualetti— a renewable energy scholar and indigenous researcher—et al. are central to *Diné* lifestyle and underscore the importance of ecosystem health to Navajo tribespeople (890-891). In conjunction with SNBH, these rites and ideas promoting animal care, even among *Diné* without grazing rights, remain salient contemporarily and thereby establish opposition to RE development since

this development threatens ecosystem health and restricts grazing, as vast and ecosystem-disrupting land allotments are often requisite (Vangee 38, 64, 134). The opposition to RE development established by these practices further extends how Navajo cultural traditions may independently obstruct green energy development and therefore indicates that *Diné* cultural structures are the most significant hindrance to RE development within the Navajo Nation. Fundamentally, by acknowledging the sacredness of wildlife in accordance with the *Diné* creation myth and how this designation impedes RE development, we may derive means by which green energy development may be established without adversely affecting the cultural beliefs of *Diné* tribespeople, such as through designating resources to protecting local wildlife or developing upon scarcely inhabited land, ultimately garnering *Diné* support and challenging climate change.

Although Navajo grazing rites impede local RE development through their cultural significance in reference to *iina* and the *Diné* creation myth, they further hinder local green energy projects due to their large land and water requirements and reliance on the politics of distribution (see fig. 1). As sustained by Hall, *Diné* grazing practices are heavily reliant on vast land and water resources, resources which are widely restricted in energy development (51-52, 76-78). This reliance, therefore, hinders RE development as commercial green energy projects require large quantities of land and water, thereby positioning themselves in opposition to these cultural practices. This notion is furthered by grazing rights' holders' reliance on government subsidies and land allotments, highlighting the vast acreage and natural resources required for successful grazing (Curley, "A Failed Green Future" 62; Pasqualetti et al. 891). However, this dependence on subsidization by the tribal government further exacerbates the extent to which these practices impede Navajo RE development. As pointed out by Dr. Andrew Curley—an indigenous scholar, energy researcher, and *Diné* tribesman—in his analysis of the Navajo Green Jobs effort, the Navajo tribal government is reliant on coal-based revenues and thereby is incentivized to prevent transitions towards green energy (Curley, "A Failed Green Future" 58-59, 63). Thus, as grazing practices require coal-based government subsidies, they further promote the obstruction of RE development within the Navajo Nation, as they are motivated to support non-renewable energy sources.

More poignantly, however, this reliance on coal-based subsidies indicates that the significance of *Diné* cultural practices may translate into political support against RE

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development, insofar as these practices may support coal development to the extent requisite for them to be sustained through subsidization. It is evident, therefore, that *Diné* culture, through these practices, markedly impedes local RE development and moreover proves to be the most potent hindrance to the Navajo development of sustainable energy, as these practices are dependent on and in support of non-renewable energy. Thus, by acknowledging the large natural resource requirements of *Diné* cultural practices and their economic reliance on distributive politics, we may formulate procedures through which these requirements may be accommodated, such as through development on land unsuitable for grazing, to conclusively combat climate change and bolster local RE development.

Notably, however, Navajo grazing rights are not the sole land-demanding cultural practice within the Navajo Nation. Wood harvesting and the use of firewood for energy is central to *Diné* cultural identity and religious ceremonies (Margargal et al. 7). The cultural practice of *Diné* woodcutting, therefore, further hinders local RE development due to its religious significance and its large land resource requirements. As noted in an interview study by Dr. Kate Margargal—a professor and indigenous anthropologist—et al., firewood is considered an essential resource used both for recreational heating and *Diné* religious traditions (3, 5). These religious implications of firewood, therefore, bolster resistance against Navajo RE development as they render *Diné* culture reliant on this natural resource, a resource that land demanding RE developments threaten. This idea is furthered by Hall, extending that energy development requires vast land resources and thereby disrupts both *Diné* cultural practices and local tribespeople reliant on these practices for subsistence (51-52). Therefore, as the development of commercial RE projects within the *Dinétah* is likely to disrupt both *Diné* woodcutting traditions and religious ceremonies, the value of these traditions provokes further cultural resistance towards RE development. Thus, the hindrance of Navajo RE development, in accordance with *Diné* woodcutting traditions, allows us to decidedly recognize additional cultural traditions requisite to consider in the development of RE projects and conceptualize methodologies through which they may be aligned with green energy, such as through the allocation of profits to *Dinétah* reforestation efforts, consequently bolstering local RE development and combatting climate change.

The influence of *Diné* woodcutting traditions on local RE development, however, is not limited to their religious significance or land requirements. These traditions further hinder Navajo RE development through a strong *Diné* cultural preference for firewood energy exacerbated by the decline of the Navajo coal industry. As referenced by Margargal et al. the deterioration of the Navajo coal industry has incited numerous *Diné* tribespeople to engage in woodcutting practices and to employ firewood as a primary energy source (5). Notably, this use of firewood as a key source of electrical power is found in even households with access to photovoltaic energy (Margargal et al. 3). Therefore, the increased use of firewood despite access to alternative, and indeed renewable, energy sources highlight a potent cultural preference for firewood energy and underlines the importance of woodcutting traditions to *Diné* tribespeople. This preference for firewood energy impedes Navajo RE development as it promotes non-sustainable energy and fosters cultural opposition to RE sources and developments. The establishment of reservations against Navajo RE developments through *Diné* woodcutting traditions furthers the idea that Navajo cultural structures decisively hinder local RE development, as these structures establish partialities for non-renewable energy sources. Thus, through the recognition of these grave cultural barriers to RE development, we may create frameworks to culturally recharacterize green energy, such as through not developing in forest ecosystems, to conclusively augment *Diné* cultural support for RE development and reduce local carbon emissions.

While the declining Navajo coal industry has led to the emergence of, and increase in, *Diné* woodcutting practices, this decline has additionally provoked the development of a coal-supporting moral economy, rooted in Navajo cultural traditions (Curley, "T'áá Hwó Ají T'éego" 71-72). This deterioration, therefore, paradoxically obstructs Navajo RE development through its foundation of a coal-sustaining cultural ideology corresponding to the philosophy of *t'áá hwó aji t'éego*, the *Diné* proverb which underscores the importance of employment within the *Dinétah* and hard labor (Curley, "T'áá Hwó Ají T'éego" 76, 79; Vangee 20). As revealed by Curley, the declining coal industry coupled with an increase in *Diné* RE activism has led to the establishment of a coal-supporting moral economy among working-class tribespeople which is constituted through unionization (Curley, "A Failed Green Future" 57; Curley, "T'áá Hwó Ají T'éego" 72, 79). Extending this idea, interviews with Navajo coal workers make evident the significance of the cultural tradition of *t'áá hwó ají t'éego* in the development of this moral

economy, as far as it serves as the guiding principle for coal-supporting mobilizations (Curley, "T'áá Hwó Ají T'éego" 76-77). To many *Diné* laborers, coal work is viewed as a methodology to live in accordance with *t'áá hwó ají t'éego*, and thus the Navajo coal industry's decline, and corresponding decline in local employment opportunities, fosters the formation of this coal-supporting cultural ideology as a protectionist effort to maintain this tradition. As RE development is likely to further the deterioration of the Navajo coal industry, and thus reduce employment within the *Dinétah*, it establishes itself in opposition to the cultural tradition of *t'áá hwó ají t'éego* and thereby this emergent coal-supporting moral economy. Thus, the declining coal industry impedes Navajo RE development, as this coal-supporting moral economy, founded upon *t'áá hwó aji t'éego*, positions itself counter to local green energy development, ultimately establishing salient resistance against green energy projects. The formation of opposition against Navajo RE development through a culturally-founded moral economy conclusively highlights that *Diné* cultural traditions pose a significant hindrance to RE development within the Navajo Nation and, more poignantly, underscores how local RE-impeding political and economic factors, such as desires for expanded coal employment opportunities, are largely conceptualized through *Diné* cultural values, hence underlining *Diné* culture's role as the predominant obstruction to local RE development. Therefore, in being cognizant that Navajo cultural ideologies both establish resistance against RE development and foreground political and economic RE-impeding interests, we may better analyze how the correspondence between these ideologies and *Diné* cultural traditions forms these reservations counter to RE development and therefore identify how to resituate these traditions, such as through ensuring local employment within RE sites, bolstering Navajo energy and economic sovereignty and reducing the local impact on climate change.

Certainly, some may argue that political and economic factors are more significant impediments to RE development within the Navajo Nation than *Diné* cultural structures due to the tribal government's fiscal reliance on coal revenues and the local influence of the politics of distribution. As illuminated by Curley, the Navajo Nation is reliant on coal earnings and therefore holds a personal stake in perpetuating the local coal industry, as evidenced by the failure of the Navajo Green Jobs effort and the governmental renewal of coal mining operations (Curley, "A Failed Green Future" 58). This economic reliance on the Navajo coal industry

therefore exemplifies how non-cultural factors influence RE development, as far as continued reliance on coal revenues provokes political reservations against Navajo green energy projects as their widespread development would hinder local coal mining operations. Moreover, the influence of non-cultural factors, in the form of the politics of distribution, likewise hinders this development. As the Navajo Nation has established itself as a welfare state, its political support is founded upon its ability to subsidize numerous necessities to *Diné* tribespeople, such as electricity and adequate housing (Curley, "A Failed Green Future" 59). Since funding for these subsidies emerges from coal revenues, a political exigence is established in favor of coal mining and therefore opposed to green energy. Thus, political, and economic factors may be argued as graver hindrances to RE development than *Diné* culture as these factors favor alternative energy sources.

Finally, although Navajo political and economic interests assuredly hinder RE development, *Diné* culture proves to be a more significant obstruction to RE development as these RE-impeding political and economic factors are supported due to their cultural influence. Indeed, even Curley acknowledges that many *Diné* cultural practices are sustained by the politics of distribution, in which the Navajo tribal government subsidizes these rites, indicating that the political influence impeding RE development emerges upon the basis of cultural support (Curley, "A Failed Green Future" 57, 62). This idea is furthered by Pasqualetti et al. who highlight that grazing practices are dependent on land allotments by the local tribal government (891). As the tribal government is reliant upon coal revenues, so too are the *Diné* cultural practices it subsidizes. Thus, as these cultural rites require subsidization, they provide the exigence for coal support rather than support for alternative energy sources such as renewable energy, cementing the idea that these cultural practices manifest political influence which impedes RE development rather than this obstruction emerging solely from political or economic interests. Furthermore, although economic interests promote mobilizations counter to RE development, for instance, since RE projects would reduce local coal employment, these mobilizations are primarily provoked due to RE development rendering *Diné* tribespeople unable to live in accordance with the cultural traditions, such as *t'áá hwó ají t'éego* (Curley, "T'áá Hwó Ají T'éego" 72, 78). Thus, it is evident that both the Navajo welfare state and political and economic mobilizations against RE development are established and supported by *Diné* cultural practices and philosophies. Extending this idea, we may determine that the political and economic support for non-

renewable energy sources is broadly due to the significance of the cultural traditions that these industries and the politics of distribution sustain. Distributive politics' cultural support underlines the significance of *Diné* cultural practices in the obstruction of RE development and furthers the idea that Navajo cultural structures are the most significant hindrance to local green energy. Therefore, by recognizing that cultural factors provide the political and economic support requisite to influence and impede *Diné* RE development, we can establish frameworks by which these practices can be accommodated, such as through subsidization employing profits from RE developments, bolstering their support for green energy and hindering local contributions towards climate change.

  Overall, the contemporary Navajo Nation remains at the epicenter of numerous debates surrounding the role of green energy and how divergent factors influence its development. Decidedly, *Diné* cultural philosophies are the most significant hindrance to RE development within the Navajo Nation as their influence furthers political and economic attempts to curb green energy, establishes preferences for and cultural ideologies in support of alternative energy sources, and makes salient religious traditions that render the land sacred, hence preventing land demanding RE development. In recognizing the influence of *Diné* cultural structures in the hindrance of RE development upon Navajo lands, we can establish conceptual frameworks and methodologies by which these, most significant, factors may be accommodated to ensure a more facile transition towards green energy within the Navajo Nation. Doing so is imperative as *Diné* cultural philosophies prove to indeed foreground political and economic support against RE development, and thus ignoring these views conclusively prevents Navajo transition attempts towards green energy. It is clear, therefore, that we must acknowledge of these philosophies and reframe RE development in alignment with them in order totally reduce local carbon emissions through a green energy transition and thereby significantly reduce the Navajo impact on climate change.

Figure 1. The Influence of Navajo Grazing Requirements on Local Renewable Energy Development

Vast Water Resources
• *Necessary water resources threatened by RE development, promote cultural resistance.*

Vast Governmental Land Allotments
• *Grazing requirements conflict with land requisite for RE development.*

Coal-based Subsidization
• *Subsidization incites culturally-based coal support.*
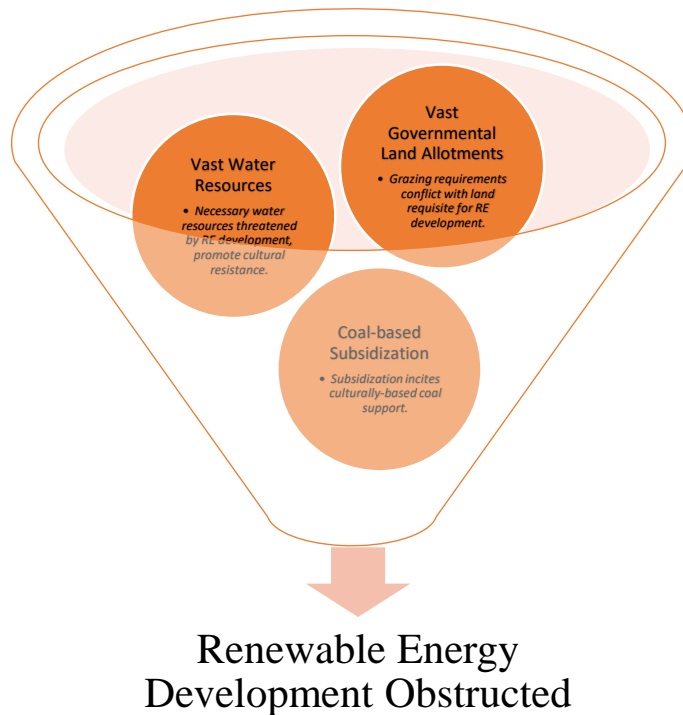
Renewable Energy Development Obstructed

Fig. 1. This flowchart is a visualization of how the various requirements for Navajo grazing rights translate directly into the hindrance of local RE development. Navajo grazing practices are dependent on governmental subsidies and land allotments generated from coal-revenues, thereby inciting support for unsustainable energy developments instead of RE projects (Curley, "A Failed Green Future" 62; Pasqualetti et al. 891). This graphic synthesizes these requirements with, as pointed out by Hall, the vast water resources necessary for Navajo grazing, both culturally and for subsistence, that are often exploited by energy developments, hence furthering *Diné* cultural reservations against RE development (Hall 76-78). Conjunctionally, these factors result in *Diné* RE projects being obstructed and sustain the subclaim that *Diné* grazing rights significantly hinder local renewable energy efforts.

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"Connor's intuitive way of layering arguments through the connection of seemingly disconnected narratives and ability to leverage strong design backgrounds in the research graphic made it a persuasive and personal addition to the argument being made." – Vincent Pham

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Dystopian Comics: Reflections of Identity Under Authoritarianism

By Connor Larmer

It is difficult to deny that the emergence of the comic as a modern vehicle of critical narrative has the potential to provide insight into the complexity of our times. Moreover, as the world that these narratives must confront grows ever more complex, we are left questioning the quality and the wisdom of the structures of power that we maintain, and our own place—the significance of the individual—as it stands in relation to the world. This is exemplified through the proliferation of dystopia as a genre in comic narratives, where tropes such as oppressive, fascist, and or authoritarian governments dominate societies severely altered from our own. The application of this genre is far from unique to comics, nor is it new. As other scholars of dystopia have discussed, dystopian narratives arise to cope with and warn of the perils of a rapidly changing world. These discussions often do not involve dystopian comics, where the audience is given a unique view into the threats that dystopia confronts. It is in this frame of reference that, although often overlooked for their association with simplistic entertainment, dystopian comics uniquely represent the ways that oppressive and authoritarian power structures fundamentally erode individual identity, and how the reflective nature of these narratives force audiences to contextualize these threats against their own, lived experiences.

The question of identity and authoritarianism that this paper explores can be split into two main focuses: dystopia as a genre, and comics as a medium for dystopia. Through exploring the former, the latter can be better contextualized and understood. This essay examines the academic findings of various authors, both within and beyond comic studies. It should be noted that—for the sake of specifying the bounds of this paper—the comics that these authors have analyzed, as well as any non-comic inclusions, all exist within western society in Europe. To better

demonstrate how authoritarianism threatens identity in comic dystopias, this essay will first dissect dystopia as a genre, as well as its relation to individual identity, history, and hope. Through understanding the genre's broader development, its significance in comics can be better analyzed. Later, this essay aims to explore the analyses of several comics, all with dystopia as a key feature. These findings will be used to identify and analyze the ways that dystopian comics uniquely capture the dichotomy between authoritarianism and individual identity.

Throughout this essay, several terms will be used to refer to various aspects and items within the discussion going forward. To remain consistent with the other authors in this discussion, I will refer to Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of dystopia, as defined in *The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited*: "[A] non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 9). For the sake of thoroughness, this essay will broadly define the phrase "comic" as an artistic medium which combines sequential panels of images and words to tell a cohesive story. Likewise, "comic narratives" refers to the overarching narrative that a comic tells, and thus dystopian comic narratives are comic narratives that integrate Sargent's description of dystopia as a key element or theme within their story.

Prior to delving directly into comics and their specific abilities regarding dystopia, it is pertinent to discuss dystopia outside of any specific medium. The genre has a unique relationship with the real world, and developing an understanding of its significance and applications beyond any one medium is crucial. Specifically, the introspective nature of dystopian narratives requires reflection on both the thematic elements of the narrative, and their implications on the world in which the audience exists. This is best exemplified by Jean-Paul Engélibert in his essay "Dystopian Fictions and Contemporary Fears." It is important to acknowledge that, as alluded to above, Engélibert applies his theories and analysis to dystopian literature, not comics. However, it is arguable that his findings can be adapted to comics just as well, if not better than to traditional literature; this is due to the medium's unique representative abilities, which will be explored in-depth in a subsequent section. Engélibert links dystopian narratives closely to history, stating that dystopian literature will always lead readers back to either their own historical context, or the context in which the dystopia was created (Engélibert 312). In other

words, dystopia is born out of, and interpreted through, the historical events of the real world. Dystopian narratives do not exist in isolation, and thus—given their basis in historical reality— they present the world and events of their narratives not as fantasy, but as speculative possibility. It is through this connection that depictions of authoritarian oppression in comic dystopias establish a real-world significance.

This application of dystopia as an expression of negative possibility is expanded in Peter Fitting's "A Short History of Utopian Studies." In his essay, fitting highlights how—at least prior to the 1970s—dystopia in science fiction was spurred by hesitancy toward the technological developments of the era (127). With this, Fitting's argument reflects the historical awareness and critique that Engélibert argues is hallmark to dystopia, and furthermore indicates a critical or satirical element to dystopia. This suggests dystopia to be a reactionary interpretation of history mediated by the author and their own experiences. Through exploring themes present in dystopian narratives under this lens, we can contextualize them in relation to our own world. Furthermore, this interpretation of dystopia suggests that, when considering the question of identity, the significance of the individual in such narratives can be reflected similarly.

Dystopia as a genre predates comics, and the development of the contemporary dystopian comic—although expanding on the genre and exploring new themes—can find its roots as a modern extension of a much older genre. Although the narrative is well removed from comic studies, this interpretation of dystopia can be applied to George Orwell's novel and dystopian classic *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Malcolm Thorp, in his essay "The Dynamics of Terror in Orwell's *1984*," asserts that Orwell's narrative is a warning of an uncertain future, as well as a denouncement of totalitarianism (3). It is notable that Thorp explores Orwell's political knowledge, background, and other works in-depth to contextualize the novel's contents and themes. Thorp attributes the narrative's success to its depiction of totalitarianism's domination of and impact on the individual (16). These themes are especially significant when considered in relation to—as Thorp has explored—the context in which *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written. However, within a modern context, they invite the reader to consider the stability of the system in which they exist, and its threat to their own identity. Regardless of medium, dystopian narratives are not purely fiction. Rather, they are grounded both in the past—through the author's beliefs and historical setting—and the present, the world of the reader. Because of its introspective nature, dystopia invites the audience to apply thematic elements within the

narrative to their own lived experiences; this includes reflecting on themes of identity present in these narratives. When considering individual identity in relationship to authoritarian oppression and power in dystopian narratives, such themes must be contextualized in the real world to be properly understood. The dynamics of their relationship remain relevant beyond the scope of the narrative. It is in this frame of reference that comic dystopias must be analyzed, as the unique abilities of the medium complicate the ways that authoritarianism and individuality are depicted.

One commonality shared across all dystopian narratives is the significance of hope. The reader, looking into a world worse than their own, seeks and identifies with hope within the narrative, as it promises salvation for both fictional characters and the audience. This relationship is best explored through comics, as they offer an abundance of ways in which hope can manifest itself, whether it be through visual representation, narrative exposition, or characters and their actions. The latter—hope manifested through a character within the narrative—is explored by Paul Moffett in his analysis of Alan Moore's comic *V for Vendetta*. In his research, Moffett analyzes the themes of hope and identity within the dystopian world that the comic illustrates. Notably, Moffett asserts that the narrative goes beyond simply offering hope; instead, it promises a utopian successor to the dystopian narrative that exists throughout the comic (57). However, within such context, the utopian promise is a form of hope. Despite its anarchic roots, this hope acts as a focus for both the comics' characters and its audience. Throughout the narrative, V's identity is built around this hope of a better world in anarchy, and through the narrative structure, the audience is directed to side with V. The audience is invited to share in his hope, regardless of its moral implications. I argue that it is through these instances of shared hope that dystopias allow readers to identify themselves within the narrative; if an audience can identify with a character, they can explore how that character's identity—as well as their own—rests in context to the wider dystopian world.

As previously mentioned, comics provide multiple modes through which this can be achieved. This is further exemplified in *V for Vendetta*, where the overarching conflict between the fascist state and V's anarchy can be reduced to the conflict of placing the individual or the society above the other (Moffett 49). No one element defines this conflict; it is explored over the narrative through multiple characters and story elements. This struggle can similarly be defined in terms of individual identity, and authoritarian oppression against it, in which hope manifests

itself as the individual prevailing. The audience is led to consider this dichotomy through V, at the same time considering the significance of individual identity under authoritarian rule.

Moffett acknowledges that *V for Vendetta* is historically specific, as he notes the political climate of England in which Alan Moore developed his career and eventually wrote the narrative (47-48). The significance of the narrative's real-world roots that Moffett develops is corroborated by Engélibert, who asserts that dystopian narratives are interwoven with the real world that the reader exists in, as that connection provides a way to compare the narrative world with reality (Engélibert 314). He goes on to assert that if dystopian narratives are influenced by the real world, then the inverse—reality being informed in some way by the world of dystopia— is likewise reasonable (Engélibert 314). If this is true, the hope manifested in *V for Vendetta*, which acts as an entry point for audiences to identify themselves within the narrative, is not only influenced by reality—as Moffett has demonstrated in his aforementioned analysis of the political climate of 1980s Britain—but also suggests the that the avoidance or restoration of these dystopian elements is possible in the real world.

Looking broader, Engélibert acknowledges hope when approaching the concept of dystopia as "an expression of specific fears and, perhaps, hopes, born of specific historical conjunctures" (313). He suggests that modern dystopia describes negative futures to demonstrate the need to avoid such an outcome (319). In other words, dystopian narratives employ the themes of fear and hope as messengers of an imminent danger and a promise of salvation from said danger, respectively. As Moffett described, the underlying fear in *V for Vendetta* is that of fascism, authoritarian suppression, and abuse. Likewise, the narrative's hope lays with V, and his vision of deconstructing the regime through an anarchic revolution. Although Moffett primarily argues that *V for Vendetta* is best interpreted as a utopian novel, the prioritization of individuality that he explores is a compelling and undeniable theme of the narrative. Furthermore, this theme is effectively executed through the comic's dystopian overtones, especially when contextualized within the real world.

Hope is a broad term within the genre of dystopia; however, regardless of whatever form it may manifest itself in, it has power over both the characters of a narrative and the narrative's audience. Through the shared hope of escaping the dystopian world, readers can identify with characters subjected to it. In turn, the events of the narrative require the reader to identify themselves within the narrative and confront how such events—if they were to transpire—would

impact and shape their own identity. Additionally, hope can be identified as a promise of salvation, as it demonstrates to the reader how the dystopian elements of the narrative can be avoided or overcome. Engélibert highlights dystopia's ability to explore social and political issues through satire. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate, comic dystopias expand on this, by bringing the audience into the narrative, and confronting them with the consequences of these issues taken to the extreme.

Dystopia is only one element within this discussion. Its study provides a general framework to use, however the medium—in this case comics—influences how dystopian themes are explored. This includes exploring individuality in dystopian narratives and the role and representation of authoritarian rule. As a result, the universal visual accessibility of comics allows for readers to identify with events and themes on a more personal level than other mediums. Unlike many other mediums, comics can explore narratives simultaneously through various elements. Dialogue and exposition can exist, often denoted by thought or speech bubbles, in conjunction with visual storytelling taking place across one or multiple frames. Leena Romu, in her essay "Dystopian Comics as Cautionary Tales about the Future of the Arctic," explores the impact of this multi-modality in her analysis of two Finnish dystopian comics, both exploring the devolution of society after climate change destabilizes the Arctic. Romu highlights the impact of visual elements on the reader in one comic, *Scandorama*, and its usage of rigid visual framing to represent the orderly control of the dystopian state (108). However, as Romu notes, this rigid framing breaks down as the characters escape beyond the state's influence and into a destabilized Arctic. She analyzes how the comic's visual organization fails, stating that these visual cues emphasize nature's dominance over humans (Romu 109). These visual prompts not only build the atmosphere within the scenes—indicating whether under authoritarian watch or beyond the grasp of civilization—but they also help strengthen the underlying themes within the narrative. The world which the narrative exists within is destabilized, and the visual element of the comic reflects that independently of any other narrative device. This visual complexity complements the overall narrative; however, it also emphasizes the underlying vulnerability of the comic's characters, both in the face of the dystopian state and climate change. This leads the audience to question the characters' significance in relation to nature; similarly, in some degree, the audience is invited to consider their own position within their context.

This de-emphasis of character identity, being supplanted instead by a focus on the role a character plays—is not unique, as Isaac Veysey-White demonstrates in his article on Arnau Sanz Martínez's *Un Fantasma*, a Spanish dystopian comic. In his analysis, Veysey-White highlights Martínez's usage of abstract illustration to emphasize the outlandish dystopia that the comic explores (356). Through these artistic choices, the comic establishes its two main characters, who exist within different classes under the fictional regime, as abstractions of their roles in the narrative, ideas that the reader must augment with their own experiences (Veysey-White 355). As both Romu and Veysey-White explore, the visual elements of comic dystopias are fundamental in influencing how readers perceive them. The representative ability that comics enable contributes to their accessibility, as visual depth—or an intentional lack thereof—invites audiences to explore the significance of characters in comparison to the overarching themes of their narratives. They present readers with unique windows into the dystopias that they illustrate through suggesting features that the reader must explore and complete on their own. It is through these characters that the audience experiences *Un Fantasma's* authoritarian brutality. Additionally, the impact of this oppression on the individual identities of these characters is interpreted through their consistent dehumanization.

The freedoms that comics as a medium provide authors in telling narratives have been used in many ways. However, they are especially effective in illustrating dystopian narratives. In comic dystopias, these freedoms are used to place the audience into the complete breakdown of normality, and it is in these instances that readers must directly contend with the threat of authoritarianism to their own identities. Looking beyond the visual elements that Veysey-White notes, he also details how *Un Fantasma's* narrative is divided between two perspectives, and furthermore how these perspectives are not always told chronologically (355). Similarly to the abstract art style, the split nature of the comic's narrative further obfuscates the identity of the comic's characters. As Veysey-White argues, this contributes to the dehumanization of the narrative's characters, however it also invites readers to contemplate the actions of each character in isolation from one another, or their own previous actions. This further develops these characters as less so individuals, and more so roles in the dystopian world which the reader must contemplate the possibility of themselves being in.

In other instances, these concepts are depicted less subtly. One such notable example of this, where audiences are directly confronted by the dystopian threat within a comic, is identified

by Moffett. In analyzing the visual significance of the comic, he describes a panel from *V for Vendetta* in which V makes a public speech:

> Juxtaposed with images of Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, V tells the public of London: "We have had a string of embezzlers, frauds, liars, and lunatics making a string of catastrophic decisions. This is a plain fact" (Moore and Lloyd 2005, 116). There is a fourth face with the other three, which is partially obscured by V's dialogue balloon…[T]he partial obscurity of the face serves to make the fourth figure deliberately ambiguous and therefore can be contextualized." (Moffett 52)

This obscurity—much like the vagueness of character identity in *Un Fantasma* that Veysey-White identifies—leaves the audience to apply their own experiences to fill in the ambiguity in the comic. However, Moffett goes further, noting that both V's speech as well as the comic's visuals during the segment are directed at the reader, confronting dystopian elements in both the past and present (Moffett 52). Even if the significance of the visual element in the narrative is considered in isolation, it demonstrates that comics as a medium can portray complex themes—beyond just the scope of the narrative—purely through visual organization and design. Thus, the dystopian image of a negative future is potent, and, as Moffett has identified, requires the reader to consider such themes and threats in relation to themselves, as well as to their own experiences.

This is by no means an exhaustive study of dystopia in comics. As the medium continues to mature and face deeper examination, considerations regarding its effectiveness in portraying dystopian worlds will evolve. However, through the analysis and examples that this essay has explored, the medium enables a unique expression of dystopia without polluting the significance of its messages. As Romu and Veysey-White detailed, the visual element of comics complements and adds depth to the themes discussed in their narratives. Dystopian narratives explore themes relevant to their own worlds, history, and the lives of the audience. Likewise, comics provide a multi-modal vehicle from which audiences can consider the significance of these themes. Some may object to the application of hope as a significant method through which audiences identify with characters and events within dystopian narratives, however the widespread usage of hope and its significance in dystopian narratives cannot be denied. The persistence of hope is hallmark to dystopia, and it provides some possibility of averting the negative futures that such narratives often portray. To refer to Engélibert, his notes on *Nineteen*

Eighty-Four are applicable. He acknowledges that the narrative's ending could be interpreted to depict any revolt against the regime as pointless; however, he also provides an alternate interpretation, noting that "the very fact that this mediocre civil servant undertook to fight against the regime shows that rebellion is possible under the most difficult conditions" (Engélibert 316). It is in the struggle of this "mediocre civil servant" that audiences can identify themselves, and the mere existence of rebellion by the everyman signifies hope for an aversion from such a future.

This essay cannot examine all the possible depths regarding the question of identity and authoritarianism in dystopian comics. There is no formula to be applied to every dystopian narrative to define this relationship. Yet, as I have attempted to demonstrate, such narratives share commonalities with one another. As others have noted, dystopia frequently deals in terms of oppression, hope, and warning. However, the unique expressive abilities of comics— exemplified through their composition and symbolic nature—have positioned the medium as an excellent vehicle for representing modern questions through dystopia. The power of such narratives to warn has been well studied in literature, however, less so is their intersection with identity. Comics are a modern medium capable of expressing the complexities of the modern world. Their intersection with dystopia, and its representation of individual identity, is an area of interest that remains understudied. The introspective and representative power of these narratives should not be overlooked, and more research is warranted. Comic dystopias are uniquely accessible, their visual depictions of dystopian hallmarks, such as hope or authoritarianism, invite audiences to explore these concepts from the point of view of the characters within the narrative. It is this medium-specific accessibility, the introspective and historic nature of dystopia, and the thematic presence of hope within comic dystopian narratives that distinguish them beyond a mere reflection of the genre. These contemporary dystopias can uniquely explore the crushing threat of authoritarianism on individual identity and expression for a modern audience.

Figure 1. The dynamics of hope in dystopia and its influence on audiences

WITHIN DYSTOPIA, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NARRATIVE AND AUDIENCE IS COMPLEX, TO SAY THE LEAST.

SUBJECTED TO THE FAILED WORLD, CHARACTERS MUST CONTEND WITHIN THEIR NARRATIVES.

ESTÁ BIEN.

BEYOND THE NARRATIVE, THE AUDIENCE REFLECTS ON IT'S THEMES, EVENTS, AND THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES.

CHARACTER   HOPE   READER

YET BOTH HOLD HOPE, HOPE FOR THE SALVATION FROM THE DYSTOPIA, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER IT IS REAL OR FICTION.

AND SO READER AND CHARACTER...

AUTHORITARIANISM.

ARE LINKED THROUGH COMMON IDENTITY, CONTENDING WITH THE SAME THREAT.

The visual explores how hope acts as an avenue through which audiences can identify with the characters within dystopian narratives. Panels 2 and 3 represent how Engélibert's argument about dystopia is connected to the real world of the reader (314). Panel 4 cites hope as another

link, as Engélibert, Veysey-White, Moffett, Sharp, and others have pointed out its significance within dystopian narratives; this link is used to suggest a shared identity between readers and narrative characters. The remaining panels leverage this idea to demonstrate how this identity is influenced by authoritarian forces within dystopian comic narratives. Illustrations from left to right: panel from *V for Vendetta* (Moore and Lloyd), panel from *Un Fantasma* (Sanz Martínez), panel from *Scandorama* ,cover art for *Scandorama* (Taivassalo and Anyango), cover art for *Un Fantasma* (Sanz Martínez), cover art for *V for Vendetta* (Moore and Lloyd).

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"This paper is an excellent example of situating an original and complex main claim within established scholarly conversations. The clear organization and specific subclaims highlight the skillfully synthesized source material and foreground Harshitha's multifaceted analysis, which connects careful close readings of celebrity case studies to peer-reviewed scholarship on restrictive gendered expectations and political expression." – Haydee Smith

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"Shut Up and Sing": Societal Attitudes Toward Political Expression
by Prominent U.S. Female Musicians
By Harshitha Palacharla

Across eras of political unrest in the United States, American musicians have frequently ventured beyond their role as entertainers to engage in celebrity politics, in which a celebrity harnesses their reach and influence in Western consumer culture to shape the political sphere (Sanati 8). While celebrity politics has been thoroughly studied for its impact on public convictions/behaviors, there is little research investigating whether historical trends of female marginalization from politics are reflected in audience reception of political expression by female musicians (United Nations 6). Studying the nature of these societal attitudes over time, using politically vocal female musicians such as the Dixie Chicks and Taylor Swift as case studies, offers a promising method to assess whether female exclusion from an ostensibly democratic political sphere has been sustained, amplified, or deconstructed over time. Despite societal attitudes remaining largely critical of politically expressive female artists in the U.S. music industry, the social media revolution has yielded modern-day artists more professional and political success relative to their 2000s counterparts. To demonstrate requires first observing how modern-day civic engagement by Taylor Swift has fueled intense criticism—defined by gendered attacks on the musician's political competence and morality—that closely resembles both the public scrutiny endured by the Dixie Chicks in 2003 and records of female marginalization in politics. This leads to examining the role of the "public screen"—comprising traditional mass media channels (e.g., radio, journalism, television, etc.) characterized by one-

way communication and rapid information-dissemination—in giving power to such criticism (Adolphson 49). However, Swift's continued eminence in the music industry and influence on public political beliefs/behaviors contrasts the Chicks' career trajectory, opening discussion on social media offering today's female musicians' greater control to shape their own narrative independent from that of the public screen and to promote political messages to their audiences.

Demonstrating society's tendency to silence and censure women for expressing political beliefs, particularly when such beliefs are contentious, requires studying public reactions toward prominent female figures who have commented on controversial social issues. The Dixie Chicks and Taylor Swift match these parameters well and are thus the case studies of this discussion. For context, the past two decades have seen significant periods of political unrest in the United States, setting the stage for a surge in controversial celebrity politics, and with it, greater media coverage and public commentary. The Chicks, an all-female country music trio that reached massive success among late 1990s-early 2000s audiences, emerged with their first political statement in the charged atmosphere of the post-9/11 Iraq War. When Chicks' lead singer Natalie Maines denounced the war and the Bush administration's foreign policy during their 2003 national tour, her words quickly caused conservative outrage and repudiation as they propagated through television shows, radio channels, and newspapers (Pruitt 89). Likewise, amidst the highly partisan ambience of modern-day politics, Taylor Swift has repeatedly made headlines for vocalizing her liberal viewpoints on gender equality and elected representatives, beginning with 2018 Instagram post endorsing Democratic candidates in Tennessee's congressional elections (Smialek 104). The Chicks and Swift serve as good comparative case studies to assess how criticism toward politically vocal female musicians—which this study primarily assesses through news and opinion journalism—has changed over time, since both have roots in the country music genre, ties with conservative-leaning audiences, and clear time stamps marking their first political engagement (to serve as reference for tracking change over time). Given that much of the criticism toward Swift echoes what the Chicks have themselves experienced, studying the Chicks' past engagement with political expression is useful to understanding public receptiveness of Swift's modern-day politics. In turn, this offers a method to assess whether society has progressed toward welcoming female artists in political discourse.

Applying the method above suggests that political activism by modern-day female musicians is met with public criticism similar in nature to what artists in the 2000s faced, which

reflects a continued trend of excluding women from politics. Notably, both the Dixie Chicks and Taylor Swift have faced significant scrutiny questioning their political competence. Following the Chicks' critique of the Iraq War, conservative Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly reduced the trio to a group of "callous, foolish women… simply not smart enough to know what's going on" (Adolphson 50, 53). Other disapproving media commentators were quick to reinforce this degrading image of the Chicks, prompting the coining and subsequent public popularization of the phrase "shut up and sing" (Pruitt 90). The barrage of scathing commentary that faced the Chicks can be distilled to a singular, overarching message: that the trio was incompetent to discuss political issues and should leave such discussion to the "better informed." In other words, the criticism sought to put the Chicks back in their place, which was determined to be far removed from the political sphere.

Fifteen years later, Taylor Swift faced similar censure for her public opinions regarding political candidates and her progressive stances on LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality. Conservative media hosts and social media commentators have echoed their counterparts from the Dixie era, insisting that Swift "shut up and sing again" (Alfaro). Further, Fox News host Jeanine Pirro warned Swift, "Don't get involved in politics; we don't want to see you there" (Alfaro). These attacks are strikingly similar to the criticism the Chicks faced, going so far as to use the same rhetoric to challenge Swift's political competency and reduce her to a passive, unassertive entertainer. Indeed, such commentary echoes society's tendency to undermine females' ability to contribute meaningfully to political discourse. Survey responses from 1996 of registered voters in Indiana and Missouri demonstrates that women have historically been perceived to know less about politics than men, even in cases where both parties have similar "objective" political literacy (Mendez and Osborn 270). The study reveals society's disposition to discount women from political conversations due to an existing gap between their "objective" and "perceived" knowledge. This accounts for women's general marginalization from politics, and by extension, for the criticism that has undermined both the Chicks' and Swift's contributions to the political sphere.

In addition to being disparaged as politically incompetent, the Dixie Chicks and Taylor Swift have both been accused of immoral political messaging, and their characters have been called into question. Upon claiming their anti-war stance, the Chicks were promptly and

baselessly accused of "selling out the troops" (Adolphson 56). Thus, though they had only ever expressed disapproval towards the Bush administration's militaristic foreign policies, the Chicks' commentary was immediately linked to moral issues of patriotism and national loyalty. Their morality was yet again challenged after an *Entertainment Weekly* cover image, for which the Chicks had chosen to pose naked and were covered post-editing with various media labels, in a show of defiance against conservative criticism (Pruitt 92). However, the cover reignited backlash, and critics were quick to compare the Chicks' media tactics to the "perverse… m.o. of female rock stars: When in doubt, take off your clothes" (Pruitt 92). Hence, the Chicks were yet again undermined by being deemed sexually provocative, and thus unfit to voice opinions on matters as serious as war and foreign policy. Taylor Swift's character has been similarly slandered, with numerous allegations from both conservative and progressive critics accusing her music and social media statements of taking advantage of LGBTQ+ struggles for publicity (Smialek 100). In this manner, Swift was characterized as manipulative and disingenuous, and equated to callous capitalism. Though the primary allegations against Swift differ in context from what the Chicks frequently encountered, the underlying implication is the same: that the female artists' use of politics are immoral and insensitive.

The negative social critique of politically active female musicians is primarily sustained and disseminated by the public screen, firstly seen through distortions of the artists' political stances. This is particularly apparent with the media's then-portrayal of the Chicks' 2003 commentary. Chicks' member Natalie Maines had begun her statement by assuring their audience, "Just so you know, we are on the good side with y'all. We do not want this war, this violence" (Adolphson 52). However, *The Guardian*—which was the first to headline the commentary—chose to publicize only the second half of Maines' statement: "We are ashamed that the President of the United States is from Texas" (Adolphson 52). Though the Chicks' original message conveyed a rational rejection of violence, the public screen—in this case, embodied by the media outlet *Guardian*—chose to highlight and disseminate the most incendiary component of their comments. Thus, the Chicks' political stance was taken out of context, and the distorted message spread quickly and far from their control. Modern-day media has similarly distorted Taylor Swift's involvement in the political sphere. In January of 2024, Fox News host Jesse Watters characterized Swift as a "psyop": a key player in a plot to boost Joe Biden's voter base for the 2024 elections (Alfaro). Despite numerous denials from the Pentagon, and Swift

herself having made no indication of possible political endorsements, the allegation has taken deep root among conservative media outlets and their viewer base. Thus, taking advantage of its wide reach, the public screen has repeatedly used fallacy to negatively shape societal perceptions of Swift's politics and character, just as it did in 2003 against the Dixie Chicks.

Besides employing distortion, the public screen has also excessively utilized sexist rhetoric to discredit political expression by the Chicks and Swift, drawing from the existing perception that women are ill-suited for politics. While the media characterized the Chicks as "Dixie sluts," "traitors," and "big mouths" in response to their anti-war stance, similar commentary by country music star Willie Nelson drew more honorable descriptions of him as a "rebel" with "moral fiber" (Pruitt 88, 97; Adolphson 49). The public screen had cherry-picked and repeatedly used negative, sexual terminology for the Dixie Chicks, thus perpetuating the narrative that their point-of-view regarding the war was unreliable and unworthy. By contrast, a male counterpart who expressed intense criticism of the war was described as a revolutionary by the public screen, resulting in his political beliefs being respected, even by those who disagreed with his convictions. Taylor Swift has faced her own share of denigrating, media-disseminated rhetoric. Speaking from experience in an interview with *CBS Sunday Morning*, Swift reflected that while a man would be labeled "strategic" for taking a particular course of action, a woman would be labeled "calculating" (Walker). Swift's claim is evidenced by the term "psyop," mentioned earlier in this discussion, that has burgeoned within conservative media to characterize Swift's behaviors/politics as manipulative and re-define her as a partisan puppet. Further, echoing the sexist shaming directed toward the Chicks, a spokesperson for Donald Trump's 2024 campaign opined that "Taylor Swift has made a career off of writing songs about picking the wrong man, so I don't think we should take advice from her now" (Brown and Pollard). In this manner, the public screen has reduced Swift to a "serial dater," playing on denigrating stereotypes of women to diminish Swift's intellectual contributions to politics. Twenty years after Chick's controversial remarks, negative, misogynistic terminology remains in use by the public screen to devalue Swift's political expression.

However, despite facing similar criticism targeting their political literacy and morality, modern day female artists have nevertheless found more professional and political success relative to artists in the past. Namely, the Dixie Chicks suffered overwhelming backlash and

irreparable career damage because of their controversial, anti-war statements. In the years leading up to their climatic concert, the Chicks had catapulted to immense success in the country music industry. Indeed, their breakthrough 1998 album *Wide Open Spaces* attained quadruple platinum status, and the Chicks were soon declared the American Music Awards' Favorite New Country Artist (Pruitt 89). The success continued with *Home* (2002) reaching the top of Billboard's Top 200 Albums (Pruitt 89). However, Maine's statements—mass-circulated in the highly sensitive, politically charged ambience of 2003 America—put an end to the group's reign. Album sales plummeted, never again to reach the pre-2003 success (see Figure 1), and country music stations were banned by parent corporations from playing the trio's music (Adolphson 55). The Chicks' comments resulted in a very steep drop in their career trajectory, which they were unable to recover from. The loss of their celebrity influence also inevitably translated to immensely reduced influence regarding politics.

However, in sharp contrast to the Chicks, Swift's immense success in the music industry has remained steady following her 2018 entrance into celebrity politics, and she has made substantial political contributions since. Unlike the Chicks, whose music had been boycotted despite continued efforts to retract their political convictions, Swift's post-2018 albums have gone on to achieve consistent and considerable success in the U.S. market (see Figure 1). Of note, even Swift's politically charged releases are included in this success, and they have made immense strides in supporting progressive causes and social movements. For instance, her music video "You Need to Calm Down" (2019), which urged viewers to sign the Equality Act petition, rapidly accumulated more than 500,000 signatures in denunciation of sex-based discrimination (Stafford 60, 61; Iasimone). Hence, Swift has successfully used her music to demand legislative changes protecting the LGBTQ+ community's fundamental rights, through which she has garnered significant support from listeners. Further, her song "Only the Young" (2020) quickly transformed into a "protest song" for the Democratic Party, demonstrating Swift's success in channeling music to encourage civic engagement, particularly amongst her younger, historically under-targeted fan base (Driessen 1063).

Beyond indirect statements made through her music, Swift has also interacted directly with her fanbase to stimulate their engagement with political campaigns and elections. Such was the case with Swift's first ever political statement in 2018: an Instagram post endorsing Democrats Phil Bredesen and Jim Cooper for Congress over staunch Republican Martha

Blackburn, which resulted in more than 2 million people (about the population of Nebraska) liking the post, and "a spike of 65,000 new voter registrations—more [in the span of 24 hours] than had registered during the entire month of September that year" (Nisbett and Dunn 26). Despite Blackburn still winning the election, the mass voter registration reflects Swift's massive success in encouraging her audience to participate and pay attention to political issues. By contrast, the Dixie Chicks struggled to manage the backlash against their controversial statements, which rapidly spiraled into widespread devaluation of their political convictions and impeded them from leaving a positive legacy of their own in celebrity politics.

It could be argued that comparing the Dixie Chicks to Taylor Swift with regards to their political and professional successes overlooks the two artists' vastly different audience demographics. While the Chicks were country singers with a strongly conservative base, Swift–primarily a pop artist–has a progressive-leaning audience with 55% of her fans identifying as Democrats (Blancaflor and Briggs). Thus, it may be suggested that a comparison between the artists would be biased, as backlash against the Chicks for taking a progressive stance would inevitably be more substantial than any criticism Swift faces for her liberal convictions. However, despite recent shifts to her audience demographics, Swift's early roots in country music yielded her a significant conservative base, and she was initially glorified by white supremacist groups as an "Aryan goddess…. [with] innocence [and] virtuousness" embodying the far-right definition of white feminism (Prins 144). During her *Miss Americana* (2020) documentary, Swift reflected on the pressure from label executives to satisfy this sizable right-wing segment of her audience, and "not be like the Dixie Chicks" (Wilson). Thus, like the Chicks, Swift's initial foray into politics came at the risk of losing her conservative fan base—a fact well known to Swift herself as she was warned to not repeat the Chicks' "mistake" of seeking political expression at the expense of career. The striking similarities in the artists' rise as country musicians justifies comparison between the two and makes it more remarkable that while the Chicks lost most of their conservative audience with their political statement, Swift's fan base remains 23% conservative (Blancaflor and Briggs). Given the persistence of negative backlash against politically engaged female musicians, this calls into question what, then, has changed over the 15-year span that has granted Swift greater liberty in expressing her views.

Taylor Swift's success relative to that of the Dixie Chicks can be attributed to the social

media revolution. In 2003—prior to social media's 2004 popularization by virtue of Facebook and Myspace—the closest the Chicks had gotten to voicing their truth without external public screen intervention was through their "Stars and Strife" *Entertainment Weekly* cover story and a Primetime Thursday TV interview (Adolphson 48-49). However, not only were the sources still "shaped…by both the TV producers and magazine editors," but *Entertainment Weekly* responded on behalf of the Chicks to the criticism of their undressed posing, suggesting that the Chicks had ignored their publicists' concerns (Adolphson 48-49; Pruitt 92). Primarily, relying entirely on the media to share their side of the story meant that the Chicks were not given the chance to convey a raw, personal narrative independent from the public screen. The Chicks' side of the story was written in part by external influences, and even their decision to pose as they did was "explained" by a media entity, which regressed to gender stereotypes of female naivety upon suggesting that the Chicks had ignored expert advice. Consequently, despite the purpose of their cover image being to reject public criticism of their political expression, the Dixie Chicks had yet again been branded too incompetent to contribute meaningfully to politics. Maine would later go on to admit that she would have reworded her anti-war statement to be "very intelligent and well thought out," and did not want the public to see the group as sexually provocative (Pruitt 94). Thus, by the end, Maine was forced to accept the criticism of the Chicks' uneducated comments and immoral behavior, lending credibility to the public screen, and surrendering her influence as a celebrity politician in the process.

In contrast, social media has given Swift the ability to establish a personal narrative, preventing her from being silenced by the public screen in the way the Chicks had been, and yielding her the control to directly/indirectly respond to and reject criticism. Primarily, Swift's discussion of politics over her social media platforms has discredited attacks on her political competency and sincerity. In her Tumblr posts, Swift identified herself as an "ally" to the LGBTQ+ community and commented on the implications of systemic racism, thus demonstrating literacy on topics of social injustice and simultaneously refuting belittling media assertions that would claim otherwise (Smialek 104). Furthermore, Swift's 2018 Instagram post and *Miss Americana* (2020) documentary utilized passionate rhetoric in discussion of Tennessee's congressional elections, in which she detailed the Republican candidate's conservative stance on numerous progressive issues and directed her followers to voter registration resources (Smialek 104; Swift). Hence, by serving as a direct bridge between Swift

and her massive following, digital platforms, and other forms of self-produced media (e.g., the *Miss Americana* documentary) have offered Swift a wide-reaching means to reject unfounded criticism emphasizing her incompetence and disingenuity. Through social media, Swift has established a narrative of her own separate from the larger public screen, which the Dixie Chicks had been entirely dependent upon in 2003.

Furthermore, the direct interaction that social media facilitates between Swift, and her followers has elevated the artist's influence over her fans' political beliefs and behaviors. A communications analysis of Swift's 2018 Instagram post identified "parasocial attachment" as a significant contributor to the message's effectiveness, in which followers are more inclined to adopt celebrity beliefs by virtue of identifying with the celebrity on a personal level (Nisbett and Dunn 29; Verhulst 111). Social media has allowed Taylor Swift to connect with her fans not as a distant celebrity figure, but as a friend, thus making fans more receptive to her political arguments and willing to engage with social causes/movements that she has endorsed. Indeed, upon being asked how they perceived Taylor Swift as a person, fan interviewees in a separate study described her as "honest, humble, relatable, and involved"—traits which they identified as foundational to her credibility as a politically-involved celebrity (Driessen 1066). Furthermore, the fans had characterized their primary interaction with Swift as participation in the artist's online fandom, thus validating the critical role of social media in developing the celebrity-fan parasocial attachment identified by Nisbett and Dunn as critical to Swift's successful political endorsements/activism. Click et al. elucidates the mechanisms of parasocial relationships developed through social media, explaining that "closeness…created by two-way interaction and celebrities' online disclosure of personal information has blurred the boundaries that once separated 'real' and 'imaginary' relationships in traditional media" (367). The Chicks' political controversy had emerged when the aforementioned "traditional media"—characterized by the impersonal nature of the public screen—was dominant, preventing them from creating ties with the audience to the extent that Swift has been able to in the modern day. Thus, whereas the Chicks were distanced from their audience, leaving their damaged credibility and trustworthiness irreparable, Swift's sway over her fans' political convictions is intrinsically stronger by her use of social media.

From a purely historical and gender studies lens, society has long since normalized the

vilification of women who publicly voice their political opinions, thus consciously denying half of the U.S. population its right to freely contribute to democratic processes and discussions. This study demonstrates that such marginalization of women from the political sphere remains prominent in the modern day, as evidenced by the journalistic criticism of Taylor Swift's political expression that echoes similar censure endured by the Dixie Chicks in 2003. The continued public ostracism of politically vocal female artists reflects enduring perceptions of women as incapable of contributing meaningfully to social discourse, which have only been reinforced by the public screen's ongoing portrayals of musicians—the Chicks and Swift included—as incompetent and unethical. However, upon comparing the Chicks' disgraceful expulsion from the music industry to Swift's continued, illustrious career and political influence, social media emerges as a novel benefactor granting modern-day female musicians a platform to communicate their political beliefs directly to their audiences. Having offered Taylor Swift, the opportunity to reject false, media-disseminated narratives and influence her fans' political behaviors through parasocial attachments, social media presents a vital solution to the public-screen-mediated silencing of female celebrity politicians. Importantly, utilization of social media to communicate directly with fans—without interference from the public screen—requires committed engagement from the audience. Thus, in addition to identifying misogynistic media narratives that distort the political convictions, competency, and character of female artists, members of the public must prioritize direct interactions that grant female celebrities a voice in the greater political discourse. In this light, social media is by itself a tool, but when appropriately used, holds potential to overcome the centuries-long marginalization of females from participation in democratic discourse.

Figure 1. Change in Dixie Chicks' and Taylor Swift's rankings on "Best Selling Albums of the Year" charts, in time since their respective first major political statements.
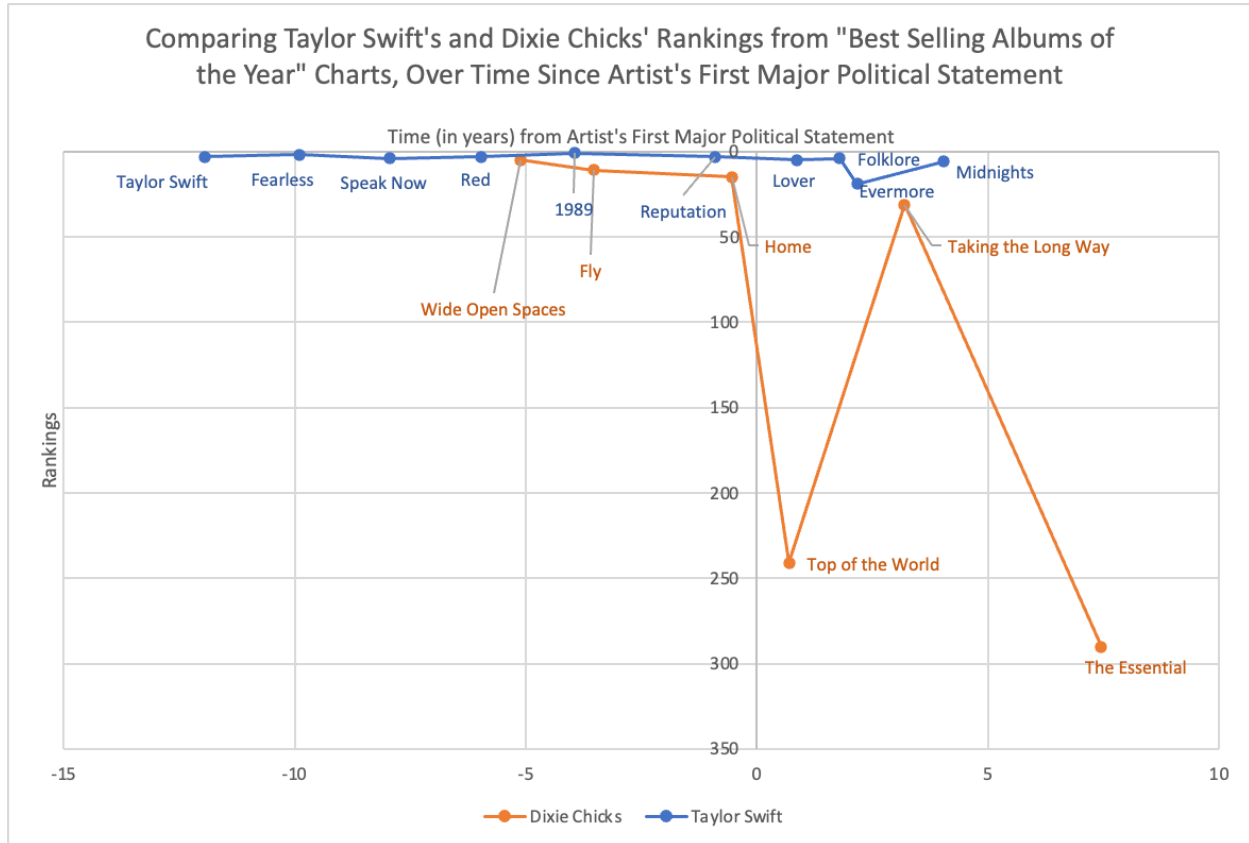
The above graph displays the correlation between the Dixie Chicks' and Taylor Swift's album sales, and the time since the artists' first major political statements. The Chicks' major political statement was their controversial commentary denouncing the Iraq War during a concert on March 10th, 2003 (Pruitt 89). Swift's first major political statement was her October 7th, 2018, political statement endorsing Democratic candidates for the Tennessee Senate race over Republican Marsha Blackburn (Smialek 104). The data indicates that while the Dixie Chicks' album sales fell dramatically following their commentary, Swift's albums found continued success in the market even after her formal entrance into politics. This supports the argument that the Chicks' political expression had a much more significant, negative impact on their career trajectory, relative to similar expression by Taylor Swift.

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"Karina did a wonderful job centering her paper around a complex, multi-dimensional and highly arguable main claim and integrating a strong body of scholarly evidence to support her arguments throughout. In addition to her writing, Karina included a visual element and accompanying descriptive caption that enhanced an important subclaim in her paper about Indigenous art forms and the ways they can reinforce and/or challenge colonial narratives."
– Kelly Silva

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Awareness, Authenticity, and Art: Indigenous Representation in Museums

By Karina Fong

Across the United States, museums serve to represent a diverse range of cultures through artwork exhibitions. For many museum-goers—an audience of varying backgrounds, ranging from young children to senior citizens—museums are the gateways to learning about not just other cultures, but of the museumgoers as well, especially if they are not well represented or educated on their own backgrounds. However, some cultural groups are not always accurately portrayed in museum spaces. For Indigenous peoples, who have historically been marginalized and undervalued in America, walking into a museum means being faced with art that enforces stereotypical depictions and outdated assumptions about their culture.

Throughout recent decades, there have been critical remarks on the inaccurate representation of Indigenous communities through art. Based on these criticisms, there have since been attempts by various museums to better this representation, in which curators simply include more Indigenous art pieces. Although the presence and amount of Indigenous art in museums has grown in recent years, this increase is not enough to authentically represent Indigenous communities, for there are still other influential aspects that are often overlooked and contribute to inauthentic representation. Such aspects are deeply rooted within colonial perspectives and practices that are both purposefully and unknowingly used, which include the contextual and structural design of exhibitions, viewers' preconceptions, and the lack of acknowledgement of Indigenous perspectives.

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If these aspects continue to be overlooked and unaddressed, Indigenous communities will continue to be inauthentically represented in museum spaces, leading to the promotion of false information to the public and the erasure of Indigenous culture. To strive towards more successful and genuine portrayal of Indigenous communities in art museums, museum curators should focus on increasing the proportionality of Indigenous artwork to other exhibitions, exhibiting current pieces from modern Indigenous artists, and incorporating Indigenous perspectives and stories. By implementing these practices into museum curation, both curators and viewers can improve their understanding of Indigenous culture and collaborate with Indigenous communities to bolster effective and authentic Indigenous representation through art in museums.

The inauthenticity of Indigenous representation stems from Westernized, colonial views, influencing the public with false notions and reinforced stereotypes about Indigenous communities as "primitive" symbols. As Native American art scholar John Paul Rangel details, The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA)—the only museum dedicated to displaying modern Native art—goes against the Westernized norm of only displaying "traditional" Indigenous art by redefining such pieces as "cultural art forms" and focusing exhibition showcases on modern Indigenous pieces. This contrasts with how most museums across America define Indigenous art into two categories: "traditional" and "contemporary" (40). These terms reflect a Western, colonial perspective on art, relating to European art-period categorizations. Paired with the fact that museums tend to only show "traditional" forms of Indigenous art, viewers are subjected to false views about Indigenous communities not being able to progress in society and perpetually being related to the past.

Indigenous artists in the modern-day are impacted negatively as well, in which they are discouraged from creating modern work. When museums mainly show "traditional" Indigenous pieces, a clear indication is given to modern Indigenous artists that those are the only types of pieces that are deemed acceptable. Joshua Miner, a film and media studies assistant professor with concentrations in Indigenous studies, adds to Rangel's points by stating that during the American Picturesque Tour (an art movement focusing on American nationalism and imperialism through landscape paintings), Indigenous artists were forced to work in Flatstyle—which consisted of cultural depictions of Indigenous life in two-dimensional perspective—and

artist George Catlin created paintings that consisted of Indigenous elements blurred into the background (Miner 88-89). Like the negative implications of the "traditional" label, the type of art presented in museums contains colonial background contexts that falsely reduce Indigenous communities to being "primitive." Flatstyle degraded Indigenous communities to being stuck in the past, visually evident by its two-dimensional perspective compared to European art styles involving three-dimensional perspective. In this sense, Indigenous artists were confined to representing themselves in one way, regardless of if they wanted to experiment with other styles or branch out with diverse ways to represent their culture. The artistic technique of Indigenous paintings also influenced the "primitive" stereotype of Indigenous communities, as evident by Catlin's techniques of purposefully painting Indigenous people and structures out of focus into the background. Both the art style and techniques that go into making Indigenous art, and thus the presentation of those pieces, expose viewers to erroneous views that Indigenous communities are incapable of progression and are an everlasting symbol of primitivism.

While some may argue that the influence and responsibility of authentic Indigenous representation should be prioritized on the content exhibited, specifically the type of Indigenous art, there are other aspects of Indigenous art exhibitions—ones that are often overlooked—that should be just as prioritized. Both the structural design of the exhibitions and the purposeful placement of the pieces are equally important in impacting Indigenous communities' representation and the messages conveyed to viewers. Associate professors Brenda Romanenko and Avner Segall, both with concentrations in museum curatorial practices and cultural communities, elaborate on this point with an example from a tape-recorded study they conducted which focused on three White middle school students and their conversations as they walked around the National Museum of the American Indian. In the study, the students critiqued the exhibition portraying Native American genocide, saying that they had difficulty reading and understanding the descriptions due to the darkness of the space and broadness of the information (Romanenko and Segall 149). While the content of the exhibition depicted truthful information about Native American genocide, the design of the exhibition diminished its significance and impact on Indigenous history. The exhibit itself can be unknowingly skipped by the museumgoer, conveying the message that the history of genocide can be blissfully ignored, while the darkness of the actual exhibition deters visitors from staying and educating themselves on those historical events. Moreover, the information presented was extremely broad about the

genocide events, omitting any indication of colonizer blame. The lack of information coupled with the physical qualities of the exhibition misinforms viewers, more drastically with school children, about the gravity of these historical events in Indigenous history, downplaying them as being insignificant to Indigenous communities.

Additionally, Kathleen Ash-Milby (associate exhibition curator) and Ruth B. Phillips (art history and Indigenous studies professor) discuss how the purposeful placement of pieces negatively impacts representation. Following the 2015 exhibition display of *The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, some criticized the inclusion of modern Indigenous art in an exhibition that focused primarily on historical works, in which the modern pieces were placed at the end of the exhibition hall (Ash-Milby and Phillips 37). The placement of the modern art pieces, both in conjunction with historical works and at the end of the exhibition, evoke the erroneous idea that to achieve authenticity, Indigenous artists need to always be connected to the past. This is harmful, as placing "traditional" and modern Indigenous artworks together in the same room maintains the damaging, Westernized view of Indigenous peoples needing to be "primitive" to be authentic and validated, when their authenticity comes from freely creating without any restriction. This purposeful placement also elicits the idea that modern Indigenous art is not as important or valued as historical works, further discouraging Indigenous artists from creating works that represent their current reality, feelings, and opinions. Similar to the structural design of exhibitions, the placement of Indigenous artworks in relation to other Indigenous pieces and the museum space itself has the power to create and distribute distorted meanings to both the public and Indigenous artists.

In addition to the physical aspects of the museum, the viewers of the exhibitions share just as much responsibility in impacting genuine portrayal of Indigenous peoples. In this sense, cognitive factors, specifically the viewers' preconceptions about modern Indigenous peoples and their unawareness of the issues Indigenous women face, are often overlooked in their effect on authentic Indigenous representation. In Trofanenko and Segall's case study that analyzed an exhibit that portrayed diverse "urban" Indigenous groups and their contributions to modern society, stereotypes regarding Indigenous appearances were questioned. One of the students commented that they knew of some Indigenous people who worked in the government, which prompted the other students to ask, "'And you believe [they are Indians]?'" and further comment

that "'they look less than what we think they ought to look like'" (Trofanenko and Segall 150-151). Within museums, there is a strong relationship between the exhibit, the curators, *and* the viewers; without the viewers, the museum's pedagogical purpose towards the public would be ineffective. Viewers come into museums with multiple preconceptions about Indigenous communities, and often, those preconceptions are developed from stereotypes and misunderstandings. In this case, the schoolchildren in the study built their preconceived notions from what they learned in the American education system, which failed to teach them about modern, current-day Indigenous peoples and instead focused on teaching about Indigenous peoples of the past. The segment of the comment "they ought to look like" clearly exemplifies that the students only knew Indigenous peoples as looking one certain way and "different" from the modern American norm. While the exhibition did accurately display modern Indigenous peoples, the students' preconceptions of Indigenous communities impacted how they believed the information presented, with some doubting the details of the exhibit because it went against what they already knew. Youth are in a prime stage of learning and development and are the new generation of change, thus the success of educating them on Indigenous communities, both in museums and in the classroom, is extremely important.

Furthermore, associate professors Karen R. Roybal and Santiago Ivan Guerra (both with concentrations in Chicana/o/x studies) highlight the fact that Indigenous women are usually left out of historical accounts of the Pueblo Revolt and constantly undervalued due to the missing and murder cases of Indigenous women going unreported (16-18). Historically, women have been misrepresented and undervalued in the art world due to White male dominance. Like viewers' misconceptions about modern Indigenous peoples, viewers' lack of education and awareness leads to misconceptions about Indigenous women, such as the false and sexist idea that they do not serve important roles in Indigenous communities. This erroneous belief prompts further inauthentic representation of Indigenous communities, and viewers may simply gloss over the importance of women subjects or artists in Indigenous artwork. A cycle of misinformation results, fueling inauthentic portrayal for Indigenous peoples, and doubt, ignorance, and refusal to believe for viewers.

Despite prevailing colonial practices and mindsets preventing Indigenous artists from fully representing themselves through art, some modern Indigenous artists are actively challenging these Westernized views with their work, but more importantly, shattering

stereotypes and expectations that viewers have about Indigenous communities. Roybal and Guerra concur with this claim with their analysis of Virgil Ortiz's exhibition *ReVOlution* (2018), in which his character, the Translator, is explained to be androgynous, relating to the two-spirit belief within Indigenous communities (19). Coming from an Indigenous background, Virgil Ortiz deeply connects with his Pueblo roots and represents his cultural pride through his artworks. Throughout his life, he has worked with multiple mediums and incorporated science-fiction themes into his work, and in this exhibition, he focuses on futuristic costume and character design in a Pueblo context. *ReVOlution* also relates to the historical event of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, an event in which the Pueblo people rose against Spanish colonization, which is not often taught or talked about. By fusing historical events from his Indigenous culture with futuristic sci-fi concepts, Ortiz confidently defies the "primitive" stereotype of Indigenous art and educates his audience on the significant yet under-talked historical event. Through his use of historic elements from Pueblo culture, Ortiz establishes his unique and authentic stance as an Indigenous artist to illustrate a hopeful and proud Indigenous future. Furthermore, his choice of making his character "The Translator" androgynous actively challenges Westernized conceptions and beliefs of only two genders (male and female). In this case, Ortiz relates androgyny to the two-spirit belief within Indigenous communities, which authentically represents Indigenous cultural views of gender and sexuality, educates the public on these views, and challenges the Western heteronormative perception of Indigenous peoples.

 The New York Times art critic Jason Farago provides another example of modern Indigenous artists challenging colonial stereotypes, in which he analyzes how the Indigenous artists at the Gagosian exhibit obscure the fluctuating cultural meanings and contexts of their paintings through the use of patterns (4). Visually, the purposeful use of abstraction challenges the conventional, clear-meaning nature of Western art, and the personal, artistic choice of abstraction evokes the unique and original voice of Indigenous artists. Compared to the paintings in Flatstyle, which stereotypically depicted Indigenous communities as being "primitive" and unable to progress, the Gagosian exhibition paintings depict the ever-changing characteristics of Indigenous culture through a modern and abstract lens, which challenges viewers' typical beliefs and preconceptions about Indigenous art (see Figure 1). These paintings also emphasize the autonomy of Indigenous artists, in which they have created artworks without conforming to

Western pressures on Indigenous communities and art styles. Much alike to Ortiz and his artistic freedom as a proud Pueblo artist, the Indigenous artists behind the works at the Gagosian exhibition are not afraid to challenge Western beliefs and stereotypes by uniquely and freely representing their culture through their artwork.

To move forward with more effective and authentic representation of Indigenous communities, proportionality of Indigenous artwork to other exhibitions, incorporation of more modern Indigenous artworks, and inclusion of Indigenous communities in the museum curation process should all be incorporated into museum practices. An example of proportionality and modernity in effect is in Ortiz's *ReVOlution* exhibition, which, as detailed by Roybal and Guerra, spans the entirety of three large rooms; the first one explained the history of the Pueblo Revolt, the second consisted of costumes pertaining to "Indigenous futurist display," and the third showcased Ortiz's documentary process (5-6). In terms of proportionality, Ortiz's exhibition covers much more physical space than other exhibitions that showcase Indigenous art. Often, such exhibitions are dedicated to a small room or off to the side. The fact that Ortiz's exhibition takes not only one room, but three whole rooms, indicates the importance and significance of his work and culture. Because of its large size, Ortiz's exhibition has the capacity to encompass a multitude of educational opportunities and Indigenous representational features that would otherwise be limited within a small room sectioned off for Indigenous art. For instance, the sheer amount of space in his exhibition allows for history segments, the background context of the artwork, and the artist's story to all be presented and showcased to the public for pedagogic purposes. Moreover, the fact that *ReVOlution* is Ortiz's solo exhibition strongly indicates his strength in authentically representing himself and his cultural community. All the artworks presented are Ortiz's own modern creations, and more importantly, they are all reflections of himself as a member of the Pueblo community and his challenging positions on Western beliefs and practices. Adding on, an example of Indigenous inclusion is described by museum curator Nadine Panayot, in which museum curators from the Pitt Rivers Museum at The University of Oxford collaborated with Indigenous volunteers who loaned cultural items and wrote labels that included their perspectives, leading to first-person representations of Indigenous communities (499). When it comes to displaying Indigenous art, most major art museums and institutions do not consult Indigenous communities in the curating and display process. This leads to inaccuracies in portraying Indigenous peoples, which domino effects into misrepresentation and

misinformation. As exemplified in the evidence, these problems can easily be avoided by including Indigenous communities in the process of displaying Indigenous artwork. The Pitt Rivers Museum's decision to display cultural items that members from Indigenous communities willingly lent, as well as have the members themselves write about those pieces from their own perspectives, exemplifies the importance of mutual agreement, trust, and collaboration between the museum curators and Indigenous peoples.

Another viewpoint to consider about including Indigenous perspectives is using Indigenous ways of thinking in the curation process, such as TribalCrit and Sāmoan cultural practices, which increase the effectiveness of authentic Indigenous representation. According to Rangel, Tribal Critical Race Theory focuses on colonization as the main factor behind "the imbalances of power relating to Native arts representation and knowledge production," and it does this by using Indigenous cultural practices (38-39). TribalCrit is a narrowed-down version of the more general Critical Race Theory, in the sense that it specifically focuses on combating issues impacting Indigenous communities using Indigenous ways of thinking. Compared to using Western colonial perspectives, implementing TribalCrit into museum curatorial practices ensures that Indigenous voices will be showcased and heard in the curatorial process of artworks representing their culture. TribalCrit also uses Indigenous perspectives to analyze and critique the effectiveness of Indigenous community representation in artwork. Sāmoan author Léuli Māzyār Luna'i Eshrāghi describes an example of how Sāmoan cultural practices were used in the Indigenous exhibition *Pōuliuli,* emphasizing how the Sāmoan concepts of "Fale Faitautusi (archive/reading room) and Fa'āliga ata (exhibition/display)" were implemented into the exhibition (248). These concepts from Sāmoan culture fully ground viewers in Sāmoan culture and perspective, with the archive/reading room serving informational and educational purposes of Indigenous history and experiences through archival documentation material. Together, both the archive/reading room and exhibition/display draw viewers in to stay and fully immerse themselves in Sāmoan culture through various forms of media.

By implementing Indigenous mindsets and concepts in the creation of Indigenous exhibitions, viewers are subjected to extremely authentic representations and accurate educational material of Indigenous communities. When considered and combined– proportionality, modernity of Indigenous artwork, and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in

museum curation– Indigenous communities can be more authentically represented by museum spaces. Ideally, creating exhibitions the size of Ortiz's multiple-room exhibition, having the majority of the artwork be displayed from modern Indigenous artists (similar to Ortiz's body of work), and including their cultural perspectives, stories, and insights through the physical display and creation of informational panels decreases problems of misrepresentation and misinformation. Centering the museum and exhibition space around Indigenous artists is the key element in uplifting their voices, educating the public with correct information, and representing Indigenous peoples with cultural and respectful accuracy.

Inauthentic representation in art museums is an issue that continues to negatively affect Indigenous peoples, posing a great risk to the erasure of Indigenous culture and community. While the issue has been addressed by including more Indigenous artwork in exhibition spaces, this alone does not solve misrepresentation completely. There are multiple other variables that account for the lack of authentic Indigenous representation in museums, and some are not as prioritized as they should be. One of the main driving influences is Westernized, colonial mindsets, which are either knowingly or unknowingly used when displaying and curating Indigenous artworks. These colonial mindsets lead to stereotypical beliefs of "primitivism" that translate into periodical labels and the type of art displayed, resulting in the stereotype of Indigenous communities perpetually staying in the past to prove themselves as "authentic." Westernized perspectives also negatively influence the physical qualities of exhibitions (such as the lighting and information presented), the placement of modern Indigenous artworks in relation to "traditional" ones, and viewers' preconceived notions and lack of awareness. These aspects can skew both the viewers' and Indigenous artists' perceptions of Indigenous communities and create fallacious perspectives, further resulting in inauthentic Indigenous representation. Despite these negative influences, modern Indigenous artists are actively challenging these colonial mindsets and perspectives and initiating more accurate representation of their communities. Ortiz's exhibition *ReVOlution* and the paintings exhibited in the Gagosian exhibit are both modern examples of Indigenous defiance of the stereotypical views imposed on them, and both have yielded accurate portrayal of current Indigenous peoples.

Authentic Indigenous representation can be further improved by actively increasing the proportionality of Indigenous artwork to other exhibitions, incorporating more modern Indigenous artists and their work as opposed to purely historical works, and including Indigenous

artists' voices, stories, and criticism in the curation process and the actual exhibition itself. When considered together, these factors allow for the accurate portrayal of Indigenous communities, which results in the public being more accurately informed about Indigenous peoples and their cultural values. Fully acknowledging colonial history and being educated on unintentional cases of Westernized mindsets are the first main steps that museum curators should take to authentically represent Indigenous communities. Equally as important, museum curators should focus on all three factors– increasing the size of Indigenous art exhibitions, displaying more artworks from modern Indigenous artists, and working actively with Indigenous groups. In tandem, these steps give Indigenous artists a much deserved and valuable space to express themselves to the world, educate mass audiences with correct information on Indigenous communities and culture, and improve in breaking harmful stereotypes surrounding Indigenous communities. Through these actions, museum curators can strive to represent Indigenous communities accurately and respectfully through Indigenous perspectives, rather than outdated and misrepresentative colonial views, and give these groups and artists the platform and space they deserve.

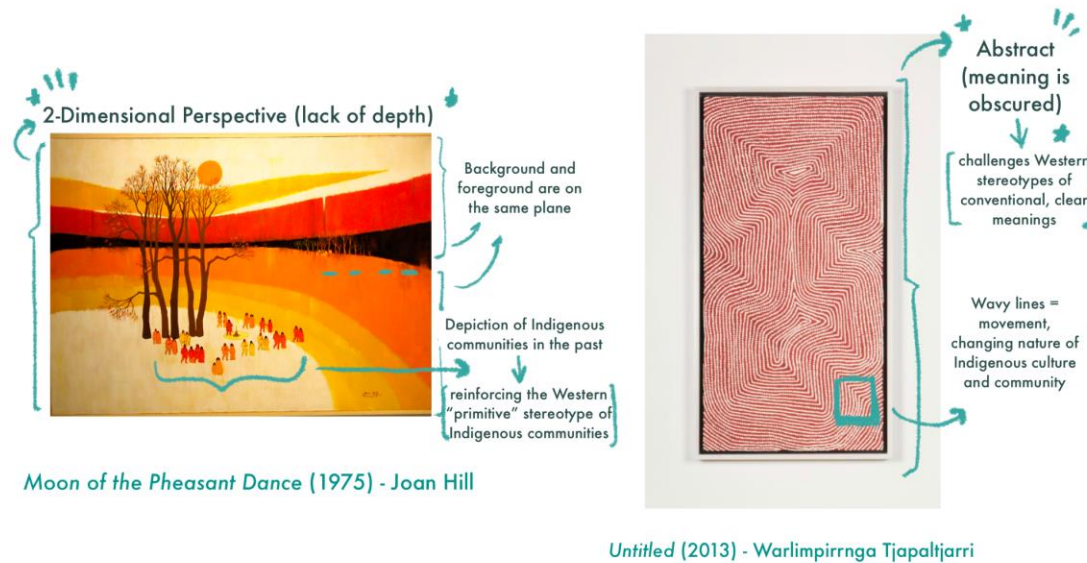## Figure 1: Flatstyle vs. Abstraction in Indigenous Art

Figure 1: On the left, *Moon of the Pheasant Dance* (1975), a painting in Flatstyle created by Indigenous artist Joan Hill, depicts the signature lack of depth, evident by the 2-dimensional perspective and overall "flatness" of the piece (specifically, the background and foreground are on the same plane instead of being dimensionally separate from each other) (Miner 88). Additionally, the scene depicted is of Indigenous communities in the past, enforcing the "primitive" stereotype. On the right, *Untitled* (2013), a painting created by modern Indigenous artist Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri for the Gagosian exhibit, depicts the abstractness and obscured meaning of the cultural context (Farago 4). Compared to Hill's piece, there is no explicit clear meaning, which challenges Western norms and stereotypes of Indigenous art always having a clear meaning and representing the past. The wavy lines represent movement and the changing nature of Indigenous culture, further challenging the colonial mindset of Indigenous peoples staying static and not being able to progress.

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"Magnolia presents a compelling and extremely well-written argument against the commodification of Hawaiian culture. Her clear organization and skillful synthesis of source material demonstrate her impressive research capabilities and strong analytical skills, making her work a significant contribution to our understanding of this important issue." – Laurie Nies

Cultural Branding: The Opposition to Indigenous Hawaiian Cultural Survivance

By Magnolia Hyon

Everything is a product. Or, at least, has the capacity to become one. The modern landscape of consumption has diversified such that consumers not only buy goods and services, but ideas and experiences. No industry is as exemplary of this demand for the intangible as the tourism industry, a historically privileged and exploitative European tradition which began as bourgeois tweens spending their youths traveling with a tutor or family member for educational purposes. Today, the tourism industry is an economic powerhouse, valued higher than world military spending at around $4.4 trillion (Liu 1). Though the practice has become more accessible to middle and lower middle-class people, accommodations and transportation significantly more advanced, and destinations diversified from the earliest days of tourism, its original flaws persist. Destinations and tourists participate in an inherently asymmetrical relationship, where the former must generously host the latter to benefit. Economies that rely on tourism, then, must maintain an almost mythical appeal to ensure that consumers believe they cannot do anything or travel anywhere else to get the experience that their destination offers, which is especially difficult in the globalized digital age. Instrumental in maintaining tourist appeal, then, has been "cultural branding." Tourist destinations will purposely consolidate and simplify the authentic culture of the region into specific icons or objects, increasing the destination's recognizability and desirability as a product. Such commodification can be problematic in its ontological implications but becomes urgently problematic as a weapon of cultural genocide. Indigenous communities are extremely vulnerable to domination by the tourism industry, as their ways of life are often romanticized as being primal or pure, and thus the perfect tourist escape to the Westernized or Eurocentric imagination. Hawai'i and its Indigenous people, the Kanaka Maoli, suffer from what is the most extreme example of

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Indigenous culture exploitation by the tourism industry. There is no brand like the Hawaiian brand, which is unparalleled in its exemplary use of Kanaka Maoli culture to galvanize the archipelago as home of the world's most iconic tropical getaway.

Hawaiian tourism capitalizes on Indigenous Hawaiian culture through the commodification of culturally significant language, places, and knowledge, which perpetuates the historical cultural genocide of Kanaka Maoli by corporations and the government for the benefit of American colonialism. Although the Hawaiian tourism industry and cultural preservation movements have some overlapping interests, employing "cultural branding" to simultaneously encourage tourism and preserve Kanaka Maoli culture promotes cultural erasure and should not be pursued as a solution to the issue.

Modern corporate branding is a body of advertising that establishes a company and its product as exemplifying a few distinct, desirable qualities in the minds of the public. By projecting a carefully crafted image through public relations, companies maximize their recognizability and appeal to consumers. A key quality of effective branding is simplicity, since high impact, uncomplicated ideas like Nike's "Just Do It" or Apple's sleek, minimalist product design have become cultural icons in their memorability. People strive to identify with Nike's bold grit or Apple's futuristic visions, namely by buying their products.

Cultural branding, then, leads to the overgeneralization of Kanaka Maoli culture since the process of making a brand inherently requires a simple, well-defined body of brand-related content, which is not conducive to complexity. Kanaka Maoli culture is generalized by the tourism industry as beautiful, welcoming, and mysterious, the perfect host for an unforgettable vacation experience. This perspective is exemplified by University of Hawaii professor Juanita Liu, who indicates that the Hawaiian brand is "the familiar word 'Aloha,' along with the universally recognizable symbol of the hula dancer" (Liu 5). Aloha is much more than a Hawaiian greeting, much in the same way hula is much more than a dancer in a coconut shell bra and grass skirt. Aloha, as Kanaka Maoli scholar and professor at the University of Hawai'i Haunani-Kay Trask describes it, is a spiritual connection to the land and people one is from and among. It is a profound sentiment of love, and traditionally reserved for those in one's family. Trask contests that the spiritual value of Aloha is lost as it is adopted into the Hawaiian brand, cheapened to "sell everything from cars… to air conditioning" (23). As an example, see Figure 1

in the Appendix, an analysis of the Hawaiian Airlines logo and mascot. Liu does not mention that the brand acknowledges these complexities, rather that people can see and recognize such symbols as "Hawaiian," which suggests a shallow, one-dimensional understanding of Kanaka Maoli culture by scholars in the tourism industry field of study. Liu, like other experts at the helm of the tourist industry, is not incentivized to honor Kanaka Maoli spirituality or thinking, since their goals are to create effective marketing and not to preserve Kanaka Maoli culture. When repurposed for branding, a culturally significant symbol or idea is distilled for its simplest, most attractive parts, and its then empty facade misappropriated with the goal of promoting consumption. Therefore, allowing the tourism industry to streamline "authentic Hawaiian culture" into a brand identity would deprive other unique symbols of Kanaka Maoli of their cultural significance.

As in the example of Aloha, the Hawaiian brand can only encompass cultural content that can be physically consumed, which excludes much of the knowledge and spiritual beliefs that constitute the core of Kanaka Maoli culture. This loss is an especially cruel, oppressive aspect of cultural genocide, as it destabilizes the very ways in which Kanaka Maoli see themselves and each other. Kanaka Maoli scholar Shannon Pōmaikaʻi Hennessey examines cultural insecurity in her fellow Kanaka Maoli, observing how individuals will judge others based on their appearances and the quantity of their "Hawaiian experiences" (1-3). These experiences, like learning hula or knowing how to fish, are all the stereotypical "Hawaiian" ideals established by colonizer forces like the tourism industry, which is not a coincidence. Kanaka Maoli scholar Lisa Kahaleole Hall agrees with Hennessy, suggesting there is no Kanaka Maoli control over "the meaning of the 'Hawaiian' identity" (404). Hall explains that the "Hawaiian identity" is deeply rooted in connection to "a genealogical relationship to 'aumakua (ancestral spirit), ʻāina (the land), and kānaka (other Hawaiians)," which is a far cry from the checklist imposed by colonizer definitions of the Hawaiian brand (405).

Much like other Indigenous cultures, Kanaka Maoli beliefs venerate nature and family. These values are instilled in the language, parts of the natural world, and within various art forms like craftsmanship and dance. These core aspects of Kanaka Maoli culture are erased when sacred icons and objects are distilled into stereotypes for branding purposes. The specificity of the criteria for being "Hawaiian," then, is divisive, indicative of how colonizer attempts to define and streamline a definition for a human culture force the people identifying with that very culture

to streamline themselves to continue existing as Hawaiian. Overgeneralizations of cultures, especially like in the example of the Kanaka Maoli, are the result of the erasure of the non-consumable aspects of a culture, which lead to widespread misunderstandings of the people and ideas associated with it and internal strife for those who identify with it.

To prevent misappropriation and commodification, implementing copyright laws may potentially restrict the usage of the Kanaka Maoli cultural brand by non-Indigenous artists or corporations, which could restore Indigenous control over Indigenous cultural content. Nina Mantilla, a 3L at American University Washington College of Law, writes that a "sui generis" model of legal cultural protection, like those established in New Zealand and Panama, would even protect the intangible, spiritual aspects of Kanaka Maoli culture (31). *Sui generis* is Latin for "of its own kind," alluding to the unique features of *sui generis* legal protections, like how in Panama the indigenous cultural materials are specifically prevented from being used commercially or in New Zealand where "high quality" Maori art is trademarked for protection (Mantilla 32). However, the establishment of Kanaka Maoli culture as a brand undermines its intrinsic value, since the conversion of the culture to a legally protected monolith of specific content designates it as an object. Much in the same way the tourism industry argues that cultural branding is a lifeline of "heritage preservation and cultural revival" but facilitates erasure through the very act of defining the brand, the potential legal protections for that brand would simplify, cheapen, and erase Kanaka Maoli culture (Liu 5). In a court case between a Kanaka Maoli photographer and a non-native artist who used the image as a reference without permission, the court "ruled on the narrow issue of protectable elements within the photograph," showing how in a legal setting, the spiritual meaning of Kanaka Maoli culture is lost and that it is reduced to just a thing to be used (Mantilla 31). Though this legal loss occurred under the current, notoriously weak United States copyright laws, it is indicative of a consumerist mode of thought inextricable from American legislation. It is simpler to designate protections on tangible things, like property or physical possessions, because the law can easily punish somebody for theft or trespassing. A legally protected object is designated as "mine" or "yours," an entity with specific, rigid boundaries. Trying to apply principles of possession to an entire culture is an absurd venture, verging on inhumane in its explicit objectification and commodification of something that is intrinsically intangible and communal. Where *sui generis* protections would

supposedly "creat[e] rights that last indefinitely and [require] prior informed consent from the traditional owners before third-party use is permitted," there are plenty of examples in other, similarly commercialized fields in the U.S. where Indigenous consultation is legally required but wealthy, powerful corporations do not heed it (Mantilla 33). If industries like mining, oil drilling, renewable energy, and agriculture disregard legal protections on Indigenous land authority, there is no reason to believe protections on something even less tangible like cultural content would make a meaningful impact.

Moreover, these protections would have little effect on the already well-established image of Kanaka Maoli culture in the public imagination. For example, Trask writes that Kanaka Maoli is seen as being beautiful, vital, and sexually available (28). This image has been drilled into consumer's minds via travel industry advertising and popular culture for decades. If the recognizability of the hula dancer as a symbol of Hawaiian-ness, even among the other Polynesian cultures that practice similar styles of dance, indicates anything, it is that the way the world has learned to see something is not easily changed. Furthermore, even if Kanaka Maoli could broadcast an authentic, culturally accurate image with the pervasiveness of current advertising, the simple fact that it would not have mainstream appeal would mean it would be unlikely to gain traction in the public imagination. As mentioned, there is a reason the tourism industry does not do so. Even if Kanaka Maoli were given legal rights to protect their culture under copyright as Mantilla suggests, it would not change the minds of foreigners. The limited power returned to Kanaka Maoli through legal cultural protections would only serve to further confine it and falsely ease tensions in the fight for Kanaka Maoli cultural ownership. A human culture is not an object but is treated like one as it is rigidly defined by a court of its colonizers.

Cultural branding encourages misappropriation of Kanaka Maoli culture because as the culture is converted into a brand, people are encouraged to live the brand lifestyle. Living a "brand lifestyle" is an increasingly popular phenomenon in which consumers will identify with a brand, buy its products, and live their lives embodying as many as the brand's ideals as possible, becoming a polished, well-defined product themselves. Such associations are desirable as assuming a brand lifestyle can establish an individual's social standing and strengthen their own self-identity. For example, athleticwear brand Lululemon promotes health and wellness beyond just selling thin, stretchy pants. A woman that embodies the Lululemon lifestyle is trendy, fit, and beautiful, a desirable and successful participant in the modern world. This marketing method

is almost insidious in how extremely effective it is at luring individuals into commodifying themselves. However, it is just that: an individual choice. Troubling, then, is when the Hawaiian brand poses this choice to non-Kanaka Maoli. As Trask says, the tourism industry would like consumers to think that if one "just move[s] to Hawai'i… [they] too can be 'Native,'" suggesting that tourists are encouraged to take on the Kanaka Maoli identity (28). Foreigners, by embodying brand ideals like the "aloha spirit" or by attending an "authentic" luau, are living the "Hawaiian lifestyle." Liu even suggests that the "genuinely welcoming, sincere, and celebratory" qualities of Kanaka Maoli culture are the reasons why the brand is so successful. Indeed, the Hawaiian tourist is comforted by the tourism industry's appropriation of Hawaiian hospitality. They are liberated from Western drudgery, relaxed on "island time," and powerful in the indulgence of it all. By successfully embodying the brand, anyone can become "Hawaiian." However, the tourism industry, by using culturally significant aspects of Kanaka Maoli culture to generate income, is participating in cultural misappropriation. Brand loyalty culture should never be used to generate interest in a human culture.

When creating a brand, the corporation must carefully tailor their image to best appeal to a specific audience, using visuals, symbols, and rhetoric that their intended customers will identify with or find attractive. For the Hawaiian brand, mainland Americans are the biggest customer base, so the Hawaiian brand aims to cater to mainland American interests. Though this is a broad category, Americans hold mostly Eurocentric tastes and perspectives, so generally aligning with Eurocentric ideas of beauty, excitement, and exoticism has been the most successful branding strategy for appealing to as many potential intranational tourists as possible. For this reason, cultural branding does not offer holistic protections for Kanaka Maoli culture against erasure, especially since it would erase non-Eurocentric conforming aspects of Kanaka Maoli culture. According to Trask, Kanaka Maoli ideas of communal child-rearing, open sexual relationships, and non-blood relatives are lost under Eurocentric governing systems, which would not be changed by the adoption of a cultural brand or protection under copyright laws (27). These practices deserve to exist because of their cultural relevance yet are prevented from continuing by the very systems that claim to have the most authority to preserve them, like the tourism industry and the U.S. legal system. There is no way to copyright the idea of spiritual familial ties or a way to add open sexual relationships to the family-friendly, Eurocentric

Hawaiian cultural brand. As Mantilla explains, Indigenous crafts can be protected by copyright laws, but in no case does she show concrete examples of how less tangible, non-Eurocentric conforming aspects of the culture can be preserved under such laws (27). Alternatively, if the tourism industry was tasked with preserving and maintaining non-Eurocentric conforming aspects of Kanaka Maoli culture, it would not perform sufficiently as there is little monetary incentive to fight for legislation permitting the practice of traditional Kanaka Maoli communal child rearing or the legal recognition of non-blood relatives. There is no place in the modern concept of a brand for ideas that genuinely alienate the current legal system or mainstream thinking.

Importantly, cultural branding benefits non-Indigenous people more than it does Kanaka Maoli as the existing cultural brand of Hawai'i brings more money to the tourism industry than to Indigenous people. As of writing in 1991, Trask contends that one in five Kanaka Maoli are "near homelessness," or so financially unstable that any change to their income would result in them living on the streets (25). This legacy continues in the modern era as recent as 2013 since Saba Behjati Kam et al. explain "Native Hawaiians have lower per capita income and are more likely to be living below the poverty line than the rest of Hawai'i's population," with a poverty rate of 13.5% compared to the state's overall 9.5% (Kam 30). Though Kanaka Maoli culture draws upwards of $3 billion (about $9.2 per person in the US) to the island from tourists spending on entertainment and educational experiences, most Kanaka Maoli see truly little of it (Liu 5). As Jerome Agrusa et al. explain, there is an income disparity between Kanaka Maoli and the hospitality industry within the tourism industry (5). While wealthy hotels and other legal vacation rental companies can fight the Airbnb owners in court or expand their property holdings, residents must simply contend with less housing (Agrusa et al. 5). Where cultural branding has attracted many non-Kanaka Maoli to live in the state, only wealthy real estate companies benefit. Due to popular demand, Kanaka Maoli are further exiled from their ancestral land.

This imbalance is exacerbated by the fact that the existing cultural brand is colonizer-controlled as opposed to Kanaka Maoli controlled. Colonizer controlled propaganda, like the brochure Trask analyzes, appeals to colonizer fantasies rather than faithfully representing Kanaka Maoli culture, which encourages misunderstandings and further appropriation (28). People come to the island for vacation, promised authentic Kanaka Maoli culture by the

manicured images and alluring ideas advertised by the tourism industry. Kanaka Maoli is paid to perform and serve at tourism industry establishments, but, unsurprisingly, the industry makes the most money from the transaction. Additionally, with the success of the industry in establishing itself as the most viable option for unskilled and low-level employment, Kanaka Maoli allow colonizer control of Indigenous narratives without major opposition. As Trask puts it, "as colonized people, we are colonized to the extent that we are unaware of our oppression," demonstrating the extreme lengths at which colonizer control of Kanaka Maoli culture and the Hawaiian cultural brand have been normalized and accepted (Trask 29). Colonizer advertisers do not account for Kanaka Maoli interests, but appeal to a mainstream audience for their own monetary gain.

Hawaiian cultural branding alienates Kanaka Maoli from their own culture, exhibited by the common phenomenon of Kanaka Maoli questioning their identities as "Hawaiian." Though corporate branding encourages individuals to strengthen their personal identities by adopting brand traits and values, such lifestyle adjustments are superficial, requiring consumers to change their physical appearance or performatively participate in brand-endorsed activities. With something as personal as a rich, ancestrally defined body of traditions and beliefs as a human culture, narrowly defining it for marketing purposes would serve a critical blow to the self-esteem and identity of individuals belonging to that culture. Hennessey, through research of and interviews with Kanaka Maoli, suggests many do not identify with the generalized blanket term "Hawaiian" as constructed by the tourism industry (Hennessy vi; Hall 404). Though some Kanaka Maoli capitalize on their cultural brand to increase Kanaka Maoli visibility and solidarity, these efforts are dwarfed by those using the brand to increase tourism industry success and enhance tourist experiences. In "Projecting an Image and Expressing Identity: T-shirts in Hawaii," Marjorie Kelley explains that Kanaka Maoli uses graphic trees to promote authentic Kanaka Maoli culture (193). However, these representations have done little to truly bring change or awareness to the islands due to the more powerful messaging of the tourism industry. As tourists and Kanaka Maoli alike internalize Kanaka Maoli culture as defined by the cultural brand, the spiritual and traditional depths of the culture are lost. As explained, Kanaka Maoli, through the lens of the brand, see themselves as needing to fulfill certain rigidly defined requirements for Hawaiian-ness to be considered Hawaiian (Hennessey 1-3). It is likely that even

representing themselves with culturally relevant paraphernalia like T-shirts is just an extension of that confinement. This complicated relationship of Kanaka Maoli disdain for and active participation in cultural branding is indicative of how powerfully pervasive hegemonic thinking can be, especially in the lives of the marginalized and oppressed. The spectrum of traumatic Kanaka Maoli interaction with cultural branding indicates that a human being cannot base their sacred, personal self-identity on something as shallow as a brand.

Cultural branding is an inhumane extension of modern corporate branding principles applied to human cultures. In the case of Indigenous Hawaiians, Kanaka Maoli, the cultural brand employed by the state's tourism industry to attract business is a weapon of cultural genocide and should not be pursued as a solution to historical Kanaka Maoli cultural erasure. But what, then, is the solution? The generational oppression of Kanaka Maoli and their constant struggle against it is a continuously evolving conflict. With every outlet for human expression, from fashion to advertising to social media, there is a new battleground for Kanaka Maoli to protest their culture's appropriation and erasure. In the digital age, Kanaka Maoli makes their voices most heard online, through pages on Instagram or TikTok run by groups like ʻĀina Momona or individuals like Melemaikalani Makalapua Mae Auwae McAllister. Aligned with Kanaka Maoli scholars like Trask or community leaders like Walter Ritte, they use their online presences to promote ideas and traditions of cultural significance, commemorate or endorse other Kanaka Maoli activists, and speak out against tourism. Tourism is the catalyst of much of the degradation of natural spaces, endangerment of indigenous species, and erasure of Kanaka Maoli culture, so it is no wonder there is loud Kanaka Maoli opposition to the continuation of the industry on the islands. Instead of tourism, Kanaka Maoli activists advocate for total decolonization and land repatriation, returning to indigenous ways of subsistence. Though this is not necessarily a majority opinion shared by Kanaka Maoli, it is the approach most well equipped to address and rebuild Kanaka Maoli culture after its widespread erasure at the hands of the tourism industry for use as brand content.

Figure 1: A brief analysis of the Hawaiian Airlines logo and mascot, using the differing testimonies of the company and Kanaka Maoli scholar, Haunani-Kay Trask, to describe the use of indigenous imagery in corporate branding.

Hawaiian Airlines:
"Pualani, with her welcoming smile and proud gaze, embodies our culture even more clearly"
- Identifies with a Kanaka Maoli woman
- Stereotyped as beautiful and generous

Haunani-Kay Trask:
"Hawaii itself is the female object of degraded and victimized sexual value."
- Indigenous woman used as symbol
- Traditional Hawaiian hospitality used to promote a multimillion dollar brand
- Non-Indigenous owned

HAWAIIAN
AIRLINES®

Hawaiian Airlines (HAL) promotes their business with the image of an Indigenous woman that is described as beautiful, loving Hawaiian culture, and welcoming to all Hawaiian tourists (Hawaiian Airlines). This is an explicit example of the commodification and appropriation of Indigenous bodies, women in particular, to promote corporations that have no connection to Kanaka Maoli or operate in the best interests of Kanaka Maoli (Trask 26).

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"Matt's research paper makes headway into marketing mixed reality products, a topic that technology companies are currently wrestling with and has implications that could impact daily life. His argument blends lessons from past failures and insights into key factors that will determine if people buy these new technologies or do not." – Michael Morshed

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Mixed Reality for Everyone: A Marketing Strategy for MR Platforms

By Matt Fan

In a world now dominated by personal computing devices such as smartphones, the natural continuation is the concept of smart glasses. Ambient computing, the ability of people to seamlessly blend digital information with their lives, has been the aim of various companies and products since the early 1990s (Farsace). Ambient computing is the end goal of several significant technologies, the most important of which are virtual reality and augmented reality. Virtual reality (VR) immerses users in digital environments that take the place of the real world. Augmented reality (AR) blends one's surroundings with digital media by using computer graphics to combine them. Mixed reality (MR) can be taken as a combination of both terms (Qualcomm), and it has become especially important in the early 2020s.

As of 2024, many technology companies have been releasing MR platforms to general availability. Products such as the Meta Quest 3 and the Apple Vision Pro are now available on the market, primarily taking the form of wearable headsets. MR technology is known to have a wide range of applications, but it is not yet widely adopted to the same degree that other devices such as smartphones and laptops are. Effective marketing and the use of storytelling could prove instrumental to MR's success. Although the marketing of technology products is a well-studied field, not much of this research currently pertains to MR and a discussion of how best to sell these products to customers is much warranted. To effectively market their MR platforms, technology companies must take a marketing approach centered around the public. Specifically, they should market their products for everyday use in public and private, reassure users of their

privacy, allow people to experience the technology with various levels of interactivity, and focus on brand loyalty to keep customers returning as MR technology rapidly improves.

Before customers purchase MR products, they need to decide that they will be useful; therefore, developers of MR platforms should emphasize how the technology can be used throughout everyday life. Derriana Thomas and Lars Erik Holmquist of the Northumbria University School of Design surveyed AR users. They found that responses focused on aspects such as comfort and appearance. Users stated that bulky headsets are "always attracting unwanted attention" and "might not be socially acceptable" and that AR glasses "would need to look almost like normal glasses" (233). Another participant stated, "if you're a woman then you often don't have pockets for the device to rest on and things start to get awkward" (234). These concerns all relate to the role of AR products in everyday use, which holds convenience, as shown by the comment from a female user, and social acceptability in high importance. Consequently, companies should consider leaning into these desires and create marketing materials that actively show and encourage the use of MR products in daily life. Ideally, they should be portrayed as having a seamless experience that makes everyday use easy. Users should be convinced that they will be able to feasibly incorporate MR into their lives.

Communications professor Laith Zuraikat discusses a real-world product that missed this opportunity: a major factor in Google Glass's failure to gain sufficient interest among consumers was unclear targeting toward consumers. Some engineers in the company proposed that it should be worn constantly as a fashion item, while others argued that it should be used as a utility instead (17). Google Glass's lack of consumer traction is derived in part from this conflict over the product's application. Because there were internal debates over the actual purpose of the product, a cohesive external marketing portrayal could not be achieved, leaving consumers confused about why they should purchase the product. Companies attempting to succeed where Google Glass failed should be mindful of what role their products should play in users' lives and portray this in their marketing efforts.

In 2023, another company launched a smart glasses product. Meta's product page for their smart glasses, in collaboration with Ray-Ban, features scenes such as a woman dancing while using them to listen to music, a DJ using them to livestream his work, a man and woman trying on different clothes, and people taking pictures of each other using the glasses (see figure 1). Below these scenes is the tagline "style meets innovation" (Meta). Here, Meta takes an

alternative focus to Microsoft in the marketing of their product. By including scenes of people using the Ray-Ban smart glasses in recreational activities, they highlight it as a fashion item that can be worn throughout one's daily life. The phrase "style meets innovation" confirms this. Unlike Google Glass, Meta smart glasses are marketed as a product that is both smart and fashionable. There are scenes of the product being used in public and private for work and recreation, which clarifies the role it is to play in users' lives. If consumers are informed as to what the product will do for them, they are more likely to consider purchasing a product that thus far remains unfamiliar, and focusing this aspect on everyday life creates the best impact among the public.

The notion that MR products could find their way into users' daily lives underscores the importance of user privacy, which is significant enough to consumers that it should also be among the marketing focuses. Allesandro Acquisti, a privacy expert at Carnegie Mellon University, discusses privacy-motivated behavior among consumers. He cites a study that found that consumers accepted a 4% premium to purchase from merchants they saw as more privacy oriented. Another experiment showed that participants were willing to make payments of over $4 simply to withhold private information from smartphone apps. In a third study, consumers turned down a 20% increase in gift card rewards with the condition that spending would be tracked (739). By synthesizing these studies, a conclusion can be drawn that customers actively incorporate privacy into their purchase decisions. In all cases, customers were willing to either pay an extra amount or, equivalently, forgo additional value to select a product or option that they perceived as more protective of their privacy. This behavior indicates that privacy must be a key component of MR marketing if customers are to be persuaded into spending money on MR products.

Joseph O'Hagan, an MR specialist at the University of Glasgow, gauged MR privacy attitudes with a public survey. It was reported that 70% of respondents had some level of discomfort with augmented reality headsets seeing widespread use, and 55% of respondents felt less comfortable with it than before the survey. Some went as far as to refer to the technology as a "dystopian privacy nightmare" and "really scary" (21). This high level of apprehension with wearable headsets can be reflective of consumer opinion. It implies that most members of the public, which is the demographic surveyed, are not yet comfortable with adopting MR

technology into their daily lives. The survey's focus on privacy and the open responses from participants cement that their misgivings are due to a perceived lack of privacy protection. To address this, technology companies should focus on privacy in their marketing efforts and communicate to potential customers that their products are suitable for everyday use in that they do not infringe on users' or bystanders' privacy.

The prior example of Google Glass also indicates the need for privacy-oriented marketing. Because Google Glass was able to film and record its surroundings, there were concerns that bad actors could abuse this capability. Due to the trend of consumers paying more attention to privacy and feeling alienated by products that do not respect it, Google Glass seemed to stand against these ideals, damaging its perception among potential customers (Zuraikat 17). O'Hagan et al.'s concerns are very real fears of privacy violations have already dissuaded customers from purchasing MR devices. The notion that a technology company as large as Google can have a project fail in this manner further demonstrates the need for even the most well-resourced companies to reassure users of their privacy.

In February 2024, Apple released a paper titled "Apple Vision Pro Privacy Overview" that highlights the measures being taken to protect user and bystander privacy. It opens by describing privacy as a "fundamental human right" (3). It also details how input from the eyes, hands, and head is used and protected. It draws focus to how this data is stored on-device and can only be shared with third parties with the user's explicit consent (5-8). Apple's emphasis on allowing users control over their privacy is a good approach. In clear and simple language, they discuss the various types of data and how it is collected and stored. In this manner, they make the reader feel like their concerns are being acknowledged, which is not always the case with technology marketing. Because it is a commonality that people use their purchasing power to protect their privacy, companies must emphasize their agreement with this in their marketing strategy.

Additionally, companies should focus on aptly portraying MR through marketing that affords users different levels of interactivity when experiencing the product, whether directly using it or viewing promotional materials. Matthew Freeman, a researcher at Bath Spa University and the founder of an MR marketing consulting firm, discusses his findings on interactivity. Various marketing materials for a VR experience were presented to study participants. Among those with little or no experience with virtual reality technology, 64% chose

videos as the most engaging form of marketing they interacted with, but only 8% chose the interactive experience that took the form of an AR avatar creation app (32). The results of this study show that those with less familiarity with the technology preferred to interact with it less directly. Understandably, those with no experience with MR might be less inclined to directly engage in an immersive experience. Thus, technology companies should consider this and offer more traditional high-impact marketing materials as well as experiences that are more interactive but have less reach. Additionally, these materials are easier to distribute and can help companies reach a larger target audience. Reaching as many people as possible is necessary for the widespread adoption of MR among the general populace, and materials like videos have the lowest barrier to access.

Pei-Shan Soon of Malaysia's Sunway Business School presents a study among shoppers using a mobile AR app to try various products. Her team found that positive emotions derived from the experience increased the desire to both use AR again and purchase a product featured in the experience, and negative emotions did not affect this desire as much (2406). Although users new to the technology might wish to experience it through less interactive means such as video, the emotional impact of interactive experiences should be considered. The power of these devices to cause strong emotional responses points to the need for more interactive marketing experiences. This can be powerfully combined with non-interactive media which can initially garner customer interest and interactive experiences such as trying the product in a store can be extremely effective in convincing the user to purchase the product.

Snap Inc.'s homepage for its Spectacles product shows various images depicting the point of view of users and what one is supposed to see when they don the glasses, indicated with the phrase "illustrative of Spectacles field of view" (see figure 1). At the bottom of the page, there is a QR code that allows users to virtually try on the glasses using the Snapchat app (Snap). The point-of-view images demonstrate a clear focus on showing people what it might be like to use the product. These serve as a more static type of marketing, as described by Freeman. The QR code demo is exactly the type of experience discussed in Soon et al.'s study and plays perfectly into Snapchat's position as an app that focuses on augmented reality experiences such as filters. Overall, Snapchat's homepage shows a good balance of interactivity.

As a hypothetical marketing effort, companies creating mixed reality platforms could release some of the features of their products as augmented reality smartphone apps. Because all modern smartphones are equipped with cameras, they could simulate the effect of mixed reality in a manner that feels familiar but is more interactive than standard forms of advertising. For example, if one of the advertised features of a mixed reality product is real-time walking directions, an app could allow users to point their camera at their surroundings and have the feature appear on the smartphone screen. This strategy has potential because it allows users to experience some of the key benefits of mixed reality and its combination of the real world and digital information but does not fully emulate the actual product and is likely to leave the user with additional curiosity regarding the product. Serving as a middle ground between actually trying the product and merely observing its use, an application of this sort is a key example of allowing people to select their preferred level of interactivity when being introduced to MR. Maximizing reach with increased choice and access proves especially important for marketing to the general public, whose diversity requires that few assumptions are made.

Interactivity can attract new customers, but because mixed reality is a constantly evolving technology, companies should make sure to keep these customers returning for future product iterations, all while not alienating newcomers. Tiwari et al. of the Indian Institute of Management discuss the importance of product coolness as a factor contributing to "brand love." In a survey of smartphone users, they found that coolness accounts for 78% of variance in brand love. They also point out several different dimensions of coolness: attractiveness, rebelliousness, desirability, innovativeness, and usability (7). According to a study of Apple customers conducted by Tsuen-Ho Hsu et al., a Taiwanese marketing research team, "brand community value" was identified as one of the most important attributes in Apple's marketing, with the highest weight compared to other areas such as product and psychological benefit and sense of honor. Brand community value refers to the positive effects of engaging with communities centered around a particular brand (53-55).

Tiwari et al.'s research pertains directly to smartphones, but its findings can be generalized to consumer technology such as mixed reality. Because MR is an emerging technology and thus not yet widely adopted, it carries a significant level of novelty that marketers should incorporate into their communication. Thus, these companies should point towards how MR exhibits these traits by emphasizing how MR differs from existing products.

The importance of community value as described in Hsu. et al's study underpins the idea that mixed reality should be sufficiently buzzworthy to inspire the formation of brand communities. By promoting a sense of belonging among existing MR adopters, they can amass more repeat customers, which is an extremely important objective due to the rapid improvement of MR technology.

Satisfying current customers is of high importance, but marketing professor Haakon Brown discusses one danger of doing so. Among undergraduate students, it was found that iPhone advertisements displaying high levels of brand arrogance led to a decrease in both attitudes toward Apple and purchase intentions of their products. This effect was especially pronounced among those who were not already iPhone users (559). Brown's findings indicate that companies must exercise caution in their efforts to construct a brand community and gain repeat customers. They must develop a loyal customer base by appealing to existing customers, but they cannot do so at the expense of turning people away through arrogance. To mitigate this effect, these companies should focus on the features and benefits of the products themselves in their advertising, which should satisfy both existing adopters with their purchases and draw in new interest. The nature of mixed reality as an ever-improving technology presents a need for MR companies to direct their marketing efforts at creating a thriving consumer base with continued interest in their products, but this must be done without alienating first-time customers who might be more apprehensive.

There exists the notion that mixed reality should be marketed primarily for professional rather than personal use, as this is more likely to make use of the wide range of capabilities afforded by technology. Although it might seem more ideal to primarily introduce MR products as a utility tool for the workplace, this strategy is more shortsighted because it is not as well-tuned to the advantages that technology companies have over other industries and does not scale as well in the long term. It also introduces the possibility of poor public relations that could harm the business.

According to a marketing specialist on *Forbes*, the business-to-consumer sales cycle is less complex than the business-to-business sales cycle. Marketing to consumers requires the creation of a memorable brand identity and a digital presence, such as through online payments (Wijayasinha). The traits of marketing to consumers rather than their employers are a better fit

for technology companies. First, the importance of digitization plays directly into the strengths of technology companies, which are better positioned to make use of technologies such as online payments and social media. Additionally, the importance of creating a brand identity fits well with the recommendations of Hsu et al. and Tiwari et al. in creating a sense of brand love among consumers. These aspects serve as advantages over a business-focused approach because they play into the strengths of technology companies.

Mixed reality was one of the focuses of the Microsoft Ignite 2023 developer conference. During the keynote presentation, a video was shown that portrayed employees at various machine shops and industrial settings using the HoloLens headset and Microsoft Copilot AI to assist with physical tasks such as operating heavy machinery and identifying electronic components (see figure 1). It featured the phrase "this is work" over five times, focusing on how MR can alter the workplace (Microsoft 55:10). The company's earlier launch of the HoloLens 2 at the Mobile World Congress was shadowed by an open letter in which Microsoft employees protested an almost $500 million contract with the United States military in which the HoloLens would be applied to defense purposes. The employees stated that they "refuse to create technology for warfare and oppression" (Glaser).

In this part of the Ignite keynote, Microsoft takes an alternative approach to marketing its MR product, showing its application in blue-collar work. Although a more novel approach, they are limiting the scope of their HoloLens product as they portray its application in just one field of work, as the scenes in the video focus on some form of machine shop or similar setting. The visuals are certainly futuristic, but the focus on productivity implies that it is targeted at employers; the headset is not portrayed as something that customers would want for themselves, thus limiting its reach. This is put on full display in the example of the public outcry over the military contract. The open letter created bad press for the company in the background of a product launch, with ramifications for the brand's overall reputation that would not have occurred if the company had designed and marketed HoloLens with everyday consumers in mind. MR's applications in enterprise and government are certainly tempting, but marketing to a consumer audience both makes the technology more exciting and plays into the strengths of technology companies.

As shown, the focus of technology companies as they market MR products should be on the general population. This requires that they target their advertising towards everyday

customers and their lives, communicate that their products protect user privacy, hook users in with hands-on and hands-off marketing experiences, and retain those customers by creating a strong brand community. Although the strategies that companies might take to market their mixed reality platforms have been outlined, MR products have yet to become a household commonality. In the future, as the market for mixed reality continues growing, future research should examine what marketing techniques were most effective in achieving the most significant growth. In particular, the course of action for companies to take regarding user privacy remains an open question, and if MR is to gain widespread acceptance, it is worth reviewing what solutions proved useful in convincing the public. The successes and failures of marketing both towards every day and business audiences should also be examined, as both marketing approaches may have takeaways that apply to each other.

Mixed reality's high potential as a technology renders it deserving of the attention it has garnered in recent years. The companies that invest significantly in developing these platforms should similarly take care that their marketing effectively portrays their products in a manner that is attractive to consumers. Centering their marketing efforts around the public is the most effective way for MR to reach as many people as possible. If the companies behind these platforms can tell an effective story of how MR might revolutionize personal computing like smartphones have, then they are better poised to do so. Thus, the futuristic image of everyday people donning smart glasses to help them live and work may not be so far off.

Figure 1. Official marketing images for various mixed reality products

Different MR products have different styles of visual marketing, either showing an Approximation of what the user perceives when they wear it (Apple and Snapchat) or a more external view of the experience (Microsoft and Meta).

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MCWP 125

Gregory Galli

Nominated by Elizabeth Miller

Michael Ross

Nominated by Marion E. Wilson

"Gregory's integration and synthesis of complex source material was impressive, but his storytelling capability stands out in his historical accounting of automobile culture in the United States." – Elizabeth Miller

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The Rise of Automobility in America and its Consequences

By Gregory Galli

The automobile is undoubtedly a key aspect of contemporary American life. It is ingrained deeply into the American culture as an essential tool, a symbol of class, and an instrument of freedom. As of 2022, over seventy-seven percent of Americans took to the road for their daily commute (Commute Mode). Automobile ownership is taken as a given fact of American life. American cities are designed to accommodate (and induce) automobile dependency with wide roads, expansive parking lots, and poorly executed alternative modes of transit. Current automobile-centric infrastructure directly conflicts with accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists leaving Americans to question why the car has permeated their cities and culture so thoroughly. The automobile's dominance in America is the result of cultural manipulation during the twentieth century by both actors in the automobile industry and the government. This dominance has led to inequity, automobile dependency, and ecological problems that now must be solved.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Americans experienced a massive cultural shift tied to automobile adoption. In James Flink's "Three Stages of American Automobile Consciousness," the UC Irvine Professor of Comparative Culture argues that the story of the automobile is best segmented into three phases. The first stage Flink identifies spans from the automobile's genesis through the year 1910 (451-452). In this period, American ideals and beliefs set the stage for the automobile's widespread adoption. The inception of the internal combustion engine powered automobile is generally credited to Karl Benz in 1885. Americans followed the European trend in the 1890s and automobile interest began to grow (Flink 452). This heightened interest in the automobile followed the explosion in popularity of bicycles the decade prior (Berger xviii). This shows a pattern of American interest in transportation. Technological developments offering Americans greater mobility had broad appeal. Flink notes

that a key driver for interest in automobility lied in rural America. For farmers, the automobile could provide a means to combat isolation (453). It promised a more convenient, efficient method to bring farmed goods to market (453). Rural America could now be more interconnected with urban areas, offering the best of both worlds. He also notes that the automobile appealed to Americans' senses of individual freedom and could be seen as an extension of individuality.

The second stage Flink defines in his article spans from 1910, with the mass production of the Ford Model T, to 1950. It is impossible to discuss the history of the American car without acknowledging the industrial and cultural significance of the Ford Model T. While the Ford Motor Company was established in 1903, it was not until 1908 that the Model T was introduced (Company Timeline). The most notable event for Flink, however, is the opening of the Ford Highland Park plant which streamlined the production of the Model T while simultaneously reducing prices. Christopher Wells, Assistant Professor of environmental studies at Macalester College notes that prior to the introduction and mass adoption of the Model T, car ownership was mostly reserved for the wealthy. Through the 1920s, the automobile only became more accessible. The mass production drastically changed the pricing distribution of automobiles. David Blanke, Professor of History at Texas A&M notes that in 1903, two thirds of automobiles cost over $875, but by 1916, over two thirds cost under $875 (Blanke 43). The automobile's appeal to individuality, a core element of the American psyche, combined with reduced costs led to the widespread adoption of the personal car (Flink 455). Its vast availability allowed it to become a tool of social progress, as Flink argues.

The automobile undoubtedly appealed to the American core value of individual liberty. However, the automobile in its infancy experienced significant growing pains. Blanke notes that although per-vehicle and per-mile fatality rates dropped between 1900 and 1940, the fatality rate per capita grew by over four hundred percent. Indeed, there was a struggle between American ideals and public safety. Importantly, Blanke notes that people saw the dangers presented by the automobile because of poor choices and driver skills instead of inherent risks of automobility. In Blanke's words, "reformers initially acted to isolate or remove these menaces, the so-called 'accident prone' drivers, so that their personal recklessness would not affect others" (52). To

mitigate the crisis, engineers and city planners collaborated to separate the automobile from pedestrians and cyclists (Blanke 53).

The separation of the automobile and the pedestrian did not come without fierce debate. There still existed many Americans who believed that streets should be for people, and not dangerous automobile traffic. Peter Norton, Associate Professor of History at the University of Virginia, delves into the cultural battle for control over the streets in his article "Street Rivals: Jaywalking and the Invention of the Motor Age Street." Prior to the widespread adoption of the automobile, pedestrians and horses dominated the street. With the growing market for automobiles, Norton makes note of the struggle, specifically between pedestrians and car drivers. Pedestrians feared for their safety at the hands of automobile users who were not going to allow pedestrians to inconvenience them. The main appeal of cars was the ease and efficiency with which one could travel. General perceptions of road use at the time contradicted the heightened speed of travel brought on by cars (335). The term "jaywalker" emerged out of this conflict to demonize pedestrians who sought to use the roads. In Norton's words, "before the city street could be physically reconstructed to accommodate motor vehicles, it had first to be socially reconstructed as a motor thoroughfare" (333). The automobile did not experience a natural rise to dominate the city landscape. It was marked by conflict.

Together, owners and manufacturers fought a social and legislative battle to ensure the automobile would displace pedestrians on the street. The initial reaction to the increasing presence of automobiles on the street was to set low speed limits to protect children and pedestrians (Norton 338). In these early days, little was accomplished by speed limit laws, and many were in support of mandatory governors to limit automobiles to reasonable speeds (338). There was a clear need for more regulation in the automotive space. During these early days of the automobile's presence, it was seen as a threat to safety more than a tool for mobility. It was not unusual to see automobiles depicted as child killers or "death-dealing demons" (340). The prior use of the street as a place of children's play planted the automobile as a dangerous intruder. Most of the blame was deflected onto careless drivers rather than automobility (Blanke 52). However, it is undeniable that early motorists had little regard for the law. In 1934, researchers in Massachusetts concluded that most motorists failed to stop at stop signs, with almost one fifth ignoring them entirely (Blanke 55). This clear disregard for the law rendered the speed limits in cities ineffective. The consensus among "motordom" as Norton calls it was that

the negative shaping of the automobile in the public eye would soon result in "legislation that [would] hedge the operation of automobiles with almost unbearable restrictions" (Norton 340). Thus, the stage was set for a cultural battle over domination over the streets. Motorists cast jaywalkers as clueless bumbling fools who simply could not catch up with the times (343). The motor age was here, and the rest of society was to adapt. President of the Chicago Motor Club, Charles Hayes, along with Yellow Cab Company president, John Hertz, denounced jaywalkers and pushed the term further into the public sphere in a successful attempt to change public perceptions (344). Hertz went as far as to say, "We fear the 'jaywalker' worse than the anarchist" (344). The portrayal of jaywalkers as disorderly and outside the law allowed motorists to further tighten their grip on city roads. Through their depictions of pedestrians, motorists were able to lift themselves out of their perceived hazardous nature and deflect most of the blame onto "jaywalkers." In the end, no attempts to counter this social reconstruction successfully caught on as they "lacked the support of a power comparable to motordom" (349-350).

Roger Roots of the University of Nevada, Reno argues that the automobile had a net positive effect on American life. In "The Dangers of Automobile Travel: a Reconsideration," his argument hinges upon comparing the relative safety of horseback and rail travel to automobile travel in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, he compares the fatality rates of train travel from 1891 and 1907 to modern day automobile travel, failing to account for technological and safety related innovation in the railway system over the past century (963). This trend continues as he cites the highway fatality rate in the year 2000 as being less than the combined rates of horses and trains for 1900 (967). In doing so, Roots fails to acknowledge that had other forms of transportation dominated the American landscape, safety reform and infrastructure would certainly have facilitated a reduction in casualties in those cases as well given a full century. His argument for the automobile's safety falls flat due to a failure to synthesize relevant evidence. Additionally, he touches on ecological impacts of the automobile relative to horses for inner city transit (969). He cites the lack of manure in the streets and the cost of upkeep for horses but fails to acknowledge other forms of urban transit such as bicycles and railcars (969-970). While it may be true that the automobile could scale with America's needs better than the horse-drawn carriage, that does not make it the best solution to the transportation problem. Interestingly, Roots' shortest section of this article also contains his strongest point: that the

automobile enabled America to reach new economic heights by facilitating expedient individual travel (969). Roots provides a very weak case for the automobile as a safer, cleaner method of transit compared to the train or the horse.

With the automobile cemented as the dominant form of transportation in America, city infrastructure began to accommodate car travel. The restructuring of the American city culminated in what is known as sprawl. To give a basic definition, sprawl is the outward expansion of a city through low-density housing and retail. In America's early days, cities were designed to be urban landscapes akin to the cities of Europe (Freilich 183). Freilich, National Editor of *The Urban Lawyer*, notes that as attitudes towards urban life became more negative, many citizens sought a more rural lifestyle which the automobile enabled (184). Nineteenth and twentieth-century Americans sought a balance between this urban and rural lifestyle. People desired the freedom and quiet of rural life, while still holding onto urban incomes and amenities (186).

The onset of suburban life was a turning point in American life. The federal government had a choice to make between promoting thriving cities and urban lifestyles or facilitating the outward sprawl of neighborhoods and communities. The Federal Housing Administration was founded to promote home ownership and development during the Great Depression. A major effect of the FHA was redlining, a process by which loans were systematically given to prospective owners and developers in "desirable" neighborhoods (Historical). The strict lending standards and community rating system meant little development for "red-lined" communities which were often separated from the more desirable neighborhoods by race (Historical). These redlined communities often existed in or around city centers, while mostly white, suburban neighborhoods were favored by the FHA and thus received significant investment (Freilich 187). Redlining effectively diverted investment away from inner city and minority communities and funneled it into white suburbia. Another government program that Freilich notes as a major contributor to sprawl is the federal tax code which allows deductions for mortgage interest from taxable income, which encourages buyers to search for larger, more expensive homes found in the suburbs (187). The federal tax code practically subsidizes suburban life. This facet is compounded by the negation of capital gains tax when selling a home to reinvest in another of equal or greater value (187). The result is that homeowners are incentivized to overconsume, a common trait of sprawl. Downsizing is disincentivized, making the decision to return to the city

a financially irrational one. Redlining, together with federal tax code played a pivotal role in the expansion of the American suburb.

The presence of sprawl as a core element of American cities has various sociological implications. An important aspect that Glenn Yago, founder of the Financial Innovation Labs at the Milken Institute, finds is that cities with origins predating the automobile are likely to be much denser with greater access to public transit (173). Not only did the automobile cause cities to spill outward into surrounding landscapes, but its prevalence changed the very nature of urban life as well. The automobile displaced public transit within cities, especially those whose growth followed the car's widespread adoption. Thus, those who do choose to live in urban environments are left with reduced access to public transportation. Yago notes that consumers have little power to change the status quo because existing institutions limit the amount of choice they have in transportation (177). Yago argues against the notion that consumers' demand for vehicles has shaped America's landscapes (177). Many Americans are confined to a market in which the automobile has become the only viable option. Infrastructure that can facilitate efficient travel within large, low-density cities is mostly nonexistent. As a result, most Americans either by choice or reluctantly rely on automobile transport for travel. The consequences of this structure are far reaching. Sprawl has resulted in a disproportionate distribution of resources and opportunities that leaves urban dwellers underserved and underemployed (183). Historically lower rates of automobile ownership for women and the elderly mean even further reduced access to resources (184). Substantial inequity arises out of automobile dependence and suburbanization. This is compounded with the fact that redlining has drawn racial boundaries in American cities that have left population distributions skewed.

Robert Kirkman, Associate Professor in the School of Public Policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, raises a fundamental question in his paper "Did Americans Choose Sprawl?" in which he explores the debate between "anti-sprawl" activists and what he calls "anti-anti-sprawl" groups (123). As noted by Freilich, "Suburbanization and sprawl are as ingrained in our national myth as baseball and apple pie once were" (186). The anti-sprawl movement however postulates that Americans would not choose it given the option (Kirkman 124). Kirkman describes the debate as a contention over whether consumer preferences drive

sprawl, or if sprawl drives consumer preferences (130). In Kirkman's "systems approach" to sprawl, he finds a balance between the two opposing parties:

> Though individual choices contribute to the development of metropolitan areas as sociotechnical ensembles, the resulting ensemble has emergent properties beyond the intentions of any individual or group. These emergent properties may then act as constraints on the choices and actions of those living within the system. In short, sprawl may be the product of human endeavor, but it is not a transparent medium through which the preferences or the will of individuals can express itself in the landscape. (133)

Kirkman's middle-ground approach is an excellent analysis of the effects of city infrastructure and cultural norms that emerged from the automobile. The contention over sprawl's origin is important for the fact that it has become the default option, and its very existence exerts an influence on Americans that serves to perpetuate suburbia's presence. It is not a symbol of freedom through mobility, it is a system that forces automobile dependency on Americans.

The prevalence of urban sprawl leads into Flink's third stage of automobile consciousness, in which the car ceases to be a force of social progress (468). Heightened numbers of automobiles due to dependency, along with relative stagnation in the industry during this third stage resulted in safety and ecological concerns, among others (469). The legitimacy of the automobile as the default form of transit was no longer a given. The flaws associated with automobile travel began to surface, giving reason to consider alternative modes of transportation. As Flink looked into the future from 1972, he saw this third stage as a continuing effort of grappling with the automobile's costs and limitations (473).
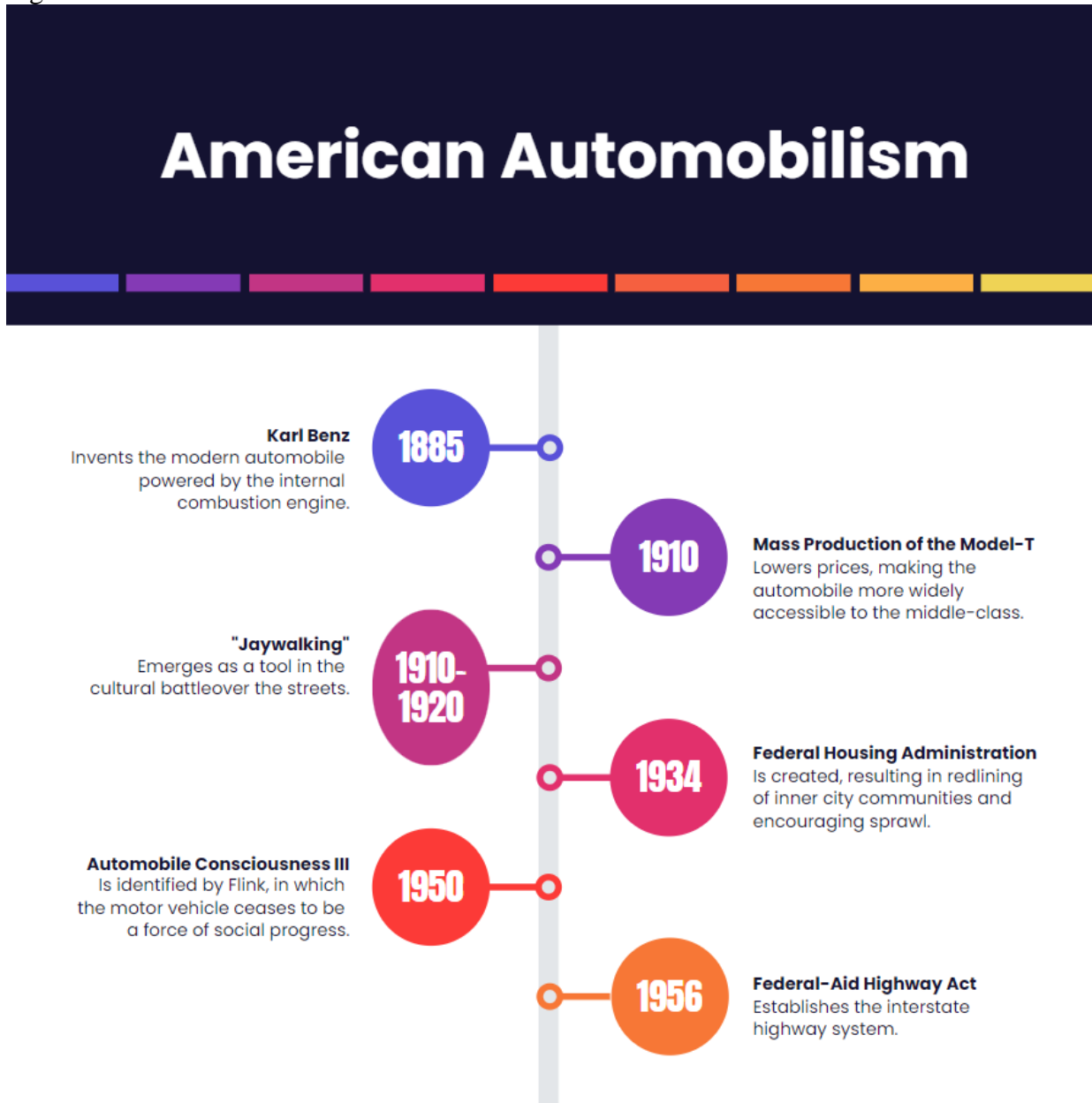
Moving away from urban sprawl has proven to be an arduous process. Among many challenges, John Huttman, author of "Conflicts in Planning for Cars," notes that for city planners to be able to plan around and mitigate future automobile use, they must be able to predict, with some accuracy, the future distributions, and densities of residential areas (93). This prediction is a difficult one to make, specifically due to the volatility brought on by automobile travel. The high traffic areas of today may not follow the same patterns tomorrow. Development of a mass public transit system must be efficient, usable, and adaptable. Another difficulty noted by Huttman lies in predicting actual usage of proposed public transit systems (94). The existence of the automobile, its infrastructure, and its place in American culture makes it difficult to convince individuals to use public transport. The convenience of the highway outweighs the perceived

social benefit of public transportation for most. Huttman argues that a successful implementation of mass public transit would require diverting funding for highway expansion to public transit lines, "finely tuned" to "achieve the optimal utilization of each" (94). A thorough cost-benefit analysis of city-wide transit infrastructures must be conducted, accounting for externalities such as pollution to effectively manage road use looking into the future. Marcia Lowe, Senior Researcher at the Worldwatch Institute argues that this analysis must be carried out by both governments and individuals alike (271). The failure to account for externalities has subsidized automobile travel and led us to automobile dependency. Lowe suggests that when properly accounted for, one hundred miles of public travel is half as expensive for consumers as one hundred miles of car travel (271). The answer to the automobile dependency problem is not the abandonment of personal vehicles, but a delicate equilibrium in which individuals are enabled and incentivized to use public means of transportation.

Much of the tangible change in recent years has been centered on improving efficiency, but as Lowe points out, the problems that arise out of automobile dependency and urban sprawl cannot be solved by technological improvements to the personal vehicle (269). Over the course of the 20th century, the automobile thoroughly cemented itself into the American culture. Its reach, as Lowe argues, extends to every facet of American life (270). Sprawling cities are dominated by wide roads and massive parking lots which render foot travel impossible (270). Lowe argues for the social restructuring of the automobile, to return it to its rightful place as a tool and do away with widespread automobile dependency (271). Just as a social battle was fought to bring the automobile to dominance, social change is the answer to departing from automobile dependency. With social change, infrastructure can begin to change as well. A reduced reliance on automobiles would mean greater accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists who are comparatively clean, efficient, and quiet when compared to motorists (273). Lowe argues that the automobile's dominance over the road must be undone to ensure that people feel safe and confident in walking and/or cycling (273). By imposing speed limits and physical deterrents, streets can be restructured to accommodate urban life, relegating cars to the main roads (273). Reserving streets for pedestrians and cyclists would promote interaction, community strength, and decrease noise pollution within cities. With a social upheaval of car culture, American cities can begin to evolve towards sustainable transport both public and private.

The automobile functions as an extension of Americans' individual freedom. However, it acts as a limitation of sorts as well in that for many it is the only option available for transit. The special interests of corporations and motorists and government policies throughout the twentieth century skewed the dynamic between public transit and the automobile. As a result, modern day America is left with infrastructure that encourages automobile use and prevents most individuals from escaping their automobile dependency. Along with dependency, Americans are saddled with the costs of car-centric infrastructure culminating in urban sprawl. As the nation looks forward into the future, many still hold on to the car as an integral part of American life and culture. However, the future does not have to be car centric. Careful city planning and social change will be elemental in moving away from automobile dependence.

Fig. 1

American Automobilism

Karl Benz — 1885 — Invents the modern automobile powered by the internal combustion engine.

1910 — **Mass Production of the Model-T** Lowers prices, making the automobile more widely accessible to the middle-class.

"Jaywalking" — 1910-1920 — Emerges as a tool in the cultural battle over the streets.

1934 — **Federal Housing Administration** Is created, resulting in redlining of inner city communities and encouraging sprawl.

Automobile Consciousness III — 1950 — Is identified by Flink, in which the motor vehicle ceases to be a force of social progress.

1956 — **Federal-Aid Highway Act** Establishes the interstate highway system.

(Flink; Norton; "Historical Shift"; "National Interstate")

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"Michael ran with the course topic of education in California to make a complex and important argument about how increasing diversity in California higher education has national significance in light of Supreme Court decisions about Affirmative Action." –Marion E. Wilson

♠

The End of Race-Based College Admissions:

Using California's Precedent to Anticipate the Future of Diversity in Higher Education

By Michael Ross

Over the last century, the United States has made significant efforts to prevent discrimination based on individual identities. Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, several nationwide policies were implemented with the overall goal of creating a state of equality for all citizens. One significant example of these policies was affirmative action, referring to a set of policies that aim to give more opportunities to members of under-represented groups, or URG. These came in the form of preferences in job hiring, college admissions, social benefits, and more. As affirmative action expanded throughout the late 1900s, its legitimacy was continually questioned about the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Many have argued that the preferential treatment of affirmative action undermines equal opportunity, and, as such, is not constitutional.

While affirmative action policies in college admissions have previously been upheld at a federal level, several states have chosen to ban these practices. One of the most notable examples of such a decision was California's implementation of Proposition 209. In 1996, legislation was passed that would "eliminate state and local government affirmative action programs in the areas of public employment, public education, and public contracting to the extent these programs involve 'preferential treatment' based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin" (California). While the voters of California did not agree with the use of identity for preferential treatment, the state government did see diversity as a significant interest and have consequently spent the last thirty years trying to improve diversity and inclusion in higher education without affirmative action.

The importance of California's efforts has recently become more significant, as race-conscious affirmative action policies in college admissions will no longer be allowed within the United States. In June of 2023, the Supreme Court overturned forty-five years of precedent by banning affirmative action. The Court held that race-based systems violated the Equal Protection Clause because these policies did not have sufficient evidence of supporting a compelling government interest (*Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*). While other cases had previously limited the extent to which race could be considered, this decision marked a clear end to race-based policies. Given the importance of diversity in higher education, The United States must continue to develop race-neutral policies to improve diversity because California's experiences with Proposition 209 have demonstrated that removing affirmative action will have drastic repercussions on URG representation and that current replacement policies are not sufficient.

Ensuring significant levels of diversity within higher education is an important goal for universities because of its impact on education regarding correcting social inequalities. In an analysis of student outcomes based on their experiences with diversity in higher education, psychologist Patricia Gurin and colleagues found that exposure to diverse identities within classrooms and in a university, environment has significant impacts on the educational outcomes and personal development of students and qualified as "academic skills" and "intellectual engagement" (27). The researchers also recognized an important difference between predicted and informal interactions with diverse individuals. Such a distinction calls back to the first landmark Supreme Court case regarding affirmative action, *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*. In the footnotes of this case, justices quote the president of Princeton University regarding the educational benefits of diversity, claiming that "a great deal of learning occurs informally. It occurs through interactions among students…who are able, directly, or indirectly, to learn from their differences…" (*Regents*). Exposure to diversity fosters better learning outcomes for developing students, the extent of which being positively influenced by informal interactions. As such, it is important to develop an environment where students can be organically exposed to diversity.

Diversity in education also plays a significant role in political engagement skills and the open-mindedness of developing students. As being immersed in a diverse environment presents students with the opportunity to experience perspectives different from their own, they are

significantly more likely to be willing and able to engage in political discussion. For example, Gurin and colleagues further investigated "democracy outcomes," identifying how interactions with diverse peers helped to better prepare individuals for participation in cultural issues (30-31). Given the democratic nature of the United States government, such development is crucial to creating a body of constituents who can positively impact decision-making.

Exposure to diversity also has considerable implications on the open-mindedness of students. A significant portion of young adults' beliefs are built based on what they are exposed to, and this exposure is primarily determined by one's environment. Furthermore, individuals tend to seek out information that aligns with pre-existing beliefs. Psychologist Raymond Nickerson investigated this inclination and developed the concept of "confirmation bias," the strength of which being significant enough that "once one has taken a position on an issue, one's primary purpose becomes that of defending or justifying that position" (177). Given the significance of confirmation bias, it is especially important to promote an environment where an individual's beliefs are challenged. If exposed to diversity, students face a level of uncertainty that is useful in allowing them to change their positions, rather than simply reinforcing what they previously thought to be true. In preparing students for a future of social and political awareness, the benefits of diverse perspectives are significant.

The lack of diversity in education can also create noteworthy biases that will impact students throughout their lives. For example, Gurin and colleagues go on to identify how a lack of diversity creates a stereotyping situation in the presence of minorities (35-36). Having only ever experienced environments consisting of those with identities like oneself will create a situation where both the majority and minority individuals are uncomfortable. For members of the racial majority, they feel uneasy due to unfamiliarity, as they have not had sufficient experience with those who are different from themselves. For members of the minority, they recognize how their presence has caused the majority discomfort and experience a feeling of non-belonging. This situation suggests that considerable diversity must be achieved within education to prevent such stereotyping. Furthermore, as students face more diverse interactions as they progress out of higher education, the significance of developing this familiarity is amplified.

A diverse student body in higher education also has consequential impacts on long-term social inequalities. URG members on average are at a lower socioeconomic status (SES) than

their majority counterparts, and this trend has remained constant for many years. Social scientist David Williams and colleagues reviewed United States census data, identifying how Black and Hispanic individuals fall below poverty at a rate that is twice that of White or Asian individuals (75). Given the correlation between race and SES, it can be useful to look at the effects of the latter to determine how race plays a role in society. Socioeconomic status has large contributions to the outcomes of individuals in the United States and plays an important role in the educational development of children. For example, in an analysis of learning-related behavior problems, social equity professor Paul Morgan and colleagues found that low SES correlated with around double the amount of behavior problems associated with worse educational development in young students (411). Based on the relationship between SES and race, this suggests that URG students are at a significant disadvantage regarding early educational potential. In the context of higher education, fewer URG students will be admitted as their academic performances fall below their high-SES counterparts. By improving the socioeconomic status of URG students, it would be reasonable to expect improvements in lower-level education, increasing the likelihood of members of that group being accepted into higher-quality universities.

Improving diversity in higher education is a powerful way in which the race-based inequalities within the United States can be dampened, due to the relationship between higher education and socioeconomic status. If it is possible to improve the incomes of URG individuals, this would result in future generations being at a higher SES, lessening present inequality. Hans Johnson and Marisol Mejia investigated the correlation between higher education and economic opportunity in California, estimating a difference in annual earnings of tens of thousands of dollars between those with a bachelor's degree versus those without (6). Further analysis also highlights how for university students from low-income families, significant wage gains are expected relative to their parents (8). These correlations help to demonstrate the ability of URG student presence in higher education to help "break the cycle" of racial inequality in the United States. Generating more diversity in higher education will increase the earning potential of people in URG. This will create a positive feedback loop in which SES-influenced repercussions such as lower-level educational opportunities will be lessened, further increasing the representation of minority students in higher education, and so on (see fig. 1). Improving diversity within higher education campuses is one of the most direct methods that can mitigate

long-standing social inequality. In conjunction with its positive impacts on the development of young adults and their education, this makes ensuring diversity an imperative social obligation.

Given the importance of diversity in higher education, it is useful to anticipate what will occur at a nationwide scale following the end of race-based affirmative action. We can expect to see immediate changes in higher education admissions policies, and consequently levels of diversity. This, in turn, will have further consequences on the choices and outcomes of members of URG, as supported by the relationship between education and wages. To estimate the effects of the nationwide race-based affirmative action ban on the United States, we can look at the effect of Proposition 209 on California. Considerable educational and labor market data has been collected since its implementation in 1996, giving us insight into what the rest of the nation may experience. Higher education researcher and economist Zachary Bleemer has continued to analyze these data since Prop 209's implementation and has contributed several articles that summarize outcomes. His research suggests that Prop 209 caused significant decreases in URG applicant admission within the University of California system, decreased the likelihood of qualified URG students applying, caused URG students to receive fewer degrees and experience worse wages following their education ("Affirmative Action" 14-15, 24-26).

The UC system contains some of the top-ranking public universities across the United States and represents a significant portion of selective universities within California. Following the removal of race-conscious affirmative action, these selective schools saw considerable decreases in enrollment, scaling with the degree of their selectivity. Bleemer highlights how the decreases in URG admission ranged from "as high as 25 percent at UC Berkeley…down to 4 percent at UC Riverside [and overall] URG applicants became 8 percent less likely to earn admission to any UC campus" ("The Impact of Proposition 209" 2). Such a decrease in URG enrollment occurred due to two main mechanisms: the likelihood of URG having sufficient academic qualifications to be admitted, as well as their decreased application rates. As reflected by the relationship between educational opportunity and socioeconomic status, URG applicants on average had worse lower-level academic achievement as compared to majority applicants. When affirmative action was removed by Proposition 209, these students no longer had sufficient qualifications to be allowed into the UC system, significantly lowering their rates of admission.

Furthermore, URG applicants were overall deterred from applying, due to awareness that race would not be considered in their application. Bleemer estimates that around seven percent of URG students who would be qualified for enrollment to a UC school chose not to apply in the years following Prop 209 ("The Impact of Proposition 209" 2). While the lack of affirmative action policies in and of itself drastically decreased admissions, it also had significant implications on the choices of URG high school seniors. The removal of affirmative action placed URG students in a situation where they did not feel confident in their ability, further exacerbating the realized effects of a lack of race considerations. These decreases in admission following the implementation of Prop 209 give insight into them? Across the United States, URG students will experience significant decreases in their rates of admission which will have subsequent impacts on levels of diversity within higher education.

Due to decreases in admissions to high-performing universities, Prop 209 caused URG students to experience decreases in degree attainment rates which worsened post-education labor outcomes. Bleemer analyzed educational achievement data from the University of California and found measurable decreases in the overall number of bachelor's degrees and graduate degrees earned by URG students following the implementation of Prop 209 ("Affirmative Action" 23-24). The justification for this can be attributed to decreases in enrollment at high-ranking universities. Such schools typically produce a higher percentage of degrees to enrollments as demonstrated through higher graduation rates. For example, while selective colleges such as those in the UC system have high rates of graduation of around 80 percent after six years, less selective universities such as the California State University system produce significantly lower rates of around 60 percent after six years (Peterson 5; "CSU Graduation"). With URG applicants being admitted at a lower rate to selective universities, those who attend college typically end up at schools with worse graduation rates, overall decreasing their level of degree attainment.

A further consequence of decreased degree attainment for URG students was worse outcomes in the California labor market. In an analysis of earnings data from the California Employment Development Department, Bleemer estimated that Prop 209 caused average post-education wage decreases in URG UC applicants of around 5 percent ("The Impact of Proposition 209" 6). By a similar mechanism to decreased degree attainment, the implementation of Prop 209 had significant impacts on long-term employment outcomes for URG.

Overall, the effects of the removal of affirmative action on URG young people were significant and immediate in California. By drastically reducing admissions rates and disincentivizing applications, the lack of affirmative action programs resulted in significant decreases in higher education diversity, URG degree attainment, and post-education socioeconomic opportunities. Following the recent Supreme Court ruling, it is important to be aware of these expected ramifications. The rest of the nation is likely to see a similar decrease in higher education diversity and subsequent repercussions on URG outcomes. Given the extent of what was experienced in California following Prop 209, it will be necessary for states to promptly implement alternative policies that can mitigate these effects.

Despite the initial drops in diversity which resulted from the implementation of Prop 209, certain replacement policies have demonstrated the ability to improve diversity without considering race. These policies, however, have not resulted in a level of diversity that is comparable to that of race-conscious affirmative action. In California, two notable examples of such policies are Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) and Holistic Review. ELC is an example of a percentage plan which aims to improve enrollment by guaranteeing admission for students with the top GPAs of their high school class. For the University of California, this threshold began at the top four percent of students and was later expanded in 2012 to the top nine percent, where it remains as of 2024. In Bleemer's analysis of educational outcomes following Prop 209, he identified that ELC programs caused a small but measurable increase in URG enrollment in the UC system from 2001 to 2011 of around four percent ("The Impact of Proposition 209" 4).

While percentage plans can generate improvements to diversity within higher education, it is useful to recognize the mechanism by which they function. Such policies contribute to diversity because high schools are often divided socioeconomically, and consequently by race. As such, admitting the top percentage of students from each school means that schools that consist of URG students will guarantee a certain amount of URG admissions to universities. Educational researcher Lara Perez-Falkner criticizes this relationship, recognizing how percentage plans such as ELC can only be effective if high schools continue to be segregated, and how this concerns public policy (21). Despite ELC producing measurable increases in higher education diversity, the method by which it functions may undermine the goals of race-neutral policies.

The University of California's usage of ELC also struggles to produce significant increases in diversity and has a low upper limit to its usefulness. Bleemer's estimated URG enrollment increase applies to the first implementation of ELC, where it admitted the top four percent of students. Higher education equality researcher William Kidder and professor of education Patricia Gándara further analyzed the efficacy of ELC regarding its expansion in 2012 to the top nine percent of students, finding that this change resulted in no significant increases in URG enrollment (41). This suggests that the possible benefits of ELC are relatively minor and will not scale as a function of the percentage of top students admitted. In combination with its basis in SES inequality, the limited effectiveness of percentage plans demonstrates that they are not a useful tool for increasing diversity in higher education. While they may provide some benefits, it is useful to evaluate other methods.

One additional method that California used to increase URG enrollment following Prop 209 was Holistic Review, where students are evaluated in the context of their experiences. This means considering factors such as decreased educational opportunities due to socioeconomic status. Rather than directly comparing students based on their quantitative academic performances, Holistic Review made it such that students are compared more holistically - based on what was possible to achieve given their circumstances. It additionally allows students to express how they may positively impact a university due to their identity, rather than only based on their academic history. This policy change had considerable impacts on the enrollment of URG at UCs, as campuses that utilized Holistic Review had increases in URG enrollment of around seven percent (Bleemer, "The Impact of Proposition 209" 5). Unlike ELC, Holistic Review provides a considerable increase in URG enrollment in higher education and does not function on a basis of high school segregation. As of now, Holistic Review is one of the most useful tools that universities can use to increase URG presence without directly considering race. Comprehensive consideration of a student's background makes the admissions process fairer to those with limited opportunities and further promotes diversity in higher education. Following the nationwide end of affirmative action, it will be useful for universities to consider strategies that incorporate some version of Holistic Review.

Despite the relative success of their efforts, California has overall not demonstrated that a sufficient level of diversity can be achieved with current race-neutral policies, suggesting that

continued development must be done. Though they have made considerable progress since the initial drops in diversity resulting from Prop 209, California has not yet reached its goals for diversity in higher education and may have hit an upper limit to what can be achieved without additional changes.

Regarding the educational and societal benefits of diversity in higher education, it is useful to quantify what is sufficient. The term "critical mass" has historically been used to define what is an "adequate representation of minority students," such as in *Fisher v. University of Texas* (qtd. in Maes et al. 4). This phrase's ambiguity means such a level of diversity can be achieved at significantly different demographic makeups. Higher education policy researcher Daniel Maes and colleagues propose a narrowed definition of "the enrollment level necessary to reflect representation given the institution's location and available applicant pool" (18). This generalized definition allows a consistent method in which to evaluate if schools have reached a threshold level of diversity, one that matches their expected applicant demographics. To evaluate policy-making outcomes, it is useful to have such a definition. By analysis of available UC demographic data, Maes and colleagues developed a model to predict changes in diversity over the next ten years. They found that given current policies, diverse demographics on the campus they chose to evaluate, UC-Berkeley, will move towards critical mass, but be unable to achieve it (22). While this shortcoming is significant, researchers also recognize the limitations of their model. Due to data availability, they identify how predictions are "quite uncertain more than four or five years into the future" (16). Despite the noted inaccuracies of predictive models, trends in the evaluated data suggest that current policies will be unable to produce levels of diversity that align with critical mass, suggesting that additional changes must be made.

In addition to a demographic-based definition of critical mass, it is also useful to look at subjective evaluations of sufficient diversity. The inability to achieve critical mass is supported by the University of California's interpretation of its efforts following Prop 209. While the university recognizes that considerable improvements have been made regarding demographics, they feel as if additional work needs to be done to create a diverse and inclusive environment. In the 2022 UC Annual Accountability Report, the university identifies increases in URG enrollment, positions in faculty, and first-generation enrollment, but further discussed student surveys that suggest URG students do not necessarily feel respected based on their race/ethnicity (UC Regents 115-116). California has made considerable progress over the last thirty years but

recognizes that improvements do not constitute success. This self-aware demeanor is important for other states to adopt following the end of affirmative action policies, as working towards a sufficient level of diversity should be a high priority. Furthermore, it will be useful for other states to adopt a demographic-based definition of critical mass and support a diverse and inclusive community. While they may be able to work towards or achieve critical mass through policy implementation, this does not necessarily indicate adequate diversity. Universities should continuously strive to create an environment of inclusion rather than meeting an arbitrary threshold of URG presence.

Regardless of whether success is defined by a measure of critical mass or by the feelings of students, California has not demonstrated that current policies are sufficient for diversity. If no changes are made, it is reasonable to assume that diversity demographics will reach a stagnant upper limit that is below critical mass. Additionally, California recognizes that high levels of diversity do not necessarily ensure a diverse and inclusive environment and that continued adaptation must be made to better serve society.

Facilitating diversity in higher education is an important goal for policymakers across the United States. Due to the educational benefits of learning from diverse perspectives, and the socioeconomic repercussions of URG students attending universities, higher education policymakers must develop systems that will support diversity. Following the nationwide end of affirmative action policies, California's experiences with Proposition 209 suggest immediate impacts on URG enrollment in higher education and subsequent post-educational outcomes. While certain race-neutral policies such as Holistic Review can help to mitigate these effects, they alone will not generate a level of diversity that is sufficient. As a result, continued policy development must be sustained to further support diversity and inclusion in higher education. Looking at California's past gives us valuable insight into what we can expect without race-conscious affirmative action, demonstrating that continued work must be done as we enter a new era of higher education admissions policies beginning in 2024.

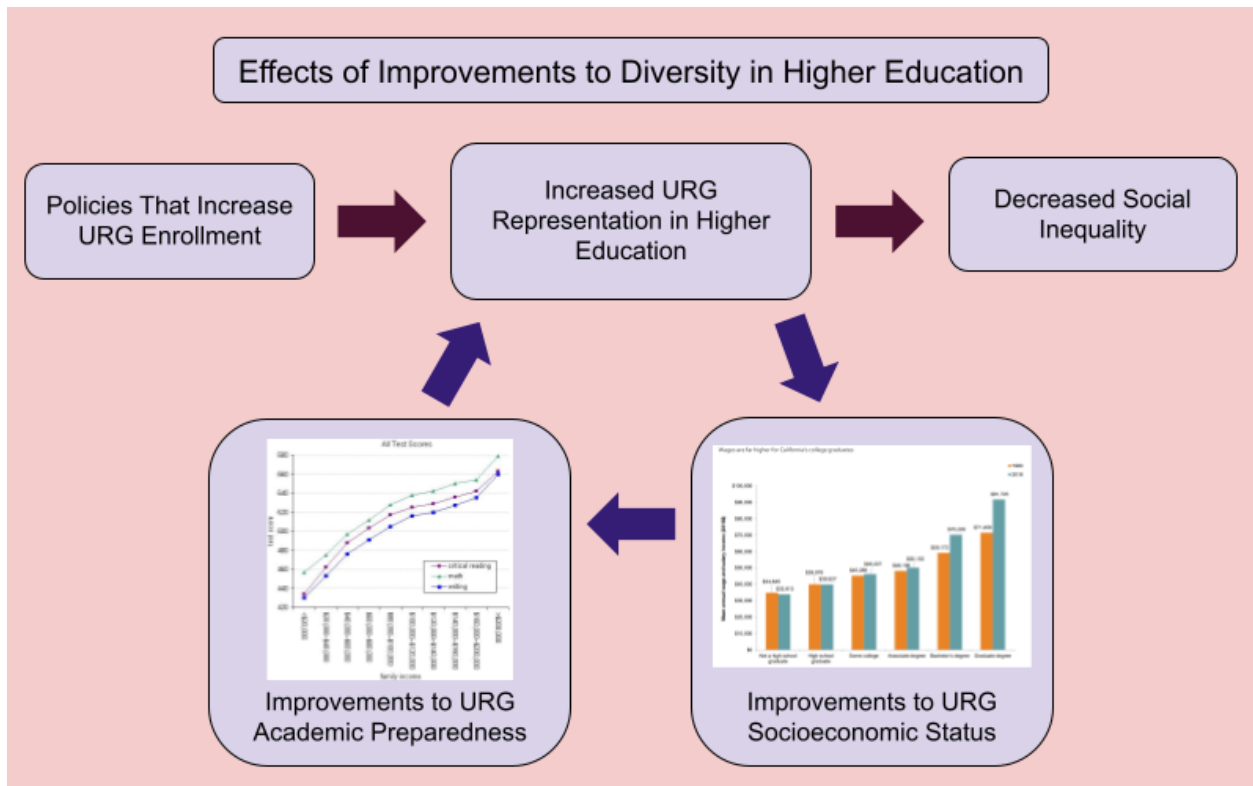Fig. 1. Positive Feedback Loop of Diversity Improvements in Higher Education

Fig. 1. This depicts how policy development which improves URG enrollment in higher education will have cascading effects on social inequality. By facilitating increased URG representation, there will be improvements to URG socioeconomic status due to the relationship between degree attainment and income (Johnson and Meija 6). Consequently, there will be improvements to academic preparedness amongst URG youth because of the impact of socioeconomic status on educational development (Morgan et al. 411). In Fig. 1, this is demonstrated by the relationship between family income and SAT test scores (Rampell).

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