Dear Reader:

The summer of 2004 was the first summer that St. Lawrence University’s McNair scholars were involved in a research internship. It lasted eight weeks. During that summer the group bonded as personal friends and academic colleagues while conducting independent research on topics of their own choosing. They attending workshops designed to assist them in presenting their research as well as to prepare them for successful applications to graduate school. They took preparation classes for the Graduate Record Examination and visited a graduate admissions program at another university. They also participated in a colloquium in order to share their research. Perhaps the most telling reaction I heard from the scholars about the summer experience was that they could not believe how hard they were working with no grade to show for the effort. Clearly the passion each held for his/her topic and the support from the program sustained them.

The McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program is designed to provide opportunities for students who would not ordinarily consider graduate programs, no less a Ph. D. These are bright and capable young men and women who by virtue of circumstances are underrepresented in doctoral programs. The McNair Program gives them the chance to be competitive.

What appears in this compilation is a collection of the written papers and abstracts based upon research conducted by each of the twelve scholars who participated in the 2004 summer research internship. For most, if not all, this was their first time doing extensive and formal research. Several are currently extending that research as part of a senior honors thesis requirement.

St. Lawrence University is proud of the work of these young scholars. This printed edition shares with the entire community the results of their work and is a testament to their efforts. St. Lawrence University also acknowledges the hard work of the mentors who advised the scholars. Had it not been for these staff members and professors, the program would not have been able to celebrate the successes displayed in this volume.

I hope that other young scholars will be inspired by the research presented here. Once again I want to extend thanks to Dr. Margaret Kent Bass. As the Principle Investigator and Faculty Research Coordinator for the grant, Margaret participated in the initial connections between these scholars and their mentors and attended the summer orientation program providing personal anecdotes that clearly inspired the scholars. She followed up with them throughout the summer and was on hand to celebrate their work by attending the poster and oral presentations. The support was welcomed and deeply appreciated.

Ms. Carol Ann Kissam
McNair Project Director
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“…Maybe a Woman Can Be”

A perspective of feminism in St. Lawrence County

Kira L. Cambridge
McNair Scholars Program
St. Lawrence University
July 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2004
“…Maybe a Woman Can Be”

A Preface

Imagine a world where common decisions are limited to an entire league of people. Where control is swiftly ripped from your hands and rigidly tossed back at you at the whim of another. A woman’s place is in the home, if that is how the man will have it.

For my research project, I chose to write three fictional stories about the life of women in St. Lawrence County. Each story takes place during different decades in time. The first begins in the early 1950s and the last ends in the year 2000. I chose to write short stories because I felt that numbers would not grasp the essence of experience that I wanted to document. It is my argument, through my stories, that while feminism has progressed in other areas of the United States, it has remained uncompromising in St. Lawrence County.

A defining feature of feminism is women’s rights; i.e. what women are entitled to within society. According to Eileen Boris and S.J. Kleinberg in their article, “Mothers and Other Workers: (Re)Conceiving Labor, Maternalism, and the State”:

“Women’s ‘rights’ had become associated with participation in the waged workforce, not the right to choose how to combine motherwork and economic survival.”
It is my argument that a woman’s participation in the workforce and what her earnings are should not be as critical a characteristic of feminism. In fact, I contend that feminism has more to do with how she interacts with and refuses to conform to a man. It has been my experience, both personally and through research that issues like domestic abuse are more clear identifiers of women’s rights. I believe that how a woman is perceived and treated in her culture and environment is more significant to her fundamental rights than how much she is able to make in the workforce.

Which leads me to my next point: in St. Lawrence County, it is generally accepted that everything a woman can possibly do in her life has to be completed though a man, by a man, for a man, or in spite of him. Fathers, brothers, grandfathers, teachers, friends; they all have one thing in common, instilling docility in their female counterparts. Everything a woman needs or wants is directly dependant upon what a man can do for her.

The docility I speak of is created through abuse as well as a fundamental discourse that women are less than men. According to the Office of Justice Systems Analysis, in their article “Domestic Violence: Research in Review,” 1.5 million women are raped or physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the United States.
In 1999, NYS (UCR) Uniform Crime Reports data indicated that there were approximately 97,000 domestic offenses reported to the police (NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, 2001). Police departments outside the city of New York reported two-thirds of the offenses.

When I interviewed Karen Easter, the founder and current director of the Reachout program in Potsdam, she was unable to give me explicit statistics for St. Lawrence County. Irregardless, a person’s experience is not something easily erased, and I have several encounters to confirm my argument. I have stories to reaffirm what I have held as valid for my entire life. A story of a Guidance Counselor who asked a single mom why she wasn’t going to “just be a housewife” after she came back to high school, finished her degree, and was considering college. A Story of a grandmother who disliked her granddaughter because she preferred to play sports, rather than figure skate. Stories of generations of women who were told they “were not good enough” simply because they were born female. When you are taught from an early age that the only way to survive is to be dependant on a man, the very reality in which you exist is altered from that of women in more urban areas.

But where does it end? It is easy to blame parents for not informing their daughters about the luxuries of independence and that there’s much more to existence beyond St. Lawrence County. But how can we fault parents for simply reinforcing what they’ve been taught from the generations prior? This is why the research I have conducted and the stories I have written are so important to me.
Because I feel that someone needs to bring attention to the microcosm and the discourse of the North Country.

Linda Kerber concluded in her article, “’I Was Appalled’: The Invisible Antecedents of Second-Wave Feminism”

“And so if we remember the laws that we are seeking to change are not very old and deeply rooted; if we remember that changing the law is not enough; if we remember that it is also habits of thought, demeanor, and culture that we are at work to change; and if we listen hard and carefully to people who are younger than us—who are different from us, who have other things to say—and if we do not lose our capacity to be appalled, then, maybe, we can be optimistic about the future.”

Listen to me; read my stories and listen to what I have to say, because I can tell you things you could never have assumed about the North Country. Out of that new knowledge will come the hope for change and equality as it should be.

⭐⭐⭐ **Author’s Note:** I am not a representative for every woman in St. Lawrence County, and I do not pretend that there are happier, more pleasant stories to consider. I can only speak for my own personal experience, and what I have encountered in speaking with friends and family. Please remember, the stories you are about to read are fiction. They are a condensed interpretation.

Nothing more, nothing less.
Marjorie:

No one wanted Marjorie. She was only six months old when both her parents gave up on her. She was the third of twelve children and her mother, Magdaline, had to make a choice between her husband, Jack, and her first three kids, and her long line of backwoods boyfriends. Magdaline chose the men.

Jack did the best he could to take care of the first three children, the children that he knew were his. But Marjorie was a sickly baby. He passed her along to a cousin, one he felt could do a better job of taking care of her.

Growing up with Joanne, she was never taught about the tools she would need to live a happy life. Things like education, hobbies, and career opportunities were foreign ideals to her. She was given the bare minimum, what she needed to survive. She learned, both by example and a basic understanding of how she believed the world to work, that she would simply grow up, have babies, and stay at home to take care of them.

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When Marjorie was fifteen, she met the man she was going to marry.

Jake Richards, the high school quarterback, was in the park playing baseball with a bunch of his friends. The sun was so bright; it was difficult to see the ball. Jake was pitching, and he was working on his third out of the inning, when his friend hit a pop fly. The catcher leaned back to get it, but considerably misjudged its location as he stared into the sky.
When the ball finally hit, it created a strange thud.

When the boys looked toward where the sound was coming from, they saw the ball roll a short distance on the ground, and a stray German Shepard run across the street to the theatre.

Marjorie stood outside the theatre window, staring up at the one sheet of *Lilies of the Field*, when the dog bumped his head into her knees. When she bent down to pet him and give him the attention he seemed to be looking for, she heard someone yell to her.

“Hey! Max, what are ya doin’?” Jake was walking toward her. Marjorie knew him from school. He played all of the sports Canton offered, but was best at football. He was one of the more popular kids at school.

“Oh, I’m sorry, is he your dog?” Marjorie looked up at Jake. He was only slightly taller than her, with sandy brown beautiful hair.

“Uh…yeah. I was just taking him for a walk, and when I stopped to talk to some of the guys, he got away from me.”

“He’s really, quite beautiful.” Marjorie was nervous and unsure of what to say to the handsome Pastor’s son.

“Yeah, thanks.”

☆☆☆
“So you met a boy, eh Marjorie?” Joanne spoke to Marjorie in the kitchen of their small two bedroom house. She was small herself, barely five feet tall, and she had to use a stool in order to reach over the stove. “Tell me about him.”

As Marjorie tried to explain the day’s events, Joanne interrupted her to ask Jake’s last name. She knew she would know the family by the last name.

“Richards.”

“Oh lovely…” Joanne was well aware of who the boy was. He was the son of Pastor Richards, one of the wealthier men in Canton. She hid the excitement well as she explained to Marjorie her understanding of how the world worked, at least in Northern New York. She looked deeply into her wide-eyed adopted daughter and said, “It’s time I tell you a few things, Marjorie. People have purposes to fulfill. Some people are meant to go on and do great things. Others have purposes that are more humble.”

“Who decides who gets what purpose?” Marjorie was extremely inquisitive toward the woman who seemed to know so much about everyone else, and not a lot about herself.

“Some things just are the way they are,” Joanne said as she turned the heat off the stove and removed the pot of boiling eggs.

“Well, what’s my purpose?”
“You’re going to be a woman soon enough, Marjorie. Someday, you’ll realize that you are meant to be married, and have children.”

That was a conversation Marjorie would never forget. It echoed in her head when she missed her period less than a year later, and it was in the back of her mind when she was in the delivery room giving birth to her baby boy, Eric.

She had to marry Jake. There was no other option. “You can’t raise it by yourself, Marjorie. Think of all the fun you’ll have in being a wife. You’re going to be able to find your place in the world, Marjorie. This is what you need to do. You’re going to have a child of your own, like I was never able to.” Joanne had told her.

Marjorie did what she had to do to avoid scandal and to please the only mother she had ever known.

☆☆☆

Cadence, three years younger than Eric, was as unplanned as her brother. When Marjorie was pregnant with Eric, Jake took a job working at the movie theatre in town, and Marjorie left school for the summer after her tenth grade year and never returned in the fall. She had liked school, but her priorities were adjusted to consider her son and her husband. Times were difficult, but Marjorie was determined to make things work for her family. She didn’t want to fail at the new life she had been thrown into.
They had been married just over two years, and were living in a small one-bedroom apartment in the town they both grew up, Canton. It was modest, but Marjorie liked the idea of finally having a place she felt at home in. She had grown accustomed to being a young housewife, and conducted herself like Claire Trevor in *Marjorie Morningstar*. She thought she was living the life that was expected of her. So when she found out she was pregnant for the second time, she was nervous, but excited. She loved her little boy and was glad to have another.

It was the end of March, 1968 and Marjorie was sitting on the floor of the living room, playing with Eric. She couldn’t wait for her husband to get home to tell him what the at home pregnancy test had confirmed. Jake was working the matinee at the theatre, so Marjorie had prepared an egg salad sandwich for him to snack on while she shared the good news with him.

It was past eight o’clock by the time he got home.

“Where have you been?” Marjorie asked softly, so as not to wake the baby.

“My parents met me after I got done and took me out for an early dinner. Why? What time is it?” He was being his usual casual self. It was an old habit for him to keep a straight face in almost any situation. Marjorie hadn’t been trained to notice these slight changes in demeanor yet, so she carried on with her news.

“Jake, I want to talk to you about something.”

“What?”
“Here, come sit down on the couch with me.” Jake seemed a bit confused and ready to change his clothes. The stench of stale popcorn permeated through every fabric of his American Theatre shirt.

“Marjorie, what is it? I’m tired, I smell, and I would just like to take a bath and watch T.V. in bed.” Marjorie continued despite his protest.

She had considered all day the most appropriate way to tell him without blurting it out. She remembered a certain affinity toward black liquorish when she was pregnant with Eric. This stuck out in her mind because that was the only real exotic craving she had and, as a child, she would gag over the sight of such an awful sweet.

“Jake, I think you may have to pick up some black liquorish from the theatre before you head home tomorrow.”

She did not wait for an expression to appear on his face; rather, she threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly, ignoring any negativity that could possibly come out of him. If she had bothered to look, wanted to look, she would have been witness to one of the first times Jake Richards had been drawn out of his cool façade.

He looked over Marjorie’s shoulder and stared at the wall, with his jaw slightly lowered. His arms found their way around her. Her body was thicker than it had been only a few years prior, having held the profit of his sentence as a parent.

He was absolutely speechless.
Marjorie and Jake were in their twelfth year of marriage before the beginning of the end.

By 1976, Marjorie had taken over Jake’s position as manager of the theatre. She loved the independence she felt while being at work. She loved the theatre in general. The only exception to this was that she sometimes felt odd about her colleagues. The girl she tended to work most with, Janice, was seventeen and merely a senior in high school. Marjorie sometimes caught herself looking at Janice, curious about what it would have been like to feel young when she was young. She was never allowed to feel her age. She sometimes regretted growing up so fast.

Jake had finished his two years at Canton College of technology only to take up menial construction work and some freelance home repair on the side. Eric was twelve and excelling in school. He loved to study and read. The other kids despised his intelligence and quite frequently, his little sister Cadence, had begun her self appointed role of bodyguard. She wasn’t as gifted when it came to academics, but common sense practically exploded out of her.

One summer afternoon, Marjorie sent the kids outside so she could clean their three-bedroom house. She put her Freddy Fender album on the record player and skipped to her favorite song, *Wasted Days and Wasted Nights*. She started by gathering dishes around the house to put them in the sink to soak.
She was adding Palmolive to the running water when she heard Eric start wailing. She cut the water and ran outside to see what kind of trouble her son was in. Just as she got close enough to Eric to place her hand on his shoulder, she caught sight of her youngest chasing the neighbor boy, Adrian, down the driveway. When Eric felt his mother straighten, he managed to calm his heaving body enough to see what his mother was looking at. Cadence had tackled Adrian, ripped his metal six shooter play gun from his suede cowboy holster and was hitting him in the back with it.

“Cadence, get your ass off him!” Marjorie screamed over the other boy’s cries. She ran down the gravel in time to grab Cadence by the arm as Adrian ran home dirty and bruised.

Silence fell upon all three of them as they entered the house. Marjorie went into the kitchen and pointed at the table for Cadence and Eric to sit down. The skipping record and the sound of bubbles popping in the sink were the only noises in the house.

Marjorie went into the living room to turn the record player off and to allow herself time to grasp some general understanding of what she had just witnessed. When she returned to the kitchen, Eric and Cadence were staring at each other, as if too afraid to look anywhere else.
"Eric, would you please explain to me what just happened?" Marjorie kept her voice cool and soft, unsure what to think.

"Adrian came over in that stupid cowboy outfit, wanting Cadence and I to play." Eric’s round face was swollen and red from the tears that had soaked into his slightly tanned skin. "He always only wants to play Cowboys and Indians just so he can tie me up and jab at me with a stick. Cadence said no, that we didn’t want to play his stupid games, that we were sick of him trying to make us. Then he said we were..." Eric looked down, too embarrassed to finish his sentence.

"Well? That you were what?"

Eric kept his neck crooked so that his face was parallel with his knees.

"Eric?" Marjorie drew out his name in that troublesome yet provocative tone, fundamental to a mother’s questioning.

"Assholes, mom. He called us a couple of assholes," Cadence spat, frustrated at her brother’s silence. "He laughed at Eric, made fun of him some more because I answered for him. Then he cracked him a good one with the metal part of that stupid gun of his. Hit him right square in the ribs, mom! So I chased him down the driveway and pistol whipped him with his own gun. I told him he better think twice before messing with us again or I’ll beat him even worse the next time." Marjorie looked down at her baby girl. Cadence’s cheeks were also flushed, not out of energy spent,
but from anger and aggravation. Marjorie looked to Eric for confirmation of the story.

“Is that what happened?”

Eric’s glassy blue eyes were wide and embarrassed. “Yes, mom,” was all he said.

“Where the hell did you learn to ‘pistol whip’ anyone?” Marjorie was hesitant but extremely curious of what the answer would be.

“T.V. Mom, T.V.” Cadence grinned proudly having educated her mother for once.

It became a regular routine for Marjorie to receive several calls a week from angry parents wanting sympathy for their son or sons who were beat up by her unruly daughter. Marjorie had become immune to their irate phone voices. She would ask Cadence for her side of the story and she would admit to the chaos she created, always with blatant honesty and certain pride. Cadence saw herself as a violent Robin Hood of the playground, ready to beat on the bullies who terrorized kids like her brother. She sat very happily on the fence between wrong and righteousness.

At first, Marjorie would try to explain to the heated parents what Cadence had said. That rarely worked, so she eventually gave up on the hope of common
ground and a pleasant apologetic demeanor. She believed her daughter was in the right, even though her method was unique. Marjorie realized that if she supported Cadence to her face, then she should be willing to defend her to others, without apologies. Once this epiphany occurred, it became systematic for Marjorie to listen to the outrage and then calmly state that if they spent more time concerning themselves with the behavior of their own children, and less on what everyone else's were doing, perhaps her daughter wouldn’t feel so compelled to discipline them herself.

Although Marjorie sometimes found hilariousness in Cadence’s never ending battle for the underdog, she was concerned about what was making her behave so extremely. She found herself questioning why Eric, the eldest, was so defenseless, so preoccupied with school that he never took a stand for himself. Marjorie felt a little guilty, considering just how much she missed out on in not completing school. And why was Cadence so contradictory? Why was she so quick to anger and defensiveness? Marjorie mulled over the possibilities but eventually only came to the conclusion that, for whatever reason, they were able to balance each other. Even though they fought and teased each other, sometimes unmercifully, they were able to come to some general understanding that they needed each other.

Even if it seemed like Eric needed Cadence a little more than she needed him.
It was October, just after Marjorie’s twenty-eighth birthday when she lost what little control she had over her marriage.

It was around 4:15 and Marjorie sat at the kitchen table with the phonebook open trying to find a babysitter. Jake had some woman’s porch to fix that night and she had to be at the theatre at 5 o’clock to prep the reel for the Saturday night showing of *Rocky*. She considered and reconsidered the names of people she knew, but most of her family was unavailable, and those who were, wouldn’t have anything to do with two kids on a Saturday night.

She thought about calling the theatre and asking Janice to stay late. She felt bad about doing this because Janice had been complaining about not feeling well for a couple of weeks. Marjorie suggested the fluctuation in weather might be a culprit, and had recommended that she get lots of fluids. Besides, it was Marjorie who offered to come in early and take over after Janice’s matinee shift.

Marjorie decided to take Eric and Cadence with her.

Marjorie drove into town and parked the car behind the theatre. When she walked to the front, her children trotting in front of her, she noticed her husband’s familiar bike leaning against the door. She became excited at the thought of Jake being there to surprise her at work.
She unlocked the glass door and let Eric and Cadence go before her. She let
the door shut behind her and noticed the kids had stopped. She looked toward the
counter where Jake was standing, facing her. Janice was behind him, rubbing her lips
with her long sleeved shirt. Marjorie could feel the condensation on her scarf as she
looked to see what Jake had clutched in his left hand.

A bag of black liquorish.

Cadence:
My parents divorced when I was eight because my father thought he got some
girl pregnant. When she got “sent away” they said that she wasn’t, she was just a
dumb high school chick, confused about the date of her period, but the damage had
already been done.

After Dad moved to Oswego, he met some girl there, not much closer to his
age, but close enough I suppose, because he ended up marrying her. They too, got
divorced, but that’s another story.

My mom, my brother, and I had to move in with my mother’s mom, Joanne.
That was really hard for my mother to take, since her and Grandma Joanne didn’t get
along that well. I used to hear them argue all the time.

“Jesus, Marjorie, how could you mess that up?” Grandma threw a clean pot
into the cupboard under the sink. “The one shot you had at a life, you blew it. Now
what kinda life are you supposed to have with those kids? What are they gonna do
now?” Grandma Joanne yelled at my mother, loud enough so Eric and I could hear from our bedroom what a screw up she thought our mother was.

“What the hell, Ma? He cheated on me,” Mom shouted back.

The door to Eric’s and my room shook with the sound of their voices. I looked at Eric. He was in the bed above mine, listening to his tape of Pink Floyd. Nothing but the The Wall was getting through those headphones. They continued for a while longer until the front door shut. That’s when I knew Mom had left. I imagined her heading to the bar to have a drink, just one, a tequila sunrise, just to avoid coming home. She’d play a few rounds of pool, let the anger and subtle depression subside before she’d even attempt to come back. When she would finally return, she’d sleep in the car, instead of the couch she had grown accustomed to.

Before the chaos in our family, I was Daddy’s little girl. He used to take me for rides to the beach on his twelve-speed, before we had a car. I would ride on the handlebars for the trip. The beach was a little over a mile from where we lived and, on the hottest summer days, just Dad and I would go.

The last summer we had as a family, my father practically confessed his adultery to me.

“Isn’t your brother going?” Dad asked as he stood over his bike in our driveway.
“Nah, he’s not interested. I think he’s reading.” Eric was never really fond of the outdoors.

“On a day like today? It must be at least eighty degrees.”

“Eric’s a bum when it comes to this stuff.”

“Alright then…Are you ready kiddo?”

“Yup!”

As I sat as an ornament on my father’s bike, I felt the warm breeze on my face saturate my clothes. When we were about ten feet from the Tailor Park sign, my father slowed to a stop. I turned around, puzzled by the delay. Dad met my expression with an intense stare. I’d never seen him look at me, really look at me like that before.

“Cadence, you know how much I love you, right?” He was never really an emotional man, so the shock of that moment froze the memory in my mind.

“Yeah,” was all I could say in return.

“And you know that I would never ever do anything to hurt you right?” He leaned a little closer to me then, his hazel eyes pleading for a response.

“Dad, are you OK?”

“I’m fine. I just wanted to make sure you knew how much you mean to me.”
He had never been that direct with me before about what exactly was on his mind, and he never was again. Even at seven years old, I should’ve known something was wrong.

☆☆☆

Mom got remarried less than two years after her first divorce. She couldn’t stand living with Grandma Joanne anymore, and she needed to find a better home for Eric and me.

At first I didn’t mind Adam. For the year that he and Mom dated, he was relatively quiet, and always trying to pick some little something up for Eric and me. His breath smelled like Old Milwaukee most of the time, but I didn’t really make the effort to get to close to him. He bought me a purple quilted jacket, and when I asked him what it was for, he smiled at me and said “Because a special girl should dress special.”

He was alright, but he wasn’t my dad.

After he and Mom married and we moved in with him, things changed. They fought all the time, about money problems mostly, and there was something strange in the way he leaned toward her when he yelled at her. At six-feet tall, he loomed over her as if she were a grass fire that he was able to put out any time. Every now and again, I saw bruises on my mother, but I was too afraid to ask where they came from.
I came down to the kitchen once to find out what they were arguing about. That’s when I saw the most horrific thing I had ever seen.

I screamed the instant I heard the slap of Adam’s left knuckles cracking first through metal, and then bone. He hit her with so much force, he broke her glasses while they were still on her face. As the pieces of my mother’s glasses fell past the side of her cheeks, damp with blood, I slowly turned to the man I had grown to hate.

“Cadence, damn it! Get the fuck out!” He spat at me through his nappy beard and rotted teeth.

“Fuck off Adam! I’ll leave after I know my mother’s alright.” By then, my mother was standing behind him, crying for me to just go to my room. She had tried to regain what little composure and dignity left in her. Blood gathered from the bruise on the bridge of her nose, and down her face. I couldn’t bear to look her in the eye. My shoulders shrugged forward as I stood defiant of any threat he dared pose to me. I was only twelve but I had been a fighter all of my life. My senses were alive. I felt ready for anything. I knew the chances of me winning weren’t great, but I wouldn’t go down without a fight.

He raised his hand to me the first and last time then.

“Go ahead, I fuckin’ dare you.” I stepped a little closer.

It might have been shock that a kid was challenging him, like his wife never dared to, but he lowered the back of his hand from his neck to his chest.
I pushed it one step further. “And I will go to my room, because my mother has asked me to, not because you tell me to!” I stared up into his dark eyes an instant longer and when I finally made it to my room, I slammed the door to only God knows what happened as a repercussion from my statement. I unclenched my fists and became aware of little divots in my palms from where my nails had dug into my flesh, and created a small pulsing of heat and pain. I stretched and warmed up the muscles in my arms and calves and face from being flooded by an intense fear and anger, I would learn to embrace later on.

☆☆☆

I only visited my father a few times after he moved away. The last time was after he was remarried, and after that, I wasn’t allowed to go back.

I hated my step mother. Anne made it quite clear that the feeling was mutual. When my brother and I were there, and Dad was at work, she would only complain. She hated how my things weren’t always completely packed—I usually just kept my backpack in the corner of the spare bedroom, with clothes pouring out of it. She despised that I didn’t do many chores around the house. I knew that she hated me cause I was more important to Dad.

“Why can’t you be more like Eric?” she said to me one afternoon. It was after having seen one dirty plate in the sink after I had fixed myself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.
“What do you mean?” I asked.

She exaggerated her exhale as if she were too important to be bothered with stupid questions from a kid. “Well, don’t you ever do anything? I mean, at least your brother gets good grades. Your father tells me you have considerable trouble with your studies. I was just wondering if you actually did anything, or if your mother ever bothers to prepare you.”

“Prepare me for what?” I tried to pretend like I didn’t know what she was talking about.

“For your future job in the fast-food industry.”

There were so many things I wanted to say to her, and never did. Instead I waited for my father to get home. I had told him before that I didn’t think she liked me very much, but he chalked it up to “the situation being very hard on everyone” and said that I “shouldn’t take it to heart.” I truly believed, though, that once I told him what she had said to me this time, that would be the end of their marriage. I would give him an ultimatum—choose me or her. I envisioned him shoving her out the door and me standing behind him grinning with superiority.

I would show her who he loved best.

I stayed in the spare bedroom the rest of the day while my brother basked in her favoritism. He posed no threat to her. I waited patiently, satisfied by my
daydreams of eradicating the woman I had donned “step-monster.” When my father finally came home, I met him at the door. He leaned over and hugged me tightly.

“How was your day, hon?”

“It was alright…how was yours?” I smiled so cheerfully at him, I felt like Shirley Temple in *The Little Rich Girl* when she had at last found her father.

“It was OK. Hey…I brought you something.” He grinned a little and leaned over to hand me an Aero bar.

“Thanks, Dad,” I said. I turned around and looked at Anne, only to see her subtle glare, first at me, then at my father. “Dad, do you think I could maybe talk to you for a little bit?”

“Sure hon, what about?”

“Come on,” I said as I pulled him by his wrist and dragged him into the spare bedroom.

I told him everything that had taken place that day. I told him exactly what she had said, and how it couldn’t be about adjusting anymore. I told him everything that was on my mind.

“Jake…Cadence…dinner’s ready,” the step-monster called through the locked door.

“We’ll finish this later, Cadence,” he said to me in a fearfully indifferent tone. We never did.
The next time Eric packed his things to see our father, my mom requested that I stay with her.

“Cadence, we could have a fun weekend together, just the two of us. We haven’t had much time just you and me lately.” Something in her voice sounded a little desperate.

“No! I miss Dad.” I didn’t want to hurt my mother, but I needed closure. I needed to know what happened after I left. I wanted to know that he had picked me over her.

“Please, Cadence.” She continued to come up with excuses for why I should stay, and when I threatened to just move out and live with dad, she became sadly furious. She handed me a letter and walked away.

It was addressed to her; postmarked a month earlier. I went to my room, and sat on my bed and read it. I read my father’s handwriting saying that things weren’t “working out” and that Anne felt I was too difficult for her to handle. It was the last line that chipped away the last hope I had for my father.

“…Marjorie, you and I both know that Cadence can be

a handful and I really feel like it would be better for her if she

didn’t come down to stay with us anymore.”

In that one simple sentence, my father managed to write me out of his life.

☆☆☆
I began to gain a new kind of respect for my mother after the letter. I began to cling to her as the one person who would never give up on me. I knew that I could count on her for anything I needed, and I realized that my brother and I were all she lived for.

Eric moved out when he was eighteen. He went to live with our dad who, by then, was divorced. I remained with our mother. Mom had also gotten pregnant, a risky thing to do at thirty-five, so I felt a responsibility to help her and be there for her whenever I could. She and Adam still fought on a regular basis, but I started to feel like there was less and less I could do.

I had begun to have a life outside of the house. I spent a lot of time at a cousin’s house during those years, in an attempt to escape, but not too far. She lived down the road, less than a mile, and I frequently made the trip back and forth.

At 15, I was raped. There had been complaints, I guess, of a peeping Tom in the neighborhood. No one told us kids. No one wanted to scare us. Mom wanted to protect me. Always.

I didn’t tell my mother about it until five weeks later when I realized I was pregnant. I was terrified I’d turn into her worst nightmare of what I would be. I was terrified she’d think it was my fault.

She cried a lot that year. She cried when I quit school; she cried when my brother moved away to live with Dad; but she cried the most over me and the
grandchild she’d never know. She took me to the rape crisis center and from there we made an appointment to go to Watertown.

There were a lot of girls in the waiting room. Some were older than me, most of them probably around my age. A lot of the younger ones were alone. My mother and I sat together. She had one hand gripping mine, tears rolling down, and the other gratefully rubbing her round belly. It was September and she was due in October. She was carrying my little brother or sister inside of her. She and Adam weren’t supposed to have children. The alcohol had lowered his sperm count and she was swiftly approaching 36. What was inside her was a miracle. What was inside me was blasphemy.

The doctor’s face is something I refuse to remember. He was shorter than I expected, that much I do recall. He thought I was a little whore who had gotten herself in trouble; I could feel that much in his hands. My mother stood at my head, her hand still holding mine. Her face was turned from mine but I knew she was crying. As I lay on my back, my legs spread and cinched at the ankles by the stirrups, I stared at the ugly pattern on the ceiling. There were clouds painted on the overhead light, I guess to help you think of a better place. None of that crap worked for me.

On the silver cart next to the doctor were several complicated metal tools. I could only look over them once, terrified I would scare myself into leaving. I couldn’t keep it. I never allowed myself to even consider a child in my life. I felt
dirty and evil as my mother sobbed behind me. All I could think about as the man got ready was that I was never going to be the same. I would never again possess the vigor and hope I once had.

This strange man who hated me for a sin I didn’t commit was extracting the life out of me literally.

Lilian:

My mom was older, menopause strikes early in our family, and my father beat on my mom while she was pregnant, so there wasn’t much chance for me. My mom told my dad that if she didn’t get pregnant within the first three years of their marriage, then it simply wasn’t going to happen. A year before the deadline, my mom found out about me.

I’m the sperm that made it.

My dad wasn’t around for most of my childhood. He was in and out of rehab, halfway houses, and jail during his three and a half decade-long career as a functioning alcoholic. I came to accept this as normal behavior for a family and I was basically raised by my mother, Marjorie, and my half sister Cadence.

My half brother, Eric, moved out to live with his father just before I was born. My sister moved out of the house to live with her boyfriend at the time, Brian, when I was three.

She never left St. Lawrence County.
“Lilian, I can’t begin to explain to you’re my dedication to this family. Know that if you ever need me, for anything at all, I’m there.” Cadence and I were sitting down in the Silver Café. It was the spring of my senior year in high school, only a month before graduation. I had been frustrated with my boyfriend at the time, Alex. Lately, he had begun trying to push me into different directions. I had the feeling he expected less of me than what I had come to expect of myself.

He wanted a girlfriend, a wife, like his mother.

There was a slight breeze coming in from the kitchen. Cadence had come up to introduce us to her latest catch, but he forgot about it and went hunting instead. So, she drove up alone anyway.

“I know Caddie, I know.” We left the diner and walked to the bridge over the gorge. Cadence tucked her coat underneath her so as not to sit on the melting snow, as I walked to the edge of the bridge and peered down. The water poured over a boulder only to drop twenty feet into the open mouth of the river flowing below it. I became lost in a trance to the melody of rushing water flooding my brain.

“Lil, you know you have people who love and support you, right? I mean we’re here, if ever you need anything, anything at all, we’re here.”

“Cadence? You know the saying, no man is an island?”

“Yeah?”
“Do you ever wonder if maybe a woman can be?”

☆☆☆

My sister had many boyfriends after she left home. It seemed like she was always looking for something better, something that she, as critical and cynical as she’d become, found perfect.

My sister had been married once and engaged three times by the time I was a freshman in college. When she got married, I was in the eighth grade. She had only known him a few months, which not surprisingly, was not as long as their eight month matrimony.

“Cadence, are you in love with Scott?” I asked her one day when I was at their place in Colton. She needed some help moving furniture and knick knacks around.

“I love him, if that’s what you mean.” She looked indifferent to what I thought was a personal and critical question. “Hey, could you push to the left a little?” Cadence and I were at opposite ends of a five foot long sofa. I lifted hard on my end and pulled to my left while Cadence pulled up her end with significantly less difficulty. She lowered it to the right of where it was.

“Ya think there really is a difference? Between love and being in love?”

“Let me tell you something, Lilian,” she said as she sat down on the couch. She patted the space next to her. When I slumped down, she continued. “Everyone can love something. But not everyone can be in love. I believe that being in love only
happens once in a lifetime. It’s rare, people start to doubt if it really exists.” I heard
the sound of tires crunching gravel in the abrupt silence between us. “That must be
Scott.”

“So, you’re not in love with him?” I asked, saddened by this spoken revelation
about my sister.

“No.”

“Think you’ll ever find it?” My sister looked down then, as she placed her
hands on her knees, preparing to get up and greet her husband.

“No.”

I was always smart in school, but extremely naïve to relationships. I didn’t
have a lot of boys interested in me, like my sister, and I wasn’t necessarily actively
seeking their attention. I had my first boyfriend in the seventh grade. It lasted for a
month and a week. I had my first kiss outside of a school dance in Hopkinton. I
thought it was gross but couldn’t wait to tell my mother about it anyway.

“You and Stephen did what?” She was less than enthusiastic.

“Mom, it’s funny though…because…” I thought about the night before and
what my initial reaction was. “Because he kisses like a fish!” My mother’s expression
erased itself from her face. She stared at me blankly for a second or two.

“Because he kisses like a what?” she asked in a reserved manor.
“A fish.” I repeated and then proceeded to suck in my cheeks and clap my lips together.

It must have been the squeaking noise I was making or the sheer hilariousness of my face, so honest and sincere, because my mother exploded into a distinct laughter. Her round body shook so hard, she had to take her glasses off to wipe a way a tear from the corner of each eye.

That was one of the few times I could make my mother laugh.

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The second real boyfriend came much later. I was a senior in high school when I started dating Alex. It was a relationship out of convenience, that’s what I thought at first. Neither of us had ever really had a “serious” significant other, and had really begun a mutual friendship.

“Lilian, I don’t understand why Alison isn’t interested in me.” Alex and I were sitting in study hall together. We were in the library avoiding homework. I wanted to tell him because she had graduated only a year prior and only took time out of her busy schedule of partying and sleeping around to pick up her little brother from school.

“Because you are too nice for her.” I tried to be sympathetic to his cause, despite my frustration with him noticing her and despite me.
“Lil, you need to know something about guys. Even though it’s important to girls to be nice girls, no guy wants to hear that the girl they have the hots for doesn’t want to go out with them because they’re nice.” I wasn’t sure how to give advice on a topic so foreign to me. I had little to no experience with guys until the fish kiss incident in seventh grade. The only thing I could tell him was what I had always fantasized about.

“Well, maybe you could try writing her a note, telling her she has a secret admirer.” I said in a hushed voice. I didn’t want the other kids in study hall to hear my confession. I really didn’t know what drew me to the idea of a secret admirer. Maybe it was the romance novels, my mother kept in her dresser drawer, or the movies I requested Cadence bring home from her job as manager of the Video News in Canton. Or maybe it was the enticing possibility that there could be someone thinking of me that way? In any case, I felt compelled to help him in his dilemma.

“That sounds like a good idea.”

Over the next month of second period study halls, I grew a small bud of jealousy for Alison in my stomach. Alex systematically came to me with his longing for different ways to catch her attention. With ever day he came in complaining, I felt sorry for Alex all the more. I wanted someone to want me in the way he wanted her. I was tired of being without that kind of companionship. Apparently as I began to replace that secret admirer in my fantasy with Alex, he began to realize that I too,
was an underdog. Shortly after one of our ‘no one wants nice counterparts’
discussions, he asked me out.

“Guys like dirty girls…that’s why they get noticed. No chick wants to be a
slut, but we don’t want to be classified as spinster either.”

“You’re right, nice guys and nice girls finish last.”

☆☆☆

Alex wasn’t as decided in going to college as I was because his parents didn’t
want him to go.

It was after dinner at his house and we were trying to decide on what movies
to watch.

“Gone in Sixty Seconds or Tommy Boy?” Alex’s dad held the movies up for us to
look at. He was hunched over on the couch across from Alex and me. He worked
construction for Alex’s brother-in-law.

“Oh, it doesn’t matter hon. Whatever you want to see.” Jane said to her
husband, without even looking at us. She was a Parishville native, remarkably set in
her ways. “So, Lilian, what are you doing after graduation?” She smiled politely at
me.

“Well, I was thinking about applying early admission to Syracuse University.”
I replied timidly. I always felt embarrassed when I answered that familiar question.

“Oh really? Alex, have you thought about your plans yet?”
“Not sure exactly. I was thinking about Canton Tech, but I dunno.”

“What? I thought you were going to try to get a job with your dad?” He’s eyes were wide with shock and betrayal.

“Well, yeah, I was, but I mean… I could have an easier job but with a little more money going to college. That’s what Lil tells me.”

“Oh really?” She looked at me, annoyed.

“Well, actually, yeah. I mean ‘you can’t make good money without a college degree these days.” I heard myself echo my mother’s words to me. I was a little surprised at the conversation. For as long as I could remember, my mother and sister had told me that college meant happiness. The way they had informed me about the benefits of continuing my education, they said I would be able to attain a divine bliss unlike they had ever thought possible. It became an understanding rather than a choice for me. I was going to college.

“Well, I know plenty of people who have jobs making good money not going to school. You’re father for example.” We all looked at Alex’s dad. He had fallen asleep in a crooked position, slumped over the arm of their couch. “Well, you know what I mean.”

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Alex and I had many conversations about school after that evening with his parents. I made a point to remind him how hard it would be to try to stay together if
he didn’t go to school. I told him we wouldn’t be on the same track, or with similar goals. When I received my acceptance letter to Syracuse, it was enough inspiration to send his application to Suny Canton in.

I didn’t understand how my feelings for Alex had gotten so serious. I grew to love him and believed that we could somehow continue the seriousness of our relationship. I was afraid of being alone. I was afraid to be without a safety net. We were both beginners and not really motivated to change the pace at which our love was going.

My mother noticed my growing attention to Alex’s and my relationship. I could tell she didn’t like it, but was hesitant to say anything. She had been through it all with Cadence dozens of times over. She knew from experience that the more she pushed her opinions on her children, the more we would resent her, and so, she bit her tongue when it came to Alex. It wasn’t until I began to question myself that she felt she had to step in.

It was two weeks after senior prom, and Alex had been irritable for a few days. Even though we had talked about it many times before, and he had claimed to support me, I knew what his frustration was over. Sex. Of course, sex was a topic on plenty of people’s minds in high school. A lot of our mutual friends had experienced it. But I had informed Alex before we ever became official that I was not interested in pre-marital sex. I told him I felt as though if it were good, it could wait.
I knew that it bothered him that I felt this way. He was sick of listening to friends divulge secrets about their experiences, without having anything to contribute. But I wasn’t about to allow his feeling of inadequacy influence such an important decision I had made.

This became the downfall to our relationship.

I called him on a Saturday to see how his day had gone and to find out if he wanted to spend time together that evening. Before we realized it, we were immersed in an argument about what we actually meant to each other. By the end of the conversation, he had basically said that he wouldn’t break up with me. He didn’t want people to think he was that kind of guy, the kind that would end a six month relationship over sex. But he would continue to bring it up until I made the decision to either have sex with him, or to break up with him. When I came of the bathroom, my mother had heard more than I had intended her to.

“Lilian, come here for a second.” I sat next to her on our small sofa. She grabbed the remote and turned the television down. “I know what he’s trying to make you do,” she said in a solemn voice.

“But mom…” I tried to contest; I knew what she was going to say.

“Lil, let me finish. You know how I feel about Alex. I know I haven’t said much about it…I’ve tried to let you make your own decisions. But I feel like I need to say something now. Lilian, I’ve made a lot of bad decisions in my life…choices
that I wish I could somehow change. I wish I could’ve been a better parent to you and your sister and brother. I wish I could have explained to you kids why I have made the decisions I have, but there’s nothing I can really do about the past. There’s a lot about Cadence that I dislike. I love her, of course, she’s my daughter. But she disappoints me in a lot of ways. She’s been with so many men, and hasn’t done much better than me in school. I feel like she had so much potential, and it was all wasted because of the circumstances we’ve lived through.” I wasn’t ready for this degree of honesty from my mother. I had known about my sister’s dependence on the opposite sex, but I never realized that my mother saw it as a flaw she had passed down. I never knew that she felt the way she did about Cadence.

“But that doesn’t…” I wanted to stop her from this cruel revealing.

“I’m not through. I love you very deeply, Lilian. You came to me at a time when I didn’t think I was going to have any more children. It is you that keeps me alive. It is you that makes the suffering I’ve been through worth while. I feel like you are the one chance I have at leaving my mark on the world. You have been my greatest success, as a parent, and as a person. You listen to me, like Cadence and Eric never did. You trust that I would never lead you in a harmful situation. You have beat the odds. I have more faith in you and pride in you than you could ever possibly know. My only doubt is in this situation with Alex. Do you understand what I’m
trying to tell you?” Her melodic blue eyes sank into mine. I felt like Debbie Reynolds in the *Unsinkable Molly Brown*, overwhelmed by circumstance and situation.

“I’m not sure I do mom.”

“Lilian, I have been pushed around my whole life. I’ve taken a lot of shit from a lot of people. Cadence has as well. We’ve had to live our lives through, by, for, and in spite of men. No parent wants their children to make the same mistakes they have. Lilian, I want you to do better for yourself than I have done for me.” My mother’s eyes began to water. Her lips dragged down on the ends, trembling, trying to fight emotion. It pained me to see her that way. I had never looked at my mother that way before. She, too, was a person, a kid who had somehow simultaneously grown up too fast, and remained a child. She had done the best she could, considering her resources. I leaned over to her and hugged her, tighter than I’d ever held her before.

After I consoled her and tried to tell her that I would do the best to exceed her expectations for me, I left.

I had to get out.

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And so I return to the gorge, a familiar and peaceful place to think. I sit down on the bridge, my legs dangling between the metal bars of safety. I think about what everyone has told me and I question myself.
I’ve seen my mother bruised, on her heart and body. I’ve witnessed my sister move between and among men to get what she needed like she never could from her own father. I consider my possibilities.

I know that everyone’s perception of themselves is usually different from how they are perceived. I know that I have a lot to live up to and surpass. I know that life for me will be difficult, and I wonder if I will be able to scratch off the labels chiseled into me. I’m a girl, a woman. Can I be free from all that binds me to my life in St. Lawrence County? Can I survive independently from any and all stereotypes I’ve been given?

Can I be an island?
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A Cuban-American History: 
His-story, Her-story, Our-story

Sara Campos

McNair Program 
Paul Graham 
July 16, 2004
Ours is a nostalgic family in the way that others are proud families. We didn’t have a sense of history, but an ache for it that had to be assuaged by an act of imagination — for there, at the head of the family where history should have been with its culture intact, its relation to the nation assumed, was my grandmother, the rootless wanderer, our oak that lived in air, not earth. Our immigrant.

-Patricia Hampl, *A Romantic Education*
A Cuban-American History:  
His-story, Her-story, Our-story

Looking Out

A rectangular black and white picture stands tall in the upper right hand corner of a similarly shaped page in my father’s scrapbook. There is a woman in her early thirties; she is wearing a long, short-sleeved dress, conservative high-healed shoes, and a bow in her dark brown hair. Her legs cross comfortably at their ankles: a statement of propriety. She sits decidedly upright on the line between the sun shining water and the dried-up, dusty land. Her body cheats towards the audience like an actor’s on a stage, but her gaze is directed towards the upper right hand corner of the picture’s border, where, on another day, actual wet water dripped on its paper representation, an event remembered in blur. Maybe she watches the American shore.

She holds her son, my father, in her lap and against her chest. His plump, baby body naturally aligns itself with her contour, maybe because her hand is on his waist, wrapped loosely but strongly around him, or maybe because he’s comfortable and agrees with his mother that out and to the right is the direction in which they should be looking. Regardless of their motivation, they both look out from the shore, seeing what lies beyond the bounds of their alligator shaped island.

I read somewhere that the division of pictures into foreground and background by the horizon line speaks to the importance given to the present and the future, foreground representing the captured moment in time and background representing what might come
next. If this is true, whoever snapped this photograph must have known that my father and his mother would eventually leave Cuban shores.

Knowing that these two people would one day find themselves in an airplane crossing over an ocean that only their eyes swam in that morning by the shore, explains why whoever took the picture devoted two thirds of the space, the portion not occupied by the people, to the water, to the foamy white sea water lapping on the edge of the woman’s seat. He knew, if only in his eye when he looked through the view and maybe in his finger when he pushed the button, that these people were headed off this shore, that they were destined to follow their eyes to places their feet hadn’t thought of turning.

**History: Background Check**

There are a few significant events in Cuba’s history of which nearly every American has heard: the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the 1994 Migration Crisis. These events have shaped Cuban history and to a great extent the Cuban future. Antoni Kapeia, author of *Cuba: Island of Dreams*, says “All Cuban history since the late eighteenth century can justifiably be seen as the trajectory of the pursuit of a ‘dream’ – of true independence” (xiv).

The island began as a Spanish colony in the eighteenth century and eventually evolved into the communist country that we know today to be led by Fidel Castro. Leslie Bethell, editor of *Cuba: A Short History*, makes the implicit argument that the most significant developing force in Cuban history is political disorder born out of a lack of unified direction. What many people fail to realize, possibly due to our 40-year-old trade embargo with the country, is the extent of American involvement in Cuban affairs.
After the Ten Years War, Cuba’s first war of independence from Spain in 1868-78, there was a significant decline of the Cuban landed aristocracy. This led to the beginning of American economic penetration into Cuba (Bethell 27). The country spent the vast majority of her history playing the part of a United States economic pawn. The US was the big brother, just slightly to the north of the little Caribbean island, that would intervene anytime there was trouble and also bought a generous portion of Cuban sugar.

When Cuba finally won her independence from Spain in 1897, it was the United States that fought the war. American capital began to control railways, public utilities, tobacco and minerals. Bethell quotes American President Teddy Roosevelt in saying, “It is eminently for our own interests to control the Cuban market” (37). This comment, made in 1902, would mean political disaster for an American president today; though, we still aim to control markets, you won’t catch anyone saying it out loud.

The United States was so involved in Cuban affairs that we even helped them write their constitution in 1900, and based it on our own. Written into the document was an allowance called the Platt Amendment, which gave the United States the right to “intervene for maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberties” (Bethell 39). This was also the time when Guantánamo Bay, the American military base in Cuba, was established.

By 1915, 83% of Cuba’s imports came from the United States, compared to 51% the year before (Bethell 48). Cuba was reliant on her northern neighbor. Bethell says, “In 1922, students at Havana University began demanding the forging of a ‘new Cuba’, free from corruption and Yankee tutelage” (49). Then in 1925 the Cuban Communist party was founded. As Bethell explains, “Its direct influence was minimal, but very soon
Marxist concepts, probably not fully studied, appeared in the writings of the new generation” (50). For instance, Joaquín Martínez Sáenz, a lawyer and future revolutionary, said “We were dazzled by the apparent simplicity and clarity of Marxist theories … all Cuban problems could be explained through class struggle and Yankee imperialism”(Bethell 50).

The United States was clearly highly involved in every aspect of Cuban life. Bethell writes, “Within a decade of the War of Independence, the USA had become a pervasive presence in Cuba, totally dominating the economy, thoroughly penetrating the social fabric and fully controlling the political process”(58). We even helped Castro, a man deemed by the United States as an unsuitable leader, gain power. In 1958, the US government took away support of Batista, then president of Cuba, in the form of an arms embargo, thus helping Castro take power (Bethell 90). American-Cuban relations would forever be changed after Castro’s Revolution of 1959.

**Our-story: Silence Speaks**

*George Campos, formerly known as Jorge Aurelio Marcelino Campos Suarez, is fifty-two years old, a little round in the face, and carries dark, unruly eyebrows that can be seen from at least a furlong away. His eyes are slightly lighter than mine, which were black when I was born, and his skin carries the color of a rich caramel sauce.*

*He is Cuban born. Twenty years ago he donated the Cuban part of my Cuban-American identity to my genes and then focused on raising me as an American. That day in July he began to let me in on the life that he lived in Cuba, on the life that, in many ways, has defined mine.*
He was sipping the last few drops of his root beer float through a clear straw on a July day in Buffalo, New York — a day so hot he said it reminded him of Cuba. On that humid afternoon my father told me his first childhood story.

“Batista takes over power when I’m born. So besides having these memories of this guy being really bad, I come to understand about Batista actually later, not as a kid. Batista ends up taking power not through the democratic process, he literally just does a coup de tat, which literally means a punch to the state. He takes over by force. It’s like having the president being bounced out by this military guy that just takes him out of there. That in itself made it to be something that people didn’t like; people wanted to get back to having democratically elected presidents.

“It was pretty typical in Cuban politics not to use the democratic process and the legal process to deal with disagreements but it was pretty common just to use force. That’s something that the Americans don’t appreciate about themselves. But it’s a phenomenal thing that people in this country do. That when they disagree with each other, they may argue pretty aggressively but it’s not accepted practice to kill each other. And that’s something that was not the case in Cuba. In Cuba, the legal practice was not followed. It was whoever had the most guns and the most power.

“I have a clear memory of the months leading up to Castro’s revolution. There’s just little memories here and there saying that something was going on and that it was exciting. Little stories would be told.

“Fidel Castro would broadcast this radio program from the Sierra Maestra, which were the Cuban hills that he was fighting from. And the Batista government, to find out who was listening to it, synchronized a beep so that every 20 or 30 seconds that you were
listening to this radio station there would be this very high pitched beep. So that literally a policeman walking by your house would hear the beep and he would know you were listening to this radio station and then you’d be in pretty serious trouble. And I remember Abo, my father, going into this closet – and remember Cuba was always very very hot, so you wouldn’t want to be inside a closet – and literally stuffing all kinds of coats and pillows and things inside the closet so he could turn on the radio and the pillows and the blankets would deaden the sound of that beep so that he wouldn’t be detected. I have pretty clear memories of that.”

**History: Beginnings of a Revolution**

Batista came to power in Cuba for the last time in 1952. He led a military run dictatorship which relied on “a divided opposition and the fragile economic success of the 1939-45 war years,” according to Kapcia. In 1953 Fidel Castro, a man whose name was not yet well known, led an attack on military barracks in Santiago de Cuba, which failed. Although unsuccessful, Castro’s plan was so daring that he was catapulted into contention for leadership over the anti-Batista forces and armed struggle was elevated as the principle means of opposition (Bethell 83-84).

Castro organized another attack from aboard the *Granma*, a small yacht he sailed from Mexico, on November 30, 1956. This revolt was crushed well before the *Granma* crew even set foot on Cuban soil. As Bethell explains, “Having failed in a dramatic bid for power, deprived of arms, ammunition and supplies, the *Granma* survivors sought refuge in the southeastern mountain range;” (85) the *Sierra Maestra*. Thus, *Granma* survivors recruited people from the mountains and started attacking Rural guards.
Insurgent victories forced Batista’s government to concede enclaves of liberated territory throughout *Oriente*, the southeastern portion of the island (Bethell 86).

In 1958, the 26 of July Movement, what would become a famous day in Castro’s history, opened war against property and production across the island to isolate Batista from the support of economic elites. Castro and his supporters sent a message: conditions of normalcy would not return until Batista departed. Guerrilla leadership, under Castro, the now established leader of the anti-Batista movement, announced the intention to attack sugar mills, tobacco factories, utilities, railroads, and oil reserves. The July 1958 Pact of Carácas named Fidel Castro the principle leader of the movement and established the rebel army as the main arm of the revolution (Bethell 90). As long as Batista remained in power, things would not be pretty.

**Policia**

One of the first memories that I have is of this bigger house that was on a bigger avenue where my grandmother lived. It was Aba’s, my mother’s, mom’s house. And one political thing that was pretty obvious is about when you saw policemen. In this country, the United States, you see policemen and they’re not necessarily your friends but they’re people that you go to if you have a problem or if you want to figure out: where something is. But in Cuba it was very very much the opposite. When you saw policemen you were really literally afraid and a little bit concerned about them, that they would do something a little crazy. Meaning they had the power and you didn’t see them as being helpful people. You saw them more as being people that had guns and they had power and they were crazy and mean.
Expectations

In another picture, four people who look a lot like people I know sit side-by-side on a couch in a room I’ve never seen before. Abo, my grandfather, sits to the left edge of the photograph, wearing black pants, a gray button down shirt, a dress coat and a mustache. He looks much younger than I ever imagined him being; a small tuft of hair still rests on the crown of his head.

Abo’s arm reaches around my nine-year-old father’s frame, evident by the hand clasped around Dad’s left elbow. Dad, or at least this tiny version of the six foot tall man I know to be my father, smiles with his whole body in the direction of the camera. We can see his teeth and a dimple on his right cheek.

Aba, my grandmother, has positioned herself slightly forward on the cushion of the couch, holding her back straight, her head strong and her knees together. She knows that somewhere somebody is looking at her and she is sending the best message she knows how to send: she embodies grace.

Pepe, my uncle, sits to the right of Aba. He wears a black suit, a white shirt, and a long red tie. He smiles, but there is a look in his eye telling me that something else is happening, something far more important than this moment on the couch in the room with flowered curtains.

All of their faces, except maybe my father’s, who was only seven years old at the time, betray their sense of expectation. This photograph was taken five days before Castro’s revolution, five days before the course of their lives would begin to bring them to America.
New Year’s Day

The revolution happens January 1st. And when you’re a kid in Cuba, the period between December 25 and January 6 is this one very exciting period every single year. Because in Cuba unlike it is here where it’s just Christmas Day and maybe Christmas Eve, it’s this very extended two week process, where Christmas day is not even any kind of a gift transfer at all, that actually happens January 6. So there are all these very highly ritualized events that have to do with the Catholic church and have to do with the community and partying and socializing that happen at this time. So right smack in the middle of that Batista loses, Castro takes over.

Well, in the days leading up to January 1st you knew something was going on, but its not at all that you knew this guy, Castro, was winning. Even talking about this guy or even knowing that there was this other guy was in itself considered not a loud speech. There’s all this hush. It’s like everybody knows there’s some sort of a problem going on and some sort of exciting thing going on, but no one is talking about it openly. So I remember that last Christmas before Castro takes over as everyone going through the motions but also with this sense that you didn’t know if it was a sense of danger or a sense of excitement or what, but there was this sense that something was going to happen.

Then it happens. Then January 1st happens. January 1st is also New Years Day, which is a big party day in Cuba. And I remember very early in the morning, probably even before 6am, I remember militia men from Castro’s army literally running up and down the streets in these little jeeps in this mood of just this like crazy celebration. The
only thing that I can compare it to is, just recently with the Iraqi war, I think Americans expected that the population would be insanely thankful and go out on the streets to welcome them. In Cuba that in fact happened, that expectation happened. It’s kinda like the pictures you see in Europe in the Second World War, when the Americans come to town, the people are there with the roses welcoming them into town. That is what happened in Cuba, this wild, everybody goes out into the streets celebration. If one of these revolutionaries touched you or shook your hand or autographed something, you were the hero in the neighborhood. It was this intense, euphoric, this bad guy’s gone and these guys with beards and rosaries hanging down on their necks are parading through town and its just going to be the best time ever.

**History: Beginnings of Communism**

In terms of the Cuban-American relationship, Fidel Castro’s assertion of power in 1959 was the most significant event of the decade. Castro’s arrival signaled a political revolution and the beginning of fiercely unfriendly relations between the neighboring countries. Edward Gonzalez describes how and why Castro decided to ally himself with the Communist Party and the Soviet Union in *Castro’s Revolution, Cuban Communist Appeals, and the Soviet Response*. Gonzalez describes Castro, the Cuban communists, and Moscow as three actors in the negotiation of support (43). He explains their initial positions: Castro needed to find a way to ensure survivability of his revolution without relying on the U.S., which led him towards obtaining Soviet assistance; Cuban communists were concerned with securing Castro’s endorsement and obtaining assurances of tangible Soviet solidarity with Cuba; Moscow wanted to restrain the tempo
and moderate the course of the revolution in order to minimize Soviet internationalist obligations (44).

As Castro worked towards a more radicalized Communist government, the Cuban-Soviet relationship became more involved. As Gonzalez states, “By the end of 1959, the Soviet Union was confronted by a transformed revolution and with implicit and explicit appeals from Castro and the PSP (Cuban Communist Party) to extend aid to Cuba” (49). Then in early February 1960, First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan of Moscow had signed a trade and aid pact with the Havana government by the end of his 10-day visit, thus marking the official beginning of friendly Soviet-Cuban relations and the deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations.

Ownership

Castro started this kind of control, this pervasive control. He started nationalizing different companies. So, all of a sudden private property wasn’t allowed anymore. And if somebody owned a factory or a business or…I don’t even remember if it affected the things you own. I still remember Castro making this speech about abolishing private property, and I still remember the women in my block, my mother’s age, kind of questioning how far it went, like if it really meant you didn’t own anything, like you didn’t own your own shovel and your own chairs and your own tools or if it meant that you didn’t own your house. What didn’t you own anymore?

It was obvious that he wanted to have complete control over everything. And all these things that you thought were yours all of a sudden were now part of the state, and it affected you at a very private level.
Our-story: Aba Speaks

Aba sits on the white couch in her one bedroom apartment in Buffalo, NY and sets herself to the task of remembering. Her brown eyes show more of their white border as my brother and I ask questions and she gets excited. “All these pictures that I have given to you mean everything in the world to me, because they tell me about my life,” she says, crying. Aba will explain, in the best English she can manage, what happened on that island south of Florida where our history was buried.

“You see the Russians there. Right away you notice them because they are completely different than us: very tall, very white, very possessive, the owners of everything. They invade Cuba, but in an intellectual way, like advisors of this advisors of that. Was like an intellectual, you know with the words too. They don’t invade Cuba with guns. No matter that after they bring a lot of guns and even they make in the beach, under the beaches, they make like a big armory.”

Stock up on Soap

It all boils down to motivation. One of the things that the capitalist system is very good at is in motivating you, because you are an individual and you can literally fail while everyone else around you succeeds. So that makes a lot of people want to try harder. Well, in the communist system, that motivation is taken away because you’re going to get compensated exactly the same as everyone else. So what it does is it creates almost immediately a lack of production.
What you experience almost immediately is all these kinds of things that you could easily find in supermarkets and easily find at outdoor markets just start disappearing. So all of a sudden buying the most simple and normal things, just going to the store and buying things becomes this insanely difficult process. They literally would give our family ration books. And the ration books would say you get so many cans of this, so many cans of beans, so many pounds of rice and so many bars of soap. But even that, it was not like you would go to this big store and it would all be there waiting for you, this was your allotment for the month. And then you would have to wait until the shipments came and things got very very inefficient very very quickly. To get a bar of soap you would have to wait in line for two or three hours, just up to get to the front of the line, show your little ration card and get your little bar of soap. And that became part of everyday life that was just crazy. Just hours and hours wasted in these very frustrating lines to get the simplest things, just to get by.

**Defensa de la Revolución**

Batista was bad. But if you weren’t against him or if you were not doing things to get in his path, ya, you were afraid of the cops, afraid of this and that, but it didn’t really personally affect you. But one of the things that I remember Castro doing was that he created these things called Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, which in Spanish was *Comités para la Defensa de la Revolución*. He would literally pick people in your block that were the heads of these committees and they would have authority to search you, and to ask you questions, and to come into your home, and do all kinds of things.
So you were literally being controlled, not by the police, but literally by your neighbors. And I still remember what an incredibly awful feeling that was. It would be like if on your street one of the families became the head of the committee and all of a sudden they would have power over you, like serious power. They could send you to jail, and they could question you. They would have authority that in this country is completely protected. Meaning people cannot come into your house without a search warrant and whatever, but in this particular case, none of those privileges existed, none of those rights existed. And I remember that being really really bad.

**History: Drifting Apart**

Cuban-American relations began to deteriorate rapidly in the summer of 1960. A newly amended sugar act, which authorized the President to cut off the Cuban sugar quota, was approved by July 3. On July 5, the Cuban Council of Ministers sanctioned the expropriation of all U.S. property of Cuba. President Eisenhower cancelled Cuba’s sugar quota on July 6. By October 19, the U.S. government had prohibited exports to Cuba except for non-subsidized foodstuffs and medicines. On October 24, Cuba expropriated all U.S.-owned wholesale and retail trade enterprises as well as the remaining smaller U.S.-owned industrial and agrarian enterprises. Then, on October 29, the U.S. withdrew Ambassador Philip Bonsal. U.S.-Cuban diplomatic relations were finally and formally broken at the end of Eisenhower’s term in 1961 (Bethell 99).

At the same time that Cuban-American relations were deteriorating, Cuban-Soviet relations were improving. On July 9, 1960, Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev declared that Soviet missiles were prepared to defend Cuba in a ‘figurative’ sense. Bethell writes
that after a few weeks the two countries signed a military agreement in which the Soviet Union pledged to “use all means at its disposal to prevent an armed United States intervention against Cuba” (100). This increasing military collaboration between Cuban and the Soviet Union heightened U.S. hostility towards Havana (100).

**Covered**

One of the things Castro did when people started turning against him: he tried to do all these control things and he tried to get people that he thought would be against him, to just get them out of the country. And some of the people he wanted to get out of the country were the priests, priests and nuns, just get them out of the country.

I was going to a private school at the time run by priests and the word had come that they had to leave the country, just get out. I would guess the year was probably 1961, probably the spring before I left, right around the Bay of Pigs, April 1961. It was kind of like the end of the school year. But the school year just ended whenever Castro threw the priests out, meaning that all of a sudden I wasn’t going to school anymore. So one of the things that these priests wanted to do is get some of the money that they had in the school out so that they could use it when they were wherever they were going to be.

I was in the third grade at the time, but where in this country childhood is kind of extended for many many years, in Cuba being in the third grade you were already kind of a little man. I think you see pictures of these other countries and you see little nine and ten year old kids with guns fighting for the country. That’s very much like a third grader thought of himself back then. You didn’t think of yourself as this little tiny kid.
I remember the priest pretty much told me what he was going to do, got my approval to do it, and while I was at recess he went into my books. In Cuba it was pretty typical that you would put a cover on the books to protect them, and he literally took the covers out and snuck thousands of dollars inside the covers of all these books and then put it back into my book bag again. So while this was going on, the militiamen had surrounded the school and they were searching the kids coming in and out every single day. So I knew that when the school day ended that I was going to have a bag filled with thousands of dollars and that I was going to be searched, that I was going to have to go through this search process and that I was going to have to get on the bus to get home. Apparently I played it cool enough. Obviously nothing happened. I’m here today. But I clearly remember the whole process of walking out with this bag that I knew had something that if they found it would create tremendous trouble for me. I don’t know if they would have killed me or whatever they would have done, but I remember me having to play it real cool, and the militia men not finding what was inside and me getting on the bus and going home. And then the priest contacting our family a few days later to get the money out of the book bags again.

**History: Exodus**

Changes in Cuba’s political relations paired with a reorganization of internal political and economic affairs caused a massive emigration to the United States. Bethell writes that the U.S. government supported this emigration with special programs in hopes of discrediting the Cuban government. From 1960 to 1962, 200,000 people emigrated from Cuba, an average of well over 60,000 per year. Bethell writes,
Most emigrants came from the economic and social elite, the adult males typically being professionals, managers and executives, although they also included many white-collar workers. On the other hand, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers were under-represented relative to their share of the work force, and rural Cuba was virtually absent from this emigration. This upper-middle- and middle-class urban emigration was also disproportionately white. Henceforth, a part of the history of the Cuban people would unfold in the United States (100).

Cubans who had the means to emigrate and who did not depend on the government for subsistence left the country as soon as Castro revealed his communistic persuasion.

**Little Big Man**

*Abo stands in the living room on Christmas morning holding his baby, Jorge. A short-sleeved arm belonging to Pepe reaches up to offer additional support for my father. Standing to the right of his father, Pepe, who must not be older than 10, carries himself like a man, protecting his much younger brother who, when they arrive in Miami, will be like a son to him.*

*All three men wear telling expressions. Dad’s eyes are wide open and almost expectant; he is watching. Eight years later he will find himself looking out in the exact same manner as he flies over the Atlantic Ocean on his way to America. Abo is calm and reserved; he looks like the kind of man that would rather wait out Castro’s rule than react so strongly and leave the country.*

*Pepe’s face is the most intense. There is something going on behind those eyes, something brewing inside. Pepe looks like a trouble maker, like a revolutionary, like the kind of person that would hold meetings to talk about Castro’s misleading rule. All the*
while, he keeps his arm held up in support of his brother, declaring responsibility for his family’s well being.

**Everybody Left**

I get my son out of Cuba. First of all I had to make the official papers. The first thing was go to the embassy and to follow the rules of the Spanish embassy to take him in the group with the priest. He has to go through airplane through the Spanish air company. They ask for us $600 because he had to take a round trip because Castro don’t let you to leave the country just because you want it. The best of the country was leaving Cuba, all the professionals everybody that don’t need the government for to live from them, everybody that has made himself his own way in Cuba, everyone that know what was communist.

**History: The Opiate of the People**

The Catholic Church became the institutional base for the opposition to the revolution, as symbolized by the one million plus turnout at the National Catholic Congress in November 1959, according to Margaret E. Crahan, author of *Cuba: Religion and Revolutionary Institutionalization* (325).

Crahan explains that many Catholics became very involved in anti-revolutionary activity. Priests urged their congregations to take part in counterrevolutionary activities and even sometimes to go into exile. According to Crahan, members of Acción Católica, a group originally formed in 1932 to promote increased involvement in church activities, began supporting anti-Castro forces by engaging in urban sabotage, relaying messages,
publicizing the cause and providing safe houses (323). Obviously, this put the church at serious odds with the government, and by 1963, the church was left with virtually no role in Cuban society (328). Active Catholics were excluded from the Communist Party, which basically meant exclusion from the way of life in Cuba.

Crahan explains that “failure to have articulated a vision of the role of the Church in the context of a socialist Cuba has made Catholicism largely irrelevant” (340). Besides that, most of the active Catholics left Cuba shortly after the revolution radicalized (became communist). A 1969 survey of Catholic Parishes in Havana predicted that by 1972 50-70% of their members would have left Cuba (321). This means that many of the émigrés arriving in Miami were Catholic, which explains the Church’s active role in helping to care for Cubans upon arrival.

**Saving Pepe**

Bueno, I was in one of the very first church in Cuba. Was, Paula. Was the hospital of Paula and was the church too of Paula. Was one of the very first church from the colonial time. In those days I was in the National Board of Catholic Action in Cuba. I have a lot of different suggestions. And one of them is that the wonderful words of the mass will be says in the native language, no in Latin. Because all the people that don’t know Latin they don’t know all the means.

That day was at 6 o’clock in the afternoon, was a little late for the mass to start that was 7 o’clock and the priest don’t come. In this way, I went to a friend of us, the Maristas; the Maristas was a school from first grade to bachelors, they has been the educators of all the boys in my family and in my husband family and everything. And I
went to them and just speaking to them, just say Father please come to the mass that you are with us too. And I hear the voice of the principal of the school, that they was hiding already from the Castro’s regimen. He told, “Isaura, do you want to lose your son?” I say, “Father, what you’re telling me.” He say, “You don’t know that your son is already persecuting for the police because he’s making contra-revolution against the Castro revolution? You have to take this boy out of Cuba immediately.” Bueno, I was so scared that I don’t know even from where even to start.

*Palabras*

You know that maybe many people today don’t give that value to the word, *palabra*, w-o-r-d. The word is more powerful; they have a lot more value than even a gun. With a gun you can kill the person, but the idea of that words, of that idea, of that thing, they don’t stop. Somebody else take that word for themselves and keep going. It is why goals, ideas, point of view, religions stand for. The word never can be eliminate completely. Nobody understand how powerful is a word. And when you convince persons is like you make this person able to sacrifice their own life for that goal that you are speaking about. It is, you know, worth while. Words is the more powerful weapon of the world.

One of the reason Pepe think Castro’s a traitor, because they close church; they don’t let free speech. Before Castro we had a lot of manifestations and everything any time that something was wrong from Batista, people go out and even fight for the things. When Castro come the manifestations was just to approve him, no anything that he was doing. Castro don’t want anybody better than him, or anybody that be preferred to him.
His-story: Let Down

By the Bay of Pigs invasion my family was already clearly against the government. In that twenty-eight month period this huge euphoria for Castro has turned into completely the opposite. My brother has already left the island; we’re planning to leave even though it’s not completely known to me; and there’s this invasion which is going to free us from Castro. There was again an expectation that something was going to happen. But this time around, the underground movement against Castro seems to have been more organized; people were talking about it more. It wasn’t like in the Batista days where everything was very hushed. At that point in time we were in the opposition against Castro, and I remember knowing lots of other people that were also against Castro.

The Bay of Pigs invasion, even though it’s become this word that lots of people know, is this invasion that literally lasts just a half a day. So there’s this euphoria that these guys are here, trying to take Castro out of the picture and then like a few hours later, Castro is blasting all over the radio and all over TV that he’s already won. So then there’s this huge let down. This thing that had been getting planned is just gone. And I remember that this time around I was almost going to be part of the fight against Castro and then it’s over and there’s just this depression.

History: Bay of Pigs

On March, 17 1960, President Dwight Eisenhower authorized the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to organize the training of Cuban exiles for a future invasion
of Cuba. Exiles living in Miami agreed to form the Cuban Revolutionary Council on
March 22, 1961 and planned to attack Castro (101). As Bethell explains, prominent
members of the Council included Antonio Varona, former prime minister (and opponent
of Batista), as well as Fidel Castro’s former Minister of Public Works, Manuel Ray. The
group planned on overthrowing Castro’s revolutionary regime and then acting as a
provisional government under the presidency of Míró Cardona. The exiles’ Brigade 2506
trained in Nicaragua and Guatemala (Bethell 101).

President John F. Kennedy inherited this plan for invasion when he came to office
in January of 1961. Then on April 3, 1961 the U.S. government published a ‘white
paper’ accusing Castro and his close supporters of betraying what had been an authentic
revolution. Bethell says, “In the U.S. government’s view, Cuba needed a non-communist
transformation. President Kennedy agreed to let the CIA-trained invasion force go
forward, provided that U.S. forces were not used” (101).

On the morning of April 15, planes piloted by Cuban exiles bombed several
airfields in Cuba, creating much panic but little damage. Castro responded by
imprisoning tens of thousands of suspected dissidents. Two days later, Monday April 17,
Brigade 2506 landed at Girón Beach on the Bay of Pigs in south-central Cuba. The
Cuban government mobilized both its regular armed forces and the militia. Led
personally by Fidel Castro, they defeated the invasion force within forty-eight hours and
captured 1,180 prisoners (Bethell 102).

Symbolically, this victory meant a great deal for the Cuban government. As
Bethell explains, “Castro triumphantly announced that Cuba’s administration was a
consolidated socialist revolution able to defeat its enemies within Cuba as well as the
superpower to its north” (102). The Bay of Pigs invasion boosted Castro-supporter’s moral and crushed counter-revolutionaries living both in Cuba and inside the United States.

**Turning Point**

That day was horrible. The bay of pig, that day was the one that make me the decision to leave the country; like to every Cuban to leave the country, because we lost the hope that the American government was going to help us. It was in April. In those days the bells of every church in the beginning of the morning the 17 of April, they start to sound because we know that this was the sign that they have arrive in Cuba, the ones that was going to support our counter revolution and that the Americans was going to help and everything. And after a while, that was a surprise for everyone that the Castro people was there. Everybody lost hope.

It was so hard, so hard, so hard. How to see just these young people among two force, the Castro force and the one that they was coming. In this way, the people in the middle they was to be killed from one band or from the other. And I know people that was in this big trucks with all these body that was almost dead. You know what they have to drink because the thirst was so big? The pee of the other person. Can you believe it? And they was dying, dying against that place.

I know the person that was in charge of them, was one of the people for Castro that he was so bad. They was dirty, they was bleeding, they was desperate of the thirst. This person I know, personally. He after, he convince that Castro was worse than any other dictatorship that we have in Cuba. Castro don’t have any humanity for the persons.
A Different Hat

A five-year-old boy stands in the middle of a black and white photograph bordered by cream-colored, tattered edges on another page in my father’s scrapbook. Gigantic green plants dominate the scene, towering over the boy’s head. He holds onto long, thin palms and waves his hand high in the air.

The sun lights his face enough for me to see that this boy looks quite a bit like my father. Only this boy in the picture looks like he will grow up to be a farmer. His straw had sits comfortably on his head, like it was meant to shade only his eyes from the midday sun.

I knew when I was five years old that I would graduate from high school twelve years later. I still have the pink tie-dyed t-shirt they gave me in kindergarten that proudly reads, “Class of 2001” in dark blue letters. I wonder how my life would have been different if when I was nine someone took the shirt from me and gave me a different future.

It must have been strange for that boy in the picture to hear at nine years old at he would take of his hat and grow into my father, a man whose life he probably couldn’t even imagine.

Leaving Abo

Eight months of hard work that I expose my life to get out of Cuba. Sometimes in the lines was violence to take your place. Your grandpa one night go with me, and one man that was Spanish he took your grandfather for his arms and with the knee he kicked
him because was time to close. Was late at night and they says to us, “It's time to stop, no more.” Like in any store. And in this way, when he says like that we try to get this last opportunity because we were the very last ones; there were more behind us. But we were in the line the very first ones that they stop. In this way, when he do like that to your grandfather and say, “I says no.” I make under him and I make it, but your grandfather cannot make it because he was hitted. But what I can do? What I can do? Your grandfather after he was waiting on the street. Laughing. But I have to do. I get the opportunity and I accept that he don’t accompany me anymore.

Abo, like many Cubans, don’t believe that it is going to last so much. Because in those days many Cubans don’t believe that he’s going to be forever, that revolution, that right away the Americans was going to help us. He get the idea that I was come back.

The friends say to him, “Bueno, your wife, when come back?” You know like making fun of him. They say, “How she was come back? She’s saved now and she have save your childrens.”

In this way, your Abo suffer a lot. When he come back, was hard to recognize him. He was very good looking man and dress very well, you know, more like a little fat than a little skinny, was very good one. When he come he looks like 20 years oldest. And his hair have lost a lot and look white and everything. Even his friends says go cause it is going to close any moment. And was like this, your grandpa comes a year after the 20 of May, that was in Cuba like here the 4 of July, and when he come, you know, was hard to get along, because he don’t believe it that. He don’t want to leave his good life because you have to come without a penny. Castro don’t let you to bring
penny, to bring any money, to bring clothes, to bring jewelry, you cannot bring anything here.

**Blazer**

Bueno, in those days was like an obsession: don’t lost my children and to be with them. If Abo don’t want to go though, other mans do it, other mans come out with their family and everything, but in their own family he have a lot of problem because they consider me…Roberto, your great uncle, says “You have revolutionary all the family.” They were people that always were very peaceful. But after, no one of the family was left in Cuba. Everybody leave. I was the one that open the door. And any person in life that have to open the way, they have a lot of contradiction.

**Hiding Places**

When you have to weight the material things with freedom, you don’t care anymore about the material things. You just leave it. Even my wedding ring I leave to my sister. As soon as you ask in Cuba for to go out, the police department come to your house and make an inventory of everything that you have. Even they open your drawer to see your silver. If something is missing you don’t get out of Cuba.

There were many stories about that. For example, was a young Cuban and he has a cast on his arm and people say he have all the jewelry in the cast because everybody try to take the diamonds out. And in this way they broke his cast and they found that is no true. In this way, they put again the cast and in that moment he really do the cast with all his jewelry. But I don’t want. I don’t want. Even womens put inside the hair or inside
the hem of the clothes, but I don’t want to spoil my moment to leave Cuba to be with my two children. I cannot. I will never pardon me. Do you understand what means the freedom?

Crossing International Waters

When you take the plane you don’t speak, you don’t breathe, you don’t do nothing, but Sarita, and you Christian, when we go through, when the man in the airplane, say, “Bueno, now we are in international waters,” you cannot believe it what happen. People, people that we were afraid because we don’t know if they were chivatos — chivatos mean traitors — they start to take off the shoes and throw in the air, shout, everybody like crazy, like these whole bunch of people that we don’t know each other because even in Cuba when you do your papers you try that no body knows because somebody can make for you a traition and you can miss your go out. You have to simulate always that you’re happy with Castro; you smile. But that moment was incredible.

Your father that was just 9 years old, we were surprised because we were afraid, but they says, “Now, we are in international waters.” Was crazy. Everybody, everybody, everybody hug one another. Everybody cry. Was something great. Freedom don’t have price. Do you remember the day that the Berlin Wall was fall down? Bueno, you see the way that everyone leave the car leave everything in order to go to freedom? You see?
I see a nine-year-old boy follow his mother onto a plane that he thinks will someday bring him back home. One day he will realize that he will never go back, he will never feel the sun on his shoulders from that spot on the map that he has walked in his whole life. He will learn later that he is in fact going home, a different home, a home he will have to make for himself. But as far as his young mind and heart are concerned, on this day in October, carrying a change of clothes and his mother’s hand, he is going to Miami because his mother, the woman in the long, short-sleeved dress, and conservative high heels is headed that way too.

No one is talking. People who look like him wait in lines at the airport and let other people reach into their pant pockets, search their bags, bodies, and histories. Someone doesn’t want these men and women to leave the sunny island, and that someone is bad, bad enough to make that boy and his mother leave without his father, without pocket change, without the assurance of survival.

He must be nervous, anxious, excited. He must wonder why people aren’t talking to each other, why he is getting on this plane in the first place.

The trip over the ocean that he has swam in so many times before takes less than an hour, a unit of time that doesn’t seem capable of measuring the distance he will travel and the years he will be gone. “We are now over international waters,” says a voice coming through plastic holes in the ceiling of the plane. The hushed group roars. Shoes come off. Cheeks greet tears with the movement of laughter. Arms reach around bodies that aren’t theirs. Freedom fills veins with fresh blood, introducing these people to the life they are pursuing.
Questions tip toe into their heads while they are celebrating and then stomp around in their minds as the plane moves closer to that shore on the other side of the water. Where am I going? What will I eat? What clothing will I change into the day after tomorrow? Was this a good decision? When can I go back?

The air in the cabin moves the air in their ears, eyes open wider, energy pulses through newly invigorated veins, and the wheels of the plane touch the ground their feet will soon call home.
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Bibliography


“I Experience Simultaneously a Continuity and a Discontinuity with the Past”: Expressions of Black Alterity in the Early Poetry of Harryette Mullen

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In several interviews and critical essays Harryette Mullen expresses her desire to create in her writing an “alternative subjectivity” (Hogue 7) that appeals to “an audience that is diverse and inclusive” (IUIR 202) while showing readers that language is not “transparent” but “constructed,” much like identity (Hogue 6). Coming from an African American, this proposition sounds eerily similar to the young black poet chastised by Langston Hughes in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” published in 1926. But where the young poet would negate black identity, Mullen hopes to expand the definitions of blackness.

Hughes states that the young man, in expressing a desire to shake the label of “Negro poet,” is essentially articulating his “desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible” (Hughes 27).

Hughes, a giant of the Harlem Renaissance, wrote this program for black artists in response to the Pittsburgh Courier journalist George Schuyler, who, in his essay “The Negro-Art Hokum” condemned arguments suggesting the existence of a characteristically black art and aesthetics in the United States. Schuyler, a black man himself, did not believe there existed an original black art in the United States, because, as he would have it, there was nothing fundamentally different between the experiences of black and white people in America. All were subjected “to the same economic and social forces” (Schuyler 25). Historical perspective regarding the systematic oppression (through colonization, extermination, slavery, the Black Codes, Jim Crow, etc.) of black and brown people in the United States is beyond consideration in this line of reasoning, especially when Schuyler argues that it was only “coincidence” that the southern peasantry happened to be black. Within the “picture of harmonious assimilation” that Schuyler presents in
his essay (Jemie 98), the thought of an essentially black art and aesthetics is indeed “self-evident foolishness” (Schuyler 24).

In “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Hughes responds to the ideological challenge with scathing critiques of Schuyler and the middle class environs that contributed to his “desire to run away from his race” (Hughes 27). However, the larger issue which Hughes addresses in the essay has to do with the difficult circumstances the black artist faces when he or she does turn from the standards of the dominant culture and attempt to represent black people who “hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations” (28). In taking up this task, the black artist constantly runs the risk of obscurity, even among his or her black audiences. “We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of this mountain, free within ourselves,” declares Hughes in the conclusion of his essay (30). However, he offers little consolation for the black artist. Instead, he asks that those who create “without fear or shame” continue doing so, even if their work does not win an immediate audience.

While I disagree with the bulk of the assertions made in “The Negro Art-Hokum,” the essay generates worthwhile discussion by drawing attention to the friction created when issues of class and racial identity rub against one another. Schuyler encourages readers to question the motives and methodology of public intellectuals engaged in identity politics, especially when they attempt to characterize entire communities. As I will show later, Harryette Mullen challenges the contemporary requirements of what a black text need be, beginning with her first collection of poetry, *Tree Tall Woman*, published in 1981.

As mentioned earlier, Hughes presents a bourgeois lifestyle as an obstacle to the black artist and to the progress of black people in his essay. He argues that the black middle class is
preoccupied with individualism, and while they may occasionally demonstrate some concern with issues of the larger black community, they are committed to mainstream (white) values and largely negligent of the beauty natural to themselves. “One sees immediately how difficult it would be for an artist born in such a home to interest himself in interpreting the beauty of his own people” (27), contends Hughes, after he condemns the entire black middle class. Hughes looked to black music, specifically the blues which he considered an essentially black form of expression, to inspire his poetics of opposition. Arnold Rampersad addresses the how and why of this combination:

This question masquerades as one simply of technique; however, it concerns not only the realities of political power—the social powerfulness of blacks translated in to declassification of their art—but the ability of the individual to attain a sufficiently deep identification with his people and their modes of utterance so that, on an individual initiative, he is able to affect a dignified fusion of learned poetic values with those of the despised masses (Rampersad 55).

In the preface to the same collection of essays, Henry Louis Gates speaks more about Hughes and the privileging of vernacular:

Hughes, in other words, undertook the project of constructing an entire literary tradition upon the actual spoken language of the black working and rural classes—the same vernacular language that the growing and mobile black middle classes considered embarrassing and demeaning, the linguistic legacy of slavery (LHCP xi).

In his rhetoric and poetry, Hughes qualifies the use of vernacular as class signifier and measure of racial fidelity, aiding in the construction of an authentic blackness.

However backwards his argument in “The Negro Art-Hokum,” Schuyler makes the point that not every black person took part in developing work songs, spirituals, the blues and jazz
when he says that these musical traditions “are contributions of a caste in a certain section of the country” and that they

are no more expressive or characteristic of the Negro race than the music and dancing of the Appalachian highlanders or the Dalmation peasantry are expressive or characteristic of the Caucasian race (24).

I would say that these musical forms are characteristic of African Americans, as they were conceived in the minds of African Americans, who, consciously or unconsciously, added to the tradition of those primary African slaves by creating, out of diverse cultural materials from across Africa, Europe and America, something of meaning and significance to themselves. Furthermore, the influence of these musical forms are still present today in the most widely acknowledged and popular forum for black expression, hip hop. Nonetheless, Schuyler challenged writers and intellectuals like Hughes who readily declared “the peasantry of the South” the foundation for their theories about the expressive forms of African Americans and the construction of racial authenticity (24). His dissent in this argument suggests the varying ways in which African Americans choose to acknowledge certain cultural practices and properties as their own. It also suggests the possibility of marginal black experiences. And related to this is the issue of accessibility: how and to what degree can or should an individual identify with cultural practices or traditions if the individual is not exposed to them?

Though the challenges addressed in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” were significant and prove in the present to be persistent, Hughes was essentially revising themes and questions raised by concerned artists and intellectuals of previous generations, such as W.E.B. DuBois to whom Hughes dedicated “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” As Henry Louis Gates says, black writers have historically defined their literary styles and rhetorical tropes by reading and critiquing the works of other black writers (The Signifying Monkey 122). In his landmark book
The Souls of Black Folk, written in 1903, Dubois renders an artist-specific scenario where his theory of double consciousness plays on the mind and in the spirit of the African American creator:

The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the beauty revealed to him was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people (47).

Hughes revises this theme by accounting for the assimilationist black artist who would articulate the message of another people by producing work that does not concern itself with “interpreting the beauty of his own” while under the spell of white literary standards (Hughes 27). This is the “waste of double aims” that Dubois speaks of in his collection of essays: “this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals” (SOBF 47). How then should the poet of disparate influences sing?

A period dominated by a poetics of integration ensued after the Harlem Renaissance. This period in African American literature was followed by the black arts movement, which called for “poetic diction rooted in black speech and black music” and shaped by the “traditions of black orality and musical improvisation” (Neilson 9). The movement was separatist, and the primary objectives were “defining and empowering blackness” and exorcising whiteness (TCBW 2). In his essay, James Smethurst details how Langston Hughes, though he had turned towards integrationism, played an instrumental role in the black arts movement, encouraging many of the new leaders in their efforts and even corresponding with the militant writers and poets, like Amiri Baraka. Over the course of the essay, Smethurst identifies many of the similarities between the black arts movement and Harlem Renaissance, indicating the numerous roles Hughes played in shaping both:
Hughes was obviously an influential model for those artists and intellectuals imagining what a "Black Art" might be. For decades Hughes had theorized, polemicized for, and practiced in his work broadly defined, but distinctly African-American literary forms, for decades drawing on a broad range of folk and popular genres: jazz, the blues, gospel, r & b, toasting, badman stories and songs, tall tales, black vaudeville humor, the dozens and other forms of "signifying," street corner and barbershop conversations, sermons. Many of the younger black artists and intellectuals—particularly such East Coast intellectuals and artists as Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, the poets of the Umbra Workshop in New York (including Tom Dent, Askia Touré, Ishmael Reed, Calvin Hernton, and David Henderson), and the members of the Muntu group in Philadelphia (which included writer, visual artist and musician James Stewart, playwright Charles Fuller, and Larry Neal)—posited a continuum of African-American culture from Africa to the U.S. present, including folk, popular, and avant garde elements. Hughes had promoted the notion of such a continuum since the 1920s (1229).

As stated above, the black arts movement resumed the privileging of black vernacular over more literary texts. And again, this designation simplifies very complex issues of class and authenticity among black people in America.

Harryette Mullen offers a critique of the black arts movement and addresses the tendency for African American poets to be canonized as “representatives of blackness” in an essay delivered at Naropa Univeristy in 2000 (1). Already an established poet and critic by this time, in her paper Mullen put the spotlight on rising black poets “who have located their poetry in a space between declarative representations of blackness and a critical engagement with the cultural and discursive practices by which evolving identities are recognized, articulated and defined” (1). These characteristics that Mullen notes in the work of younger poets are essential to her poetry and what she means by alternative subjectivity. Unlike George Schuyler, Mullen is not out to negate black identity. In fact, she hopes to raise the questions that “allow the meanings of
blackness to proliferate and expand, thus stretching black identity and making it more inclusive; but also allowing instability in defining what blackness is” (2).

Harryette Mullen was born in Florence, Alabama on July 1, 1953, before her family moved to segregated Texas, becoming the first black family to move into their neighborhood in Fort Worth. Mullen was only three at the time of the transition, but she clearly recalls the signs of racial prejudice in the neighborhood. There were the material signs designating colored and white restrooms and water fountains. And there were signs registered through experience, like the neighbors who moved out in response to the arrival of the black family. Then there was the man who did not move out of the area, but gained some sort of satisfaction from letting his German shepherd chase Harryette and her sister as they rode their bicycles (Bedient 2). While running up against shameless racism was common among African Americans throughout the country, the dynamics within Mullen’s family, like those of many other black families, did not necessarily match up with popular perceptions of African American life.

As stated in Contemporary Black Biography, “Not only was Mullen the wrong color, she did not sound right either” (119). With roots reaching north to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Mullen family was perceived as different by their southern neighbors because of their language, as well as their color and social habits. Harryette spoke a different kind of English from that of her peers, who had no trouble reminding her of this facet of her identity. Mullen says in an interview with Cynthia Hogue: “In our case, my sister and I went through people saying, ‘You talk funny. You talk proper. Where are you from? You don’t sound like you are from here,’ just because we were speaking standard English” (2).

The legacy of education already established in the family by the time Harryette was born also contributed to the family “sound.” Her parents met at a historically black college in
Alabama. Her maternal grandfather was a Baptist minister, while another one of her
grandmothers attended normal school and taught in an elementary school. Her mother was also
an elementary school teacher who “stressed the value of literacy and education” (Henning 5).
Considering this mix of geographic roots and education, Mullen describes her family and others
of similar social background: “Educated, middle-class, black speakers are code-switchers, and
what we really did was learn to switch from standard English to a black vernacular in certain
situations when that was called for” (Hogue 2).

Mullen grew up without much knowledge of the black folk culture that would inform her
early writing. During interviews, she often reflects on how she learned about the African
American folk tradition while taking a class with folklorist Roger Abrahams, who wrote the
books Deep Down in the Jungle and The Signifying Monkey (Hogue 3). Abrahams gathered
stories from areas where there were high concentrations of black men from various places; he
went to street corners, prisons and jails namely, and sorted through all the variations of these oral
texts (Hogue 3). Growing up, Harryette was not exposed to the urban folklore, like the
Signifying Monkey tales that supply the foundation for some of the dominant modes of African
American literary theory today, because those aspects of the larger black culture were not
emphasized by her family.

In her essay, Mitchum Heuhls focuses on manifestations of this code-switching in
*Trimmings*, Mullen’s second collection poetry, published in 1991, ten years after *Tree Tall
Woman*. Heuhls states that Mullen writes with “an awareness of the social construction of
identity, and the complex relationships in American culture among race, sexuality, and economic
privilege” (4). Critics tend to focus on the poetry after *Trimmings* to address these characteristics.
The later collections depart from the linear narratives in *Tree Tall Woman* and move into the
avant-garde. These themes are present in Mullen’s first book, but the poems in *Tall Tree Woman*, if addressed at all, are given a cursory running over. Many of the poems in *Tree Tall Woman* are drawn from her experiences living in the southwest and are informed by the revelation revived during the black arts movement that “you could write from the position of being within a black culture” (Hogue 2). Enough poems in the collection are beautiful; some are playful and carry the warmth of the provincial southern voices that inspired them; just about all of the poems are rich in music, some blues, and black idiom and expressions are used in the collection, though much less frequently as the text progresses.

While the black arts movement demanded African American writers focus exclusively on subjects deemed appropriately black and approach those subjects in a particular mode of speech, Mullen did not give herself fully into the trend. The poems in *Tree Tall Woman* are about “relations among black people,” but these angles are achieved without Mullen continually pointing out that she is writing from the perspective of a black person (5). Mullen would break from the southern voice established in *Tree Tall Woman* in her subsequent collections when she “began to think of the subject as the problem” (5). Responding to poststructuralist texts introduced to her during graduate school, her work reflected the tensions stemming from her upbringing on the margins of what has been traditionally conceived and accepted as authentic black culture. In her postcard interview with Barbara Henning for *The Poetry Project*, Mullen, highlighting the major themes of her long poem, *Muse & Drudge*, published in 1995, writes that the poem works through: tradition and its rupture, the continuities and discontinuities of cultural transmission, the dissemination and preservation of language, of speech and writing or meaning itself (Henning 1).
While, in later collections, Mullen expertly manipulates and deconstructs language to show how language and identity are constructed, her poems in *Tree Tall Woman* are uncertain or unconscious performances of these tensions, where Mullen, negotiates the identity politics of authenticity and race and class. There are instances in the collection where the speaker is so enamored by her ability to shift between disparate languages that the performance suggests parody, conscious Signification and pastiche, what Baker calls, “unmotivated Signification.” These fractures in the collection suggest the contentious relationship between language and culture Mullen would more explicitly address in later collections.

The speaker in the first poem of the collection addresses the slender woman who is the subject by invoking the voice, the language and descriptive power, of her mother.

> You’re like the skinny folk  
> my mama used to kid, the straight-gut people.

The idiomatic expressions tacked to the end of the first and second lines are on display like verbal adornments — trimmings. They look like they could be found in “Characteristics of Negro Expression”, where Zora Neale Hurston lists particularly black idiom and verbal constructions in her effort to show some of the ways in which black people have “made new force words out of old feeble elements” in the English language (32). Additional creative flourishes in the vernacular of the mother figure follow the opening lines.

> (Got a crane stomach.  
> Eat you out of house and home,  
> though you’d never know,  
> to look at them.  
> Food goes straight through them  
> and they always hungry.)

Though these six parenthetical (subordinate) lines elaborate on the naming that precedes them, they are dense and highly figurative, and demand a bit of decoding on the part of the reader. The female subject of the poem deceives the eyes of those whom she keeps company
because she is capable of consuming much more than others assume she is able. It is her evasive form that makes the ambiguity and illusiveness in the language of this poem appropriate.

My reading of the poem is hinged on the word “crane”, present in the third line. Not only is the speaker making reference to the bird, but she is referring to the construction machinery that can knock down buildings with a wrecking ball. The bird interpretation is the most apparent because it allows for a literal reading of the woman’s hunger for food. However, the second stanza allows for a rereading of these lines, with the giant mechanical apparatus as the deciding image in the stomach metaphor.

As Elisabeth Frost points out in “Recyclopedia”, the mode of speech in the second stanza of the poem is different from the kind of speech found in the first, “with its lack of contractions and more formal diction” (409).

Reed woman,
that’s how you are.
No man can fill you.
You look like one
who could be contented

Though the syntax and diction changes from the previous stanza to the second, the language here in the second stanza, much like that in the first, pretends to conceal as much as it reveals, even as it descends into more formal speech. Despite appearances, it becomes clear in this stanza that food is not the only thing the woman being portrayed consumes. “No man can fill you” recalls the line: “Food goes straight through them”, even in the number of syllables, but the language has sexual and spiritual connotations. The former becomes the predominate suggestion in the final three lines of the poem.

but you will always want
a taste of something
you’ve never had.
The shift in focus, from the woman’s appetite for food to her sexual appetite calls for a rereading of the first stanza, where “crane stomach” can be read in reference to the demolition machinery, in addition to the seafood loving bird. With this reading, the stakes are raised in the poem. “Eat you out of house and home” becomes a violent image indicating the total destruction of a household.

So, although the speech in the second stanza is more formal than the first, the latent blues theme is only revealed in the latter, when the woman’s desire is mystified, recalling Muddy Waters singing:

Woman I’m troubled, I be all worried in mind
Well baby I can never be satisfied

The intentionally flimsy masking of the sexual overtones is also reminiscent of male and female blues vocalists. In her song *Me and My Chauffer*, Memphis Minnie slyly sings:

Won't you be my chauffeur
Won't you be my chauffeur
I wants him to drive me
I wants him to drive me downtown
Yes he drives so easy I can't turn him down
But I don't want him
But I don't want him
To be ridin' his girls
To be ridin' his girls around
So I'm gonna steal me a pistol, shoot my chauffeur down

Frost says that the change in this poem forecasts the ambiguous relationship between the speaker of the poems and the languages of her past, which the speaker evokes throughout the collection (409). However, with my reading of this poem, I would have to disagree with this point. I think the speaker is deliberate in her use of language in this instance. The black vernacular is set within parenthesis, being called up from the speaker’s memory. Then the speaker asserts her voice, engaging her mother’s metaphor with her own, and so enhancing both. As stated earlier, the blues theme surfaces in the second stanza, and not in the explicitly black speech. The blues
tradition is contained in the formal language, as it inhabits the spirit of the woman whose
tremendous appetite seems inconsistent with her slim figure (form).

Used infrequently and almost always attributed to the mother figure that appears in
certain poems, “black speech” rarely stands alone outside of formal surroundings in the
collection. I assume this is why Frost considers the relationship between the speaker and the
language ambiguous. Though this voice does not always appear on the page, in ink, I believe the
presence is there and should not be discounted or considered arbitrary. The way in which Mullen
uses black vernacular emphasizes the fact that it is a cultural inheritance and construction. While
she chooses to use embrace the inheritance, she does not let it dictate the direction of the poetry
or hold back the breadth of her voice.

Cultural reproduction and inheritance are implied in the opening lines of To A Woman,
when the speaker attributes her sense of language to her mother. In the two poems Eyes In the
Back of Her Head and Momma Sayings, the speaker makes this aspect of the relationship more
explicit. The opening lines of Eyes In the Back of Her Head are indicative of the rest of the
poem, until the turn in the third stanza. The mother uses idiomatic expressions as she asserts her
imminence and authority over the speaker.

I’m your momma, and I could always tell when
you’re doin something you aint got no business.
Hell, I know you: I birthed you.
Saw you before you saw yourself.
Watched you climb a chair to the
kitchen’s highest shelf and steal
a sip of whiskey,
just to know how it felt going down your throat.
You choked, but I beat you for it anyway,
Cause the stuff aint made for kids to waste.
'Sides, was too early for you to get to likin that taste.
Watched you climb a chair to the
kitchen’s highest shelf and steal
a sip of whiskey,
just to know how it felt going down your throat.
You choked, but I beat you for it anyway,
Cause the stuff aint made for kids to waste.
‘Sides, was too early for you to get to likin that taste.

Yeah, I’m your momma, got eyes in the back of my head.
I guessed what you’d do before you did it.
I knew your secret before you thought,
and hid it.
And, hey, you better look down, child,
don’t roll your eyes at me.
You can aim those bullets but
you can’t shoot em.

In addition to displaying some of the freedom of expression and creative possibilities black writers (re)gained during the black arts movements with the use of vernacular, this poem presents one of the problems with the movement, and a solution. In *Eyes In the Back of Her Head*, the mother always knows what the daughter is doing; she knows how the whiskey tasted and felt going down the little girl’s throat; she has eyes that her daughter cannot match and she knows the secrets her daughter keeps; the mother knows best and, more importantly, she has the history to back her up. The vernacular tradition in African American literature has this sort of presence, conceived in the minds of many writers and critics, and black people in general, as the ethereal, breathy chest of culture and measure of authenticity in literary and social contexts.

Houston Baker addresses the generational shift between the poetics of integration (Richard Wright and Arthur P. Davis) and their militant, separatist successors in the black arts movement, in his book *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*. He writes:

Baraka and other artists who contributed to the establishment of the school felt that the perpetuation of Afro-American vernacular forms would aid the growth of Afro-American social and political autonomy in America (Blues, Ideology 73).

This comes in stark contrast to Wright and Davis who, according to Baker, believed the mainstream acceptance of black literature, black literature being “indistinguishable” from white, would indicate the realization of those positive ideals underpinning American society (68). The artists propelling the black arts movement sought to counteract the effect of Wright and Davis who, according to Baker, believed the mainstream acceptance of black literature, black literature
being “indistinguishable” from white, would indicate the realization of those positive ideals underpinning American society (68). Amiri Baraka reflects on the black arts movement in his 1980 essay, “Afro-American Literature and Class Struggle”:

The Black Arts Movement of the ’60’s was certainly a rebellion against the bourgeoisie’s and revisionists’ ’50’s liquidation of the Afro-American national question, and the rise of conservative, reformist, capitulationist as well as comprador writing as “Negro Writing”—just as Malcolm X emerged to forcefully oppose the Black bourgeoisie’s domination of the Black Liberation Movement, as well as the reformist and even outright comprador lines that dominated the Movement in the ’50s. The “Blackness” of the Black Arts Movement was the attempt to restore the national priorities of the Afro-American nation and oppressed nationality to the art of the Black artists. The art had to be an extension of the people themselves, involved with them, expressing their lives and minds with the collective fore of actual life committed to the necessary struggle and revolutionary transformation that we need in the real world! (8)

Though similar, the ideology maintained by Wright and Davis was different from the one George Schuyler presented in “The Negro Art-Hokum”. Where Schuyler discounted the existence of particularly black forms of expression, Wright and Davis acknowledged the forms; the peculiarity of these forms, in fact, was representative of the problem, which was (and still is) the marginalization of black people in society. Wright considered the blues and other cultural products, such as signifying, the dozens and folktales to be evidence of inequality. He perceived these forms as the “sensualization” of the continuous suffering undergone by black people in America (68). Arthur P. Davis sought his integrationist dream by “offering genuine, ‘artistic’ contributions to the kind of classless, raceless literature that he and other integrationists assume will carry the future” (70). Davis also discouraged particularly black forms of expression, leading Baker to the conclusion: “integrationism holds that structurally peculiar Negro forms are trapped in an evolutionary backwater” (70).

In Eyes In the Back of Her Head, the mother figure knows what the daughter is doing at all times, and always has; she knew how the whiskey tasted and felt going down the throat of her little girl; the mother also has eyes that her daughter cannot match and she knows the secrets her
daughter keeps; the mother knows best essentially but, more importantly, she has the history to
back her up. The vernacular tradition in African American literature took on this sort of presence
during the black arts movement. The vernacular was conceived in the minds of these writers and
critics as the ethereal, breathy chest of culture and measure of authenticity in literary and social
contexts. The mother figure in the poem is constantly imposing her viewpoint on the daughter,
literally discounting every bit of sense the daughter possesses until the third stanza.

Now I want to close
those mamma’s extra eyes,
since you can’t see what they see,
or let them see for you.
Since they won’t keep me smug against
the things that hurt me once,
that hurt me twice.

In the third stanza (above), the mother figure chooses to close her mystical extra eyes,
realizing her daughter cannot and will not take on her perspective. This indicates maturity on the
part of the mother and the daughter. The mother realizes that in trying to shelter and guide her
daughter, she was also trying to shelter protect her own interest and affirm her pains and
experiences.

I’m your momma (she always said).
Yeah, I’ve got eyes in the back of my head.
Eyes that see where you’re goin,
Where I’ve been.

In spite of the change the mother undergoes in the end, the ability of the speaker in
replicating the voice of her mother says that she was listening to the advice offered, and
maintains it in memory. When she recalls it, she has the choice responding in accordance to it, or
deviating depending on what the situation demands. As she exhibits in *To A Woman*, Mullen is
able to replicate this voice, while signifying on it. In this poem, as she does throughout the
collection, Mullen shows signs of her desire to write towards an alternative subjectivity, performing what Houston Baker, Jr. calls “a generational shift”:

A “generational shift” is, in my definition, an ideologically motivated movement overseen by young or newly emergent intellectuals dedicated to refuting the work of their intellectual predecessors and to establishing a new framework for intellectual inquiry (Baker 67).
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WILLY LAU, is a seventeen-year-old Chinese boy. Around five feet tall with a petite frame, he looks younger than he is. He is the eldest son. He has an inquisitive and adventurous nature.

GONG LAU, an elderly Chinese man, who is proud, strict, and extremely sterile in his mannerisms. He is the owner of the Wishing Well Launderette, and the sacrosanct ruler of his household. Although he is an old man, he stands at six feet. He is Willy’s Father.

MING-YA, wife of Gong Lau, a small quiet Chinese woman. She is middle-aged. She completely abides by Confucian ideals of womanhood, although, we sense something lurking behind her idiosyncratic facade.

JOHNNIE LAU, is Willy’s younger brother. He looks up to Willy, but is ignored by the rest of the family.

MISS MARY, an eccentric white lady, who comes to the launderette everyday. She dislikes black people.

TYRONE, he is Willy’s best friend. He lives in Miss Mary’s building. He is talkative.

TERRI, is Willy’s fiancée. She is a bit naïve, but charming and respectful. They are having a baby.

SCENE I

REQUIEM FOR WILLY

Lights fade up, as Ella Fitzgerald’s “Dream a Little Dream of Me” plays from a victrola placed on rectangular table. The kitchen screams simplicity: fashioned in 1950’s décor, its spotless counters and waxed floor shine with all that is good. A white woman, dressed to perfection, beckons to people we cannot see. She looks excited and happy. Her husband rushes in followed by three young boys gallivanting toward the table; they all look hungry and pleased with the empty plates they eat from. Unnoticed from before, a
young Chinese boy walks slowly around the happy table. He listens to a conversation we cannot hear, and even laughs on cue with the seemingly happy family. They do not see the boy invader. Fascinated by the victrola, the boy turns it off abruptly; his presence is finally taken note of. They all stand up. The young boy shyly walks away, he turns to come back to the table, but they all gesture for them to leave.
Fade to black.

San Francisco/ China Town 1980: The House of Lau

THE PROCESSIONAL

Spotlight, as WILLY LAU, a late twenty-something stands center stage. He wears an Armani black suit; his thick black hair is slicked back—marinated in gel. His face wears and expression that is sad and distant, detached from reality. Lights fade up, as Willy looks down on the open casket of GONG LAU.

A fairly large portrait of Gong lies at the head of the casket. You will never see Gong Lau look happier. At the foot of the casket there is a small table with white candles and money. The candles were blown out recently; smoke still rises from their silent wicks. A victrola lies on a shelf it looks old and out of place beside the small statues of Chinese deities and wooden framed family portraits. All the statues have been covered with red paper.

MING-YA sits in a reclining chair; she stares at Willy intently, as if she is trying to solve a puzzle.

She is dressed in all white—hair pulled back in a tight chignon. She holds an open box filled with money on her lap. She starts to talk and attempts to stand up. The money floats out of her lap. She falls to the ground.
WILLY

For Christ sakes, Ma, why are you so clumsy? You could have knocked the damn coffin over.

MING-YA

(Speaks with a Chinese accent)

I am sorry, William—(Ming-Ya scrams to pick up the money while talking to Willy.)

WILLY

(Annoyed)

Don’t be sorry, Ma.

(Puzzled)

Where is everyone?

MING-YA

Gone. Everything is finished. (Pause) Where were you, William?

WILLY

I was working...

MING-YA

I suppose you have lots to do now, that you’re a man of the law. You make me proud, William—*the family* is proud of what you have accomplished.
WILLY

No, Ma, just you… (Pause) where the hell is Johnnie?

MING-YA

He was here, William. He had to take your place—

WILLY

Ma—I know.

MING-YA

I called you, everyday—

WILLY

I’ve brought some money, Ma… (He fishes around in his pockets.) You know, to help out—

MING-YA

Your Father doesn’t need money, William—

WILLY

(Changing the subject.) I’ve brought Terri all the way from the Bronx to meet you and the family.

MING-YA

Who is Terri?
WILLY

(Yells)

TERRI! (TERRI waltzes in. She is a tall statuesque girl. She’s been rounded out by a full pregnant belly. She has an unearthly glow to her brown skin; she brings light into this dark room.)

TERRI

(Speaks with a Bronx/southern accent—whispering to Willy)

It’s so quiet, Willy. Where is everyone? (Pause) (Stares at the open casket—shocked)
You look just like your Father... (Ming-Ya stares at Terri blankly. Terri looks toward Willy for reassurance, and bows, as if she was taught to do this earlier.)

(Embarrassed)

Oh, hello! I’m TERRI—Willy’s girlfriend. I’m from the Bronx, well, originally Georgia. I am so sorry for your lost, uh I mean, yours and Willy’s lost—the families lost… (She shoves her hand in Ming-Ya’s face. Ming-Ya is startled, she jumps back, and the money falls from her hands again.)

WILLY

Ma, this is Terri, my fiancée.

MING-YA

(Pause) Oh. Ms. Terri, please have a seat—William has told us so much about you.
TERRI
Really?

MING-YA
A Mother and son are bound to one another. (Pause) William tells me everything.

TERRI
(Relieved)
That’s nice to hear, knowing Willy. He sure can be quiet. (Pause) He’s a hard man to read, sometimes.

MING YA
Doesn’t he look like his Father? —Split images of each other. (Pause) The day he was born his Father wept…first born is so precious to us Chinese. William was a diamond in his Father’s eyes. He loved holding and touching his baby boy, but—

TERRI
(Laughs)
Willy is the same…he loves rubbing my belly—he can’t wait for his baby boy to come—

MING-YA
…He knew it was bad luck. Evil spirits and demons come to the young ones; they’re attracted to their light…shun your child or the demons will follow, forever.

WILLY
Ma, please stop this nonsense. (To Terri) My Mother is too superstitious…my Dad didn’t believe in that stuff—
MING-YA

(Seriously)

It’s not nonsense. (Pause) And your Father believed in that stuff. (Mumbles) Not soon enough… (Terri looks nervous. Willy takes notice and rushes around to make sure Terri has taken a seat. He looks nervous and concerned about how comfortable Terri is. When she is seated, she looks over at Ming-Ya, who is standing beside him.)

TERRI

Willy, get your Mother a seat.

WILLY

Oh.

TERRI

Everyone please sit.

(Willy and Ming-Ya sit. They all stare at Gong’s open casket. Terri’s laughter nervousness increases into a visible twitch. She sits stiffly—finally aware of her surroundings.)

TERRI

You have a lovely place, Mrs. Lau.

MING-YA

Thank you.
TERRI
Willy gave me a tour of the house. It’s big—way bigger than anything I ever lived in. Willy must have had fun growing up here, all these rooms—so spacious. It’s precious place you got here, Mrs. Lau.

MING-YA
Thank you, Ms. Terri. Willy—

WILLY
I never got a chance to live in this house. I was grown long before my Mother and Father moved into their luxurious home.

TERRI
Oh. No matter…(Pause) this would be a wonderful place to live. A place we could settle down: A good neighborhood for raising children. (Pause) We could be closer to your Mother and family—

MING-YA
(Clears her throat) Would you like a cup of tea, Ms. Terri?

WILLY
She’ll have orange juice.
TERRI

(Irritated)

I’ll have that cup of tea, Mrs. Lau. (Ming-Ya exits.) Your Mother is so nice, Willy. I just love her!

WILLY

Yeah, a wonderful woman—she can be a little cuckoo sometimes, don’t be bothered by her—

TERRI

Oh, I wasn’t. (Pause) I believed her, she seems to know what she’s talking about, Willy. My family is superstitious as well.

WILLY

(Astonished)

Oh.

TERRI

I don’t know. (Pause) Sometimes, things just can’t be explained. It’s a feeling…you got to go with it. (Terri walks around the room, as if she is waltzing—her long legs gliding across the wooden floors. She stops near the wall unit and looks at old family photos. Her hands glide over the victrola.)

WILLY

Don’t touch that!
TERRI

(Shocked)

Jesus, there’s no need to be loud. I was just lookin’ at it—

WILLY

I didn’t mean to sound that way. I’m feeling jumpy today, that’s all. (Pause)

TERRI

I know. It’s okay—I wouldn’t know how to feel if my Daddy died—must be god-awful. (Pause) Maybe we should close the casket.

WILLY

Good idea. (He closes the casket. Ming-Ya has just walked in the room she has a tea on a platter.)

MING-YA

(Scared)

What are you doing? (She pulls Willy close to her—whispers.) Did you look upon your Father’s face?

WILLY

Yes. I had to—

MING-YA

(Angry)

No, no, no! That is bad luck, William. Have you not learned anything?
WILLY

Ma, stop this. This is crazy talk. The casket needs to be closed...let’s go into the kitchen and have some tea—

MING-YA

No. (Pause) I’m waiting here.

WILLY

(Mumbles)

I hated this bastard—

(Terri sits down next to Ming-Ya, avoiding Willy’s gaze, as if afraid of what he might say next.)

MING-YA

Green tea is good for you—please try. It will make you strong and healthy. (Pause) It’s good for the baby—

WILLY

Orange juice is good for the baby, and Terri has low sugar ...(Pause) This tea is bitter and green. Tea isn’t meant to be green—

TERRI

(Eagerly)

I’ll try it, Mrs. Lau. Green is my favorite color.
(Terri picks up the teacup and sips lightly. The tea is too hot and she burns her tongue. She spills some tea on her dress.) Oh, goodness! Where’s the bathroom? (Pause) I’ll find it on my own. (Willy returns and sits by his Mother.) (Silence)

WILLY

When is the coffin going to be moved?

MING-YA

When you arrived. (Pause) I waited for you…I knew you would come, William. (Pause)

WILLY

I have a family of my own. (Silence) What are you going to do tomorrow, Ma?

MING-YA

Cleaning the house—preparing for your Father’s return.

WILLY

He’s dead, Ma. (Pause) You’ve mourned enough…I don’t understand why you’re doing all of this—

MING-YA

(Infuriated)

Why? He was my husband… he was your Father—

WILLY

He wasn’t my Father. He was a coward, a white man’s pussy.

MING-YA

You can’t mean that…you meant everything to your Father.
WILLY

Yeah, right.

MING-YA

(Ming-Ya grabs him by the hand.)

You will stay here the next seven days. (Pause.) He will come, and, you two shall talk—

WILLY

I came to be with you. I didn’t come to see a damn ghost.

MING-YA

(Mumbles)

You’ve cursed yourself…

(Terri enters with a Chinese man dressed in working clothes. She looks refreshed and relaxed.)

TERRI

This is Mr. Wu; he’s here to pick up the casket, Mrs. Lau.

MING-YA

So soon—

WILLY

(Silently)

Ma, let them take it. (Willy takes Ming-Ya to the side as three Chinese men remove the
coffin. Suddenly she breaks away from Willy’s embrace and tries to stop the men. Willy retrieves her; the men leave with the casket looking very sympathetic toward Ming-Ya. )

MING-YA

(Dazed)

I want to see my soaps...(Willy takes the television out of a cupboard near the wall unit.

He plugs it up and turns it on.)

WILLY

Ma, it’s on.

MING-YA

Ah, this is my favorite, William. Xiao Lee—the funny man; your Daddy’s favorite…

TERRI

Is she all right?

WILLY[

My Mother’s an Ox. (Pause) She’s fine.

TERRI

Maybe we should stay a couple of extra days. I know we have the house warming and all but…your Mother needs some help—

WILLY

(Persistent)
Let’s go. It’s getting late and you haven’t seen the entire city yet. (Pause) I can’t wait to walk over the bridge with you. This place is magical with you here with me…

TERRI

(Whispering)

Your Mother doesn’t look very well. Let me make her some dinner—

WILLY

I said she’s fine—don’t you think I’d know if something was wrong with my own Mother?

TERRI

Do you always need to pick a fight?

(Bewildered)

Ok, Willy—whatever you want. (Silence) I’ll be in the car. (She goes over to Ming-Ya. She is sitting with her chin on her knees, watching her soaps intently. Terri gives her a quick kiss on the forehead and exits.)

MING-YA

William.

WILLY

Yes, Ma. You’re fine, right?

MING-YA

I’m fine, William, but your Father isn’t.
WILLY

He’s dead—

MING-YA

Can’t you hear him?

WILLY

No.

MING-YA

(Gets up and takes Willy’s hands in hers.)

His soul is here—in this very room. He needs release, William.

WILLY

(Jerks away from his Mother. Shaking violently and stumbling toward the door.) Leave me out of this!

MING-YA

William you curse yourself…you curse the family!

WILLY

(Calm)

I have to leave, Mother. Terri is waiting in the car. (Pause) Tell everyone I said hello. I’m sorry I couldn’t stay longer…(His words trail off.)

(Willy exits. Ming-Ya stands alone. There is a period of silence. The lights in the room go dim. Suddenly the victrola starts playing “Dream a Little Dream. “Ming-Ya
smiles...Fade to black.)

A.F.L

SCENE II

WISHY WASHY WILLY

NYC—The Bronx 1960/ Wishing Well Launderette

Willy enters. The stage is dark. Light seeps in through the open door. The sounds of city streets pour through the room—cop cars, fire engines wailing, the laughter of children all seem to engulf the space of the cramped Launderette. Lights fade up...Willy walks briskly around the Launderette. This is a younger, light of heart, and mischievous Willy. He waltzes around the Launderette; he is very comfortable in his environment. He’s like a woman in kitchen—no task takes much thought here.

He does everything with ease. He pulls out a load of laundry and on a circular table starts to fold diligently. He even has a system of folding that looks powerful and refined—swan lake a la Willy. Ming-Ya enters; she too looks younger and light of spirit—however, her edges are rougher than Willy’s. She seems rushed. Everything about her tells us she didn’t get enough sleep. She would be prettier any other morning.

WILLY

Good morning, Mama.

MING-YA

(Gives him a kiss on the forehead) (Jokingly) You didn’t fold the clothing last night--what, am I going to do with you? (Pause) This is the third night in a row…
WILLY

(Laughs)

Beat me on the head with a broom, Mama—

MING-YA

(Indignantly)

That is not a matter to joke about. (Pause) You could have serious bad luck, William—

WILLY

Aw, I don’t believe in that stuff—

MING-YA

Believe in it for me…(Pause) I dreamt a strange dream. (Mumbles) Snowy mountains…

WILLY

(Attentive)

What happened?

MING-YA

(Coming to her senses.) It’s not for your ears to hear, William. (Pause) Where did you go last night? Your Father was worried about you.

WILLY

(Shyly)

I went for a ride.
MING-YA

A ride? Riding what? Where?

WILLY

My friend Duke lent me his new bike. Gorgeous. Smells fresh—

MING-YA

Did you study? Exams are coming soon—

WILLY

Like you can’t get enough of it. You know what fresh money smells like--that smell, that new smell: in a pair of converse, a Yankee cap, and a fresh pot of coffee. It was great, Mama. All that riding—the smell of burning rubber on hot pavement—

MING-YA

Miss Mary is coming soon. She’ll want her clothes folded a certain way, you know how particular Miss Mary is, and I see you’ve—

WILLY

Mama, I folded them the fastest way. If I fold them the way she wants, I’d never get to the other clothes. It would take forever—

MING-YA

(Tired)

Just do them the way she wants, William. Do you have to be so difficult?

WILLY

But—
MING-YA

Miss Mary is a faithful customer. We run the best Launderette around here, and some have forgotten how great our service is. They’ll see. That Mr. Chan, he was a butcher in China. And a cheat! He doesn’t know his fingers from his toes. We know what good service is, that pig Chan—you’ll do what Miss Mary wants and exactly the way she wants it!

WILLY

(Defeated)

Yes, Mama. And Mama…

MING-YA

(More of herself—calm) YES?

WILLY

Is Johnnie taking over my shift? Today’s his day—

MING-YA

No, Johnnie won’t be coming. He’s studying for his examinations—

WILLY

(Surprised)

But he’s supposed to be here. I promised Duke I would play basketball.

MING-YA

Don’t you think it’s more important that Johnnie study?

(Enter MR. LAU. He is six feet tall. He towers over both Willy and Ming-Ya. He is a man with presence.)
WILLY

Morning, Daddy.

(Willy pours a cup of tea for Mr. Lau, as he takes a seat near the folding table. He holds several small notebooks in his hand with a calligraphy brush. He puffs on a cigarette lightly. Although the Launderette is small, he looks comfortable regardless of his size.)

MR. LAU

(To Ming-Ya) Negro boys broke into Mr. Chan’s place.

WILLY

Mr. Chan? (Pause) What—a no good peasant!

MR. LAU

He’s in the hospital. Those Negro boys robbed him. (Pause) Even thieves have their own code of behavior…How could they harm such an old man like Chan? He was here only a year…It seems crows everywhere are equally black…you cannot trust the Negro man. Mr. Chan is a hard workingman, someone to be admired, William. He taught me that a book holds a house of gold…He is nothing like you, he is an ox.

WILLY

He’s a filthy peasant, Dad…(Pause) yesterday night I saw him at Hunts Point…

MING-YA

(Warningly)

William.
WILLY

With a prostitute!

MR. LAU

What!

WILLY

That’s what I thought. I couldn’t believe my eyes—

MR. LAU

You went out last night. I told you not to be hanging around those Negro boys. You can get mixed up—

WILLY

But Mr. Chan—

MR. LAU

You believe that Mr. Chan is a filthy peasant; your Mama comes from two filthy peasants…Mr. Chan has struggled in this country. Good fortune has not befallen him. His daughter has become a whore—a shadow in the night. Can you not see the goodness in Mr. Chan? No daughter of mine would be welcomed back in my home, if she were to become a whore. (Pause) She feels she has no choice but to run the streets…boy-child… and you run willingly. What do these streets offer you?
WILLY

(Willy looks stunned. He’s about to talk but MISS MARY enters. She is short and squat—an elderly lady. Her clothes positively hang off her. They’re expensive, but don’t fit to her square frame—baggy stockings and jeweled rings make her look comical: bag lady-ish.)

MISS MARY

(Very excited)

Good morning, Mr. Lau!

MR. LAU

(All smiles and sweetness.) Ah, Miss Mary, your laundry folded and pressed just the way you like! (Ming-Ya and Mr. Lau give her a gracious bow. Willy rushes up with a laundry bag.)

MISS MARY

What a fine boy you have! Oh, goodness—this isn’t my laundry bag.

(Silence) Oh, Mr. Lau that bag is dear to me, it belonged to my Mother… please find it!

(Pause) I expect much more from this Launderette. Your place is unlike that Mr. Chan’s…

MR. LAU

Your laundry is free of charge Miss Mary. No problem here—this will never happen again. We shall find your Mother’s bag.
MISS MARY
Oh, Mr. Lau, that is too kind of you. (*Pushes the laundry bag safely underneath her arm.*)
One just can’t get good service these days, haven’t had service like this in years! Well, I have to get going. Good day to you all! (*Miss Mary awkwardly bows as she exits. They all bow not looking up.*)

MR. LAU
Where is her bag?

WILLY
She doesn’t have a bag. She’s been saying this for the past week.

MR. LAU
We must find her a bag…

WILLY
That’s bullshit—she’s crazy.

MR. LAU
Find a bag, boy-child…(*Mr. Lau exits.*)

WILLY
I’m supposed to get a bag for a bag lady. (*Laughs*) He must be out of his mind—

MING-YA
(*Authoritatively*)
Do as your Father says, William.
WILLY

Yes, Mama… (Pause) You got some mail today.

(He walks over to a cupboard and takes out a letter and brings her a silver dragon embodied letter opener. Willy waits for her to open the letter; she looks at him inquisitively.)

MING-YA

Get that bag, like your Father told you, William. (Willy exits, looking very disappointed. Ming-Ya opens the letter slowly. The letter opener makes a loud thud as it hits the floor. The letter falls to the floor as well.)

(Whispers)

Sister Mei.

(Willy stands behind her with a purple laundry bag in his hands. Fade to black.)

A.F.L

SCENE III

WASH CYCLE NO. 1

Spotlight, as Willy drags a heavy laundry bag to the folding table. Sly and the Family Stone’s “Everyday People” is playing from a small radio. Willy walks off stage, only to return with another bag that looks even heavier. Exhausted, he takes a seat by the radio and starts singing along. A young white lady enters, she places her money on the counter and Willy gives her a laundry bag; he hums along to the song. They do not converse at all. The young white woman exits. Miss Mary enters the launderette.
WILLY

Good Morning, Miss Mary. *(He takes a bow. He’s all smiles and sweetness, but not as sweet as his Father.)*

MISS MARY

Oh, hello, William…morning to you. *(Pause)* Is your Father around? I must talk to him immediately.

WILLY

How can I help you? My Father has left me to run the *Wishing Well* today. I’m sure I can be of service!

MISS MARY

*(Frantic & Nervous)*

What would a boy your age know about good help? I’ve known your Father for years, the best help around—you couldn’t possibly know. Mr. Lau runs the launderette and I will not talk to anyone else. Am I clear? —No one but your Father.

WILLY

It’s crystal, Miss Mary.

MISS MARY

*(She fans herself profusely.)* Will he back soon?

WILLY

Yes.

MISS MARY
I’ll be waiting for him. (Pause) Where’s my seat, William? Mr. Lau always has my chair ready. It’s that nice purple cushioned one. I get pains in my legs—he knows. The dear man recommends good herbal medicine all the way from China—worked like a charm.

WILLY

(Willy brings a tattered chair for Miss Mary to sit in.) He’ll be back soon, Miss Mary. My Father’s gone over to visit Mr. Chan. He’s in the hospital—

MISS MARY

Paying his last respects—to that cheat! (Still fanning profusely.)

WILLY

I said he’s visiting Mr. Chan. (Pause) They were good friends in Shanghai. My Father respects him, but—

MISS MARY

My god it’s hot. (Pause) Open a window! (Pacing)

WILLY

There isn’t a window to open, Miss Mary.

MISS MARY

(Miss Mary plops herself back into the chair.) Have you read the papers lately?

WILLY

No.
MISS MARY

(She looks around, paranoid, as if someone might hear her.) I’ve been robbed, William!

(Whispering) I was on my settee doing some needle work and I heard a noise. It was distinctive, a sound of my childhood. A native call—my dear Father warned me of this as a child. “Hide!” he said whenever I heard it. (Pause) I told Mr. Schmidt what would happen if he rented to Negroes! That Mr. Williams is a nasty man--he has unruly sons. There’s hope for the young girl, she’s helpful. (Pause) They took everything! My rings and furs: my legacies to my grandchildren. Everything—even the money I use to pay my laundry bill. (Convinced) I’m sure it was that Negro family!

WILLY

How sure are you, Miss Mary?

MISS MARY

Oh, I know who robbed me. Your Father is going to help me bring the criminals to justice. (Silence.)

WILLY

Did you see the intruder?

MISS MARY

Oh, William! It’s nothing for your innocent ears to hear. You could be put in danger, it’s best you don’t know. There’s no need for you to be involved. Your Father knows best!

(Pause) I cannot believe Mr. Lau visited that Mr. Chan, even if they were friends in China!
WILLY
My Father looks up to Mr. Chan. He taught him everything there is to being a good Chinese man. You see…Mr. Chan had problems back in China, that’s why he didn’t come for such a long time. Otherwise Mr. Chan might be your laundry man.

MISS MARY
Oh, that is impossible! I would never trust a seedy man like that. My Father taught me the ways of this world. He taught me how to survive. Mr. Chan cannot be trusted, and anyone who trusts him is a fool. William, you must listen to me. (Grabs him close) The man is a cheat!

WILLY
I’ve talked to Mr. Chan and I reckon he’s just a little secretive in his old age.

MISS MARY
Secrets? What do you know about secrets? The young don’t have them and shouldn’t— it’s unnatural.

WILLY
Everyone’s got secrets; it just happens that Mr. Chan has more. You know, secrets get worse with old age; you could say it’s something that builds. By the time you’re a boy my age, you become an efficient secret hider.

MISS MARY
(Interested)
And what would you know of Mr. Chan’s secrets?
WILLY
Ah, not much of nothing, Miss Mary—only that he had many. He’s the type of man that carries secrets around like luggage. He’s full of them. (Pause) You can tell.

MISS MARY
(Disbelief)
And how’s that? Does he walk around with a sign? The man is an insufferable human being, but—

WILLY
It takes an experienced secret finder to see a secret hider. Just look at the way he walks. It’s like a strut, almost like a horse—yeah, it’s a trot. He reeks with the possibilities of secrecy. A proud man, Mr. Chan.

MISS MARY
That man does not trot, William. He definitely doesn’t have the elegance of a horse. He is a pig, and he runs his launderette accordingly.

WILLY
Oh no, Miss Mary. I assure you that he is exploding with the idea of it. (Pause) My Father sent me off to carry a letter to Mr. Chan. He said he would whip me if I even peeked at the note. And I got to thinking, “How would he know if I stole a glance?” And before I could walk out the door, he said, “Mr. Chan has a way of looking into a boy’s soul. He’ll know what secrets lie beneath, and tell me of them.” Now I got to thinking that I didn’t want any man reading the secrets of my soul, and decided not to read the letter. That letter must have been important—
MISS MARY

And why is that?

WILLY

The things that matter most to us are hidden. (Pause) Anything worth knowing isn’t worth knowing if it isn’t a secret. (Silence)

MISS MARY

Why would your Father consort with a cheat?

WILLY

He said Mr. Chan is a righteous man—

MISS MARY

(Annoyed)

I know what Mr. Lau said. And Mr. Chan is a cheat and thief. I can prove it!

WILLY

And how’s that?

MISS MARY

I need to talk to your Father first. (Pause) You said he would be here soon.

WILLY

He’s coming—paying your respects in Chinese takes awhile.

MING-YA

(Ming-Ya calls from off stage, which is the backroom of the launderette.) William!

William! Have you put in the new batch?
WILLY

(Exits. Yells off stage.) Yeah! Miss Mary is waiting for Daddy. I was keeping her company.

MISS MARY

(Pacing the laundrette. Enter Tyrone, a tall black boy.) Oh goodness.

TYRONE

Hey, m’am. Is Willy here?

MISS MARY

Who is Willy?

TYRONE

A lil’ China boy—

MISS MARY

I don’t know any Willy.

(They both stare at each other. (Pause.)

WILLY

(Enter Willy with another bag of laundry.) Hey, brotha!

(Miss Mary sits down in her tattered chair. She opens her handbag and pulls out a crochet needle and purple yarn. She watches the two nervously, as they converse.)

TYRONE

How are you?

(They give each other a pound—an elaborate handshake.)
WILLY

I’ve been better. *(Whisper.)* Haven’t been out all day long! I’m running the joint.

TYRONE

*(Whisper)*

Who’s the old white chick?

WILLY

*(Laughs)*

A faithful customer of Wishing Well Launderette—

TYRONE

For a second there I thought you forgot all about Cheri. *(Grinning)* Boy, Willy you sure know how to pick em’! That Cheri is one lil’ hot number and she would have been mine if you didn’t show up last night. *(Laughing)* Everybody is calling ya’ll secret lovers—coz’ its one *big* mystery how you got her to leave with you! *(Pause)* You going to come and check the joint out with me tonight?

WILLY

I don’t know. It’d be hard to get away.

TYRONE

You better! *(Laughing)* You’re a rich yellow brotha now impressing all the ladies with *the cash.* *(Grins)* Anyway, don’t you owe me some money?

WILLY

Yeah, I owe you. I’ll be there as soon as I can. This launderette is a full time job.
TYRONE

You got to tell me how you got that *sweet* girl—what’s your secret, Willy?

WILLY

Ah, we Chinese don’t kiss and tell—

MISS MARY

William, will your Father be here soon?

WILLY

*(Exasperated)*

Yes, Miss Mary, he’ll be here any second now.

TYRONE

*(Whispers)*

Do you think I should leave? It doesn’t look like old blue eyes like Negroes.

MISS MARY

*(Anxiously)*

I can’t wait here all day, William. *(Pause)* I must go to the police station soon. There are criminals running free at this very moment!

WILLY

*(Annoyed)*

Yes, Miss Mary, and my Father will help you catch them. Just *wait* and see.

TYRONE
I should get out of here. I think I’m making the lady—well, just look at her.

*(Tyrone motions toward her chair. Miss Mary looks edgy.)* Come on down tonight. *(He winks)* Cheri will be there and there’s going to be some live music. Say you’ll come, Willy.

**WILLY**

I can’t promise you anything. Look, what I have to deal with. If my Dad doesn’t show up soon, I’ll be closing this place down tonight.

**TYRONE**

Do you always listen to what your Father says?

**WILLY**

Yes. Don’t you?

**TYRONE**

No. *(Pause)* I don’t have to. I’m a grown man now. I got to be me and take care of myself too—you dig?

**WILLY**

Yeah, I got you.

**TYRONE**

*(With a wide smile.)* You coming?

**WILLY**

*(Enthusiastically)*

Cheri will be there. *(He smiles.)* I’m definitely coming.

*(Tyrone exits.)*
WILLY

(Miss Mary grabs Willy by the arm. It is sudden and shocks Willy.) Let go of me!

MISS MARY

(Comes back to her senses.) How do you know that Negro?

WILLY

He’s a customer... (Pause) and my friend.

MR. LAU

(Enter Mr. Lau, dressed in a black suit. It looks like the only suit he’ll ever own. He too is hot. Sweat runs down his face; however, he emanates an air of calmness.) Hello, Miss Mary. (Takes a bow) What can I do for you on this fine day?

MISS MARY

(Coldly)

Absolutely nothing. I just came to say I’m taking my business elsewhere—goodbye, Mr. Lau. (She exits with Mr. Lau at her heels pleading with her.)

MR. LAU

Wait, wait, Miss Mary! (The door is slammed in his face. Mr. Lau turns to Willy. He no longer looks calm.) What have you done?

WILLY

Nothing.

MR. LAU

Then why is she acting the way she is? What did you tell her?
WILLY

I didn’t tell her anything. You know how crazy she can be; she’s an old white woman.

MR. LAU

Do you know how much business she gives the Wishing Well? She comes in here everyday. We make money off that crazy old white lady!

WILLY

(Irritated)

I know. (Pause) I didn’t say anything.

MR. LAU

(Angry)

Then what happened here? (Pause) Willy, this launderette will be yours one day. Whatever happened can’t ever happen again. (Talking to himself.) I’ll go over and bring her some more herbal medicine—she’ll be back, I know it. (Mr. Lau sits. He looks tired.)

WILLY

How was Mr. Chan?

MR. LAU

He’s alone. No family and no friends. The old man has outlived everyone other than me. It’s strange what time can do to a body. It can cripple the best of us.

WILLY

That’s what happens with old age, Dad.
MR. LAU

No, it doesn’t have to be that way, Willy. *(Pause)* I used to dream. I used to have heroes. And now look at him. He’s laying in some nursing home. *(Quietly)* With no kin…*(Pause)* I hated my Father. He was a distant man. He left my Mother and married whores. He had many wives. *(Pause) (Looks at Willy)* I never went back to China, Willy…someday I will take you, and show you the village of our ancestors—

WILLY

How come you never went back?

MR. LAU

Too many reasons…perhaps one day we shall discuss them, *today*, is not the day…

WILLY

Is it true that you were a poet in China?

MR. LAU

*(Surprised)*

Who did you hear that from?

WILLY

No one. *(Pause)* I watch you write in your notebooks. No one writes in the pages of their diary while people are in view… you must be writing important stuff.

MR. LAU

*(Laughs gently)*

We are like minds, you and I, William.

MR. LAU

Will you promise me something?
WILLY

Ok. (Pause)

MR. LAU

When I die, will you do your duty as my eldest son? (Turns to Willy) Do you understand your duty? WILLY

(Silently)

Yes. (Pause) I understand.

MR. LAU

I never buried my Father. China haunts me. (Mumbles) I will never go back…

Willy turns to his Father to console him, but does not. He leaves his Father to ponder what is on his mind. Willy folds laundry, as he watches Mr. Lau write in a tattered notebook. Fade to black.

SCENE IV

WASH CYCLE NO. 2

Lights fade up as Willy comes into Wishing Well Launderette with a shiny red bike. It looks brand new, and so does Willy. He looks like the kid that who’s found that toy every boy searches for in a dream. Although there are loads of laundry bags on the table, Willy doesn’t seem to mind; he hardly glances at them.

Instead, he caresses his bike like an old lover and whistles to himself. Heavy footsteps approach the launderette front door.

Willy lays his bike down in the corner and covers it up with several laundry bags.
JOHNNIE, a tall Chinese boy enters. Although he is taller and sturdier than Willy, he is Willy’s younger brother. Johnnie has a black eye. He looks like a person who knows defeat. He slouches and hides behind his longish hair. He seems unfazed by the knotted swelling of his eye. They both cross the room and start folding clothes. After a long moment Willy speaks.

WILLY

You’re working today? I thought you were off educating yourself.

JOHNNIE

Yes, I educate myself Willy.

WILLY

Yeah, you’re real smart, Johnnie.

JOHNNIE

(Annoyed)

I would think so, Willy.

WILLY

You think you’re smarter than me?

JOHNNIE

Yes, I do. (Pause) Can we stop talking now?
WILLY
Anything you want, Johnnie. (Pause) What are you studying? I want to know how your mind is developing now days.

JOHNNIE
I’m studying science.

WILLY
You’re going to be a rocket scientist then?

JOHNNIE
Perhaps, Willy…And I’ll go to the moon. (Pause) (He slowly waves his hands around the launderette.) And this will all be yours… It was your dream.

WILLY
Yeah, I remember, Johnnie. (Pause) You smell foul.

JOHNNIE
Sulfur—it was on the lab table. It fell on me. It was a mistake. My lab partner forgot to tighten the cap that’s all. (Pause) It was a mistake…

WILLY
Sure. (Pause) I watched the Queen Elizabeth at the harbor. You should have come.

JOHNNIE
I was busy, Willy.

WILLY
You used to like it.
JOHNNIE

I don’t like ships anymore. Rockets are better—outer space is better. I hate the sea…

WILLY

And I was captain. Don’t you want to sail again, and be co-captain? It was great fun. Why fly when you can sail.

JOHNNIE

I’m afraid of water.

WILLY

I forgot about that phobia.

JOHNNIE

How could you? (Pause) It was the day I almost died…

WILLY

(Concerned)

(He reaches over to examine Johnnie’s swollen eye.) How are you going to explain this to Dad?

JOHNNIE

(He slaps Willy’s hand away.) Don’t touch me!

WILLY

Fine. I won’t. Are you happy now?

JOHNNIE

Extremely. (Pause) Can we stop talking?
WILLY
Not until I say so.

JOHNNIE
Must you always have it your way?

WILLY
No. (Pause) What do you do all day?

JOHNNIE
Study.

WILLY
Liar. I followed you.

JOHNNIE
No, you didn’t. (Pause) You’re always here.

WILLY
You sat in the park and people watched for hours—I watched you for hours. You’re very entertaining, you know—

(Enter Mr. Lau with several notebooks in his hands. He looks stressed. Both boys pretend to work diligently. Mr. Lau sits at the desk. He doesn’t look their way; he is consumed by the contents of the notebooks before him.)

JOHNNIE
(Whispers)

Why is he here?

WILLY
(Stiffly)
I don’t know.

JOHNNIE

What’s he doing?

WILLY

He’s writing in his secret diary, Johnnie.

JOHNNIE

Writing what?

WILLY

It’s unreadable.

JOHNNIE

(Eager)
I bet you I could read it.

WILLY

Do you know Chinese?

JOHNNIE

No.

WILLY

Then you won’t be reading anything.

JOHNNIE

I want to read it.

WILLY
So do I.

(Enter Ming-Ya with a letter in her hand. She looks like she has never been happier.)

MING-YA  

(To Mr. Lau) (Excited) Look! It’s a letter from my sister.

MR. LAU  

How is she?

MING-YA  

She’s coming here!

MR. LAU  

Here? When?

MING-YA  

Soon. I haven’t seen her since we married. (Pause) It’ll be like old times—

MR. LAU  

She can’t stay with us.

MING-YA  

Why? She’s my sister…

MR. LAU  

(Nonchalantly)

There isn’t any room.

MING-YA  

(We have never seen Ming-Ya look sadder.) She must stay with us. She has nowhere to go, Gong.
MR. LAU

And I know that but she can’t stay here. (Pause) I can’t risk my business. You understand. Her reputation cannot dirty the hard work I have put into the Wishing Well.

(Silence)

MING-YA

I understand.

(Willy stops his folding. He goes over to his mother, but she turns away and slowly exits. Johnnie stands off to the side, as if he is about to watch a car crash.)

WILLY

(To Mr. Lau) Why can’t Auntie Mei stay with us? Johnnie and I can share a room. Auntie Mei can have my room—

MR. LAU

Boy-child, do not concern yourself with my business.

WILLY

But Mama needs this. Can’t you see she’s lonely here?

MR. LAU

Go back to work, William.

WILLY

(Mumbles)

NO.

MR. LAU

What did you say?
WILLY

Nothing, Dad.

MR. LAU

*Nothing* is not what you said William. What did you *say*?

WILLY

I didn’t say anything.

MR. LAU

Nothing will lay on the plate you eat from tonight, nothing is the amount of school work you do, nothing is in your brain, William, and nothing is all you’ll have in life…if that’s all you can say.

WILLY

*(He folds laundry, but this time his anger is visible. Johnnie gives Willy some space. He decides to start separating the laundry on the floor. Willy turns the radio on. The Monkees “Pleasant Valley Sunday” is playing loudly. )* 

MR. LAU

Turn it off, William.

WILLY

I always play the radio.

MR. LAU

*(Mr. Lau gets up.)* You’re the reason why the customers are leaving.

WILLY

No, I’m the reason this launderette is still standing. I run this place. Miss Mary left because she’s a crazy, and you *know* that.
MR. LAU

What’s that?

WILLY

What?

(Johnnie has unearthed Willy’s red bike. He is admiring it.)

MR. LAU

(He picks the bike up, but before he can examine it Willy snatches it away from him.)

Give me that bike!

WILLY

No. (Willy swiftly rides out of the store. The wind chime near the front door is chiming very fast. The Monkees’ “Pleasant Valley Sunday” has just ended.)

MR. LAU

What’s wrong with your brother?

JOHNNIE

I don’t know. (Pause) He’s been acting strange lately.

MR. LAU

(Pondering)

Maybe he’s hiding something from me…. (He finally notices Johnnie’s swollen eye.)

(Outraged) Did William hit you?
JOHNNIE

Yes.

MR. LAU

Where did he get that bike?

JOHNNIE

I don’t know. (Pause) He’s been hanging around those Negro boys… again. (Mr. Lau moves away from Johnnie and puts on his coat.) Where are you going? Aren’t you going to help me with my eye?

MR. LAU

I need to find William. (Pause) You’re in charge of the Wishing Well until I get back.

You’ll be fine, son.

Mr. Lau exits leaving Johnnie standing alone with clenched fists. Fade to black.

A.F.L

SCENE V

SPIN CYCLE

Willy walks into the Wishing Well. The early morning sun engulfs the darkness of the small launderette. He leaves his bike by the front door and exits upstairs (off stage). He comes downstairs with a duffle bag. Johnnie is sitting in a chair. Johnnie goes unnoticed, as Willy bends down to clean the dirt off the wheels of his bike. He is about to leave.
JOHNNIE

Where do you think you’re going?

WILLY

(His backed turned.) I’m going away and I’m not coming back—

JOHNNIE

No you’re not.

WILLY

(Facing one another.) You’re going to stop me?

JOHNNIE

You can’t leave this—this is supposed to be yours.

WILLY

I don’t want it. Why don’t you take it? (Pause) The launderette suits you. You’re a good Chinese boy…you should’ve been born first. We’re practically the same age—

JOHNNIE

I like being co-captain. I always enjoyed it. Even when we were young children, you were always number one…always the captain. I used to care—I wanted to be first. Some people always strive for first place, I love being second born. I’m not too good for second place. (Pause) You think you are. (Laughs) You’re going to be number one until the end of time—that’s your hell. (Pause) Not mine, brother—I would never want that—

(Silence)

WILLY

(Angry)

We’re brothers, aren’t we?
JOHNNIE

Yes.

WILLY

(Pause) I hate you—

JOHNNIE

—More than you can understand.

(Enter Mr. Lau. He’s wearing pajamas and looks very sleepy. The sight of Willy wakes him up.)

MR. LAU

(Worried)

Willy, where have you been? (He embraces Willy feverishly.) I thought you were lost. I knew it…not my son—you have returned, as I expected and prayed.

WILLY

(Silently)

I’m leaving, Dad. (He breaks their embrace. Father and son stand staring at each other.)

MR. LAU

(Confused)

What? Where are you going?

WILLY

Everywhere. (Willy tries to leave.)

MR. LAU

Get back here right now, William!
WILLY

I’m leaving. Get out of my way. *(Enter Ming-Ya in a nightgown. She never looked lovelier than she does now.)*

MING-YA

*(Relieved)*

I thought we were being robbed like poor Mr. Chan! What are you doing down here so early?

WILLY

I’m getting an early start, Mama. Takes a lot of time and energy to run the Wishing Well. Go back to bed—

MING-YA

*(Confused)*

Why do you have a bag, William? Where are you going so early?

MR. LAU

He’s off to run the streets with the Negroes. *(Pause)* I prayed for a good son—

WILLY

You don’t pray—

MR. LAU

And how is it that a boy would understand the secrets of an old man’s heart? You don’t hear my prayers—and you don’t know them.

MING-YA

What is wrong with you, William? Your Father is a good Chinese man. He is good to you and John. He has sacrificed so much for the family—
WILLY

I didn’t ask for any sacrifices. *(Pause)*

MING-YA

William, you cannot talk like this. We give you our backbones, our blood—this is all for you.

WILLY

I don’t want any of this!

MR. LAU

You cannot deny the blood within you—you would deny your family!

WILLY

*(Viciously)*

Yes. *(Pause)* You call him a good Chinese man, a good Father…fuck being Chinese.

MR. LAU

*(Angry)*

Do you believe you are better than us? Because we are immigrants and you are not—you are Chinese! *(Pause)* Where’d you get that bike?

MING-YA

*(Afraid)*

Please, William—stop talking...

WILLY

*(Bluntly)*

I stole it. Is that the answer you were waiting for? I needed it—
MR. LAU

You stole…You’re lying—I’d chop your hands off if it were true—

WILLY

To get away from this! —To have release from my silent hell—from you!

MR. LAU

(Mr. Lau goes over to seize Willy. Ming-Ya gets in the way. Willy hits Ming-Ya accidentally.) GET OUT…GET OUT! I curse the day you were born! (Enter Miss Mary with her laundry.)

MISS MARY

Goodness gracious, Mr. Lau, what is going on here? I could hear you down the street, for Christ sakes, it is Sunday! —(They all look as if they have been caught with their hands in the cookie jar.)

MR. LAU

(Startled)

Oh, nothing is happening, Miss Mary…nothing at all. What can I do for you on this fine morning? (Pause)

MISS MARY

You can tell me what’s happening here. (Pause) Did that Negro boy come back here? (Angry) Now, Mr. Lau you promised me—you said this was a safe establishment.

MR. LAU

(Apologetic)

IT IS…IT IS, MISS MARY. Don’t have any worries—you can always come to the Wishing Well—
WILLY

I wonder about these fucking people who have my family and I washing their shit, piss, cum, and bloodstains. I know them…same goddamn people come in everyday. Miss Mary comes in here everyday! I wonder why I must wash their dirt—

MR. LAU

WILLIAM!

MISS MARY

(Shocked)

We are good people, William. This neighborhood has welcomed your family—

WILLY

Welcomed? (Laughs) I go to school with your children. And I swallow their spit, blood, and shit. And I fight hard not to…I come right back here and I’m forced to bow my head in it anyway. They come in and smile and say, “Hi, Mr. Lau, please wipe my ass.” And Mama bows and passes you the paper. She bows low enough to be knuckle deep in it. And I must play along with it all. (Pause) I wash their shit and I hate them. (To Mr. Lau) I hate you for making me wash their shit…Go on, disown me…I don’t want to be your son.

(Willy exits—he leaves his red bike. Mr. Lau tries to stop him, but Miss Mary interrupts him.)

MISS MARY

(Almost swooning)
What a foul mouth that boy has on him. Must be that he’s hanging out with those Negroes. *(Pause)* Mr. Lau, could you please get my chair…the one with the purple covering, you know how much my legs hurt…

        MR. LAU

I need to talk to my son.

        MISS MARY

He’s a good boy. *(Pause)* He’s just confused, that’s all.

        MR. LAU

  *(Hesitant)*

Yes, Miss Mary right away.

*Lights fade down as Ming-Ya silently cries. Mr. Lau returns with a purple cushioned chair. Johnnie sits at the front desk. He looks satisfied.*
Afterword for “The Wishing Well”

This all started in London. In the spring of 2004, I took my first writing class—uncertainty had already permeated in my countenance. I was afraid: Afraid, that I had gotten myself into some big trouble. I didn’t see myself as a writer just a bibliophile, obsessed with the written words of others. My classmates had bundles of experience whilst I had none. My first assignment was to write a monologue. Every writer is always told to write from what you know. A writer’s muse is the world, a conversation heard on a street corner, or even dreams we cannot quite remember.

I picked something I knew little about—a Chinese boy. Although I am fifty percent Chinese, I do not know anything about being Chinese. I am a multi-racial woman, and my Black roots heavily influence me. My definition of my Chineseness is not any clearer than middle Americas.

It was curiosity that lured me. My whole life I had always wondered about the other half of me. It wasn’t easy to forget. I don’t look like a black person. I do not have my Mother’s dark mahogany skin or her curly Afro. My skin would be considered too fair to be a real black person amongst Black Americans.
In life I will always have to prove my authenticity, as my Mother had to prove her right to claim my sisters and I as daughters. It seems no one would believe her either. A white lady in Central Park once told her it was inappropriate to spank someone else’s child, that wasn’t the Nannies place. I cannot deny the Chinese in me; the world simply won’t allow me to, as my Mother cannot deny that I am her daughter. Categories are much easier for people to except. Checking the other box is not acceptable. Everyone wants to know, “How exactly do you define yourself?”

I started to yearn. I wanted to know the other half of me, the Chinese half, that secretive half. I tried to forget my hidden side growing up in the mean streets of the Bronx, but how can you stop thinking about what you come from when the whole world won’t? Too many people have asked me, “What are you?” And I started to feel dumb when I said I was Black, that wasn’t the answer they wanted to hear. I think alien would have been more believable.

I wrote this play so that I might understand my father, the absentee figure of my life—a Chinese puzzle box that I could never figure out. The reason I have all these questions without answers. I was angry when I wrote the first scene and naturally my protagonist was too. I wrote a
four-page monologue where my Chinese protagonist completely bitched out his Father. Perhaps it was something I wanted to do as well. His Father never responded to all the yelling, which doesn’t make for good drama. I had to start from scratch when I arrived this summer. I barley had the skeleton of the story. However, I knew what kind of play I wanted to write, a play about the human condition. In a world built on limitations, where does one go to escape? When race, heritage, and ethnicity determine one’s fate.

I chose a Chinese launderette to be the setting of my play because it symbolizes a cultural prison for my Chinese protagonist, Willy Lau. In America the Chinese are associated with launderettes and restaurants—servicing is what they have been allotted to. A launderette was the perfect place to show the struggles of life for a Chinese American boy, who does not want to be Chinese.

Willy must struggle between his two identities. According to Chinese customs the first-born son has an incredible responsibility to the family and pressure to uphold the family name. The Chinese familial system is rigid allowing for little else than perfection. The first-born son must take care of his parents and marry well. Chinese customs are built around the elderly. Respect your
elders is not just something they say, they positively mean it. Chinese children are expected not to ever question the authority of their parents or if they do, they have made a grave mistake. Disrespect is not looked upon lightly. Respect can be seen in all aspects of Chinese culture. If a younger person dies, no funeral rites are performed, because an older person should not show respect for a younger person. The funeral is completely silent. The fact that Willy does not fulfill his responsibility as the eldest son is crucial.

The time frame is very important to the themes of the play. Willy grows up in the 1960’s, a time of Cultural Revolution in America. The ideologies of America that once existed before hand were being challenged. People started to wonder about the reality of the American dream. I wanted Willy to embrace that idea, that there was an American dream and he had full rights to obtaining it. I opened the play to a dream like sequence, a Chinese boy tips toes around the very idea. It is called “Requiem for Willy.” It’s a requiem for what Willy believes is his; it is a lament for a dream that only existed in the mind of a boy.

Willy’s red bike symbolizes the American dream. He steals a red bike because it is the only way to reaffirm that he can get up and leave. The launderette represents
Willy’s stagnate life, and the bike is the only escape from it. The other characters, Johnnie, Miss Mary, Ming-Ya, and Mr. Lau, embody exactly what Willy hates about his Chineseness. When faced with so many limitations, Willy decides to drop his own cultural roots for another.

This is where Act II picks up. We see the direction Willy is going in. He turns toward characters such as Tyrone and Terri to escape the monotony of Chinese life. He looks toward Black culture for an escape. While writing this play I wanted to understand abandonment. What are the social implications of abandoning someone? Willy is willing to be there for Terri and Tyrone without any doubts in his mind, but would he do the same for his family?

Act II explores abandonment further. Willy will ultimately abandon his mother, who is alone and without someone to care for her. As you may recall, this is Willy’s responsibility as the eldest son. It was also his responsibility to bury his Father. Willy decides not to. Essentially, he has cursed himself; to abandon one’s father during funeral rites is bad luck. The father will be unable to completely rest without the first-born son.

The play is about cultural ties, cultural hybridity, deconstructing the American dream, but the core of it centers on Willy’s decision to abandon his family. I know
by Chinese customs he must take care of his parents, but beyond cultural responsibility, how does one abandon one’s mother? Conclusively, I have found, that if one abandons his cultural past in America there is nothing for that individual, because in America checking the other box is not acceptable.

A.F.L

Canton, New York
2004
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Stephanie Lusk
Mentor: Ms. Cathy Tedford

No-Man’s Land: Identity and Cultural Continuity in Traditional and Contemporary Tibetan Painting
Summer 2004 McNair Research
Indian author Salman Rushdie speaks of “imaginary homelands”, or places that the mind creates in response to lingering memories and past experiences. Now estranged from the country of their ancestors, a country that in the years to come will become increasingly prone to take on the characteristics of its colonizing neighbor, Tibetans today face a great challenge: how to continue their heritage in alien environments, and how to preserve cultural tradition in occupied territory. Rushdie recalls a photograph of the home he was raised in, one taken before he was born. He states that, “The photograph reminds me that it’s my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of a lost time.”1 Painting in the Tibetan community plays the same role that Rushdie’s photograph performs in his life: traditional thangka painting connects Tibetans to their lost homeland, while contemporary art reminds them that the present is continually evolving.

The search for defining persona has led the younger generation of Tibetans across many boundaries, literally and figuratively speaking. Those born into post-communist Tibet struggle with conflicting ideas of self-perception; do they associate themselves with the Chinese and the communist ideals that have been forced upon them, or do they break from their present reality and connect with a culture that is in essence their own legacy, but has since been nearly obliterated? Those Tibetans born in refugee camps and in exile around the world also face a similar position.

Close to one hundred thousand Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama when he fled Tibet for refuge in India. Presently the older community members are struggling to maintain their cultural identity, while noticing the gradual infiltration of outside influence upon their offspring. Tibetan youth in exile are confronted by a past that no longer exists, and a future that is determined by the actions that they perform in their existing present. Do they cling to the heritage that is imparted to them from their community, one that they perhaps do not relate to, or do they realize that it is time to move on, that culture and tradition—along with time—is steadily moving forward? Is there a way to act on both?

Painting personifies all of the ambiguities that currently exist within the Tibetan communities, both in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and abroad. The preservation of traditional arts is a way for Tibetans to continue to represent their customs within their community, a luxury which up until the mid-1980s was impossible for Tibetans in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The exiled community has experienced oppression at the hands of the communist Chinese that limited their every movement and attempted to destroy their way of life; they no longer take for granted the freedom that they possess outside Tibet. By practicing and preserving tradition, they are giving respect not only to the refugee community, but also to those Tibetans who remain in the TAR.

Circumstance and experience dictates the movement of contemporary Tibetan artists. Depending on where they are going or where they have gone, Tibetan artists today draw inspiration from their personal histories. The contemporary genre arose out of necessity and has since transformed into a kaleidoscope of the emotions that subsist within the Tibetan artistic community. Hope, frustration and the continual search for a displaced home, if even in the mind, are all evoked in modern Tibetan painting.

Identity and culture conveyed in contemporary Tibetan painting is shaped not only by traditional concepts, but is molded by a number of variables. The recent history

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of Tibet coupled with contemporary Tibetan societal values and concerns are all included in the modern movement. Therefore, when trying to analyze and define contemporary Tibetan art, it is useful to have some knowledge of the Tibetan past to be able to fully appreciate the development of the present.

Welcome Back to the Motherland: the Communist Invasion

When the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950, they promptly implemented their own brand of suzerainty. Thousands of troops marched into a country with virtually no military background and took by force a peaceful population that would refuse to break from its cultural roots regardless of physical threat. Torture and beatings were not limited to physicality; the communist regime attacked religion, education, and took away basic human rights. It is precisely this history which underscores how important it is for Tibetans today to keep tradition and ritual alive in contemporary society.

Tibet had already lost its freedom on paper years before the Chinese decided to storm the Himalayas. A strategically sound location made Tibet an interesting property to control. The fact that Tibet was a passive aggressive state also did little to protect it from outside interest. China had been lobbying for control of the country for centuries and finally got the chance to act in 1913-14 with the Simla Conference. This conference, attended by the states of Tibet, China and Britain respectively, brought into light the differing views on where Tibet stood as a territory. China was fairly confident that Tibet was just another misplaced province of their terrain, while Tibet adamantly refused any claim but complete independence. Always the non-partisan mediator, Britain exerted their great influence and furnished a compromise that was not fully accepted by either side. Under the agreement, Tibet would be considered under the suzerainty of China, but China would recognize the autonomy of Outer Tibet (the westernmost provinces) and would agree to abstain from interfering in the administration of that area, as well as in the selection and installation of the Dalai Lama.²

The People’s Republic of China would later disregard the following terms also presented at the convention: China was not to convert Tibet into a Chinese province, and the Chinese would not send troops into Outer Tibet or attempt to station officials or establish colonies there.³ The Chinese representative merely initialed the document at the behest of party leaders, blatantly expressing his country’s disinterest in the compromise suggested. The People’s Republic chose instead to keep their options open for the future when negotiations failed and an attack on Tibet was more feasible; by doing so they legitimize their claim that the Simla Conference is invalid because it lacked their party signature.

Politics negated actions that could be carried out by foreign aid in reaction to Tibet’s appeal for help. Although juvenile and more than a little suspect, China’s claim that they had no part in the Simla Conference is not far from correct. Technically, since China would not agree to the terms nor add their official seal, Britain opened negotiations with Tibet on the same grounds. Tibet agreed to the terms to end the dispute, and was under the impression that the above-mentioned points would be kept by the Chinese, at

³ Nowak, 19.
the risk of offending Britain, then a powerful global force. They were wrong. And in the
end, conflicting interests left foreign hands tied and unable to give Tibet the support they
so badly needed. Appeals to the United States, Britain, and the United Nations were to no
avail as China was fast rising as a world power; any skirmishes that arose out of
indignation in regards to the Tibetan situation would tarnish relations with a potentially
dangerous country. It is safe to note the irony present in the People’s Republic of China’s
involvement in the United Nations, an organization committed to halting colonization
worldwide, considering that this was precisely what China had in mind for their
unfortunate neighbors. But when the hammer of communism dropped on Tibet, refugee
status was the only foreign aid that was presented to the Tibetan people.

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in China, Mao Tse-tung told his
doctor, Li Zhisui, “Everything is turning upside down. Wo xihuan tianxia da luan. I love
great upheavals.” His love of turning the world upside down would shake the foundation
of Tibetan society and undermine the continuation of a culture. Immediately after the
establishment of the People’s Republic of China in October of 1949, plans were put into
action to take abrupt and permanent control of Tibet. Under the communist guise of
seeking to release the Tibetan people from their debased and oppressive “feudal” way of
life, Chinese troops were dispatched and made the long and arduous march through the
sparse mountainous terrain in pursuit of the greater goal of freedom for all. Eastern Tibet
was logically the first conquest. According to the official Chinese website of their close
association with Tibet, the peaceful liberation of Tibet [was] a joyful historic event for
the Tibetans and peoples of other nationalities in China. The same site describes in detail
how the Tibetans welcomed the troops with open arms, prostrating themselves in
gratitude for saving them from their sad and sorry existences.

The Dalai Lama recounts an example of how the Chinese initially underestimated
the importance of the Tibetan family and the Buddhist faith. After taking control of
Amdo, the province of his birth, the Chinese sent the Dalai Lama’s brother to Lhasa with
a message: the fourteenth Dalai Lama was to accept unconditional Chinese rule, or his
brother was to immediately put him to death. The brother would then be rewarded for his
loyalty. This is a scenario which possibly would have worked in communist China, but in
Tibet failed for more than one reason. His Holiness reiterates that “the idea of killing any
living creature is anathema to Buddhists. So the suggestion that he might actually
assassinate the Dalai Lama for personal gain showed how little understanding the
Chinese had of the Tibetan character.” Family is extremely important to Tibetans. The
fact that the younger brother who was to be put to death was the Dalai Lama, and the
Chinese expected him—the most important and influential religious and political leader
of the nation—to be assassinated by his own brother, illustrated how much loyalty was
present in the communist regime. Years later, after Tibet existed no more, and in its place
the Tibetan Autonomous Region was erected, this sort of betrayal would become
commonplace. Everyone would become suspect and no one was to be trusted. Most of the

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   <http://www.tibet-china.org/historical_status/english/e0700.html>
betrayers betrayed not for political or financial gain, but because they felt they had no alternative. Instead of the Dalai Lama being assassinated, it was the Tibetan character that was the first to suffer.

The Chinese realized that best strategy to tear down resistance was to attack the core, and in Tibet’s case, religion played the biggest role in society. Life for the majority of Tibetans was centered around the Buddhist monasteries, which were not only religious centers, but also involved educational and artistic endeavors. Communist propaganda deemed such places “tyrannical” and “feudal” in nature, which gave them the excuse they needed to rip the foundation of Tibetan culture to shreds. Monasteries were burned and sacred paintings, sculptures and shrines destroyed. Monks and nuns were beaten and forced to leave their homes, while others were forced to follow the cruel orders of their new masters. This was only the beginning of decades of religious oppression that would last until the later half of the twentieth century.

When they were once again allowed to practice their religion and return, in a limited manner, to their former daily exercises in the mid-1980s, the Tibetan population immediately began to frequent the monasteries and openly performed sacred rituals and gatherings. Through their dedication to their faith, the Tibetan people have shown that they will continue to fight for their cultural freedom, from within the boundaries of their misplaced home, in the exiled communities and abroad.

**Tibetan Buddhism**

One of the most appealing aspects of Tibetan Buddhism is its unconditional acceptance of alternative religions. In his book of basic Buddhist teachings, the Dalai Lama writes: “All the major world religions have a potential to serve humanity and develop good human beings. Human nature is such that sometimes, in order to justify our adoption of a new religion, we may criticize our previous religion and claim it is inadequate. This should not happen.” The Dalai Lama and the Buddhist faith operate on the basic principles of kindness, generosity, and respect, all of which are followed quite closely by the Tibetan people. Although the majority of Tibetans practice Buddhism, there are small contingents of Muslims and practitioners of the indigenous religion, Bon.

Buddhism in general has proved itself to be an inclusive system that not only acknowledges the basic beliefs of additional cultures, but also, on a local level, embraces and expands its views to accommodate those of others. The varying religions present in the South Asian region have come to pleasantly coexist in the shelter of the Himalayas. Tibet was the last Asian country to be exposed to the Buddhist doctrine, but has since created a unique interplay of the varying beliefs presented to them. Tibetan Buddhism incorporates ideas from the Hindu, Indian tantric, Bon, and Mahayana Buddhist faiths to create the “completed dharma” of the “Diamond Vehicle” (Vajrayana). Many of the iconographic subjects present in traditional thangka paintings are derived from Hindu inspired deities.

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7 French, 10.
The Three Jewels, or the foundation of Tibetan Buddhism, consist of the Buddha, the dharma, which is his teaching, and the sangha, or the practicing Buddhist community. To become a Buddhist practitioner, one must first Take Refuge in the Three Jewels and Generate Bodhichitta. To take Refuge in the Three Jewels, the realization must occur that through the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha one can achieve spiritual and mental stability, with the greater goal of improving society in mind.

To truly understand traditional Tibetan painting, which is purely religious in content, it is essential that the viewer have a basic understanding of Tibetan Buddhism to be able to discern the different components of a piece. It is impossible to separate a traditional thangka painting from religious tradition.

Picturing Enlightenment: Traditional Tibetan Buddhist Thangka Painting

Note: the word “traditional” must be emphasized in this section. Traditional thangka painting is currently being threatened by various elements that will be examined later on in this project. Mass produced thangkas, or those “commissioned” via faulty services, i.e. the internet/mail order, are not included in the following portion; they are, however, further explored under the heading Thangka Painting Today.

Since the occupation of Tibet and the subsequent movement of what are now termed the exiled communities, knowledge of Tibetan arts has become increasingly more available. Today, Himalayan art is still not regularly included in survey texts of world art and has not yet achieved a stable presence in Western museum displays, but limited sources have been published, and are accessible for public viewing, nonetheless. It is these sources which introduced the unique nature of traditional Tibetan thangka painting, an exclusively religious form of art. Previously in Tibet, most of the artists were high lamas; art was only for the monasteries and temples, there was no folk art tradition. Monks and select devout Buddhist laymen were taught mainly in the monasteries the intricate processes required to produce thangkas, or religious paintings done on cloth that can be easily transported and used for personal and ceremonial reasons. Traditional thangkas are very complex objects that function on many different religious levels, all of which directly benefit those who are involved with, or who come into contact with such pieces.

Monks would travel the countryside spreading the dharma using thangka paintings to convey the ideas of Buddhism to the people. To be cliché, a picture is worth a thousand words, but in this case, it was worth a thousand souls. Buddhism does not exclude the beliefs of additional religions, but it does believe that Buddhist ideals can benefit whatever religion a person practices. Traditional thangkas allowed monks and laymen an opportunity to interact with a tangible visual component of their religion, and to actively communicate the Buddhist doctrine with pictorial representation. Often used for guides in visual meditation, a thangka was an important part of Tibetan society, both in the monastery and for personal use.


Traditional thangkas are not simply purchased at the market, but are most often commissioned directly from the artist. There are several reasons for the commissioning of a thangka painting, among them the most prevalent being: sickness or troubles, death in the family, or the need for an image in connection with a particular religious practice. In troubled times such as these, devout Tibetan Buddhists naturally turn to their religion for aid, and a thangka is tangible support for both faith and family. By coming into direct contact with an artist, a patron can specify for what purpose the thangka is intended, and the correct deity, colors, and appropriate settings can be established to suit the patron’s needs. In this way, a patron receives a painting that is directly related to their situation that will help encourage and guide them through their time of need, and both the patron and artist amass recognition for their performing a good deed in support of the Buddhist faith.

Traditional painting relies heavily on religious principles to validate its purpose in society. Thangkas have meaning within their whole cultural and religious context. A common Western misinterpretation of this genre is that thangkas are merely decorative pieces that, like Western paintings, adorn walls simply to please the eye and impress visitors. In actuality, thangka paintings play specific roles in society, and are strictly governed by religious traditions. A Tibetan thangka is a Buddhist ornament with which the practitioner can reflect and meditate in order to improve his or her spiritual well-being. A thangka painter must be completely focused and prepared for each separate painting. One mistake or imperfection in a painting devalues it in its religious content and brings no merit to either the patron or artist. Therefore, it is essential that a traditional thangka painter receive all training necessary to create such a structured form of art. Years of study combined with knowledge of Tibetan tantric concepts and adherence to ritual religious processes is required to adequately produce a thangka which can be pronounced authentic, in both a religious and artistic sense.

Thangka painting is an extremely complex form of art that is hard to visualize when generally described. It is highly beneficial to the viewer’s comprehension of the mastery of skill, technique, and discipline that goes into creating each painting to focus on one piece in particular and to have that specific example on-hand. A copy of The Twenty One Taras: The Atisha Lineage will suffice as a guide to traditional thangka painting.

Tibetan Buddhist art carries with it a strong tradition of representing the female buddha. A buddha is someone who has renounced worldly concerns and achieved a state of enlightenment. Tara is the embodiment of the female buddha and represents buddha karma or enlightenment energy/activity. At least once a month, usually around the time of a full moon, Tibetan monasteries recite praises and offer prostrations in homage to these twenty-one forms of Tara. This particular painting is done based on the “The Praise of the Twenty-One Taras”, a liturgy written by the first Dalai Lama, and on the meditational experiences and visions of the eleventh century Indian master Atisha.

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12 Jackson, 9.
13 “Art of Enlightenment: A Perspective on the Sacred Art of Tibet.” (Yeshe De Project: Darma Publishing), 25.
Dipamkara Shrijnana, which attests to the attribution of the Atisha lineage in the work’s title. The practice of visualization is imbued in this piece, as the practitioner places him/herself in place of the Arya Tara, the Mother of all the buddhas, the focal point of this specific thangka. Four cycles of meditation are then performed, accompanied by a symbolic offering of the universe and seven recitations of the twenty-one verses to Tara, followed by a mantra recitation; the merit accumulated by the performance of this religious rite is then in general dedicated to the benefit of all living beings, and in particular is dedicated to the specific purposes for which the rite was commissioned. This, in turn, generates karma blessings for all of those involved in the performance.

At the center of the piece is a golden Tara. Tara is seated on a lotus and surrounded by blossoms. She is flanked by twenty-one manifestations of her person, each unique in its purpose and manner. Each is separately evoked in the “Praises of the Twenty-one Taras.” The golden Tara’s body positions are particularly important, as they represent certain Buddhist ideals. Her right hand performs the “supreme generosity” mudra, which designates the way to the ultimate path of enlightenment through meditation and mantra practice, while her left hand is in the mudra called “bestowing refuge,” indicating how her meditation and mantra practice bring complete protection of Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. The beauty and purity of the Tantric faith is embodied in the stems of utpala flowers, grasped in both hands. The Tara’s right leg is extended slightly and folded in back towards her body, with the foot twisted away from the figure. This signifies the involvement and activity of the Tara practitioner in the mundane world. The left leg, however, remains in the half lotus position, which demonstrates the presence of faith and meditation that is involved in even the smallest day to day actions.

A thangka painting is done on cloth that has been carefully stretched and prepared before the painting begins. The surface is washed and painted over with gesso or its equivalent, which covers up any inconsistencies in the surface and allows the paints to adhere more evenly. A preliminary sketch is then done directly on the surface in charcoal crayon. A grid is constructed with exact measurements and specific proportions that are used as guidelines for each figure. Once an artist has sufficiently memorized the grid system, they are able to recreate the figures without governing lines. When the piece has been drawn to the satisfaction of the artist and in congruence with the patron’s expectations, the paint is then applied.

Every inch of a thangka is carefully dictated according to precise painting procedures. Colors are extremely important, as they convey meaning within their differing pigment. For example, the color of a deity changes the purpose of that exact figure: white Tara, the most popular manifestation of the deity, brings good fortune, health, peace and prosperity, while green Tara overcomes obstacles and aids in difficult situations. Shading and minute details are also relevant to a finely crafted traditional work. Clouds, nimbuses, lotuses, clothing, etc, are all shaded in a particular manner.

In order for the paint of a thangka to dry quickly and remain intact, painting is also done in stages according to color and importance of figure(s). In the Twenty-One

16 Mullin, 62.
17 Mullin, 62.
18 Mullin, 61.
Taras thangka, the paint was most likely applied to the furthest planes first. This means that the sky and landscape received the initial coats of paint, and color was applied in progression to the primary figure. Lighter colors are generally used before darker for shading and tinting, except for the smaller figures and details of a painting, where the lighter shades are done lastly so as not to smudge during the process. Colors are applied one by one, the most convenient pattern being: blues, greens, whites (bluish/greenish), reds, oranges, yellow, ochre, brown, pink, white and gold.¹⁹ The flowers held by the golden Tara occupied one of the last paintings positions, next to the golden rays that are present in the nimbus, emanating out from the Tara’s being.

After the initial coats of color have set, the paint is then scraped clean and a ball of dry dough is rubbed over the surface to create an even plane. Shading and shadowing are then added to create depth and contrast to the piece. Shading differs with each separate object. One of the most important elements of a thangka, shading is done carefully and precisely and consumes a large portion of the artist’s time.

Outlining is one of the last details to be added and must be done with smooth and continuous strokes that produce a fluid tapering throughout, in order to give the painting a feeling of depth and volume.²⁰ The most important step in coloring the thangka is the application of paint and outline of the faces of the deities. In the West, the cliché prevails that the eyes are the window to the soul; in thangka painting, the eyes of a deity have the power to bring a painting to life. This process is called “eye opening”, and after a thangka or mural had been completed in Old Tibet, the painting of the eyes was accompanied by ritual and celebration.

After the face has been completed, the last step in the painting process is the addition of the gold pigment. The most commonly used gold pigment for thangka painting is a finely ground gold powder. Gold is a symbol of wealth, power and beauty and is used to accentuate the details of a piece. This pigment is reserved mainly for brocade design, the coloring of jewelry and accessories, highlighting, and for the surrounding detail of the main figurehead. In The Twenty-One Taras piece, the rays in the nimbuses that surround theTaras would have been one of the last details to be completed.

Culture and Identity in Traditional Thangka Painting

Religion is the core of Tibetan society. Thangkas are visual representations of a nation that was once influenced and governed by the Buddhist faith. After the communist takeover, anything that was produced with a “traditional” label was seen as counterrevolutionary, and therefore against the communist regime. Traditional arts became the symbol of a lost nation, and hope for a future free Tibet in the exiled communities. No longer able to produce “traditional” works in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, the exiled communities rallied together in full force to keep their traditions alive.

Today, cultural preservation is the main goal in Tibetan refugee camps. Schools were opened in the exiled communities with the intention of retaining and passing on religious and cultural traditions. Since the establishment of the exiled communities, the Tibetan people have forged alliances with their host countries and successfully transplanted their own society into an alien environment. The host countries, particularly

¹⁹ Kapsner, 23.
²⁰ Kapsner, 23.
India, have shown great sensitivity towards the plight of the Tibetan people and have attempted to accommodate their social and political needs. Now, there are places for students to learn fundamental Buddhist concepts and various traditional arts.

Thangka painting has seen an influx of interest in preserving its artistic legacy. To the Tibetan community, the thangka is a symbol not unlike that of the Dalai Lama. Both are reminders of a lost home, the fragility of the Tibetan state at present, and the hope that the Tibetan people will one day be reunited with their homeland. The continuation of traditional and cultural rites strengthens the Tibetan community in its resolve to fight against the attempted Sinicization of their heritage.

**Thangka Painting Today**

Many thangkas today are becoming increasingly shoddy in appearance and production. Foreign interest has led thangkas to be mass produced for the first time in history, a process which demeans the whole practice. With mass production, you lose the religious integrity and general purpose of the pieces. Inauthentic thangkas are also being produced as a result of money making schemes, and most buyers do not know, nor care whether a thangka is authentic because they do not understand its true meaning.

Previously, paintings were commissioned solely for religious reasons: nowadays, paintings are made mostly for commercial purposes to satisfy demands from a largely foreign clientele.\(^{21}\) Hastily made paintings used for commercial purpose discredits the whole process of thangka painting. Most foreign purchasers realize that thangkas are Buddhist paintings, but are unaware of the sacred nature of the each individual piece; this, however, is not such a bad thing in light of the fact that most thangkas that are sold to foreigners are merely for profit and hold no religious merit. The Tsering Art School in Kathmandu distributes a basic study manual for deity drawing and describes the importance of the intention possessed by an artist when creating a thangka:

> The accumulation of merit and whether something is sacred or not depends on our motivation. We do not create this art or purchase this art for money, power or fame, we do it for the benefit of ourselves and others in this and future lives, to accumulate wisdom and attain enlightenment. If it is not created for these aims, then it reduces its sacred meaning.\(^{22}\)

Inauthentic thangkas contest the reliability of true artists who take pride in their religion, their culture and their work.

While there are pieces circulating that are not up to traditional standards, artists that adhere to customary thangka techniques do operate. These artists use the same guidelines as traditional painters from Old Tibet; they are formally trained in the thangka painting style, and works are commissioned for designated patrons, based on the needs of the client. Most of the traditional painters trained before the 1950s left Tibet with the Dalai Lama, and continued to practice in the refugee communities. The Tibetan Autonomous Region still retains a few artists who studied in the traditional school, but


\(^{22}\) Lhadrepa, 12.
they have since been censored in output. When constraints were loosened and the Tibetan people were given leave to revive their religious and cultural practices, *thangka* painters were no longer of the same caliber as those present in Old Tibet. Today, broadly speaking, *thangka* painting is stronger and of a finer quality in the refugee and exiled communities.

**Buddhism in a Box: Is Nothing Sacred?**

There is a book out on the market today titled “Just Add Buddha: Quick Buddhist Solutions to Hellish Bosses, Stubborn Spouses, Traffic Jams and Other Annoyances of Everyday Life.” For the meager price of $10.75, you too can purchase this “serious” book by Franz Aubrey Metcalf that seeks to enlighten even non-Buddhists in the path to nirvana. Did your car get keyed in the Wal-Mart parking lot? Don’t fret: mutter a quick mantra, close your eyes, count backwards from ten and float into the oblivion that is enlightenment. I make no qualms about issuing such a harsh critique to a book that I have never read; religions today are constantly being marketed to the general population—with coffee table editions of the Tibetan Book of the Dead alongside Buddhism for Dummies—and in consequence are losing their religious integrity.

I admit that in my spare time, I have done research on virtually all of the Asian countries, but Tibet was one that I had tried to stay away from. I remember being obsessed with rock and roll magazines in my early teens. One image in particular from the *Hit Parader* that lingers in my mind is that of R.E.M.’s lead singer, Michael Stipe, wearing a skirt and sauntering about in front of an audience of pseudo-hippies intent on saving the world. The setting: The Tibetan Freedom Benefit Concert of 1998. The second largest rock benefit ever to be hosted, this concert featured some of the biggest names in music, and raised over a million dollars in aid for the Tibetan people. I had no idea at the time what was going on with Tibet, but I was sure that if my favorite rock bands were trying to help, then it must have been important. However, this view quickly faded. I was never one to jump on the bandwagon, as they say.

It is disparaging to see a country reduced to “just another Hollywood fad.” While a handful of the entertainment elite are serious in their endeavors to promote awareness of the plight of Tibet, there are those that manage to single-handedly discredit the whole situation while making full use of the cameras present at benefits and functions. Although a huge monetary supporter of the Tibetan cause, actress Sharon Stone is the perfect example of a limelight lover: always the consummate performer, she often appears at the Dalai Lama’s few public outings, emotionally dabbing at tears brought on by his speeches and wowing the crowd with her movie-star good looks. She may be able to fool mainstream America into believing that she is an avid Buddhist, but it raised some eyebrows when Stone introduced the Dalai Lama—after a couple of minutes of careful musings at the blessing of a sand mandala as “the hardest-working man in spirituality. . .Mr. Please, Please, Please let me back into China!”

Sharon Stone’s introductory speech would have gone down in the Hall of Shame had it not been for talk show host Larry King doing her one better: on his nightly show, *Larry King Live*, he introduced the Dalai Lama as one of the most influential Muslims of our time. It is mistakes such as these that illustrate how, in some cases, this religion may

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23 French, 117.
not be taken seriously. How do you confuse the world’s leading Buddhist icon, the Dalai Lama—scarlet robes and all—with a Muslim? And what sort of Buddhist, Western or not, introduces the Dalai Lama as a man who wishes to go back to the country that colonized his own and forced him and close to a hundred thousand fellow Tibetans into exile? Despite the fact that these statements are laughably incorrect, this is an affront to both Tibetans and the Buddhist religion; it highlights the lack of awareness within the global community of separate cultures and religions.

Reincarnation is a serious belief within the Buddhist community. The search for a reincarnate is a sacred journey that is carefully and cautiously performed. America already knew there was something different about actor Steven Seagal long before the Tibetans got a hold of him. Maybe it was the way that he always seemed to speak in a monotone, even when he was off set; or maybe it was the aloof manner in which he conducted himself. Whatever the case, in 1997, the world found out what was really wrong with Steven Seagal, besides his bad acting: he just so happened to be the reincarnation of Chungdrag Dorje, a revered seventeenth-century tertön, or “releaver of the treasures of Padmasambhava,” the grand progenitor of Tibetan Buddhism.24 Obviously, due to the long-winded nature of this title, it holds some weight within the Tibetan Buddhist community.

So why was it that a Hollywood actor from Michigan was all of a sudden recognized as the re-embodiment of an important Buddhist figurehead? Apparently Penor Rinpoche, the eleventh throne-holder of the Payul tradition from Eastern Tibet and the supreme head of the oldest and most mystically inclined Buddhist lineage, met Seagal in India just as he was in the process of setting up dharma centers around the world.25 Some currency allegedly exchanged hands, and Penor suddenly realized that he was in the presence of a great spiritual leader. In this case, the Buddhist religion was discredited from the inside when a notable figure accepted cash in place of legitimacy.

At the third annual Tibetan Freedom Festival, Buddhist monks and nuns mingled with the youth of America who walked around getting high off of nitrous balloons, stumbling in search of the nearest keg. Eddie Vedder, the reclusive lead singer of grunge band Pearl Jam, voiced his disgust at the lack of consciousness present in the crowd. As he hurled insults at the gathering, belittling them for truthfully stating that they were there solely for the music, someone had the piece of mind to hurl something back at him: a bottle. His tirade ended and the crowd went back to their peacefully unaware existences, grumbling about wasting their time and money.

Carly Carioli, a reporter present at the Festival, documented the wide array of products available for public purchase:

The booths were of two basic types: Tibetan trinkets and hippie gear. At the former, you could use major credit cards to buy items from “The Tibet Collection: Gifts Made by Artisans in India and Nepal”; or you could buy the Dalai Lama’s life story, or thrift-store goods adorned with silk-screened slogans, or wood grain-finished FREE TIBET skateboards. Notices at these booths encouraged shoppers to “Preserve Tibetan Culture” with their purchases.

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25 Morgan, 87.
A few feet away there were booths hawking hemp products and limited-edition Jerry Garcia lithographs. You could get a “Tibetan Combo Meal” for $6, drink not included.26

Carioli continued to observe how the festival demonstrated the kind of image Americans tend to hold of the rest of the world—a cartoonish, exotic theme park of heroes and villains and martyrs.27 What struck me the most about this quote was the correlation of the “theme park” description and the current treatment of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in the hands of the Chinese.

**Perpetual Minorities and the Tibetan Theme Park**

The Chinese continue to perpetuate an even stranger and more patronizing image of Tibet than do most Westerners.28 It is purely coincidental that the rebuilding of Tibet’s leading monasteries and cultural sites just so happened to coincide with the opening of the country to mobs of Chinese tourists. There are now places that produce costumes of “traditional” Tibetan dress, which cater to foreign visitors, allowing them to rent clothing to pose in for pictures as a keepsake of their lovely vacation in the Himalayas. The Tibetan Autonomous Region has become rather like a Shangri-La Disneyland of sorts; that elusive place of peaceful serenity that exists in the mind, has now been badly reproduced in a farcical manner by Chinese tourist agencies.

The “minority” status of Tibetans now that they are a part of the Chinese state is probably one of the biggest issues that younger Tibetans must deal with. On a trip to Lhasa with a group of college students in 1991, author Lee Feigon recalls the unease with which their young Chinese tour guide interacted with the Tibetan crowds:

> When a monk stopped them [the students] and asked what nationality they were, she answered quickly, “We’re all Americans.” Although [the Chinese] argue, as our guide did, that Tibet is an inalienable part of China, the fact is they feel foreign amid Tibetans. It felt safer to our guide to relate to the Tibetans as an American than as a supposed Chinese compatriot.29

This feeling of unease is also echoed in the views of Tibetans born after the communist invasion. Because they have been exposed and raised amid communist Chinese ideals, they too possess a quality that alienates them from their own people. On one hand, they are citizens of Tibet and share the same cultural heritage, but they differ from their parents in that most were educated in Chinese schools, or under Chinese direction. Contemporary Tibetan artist Gonkar Gyatso experienced this understanding when he returned to Lhasa after years of study in Beijing. He realized that he ‘felt like a Chinese looking at Tibet’ and that what he had learnt under Chinese tutors did not do justice to Tibet.30 What resulted was the acceptance of a sort of “split personality” within the

27 Carioli, 8.
29 Feigon, 184.
30 Harris, 179.
younger generation; a cultural ambiguity that would later define, and yet not quite identify, an artistic movement.

**Split Personalities and Contemporary Tibetan Painting**

It is debatable as to who is included in the “contemporary Tibetan artist” category. According to the People’s Republic of China, contemporary Tibetan art ironically includes the Han Chinese population and only those Tibetans present in the Tibetan Autonomous Region; to others, this sect is comprised solely of Tibetans, both in the TAR and exiled abroad. This research agrees with the latter grouping and focuses exclusively on the art of Tibetans in the TAR and those presently living abroad or within the exiled communities.

To respect the sacred is to be paralyzed by it. The idea of the sacred is quite simply one of the most conservative notions in any culture, because it seeks to turn other ideas—Uncertainty, Progress, Change—into crimes.

—Salman Rushdie

Before the 1950s, Tibet was virtually closed off from the rest of the world. Vast expanses of rugged mountains and undeniably harsh weather, coupled with the wish to remain independent kept Tibet sealed off from foreign interference until the Chinese occupation took effect. What followed was not only an opening of the country on varying levels to the international scene, but it also created a rift in Tibetan society that left the majority of the population searching for their cultural and social identity. One contemporary artist in particular owns a history that is mirrored by that of the Tibetan population born after the invasion. The obstacles that Gonkar Gyatso has faced since being born under communist occupation are reflected in his artwork and are a basis for analyzing present-day Tibetan identity.

The Chinese declared that traditional arts in Tibet were testament to the old feudal society that once enslaved the country. The only art that was produced after the 1950s was strictly censored and dictated by the Chinese authorities. Artists had to join work forces as soon as they were schooled, and creativity in virtually every field was discouraged, unless it glorified the communist regime. As a result of being born under communist rule, most young Tibetans, particularly artists, suffered from a sense of split personality as a result of reaching adulthood in a version of Tibet constructed by China. They were Tibetans living in a world now controlled by another society that was wholly unlike their own, and yet that was all that they had to identify with.

Gonkar Gyatso was born into a communist Tibetan family. He was taught from birth that communism as the savior of his land, and that he should, in all things, give credit to the system. After working as a tour guide at the ‘Museum of the Revolution’ in Lhasa, Gyatso left Tibet to attend school in Beijing. He studied various Chinese oriented arts, and became more aware of the firmly established guidelines that were to be

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31 Harris, 185.
followed. He remembers that he “be came very aware of the distinctiveness of [his] cultural identity, especially after experiencing abuse and insults in the streets.”

It was at this “School for Minorities” that Gyatso took notice of the segregation that was present in his society. Although technically a province of China, and one that the PRC adamantly claims as a close territorial relation, Tibetans—along with all other minorities in China—are ostracized as outsiders. This was illustrated in the students’ account of the young Chinese tour guide in the market. If those Tibetans born under/after communist Tibet are not able to identify with their culture in the TAR, and are unable to translate their minority status into their position as Chinese citizens, then how exactly are they supposed to define their place in the world?

Gonkar Gyatso studied in China for a few years, yet he still did not realize the extent to which his people had suffered until he was on the plane back to Lhasa. He looked out his window at the stark Tibetan landscape and it occurred to him that the Chinese had always portrayed his country as something beautiful and exotic, and that when artists from China recreated the landscape they made it “pretty”; Gyatso decided then and there that he would “re-work [his] vision to remove the ‘Sinocization’ of [his] aesthetic sensibilities, and to find the real Tibet.” Through his association with art, Gyatso was able to discern the wrongful indoctrination of his society; he also now had an emotional outlet to express his views and to determine exactly what had become of Tibet.

Back in Lhasa, Gonkar Gyatso began a movement that deviated from communist dictated guidelines. While the PRC held “Tibetan” art shows that included works by the Han Chinese living in Tibet, and only those paintings deemed appropriate by the authorities, Gyatso and a small group of artists counteracted these showings with their own. In the Tibetan tea houses where mainly students and activists would gather, Gyatso and company would create temporary informal galleries where those interested could attend and comment or discuss issues that were not addressed by the communist regime.

Contemporary Tibetan painting arose out of a sudden awareness of the predicament of the Tibetan peoples. Initially influenced by their Chinese occupiers, young Tibetan artists struggled to determine their place in society and in effect, began a new movement to connect with their cultural roots and evaluate the presence of an alternate influence in their society.

‘Borderlessness’ and the Contemporary Tibetan Art Movement

My search for a Tibetan identity both as an individual and as an artist has led me across many borders of different kinds: national, stylistic and political. It is a journey that has brought me to a ‘no-man’s land’, where I am caught between the imaginative territories that currently define Tibet. I am in search of my true identity, and even though cultures and identities do assimilate, at the same time, I believe one’s true identity is revealed by keeping some certain markers of one’s own culture. I see this process as the birth of a new hybrid culture and identity.

34 “Artists in Exile: Gonkar Gyatso,” 2.
Traditional Tibetans have a hard time associating themselves with contemporary Tibetan art. Tibetan art was once a solely religious based form of expression. Today, that is no longer the case. While contemporary Tibetan artists like Gonkar Gyatso might incorporate traditional elements into their works, religion is not the central objective of each piece. This causes quite a bit of controversy within the Tibetan community. On one side there are the Tibetans who were born pre-communist era, and adhere strictly to traditional values and practices. In opposition, there is the younger generation of Tibetans who are seeking to associate themselves with some aspect of their upbringing, while separately searching for their place in contemporary society. Paintings and artistic works today that include traditional Tibetan elements are, at times, considered sacrilegious because they do not conform to the original intent of Tibetan artistic endeavors. Tibetan artists today are forging a new outlook on life based on their dealings with both their traditional past, and their distinctively ambiguous futures.

Gonkar Gyatso recently opened the first Contemporary Tibetan art gallery in the West. London now houses The Sweet Tea House Gallery, a gallery dedicated solely to promoting and exhibiting contemporary Tibetan arts. This is a step forward for modern Tibetan arts; it allows them freedom of expression without judgment, particularly exhibiting in a Western environment, and the acceptance that they have been searching for and were unable to receive both in the TAR and the exiled communities. Gyatso has since been lobbying to free himself from cultural stereotyping. So in his “borderlessness,” he has stepped out of the veritable “no-man’s land” and entered a new realm: one in which he creates his own criteria for defining his role in society, wherever that might be.

Contemporary Tibetan painting in the exiled communities has taken a drastic move away from the structured, traditional religious paintings that were produced in their homeland. Increased exposure to outside influence has led modern Tibetan artists to use together traditional techniques with contemporary, controversial styles. It is through these stylistic changes that the plight of the Tibetan culture can be analyzed. Traditional painting demonstrates the sense of community and the need for continuation within the Tibetan population, while contemporary Tibetan painting reflects changes in societal value, cultural struggle and the search for identity within contemporary Tibetan society. Although there are not many sources presently available on the two distinct styles, the efforts of Tibetan artists today is steadily assuring that one day in the future, Tibetan arts will gain the recognition that they deserve, both in the artistic and world communities.
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Note: the cover art is a screen print by Gonkar Gyatso called “Banned”. There is no dating documented.
The Cycle that Never Ends: Minstrelsy Then and Now

Aaron Marshall
McNair
Research Paper
“You don’t have to wear blackface to be a minstrel actor”
– Spike Lee

Growing up I didn’t know much about minstrelsy, but after taking “Music of the World,” with Dr. Michael Farley, a professor at St. Lawrence University, and reading and learning about the subject, I began to feel guilty for being a young African American and not knowing much about this part of black history. I also had feelings of resentment for whites appropriating from our culture the way they did. However within some of these mixed feelings grew a weird fascination with minstrelsy because I knew that there were other things about minstrelsy that we didn’t cover and I wanted to know. For instance, how did minstrelsy start? What roles did blacks play besides being the focus of the shows? How were black performers treated when they began to perform? When I started to gain more knowledge I came to the conclusion that minstrelsy is very important to American society. Minstrelsy shows, in my opinion two things, the transition of the oppressed (African Americans), from being appropriated, to taking back what was taken from them and using it to their advantage, and minstrelsy still exist in our society today.

Imagine that someone takes your status and life, whether good or bad and displays it on stage for the world to see. They do it without your consent but you have to live and deal with it. How would you react to that? If you could, would you try to do something about it? Or would you sit and let someone continue to make a mockery of your culture, which is something that defines not only who you are as an individual, but who your people are as a whole? This was something that we as African Americans have had to endure since we set foot here in America. African Americans were then given the opportunity to wear “the badge of oppression,” and wear it proudly but face it and turn it
around for our good. Even though we have come along way since the sixteen hundreds, we still face this notion of minstrelsy today.

What is minstrelsy? Many people have their own view and definition of minstrelsy. However, according to the Merriam-Webster Online dictionary minstrelsy is the singing and playing of a minstrel, or a group of songs or verse. A minstrel is any of a troupe of performers typically giving a program of black American melodies, jokes, and impersonations and usually wearing blackface make up. Scholar Christopher Small describes it as “a farrago in which white actor-singers blacked their faces with burnt cork, dressed outrageously in exaggerated versions of Negro-costume and presented in songs and dances, jokes and theatrical sketches a caricature of blacks for the entertainment of white audiences” (144). However African-Americans were the most popular and most performed group, because they were set apart by the color of their skin and were in a position to be disgraced and kept at the lowest level of society (Small, 144). In the book Race Changes, Susan Gubar refers to a statement from Walter White’s Autobiography, A Man Called White (1948). White was a prominent spokesperson for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the 1930’s and 1940’s, and he stated that, “for white, there is magic in white skin; here is the tragedy, loneliness, exile, in a black skin” (14). Therefore making it clear that to be white gave a person greater status than any other race, and anything darker than whites were inferior.

The thing about minstrelsy is that scholars can’t really pin point where and when it started. The portrayal of blacks by white actors was not new; it had a long history in the theater on both sides of the Atlantic (Small 145). What was new in the 1820’s was that white performers began to specialize in blackface roles and build whole shows around
blackface characters. The acts consisted of comic dialect, jokes, with songs and dances, some of which were in the form of plays or even the circus. The songs and dances were adaptations of Negro melodies picked up by singers on plantations.

The most famous blackface minstrel was Thomas Dartmouth Rice’s “Jump Jim Crow”. Thomas Dartmouth Rice was born of poor parents in New York City, on May 20, 1808. When he was younger he served as a supernumerary at the Park Theater in the New York (Wittke 21). Rice then went on to travel with the itinerant Thespians, found himself in small towns all over the South, and ended up in Louisville, Kentucky, at Ludlow and Smith’s Southern Theater, where he worked as property man, lamp lighter and stage carpenter. Smalls states that Thomas Rice got his ideals from listening to the songs of a plantation worker from Louisville in 1828, a slave named Jim Crow, whose shuffling, crippled step and hunched shoulders Rice imitated on stage to make a fortune (Brown 19). Here is response to Rice and his show, described in the New York Tribune in 1855:

It was at this epoch that Mr. T. D. Rice made his debut in a dramatic sketch entitled “Jim Crow,” and from that moment everybody was “doing just so,” and continued “doing just so” for months, and even years after. Never was there such an excitement in the musical or dramatic world; nothing was talked of, nothing written of, and nothing dreamed of, but “Jim Crow.” The most sober citizens began to “wheel about, and turn about, and jump Jim Crow.” It seemed as though the entire population had been bitten by the tarantula; in the parlor, in the kitchen, in the shop and in the street, Jim Crow monopolized public attention. It must have been a species of insanity, though of a gentle and pleasing kind... (qtd. in Lott 3)

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938), poet, writer and song writer of the “Negro National Anthem” *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, similarly remarked that minstrelsy originated on the plantation and constituted the “only completely original contribution,” of American to the theater (qtd. in Lott 17). Johnson, who published *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* under a pseudonym, told the story of a musician who rejects his black roots for a life of material comfort in the white world (Cooper). Johnson was very
active in uplifting black culture and making social awareness’s to other races of stereotypes about blacks, trying to change those negative stereotypes. He had a talent for persuading people of differing ideological agendas to work together for a common goal, and in 1920 he became the national organizer for the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Cooper).

Minstrelsy was one of the first major popular entertainment commodities in the United States. Whites didn’t know much about black culture; nevertheless, they found a way to appropriate from black culture to make it a part of America’s economy and a source of income for white performers. Economics was another reason why minstrelsy was important and significant. According to William Mahar, author of Behind the Burnt Cork Mask, commodities, in this case cultural commodities “blackness” became successful because they served needs of a cross-section of people at a particular time, in a particular place. In the early part of the sixteen hundreds Americans brought Africans over to help with labor, labor for which they would not have to pay the Africans who would be slaves to their owners. Similarly, in the case of minstrelsy whites were looking for something entertaining and blacks would provide that for them for free.

Minstrelsy was the acting and performing of blacks (appropriating from their culture), on a mainstream stage (white), showing blacks as being inferior people to the white culture. Even though Carl Wittke author of Tambo and Bones described the mainstream stage, as a stage made up of white performers, at that time the audience wasn’t just whites. There were blacks in the audience; however they were segregated from the white audience members, given seats under the stage or way in the back of the
performance area. Blacks were the main act of the shows but were not permitted to perform on stage with white performers.

Minstrelsy was socially significant because it wasn’t just a form of entertainment that demeaned blacks, but it showed two cultures working together in a way in which one played the superior role (whites) and the other played the inferior role (blacks), a double edge sword. Within the relationship there was some sort of fascination in which Eric Lott author of Love and Theft calls a racist curiosity that whites had with black culture. But due to social restrictions and cultural rules, that made it wrong to have blacks be socially equal to whites. Therefore they had only one way to display that fascination, on stage while perpetuating racist stereotypes (Ben, Hatch and McNamara 26).

Regarding its social significance and the battle of oppression, especially in the social realm of African Americans, minstrelsy clearly shows two things: One, it shows that African Americans are not and have never been passive victims. Second, minstrelsy set us up for entertainment today, showing the cruel side of it because in reality minstrelsy has not disappeared because self-deprecation is an important part of African-American humor today.

Some scholars believe that there were two types of minstrel shows in America before 1830: first were the impersonation of blacks given by white actors between acts of plays or during circuses; the second were the performances of black musicians who sang, with banjo accompaniment, in city streets. However, the minstrel show as a theatrical form in its own right originated in New York in February of 1843, when four performers who called themselves the Virginia Minstrels presented an entire evening of blackface songs, patter jokes, dances and sketches, all at a pace which as Robert Toll, the author of
Marshall Blacking Up, says was “something new, unusual and compelling” (qtd. in Small 145).

The minstrel show was an unusual phenomenon, in our society at that time and it gave us an image of what the theater was like. Toll’s description of the show went on to say:

They burst on stage in makeup which gave impression of huge eyes and gaping mouths. They dressed in ill-fitting clothes and spoke in heavy “nigger” dialects. Once on stage, they could not stay still for an instant. Even while sitting, they contorted their bodies, cocked their heads, rolled their eyes, and twisted their outstretched legs. When the music began, they exploded in a frenzy of grotesque and eccentric movements. Whether singing, dancing or joking, whether in a featured role or accompanying a comrade, or just listening, their wild hollering and their bobbing, seeming compulsive movements charged their entire performance with excitement. They sang and danced rousing numbers and cracked earthy jokes (qtd. in Small, 145).

The way people viewed minstrelsy in its popular days, especially African Americans who weren’t a part of the show but in the audience laughing hysterically at jokes that were at their expense, is as a cultural experience: Similar to the way we would look at a film like Troy or The Passion of Christ. Some blacks would refuse to attend shows; they were outraged at how whites appropriated from them. This attitude can probably be summed up by Fredrick Douglass’s righteous response in an edition of the North Star in October of 1848. Blackface imitators, he said, were “filthy scum of white society, who has stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature; in which to make money and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens”; Douglass’ denunciation nicely captures minstrelsy’s further commodification of an already enslaved, non-citizen people (Lott, 15).

Nevertheless, it was easy to condemn the racial attitudes underlying the minstrel show at the time. The racial attitudes were no more than a reflection of the prevailing attitudes of the day, where blacks were inferior to whites. Small points out that minstrelsy was the principal channel through which the majority of white Americans became aware of black music and dancing, even if it was filtered through the perceptions of minstrels.
Ben Sidran, the author of *Black Talk* wrote: "The white minstrel tradition, which dates back to the early part of the nineteenth century at least, established that there was a need in white culture for what the black culture had to offer" (32). A need for something they couldn’t discover or come up with on their own, a form of entertainment (music and dance) that would be pleasing to audiences. We can not forget that there was a social relationship between blacks and whites within minstrelsy, which Lott calls “racial production” because the structure of both cultures helped produce the commodity we know today as blackface or minstrelsy. Even though within that social relationship, minstrelsy displayed inequality of status and power, somehow it grew into socially acceptable forms which did not compromise white superiority.

Minstrelsy, in my mind, was about a fondness for black culture which whites who owned plantations seen and witnessed themselves. This interest, which brought black culture to minstrel acts and on the stage, was the only socially acceptable way to demonstrate their interest and fascination, because “white America preferred its doses of black culture in diluted form, just as the spiritual and field-holler showed that black America preferred to assimilate white culture in small doses” (Sidran, 32).

We can look at minstrelsy for what it was: an interracial creation that was performed on white mainstream stages for sport and profit (Lott 3). According to Lott, minstrelsy fed into a system of cultural signifiers that both produced and continually marked the authenticity of African Americans’ “blackness”: their ridicule asserted the difference between counterfeit and currency even though audiences believed shows and actors were made up of black music, dance and gesture (9). Meaning that the minstrel shows made the images and descriptions of black’s real, therefore leaving room for
stereotypes, and helping the audience cope with their deepest concerns, anxieties, and needs.

Minstrelsy would make a shift that highlighted the social relationship between whites and blacks. As a result of this shift, it also would display how African Americans had a gift of grasping and dealing with the circumstances in which they found themselves. White minstrel performers began to lose interest in portraying black people. Although troupes of black minstrels appeared as early as 1855, it was a decade before blacks had established themselves in minstrelsy, their first large-scale entrance into American show business (Toll 195). Blacks showed that they would not be passive victims; they were given the opportunity to not only be in show business, but finally put on a show, that in essence was their own. To some people’s dismay, there would be a new minstrel show. It was clearly a racial business, but if blacks wanted to continue in this business, which was the only entertainment business they could be a part of, they had to deal with the racial attitudes.

Ironically, the new minstrel shows were as popular with black audiences as with white. Blacks would help fill the theaters, which again showed that they would not be passive victims, by taking advantage of the opportunity given to them, hence took the opportunity to watch the minstrel shows that were finally original performances by people in their own culture. Emphasizing their authenticity as Negroes and claiming to be ex-slaves, black minstrels became the acknowledged minstrel experts at portraying plantation material (Toll, 195). But since they inherited the white-created stereotypes and could make only minor modifications in them, black minstrels in effect added credibility to those images by making it seem that Negroes actually behaved like minstrelsy’s black
caricatures. One could ask why did blacks go on stage and perform in front of white audiences, and why were there blacks in the audience at times? One answer might be that the negative aspect of their shows was balanced, perhaps even outweighed, by the fact that blacks had their first chance to become entertainers, which not only gave many Negroes in entertainment opportunity for mobility but also eventually put blacks in a position to modify and then correct these stereotypes (Toll 196).

The generation of Americans in the 19th century would see the heyday of Negro minstrelsy in the United States. This new form of entertainment reached its highest level in the decades from 1850 to 1870 (Wittke, 64). With the development of railways and steam carts during the latter half of the nineteenth century, the field for theatricals expanded enormously (65). Minstrelsy spread rapidly through out the United States, from New York to California, from Massachusetts to Georgia. Black minstrels tried to legitimize themselves in two ways. In their advertisements, they quoted extensively from favorable reviews stressing that they were at least the equal of whites as minstrels (Toll, 200). An example was from a St. Paul, Minnesota, writer felt and wrote that “the efforts of white men in the same entertainment must pale before the genuine fellows, who are naturally Negro minstrels (Toll 202).”

Traveling black entertainers had to endure much on the road: at times it was a matter of survival. They were denied their basic needs and regularly insulted and threatened with things like the “Nigger Read and Run” signs they saw throughout the South. Violence was also common (Fletcher, 46-50). For example, the residents of one Texas town got their target practice riddling black minstrels railroad cars with bullets whenever they passed through (Toll, 221). Not only did blacks have to deal with
violence, but they had to deal with not getting food, water or places to sleep while on the road. Financially, black minstrels seem to have fared worse than whites, but they were better off than other Negroes who were slaves and paid nothing (Toll 223). Toll quotes Tom Fletcher a black minstrel performance assessment of the financial benefits:

> It was a big break when show business started for blacks… Salaries were not large, but they still amounted to much more than they were getting before joining, and there was the added advantage of opportunity to travel with the company taking care of them. (qtd. in Toll)

At this point in the development of minstrelsy, by 1870 blacks were established in American show business, a business that at first rejected them but appropriated from them also. There began to be black composers and black companies that ran their own shows. The Africans American booking circuit was called the Theater Owner’s Booking Association (TOBA), though some performers referred to it as the “Tough on Black Actors” circuit. Some early black troupes were Mahara’s minstrels and the Rabbit foot minstrels, both out of Virginia. The most famous black composer/actor was James Bland (1854-1911), who was the only notable African American song writer of the late nineteenth century. He went on to write over 220 songs, and his most famous were “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny,” “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” and “In the Evening by the Moonlight.” (Joplin)

By the early 1870’s the minstrel show again was changing, and the popularity of the minstrel show began to decline rapidly. Between 1873 and 1874, eighteen out of thirty-nine minstrel companies, most were white, on the road failed (Wittke, 89), and the decline continued into the early 20th century. By April of 1919 only three troupes remained in the United States. Wittke claims that the end may have been forecast at least
as early as the 1880’s. Economic reasons added to the decline of the shows, because minstrel performers became unprofitable for various reasons (Wittke, 112). Minstrel shows became financially unprofitable not only because of the competition of other forms of entertainment which were supplanting them in the popular taste (vaudeville), but also because of the rapidly rising expense of theatrical productions, the cost of stage settings, advertising equipment of various sorts, and salaries (Wittke, 113). Minstrel shows declined also because they were considered a masculine event; it didn’t have sex appeal says Wittke, or sex fascination for its audiences, and the other forms of entertainment provided that sex appeal (123). The minstrel show began to merge into Vaudeville (Saxton, 67). As Vaudeville salaries and musical comedy salaries attracted men, the public followed its favorites into these new lines, and minstrel patronage declined (Wittke, 125). The diminishing popularity of blackface acts was the main reason for the decline in minstrelsy. The origins of the term Vaudeville is unknown, even though some make the case that it’s from a French word. Vaudeville was a traveling show housed in tents, and traveled through the south, in which is borrowed from many different shows. Vaudeville acts consisted of minstrel singers, dancing girls, conjurers, magicians, circus-style acrobats, Swiss yodelers, Hawaiian strings bands, anything “that the management reckoned would please the unsophisticated audience (Small, 156). Vaudeville shows incorporated little pieces from minstrel shows, but didn’t make it its focus.

African Americans faced a paradoxical dilemma with minstrelsy during the early 1900’s playing demeaning and stereotypical roles to be successful in a mainstream business. As time passed on and minstrelsy came to an end, blacks still found themselves dealing with a similar issue of stereotypes and equal opportunity. However, we can’t
assume that minstrelsy stopped when people stopped blacking up their faces and think
that it no longer exists in our culture. Even though we have come a long way, minstrelsy
is still alive in our culture, our world has changed so much that we do not recognize it, or
maybe ignore it. Entertainment gradually moved from live acts of song and to films.

According to Gerald R. Ruther Jr. who wrote *Black Manhood on the Silent*, in
early twentieth century motion picture houses, offensive stereotypes of African
Americans were as predictable as they were prevalent: watermelon eating, chicken
thievery, savages with uncontrollable appetites. One of the early films that seemed to
attempt to define black manhood was *The Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffiths, the 1925
epic that glorified the Ku Klux Klan while demeaning blacks (Butters).

The movie is about two brothers, Phil and Ted Stonemans, who go and visit their
friends in Piedmont, South Carolina: the Cameron family. The friendship is affected by
the Civil War, as the Stonemans and the Cameron’s must join up opposite armies. The
consequences of the War in their lives are shown in connection to major historical events,
like the development of the Civil War itself, Lincoln’s assassination and the birth of the
Ku Klux Klan started by Ben Cameron. Overall the movie reveals racist versions of
American history (Munoz).

Gerald Butters Jr. is an assistant professor of history at Aurora, and his study of
African Americans in film and theater concentrates on separating cinematic myth from
historical reality, in other words the myth of white Euro-Americans portrayal of black
men versus the actual black male experience. In doing this, showing how blacks are
treated in film, he presents what minstrelsy had shown in its day, a superior fondness by
whites for a culture that they believe is inferior to their own.
Now in the late twentieth century it isn’t whites playing the stereotypical roles: instead, blacks are doing it, even though in some cases it helps in creating positive images for blacks. Is playing stereotypical roles the only way we as African Americans can be successful in the entertainment business? The images of minstrelsy as we look back at times are painful and ugly. Depictions of blacks as mammies and Uncle Toms, with their over exaggerated features may have long gone from some of our minds. But even though we have come along way in the entertainment business, now today there are African Americans playing some of the biggest roles in Hollywood, for example Denzel Washington playing in many great films, Halle Berry, who has played in many controversial films. When Washington and Berry won Best Actor (Training Day) and Best Actress (Monsters Ball) at the 74th Academy Awards in Hollywood California in 2001, I remember there being a sigh of relief in the black community. A sigh of, we as African Americans have made it, we finally won the big one. The two did something that no African American male or female had ever done.

I understood that to be the moment in history that would open doors for blacks in the entertainment business, whether it is film, music or theater. Even Berry commented in her acceptance speech saying “It’s for every nameless, faceless, woman of color who now has a chance because this door tonight has been opened” (Casenova). I believed too, like a lot of African Americans, that maybe this was also putting African Americans on the same equal opportunity as whites. The answer would be no, when certain critics, even African Americans complained about the roles both had to play to get the Oscars. According to James Hill, staff writer for BET.com, even though they were Oscar leading roles, they were in reality some of the worst stereotypes aimed at African Americans.
Washington played a dirty murdering cop in Training Day and Berry played an uneducated, single mom who slept with the racist prison guard who executed her husband, who was convicted of murder.

In 2001 Spike Lee released *Bamboozled*, which to some people was an angry satire, asking that we not forget the offensive and disturbing corners of our history. It gives us an up to date look at minstrelsy in our culture. Damon Wayans plays Pierre Delacroix a black writer working for the CNS television studio, run by mostly whites. Delacroix (Wayans) comes up with a new T.V. idea which would push the boundaries of acceptable viewing by exaggerating black stereotypes and satirizing America’s racial biases. His show, *Manton: The New Millennium Minstrel Show* puts two talented black street performers in the spotlight and eventually becomes a huge success, much to the disappointment of Delacroix, due to the show not going the way he wanted it to go. The minstrel show excerpts in Bamboozled are at once sad, disturbing and utterly fascinating, because he stages what appears to be actual routines from the days of minstrelsy.

Lee in an interview with Cynthia Fuchs says that the film is really an exploration of history of racism and misrepresentation of African Americans and people of color since the birth of film and television. Lee also raises some interesting racial questions in the movie asking, was Cuba Gooding Jr.’s back flip on stage when he received his Oscar for *Jerry Maguire* a sign of engaging in the ol’ shuck and jive? He seems to think so. Was “The Jeffersons” a latter day minstrel show? “Good Times”? “In Living Color”? “The Chris Rock Show”? All are mentioned in the movie, which doesn’t tell us the answer but at least has the courage to pose the question: who’s bamboozling who?

(Williams)
As Spike Lee has posed who is really being bamboozled or who is using who, we are aware of racial and social prejudices, but we as African Americans continue to do what those before us did, wear the badge of oppression and wear it proud and making something out of it. In other words, taking all the things like racism and discrimination and continue to push through it all, in hopes to open more doors for other blacks. Three T.V. shows today, “The Chris Rock Show,” “The Dave Chappelle Show” and “Method Man and Red,” not only display black culture, but show the interaction between blacks and whites in different situations. Even though at times the shows can stereotype blacks, they also show the stereotypes that blacks have for whites.

An example of blacks referring to their own culture to amuse an audience was Chris Rock in 1996, during his HBO special *Bring the Pain*, where he did his “Niggas vs. Black People” routine, which I must add helped him revive his career. The heart of the bit went:

> “Every time black people want to have a good time, ign’ant-ass niggas f--- it up! …Can’t do nothing! Can’t keep a disco open more than three weeks! Grand opening! Grand closing! Can’t go to a movie the first week it comes out! Why? Cause niggas are shooting at the screen! …I love black people, but I hate niggas, brother. Oh, I hate niggas!” (qtd by Handy).

Many people thought that this act was funny while some criticized him calling it politically incorrect humor that gives face to the racist.

The “Method Man and Red” show in which the rappers play themselves, centers on the misadventures of two hard core rappers, who move into an exclusive, snobbish, white collared suburban neighborhood. According to Junious Ricardo Stanton, a journalist and host of Black Talk & TBWT Editor in Philadelphia, the show is basically a
Marshall

hip hop variation of the old school television series The Beverly Hillbillies and a much raunchier version of the black sitcom Movin’ On Up (Stanton). Stanton claims that the show is supposed to generate comedy from the culture shock/clash between Method Man and Red’s naive rich, raw, let it all hang out lifestyle and values. While their upper class snooty neighbors one of who has an adolescent son who idolizes the rappers and hangs out with them at their house. Stanton’s final analysis of the show is the plot line reinforces the prevailing message of mainstream corporate media in general and much of commercial hip hop in particular: the promotion of wayward irreverence, incivility and disrespect, crass materialism, misogyny and racial stereotypes of the worst kind. This is one of the concerns that many African Americans have: when the producers and T.V. stations air shows like this, it show us blacks in a bad light. At the same time we have a lot to do with it because we help write the plots and story lines (Stanton). Therefore again I ask the question is this the only way we can be seen on television or seen in general and is this how we would be accepted?

Dave Chappelle takes a similar but different approach. During his show he not only acts out blacks, displaying the stereotypes that people have of blacks, he also acts out stereotypes of whites and sometimes combines the two. For example, one skit centers on Clayton Bixby, a blind African American who thinks he is white because he grew up in an orphanage, in a racist town. Growing up the people of the town hid his identity to the public by clothing him in a Ku Klux Klan robe, and put in his mind racist thoughts toward blacks, which stuck with him when he got older. Clayton Bixby became a famed white supremacist and author, while still not know he was black. Frontline while doing this story witnesses at a book signing where he then for his fans takes off his robe,
revealing who to the word that he is black. When the whites see that Mr. Bixby is white many of the whites began to vomit and pass out.

In this skit Chappelle is consciously showing the racist attitudes that existed and still exist in our world today. But he does it in a humorous way to show a racial perspective that many try to hide or not talk about. Chappelle also makes fun of the African American community in most of his skits. In another episode, he presents the History Channel’s coverage of great inner city gang wars from the 1980’s. In the end, Dave Chappelle willingly takes on almost every situation that occurred in our history between blacks and whites, even Asians, from slavery, to minstrelsy, to gang violence and stereotypes of African American rappers and singers, and used in a form of comedy that a diverse audience enjoys.

Even though *The Chappelle Show* is very successful, some might argue that our world hasn’t really changed from centuries ago, we still accept the minstrel ideal in our culture. The minstrel ideal that performers or entertainers can poke fun at their culture and now others and perform racial stereotypes and it be ok. People are talking about Chappelle and his show calling it very controversial. Many people are outraged with his show and disagree with the whole concept of it. Surprisingly, blacks find it offensive and like many other black shows, movies and music, displaying us negatively. One chat room recently included a heated discussion about Chappelle’s show. This is what an anonymous character name zooropaflygirl had to say about Dave Chappelle and his show:

WAKE UP AMERICA!!! Dave Chappelle is NOT funny. Dave Chappelle is to comedy what KFC is to soul food. It is juvenile, cliché, and tiresome. Next Richard Pryor? Muwhahahaha.. (The only funny sketch I saw was the one about the Klan). I recently saw a commercial addressing the show's negative image of white people! HA! What a big fat joke. This show has the opposite problem- its negative portrayal of
BLACK people. Yeah that's right; you heard me correctly. I am sick to death of the negative, false, and inaccurate stereotypes of us on television, every one in the book portrayed in this show. From the cliché ghetto-acting hip hop stereotypes to the crack-smoking, I am ready to hurl. And the lies. One of many examples: I saw this sketch the other night on his show about how white people loooove electric guitar and Latinos love electric piano. Okay the last time I checked rock and roll is BLACK music invented by BLACK people; the sad thing is that half the planet thinks that it's white music and Elvis invented it, which is such a lie. In that sketch is the trendy stereotype of black people being absent minded "Yo whaddup G" fools that can't play instruments and just rap. We f*ckin' play every instrument in American music, as well as invented some of them, AND invented every genre of American popular music. (R&B/soul, rock, jazz/ragtime, reggae, etc. Also if it weren't for blacks we wouldn't have country because several country instruments like the banjo are black inventions, and the roots of country music trace back to Negro spirituals and folk songs. I may be only 17, but I'm not naive and I'm a liberal black woman who knows my history). The reason why this show is so successful is because the show's target audience is white people, who eat this stuff up. This is how white America perceives us. Especially 13-year old white boys who looove those ghetto-acting "it's cool to be stupid" stereotypes. That's what Dave Chappelle is: a 13-year old white boy trapped in a black man's body. I wonder if Chappelle really is a stupid modern-day minstrel "coon" or a smart man who is laughing up the bank by exploiting these stereotypes for his own profit and benefit. It's not like it's the 1930's and he doesn't have a choice. Fine if you enjoy watching this show but if you think this represents real-world African-Americans, get your head out of your ass! And if you think Dave Chappelle is some innovative comic genius that addresses racial issues, shoot yourself in the face. I haven't met any brothers or sisters who disagreed with everything I just said. Do all yourselves a favor and rent Spike Lee's Bamboozled. Read "My Bondage and My Freedom" by Frederick Douglass. Listen to an Otis Redding record. Talk to my grandfather—a scientist, professor, and teacher of Afro-American studies and Latin. Those are REAL African-Americans. Bottom line: At least Stepin Fetchit was funny. (I'm willing to risk getting lots of anti-votes because I'm brutally honest, a lot of you people can't cope with the truth. I'd rather write an honest review and be deluged in anti-votes than lie and receive ill-gotten votes. I'd never compromise my integrity to acquire the approbation of a bunch of subconsciously racist low lifes).

Within this quote she expresses how Chappelle’s stereotypes aren’t funny, but childish and ignorant. At the same time she claims that the skit he did about Clayton Bixby and the KKK was very funny. In other words it’s ok for Chappelle and other black comedians or actors to stereotype other races and cultures but not theirs. Sounds familiar, wasn’t that the same thing white minstrel performers did in its day. Performed different cultures and races and stayed away from showing images of them. The writer also makes references to Hip Hop and how African American rappers are seen as absent minded fools and helps in making negative stereotypes of blacks. Throughout her statement she raises some controversial questions that I disagree with but what I do agree with is that
Chappelle like many other black shows or movies target white audiences, giving an image that at times is negative perceptions of African Americans. There are people who cannot handle racial issues.

Since everyone can’t handle issues of race, when we were being appropriated in the 19th hundreds we accepted that we could do nothing and played with the hand that was dealt to us. Today we face a similar challenge but now we have the freedom to voice our opinions and displeasure with certain issues, without getting lynched or being imprisoned. One may disagree but since we have always made use of the things that were given to us why stop now. This is what film and comedy does today and what minstrelsy did then.

In conclusion we have made the transition from minstrelsy to now, but amazingly minstrelsy has been able to stay alive in our culture. Minstrelsy in my opinion isn’t just an important part of African American culture. Even though it gave blacks a chance to earn a decent living outside of the plantation where they were enslaved and had very little status. There would have been no formal public acknowledgement by whites of black culture if there wasn’t for minstrelsy. But by wearing the badge of oppression it opened doors for blacks in theater and many different forms of entertainment. Minstrelsy was important to American culture as a whole. Minstrelsy can show a lot of negative images and can paint a picture of stories of painful and ugly experiences and it can also show and tell us that our society has not changed much since then. That we still have a lot of work to do in breaking stereotypes and prejudices. However, our ancestors who endured hardship throughout history have paved the way so that we could take back what was appropriated from us and use it for our own benefit. This ideology may be controversial,
but remember this same controversy lead to open doors, Oscars and economic prosperity. Like today Hip Hop may not have been discussed in this paper in dept but I believe it is an example of where our society is going. The more popular and mainstream, Hip Hop and Rap become, the more our society and world will see that they don’t tell who African Americans are. It just says on a small scale what we can do: also showing the influence that African American culture has on American society. I will continue to develop my analysis on this topic and expand my study of this subject.
Working Bibliography


http://www.Kansaspress.KU.edu/butbla.html

I have experienced racism many times in my twenty-one years of existence. This baffles some people because, in their sheltered world, it is a common belief that racism has faded from existence in the United States. Still others (the majority) are shocked after they discover that I was born and raised in Cleveland, OH. The shock doesn’t come right at that moment; no, first they think that I traveled down into the southern states and there had my encounters; it isn’t until I confirm that assumption and then go on to point out that I have had the majority of these experiences right at home in Ohio that the feeling of shock really takes hold.

It is a common belief that prior to the Civil War white Ohioans were fairly accepting of African Americans, because Ohio was a free northern state. Furthermore, problems between the two groups only began to develop after the Civil War when African Americans began migrating north in mass quantities. Before I began my research, I held these myths to be somewhat true as well, but being from Ohio and having experienced racism and witnessed some of its deep roots there I hardly held them as definite facts. The truth of the matter is that although, Ohio was a northern state with a large abolitionist population, whites there still did not necessarily want equality or to even co-exist with African Americans. These mixed emotions on the issue resulted in very tense race relations, but there were areas, especially in the northern regions, where free African Americans and fugitive slaves were treated with common human decency. However, as the Civil War began and the fear African Americans’ migration north, and
In the following pages it is my wish to explore these wavering race relations from about 1850-1865. These fifteen years cover a portion of the ante bellum period and the Civil War. It is not my intent to downplay the great abolitionism that was a characteristic of the state or to put Ohio down in any way, but rather to give a more complete and realistic picture of “who” Ohio really was during those trying times.

**Ante Bellum**

1850-1861

*Black Laws and Ohio’s Fugitive Slave Act*

To understand the turn of events that happened in the 1850’s we must first overview what the racial climate was like prior to this decade. The best way to do this, in my opinion, is to talk about the Black Laws, which were laws the state passed in hopes of deterring freed and fugitive slaves from settling in Ohio. In 1803 Indiana passed a law that prohibited any African American or mulatto from testifying in court unless it was against a Native American or a member of their fellow race. They pieced this law together from an article that some of the founders of Ohio had tried to include in the state’s constitution, and when anti-freedom citizens in Ohio witnessed the success the law had in Indiana they too began to devise laws to hinder the non-whites of their state, (Love 38). To gain support for the laws that would come the attitude of Ohio as a state for whites began to increase, and one Ohio delegate was quoted as saying that “blacks had no claims upon the people of Ohio; Ohio is a state for white men. The Negroes are
intruders,” (Love 38). With tensions rising Ohioans returned to the previously despised article and, like Indiana, began to piece together laws to create a wall.

The first appearance of such laws in Ohio occurred in 1804 when African Americans were forbidden from settling in Ohio unless they filed their certificate of freedom with the county clerks office, and after that they had to pay a fee of twelve and half cents per person settling in the state. Furthermore, anyone who employed an African American without proof of his freedom was fined ten to fifty dollars, and if the employee turned out to be a fugitive then the employer had to pay the owner fifty cents for each days work done (Preston 425). Anyone caught helping a fugitive run to Canada was fined a thousand dollars, and those who interfered with the capture of such a person was fined fifty dollars (Sheeler 210). These seedlings of the future Black Laws came about because many whites, especially in the southern regions of the state where many of the citizens were from Virginia or Kentucky, began to worry as the number of African American settlers began to increase. The very notion of this fear is laughable because although the black population was growing it was nothing compared to the influx of settlers from Europe, yet and still the slowly increasing numbers spooked people so the above laws were inducted to give them peace of mind.

The problem was that these laws didn’t seem to be stopping the “rush” of freedmen moving into the state, so once again the people cried out for some form of “crowd control,” so beginning in 1807 the appearance of Black Laws began and continued to increase. The amended law of 1807 required African Americans to post a five hundred dollar bond (a guarantee of good behavior) after being in the state twenty days, which had to be signed by two freeholders. The fine for interfering with a fugitives
capture was increased to a hundred dollars, and the same amount was charged to anyone who employed an unbonded African American (Preston 425). The final, and most troublesome, part of these revisions was the law that denied any person of color the right to testify in court against a white man. Finally, Ohio had adopted the law that inspired Indiana and in turn its own citizens, but they were much more blunt with their wording. This law was particularly heinous because it gave free range to any white person who wished to rob, beat, or kill a person of color, and there was nothing the victim could do unless a white person, who was willing to testify on his behalf, witnessed the event (Sheeler 210). Whites in the southern regions of the state had a field day and race riots were incited to drive African Americans from Ohio. Just as Indiana had inspired Ohio its new and harsher laws had a domino effect in its surrounding states. Soon similar laws were found to be appearing in Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois. One of the supposed homes of abolition and love of the fellowman was proving not only to be less than innocent, but also the arouser of hatred amongst its neighbors.

The bolstering of these laws didn’t stop here. In 1829 African American children “were prohibited from ever entering public schools and also [African Americans] were barred from all institutions, asylums and poor houses” (Sheeler 211). To clarify about the restrictions on education, I must call attention to the fact that African Americans were not only barred from white schools they could not open their own segregated schools for their children. Some liberal whites privately taught these students, but when this knowledge became public such people were harassed or their homes burned to the ground. Later that same year a law was passed denying African Americans the right to serve in the state militia, and finally, in 1831 they were locked outside of the jury box as
well. Many of these latter laws were a result of, not only the fear of population increase, but also because talk of colonizing freedmen in an area north of the Ohio River had begun to arise.

Despite Ohio’s abolitionist population, who were the majority most times, such laws were passed and carried out with extreme harshness in southern areas of the state, such as Cincinnati, which was known as possibly the worst area in the state for African Americans to settle. In that city alone in 1829 twelve hundred African Americans fled the state due to mob violence in which citizens of Kentucky came to help beat, burn, and kill those not “willing” to move on their own, or had the audacity to fight back for the homes they had established (Sheeler 213). Yes, although Ohio was a free and supposedly pro-freedom state “there were sincere and conscientious efforts on the part of the state, at times, to aid the South (particularly Kentucky) in apprehending its fugitives,” (Sheeler 426) on top of the mistreatment its freedmen population had to endure. Sentiments such as these resulted in the state’s further attempts to create harmony with its southern border states, and on January 27, 1823 the Ohio State Legislature agreed to work together with Kentucky, who was suffering great economic losses due to the activities of the Underground Railroad, Illinois and Indiana to resolve the fugitive slave problem. The state agreed to comply with Kentucky’s request to provide two commissioners to represent the state in discussions about a resolution that would be agreeable to all parties included (Preston 426-427).

After sixteen years of these meetings Ohio’s answer to this problem came in the form of a legal act to aid slave owners and catchers. On February 26, 1839 the state’s legislature passed Ohio’s Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed those in pursuit of runaways
or fugitives to enter the state and reclaim their lost property, and it was strongly
suggested that court hearings be held to prove the pursuers were who they claimed to be
and that the person seized was actually their “property,” but such acts of due process
were not mandatory and avoided by owners when possible. Many citizens in Ohio were
outraged at the passage of this act and refused to be bloodhounds for southerners who
wished to drag others back into bondage. They ignored the law and others that threatened
retribution for those who helped runaways/fugitives reach freedom. No longer was it safe
for African Americans in Ohio, so many were encouraged to go to Canada where true
freedom could be found. In the northern and some central areas of the state when actions
were taken to remove African Americans from their areas they fought slave catchers or
threw them way off track until the objects of their intent had been safely sent to Canada.
Such suggestions and actions were very honorable, but still there were those who joined
this bandwagon because then they could fight slavery without having to worry about
those they set free moving in next door.

One of the first and most noted cases that occurred under this law was the case of
Black Bill. Black Bill was a fugitive slave who made Marion, OH his home until the
afore mentioned act gave his “owners” (those who came to claim him were actually
associates of his deceased master) the free range they needed to come claim him. Marion
at the time was not known for it’s abolition, but Bill was well liked in the area so the
whole town turned out to support him. When the courts granted him freedom based on
the technicality that those who had come to claim him were not his owners the slave
catchers commenced to beat him and rush him to the clerks office to re-arrest him as the
property of his true owner. They pulled out guns and knives to ward off the citizens of
Marion who had packed the courthouse for the case. This incident enraged the citizens who then busted open the arsenal to fight off the evil men who were attempting to walk all over their laws. This ended up inciting a mini riot that gave Bill the opportunity to reach Canada. Afterwards the case received national recognition and Marion was painted as a house for the “evils of abolition,” but its citizens contended that they were not abolitionists they were just doing the humane thing by protecting an innocent man from the evil “man-stealers,” and ensuring that the laws of their land were respected. Despite the attempts to erase the image of their area as abolition central it stuck thus dividing the citizens, but eventually Marion did become a major player in the Underground Railroad housing many safe and untraceable routes to Canada.

Still there were plenty of incidents when no actions were taken, and one such incident in Norwalk (Fitchville, Huron County) OH proved to be the last straw for those in opposition to the law. On a Sunday morning in 1842, while the citizens of the town were enjoying their church services, twelve fugitives (men, women, and children) were apprehended by armed guards, chained and led back to Kentucky without anyone so much as speaking out against it. Once the church bells stopped ringing and the citizens became aware of what had happened they were enraged for not only had such an incident taken place in their hometown, but also because it had happened on the Lord’s Day and no action had been taken against it. This was an ultimate disrespect, so on November 17, 1842 a large group of citizens met in the Norwalk courthouse and gathered money to purchase the freedom of the twelve unfortunates forced back into bondage. After this task was completed they began spreading the word and campaigning for the repeal of Ohio’s great blunder. “Popular opposition had therefore been aroused and its fury increased,
culminating in 1843 when strong pressure was brought to bear upon the legislature for the abrogation of this measure,” (Preston 427-28). With such strong feelings spreading throughout the majority of the state the legislature felt they had no choice but to comply to the requests of its citizens, so on January 19, 1843 the act was repealed.

While all of these battles for the repeal of this act were going, and even after its repeal, there were those in the state fighting for the repeal of Black Laws, particularly education which many felt was the key to removing the other oppressive laws. Influential African Americans like John Malvin and William H. Day headed these efforts putting together organizations like the Convention of Colored Men and the School Fund Society, which provided finances for groups of African Americans and liberal whites who had decided to ignore the law against education and attempt to enlighten not only black children but any member of the race who wished to learn. As in earlier years such institutions were burned down, students harassed and abused as they went to and from school, and the horrors those who stepped up to teach went through are beyond explanation.

In addition to fighting off these attackers those fighting the Black Laws had to compete with church organizations that encouraged African Americans to accept the fact they would never find peace here so they should allow themselves to be colonized in Liberia. These organizations already expressed the feelings that they didn’t want blacks enslaved, but they didn’t want them around either. They also wanted an easy way to spread the word of God in blackest Africa, and since they assumed these African descendants still maintained their immunity to disease they were the perfect candidates. So although it would seem they were willing to provide a free ride away from American
abuse it really wasn’t, because they required all who agreed to go to be trained in their ways and work with the missionaries in their area.

Still the fight for repeal continued and soon Oberlin College had several successful African American graduates who readily joined the fight for fair treatment. The movement then took a turn for the best when word began to spread that, “many of the slave states treated their free Negro population with less cruelty than did the free state of Ohio” (Sheeler 214). Ohioans, ever conscientious of their image, now began to rage against the poor treatment of their non-white population. By the time 1849 came and a repeal drafted they seemed more than ready to accept in most areas. The Ohio government, though aware of the need for repeals, was far from willing to grant all of the requests for repeal. Instead they allowed for education in separate institutions at the public’s expense, and gave blacks the right to give testimony as a witness in court cases regardless of who they may be speaking against. Overly excited groups began organizing more complex and better educational facilities only to find that the honoring of these changes all depended on where in the state they were. They did not let this discourage them and soon even those in opposition to the changes began to allow for some form of cooperation.

*The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850*

Just as Ohio was beginning to change its laws and work towards more cohesive race relations the nation came to a decision about fugitive slaves. By the time 1850 rolled around the “Underground Railroad was so organized and efficiently managed it was almost impossible to capture a slave once he reached a free state, particularly Ohio” (Preston 428). As a result of these advances, many slaveholders in border states,
especially Kentucky, decided to count their losses and set their slaves free. It has been estimated that 1467+ slaves were freed. This obviously was not good news to slave states and Senator Mason of Virginia devised a plan that would hopefully eradicate the problem. On January 3, 1850 he proposed a bill that would further aid slave owners in their pursuit of fugitives. This act would make it possible for slaveholders to recapture their slaves no matter where in the Union they might find them. It also required that commissioners be elected/assigned in areas to aid them in their pursuit, and it required very little proof from the pursuing party to claim a supposed fugitive. This proposal was obviously not well received in the north and rather than damn it out right many northern congressmen tried to propose more acceptable revisions. For example, Ohio Senator Salmon Chase wanted to simply add an article that would require, or either provide the option of, a jury trial for African Americans who were accused of being fugitives; that way freedmen wouldn’t be mistakenly taken back into bondage and those who might abuse the law wouldn’t be able to if it was mandated that they provide ample proof of ownership and fugitive status. Chase argued that, “the language of his (slave hunter) action is ‘My word strands for law; the laws of your state stand for nothing against my claim’” (Preston 432).

Despite such valid arguments President Fillmore signed the bill, as it was proposed, into operation on September 18, 1850. Just in the first year of its passage, the Fugitive Slave Law allowed more slaves to be captured than had been recovered in the prior half century. In addition, the evil of kidnapping soon reared its ugly head. Ruthless white men would take free African Americans from their homes in the night and resell them back into slavery. As a result of such actions resentment for the law began to
increase, and in Ohio those who often remained neutral quickly switched to the abolitionist point of view, and even those who were pro-slavery found fault with the law and how it was being carried out, but they still supported the law as it was now the law of the land and felt if those with strong opposition to the law would give it time things would improve. No such thing occurred though and soon the number of riots increased, but now, instead of whites running African Americans out of the state, abolitionists and African Americans were fighting overly aggressive slave hunters and thwarting the plans of kidnappers. In response to the increasing numbers of fugitives returning to slavery and freed people being re-enslaved, “the Underground Railroad became more fearless and rendered more effective aid from 1850 to the Civil War than it had ever done in the past” (Preston 457). Not only were they making more trips more frequently they were also taking larger and large numbers of slaves to freedom with each journey.

Feelings about the law quickly began appearing in papers across the state and those in the southern regions of Ohio occasionally hosted some of the strongest mottos against it. For example, in Senecaville, OH a group of people were so against the law that they let it be known that they refused to obey any part of it, and took up the motto, “repeal! Repeal! REPEAL!!! Or dissolution of the Union,” (Preston 462). Other southern towns that held to their original views, such as Cincinnati, looked down on places like Senecaville and expressed shock that such people inhabited any part of southern Ohio. They painted pictures of such people as the cause for the problems being had and often referred to them as lunatics. Still others began picking up the cry of repeal or dissolution. This obviously upset citizens no matter which side of the issue they stood on and some began looking down on such passionate people as rebel rousers and anti-American, still
they refused to be budged from their beliefs. The Western Reserve *Chronicle* responded to such opinions by turning the accusation of anti-Americanism back on those against freedom stating, “There it [the Fugitive Slave Act] stands, a black, damnable disgrace to a country calling itself the freest in the world,” (Preston 463) and dared slave catchers to enter the state at their own risk for the law would not be carried out in Ohio.

Many in power seemed to share these same sentiments and didn’t hesitate to express their opinions along with their constituents. When the law was passed Judge Benjamin F. Wade of Ravenna, OH was holding court and when asked what his feelings were he shocked many when he stated,

“For myself, regardless of fines and imprisonment, if called upon, I would grant to a fugitive slave the writ of habeas corpus, nay more, I would give him his liberty under it. I will not counsel the people to forced and armed resistance against the execution of the Law, but I would say that in my judgment, should they imitate the example set by the old fathers in regard to the Stamp Act and the Tea Act, they would not err much,” (Preston 466).

Even those who weren’t exactly in opposition to the law held little hope for its success. Governor Wood of Ohio took office three months after the law was passed and as a Democrat he agreed with the notion that the law was constitutional and should be respected as such. However, he admitted that it did house some flaws and that these would keep it from being able to be effectively carried out. He did not attempt to deter those against the law, but did advise them to do so without the use of violence.

So intense was the climate surrounding this issue that on March 22, 1851 the Ohio General Assembly made an official statement that the law either needed to be amended to protect the rights of freedmen or it needed to be repealed (Preston 466). They more so stressed amendment so as to provide more of a compromise: those in favor of the law
would still have its aid in some form and those against it would have added articles to assure its fair and proper execution. Despite this motion, within the nation, as a whole, there was little progression towards repeal or amendment. On June 23, 1852 Representative Joshua R. Giddings of Ohio pointed out that the fugitive slaves in his area were becoming so desperate that they’d begun to inform owners of their whereabouts, because they would rather face and kill them then live in fear of being drug from their homes in the night. He concluded his speech against the law by stating “if this law continues to be enforced, Civil War is inevitable,” (Preston 458). Even as people were encouraged not to use violence to express their views such requests were more or less ignored, and there were those who, taking their cue from the actions of the African Americans in Giddings’ area, encouraged those fugitives who could not go to Canada to take up arms and not hesitate to take the lives of those who would come and steal theirs. Mini wars already seemed to be taking place within the state of Ohio making Giddings’ prediction of a civil war more credible and likely.

Those in favor of the law began having indignation meetings across the state and on top of pledging their support to the law and its constitutionality they too began plotting acts of violence. They felt “that all good citizens should support [the law] faithfully in the name of the Union,” (Preston 466) and if those who wouldn’t insisted on using violence as their opposition then they would be prepared to meet them in battle. They also once again expressed the opinion that those that didn’t share their views weren’t really American citizens at heart. So exasperated were the citizens of Toledo, OH by such remarks that not only did they get together and let it be known that they wouldn’t be happy until the law was repealed and slavery abolished they also pledged not to
support anyone or thing that helped pass the law, was for it, or participated in its enforcement. They came to the conclusion that if the law was constitutional and supporting it held the essence of American citizenship then being an American citizen meant being a traitor to humanity.

Those in Wilmington (in southwest Ohio) extended the opinions being aired in Toledo stating that the law was not only traitorous to humanity but also to God and the Constitution. The citizens in Youngstown devised a Freemen’s Declaration of Independence in which “they absolved themselves from all allegiance to such iniquitous statutes and ‘solemnly promised prudently and discreetly to endeavor to render it null and void,’” (Preston 469). In Washington County (southeastern Ohio) citizens took the idea of the law being against God to heart and said those who supported it were “false to God and totally unfit for civilized society. Disobedience to the enactment is obedience to God,” (469). To respond to the accusations that those opposed to the law insisted on using violence the citizens of Chagrin Falls put it best when they said that they would “resist the tyrannous law, ‘peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must,’” (468). The citizens of Ashtabula County were not so cordial. They cried out that not only was the law trying to uphold the current system of slavery, but also it was trying to make slaves out of northerners by forcing them to be bloodhounds and man stealers for the South. To this they continuously stated, “sooner than submit to such odious laws we will see the Union dissolved; sooner than see slavery perpetual we would see war; and sooner than be slaves we will fight,” (468). Once again talk of dissolution and war appeared within the state and seemed to be the feeling that was sweeping the nation.
The friends of the law, although disheartened by such opinions, did not waver in their opinions any more than those against it did. Instead they held their own meetings in Dayton and Hamilton to defend the law and attempted to present those not for the law as people out to defeat the Constitution. Clement Vallandigham was a Copperhead (Democratic group that was pro-slavery) who led these groups in approving of the law and speaking against those who didn’t. In response to those who cried for dissolution he came up with the counter cry of “The Union, the Constitution, and the Laws, must and shall be maintained,” (470). These groups, which were very much in the minority, consisted mainly of Democrats, former southerners, and businessmen. The businessmen particularly wanted the law to bring some finality to the fugitive issue so that they could get back to business as usual.

Since it appeared that the country would never agree on this issue the Ohio General Assembly took matters into their own hands, and on April 16 and 17, 1857 they passed laws that would render the Fugitive Slave Law ineffective in Ohio. The first of these laws made it unlawful in Ohio to imprison anyone in any way shape or form just because they’d been accused of being a fugitive. Punishment for violating this law consisted of a five hundred dollar fine and thirty to ninety days in jail. The second law was an anti-kidnapping act which created the consequence of three to nine months in prison along with a three to five hundred dollar fine for anyone who attempted to seize or detain another as a fugitive under a charge of false imprisonment. The charge for kidnapping promised three to seven years of hard labor in prison to anyone who tried to remove anyone from the state of Ohio with the intent of making him a slave in another state (Preston 472).
These laws though noble in intent were less than perfect when it came to actually carrying them out. If they were ever actually enforced is unknown, but their lack of effect led to their repeal on March 27, 1858. To some this seemed to be a step back, but, rather than dwell on the unsuccessfulness of these valiant efforts by the state, law officers were encouraged to follow the example of Judge Wade and use habeas corpus as a weapon against the law. This technique proved to be very effective as the arbitrations between the two views continued.

Many Christians at this point became unified in the opinion that the law was wrong and that as the children of God they were responsible to a higher law than that created by man, and that law made it clear that slavery and the 1850 law was against God and thus all efforts should be made to abolish them from existence. “They resolved that those who aided in the execution of the Act were wicked and declared that the duty of all churches was to excommunicate all who engaged officially or otherwise in this inhumanity,” (Preston 474). Many churches began to follow this suggestion, and one Baptist Church in Zanesville, OH refused to let Representative Samuel S. Cox remain a member of their congregation for helping to enforce the law. At this the Democrats of Ohio came up with their own higher law and let it be known to the public on September 15, 1859 at the senatorial convention in Toledo. At this meeting they stated, “the great Author of our being never intended to place the Negro on equality with the white man,” (Preston 474) and for this reason they would never extend their hand to them in any way.

When it seemed that all hope was becoming lost Ashley of Ohio proposed a bill, which was presented to Congress by Corwin of Ohio, which proposed to protect the rights of one accused of being a fugitive while compensating the owner at the same time.
In this bill Ashley recommended that when any person accused of being a fugitive from indentured or life service that they be brought before the court, and in ten days a judge had to decide if sufficient proof was provided by the pursuer to prove such a claim. If said person was determined to be a fugitive then he/she would have the opportunity to pay his/her accuser the value of their remaining service. If the accused could not provide the money then the community would be given the option to raise the money and pay this fee for him/her. If neither of these options were possible then the person was forfeited to the claimant (475-477). The bill seemed to provide a just amount of compromise, but now slave catchers cried out in opposition. For years now they had earned their living because of this dispute. As long as free thinking northerners were helping freedom hungry slaves to Canada then their services would be needed by oppressive southerners. So would the north and south finally agree and pass the bill? On April 12, 1861, before this question could be answered, the Confederacy fired on Fort Sumpter and so the American Civil War began.

**Civil War**
1861-1865

Now that the much-anticipated war had begun Ohio’s focus, like the rest of the nation’s, turned from the fate of fugitive slaves to preserving the Union and restoring peace. For the first year of the war emotions on this topic seemed to cool not fade, but as the second year of carnage began the beliefs of those in favor of freedom began to falter. No longer were the strong voices speaking out against slavery heard, no longer did it hold the unattractive gleam of yesteryears, no longer were the abolitionists definitely in the majority.
“Now, with slavery in jeopardy for the first time, the most disturbing aspect of this problem in the Northwest [Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa] was the apprehension that the freedmen would throng into the area and become social, economic, and political competitors of the whites,” (Voegeli 236).

This feeling was sent flying through the roof after July 17, 1862 when the Confiscation Act was passed. Prior to the passage of this act it had been deemed illegal to use military power to return fugitives to their owners and in certain cases/areas slaves were “freed.” With the passage of the act, supposedly, all slaves belonging to any person supporting the rebellion were forever set free. Obviously actually enforcing this wasn’t easy or even possible, but slaves that were confiscated from the south were soon being set up in confiscation camps like booty, and as these filled the question on everyone’s mind was “Where will the slaves settle when freed?” This is what Ohioans had been fighting for right? Hadn’t they cried for repeal or dissolution the end of the return of fugitives and the evils of slavery? That is what they said but when asked to stand behind those convictions suddenly they were willing to tolerate all of these wrongs rather than see the numbers of African Americans in their area increase.

Ohioans readily listened to; the once spurned, Representative Cox when he made the observation that,

“If slavery is bad the condition of… Ohio, with an unrestrained black population, only double what we now have partly subservient, partly slothful, partly criminal, and all disadvantageous and ruinous, will be far worse,” (237) “these Commonwealths and this Union were made for the white men; that this Government is a Government of white men; that the men who made it never intended by anything they did to place the black race upon an equality with the white,” (239).
Democrats quickly realized that if they could exploit these fears and, until recently, suppressed beliefs then they could bolster up their party and take control from the Republicans. Thus throughout Ohio and the Northwest they began to show the people all of the bad things that would happen in their areas if the Union continued following their current course. They threatened that the end of slavery meant the end of the South’s prosperity and thus their market for surplus goods; bills that Republicans were proposing for compensating slave states were actually tax increases on whites so that black communities could be built; that their economy would soon drain because of black’s thievery and chronic pauper status, and those willing to work would flood markets with cheap unskilled labor thus reducing wages and forcing skilled whites from their jobs.

The people began taking such threats to heart and although they wanted to punish the South they were not willing to risk the above-mentioned scenarios to do so. When they turned to the Republicans for the response to such accusations they got a different answer, which rarely, if ever, included any mention of the plight of the enslaved. Republicans justified confiscation and emancipation as things that would hinder the southern armies, thus saving the Union and insuring national unity, while at the same time punishing the South. In 1862 they continuously assured the people of Ohio and the northwest that “the war was being waged for the restoration of the Union, with or without slavery,” (239).

Still the people worried about where the freedmen would go if liberated. Republican and sanguine emancipationist Albert G. Riddle of Ohio assured the people that the exact opposite of what they anticipated would happen if freedom were granted to Negroes in the south. He, and the Republicans, pointed out that just because slavery was
ended didn’t mean that the labor of Negroes wouldn’t be needed. As a matter of fact, they’d be needed so much that it would drain the Northwest and Canada of all their current colored residents. In addition to this argument they pointed out that Negroes were creatures of the tropics, and as such they naturally preferred the warmer climate of the south (241). Even those who were once cornerstones in the fight for freedom and equality seemed to shift in their views. Former Senator and current Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, who at one point was a major voice for the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act and the end of slavery, agreed that the African Americans would prefer the southern climate and encouraged Ohioans to continue to support the coming end of slavery because it would surely rid them of their current black population as well as deter any other coloreds from heading north.

Although Republicans made this one of their main arguments in support of emancipation they more readily depended on the plan that when the slaves were freed they’d be colonized in foreign lands. Senator John Sherman of Ohio and President Lincoln were among the group of people in strong support of this deportation movement. To try and make this plan a reality, or at least more likely, Lincoln addressed a group of African Americans and tried to pursued them to join such efforts on August 14, 1862. During this speech he told them,

“I think your race suffer very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence… if this is admitted, it affords a reason at least why we should be separated. On this broad continent, not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours,” (243). “There is an unwillingness on the part of our people, harsh as it may be, for you free colored people to remain with us. Now if you could give a start to the white people, you would open a wide door for many to be made free,” (245).
The hope of Lincoln and other colonizationists was that this movement would bring the slave states to a point where they would move toward emancipation and silence the fears of African American settlement in the north. They continued to stress that they were for charity and humanity not racial equality. Any who harbored any egalitarian views no longer voiced them, save for a few people in New England who felt that colonization was “inhumane, impractical, uneconomic, and un-Christian,” (243) but they were now the minority and Ohioans, along with the rest of the country, turned deaf ears to their arguments.

In Ohio, Representative John Hutchins spread this message to his statesmen ensuring them in no way shape or form did their (Republicans) desire to end slavery mean that they desired or required to grant African Americans the same privileges they enjoyed. Prior to this word getting around there had been movements towards reinstating some of the repealed Black Laws and others like them, but after, emotions seemed to cool, for a while at least, so whereas Ohioans didn’t remove any of the remaining oppressive laws they resisted the Democrats push to add more. Such victories for the Republican party can also be attributed to the fact that (as with any group at the time) there was no definite unity in feelings toward African Americans, thus there were plenty of Republicans whose feelings against freedom and the African American were as strong and harsh as those of Democrats. The founder of the party in Ohio, William Dennison, was very much so a white supremacist that rarely referred to his people as the white race rather he went about talking about the “superior race.” Taking his cue from him Senator Sherman joined with other such members of his party in professing that God did have a higher law than man’s that said “the whites and blacks will always be separate, or where
they are brought together, one will be inferior to the other… God and nature, not prejudice, accounted for racial antipathy,” (246) and who were they to go against God?

Then in the summer of 1862 hostility towards the black race began to intensify when Illinois passed a law that prohibited any Negro or mulatto from settling in the state, voting, or holding a public office. When those in Ohio became aware of this law anti-Negro sentiments flew through the roof. In July and August race riots ran wild in Cincinnati and Toledo. Yes, Toledo; the city that once harbored some of the strongest feelings in favor of African Americans had now resorted to brut and unfathomable violence to run them from their midst, discourage others from coming, and let out their frustrations over the countries dilemma. Ohio Democrats, taking advantage of such setbacks as always, called for a similar law to keep blacks out of the Buckeye State. They increased their campaigns against the “degrading of the superior race” by allowing “the inferiors” to wallow among them, and, using Lincoln’s preliminary emancipation proclamation as an example, assured the people that this was the intent of the Republican party.

The Republicans responded to such rumors by, once again, reminding Ohioans that in order to win the war confiscation and emancipation were needed, that the Union was the reason for the war not abolition, and added that they too did not want Negroes in the area. When these heartening promises didn’t seem to bring much peace to the issue they went on to make the claim that it was slavery that was causing so many African Americans to seek refuge in the north and thus the state. They pointed out that the only reason blacks were flocking to the state was because they were running from bondage, and if that bondage was removed there would be no reason for them to flee. Despite
these efforts the Democrats carried Ohio in the October and November elections that year occupying fourteen of the nineteen House seats. There were many reasons why support for the Republicans failed, but many (in and outside of the party) believed the main reason to be the poor timing of Lincoln’s issue of the proclamations. The Cleveland Leader ran headlines and stories proclaiming that “Ohio had voted against emancipation,” (249) and that this was due to the Democrats successful introduction/spread of Negrophobia. When writing Salmon Chase about the negative effects of the emancipation proclamation, H.S. Bundy, an unsuccessful candidate, said “I had thought until this year the cry of ‘nigger’ & ‘abolitionism’ were played out but they never had as much power & effect in this part of the state as at the recent elections,” (250). The Columbus Crisis (a Democratic paper) seemed to reiterate these feelings as they boasted that “Ohio would never become the refuge for southern Negroes,” and Representative Cox let it be known that a new commandment had taken form—“Thou shalt not degrade the white race by such intermixtures as emancipation would bring,” (250).

In order to save some face, Republicans began exhaustively emphasizing their devotion to the white race, and in December President Lincoln responded to all that had taken place. During his annual address to Congress he re-voiced that it was slavery driving African Americans north and urged the passage of an amendment that would provide for compensated emancipation and voluntary colonization. To those who supported slavery for fear of the loss of employment for whites he said if things remained as they were, “they [African Americans] jostle no white laborers; if they leave their old places, they leave them open to white laborers,” (251) thus improving the earnings of
whites. To readdress the Northwest’s greatest fear—a non stop flood of freedmen settling in their area—he pointed out that once the blacks stop fleeing their masters would obtain their work in exchange for wages only until a colony of their peers in an acceptable climate could be created. “And in any event, cannot the north decide for itself, whether to receive them?” (251).

By the end of 1862 the freedom issue was deadlocked in Ohio. It had become the headquarters for the Copperhead movement, and the Democrats therein continued to terrorize the people by exploiting their fears of Negrophobia and miscegenation (cohabitation of whites and blacks). Then on January 1, 1863 Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all slaves whose master’s were still rebelling against the Union, and the Copperheads took up the cry of “The Constitution as it is, the Union as it was and the Negroes where they are,” (Jackson 250). Just as it was beginning to seem like Ohioans had abandoned their former principles altogether they began to take note of African Americans ability to live free and intelligently because of their work on abandoned southern plantations, military labors, and the efforts and conduct of black soldiers. The Democrats/Copperheads tried to ignore these sentiments, but when their leader, Vallandigham, fled to Canada to avoid federal imprisonment after being found guilty of disloyalty to the Union in Cincinnati, they strengthened their efforts to manipulate the people’s fears.

To aid the Democrats in their efforts, The Crisis editor, Samuel Medary of Columbus, ran an editorial in which a group of white girls were depicted screaming, “Father save us from Negro Equality,” (251). Despite these efforts, it would seem that Ohio’s ever changing opinions were shifting once again. They still did not want equality
but no longer were they allowing their fears to drive them to support the institution of
slavery. An article in the Cincinnati Catholic Telegraph summed up the feelings of most
Ohioans when they said,

“We desire to see them far apart; there ought to be no partnership between the two races. We have no desire to see them intermingled, neither working together or even cultivating adjacent fields. The natural superiority of the race ought to be carefully preserved. This is impossible so long as slavery exists, because the poor white man is just as much, or to a great extent in the power of the rich planter as the slave,” (251).

Even though they no longer “glamorized’ slavery they held tight to their superior attitude and the disapproval of cohabitation and equality. They believed the only way to restore peace and unity was to vigorously prosecute the war. With the slight turn around, Ohioans were now ready to accept abolition as a necessary casualty of war. Though they were now in support of abolition again citizens were skeptical about the President and Congress’ ability to legally abolish slavery via a proclamation or declaration. This uncertainty left many unsure of whether they should support the proposed Thirteenth Amendment, which would make slavery and involuntary servitude illegal in the United States except as a sentence for a crime. Most leaned more towards disapproval because they felt imposing the amendment would violate the inalienable rights they were entitled to.

On March 4, 1864 Abner Kellogg of Ashtabula addressed the General Assembly and encouraged them to support the passage of the amendment. He agreed that accepting such a law did violate the rights of the citizens, but that the institution they were thinking about allowing to remain was “a disturber of the Union and of domestic tranquility, a
hindrance to the common defense, a spoiler of the public liberties, has inaugurated civil war and is the cause of our national calamities,” (252). He proposed some kind of joint resolution, but first his requests were set aside and then when they actually got around to addressing it there was definite disapproval by the Democrats. They would not warrant the government issuing and enforcing such a law. They wanted to leave the Constitution as it was and restore the Union the way it used to be. In the Ohio Statesman they poked fun at the fact that Lincoln had already abolished slavery so many times and yet it survived, and “joked” that if these movements ever took effect the main thing they’d be doing was getting rid of abolitionists’ hobby. They complained that those in favor of freedom had spent countless hours proclaiming the evils of slavery but had never pointed out all of its benefits. Thus they tried to paint a picture of those for slavery as more well rounded in their views thus having a better position. Despite these efforts Kellogg received the approval of the House by a 63-17 vote, and when the Ohio Senate received the word they concurred. It would seem that Ohio was once again saying yes to freedom.

Realizing that their influence was failing the Democrats increased their efforts in central and southern Ohio, where Negrophobia was still a stronghold, so as to maintain the support they still had in the state. Don’t think that because things seemed to be going well that Negrophobia and fear of Africanization weren’t still running wild in Ohio, but despite these things when the Ohio delegates met in Columbus that May, to select candidates for the June convention, they were very much in support of Lincoln’s renomination. During the convention slavery was once again blamed as a major cause for the war and when they re-expressed their strong support for abolition the delegates stood and applauded. As Lincoln and his new running mate, Andrew Johnson, continued to
campaign they pointed out that the offer to the Confederacy to return to the Union without the loss of slavery had been ignored, and encouraged the people to support them as they fought to end the war the south insisted on fighting.

Ohioan Democrats didn’t let such things deter them realizing that the battle to stop the amending of the Thirteenth Amendment was far from over. To jumpstart new efforts against this event from occurring they slightly turned their attention to Unionist (a party once affiliated with the Republicans until their defeat in ‘62’) candidate Brough. While campaigning in Marietta, he had gone on about how the Constitution did not recognize slavery and that all these years people had misinterpreted and twisted the section about fugitive labor to make it appear as if it did. These words were not taken lightly by Ohioans especially those who still worried about where the slaves would go when freed. The Democrats, noting their cue as usual, began stressing Negrophobia as the presidential campaign of 1864 began in September in Ohio. On top of their usual threats they added that abolition would be the beginning, rather than the end, of the black problem, and that race wars would take place of the current conflict, (255). In spite of these efforts, their actions during their convention, prior to the start of the campaigns, left some wondering about their real intentions.

During that convention the Democrats had stressed their platform to end the war, but not once did they mention slavery or abolition. Many saw this as proof of their continuous disapproval of the black race, and one Union journalist summed up these feelings when he wrote,

By ignoring the whole question of slavery the Democrats calculate to create the impression in the South that if the democratic party can only be reinstated in power they will make due reparation and apology for all damages and
grievances rebels may have suffered during the progress of the rebellion (255).

Ohioans who now turned their skepticism toward that party did not soon forget these actions and words. These feelings were only intensified when a fairly large group of Copperheads suddenly decided that, even though they opposed it, they were willing to support abolition if it would end the war. These feelings were brought about when many of them realized that the rebels were in favor of ending their ties with the Union, thus destroying the government, no matter what. They felt that men who held such negative convictions “had not rights that a white man was bound to respect,” (255) so no longer would they fight to make things easy and favorable to them. It would seem that the party was crumbling under the pressure and their hold on Ohioans began to weaken.

As the summer drew to a close and the war raged on with murky military situations continuing it would seem that the Democrats might maintain their position after the October elections. However, as the fall withered away General Sherman and Sheridan pulled through with several impressive victories for the north, and the Unionists renewed their efforts and managed to obtain success in the elections, although it was no where near the degree of the Democrats success in 1862. Despite this they used this same ambition to push the Thirteenth Amendment through Congress. The news of its passage resulted in numerous guns being fired in the air in Columbus as a celebration, and the General Assembly was strongly encouraged to take immediate action, which they did

Needless to say this news was not well received by Ohio’s Democrats who increased their efforts more than ever in hopes of stopping ratification. In addition to their usual battle cry of equality and miscegenation, they promised that ratification would bring blacks to the polls, marriage with white women, and poorer conditions for blacks
because they would be unable to compete with white men. They pointed out that with ratification the amendment would “only make the black man a ‘slave without a master, a vagabond, a nuisance and barbaritic,’” (258). Even with their faithful efforts and attempts to delay ratification it came on February 8, 1865 and soon after, in April, the war of the states finally came to a close with General Lee’s surrender. For Ohioans this victory seemed to be bittersweet: sweet because the war was finally over, and bitter because, though they realized slavery was a necessary “casualty” to end the war, the fear of Negrophobia and miscegenation had never been removed only numbed, and as the realization that this time the slaves were actually freed these fears and hatred came roaring back into their hearts. “As far as Ohio was concerned the black man would be free but un-equal,” (257) doomimg the racial tensions felt during the last fifteen years to be as unstable as ever, except this time around it would appear that even those who once supported African Americans would turn their backs on them.

In conclusion, although there were many white Ohioans prior to and during the 1850’s who extended their hand to the African American these sentiments proved to be disposable when they were actually asked to uphold them. As war raged and the threat of a substantial African American community with equal rights in their midst increased the once majority abolitionist population soon switched sides. The flip flop of these emotions and convictions would extend into the Reconstruction period, but once again it would seem that the state would lean more towards their anti-Negro positions. Even today such effects can be seen in Ohio as treatment of blacks is almost totally dependant on where in the state they might be.
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Soka Gakkai International:
A New Religious Movement on the Information Superhighway

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July.16, 2004
The internet has been used as a tool which helps religions around the world flourish and attract new and wider audiences. Soka Gakkai International, like many new religious movements and religions on line, uses internet sites to explain itself as a religion to an American audience and defends itself from detractors. All the while, Soka Gakkai International has struggled from its humble beginnings to become the power house that it is becoming world wide. Although most new religious movements are small, SGI continues to grow in population as it as a group is sweeping the globe and opening to a broader audience of Buddhist practitioners. SGI has broadened from its country of origin, Japan. SGI has been coined a new religious movement, which I will later explain in more depth.

New religions are taking the internet by storm and are fighting to stay alive in a world where only a handful of mainstream religions have lasted for hundreds of thousand of years. How long will SGI last? Only the future can tell. The arrival of these newly founded religions could have occurred through the progressive change that has came through technological advancements and societal changes. The changing society around us has bred a new breed of religions that are more convenient to those of us that have little time in our busy everyday schedules to practice a full fledged religion.

The internet is key in this explanation to show how convenience changes with technology. Also people may have to travel far distances to get to their chosen place of worship, while a internet feed of video and an e-mail of questions may do the trick to get devoted followers to take part in religion, also people may want to take part in a religion when they choose to, the internet lets web surfers explore their options without leaving the privacy of you own home.
A religion on-line can be seen as the next stop on the technological timeline. Before the Protestant Reformation occurred only the extremely wealthy and high priests could afford to own Bibles and other religious texts. The later invention of the printing press changed all of that. My point is that religious texts were expensive and not open to the direct population at the time. The inventions that come from technological changes allow all to benefit. For instance, hundred of years later, came televangelism with the technological changes, people no longer had to go to church to practice their faith, although many still do. Television has allowed followers to worship in the convenience of their own homes.

In a similar way the internet is doing the same for religion that the printing press and the television have already done. Today in the 21st century the internet can combine the power of the printing press and the television along with that of audio and video. In the future the internet may replace television, or a hybrid of the two could evolve. It is even possible to sent letters on-line and donations over the internet by credit card.

A religion on-line is a religion that uses the internet to get its word across, also religions on the internet are open to anyone on the internet. “The internet is an important religious phenomenon for understanding the new ways of being spiritual in the post modern world” (Mac Williams 315). Religions on line are linked to actual sacred sites and they exploit the new technological possibilities of the internet to re-imagine the sacred (Mac Williams 315). An example of a religious site that exploits technology is the official site of the Vatican. The Vatican’s site is specifically geared towards non-
members. Many religions remain solely on the internet, and a physical sanctuary does not exist. These religions are referred to as online religions. Other religions on the internet just choose to use the internet to attract a wider range of followers.

SGI is a religion online and it is used for informational purposes. The internet is used for SGI to explain itself to those who know little or nothing about its doctrines and rituals. SGI would never be an online religion, since an online religion is a religion that has its entire existence, consisting of performed prayer, rituals, and virtual meetings—all done online. SGI is the direct opposite of an online religion. SGI needs face to face contact with the worshipers for it to work as a movement. The worshipping of the Gohunzon has to be in person for them, with a group of members for the religion to be meaningful (Dawson ch. 7).

“Online religion is crucial and positive for the future of religion” (Brasher 11). “It is a vital cultural vehicle necessary for the emergence of the religious experience and expression relevant to a future society” (Brasher 11). On-line religion has been caused by cultural shifts as technology itself generates revolution (Brasher 12). The creation of expensive texts becoming affordable in the time of Martin Luther’s Reformation to the 21st Century, when the internet is a cheaper and more accessible way of practicing and participating into a religion (Brasher 14). It was said by Freud that God is dead and that a rise if education would cause religion to become obsolete. He was wrong and with the growth of education religion has only become more powerful and prominent in the world (Brasher 16).

A major religious presence online is NRM’s. Since 1965, NRMs have been a major part of the religious development in America. These so-called new religious
movements are often a Controversial topic, since they are sometimes negatively referred to as cults. Many Americans are quick to judge new religious movements like Soka Gakkai International and refer to them as cults. People fail to research the unknown and often assume things when they know little or nothing about a topic. Soka Gakkai International’s religious popularity appeals to America and is helping NRM’s gain ground little by little.

SGI is a lay Buddhist religion that stems from Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism, which originally comes from Japan. SGI like many new religions has gone on-line in an act to recruit members. Although SGI is a religious group that demands much physical contact with the individuals who practice the faith, anybody interested in the faith can get easy access to SGI’s information via the internet. NRM’s are open to anyone and since most of them stem from the traditional religions, there is a possibility that you could be a devotee of a new religious movement and not even realize that you are a member. Many NRM’s take an idea or aspect of a traditional religious belief and make it their own.

New religious movements tend to appropriate the dogma of elder religions to suit their convictions then they recruit members who have similar beliefs. SGI is still relatively new to the United States, where there is much controversy over defining the religion as an NRM or a cult, as with most religions on the internet. The word cult is used negatively when referring to a religion. Skeptics often think of brainwashing and losing control of their life when they think of cults. The members of today’s society often get hung up in the rumors that they have heard about different ‘so-called cults,’ how everyday people are said to have been taken away from their family and friends and have lost everything they have ever owned to the cult. NRM’s, or new religious movements
are not cults like most of the general population believes them to be, but the masses often confused new religious movements with cults. NRM’s can be said to be cults without the negative condensations that the media has attached to the word.

In America most NRM’s do not have the popularity of becoming a major religion, while in Japan more than 20 percent of the population are members of an NRM. SGI has millions of members, although 80 percent of Japan does not belong to an NRM (Barker 15). NRM’s since World War II claim to have answers to the questions that the traditional religions do not have answers for, such as questions about why bad occurs in the world, the creation of the human race, and an explanation about life after death (Barker 16). Many NRM’s are on-line but not all of them, there are many NRM’s worldwide. The tabulated numbers of devotees of a NRM are often not accurate, since followers who have left the faith are still counted (Barker 18). Many members of NRM’s are born into them and change often occurs with NRM’s when the old leaders die and the young takeover (Barker 21). It is for these reasons why many NRM’s do not last very long as practices open to the public.

Most commoners confuse cults with NRM’s or new religious movements. New religious movements are organizations which have split off of a basic founding religion. The odds are that you could be practicing the faith of a NRM and not even realize it. There are many NRM’s available today and most are not considered to be new. For instance, SGI, Protestants, Methodist, Unitarian, Shinto, Sikh, Wicca, Amish, Quakers, Atheism, Baptist, Christian Science, and Moonies are all a few NRM’s that are available today. For instance, some NRM’s are not new at all, for instance the Protestant faith that
stems from Catholicism is an NRM, since the founder Martin Luther seceded from the Catholic Church over the sale of indulgences (Miller 2).

A negative meaning is usually thought of when the word cult is brought up when talking about a religious group in practice. People refer to cults as groups where people are brainwashed and unhappy they lose everything they own to the cult, including their precious time. Webster’s Dictionary defines the word cult as a “formal veneration: worship: system of religious beliefs and ritual: a body of adherents: a group of persons showing devotion to a person, idea, or thing.” Does this definition sound like the idea and image one gets when the word cults pops into their head?

According to noted religious expert Saliba, the definition of a cult has been occurring for decades and it shows no signs of ending soon. The pre-existing religions are not about to make cults equal, this is the factor which creates conflict. The idea that one religion is better than another could be a reason why the term cult is considered negative (Saliba 107). A traditional religion can contain values that are thought to be those of the ultimate truth, and they can use the word cult to scare their members into belonging as part of their religious group. This comes from the idea that the word cult projects fear and negativity. No religion or NRM wants to be called a cult unless they crave a negative association to their beliefs. For example, sociologists study cults for their values or formation of social behavior. It is for this reason that Saliba and others think of sociologists that research cults as cult sympathizers or even cult promoters. Sociologists may not realize that they are actually giving a cult a method of exposure by studying a
Cults are said to have origins refined in any ritual, liturgy, or ceremony (Andres 1-4). This term is rarely used anymore just like the definition from Webster’s Dictionary. “Cult” came to mean a teaching, group or movement that deviates from what orthodoxy claims represented true faith. It is through the media that the word cult lost its true meaning and became sinister. After the 1960s was when cults were considered negative from bad publicity and exposure. Some cults were involved in illegal activities and were bashed by the news media. For example, the cults of the Branch Davidians and Heavens Gate, along with others have caused cults to be thought of in negative terms, through mass suicides and entanglement with the wrong side of the law. The new meaning “describes a group who are considered injurious, authoritarian, or incomprehensible outsiders” (Andres 1-4).
Cults characteristically consist of a living leader, who is the dominant, usually a male figure, and sometimes is led by a family. The leader has absolute claims of the character, ability, and knowledge of the divine, god, incarnate, or messiah. The leaders are the sole agent or god’s emissary. The leader of the group is considered to be infallible and the possessor of absolute truth and total wisdom (Andres 1-6).

The cult movement in America happened in the 1960s as American youths searched for more from life (Galanter 14). They grew tired of political establishments and the religious establishments that contained implications of the old mores and folkways. They no longer believed in the American dream: through hard work came happiness, a family, a job, and a good life. The truth was dismal the isolated and lonely did not tend to fit the mold of complex society. Those who had few close ties and satisfactory relationships were prey for cults and were perfect for recruitment. The cults were installed to add positive reinforcements and project positive implications into a devotee. What most cult members lacked was positive self-fulfillment and a positive self-identity; only a cult was thought to be able to provide them with the ability to meet their needs (Galanter 14).

Cults were different from the mainstream religions and offer personal control over religion. Since many cults were splinter organizations from the mainstream religions they differed by dogma and tradition (Galanter 15). For a cult to be considered a splinter organization it needs to contain many similar aspects to a religion that has come before it, yet differs from the parent religion in a number of ways and has become a religious group on its own accord and nature. Youth were spiritual search seekers who wanted attention,
adventure, and new experience; many felt a cult could bring them these kinds of satisfaction (Galanter 17).

Cults promised ways to fix the foibles of life, they promised self-concept and self-identity in the positive sense. They then emphasized corrective measures of self-enhancement to project them as an image of society. Cults gave the rejects of society a place within it and did what society could not: they made a reject feel wanted and needed as a productive member of the world around them (Galanter 22).

Internet theorists have explored NRM’s on line. They have discussed various issues of recruitment, audience, etc. Many NRM’s like SGI on the Net use their downloadable materials to their advantage to provide more conventional ways of substituting their publications (Dawson ch7). Many of the ways that interested on-liners establish further contact is by obtaining more of the faith materials offered, including pamphlets, books, tapes, and videos. NRM’s also can include courses, lectures, and other programs. Contact information is usually available by e-mail, telephone numbers, or mailing address. Most NRM’s claim that they as a religion respond to several messages daily, and claim to have received around 100 messages per day. For example, SGI, Heaven’s Gate, the Branch Davidians, and the Church of Scientology along with other NRM’s claim to receive vast numbers of messages. The web is another way that NRM’s can advertise and deliver information cheaply to the curious viewer. People can take
virtual tours along with audio of the religious facilities. Search engines have a variety of
different related information of the group or groups anyone has in question. These web
sites also add to the revenues obtained by the sale of books, tapes, and other
paraphernalia.

NRM’s use the internet to recruit the young, naïve, misfits, and the social losers
of society. It is thought that most recruited members are persuaded to join. Recruitment
is usually done through norms and pre-existing social networks, including intra personal
bonds, which is a normal way of networking. The idea is that friends often recruit
friends, families recruit other family members, and neighbors often try to recruit their
neighbors. Most people in NRM’s are said to have bonds with specific members which
help lead to a wider involvement in the faith itself. For someone to be successfully
recruited into the faith, intense interaction of the recruits with the rest of the established
congregation is needed.

Only about one third of the planet actually has access to the internet, so the
growth of people being on-line is a must for the success of on-line religions (Dawson
Ch.7). While, religions on-line are not affected as deeply by the change that would occur
from the lack of countries on-line. SGI also fits Dawson’s model of an NRM in terms of
recruitment. The internet is a tool for SGI to get its words out to people, but the face to
face interaction of a personal religion is the way for SGI. Despite the popular fears
projected from the news media and anti-SGI sites on the internet, the internet is not the
major reason for joining NRMs like SGI.

The internet is used as a technological tool and a medium to duel among
religions and practice ones religion. The internet is open to all. When a religion dies it is
because it fails to provide itself with new recruits. When a religion is said to have died it is remembered by only the few and the materials that have been left behind. Religions can fade away and die because there is no longer an interest in them. Also many religions become deinstitutionalized and are open to anyone by the use of books and the internet anyone can look up anything and this is how a dead religions can stay alive, not through practice but through the knowledge of such a belief system (Dawson ch. 7).

The origins of Soka Gakkai international can be explained by a telling of its brief history. Soka Gakkai was founded by Makiguchi Tunesaburo in 1937, and Soka Gakkai has connections to the religion Nichiren Shoshu founded in the 1930’s. Soka Gakkai is
said to be one of Nichiren Shoshu’s infant sects that followed his teachings from the 13th century. The second president of the religion Toda Josei, the protégé of Tsuesaburo, re-established the religious group after World War II, when the Japanese people were free to practice any religion they chose (Profile 1). The group was first founded in 1937 as *Soka Kyoiku Gakkai*, then again in 1951. After SGI’s beginnings in 1943 the religion claimed three thousand members. Both Tsunesabro and Toda were members of Nichiren Shoshu when they joined in 1928. The leaders of SGI were imprisoned in 1943 because they refused to consolidate their religion with the other Nichiren lay groups. He was accused of treason for his efforts to go against the main religion of the time (Profile 1). In 1944 Makiguchi died of malnutrition at the age of 73 in prison (Seager 73).
It was only with the allied occupation in Japan during World War II that the prisoners were released. In 1945 Toda Josei began re-establishing the group that was SGI. During the post war SGI claimed over 15 million. SGI then grew to aver several international branches, also upholding the birth of a major political party, and helped to build a multi-million dollar temple.

Soka Gakkai International a lay Buddhist form of Nichiren Buddhism. SGI is a splinter organization from Nichiren, containing origins and rituals similar to Nichiren Buddhism. The idea that the medium (Buddhism) is the mode (enlightenment), though the mode can be entered to by many different sources.

“A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of the life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo” –Nichiren Daishonin (Beliefs 2).

Nichiren Buddhism like most other forms of Japanese Buddhism can be connected to China and then to India where Buddhism originated. The main belief of the
religion is the chanting of the *daimoku*, which is an aspect of the *lotus sutra* or sacred text of Buddhism. The shrine of the *gohunzon* is the image of the Lotus Sutra written in the style of its founder. Gohunzon originates from the founder, which the Nichiren Buddhism was named after. A drawing inlaid with the words of the lotus sutra, made by the founder Nichiren. In 1992 SGI formally separated from Nichiren Shoshu, its parent religion (Profile 2).

The three great secret laws of Buddhism or *mappo* are marked by the degeneration of the dharma. They are constituted from the framework of laws from Nichiren Buddhism. The first law has to deal with the gohunzon, a scroll which is considered to be the supreme object of worship in the faith (Hurst 80). The second law
pertains to the *kaidan*, or the high sanctuary of Buddhism which was to be built at the age of the mappo. The third law deals with daimoku, or the true chant that is the most dominant characteristic of the Nichiren Buddhist practice. The followers chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, which means hail to the wonderful dharma lotus sutra, is the chant used at temples, community centers, and home alters, and this practice is the most basic form of group worship. The chanting is often done in unison as a group for usually 15-20 minutes to create a highly charged atmosphere (Hurst 80). Knowledge of each of the laws and the elements within the religion help to understand the conflict between SGI and Nichiren Buddhism, the conflict is based over interpretation of doctrine, ritual, and the issues of the institution (Hurst 80).

![Diagram of Mahayana Buddhism]

The idea of a new religious movement today is a religion without political power. The SGI have a history in Nichiren Buddhism which is a religion by the people and the lotus sutra from the first century BC. The thoughts of Nichiren Buddhism is the concept of universal salvation, this is based on Mahayana Buddhism as a sector. The idea of universal salvation is that all beings have a potential to obtain enlightenment and freedom
from suffering. Nichiren Buddhism also contains the Buddha nature, this is said to be part of all living things. To release one's truest nature is to obtain Buddha hood. Like most people you are asking how one realizes Buddha hood? There is an expedient way that can be found to enlighten you. This is part of relying on the lotus sutra.

The lotus sutra can be thought of as a power plant in the western perspective. The way that one can connect to the power plant or lotus sutra is by a connection, this connection is created by chanting. People chant to connect to the lotus sutra; this allows them to become a manifestation of the words of the Buddha himself, through spiritual power. The gohunson or shrine is one aspect that this is possible. The gohunson is a Nichiren writing of a copy of the actual sutra, by chanting the sutra one can incarnate the Buddha and this is how Buddhism saves people. The mantra of Nichiren Buddhism that can be done by chanting the lotus sutra and repeating the name of the sutra over and over again as part of a group. The sutra is to become part of you and is to empower the person who chants it. The chant stimulates the five senses: touching, tasting, and smelling, hearing, and seeing. Your mind is used while chanting to plug into the lotus sutra. This is an act that causes a connection.

There are many different sites on the internet that discuss Soka Gakkai International. People who do not know very much about the religion need to be aware that the information that they are looking at may not be SGI’s exclusive materials and beliefs. Soka Gakkai International itself as a group has a number of splinter groups associated with the belief structure of the religion. Both official and non-official sites can be found. For example, most SGI official sites have their official logo and are copy righted for their protection. Also, when looking at sites that are not official viewers should be aware of
the tone of the articles. The tone of the article can state whether a site is for or against SGI. There are many anti-SGI sites located on the internet and their main goal is to find information that makes SGI look bad. Anti-SGI groups will do anything in their power to get devoted members of SGI to leave the religion and convince prospects not to join.

SGI web sites usually contain flash graphics and are easy for non members to scroll throughout. SGI brings up statements of their beliefs in subtle ways, and they do not try to offend their American audience in doing so. They do try to incorporate the views that all of humanity can respect. Soka Gakkai as a group conveys their message in a Japanese manner. Their goal is for world peace and for every ethnic group to get along. The only problem is that they as a group convey their meaning in a way that tries to show the Japanese way of Buddhism as the structure that all people should follow. The web based site includes information for all ages: young adults, boys and girls groups, and new members. The site tells how one can: become a member, download available information, contact to links and daily encouragements, along with a mail order center.

There are many web sites that are done by volunteers that show the wide variety of SGI sites available and offer hyperlinks for the browser to connect to them directly by clicking on the hyperlinks provided. Most official SGI sites visited are browser friendly, easy to use for those who never used the site before.

The New Members linked page consists of information how to better ones life with SGI. The link contains information about the altar that are found in SGI temples and gives an explanation of every object found on the alter itself. The site offers a question and answers page along with an encouragement for new member’s page and a practice page, these pages tell of the basic practice of the religion and how its chant is
said and used. An audio file that is downloadable is offered and gives an onlooker an example of how the chant is said and used to benefit SGI members.

The Encouragement for New Members section of the website offers information about how a new comer to the religion takes the first step toward becoming a member. The site gives positive feedback and requires goals for each individual to follow to progress onto the next. The site then offers of how to receive solid results from ones training of the religion. The site also gives information about the leaders of the group and how they are available to help new comers every step of the way throughout their training.

Their website offers bright colorful pictures and diagrams that show information on SGI-USA, Buddhism, and Publications. The web site offers a Question and Answer page of the major questions SGI individuals inquire about SGI.

SGI has many different websites world-wide; there is a website for each country of affiliation. The countries websites include the usual information that most religious websites contain an overview of the religion: the religions mission statement and goals. The site explains the kind of Buddhism they as a group practice along with the group of Buddhism that they have split from. The site contains information of the split up according to SGI. Everything on the website is there for non-members to view and websites are set up to project a positive image of SGI.

The official site of the USA contains information of the projects that SGI are involved in, how SGI as a new religious movement is working with organizations in a campaign to help the community and the people of the world. The internet site shows the good deeds that the members of SGI have accomplished. The programs and drives that
are held to help people in need of assistance. SGI sites are often colorful to capture the eye and attract the viewer some even have videos of SGI’s current President. SGI official sites have information on their current President and quotes from the President himself. The SGI sites also offer paraphernalia for sale along with pamphlets. They even use their site to promote the skills of their President and the books that they are releasing to the public. There are usually links in the official sites of SGI to other official sites around the world. Most of the websites are given in many different languages so a variety of ethnicities are able to view their sites.

In 1955 one of the group members took a seat in the prefectural assembly in Tokyo. Starting SGI’s involvement in politics, the party later became the komeito, or the “clean Government Party, which consists of high Buddhist morals. As of 1960 The Komeito is the third largest political power in Japan (Profile 2).

The current president of SGI, Ikeda emphasizes on progressive education.

“He is a prolific writer, poet and peace activist, recognized as one of the leading interpreters of Buddhism; bring it timeless wisdom to bear on the many contemporary issues confronting humanity” (SGI- President 1).
SGI is doing great things worldwide and helping the people when and where it truly counts. Several websites discuss Soka Gakkai International on the internet. These web pages reflect upon the religion in a plethora of different ways (Dawson 271). Ikeda created the Soka Gakkai Culture Bureau, with economics, speech, education, and art departments that foster value formation. Ikeda founded an SGI high school in 1968 and in 1971 Soka Gakkai University of America, located in southern California (Hurst 76). In addition, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, located in Cambridge, Massachusetts next to Harvard University is dedicated to forging new humanistic values across cultural and religious boundaries which was founded in 1993 by SGI (Hurst 86). SGI has grown to out run its father religion in aspects of authority, power, and imagination; once SGI flourished as an international movement (Hurst 77).

SGI today is a Buddhist association with more than 12 million members in 188 different countries and territories worldwide. The members of the organization believe that Buddhism is a philosophy of individual empowerment and inner transformation, enabling people to
develop and take responsibility for their life. The members strive to develop the ability to develop the aptitude to live with confidence, and create value in any circumstance. This allows them to contribute to the well-being of family, friends, and community. The promotion of culture and education is central to the members of SGI (Soka Gakkai International 1).

SGI are a positive aspect of the communities that they touch and they are involved in several activities to benefit the world that surrounds them as a group. For instance, SGI promotes Peace Awareness, Humanitarian Relief, Environmental Awareness, Human Rights, Awareness on Education and Literacy, and Cultural Exchange. SGI is also concerned with two of their projects as of late, including Abolition 2000 and the Earth Charter (Soka Gakkai International 1).

SGI has helped numerous countries with education and literacy. They offer educational counseling services to parents, children, and teachers. They offer classes to the public, conduct book drives for NGOs. SGI has composed over 80 volumes of books that are made to show the future generations the misery of war and not let them forget; as well 20 of the volumes contain testimonials by women. The volumes have been translated into several languages, these volumes were made with the hope that they could
help to prevent a repeat of the tragedy that comes from war (Soka Gakkai International 1).

“What is the heart of a lion king? It is courage. To put this inexhaustible treasure that is common to all under seal is to live in delusion and timidity. Happy are the people who tackle life’s challenges with courage drawn from their own hearts” – Daisaku Ikeda (Untitled 2).

SGI-USA youth members promote nonviolence through grassroots activities, these activities include concerts, cultural festivals, public lectures, and workshops. SGI is part of the “Victory over Violence” campaign that started in 1999 as a youth initiative. The program has grown to become a nationwide campaign that gained support from schools and community organizations. The main emphasis of the campaign is to build culture and peace, while encouraging our youth to develop tolerance, trust, and friendship with one another despite the differences of race, religion, color, and language (Soka Gakkai International 2).

SGI has been an active part of the Abolition 2000 movement, as of late over 13 million signatures have been collected in support of the petition which calls for the eradication of nuclear arms. The movement calls for all governments to end the nuclear threat by withdrawing all nuclear weapons from foreign soil and international waters, separating warheads from delivery vehicles, and committing to no use of nuclear
weapons. The goals are that governments will sign an international treaty by the year 2000 to agree on the phased elimination of all nuclear weapons within a period of time. The petition calls for the reallocate resources from military purposes to assuring a sustainable global future (Soka Gakkai International 2).

SGI members around the globe have comities working to fix the problems caused from natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies. They contribute to local relief efforts by donating funds for relief goods, while the local members gather and deliver the supplies. SGI also organizes a campaign to collect supplies for refugees, and provide shelter for the homeless. SGI has held fund raising drives since 1973 and since then have donated over $12 million to UNHCR and NGOs assisting refugees (Soka Gakkai International 1).

Soka Gakkai International uses the internet to get their word out. SGI does not consider the internet as a major tool in their recruitment of members although many members and people interested in the religion can go online and read about the religion and how they as a group perceives themselves to be on-line. Members are allowed to feel free to use the internet as a tool to write e-mails and find a temple close to them. SGI is considered to be a hands on religion and it takes an active role from the devotee to participate in the religion (Profile 2).
Similar to other NRM’s, SGI aspires to overcome national boundaries of ideology to create a re-harmonious world that is unified by what they consider to be universal values (Lucas 6). “SGI manifests its own ideological visions of global order of the contemporary global crisis” (Lucas 20). SGI is the biggest religious organization in Japan against militarism (Lucas 197). Soka Gakkai stresses interconnections, human actions, and social institutions at a global level. The group together tries to overcome national boundaries of ideology, religion, ethnicity, and citizenship in a drive for world peace and the creation of universal values according to SGI’s perceptions (Lucas 255).

“No matter the goals SGI remains Japanese in character” (Lucas 257).

Americans are embracing the religion from abroad are accepting it as a counter culture to Zen Buddhism (Seager 70). The religion of SGI does not discriminate and accepts a wide range of ethnicities including African Americans and Hispanics, to name a few (Seager 70). SGI in the USA has from 100,000-300,000 members the wide range comes from the home based nature of the religion (SGI Seager 71). The leader of SGI and founder, Tsuesaburo, originally was a school teacher before he founded the religious group and movement. He also wrote many books about his educational theories (Seager 72). He drew from the reciprocal relationship between cultures and their environment and their influences in developing
the individual (Seager 73). It is said that Toda revived the religion after the death of the creator of the religion and renamed the religion Soka Gakkai or value-creation Society (Seager 74). It is said the movement had faltered in prewar times because of the lack of doctrines that were clear and disciplined, so he began to teach the Lotus Sutra. The main goal of all Buddhism is to convert the world to true Buddhism and the utopian vision of the world peace and harmony (Seager 74).

Many testimonials can be found by SGI members relating to how SGI helped them overcome advisement in their lives, whether it was from addiction, a disease, a bad relationship, or whatever the circumstance; it has been written how SGI was proven to provide its members with the support needed to overcome obstacles (Causton 87).

SGI on its own is similar yet different from the religious movements of the past. For instance, the teachings of Martin Luther and his split from the Catholic Church arose a hierarchy in the Protestant faith. This has caused the followers of the same religious goals to have split religions, containing many sect of the Christian faith. SGI in its own right had subsided from its father religion only to become an adult religion and have its own sects that branch from itself.

SGI does not consider their organization to be a cult or a sect, since they usually have negative sentiments attached. SGI considers their faith to promote religious tolerance and appreciation of positive benefits of pluralism and religious diversity in human cultures, and encourage the use of alternative concepts that do not carry the implications of negative stereotypes. It is said that the founder Makiguchi outlined the elements of understanding life and the external world, while Toda organized the religions
In my research I proved that SGI is not an online religion. Since SGI is not a religion totally based on the internet SGI can only be a religion online. The religion has an open interest in live worship and does not rely on the internet as a tool for its survival. The survival of the religion is in the followers who attend and believe in the religion. I performed a case study on NRM’s in my research this proves how the history of SGI through its founding and origins and how the religion has become a world wide mogul since its controversial split from its founding religion of Nichiren Buddhism (Profile 4).

Many Americans are quick to judge new religious movements like Soka Gakkai International and refer to them as cults. People fail to research the unknown and often assume things when they know little or nothing about a topic. SGI is a new religious movement that is open to a broader audience of Buddhist practitioners. Soka Gakkai International’s religious popularity appeals to America and is helping NRM’s gain ground little by little. The internet has been used as a tool which helps religions around the world flourish and attract new and wider audiences. The internet is a place where SGI can recruit members, and anti-SGI members are able to air their dirty laundry about
SGI. SGI is an organization that is heavily based on group participation, with active roles in the religious community. The internet acts as a means for the religion to get its word out and let people be known to the religion that is available. The news and other means of communicating data can also be used, but not to the widely diverse extent of the internet. The internet allows active participation between the religion and its newly found followers without individual contact.
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Rural Economic Deprivation in New York and the Effect on Children

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Abstract

Rural Economic Deprivation in New York and the Effect on Children is not meant to prove a new solution in rural America. It is meant to bring social awareness to St. Lawrence University students and faculty. This research paper discusses and evaluates the vicious cycle of poverty in the North Country and children’s economic well-being. Sociologist Daniel T. Lichter wrote: “A disproportionate share of today’s poor children will become tomorrow’s poor adults” (1997, p. 121). This review evaluates why this statement is true in two rural communities, Parishville and Harrisville. It measures the various degrees of poverty in hopes of proving that the “culture of poverty” is the best model that explains the effects of maladaptive behavior and education/employment limitations on children.

From Urban to Rural Homegirl

“To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.” ~ George Orwell

Approximately four years ago I set foot in Canton, New York, prepared to embrace a new environment. In spring 2001, I took a trip to St. Lawrence University and immediately fell in love with the peaceful atmosphere; it was unlike anything that I had ever experienced. Everyone greeted me with a friendly smile and was ready to have a conversation about the weather, academic courses, or simply how my day was going. It seemed like the norm in the North Country was to be genuinely nice. This friendliness was something I had never experienced in my hometown of Flushing, Queens. After one day at SLU, I came to the conclusion that I wanted to spend four years in this wonderful community. I was willing to make the transition from an urban to a rural girl.

I knew nothing about rural areas; I figured they were basically the same as suburban areas, and I was more than willing to make the transition. However, after living in Canton for three years, I realize that rural communities are unique and, therefore, I have decided to write a research paper about my new environment. I do not wish to simply exist as a St. Lawrence University student; I want to embrace the North Country.
In this paper, I am writing to learn about the lifestyle in rural communities and understand why some residents are eager to escape the North Country. But more importantly, I am interested in learning about the effects of economic deprivation on children in Parishville and Harrisville. According to sociologists Daniel T. Lichter, Vincent J. Roscigno, and Dennis J. Condron, authors of “Rural Children and Youth at Risk,” unless researchers and policy makers address the consequences of child poverty in rural areas “Rural America’s next generation of adults may be poorly prepared for success in the workplace, for a healthy family life, and for active community engagement, participation, and civic leadership” (Brown & Swanson 2003, p.108). This quote indicates that in rural communities there exists employment inequality, deviant family behavior, and lack of community involvement. This paper is meant to bring social awareness to North Country residents.

I travel eight hours from New York City to St. Lawrence County, attend a liberal arts college that costs $38,000 a year, and leave my loved ones to come to a community that students seem to dislike and for what? A taste of tranquility. Have I truly found that tranquility in upstate New York? Yes and no. I no longer have to wake up at 6:00 a.m. to catch the Q17 bus and two trains, which take me into Manhattan to attend college. I no longer have to deal with the crowded subways, grumpy New Yorkers, and beggars asking for money. Instead I deal with the empty streets of downtown Canton, lack of diversity (in every aspect imaginable), and rural poverty. The lack of community involvement and cultural activities has led me to endless weekends of maladaptive behavior. I read in Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century that

![Image](https://example.com/image1.png)

Roughly one-third of rural youth have used alcohol by the age of twelve and by the twelfth grade, this figure jumps to 78 percent. Four-fifths of rural school
teachers report that alcohol use by their students is a serious problem at school, compared to 61 percent inner-city areas of the United States (Brown and Swanson 2003, p.103).

I remember wondering if there was any correlation between living in rural communities and the high alcohol intake.

Fortunately, I know that my personal scenario is temporary and just a phase; soon I will graduate and move back to New York City. An outsider might say that it was just my friends that led me to my lifestyle and that the rural environment I experienced had nothing to do with it. I once thought the same, but after a semester in Washington D.C., I realized that an individual’s surroundings have the potential to mold his or her personality. Can one’s environment transform one’s individuality? Does that individual become adaptive to their immediate surroundings? Take for instance my experience growing up in Queens, New York. I lived in a predominantly Asian community and therefore learned a lot about Korean traditions and customs. My mother and I would devote our entire Sunday morning to Dim Sum, my first boyfriend was Korean, and I learned Tai Chi. Because of my surroundings I acquired knowledge that I might have never learned if I lived in an Irish community. Elizabeth Smith and Barbara White1, rural residents in the North Country, were also changed by their surroundings.

Elizabeth is from the town of Parishville, which has a population of 2,049. The socioeconomic characteristics of this town are quite simple and straightforward. The population of residents 25 years and over is 1,351 of which 1,127 are high school graduates and 217 have a bachelor’s degree. The median household income is $32,210, the median family income is $37,981, and the families below poverty level are 34, with 219 total individuals below poverty level. Compared to the USA, 80.4% are high school

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1To protect identity, names throughout this paper have been changed.
graduates, 24.4% bachelor’s degree, median household income is $41,994, and 12.4% are below poverty. Putting Parishville’s numbers into perspective, 10% of individuals are below poverty level. Although 10% might not seem like a huge proportion, to a small town in the North Country it is.

Elizabeth’s guidance counselor once told this woman, now her in early 20s, that she could not amount to much and that her only two options were to join the Army or become a housewife. His perspective on her turnout in life could be compared to Karl Marx’s coined terminology “deterministic,” which means that people’s futures are determined for them by the economic structure and their position within it. Fortunately, her unconditional family support enabled her to overcome countless obstacles and she got accepted into a liberal arts college; however, her closest friend was not as successful. Lacking emotional support from her family and guidance counselor, this friend dropped out of high school. Again this scenario coincides with Marx’s resistance theory: student resistance to school is a political response to oppression and limited life chances. The lack of educational support discouraged the woman from attending high school and hence perpetuating the economic limitations in the North Country.

Barbara White is from the village of Harrisville bordered between St. Lawrence and Lewis County, which has a population of 653. The population for residents 25 years and over is 455 of which 378 are high school graduates and 50 have a bachelor’s degree. The median household income is $30,833, the median family income is $32,946, and the families below poverty level are 23, while the individuals below poverty level are 107. Putting these numbers into perspective, 16% of individuals are below poverty level. Once more, although 16% might not seem like a huge proportion, to a small town in the
North Country it is. Barbara married at 22 years old and with three children, earned her bachelor’s degree but because of employment limitation in North Country could not find a decent job. The authors of “Rural Children and Youth at Risk”, state “Investments in schooling reflect the low economic returns to education in depressed rural labor markets-a high school or college education is less likely to be rewarded with a decent job in America’s small towns and rural areas” (2003, p.101). Therefore, her inability to find a job that could financially reward her for the time spent in undergraduate school led her to emotional withdraw, a maladaptive behavior caused by economic deprivation.

Community Legal Services, Inc., (CLS) an on-line service that provides information and advice about legal rights, state that maladaptive behavior is poor or inadequate adaptive behavior, which can be “described as the individual’s progress in acquiring mental, academic, social, and personal skills as compared with unimpaired individuals of the same age” (Community Legal Services, Inc. 2003). CLS offers a list of maladaptive behaviors\(^2\), which if escalated could lead to severe long-term problems. My guess is that if a child were to develop maladaptive behavior, such as poor concentration or temper tantrums, it would affect, his or her success rate at school, relationship with parents, and develop an inner-conflict. Add economic limitations to the list, and other problems arise. These maladaptive behaviors learned at a young child perpetuates the cycle of poverty because it affects his or her achievement rate in school and workplace.

Maladaptive behavior can lead to development of some mental disorders that are invariably accompanied by maladaptive behavior are attention-deficit/hyperactivity

\(^2\) Emotional withdrawal, bed wetting, eating disturbance, sleep disturbance, impulsivity, poor concentration and attention, hyperactivity, temper tantrums, negativity and defiance, lying, cheating, stealing, physical aggression, running away, self-injurious behavior, and destruction of another’s property (Community Legal Services, Inc. 2003)
disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder, and personality disorder (Community Legal Services, Inc. 2003). Examples of some mental disorders that may be accompanied by maladaptive behavior are organic mental disorders (e.g., impaired emotional ability), schizophrenia (e.g., unusual behavior), mood disorders (e.g., suicidal acts), separation anxiety disorder (e.g. refusal to go to school), eating disorders (e.g., excessive dieting), learning disorder (e.g. angry outbursts when unable to cope with assignments), borderline intellectual functioning (e.g., anger outbursts when unable to cope with life situations), and mental retardation (e.g. head banging, temper tantrums, verbal or physical aggression when frustrated by inability to perform tasks) (Community Legal Services, Inc. 2003). The list seems endless. Maladaptive behavior should not be taken lightly.

Children’s experiences with poverty are based on the structural and cultural contexts in which they live, with a specific concentration in rural communities. The independent variable is the culture of poverty phenomena and dependent variables are maladaptive behavior and education and employment. Although Canton, New York, shares characteristics of the North Country, I decided not to research my community because St Lawrence University is a major financial contributor and therefore, cannot be represented. Furthermore, I would like to know why economic deprivation increases children’s risks of emotional and behavioral problems.

**Stuck in a Rut**

Despite popular belief that in the state of New York only low-income urban neighborhoods face economic and social hardship (Brown & Swanson 2003, p.97), rural New York has the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the entire state. According
to the U.S. Census Bureau, 16.9% St. Lawrence County residents are below poverty compared to 14.6% in state of New York. Generally Americans believe that only minorities living in urban communities are poor, not white residents in rural areas. Rural communities are places characterized by peaceful beauty and tranquility; therefore what sort of problems could residents possibly face? This notion conceals the fact that economic deprivation does indeed exist in rural areas. These misconceptions do not allow Americans to understand that the challenges faced by urban areas are similar to those of rural areas and therefore, rural communities are often ignored.

In the past decade there has been a dramatic increase in poverty that affects the economical and social components of rural New York; before the situation worsens, communities must create change. It is crucial that rural communities understand that if change is not created within their neighborhoods, maladaptive behavioral or cultural adjustments, which perpetuate poverty, will continue from generation to generation.

Unless the economic, social, and cultural life of local rural communities changes, the “economic deprivation of today’s children will continue in tomorrow’s adults” (Lichter 1997, p.122). Unemployment and poverty rates will continue to increase as poor children continue to socially and spatially isolate themselves from nonpoor neighborhoods. The reason for this is based on the “culture of poverty” thesis (which will be further explained in the paper) that states that the poor tend to live in enclaves, have similar socioeconomic characteristics, and share a common set of life conditions (Roach & Gursslin 1967).

The study of rural communities is a new phenomenon. The economic restructuring occurring in rural America in the 1980s triggered curiosity among many
scholars, in particular sociologists. Books, such as *Endangered Spaces Enduring Places* or *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century*, have been written to understand the economic and social consequences of poverty. Author Janet M. Fitchen wrote: “The general’s public image or rural America does not include poverty; conversely, the public image of poverty does not include rural places” (Fitchen 1991, p.115). To unveil the hidden challenges, obstacles, and dilemmas that currently face rural communities, such as in St. Lawrence County, countless research has been produced by sociologists.

The research is based on two methods, scholarly sociological inquiry and action research. In order to understand the economic and social components of rural communities, the first part of my research is strictly academic. After an examination of rural economic deprivation in New York, through books and journal articles, I proceeded to interview two members of the Parishville and Harrisville. Therefore, my research paper uses qualitative methods of social observation, open-ended interviewing, and content analysis. Ultimately, I offered a possible solution that will aid the children of Parishville and Harrisville.

**A Halt in Our Future**

Poverty is an epidemic that is currently affecting rural children. In every corner of this nation, there is a child waiting to become a writer, a musician, or a teacher, but if there are socioeconomic limitations, those childhood aspirations simply slip into air. By not addressing issues such as behavioral problems, depression, or limitations in educational achievement, we as a nation are saying that we do not care and value our
children. Children need to have a sense of security in their environment but, unfortunately, rural communities do not appear to offer this safety net.

According to the authors of “Rural Children and Youth at Risk,” “America’s future is threatened by increasing numbers of children ‘at risk’ because of family disruptions, school dropout, drug abuse, delinquency, and teen pregnancy” and since the stereotypical mentality is that inequality issues solely exist in inner-city neighborhoods, rural children have been overlooked (Brown and Swanson 2003, p.97). The numbers clearly indicate that rural children should be on top of the list. Lichter, Roscigno, and Condron write, “In 2000 the poverty rate was 20.8 percent for nonmetropolitan children, compared to 16.9 percent in metropolitan areas” (Brown and Swanson 2003, p.98). The concept is pretty simple but apparently hard to grasp; children living in poverty have issues that do not permit them to escalate to a better tomorrow.

Children are not receiving an equal opportunity because of social and economic circumstances. It is a vicious cycle that appears to have no solution. Unfortunately, a downfall to this research paper is that studies have shown little information about “short- and long-term developmental consequences of poverty for rural children” (Brown and Swanson 2003, p.99), there is a lack of long-term population studies over decades, and therefore, the research conducted relies on established research on rural poverty plus the stories of two North Country residents. Although the North Country faces economical challenges: “poverty rates among rural children have declined unexpectedly since the mid-1990s, paralleling the declines recorded nationwide” (Brown and Swanson 2003, p.98). But that does not mean that child poverty has come to an end. Sociologist Patrice LeClerc states “Some real questions about these kinds of data—some problems in how
government records such things, for example, someone is not listed as unemployed unless
they are in the 2 years they receive assistance, once they no longer do they fall out of the
data base entirely.” According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the
United States: 2003, 12.8% white children, out of 15.6%, were below poverty level. The
challenge to find a solution to child poverty still remains. We as a nation should
recognize and realize that children are tomorrow’s leaders and if we fail to educate them
then we as nation are placing a halt in our future.

**Measuring Economic Well-Being and Poverty in Rural America**

The meaning of poverty has taken various definitions over time and place. The
Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and
composition to detect who is poor. The official definition uses 48 thresholds that take
into account family size (from one person to nine or more) and the presence of number of
family members under 18 years old (from no children present to eight or more children
present) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). The poverty thresholds are not adjusted for
regional, state, or local variation in the cost of living. Family income then determines
who is poor: if a family’s total income is less than the threshold for the family’s size and
composition, the family and everyone in it are considered poor (U.S. Bureau of the
Census 2000).

In “Poverty and Inequality Among Children,” sociologist Daniel T. Lichter
examines the etiology of changes in children’s absolute and relative economic well-being
and poverty; he states that the level of family income that defines children as poor or not
poor is ultimately arbitrary because it does not take into account at least seven measures
(Lichter 1997, p.124). First, he states that the official poverty income threshold is
adjusted for inflation each year, but not for the increase in real family income and consumption of children. Second, it does not take into account near-income (i.e. food stamps) or in-kind public assistance (i.e. subsidized school lunches) for children. Third, it does not correct for geographic differences in the costs of feeding, clothing, and sheltering children. Fourth, it does not adjust for income that represents the costs of working (i.e. cost of childcare) or that is not available for the purchase of material goods or services (i.e. child support payments paid by the non-custodial parent at the expense of co-residential children), or that trades in the informal economy. Fifth, income is not adjusted for taxes, which have varied enormously across political units and over time. Sixth, the various poverty thresholds do not adequately reflect economies of scale or measure “equivalent” poverty income for various family sizes and the adult-children composition. Seventh, the measure also does not take into account the increasing share of children reared by single parents and their cohabiting partners. The current official poverty measure is that it may not accurately reflect group differences in available family resources over time. Therefore, this measure still “implicitly assumes that parental resources are reinvested in children in an equitable way” (Lichter 1997, p.124). Lichter (in correlation with other researchers) concludes that poverty should consider “actual consumption levels rather than income alone” (1997, p.124).

Currently poverty is solely measured by income; however, the effects of poverty are beyond numbers. How can a number possibly measure the impairment of physical growth, cognitive development, and socioemotional functioning on childhood poverty? Therefore, to better understand the causes and effects of poverty on rural children in New York, this paper contains research conducted exclusively (but not entirely) by
sociologists, which take into account the social and economical components of poverty. Sociologists such as Daniel T. Lichter, Dennis J. Condron and Leif Jensen focus on the social and economic dynamics of rural communities and examine inequality issues that effect both societies and individuals. Lichter, in “Poverty and Inequality Among Children,” writes:

The bottom line is that the issue today arguably is less one of growing absolute material deprivation—that is still an empirical question depending on whether cash income or consumption is the relevant indicator—but rather whether child poverty or deprivation is morally defensible in an affluent society (Lichter 1997, p.125).

How is it possible that poverty exists in a nation where the gap between rich and poor is increasing at all levels, and is getting greater in world comparisons (Lichter 1997, p.126)?

Sociologists William Falk and Thomas Lyson, authors of Forgotten Places Uneven Development in Rural America, provide a framework for constructive rethinking of rural development policy and offer two distinct explanations of poverty: the culture of poverty thesis and the structural explanation of poverty (Falk & Lyson 1993). The culture of poverty thesis focuses on individual and cultural factors that make and keep individuals poor, whereas the structural approach is based on the inability of the social structure to provide the necessary opportunities for the poor to improve their plight (Falk & Lyson 1993). Challenges of for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century, a book sponsored by the Rural Sociological Society, defines the changes of a rural economy and interprets their implications for the future of rural America, giving in-depth explanations of both causes. According to sociologists Leif Jensen, Diane K. McLaughlin, and Tim Slack, an explanation for poverty that straddles the individual/structural dichotomy is the “culture of poverty” approach. This theory holds that poverty is perpetuated across
generations through particular cultural characteristics, including lack of integration with formal institutions and society in general, a sense of fatalism that hinders people from seeing and seizing opportunities and planning for the future (Brown & Swanson 2003). Oscar Lewis introduced the notion of culture of poverty in his book *La Vida*: “Once it comes into existence, it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effects on children” (Corcoran 1995, p. 238). Does this notion apply to the North Country? Do we live in a nation that condones this behavior?

Culture of poverty literally becomes part of a culture because of low wages, unemployment rates, and personal inferiority, which residents learn to accept and therefore, poverty continues from one generation to another. In order to stop this vicious cycle, rural communities must focus on children. Children need to be prepared to take on economical challenges. Community members must unite and stand up for children. Yes, economic limitations exist in the North Country but job opportunities do exist. For instance, if children in Parishville and Harrisville, encouraged to attend colleges such as Clarkson University or St. Lawrence University, were to earn their masters or PhD in education then they might eventually be able to become a faculty member and earn a decent salary or “or get jobs that really pay well-lawyer, physician, business” (LeClerc 2004). Take the resources that already exist within a child’s community and use it to his or her advantage.

Sociologists Leif Jensen, Diane K. McLaughlin, and Tim Slack, “Rural Poverty The Persisting Challenge,” argue: “Structural explanations of poverty stress the importance of local opportunity structure rather than individual characteristics as central to understanding poverty; they address how social structures affect the allocation of
people to job opportunities” (Brown & Swanson 2003, p.125). In Worlds Apart, Cynthia M. Duncan examined the roots of persistent poverty by taking a journey into two historically impoverished regions; she notes that in recent years, urban-poverty scholars have begun to focus on how poverty is perpetuated by the social relationships and institutions in the community (Duncan 1999). For instance, Daniel T. Lichter and David J. Eggebeen, “The Effect of Parental Employment on Child Poverty”, suggest that the solution to the poverty problem resides both in encouraging parental patterns of work and in creating jobs that pay a family wage. Furthermore, the patterns evident in their data suggest that policies whose aim is merely to “get people working” will not eliminate poverty unless the pay is sufficient to provide for the basic material needs of families and children (Lichter & Eggebeen 1994). Ann R. Tickamyer and Cynthia M. Duncan, “Poverty and Opportunity in Rural America”, add that the spatial dimension of limited opportunity “has created and perpetuated a social structure that reinforces poverty and underdevelopment” (Tickamyer & Duncan 1990, p.69). In other words, the lack of job resources and limitations on career mobility in the rural communities perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

As illustrated, poverty has several mechanisms, but for this paper, poverty will be defined as a “limited opportunity structure which is the outcome of both past social and economic development policies and current economic transformation,” to borrow the definition of Ann R. Tickamyer and Cynthia M. Duncan authors of “Poverty and Opportunity Structure in Rural America” (Tickamyer & Duncan 1990, p.67). Their study “reviews research on rural poverty and traces its relationship to its historical roots in social, political, and economic inequality and to current economic restructuring”
(Tickamyer & Duncan 1990, p.67). The authors state that the structure of economic opportunity in a given place or time provides the context for the behavior of the rural poor because “poor rural areas lack stable employment, opportunities for mobility, diversity of social structure, and investment in community” (Tickamyer & Duncan 1990, p.81). In addition, rural communities are increasingly socially and spatially isolated and particularly vulnerable to adverse effects from structural economic change (Tickamyer & Duncan 1990). According to the authors rural poverty has always been linked to the limited opportunity structure in rural communities and therefore concludes:

[That the] regional and local labor market research confirms that rural poverty is not simply the result of lack of economic growth or lack of income and employment, but it is also the result of inequality in the distribution of income, jobs, and resources within communities as well as regions (Tickamyer & Duncan 1990, p.77).

This definition of poverty is adequate for this research paper because it corresponds with the notion claimed by Daniel T. Lichter’s case study, “Poverty and Inequality Among Children,” that increasing geographic concentration of poverty in low-income rural areas promotes maladaptive behavioral or cultural adjustments that perpetuate poverty in adulthood (Lichter 1997). This contrasts with Michael Harrington’s belief stated in The Other America, which analyzes the reasons for the persistence of mass poverty in the midst of general prosperity and states that poverty in the United States is not a confined to the rural areas (Harrington 1981); however, note that Harrington’s statement was made before the economic restructuring occurring in rural America in the 1980s that had dramatic social and economic consequences.

To summarize the theoretical background of poverty, one should examine Hunt’s study, “The Individual, Society, or Both? A Comparison of Black, Latino, and White
Beliefs about the Causes of Poverty.” Hunt follows Joe Feagin’s belief about poverty, author of “When It Comes to Poverty, It’s Still, ‘God Helps Those Who Help Themselves.” Fegin (1975) noted that beliefs about poverty are of three types (1) individualistic-in which characteristics of persons are used to explain poverty, (2) structuralist-in which the larger socioeconomic system is seen as the case of poverty, and (3) fatalistic-in which supra-individual, but non-social structure forces (e.g., luck, chance) are pointed to as source of poverty (Hunter 1996). Therefore, we see again, poverty goes beyond income.

It is essential to define poverty as movement affected by economic and social components in order to demonstrate that poverty is a component of several factors and not only annual income. For instance, anthropologist Janet M. Fitchen, *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places*, notes that “the counties classified as ‘most rural’ together have had the highest unemployment, lowest median family income, lowest percentage of families in affluence, and lowest level of formal education attained; their poverty rate was exactly tied with the NYC metropolitan area” (Fitchen 1991, p.116). Furthermore, Tickamyer and Duncan state that rural areas are dominated by low wage employment in agriculture, service, and manufacturing sectors. The authors add that many other jobs are part-time and seasonal such as in agriculture and construction, making underemployment a chronic condition for the “working poor” (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). Therefore, poverty is not based only on an income level but also shaped by the economic, social, and cultural life of local communities (Fitchen 1991), which leads to understanding the structure of rural communities.
Sociologist Irwin T. Sanders and Gordon F. Lewis, “Rural Community Studies in the United States: A Decade in Review,” define rural communities as being small, nonmetropolitan areas with distinct traits such as agricultural area, primacy economy, and obvious nonurban culture, as well as social, and ecological characteristics (Sanders & Lewis 1976). According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, “nonmetropolitan” America is all that which is not included in such metropolitan statistical areas; “rural” technically refers to the population outside incorporated or unincorporated places with more than 2,500 people and/or outside urbanized areas (Fitchen 1991). Sociologists Kenneth M. Johnson, professor at Loyola University, adds that while the 2000 census showed that eight out of every ten Americans live in urban areas, over fifty-six million persons reside in rural communities (Brown & Swanson 2003, p.20). In addition, the Population Reference Bureau (2000) notes that this exceeds the total population of all but twenty-two of the world’s two hundred nation-states (Brown & Swanson 2003, p.21). So while rural people make up a minority of the U.S. population, they are a very large minority indeed (Brown & Swanson 2003). According to Fitchen, there are 727 townships in rural New York, each with a government structure and municipal functions and responsibilities, and 324 incorporated villages. She writes:

Some municipalities contain very small populations: One township has under 100 people; over 180 villages have populations under 1,000. One whole county contains only 5,000 people, and thirteen more have fewer than 50,000 people. Ruralness in New York is not just a matter of numbers of people or communities, however, but also a matter of space and the uses of space. Over a quarter of the state’s total land area (8.5 million acres) is farmland. Agriculture composes a major sector of the state’s economy, and New York ranks third in the nation in milk production and at or near the top in the production of several dairy products (Fitchen 1991, p.5).
Furthermore, Fitchen adds that the counties in the North Country often have “the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the entire state” (Fitchen 1991, p.54). Rural communities are indeed in economical danger.

Rural sociologist Kenneth P. Wilkinson, “The Future of the Community in Rural Areas,” addresses ruralness as a spatial concept and notes that the social costs of space may outweigh the economic (Pigg 1991). While the economic costs may contribute significantly to the high incidence of rural poverty and unemployment, the social costs are directly reflected in dependency, economic depression, internal conflict, and extreme individualism (Pigg 1991). Furthermore, according to Brown and Swanson, today the structure of rural families resembles their urban and suburban counterparts with higher divorce rates and more single parents (Brown & Swanson 2003, p.89). In addition, work patterns among rural adults have shifted as well, which means that agriculture involvement as declined dramatically (Brown & Swanson 2003). These definitions relate to Lichter’s research on poverty and inequality among children.

According to Lichter the etiology of changes in children’s absolute and relative economic well-being are caused by three factors: “the role of the changing family, parental employment, and the level of social provision for poor families” (Lichter 1997, p.121). He adds that childhood “poverty impairs physical growth, cognitive development, and socioemotional functioning in addition to large negative effects on children’s IQ, educational achievement, and later adult productivity while increasing their adult welfare dependency” (Lichter 1997, p.122). These are simultaneously occurring with “real declines in income among poor children, a growing gap between rich and poor children, increasing dependence on welfare income (before Welfare Reform Act of
1996), a changing family and spatial ecology of poverty, and the growing incidence of chronic or persistent poverty” (Lichter 1997, p.127). However, note that the research conducted by Lichter, Roscigno, and Condron indicates that “more rural single mothers today are earning a living rather than relying on public assistance income” (Brown and Swanson 2003, p.99). The tricky part of research in the socioeconomic circumstances in rural communities is that every year brings a twist.

As a result, Lichter concludes that the effect of high rates of economic deprivation among today’s children may only be fully realized by tomorrow’s adults, which coincides with Fitchen’s research. According to Fitchen, “demographic changes are not just a matter of changes in numbers of people or characteristics of populations, however. They occur within and have consequences for places: They shape and are shaped by the economic, social, and cultural life of local communities” (Fitchen 1991, p.85). Wilkinson, The Community in Rural America, states that the community also is important because of its role in meeting the needs of people, especially the needs for collective involvement and social definition of self (Wilkinson 1991). Hence it can be determined that the increase in rural poverty in last decade is due to multiple factors of poverty that range from unemployment to community identity.

Societies need to become aware that rural children face socioeconomic problems. Lichter, “Poverty and Inequality Among Children”, states that the effects of high rates of economic deprivation among today’s children may only be fully realized by tomorrow’s adults (Lichter 1997). According to sociologists Litchter, Roscigno, and Condron “America’s rural children are often overlooked” (Brown & Swanson 2003, p.97). These sociologists examined the “persistent rural problems that shape children’s healthy
development and that call for serious research and policy attention” (Brown & Swason 2003, p.98). My paper is intended to follow their footsteps.

**The History of Poverty from 1980s to present in Rural Communities**

As mentioned previously, the 1980s not only brought tremendous socioeconomic change to rural communities but also brought nationwide attention to rural poverty. Fitchen states that the “decade of the 1980s brought either impoverization in place, outward dispersion of poverty from metropolitan areas, or some combination of the two, keeping some rural counties poor” (Fitchen 1991, p.131). The author is not clear about what happened to the other counties. At one point “the poverty figures for the most rural counties ran as high as 18.4%, compared to the national poverty rate in that year of 13%” (Fitchen 1991, p.116). Litcher, “Rural America in Transition: Poverty and Welfare at the turn of the 21st Century”, writes:

> Rural America has been buffeted by a depressed farm economy, a shift way from extractive industries, severe competition from cheap labor overseas in the manufacturing sector, and the continuing economic legacy of the old slave and plantation economy and government policy regarding tribal affairs and governance (Litcher, p.4).

Irwin Sanders, “Rural Community Studies in the US a Decade in Review,” coins the terms spatial dimension or territoriality, which basically means environment is crucial (Sanders). He states that a community exists as a backdrop against which the action unfolds. Fitchen, who visited and interviewed forty farms in 1986 and 1987, notes that of all changes taking place in rural New York in the mid-1980s the farm crisis was the topic most conspicuous and mostly widely discussed in communities. The 1980s was a rough decade for rural communities; local residents told Fitchen that women were wearing their lack of nutrition and people were falling through the cracks, making just above eligibility
guidelines [mostly on part-time jobs] (Fitchen 1991, p.57). Fitchen states that the changes taking place in rural economic, demographic, and sociocultural patterns in the 1980s were causing qualitative as well as quantitative changes in rural poverty (Fitchen 1991). The changes that occurred in this decade would have a tremendous effect on future generation, in particular in the North Country. The advantage of this crisis was that it brought national attention to rural areas and therefore, researchers and policy makers suddenly became aware that rural communities were in danger.

Welcome to St. Lawrence County

In St. Lawrence County many residents rely on government subsidy; as of June 2004 there were 2,014 individuals and 963 cases receiving public assistance and 7,892 individuals and 3,676 cases, receiving food stamps (non-public assistance). Although the total population of St. Lawrence County is 111,655, the number of residents dependent on government assistance is noteworthy. But before proceeding with statistical information, let’s first understand and analyze St. Lawrence County characteristics.

According to the St. Lawrence County Office of Economic Development:

St. Lawrence County is located in northern New York along the Canadian border. The Adirondack Mountains lie to the east, the Thousand Islands region to the south, and the St. Lawrence River to the northwest. The total land area of the county is 2,685 square miles. It comprises thirty-two towns, thirteen villages, and one city. The County Seat is the town of Canton, which is near the geographic center of the county. St. Lawrence County may be divided into three physiographic regions, the St. Lawrence Valley, the Adirondack Foothills, and the Adirondack Mountains. All of St. Lawrence County is within the watershed of the St. Lawrence River (St. Lawrence County Office of Economic Development 1997).
The beauty found in the North County is surreal. The truth of the matter is that economic deprivation exists in rural communities, which is concealed by the heavenly mountains, roaring waterfalls, tranquil environment, spacious roads, and sight of peaceful residents.

The employment composition is quite interesting, according to the St. Lawrence County Office of Economic Development: in 1994 the median wage for a plumber was $624 while a secretary earned $271. 770 trade industries had 8,700 employees. The St. Lawrence County Office of Economic Development 1997 states “St. Lawrence County residents are primarily employed in nonmanufacturing industries”, which says a lot about the expected entry level of education. Not only is there a lack of economic employment but the jobs that do exist only require a high school degree.

In November 1996, the unemployment rate was 8.4 (in thousands) compared to New York State of 6.2 (St. Lawrence County Office of Economic Development 1997). The median household income in 1999 was $32,356, and the per capita money income was $15,728. The percentage of persons below poverty was 16.9, compared to the New York State percentage of 14.6. Therefore, the unemployment rate and of persons below poverty go hand in hand. In addition, the percent of high school graduates was 79.2% compared to 79.1% in the state of New York, but the number of personas with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 16.4% compared to 27.4% in the state of New York as a whole. The education and employment link is extremely essential when attempting to understand why poverty perpetuates in rural communities and maladaptive behavior occurs.

According to McLeod and Edwards, “Adults with low levels of income, education, or occupational status report more psychological distress and have higher rates
of psychiatric disorders than do adults of higher status.” It was mentioned in the beginning of this research paper that today’s children will become tomorrow’s adults and therefore, based on the information above, the statement can be claimed that the socioeconomic status of individual not only effects their emotional well-being but forces them to remain in their impoverished environment. Furthermore, Lichter adds “By almost any standard, for example, rural America continues to be an economic backwater and it faces new challenges in today’s increasingly global and high tech economy (2000, 3). As technology progresses, certain communities remain still in time.

The Economic Scars on Children

Children who face economic limitations develop maladaptive behaviors that do not permit them to live a stress free lifestyle. According to McLeod, University of Minnesota, and Edwards, University of Minnesota, from Social Forces, “Children’s Responses to Poverty,” “poor children have high rates of conduct disorder, behavior problems, depression and low levels of self-confidence relative to nonpoor children” (McLeod & Edwards 1995). Research is important in learning about child poverty but the downfall to children studies is that scholars have forgotten what it means to be young. Being a child is not easy. Children are sensitive human beings who need extra care and security. Peer ridicule can be traumatizing for a child and therefore household affection is vital. Kids easily become adaptive to their environment and tempted to mimic the action of others: parents need to be the child’s supportive system through this time of self-discovering. However, children can be stubborn and uncooperative. Children go through a materialistic phase in their childhood where they are unable to comprehend why they cannot own the fads, making it not only harder on themselves but their parents
According to M. Corcoran, “Rags to Rags: Poverty and Mobility in the United States,” poor families are survivors. She writes:

> Because poor families are constantly in economic crisis, these families must concentrate on survival: They have little time, money, or energy to devote to developing children’s human capital or earnings potential, have little time for supervising children, and are less plugged into job finding networks. Similarly, poor parents can afford housing only in disadvantaged neighborhoods that provide lower quality schools, fewer good role models, less social control, and fewer job networks, and they are more likely to be beset by teenage gangs and high crime rates (Corcoran 1995, p. 243).

Take for instance, the woman from Parishville, whose primary goal was to financially support her children so that her children could have the basic necessities; she did not have the time or motivation for anything else.

Parents, for the most, desire to offer their child the best lifestyle possible but when there are socioeconomic limitations, that target becomes an illusion. This reinforces the point that communities play an essential role in childhood development. McLeod and Edwards write: “Communities define the context of children’s development by shaping the likelihood that children will experience a variety of advantages and disadvantages” (McLeod & Edwards 1995, p. 1489), such as an educational disadvantage. McLeod and Edwards then proceed to propose that “children’s mental health is determined by economic experiences in their immediate families as by experiences common to persons who live in the same area,” which supports the notion that the culture of poverty indeed exists and can be observed in two variables: employment/education and maladaptive behavior. Furthermore, the authors add: “Neighborhood deprivation increases the likelihood that children will experience stressful events and chronic deprivations and family poverty decreases families’ abilities to cope with those stressors” (McLeod &
Edwards 1995, p. 1490). However, the authors do mention that “Poor children living in poor areas also have the advantage of living in what Morris Rosenberg called a consonant social environment” (McLeod & Edwards 1995). Therefore, although economic limitations exist in rural communities, which trigger maladaptive behavior, children are safe. McLeod and Edwards write:

Consonant social environments in which children share important sociodemographic characteristics with the majority of population. In such environments, children are insulated from prejudice and enjoy a familiar, comfortable environment within which to develop…extended to the case of poverty, Rosenberg’s arguments imply that poor children living in poor areas would have better mental health than poor children living in affluent areas (McLeod & Edwards 1995, p. 1490).

Children in Parishville and Harrisville, facing economic limitations, are naturally bound to feel safer within their communities than living in a wealthier community, such as uptown Manhattan. However, just because children are physically safe does not mean that this environment is best for them.

The downfall to McLeod and Edwards study is that they focus on the “proportion of the population living in an urban area” but at the same time, focus on “the proportion of families living in poverty” (McLeod & Edwards 1995): however, the study did offer valid information for the research evaluated.

**Rural Education**

“It's not a matter of whether the war is not real, or if it is, Victory is not possible. The war is not meant to be won, it is meant to be continuous. Hierarchical society is only possible on the basis of poverty and ignorance. This new version is the past and no different past can ever have existed. In principle the war effort is always planned to keep society on the brink of starvation. The war is waged by the ruling group against its own subjects and its object is not the victory over either Eurasia or East Asia but to keep the very structure of society intact.” ~ George Orwell
There is a war in our nation that is not being covered by the media, a war that affects children: the War on Poverty in rural communities. On April 2, 2003 U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige said, “Children in rural schools deserve a great education just like all the other children in America.” Paige clearly addresses the fact that rural children are facing education limitations. Then in a virtual town hall meeting on September 25, 2003 he highlighted:

[That] forty-three percent of the nation’s public schools are in rural communities, and nearly one-third of America’s school-aged children attend public schools in these communities. Rural schools face exceptional challenges and many have questions concerning the implementation of No Child Left Behind in their rural communities. In response to these questions I, Secretary Paige, have formed a high-level Rural Education Task Force to identity challenges and to recommend ways that rural schools and their communities can address these challenges” (Paige 2003).

Paige then proceeds to ask rural educators, parents, or citizens if they would like to inform the Department of Education about the challenges that rural residents face in general and in implementing No Child Left Behind. Furthermore, he asks what the general public has come up with for addressing those challenges. Paige seems to hint at the importance of community involvement in children education. Therefore, not only is it vital for researchers and policy makers to acknowledge educational problems that exist in rural communities but also community members. It is common sense that if a child lives in a financially limited household then their education opportunities are restricted. For instance, if a child required additional assistance in a subject such as math or science, his/her parent would be unable to hire a private tutor and would have to rely on classroom time. What about the SAT’s? When applying to college, SAT scores are required, but if a high school senior is unable to take a prep course or simply pay the admission fee then
taking the exam becomes an obstacle and other opportunities, such as joining the Army, become more enchanting. But before analyzing the educational system in rural communities such as Parishville and Harrisville, let us first get a glimpse of the schools accountability.

The New York District Report Card Comprehensive Information Report 2002-03 states that in Parishville, New York there were 487 students, 258 in grade levels KG-06 and 229 in grade levels 07-12. The enrollment by race/ethnicity in KG-12 was 487 white, non-Hispanic. Out of 31 twelfth graders, 16 received regents diplomas. Two general-education students and one student with disabilities dropped out. Fourteen graduates opted for a 4-year college, 13 to 2-year college, 2 to the military, and 2 to employment, which indicates that 87% decided to further their education while 12% preferred to take another road. The percent of students eligible for free lunch was 19.1 while the percent of students receiving reduced lunch was 17.0. In addition, for maladaptive behavior reasons, the percent of students suspended was 2.3, or 12 pupils.

Another important factor to take into consideration is that in 2001-02 the school district spent $6,125 per pupil whereas in similar district group[s] the cost was $6,365. Daniel T. Lichter, Vincent J. Roscigno, and Dennis J. Condron state, “Rural Children and Youth at Risk,” “For many rural children and youth, poorly funded schools reinforce low educational aspirations and achievement rather than providing a route to upward mobility” (Brown and Swanson, p. 102). According to Jonathan Kozel, public schools in the United States spend $3,000 to $12,000 per pupil, which shows that money invested in school depends on property tax. According to the Census Bureau, in Parishville the common value, mortgage status, is $50,000-59,000 out of 361 specified owner-occupied
housing units. Unfortunately, this information was found only for Parishville and not Harrisville. Overall, according to the University of the State of New York the State of Education Department, Parishville is in good standing.

Again, according to the New York District Report Card Comprehensive Information Report 2002-03, in Harrisville, New York there were 418 students, 226 in grade levels KG-06 and 192 in grade levels 07-12. The enrollment by race/ethnicity in KG-12 was 407 white, non-Hispanic, 2 Black, non-Hispanic, 4 Hispanic, and 5 Asian/Pacific Islander. Out of 30 twelfth graders, 14 received Regents diplomas. Five general-education students and one student with disabilities dropped out. Two general-education students and one student with disabilities entered GED program. There were seven general-education noncompleters. Fourteen graduates opted for a 4-year college, 9 to 2-year college, 4 to the military, and 3 to employment, which indicates that 77% decided to further their education while 23% preferred to take another road The percent of students eligible for free lunch was 23.9 while the percent of students receiving reduced lunch was 16.0. Again, for maladaptive behavior reasons, the percent of students suspended was 2.6, which are 11 pupils.

Ideally education in our nation should be equal because if it were not than “this would violate the US ideal of equal opportunity, i.e. that a young adult’s economic destination should not be predetermined by his or her social origins” (M Corcoran 1995, p. 237). However, social and economic deficits in the North Country have created poverty and inequality among children.
Welcome to Parishville

The woman interviewed was born in the Canton, New York but has lived in Parishville for 8 ½ years. Joan Smith got married when she was sixteen, had three children, and never completed high school. Throughout her lifetime, Joan Smith has lived below poverty level and held several jobs. She has driven bus for mentally disabled patients and senior citizens, groomed dogs, showed dogs, worked in a movie theatre, movie store but like her daughter, Elizabeth, said, “Nothing to really make enough money to support a family.” As Lichter indicates minimum wages among less skilled young adults contribute to economic deprivation among children (1997, p.122). To make matters worse, Joan’s husband was not a reliable source; Frank was an alcoholic that could not provide any economical or emotional support. Joan and Frank are no long together. McLeod and Nonemaker state:

Young women with low self-esteem are more likely than other women to choose “undependable” partners-partners who do not maintain steady employment and/or who abuse alcohol-thereby increasing their risk of becoming poor. Finally, women with low academic aptitude are less likely to achieve sufficient education to secure, high-wage employment. All of these parental characteristics are related to child emotional and behavioral problems and thus have the potential to create a spurious relationship between poverty and child problems” (2000, p.139).

Joan felt like an inadequate mother because she unable to provide her children with financially luxuries such as a holiday vacations. “My mom gets really upset and depressed when she can’t help me out financially with school, or clothes. She always feels like she can’t do enough for me, and that I somehow suffer because of it. She was never really sure where we would get the money to eat.” Joan struggled to raise her children but never showed signs of defeat.
Joan constantly reminded Elizabeth of the importance of education. “My mom told me that I needed to go to college in order to do better for myself than she and my sister did. She felt that they were perfect examples of what not to be growing up.” Although Joan did a fine job encouraging higher education, Elizabeth would have wanted her teachers and counselors to advice her mom about the college process. Elizabeth suggests: “Have classes for parents, so parents can be made aware of all that school can do for their kids, and encourage them, whatever their talent, that they can do what they want. Sports aren’t the only way to get a scholarship to a good school.”

Joan felt the need to be extremely protective of her daughter. Joan would not allow her child to participate in any social activities because she was afraid that Elizabeth would get involved in the wrong crowd. “My mom feels as though generalizations [of rural children] help reinforce how they feel about themselves. Why should they do more, when no one else expects them too?” Joan did not want Elizabeth to listen to this nonsense and therefore, kept her close to home.

Elizabeth listened to her mother’s advice. This spring, Elizabeth will graduate from St. Lawrence University and plans to attend graduate school. However like most North Country residents that academically succeed, she would like to leave St. Lawrence County. “My mother wants me to get out of upstate so I have chance at ‘real’ work.” Joan is a firm believer that the only way to succeed in life is to leave the Parishville. “My mother always told me that she was never really informed about how important education was growing up, she was never taught the benefit of getting out of Northern New York.”

Both mother and daughter relate success to leaving the North Country. “My mom wants me to be happy. She feels as though she’s never really been happy, and wants better for
me. She says she is glad that I have money, someone that really loves me back, and she feels as though because I went to St. Lawrence University, that I will be able to make good money someday,” but not in Parishville.

Welcome to Harrisville

The second woman interviewed was born in Watertown, New York but has lived in Harrisville for 20 years. At the age of five Barbara White’s father died of a brain tumor and her mother is left raising seven children. Barbara’s income situation while growing up was borderline poor; her mother would constantly work long shifts as a nurse her children took care of themselves. Barbara recalls that the mother/daughter bond hardly existed. “My relationship with my mother was lessened because of the fact that she had to work so much to support our family, and was too tired to do things with me most of the time, and by the time I was a teenager I think she was tired, I was the youngest of eight and all.” Ten years after her father’s death, her mother remarries. Because of the stepfather’s unkind treatment, at the age of 16, Barbara moved out of the house to be a live in babysitter. Shortly afterwards, without the help of anyone, she decided to attend college. But unfortunately, because of economical limitations in the North Country, her undergraduate degree never paid off.

Barbara is currently raising her children in the North Country because she feels that “Harrisville is a close knit community and it is a safe place to raise children. I have always felt safe knowing where my kids are and who they are with and not worrying about something terrible happening to them.” MacTavish and Salamon state, “Rural communities are a places where residents know one another, share values and history, and feel a sense of trust” (Brown & Swanson 2003, p. 74). Her current income situation
is lower middle class, her husband is currently disabled and therefore, all the economic responsibility is on her. Over a month ago, Barbara was hospitalized due to a nervous breakdown. “I spend much of that time reflecting on everything that stressed me out in my life and one of the biggest factors was bills. My husband is sick and cannot work so I have to support my family on my own. I hold a lot of responsibility because I have to play the supporter and the mother because my husband is in bed a lot and really can’t help with the kids.” She shares that part of the reason for her hospitalization was due to abusing alcohol. “I used it to deal with much of my stress, paying bills, working full time, coming home and cleaning, dealing with a sick husband who is frequently hospitalized. I am not attending AA meetings on a regular basis and have been getting help for my addiction.” Fitchen states “alcoholism has long been recognized as a serious rural problem, not only by courts and rehabilitation programs but by local residents in general” (1991, p. 162). But in small niche environment, would residents address this problem as something that needs immediate change or merely gossip?

Barbara has a daughter currently attending St. Lawrence University. When it comes to education, she does not pressure her children instead she reminds them that without her bachelor’s degree she would definitely be poorer, although her expectations for her children are extremely high. Barbara knows that if did not motivate her children to aim for the sky then no one would. “I wouldn’t say that the teachers were very much help or any counselors. I just think that I pushed myself to pass because I know I wanted to climb the social ladder” and indeed she did. She believes that her children are capable of making their career dreams come true as long as they challenge themselves.

“[Children in rural communities] many times are considered hicks and poor. But as far as
I’m concerned these children don’t know any better because they don’t have good role models, or parents that care about whether they succeed in life or not. There is much more to be considered about a child than the way they look or come across. Many times there are things happening at home that effect every aspect of the child’s life, such as fighting, lack of money, and many other things.” The economic limitations that effect parents reflect a child behavior. Barbara’s daughter is a brave independent woman. She wishes to financially live well and therefore, constantly pushes herself at work and school.

Before ending the interview, Barbara was asked if she could create change within her community what it would be. “Somehow make more job an internship opportunities for both parents and children. Our community on average has a low income and little opportunity for work and moving up the social ladder. I think if some kind of program to create jobs in the local area was implemented it would really give our local economy a boost; and show children how important jobs and education.” Her suggest implies that currently children in rural areas are not shown how valuable education is. A downfall of this research is being unable to visit Parishville-Hopkinton Central School, therefore seeing that Barbara is a mother and rural resident; her remark will be held with great esteem.

The interviews focused on adults that originate from the North Country and continue to reside in St. Lawrence Country. Lichter states “Today’s poverty among children must be judged against the living conditions and consumption levels of society as a whole and other advantaged groups-current and past (1997, p.130). Therefore, it was important to conduct the interview with adults whether than children.
Joan Smith and Barbara White illustrate that maladaptive behavior and education/employment limitations exist because of “culture of poverty”. Joan Smith was given for adoption and never received adequate emotional support or economic stability. Barbara White did have a supportive working mother but was unable to maintain a healthy mother and daughter relationship because she was constantly at work. Both women realized at an early age that in order to overcome their economical obstacles in life, they had to fend for themselves. Joan remains below poverty while Barbara barely manages in the lower middle class. Their children, both students at St. Lawrence University, appear to be paving their own way in life. Joan’s daughter, Elizabeth, is anxious to leave the North Country and explore new horizons, whereas, Barbara’s, daughter Jessica, will probability remain in Harrisville. Jessica is currently living with her high school sweetheart of five years. With any luck, she will not “reinforce the intergenerational cycle of poverty in rural areas” (Brown & Swanson 2003, p. 105) by having children as a young adult.

Conflicts and possible solutions

Finding a solution to child poverty is not easy because if it were then the policy solution would be straightforward and effective: “Provide more economic resources to poor families and to poor children, and enable poor families to buy into ‘better neighborhoods’, which could be accomplished through earned income tax credits, refundable child care tax credits, housing voucher...policy interventions should focus directly on improving schooling and school outcomes for children ” (Corcoran 1995, p. 243). The economic limitations that rural communities face are harsh. It cannot be easy to have to deal with economic deprivation on a daily basis. A child wakes up and
immediately has to confront these unsolicited issues. Corcoran raises an interesting question. She asks, “What is it about childhood poverty itself that damages children’s economic prospects?” The answer still needs to be discovered.

The National Center for Children in Poverty state: “One of the most harmful risk factors to young children, including to their emotional development, is poverty” (2002, p. 7). Furthermore, “The more risk factors young children experience, the higher the probability that their emotional and cognitive development will be comprised” (2002, p. 7). Parent’s actions mold the future of their children and therefore it is crucial that change be implemented today; easier said than done. In “How Much Does Childhood Poverty Affect the Life Chances of Children,” the authors claim, “raising the incomes of poor families will enhance the abilities and attainments of their children” (Duncan, p. 421). However it is difficult to increase income when “there is too little work, and the lack of diversity in the economy extends to social and political institutions, creating a highly stratified and unequal social structure (Tickamyer & Duncan 1990, p. 81). The vicious cycle of poverty is difficult to untangle.

Although, Lichter and Eggebeen are right that “from the perspective of children, the policy implication is that promoting parental job skills and eliminating barriers to employment among poor mothers could significantly enhance children’s economical well-being (1994, p.634). Children rely on role models such as parents; therefore, it makes sense to encourage parents to work because “children’s mental health is determined by economic experiences” (McLeod & Edwards 1995, 1489). To conclude, it is absolutely crucial to continue research that examines “relationships between poverty and biology that may perpetuate inequality from generation to generation” (Lichter,
How are rural communities, researchers, policy makers suppose to help rural children if they do not understand what they are up against? How exactly does income affect cognitive traits? The research would have to be a combination of psychological and sociological studies. Rural areas must realize that change is dependent on them. Unfortunately, rural communities are a silent voice in this nation. Rural children are in danger and researchers are still attempting to understand how policy makers could help.

Sociologists Lichter, Roscigno, and Condron ask:

Do rural parents provide a nurturing family environment for children? Or are rural children, on balance, exposed in greater proportions to parents who suffer from mental health problems such as depression, who are neglectful, or who are physically or emotionally abusive? We currently lack the data necessary to better understand the risk and protective factors now influencing the development of America’s rural children (Brown & Swanson 2003, p. 101).

In the mean time, community members must unite and help rural children stay free from adapting to their environment. There is, however, there are educational programs that can implanted today.

Flipping through the pages of PEOPLE magazine, I saw an advertisement that promotes community involvement. Target is reminding communities that it’s never too early to start reading to kids. In addition to celebrity partnership, it has national partnerships with Reach Out and Read, No Child Left Behind, and Letter about Literature. Target states:

According to the American Library Association, “reading helps children learn, promotes parent-child bonding, introduces children to art, encourages listening skills, prepares children to learn to read, enriches their lives, and provides fun and enjoyment for everyone. So grab a great children’s book and start reading to your child today!” (Target 2004).
Apparently Target gives back over $2 million a week to the community. I automatically thought about Wal-Mart because within 50 miles of St. Lawrence University there are two stores, one in Massena and the other in Ogdensburg. I am not sure if the giant retailer offer such programs but developing a program like Ready, Sit, Read would be beneficial for the rural children. Target is “broadcasting the importance of reading and reinforcing the parent’s role as the first and most important teachers” (Target 2004). Rural children need the encouragement of community members; programs such as Ready, Sit, Read precisely do that.
APPENDIX A

1. Where you born in the North Country? If so, where?
2. How long have you lived in Parishville or Harrisville?
3. What is the highest level of education received?
4. How old were you when you got married?
5. How many children do you have?
6. How was your income situation when growing up?
7. How is your current income situation?
8. Do you receive government assistance, such as Welfare, food stamps?
9. Your child attends SLU. What support system did you offer your child throughout their high school years to get them here?
10. What expectations do you have for your kid?
11. What was your childhood like?
12. Do you feel that living in the North Country limits your job opportunities?
13. What are the benefits of living in a rural community?
14. Are you actively involved in your community? If so, how?
15. Extremely important and vital to my paper but if you're not comfortable answering this, it's OK. During your childhood, did the lack of income affect your performance in school? Did it affect your social scene? Did it affect your relationship with your parent(s)?
16. As an adult, did (or does) the lack of income effect you emotionally? For instance, I know that when I am economically deprived (low on cash) I feel limited but more importantly I become really concerned about how I am going to manage to pay next month's bills. Thinking of these things sometimes makes me anxious, sad, or even depressed. Can you relate to this scenario?
17. How was your elementary and high school experience? Where the teachers and counselors helpful?
18. If you could create any sort of change in your rural community, what would that be? If a researcher or policy maker were to ask you "If you could create a policy aim to help children in the North Country, what would that be?"
19. What are some misconceptions about the children in rural communities?
20. As an undergraduate student trying to understand the socioeconomic components of rural communities, what advice would you give me?
21. Another personal question. Have you relied on alcohol to get your through the rough times?
APPENDIX B

Selected References for Policymakers

A Good Beginning: Sending America’s Children to School with the Social and Emotional Competence They Need to Succeed
By Robin-Peth Pierce
Available from:
The National Institute of Mental Health Office of Communications and Public Liaison
6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 8184, MSC 9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663
E-mail: nimhinfo@nih.gov
Website: www.nimh.nih.gov/chilhp/fdnconsb.htm

Lessons from the Field: Head Start Mental Health Strategies to Meet Changing Needs
By HiroYoshikawa and Jane Knitzer (1997)
Available from:
National Center for Children in Poverty
Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health
215 West 125th Street
New York, NY 10027
E-mail: nccp@columbia.edu
Web site: www.nccp.org
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Implementation and Re-Integration: Charter School Education as a Remedy for African American Inequities in an Urban Context

Research by Christine Ranney and Research Mentor Ron Flores
July 15, 2004
“We have a school in East St. Louis named for Dr. King,” she says. “The school is full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains. Every student in that school is black. It’s like a terrible joke on history. .. It startles me [Kozol] how seldom any press reporter has observed the irony of naming segregated schools for Martin Luther King. Children reach the heart of these hypocrisies much quicker than the grown-ups and the experts do... East St. Louis will likely be left just as it is for a good many years to come: a scar of sorts, an ugly metaphor of filth and overspill and chemical effusions, a place for blacks to live and die within, a place for other people to avoid when they are heading for St. Louis (Kozol, 1991, p. 35, 39).

Fifty years after Brown vs. The Board of Education, the American school system continues to represent a contradiction of ideals and practice. Despite lofty promises of equal opportunity for all, schools continue to reflect the effects of continued segregation, such as, test scores that do not show competency but rather a furthering gap in equity for African American students and their affluent, white counterparts (“50 Years”, March 2004, p. 64). Though the average American appears not to be concerned with the disparities of urban education, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore, as the drastic differences in resources and opportunity available to minority students in poor urban areas compared to their affluent suburban counterparts are still prevalent, continuing to separate the wealthy from the poor in our country.

At the heart of this educational inequity, as detailed by theories of social reproduction, is a racist ideology, one that has created an inherently bigoted system based on a hierarchical mentality within our society, which demands that the value of some of our children is worth more than others. Simply put, students in predominantly white, affluent, suburban areas are provided a more lavish education, and therefore are given the opportunities to succeed that poor, urban students are without. Unfortunately, this reality
is often seen through the eyes of the students who live these inequities far before the policy makers and administrators are willing to recognize them, producing a sense of alienation among black students that hinders successful achievement rates.

These racist outlooks are now so entrenched in our urban public schools that it is necessary that we look beyond the established system for an answer. Because school structure and climate have a profound impact on the educational attainment of students, there has been much interest in the charter school model as an alternative to traditional public schools. Specifically, this paper examines the socio-economic status of school district 189 in East St Louis, Illinois, an almost exclusively black community that harbors within it the negative mentalities that represent most urban neighborhoods. By looking at the public schools within this area, I will examine the ways in which these schools fail to serve their students; I will further make the case for the creation of strong charter schools in not only this area but all struggling, urban populations.

As the 2002 United States Census Report on Child Poverty reports, 30 percent of African American children live below the national poverty rate, contrasted with 12.8 percent of white youth who live in similar conditions, showing that race and poverty continue to be greatly linked. Only about 78 percent of African American students graduate high school, as opposed to the approximately 85 percent of white students that do. The effects of poverty and community on educational attainment are well documented: For example, Nogeura (2001), in an examination of Berkeley, shows the correlation between residence and grade point averages. Students from the poorest sections of the city, with the highest African American and Latino populations, had the
lowest GPAs, whereas students in north Berkeley and the affluent Berkeley had the highest GPAs”.

The government census (March 2002) shows us equally disturbing statistics about the achievement rates of African American students: Black students continually score at least twenty points lower than their white peers in most areas, including writing and reading performance. The average African American student will score below 75 percent of American white students on most standardized tests (Hallinan, 2001). Similarly, Hodges and Nowell (1998) demonstrate that in two separate studies, done in 1982 and 1992, white high school seniors were nearly 10 times more likely than their black equivalent to score in the top 5% of national distribution on a test of academic skills (Hallinan, 2001). Of further significance is that African American academic success decreases the longer students stay in the educational system. As “A Nation at Risk” (1998) states, “We seem to be the only country in the world whose children fall farther behind the longer they stay in school”(p. 2).

These statistics of black students’ academic achievement, or rather lack of educational attainment, are a precursor for lifelong failures. The number of African Americans from the ages 16-24 who are neither in school nor working is double that of white youth (Census 2002). Not only is it more difficult for African Americans to succeed in the public school system, but they are also less likely to see higher education as an option: 51 African Americans were reported to have earned their doctorate in the March 2002 Government Census, a damaging comparison from the 1,478 white people who attained it. Furthermore, those fifty-one African Americans who earned their degree, receive over $20,000 less than their white counterparts with the same schooling, showing
that the value of the black education is deemed lower economically. Numbers are often stagnant, giving us empirical evidence of the now, but what these figures really represent is the disparaging future of our children. Consistent with social reproduction theory, our educational system is designed to create white leaders.

Since there are effective schools educating the affluent, it is clear that we know the formula to creating excellent schools. (“A Nation at Risk”, 1998) Yet, through the affects of Social Reproduction Theory, we see that there are many ways in which our educational system perpetuates racist inequities: one important component to that formula is money. (“A Nation at Risk”, 1998). With funding based on the income taxes of the community in which the school resides, the financial investment of students range from $3,000 per pupil in many urban areas to over $12,000 in affluent suburbs (Children in America’s Schools). The economic stability of communities and families defines the academic success of the students, yet, for the most part, we chose to not address it. Jonathan Kozol, in his impassioned book Savage Inequalities, exposes the gravity of these educational injustices. As the epigraph of this paper depicts, Kozol (1991) identifies a school in East St. Louis named after the civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., through the words of one of its educators. What he shows us is that we live in a world that chooses to ignore the status of education for its underserved students. As Kozol describes, the schools in parts of our inner cities, like the South Bronx and East St Louis, are best fit for a third world country, with caving walls, classes in closets, and sewer water contaminating the air (p. 23). In this vein, we have created a clear paradox in how we value our children. This problem of funding, however, is substantiated by the fact that it is only one indicator of institutionalized racism. The lowered expectations of our
teachers and administrators reflect the same subordinate expectations that our government imposes when they provide less funding for a portion of our country’s students.

These problems are now so integrated into our urban schools that it is necessary to recreate an educational system that both reflects the original ideals of a public education but further speaks specifically to the needs of students of the 21st century. It is clear that we need change: this transformation must be effective and it must come steadfastly.

“They [parents] should not be expected to wait patiently for the transformation of the failing institutions where their children are required to go each day, the places that the secretary of education says do not deserve to be called schools at all. We surely would not be willing to make the same sacrifice for our own children. Why should they? Dewey was right: what the best and wisest parents want for their children is what the community should want for all its children. Not the promise of good education someday, maybe, but the reality of good education today.” (Ravitch & Viteritti, 1997, p.253)

We have tried to tweak our current public schools by throwing money at the problem, but the issues are so institutionalized that the logical remedy is to move out of the system. Charter schools, therefore, are a necessity for they are an effective solution now. We cannot wait longer, letting more of our promising youth fall under the cracks of a system that perpetually keeps them down. With this said, the establishment of charter schools must not be seen as a substitution for public school education but rather as a movement, a fervent attack on the inequities present in our system and a commitment to the equal opportunity of all our students. Therefore charter schools should be produced with the rationale of expansion and eventually reintegration into the public schools.

The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) is evidence of the potential and necessity of charter school education. It produces consistent and drastic improvements for
the students who traditionally score lowest in public schools, namely minority and socio-economically disadvantaged youth. The model is simple: give youth the tools and attitude for achievement and they will succeed. Not only does the program thrive in educating its students, but further it is committed to the reproduction of its educational model by creating KIPP schools around the country. Furthermore, as we will later see, it has a program for aspiring educational administrators to learn the necessary skills to start their own effective schools.

The Sociological Explanation for African American Inequities:

Although there are many theories that address African American success rates\(^1\), the focus of my research lies in Social Reproduction Theory. As Mickelson outlines, Bowles and Gintis define Social Reproduction Theory by contending that within a capitalist society, our educational system reproduces class structure by offering unequal education to certain children (Mickelson, 8). Cultural capital, a central dimension of Social Reproduction Theory, is defined by Bourdieu, through Hallinan’s article, as “general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next” (Hallinan, 2001). Parents from higher socioeconomic statuses accumulate more cultural capital than those of lower economic ranks, and therefore wealthier parents are able to provide their children with a better cultural climate to grow up in (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997). Furthermore, as Aschaffenburg and Maas go on to describe, the effect of cultural capital on educational success is contingent on the fact that these values stay constant over time – the students who enter school with advantageous
cultural capital will always benefit, as opposed to those who begin their educations without it (575). As this theory illustrates, the effects of social background and familial influence play an essential role in Social Reproduction Theory.

Furthermore, Social Reproductive Theory argues that the school enables this capitalist structure by arranging the system in a manner that makes students “assume their place in a hierarchy of dominance and subservience” (Hallinan, 2001). The preconceived notions of a child’s place on the educational ladder, based on the cultural capital afforded to them, portrays an intrinsically racist system, one that is easily proven through the statistical evidence of how our African American students perform. Consistent with social reproduction, schools offer different learning opportunities to students depending on the characteristics that define their social capital (Hallinan, 2001). Furthermore, the influence of cultural capital and the ways in which Social Reproduction Theory manifests in our society are found in the way that, as a culture, we chose to value the education of “these” students. Jonathan Kozol (2001), yet again has an eloquent and ardent way of illustrating this paradigm in his book, Ordinary Resurrections:

“We must start to think about these inner-city children as our future entry-level workers,” we are told by business leaders as they forge their various alliances and partnerships with poorly funded urban schools. It’s said so frequently that it occasions little stir. Still, its fair to ask why we are being urged to see “these” children in that quite specific way. Why are we to look at Elio and see a future entry-level worker rather than to see him, as we see our own kids as perhaps a future doctor, dancer, artist, poet, priest, psychologist, or teacher, or whatever else he might someday desire to be? Why not, for that matter, look at him and see the only thing he really is: a seven-year-old child?” (Kozol, 2001, p.138-9)

What we see here is that from an early age we attach stereotypes and predetermined roles to the urban youth of our country. We see the way in which our administrators and government officials visualize the future of these students as well. Later in the same
book, Kozol makes a case that the way in which we spend our money is indicative of our values as a country. As he does the calculations for New York City’s spending, he writes that we have exhausted about 11 times as much annually on the detention of our children in prisons as we have on educating children in NYC public schools during the 1990s, and 18 times what it spends a year to educate one mainstream student in an ordinary first-grade classroom of the South Bronx (Kozol, 2001). When we talk about predetermined notions, there are fewer statistics more enlightening. We spend more money on our prisons for we conceive that this is where our urban students will end up.

The institutionalization of social reproduction is not only inherent in the mentality of our government, but further, and equally as damaging, in the way our teachers educate urban youth. The problems of teacher bias and low expectations are paralyzing to African American youth. Many black children attest that their teachers underrate their ability by lowering their expectations for student performance and creating within them a negative self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. (Hallinan, 2001) One explanation for this is found in how teachers perceive their roles to differ when working with African American students. A major contribution to the academic collapse of African American scholars is the fact that teachers do not expect many students to learn, and therefore adopt different roles around them; turning in their chalk for whistles as they institute a more disciplinary position (Clark). Furthermore, Irvine and York write that teachers of African American students were quick to accompany cultural excuses and parental blame when explaining educational flaws in their black students, defining academic failures as both a function of parental insufficiency and negative student characteristics, like lack of motivation, disciplinary problems, and negative self-contempt (p. 169). It is clear that the perception
of teachers greatly impacts the mentality of African American pupils. Slaughter-Defoe, summarized by Epps (1995), challenges that the entrance to school is a poignant time of “discontinuity” for African American students. She contributes the success of students to the self-perception of accomplishment that the student feels, and makes a direct correlation to this esteem and the opinions of educators. As Epps writes of her work, “research findings... suggested that the self perceptions of the African American children in her study about their academic capabilities and potential were strongly influenced by the grades their teachers gave them...” (Epps, 601).

Furthermore, these teacher biases, according to Rist, are also connected with the socioeconomic characteristics of students, showing that teachers also have lower expectations for the progress of poorer students. (Hallinan, 2001). Kahlenberg (2001) finds a link between the socio-economics of an area and the expectations of both the administration and the teachers for the success of the student. He found that the “low expectations in our suburban schools are high in comparison to expectations in urban schools and rural schools with concentrations of children in poverty” (71). He depicts this by showing that it is more probable for higher level (“gifted and talented classes”) to be held in low poverty than high poverty schools (70 versus 83 percent). Furthermore, high-poverty schools are much less likely to offer calculus than other schools (54 versus 82 percent) (74). The problem is not only that challenging classes are more likely offered to affluent students, but that “a grade of ‘A’ in a high-poverty school is comparable to a ‘C’ in a lower-poverty school” (71), showing that our expectations extend not only to the classes offered but also to the grades submitted. In similar research, Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell (1999), cite that ‘gatekeepers (teachers) may play a role in rewarding
affluent students with high-brow cultural capital and with more attention, assistance, and expectation (161).

It is not only the low expectations of the teachers that are harmful to student success. Administrators and counselors also influence these negative perceptions. As Kahlenberg (2001) explains, “Researchers at Johns-Hopkins University have found high-scoring but low-income students to be much less likely to go to college, not for lack of financial aid but because counselors are overwhelmed by the need to keep low-achieving children from dropping out and do not encourage the high achievers to carry a college-prep course load, take the SAT, or apply for financial aid. And when given the opportunity to attend a school in a suburban setting, high school students found that they benefited from the higher expectations of school counselors” (72). What this research further depicts is that the lack of college enrollment, as we will see in the analysis of East St. Louis, determines employment opportunities and perpetuates the climate of poverty in urban areas.

Perhaps resulting from these ‘teacher based’ stereotypes are a collection of negative student mentalities that also greatly affect the success of African American students. Through the tainted teacher and administration perceptions, we have created a school that does not reflect the ideals of our equal educational access. As Epps (1995) writes, the function of the school is primarily to impart knowledge and skills, but that the success of these skills is contingent on the identity established by the student (596). The identity of African American students in our public schools is reliant on the perceptions and expectations that develop among adults and students (Noguera, 2001). As we have established, these expectations are limited, and therefore students have developed
“concrete attitudes”, which “reflect the race-, class-, and gender-specific social and cultural experiences that people have in the opportunity structure” (Epps, 1995). Epps goes on to say, “African Americans and people from lower class backgrounds have concrete attitudes that are more cynical about the occupational and economic benefits of education than are those of middle-class Whites” (599). These attitudes are not irrational when we consider how little we afford to a population of our society. As we see, the public education system only continues to negatively label the identity of black youth, creating within them an attitude of suspicion and pessimism.

Charter Schools as a Necessary and Adequate Alternative

Thus, public schools are paralyzed by deep-rooted racism that has completely infected the education offered to inner city African Americans. It is evident that a drastic change must come immediately. The continued denial of the problem has only served to perpetuate the paradigms that are already drastically affecting the achievement rates of our underserved youth. As Shokrii (1996) writes, “The present school system is the vehicle that puts us on welfare, in prison, and leaves us illiterate... School choice is the only way out of this vicious cycle” (3). Charter schools have the ability to ameliorate the public school system by providing a structure that is void of the negative mentalities that currently cripple our students. By offering small class sizes and innovative lessons, teachers are able to reach more of their students. Moreover, charter schools have the ability to create a new social consciousness – one that acknowledges the current inequities in our system and is committed to eradicating them. By creating a “dream
“team” faculty and administration based on the same principles of educational equality, they are able to create an educational revolution. Once charter schools are effectively integrated into urban populations, their ideas and practices can be reintegrated into the public school model, as to not completely abandon the public school system. Rather, charter schools serve as an immediate remedy to the problem. They provide the necessary rights of our urban students.

A charter school is like a public school in that it is financed by tax dollars, but unlike a public school it is given more flexibility as to state and federal limitations and guidelines (Barr, 1997). With this said, however, there are specific criteria that must be followed in order to hold each charter school accountable for their students’ performance. Those rules are specific to the state with which the charter resides. As long as schools meet their accountability plan, they have the flexibility from the state to educate their students however they best see fit (Riley, 2004). Charter school legislature also usually allows a variety of different educational players to start a school, including groups of teachers, parents, and some private agencies and organizations (Barr, 1997). With this kind of diversity in founders comes a variety of theme specific charters, focusing on such things as at-risk students or specific subject content like science or humanities (Riley, 2004). There is much controversy surrounding the charter school model, largely because it remains a relatively new program and there is a lack of conclusive results as to the progress and ability to educate urban youth.

Advocates of the charter school model praise it for its strength in involvement and satisfaction of parental figures, climate of academic success, ability to reach urban youth, and it’s improvement of academic achievement for urban youth. As Schwartz (1996)
states: “In general, charters have higher rates of parental involvement than other schools, a universally supported goal and a factor that contributes to their uniqueness” (4). She goes on to outline that many charter schools are instituting parental contracts as a way to ensure familial support. This move to incorporate parents into the school choice process has also increased the appeal of charter schools to urban, specifically African American, students. Bierlein suggests that the ethnic enrollment of African American to charter schools is overwhelming in comparison to those who chose public schools (Ravitch & Viteritti, 1997). As he writes, “charter schools are generally attracting a disproportionately high number of such students. Many charter schools have been established within inner-city environments, often by minority leaders in those communities”(50). As was aforementioned, each state has the liberty of institutionalizing its own policies, and therefore the evidence of specific charters is not always reflective of the entire country. Like Schwartz notes, about 38 percent of charter schools nation wide were inhabited by minority students in 1995. In areas like New Mexico, this number rose to over 70 percent whereas Colorado was as low as 20 percent (3). By looking at the policies established in Colorado, it is clear to see why their minority population is so low. This is because, by law, the diversity of each school in Colorado must reflect the composition of the district with which it resides (Schwartz, 3).

Charter schools establish an ideal school climate that public schools are often not able to do. The climate of a school is extremely important to the motivation and success of all participants, including administrators, teachers, students, and even parents. Ravitch (1997) writes: “I am persuaded that the most successful urban schools are those that have a sense of purpose, a mission, and identity of their own” (256). She further describes
charter schools as “high schools with character”. With this comes a positive climate for teaching and learning, where students and teachers form a respectful relationship based on the pursuit of knowledge (Ravitch & Viteritti, 1997). The ability for charter schools to provide such improved climate is reflective of both the small class sizes and the flexibility of both the institution and teachers to create curriculum that supports its students. As Bierlein cites, 42 percent of enrollment has 100 students or fewer, half of those have fewer than 50 students (Ravitch & Viteritti, 1997). It is clear, therefore, that charter schools are able to offer better instruction because of the smaller class sizes (Chubbs & Loveless, 2002). The theme status of some charters and the focus on cultural and personal assets helps to build purpose and meaning for African American students (76). These factors furthermore increase achievement for underserved students. Seventy percent of African Americans in study made major academic improvements compared with a control group in public schools. In fact, after three years, the gap between test scores of whites and minorities narrowed by 33 to 50 percent (Shokraii, 1996).

However, not everyone is in support of charters. Although it is clear that students in charter schools have more actively involved parents, many families are discouraged by their inability to fulfill contractual terms. This is especially so for families who work more than one job, for they don’t have the time to commit to helping the school (Schwartz, 4-5). Furthermore, socio-economically disadvantaged families are often discouraged as well by financial impositions. Although charter schools cannot charge tuition, there have been instances of schools that impose fees, aggressively solicit contributions from families, and generally pressure parents to raise funds (Schwartz, 3). With these deterrents, many are suspicious as to whether the children that most need
charters are being attracted to them. This is so because not all schools have to document which students they serve, including demographics, number of at-risk/minority students, staff turnover, etc. (Barr & Parrett, 1997). Schwartz follows this assertion saying that charter schools are in fact attracting urban students, but they are not the most vulnerable minorities and disadvantaged (Schwartz, 6). This follows the “creamimg off” theory, which states that charters are selective about who they admit to their schools: they may accept minority students but intentionally take ones that are performing well in order to keep their own accountability on track (Schwartz, 2). Furthermore, many parents do not even hear about charters. Market choice theory assumes that information on schools can be made widely available so that all parents can make informed choices, but this is not always the case (Ascher & Wamba, 2003). Some research shows that high-income families often have better access to a greater array of resources that lower-income parents when choosing schools. The parents who had limited resources were those who were out of work and had never graduated from high school or attended college (465).

Beyond those that charter schools serve, there is also controversy as to how they are administered. Foremost, there is much concern about the financial stability of independently run schools. Many people who eagerly start their own schools have a lack of business and budget experience (Barr & Parrett, 148). Furthermore, the state does not always support charters generously. As Schwartz writes, “Some charters don’t receive certain federal monies for special services for at-risk students that are received by other public schools although their student populations are no more advantaged than those at other schools (3). Some argue as well that charter schools take money away from the public schools that most need the financial support (Barr & Parrett, 151). Assertions like
that, however, have been contested as there is evidence that shows that there is less validity to the theory that choice prompts schools and districts to reform programming to meet the demands of families, showing that in fact there isn’t a great effect financially as a result of the creation of charters (Cookson & Scruff, 1997). Furthermore, there is cynicism about the ways in which charter schools could be used to only perpetuate the wealth of those who aren’t struggling. As Wamba and Ascher (2003) assert, the problem of socio demographics is that wealthy public schools take the money to create wealthier charter schools, only perpetuating the wealth among white youth. (474). And, in some extreme cases, administrators have completely taken advantage of the financial freedom afforded to charter schools. A school in California reportedly went bankrupt; after investigation it was proven that the principal had used funds in order to take his staff on an expensive retreat and then proceeded to pay off his mortgage. (Barr & Parrett, 148).

As the discussion of charter schools become more intensified, it is clear that some who resist charters are largely opposed as a result of power. The document “A Nation at Risk proclaims: “Power over our educational system has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few who don’t really want things to change, not substantially, not in ways that would really matter” (3). In the same way that our public educational system is plagued with racism that is inherently related to power, so it is true that the perpetuation of public schools is largely an attempt to keep those dynamics. As Shokraiii says, “Perhaps one of the strongest reasons why the civil-rights establishment opposes choice is economic… They strongly feel that competition and privatization will leave them out in the cold” (Shokraii, 6). And it is so that those who are in power speak loudly. Teacher unions and other groups are suing charter school administration, making those
administrators bankrupt and paralyzing the success of starting a new school (Ravitch & Viteritti, 59).

By examining the pros and cons of charter school structure, there is a charter school model that supersedes any criticism previously noted. KIPP, short for Knowledge is Power Program, has produced a model that not only works but is also beating the alternatives. With its emphasis on five pillars -- consisting of more time, choice and commitment, power to lead, high expectations, and focus on results (Choi, 2003) -- the school is able to focus itself in a way that guarantees it will not make the same failures of its charter school predecessors. The program was started by two Teach for America alumni, Michael Feinberg and David Levin, who saw the lowered achievements of underserved students within their classrooms. Motivated by the inequity that they saw, they created a unique alternative, a school that requires the highest expectations of both its students and teachers. The school schedule alone reflects this intensity, running ten hours a day, with classes on Saturday, and two hours of homework a night. The major emphasis is on reaching disadvantaged students and sending them to college. The students are chosen on a lottery basis, not seeking out the so-called top students (Hebert, 2). The emphasis on college is not a suggestion but an expectation of its students. Some KIPP schools even refer to their students as “College Freshman, Sophomore, Juniors, and Seniors” giving them tangible reminders of their goals (Choi, 69). No two KIPP schools are alike, although they all hold the same ideals (Choi). Some are held in church basements, others in already existing schools, and others have their own facilities, yet they are all bound together by their strong performance rates (Carnahan, 2003).
With such high expectations for its members, there is a strong emphasis for parental and student involvement in these schools. One of the reasons why KIPP has such great success is because the students there want to learn. This is a bold assertion, for as we have seen test scores have too often been deemed a reflection of commitment. KIPP, on the other hand, acknowledges that students may not have previously succeeded but attests that if they are willing to put in the effort, the results will show that they are intelligent (Choi, 68). Parents sign a contract with their children, guaranteeing that the child will meet the school’s demanding expectations: being on time and attending school each day, following the rules set forth by the school, and doing homework. Although the schools policies are stern, a student who breaks the contract is not simply asked to leave. Instead the program offers a severe and direct consequence for actions, for KIPP does not give up on its students (Chubbs & Loveless, 139).

As has been praised about the charter school model, KIPP is known for its ability to create an environment of excellence. Rosellini (2004) describes the school as a cross between a motivational workshop and a military corps (2). Schools are created on strong discipline, with the rational that “you have to have basic order before you can do anything educationally sound” (2). Students who enter the fifth grade at KIPP, New York go through a process that the staff refers to as “KIPPhotizing”, where students learn the fundamentals of being an effective student. In particular they learn to SLANT, the acronym for sit up straight and listen, ask and answer questions, nod your head, and track the speaker (2). Furthermore, many KIPPs have established a paycheck system with its students, a way to show students that they should treat school as though it were a job. The student accrues money throughout the week by completing assignments and following
rules. At some schools, students can cash in their checks at the end of the week or save their money for a trip at the end of the year.

The innovative instruction and dedication of the teachers further reflects the intensity of the program. Rafe Esquith, an inspiring teacher of the South Bronx program, holds a monthly auction where students can purchase a seat in class. Classroom seats, as he describes, are real estate— with some locations worth more than others. Once a student has accrued enough money they can buy their seat as a condo. Students can even buy other students’ seats. All students pay income tax and seat owners are forced to pay property tax (Chubbs & Loveless, 149). If students are unable to pay, they are left without a seat. And Esquith means business. When a student explains that the game is like Monopoly, he responds, “Buddy, this is real life” (149). Even within the classroom, teachers have found innovative ways to show the link between education and future success.

Furthermore, the staff is unified by a “whatever it takes” policy when it comes to the success of their students (Carnahan, 2). As Mike Feinberg, one of the programs founders, states, “We are never going to end the day shrugging our shoulders and making excuses. If there’s a problem, if something is impeding the success of our kids that needs to be solved one way or another” (Herbert, 2002). The founders convey well the message that they must refute the paradigms that are inbuilt in our youth as a result of social resistance theory. Levin, the other co-founder, states that he is ‘trying to break a complicated cycle’ in which the kids who start behind stay behind (Chubbs & Loveless, 148). Although the program holds within it a realistic and harsh mentality at times, with consistent and direct consequences for every deviance of the rules, it succeeds to prepare
students for the real world (Chubbs & Loveless, 151). Furthermore, there is a very compassionate side to this staff, as well. They frequently make visits to students’ homes (Carnahan, 2). Teachers make it clear that students can reach them any time, day or night. Some schools even provide teachers with cell phones so that students can call them with questions on their homework.

Furthermore, KIPP works so well because it is a social movement. Not only is it revolution in the way that it looks at its students, but furthermore, it has created a whole network of teachers who are dedicated to equity. Within its program is a Leadership Administration program to which teachers can apply to. KIPP sends teachers who are accepted to the University of California at Berkeley to learn the intricacies of school finance reform, eradicating the troubles that anti-charter school advocates state is one of their greatest weaknesses. Teachers then undergo an intense year of training and are given financial assistance to start their own KIPP program. As Wingert and Kantrowitz (2003) state, “… while some reformers argue that charters are primarily about choice, others say that the point was to make demonstrably better school – not just different ones. They contend that there simply aren’t enough successful charters and want the focus on creating prototypes that really work and can be replicated” (2). A successful charter school therefore should be defined by its ability to be reproduced. KIPP has been replicated in 32 different areas, showing that “the culture and high expectations of the original school can be replicated. KIPP is showing that demography is not destiny” (Rosellini, 2).

Although the KIPP School is still a new creation, founded in 1994, Wingert and Kantrowitz have noted a number of impressive successes that confirm that KIPP has
become a national model for more widespread reform for charter school programs (1). An astounding 98 percent of their students passed the state's standardized tests compared with just fifty the year before (1). Students who enter the school in the 5th grade have test scores that are equivalent to the results of a 3rd grader, yet in less than one year they have caught up to their own grade level, and within years most test ahead of their peers (Carnahan, 1). Not only do KIPP schools meet expectations, but KIPP students even outscored their peers in other schools, winning national recognition (1). The South Bronx program has been acknowledged as the highest performing public school in the area since 1998 (Choi, 67). Not only are students making academic strides, but there have been significant strides as well in the transformation in student outlooks. As Choi writes, “Results are demonstrated by students’ attitudinal changes: They know they are in control of their destiny and their education” (69). The creators, teachers, and administrators have produced a program where it’s cool to be smart (Chubbs & Loveless, 148), a huge feat when considering the philosophical implications discussed earlier of being black and in a public school. With such drastic improvements, it’s no surprise too that there is much interest in teachers to work for KIPP: KIPP Washington DC received 250 applicants for 4 open teaching positions (Wingert & Kantrowitz, 2).

Although there are criticisms and concerns, there are many facets to charter schools that work exceptionally well. In particular, the inclusive climate created by small class sizes and an institution created with a group of people that share the same ideals allow for more satisfied students and parents. As a charter school parent in Michigan said, “For those who seem to be intimidated or afraid of educational reform, we would like to offer a challenge: put politics, money, and special interests aside momentarily and
spend a day at (the charter school my children attend), observing and interacting with the kids, then join our family for dinner afterwards. Ask questions and listen to the kids’ answer, then make your decisions” (Ravitch & Viteritti, 60). Specifically, the KIPP model seems to be the most successful charter, because it is a social movement that not only educates the population of students that is most underserved, but it also creates a network of teachers interested in educational equity and equips them with the knowledge to start their own KIPP schools.

With this said, it is clear that there are conditions of inequity inherent in all urban settings. By looking at the achievement rates of students in urban settings, we are able to see specific trends. Given these common characteristics, the charter school model is an appropriate remedy to these injustices. This is so for, if implemented at the onset of a child’s education, charter schools eradicate the cycle of negativity. They do this foremost by hiring qualified teachers and administrators who see education as a vehicle of social change. This, in turn, creates a center for learning where African American youth view education as an opportunity for success. However, charter schools as a single entity will not survive, for their lack of funding and experience will only perpetuate the problems. I have applied this theory to the intricacies of District 189 in East St Louis, Illinois, first showing the lack of success for urban public schools and then making the case for strong charter schools in the area.

As Jonathan Kozol notes in Savage Inequalities, we have schools in East St Louis named after some of the finest black leaders, including Miles Davis and Nelson Mandela. Yet their dreams of black perseverance and success are met by very few students in this
community, and not because these students lack the motivation or drive that Mandela had, but rather because they are not afforded the opportunity to show their ability. Living in a community that reflects bare hope and realistic limitations, students are taught to re-evaluate how they define success. The top of the corporate ladder quickly transforms itself into a managerial position at a labor intensive job. The normal dreams and ambitions of our children become convoluted by the reality of poverty and injustice that engrosses their lives, so much so that those dreams begin to disintegrate as the schools around them collapse with equal rapidity.

Data and Methods: Measuring Educational Inequities in East St. Louis

Although it has been established that racism is inherent in the urban school system and absorbed in surrounding communities, the term itself has yet to be explicitly identified. In the context of this research, institutionalized racism is defined as the belief that a single race is superior to another and is therefore deserving of a considerably better education, resulting in a greater opportunity for future success. Success in this framework is measured by academic achievement and the opportunity for further scholastic advancement, resulting in the earning of a degree in higher education and the chance for higher paying employment that would ultimately mean crippling the cycle of inequality in urban confines. Racism, that ultimately prohibits success, is found everywhere in the urban context: from the segregation present in urban populations to the concentration of poverty in these communities.
It is not enough, however, to simply say that the poverty concentration and segregation found in urban areas reflect racism. It is more important how these facets of continued community alienation and economic instability paralysis and perpetuate our society. Education is the key to this perpetuation. Low GPAs, high drop out rates, and poor college enrollment are all measures of racism and are the ultimate blame for concentrations of poor communities, as the members of these neighborhoods lack the skills to succeed and eradicate the culture of poverty (Harrison). Without the proper tools for success, communities are established that reflect inequity and the schools that are founded within this already tainted system enable the cycle of poor communities.

With the arrival of President Bush’s No Child Left Behind act every public school in the country, with exception to those states who have decided to not honor the bill, is required to publicly display their student achievement rates. This report, known as a School Report Card, details the performance of the school in every category, including teacher retention, parental involvement, class size, and performance in subject area and academic year. Achievement rates, in particular, are defined through the Illinois State Achievement Examination and the Prairie State Achievement Examination, and all figures for the school are examined against the performance of the district as well as the overall state to show how the school performs more generally. Furthermore, schools that qualify as Title I institutions are also required to document whether they have made adequate yearly progress (AYP). This is defined by whether or not schools have shown improvement, and the failure to meet AYP guidelines results in a multitude of penalties, including the opportunity for students to transfer to another public school.
Analysis:

District 189 in East St. Louis harbors 25 public schools, all of which are dubbed Title 1, meaning that at least 40 percent of students live below the poverty rate and therefore qualify for reduced or free lunches. Within these 25 institutions, only 30 percent, or 7 schools, were recognized for showing annual yearly progress. This means that the remaining 70 percent of schools perform below national standards and are not showing significant increase in achievement. There are many factors responsible for the poor achievement rates of these students, but none are more indicative than the number of poor African American students congested in this small area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East St. Louis (district 189)</th>
<th>Illinois</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census Bureau

The data are overwhelmingly conclusive that segregation is a prevalent problem in East St. Louis. As the chart above indicates, the isolation of African American students in East St. Louis is overpowering in comparison to the racial dispersion of students elsewhere in the state of Illinois. As has been suggested, race has a significant effect on the achievement rates of students, specifically the fact that black students under perform their white peers. Although we cannot make a comparison of white students in this area, solely because there is not a substantial population of them, it is clear from our assessment of
East St. Louis’s performance rates juxtaposed with those of Illinois state, where there is a considerably higher population of white students, that race does correlate with achievement.

Likewise economic instability continues to mark East St. Louis, defining too the educational attainment of our youth. Since racism is defined by opportunity, we see that it greatly correlates with poverty, in that those who do not have the minimal needs are often the victims of discrimination.

Table 2
Economic Characteristics
East St. Louis (District 189) and Illinois, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East St. Louis</th>
<th>Illinois</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Earning Less than 10,000 Annually</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>8.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with Disability (pop. 21-64)</td>
<td>34.90</td>
<td>17.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Poverty Rate with Children Under 18</td>
<td>28.80</td>
<td>11.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Poverty Rate with Children under 5</td>
<td>33.10</td>
<td>14.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census Bureau

As the data in Table Two shows, the poverty in East St. Louis is grave, and when the statistics are compared with Illinois state standards even more urgency emanates. The unemployment rate is nearly three times as large as that of the state standards, likely contributing to the low annual earnings of families in the area. The staggering measure of disability for members of the East St. Louis community is further testament to the lack of
economic stability of the area. I propose that because of the high number of labor
intensive jobs offered to those with a lack of substantial educational attainment, the
number of disabilities is increased. Furthermore, evidence shows that poverty is often
directly linked to poor health (Cohen, Farley, & Mason), as many are unable to afford
insurance and lack the proper education on health awareness issues. What is most telling,
however, of the severity of life for our youth is when we consider the poverty rates of
families with children. More than twice the number of families with children under the
age of five in East St. Louis are exposed already to the lacking values of a society that
does not provide enough for a population of its children. The early revelation of poverty
results in a lessened education even before Kindergarten, setting many of these students
up for failure before they even enter the system - an institution that has proven to only
catalyze these disappointments for urban youth.

As has been alluded to, the lack of economic advancement is greatly correlated
with education. We see this specifically in the education of the parents and older siblings
of many of the children currently imprisoned in the educational system of East St. Louis.
In the state of Illinois, 11 percent of adults 25 years and older do not hold diplomas,
having completed only part of their high school career. In East St Louis, however, 22.5
percent of the same population does not have a high school diploma. A large percent of
this population serve as the parents, guardians, and role models of our current urban
youth. And it should be noted that it is not this population that is to blame for their
failures. We, as a country, have re-established the bounds of success, defining it
differently for a population of our country in order to enable our hierarchical society. The
low academic achievement rates of our adults transcends into the unpreparedness of our
current youth, who unfortunately will continue the cycle because of what little we afford them.

It is impossible not to ask ourselves why such high concentrations of black people are crowded in one infested area; in fact, we are obligated to question why we are quick to dismiss the appalling evidence of segregation in our urban cities, specifically here in East St. Louis. The answer, of course, is racism. The public schools in the city reflect the same indicators of racism as defined above: high levels of poverty, underperforming students and schools, and low levels of academic attainment, both of students and parents. By analyzing the communities themselves we are able to better get an idea of how education and community correlate – the poor conditions of the city are reflective of an ineffective educational experience, and in turn, the deprived environment of East St. Louis perpetuate the negative academic experience.

Having the community context in place, we are able to evaluate the educational well being of East St. Louis with better perspective. As was aforementioned, there are 25 public schools in East St. Louis, not including private or alterative schools (including the at least two charter schools that I was able to find). Although there are 20 elementary schools, there are only three middle schools and two high schools (only one of which I could find the Illinois School Report Card for). This institutional breakdown in itself seems to suggest something about the expectations of our students, for we do not create enough public high schools to accommodate the number of students who could potentially graduate from high school because we do not believe that they will all make it that far. The numbers below represent a picture of the makeup and achievement rates of
middle and high school education in District 189. The 20 elementary schools report
similar results, but the emphasis for this analysis is primarily on the middle school model.

Table 3
Selected Population and Academic Achievement Characteristics
East St. Louis and Illinois Schools, 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clark Middle School</th>
<th>Landsdowne High School</th>
<th>E. St.Louis Lincoln Middle School</th>
<th>Illinois</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent African American</td>
<td>99.90</td>
<td>96.60</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>20.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income Rate*</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>93.30</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>37.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Academic Performance**</td>
<td>30.50</td>
<td>66.50</td>
<td>31.50</td>
<td>61.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall ISAT Performance***</td>
<td>30.60</td>
<td>68.60</td>
<td>31.40</td>
<td>63.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percent Population below poverty
** Average of all State Examinations
*** Illinois State Achievement Test based on scale of 100

Source: Illinois School Reports

Table Four: Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Information for East St Louis Public Middle Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State AYP Minimum Target</th>
<th>Is this school making AYP?</th>
<th>Percent Meeting/Exceeding Reading Standards</th>
<th>Percent Meeting/Exceeding Math Standards</th>
<th>Attendance Rate</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clark Middle School</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansdowne Jr. High</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5
Selected Population and Academic Achievement Characteristics
East St. Louis Senior High and Illinois High Schools, 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East St. Louis Senior High School</th>
<th>All Illinois Public High Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent African American</td>
<td>99.50</td>
<td>20.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income Rate*</td>
<td>70.50</td>
<td>37.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Academic Performance**</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>61.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall PSAE Performance***</td>
<td>18.10</td>
<td>55.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percent Population below poverty
** Average of all State Examinations
*** Prairie State Achievement Examination based on scale of 100

Source: Illinois School Reports

Table Six: Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Information for East St Louis Public High Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this school making AYP?</th>
<th>Percent Meeting/Exceeding Reading Standards</th>
<th>Percent Meeting/Exceeding Math Standards</th>
<th>Attendance Rate</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AYP</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>East St</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AYP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East St Louis</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**East St. Louis Report Card**

As these tables show, there is a staggering gap in the education produced in East St Louis public schools and those expected by state standards. As we see in both the middle and high schools, the number of African American students in poverty is considerably larger than the number of similar students in other areas, further proving that East St. Louis is an exceptionally segregated area with great economic inequality. Furthermore, it seems significant to consider the academic gaps between the middle and high school rates. As has been said before, it seems that students do worse academically the longer they stay in the public school system. The middle school achievement rates are considerably lower than the state standards, nearly half that of Illinois state, with exceptional of Lansdowne Jr. High School. However, when looking at the high school, we are presented with even more appalling statistics, as students performed only a third as well as the state. These are alarming figures, to say the least, and represent a fundamental flaw within the educational system.

It is noteworthy, as well, that we look at the scores of Lansdowne Jr. High School, recently renamed Wyetter Younger Middle School, as they far outscore the other two schools. In an article published by Beleville News, Mike Fitzgerlald writes that only 69 percent of the eligible seventh and eighth graders at the school took the ISAT exam.
Critics say that the low number of students who took the test, which is required of 95 percent of each school by state mandate, may be correlated with the strong test outcomes. Suspicion of cheating by high performing schools is not uncommon in the area either, as it is worth the raising of an eyebrow if a school that has traditionally run poorly has found a solution that perhaps other school administrators have not.

When students underperform, it is often appropriate to look within the institution to find a solution. From the report cards of the middle and high schools in East St. Louis, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what is so fundamentally flawed within these schools. It appears that class sizes are fairly small, under the state average with about 22 students per class. 60.9 percent of the teachers in the district have their Bachelor’s Degree and an additional 39.2 have their Master’s degree or above. Almost ten percent fewer have a degree above their Bachelors than the state average, which could signify less educated teachers. However, according to the records there are no classes taught by teachers who are not defined as highly qualified. These factors all seem to disturb the normal measures of school success. However, if one were to look at the revenue for East St. Louis schools in comparison to Illinois State averages, we see that District 189 is provided a lot less financial support. The district receives only 7.4 percent of its fiscal advancements from local property taxes, while the state funds 55.4 percent of its schools with this budget. This is fundamentally flawed because schools in this district are surrounded by poverty, and with this comes families who cannot afford high property taxes. This concept has been delved into earlier in the paper, but we see here through the statistically evidence that funding is a reality for urban schools.
Conclusions

What is clear from the analysis of East St Louis is that the schools within it reside in a highly impoverished and segregated community. This poverty influences, and is influenced by, the poor achievement rates of African American students. The cause for these inequities, however, is not easily determined by the data alone. Students are clearly performing at rates far lower than the Illinois state averages, and yet from the School Reports, class sizes and teacher experience are higher than in areas outside of the district. From research conducted in the literature review, we see that a large part of the perpetuation of inequalities in education is a result of mentalities, perceptions that allow the continuation of unequal access.

Therefore, a limit to my research is that it is nearly impossible to evaluate the institutionalization of the school without conducting site visits. Seeing the general layout and appearance of the schools, as well as observing classes is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of the system. Furthermore, it is imperative that one know the climate and discourse within the community. Are the students motivated for excellence? Do teachers believe that their students will succeed? Do students go to school in an environment where they can learn both in and out of the classroom? These are essential questions that can only really be evaluated through observation, engrossing oneself in the system. Although it is clear from the drastically low test scores that students do not feel success, it can not really be attributed to anything without having seen first hand the schools. It is for this reason that I am especially anxious to visit East St. Louis over winter break, as I complete my Tanner Fellowship.
The No Child Left Behind act has invoked a lot of impassioned conversation within the world of education. It is clear that it is not without flaws, and I found those to be especially constricting as I attempted to conduct this research. It is, foremost, a great leap that we are able to access the reports of all schools via the internet. This not only allows researchers to more efficiently pull out information that may be useful, but it gives parents an opportunity to be informed about the struggles and successes of the school. The original aim of course was to hold accountability for the schools by publicly mocking those that do not perform to the standards giving. Within this district, however, there were some schools that I was unable to access, including the second public high school. The charter schools were nearly impossible to find information on. Furthermore, because of the requirements of NCLB, schools that under perform lose a portion of their government funding as a punishment for their low achievement rates. With nearly all of the schools in East St. Louis below the national averages, it is evident that they will be the institutions to suffer most from Bush’s plan. This is detrimental to any hope of future success, as these schools are already lacking funding and the deprival of more funds will likely only continue to lower their scores.

The Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), another component of NCLB, is also flawed in practice. The theory is that by giving students the opportunity to transfer schools, it will enhance the educational opportunity for those in struggling institutions and furthermore, it will scare the administration enough to make changes as to avoid more public embarrassment. The practice, however, would only further crowd the other schools, forming more inadequate institutions. Furthermore, it is impossible to apply this to East St. Louis, as there are no strong, public alternatives. The restrictions state that
schools have the choice to transfer their children to schools which are (1) not identified for school improvement and (2) not identified by the state as a persistently dangerous school. It is without much analysis that we see that the schools in East St Louis qualify in atleast one of those two categories. As we see, the policy instituted does not actually speak to the urgency of our urban neighborhoods, for policy makers have the misconception that within urban communities there are a few struggling schools. The reality is that virtually all urban education is defined through what it lacks.

There was only one charter school for which I was able to find documentation. The SIU Charter School of East St Louis is certainly nothing to brag about. It is like its public school predecessors in that it too is 100 percent African American with 95 percent of its students coming from limited economic opportunities. However, 66 percent of teachers at this institution have received their Master’s Degree or above, a significant comparison both to the state average, which is only 46, and the district average which is considerably lower than either. However, the overall school performance is inexcusable. Only 7.8 percent of its students met or exceeded the state standards on all state tests in 2002-3, whereas the state average was 61 percent. These numbers are overwhelming and initially can be seen as proof to the lack of credibility of the charter school model. Again, it is hard to evaluate the reasons for such poor records without visiting the school, and likewise, it is hard to see the full picture of a charter school with such meager documentation, but nevertheless, I predict two fundamental reasons for the SIU Charter Schools’ failure: Foremost, it is a high school. Looking at the poor performance of East St Louis elementary and middle school students, it is clear that they are drastically behind in their education. It seems like poor strategy to create a school for students who have
already spent the majority of their young lives tainted by the public school system. Most of these students do not have basic reading, writing, and math skills, let alone the means to successfully complete high school and apply for higher education. Also linked to this idea is the fact that this is an independent school, affiliated with Southern Illinois University. The school was founded in 1999 and has yet to show drastic advancement and a plan of further implementation. Had the school been established after an already successful model, it would be able to regenerate itself throughout other neighborhoods in East St. Louis, recreating the public school model and giving students an affective alternative to public schools in the area.

My prognostication, therefore, is that the integration of a KIPP School within this community would allow students to flourish in an environment where they could feel comfortable learning and see the relevance of their education for future achievement. This is a huge component to the current lack of success for urban students, as we’ve established that the community within this district does not see the value of education. Adults are recipients of little more than high school equivalencies, and the financial rewards of having a job now often supersede the effort of staying in school long enough to significantly advance. However, the KIPP School, as was described above, sees the power within this perception and uses its innovation to counteract it. By providing pay checks to students, demanding constant excellence, and letting them consider nothing less than a college diploma, students are bound to succeed. Rather than being told subtly that they are not worth this kind of effort, as shown through the lack of resources in their schools, they are straightforwardly told that life is not easy, and although they will not be
afforded any guarantees, they certainly have the ability to make their own paths. That is the essence of KIPP and truly the reason that it is imperative in the urban context.

It is worth questioning, then, why KIPP would be successful in this area and other charters have not been. The fundamental reason is the strength of KIPP’s administration. With the plan of further implementation, the school has established within itself a successful model of ideal put to practice. They do not appear to be financially struggling because they have been able to catch the eye of highbrow businesses, like the founders of GAP Clothing, because of their phenomenal achievement rates. Furthermore, after establishing such a successful model, the founders created a way to reproduce the legacy by teaching educators how to become successful administrators.

It can be concluded, therefore, that achievement rates and economic and racial disparities are greatly linked, especially in an urban climate. These inequities are prevalent because of a deep rooted racism that prohibits the success of a population of our countries youth by redefining success in an urban context. By providing a system that lowers the expectations of urban students, we create a preconceived notion of failure. This conception becomes impossible for underserved students to ignore, as the world around them reflects a contradiction of educational opportunity. The KIPP model has proven exceptionally success in urban neighborhoods for its ability to eradicate the negative mentalities that engross all important players of the urban public school model, including teachers, parents, and students. Because the program was deeply founded on ideals of equal access for all, and the intention of a movement to change the education for all students, the KIPP model can be replicated in any struggling community. By proving
that East St. Louis is a urban population with much difficulty, it becomes even clearer
that there is a great urgency for the integration of a KIPP charter in this community. The
lack of success of current charter schools in the area is an important factor as well, for it
shows that the community is desperately looking for alternatives. The poor achievement
rates of the SUI Charter School prove that independent charters are unstable. The
integration of KIPP will reaffirm the belief that charter schools are an exceptional
alternative when created as a movement, and furthermore, that there is hope for the
education of urban youth in District 189.
End Notes

1 Although it didn’t seem appropriate to delve into at this point in my paper, the evolution of such thought is certainly worth noting: Sociologists have many theories for the drastic inequalities between black and white students. Generally, they can be broken down into two categories: (1) those that deem the structure of society, found through the establishment of the school, responsible for poor attainment in underperforming students and (2) those that hold the attitudes of the underserved students foremost accountable for lower achievement rates. Cultural Difference Theory, Cultural Deprivation Theory, and Resistance Theory all represent the later, depicting how the attitudes of the students, all formed as a response to the inequality in our system, hinder success for students. Social Reproduction theory inhabits the second. Cultural Difference Theory suggests that the low achievement of black students is a result of their growing up in a society that differs greatly from the dominant, white culture (Hanninan, 55). As Ogbu explains, black students are taught to aspire for lower expectations of success that the establishment labels are appropriate, limiting their educational attainment and professional opportunity (55). Similarly cultural difference theory proponents have also argued that white students and educators are culpable for this condition, as well, since they have not taken into account the differing needs and perspectives of African American youth (55). It is with this rationale that the basis for the multicultural educational movement and the notion of “culturally responsive/responsible pedagogy” was created, as the assumption was that it takes into account the culture of African American students which is most often overlooked in school curriculum (Epping, 595).

Similarly to Cultural Deprivation Theory, Resistance Theory asserts that students are able to comprehend the inequities present within the system and act out by consciously challenging the school as a social establishment (Mickelson, 8). Resistance theorists, therefore, attribute the lack of academic success for minority and socio-economically disadvantaged students to their rebellious attitudes. Therefore, the criticism within this theory lies in the fact that it underestimates the function of race and gender in educational inequities (8).

Cultural deprivation theory, on the other hand, suggests that the lack of academic achievement for black students is not an indication of their inferiority or even the role that the educational institution takes, but rather it is a reflection of the black community’s own negative and self defeating attitudes (Hanninan, 55). They assert that there are deep structural problems, dealing with institutionalized values and attitudes within black communities, that inhibit educational achievement (55). Ogbu, also found in Hanninan’s article, extended this argument by asserting that many African American students do poorly as a sort of educational rebellion.
against the perceived standards set up by the dominant, white culture. (55). As Noguera writes, “Academic success is perceived as ‘acting white’” (25). Maxine Greene, as defined through Epps work, delves into this perception as well, suggesting that white people have erected a mentality of Black people as “other” and classify them in the category of what “White’s deny, repress, or exclude” (Epps, 595). This definition resonates the influence of philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois, who was perhaps most famous for the Black Consciousness Movement, which as he defines, is “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”. Scott Davies adds an economic dimension, as he defines cultural deprivation theory by the values deemed essential to our industrialized society and the inability of lower socioeconomic groups to accept those values (1452). As we have seen, however, race and socioeconomics continue to be extremely connected. This approach, however, has received much criticism for its inability to take into account the middle-class students and the struggles associated with groups that do not fit extreme poverty or wealth (1453). These concepts play an integral role in cultural deprivation theory for they show how white racism has plagued the esteem of the black race and really put injury to the academic success of its students.

2 Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was established as a reaction to the educational challenges facing poverty stricken communities. As the government found areas with such economic instability fond lowering performance trends. Currently Title I fully serves about a third of all eligible children. In the 1998-99 school year, which is the most recent year of data release, 13,081 districts and 46,656 schools received financial assistance on account of Title I. The money is intended to improve the quality of education in these communities and give extra help to struggling students. Schools often use a portion of this funding to provide academic tutoring, primarily in reading and math, to students whose performance rates show a lack of comprehension. The Title also allows for school wide initiatives if at least 40 percent of the children attending are below the national poverty rate. Since 1994 ESEA reauthorization dropped the number of school wide programs has burgeoned from about 3,200 to more than 19,000.

3 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a federal act established by President George Bush in 2001, which aims to increase the educational attainment of all students to the proficient level by the 2013-4 schools year, as well as hold states and schools more accountable for the performance of their schools. If a school is a member of Title I, they must meet state “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) goals for their total student population, as well as sub sectors made based on ethnicity, economically disadvantaged students, ESL, etc.


Hayden, Jeffrey & Kelley Cauthen. *Children in America’s Schools with Bill Moyers*. (videotape), South Carolina: Television that Teaches and Inspires


“50 Years After Brown” (March 22, 2004). *News and World Report*, p. 64

(http://www.census.gov)

(http://www.estlouis.stclair.k12.il.us/elementarysup.html#middle)
London’s music scene has been uplifted by a six year old genre titled garage that has successfully placed conscious underground artists into the mainstream media, allowing the voices who are delivering these conscious messages to be amplified through the London communities. Garage music is very appealing to inquire about due to all of its historical musical influences, which not only affect the music itself but are also incorporated and prominent within this rapid growing scene as well. What is also intriguing about this fairly new genre aside from its development within the London culture is the different audiences it has reached, the dissimilar messages it has delivered, and the massive commotion is has stirred within people in the London communities, garage artists within the industry, and the media itself. It is somewhat surprising that there are not many sources on garage music that connect this new sound to the politics and the realities of the London ghetto’s such as violence, discrimination, and poverty. In the past the idea of “Art for Arts Sake” was argued in hopes of drawing a line between the expression of art and its relation with the affects of society itself. “Artist and critics sometimes create or seize upon ideas that justify their actual behavior and symbolize what they are trying to do anyhow; and sometimes they redirect their efforts, consciously or unconsciously in accordance with influential forces in both material and ideological environment.”  

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their communities; therefore, their musical expression is not the cause of crime, given that, it is only a reflection of the many realities of London.

Before one can begin to define the genre of garage music, one must understand the history of its dominant musical influences. Garage’s primary musical influences are ska, reggae, rap, r&b, and house music. The primary influences of garage are all interconnected through the similarities that each has in comparison to one another. According to Hebdige, ska music derived from the influences of modern jazz and black American r&b, and it allowed artist to improvise (to “toast”) on a track. Rap also included improvisation, but due to the fact that it first developed in one of the poorest boroughs of New York City; The Bronx, rap developed with a realistic edge. However, there are many different messages that are delivered through rap as well as in reggae. Anything can and will be spoken about within these genres.

“Just as reggae is bound up with the idea of roots and culture, so rap is rooted in the experience of lower class blacks in America’s big northern cities.”2 House music also incorporates the disk jockey as the artist and has been known to stand out for its club culture which has not been recognized in many books, and its mixed sounds. “Disk Jockeys, improvising with records or electronic gadgets and usually backed up immense sound systems, produce variations on hit records by taking them apart, adding new drum tracks , superimposing tunes or bass lines all with a careful attention to the sensuality of sound and the efficacy of rhythm.”3 House music also stands out for its blurring of gender, race and sexuality barriers within its subculture. Overall, house, rap, and reggae

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3 Thornton Sarah, Club Cultures( London: University Press,1996), 65
artists reinterpreted what was going on in society through the music. Eventually these genres were classified as underground and as well as mainstream music.

When a genre of music is classified as underground or mainstream that genre becomes part of two completely different worlds. Mainstream music is the popular music that gets put on rotation at popular radio stations, which from the beginning was intended with the idea of selling large amounts of records. Mainstream artists also undergo constant promotion schemes to sell the record, where as an underground artist does on a much smaller scale, since they tend to be more concerned with making music for the simple love of it. Underground artists usually obtain more credibility for their work because they do not consider themselves part of the Pop culture, which dominates the music industry. Underground music usually has more substance, and there’s always an interesting message within the lyrics, unlike mainstream artists who are constantly questioned because they usually tend to focus on capitalism instead of the content within their songs. However, occasionally there are a few select artists who are mainstream artists and also have in depth lyrics, as well as constant control over their music. “More than anything else, then, undergrounds define themselves against the mass media. Their main antagonist is not the law which might suppress but the media who continually threaten to release their knowledge to others.”

Now that the prominent terms that have affected the creation and growth of garage have been defined, one can now begin to somewhat understand what garage music really is. Garage music also known as “2step” is a new style of music that is influenced by traditional U.S Garage music. It first developed in the late 80’s in N.Y.C, and it was named after a legendary club called “Paradise Garage”, a place where garage was first

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4 Thornton, 117.
heard. Due to all of its musical mixtures, unique elements have been incorporated within garage such as the breaking up of the sounds of different instruments in a song, and reversing the drums as well as incorporating stronger bass lines. These different techniques made garage a huge success within the London music scene. Garage became popular with the emergence of artists such as The Dreem Teem a trio of disc jockeys The Dreem Teem became the ambassadors of garage music by promoting it through their own radio show, which they received after working for other stations and obtaining great acceptance from the public. However, even though they are proud of the success garage has reached The Dreem Teem has clearly stated their own stance on the garage scene and its message most garage artists are putting out there today.

“If the old guard goes, then most of the music will be like that- and then U.K garage is dead…Kids buy into credibility. Kids want to associate with cool; they don’t want to be associated with mass market.”5

“Dreem teem’s Timmi Magic said: “We believe music’s the way out of violence not the way in. Some record companies today forget that. They will do anything for 30 pieces of silver. The music they are putting out has gun-toting lyrics with no place in the U.K scene…I don’t want my child telling me that “gat” means “gun.” We need to do a U-turn like the U.S is starting to do, because right now, it is not acceptable.”6

Due to its fast and steady development garage is also part of the underground as well as mainstream music scene within London. The messages behind garage music vary throughout every artist and their experiences. The Dreem Teem might disagree with the messages that some garage artist are putting out, however, for many music is an outlet. And just like Timmi Magic stated, “music is the way out of violence.” It is an outlet of expression that allows many to speak about what is affecting them and their

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5 Phillips, Dom, “Garage Wars: The world of U.K garage is split down the middle. The young guns want to make a new kind of music, but the thirty something’s who started the scene accuse them of making ‘piss-take records.” Guardian Newspaper 8 December, 2000.
6 Patris, Gordon “Give us garage, not gun glamour: Team dreems of violence-free music scene.” The Voice: 10 December, 2001
surroundings. According to a newspaper article titled “The Facts Of Life on Teen Sex” it is stated that “British youngsters have the highest pregnancy rate in western Europe…Up and down the country, especially in inner city areas, young people are sexually mature and sexually promiscuous.” This is probably one of the reasons why Dizzee Rascal decided to attack this issue due to the fact that the rate of teen pregnancies is continuing to escalate. Some examples can be seen within the following lyrics. Nineteen year old Dizzee Rascal is one of the latest artists to arise in the Garage scene, and top the charts with his conscious lyrics that touch up on topics such as unprotected sex and teen pregnancies.

The following lyrics were taken from a song titled “I love you”

“Yo, if that girl knows where you stay that’s poor. Some whore banging on your door. What for pregnant? What are you talking about this for fifteen she’s underage that’s raw and against the law five years or more.”

The following lyrics were taken from a song titled “Jezebel.”

“They call her Jezebel on her way to get worked out. Get battery, and get kicked out. Jezzy weren’t expecting more than four, what could she say? She just did it anyway. Messed up, caught a kind of STD, gonorrhea, Herpes, no VD. Left bitter, left angry, left Vex. But still loves sex, passed it on to the next.

Another group of artists whose music have grown into the mainstream media is the So Solid Crew. The So Solid Crew is a group made up of thirty members, all are London natives. Their lyrics are both conscious but also crowd movers as well. So Solid touches on any topic regardless if it’s a personal problem or a societal one, they hold no barriers to what they decide to talk about, which gives their group a sense of familiarity between

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7 Tilley David, “The Facts of Life On Teen Sex.” This is Local London 6 April 2001 sec. A.
8 Cite web site!!! No webmasters included how do u cite it?
their music and their followers. Their approach to garage depicts the truthfulness that the early influences of garage incorporate into their music.

The following lyrics were taken from a song titled “Hater.”

“So many haters are clocking our figures. So many haters don’t like us raking papers. But all we did was bring Garage through, from the underground straight to you. Use to want to screw and brawl now you want to join the crew.”

The following lyrics were taken from a song titled “Broken Silence.”

“I grew up in the same places, he got shot in the face, I saw Abrahams brain split on the pave. He jumped off the block; right where the kids play we used to sit everyday, chatting, shit we all strayed. I guess its deep seeded urban decay, from my angle. I can see the ghetto burning away, I want to cry. I find myself turning away, this kid sixteen, burning the yay, mislearning the game. I send a prayer for the pain. As I stand here, watching the world go round, how it always gets me down, is it supposed to be like this?”

Ms. Dynamite at the age of 21 is The United Kingdoms, first female to take garage in a different direction. She first started as an underground artist and her music then became mainstream. However, she still releases music in the underground scene, as well as the mainstream allowing her to reach different audiences. She too speaks about issues affecting society but she focused on self empowerment and self respect. The issues that she talks about also help her vent, since, Ms. Dynamite herself, was once addicted to drugs and fell into depression due to her drug use. According to an article titled “Blast of fresh air” the singer stated “I was living in this grubby little hostel, she says. “It was a horrible place, and I think I was depressed, because I started to smoke and drink. I was smoking all the time.” After experiencing the struggles of the streets Ms. Dynamite incorporated what she had learned into her music. Most of the songs she has released are also aimed towards women, in hopes of serving as a positive example to women who get

caught up in unconstructiveness. Ms. Dynamite has obtained success in a male dominated
industry and she has also opened doors for other female garage performers. It is
important to recognize some of Ms. Dynamite’s lyrics both from her garage as well as
r&b background because her words are empowering for many youths in London. She also
touches on drug use and teen pregnancies in her lyrics.

The following lyrics were taken from a song titled “Put him out.”

“Your little girl needs a daddy I agree, but the fool is far from that. Any boy can
be a father that ain’t reason enough to keep on taking him back. He never reads
with her or takes her out that shits called neglect you hear. Sure she confused and
tired of always seeing mammas face bruised and drowning in tears. Look what
you showing’ her by letting’ him disrespect you. You just growing her to think
that it’s something that all men do. You owe it to yourself and your daughter
cos she thinks it’s all alright. When she get older follow the footsteps you showed
her how you gonna look her in the eye??”

The following lyrics were taken from a song titled “Seed will grow.”

He got a family to feed, So every night he out on the street, shooting poison to
young mothers and youths dem, coz he feel it the only way to keep his peeps on
they feet, makes ends meet, and gets his own up out of poverty. Until one night,
he came home to find his mother cry, she pointed to the floor and he saw a trail of
his supply, she led him to his room to find his brother on his bed, track marks,
needle in his arm and stone cold dead. And suddenly, they all flashed before his
eyes, the kids that he sold to, And they mothers cries. Every child is someone’s
child you have to mind what u do, Cos Karma gonna bring the drama back on
you.

It is interesting to recognize that the above artists and similar artists are the ones
who are topping the charts and classified as mainstream in London’s garage scene. One
can argue that the music consumers in London are interested in artists who seem relatable
and realistic. One can also make the assumption that people like the awareness within the
garage music, because they are the ones who are buying the music and keeping its
success stable. The realistic tales of the ghetto’s that is incorporated in garage is very
similar to the United States hip hop scene for the following reasons: garage however, is a
subculture and it is also a music that is under constant attack by people who believe it is promoting negativity.

“New research shows they are strongly influenced by consumer culture, and the labels and status symbols in US rap and UK garage music. "There is a higher proportion of kids than 10 years ago who feel their identity is linked to the way they are dressed, the cash in their pocket, the trappings of success in society. It is almost as though there is juvenile competition and a feeling that you don't look the part without a lot of these accoutrements.”

According to an article titled “The Kids are Alright: New Wave Sub cultural Theory” it is believed that

“Subcultures are the meaning system and modes of expression developed by groups in particular parts of the social structure in the course of their collective attempts to come to terms with the contradictions of their shared social situation.”

Calluori also believes that “subcultures present strategies for surviving the degradation of everyday life in postmodern society. It is argued that subcultures develop as a positive outlet within the harsh realities that many face. Here is where I pose the following question. Both the garage and the hip hop Scene are conscious, controversial and political oriented subcultures, therefore, Should one assume that these genres are responsible for the increase in violence and other negative issues that are occurring within their communities when they are just serving as a reflective voice to the public, or is the government just working against these artists who are speaking and enlightening people about the system which they live in? While I was researching I came across the following terms: violence, negative music, drug use, sex, and crime. When I searched up artists in the garage scene who are successful right now I did not come across

12 Callouri
their musical success stories first, and how their unique skills within the industry. Instead, the information that seemed to be more significant dealt with crime, and depicted the violent act that happened in a So Solid concert, for example, as something that was possibly caused or promoted by their music.

There have been a few incidences that the media has used as bait to attack some of the garage acts today, depicting the media as the true promoters of violence itself. One of the incidences surrounds the successful So Solid Crew. A few members of the So Solid Crew have been involved in a few negative situations according to the media, which so far have only reported the facts that constantly depict So Solid Crew as being negative role models to their fans. One specific incident dealt with Dizzee Rascal, who “…was himself stabbed in the chest, back and buttocks in July 2003.”\textsuperscript{13} It was also rumored later on that some members of the So Solid crew were questioned.” This article reflects violence that happens within the U.K. garage scene but it also reflects the media and its one sided views, and the ways that a situation can be manipulated, by simply stating that So Solid Crew members were questioned, even though there is no proof that they had any involvement whatsoever with the incident. According to Ms.Dynamite “The Media have blown it out of all proportion. Garage is a young London scene. That’s why people are afraid of us and try everything to shut us down.”\textsuperscript{14}

Many question and firmly believe that garage has a lot to do with the crime and drug use in London. They believe that the solution for the crime and drug rates in London to decrease is to produce positive music which includes positive lyrics. However, in

\textsuperscript{13} Sherwin Adam, “Stabbed rapper’s debut album wins top award.” Times(United Kingdom), 10 September2003
\textsuperscript{14} Gibbons Fiachra, “Minister Labeled racist after attack on rap ‘idiots.” Guardian Unlimited 6 January 2003
order to understand the connection between garage music, crime and drug use in London, one must focus on the statistics of these occurrences before and after the success of garage. According to the Annual Abstract Of Statistics\textsuperscript{15}, the pattern of drug offenses which included the selling or possession of drugs illustrates an unstable rate. In the year 1998 the number of drug offences was 21.3. Then in 1998 after the counting rules had been revised, the number went up to 135.9. In comparison to the year 1998, drug offenses declined in the three consecutive following years, and in 2001 remained at 121.3. However in the year 2002 drug offences escalated to 141.11

\textbf{UK 2004} \textsuperscript{16} depicts a broader range of statistical data that illustrates the British Crime Rate of offences in England and Wales.

Fortunately, from the years 1996 to 2003, there has been a steady decline in recorded crimes. In the year 1996, the recorded number of reported crimes was fifteen million which declined steadily and remained at eleven million in the year 2003. Only seventeen percent of the crimes in the year 2003 were violent crimes. From the above data one can see that in the year 1998 the year when garage music’s presence became known within the industry, crime rates were at its highest. As garage continued to develop, recorded crimes began to decline, and in the year 2003 when the success of garage was at one of its highest points, recorded crimes declined by four million.

To assume that garage is increasing the crime rates and drug use in London is not factual whatsoever. In fact one can make the assumption that the media is projecting a connection between garage and crime that according to the statistics it is proven non-existent. The only connection that can be made between garage and the crime rates in

\textsuperscript{16} Beachly Anthony et all \textit{UK 2004} (National Statistics Publication: 2004),190
London is that during the time garage entered the music scene, crime rates went down. In relation to the drug offenses in London, during most of the time garage has been exposed to the public on a larger scale, drug offenses have shown a slight decline as well. The above statistics do not only reinstate calluori’s point of view on subcultures, but also enables one to question the power the media has, and the way it amplifies ideas that are not necessarily factual, staining the reputations of many artists in the industry.

One example can be seen in the garage scene with London’s So Solid Crew who have had a few incidences with arrests and now have been categorized as being violent, within the media. This has injured their careers to an extent where they have been denied requests for a video shoot and a tour cancelled due to outbreaks at locations where they were performing. The way that So Solid has been attacked by the media are somewhat similar to the way that artists like Eminem and Marilyn Manson get attacked, and accused of promoting violence within their fans. The idea of their music promoting violence was mostly questioned when the Columbine incident occurred. In September of 1999 Lynne Cheney stated the following:

“Some in the entertainment industry are consistently failing to act responsible industry are consistently failing to act responsibly. They are producing violent, sexually-explicit material, and they are peddling it to children. They claim unbridled license to do so under the first amendment as their product is so objectionable that more and more good citizens find appealing the idea that government regulation should remove entertainment industry products from the public square…I noted in my letters that the time has long passed when we can shrug off violence in the entertainment industry by saying that it has no effect, by saying its just coincidence that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the murderers of Columbine High, were fans of the shock rocker Marilyn Manson, also distributed by Seagram. It is no longer credible to suggest that young people aren’t affected by music, films, and video games that celebrate violence.”

\[17\] Former Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation (CITE THIS PROPERLY!!)
Not only was both Manson’s and Eminem’s music questioned, but people began to protest their music in hopes that others would boycott their music.

“We believe Manson promotes hate, violence, death, suicide, and drug use said Jason janz, the group’s president. We don’t say Manson caused Columbine, but we believe he promotes the attitudes and actions of the Columbine killers…Students quoted immediately after the massacre said Manson’s music influenced the gunmen, but people who knew the teens denied they listened to the music.”

One can look at the careers of the late Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls who were two of hip hops conscious rappers. According to an article found in crimelibrary.com both Shakur’s murder and Biggie’s murder remain unsolved. What is intriguing is that it is believed that the person who shot Biggie was Amir Muhammad a person who was helped by a gang related officer, who worked for the L.A.P.D. What was also interesting is that the only person who wanted to come forward and give evidence of what they witnessed during Tupac’s shooting, was killed two months after the police refused to question her.

In conclusion, was it just a coincidence that many artists who stray from the norm, are blamed for the crimes that occur within the communities? Is it a coincidence that two of hip hops most influential rappers of all time, were both shot to death? Is it a coincidence that Dizzee Rascal, who is clearly one of London’s conscious lyricists, was almost killed, and that constant shootings occur during So Solid performances? One could question the concerns of the media, and wonder if this is really a sincere concern from people who hold a high position within the government or the communities in general or is this simply an attempt to get rid of a truthful voice that many people are beginning to follow? One can’t help but be reminded of the Hip Hop Scene in London

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when thinking about the negative occurrences that surround both scenes, because they are two genres who have been prominent in representing the urban communities. “In the words of Africa Bambaata, a leading hip hop dj. “It’s about survival, economics, and keeping our people moving on.”¹⁹ Can music really be that powerful, that it can brainwash people into doing or believing things that they normally wouldn’t do or believe in? Or is society only using popular genres as scapegoats, in attempts of getting rid of the truthful voices within the genre?

¹⁹ Hebdige, 136
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Colonizer Beware:
The Algerian & Vietnamese Response to French Imperialism.

In front of the gate, the guard stands with his rifle.
Above, untidy clouds are carrying away the moon.
The bedbugs are swarming round like army tanks on maneuvers,
While the mosquitoes form squadrons, attacking like fighter planes.
My heart travels a thousand li toward my native land.
My dream intertwines with sadness like a skein of a thousand threads.
Innocent, I have now endured a whole year in prison.
Using my tears for ink, I turn my thoughts to verses.¹

The confines of Ho Chi Minh’s cell not only reflect the shackles placed upon an individual but it also reflect the restraints that bind the colonized. The initial impression that one gets when he or she reads this poem is a sense of despair and helplessness. A man’s life is confined in a world created by military force. It is a place where French paratroopers control the “Other’s” every move. The author longs for the independence and liberation of himself and his fellow countrymen. His time spent in prison is a metaphor for decades of colonialism. While living in his prison he only has his dreams to keep him going and through his dreams his tears turn to ink, for ink is the means through which his pain can be released. His pain and his thoughts create an internal tension. The tension steams from the colonizer saying that the colonized does belong but

the atrocities against the indigenous by the colonizer are a contradiction. Later this tension can only be relieved through freedom and as a result these tensions explode in aggression towards the oppressor. These written feelings which were laid out by Ho embody and reflect the feelings of many colonized peoples; eventually those feelings and thoughts would turn to violent revolution.

The support of violent revolution is what connects Ho Chi Minh to Frantz Fanon. Fanon was born in the French colony of Martinique, therefore like Ho Fanon too was a child of colonialism who would become a revolutionary. In Fanon’s opinion it was the violence of colonialism that led to oppression in the colonies. The oppression backed by military force spawned the need for violent rebellion by the colonized. The oppression is felt most by the lower classes and the peasantry these groups would become the catalyst for rebellion because they benefit the least from the colonial system. Fanon professed that colonialism was established through violence therefore it took violence to break the stranglehold of the colonizer.

Ho Chi Minh longed agreed with Frantz Fanon that the oppression and violence exercised by the French government and military warranted indigenous reaction. Ho understood that the only way to rid his people of imperialism was to rise up as a collective group. Diplomacy would not work with the French, for the refuse to let go; only brute force would free the colonized.

To understand the context in which Ho and Fanon became revolutionaries this piece will focus on French imperialism in Vietnam and Algeria. While researching this topic I kept two questions in mind; the first being did colonialism breed revolution in Vietnam and Algeria? If so did revolution come about in each place for the same
reasons? While examining these two questions I will be looking through the lens, Frantz Fanon and Ho Chi Minh. The reason why I am examining violent revolution of indigenous peoples through the frameworks of these two figures is because they outwardly advocated violent revolution for the purpose of colonial cleansing. While first reading Fanon’s material and then later reading Ho’s writings I began to agree with what they had to say. Violent revolution by the colonized peoples was justified and necessary.

The world has been carved up and recreated by colonialism. For the purpose of this paper I will be using the terms colonialism and imperialism interchangeably because fundamentally they both mean the same thing, which is exploitation. Many nations rose to the top of the imperial tree but the two that stood as imperial juggernauts were England and France. Late nineteenth century to mid twentieth century scholars, such as French journalist Charmes, argued that imperialism was a good advancement for many colonized nations and that in fact it was the White Man’s or Western society’s burden to bring civilization to the primitive. Historically speaking, France’s ‘Mission to Civilize’ became official government policy around 1870. Essentially, the mission was supposed to ‘civilize’ all conquered peoples who fell under French control. The French definition of civilization would bring enlightenment, temperament, virtue, industrial strength, culture, Christianity, and democratic principles.²

The Mission to Civilize was a struggle for the colonized man because the construction of the society was not made for him. * The colonized man by imperial

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* I recognize that gender is an issue when using the word man or men. I also understand that the two writers that I choose to use as a lens speak from a masculine point of view in which they do not specifically look at the women’s point of view. But these two men are caught up in regaining their manhood and trying to define masculinity in pre and post-decolonization world. I leave the gender subject for another project.
construction could not become European and he could not be what he was before because
the colonizer would not let him be, therefore he was something else. That lack of identity
help to create a tension within himself and his community. In an effort to reclaim himself
the colonized man struggles against his oppressor in an effort to gain his autonomy.
What is evident by that continuous binary struggle, the colonizer vs. the colonized, the
Mission to Civilize did not enhance all of the indigenous people’s way of living. The
‘Great Mission’ did not remake the supposedly uncivilized into cultural, political, and
economic replicas of the French, instead the Mission depressed much of Vietnamese and
Algerian society. France’s occupation of Vietnam and Algeria truly benefited the French
metropole rather than its holdings. I would also argue that not all of the French
population benefited from imperialism. The central French government, big business, and
the bourgeoisie were the true beneficiaries of colonialism. A small portion of indigenous
Algerians and Vietnamese did benefit from colonialism but that was only allowed to
happen under the watchful eye of France.

French imperialism created social, political, and economic inequalities for the
indigenous peoples. As a result of these socio-economic and political atrocities, the need
for decolonization began to manifest itself within the native lower classes. I argue that the
peasants are the heart and the catalyst for the revolution. They are the ones who suffer
most from colonial segregation, isolation, poverty, and a lack of voice in government.
The Algerian and Vietnamese bourgeoisie were just western pawns who wanted to kick
out the French and then put themselves in the vacant socio-economic and political seats.

One may ask the question, why did these two very different peoples feel the need
to rebel in a violent manner? The answer to that is complex but can be understood.
Vietnam and Algeria were conquered by violence and they were kept subordinate through violence, hence violence begot violence. Fanon said, “Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon”. A man can only take so much before he retaliates in an effort to regain what he has lost. The oppressed man sees that Frenchness and French universalism, meaning great democratic principles such as individual freedoms for all, do not and will not ever apply to him because they were a myth. He needs to liberate himself and attain autonomy. His needs and his wants resemble the universal rights of man that France vowed to bring but fell short in their ‘valiant’, I use this word loosely, effort. Consequently, the rebellion was legitimized in the minds of the colonized because of their primary need for self-determination.

Looking at the way in which two countries chose to decolonize themselves is important because as a contemporary global society we need to understand revolutionary violence against colonialism. Showing the reasons and giving examples of why a group of people rebel against an oppressive enemy will hopefully legitimize past and future revolts. One goal of this piece is to change the way in which supporters of the Western World view the effects imperial occupation.

As I write, the world is being reshaped. We use different terms and phrases to be politically correct. Western nations that invade and occupy non-western countries do not want their efforts to be associated with old regimes because many of those regimes fell to indigenous revolution. The terms imperialism and colonialism are old world terms. The rhetoric now is that the West is bringing democracy through violent liberation to free peoples oppressed by dictatorships. However you describe it, colonialism is still in

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3 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of The Earth (New York: Grove Press Inc, 1963), 35.
practice; those who have control want to maintain and gain more control. The contradiction is at the heart of George W. Bush’s War on Terror, and The Iraqi Conflict. As historians, and more importantly as human beings, we need to look at past events in an effort to correct and escape future wrongs. In our collective discipline we ask questions; good historians interrogate the norms, discourses, and ideals of societies to discover new conclusions. These conclusions can typically change the way in which individuals view themselves and the world.

The Evolution of imperialism was backed by Western nations. Imperialism before the 1970’s was viewed in the Western world as a necessary evil. I use the 1970’s as a stopping point for imperialism because by then most of the colonized world had freed themselves from direct foreign control. The majority of Western societies and governments believed in some sort of civilizing Mission. Some Western countries, such as France, in the 1870’s, believed that because of enlightenment and newly established democratic principles of universalism they had a duty and a right tocivilize what they saw as the primitive world. In actuality the French praised themselves for the creation of the term civilization. Alice Conklin writes, “the French invented the term in the eighteenth century and have celebrated the achievements of their own ever since.”

Therefore, these ideas were not just abstract concepts. Rather they animated colonial policy. Westerners really believed in their ‘Great Commission’ whole heartedly.

The Mission Civilsatrice was an ideology that was believed and promoted throughout the metropole by many scholars during the late nineteenth century. Some publicists, such as Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, would be so bold as to think that the mission

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4 Conklin & Fletcher, 60.
* French for the Mission to Civilize
could succeed without the use of violence. Leroy-Beaulieu and others like him felt that because the French society was so moral and virtuous that the natives would gratefully give up their lands. The belief was that ‘new colonies would be acquired through commerce, with a minimum of violence.’ This argument would be challenged by journalist Gabriel Charmes who felt that the civilizing mission could not happen without the companion of force. Charmes would have administrative backing from the French Republican leadership.

By 1878 the French republican leadership asserted itself politically and economically outside the metropole. Jules Ferry, a republican leader, used the Mission to Civilize to legitimize French imperial actions. Contrary to Leroy-Beaulieu’s gentle commerce, Ferry believed that France had every right to civilize by force. Ferry so adamantly stated, “the superior races have a right vis-à-vis the inferior races… they have a right to civilize them.” The right was given to France by virtue of their intellectual and physical ‘mastery of the earth’. The way in which a society mastered the land was by having a surplus of goods and privatizing the land. Since the natives did not master their own lands it was the duty of the French to bring civilization.

There was no debate in France that the Mission Civilatrice was justifiable. The issue was how the mission should be carried out. One side believed that civilizing should be acquired through intense force and less commerce other side believed the mission should consist of a moral conquest. What comes through in both arguments is that the French people truly believed in their mission and their superiority.

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6 Conklin, 13.
Rudyard Kipling may not have been of French decent but he wrote one of the best known statements of the Civilizing Mission. His poem “The White Man’s Burden”, published in 1899 supported American colonialism in the Philippines. Kipling’s poem conveys the fact that the civilizing mission was a burden placed on the white man’s shoulders. The West had no choice but to bring western practices to the natives. Even if the French did not want to go into Algeria and Vietnam they still had to because of their intense burden. A burden is a heavy load that looms over one’s conscience. When one is weighed down by a burden it has to be exercised or else that person is escaping their duty.

Kipling’s poem demonstrates the themes of arrogance, power, prestige and sacrifice. For example, the words ‘best ye breed’ were referring to the cream of the crop, which were white young men. That phrase was set in parallel with the words, “Half devil and half child”. Reference to the devil describes the way in which the West looked at the indigenous people of the non-West. In essence, Kipling was saying that ‘these’ people are savage, not even human, and ‘we’ need to go in there to civilize them. The mission would be carried out through an imperial military for a self-serving empire.*

Critics of imperialism during the early twentieth century did not critique imperialism because imperialism oppressed the colonized, but the European critics criticized imperialism because it did not benefit the white European lower classes. Political economist J.A. Hobson critiqued the imperial actions of nations such as England and France. His analysis would come directly from the metropole illustrating the

* See Appendix One
disorder in the mainland. Hobson believed that, “The New Imperialism nowhere extended the political and civil liberties of the mother country to any part of the vast territories which, after 1870, fell under the government of Western civilized Powers. Politically, the new Imperialism was an expansion of autocracy….”\(^7\) He believed that the true beneficiaries of imperialism were the central government, big business, and the upper classes. Hobson was not a noble European in favor of the colonized people. He had many prejudices of his own, but he was in favor of the lower and middle class Englishman who was not getting a share of the spoils of imperialism. The main purpose of imperialism, in Hobson’s opinion, was the economic expansion of England. The colonies were a place to extract resources, find/enslave cheap labor, create new markets, and settle new lands. In his opinion the colonies were a capital investment. As Hobson stated, “The growing cosmopolitan of capital has been the greatest economic change of recent generations. Every advanced industrial nation has been tending to place a larger share of its capital outside the limits of its own political area, in foreign countries, or in colonies, and to draw a growing income from this source….\(^8\) When he looked at European expansion he saw it as using the ideology of the rhetoric of the Mission to Civilize to further economically expand the government, big business, and the upperclasses. As a result the monetary expansion of wealth at the top of the social ladder would only create a larger gap between them and the lower classes.

W.E.B Du Bois looked at imperialism and the Mission to Civilize through a different set of eyes. In 1906, Du Bois was a black man living in America, which was a product of England’s imperial enterprise. Contrary to what many white Europeans

\(^7\) Conklin & Fletcher, 14.  
\(^8\) Conklin & Fletcher, 15.
thought Du Bois proved that a person of color could be educated and reach the ‘civilized’ status. His issue with imperialism did not deal with economics but rather its color lines. He felt that the West had created a world in which white stood for civilization and black, brown, or yellow had become synonymous with primitive. Therefore the ideology of the mission to civilize was racist by nature. A color line was drawn and if one did not fit the European mold then that person was at the bottom of the racial ladder. That theory can be applied to Algeria and Vietnam. Many Vietnamese could not attain ‘Frenchness’ because of the color of their skin. Consequently, Frenchness equaled whiteness and whiteness equaled civilization. Because the indigenous Vietnamese and Algerians were not white they could never tap into the spoils of colonialism, leaving the colonized forever at the bottom of the economic, political, and social ladders.

Rosa Luxemburg like Hobson was speaking from an economic standpoint in 1913. She felt that the colonial societies were only using the non-Western world as its industrial candy jar. Therefore, the West would want to convert the non West to its capitalist ways in an effort to promote the West’s agenda of profit. Again the civilizing mission of France and many other Western nations was viewed as legitimizing rhetoric. That rhetoric only covered up the true ills of imperialism. In 1916, V. I. Lenin was in support of Luxemburg’s theories. Lenin felt that Imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism. Lenin writes, “As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilized not for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country, for this would mean a decline in profits for the capitalists, but for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries.”

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9 Conklin & Fletcher, 22.
10 Conklin & Fletcher, 36-37.
colonies were created to have a place to invest surplus capital, sell surplus, and to extract raw materials. The standard of living in the colonies did not improve the status of the colony as a whole but it improved the metropole, while disempowering the majority of the colony. These ideas can be applied to France’s endeavors in Vietnam and Algeria. Both places would become resource candy jars; these were places where the colonist could seize what they wanted for the benefit of the metropole.

Albert Camus was an earlier supporter of imperialism and insisted that the French stay in Algeria. He, like many others, took a paternalistic point of view when looking at a colony such as Algeria. For example, when famine hit Kabylia in 1939 Camus did not want to send aid to the starving Kabyles because it was the ethical action to take, but because he felt it was the paternal obligation of France. Camus like many others who supported the occupation of Algeria believed that Algeria was France.

The reason why Albert Camus did not see the Algerian struggle for independence as a rational revolt was because Algeria was conquered and made French. To him Algeria was made French and was under French control. Camus believed that there had never been an Algerian state, which was joined and governed by indigenous Algerians. In Camus’ own words, “There has never yet been an Algerian nation.”11 Not only did he not believe in the Algerian struggle, which was in opposition to colonialism, but he did not believe that Algeria had justice for all. As stated earlier there was a distinct line as to who was French and who was classified as Other. In his 1957 remark, “I believe in justice, but I shall defend my mother above justice.”12 No matter what his countrymen

12Schalk, 65.
did in Algeria and no matter how unjust French law might be in Algeria, Camus would defend French colonialism.

The ideology of Western superiority did not die with decolonization after World War II. Mid twentieth century rhetoric of Western superiority would still be advocated in 1993 by Samuel P. Huntington in an article in the journal ‘Foreign Affairs’ that caught a lot of attention. The reason why the article attracted so much attention was because Huntington argued for Western dominance. He assumed that virtually every other form of government that was in opposition to the West, such as communism, socialism and fascism, had fallen as a result Western dominance, therefore the West should dominate.

As Huntington states in the article:

The west is now at an extraordinary peak of power in relation to other civilizations. Its superpower opponent has disappeared from the map. Military conflict among Western states is unthinkable, and Western military power is unrivaled. Apart from Japan, the West faces no economic challenge. It dominates international political and security institutions and with Japan international economic institutions. Global political and security issues are effectively settled by a directorate of the United States, Germany, and Japan, all of which maintain extraordinary close relations with each other to the exclusion of lesser largely non Western countries.13

The countries or nationstates that oppose the inevitable ‘Western Universalization’ are the more traditional, Third World, or developing countries. The way in which the West should maintain their dominance was to unite as one collective group. A joint unification against the non Western states was not only needed but warranted. He also believed that many of the non Western states have become warlike states because the lack of Western principles. This is why Western civilization needs to be preserved. Huntington’s analysis was that the Western Civilization was greater than every other civilization because democracy, or at least the idea of it, is the best.

As Huntington affirmed Western dominance he also produced a homogeneous non-West which was only out to get the West. He argued that without the aid of Western countries, the non-West would be a boiling point for violent hostility. This is where critics attacked his analysis. One of the most influential critics was Edward Said. Said actually held a lecture at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where he attacked the 1993 article.

Said was one of the most influential writers of our time. His book Orientalism made Westerners reexamine the way in which they viewed the world and themselves. In the Amherst lecture Said stated that Huntington just reiterated old Cold War rhetoric only this time Huntington was speaking about the Middle East. In Said’s opinion Huntington depicted the civilizing mission or modernization as a noble purpose, which it was not because it exploited many indigenous peoples. Huntington truly proved Said’s point when he created a homogeneous non-West. Orientalism is the way in which the West categorizes the non-West called the Orient. In response to critiques Huntington wrote a book that was suppose to go into more detail about the topic of civilization, but it only reiterated what he previously said.

Huntington’s argument brings us back to the French ideology of the Mission to Civilize. Looking at the context in which this mission would take place is essential to the understanding of French imperialism. Before the French invaded Algeria the Ottoman empire had granted Algeria semi autonomy. The Algerians were able to govern themselves under the watchful eye of the Ottomans. Around 1827 an altercation broke out between the Turkish Dey, governor of Algiers, and a French Consul. No one knows for sure what happened but what ever it was brought about French retaliation. On July 5,
1830 the French launched a military attack that would lead the last Dey of Algiers to surrender. The conquest of Algeria was not without struggle. The last stand for Algeria was in Constantine, were eventually they fell to the French. Even though folklore states that the Algerian Dey had disrespected the Consul in some way which led to the invasion, what is more believable and what most likely happened was that Charles X was losing popularity in the French metropole. In an effort to boost his popularity the French decided to invade Algiers. As luck would have it the ‘July Revolution’ would break out in France which would eventually force Charles from the throne.

Like the Algerians the Vietnamese were also infested with foreigners. Previous to French intervention the Vietnamese were constantly invaded by the Chinese. The only way to keep the Chinese off their backs was to pay a tribute to the emperor of China. As a result the Mandarin system began to have an impact on the upper class Vietnamese society. Ruling members of the upper class had fought for independent states, while the Chinese emperor tried to create order in the fractured state. In an effort to kick out the Chinese, the upper class backed a ruler that supported their interests.

Conquered by military force the first government act by the French would be to rob the natives of their land and in turn place Algeria under French directorates. France would still face resistance for at least another decade; as a result the French sent in 100,000 more troops. Not only would Algeria become a possession of France but it evolved into a settled colony. Half of the settler population would be of direct French descent and the other half would be composed of Spaniards, Italians, Corsicans, and Maltese. Before the French acquisition of Algeria there was a large Mediterranean

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population that lived along side the Arab/Berber population in North Africa. These
groups would build a commonality through intermarriage, and their hatred of Arabs.

In 1850 France would open up Vietnam by force. By 1858 Napoleon III launched
an attack on Vietnam to retaliate against the alleged murders of Christian missionaries
and their converts. Through 1867 there was immediate Vietnamese resistance to French
colonialism just like in Algeria but Vietnam would soon fall as well. Later in 1882, after
a war of ten years, Hanoi was taken and Vietnam was forced to sign treaties 1883 and in
1884 to confirm French rule. Instead of a designated French government being set in
place the French chose to administer the colony through the Vietnamese mandarins with
a French resident commissioner. Vietnam would become an extraction colony as
opposed to a settler colony such as Algeria. This could have been due to the fact that
there were already ‘whites’ settled in Algeria whereas there was not a ‘white’ settled
group in Vietnam.

Unlike Algeria, whose main export was wine, the main export of Vietnam was
rice. In 1860 Vietnam exported 57,000tons of rice by 1937 Vietnam exported 1,548,000
tons of rice.\footnote{Wolf, 165.} Out of this expansion of rise production arose a large class of land owners.
This new class was made up of Vietnamese mandarins and other members of the
Vietnamese upper class. But most of the land was own and controlled by the French. As
shown in the movie \textit{Indochine}, peasants were kicked off their land, as a result rice and
rubber plantations began to flourish. These land owners were the direct beneficiaries of
French efforts to reassign old land or to colonize new land, as part of their colonial
mission.\footnote{Wolf, 166.}
This new landed Vietnamese and French bourgeoisie’s income came from agriculture, manufacturing, trade, banking, rents, and interest on loans. All of those components helped the bourgeoisie become political rulers of the Vietnamese people on the village level. Out of the unequal social status arose a large poor tenant class whose only source for adequate, I use the word loosely, income came from sharecropping. Most of the peasantry barely had enough land to feed their family. On the plantations men worked from dawn till dusk, and as a result of the horrible pay and conditions desertion was high. In order to maintain a 22,000 man crew between the years 1925-1930, 75,000 individuals had to be ‘recruited’.  

Industry remained limited because the metropole placed restrictions. Extraction of coal, zinc, and tin required 55,000 workers in 1928. Another 80-90,000 manned other industries such as railroads, textile, repair shops, electric power plants, and distilleries. Increase in taxes on commodities such as salt, alcohol, and opium were controlled mainly by the French.

The Algerian export of wine was at the expense of the indigenous population’s food crops and pastures. As the rice and rubber plantations in Vietnam relocated the indigenous poor population so too did the vineyards in Algerian. As French control progressed loams, banks, buyers, and sellers built a stronger political niche. The Europeans were concentrated in the urban settings leaving the unwanted rural parts of Algeria to the Muslims and other hated groups. Anticolonialism and nationalism would begin to manifest in the outskirts of Algeria among the oppressed indigenous. Whereas national identity and resistance would also manifest itself in rural and poverty stricken

\[17\text{Wolf, 168-69.}\]
\[18\text{Wolf, 223.}\]
Vietnam. During the 1920 and 1930’s there was an indigenous middle peasantry and agricultural poor move to return to the Quran. This was a drastic and public display of mass rejection of Western ideology and influence. The hinterland became the thinking ground and catalyst for rebellion.\(^1\)

The Massacre of 1945 ended up being the deciding point that fueled revolution. Muslims gathered to celebrate the allied victory and to call for equality for Muslims. Shots rang out and a riot ensued. The French repressed the riot and estimates say that 8,000 to 45,000 Algerians were killed. The discrepancy in the large gap between the numbers may be a result of the French wanting to water down the casualties and the Algerians wanting to inflate the causalities. Each side may have wanted to do so in an effort to gain supporters. In 1950 an Algerian revolutionary group sprang up called the Special Organization led by Ahmed Ben Bella. This particular group conspired against the French government. But the main source of the rebellion would come out of the FLN in 1954. The FLN or the National Liberation Front provided leaflets to the indigenous population that called for Algerian independence, as well as stating that Algeria should also be a “social democracy within an Islamic framework and decided to use the weapons of guerilla warfare at home and diplomacy at the United Nations.”\(^2\) Their goals were different as from those of the assimilation camp. The Algerian assimilation camp was composed of the educated middle class that was allowed to have French citizenship. This citizenship was a passport for social mobility that the peasants and the Muslims lacked.

\(^{19}\) Wolf, 226.
\(^{20}\) [http://novaonline.nvcc.edu](http://novaonline.nvcc.edu), pg. 1.
Vietnamese disenfranchisement affected the internal structure of the village at the structural level. All of the adverse factors fueled nationalism for the Vietnamese. Even wealthy, educated Vietnamese could not find jobs. This lack of employment led to some indigenous Vietnamese to join national and socialist groups. A nationalist party evolved in 1927 which was part of Chinese Kuomintang. The Communist party mainly consisted of workers and peasants who performed mass resistance such as strikes. These demonstrations were led and constructed by many educated leaders such as Ho Chi Minh. There were three stages of revolution the first was the Japanese Incubation from 1940-45, second was the French coming back after WWII (who eventually get kicked out in 1954). The third stage was the United States intervention, which will not be discussed here.

The German takeover and occupation of France was essential to the rebellion of Vietnam and Algeria. France had painted a picture of itself which reflected superiority, authority, modernity, intelligence, and strength. The German military crushed that ideology and its effects were felt in the metropole and more importantly in the colonies. Vietnam and Algeria saw that France was not the almighty super power that they said they were. With the Japanese occupation in Vietnam, called the Incubation, it was extremely evident that France no longer had its long standing control. Clearly France was weak, and, in fact, they were even weaker after WWII. Resistance started brewing before the WWII but the war gave Vietnam and Algeria an opening that they might not have had if Germany had not occupied France.

In 1946, a war for the control of Vietnam broke out between the Vietnamese and France. The communist Vietnamese held the highland and the mountains while the
French occupied the low land. Like the Algerians, the Vietnamese also used guerilla
tactics to beat the French. In actuality the Algerians looked to the war in Indochina as an
opening for their own revolution. At the French fort of Dien Bien Phu, after months of
fighting and intense lack of support from the metropole, the French were defeated. On
July 21, 1954 at the Geneva conference the Vietnamese were granted their freedom.

Ironically the FLN would not have been able to succeed if the French colons* did
not protest for Algerian integration with France. During the protest there was a mixture
of Muslims and colons. On October 30, 1958, in response to the protest, General Charles
De Gaulle* announced a series of initiatives, such as schools and medical services, for
Muslim population.21 The next year De Gaulle was ready to talk about independence
negotiations. After years of urban guerrilla warfare, on July 1, 1962 Algeria was
declared free.

Given this history, when I examined this much debated topic I kept two questions
in the back of my mind. Did colonialism breed revolution in Vietnam and Algeria; if so
did revolution come about in each place for the same reasons? What I think is very
evident from the history of the two colonized places, and according to my research, is
that French colonialism did breed revolution in Algeria and Vietnam. Not only did
French colonialism breed revolution in both places but the reasons for revolution were
similar. The most obvious similarity is that the Algerian and Vietnamese revolutions
were violent in nature. One could hold the opinion that the violent nature of the rebellion
could be attributed to the violent nature of the indigenous peoples, the lack of civil order
was the reason why the French went in to colonize the heathen. But I along with Frantz

* The settled French
* President of the French Fifth Republic
21 http://novaonline.nvcc.edu, pg. 2.
Fanon and Ho Chi Minh argue that it was the negative consequences of French colonialism which lead to the revolutions.

The harmful impacts of French imperialism on both indigenous populations did not just bring about revolution but it brought forth violent revolution. The way in which Algeria and Vietnam were conquered was by the military force of France. As Fanon states, “Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together – this is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler – was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons.”

Therefore, from the very beginning the French had been using violence to implement their Mission to Civilize. The reason why French could invade another land that was already inhabited by another group of people was because the French created an ideology that the indigenous groups were not like them. The indigenous groups of Vietnam and Algeria were, in the thoughts of the French, different. Two key binaries are created through the construction of the French empire. Edward Said labels these binaries as the West vs. the Other and the Orient vs. the Occident, which can all be summed up in one word, Orientalism. Said writes, “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident.” It was the way in which the Europeans could compare and contrast themselves to other human beings, who would be considered lesser in value than they based on conceptions of civilization.

These binaries dealt with the power of illusions. The illusion, designed by the French, was that the French were superior by virtue of their intellect, industry, and democratic principles. The natives were inferior because they were not civilized by

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22 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of The Earth (New York Grove Press Inc, 1963), 36.
French standards. Said wrote, “I have begun with the assumption that the Orient is not an inert fact of nature.” Essentially, what he is saying is that the Orient is an obscure concept. The Orient is based on European interpretations of a society. The society was judged in juxtaposition to the European society. Being labeled the other meant that Algerian and Vietnamese men are not as strong physically, intellectually, and spiritually as the French men. Native women were not pure and virtuous, such as the French women, but they were sexual or desexed. The notion was that Algerian and Vietnamese lands were not productive because the land was not controlled by man but it was untamed and controlled by nature.

Ho Chi Minh would not become the product of French ideological construction. At the age of thirteen he was kicked out of a French school in Vietnam for anti-French nationalist activities. Ho grew up a as peasant unlike revolutionaries such as Lenin and Fanon. He never believed he could be French; he knew that he was not French. The only way that many poor Vietnamese could better their status was to go abroad via education or working for someone. Ho would work on a ship as a mess boy. Through his travels around the world he began to see colonialism as a global problem not just a Vietnamese problem. After a brief stint in London Ho moved to war torn France in 1917 and ironically 80,000 Vietnamese were fighting for the French military or working in factories during World War I. France was under political stress with socialist parties debating the colonial mission and these critics began to appeal to Ho. He sat in on French socialist meetings and eventually began to speak out in various ways.

24 Said, 4.
25 Minh, vi.
One way in which Ho Chi Minh spoke out in defense of the Orient was in his letters. A letter addressed to M. Albert Sarraut, who was the Minister of Colonies; expressed Ho’s disgust for the French government because of the negative consequences of imperialism. He could see that colonialism was not exercised for the benefit of the colonized. Ho adamantly pointed out that the way in which colonies were maintained was through violence, and the failures and hypocrisy of the Civilizing Mission. In 1922 Ho exclaims:

Your Excellency,

We know very well that your affection for the natives of the colonies in general, and the Annamese in particular, is great.

Under your proconsulate the Annamese people have known true prosperity and real happiness, the happiness of seeing their country dotted all over with an increasing number of spirit and opium shops which, together with firing squads, prisons, “democracy,” and all the improved apparatus of modern civilization, are combining to make the Annamese the most advanced of the Asians and the happiest of mortals.

These acts of benevolence saves us the trouble of recalling all the others such as enforced recruitment and loans, bloody repressions, the dethronement and exile of kings, profanation of scared places, etc. 26

The sarcasm that comes through from the pen of Ho speaks volumes. I can imagine the Minister reading this letter at his desk first thinking that the memo was written in admiration of his and his countrymen’s accomplishments. But as he reads on the Minister is hit squarely with expressions of anti-colonialism. What is evident is that the colonized are not happy with the colonizer. The colonized are not happy because the majority of Ho’s countrymen are not reaping the glory of imperialism. Many indigenous are forced off their lands, men are forced to work on rice and rubber plantations, and these great democratic principles are not reaching the Vietnamese masses. As Ho points out, the French are maintaining order through firing squads and throwing natives into prisons. In effect Vietnam was being kept under Martial Law.

26 Minh, 15.
The French were behaving similarly in North Africa which is why I say the histories of Vietnam and Algeria mirror each other. Frantz Fanon came to Algeria as a ‘French’ psychiatrist to examine prisoners in 1953. He too at one time believed in the Mission to Civilize. Born in French colony of Martinique in 1925, Fanon was lucky enough be grouped with the small percentage of black Martinicans who were able to be educated. While growing up in the French imperial system many blacks had felt that French colonies were an extension of the metropole. That façade would be interrupted during his military stint in the Free French Army in 1944. He left his native land to join the Allied forces and to fight the German war machine in North Africa and in Europe. He had grown up thinking of himself as French but he would be discriminated against by the French Army and the mainland French populace. That discrimination and overt racism would give birth to his doubts about his identity as a ‘Frenchmen’. The universalism of liberty and freedom that the French preached about did not seem to apply to him.

After the war, as a veteran, Fanon was able to receive a veteran’s scholarship to attend a university. At the University of Lyons, located in France, he studied medicine and psychology. After completing his studies Fanon went to Algiers in 1953. There he would find himself in close proximity to the Algerian Freedom Fighters and he would become fond of their struggle for independence. As Ho Chi Minh had witnessed imperialism in his own country and then witnessed it again in other places around the world stating that imperialism was a global struggle so too did Fanon. Fanon had already experienced imperialism in his own state but now he would see those same imperialist
practices in another state. In both places oppression was prevalent. This helped to show him that colonialism was a global struggle for all colonized peoples.

The key theme that comes out of the background of Fanon is the issue of identity. The colonized, or the black man in his case, seeks to mimic the colonizer because the Great Mission to Civilize becomes ingrained in the society through colonial rhetoric. Within the context of imperialism a ‘new man’ is created; a man that is not empowered by his own virtues. He has no abilities that he can contribute. Fanon states, “Whence his constant preoccupation with attracting the attention of the white man, his concern with being powerful like the white man, his determined effort to acquire protective qualities…” He is trapped in a world that does not benefit him. In this context the colonized man is not a man but a creature to be dominated such as the pigs and the cows. While lying in the mire of a construction that is placed upon him, the colonized man seeks to mimic a culture that is not made for him and despises him.

Then there comes a point in which the colonized man wants more for himself. He needs his autonomy, he needs to be free. Again, Fanon’s revolutionary theory states that the colonized people have an added tension placed upon them by virtue of their oppressed position. From that position the natives turn their frustrations on themselves. Later those frustrations are transferred into a thirst for freedom and in turn they explode in aggression towards the colonizer. The colonized man wants to be a product of his own creation not and imitation of his oppressor.

The oppressed indigenous peoples that lived under the French imperial thumb had reached a point in which socio-economic, and political factors had gotten so bad that they

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felt a collective urge to revolt. At its heart French colonialism was about the acquisition of land and labor. The fact of the matter is that under the French flag many indigenous peoples were forced off their lands, killed, raped, forced into poverty, and made to be inferior to the French. This is what fueled the revolutions in Algeria and Vietnam.

The need for revolution is a need for change that will not come under the thumb of the colonizer. The colonizer wants to support his interest any way he sees fit. Therefore, the colonizer acts in ways that are inhumane by any definition but are acceptable because the acts are done to the ‘Other’. As a result the colonizer becomes the oppressor in the eyes of the colonized because the colonized knows that the reason why they are impoverished, hungry, and disenfranchised is because of the colonizer.

The need for revolution shifts to a need for decolonization. This shift occurs because revolution itself is not enough for the colonized. The colonized people need to be free from foreign oppression and control. As Fanon writes, ‘decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain “species” of men by another “species” of men.”28 The proof of decolonization is in replacement of the old imperial social order with the new indigenous social structure. Decolonization also fulfills the natives’ need for a new self. In the words of Fanon, “Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.”29 It is essential to remember that decolonization is rooted in violent revolution because colonization was marked by violence in its existence and was maintained through violence. The colonizer refuses to let go of its ‘possession’ therefore violence is required

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28 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press Inc, 1967), 35.
for the liberation of the colonized. The colonizer will not give in and the colonized will no longer be oppressed so the two inevitably will violently collide.

Decolonization is the explosion of aggression towards the oppressor. Again I say this to stress that the oppressor is considered to be the main source of frustration by the indigenous populace. The violent revolution does not consist of a wild mob who converge upon some frail policeman or solider. The revolution has a task and a goal to achieve. Each one of the revolutionary participants has a distinct connection to another that connection exists in a common history. Their common history lay in murder, rape, extraction, dehumanization, and imperial tyranny. The way in which a colonizer can keep ‘order’ and civility is to divide and conquer. Colonialism was based on power relationship binaries such as the black vs. white, evil vs. good, barbaric vs. civilized. While creating colonial unrest the ‘thing’, meaning the Algerian and the Vietnamese, becomes a man by virtue of freeing himself and his people. The violence of the revolution is not created by the colonized but is the result of the colonizer’s violent traditions. In the case of Algeria and Vietnam, “It is colonialism which forces violence to become a cleansing agent which has the cathartic effect of creating a new identity both at individual and collective levels.”30 The revolution will meet the demands of the oppressed peoples. All avenues will be exhausted in the native’s effort to free themselves.

The great Mission Civilsatrice was deemed to be a noble cause by the French empire. The society as a collective majority believed in these grand endeavors. The ideology that was constructed emphasized the assumed fact that the achieved civilization

of France was superior to the cultures of primitive peoples. Therefore, it was French
duty, burden, and moral obligation to civilize the natives they encountered. From the
beginning of the operation the French military led the way. France inflicted violence
upon the natives and when the natives were conquered France maintained their grip on
the colonies through violence. French violence would inspire opposition from the
oppressed native populace. The indigenous would rise up against France in violence.

From the framework that I have created violent rebellion is legitimized because the
rebellion sought out one essential goal, and that was freedom from colonialism. France had oppressed the Vietnamese and the Algerians for too long politically,
economically, and socially. Today many non-Western groups are oppressed in the same
way for the same three basic reasons. The language of the dominating capitalist nations
might change but the ideas are the same. The ideology is to open up non-industrial
countries, by force if necessary, for business production, business surplus, finance capital,
raw materials, and cheap or unpaid labor. Western men and women pack up their
families and settle in non-Western countries to propel or to use nineteenth century
rhetoric to civilize the indigenous populace. All of these things went on in the French
empire that is why I say colonialism still existing today.

As a Westerner I feel that it is imperative that we challenge the actions of our
society, meaning the West, in an effort to prevent similar occurrences such as those in
Vietnam and Algeria. At the university level we learn to challenge discourse, discipline,
and ideology. We do this not to be rebellious but to discover new conclusions for better
individual and global understandings. If we do not then all of this acquired knowledge
that we have achieved is for naught because to simply except Western ideology is to
blindly except the conventional. Seeing that we are a heterogeneous global society I believe that we should recognize and respect our communal differences in an effort to coexist. If we do this, assumed inferior and superior civilizations will not be pitted against one another.

Epilogue:
The New Mission to Civilize in the Middle East

Colonialism is still alive today. The only difference between old colonialism versus, what I call, ‘Neo Occupationalism’ is the writing because both deal with foreign control. In the mid nineteenth century a powerful country would make it clear to the rest of the world that they were an imperial force, in fact they would boastfully tag the word *empire* to their name. To be considered an empire was laudable and legitimate; it was the norm for a select few. A small group of scholars or critics spoke out against imperial actions but the civilizing burden of the metropole, which held the majority, muffled the critics. Consequently, countries such as France could go into non-Western lands and colonize. In the contemporary world colonialism would not be allowed. For one country to invade another for socio-economic and political benefits would cause global alarm. Currently Western nations, such as the United States, dub the invasion of another country an ‘Occupation’, because the word occupation has temporary connotations not permanent associations such as the old world term colonialism.

After examining the way in which two countries choose to violently shed themselves of colonialism, nations with imperial ambitions should think twice when
debating whether or not to invade and maintain other states. We need to look at French imperialism in Vietnam and Algeria as a blueprint so as not to repeat similar mistakes in the present and the future. I am presently speaking about the Iraq situation of today.

There are many parallels between French imperialism and the United States’ Occupation of Iraq. In order for the U.S. to avoid similar outcomes, such as violent revolt, the Americans should look upon past failures for insight. One would think that the U.S.’s military failure in Vietnam would provoke discussion but the same mistakes are being made today.

In the United States there is one essential theme that seems to spill out of the mouths of the administration and their primary spokesman President, George W. Bush. America is bringing democracy to the people of Iraq. The French made similar statements in the nineteenth century. The Great Mission to Civilize was supposed to free the Algerians and the Vietnamese from barbarian bondage via Western culture. The French established that ‘Frenchness’ was superior and the indigenous populations were inferior. The natives did not know how to modernize and govern themselves so the French would help them along by giving the natives a cultural boost. The echoes of French imperialism radiate through the United States’ diplomacy. President Bush is professing that democracy is superior to whatever else the Iraqis have known. The Iraqi people need a cultural boost, just like the French colonies, because they are incapable of modernizing and governing themselves without assistance because they lack a democratic base. If they do not receive assistance they will become a state of civil unrest. In addition the U.S. is protecting their interest, such as homeland security, and Iraqi freedom. Therefore, the connection can be made the nineteenth century Mission to
Civilize and the twenty-first century Mission for Democracy are theoretically similar. It was very clear that the people of Iraq were ruled by an evil dictator, but the way in which the United States imposes their liberation is troublesome and harkens back to French rhetoric.

In Bush’s assessment of Iraq and the Middle East he tends to group a vast area into one homogeneous pot. As Bush exclaims in his State of the Union address in 2004:

As long as the Middle East remains a place of tyranny and despair and anger, it will continue to produce men and movements that threaten the safety of America and our friends. So America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East. We will challenge the enemies of reform, confront the allies of terror, and expect a higher standard from our friend.31

Bush paints a picture of the Middle East as a place infested by bloodthirsty thugs and tyrants who are opposed to democracy. In his opinion the Middle East is opposed to everything that is good and virtuous. The federal government and Bush challenge Iraq and the Middle East to join the side of freedom because democracy is the only way to truly live. Sadly enough Bush is not the only one to think of the Middle East in such a closed minded way. Samuel P. Huntington believes that Western interest should be backed by whatever force it takes because the non-West, the Middle East in particular, has become a place of nuclear hoarding and violent turbulence. In his 1993 article Huntington suggest that the primary objective of the West is to prevent non-Western societies from developing military capabilities that threaten the West. These preventions should be exercised through international agreements, economic pressure, and control of

31 http://www.whitehouse.gov
arms. Bush in his speech and Huntington, in his article created this new Orient, the Middle East, as substandard while establishing the Occident, the U.S, as greater.

When the French established their colonies they created their ideology of the Mission to Civilize to justify occupation. Today Bush has created a similar ideology of America bringing democracy to liberate Middle Eastern peoples through occupation. Essentially, Bush has produced the Neo Occupationalism which established control of Iraq. The way in which the United States conquered Iraq and imposed their ideals of democracy was through violence. The United States did conquer Iraq because it was a military not a diplomatic campaign that overthrew Saddam.

Conquering and maintaining territory through violence is what got Franc into trouble. The Iraqis know that truly they had no say as to what kind of government would be set up when Saddam’s party was overthrown. The Iraqis could never have become a communist or socialist party because they would not have been allowed to do so by the United States which is a democratic and capitalist hegemonic power. The only government that could have been put in place was a democratic administration. The Bush Administration is adamant about making formally democracy work in Iraq so that it spreads to other Middle Eastern states and the U.S. will do this by force if necessary. As Bush expressed in his speech:

... the Voice of America and other broadcast services are expanding their programming in Arabic and Persian -- and soon, a new television service will begin providing reliable news and information across the region. I will send you a proposal to double the budget of the National Endowment for Democracy, and to focus its new work on the development of free elections, and free markets, free press, and free labor unions in the Middle East. And above all, we will finish the historic work of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, so those nations can light the way for others, and help transform a troubled part of the world.33

33 http://www.whitehouse.gov
As a result of these forced democratic principles and government by the U.S. the West should be wary. I suggest that the West should be a little uneasy about the aftershocks of forcefully implanting democracy in Iraq and the Middle East for three reasons. The first reason is that the violence that has been exercised by the United States may foster violent rebellion by the Iraqis against the West. We have already seen instances of this on television and in the newspapers. As of right now there are groups of Iraqis that do not approve of the way the U.S. brought about liberation. Second, a need for decolonization or occupation coming out of violent rebellion could surface. Violent rebellion may not be enough for the Iraqi people. They may want to be completely relieved of foreign control and will use violence as the cleansing agent. The last reason that the West should be hesitant about the Great Mission to Bring Democracy is that the mission may intensify the hatred towards the West. Enforcing foreign ideals, government, doctrines, and principles on a conquered group of people will foster resistance.

It is evident by my assessment that some type of resistance or revolution will take place in the Middle East in opposition to Neo Occupationalism. To back up my argument I have examined French imperialism in Vietnam and Algeria. What I have determined is that colonialism or Occupationalism can have adverse effects. As Bush stated in his State of the Union speech I too ‘believe that God has planted in every human heart the desire to live in freedom. And even when that desire is crushed by tyranny for decades, it will rise again.’[^34] Right now your mission for democracy is just as appalling as the regime that ruled before.

[^34]: [http://www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)
Appendix One

Take up the White Man's burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden--
The savage wars of peace--
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hopes to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden--
No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper--
The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
The roads ye shall not tread,
Go mark them with your living,
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden--
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard--
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:--
"Why brought he us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?"

Take up the White Man's burden--
Ye dare not stoop to less--
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloke your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your gods and you.

Take up the White Man's burden--
Have done with childish days--
The lightly proferred laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search your manhood
Through all the thankless years
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,
The judgment of your peers!

BIOGRAPHY


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