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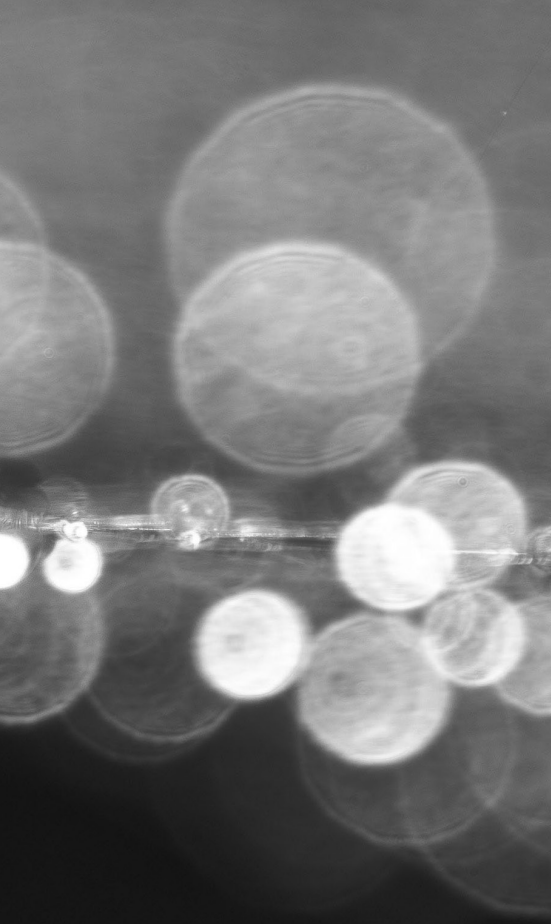


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Dearest Reader,

Welcome to the 10th anniversary volume of *Occam's Razor (OR)*, Western Washington University's undergraduate academic journal. Beginning in 2010 as a passion project of co-founders Chris Crow and Cameron Adams, *Occam's Razor* set out to become the premier platform for exceptional undergraduate scholarship at Western, to communicate research in a uniquely interdisciplinary manner and, in Cameron's words, to hold space for the communal exploration of ideas and topics.

In ten years and ten volumes, *Occam's Razor* has accomplished much: We have achieved official recognition as a Western Student Publication with full university funding; we have helped jump-start the academic careers of numerous Western scholars; we have developed methodologies to make challenging scholarship accessible across disciplinary boundaries; and we have forwarded knowledge and learning regarding pertinent issues of inquiry, especially in relation to efforts of social justice. While I look upon what we have accomplished—that is, what accomplishments have been passed down to this team—with pride, I also acknowledge that *Occam's Razor* has much more work to do in the future: We must increase our submission and publication rates to be of better use to our campus community and we must increase our efforts to publish WWU students of color and, in particular, Black and Indigenous scholars. These questions remain to be answered and developed: How do we truly hold communal space for an empathetic and just exchange of interdisciplinary ideas, and how can such a space produce action and transformation in and outside of our academic institutions? In short, what exactly is an academic journal for?

In Vol. 10, the *OR* staff are proud to offer five excellent essays and research papers from the disciplines of Communication Studies/Journalism, Political Ecology, Psychology, Critical Film & Game Studies, and History. All of these pieces investigate or address a variety of unjust systems, a complex multitude of interrelated social mechanisms and complicities. Discussions include settler colonial continuities in neoliberal environmentalism, hegemonic white bias in news writing and coverage, and the multi-faceted sociopolitical and economic systems responsible for the history of Atlantic piracy. Some essays offer potential solutions: how music might make school classrooms more accessible for neurodivergent students and how the thoughtful construction of video game environments might provoke revolutions in social life and desire. Simultaneously, we must acknowledge that such works diverge radically in their approaches and we not wish to erase their differences but, instead, to see them in communication with each other and with readers across a variety of disciplines.

I would like to thank every member of the *Occam's Razor* staff—Katie, Mac, Sam, Fiona, and Veronica Anne—for their diligent work in a time of crisis and reduced *OR* funding. This year has been difficult, but I could not be prouder of our work. I am also grateful to Student Publications for continuing to fight for Vol. 10's printing budget and to Megan McGinnis and Christopher Patton for their ongoing support of our enterprise. Finally, I must thank every past member of the *OR* staff for their commitment to producing this magazine and leaving me—and future chief editors—with visions of what *Occam's Razor* can someday become.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ally Remy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ally Remy
Editor-in-Chief



#IFTHEY GUNNED MEDOWN

A Narrative Analysis of News Media Coverage

By Zoe Deal

ABSTRACT

This study examines the 2014 media coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, an early example of hashtag activism driven by the social media sub-community Black Twitter in response to the murder of a Black teenager, Michael Brown, Jr., by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Reacting to national reporting on the event, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown criticized the mainstream media for promoting racially prejudiced representations of Brown and utilized this example to critique two historical patterns in American news coverage: the pattern of stereotyping Black Americans as violent to justify police brutality and the pattern of representing journalism informed by a hegemonically white perspective as “objective.” Under the lens of Critical Race Theory and following Sonja K. Foss’s method of narrative analysis, this research identifies, organizes and compares models of reporting on #IfTheyGunnedMeDown in mainstream national, mainstream regional and Black American-centered news media outlets. The emerging narratives, grouped under the terms “Empowerment” and “Information,” reveal that the mainstream media often evaded addressing the critiques of its institutional practices while Black American-centered publications illustrated the historical significance of digital counterpublics in advocating for social change. These results suggest the ongoing need to diversify mainstream media institutions and fundamentally transform their traditional approaches to news narratives.

INTRODUCTION

On August 9, 2014, around noon, the doors of Ferguson Market and Liquor swung open as Michael Brown, Jr. and his friend, Dorian Johnson, departed with a pack of allegedly stolen cigarillos in hand (Bosman & Goldstein, 2014). Following an altercation with Officer Darren Wilson, fatally shot Brown with six bullets. In the hours and days that followed, tensions in the city of Ferguson rose; at the candlelight vigil the next night, thousands of chanting mourners were met with hundreds of law enforcement officers in riot gear sparking weeks of protest in what became known as the Ferguson Uprising (Bosman & Goode, 2014). This local event quickly turned national as Brown's killing was publicized by the **Black Lives Matter** movement and contextualized with an ongoing history of violent police brutality and murder of Black youth. The news media scoured Brown's social media in the days that followed, pulling details of his life and death from the posts of friends and Ferguson locals.

As media coverage grew and images of Brown's face spread across the nation and world, the photo did not reflect the face his family recognized, the face of a high school graduate—it showed the face of an “intimidating” man holding up what some perceived as a gang sign (Callahan, 2014). This negative portrayal was chosen by regional news media, such as *The St. Louis American*, and national legacy news media, such as *USA Today* and NBC News. Like many Black victims of gun violence, Brown's story was shaped by visuals that fed into historical stereotypes of Black men as “animalistic and brutish” (Smithsonian, n.d.). Members of Black Twitter publicly reasoned that this choice joined a longstanding pattern of

AS A HASHTAG MOVEMENT, #IFTHEYGUNNEDMEDOWN REMINDED THE NEWS MEDIA TO MAKE RESPONSIBLE CHOICES IN THEIR COVERAGE; BY CHOOSING A PHOTO THAT DISPLAYS A PERSON IN A SOCIALLY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE WAY, THE NEWS MEDIA HAS THE POWER TO SWAY THE PATHOS OF THE PUBLIC.



media prejudice in reporting on Black victims, a way of “justifying the use of lethal force on an unarmed teen” (Serwer, 2014). The group identified this decision as an example of the mainstream media's enduring white-by-default coverage, denouncing the media's conceptions of objective reporting as informed by a white perspective.

On the morning of August 10th, C.J. Lawrence posted on Twitter, challenging the media's erroneous representation of Brown. He tweeted, “Yes let's do that: Which photo does the media use if the police shot me down? #IfTheyGunned-MeDown” and included two juxtaposed images: one of him speaking at the 2003 Tougaloo College commencement beside former President Bill Clinton and the other of Lawrence on Halloween dressed as Kanye West (Chappell, 2014). The hashtag pointed to the bias in the news media's coverage of Black people compared to white people and addressed the economies of power at play in the media's facilitation of public judgment concerning whose life had value. In the biased coverage of Brown's killing, Black Twitter was particularly outraged by and responsive to the extensive coverage of Darren Wilson, the Ferguson police officer who killed him.

On social media, *The New York Times* found itself the subject of mass critique and outrage after a photo of their front-page spread went viral; profiles of Wilson and Brown ran side-by-side, intertwining their stories and initiating a game of legitimacy (Sullivan, 2014). *The Times* public editor Margaret Sullivan (2014) admitted, “In my view, the timing

BLACK LIVES MATTER:

In response to continued trends of police brutality against Black Americans and spurred by the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2013, the online community #BlackLivesMatter was founded to demand change. It has since grown to a vast network spanning more than 40 communities around the globe.

SUBALTERN COUNTERPUBLIC:

Discursive arenas created under the significant exclusions of dominant public spheres where members of subordinated groups revise discourses to form new interpretations of identity.

PUBLIC SPHERE:

A realm of discourse between society and the state where public opinion is formulated and, Jürgen Habermas noted, "access is guaranteed to all citizens."

DIGITAL COUNTERPUBLIC:

a digital form of Fraser's subaltern counterpublic, where diverse communities generate critical discourse apart from the dominant public sphere

of the article (on the day of Mr. Brown's funeral) was not ideal. Its pairing with a profile of Mr. Wilson seemed to inappropriately equate the two people." Many also noted that the photo of Darren Wilson used widely by the news media (including *The New York Times*) featured him smiling in uniform, begging the question: What is the media's responsibility in representation? As a hashtag movement, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown reminded the news media to make responsible choices in their coverage; by choosing a photo that displays a person in a socially positive or negative way, the news media has the power to sway the pathos of the public.

The hashtag erupted on Black Twitter and within 24 hours had been used more than 100,000 times (Judah, 2014). Simultaneously, #Ferguson flew up to the most used social-issues hashtag in Twitter's 10-year history, and as of March 2016, had been tweeted over 27,200,000 times (Sichynsky, 2016). With the support of Black Twitter, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown joined the ranks of other burgeoning hashtag movements, including #BlackLivesMatter, #WeAreTrayvon and #IdleNoMore, demonstrating the potential of social media to act as a catalyst for nation-wide socio-political movements.

Twitter users responded to the Ferguson uprisings before national news media could get on the scene. Through social media, civilians shared what they were seeing and experiencing. Sichynsky (2016) of *The Washington Post* wrote that "social media became a critical component of balanced coverage of the protests in Ferguson." Sichynsky added that the use of Twitter and hashtags amplified the voices of a community often left unheard. This was a movement by Black people for Black people and a wake-up call to traditional news media as well as white Americans. Within days, the mainstream news media had no option but to respond to #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. It was not the first time Twitter users had forced the media to consider their errors, and it would not be the last. In the years to follow, more examples of hashtag activism would join #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, including #TakeAKnee, #Metoo, #MarchForOurLives, #OscarsSoWhite and #DefundThePolice, demonstrating the power of social media as a rapidly growing platform for news consumers to create and publicize narratives of change.

This article is devoted to an analysis of how the U.S. mainstream news media covered #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. It centers around online-available news stories focused entirely on discussing the hashtag movement. Under the lens of Critical Race Theory, this study analyzes a select group of texts from mainstream national, local and historically Black American news media to explore the dominant narratives in news coverage and understand the direct result of this protest at a news-room level.



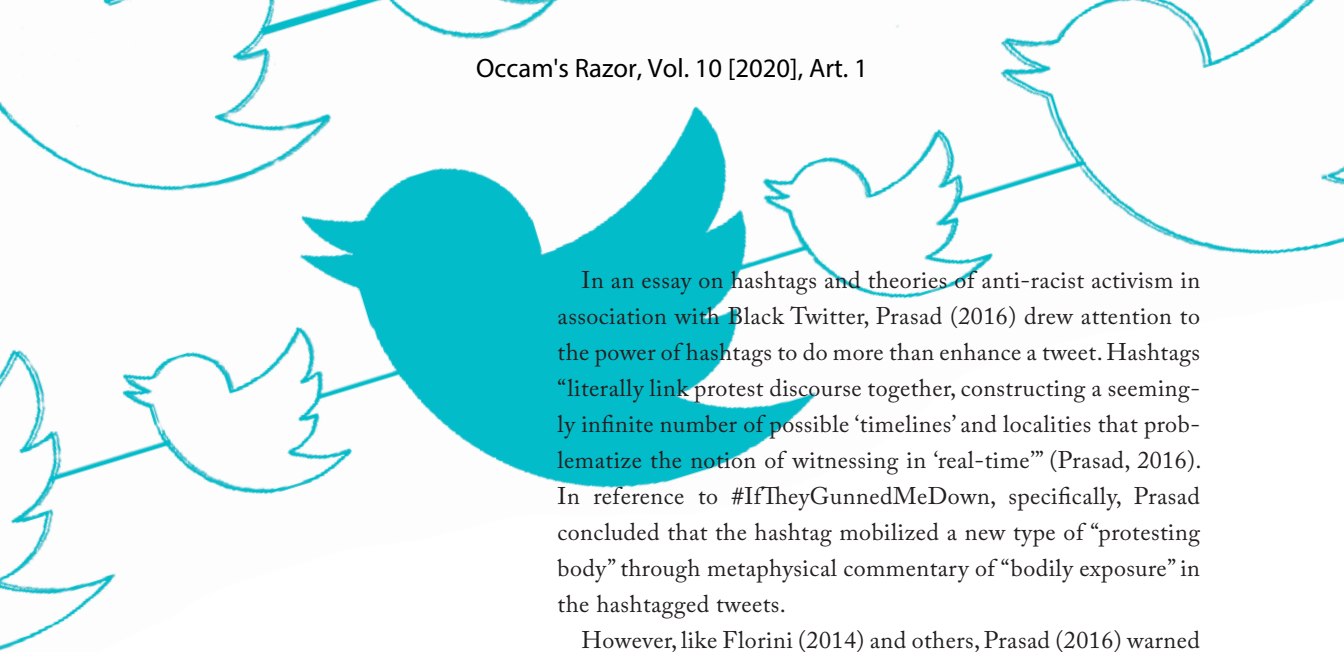
A key facet of this study is an analysis of how social media can push a story onto the national agenda—a reverse agenda-setting technique that requires consideration in the social media era. This research illustrates the importance of news media transparency by interrogating how the field of journalism traditionally responds to issues in their coverage of race and misrepresentation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

BLACK TWITTER

Black Twitter is a subset of Twitter often characterized by “short-lived internet memes, often in the form of ambiguous racialized humour” and recognized as “a space created to expose systemic injustices” (Sharma, 2013, p. 48; Stevens & Maurantonio, 2018). Florini (2014) described Black Twitter as, “the substantial Black presence on Twitter,” built off of a 2009 Pew Internet and American Life Project report which found that 26% of Black Americans use Twitter and/or social media, compared with 19% of white Americans. An Edison Research and Arbitron study found that Black Americans comprised 12-13% of the U.S. population, yet made up 24% of 17 million U.S. Twitter users (Webster, 2011), a population discrepancy which drives Pew’s findings even further.

As a community of narratives, Black Twitter builds upon what Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) calls “signifyin’.” Florini (2014) explained signifyin’ as “a catch-all term for various Black American oral traditions.” Put simply, it is an “alternative message form” that fosters collective solidarity in Black American communities (Florini, 2014; Mitchell-Kernan, 1999). In this medium, meaning is often placed outside of lexical and syntactical bounds and requires “certain forms of cultural knowledge and cultural competencies” (Florini, 2014). As an extension of Fraser’s (1990) **subaltern counterpublic** and Habermas’s (1962) notion of a “**public sphere**,” Hill (2018) has put forward the term “**digital counterpublic**” to characterize Black Twitter. Hill explained that Black Twitter is a modern alternative to traditional locals, like Black barbershops and churches, as a place to “generate critical racial political discourses outside the gaze of the White mainstream.” The resultant online community has therefore acted as a forum for protest and social critique (Carney, 2016). Florini (2014) observed that hashtags similarly serve this function.



In an essay on hashtags and theories of anti-racist activism in association with Black Twitter, Prasad (2016) drew attention to the power of hashtags to do more than enhance a tweet. Hashtags “literally link protest discourse together, constructing a seemingly infinite number of possible ‘timelines’ and localities that problematize the notion of witnessing in ‘real-time’” (Prasad, 2016). In reference to #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, specifically, Prasad concluded that the hashtag mobilized a new type of “protesting body” through metaphysical commentary of “bodily exposure” in the hashtagged tweets.

However, like Florini (2014) and others, Prasad (2016) warned that quantifying Black bodies and framing Black identity as a monoculture “risks reifying the racial categories of White and Black.” Not all Black American Twitter users categorize themselves under the umbrella of Black Twitter, and not all Black Twitter users identify as Black. For this reason, the nuances of Black Twitter and the Black digital counterpublic must be kept at the forefront of analysis.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Advanced out of legal scholarship, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a lens through which scholars in all fields analyze race and institutionalized racism. Alarmed when the forward momentum of the civil rights movement shuddered to a halt and even rolled back, scholars in the 1970s built CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 4). The theory considers conventional civil rights in a wider context that takes into account self-interest, feelings and history (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and so “foregrounds a concern with the historical, political and socio-economic position of Black Americans relative to white American society” (Breen & Meer, 2019). For the purposes of this study, five key points have been pulled out that specifically relate to journalism and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown:

1. Racism exists and is, in fact, ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7).
2. Under the “social construction thesis,” society has invented the concept of race and races, as neither correspond to genetics or biology. (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 8).
3. The resulting society/public sphere has been historically constructed through “a series of tacit agreements mediated by images, tales, and other scripts” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 8, 48).

4. Due to different histories and experiences with oppression, people of color have the ability to speak on the subject with a presumed competence and should be given a chance to do so (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p 10).
5. And so, counternarratives center the experiences of people of color, allowing for amplification of often silenced perspectives, thereby pushing the bounds of white supremacy (Dixson & Anderson, 2006).

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown and the Ferguson protests must be contextualized within the history of race and power in the United States. The large number of Black Americans on Twitter led to the subcommunity “Black Twitter,” which has partially replaced traditional modes of discourse in the Black community for younger generations of Black Americans. This trendsetting, challenging platform has empowered previously silenced voices to speak out against injustice. As social media surmounts traditional print newspapers as the top source of information for media consumers (Shearer, 2018), hashtags became the method by which community and protests can form; they offer a unique channel that continues to transcend geographic boundaries and unite strangers in a common goal. Guided by the tenets of CRT and the context of Black Twitter, this study seeks to answer the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1: What were the prominent narratives of mainstream, local and Black American-centered news media in their coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown?

RQ 2: Did Black Twitter’s efforts to promote #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and challenge misrepresentation in mainstream media force a conversation between the two parties?

RQ 3: Did the media respond to the concerns of Twitter users in their coverage?

METHODS

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis is a family of approaches with which scholars explore various forms of storytelling. Some analysts have looked at the function of narratives, while others analyzed interactions between creator, audience and performative elements (Riessman, 1993); these various methods are utilized based on the nature and type of text. Narrative “functions as an argument to view and understand the world in a particular way” and is used by writers to “help us impose order on the flow of experience so that we can make sense of events and actions in our lives” (Foss, 1989). To study narratives is to study how humans understand existence and recognize broad themes that define each generation.

The idea of creating order is primarily noteworthy in looking at media coverage. In the modern century, journalists cater to the changing narrative needs of the population (American Press Institute, n.d.). Richardson observed, “At the individual level, people make sense of their lives through the stories available to them, and they attempt to fill their lives with available stories. People live by stories” (as cited in Barnett, 2005). As media gatekeepers, journalists also play a significant role in actively influencing and guiding these narratives, to both positive and negative effects. There are only so many stories, and so many ways to create those stories, often journalists are pushed to “use and reuse ... story lines” and “take comfort in the old formulas” (Hanson, 2001), even as these formulas may engage in bias and enforce misrepresentation. As online clicks become more important to the financial success and profit of the news media, these repeated narratives have become more sensationalized, leading to the prevalence of the term “fake news” and the degradation of media trust (Brenan, 2019). As a result of the cursory modernization of these old formulas, the field of journalism has often shown an implicit bias in coverage and a failure to offer adequate coverage to the diverse communities they serve (Armstrong, 2018).

In analyzing the following coverage, narrative analysis offers the means by which to identify themes and characteristics of individual texts. Foss's (1989) guided questions for narrative criticism structured the analysis of these texts, specifically focusing on her sample questions on **causal relations**, as well as audience, **characters**, narrator and theme. Scholars have previously used Foss's questions to frame analysis of media coverage on topics such as eating disorders (Bishop, 2001) and women who perpetrate violence (Barnett, 2005). Foss's method is the best to employ here due to its flexibility, which extends fewer constraints on analysis and allows for extended interpretations of stories.

MEDIA SELECTION

MAINSTREAM NATIONAL SELECTION

The character and influence of each traditional news media outlet were critical in choosing articles and publications. After #IfTheyGunnedMeDown went viral, many media outlets quickly swapped their photos of Brown, making it difficult to track which organizations originally shared the negative depiction. Due to this issue, visual elements did not affect article selection in this study.

The New York Times and *The Washington Post* were central to the national corpus. In terms of national coverage, these rival news outlets were the most likely to offer in-depth coverage of social issues, regardless of proximity. With a diverse reader base and strong global identity, *The New York Times* is a legacy paper that drives national conversation and is widely considered to be the newspaper of record for the United States (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). The company reports 78.1 million unique visitors each month online with 3 in 4 readers consuming news exclusively online (*The New York Times*, n.d.). *The New York Times* also emphasizes having an affluent reader base of "Opinion Leaders," c-suites, millionaires and business decision-makers. In this realm, the newspaper reports a circulation of 4.6 million and

readers with an average \$191,000 annual income. With a similar audience, style and content, *The Washington Post* (n.d.) self-reports that it is one of the fastest-growing news sites in the world. Each month washingtonpost.com reports an average 66 million unique visitors and, as of 2017, the newspaper's print circulation hit an average 359,158 daily and 551,360 on Sundays (Washington Post Media Kit, n.d.).

The other publications in the national corpus are NPR and MSNBC. NPR is first and foremost a public radio outlet, serving a wide demographic of national consumers. With a growing online presence, however, NPR has redefined itself as a credible online-only national news outlet (NPR, n.d.). The organization reports 41.6 million monthly users and characterizes their audience as influential and curious (NPR Audience, n.d.). As small, local newspapers and radio news outlets have diminished in size and scope, NPR has continued to have "a major role in the American journalistic landscape" (Fallows, 2010). With 34 bureaus worldwide and more than 1,000 local member stations broadcasting their content, NPR has managed to sustain national and international influence without sacrificing its quality content and ample mission to promote a more informed public.

MSNBC is a television network offering live news coverage at all hours of the day (Comcast Spotlight, 2019). Though it was founded independently by Microsoft and General Electric's NBC unit in 1996, it is now a manifestation, or brand, of NBC News (Weprin, 2012). While NBC is focused on news and entertainment, MSNBC found a niche reporting national and international news primarily focused on politics and society. MSNBC has grown rapidly in audience viewership over the past few years, reporting double-digit growth from 2017 to 2018 as it consistently barreled ahead of rival CNN, though remaining

well below Fox News (Katz, 2019, Jan. 2). In 2018, it reported more Black American and Asian American viewers than any other cable network. Though their online content is less likely to reach as many readers as other outlets, MSNBC remains a valuable asset for research as a broadcast-focused news outlet.

It is important to note that, while these organizations are not quick to release information about audience demographics, a large body of research shows that the modern newsrooms of the mainstream news media do not reflect the diversity of the communities they cover (Section 4, 2012; Chideya, 2018; American Society of News Editors, 2016). In America, where roughly 40% of citizens identify with a minority group, the percentage of minorities in the overall workforce of traditional daily print and online-only organizations is about 17% (American Society of News Editors, 2016). Black and Hispanic Americans in particular tend to be the most underrepresented in newsrooms (Atske, Barthel, Stocking & Tamir, 2019). In analyzing work from these outlets, it is essential to recognize that traditional reporting practices often continue to position journalistic narratives in a de facto white perspective.

BLACK AMERICAN-CENTERED MEDIA

History and audience were important factors in choosing articles from Black American-centered media outlets. The publications included in this study are either historically significant and well-known Black American-centered media news organizations or news outlets founded on catering news to an often-underserved population. These news outlets have each established credibility and community as they have been devoted to reporting about injustices against Black Americans and keeping communities informed and bound together.

The Chicago Defender has long been the nation's most influential Black newspaper, supporting the great migration of Black Americans to the north in the early 1900s (History of *The Chicago Defender*). It is now the flagship weekly publication of Real Time Inc., the publisher of five other Black American-centered regional weekly newspapers.

Another longstanding newspaper included is *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Established in 1884, it is the longest continuously running Black American-centered newspaper in the country (*The Philadelphia Tribune*, n.d.). Founder Christopher James

CHARACTERS:

When reporting on an event, journalists must make choices about what people to include, how to characterize them, and how to connect this characterization with the overall meaning or focus of story. Important questions to ask when considering the role of characters in journalism include: What aspects of these people are included in the reporting? Who is allowed to speak? What are people reported as saying and what message is being communicated about their speech? Are these characters dynamic and given a stake in the story or are they characterized as flat, formulaic, and utilized only to fill a narrative need?

CAUSAL RELATIONS:

The cause-and-effect relationships between events as presented in a journalistic article

Perry, Sr. once said to his father, “For my people to make progress, they must have a newspaper through which they can speak against injustice” (The Philadelphia Tribune, n.d.). The newspaper is now published five days a week and has been honored with the John B. Russwurm Award seven times since 1995 for “Best Newspaper” in America.

Originally a collective of church publications, the *Baltimore Afro-American* is the longest-running Black American family-owned newspaper in the United States, established in 1892 (About Us, n.d.). For a time, as many as 13 editions of the newspaper circulated across the country, though that number has dwindled to two as of 2019: Baltimore and Washington, D.C. (Rienzi, 2008).

The odd addition to this collection is an article from *The Root*, an Black American culture-focused online magazine created by *The Washington Post* in 2008. The magazine set itself apart from similar websites through more highbrow, culture-focused coverage (Pérez-Peña, 2008). The magazine’s founder Henry Louis Gates, Jr. sees *The Root* as a way to bring back the once thriving dissemination of Black American-centered news media. In his childhood, he recalls, “We would get in the Black barbershops both *The Pittsburgh Courier* and *The Baltimore Afro-American*” and people would read and discuss the news (Pérez-Peña, 2008). By catering to the digital-first younger generation of media consumers, *The Root* sets itself apart from the organizations that paved the way for Black American-first media outlets.

REGIONAL MEDIA

One local article from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Missouri’s major regional newspaper, was included in this study. Ferguson is a mere 20-minute drive from St. Louis; reporters from the station were likely the first on the scene when events in Ferguson became a national issue. The newspaper reports 5,350,958 unique visitors each month on their website STLToday.com (2019 Audience Scorecard, 2019). This regional coverage was included to mediate

NATIONAL NEWS PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION (NNPA):

A longstanding collection of Black American media publishers.

the national and Black American-centered news outlets. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*’s circulation level sits between the two other categories, and its audience is regional and community-based. This text was included to determine whether coverage from a regional paper aligned more with patterns in the mainstream media or those of Black American-centered news media. Due to small sample size, the findings of this category cannot be indicative of all Missouri-based or other regional outlets.

SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

Articles from well-known national news media were found and collected by searching the Nexis Uni database using the search terms “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown” and “If They Gunned Me Down.” While there are many news outlets based in Missouri, a regional paper was chosen because it was the only one found with coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. Ferguson’s newspaper, *The Ferguson Citywalk*, did not provide coverage available online. To find instances of “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown” and “If They Gunned Me Down” in Black American-centered news media, every site recognized by the **National News Publishers Association (NNPA)** was searched through individually. Roughly 200 community newspapers are affiliated with the NNPA; of the eight articles devoted to discussing #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, four were chosen (NNPA, n.d.).

Stories included in this study were empirically hand-picked based on the depth of their coverage. Those that mentioned #IfTheyGunnedMeDown in passing were disregarded, as well as any stories outside of the period marking the first four weeks of the Ferguson Unrest—from August 9, 2014 to August 25, 2014. Though most of the articles included were published between August 10th and August 15th, the time frame was extended to the supposed end date of the first wave of Ferguson Unrest—the day of Michael Brown, Jr.'s funeral—to accommodate weekly and monthly publications. Nine news articles were coded: four national, four Black American-centered and one regional.

CODING

Each article was read numerous times, guided by Foss's (1989) sample questions of narrative structure, to determine and understand the narratives presented. Key subtopics intrinsic to media coverage, including characters, causal relations, themes, narrator and audience, were then identified. Myths and language, as well as how the texts introduced and named characters, were also analyzed. Notes on these topics were recorded in a color-coded spreadsheet for each article, using each subtopic to inform an understanding of the story's dominant narrative. Finally, due to each story's uniqueness, the intricacies of each narrative were examined and grouped under a broader narrative.

FINDINGS

In U.S. news coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, two opposing narratives appear. The first collection of stories focuses coverage on Black Twitter and movements of resistance and empowerment. The second category looks at the effect of negative media stereotypes surrounding Black victims of police brutality and gun violence, addressing the media's potential to perpetuate systemic violence. These narratives were informed by an intensive analysis of nine stories focused on #IfTheyGunnedMeDown published between August 9 to August 25, 2014. The purpose of this research is to find the prominent narratives in coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown between news media types to see whether a conversation ensued between the protestors and the media and whether the media was reflexive in its response.

EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVE: BLACK TWITTER AS A FORUM FOR EMPOWERMENT

Stories under this category ascertain that the unjust killing of Michael Brown, Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014, fueled unrest that was amplified by his unsympathetic and inaccurate representation in the mainstream media. These stories viewed Black Twitter users as responding to an unjust event and fairly pushing the mistakes of the news media into a national conversation on stereotyping and (mis)representation. They accomplished this through including young Black sources, specifically from Black Twitter, and the occasional professional source. In coverage from each Black American-centered news outlet, the authors spoke from experience and used self-inclusive language, such as “us” and “we,” to unite Black Americans. The main theme of these stories was positive, and by focusing their attention on the movement's creators and constructing a narrative about shifting power dynamics and social media as a counterculture, these news media outlets found their coverage in historically-significant research while looking toward the future.

In coverage by *The Root* published on August 11, 2014, visceral, potent language set the tone for Black Americans to rise up to the task of sharing their “accurate narrative.” Author Yesha Callahan (2014) wrote: “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown is not only a sad commentary on what it means to be black in America but also shows that in order to have our own narrative correctly reported, we have to

do the reporting ourselves.” Other articles similarly used #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to address the burgeoning power of Black users on social media. In an article published in *The Philadelphia Tribune* on August 17, 2014, Bobbi Booker wrote, “As social media networks evolve, ‘Black Twitter’ proves to be the underground railroad of activism as it’s hashtag messages dominate Twitter timelines 140-characters at a time.” These articles included statistics on the high percentage of Black Americans on social media platforms from the Pew Research Center, alongside details about Twitter use. Visual examples were included in each story via embedded tweets. The text-heavy stories with this narrative from Black American-focused media outlets included only the first use of the hashtag by C.J. Lawrence. On the other hand, *The Chicago Defender* story relied heavily on visuals, embedding five tweets as examples of the hashtag (Editor, 2014).

A question appeared in the underlying structure of some stories in this category: Is social media activism really activism? Each story answered with a strengthening quote from a source stating that, yes, social media activism is activism. Other articles came to this conclusion immediately and spent the rest of the story discussing how the newfound power of marginalized groups in social media reflects a changing global dialogue surrounding race and the literal breaking of systemic, hegemonic narratives. These stories asked, “What does #IfTheyGunnedMeDown say about the influence of Black Americans on culture and society today?” Authors and sources alike shared their experiences and opinions about the transforming landscape of digital conversation. While writers at *The Root* and *The Chicago Defender* relied on their own voices as sources for the issue, articles from the NNPA, *The New York Times* and *The Philadelphia Tribune* weighed their narratives

on the movement’s actors, including highly-followed Twitter users and those who have used and created this and other hashtags. The only high-profile source used by texts in this narrative is President Obama, whose statement on the shooting appeared in *The New York Times* coverage.

The New York Times, as a traditional mainstream media outlet, is an outlier within this narrative, which is defined by ingroup language and motivations. Yet, with its angle, temporal relations and characters, *The New York Times* coverage is clearly within the bounds of the Empowerment Narrative. While journalists writing for Black American-centered news media utilized their own voices as group insiders to create their narratives, *The New York Times* took to interviewing people from around the country to build the story. This was likely done because *The New York Times* doesn’t speak for or with any community in particular, and so the voices important to raise were the ones from the community that drove the story. Yet, by assigning this story to a woman of color who specializes in issues of race and representation, *The New York Times* was able to diverge from traditional coverage methods and position itself within a new movement of diverse coverage. Tanzina Vega (2014) of *The New York Times* wrote, “the social media chatter and anguish have become part of a complicated sea of viral words and images [...] that have created a new and charged environment for social activism.” Among the many quotes included in the article, Vega chose to end on the words of Yemisi Miller-Tonnet, 19, a student at Spelman College in Atlanta: “Hashtag activism is activism. We might be tweeting from a couch, but we’re also getting up and doing the work that needs to be done.”

INFORMATION NARRATIVE: U.S. NEWS MEDIA IS IGNITING A LARGER TRADITION OF BIAS AND HARM AGAINST BLACK AMERICANS

Stories within the second narrative focused on the mission of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to change the habits of the mainstream news media. Four of the nine stories included in this study partly or fully subscribed to the Information Narrative by analyzing how media stereotyping might impact society and individuals. The causal relations (cause-and-effect) in these stories show a clear understanding of the potential damage of negative media representations, and the underlying theme is largely informative. This narrative has multiple veins and the stories within this category have as many differences as they do similarities, but all aim their analyses at the faults of the news media.

In coverage by *The Washington Post* and MSNBC, journalists brought up respectability politics as the key theme and/or catalyst of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. *The Root's* Damon Young (2016) defines respectability politics as “the idea that if [Black Americans] walk a little straighter and write a little neater and speak a little clearer, then white people will treat us better.” Soraya Nadia McDonald (2014) catered to this point in *The Washington Post* by structuring her article’s narrative around the media’s error in portraying Brown and **Trayvon Martin** as “violent thug[s] who had it coming.” In the wake of Brown’s murder, many recalled Martin’s murder and the subsequent media frenzy; not only were the events tragically similar, but the misrepresentation of both victims by the media broached respectability politics. McDonald (2014) addressed this by sharing a quote from talk show host Geraldo Rivera in a *Fox & Friends* segment as an example of stereotyping at its highest potency. Rivera said, “I think the hoodie is as much responsible for Trayvon Martin’s death as George Zimmerman was” (as cited in McDonald, 2014). The story then focused on its driving narrative: That the mainstream news media is actively passing judgment on victims as it sifts through potential photos. MSNBC’s coverage mirrored *The Washington Post* in its headline, in which it referenced victims’ “trial by social media” (as cited by Serwer, 2014). The story reflected on past cases when Black

TRAYVON MARTIN:

Trayvon Martin was a Black American high school student killed by George Zimmerman in February 2012. In 2013, the acquittal of George Zimmerman on the charge of murder sparked the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter which would later expand into a national organizing movement.

THE MAIN THEME OF THESE STORIES WAS POSITIVE, AND BY FOCUSING THEIR ATTENTION ON THE MOVEMENT’S CREATORS AND CONSTRUCTING A NARRATIVE ABOUT SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COUNTERCULTURE, THESE NEWS MEDIA OUTLETS FOUND THEIR COVERAGE IN HISTORICALLY-SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH WHILE LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE.



shooting victims were “tried” or judged over social media as a result of the news media’s choice of visual representation, giving evidence in the form of links, embedded videos and studies on racism and criminal justice policies. This is one sign of the second element of the Information Narrative—looking to the future. While The Washington Post and MSNBC articles referenced the past and made conclusions about the present, they failed to offer apologies or solutions.

NPR and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, on the other hand, pushed the topic by mentioning the stakes of making errors and referencing the need for future growth in media coverage. NPR’s brief coverage of the movement relayed events, referenced its parallels with Trayvon Martin and ended with a voice from Black Twitter: “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown Tweets should be required reading in every journalism class in America,” said one tweeter” (Chappell, 2014). The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* broke ranks by allowing two guest columnists to author its coverage. In the story, Salem State University communications professors Robert E. Brown and Rebecca Hains (2014) commented on the state of the media and responded to #IfTheyGunnedMeDown outright: “Selecting such unsympathetic photographs to represent young men who have been forever silenced through death — who can never tell their side of the story — is unjust” (Brown & Hains, 2014). The rest of the story was a call to action to journalists: #IfTheyGunnedMeDown should be “breaking news for the news media” (Brown & Hains, 2014). As gatekeepers, the article noted, the news media must be aware of the detrimental consequences of publishing inaccurate photographs, because the image choices have influence over the pathos of the public. While other stories in this narrative used embedded #IfTheyGunnedMeDown tweets, the only visual in this story was one of Michael Brown, Jr. in cap and gown in his high school graduation photo.

DISCUSSION

By comparing multiple veins of the news media, this study has the potential to stir a larger conversation about how different news media outlets react to and remedy errors publicly. Though Black Twitter pushed #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to the forefront of social media, stories within the Empowerment Narrative did not respond directly to accusations and spoke from an “Us vs. Them” perspective. Black American-centered outlets wrote as Black Americans, not members of the media, isolating mainstream media as the perpetrators. *The New York Times*, in speaking from a similar place, deflected the issue of the media’s wrongs and focused on hashtag activism and Black Twitter. All other mainstream news media fit conveniently into the Information Narrative as they focus on the cause of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and the future implications and impacts.

A past study by Araiza et al. (2016) on journalists’ tweets further explained the “Us vs. Them” approach taken in the Empowerment Narrative. The study found that journalists often framed protesters using language such as “angry mob,” “defiance” and the generalizing “they,” and that the use of this language “disassociated journalists from the protesters and aligned them with the police and the social order” (Araiza, Sturm, Istek & Bock, 2016). The heated, distrustful angle of the Empowerment Narrative, then, is extended by understanding that many journalists set themselves apart from the public through their actions in Ferguson. When journalists at Black American-centered news outlets called for continued efforts from Black Twitter users to build an accurate narrative, they referenced this media tradition of bias. The media’s negligence and biases were shown clearly in tweets from the scene; using a misrepresentative photo of Brown was merely one of the news media’s mistakes.

The national and local mainstream news media,

**WHILE THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA
GENERALLY FOLLOWS A STANDARD
METHOD OF COVERAGE, THE BLACK
AMERICAN-CENTERED NEWS MEDIA
TURNS THE FOCUS AWAY FROM THE
HASHTAG TO THE PEOPLE BEHIND IT.**



bar *The New York Times*, followed a distinct and largely unwavering narrative. At a baseline, they reported on the issues (*NPR*), talked about the context socially and episodically (*The Washington Post*, MSNBC) and looked to the future (*St-Louis Post-Dispatch*), offering that choosing less distorted images to represent young Black men “could go a long way toward mitigating prejudicial tendencies in news coverage” (Brown & Hains, 2014). Though they covered the movement, most of these outlets did not apologize, respond to allegations directly or offer plans to change the hegemonic narrative practices which have led to misrepresentation. *NPR*, *The Washington Post* and MSNBC’s coverage of the hashtag movement commented on the importance of the issue but neglected to recognize their roles as media outlets and engage with Black Twitter. The lack of exchange between the two parties signals that there was no conversation, or, at least, not on a large scale. *The St. Louis Post Dispatch* (2014) article was the sole story in the corpus to devote its entire narrative to changing the media landscape and was not even written by the publication’s reporters. The coverage, as a whole, shows startling discrepancies in understanding the larger societal themes that sparked #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. While some texts treat #IfTheyGunnedMeDown as a passing movement, an example of hashtag activism, others put the event into context and remark on the past and the future of United States race relations.

The key difference between the two narratives is perspective. While the mainstream media generally follows a standard method of coverage, the Black American-centered news media turns the focus away from the hashtag to the people behind it. In doing so, the Empowerment Narrative looks past the moment to look to the movement. This shift in perspective from the effect to the cause is the primary way coverage in the Empowerment Narrative strove to explain the complexity of this multifaceted social media movement. On the other hand, the mainstream news media largely failed to cover this issue in a personal and provocative way. None of the articles in the Information Narrative used ingroup language regarding the media or took time to recognize their part as members of the news media. Instead, they placed blame on other news outlets that had made errors—their commentary broad and their objective, third-person writing style not inclusive of the speaking party. While various articles spoke on the “court of public opinion,” they overlooked the role of journalists as the gatekeepers of the national agenda. The lacking coverage reflects a missed opportunity to spark a greater conversation about media stereotyping and diversity in news reporting and narrative perspectives.

CONCLUSION

This sample of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown coverage reveals tangible differences between coverage of events from Black American-centered news media and mainstream/regional news media. The stark contrast in focus between the Empowerment Narrative and the Information Narrative offers insight into how Black American-centered news media operates with a strong cultural and community focus, whereas mainstream news media approaches coverage from a strictly journalistic, hegemonic white perspective. Black American-centered news media reported subjectively on the power of Black Twitter and their digital counterpublic (Hill, 2018); mainstream

national and regional news media reported on the dangers of stereotyping and the Ferguson Unrest in an objective, third-person style and, thus, rarely acknowledged the institution's role in formulating and maintaining these biased narrative practices.

By reporting introspectively and looking toward the future, some articles in the Empowerment Narrative addressed how Black Twitter users could orient media gatekeepers' decisions, leading to "moments of forced reflexivity" (Carr, 2012). Black American-centered news media furthered Black Twitter's efforts by offering a more detailed analysis of the strength of Black communities on social media to drive trends and movements. In his study on the power of cyberspace to subvert conventional media gatekeepers, Carr (2012) found "when acting in large numbers, the gated have a powerful ability to act as gatekeepers to spread stories that would otherwise receive limited exposure in traditional media." Though mainstream media failed to take the opportunity to speak transparently, in some instances, such as in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *The New York Times*, coverage reveals that when pressured by activism, media may respond by taking steps to diversify the stagnated, white storytelling tradition of the American news media. Narrative studies of more recent race-related coverage in mainstream journalism—as well as more recent encounters between online protesters and media—are necessary to evaluate the long-term effects of social media activism in the transformation of harmful institutional practices.

THE STARK CONTRAST IN FOCUS BETWEEN THE EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVE AND THE INFORMATION NARRATIVE OFFERS INSIGHT INTO HOW BLACK AMERICAN-CENTERED NEWS MEDIA OPERATES WITH A STRONG CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY FOCUS, WHEREAS MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA APPROACHES COVERAGE FROM A STRICTLY JOURNALISTIC, HEGEMONIC (AND WHITE) PERSPECTIVE.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article was written in the spring of 2019, five years following the Ferguson Unrest and a year prior to the 2020 murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of the police. At the time of this article's publishing, white-centered ideas of "objectivity" in journalism ethics are as present as ever. While this article did not delve into the media coverage of the Black Twitter-led 2020 protests, I encourage the reader to consider how media reflexivity and methods of movement within the digital counterpublic have or have not evolved.

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BLACK LIVES MATTER



THE EFFECTS OF THE WIND FARMS ON THE INDIGENOUS ZAPOTEC COMMUNITY OF THE ISTHMUS OF TEHUANTEPEC, MEXICO

By Nichole Vargas

ABSTRACT

*This qualitative case study examines the effects of private sector-led wind farm development on the Indigenous **Zapotec** community in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Mexico. As a location with one of the highest wind potentials in the world, the Isthmus has, over the past twenty-five years, increasingly attracted the attention of international companies seeking to build and profit from massive wind farm installations. The Zapotecs of the Isthmus have fought back against this private development, claiming that their way of life, land rights, and **sovereignty** are threatened by the physical and ecological effects of the wind farms and by the companies' unjust and often illegal methods of acquiring Indigenous land. Research was conducted through in-person formal and informal interviews with local Indigenous land rights organizers and participant observations from the fishermen of Álvaro Obregón, a Zapotec community on the Eastern coast of the Laguna Superior. The effects were analyzed and divided into five categories based on interview responses: ecological, health, safety, political, and cultural. Partially corroborated by previous literature on the dispute, this analysis suggests that the region's wind energy movement, with its complex and intertwining ecological, social, economic, and political implications, remains a significant contributor to ongoing Indigenous land dispossession and elimination within the **settler-colonial** Mexican state. Conclusions indicate that **neoliberal** solutions to climate change cannot adequately address demands for **decolonial climate justice**.*

INTRODUCTION

Situated where the Sierra Norte and Sierra Sur mountain ranges meet, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is the narrowest region in Mexico and one of the most fertile lands in the world—perfect for agriculture, trade, and wind energy. Energy scientists have found the Isthmus to possess one of the greatest wind potentials in the world, estimated at being able to support over 44,000 megawatts (MW) of wind capacity (Elliot et al., 2003). This wind potential, and the accompanying profit potential, has caught the attention of international companies, primarily from Spain, who have built an increasing number of wind farms in the Isthmus since the first, La Venta, was constructed in 1994. A prototype, La Venta only consists of seven wind turbines with a 1.6 MW capacity (Hamister, 2012). However, the size of the wind parks has increased over time, with a recent project built by the Mitsubishi Corporation in 2019 containing 132 wind turbines and a capacity of 396 MW (New 132-Turbine Oaxaca, 2019).

Globally, the number of wind farms has increased rapidly in recent years, with the newest installations occurring primarily in **developing countries**. This popularity likely stems from the decrease in the marginal cost of wind power, making it one of the most economically viable non-carbon emitting energy generators compared to other generating options like solar energy. Moreover, wind energy gained traction in Mexico when the government made international and national commitments to lowering carbon emissions and meeting energy needs. Starting in 2008, the Mexican government has passed multiple legislative acts to encourage the development of efficient and renewable energy to meet Mexico's energy needs, including the Renewable

ZAPOTEC CIVILIZATION:

In pre-colonial times, the Zapotec people were a large civilization that populated the Valley of Oaxaca. Although Spain's genocidal colonization drastically dwindled their population size, the Zapotec still inhabit their ancestral lands in Oaxaca and maintain their cultural and linguistic practices.

INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY:

Complete self-determination of Indigenous peoples as a sovereign political entity, including full power over their own politics, governance, culture, and territory.

SETTLER COLONIALISM:

A distinct type of colonialism that functions through the replacement of Indigenous populations with an invasive settler society. Settler colonial invasion is a structure, not an event: settler colonialism persists in the ongoing elimination of indigenous populations, and the assertion of state sovereignty and juridical control over their lands.

NEOLIBERALISM:

The twentieth-century resurgence of nineteenth-century ideas associated with laissez-faire economic liberalism and free market capitalism. It is generally associated with policies of economic liberalization including privatization, deregulation, globalization, free trade, and austerity.

DECOLONIAL CLIMATE JUSTICE:

A climate justice movement for climate change mitigation that includes social justice efforts such as seeking to reverse existing structural inequalities and mitigate the disproportional damage of climate change on marginalized peoples. A decolonial climate justice also centers particularly on Indigenous peoples, their leadership, and the just reclamation of Indigenous land and sovereignty.

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:

A technical term; denotes a country in which a large share of the population cannot meet basic material needs such as housing, food, water, education, electricity, transport, and security.

LOGICS OF ELIMINATION:

Coined by Patrick Wolfe (2006), the logic of elimination refers to the ongoing elimination of Indigenous peoples as a continuous feature of settler colonial societies. Elimination often converges with but is not equivalent to genocide and can include methods such as “the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, [and] resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools.”

EJIDO:

In the land distribution following the Mexican Revolution of 1910, land parcels, called ejidos, were given to groups for communal ownership under Article 27 of the Constitution. In 1992, amendments to Article 27 in 1992 made it possible for individuals with communal membership of the ejido to privatize their portion and sell it to another Mexican national. The reforms to Article 27 resulted in the complicated mixed private and communal land system that we see today and has been heavily criticized by Indigenous groups (Hamister, 2012).

Energy Usage and Energy Transition Financing Act, the Public Electricity Service Act, the Energy Regulatory Commission Act, and the Sustainable Usage of Energy Act. While beneficial for guiding Mexico’s energy future towards renewable sources, these laws do not adequately address the socio-political, cultural, and environmental ramifications of energy development for Indigenous communities (Hamister, 2012).

Indigenous regions are not the preferred location for international mega-projects by accident: As settler colonial studies scholars David Lloyd and Patrick Wolfe (2015) describe, ongoing settler-colonial **logics of elimination** place poor, rural, Indigenous land at a higher risk for capitalist exploitation and dispossession worldwide. Despite the partial legal protection in many countries, Indigenous land continues to be treated by settler states and international capitalist actors as *terra nullius* (in Latin: empty land) open to coercive utilization or land grabbing—operations which represent only a few of many “fundamental [continuities] between the historical development of European settler colonialism and the present-day development of the neoliberal world order” (Lloyd & Wolfe, 2015). While Mexican laws such as Article 2 and Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution were passed to protect certain types of Indigenous land rights and culture, create federal responsibility to improve Indigenous standards of living, and grant a degree of Indigenous self-determination, such paternalistic and limited protections still result in subordinating Indigenous sovereignty to the “provincial and federal authorities” of the settler-colonial state (Ramirez-Espinosa, 2015). For example, the 1992 amendments to Article 27 made it possible for individuals with communal membership of the **ejido** to privatize their portion of land and sell it, resulting in the complicated private and communal land system that endangers the survival of communal Indigenous rights—rights which Indigenous groups wish to see legally formalized without exception (Hamister, 2012; Ramirez-Espinosa, 2015). Moreover, Mexican Indigenous law includes goals to promote job creation and the sustainable development of the natural resources in

Indigenous-dominated regions, often through incentivizing private and public investment. As observed in the Isthmus, this policy can lead to private encroachment upon autonomous and communally owned Indigenous land in the name of economic development or improving living conditions for Indigenous peoples (Hamister, 2012).

There are 54 wind farms in all of Mexico, most of which are located in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, with a total capacity of 4,935 MW in 2018 (“El viento en numeros,” n.d.). However, this green technology comes at the cost of the sovereignty and well-being of the Zapotec community who communally own their ancestral land on the Isthmus. The wind developers have deployed unethical and illegal methods, such as manipulation, bribery, intimidation, and violence to acquire the land needed for the wind farms, often with the support of the government and local stakeholders (Martinez & Llaguno, 2014). As of 2019, four more wind projects have been planned, with seven international companies involved (“El viento en numeros,” n.d.). In response to the dispossession of their land, local community members have organized to demand justice. This situation raises concerns about the ethics of neoliberal climate catastrophe mitigation: Who benefits or profits from the green energy sector, and at whose expense?

INDIGENOUS REGIONS ARE NOT THE PREFERRED LOCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL MEGA-PROJECTS BY ACCIDENT: AS SETTLER COLONIAL STUDIES SCHOLARS DAVID LLOYD AND PATRICK WOLFE (2015) DESCRIBE, ONGOING SETTLER-COLONIAL LOGICS OF ELIMINATION PLACE POOR, RURAL, INDIGENOUS LAND AT A HIGHER RISK FOR CAPITALIST EXPLOITATION AND DISPOSSESSION WORLDWIDE.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature written on the Isthmus region of Oaxaca portrays the conflict as a dispute between the Indigenous community—who own, live, and work the communal parts of the land—and the international companies who continue to unjustly acquire land to build the wind farms. Avila-Calero (2017) and Zárate-Toledo et al. (2019) focused specifically on the Zapotec resistance that developed from this conflict, by using San Dionisio del Mar and Álvaro Obregón, respectively, as case studies. Various studies corroborated Indigenous claims on the multitude of environmental and social effects of the wind parks, focusing on select communities.

In “Wind Development of Oaxaca, Mexico’s Isthmus of Tehuantepec: Energy Efficient or Human Rights Deficient?” Hamister (2012) examined how the companies installing the wind farms violated the various energy policies and Indigenous protection laws, but added that the wind farms provided benefits, such as the decreased reliance on fossil fuels and increased job opportunities through construction. Overall, such energy developments failed to uniformly improve the living conditions of the Zapotec community; the majority have been excluded from sharing in

company profits, and many were displaced from their ancestral land (Hamister, 2012).

In “Social Perception of Wind Energy in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec,” Mendoza et al. (2015) surveyed locals and found that the majority approved of the wind parks. This finding contradicted the majority of other literature on the topic, which suggested that the wind parks were perceived as harmful, although differing opinions towards the parks continue to exist. This contradiction may be explained by the fact that Mendoza et al. (2015) only surveyed landowners, the only group capable of renting land to wind parks, while other studies focused on the perceptions of fishermen, farmers, and resistance groups, which were significantly more negative.

In “Windmills: The Face of Dispossession,” Martinez and Llaguno (2014) specified two instances of land disputes to demonstrate how international companies have unfairly and illegally taken control of the Zapotec land, identifying acts of bribery, misinformation, and violence. In “The ‘solution’ is now the ‘problem:’ wind energy, colonisation and the ‘genocide-ecocide nexus’ in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca,” Dunlap (2017) recommended that the planning process of wind projects include the local community to avoid such conflicts, while Hamister (2012) suggested that the conflict might resolve if the community can benefit financially from the wind farms, gaining direct access to a percentage of the profit earned off of their land. Likewise speaking to the socio-political conflict, in “Contesting energy transitions: Wind power and conflicts in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec,” Avila-Caleiro (2012) offered an analysis which situated the struggles of the Indigenous groups within the historical power imbalance of the Mexican economy and settler-colonial state, and, similar to Dunlap (2017), suggested that energy transformations must address and advance climate justice and decolonization, rather than neoliberal economic paradigms, to result in a simultaneously fairer and greener future.

RESEARCH METHODS

INTERVIEW PROCESS

Through a study abroad program with the University of Arizona, I traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico to study the environmental and sociopolitical issues of Oaxaca from June to August of 2019. I was in the city of Juchitán de Zaragoza from July 23rd to July 26th. I did not visit any of the wind farms in these four days, but I had visited a wind farm in La Ventosa during a prior visit to the region a few weeks before my research began.

To conduct research, I interviewed four members of Juchitán de Zaragoza, located in the Isthmus. I took notes during the interviews to record the respondents’ answers and did not record audio. All of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, and I translated the information to English in my notetaking. My interviewees were Carlos, from Radio Totopo; Mario, from the Assembly for Indigenous Towns of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Defense of the Land and Territory (APIIDTT); Rosalino, the son of a farmer associated with Radio Totopo; and Nisaguie, from the APIIDTT and the daughter of Bettina Cruz, a well-known activist in Juchitán. Three out of my four interviewees—Carlos, Mario, and Nisaguie—are Indigenous land rights activist leaders. The fourth interviewee, Rosalino, is the son of a rural farmer who moved to the city of Juchitán to find work.

For the purpose of this research, Carlos served as my first point of contact with the local community, aiding me in the search for other relevant interviewees. As a well-known figure and activist, Carlos is knowledgeable about other significant actors in the region. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that Carlos' acquaintances are more likely to share with him similar perspectives on the wind farm issue, a fact which introduces bias in my findings. Furthermore, I recognize that my interviewees cannot serve as accurate representations of the thoughts and ideas of every community member. The diversity of the Isthmus, home to a number of groups, organizations, and individuals, makes it imperative to refrain from generalizing the entire region. Different people and communities do not all share the same goals, perspectives, and livelihoods, and therefore make different choices and interactions with the wind energy companies. In an effort to avoid over-generalization, this study focuses on the specific peoples and community with which my interviewees were most familiar: the Binnizá (Zapotec) Indigenous group in the communities of La Ventosa and Álvaro Obregón.

During my research, I asked my interviewees a series of questions:

RQ 1: What is your perspective on the wind farm conflict?

RQ 2: What effects do the wind parks have on the community, people, and land, if any?

RQ 3: What actions have you or others taken with regard to the wind parks?

ANALYSIS

Working within the constraints of the limited time in the field and a limited sample size, my qualitative research process allowed me to become familiar with the small community and form connections with my interviewees, who gave me in-depth, detailed narratives and explanations. In my analysis of the information, I examined my notes in order to categorize and track common themes. Five themes were identified, although many aspects of them intertwine or overlap: ecological, health, safety, political, and cultural effects. When possible, I corroborated the accounts by cross-referencing the evidence with other interviewees and with the current literature available on this topic.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The four interviewees each offered a unique perspective into the past and current conflict between the Indigenous communities, the Mexican state, and the international companies. They each played different roles in the conflict and gave a wide range of information. When asked about the effects of the wind parks, the interviewees gave responses about effects they personally experienced, how they perceived the effects on the community, and how they perceived the effects on the farmers and fishermen specifically. This analytic discussion categorizes the information into five sections: ecological, health, safety, political, and cultural effects.

ECOLOGICAL EFFECTS

All the interviewees noted how the “green” technology of wind parks caused ecological damage to the land and water of the surrounding environment. Both Carlos and Rosalino (personal communication, July 24, 2019) explained how oil spills and other contaminants from the wind turbines contribute to soil and water degradation; when it rains, the pollution seeps into the soil and runs off into the water. While each wind power project underwent an Environmental Impact Assessment, conducted by the federal Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, the assessments were deemed inaccurate when close inspection of them revealed “technical deficiencies and incomplete information” (Zárate-Toledo et al., 2019). Additionally, the tests did not assess the cumulative impact that all of the wind turbines have on the land (Zárate-Toledo et al., 2019).

On my visit to the Laguna, Mario and local fishermen (personal communication, July 25, 2019) pointed out a visible ring of white mud around the shore, which they claimed was the accumulation of run-off pollution, although I have no means to confirm this information. Additionally, one fisherman remarked how the recent lack of rain worsened the mud’s presence, indicating that the visibility of the ring may be weather-dependent. On the truck ride to and from the Laguna, the fishermen spoke about the declining numbers of fish in the Laguna over time which, they said, was caused by the presence of the windmills. Rosalino (personal com-

munication, July 24, 2019) agreed with the fishermen’s claim, adding that, because of the decline in fish, fishermen have had to turn to wage labor within the city. Dunlap’s (2017) interviews with the fishermen of the Southern Isthmus supported these observations: “... [F]ishermen [witnessed] the mass-killing of fish during the construction of a pilot wind turbine on the Barra.” Martinez and Llaguno (2014) likewise referenced the account of fishermen who found thousands of dead fish following the installation of a concrete foundation and turbine tubes for the Mareña Renovables wind park construction in 2011.

Furthermore, all my interviewees described ways in which the ecosystem and land use changed after the appearance of the wind farms. Roads, infrastructure, and turbine construction cut up the landscape that was once used for agriculture and livestock. Wind turbines surrounded the Northern Isthmus, affecting the livestock and wildlife through increased instances of death and illness (Carlos & Rosalino, personal communication, July 24, 2019). Similar ecological damage was studied in Dunlap’s (2017) and Avila-Calero’s (2017) research, wherein they discussed biodiversity loss and ecosystem disruption caused by the noise and vibrations from the turbines.

Rosalino (personal communication, July 24, 2019) mentioned bird loss as a notable problem, given that the Isthmus sits in the migratory path of many bird species. Hamister (2012) cited an estimate from a 2007-2008 study done in Venta II in which “78 bird carcasses” were discovered; however, many experts considered this a conservative and misleading statistic as the actual mortality rate could be almost 50 times higher. Rosalino (personal communication, July 24, 2019) claimed that the bird carcasses often mysteri-

ROADS, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND TURBINE CONSTRUCTION CUT UP THE LANDSCAPE THAT WAS ONCE USED FOR AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK.



ously disappeared in the night, allegedly cleaned up by wind company workers in an effort to hide the harmful ecological effects of the turbines. This assertion has not been corroborated.

In his interview, Carlos (personal communication, July 24, 2019) pointed out the irony in clearing so much flora, which itself takes in carbon dioxide and releases oxygen, to install wind parks that are then hailed for reducing carbon emissions. While drawing a perfect equivalence between flora and energy-producing windmills may be inaccurate, Carlos's statement points to the often-ignored environmental impacts of wind power. For example, following a successful 2007 court battle, a group of farmers were granted repossession of some 7,000 hectares of land, only to discover that the soil was not as productive as it had been prior to park construction—an exhibition of the long-term effects such parks have on the ecosystem (Carlos, personal communication, July 24, 2019). Overall, the literature on this topic supported the interviewees' anecdotes, as windmills' harm to the water quality, wildlife, land, and ecosystem are well-documented. Dunlap (2017) went so far as to compare these environmental impacts to those of fossil fuel production.

HEALTH EFFECTS

Though perhaps less obvious than the environmental effects, locals have asserted that living and working near the parks jeopardizes their own physical and mental health. Rosalino (personal communication, July 24, 2019) spoke the most in-depth on this topic, reporting that farmers and fishermen suffered a variety of ailments such as hearing loss, headaches, body aches, and insomnia. A plethora of studies, including the following by Nissenbaum et al. (2012), Schmidt and Klokker (2014), and Knopper and Ollson (2011), found correlations between windmills and health effects. Although a correlation between turbine proximity and worsened sleep has been identified, direct causality has not been empirically confirmed (Nissenbaum et al., 2012; Schmidt & Klokker, 2014). Others have agreed, however, that windmill proximity resulted in stress, which can lead to indirect health effects (Knop-

per & Ollson, 2011). Whether these effects are directly, indirectly, or psychosomatically caused by the windmills remains unclear, though it is undeniable that locals suffer from the presence of the windmills.

Rosalino (personal communication, July 24, 2019) asserted that soil and water pollution also led to contamination in local food sources. Participants in Dunlap's (2017) research also claimed that decreased quality and diversity of food, along with increased reliance and consumption of processed and canned foods, resulted in shorter life expectancy and increased cancer rates. In the Isthmus, farmers are not allowed to work or to trespass on the parcels of land rented by companies without permission. Moreover, fishermen are often restricted from accessing the Laguna, which means that some locals can no longer grow or catch their own food—acts of sustenance not only central to their health and economic livelihoods but to the healthy maintenance of their ancestral practices and to their way of life.

FISHERMEN ARE OFTEN RESTRICTED FROM ACCESSING THE LAGUNA, WHICH MEANS THAT SOME LOCALS CAN NO LONGER GROW OR CATCH THEIR OWN FOOD—ACTS OF SUSTENANCE NOT ONLY CENTRAL TO THEIR HEALTH AND ECONOMIC LIVELIHOODS BUT TO THE HEALTHY MAINTENANCE OF THEIR ANCESTRAL PRACTICES AND TO THEIR WAY OF LIFE.

SAFETY EFFECTS

Differing from the health category, concerns for the safety of those who live in Juchitán and the general region arose in the interview process. Mario, Carlos, and Nisaguie (personal communication, July 24, 2019) recounted a history of threats issued against local activists who spoke out against the wind companies. Indigenous activists have also suspiciously disappeared or died in what the Assembly for Indigenous Towns of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Defense of the Land and Territory (APIIDTT) speculated were political assassinations. The APIIDTT website (Asamblea de Pueblos Indígenas, 2019) included blog posts that demand justice for Beto Toledo and Rolando Crispín Lopez, two outspoken Indigenous land activists murdered within the last two years. The posts reported that Toledo was murdered by unknown men alleged to be hired hitmen while Lopez died in an altercation with municipal police (Asamblea de Pueblos Indígenas, 2019). In anecdotal testimony, Carlos and Mario (personal communication, July 24, 2019) claimed they have been targets of such threats and therefore have to practice caution in their own city.

As the wind projects, which first began in the North Isthmus, spread south towards the Laguna, the southern communities learned of their northern neighbors' losses and proactively mobilized. Community groups organized to resist the construction of windmills near the Laguna through blockades and marches. The local governments and the security hired by the wind companies responded to these defensive acts of Indigenous resistance by increasing military presence, direct conflict, and overall violence (Mario & Rosalino, personal communication, July 24, 2019). Rosalino (personal communication, July 24,

2019) believed the arrival of the wind companies in the area was partly to blame for the notorious violence in Juchitán. Martínez and Llaguno (2014) cited multiple incidents of violence perpetrated by paramilitary groups and governmental authorities onto resistance groups, in the form of direct clashes, threats, and persecution. In Álvaro Obregón, community guards, some of whom were fishermen I met, were formed to protect their land and ensure that the wind companies do not attempt to infiltrate their land again. This action and reaction cycle, initiated by the encroachment of wind companies, decreased local levels of safety over time.

POLITICAL/LEGAL EFFECTS

Once one company acquired property, like a domino effect, the land gradually shifted from being under the control of the Indigenous groups to being under the control of multinational actors. Starting in 1994, multinational companies created contracts and began renting parcels of land that individual farmers owned within the communal land, creating a checkerboard of land caught between privatization and communal ownership (Hamister, 2012). Once one company acquired property, like a domino effect, the land gradually shifted from under the control of the Indigenous groups to that of multinational actors. In a “top-down planning logic,” the state was able to go over the heads of the local Zapotec land practices to divide and sell land to multinational companies, in the name of reducing carbon emissions, to meet international agreements and to earn profits for wealthy developers (Zárate-Toledo et al., 2019). Unscrupulous tactics were deployed, such as “fake consultation processes, manipulation of information, illegal land titles and false land leases, bribery and corruption, bullying and violence” (Martínez & Llaguno, 2014). All four of my interviewees (personal communication, July 24, 2019) described these same unjust methods utilized by the wind companies to acquire land—land which they all claimed rightfully belongs to the Indigenous people of Oaxaca.

ONCE ONE COMPANY ACQUIRED PROPERTY, LIKE A DOMINO EFFECT, THE LAND GRADUALLY SHIFTED FROM BEING UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE INDIGENOUS GROUPS TO BEING UNDER THE CONTROL OF MULTINATIONAL ACTORS



While they did not have issues with wind turbine technology itself, they opposed the encroachment onto their land and destruction of their way of life—all done for the profit of foreign companies. The APIIDTT (2019) proudly displayed, “The sea, the land, the wind, is not to be sold, it’s to be loved and defended!” on banners and on their website, a sentiment that is echoed throughout the region. Carlos (personal communication, July 24, 2019) carefully clarified that they were not against technology or infrastructure, and Bettina Cruz agreed: “[T]hey are not against wind power, but against land grabbing and its impacts over local communities” (as cited in Avila-Calero, 2017).

Brought about by Article 27 of the Mexican Consultations, this gray-area of land ownership partially allowed for the initial land dispossession process to begin and has been used to the resistant groups’ advantage in court. “It is in this heterogeneous and rather unclear context that 126 legal demands of communal landowners were registered to nul-

lify land lease contracts made with foreign companies” (Avila-Calero, 2017). However, there have been mixed results, as Carlos and Mario (personal communication, July 24, 2019) claimed that the judges were corrupt and sided with the wind companies.

Despite some success gained in court, the 20 years of land dispossession minimized the established Indigenous protections and communal land laws. Hamister (2012) emphasized the various levels of legal protections that these wind parks violated, such as the Mexican Constitution, energy policy, agrarian laws, international agreements, and laws that protect Indigenous rights and the environment. Carlos (personal communication, July 24, 2019) summed it best when he said these wind parks were “illegal.”

Even with these protections in place, the wind companies succeeded. “The current law that is in place to protect the Indigenous communities of Mexico may appear powerful but in reality, poses little obstacle to those who require its protection” (Hamister, 2012). My interviewees (personal communications, July 24, 2019) agreed with this conclusion; even following some of the Indigenous legal successes, the companies still managed to construct more projects. Although the companies have been legally required to give free, accessible, and culturally appropriate consultations prior to wind park construction since 2014, Carlos (personal communication, July 24, 2019) emphasized that companies do the bare minimum or less. Consultations have been provided in confusing Spanish and sometimes only in written form, a significant observation given that many fishermen and farmers cannot read or write in Spanish (Carlos, personal communication, July 24, 2019). Furthermore, even if a consultation took place, the locals were often not given adequate time to prepare for construction, or construction had secretly already started (Carlos, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

This information indicates that the unjust actions of the wind companies perpetuate the settler-colonial elimination of Indigenous peoples and their sovereignty, setting some legal precedents and practices that only make it easier to continue land dispossession in the future.

CULTURAL EFFECTS

Concurrent with the other effects, the wind parks have also devastated the local community and Indigenous Zapotec culture. The Zapotec interviewees emphasized the importance of a close, interconnected community. When asked if the wind parks provided any community benefits, all said that benefits only went to the foreign companies and certain individuals (personal communications, July 24, 2019). Even the individuals who rented their parcel of land to wind companies, whether they did so intentionally or through coercion, received little money in comparison to the companies; while unconfirmed, Carlos (personal communication, July 24, 2019) speculated that the farmers are paid only 0.1% of the total profit. Moreover, he mentioned that the farmers could make more money by working, as opposed to renting, their land for a year. Hamister (2012) supported this statement: While rent can be as low as \$50, “a single cow can produce \$90 worth of milk each month.”

Along with the lack of community benefit, the wind parks have caused and exacerbated divisions in the community. Santa Maria del Mar, a neighboring community to the southeast, rented their land to the wind companies, increasing the difficulty for fishermen in Álvaro Obregón to defend their land (Mario, personal communication, July 25, 2019). As some communities conceded, solidarity and collective action grew more difficult. Mario (personal communication, July 25, 2019) described how the various groups and organizations that formed to resist the intrusions offered differing ideas on how to reach their common goal. Rosalino (personal communication, July 24, 2019) also explained that, although the groups wanted and tried to show solidarity and help one another, they were

WHEN THE ZAPOTEC ARE FORCED OFF THEIR LAND, THE EFFECTS ARE DEEPER THAN ECONOMIC: THEIR INTEGRAL AND EMBODIED CULTURAL PRACTICES, WHICH INCLUDE FARMING AND FISHING, ARE DEVASTATED.



constrained by time and money. People had day jobs and daily chores that they could not suddenly neglect, and transportation costs came out of their own pockets.

Overall, the wind companies deployed a “divide and conquer” strategy. Carlos (personal communication, July 24, 2019) recounted how the companies went door-to-door to coerce people into signing contracts by lying, saying that their neighbor had already signed a contract. The companies also deployed propaganda-like tactics and hired people to spread social acceptance of the wind projects, a tactic that “[intensified the] social schism between landowners and other locals” (Zárate-Toledo et al., 2019). In the Mareña Renovables wind project of 2011, the Spanish company created a puppet civic organization led by corrupt local authorities in order to lobby for increased acceptance of the project (Martinez & Llaguno, 2014). During the interview with Carlos, a car drove by announcing through a speaker a summer-school program funded by the wind companies.

However, even as the resistance continues, the residents of the region have not been and are not universally against the wind projects. Though it remains unverified, Carlos (personal communication, July 24, 2019) cited statistics from a 2013 survey that reported 36% of locals to be in favor of the wind companies, explaining that those people who do not rely on the land for food and work made up the majority of those in favor. The companies arrived with promises that they

would bring economic prosperity and development to the community, which many initially believed. The promise of “gains on land rent, access to jobs during the construction and operation of parks, and public works for the community” was enough for many to sway towards the wind companies (Zárate-Toledo et al., 2019). On the other hand, primarily Zapotec farmers, fishermen, students, and those who “recognize the intrusive colonial behavior, unequal benefit sharing, disregard for public consultation as well as the cultural and ecological impacts of wind parks” made up the resistant populace (Dunlap, 2017). The community was thus divided into those who benefited or wished to benefit from the privatization of land and those who detected the empty promises and wished to maintain their ancestral community life (Zárate-Toledo et al., 2019).

Increasingly, many community members have lost their livelihoods and had to turn to wage labor; Rosalino (personal communication, July 24, 2019), at the time he was interviewed, had turned to operating a moto-taxi. People who have lived communally as farmers and fishermen since time immemorial were forced towards wage labor or to migrate elsewhere to sustain their families. Land contracts can last for 25–50 years and have automatic renewal, so a family could be forced out of the land for generations (Carlos, personal communication, July 24, 2019). A 2016 report from the Independent Consultation and Investigation Mechanism of the Inter-American Development Bank said, “the intense and rapid wind development in the Isthmus region’ provokes that ‘the Indigenous communities of the Isthmus do in fact face the risk of losing their identity and customs’” (as cited in Zárate-Toledo et al., 2019).

Carlos (personal communication, July 24, 2019) stressed that the wind parks were an attack on their Zapotec sovereignty and way of life, which are tied to their land and to the sea. When the Zapotec are forced off their land, the effects are deeper than economic: Their integral and embodied cultural practices, which include farming and fishing, are devastated. In his research on sustaining Zapotec culture, Zapotec scholar Joshua Schwab-Cartaas (2018) describes such “Indigenous, Oaxacan methodology” or practices by the cultural term “communalidad”—an engagement of “cultural praxis” rooted in the “commitment to strengthening the future of communal lifeways” through doing and passing on embodied ancestral Zapotec practices such as “making gueta biza (black bean tamales)” or “planting corn crops.”

CONCLUSION

Mediated by the settler-colonial Mexican state, the situation in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a complex land-based conflict between the Indigenous Zapotec community, who have communal ownership of most local land, and the international companies seeking to profit from the production of clean wind energy. While certain aspects of my four interviewees’ claims about the wind farms’ effects on health or safety, such as cases of windmill-caused body aches or political assassinations of Indigenous activists, have not been externally verified, the literature available on this discourse supports the majority of their assertions around ecological, political, and cultural harm caused by the wind farms and the exploitative methods of international wind energy companies. Overall, the mutual corroboration of multiple Zapotec testimonial reports on the topic of their own land and

circumstances should be treated as significant evidence, although the small sample size of this particular study remains a limitation. In studying these effects, it is evident that the Zapotec peoples of the Isthmus have legitimate grievances against the wind projects due to the threat they pose to Zapotec land rights, sovereignty, and culture. Because of this ongoing damage, the green energy movement in the Isthmus contributes to the continued Indigenous land dispossession and elimination of Indigeneity within the boundaries of the Mexican state.

Since the different communities in the Isthmus vary, more research on individuals and communities' relations to the wind parks remains necessary. This study's small sample size cannot account for the variety of perspectives in the region. Research that reports directly, rather than indirectly, on the testimony of Zapotec farmers and fishermen would be valuable. Potential research questions include: What factors cause a community or individual to favor or resist the wind parks? Are there class or cultural tensions that arise as a result of some community members privatizing and renting their land?

Furthermore, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec offers a compelling perspective on the complex relationships between the Indigenous people, the Mexican state, the environment, and the international market. As part of a global trend of economic exploitation and land dispossession which is occurring under the structure of globalized capitalism, more research needs to be done in comparing the effects of the growing green energy sector on different Indigenous peoples in regions across the world. Have other peoples experienced similar effects to their health, community, and environment? What forms of resistance

have been occurring in other regions, and have they experienced similar successes or losses? What significance does Indigeneity play in this type of conflict?

Significant change to energy production needs to occur, sooner rather than later, to help avoid climate catastrophe. However, the situation in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec suggests that the strict reliance on neoliberal capitalist structures and marketplace to provide climate mitigation will only exacerbate existing socio-economic inequality and colonization. In accordance with the principles of decolonial climate justice, the climate change response must attend to previous structural issues and inequalities in capitalism, take into account the disproportionate impact of climate disaster on marginalized peoples and the Global South, and center decolonial effects such as the reclamation of land and sovereignty by Indigenous peoples. The private expansion of renewable energy might seem like a benefit to all, but, once the local effects are examined, one must ask, "Is it really about saving the planet, or is a different green being prioritized?"

**"IS IT REALLY ABOUT SAVING
THE PLANET, OR IS A DIFFERENT
GREEN BEING PRIORITIZED?"**



APPENDIX



Maps locating Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca, México.



Map of the southern Isthmus region, showing the capital city of Juchitán, the Laguna Superior, and Álvaro Obregón.



Photo of the turbines next to a farmers' field in La Ventosa, taken in July of 2019.

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THE EFFECTS OF BACKGROUND MUSIC ON THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTION OF CHILDREN WITH ADHD IN THE CLASSROOM SETTING

A Study Proposal

By Jennifer Mittag

ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the proposed study is to determine how children diagnosed with **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder** (ADHD) and **neurotypical** children will perform on executive function tasks while listening and not listening to music in a classroom setting. Prior research suggests that the presence of background noise improves the executive function performance of children with ADHD during specific memory tasks. In this study, fifty children diagnosed with ADHD and fifty neurotypical children from Bellingham, Washington will take the **Working Memory Test Battery for Children** (Pickering, 2006), either with or without classical music playing in the background. Scores will be calculated, and an inferential statistical test will be run to identify any*

*statistical significance between the mean scores of the two populations (ADHD vs. neurotypical), the two situations (music vs. no music), and the four different conditions (A, B, C, D). It is hypothesized that low-level music will produce improvements in the executive function of children with ADHD, allowing them to outperform neurotypical children under the same conditions. However, in the absence of music, it is predicted that neurotypical children will perform better on the tests than children with ADHD. Limitations of this research include potential inconsistency or bias in the clinical diagnoses of ADHD and the removal of **comorbidities** from the scope of the study.*

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies correlate the diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) with impaired executive function (EF) in children, resulting in lower cognitive achievement test scores, lower academic scores, and higher likelihood of developing a **Learning Disability** (LD) (Mattison & Mays, 2010; Biederman et al., 2004; Schoemaker

et al., 2011). Executive function refers to a set of interrelated cognitive processes, such as working memory, **attentional control**, and **response inhibition**, that enable the control of specific, goal-oriented behaviors (Huizinga et al., 2006). While primary cognitive development occurs throughout childhood and in the transition to

young adulthood, EF remains changeable over a person's lifespan and subject to the influence of adverse or advantageous life events and routines (Harvard University, n.d.). In everyday situations, EF can be affected by environmental factors including background noise, the presence of other people, a natural or urban setting (Schutte et al., 2016), or the mode of learning utilized in a school classroom (Diamond & Lee, 2011). Increasing diagnosis rates, study, and knowledge of ADHD in children—including the identification of issues with executive functions like working memory (Martinussen et al, 2005) and response inhibition (Bunford et al., 2014) —have expanded interest in research aimed at developing methods to aid **neurodivergent** students in neurotypically-privileged academic settings. Following the **social model of disability**, implementing situational or environmental mechanisms to increase attentive tendencies in the classroom setting would improve the accessibility of learning for children with ADHD while also benefiting their overall wellbeing.

While the general link between ADHD and impaired EF in children remains well-supported by evidence, prior research on ADHD and working memory in the classroom setting have been broad in scope and inconsistent in the specificity of findings; many studies are conducted as comorbid studies with a variety of diagnoses and age groups and investigate a generalized range of EF-related skills simultaneously. For example, the Bunford et al. (2014) study on the relationship between ADHD and EF in preschool-aged children suggests that inhibition and working memory are related and “contribute to hyperactivity/impulsivity and inattention.” However, this conclusion is contested by Elosúa et al. (2017), a study examining working memory in fourth graders diagnosed and undiagnosed with ADHD. While the latter study confirms that such students struggle with tasks like attentional shifting, updating functions,

ATTENTION DEFICIT/ HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER:

One of the most common mental disorders affecting children. Symptoms of ADHD include inattention (not being able to keep focus), hyperactivity (excess movement that is not fitting to the setting) and impulsivity (hasty acts that occur in the moment without thought). ADHD is diagnosed as one of three types: inattentive type, hyperactive/impulsive type, or combined type.

NEUROTYPICAL:

The opposite of neurodivergent, having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of “normal.” The setup of the school system, such as teaching styles and test-taking regulations, privilege the cognitive functions of neurotypical students.

WORKING MEMORY:

Governs our ability to retain and manipulate information over short periods of time.

COMORBIDITIES:

The simultaneous presence of two chronic diseases or conditions in a patient.

LEARNING DISABILITY:

Sometimes abbreviated as LD, can be defined as “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (Martin et al., 2017). LD are not defined by one feature; they vary depending on the study and can affect up to 80% of children with ADHD (Mattison & Mayes, 2010). LD can stem from the lack of EF in children, specifically affecting their inhibition and working memory.

ATTENTIONAL CONTROL:

Involves the ability to direct attention to only those stimuli that are relevant to our current goals.

RESPONSE INHIBITION:

Refers to the suppression or inhibition of actions that are inappropriate in a given context and that interfere with goal-driven behavior.

ADHD DIAGNOSIS:

As knowledge of ADHD becomes more common and detailed, it is more likely to be recognized and diagnosed, increasing the overall rate of diagnosis in the population (Kumar & Gleason, 2019).

NEURODIVERGENT:

Sometimes abbreviated as ND, means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal."

SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY:

A civil rights approach, the social model of disability proposes that what makes someone "disabled" is not their medical condition, but the attitudes and structures of society. If modern life was set up in a way that was accessible for people with disabilities, then they would not be excluded or restricted. The distinction is made between "impairments," which are the individual problems which may prevent people from doing something, and "disability," which is the additional disadvantage bestowed by a society which treats these "impairments" as abnormal.

AMYGDALA

An almond-shaped cluster of nuclei located within the temporal lobes of the brain. Part of the limbic system, it is known to perform a primary role in the processing of memory, decision-making, and emotional responses (including fear, anxiety, and aggression).

and inhibition, its results indicate that children with ADHD performed better in the divided attention task than children without an **ADHD diagnosis**. Dividing the children's attention with additional stimulation appears to help them focus on the task at hand. Additional research on divided attention has similarly found that low-level background noise can benefit children with ADHD by improving their EF performance with specific memory tasks (Söderlund et al., 2010). While background noise may distract neurotypically attentive children, it increases dopamine levels in inattentive children, improving their cognitive functions and ability to pay attention (Söderlund et al., 2010). In a follow-up study, Söderlund et al. also observed that the presence of traffic noise improved memory tasks in children with attention difficulties. While such studies have examined the role of various background noises, very few have considered the effects of background music on EF, even though evidence suggests music therapy helps regulate emotions, mood, and behavior (Fernández-Sotos et al., 2016; Uhlig et al., 2016). When listening to music, the **amygdala** registers the sensory input, processing tempo, rhythm, and notes to determine the emotional response and stimulate behavior accordingly (Fernández-Sotos et al., 2016; Uhlig et al., 2016). In the existing research on the topic, participants with ADHD who listened to music while completing mathematical problems solved more problems correctly when compared to the neurotypical control group not listening to music (Maloy & Peterson, 2014; Greenop & Kann, 2007; Zentall, 1993).

Building on such research, this paper proposes a study to examine the effects of playing low-level classical music on the working memory of children diagnosed with ADHD and neurotypical children while they perform divided attention tasks in a classroom setting. I hypothesize that, when listening to low-level instrumental music, children diagnosed with ADHD will present improvement in working memory due to the background noise creating divided attention. Based on previous research, the added stimulation of music should increase the attention of children with ADHD, allowing them to better engage working memory tasks than neurotypical children under the same conditions. Concurrently, in the absence of music, the neurotypical children will perform better on the working memory tasks than children with ADHD.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Children diagnosed with ADHD (n = 50) and neurotypical children not diagnosed with ADHD or any other neurodivergent condition (n =50) will participate in this study. The participants will be recruited from five local elementary schools in Bellingham, Washington. Each child will be in the third grade, between the ages of 8 and 9 years old, and will have signed parental consent to allow their participation. Children in the ADHD group will have clinical proof of diagnosis, no diagnoses of other neurodivergent condition, and be on medication for ADHD.

DESIGN

The **between-subjects** design will be a 2 (Population: ADHD and Neurotypical Children) x2 (Music: Instrumental or No music) design. Twenty-five children will be randomly assigned to each condition. During each condition, the children will complete the Working Memory Test Battery for Children (WMTB-C; Pickering, 2006) either with or without music. The study will use four conditions: Children with ADHD listening to music while completing a task (A), children with ADHD not listening to music while completing a task (B), neurotypical children listening to music while completing a task (C), and neurotypical children not listening to music while completing a task (D). An IBM statistical software program (SPSS) will run an algorithm to randomize each group.

RESULTS INDICATE THAT CHILDREN WITH ADHD PERFORMED BETTER IN THE DIVIDED ATTENTION TASK THAN CHILDREN WITHOUT AN ADHD DIAGNOSIS.

BETWEEN-SUBJECTS:

Participants that are participating in one and only one group of the study.

PHONOLOGICAL LOOP:

A part of the working memory that focuses on auditory and verbal information such as language and music.

VISUO-SPATIAL:

Part of the working memory that focuses on visual and spatial information.

MATERIALS

Classroom and Speaker Setup. The experiment will be set up in a classroom that remains consistent for all four conditions: There will be a set number of empty school desks in rows and a large table with two chairs (for the researcher and participant) at the front of the room. The curtains on all windows will remain open. The walls will have simple, non-distracting decorations. Four small speakers will be connected to an iPod and placed in the corners of the room.

Music. The researchers will play downloaded instrumental music from the iPod while the participants perform the WMTB-C. The music will play on loop and at the sound level of 80 dB, matching previous studies with responses to working memory (Belleville et al., 2003; Söderlund et al., 2010). The playlist will be a combination of songs by Mozart and Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 23 (Mozart), Fur Elise (Beethoven), Salzburg Symphony No. 1 – Divertimento in D major (Mozart), Moonlight Sonata (I) (Beethoven), and Salzburg Symphony No. 3 Divertimento in major (Mozart).

Working Memory Tests. The Working Memory Test Battery for Children (Pickering, 2006) will be used to assess working memory in relation to the **phonological loop**, **visuo-spatial** sketchpad, and central executive functions within the children. The WMTB-C consists of six phonological tests, four visuo-spatial tests, and three central executive functions tests.

The phonological tests are Digit Recall, Word List Recall, Non-word List Recall, Word List Matching, and Children's Test of Non-word Repetition. The tests are span tasks, wherein the participant is asked to repeat the words of the researcher in the same order that they were spoken (Geary et al., 2013).

The visuo-spatial tests are Matrices Static, Matrices Dynamic, Mazes Static, and Mazes Dynamic. The tests include span and memory tasks. In the span tasks, Block Recall, which focus on Matrices Static and Matrices Dynamic, the researcher shows the participant a board with nine blocks on it, in a randomized order. The blocks are numbered but the numbers are only visible to the researcher. The researcher taps a single block and then a series of blocks and the child must correctly repeat the tapping. In the memory tasks, which focus on Mazes Static and Mazes Dynamic, mazes are given to the participants to solve; each maze will have more than one possible solution. After viewing a picture of one way to complete the maze for two seconds, the participant will be asked to recall the method and complete the maze as demonstrated. At different levels, the mazes become increasingly difficult by adding extra walls.

The central executive functions tests are Listening Recall, Counting Recall, and Backward Digit Recall (Pickering, 2006). Each dual-task subtest consists of six items (Geary et al., 2013). During Listening Recall, the child identifies whether a statement is true or false and recalls the last word in each sub-set. In the Counting Recall sub-set, the child recalls the numbers of dots on a set of cards. In the Backward Digit sub-set, the child recalls a span of numbers backward.

PROCEDURE

One set of child participants (Conditions A and B) will be referred to the study by their school counselors because they have an ADHD diagnosis confirmed by a letter from their pediatrician or primary care provider. The other set of child participants (Conditions C and D) will not have any diagnoses of neurodivergent conditions and are not taking any medication regularly. All participants will have signed parental consent in order to partake in the study. The researchers will randomly assign the participants to either a control or experimental group depending on whether they have an ADHD diagnosis or not. The participants will be tested individually in a room with a single researcher in the early morning hours, after breakfast but before lunch. The same researcher will administer the WMTB-C to each child in all four conditions. This researcher will conduct a double-blind test, in which they do not know which child participants do or do not have an ADHD diagnosis.

Children in Condition A and C will enter the room while the music is already playing. Children in conditions B and D will enter the room and no music will be playing. The researcher will sit across from the child at a table and administer the WMTB-C. They will give each sub-test in the same order for each group, starting with the six phonological tests (Digit Recall, Word Recall, Non-word Recall, Word List Matching, and Children's Test of Non-word Repetition), then the four visuo-spatial tests (Matrices Static, Matrices Dynamic, Mazes Static, and Mazes Dynamic) and end with the three central executive functions tests (Listening Recall, Counting Recall, and Backward Digit Recall). The researcher will first read the directions to each sub-test and then give the participant the task to complete. To eliminate the added stress of time restrictions, the children will be able to complete each task at their own pace. After the final sub-test, another researcher will escort the child back to their parents. As compensation, each

participant will receive a \$10 gift card to a local ice cream parlor. Scores will be calculated, and an inferential statistical test will be run to identify any statistical significance between the mean scores of the two populations (ADHD vs. neurotypical), the two situations (music vs. no music), and the four different conditions (A, B, C, D).

PROPOSED BUDGET AND TIMELINE

The proposed timeline to complete this research is one year. This includes time for participant recruitment, the collection of parental consent and clinical documentation, testing, and final analysis. Previous research indicates that testing takes approximately one hour per participant. With two children testing per day over two weeks at each school, the testing procedure will take approximately ten weeks. The proposed budget for this study is \$20,000, including items such as classroom rental, gift cards, and supplies.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Limitations of this study include its dependence on clinical diagnosis of ADHD, as studies suggest racial and gendered bias exists in the subjective interpretations of clinicians, causing them to inconsistently apply the ADHD diagnostic criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Bruchmuller et al., 2012; Fadus et al., 2019). Fadus et al. (2019) indicates that unconscious bias and racial stereotypes of aggression result in statistically significant misdiagnoses of ADHD as disruptive behavior disorders in “ethnic and racial minority youth” and particularly boys (Fadus et al., 2019). In addition, men and boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than women and girls, with studies demonstrating bias and socialization as the primary explanatory factors (Bruchmuller et al., 2012). Inattentive ADHD, which is the most common subtype diagnosed in women and girls, primarily presents as “inattention and disorganization,” behaviors that are more subtle and difficult to recognize than the “disruptiveness and impulsiveness” of the hyperactive subtype common in men and boys (Bruchmuller et al., 2012). Many therapists remain biased toward the masculine hyperactive stereotype of ADHD expression, likely adversely affecting rates of ADHD diagnoses in women and girls (Bruchmuller et al., 2012).



The current study does not account for comorbidities in children diagnosed with ADHD, such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), anxiety, depression, and behavioral conditions. Future research should examine the effects of background music on children who have comorbid disorders with ADHD. It would be beneficial to study how differences in reaction to low-level background music in children with only ADHD and children with ADHD and other disorders may impact scores on the working memory tasks.

The current study does not examine the benefits or disadvantages of more than one level of noise or of types of music other than classical. Most past research has focused primarily on the negative aspects of noise (Söderlund et al., 2010). Future research should consider the effects of differing music and music at different volume levels on children with ADHD, children with ADHD and other conditions, and neurotypical children.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

As ADHD and other forms of neurodivergence become increasingly recognized, researched, and diagnosed, it is necessary to develop environmental tools and methodology to help accommodate a range of **neurodiverse** learning needs and styles in the primary and secondary school system. This study intends to determine whether the auditory mechanism of classical background music aids the EF performance of students with ADHD diagnoses in working memory tasks. This research has the potential to reduce the stress placed on students with ADHD in the classroom environment and improve their likelihood of academic success.

IT IS NECESSARY TO DEVELOP ENVIRONMENTAL TOOLS AND METHODOLOGY TO HELP ACCOMMODATE A RANGE OF NEURODIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS AND STYLES.



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THE HERO INDUSTRY

Spectacular Pacification in the Era of Media Interactivity

By Braden Timss

INTRODUCTION: THE SPECTACLE, SITUATIONS, AND THE VIRTUAL CITIZEN-SOLDIER

In Ben Fountain's 2012 novel, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, the titular US soldier and the Bravo squad become canonized Iraq War heroes when their rescue attempt is captured on digital video. In recognition of their bravery, their tour of duty is halted for an American media stint that culminates in their participation during the 2004 Dallas Cowboys Thanksgiving halftime show. This celebratory return allows the proud American public to interact with the heroes from the video, subsumed, however they may be, by the militarized media spectacle and abstracted into icons of precious, simplified meaning. **Commodities** like War Hero Billy Lynn are a necessary product when images of postmodern warfare do not bring a nation's culture any grounding, pacifying sense of meaning. Better than a mere screen, Billy is alive; he can be touched. Endowed with the experiential knowledge of soldier subjectivity, he becomes a ready vessel brought close for an American public to inhabit . . .

Entangled in the complex interplay between war, mass media, and capitalism, the process of American hero commodification undergone by figures like Billy Lynn can be demystified with consideration for Guy Debord's theory of *the spectacle*. Developed in the 1960s, the spectacle describes the worldview necessarily produced by capitalism: a transformation of social values into general equivalence with the values of the economy and the emergence of a new social reality subsumed by symbolic commodity logics (Society of the Spectacle sec. 4-6, 40). Moreover, Debord argues that the spectacle has become "the main production of

present-day society”—when the “satisfaction of [basic] human need” is replaced by the capitalist “necessity for boundless economic development,” capitalism must (re)produce the spectacle which “[fabricates]” the “pseudo-needs,” desires, and subjective positions required for the system’s maintenance and expansion (Society of the Spectacle sec. 15, 51). The spectacle is, in effect, total ideological subjugation through cultural hijacking, as social institutions, mass-media, modes of organization, and recreation become the very image, means, and ends of capitalist economics. Furthermore, in the twenty-first-century context, overlapping relations between capitalist globalization, global warfare, and information technology have produced a hybrid militarized-capitalist spectacle in which “culture” becomes the new “means, location, and object of warfare” (Mirzoeff 1737).

As visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff observes, the ongoing assimilation of the non-Western world by a globalized capitalist economy remains largely an imperialist project wherein “modern technologies of information and war” instrumentalize the concept of **counterinsurgency**, a revolutionary strategy of waging an “explicitly cultural war, to be fought in the United States as much as it is [overseas]” (1737-8). Aiming to reproduce “[its own regime] in thought and deed,” this war culture, in essence, legitimizes global capitalism’s imperialist campaign overseas by pacifying citizens with “progressive applications of techniques [that manufacture consent] under the imperative ‘culture must be defended,’” (Mirzoeff, 1738). Just as Debord theorized that the spectacle produces incessant economic growth by making capitalism the simultaneous justification for and goal of social existence, the goal of modern military

intervention likewise lies in “manipulating the interests,” or pseudo-needs of social groups in order “to render a culture in [the self-perpetuating] image [of war]” (qtd. in Mirzoeff, 1738).

Preliminary traces of this military intervention of culture litter battlefields, movie theatres, and living rooms with material artifacts. Army combat training simulators sold as commercial video games and unmanned drones piloted with PlayStation 2 controllers attest to the existence of a veritable **military-entertainment complex** with

COMMODITY:

For economists, commodities are manufactured objects with an equivalent value, namely commercial products to be sold. In Debord’s Marxist critique, however, capitalism reorganizes personal consumption to conform to the commercial principles of market exchange; commodity fetishism transforms a cultural commodity into a product with an economic life of its own that is independent of the volition of the commodity’s producer. Guy Debord argues that, in modern society, intimacies of intersubjectivity and personal self-relation are commodified into discrete experiences that can be bought and sold and every human relation becomes viewable as a (potential) business transaction.

COUNTERINSURGENCY:

Codified into a field manual by retired US Army general David Patraeus, this military tactic seizes the manipulation and production of culture as a means to preempt the rise of insurgent forces in occupied foreign regions or in the homeland. It has transformed the way wars are fought in the early twenty-first century.

MILITARY-ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX:

A continuation of the logic of the cold war’s military-industrial complex, this term describes how the US Military, defense technology, and entertainment sectors have formed a material, collaborative network wherein each can benefit from the research, commercial successes, and sociopolitical influence of the other.

SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL(SI):

A group of avant-garde artists and political theorists active in Paris from 1957–1972 who are famous for their contributions to anti-capitalist theories such as Unitary Urbanism, Situations, and Derive. SI considered architecture, especially that of cities, as a major factor in both the oppression or liberation of people under capitalism.

AMBIANCES:

As deployed under a Situationist context, ambiances are the sum effect of various environmental factors that can be appreciated as the kind of mood certain architectural features and structured activities influence people to adopt. Basic examples include the Gothic cathedral that inspires gloominess or the office cubicle that affirms focus and isolation.

an acculturating influence (Lenoir; Stahl, 112 & 116). In the consumption of artifacts like military-themed video games or films, the military-entertainment spectacle manipulates the subjective position of the citizenship *into the image* of the soldier embedded within the ranks of a culture of war. Roger Stahl calls this phenomenon the *virtual citizen-soldier*, a “symptom of the recoding of the social field” by counterinsurgency “with military values and ideals,” which assures the apolitical function of the soldier subsumes and impinges on the democratic role of the citizen (125).

In such ways, the overwhelming, enveloping media environment of the twenty-first century—enabled by audio-visual, information, and simulation technologies—virtually surrounds, penetrates, and defines the social field and subjective positioning more than ever before. And yet, simultaneously, the level of spectator interactivity and involvement in the emerging media landscape arguably increases (albeit in a limited capacity) the vulnerability of hegemonic top-down social control. It has always been false to portray spectators simply as overdetermined consumerist receivers without any form of exchanging interactivity, social agency, or creative industry. As recent phenomenological and post-structuralist theory asserts, the always-already active spectator can potentially manipulate, subvert, and construct—or even play with, as it were—the social world which produced them and which, through their collective everyday actions, is reproduced and, thus, might be reproduced differently. For Debord and the **Situationist International** (SI), the exploitation of the vulnerable sociocultural mechanisms enabling the spectacle is precisely the goal of their revolutionary theory of *the situation*: a mobilization of social life against capitalism in “the creation of new forms and the *détournement* [hijacking] of previous versions of architecture, urbanism, poetry and cinema” (12). Play is a revolutionary act that can disrupt spectacular “passions, compensations and habits” of capitalist culture. The creative construction of new channels, architecture, **ambiances**, and images can “condition new behaviors” or desires and “provoke [people’s] capacity to revolution-

ize their own lives” (SI, 11 & 15). Every day, we—twenty-first century people who live our lives within capitalism—create and are recreated as images in the living that we do.

But how do we break from the capitalist repetition of a permanent culture of war and provoke a more exciting way of life? The revolutionary impulse is to answer this question by imagining and inventing more interesting environments, games, and images. Described by new media theorist Richard Grusin as “the first and last live media event” (21), the September 11th terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center (a monument to globalized capital) exemplified a situationist opening, a potentiality for American self-recognition regarding worldwide imperialism and a support for the SI notion that “something that changes the way of seeing the streets is more important than something that changes the way of seeing paintings” (SI, 16). The enduring efficacy of the disaster is its media visibility; it showed, in the clearest resolution of the era, that the spectacular image—too often understood as distant and untouchable in the twentieth century—can be interacted with, breached, and transgressed in the new millennium. While Richard Grusin suggests that “9/11 [marked] an end to (or at least a repression or sublimation of) the US cultural desire for immediacy” (21), I contend that American anxieties at the start of the twenty-first century have actually inspired an upheaval in what is expected and desired by audiences: a postmodern self-awareness and an impulse for interactive and experiential knowledge despite the pacifying modernist narratives maintained by the spectacle. At the same time, 9/11 proves that the spectacle is capable of reincorporating even the most poisonous of images. As the attacks became the

prime justification for the United States’ Global War on Terror, a spectacular image of the civilian-as-hero-of-war was manufactured to cover the wound and to “recapture a [particular] sense of purpose and meaning” related to American superiority, domination, and saviorhood (Hammond 11). Contextualized by the new asymmetry of twenty-first century warfare in opposition to wars past, this quick manufacturing betrays the fact that wars against abstract concepts like Terror necessarily forgo the knowledge of a particular enemy as a concession to know the hero with certainty. As such, the indefatigable spirit of the country’s citizens and soldiers—ready to die, in the name of Liberty, at home or overseas—emerged righteously, always and already victorious, as the unified image of an invulnerable patriot: the American hero.

The following essay analyzes the commodified hero image and the production of virtual citizen-soldier subjectivity within the military-entertainment spectacle, focusing particularly on the rising genre of films based on the lives of civilian and military heroes as well as the third- and first-person military action video games. Following situationist thought, I explore the “behaviors” produced by these virtual “environments of life” in order to theorize a transgressive space of possibility within which film and video games can produce revolutionary experiences, desires, and subjectivities that negate the prevailing capitalist worldview and its related, all-pervasive culture of war. In highlighting these elements of the interactive spectacle, I wish not to suggest that we are trapped, but that we are closer than ever to the spectacular limit now that it stands within the reach of our playful touch.

THE REAL IS FAKE: HERO OBJECTS IN *BILLY LYNN*, *AMERICAN SNIPER*, AND *THE 15:17 TO PARIS*

Films about contemporary war and its heroes are largely concerned with the subjectivity and knowledge that combat instills within its participants. This intimate combat subjectivity is the authority of knowledge that sees and frames the chaos of battle—or, in Mirzoeff's terminology, the knowledge endowed by a soldier's subjectivity is their *visuality* (1741). As cultural products of the military-entertainment spectacle, films such as Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* (2014) serve post-9/11 American anxieties with an uncomplicated, though often sympathetically traumatized, hero figure whose professional and personal lives are framed and made intelligible by their militarized visuality. The trailer for *American Sniper* (Warner Bros. Pictures) intercuts scenes of childbirth with the framing of an Iraqi child in crosshairs, promising audiences a glimpse through the subjectivity of Chris Kyle, the "Most Lethal Sniper in US History," to reconcile these irreconcilable events. Here, the military-entertainment spectacle attempts to quell anxieties about real life, either on a screen or during disaster, when it most appears like war. In contemporary war films, the rigid characterization of soldiers parallels the function of the military-entertainment complex; as war-media scholar Alex Vernon notes, "such films replicate the transformation of people into [single-function soldiers], into consumable objects" (390).

Referenced in this essay's opening paragraph, Fountain's book, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, articulates the experience of this commodification from the position of the hero object. The fictionalized soldier Billy Lynn experiences the alienation which abstracts the real Chris Kyle from Eastwood's *American Sniper*, or the real Marcus Luttrell from Berg's *Lone Survivor* (2013). Other characters describe the experience of watching Billy's attempted rescue on video through American political, mythological, and cinematic analogies; the video is as stirring as watching 9/11 on TV (Fountain 48), like feeling the pride of the Alamo (123), and akin to witness-

ing John Wayne in action (214). In the chapter "Money Makes Us Real," Dallas Cowboy team manager, Norm Oglesby, recognizes the symbolism in the images of Billy's heroic actions and wants to make a movie out of it to inspire the masses: "They forget some things are actually worth fighting for . . . our country *needs* this movie, needs it badly" (309, 311). But Billy and the Bravos are already abstracted without the aid of a Hollywood film: Experiencing the soldiers through the liveness of the video or directly in person during their media tour is greater than anything a Hollywood film could fake. The real looks fake enough, and, Billy paradoxically admits, "nothing looks so real as a fake" (325).

Where are we? It is "15 August 2015" and we are on a train headed from Amsterdam to Paris. Three Americans have just become heroes by stopping a nameless gunman from killing everyone onboard. Who are the heroes? Alek Skarlatos, Anthony Sadler, and Spencer Stone. Who is the villain? We don't know. Clint Eastwood is directing. We are in, perhaps, the furthest limit of the military-entertainment spectacle's project of side-stepping the twenty-first century interactive impulse: *The 15:17 to Paris* (2018), directed by Clint Eastwood, starring the real Alek Skarlatos, Anthony Sadler, and Spencer Stone. The unreality of the

film is encapsulated by its star, Spencer Stone, as he says in an interview for USA Today, “[T]he same amount of blood, same injuries ... It was felt like that was reality, not fiction” (qtd. in Alexander). Based on the non-fiction book of the same name, Eastwood’s film creates a non-chronological depiction of the real 15 August 2015 event alongside a story of its real-life heroes growing up together, forging a path through destiny toward the fated day on the train. Fate is one of the film’s few thematic through-lines, but the question remains: Who or what designs or produces this fate? God is, of course, suggested, but so are the laws of physics when Spencer philosophizes “an object in motion stays in motion” (Eastwood, 01:05:33). In any case, for Alek Skarlatos and Spencer Stone, fate involved enlistment in the armed forces prior to their heroic objectification in film. In accord with my analysis of Fountain’s novel and the military-entertainment spectacle, I posit that the immaterial force Clint Eastwood, screenwriter Dorothy Blyskal, and heroic ordinary-person Spencer Stone refer to is spectacular culture.

The 15:17 to Paris marks the furthest limit reachable by the modernist spectacle in its project of satisfying the audience’s desire for heroic subjectivity and quasi-interactivity. The commodification of Stone, Sadler, and Skarlatos represents the military-entertainment spectacle’s hegemonic claim to structuring the appearance of reality, but this inclusion of the real heroes within the film is not, in turn, a real transgression against the **hyperreal** spectacle. While the spectacle appears to open up for these three virtual citizen-soldiers, merely partaking in the productive apparatus or “acting the part” does not necessarily “mean

that the citizen plays a more ‘participatory’ role in the democratic sense” (Stahl, 115). Like Billy Lynn and the Bravos when they participated in the 2004 Dallas Cowboy Thanksgiving halftime event, the heroes of *The 15:17 to Paris* are merely conscripts for the perpetuation of a spectacular effect of hero objectification.

Still, the specific effect remains crucial. Josephine Livingston writes for *The New Republic* about the experience of witnessing the real heroes cast in their roles, reporting that “they are all handsome but appalling actors ... [They are] so surreal that [*The 15:17 to Paris* is] worth watching” (Livingston). The film’s surreal qualities did not serve to critique the core values of American traditionalism nor hamper the movie’s commercial success (Box Office Mojo). While strange, Eastwood’s film cannot function as an anti-spectacular critique because it is a type of strange that remains unthreatening to spectacular capitalist hegemony and the imperial image of the American military hero. To Debord, the commodification of **surrealism** after World War

HYPERREAL (AND REAL):

These terms are used with respect to French post-structuralist philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who believed that it was impossible for any rational model of reality to contain anything more than a representation, and thus a false image, of reality. These models of reality, which do not possess an origin or base in reality, inform a shared social reality which he refers to as hyperreal.

SURREALISM:

An early twentieth-century avant-garde art movement that lies within the lineage of the Situationist International, the Surrealists sought an anti-bourgeois, anti-traditionalist mode of expression through the harnessing of Sigmund Freud’s theories of the unconscious mind.

It was a preemptive attempt to discredit future revolutionary methods of art as “[reruns] of a defeat which according to [the bourgeoisie] is definitive and can no longer be brought back into question by anyone” (6). So it follows that, if in films like *The 15:17 to Paris*, the surreal becomes quaint, and the real looks fake, then the revolutionary impulse to “seize [mass culture] in order to negate it” (Debord 11) might require the construction of ambiances of ridiculous and total artificiality.

ANG LEE'S FUCKING CRIME AGAINST CINEMA: THE HYPERREAL ADAPTATION OF BILLY LYNN

Ang Lee's 2016 adaptation of *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* has been called, by its director, “a new format of filmmaking” (Film4) and, by others, “a fucking crime against cinema” (@BilgeEbiri). The hypermediated ambiance of Ben Fountain's satiric novel survives its adaptation into film because of cutting-edge filmmaking and theatrical projection technologies:

The brief on this technological milestone? Images shot and projected at 120 [**frames per second**], dual 4K RGB laser projectors that display wide color gamut and high dynamic range, bright RealD 3D, 12-channel audio with overhead speakers plus sub-bass. Talk about immersive! (Leitner)

In the history of film production and projection, advancements in image resolution, color, sound, and even optical 3D have been embraced by filmmakers and audiences as enhancements of the cinematic experience. Yet the rate of 24 frames per second (FPS) has, for initially technical but increasingly aesthetic reasons, remained the standard for analogue film and most digi-

tal cinema. Twenty-four FPS is the accepted “cinematic look,” and continues to be legitimized by the industry convention of “filmizing” digital video to avoid comparison with less prestigious artforms like the soap opera, sports broadcast, or video games. For many, the discomfort created by any deviation from this norm indicates that 24 FPS “is an inherent part of the cinematic experience ... [in] the way we accept cinema [and] the way we suspend our disbelief” (Yamato). But, in the novel *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, Billy cannot suspend his disbelief within the spectacle that subsumes his life and the American culture. He cannot reconcile his averageness, his history as a high school delinquent, or his muted individuality as a soldier with the celebrity status that lands him on stage next to Beyoncé. And so, a proper film adaptation would invite the audience, as other hero films do, to inhabit this particular subjectivity. Lee achieves this effect by filming at a high frame rate of 120 FPS, more than four times the standard and higher than any prior film in history, ushering in what he claims to be “not just a new technology, but a new habit in watching movies” (qtd. in Engber).

Billy's words, “nothing looks so real as a fake” (Fountain, 325), are integral to the theatrical presentation of Ang Lee's film. Artificiality is brought to the foreground with a kitschy chamber choir cover of David Bowie's “Heroes” in the film's trailer (Movieclips), a steady zoom beyond the scan lines of the movie's opening news broadcast, and cellphone interfaces that float over the screen as Billy composes text messages. In order to share the hero's subjectivity with the audience, all the traditional cinematic tricks are deployed, yet everything is mediated through images that contain forty-times more visual data due to

the film's 4K resolution, its **high dynamic range** (HDR) color image, and its delivery at the rate of 120 times a second. The high frame rate sensation of the film's dissolve between an exploding Halftime pyrotechnic and the destruction caused by rocket propel grenades (RPG) in Iraq or its frequent first-person close-up addresses lie somewhere between too real and too fake. "Some people might use the term hyperreal," explains technical supervisor Ben Gervais, "but we feel very much like it's just real, and what you've been seeing for the most part in other films has been less than real" (Sony Pictures). For others, however, the effect is not realistic but grotesque and video game-like, as Daniel Engber from Slate writes, "the scene looked queer, uncinematic, like a theater sketch acted out in virtual reality." This ambiguity evokes questions central to the novel: Is it better to have access to the real, or to be insulated by its approximation? "You ever kill somebody ... watch them die?" asks a member of the Cowboys in direct address to the camera, an address to an audience who will later have the privilege of witnessing, through the eyes of Billy, the most information-dense close-up of a person bleeding out ever created (Lee, 00:38:23 & 01:16:37).

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is a strange text to adapt into a medium traditionally considered to be so passive and pacifying. Lee's film transgresses the conventions of the classically spectacular medium of film in more ways than one. Even though its trailer invites audiences "to walk in the path of the hero" (Sony Pictures), and certain production team members believe the film's goal is to increase immersion within Billy's subjective experience, I abide that the 120 FPS 4K IMAX presentation of the film is a deliberately constructed situation against the spectacle—a potential provocation of new, and possibly revolutionary, desires and subjective positionings.

At one point, Debord defines situations as "the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality," comprised of a perpetual interaction between and a playful intervention in "the material environment of life and the behaviors which that environment gives rise to" (12).

FRAMERATE (FRAMES PER SECOND):

In both analogue film and digital video, camera footage is recorded in a procession of still images, or frames. When projected or played back, the rate at which these frames flash on the screen per second is the framerate, or FPS. This process produces the cinematic illusion of motion. The cinematic standard FPS is approximately 24 frames per second (FPS).

HIGH DYNAMIC RANGE (HDR):

A dynamic range higher than what is considered to be standard dynamic range; often used in discussing display devices, photography, 3D rendering, and sound recording including digital imaging and digital audio production.

In Lee's "new habit of watching movies" (qtd. in Engber), novel projection technology, specifically designed auditoriums, and a new vision of the cinematic experience formally reconfigures the pacifying spectacle of the cinema and produces an ambiance with an unprecedented "passional quality" (12). The culminating effect of Lee's new cinema is, as has been said, a criminally uncinematic and unsatisfying experience. But in this way, audience members may feel uncategoryzable unsettlement and be provoked into a reflection on the nature of and their participation in the architectural and psychological structure of cinematic spectatorship. Ang Lee's film is an exceptional anti-spectacular situation, a stirring of consciousness against the mediation of the real in accord with Ben Fountain's original text. *Billy Lynn* in 4K at 120 FPS disrupts the spectacle's ability to comfortably close the gap between the audience and the film's depicted heroes, suggesting that the modern spectacle cannot channel the twenty-first century interactive impulse through film. Indeed, with this properly avant-garde experiment, Lee recognizes such limitations and seizes "the first elements of a more advanced construction of the environment" through the incorporation, or remediation, of the high frame rate technology and aesthetic already used in the, arguably, more interactive medium of video games (Debord 11).

**THE HARD LIMITS OF SACRIFICE:
PROCEDURAL RHETORIC AND
TRANSGRESSION IN CALL OF DUTY 4:
MODERN WARFARE AND SPEC OPS: THE LINE**

As megaplex theatres close and digital streaming platforms bring films to exponentially smaller screens, it is difficult to imagine a future where US theatres are equipped to show Lee's film (Giardina), let alone anything of a larger scale. The film's high frame rate does, however, gesture towards the format of video games. At the time of publication of Fountain's novel, franchises like Activision's *Call of Duty* were already setting records for the biggest entertainment launch of all time (Stuart). In this sense, Lee's remediation of high frame rate may be a late concession to a cultural shift to and interest in the immediacy of video games. Plainly apparent since at least the 1960s, passivity and noninteractivity are principle in the spectacular alienation of the revolutionary impulse (Debord 14). But, in the post-9/11 era, the desire for agency and experiential knowledge is more alive than ever—a desire that the new medium of video games can facilitate in unprecedented ways.

As a medium, video games are particularly equipped to aid in constructing political meaning as players explore the intentionally crafted limitations and possibilities of their design. Ian Bogost's theory of procedural rhetoric reveals how video games can be used to both perpetuate the military-entertainment spectacle and construct anti-spectacular situations. Procedural rhetoric illustrates that games are not a didactic medium: Meaning emerges out of interaction and through the formation of behaviors, which condition and inspire a player's understanding of game rules (hard limits) and their experimentation against those rules (what is possible). Moving

beyond graphical realism, “the effective arrangement of a [game’s rules]” affect persuasion and create “a desirable possibility space for interpretation” (Bogost 124). As objects of a new media with a unique capacity for political expression, video games warrant theoretical and critical attention. Through our play, though we may not realize it, what seems like leisure may be politics. Roger Stahl warns us, “[T]here are many ways of killing that do not necessarily involve pulling a trigger oneself, such as the collective condoning of state violence” (118). Video games and the military have had a close relationship since the rise of computer simulation technology, bringing military-funded simulations, like *Apache* (1995), to the commercial market (Stahl 116-7). The militarization of games justifies their consideration under the war-media scholarship already commenced in the era of the military-entertainment complex.

In accord with Hammond’s assertion that US interventionism in the twenty-first century is a project of manufacturing meaning for American culture, Bogost’s theory of procedural rhetoric can help to explain how the manufacturing of heroic subjectivity and visuality in military first-person shooters militarizes civilians. In the single-player campaign for *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), players inhabit the avatars of several soldiers across a global conflict which threatens to break out into a nuclear war. Warfare in this game is ostensibly modern, refiguring contemporary war’s asymmetry into an even-sided conflict between a high-tech coalition of Western nations and a Russian-led rogue state of advanced paramilitary contractors. As Matthew Payne notes, this “adroit sleight of hand . . . enables the [player’s] virtual war experience to be politically and ludically satisfying” (LOC 1514). After presenting players with this simplified, pre-Cold War narrative of conflict, the game manufactures a globalized visuality of the battlefield by inhabiting British SAS soldiers and US Marines fighting the same war from different parts of the world. Moreover, this visuality extends temporally through history as the player also participates in past, fictional conflicts. *Call of Duty* can manufacture the heroic subjectivity for players

AS A MEDIUM, VIDEO GAMES ARE PARTICULARLY EQUIPPED TO AID IN CONSTRUCTING POLITICAL MEANING AS PLAYERS EXPLORE THE INTENTIONALLY CRAFTED LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES OF THEIR DESIGN.



that Hollywood films cannot, reconciling the citizen with the soldier as per Stahl’s concept of the virtual citizen-soldier. *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* sinks its virtual citizen-soldiers even deeper within their subjectivity during in-game moments of virtual sacrifice when their weapons are taken away and they are forced to die. These moments of conscripted sacrifice are shocking because they remove player agency, defining the hard limits of sacrifice with no room for experimentation. The spectacular deactivation of the citizen is achieved within the subjectivity of the virtual citizen-soldier as the apolitical role of the soldier supersedes the democratic social role of the citizen. In *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, the “[subordination of] critical and ethical questions to movement and action” depoliticizes democratic citizenship (Stahl 126).

Video games such as the *Call of Duty* series perpetuate spectacular oppression in the interactive medium by constructing virtual environments and gameplay mechanics with a possibility space that constrains the po-



litical agency of players. But procedural rhetoric can also be harnessed to construct possibility spaces which contend with the political hegemony upheld by militarized culture and conditioned by many military video games, creating forms of protest within and through the architecture of video games. By relating the theories of Bogost and Debord, this medium can realize much of what the SI hoped to affect through material urban landscapes in their theorized experimental cities. Situations occur in the interaction between “the material environment of life and the behaviors which that environment gives rise to” (Debord 12), and, in the virtual realm of games, the management of environment and possible behaviors utilizes these exact same mechanisms for producing many types of meaning through play. In fact, the situation is described by Debord as a new type of game (13), of which the large-scale physical production, in the form of experimental cities, was perhaps too difficult and expensive to realize in the 1960s (14), but which could certainly be facilitated virtually today.

Released in 2012, Yager Development’s third-person shooter *Spec Ops: The Line* directs attention to the limited possibility space that typified the play experience of military shooters during the seventh generation of console gaming. *Spec Ops: The Line* was the first entry in ten years for a series of generic tactical military shooters that had long been forgotten in a market obsessed with *Gears of War* and *Call of Duty* and inundated by their mediocre, yet often profitable imitators. Besides being uniquely set in a sandstorm-devastated Dubai, advertising for the game leading up to its release betrayed nothing of its anti-war gaming messaging, nor did it signal the difficulties it had planned for players all too comfortably inhabiting their virtual citizen-soldier subjectivity. The story situates players in the role of US Army Captain Martin Walker as he and his squad-mates explore a ravaged and inhospitable Dubai, following the last received signal of the esteemed Colonel John Konrad, who was trapped by

the storm with his company of soldiers on their way home from Afghanistan. The game's objectives and mechanics reflect de facto industry standards, allowing even the most casual seventh-generation player to immediately intuit its cover-based shooting mechanics and A-to-B checkpoint level design. With the volume muted and without ever reading a single line of tutorial text, players could play *Spec Ops: The Line* and know exactly where to go and exactly who to kill, exercising the lethal instinct of a well-trained virtual citizen-soldier. The unsettling ease with which players take to *Spec Ops: The Line's* by-the-numbers military shooter design becomes apparent when the game begins to condition success upon murdering American soldiers.

Spec Ops: The Line hijacks the form and limited possibility space of pacifying military shooters to encourage a new behavior within the culture of the military-entertainment spectacle. In the chaos of a fracturing state of martial law, the last of Konrad's company of soldiers, the 33rd, mistake Walker and his squad for armed dissenters and fire upon them, forcing the player into a defensive stance. The legitimized murder of American soldiers in *Spec Ops: The Line* complicates the rigid possibility space of the shooter and its virtual citizen-soldier subjectivity with what should be an ethical dilemma. The situation's contradiction compromises the player's identification with what is and is not possible in this play experience; and, poignantly, the form *Spec Ops: The Line* borrows cannot facilitate the ethical dissonance its narrative creates by allowing players to win and not kill American soldiers. This constructed environment can harbor only the mechanisms of uncritical murder. *Spec Ops: The Line* inhabits

VIDEO GAMES AS A MEDIUM ARE INHERENTLY INTERACTIVE, BUT THE CONSTRUCTED ENVIRONMENT THAT FACILITATES THEIR IN-GAME INTERACTIONS DETERMINES WHETHER OR NOT PLAYERS PARTICIPATE AS DEMOCRATIC AGENTS OR DEPOLITICIZED CONSCRIPTS.



the familiar environment of the military shooter and explodes it to reveal how such games prefigure a depoliticized and pacified subjectivity.

Unpronounced in the media landscape of the twentieth century, the architecture of video games now stands among, and often taller than the original mediums of the touch-shy modernist spectacle. Video games as a medium are inherently interactive, but the constructed environment that facilitates their in-game interactions determines whether or not players participate as democratic agents or depoliticized conscripts. Harnessed by the military-entertainment spectacle, video games can work, as Stahl argues, to shift the emphasis from the ethical question of "why we fight" to the dazzling showcase of "how we fight" (126). Within the novel medium of video games, the military-entertainment spectacle perpetuates its pacifying transformation of the political citizen into the virtual citizen-soldier, manufacturing heroic subjectivity in response to the conspicuous lack of heroes in postmodernity. However, as *Spec Ops: The Line* demonstrates, video games may prove to be dangerous to the industry of hero manufacturing insofar as it remains necessarily restrictive and intolerant of agency. Yager Development has seized upon a limit and now we must, as Debord says, transgress and begin construction of new, better ambiances (11).



Is the hero real in the twenty-first century? No, it is absurdly artificial. The music video for David Bowie's "Heroes," essay documentarian Hito Steyerl asserts, heralded the truth of this in 1977:

[Bowie's hero is] an object: a thing, an image, a splendid fetish—a commodity soaked with desire ... [H]e has become above all an image that can be reproduced, multiplied, and copied ... [T]his hero's immortality no longer originates in the strength to survive all possible ordeals, but from its ability to be xeroxed, recycled, and reincarnated. Destruction will alter its form and appearance, yet its substance will be untouched. (Steyerl, XX)

The hero commodity is, like Billy Lynn and virtual citizen-soldier subjectivity, a porous vessel for audience desire; it short-circuits the satisfaction of being a meaningful symbol by only resupplying the original desire for meaning. The post-9/11 military-entertainment spectacle's obsession with manufacturing heroes reflects a real desire for heroism in postmodernity, but it only has Rambo and cowboys to offer. The unreachable ambiance of this spectacle wears these heroes like a coat, begging not to be touched and, oh, don't even think to ask if it is real! I suspect we will know the era's new heroes when we see them radiating with insane artificiality, urging us closer. Real heroes fake enough to be real would never be afraid of the twenty-first century's touch.

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PIRATICAL ACTORS

Origins, Motives, and Political Sentiments, c. 1716–1726

By Corey Griffis

In the middle months of the year 1720, Clement Downing arrived at the settlement of Saint Augustin in Madagascar, a midshipman aboard the *Salisbury* on its journey to trade in India. Led by ex-pirate John Rivers from 1686–1719, Saint Augustin was well-known as a resupplying depot for pirates operating in the region and, like other settlements in the immediate vicinity, was populated by “30 to 50 ex-pirates, or men waiting for a ship.”¹ As ex-pirates, these men were said to have had “a very open-handed fraternity” with the Indigenous **Malagasy** populations; on rare occasions, the ex-pirates traded for **enslaved people** captured in local warfare and sold them to passing sailors or merchants.²

According to Downing’s journals, Malagasy traders from Saint Augustin asked the crew of the *Salisbury* to stay, feast together, and exchange goods, interactions that the Indigenous peoples of Madagascar often had with pirates, ex-pirates, and merchants friendly to men of a piratical occupation. Although the crew declined the invitation, Downing stayed in Saint Augustin long enough to note how the Malagasy, despite knowing very little English, often verbalized “wicked Execrations,” such as “many a ‘God damn ye.’”³ Historian Arne Bialuschewski writes that “among the phrases that the Malagasy men must have learned [...] was ‘D[am]n King George,’”—a vulgarity which would not have fallen kindly upon the ears of any proud Englishman aboard the *Salisbury*.⁴

In such accounts, one implication remains noteworthy: the Indigenous populations near Saint Augustin must have learned these contemporaneously vulgar phrases from the pirates and ex-pirates who frequented the settlement as late as 1719 and who remained prominent in the region until about 1722. While this proclivity for blasphemous language aligns with the popular image of pirates as social scoundrels and bawdy drunks, one of the phrases that Bialuschewski singles out as prevalent—"Damn King George"—bears significance due to its political orientation. Scholars such as Bialuschewski and E.T. Fox have linked the phrase to symbolic concord amongst pirates with Jacobitism, a political movement that advocated for the restoration of the Stuart dynasty to the British throne.

Though the notion may run against the popular pirate mythos and anarchic imagery, evidence suggests that **Golden Age** pirates held political views contextualized by the politics of eighteenth-century imperial England, the country from whence most of them drew their origin. Nor were they simply opposed to all the political currents that ran through their time. Rather, they sailed upon some of these currents out of their own will—either out of sincere ideological conviction or out of superficial convenience. Political and economic currents eventually drew them in against their wishes, although in direct response to their actions. Such currents culminated in colonial societies turning against pirates; the enactment of prominent mass executions created a decline in piracy as rapid as the fomentation, ending the Golden Age of Atlantic piracy.

But while they lived and died, Golden Age pirates were diverse in terms of their political ideologies. There were convinced **Jacobites**, Jacobites of convenience, ex-privateers, aggrieved reactionaries, apolitical opportunists, and, only on rare occasions, the genuine swashbuckler who was in it merely for adventure. All of them sought the wealth of plunder, though many were quick to spend it, and nearly all of them held some sort of grievance with English society, politics, and economics. The nature of that grievance cannot be generalized across all piratical actors, nor can it

BUT WHILE THEY LIVED AND DIED, GOLDEN AGE PIRATES WERE DIVERSE IN TERMS OF THEIR POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES.

MALAGASY PEOPLE:

A Southeast African Austronesian ethnic group native to the island of Madagascar. Many Malagasy people were traded, stolen, and enslaved in the Americas during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

ENSLAVED PEOPLE (CHATTEL SLAVERY):

The enslaving of African peoples by White Europeans and Americans, occurring primarily between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In this system, persons are denied the status of personhood and considered to be personal property (chattel) that can be bought and sold as commodities. The profits gained by American settlers and Europeans from the slave trade and slavery created huge economic development in major regions of the Americas and Europe.

GOLDEN AGE OF PIRACY:

A common designation for the period between 1716 and 1726, when maritime piracy was a significant factor in the histories of the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and Atlantic Ocean. This essay focuses on piracy in the Atlantic.

JACOBITES:

Supporters of Jacobitism

be accurately ascribed to a revolutionary zeal. The basic ideological categorizations outlined tend to overlap; thus, the goal is not to develop a rigid scheme for classification but to synthesize and contextualize the varying motivations and political sentiments of piratical actors. In outlining the diverse motivations that shaped Golden Age of Piracy in the Atlantic, this paper develops a framework to better understand the broader relationships that pirates had with maritime communities and the imperial state.

HOW THE SAILOR AND HIS GRIEVANCES SET OUT TO SEA

The Golden Age of Piracy began in late 1715 and early 1716, following the end of the War of Spanish Succession. The end of the war, which saw the English crown among the victors, was accompanied by the decommissioning of the majority of the British Royal Navy, resulting in mass unemployment amongst seamen. With few occupational opportunities available, some seamen found a livelihood in colonial fisheries; others became employed as logwooders, cutting and hauling timber from the *Hæmatoxylum campechianum* tree, which was valued as a source of brilliant red dye. Such occupations were associated with their own pressures, dangers, and unpleasantnesses.⁵

The sailors who remained in the employ of the Navy were subjected to “brutal discipline, and sometimes death.”⁶ Such mistreatment was commonplace, with few substantive avenues for recourse or redress available. Captain Charles Johnson, the pen name of the unknown author of *A General History*, wrote that even those decommissioned sailors who managed to find employment with maritime merchants were “poorly paid, and but poorly fed,” and noted that “such Usage breeds Discontents amongst them.”⁷ Whether formerly or presently employed by the Navy or by private men of commerce, such sailors had often been at work aboard ships for many years. While a significant majority were in their



mid-twenties during the Golden Age, such an individual would “not, by the standards of his occupation, have been [deemed] a young man.”⁸ Such men would have worked from early youth to what was then considered middle-age, spending years developing skills that were particular to the maritime realm and toiling in an oft-abusive environment that required a hardened constitution and gritted teeth. Their grievances lay in the lack of decent work that utilized such varieties of labor; in being unable, after years of travail, to find a means of simply sustaining a livelihood. War had meant greater stability for them in terms of employment, even if it was not without danger and exploitation. Captain Johnson also perceived the inverse relationship between naval employment and piratical activity levels, stating that men who

might otherwise be “Breakers of the Peace, by being put into order, become solemn Preservers of it.”⁹

However, not all ex-Navy sailors who became pirates were commissioned to their former posts of their own volition; some had been targets of **navel impressment**, a practice of “extremely dubious legality” with a long history in American waters.¹⁰ Thus, for some sailors who turned to piracy, the circumstances of their induction into life at sea were as much of a grievance as the conditions of the service itself.

Not all of those who turned to piracy were former navy sailors; alongside such individuals were those who “had been fishermen, baymen, or servants, and a few had been bargemen and turtlers.”¹¹ Furthermore, a significant minority of pirates were not from marginalized social strata or deprived circumstances. One of these exceptions was notable captain Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard, who, from what can be gleaned from genealogical records and in-depth research done by historian Baylus C. Brooks, was “an educated aristocrat” from Jamaican planta-

tion society, “a veteran” of Queen Anne’s War, and may have turned to piracy “burdened by concerns for his family’s welfare.”¹² Teach’s place in the piratical mythos as Blackbeard may be outsized and sensationalized, but the man himself was very much of the world he lived in; like all pirates, he plundered and had connections to the same mainland society that he had left behind. He did not set a-sail with **‘candles lit underneath his beard’** and was far more likely to have sat by candlelight and written letters to individuals such as Tobias Knight, a colonial official in North Carolina. Knight’s correspondence with Teach was “found among Thaches [Teach’s] papers [after] his death.”¹³ The presence of these letters, among other papers, tells us that Teach was a literate man, a skill that may have existed in perhaps 60 percent of the free male population at the time.¹⁴

However, such men as Teach were undoubtedly outliers in terms of their background. And for the many ordinary seamen who turned pirate directly from the navy or merchant ships, volunteerism was the rule and mutiny the exception. For most of the Golden Age, “pirates relied as much as possible on being able to augment their crews with volunteers,” and there was no shortage of willing recruits.¹⁵ Typically, when pirates seized a merchant ship, they would extend an offer to those who had labored aboard a captured vessel, giving them the choice of freely submitting their signature to the articles of the pirate ship. Volunteerism was an attempt to ensure that new members were dedicated to the crew and the lifestyle that piracy encapsulated, given that a forced pirate was far more likely to turn against the crew, commit sabotage or mutiny, or desert at the first salient opportunity. It might be said that, though pirates engaged in activities that carried a great risk to life and limb and were prone to liberal engagement in a cornucopia of vices, they also sought to guarantee stability amongst themselves whenever it was possible. Pragmatism by no means necessitated sobriety.

NAVAL IMPRESSMENT:

The practice of forcing people into navel service without their consent.

CANDLES LIT UNDERNEATH HIS BEARD:

One of the many myths about Blackbeard is that he would light candles underneath his beard before battle; the resulting smoke would give him a demonic appearance. Although historically inaccurate, this myth fits well into mythologized image of Blackbeard as a particularly vicious pirate.

ACROSS THE POND: TRANS-ATLANTIC TRADE, THE SLAVE TRADE ASIENTO, AND PIRATICAL OPPORTUNISM

In addition to the motivational strength of wretched material conditions and ample personal opposition, the end of the War of Spanish Succession coincided with and facilitated a marked increase in the exchange of goods across the Atlantic. The coerced opening of the Spanish Empire to British trade was one major factor in this growth. A significant point of contention during the conflict with Spain had been the English desire for an *asiento* agreement in relation to the **Trans-Atlantic slave trade**. The *asiento* was a sought-after commercial contract between the Spanish crown and foreign merchants or companies, wherein the latter were granted a monopoly on specified foreign exports to Spanish colonies in the Americas. Given the wealth of the Spanish Empire, holding an *asiento* for any product was considered an immense privilege. In order to tip the “balance of trade” away from France and in their favor, Britain made a slave trade *asiento* with Spain one of the stipulations included in the treaty that ended the War of Spanish Succession.¹⁶

Post-war growth was most certainly not limited to trade between Britain and Spain. For example, the total average annual value of import-export trade between England’s American colonies and the British Isles increased from 337,502 pounds sterling during the period from 1710-1715 to 448,838 pounds sterling during the period from 1716-1720, an increase in the total average annual import-export trade value of almost 25 percent.¹⁷ Piracy was prevalent across many regions of the world during the Golden Age, but the combination of the British-Spanish slave trade *asiento* and dramatic growth in trade between Britain and its colonies provided particularly ripe opportunities for aggravated levels of piracy in the colonial Americas.

However, pirates themselves typically viewed enslaved African people as “worthless, disposable com-

TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE:

Oceanic trade that existed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries in a triangular trade route carrying enslaved African people, cash crops, and manufactured goods between West Africa, Caribbean or American colonies and the European colonial powers. As a trade between European and African slavers, the slave trade murdered, enslaved, and victimized millions of African men, women, and children.

modities, and they treated them as such.”¹⁸ There is evidence that at least one pirate crew operating offshore of West Africa “returned about 300 slaves to the crew of an English vessel because the marauders did not know how to make money [off of] them.”¹⁹ Pirates who discovered a ship full of enslaved people would most often loot the ship for goods and then sink the vessel, killing all the Africans left aboard. In general, because pirates most often came from lower-class English backgrounds, they shared and perpetuated the racial prejudice of their countrymen. In contrast to the volunteerism that defined piracy’s labor supply, it was extremely rare for pirates to accept Africans into their crew as equals; “Black people under the black flag were usually slaves who fared no better than other Africans shipped in chains to the New World.”²⁰ While it is undeniable that some pirates participated in and profited from slavery, the majority operated as disruptors of the slave trade and did so in a manner fatal to the enslaved Africans they encountered. The typical European pirate cared only about the seizure and sale of “gold, silver and other valuables,” as opposed to the life, or the economic value attached to the life, of an enslaved African person.²¹

These facts did not matter to the British Empire and British merchants, however; regardless of whether a vessel was carrying enslaved people

or dry goods, pirates sank ships, stole valuable cargo, and occasionally killed sailors. Unlike the piratical activities of prior eras, piracy in the Golden Age was perceived by the state as a clear and present threat to English trade in the Americas and beyond, rather than as a valuable tool of the Crown against her imperial rivals. Whereas earlier pirates had centralized their harassment upon the Spanish, Golden Age pirates rarely drew any sort of meaningful distinction between vessels of differing origin. They would attack English ships as readily as they would Spanish merchants and kept numerous stolen national flags aboard their vessels for deception. Piracy had been seen less and less favorably since “the end of the seventeenth century” but became a particularly prominent issue in the years following 1713.²² Initial complaints about a surge in piratical activities came from unhappy merchants, who pushed for changes in state policy and often collaborated with colonial actors to eliminate sea-bandits. Thus, attempts by the British empire to eliminate piracy were “driven by metropolitan concerns [about] colonial trade,” although there were also concerns about how the rampant mythologization of pirates might spread “notions of aggressive social mobility” that the ruling social strata considered threatening and undesirable.²³

To go a-roving was most typically an “opportunistic and economically motivated exploit and, when they could, numerous pirates seized the chance to reenter colonial society.”²⁴ Merchant vessels were relatively easy targets, as they were often slower-moving, and recourse from maritime robberies took a longer time to materialize. By the time authorities were alerted, the culprits had generally already fled and divided up their stolen bounty. Because many men turned to piracy out of necessity more than anything else, it was not uncommon for pirates during the earlier years of the Golden Age to aim to “commit a few

successful strikes and then settle down somewhere,” not unlike many of their predecessors from generations past.²⁵ The easy availability of state pardons lent some observable credence to this rationale, as one of the first strategies that the British empire utilized to reduce piratical activity was the providence of amnesty to those pirates who willingly turned themselves in and disavowed their banditry. Often, those who took such amnesties were even allowed to keep their loot.²⁶ This policy was frequently abused by numerous pirates, including Edward Teach, who accepted numerous pardons from the colonial government of North Carolina and then promptly “resumed seizing vessels.”²⁷ His abuse of the pardon system was an example of the sort of policy failures that led the English colonies to engage in more

UNLIKE THE PIRATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF PRIOR ERAS, PIRACY IN THE GOLDEN AGE WAS PERCEIVED BY THE STATE AS A CLEAR AND PRESENT THREAT TO ENGLISH TRADE IN THE AMERICAS AND BEYOND, RATHER THAN AS A VALUABLE TOOL OF THE CROWN AGAINST HER IMPERIAL RIVALS.

drastic methods of suppressing piracy, including “a fragmented series of campaigns driven by local or, in some cases, individual motivations.”²⁸ A campaign of “mass executions” was carried out from 1719 to 1726, characterized by the parallel publication of myriad pamphlets that warned both of the moral impropriety and the capital offensiveness of piracy.²⁹

In short, the Golden Age saw the economic motivations of pirates come into conflict with the economic motivations of the state, and, at this period in history, the reaction on behalf of the state was to eliminate those who committed piracy. Captain Johnson writes in the *General History* that one po-

tential solution to piracy could have been the establishment of a “National Fishery” in the likeness of the Dutch; a fishery would have employed men rendered jobless by the end of the War of Spanish Succession.³⁰ While there is no way to retrospectively test the validity of this theory, it highlights the role played by the state in, if not creating, at the very least ignoring the sociocultural tensions and economic circumstances that allowed piracy to flourish—particularly as an avenue taken by economically marginalized, lower-class Englishmen.

“THAT’S GOT TO BE THE BEST PIRATE I’VE EVER SEEN”: PIRATES AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY MYTHOS

Predisposed by talent and circumstance, a few rare men who sailed did in tandem have a deep personal affinity for life at sea; “a roving adven’turous Disposition” that drove them to pursue wealth, notoriety, and something more.³¹ Though the days of **royal patronage** that pirates like William Kidd enjoyed had ended by the beginning of the Golden Age, plenty of men still lived who saw the sea as a preferable way of life. Like Walter Kennedy, a prominent pirate of the era, they became familiar with the larger-than-life figure of the heroic and fantastically successful rogue through their stories. Many seamen “loved to hear about Henry Avery and no doubt others.”³² Stories of piracy had wide popular appeal, and “the theme [was] a manifestly commercial one”; there was both supply and demand for books and theatrical productions formulated around the piratical lifestyle, in addition to word-of-mouth tales.³³

Some of those tales were fictive, while others were rooted in accounts of the Caribbean buccaneers and “the essence of their glory days.”³⁴ More generalized stories about Robin Hood-like figures were popular among the masses, including among sailors who might have turned pirate, even if very few of those eventual pirates had “the idealism, the unselfishness, or the social consciousness” to become as romantic a

figure as were the protagonists of such stories.³⁵ Though some pirates may have been inspired by heroic tales or stories of the buccaneering era, “perhaps few [could] afford” to fulfill those roles, if those roles ever truly existed as anything other than ideations.³⁶

Given the prevalence of these stories and folk heroes, many men of this time would have had their own ideas about what constituted pirate life. They would have had expectations of some variety of liberty and fraternity or seen some justificatory benefit to piracy as a form of **social banditry**. Thus, at least some of the sailors who became pirates during the Golden Age did so not simply as a response to their present conditions but also as a result of possessing certain ideas about what life at sea ought to or could look like. Aggrieved, they sought an idealized reality, a sort of maritime **Arcadia**. In this vein, they established societies at sea that were characterized by some level of genuine democracy and egalitarianism amongst white European crew members. Like Bartholomew Roberts and crew, they may have given “Every Man [...] a Vote in Affairs of Moment,” restricted onboard gambling, guaranteed compensation for lost limbs, and outlined a relatively equal distribution of plunder.³⁷ The notion of a seafaring society where such articles had voluntary force would likely have been a drastic improvement to life as pirates had previously known it, and would have been appealing regardless of whether a pirate had high-minded ideals or expectations.

It is perhaps possible to relate some of those stories, or story-myths, to the notion of nostalgia. Nostalgia has a complex and philosophically dense historiography and doubtlessly “developed over time and in relation to momentous historical change.”³⁸ What is now referred to as nostalgia was originally perceived as a medical disorder or physical ailment, rather than a common

emotional phenomenon. It was first described in 1688 by a Swiss physician, Johannes Hofer, who defined it as “sadness arising from the burning desire to return to the homeland.”³⁹ Over the centuries, the notion of nostalgia came to reveal the “subtle changes in perceptions of time and space” and “widespread sense of unease” caused by the “momentous social transformations of [Hofer’s] epoch.”⁴⁰ The emotion would only grow more observable in later eras of social change, with one French author from the mid-1800s noting that “he knew of no colleague who hadn’t dealt with a ‘nostomaniac’ sailor or at least once in their career.”⁴¹ Such complex sensations of longing might have been a factor in the decision of some men, particularly mistreated sailors, to turn to a life of piracy during the Golden Age. Perhaps, for such men, the idyllic homeland that they wished to return to was one they knew only from stories—a homeland out at sea, always, in every moment, waiting over the horizon, in the perpetual offing. Such a utopian vision implies a dissident politics—both radical and reactionary.

It is, however, wise to observe that, although some pirates were explicitly inclined towards what might be considered radical actions and radical values, “to address radical pirates is not [...] to slip into a view that pirates *were* radicals.”⁴² As previously outlined, the men who became pirates typically came from backgrounds that rendered a-roving almost a necessity, in the absence of other options. While some pirates may have yearned for the sea, by no means was a Romantic sentiment the sole driving force behind the Golden Age. Our modern myths about piracy are based in truth, but only in one of many: how an era is remembered rarely reflects the reality of that time. To the extent that the Golden Age pirates attempted to actualize the story-myths of the buccaneer and the social bandit, they ultimately became the stuff of story-myths themselves.

DAMN KING GEORGE: JACOBITISM, PRETENDERS, AND ‘PRETEND PRETENDERS’ AMONGST THE PIRATES

As heretofore established, pirates were people—people driven by varying motives of survival, financial insecurity, storied nostalgia, revenge, and a desire for wealth and notoriety.

ROYAL PATRONAGE:

Prior to c. 1700, most pirates made their living as privateers who conducted piratical activities under legal auspices. They were individuals who were granted letters of marque by their home governments, permitting them to attack foreign merchant vessels and seize their goods. They were often funded by societal elites; some became elites, while others were exploited.

SOCIAL BANDITRY:

Social banditry is a popular form of lower-class social resistance involving behavior characterized by law as illegal but is supported by wider (usually peasant) society as being moral and acceptable.

ARCADIA:

Arcadia refers to a utopia where people may live simply and peacefully. The stories that inspired some Golden Age pirates to take to the sea frequently involved maritime egalitarianism or bountiful, pastoral island-oriented life, paid for via a temporary devotion to plunder. The buccaneers of early 1600s Hispaniola, who initially lived as rural meat and leather traders before turning pirate, were a particular inspiration.

Many pirates had families and had endured abuse or mistreatment. While they may have often broken eighteenth-century English societal conventions aboard their ships in terms of organization and conduct, they were not revolutionaries. Pirates were contextualized by and produced within the political realities of their time.

As a result, it is worthwhile to examine the explicit political sentiments that connected English-descended pirates to the society that brought about their birth and death. Most notably, many pirates expressed documented Jacobite sympathies or at least utilized Jacobite symbology and language as a tool to recruit volunteers and form ties among crewmembers. While difficult to define, Jacobitism can be most usefully described as support for the restoration of the deposed House of Stuart to the British throne. The Stuart line, embodied by James II, had been overthrown in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, after which William and Mary ruled for a decade. Following this interregnum in the Stuart line, Queen Anne ascended to the throne in 1702 and reigned until she died in 1714.⁴³ After her death, the House of Hanover inherited the British Crown, and no Stuart ever again reigned in England. Jacobites attempted an uprising in 1715 but failed.

The revolt did, however, coincide with “the dramatic increase” in piratical activities that occurred in 1716 and 1717, and evidence suggests that the events are correlated. Jacobitism frequently represented a general “defiance of authorities,” rather than loyal and comprehensive support for the exiled Stuart line, in part because it was “the only movement aimed at overthrowing the political regime in the British Isles at that time.”⁴⁴ The fact that an imperial crackdown on piracy closely coincided with the Hanoverian succession further fueled Jacobite sympathies among individuals who either engaged in piracy or otherwise depended upon it for their livelihoods.

Valuable discussions of Jacobitism and piracy, the Flying Gang was a group of pirates who operated

in the Bahamas prior to the installation of Woodes Rogers as Governor-General of the colony in 1718. Marcus Rediker notes that approximately ninety percent “of the Atlantic pirates operating between 1716 and 1726” were part of two “lines of descent,” one of which was the Flying Gang, and the other of which was rooted in the 1722 meeting of George Lowther and Edward Low.⁴⁵ Rather significantly, there is “evidence of Jacobitism in both lines,” and of great interconnection between the separate crews that composed the Flying Gang.⁴⁶

In many ways, historians E.T. Fox and Arne Bialuschewski dovetail in their interpretations of Jacobitism amongst the pirates of the Flying Gang and the broader Atlantic. They differ in what degree they perceive genuine adherence to the Jacobite cause, as opposed to a superficial usage of Jacobite symbology and idiom. Bialuschewski remains more skeptical of the extent to which piratical Jacobitism was sincere, determining that “true Jacobites did not make up more than a tiny minority among pirates” and had little wider influence in terms of what their contemporaries believed.⁴⁷ Fox, on the other hand, concludes that the movement “was sufficiently important to pirates to be worth proclaiming clearly and distinctly.”⁴⁸ Both historians view Jacobitism as a rhetorical framework and oppositional vocabulary for piratical society, citing support such as the christening of pirate vessels with politically-oriented names (e.g., the *Queen Anne’s Revenge*⁴⁹) and the common usage of vulgar anti-Hanoverian phrases that were prominent across many Jacobite subcultures. Essentially, Fox and Bialuschewski find common ground in pinpointing Jacobitism as a unifying language of dissidence.

Fox offers highly convincing evidence, however, that the importance of Jacobite political sentiments was immense. It not only served as a tool for recruitment and social cohesion but

had direct implications for the history of Golden Age piracy. As previously established, the vast majority of pirates during the Golden Age were voluntary recruits, typically poached from the crews of captured merchant vessels. This voluntary labor was vital to the facilitation of egalitarianism in piratical bonds of fellowship, bonds that linked pirate crews and communities together both while at sea and at friendly port. However, as the Golden Age went into decline, the number of men who sought to become pirates decreased, resulting in an increased “proportion of forced men” on pirate crews in the years after 1720.⁵⁰ When, for a variety of reasons, “Jacobitism waned in the 1720s,” its usefulness as a framework for socialization correspondingly lessened. In turn, this affected the degree to which pirates were able to solicit volunteers.⁵¹ Put simply, Jacobitism played a key role in stimulating the labor supply of Golden Age piracy. “[Without] a core of ideologically committed Jacobites” wielding the sentiment to motivate recruits, piracy may not have been as successful or widespread. Jacobitism “was not the only cause” of Golden Age piracy, but it was present as superficial speech, present as a generalized framework for social defiance, and present, to a lesser extent, as “a manifestation of [...] active support for the restoration” of the House of Stuart.⁵²

Jacobitism amongst the pirate community thus indicates the presence of explicit political sentiments and language, a fact which further counters the mythologized image of pirate-as-swashbuckler. Rather, because of Jacobitism’s popularity in marginalized English subcultures, the prominence of the movement in piratical society reinforces the argument that pirates were most frequently sailors with a grievance, participating for reasons that had little to do with romantic expectations or adventurousness.

A BRIEF CONCLUSION

The popular image of the pirate tends towards the liberated swashbuckler, standing apart from any nation, complex circumstance, or ideological sympathies. Though it has an adventurous and exciting appeal, this image fails to accurately represent the historical realities of Atlantic piracy, even those of the Golden Age that originated much of the present romanticized myths. From 1716-1726, the Golden Age period





saw a greater number of pirates than any other; and, indeed, they played a significant, disruptive role in maritime commerce and politics. They were intimately involved in acts of violence and thievery, including the murder of enslaved Africans and sailors, and they created a prolonged disturbance in the movement of goods and enslaved persons across the Atlantic. Such actions cannot be categorized as an expression of revolutionary desire. Golden Age pirates were deeply shaped by the sociocultural, political, and economic factors that defined the early eighteenth century in England and the colonial Americas, including the mass unemployment of seamen and the profitability of the slave trade. Reflecting these factors in numerous manners, they bore diverse motivations, often born out of unemployment, or exploitative conditions. Among their own European crew members, they created conditions that were often more democratic and egalitarian than those found in class-stratified aristocratic Europe and were influenced by the politics of popular Jacobitism. Many were familiar with the stories of the pirates who had come before them and were profoundly influenced by those narratives.

Simultaneously a part of mainland society and exiled from it, pirates were not idealized insurrectionists against the entirety of the established order, yet they also operated at a distinctive distance from the rest of their world. Coming from primarily downtrodden circumstances, pirates seized the imagination—terrified or fascinated, or perhaps both—of their contemporaries. Never were they one-dimensional, whether in piratical fraternity or in the cruelties that they visited upon the world. They were something far more interesting, if still elusive, still difficult to understand—they were people who went ‘a-pyrating.’

THOUGH IT HAS AN ADVENTUROUS AND EXCITING APPEAL, THIS IMAGE FAILS TO ACCURATELY REPRESENT THE HISTORICAL REALITIES OF ATLANTIC PIRACY, EVEN THOSE OF THE GOLDEN AGE THAT ORIGINATED MUCH OF THE PRESENT ROMANTICIZED MYTHOS.



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