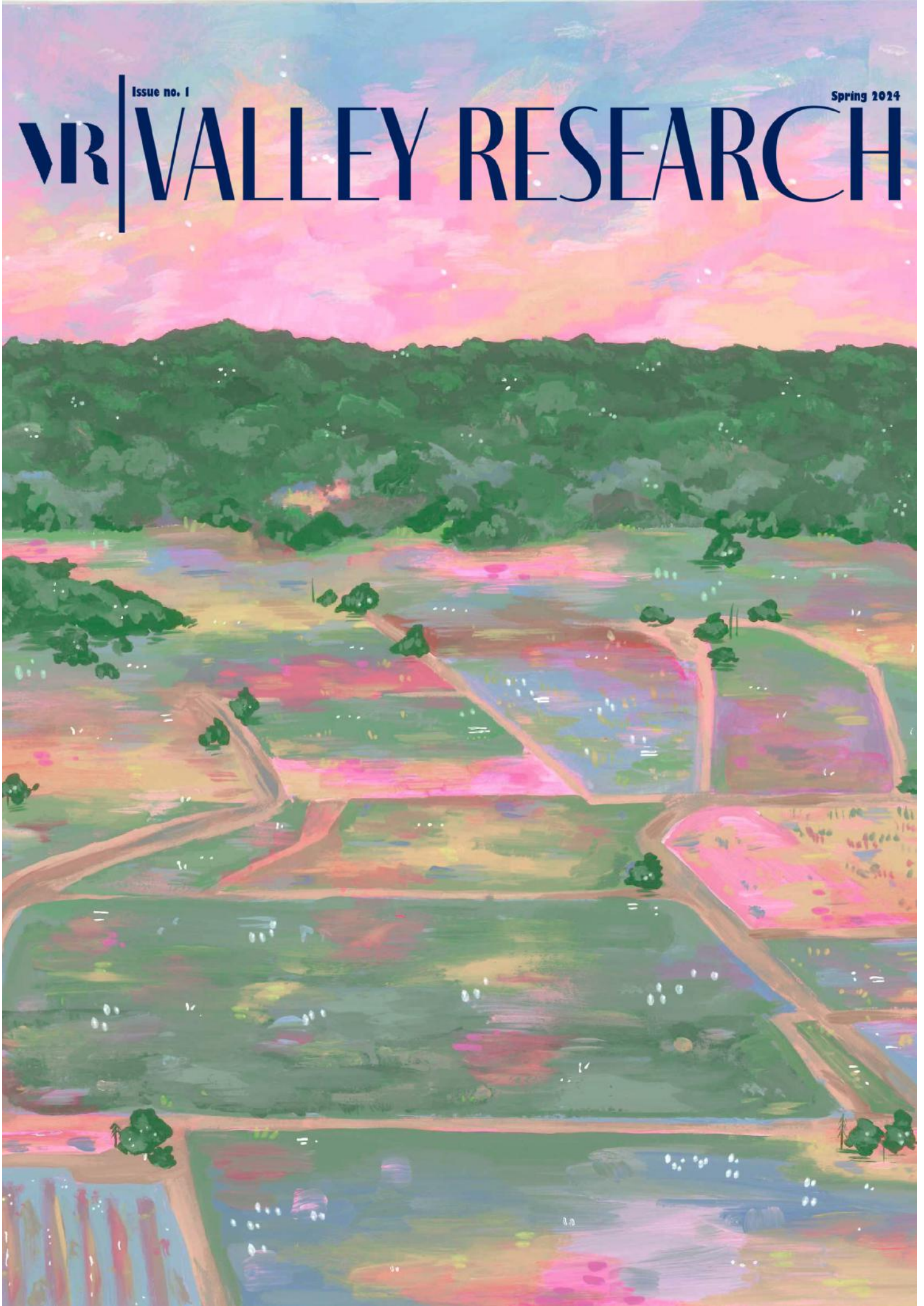


Issue no. 1

Spring 2024

# MR VALLEY RESEARCH



# Valley Research

*A social scientific, interdisciplinary academic journal showcasing student research and inquiry from Merced College.*

---

School of Social Sciences  
Merced College  
3600 M Street  
Merced, CA 95348

**Editor**

*Dean Caivano*

**Associate Editor**

*Maggie Devins*

**Associate Editor**

*Zachary Gomez*

**Manuscript Editor**

*Debby Tiner*

**Front & Back Cover Art**

*Bella DeHaro*

**Funding Source**

*Merced College President's Circle*

**Issue no. 1**

**Spring 2024**



VALLEY RESEARCH

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b> <i>Dean Caivano</i>	p. 2
<b>Introduction</b> <i>Maggie Devins, Zachary Gomez, &amp; Debby Tiner</i>	p. 3
<b>Home</b> <i>Liliana Reyes</i>	p. 4
<b>The Queering of Plato's Cave</b> <i>Cameron James Raines</i>	pp. 5-11
<b>Think Outside the Box</b> <i>Joseph Abasolo-Lobato</i>	pp. 12-13
<b>Child or Adult: Autonomy at Young Ages</b> <i>Debby Tiner</i>	pp. 14-17
<b>eight: eclipse</b> <i>Elijah Crane</i>	p. 18
<b>Hannibal Barca: An Examination of His Military Intelligence and Legacy</b> <i>Roman Rodriguez</i>	pp. 19-23
<b>Survival of the Flame: Italy's Center Right First Republic Political Evolution</b> <i>Eris White-Wadham</i>	pp. 24-27
<b>The American Dream</b> <i>Frank S. Roeblich</i>	pp. 28-30
<b>The Kids Are Alt-Right?</b> <i>Arisbeth Manzo Charles</i>	pp. 31-40
<b>On Mexican American Identity</b> <i>Zachary Gomez</i>	pp. 41-43
<b>Is the American Dream Realistic for the Average American?</b> <i>Kathia Contreras</i>	pp. 44-48
<b>HandiCapitalism</b> <i>Jesus Gabriel Valdez Huezpo</i>	pp. 49-53
<b>The Yellow House: Community Gardens and Their Role in the De-commodification of Food and Third Places</b> <i>Maggie Devins</i>	pp. 54-57

## Acknowledgments

Dean Caivano

Here at Merced College, we have an outstanding student population. We are training the future nurses of the Central Valley, preparing the future farmers of California, and teaching the future mechanics of the Southwest. We are also educating the future political scientists, historians, sociologists, and philosophers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The following pages attest to this promise.

This inaugural issue of *Valley Research* showcases original analyses of contemporary social and cultural life from students learning, researching, and working at the forefront of critical thinking across our programs within the School of Social Sciences. Primarily, the journal aims to open dialogues between programs, providing students with invaluable experience to collaborate from an interdisciplinary approach.

Each article presented in this issue underwent a peer-review process by discipline faculty members. Unlike traditional academic journals that maintain anonymity during peer review, *Valley Research* encourages open dialogue and disseminates ideas in a collaborative and supportive environment. As a result, the review process was fully open, with all reviewers and authors being apprised of one another's identities, providing essential learning opportunities for students and faculty alike.

The President's Circle Foundation generously provided the funding to make this journal a reality, helping to establish only the fourth undergraduate academic journal across the California community college system. More importantly, this funding helped establish the very first undergraduate academic journal dedicated to showcasing social scientific scholarship undertaken by community college students.

This journal stands on the cutting edge of innovation and scholarship, creating a venue for Merced College students' high-quality research to be read, analyzed, and disseminated across various fields of scholarship here in California and beyond.

To bring this journal to fruition, countless individuals and offices were supportive, including David Chambers, Mehra Charibian, Renée Dekker, John Albano, Jacqueline Alvarez, Dennis Nichols, Krystal Pollinger, Liliana Cruz, Andrew Hoyt, James Leonard, Jill Cunningham, Joseph Lara, and Karissa Morehouse.

Most importantly, this first issue was only possible with the talents, energies, and work of three exceptional students: our associate editors, Maggie Devins and Zachary Gomez, and our manuscript editor, Debby Tinner. These three – a dream team, to be sure – promoted the journal, made classroom visits, worked with authors and reviewers, provided valuable feedback and edits, and envisioned and created an impressive piece of scholarship. It has been an honor to work with these three.

In closing, I invite you to explore the following pages, which demonstrate the brilliance of community college students in the Central Valley of California.

## Introduction

Maggie Devins, Zachary Gomez, & Debby Tiner

Arguably the most endangered of disciplines, non-academics and academics overlook the social sciences as a genuine science or valuable contributor to society. Common names for disciplines in the field include “soft sciences” or “pseudosciences,” as even though social sciences have the common goal of understanding humans and their interactions with each other and their environment, these are done in unconventional ways compared to the “hard sciences.” Social science methods are weird and radical: they directly question authority and thrive under deviancy. While social sciences cannot be used to affirm the norm, they are essential in understanding the ugly and beautiful truth surrounding humanity. Social sciences are a science and an art. The negative attitude towards the social sciences is the most significant factor in why *Valley Research* is important: Not only are we the fourth community college academic journal in California, but we are also the only social science exclusive journal in the entire state. This first issue is notable not only for this breakthrough but also for the pure talent that is infused within the pages cover-to-cover.

The social sciences are usually defined in relation to humans and the study of society and social groups. As such, they range from such different disciplines as anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. In this issue of *Valley Research*, we see an equal amount of diversity, with essays on disability studies, political ideologies, colonialism, identity, fascism, and American conservatism. We find discussions of what it means to be a child or an adult, a woman or a man. We see the rise and fall of religions, beliefs, and structures discussed or challenged. This journal showcases a variety of viewpoints in a multitude of approaches, from the traditional essay form to more unconventional approaches like poetry. In this way, we have embraced the true meaning of a social science journal: studying and learning what it means to be human in various ways.

Challenging convention is central to the themes covered in our inaugural edition. In the conception of the journal, we aimed to be non-traditional in several ways. One of the most significant ways we did this was through an open peer-review process. Students could see who reviewed their work and collaborate directly if they felt so inclined. *Valley Research* is also open access and will be available online for viewing. These examples showcase how we challenged tradition but, more importantly, neoliberalism in academic contexts. The anonymity of the current state of academia creates alienation in a setting that should foster community, support, and collaboration. Our goal, especially as a community college journal, is to encourage students to showcase their thought-provoking and truly critical work rather than creating exclusion. Our holistic approach also presents an important point of discord. Interdisciplinary research is vital to the social sciences as each discipline supports the other. The result is an incredible spectrum of scholarship that even includes creative works. Overall, our form and philosophy in creating this journal have allowed for an inclusive and approachable space for students to platform their scholarship.

## Home

Liliana Reyes

Caught, trapped, free at once  
Scrolling, feeling, and numb.  
What for? `  
And for how much longer?

Blue, red, yellow, purple, pink,  
Black and white.  
Life's really just a convoluted grey,  
Really only specks of color seem to exist.

Tired, anxious, and confused,  
Life consumes, controls, yet confesses  
That liberty lives in you.

Simulacra? Reality?  
Differences blend into similarities.  
Blind and beloved dance hand in hand  
Complacent, we do, till we part by death.

Complacency and peace.  
Is that what love brings?  
A new dawn, new memories,  
New everything?

New everything?  
Covered in fear, sweat, and tears,  
One foot in front of the other,

Inching toward tomorrow,  
Inching toward a new dawn,  
Inching toward new memories,  
Inching toward a new everything.

Simulacra? Reality?  
Blind and beloved, they dance  
Differences into similarities.

# The Queering of Plato's Cave: The Unchained Prisoner or Are We Free to Leave?

Cameron James Raines

*Rising Scholar*

## Vocabulary

*Gender*: “2. Sexual identity, esp. in relation to society or culture” (Webster 2005, 474), or the expressed form of an individual's masculine or feminine feelings.

*Heterosexual*: “1. Marked by attraction to the opposite sex. 2. Of or relating to the different sexes.” (532)

*LGBTQ+*: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus. An umbrella used for those who are of a sexual minority or those who identify beyond “straight.”

*Sex*: “1a. The property of or quality by which many living things are classified according to their reproductive functions.” (1036)

*Transgender Man*: A Female-to-Male (FTM) transition. A natural-born female who seeks to transition to a man, using either clothing, hormone treatment, gender-affirming surgery, or even none of them, but still identifies as masculine.

*Transgender Woman*: A Male-to-Female (MTF) transition. A natural-born male who seeks to transition to a woman, using either clothing, hormone treatment, gender-affirming surgery, or even none of them, but still identifies as feminine.

*Transgender*: “1. Appearing as, wishing to be considered as, or having undergone surgery to become a member of the opposite sex. 2. Of or relating to a transgender person.” (1198)

## Introduction

What is the appropriate response when one finds out that the way they live and the expectations they live by are just caves to keep them in compliance with the power(s) in authority? However, not only is there a single cave, but there are abundant caves—one of the caves our parents created for us. Our friends live in another. Even separate caves hold us for work and/or school.

Moreover, each decision we make adds more caves to the equation. Society created these caves to demand that people live a certain way. One of my first questions was, “How can one escape and remain free?”

We know that society created these caves to break down who people are, what they are supposed to be, and how they are supposed to act. Society has rules for what you wear and when you can wear it. They even tell you what to eat and how to eat it. For some, the worst cave to live in that society ever created was when they heard what their “gender” was. Gender places more rules and guidelines on people. The results from these expectations can be crushing. Nevertheless, to understand how gender can be a cave, it is pertinent to understand what gender is and how people may feel discontent within the “normal” gender binary.

## **The Cave of Gender**

The dictionary defines gender as "... Sex" (Webster 2005). However, this definition is wrong. The best definition of gender that I understand is that gender is "Often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity; gender is largely culturally determined and is assumed from the sex assigned at birth." Gender is not always strictly male or female. Some people fall in between, and some prefer to be less on the scale than the stereotypical masculine or feminine. The sad part about society is that many people confuse gender with sex. Sex is usually defined as "assigned to a person based on primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions." (Cartwright and Nancarrow 2022).

Gender is no longer the binary male/female, he/she, his/hers. Gender has been opened to include those who identify as both, those who identify as neither, and those who transition from one gender to the respective "opposite." People believe that the opposite of male is female. This is why society has said that males are stern and females are soft. Males are protectors, and females need protection. That males are born leaders while females are submissive. Lastly, society says that males are expected to remain distant from their emotions, while their counterpart, the female, is expected to be emotionally unstable. These are the "rules" society and American culture placed many generations ago. Those who decide to break out of society's cave of expectations receive criticism from those they love, live around, and come across.

Gender is not the only leading cause of the issues that turned society against the LGBTQ+ community. Another issue is sexual orientation. Society makes assumptions that everyone is straight. This belief gives society the filtered view to see things through a gender bias. It is expected to believe that society has accepted that lesbians are both more valid and more acceptable to be around than gay men. They also think that men should not be bisexual, but they are more likely to see a woman enjoy the companionship of both male and female with less criticism. Another issue that plays a vital part in the issues is race. This shows that society judges those who no longer live within the heterosexual default simply by the color of their skin. For example, a black transwoman has a more difficult time gaining acceptance in society than a white transman does.

## **Heterosexual-By-Default**

The heterosexual default is a way for people to categorize. "People often construct concepts in ways that assume certain characteristics (e.g., White, male, heterosexual) that go without saying." Society believes that people fit nicely into their boxes. So, what do we do when people do not fit nicely in their boxes? The United States, like most of the world, revolves around the heterosexual default. This means that people expect other people to have romantic relations with those of the "opposite" gender. In fact, "Cultural heterosexism is a socially structured ideology that disadvantages sexual minorities, via assumptions that people are heterosexual-by-default and that homosexuality, when acknowledged, is 'unnatural,' exceptional, and requiring of particular explanation." This mindset causes many within the sexual minorities to feel less than normal, and for some, the feeling goes even more profound to feeling less than human.

My fear of coming out when I was younger prevented me from opening up to others for many years. Being a young individual, I only wanted my mother's love and acceptance. I felt that she was always disappointed in me. At 16, I entered a heterosexual relationship that was dysfunctional. I was trying to hide what I felt and truly wanted for myself. I was miserable in my previous marriage. I was sick and tired of being with someone who would never understand or accept my deepest longing to transition from female to male. I believed that society (and my mother) was correct about who I was supposed to be.

Society claims heterosexism because a natural-born male and natural-born female are the only couples that are capable of procreating. It is more "acceptable" to see a man with a woman than a woman with a woman or a man with another man. This stems from a religious aspect. "And God

blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth ...” (Genesis 2003). This is what people have told me when I tell them my story. They use this to say to me that I am wrong, that I am living my life in sin. However, even they do not have the answer I seek. I know that God, as I see Him, does not make any mistakes. He created me as a female, but perhaps He made me a female who would transition to male to help someone in need or pave the way for someone else. Maybe He made me this way to develop a relationship with Him in my secret part.

Society has often put my community down. Some places refuse to let the LGBTQ+ community shop in their stores. In addition, most of them bring religion to it. They say they have the right to refuse, and they do, but why would a straight man or woman’s money be worth more than another’s? Should not anyone, upon working hard, be able to spend their money however and wherever they want? There is no reason for someone to go somewhere else to get better customer service or be accepted for who they are. However, this is what I have seen people do. This happens everywhere, even in prison. I have had people refuse to work with me based on me declaring to be a transman. I see transwomen face challenge after challenge and discrimination, and people fear them because of their misunderstandings. These issues are the reasons why society needs help escaping this particular cave, known as the cave of the Heterosexual-Default.

### **“Looking-Glass” Concept**

There is a concept that can connect both theories of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave and heterosexuality by default. Charles Horton Cooley, a sociologist, hypothesized this concept called the “looking-glass self.” This concept is “shaped by a host of factors, including your family, friends, gender, and culture.” The “looking-glass self can be seen in the example I used in the previous section, where someone may feel less than human because of the differing beliefs and expressions of gender. Of course, mental health issues may arise when one is forced to keep their true sense of identity locked up. What else can someone do when “...culture warriors gang up on sexuality—and from several directions” (Klein 2023)? When society dictates what an acceptable way to express their gender is but then also dictates what gender you “should” be, it can cause this phenomenon called “gender dysphoria.” “...the looking glass self-integrates ‘feeling, appearance, and cognitive thought’” (Williams and Murphy 2022, 1544). I have witnessed and read countless reports of people who lived their daily lives worried about how others thought of them.

For transmen, the expectation for them is to be tough, aggressive, to be a hard worker, to provide for their family, to be messy, and possibly even to have short hair. It devastatingly feels as though they will never meet society’s expectations and are destined to fail, no matter their gender identity. It is horrible, that feeling of failing at being themselves. It has become quite normal to “...underscore the importance of the individual’s interpretations of others’ reactions to their evolving sense of self, showing how people instinctively ‘learn to be different to different people’” (Williams and Murphy 2022, 1542). I think of the phrase, “If you cannot beat them, join them.” It is difficult to break free from the looking-glass concept and, thus, from our views on how society believes we should be. There are two types of people: those who cannot break free but accept it and those who will not accept what others think, say, or believe about them. It is those who pave the way and go to great lengths to bring awareness to all who are willing to listen.

When transgender individuals genuinely find themselves, they have a special gift that not every person gets to experience. Transgender individuals can embrace all sides of themselves. This includes the “feminine” traits, the kindness, the love, the compassion, and the “masculine” qualities of being strong, a leader, and a provider. A transman can accept both his natural born gifts of nurturing and embrace what makes him “masculine.”

### **Transgender Outside Prison**

As a child, Dakota had never felt feminine. This child was what his parents would describe as a tomboy. Dakota enjoyed riding bikes and skateboards, wore his hair back in a low ponytail, and hung around the neighborhood boys. His parents would put him in dresses and pigtails, and he hated every second. He always brought a change of clothes for picture day. Dakota kept his desire to transition locked away for quite a few years. At first, Dakota's parents believed that Dakota was only a lesbian and accepted that he would have girlfriends. In 2017, Dakota came out as a transgender person.

Since then, Dakota admits that it has been rough. For every new job, there is a misgendering issue. Even now, in a job that he has had for three years, the misgendering still occurs, even though he has changed both his name and his gender marker. He has a couple of transgender groups that he is a part of on social media, offering support and a place to ask questions regarding transitioning. These groups are beneficial for those who need support and lack it from their societal circle.

### **Transgender Inside Prison**

I am a transgender man. I was born female, and I believe that I was born in the wrong body. I tried to live as a female, but I do not think it was supposed to be that way. I was miserable; I was disgusted with the way my body was changing. I hated how I looked in the mirror. I felt more comfortable wearing men's clothing. I felt freer within myself once I had chosen to open up with others about this belief. I risked losing my family by doing so, but to keep it locked inside, I was losing myself. I was sick and tired of hating myself, of making sure everyone else was happy. In 2019, I decided enough was enough. I embraced my masculinity and told first my wife and then my family. I could not be any happier with the results. I have been on hormone treatment for four years; I have had a double mastectomy, and I have grown accustomed to facial hair. I am finally comfortable within my skin. Even though not everyone I am in contact with accepts my choices, I would not return. I do not know what tomorrow brings, but I do know that I am not doing this alone, and I will seek others out and share with them what I know, feel, and believe. I will advocate for their rights. I will do what I can to help society see that the cave they put us in is not the way to live a happy, successful life. The only way for that to happen is to live authentically.

Jalin is a transman that came out and faced little challenge. Jalin did it for himself, not for anyone else. Jalin had to find out who he truly was. After sitting with himself, digging inside, and seeking the answer from within, Jalin discovered that he was a transgender male. It was easy once he realized he was different, but this made him happy. Friends showered him with support. They loved him enough to accept him just as he was, no questions asked. Today, Jalin feels his life is going great because he feels like himself. The best thing that Jalin could ever have done was acknowledge who he was. He has a sense of pride that came from growing into himself. By finding his identity, he is successfully living a life as a transgender male, achieving inner peace as he lives his authentic life every day.

Being a transman, especially in a women's prison, is not always easy. There have been times when I hear people judging those within my community for being "fake." Some have even told me I am "fake" because I am kind. If being kind is simply a feminine trait, I feel bad for those who have never been in a kind relationship. The worst part of being a soft-spoken transman inside of a prison is when transmen look at others like they are less than, or even fake, and try to make them feel shame for not being like the others. The best thing about being a transman is that I can embrace my masculinity while still being sensitive and embracing my own emotions.

If being a transman inside a woman's prison is difficult, then being a transwoman in a women's prison starts as a living hell. Some of the women are ruthless since women's prison is a cutthroat society. Many fear what they do not understand and are as close-minded as possible. California opened the doors for transgender rights. Since Senate Bill 132 came into effect, women have been terrified at

the thought of who they view as “men” coming into their living quarters. It takes some time to get to know whether a transwoman is here for the right reason or if they had an ulterior motive for coming to a woman’s prison.

Nevertheless, one fact remains. The transwomen face an unacceptance that is so like racism at its very worst. This does not mean that they have not had a successful transition.

Of course, there are many differences between the two prisons. The men stick together to get things done. The women cannot dream of going without a canteen or not programming. The men fight for things that matter; women fight over the little things. Aside from these differences, the transwomen were able to build healthy relationships, both with those they lived with and those they worked with.

### **Living with a Transgender**

Ingrid is a woman who met a transgender man. Captivated by this person’s personality, she had asked if they could become more than just friends. The relationship formed rapidly. Ingrid accepted this individual for who he was, even if he did not live by society’s norms. She never received any negative remarks about who she was dating based on their gender identity. Ingrid does not see color, race, or gender. Ingrid has many friends who are gay, lesbian or identify as transgender. She knows she supports a “flag” that not everyone will accept. While she identifies as a straight cis woman, she loves her diverse surroundings. She feels that all humans are created equal, no matter what anyone says or believes.

Sean is a father of two transmen. He disagrees with his two children's choices; he does not understand their motives. Sean has posted his opinions about whether transwomen should play on women’s teams and has received backlash for not being supportive of the LGBTQ+ movement. Even though Sean disagrees with his children's choices, he supports them because he knows their transitions make them happy.

Jessica never had a bad experience while living with a transgender person. She sees the transwomen act like natural-born women, and she meshes well with the transmen since she has always gotten along better with men. She did not listen to what everyone else had to say. She was not afraid or listening to the stereotypes given to the transgender community.

Sara is a woman who does not view transwomen as a threat within the women’s prison. She believes that few of the transwomen have snuck through the cracks using manipulation to be inside a California Women’s Prison. Sara also gets along well with the transmen. Sara believes that all should be able to be their authentic selves without anyone else dictating what is right or wrong.

Cheyenne is married to Dakota, whose story is shared above. Cheyenne supports her husband and reminds him daily of who he is. Dakota and Cheyenne are actively proving that love knows no gender marker. Their love is what society calls abnormal, yet their love for each other shines brightly as each day they work toward a successful, happy marriage.

### **Escaping the Cave**

They say it is impossible to escape from reality; so, finding out that these caves are real, is it possible to escape the caves of gender and heterosexual-by-default attitudes? The answer is yes. However, as we have read, changes cannot happen overnight. There needs to be patience, perseverance, and courage. It requires you, the reader, to open your heart and mind to the possibility that those of the LGBTQ+ community are the same as you. Underneath the skin, we all bleed red. By applying Plato’s cave to the equation, someone may be able to not only escape themselves but help others escape as well. If this sounds too simple, that is because it is. Plato states the conditions of the prisoner and to “free them of the shackles of ignorance and lead them to the light of truth... there is much at stake. In doing so, he sacrifices his happiness and well-being for the sake of trying to help the ignorant, and

success is not guaranteed” (Holowchak 2013, 3). The truth is always hard to swallow; for some, it may be impossible. However, the truth is the only way to be set free.

Some people believe that ignorance is bliss. I worry about those people. They are prisoners only because of their ignorance. They have no clue that the world they see is shadows cast before them, falsities that feed them just enough to ease their curiosity. Amazingly, the real world is majestic. To experience it, and to gain freedom and see that society is simply the “master” of puppets, we must flee this cave.

There are numerous ways to help people escape “The Cave.” One way to bring about awareness is to advocate. This tool includes a mixture of things. Three things are needed: sharing information, listening to others, and networking to make connections. People do not want to get stopped in the middle of the doorway on their way inside or outside the store. Most people do not want to watch sad commercials either. Therefore, the question arises: how do we get information from Point A to Point B?

One solution is to be like the girls in green selling cookies outside every shopping mart with a booth full of brochures and fliers that no one wants to keep. Another way is to post the fliers on billboards or at the church. Finally, getting together with others and discussing the importance of bringing the awareness that their transgender neighbor is still human and that their sibling or child has not changed; they just opened up to be who they truly feel they were made to be. For advocacy to succeed, it is essential to listen to what people say, not only to the verbal words but also to the nonverbal cues. The people this advocate is listening to for this international problem receive backlash because they try to embrace their identity. Building connections and networking allows the ideas to spread. When a seed is planted, watered, and loved, it grows to be a beautiful plant. This is the same ideology for networking. These three components help create empathy. “Empathy allows us to tune into how someone else is feeling...an important contributor to successful social interaction and a key motivator of altruistic behavior” (Jie and Wang, 2023). Empathy is ultimately the only way for the LGBTQ+ community to be entirely accepted.

### **The Unchained Prisoner or Free to Leave**

In Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, it is read that they return to the cave after the prisoner is released. The result is, “Upon returning to the cave and resuming his former seat, he can no longer discriminate between the various shadows. All shadows seem indiscriminately dark to him. Soon, he relates his adventure to his fellow prisoners. They think he is mad—the consummate fool. One can imagine that he is rebuked, scoffed at, and contradicted by his fellow prisoners. Nonetheless, he stays in the cave, though he longs again to be outside it” (Holowchak 2013, 3). Why remain in a society that scoffs at you when you would rather be somewhere else? What can someone gain by remaining within the cave that society places you in? We return to the caves to educate others in a new world. The caves are not accessible to live in once one has already escaped. It is not for everyone to gain enlightenment and return to the dark. Sometimes, it is easier to remove oneself from the cave and forget those we left behind.

Today, I see changes happening in American society. Change cannot happen overnight. Like a butterfly escaping its cocoon, there are hopes that life for LGBTQ+ individuals will be beautiful and free. New laws have been passed for the safety and validity of transgender individuals, even within the prison system. While these changes are slow, they are starting to come together. I hope we see peace between our community and the rest of society someday.

### **Conclusion**

Life appears to be a series of caves. The government creates caves, allowing the citizens to know only specific facts that benefit those in charge. The education system created caves for the kids of the

future, picking and choosing which teachers teach the moldable minds of our children. What is worse is the series of caves we allow society to make. Society tells people how to live, what to think, and how to act. People allow society to dictate their lives. Living for the truth allows one to stand up, shake off the mental chains, and walk out of the cave that they are placed in. The journey is bound to be difficult, and many who venture out of the heterosexual defaulted cave and the cave of gender are often criticized, judged, and face many difficult trials. However, to break out of the same-mindedness that is habitually boring and snotty, the rewards of self-acceptance and self-love are worth it. Breaking out of the cave can destroy depression and other mental ailments. I know this from personal experience. Internal freedom is worth more than all the comments, jokes, and ignorant people putting others down. To finally have peace, I hope everyone I share my story with will be able to say this same thing someday.

Ultimately, the caves that society created are not going anywhere. There will always be those who stubbornly cling to wanting acceptance by remaining inside the caves. That is fine. They can stay. Nevertheless, I plan to help as many prisoners escape as I can. I cannot do this alone, but I will do my best to recruit as many people as possible to help me branch out this idea as much as possible. By bringing awareness, sharing not only my story but networking and sharing others as well, asking--no, pleading--others to spread this message to all they see. This is me, and this is my life. I am out of the cave and am no longer a chained prisoner.

## References

- Cartwright, Trixie, and Clive Nancarrow. 2022. "A Question of Gender: Gender Classification in International Research." *International Journal of Market Research* 64 (5): 575-93.
2003. "Genesis." In *King James Version Holy Bible: Personal Reflections Edition*, 1. Barbour Publishing.
- Holowchak, M. Andrew. 2013. "The Paradox of Public Service Jefferson, Education, and the Problem of Plato's Cave." *Student Philosophy Education* (Springer) 32: 73-86.
- Jie, Jing, and Yang Wang. 2023. "Development and Validation of the Counter-Empathy Scale." *Psychological Report* 126 (4): 2078-95.
- Klein, Marty. 2023. "Sex, Mental Health, and the Culture Wars." *Skeptic* 28 (4): 62-65.
- McCornack, Steven, and Kelly Morrison. 2019. *Reflect & Relate*. Edited by Catherine Burgess, Tom Kane, Kimberly Roberts, Lisa Kinne and Angela Boehler. Vol. 5. Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Ostovich, Steve. 2020. "Out of Plato's Cave." *Kronoscope* 121-134.
- Thorne, Sapphira R., Peter Hegarty, and Erica G. Hepper. 2021. "Love Is Heterosexual-by-Default: Cultural Heterosexism in Default Prototypes of Romantic Love." *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 653-77.
- Webster. 2005. *Webster's II New Collage Dictionary*, 3rd ed.
- Williams, Trenton Alma, and Chad Murphy. 2022. "Ruminating on What You Think of Me: A Grounded Model of Construed Image Work." *Academy of Management Journal* 65 (5): 1541-1570.

## Think Outside the Box

Joseph Abasolo-Lobato

“Mijo! Think Outside the Box” was a repeating metaphor that my father used to relay to me frequently as a kid, over and over again. “Mijo” references “My son” in the Spanish language. This is an inductive argument, specifically an analogical one, stating that a person’s memory always thinks differently than the norm or unconventionally causes you to solve problems and have perspective and foresight. Believe it or not, the phrase “Think Outside the Box” is based upon ‘the nine dots puzzle,’ which became trendy in the 1970s. The set of dots was put in order in a 3x3 grid, and the game's name was linking all nine dots without raising your pencil from the paper; the fewer straight lines, the better. Many contended that the well-known puzzle could be traced back to a cognitive performance test in 1945, otherwise recognized as “Duncker’s candle problem.” This test was used to assess the cognitive capabilities needed to solve problems.

I am presenting this inductive argument as a claim that my father told me about my childhood. Causal arguments are a matter of degree; they can be strong or weak. What makes a solid analogical argument is the consideration of other possible causes and considering the inverse correlation. Then, and only then can you decide on the strength of that specific causal claim. The argument goes as follows: Premise 1: You can take a bird’s eye view and see beyond what is given. Premise 2: You will have perspective and foresight. Premise 3: You will be able to solve inquiries or uncommon problems. Conclusion: So, you should think outside of the box. This claim could be strong with further exploration. Does thinking outside of the box cause you to solve the world's problems? Or do the world’s problems cause you to think outside the box (inverse correlation)? Or is there some other cause that would make someone think outside the box?

Let's look at the bigger picture with unconventional thinking. We can maximize our problem-solving capabilities to deal with group thinking or relinquish our minds to what we have inherited as a folkway. My father instilled strong moral principles in me and taught me to adapt to unconventional thinking, even if it meant I departed from his view. Ever since I could remember, my dad has told me to investigate life through a magnifying glass. Urging the importance of analyzing everything around me with wonder and curiosity. This benefited me in ways I could never have imagined. It motivated me to think out of the ordinary thoughts, far from what I was already familiar with, to explore the creative side that I never knew existed until I started being more open-minded, and to have a different perspective by allowing myself to have a new outlook on life.

The downside and disadvantage of this argument is that it is “easier said than done.” During my first encounter with the “Think Outside the Box” phrase, it rubbed me the wrong way. I found it to be very challenging to what I was accustomed to. At times, I would be alone in my room, asking myself, “How does my brain stop working when a complicated scenario comes up in discussion?” Using my brain too much has become exhausting and stressful, so I sometimes find myself taking the easier way out and remaining in my comfort zone. So, in that way, I had limited my thoughts and lived in fear of my mind wandering. Most of it had to do with being scared to take chances or risks and daring myself to go the distance. I found myself many times looking in the mirror and questioning who I was as an individual and what was stopping me from proceeding. The closure I encountered was not accepting reality, knowing I could do better.

Another important thing I realized was that I needed to start believing in myself more than ever. This meant having a positive mindset, thinking I could accomplish anything with enough effort. I deserved that opportunity, and if it ever came my way, I would take advantage of it by leaving my comfort zone.

In conclusion, we're told to be original, creative, expressive, to think freely, and to lead by example. By doing so, that's what separates us from others. Given the strengths and weaknesses demonstrated, it depends on a person's preference in how they conduct themselves in real situations. When the question lingers, "How do you Think Outside the Box?" I can answer that question quickly by saying it was conducted before my eyes through my father. As a teenager, I watched my father go through financial problems, but I also watched him wipe out all of his debts the following year. My father was in debt because he kept borrowing money from people to provide for his family. Soon after, my father dug himself more and more in debt. I have never blamed my father for that, even to this day. My father did what he had to do for the sake of his family. My father's secret to success was using basic strategy, capitalizing on valuable tips, and discovering new methods for problem-solving. That was why my father always conveyed, 'Think Outside the Box.' It was because my father was living proof that the impossible could be achieved if only people took the time to allow themselves to think outside of the equation. I miss my father relaying that message to me when he was alive, but most of all, I miss him showing me how it's performed.

### Works Cited

- 1.) Wax, D. (2023, August 25). *Thinking outside the box: 11 tips on shifting perspectives*. Lifehack.  
<https://www.lifehack.org/articles/featured/11-ways-to-think-outside-the-box.html>
- 2.) Jacobs, A. J. (2022, December 29). *10 of the greatest puzzles in history*. Mental Floss.  
<https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/greatest-puzzles-in-history>
- 3.) Art of Play. (2024, March 2). *History of the nine dot problem*.  
<https://www.artofplay.com/blogs/stories/history-of-the-nine-dot-problem>

## Child or Adult: Autonomy at Young Ages

Debby Tiner

From some perspectives, parents and guardians have excessive control over decisions regarding their children. In many cases, a child's opinion is only considered if the guardian chooses to do so, with child autonomy often ignored or discredited. Many drawbacks result from such treatment of children, especially in a society such as America that highly values autonomy. Many children can utilize autonomy, but denying it goes directly against ideals of equality. Determination of adulthood plays a particularly important role in this issue, with children being presented with autonomy based on age, which is a problematic metric for such a determination. It is imperative to re-evaluate how adulthood is determined, as the current age-based system is flawed, especially when considering all human beings' autonomy.

Children are one of the few remaining groups that do not have autonomy in America despite the detrimental effects that such a lack of autonomy can have. According to the United Nations' "Convention on the Rights of the Child," "For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (Article 1). Childhood has been determined to be any age from birth to 18 years old. Adulthood is given, almost arbitrarily, to individuals based on their age. One could question why 18 is the legal age of adulthood, not an age of older or younger. In his article "'Ain't I a Person?': Reimagining Human Rights in Response to Children," philosophy professor John Wall says:

... few could deny that children may be today's most marginalized social group, having the highest rates of poverty in rich and poor countries alike; dying at a rate of about 9 million a year from easily preventable diseases and malnutrition, more than all who perished in the Holocaust; suffering the most profound gender, racial, ethnic, class and other forms of discrimination; having the least rights of citizenship and so on. (39)

In a country that believes in equal rights for everyone, children seem to be the biggest exception, and they suffer greatly because of it. Children's rights and autonomy are a subject of controversy. The fact that children are today's most marginalized group means that it is past time that their issues were discussed and hopefully resolved. While there may be many potential solutions to the current dilemma, one option is to lower the age of legal adulthood so that individuals currently considered children have more rights, freedom, and autonomy.

Though the legal age of adulthood is currently 18 in most places (including America), evidence suggests that individuals may be capable of making sound decisions if given autonomy at a younger age. Therefore, it may be morally right to allow them said autonomy. In the article "What Is a Child?" MIT philosophy professor Tamar Schapiro says, "Positive laws may stipulate, for example, that anyone under the age of seventeen counts as a child from the point of view of the state. But we can ask in any particular case whether this stipulation is reasonable from a moral point of view" (715). Although the legal age of adulthood is 18, most children can form opinions and sound decisions at a much younger age.

Given that knowledge, it must be questioned why children do not hold any autonomy until the age of 18. It is unfair to deny such a large population the same freedoms and autonomy that other groups have, especially when equal rights are taken into consideration. Philosophy professor Amy Mullin argues in her article "Children, Paternalism and the Development of Autonomy" that "... even children under 10 are capable of some degree of autonomy in particular areas of their lives. Therefore,

we cannot simply assume the actions that thwart their wills are justified whenever the interventions serve children's long term interests" (413). Many children can make logical, rational decisions regarding their lives from a very young age but are denied the autonomy to act on their opinions. With the knowledge that children are capable of such rational decision-making, denying children autonomy becomes morally dubious. If children can utilize the same freedoms and autonomy as others, moral reasoning would suggest that they deserve them equally.

Despite the capabilities of many children to successfully make sound decisions regarding their own lives, many people hold concerns over their ability to take care of themselves at young ages, and some people may even be inclined to urge that the legal age of adulthood be *raised*, not lowered. In their article "Executive Summary," research analysts Ashley Nellis and Niki Monazzam state, "Compelling evidence shows that most adolescents are not fully matured into adulthood until their mid-twenties" (2). Scientific evidence indicates that brains are still undergoing significant growth and change until individuals are in their twenties. This could call into question the current validity of assigning adulthood to individuals aged 18 or younger. Regarding laws around juveniles, the article "Juvenile Justice and the Adolescent Brain" on the Center for Law, Brain, & Behavior website says:

While the science has advanced a general understanding of normal youth development, gaps remain in a thorough neuroscientific, genetic, and epigenetic understanding of adolescent development and the factors that drive juvenile offending. Meanwhile, the legal system urgently lacks a nuanced conception of adolescent brain development as it is currently understood and an effective use of data and assessment tools that would drive systematic change.

In this article, it is clear that science and the law are still trying to negotiate what it means that brains are not fully developed until the late 20s. Based on the scientific evidence, many people would be inclined to raise the age of adulthood rather than lower it. However, there are many ramifications surrounding the age of adulthood, especially concerning the law. If the age of adulthood is raised, much of our legal system will be forced to undergo significant changes. Furthermore, raising the age of adulthood may not address the main issue at stake: equality and autonomy.

Therefore, it may be necessary to have some form of determination of adulthood other than age, such as competency. There are numerous flaws with age-based determination of adulthood, one of which Moral Psychologist Joel Anderson and Rutger Claassen, Professor of Ethics and Political Philosophy, point out in the article "Sailing Alone: Teenage Autonomy and Regimes of Childhood," saying, "The problem with age-based theories is that they seem to rely on ageist discrimination against children" (501). Basing decisions about certain individuals solely on age is an inaccurate and biased method that presupposes a "norm" of incompetence before a certain age. It is past time that alternatives to age-based determination of adulthood were considered. However, the biggest issue with a competency-based adulthood is *who* determines what "competent" means. A system based on competency is just as ripe for bias as age-based determinations. Regardless, alternatives to age-based determinations of adulthood must be considered.

The standard approach to children's rights is that their prospective safety comes before their independence. While many people believe that these two are mutually exclusive (resulting in an almost total lack of autonomy for children under the age of 18), this outlook is slowly changing. The UN "Convention on the Rights of the Child," adopted by many members in 1989, addressed not only children's rights but their capabilities of handling autonomy, saying ". . . the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. . ." (Preamble). This stance clearly views children as deserving of equality, like

any other group. However, the convention does take certain limitations into account, proclaiming, “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (Article 12). The convention clearly expresses that an individual’s decisions should be evaluated in accordance with their capabilities. The United States has not ratified this resolution, but 195 other countries in the UN have implemented it. Hopefully, the United States will soon see the value of awarding more autonomy to individuals regardless of age. Societal norms towards the rights and capabilities of children are shifting all over the world.

Another consideration in determining adulthood is the moral responsibility towards children’s equality balanced against their safety. While one perspective may be that children deserve autonomy based on the equality principle, this must be weighed against the ability of children to utilize said autonomy if they were awarded it. Anderson and Claassen address the equality issue, opining:

On the one hand, it seems morally imperative “to treat like alike,” which means that both children and adults should be allowed to undertake all actions for which they have the relevant competences. On the other hand, requiring proportional treatment of children and adults seems to neglect the special nature of childhood as a distinct stage in life that ends at a specific age. (495)

People hold differing opinions on the morality of child autonomy, with the common consensus in the US being that children deserve to be governed primarily by a parent or guardian until the age of 18, believing that most children are incapable of making sound choices at a young age. However, principles of equality may not necessarily require equal treatment but equal *consideration* regarding an individual’s capabilities. As Peter Singer explains in his book *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, “The extension of the basic principle of equality from one group to another does not imply that we must treat both groups in exactly the same way, or grant exactly the same rights to both groups” (2). Singer points out that the objective reality is that all humans are *not* equal. Therefore, the equality principle should not be based on certain requirements such as intelligence or moral capacity. Still, the equality principle must be extended to all entities that can suffer and feel pain. Singer continues his argument by stating that this does not mean all individuals must be treated equally in every instance but should be given equal consideration. Therefore, children must be given equitable consideration regarding adulthood and autonomy.

If children were given more autonomy, the process has many potential benefits, such as healthier parent-child relationships, a more independent and functioning society, and more options for children in unhealthy environments. It could be argued that a parent or guardian should raise children who will eventually become capable of independence and autonomy. In many cases, parental or guardian control may harm a child’s autonomy development. In “A Child’s Voice vs. a Parent’s Control,” Soo Jee Lee points out, “. . . ‘best interests’ of children are determined by parties other than the children themselves, such as their parents, a guardian or a government entity. . .” (695). If children are not afforded a say in their lives, there is considerable potential for bias from a parent or guardian to affect a child’s well-being negatively. Parent or guardian actions and decisions can have major ramifications in a child’s life, and without safeguarding child autonomy, many ramifications can be incredibly harmful to the child. This can be especially problematic in difficult home situations. According to the CDC website, “At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States. This is likely an underestimate because many cases are unreported. In 2020, 1,750 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States.” Many children live in unstable or threatening environments, and the number is almost impossible to calculate since many families do

not report the danger children are in. These statistics are massively concerning, and it is worth questioning whether the implementation of child autonomy could help prevent some of these cases. Child autonomy could shift the dynamic between guardians and children, hopefully initiating more regard for children as human beings.

After close examination, it is clear that determining adulthood is a complex issue that should be re-evaluated, as determination based on age has many drawbacks. The current system typically awards adulthood to individuals at the age of 18, regardless of individual capability and according to ageist preconceptions. Many children can make sound choices and exercise autonomy even at young ages. There are many concerns regarding the morality of determining adulthood and a child's capability to make safe decisions. Still, if equality principles are considered, children are a group suffering from discrimination. The potential benefits of a new method of determination for adulthood may outweigh people's concerns about changing how people view adults versus children, so the time has come for child autonomy to be considered closely.

### Works Cited

- Anderson, Joel, and Rutger Claassen. "Sailing Alone: Teenage Autonomy and Regimes of Childhood." *Law and Philosophy*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2012, pp. 495–522. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23321370>. Accessed 4 July 2023.
- Center for Law, Brain, & Behavior. "Juvenile Justice and the Adolescent Brain." 2015. <https://clbb.mgh.harvard.edu/juvenilejustice/>. Accessed 26 May 2024.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention." CDC, 6 Apr. 2022, [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/index.html).
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." OHCHR, 20 Nov. 1989, [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child](http://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child).
- Lee, Soo Jee. "A Child's Voice vs. a Parent's Control: Resolving Tension Between the Convention on the Rights of the Child U.S. Law." *Columbia Law Review*, vol. 117, no. 3, 2017, pp. 687–727. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44177167>. Accessed 5 July 2023.
- Mullin, Amy. "Children, Paternalism and the Development of Autonomy." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2014, pp. 413–26. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24478657>. Accessed 5 July 2023.
- Nellis, Ashley, and Niki Monazzam. "Executive Summary." *Left to Die in Prison: Emerging Adults 25 and Younger Sentenced to Life without Parole*, The Sentencing Project, 2023, pp. 2–2. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep51131.3>. Accessed 4 July 2023.
- Schapiro, Tamar. "What Is a Child?" *Ethics*, vol. 109, no. 4, 1999, pp. 715–38. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.1086/233943>. Accessed 4 July 2023.
- Singer, Peter and Tom Reagan. "All Animals Are Equal." *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, Prentice Hall, 1989. [spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/phil1200,Spr07/singer.pdf](http://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/phil1200,Spr07/singer.pdf). PDF file.
- Wall, John. "Ain't I a Person?": Reimagining Human Rights in Response to Children." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2010, pp. 39–57. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23562943>. Accessed 5 July 2023.

## eight: eclipse

Elijah Crane

full moon  
pull your waves off it  
off my heart,  
as blood your inner intentions are thick  
AB, negative and positive  
my serum, my plasma my sweat  
i get,  
condensed in all the love-making  
gravity holds me down when love is in rotation  
cool like an avalanche, when things get too hot  
i am spacing  
i go deeper than the breaths that we take in

i got drive, even without a license  
drive, within my essence, I'm striding  
you put me on just like a trojan  
electromagnetic, beyond your temptations  
24k it is your bold  
within you, upon  
solid to replenish your soul  
adversity forces us to sync  
i explore coexisting deep in emotions

new experiences, take me never for granted  
always in light, like a prism, it is strobed in  
perpendicular erosion, probing out the dark  
i choose, to let it go when  
it affects all our matters  
leaves people broken down  
codependently stolen

full moon in orbit  
illuminated emotion  
seconds in moments  
like space in my view

high like mountains we are on top of the morning  
on top like the power lines too  
connected upon a basis, beyond basic  
no application anyone else can ever replace this

# Hannibal Barca: An Examination of His Military Intelligence and Legacy

Roman Rodriguez

Hannibal Barca's legacy is not the traditional story of success we are familiar with in military generals such as Ghengis Khan or Alexander the Great. Instead, his story ends in failure, unable to accomplish his life's dream. It is not the outcome but the leadership qualities that Hannibal is remembered for. Hannibal's exceptional qualities enabled him to launch an unprecedented attack on Rome. Despite his failure, Hannibal's military campaigns left a lasting legacy of fear within the Roman Republic. As a result, government reforms were implemented, leading to changes such as an increased emphasis on expansion and conquest of neighboring territory. Of course, there were other contributing factors to Rome's expansion, such as their ambitions to acquire territory and wealth and spread Roman values worldwide. While Hannibal was not the only reason for Rome's pursuit of expansion, he ignited fear in Rome, accelerating the desire for conquest to self-preserve. This article will claim that Hannibal's unique qualities allowed him to persist and maintain an unrivaled offensive against the Romans, which would leave a legacy in Rome, causing fear and reforms despite the war's outcome.

The analysis begins by exploring Hannibal's upbringing, in which he will gain valuable skills and insights in military proficiency, having served under his father and brother-in-law in the first Punic War. From here, I will appraise Hannibal's daring venture as he would assemble an army and cross the Alps, utilizing previously acquired skills. Once in Rome, three major battles will be explored, including the Battle of Trebia, the Battle of Lake Trasimene, and the Battle of Cannae. During these initial campaigns, Hannibal demonstrated significant military techniques, signifying the extent of his threat to the Roman Republic. The article will examine the circumstances that led to the eventual fall of Hannibal's campaign. Finally, the article highlights Hannibal's characteristics, which enabled him to launch the unprecedented attack on Rome, causing reforms and establishing his legacy as a formidable historical general.

Hannibal, a tenacious leader, persisted in allowing stability in his army, even in the most undesirable situations. A strategic leader, a tactician by nature, who had had early exposure to warfare, would display this quality numerous times on the battlefield. A man with an audacious spirit, willingly able to take precarious risks. This distinction would propel his army into the forefront of the classical world's most crucial battles. Integrating these qualities, we are given one of the world's greatest generals, which took the Roman Republic's total exertion of strength and strategy to overcome. Ultimately, General Scipio Africanus, an admirer who studied Hannibal's tactics, would win the war. Despite his loss, having looked at these aspects, we see that Hannibal's legacy will exceed his ambitions as he influenced military reforms and foreign policy and instilled a sense of fear amongst the Romans regarding foreign threats.

Hannibal Barca was born in 247 B.C. towards the end of the first Punic War. Having been the son of the renowned General Hamilcar Barca, he would instill a hatred against Rome from a young age. The first Punic war, fought between these two powers, would last 23 years, as they had different power advantages aiding their continued effort against one another. Carthage had a formidable navy representing the most vital sea power in the Mediterranean, while Rome's strength was centered on land warfare due to its vast military size. In a display of military genius, Rome, having adapted to sea warfare, would beat Carthage in its preferable environment, naval combat. At the Battle of the Aegates,

Rome defeated Carthage at Sea in 241 B.C.<sup>1</sup> Instability would emerge as rebellions revolted against the state, as there was discontent amongst the economic situations. Hamilcar Barca would quickly put down these rebellions and, once unified, set his territorial ambitions on the Iberian Peninsula.

Discontented with the war's outcome, Hamilcar would concentrate his ambitions on conquering Rome. Before embarking on this military operation, Hamilcar would focus on the Iberian Peninsula to regain needed resources and acquire strategically located territory. Hamilcar would spend nine years advancing military operations in Spain, where he would gain territory until his assassination by a Celtic tribe. In these early years, Hannibal gained early exposure to warfare as he began his military training at age thirteen under his father's watch. Following Hamilcar's death, his son-in-law Hasdrubal succeeded him and continued Carthaginian expansion until his assassination. Under Hasdrubal's command, Hannibal gained a reputation as an excellent soldier and was appointed Calvary Commander and later Senior rank.<sup>2</sup> In 221 B.C., the 26-year-old Hannibal succeeded Hasdrubal and continued the military campaigns in Spain, successfully conquering additional territory. Hannibal's most daring challenge would come as he attacked the city of Saguntum, an Iberian stronghold in the Eastern coastal range. The town had an ongoing treaty with Rome, although it was in territory that Rome and Carthage previously decided was part of Carthage. Despite the political implications of what an attack would cause, Hannibal viewed Saguntum as an essential territory that would provide Carthage with strategic support in his invasion of Italy.<sup>3</sup>

In 219 B.C., Hannibal laid siege on Saguntum and conquered the city after eight months of fighting. Rome, discontented, would request Hannibal's extradition. With Carthage's denial, war became inevitable, and both powers would start preparations. Having control of the Mediterranean, Rome was confident in its positioning, which allowed it to attack Spain and North Africa directly. Before advancements could be made, rebellions amongst the Celtic tribes in Northern Italy broke out, causing military delays. Having studied the first Punic War, Hannibal knew that Rome's strength came from their perseverance and unwillingness to lose. If an army were to be annihilated, Rome would raise another one. A defensive strategy against Rome would be ineffective, likely resulting in a stalemate. Hannibal knew his best chance of winning would be taking the fight to Rome.<sup>4</sup>

The prospect of Carthage creating an army, leading it hundreds of miles through the unconquered tribal territory, and advancing over the Alps into Italy, where it would be deprived of resources, only to fight against Rome's formidable army, seemed unlikely. Having heard of the instability amongst the Celtic tribes, Hannibal believed that he could stage the war at Rome if, after passing the treacherous pass, he could unite the tribes under his campaign.<sup>5</sup> In the spring of 218 B.C., Hannibal and his army set out for Rome, reaching the Allobroges region by fall, where he would begin the passage over the Alps. They would meet initial resistance from Gallic tribes, although they were able to fend them off. This ascent proved the most complex challenge yet, as the Carthaginian forces were not accustomed to the cold and snow-topped Mountain ranges. After the initial struggle, the troops reached the summit. Due to the icy terrain and freezing weather, the ascent down would also prove challenging. After around a few weeks, the now weak army crossed the Alps. Having accomplished this achievement, Hannibal would demonstrate his strategic intuition as his audacious

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Miles, *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilization* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 193–96.

<sup>2</sup> Richard A. Gabriel, *Great Generals of the Ancient World: The Personality, Intellectual and Leadership Traits That Made Them Great* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2017), 146–48. <https://search-ebshost-com.mccd.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1638941&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Salmon, "The Strategy of the Second Punic War," *Greece and Rome* 7, no. 2 (1960): 131–42.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars* (London: Cassell, 2000), 150–53.

<sup>5</sup> Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 210–11.

tactics would surprise the Romans. Furthermore, Hannibal's ability to successfully lead an army that included war elephants through such conditions showcased his leadership and resilience.

This famed military campaign took the Carthaginian forces five months, resulting in a diminished army and reduced size and energy. While fatigued, Carthage's spirit remained ignited as Rome was in sight. Hannibal's force arriving at Gaul consisted of 50,000-foot soldiers and 9,000-horse cavalry. In Italy, Hannibal would be left with 20,000-foot soldiers and 6,000 horse cavalries, a fraction of the initial force. Many of the men left the group for varied reasons, including fleeing, dying, and being left to monitor new territory.<sup>6</sup> The short-term goal for Hannibal was to recover from the march, gain local allies, and win battles. In the long term, it was to build on top of the initial goals with the inclination of the Roman Confederacy disintegrating as instability rose and the people revolted. Hannibal's first conflict with the Romans would come at the Battle of Ticinus in November 218 B.C. against Scipio Africanus. With his army replenished and reinforced with several Gallic tribe alliances, Hannibal would easily win this battle, forcing the Romans to withdraw. Although this was a relatively small win, it would foreshadow the devastation to come.

Without hesitation, Hannibal issued a devastating defeat against Rome at the Battle of Trebia the following month. Having studied the field where the battle was anticipated, Hannibal would devise a plan in which a light cavalry would lure the Romans to a battle zone as they staged a retreat. At this zone, the Romans would have crossed a river, to which Hannibal would send an army centered with infantry. Elephants and cavalry would be stationed on the sides to add pressure on the Roman soldiers. In addition, Hannibal would stage a rear-flank attack led by his brother Mago from an ambush site.<sup>7</sup> Through a combination of tactics, Hannibal delivered a decisive win over the Romans and demonstrated to them that they were facing a formidable opponent. Hannibal's ability to outmaneuver his adversaries would demonstrate his exceptional military expertise and be the reason behind the fear that would spread across the empire during and after the Punic Wars.

Hannibal's successive decisive win would come in June 217 B.C. at the battle of Lake Trasimene. Hannibal would set up an ambush against Consul Gaius Flaminius Nepos and his army. To do this, he staged a retreat from Flaminius forces by setting up forest fires. Flaminius, whose army comprised over 40,000 soldiers, was believed to be in control and would follow the forest fire signals to fight Hannibal. Unexpectedly, Hannibal positioned his army hidden across the narrow path along the lake's shore. Using the terrain to his advantage, Hannibal would ambush and slaughter most of the Romans, delivering a significant win for Carthage.<sup>8</sup> Once more, Hannibal would outmaneuver his opponents as he lured the Romans into a trap by using the terrain to conceal his forces for an ambush. Hannibal decisively won against the Roman advancement despite having a smaller army through his tactical ingenuity and resourcefulness. As a result, Rome would adjust its military strategies to adopt a more careful approach to combat that would focus on gradually weakening the Carthaginian army by attacking food supplies and depriving the enemy of resources rather than confrontations. The Romans were discontented with this new strategy as it was considered driven by fear. Consequently, the Romans brought in new consuls interested in traditional Roman conventional warfare, an oversight they quickly acknowledged.

---

<sup>6</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 167.

<sup>7</sup> Dexter Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty: Power and Politics in the Western Mediterranean, 247-183 BC* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 114. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.mccd.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=102114&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>8</sup> Bret Mulligan, *Cornelius Nepos, Life of Hannibal: Latin Text, Notes, Maps, Illustrations and Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 32. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.mccd.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=102114&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

In the Summer of 216 B.C., Rome faced its most significant defeat against Hannibal. Hannibal captured the fortified town of Cannae to restock food supplies. Hannibal was prepared to fight on the battlefield with the Romans in pursuit. Hannibal's army was outnumbered, as the Romans consisted of 86,000 men compared to Hannibal's 50,000 men. Nevertheless, Hannibal, familiar with disadvantaged conditions, would devise a plan to compensate for this lack of support. In this battle, the Romans would attempt to fight traditionally, relying on their vast army to overpower Carthage's defense lines. Hannibal, anticipating this, would station his Celtic soldiers in the center to withstand the bulk of the attack while stationing the North African soldiers along the sides. The cavalry would be placed along the side flanks. This setup aimed to position the Romans at the center of the line so that the North African soldiers could encircle them and the cavalry could finish the encirclement from behind.<sup>9</sup> This plan succeeded, and Hannibal would win, having slaughtered most Roman soldiers. With Roman casualties estimated at around 70,000, The Battle of Cannae was a bloodbath.<sup>10</sup> This decisive win would hold significance as it presented the extent of Hannibal's strategic innovation, as he successfully executed a military strategy known as the Pincer movement, which encircled and trapped the Roman army. The devastation would cascade on Rome, resulting in widespread fear as the empire was on the brink of collapse.

At this moment, Rome was at its darkest hour, facing a catastrophic loss in Cannae. Rome's army experienced a significant setback in one battle as most of its army was destroyed. Despite this, Rome determined, in its efforts, that it would be able to replenish its army as there were still plentiful resources and manpower throughout the country. Having fractured the Roman military, Hannibal was in a position to attack Rome, given its current instability. Instead, Hannibal did not decide to attack but would rather keep his army positioned at Cannae, where they could rest and recover from their heavy battle. After the battle, Hannibal's resources were inadequate to sustain a long-term campaign against Rome. Alternatively, Carthage and Rome could have established a peace treaty, but this possibility was unlikely given Rome's quick recovery and continued military ambitions. This determination and willingness to continue fighting from the Romans likely brought Carthage's ambitions down.<sup>11</sup> Carthage's continued success would end in the following years as the Romans regained support and adjusted their military strategy. As a result, they would implement the small guerrilla war tactics used earlier to weaken the Carthaginians gradually. Rome would regain success and expand the war into Spain, where it would conquer the territory in 206 B.C. at the Battle of Ilipa. The capture of Spain left Carthage isolated from reinforcements, preventing its ability to sustain its military campaign in Rome and ultimately marking the beginning of the war's conclusion. In 202 B.C. General Scipio Africanus would redirect the war to Carthage and defeat Hannibal at the Battle of Zama, ending the second Punic War.

Despite Hannibal's defeat, his campaigns in Rome would leave a legacy and influence government reforms. Having endured many years of distress under Hannibal, fear would spread across the republic, leading to expansionist ambitions to protect from foreign invasion. The prolonged war against Hannibal would also allow the Roman army to develop as they incorporated new tactics. By the war's end, the Romans would have witnessed countless initiatives fostered by Hannibal, including his use of cavalry, elephants, and strategic tactics. As a result, Rome's army grew stronger as it actively integrated and studied Hannibal's strategies. Having fought a war against an admirable adversary who used unprecedented strength and ability, Rome proved to have the unification in government and society to counter such resistance. Staying united would allow them to prevail in such distressing

---

<sup>9</sup> Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, 270–75.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Dexter Hoyos, *The Carthaginians* (London: Routledge, 2010), 202. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. <https://search-ebscohost-com.mccd.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=324344&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

situations. Having defeated the behemoth, Rome, now enriched with power and wealth, was empowered to expand its empire.<sup>12</sup>

During the 2nd Punic War, Hannibal displayed exceptional qualities and characteristics, enabling his army to overcome distinct challenges. His unprecedented effort in leading an army over the Alps into Italy, engaging and defeating the Romans in pivotal battles, is unparalleled. Hannibal's ability to outmaneuver and strategize his opponents would instigate fear and promote the response in which Rome had to overhaul its approach to military strategies. Despite the initial triumph, Hannibal's limitations would be the defying factor in his campaign's outcome. Having spent over fifteen years in Rome, Hannibal was in an undesirable situation. To sustain an army of massive size, there would have to be massive support from local tribes to replenish troops and resources. This support did not come on the scale initially anticipated, as many tribes and local cities refrained from supporting Carthage, given Rome's continued unification and ambitions. Governmental support from Carthage was also limited due to instability and lack of resources. Having adapted to the Carthaginian invasion, Rome would capitalize on its advantages and, therefore, pursue the delay strategy, weakening Hannibal's forces over time. This effort would be successful, and Rome would defeat Carthage. Even with the defeat of Hannibal's military campaign, his legacy as one of history's greatest generals remains undiminished. Looking at these aspects, we see that Hannibal's legacy will exceed the outcome of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punic War as it would encompass the characteristics that allowed for the exceptional campaign that caused fear, reforms, and admiration.

### Bibliography

- Miles, Richard. *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilization*. New York: Penguin Books, 2012.
- Gabriel, Richard A. *Great Generals of the Ancient World: The Personality, Intellectual and Leadership Traits That Made Them Great*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2017. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.mccd.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1638941&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Salmon, Edward. "The Strategy of the Second Punic War." *Greece and Rome* 7, no. 2 (1960): 131–42.
- Goldsworthy, Adrian. *The Punic Wars*. London: Cassell, 2000.
- Polybius. *The Rise of the Roman Empire*. London: Penguin, 1979.
- Hoyos, Dexter. *Hannibal's Dynasty: Power and Politics in the Western Mediterranean, 247-183 BC*. New York: Routledge, 2003. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.mccd.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=102114&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Mulligan, Bret. *Cornelius Nepos, Life of Hannibal: Latin Text, Notes, Maps, Illustrations and Vocabulary*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.mccd.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=102114&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Beard, Mary. *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016.
- Hoyos, Dexter. *The Carthaginians*: 1<sup>st</sup> ed. London: Routledge, 2010. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.mccd.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=324344&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Duncan, Mike. *The Storm Before the Storm: The Beginning of the End of the Roman Republic*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2018.

---

<sup>12</sup> Mike Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm: The Beginning of the End of the Roman Republic* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2018), 19.

## Survival of the Flame: Italy's Center Right First Republic Political Evolution

Eris White-Wadham

In the wake of the fall of fascism, Mussolini's command fell from the voices of the people combined with the sorrow of those who suffered under the iron boot of Italy's Negri years with the people of Italy fractured at its core with the mantle of fascism—at the same time, broken from the ordeal leaving a long-lasting influence upon the nation in its disdain to the far right. During the post-fascist recovery period, the Italian people, driven by their conviction and commitment to inclusivity, solidified the nation's will under the Christian Democrats (DC). In this paper, I will discuss how the Christian Democrats' governance under the First Italian Republic, uniquely guided by faith-led bureaucracy and political coalitions, kept the flame of Italy's pride alight until their historic downfall in the Tangentopoli Scandal.

The First Italian Republic synthesized several political ideologies that had been suppressed until the end of the Second World War, allowing the Italian people to voice their beliefs in the first post-war election. Following the 1946 Italian general election, a new dominant party emerged through the airwaves. *The New York Times* tallied the initial distribution of chairs among the Chambers of Deputies with each party, which resulted in the change within the motherland. Across newspaper stands and radio waves reported: "Christian Democrats, 207; Socialists, 115; Communists, 104; National Democratic Union, 41; Common Man, 30; Republicans, 23; National Bloc of Freedom, 16; Action party, 7" (Wireless 1946, 7). The 1934 historic election marked a break from Italy's fascist past, with new party electorates displaying the change of ideology across the nation. However, collation discussions loomed upon the Chambers, with multiple voices and perspectives clashing in Italy's First Republic Chambers of Deputies. For the first time since the single-party election of 1934, the majority's complex will—excluding UN-occupied South Tyrol and Julian March—voted with a full ballot to elect their representation in the government. The DC won the majority with 35.2% of the vote, appealing to voters with the Vatican's support of the party as a bulwark against atheistic communism and offering practical solutions to Italy's pressing post-war problems to alleviate the needs of various societal groups. This newfound success teetered on alliances until DC won an outright majority in the 1948 election. After the 1948 election, DC found temporary alliances with the center-right Italian Liberal Party (PLI), the anti-communism Italian Republic Party (PRI), and the moderate social-democratic Socialist Unity Party (PSU). This temporary coalition of fellow centrist parties and the PSU allowed for the DC to enact efficient post-war recovery efforts in a fractured Italian landscape while maintaining a Christian ideology of listening to those of the lower classes. This policy allowed the party to connect to their constituents at their doorsteps.

Listening to the people through their allegiances allowed for DC to have the support of the religious populace while appealing to other demographics within the factionalized Italian state. According to Bjørn Thomassen and Rosario Forlenza, in documenting the belief of Augusto Del Noce, a prominent Italian Catholic philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which Christian Democracy became the "central forum for institutionalizing Catholic modernity" (Thomassen and Forlenza 2016, 5) in post-war Italy. The success of DC rang through the 1948 election, with the party gaining a supermajority with 305 seats in the shadow of the Cold War, forming a government without the leftists after the prior events of the May 1947 crises. Instead of DC's success, detectors of the ruling government claimed the party's electoral success threatened the existence of governance within the Italian republic as the United States funneled support for the Christian Democrats, controlling the nation's voice. Jan-Werner Müller's analysis of Christian Democracy attributes the success of Christian

Democracy to two factors: "a particular electoral alliance of the middle class and the peasantry' and 'the fact that the traditional right had been so thoroughly discredited alongside fascism'" (p. 138.) The Christian Democrat's electoral success was attributed to the belief of the middle class and equalized to the support in the future of faith within an encyclical by Pope Pius XII, *Communium interpres dolorum*, documenting the importance of peace through faith determines the fate of humankind as offered by the DC. Thomassen and Forlenza's journalism and Müller's analysis support the belief that the Christian Democracy Party secured the Italian people through faith and conviction to hold the torch towards the future. The DC utilized the voice of the people in forming coalition parties.

Furthermore, under the 1953 and 1958 elections in the aftermath of the disastrous "Scam Law," the support of minor parties determined the balance of power within Italy's contentious Chamber of Deputies. In the 1953 elections, the centrist coalition of DC, Italian Democratic Socialist Party (PSDI), PLI, PRI, and Sardinian Action Party (PSd'AZ) won 49.9 % of the national vote, causing outcry and political instability due to the supermajority effort failing.

The coalition's failed effort led to a political deadstop within the nation, with minor disagreements causing widespread condemnation of the DC within minority parties and internal factions. In the 1958 election, the same problems of the political instability of the centrist factions occurred with DC itself, leading to short-term leaders. Members of the party, such as Amintore Fanfani and Fernando Tambroni, the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> prime minister of Italy, were voted out of office due to various coalition partners disagreeing with the nation's operation in rapid succession. Thomassen and Forlenza also say, "Christian Democracy was subjugated by other political cultures. While assuming the character of a modern, pragmatic mass party, the DC oscillated between 'laicism' and 'clericalism.' It developed its politics and policies merely in terms of 'tactics' and 'sociological techniques.'" (2, 2016). DC had devolved into a battle of ideology with clerical factions fighting to validate the Vatican's decisions, as seen from their promotion of ex-communication from the church if the followers voted for the PCI.

In contrast, the Laicism factions fought for the celebration of the separation of religious importance and values, highlighting the impact of the Dreyfus affair in France as their motivation. This infighting caused the Italian people to see the Christian Democrats as a fractured party that had lost itself as catalyzed during the fall of Premier Fernando Tambroni. The Tambroni Cabinet, in an attempt to legitimize the vote of confidence from parliament, pleaded to the Italian Social Movement (MSI). Riots broke out in the summer of the same year, with *Time Magazine* reporting, "this government no longer corresponds to the political situation" (Il Motorino, 1960) as the Communists protesting the Tambroni government returned to the decrepit fascist ideology, resulting in Tambroni's subsequent resignation. The DC, as a result, paved the way to the third term of Amintore Fanfani without the support of the neo-fascists of the MSI, leaving deep scars on the support of the Christian Democrats throughout the population leading up to the 1960s.

The elections of 1963 and 1972 were marked by DC remaining the leading force in the government facing the Italian Communist Party (PCI), notably passing 30% of the Italian Senate. However, Italy's society moment of stability was not maintained, as while the economy was growing in the north, the south was left untouched. The squalid southern region was considered a stain by DC due to its support of the PCI and was left to economic isolation until the Sessantotto riots. Spurred by the rising costs of the growing Italian economy, the 1968 movement localized in Italy and was formed of students, workers, and intellectuals. In the first months, they peacefully took to the universities initially to argue the rising tuition prices. Later, the riots grew to protest the one-sided economy of Italy under DC's rule, with rampant violence between rioters and government agents. The Sessantotto student riots of 1968 focused on the proclamation of shame within the nation, with many members arrested for their involvement. However, "In November, the first few people died in

Milan, followed in December by terrorist attacks in several cities" (Von Kempis 2008, 2). This escalation in conflict to Italy's political landscape, spawning from the once peaceful 1968 movement, caused infighting within the parties, leading to a political collapse, with six prime ministers coming to office during these five years as the people of Italy waged war upon the nation, setting the scene for the 1972 election. The election surprised the left as it was nearly identical to the 1963 election, marking the fall of Giulio Andreotti's centrist movement and the rise of the MSI. These factors of a failing centrist faction and the rise of the far right led to the full swing of the *Anni di Piombo* or Years of Lead. Years of Lead, categorized by political violence between political militias such as the Red Brigades and *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari*, they caused swaths of casualties haunting the Italian public. The rising attacks brought widespread condemnation to all ruling parties, with the DC stabilizing the government in their centrist viewpoint as the aftermath of the right-wing *Golpe Borghese* coup and the assassination of Alessandro Floris, which caused the condemnation of left allowed Italy's faith-led party to look towards desperate measures.

The Historic Compromise, known as the Third Phase, started in 1973 when PCI launched a proposal for a democratic alliance with DC in the wake of the fear caused by the overthrow of the democratically elected socialist government of Chile in the first months of 1973, which gripped coalition governments across the world and launched emergency meetings between the PCI and DC. *The New York Times* reported that the face of the nation changed to the lamentations of the right with the Italian government meeting the PCI, a first since "the party was ousted from a national-unity government in 1947" (Press 1976, 4). This departure from DC's anti-communist actions out of fear from the Chilean Coup led PRI and RSI, alongside right-wing DC and radical communists, to have reservations about the coalition. The unholy alliance focused on European-based trade and economic development to reduce unemployment and the modernization of the state. Nevertheless, this progress was marred by political violence across the nation when Aldo Moro, the DC Prime Minister, was kidnapped and killed by the Red Brigades, shattering the trust of Communists, while the centrist part of DC deputies' efforts to maintain government failed, causing the 1979 general election.

The 1979 general election elected the DC as the leading party within the Chamber of Deputies, with the PCI sitting in opposition again. The coalition of parties, however, caused a fallout among parties, with initial attempts to form a government failing due to the resignation of Prime Minister Francesco Cossiga, disrupting Italy's governance. This political crisis, paired with the scandal of Masonic Lodge P2, led to the foundation of the ruling coalition of five parties known as *Pentapartito* (CAF) until the *Mani Pulite* scandal of the early 1990s. CAF was a fixed coalition of DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI, and PRI that snuffed out the threat of PCI yet came at a cost for Italy's faith-led governance, with the DC having to recognize the so-called secular parties of the majority formally. From the 1983 election, with DC losing 37 seats to other centrist parties, the Italian people followed the idea of voting for one of the four minor parties in the coalition as a form of protest, as the debt ratio within Italy plagued it onwards until the 21st century. The CAF was held through the 1992 Italian general election, with the notable disbandment of the PCI in 1991 and the rising success of MSI coming into view as the decline of DC was on the horizon.

*Tangentopoli*, otherwise known as *Clean Hands*, was a nationwide judicial case destroying the First Italian Republic, where the nation of conviction, coalition, and inclusivity was crushed. It started when Mario Chiesa, a member of the PSI, accepted a bribe from a Milan cleaning firm and was subsequently arrested. The PSI attempted to distance themselves from Chiesa, which caused Chiesa to give information about other areas of corruption. In specific accounting, more than half of the members of the Italian parliament were under indictment with the subsequent fallout for the DC party, and the rise of the MSI was apparent. In the aftermath of the 1992 election, DC dismally secured 29.7% of the vote, and the subsequent *Eni* energy scandal caused DC to fall from the head

government, leaving the void they filled after the fall of fascism. Alongside the DC, the PSDI and PLI subsequently disbanded, leaving the PDS, PRI, and MSI as the only surviving national parties in the electorate. However, due to DC's favor in seeking allegiances with various parties, the dispelling of the MSI during the Tamborini riots and the resolution of the Years of Lead gave way to the rising figure of Gianfranco Fini of MSI filling the void of the now extinguished DC.

The rise of the MSI and the rekindling of the flame after the fall of DC filled the void left by Tangentopoli as DC did in the aftermath of the Negri years. The MSI would solidify its unprecedented historical importance as the first far-right party to have ministers in Italy's political history since the Second World War. Gianfranco Fini, the former national secretariat of the Italian Social Movement, was the catalyst for the party's success in the new age of the Italian Republic. This later signified the rise of the current Brothers of Italy, who rose from the fall of the Five Star Movement through the capitalization of success and the failures of political management. Rising from the fall of the faith-led DC, Fini was documented by Corrado De Cesare in 'Il fascista del Duemila. Le radici del camerata Gianfranco Fini,' in 1992, "After almost half a century, the idea of fascism is alive," (De Cesare 1995, 52) signifying the rise of a flame within Italy in the aftermath of the centrist collapse. However, Fini and the MSI, in the aftermath of the fall of the DC, pushed forth a separation of fascism inherently following the ideals of Del Noce and Giorgio Almirante, the founder of the MSI, moved away from its neo-fascist ideology to a traditional conservative political agenda to progress the liberation of Italy and the inclusivity of the Italian people.

The faith-led Christian Democrats secured their political dominance over seventy years in Italy, surviving the Cold War, Tamborini Riots, Sessantotto, The Historic Compromise, and Years of Lead while dealing with party infighting of 'laicism' and 'clericalism' factions. The struggles of the Christian Democrats led to the successful establishment of the Pentapartito until their downfall through the Tangentopoli scandal in 1992, causing the Italian Social Movement to secure their future. Italy's history with Christian Democracy still plays a crucial role in politics today, particularly regarding the Brothers of Italy as the current ruling party entered the primer leadership by filling the void from the failings of prior ruling coalitions. Further research should be conducted on the relationship between the rise of the successor of the Christian Democrats, the Italian Social Movement, and the Brothers of Italy's political correlations within Italy's Second Republic alongside the political impacts regarding the Christian Democrats' efforts to keep the flame of Italy's democracy burning.

## References

- De Cesare, C. *Il fascista del Duemila. Le radici del camerata Gianfranco Fini*. Kaos Edizioni. 1995
- Il Motorino LXXVI(5) (1960, August 1) *Time*  
<https://doi.org/https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,869662,00.html>
- Muller, Jan-Werner. *Contesting Democracy: Political ideas in twentieth-century Europe*. Cumberland, United States: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Press, A. (1976, March 18). Italian Communists Consulted by Premier First Time Since '47. *The New York Times*, CXXV(43,153), 4. <https://doi.org/https://nyti.ms/4akzTLf>
- Thomassen, B., & Forlenza, R. (2016). Christianity and political thought: Augusto Del Noce and the ideology of Christian Democracy in post-war Italy. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 21(2), 181–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2016.1150135>
- Von Kempis, S. (2008). 'The Long '68'. Italy's View of the Protest Movement of 40 Years ago. *Radio Vaticana*. [https://doi.org/https://www.kas.de/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=d2e66f4e-6bb9-854b-058b-b7910639b9c9&groupId=252038](https://doi.org/https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=d2e66f4e-6bb9-854b-058b-b7910639b9c9&groupId=252038)
- Wireless, P. (1946, June 19). Italian Court Proclaims Republic Victor; Official Count Shows Little Vote Change. *The New York Times*, XCV(32,288), 7. <https://doi.org/https://nyti.ms/3wvyBzs>

## The American Dream

Frank S. Roehrich

*Rising Scholar*

Restoring the American Dream is the goal of the Republican Party. Rebuilding the economy and creating jobs is the key. This is the party of a growing economy that gives everyone a chance in life, an opportunity to learn, work, and realize what prosperity and freedom make possible. The government cannot create prosperity, though the government can limit or destroy it. The Democratic Party is making things look ugly right now. They are limiting and destroying our chance of prosperity within our country today. Our national debt is through the roof. People are hurting now because of inflation and the cost of living. Prosperity is the product of individuals' self-discipline, enterprise, saving, and investment. Prosperity provides how citizens and their families can maintain their independence, raise their children by their values, practice their faith, and build communities of cooperation and mutual respect. The Democrats are destroying these things in our lives today. They want to control every aspect of our lives. There is so much change in how our kids live and learn today. How kids spend their free time today is irrational compared to how kids used to do it. I was outside the home all day when I had time to play. We interacted with the other children in our neighborhood. Today, kids miss out on all the social interaction they would get with other kids. Yes, they spend time with each other during school. Instead, they spend their time on their phones and computers using social media rather than doing this in person. This opens many dangers to our children today.

Prosperity is the foundation for our nation's global leadership, and the vigor of our economy makes our military strength and national security possible. "Pundits and Democrats tell us that we should accept the new normal of a slow-growing economy. As a result, the number of Americans living in poverty has increased by millions." This is absurd to even think about. The Republicans want a strong economy with lots of growth for all to benefit. Republicans like to work for what is theirs, not just given to them. The Republicans also believe each state should be responsible for governing themselves, rather than the federal government having so much control over the States. I like this way of thinking because each state is unique in its needs and ways of living. As individual States, we should have the final say in how we want to live. That's living the American Dream, the freedom to choose how we want things to be, as long as it does not infringe on someone's rights and freedom.

"Republicans consider the establishment of a pro-growth tax code a moral imperative. More than any other public policy. It powerfully influences economic growth and job creation, which translates into opportunity for those who would otherwise be left behind. Getting our tax system right will be the most important factor driving the economy back to prosperity." We need our dollars to count the most on where it goes. They want more job opportunities for those who still wish to work for their dream. The ones I'm talking about don't have their hands out for freebies. I was raised to believe that you must work for your dreams, and I still think this today. Dad was a strong worker who made things happen for us as kids. My brother and I were lucky to have a dad who believed in working for what you want. He never, as I call it, "Pan-Handled" for anything in his life. This is the kind of work ethic that made this country into what it is today. I've said, "Freedom isn't free, neither is your dreams. You have to sacrifice, fight, and work hard for your dreams.

"The current tax code is rightly the object of both anger and mockery. Its length is exceeded only by its complexity. We must start anew. That will be an enormous undertaking, and if it is to succeed, it must command the attention and approval of the American people. It cannot be engineered from the top down, but must have a commonsense approach and be simplified." We need to use our

common sense in this situation and work from the working people up to the elite. Speaking of which, they need to throw us a bone occasionally to stay rich and enjoy what they have. If not, then others will try to take what is theirs for not sharing the American Dream. Greed is a terrible thing; it will destroy you from the inside out. That was another excellent life lesson Dad taught me. Don't be greedy, and be empathetic for others. This will help you sleep easily in life.

Another dream that should be a right for all Americans is free college tuition. This will benefit you as a citizen of our country. If you genuinely want the American Dream, you must have a solid educational background to achieve it. Some have started with little to no education, hit it big in life, and become very successful. That's a long shot with little hope, but if you go through the college system and earn your different degrees, you are almost guaranteed to earn a very lucrative job that will allow you to live your dream. I wish I would have done this sooner in life. I don't regret being a firefighter in my youth, but I should have pursued my education more back then, too. I also believe in social medicine. Canada has a sound system up there that works well for them. My belief in free education and free health care is so that it would produce a better citizen. If you keep your citizens healthy and educate them, they can work smarter and healthier for you, which means more income from taxes. It's a win-win situation for everyone.

"International trade is crucial for all sectors of America's economy. Massive trade deficits are not. We envision a worldwide multilateral agreement among nations committed to the principles of open markets, called a "Reagan Economic Zone," in which free trade will truly be fair for all concerned." We need better-negotiated trade agreements that put America first. When trade agreements have been carefully negotiated, millions of new jobs are created at home. When those agreements do not adequately protect U.S. interests or U.S. sovereignty, or when they are violated with impunity, they must be rejected. With this whole thing in international trade, there are better men than President Biden to negotiate the difficult task of trade agreements for our country. There have been many rumors of President Biden and his family dealing with shady business deals under the table for their benefit and not for our benefit. If this is true in any way, it must stop. We need someone who puts America first.

I'm so tired of the corruption in our politics. This country is the greatest nation in the world. There is nothing like us. We set an example for others to see and follow. We give hope to others for a better world. I have no problem with saying I'm American. This is why we must be careful with our business with other countries. It is about character and doing the right thing even when nobody is looking. When we deal with another country that is simply trying to take advantage of us and not trade fairly, we should stop immediately and turn the deal around on them, showing them how we feel about it. This is why President Trump is the better man for the job. He can negotiate a fair trade, and all is good, but if he sees something wrong, he will be very tough with them.

Trump works with America's interest first. After this last administration, we need a man like Trump to set things right again for our country. President Trump is not afraid to throw punches back at other leaders. He commands a sense of respect from those with whom he deals. I like this about him. He is genuinely looking out for this nation's best interest. He cares for our country just as I and many others do. I'm a proud citizen of the U.S.A. This country allowed us both to live out our American Dream, and that's the whole point of things. To be successful and happy with our lives and accomplishments.

Some would say I'm a failure as I sit here, even at this darkest point in my life, but I have found meaning and a new dream of what I can be. I can achieve great things because I live in a country that fosters the belief that anyone can reach greatness at any time in their lives if they can believe in themselves and put in the necessary hard work. I, too, can still live the American Dream and be proud of the accomplishments that I have made in my darkest hours. That's what it means to be an American citizen, a proud citizen. Never give up, never surrender; when knocked down, stand back up, dust

yourself off, and start again, no matter how hard it is. That's how you win and show perseverance for your dreams.

## The Kids Are Alt-Right?

*Meme culture and the alt-right: the forefronts of the pipeline connecting edgy humor to far-right extremism and male-centered violent communities*

Arisbeth Manzo Charles

### Introduction

Memes can best be defined as humorous media, visual or audio, shared by users on the internet. With time, memes have transformed from jokes like the ever-loved Grumpy Cat to symbols that describe certain ideals, cultures, or behaviors. Take, for example, the tragic case of Pepe the Frog, who went from a crude cartoon comic character of a frog into a symbol of the Alt-Right, even branded a hate symbol by the Anti-Defamation League. This is not an isolated case regarding “meme culture.” It is through humor and memes that a rise in indoctrination towards extremist or alt-right ideology can be speculated. Platforms like YouTube have been identified as major contributors to the alt-right pipeline. But why? The answer lies in the desensitization and normalization of extremist ideology; more often than not, it is presented in the form of humor. One would not suspect a cartoon frog to be a symbol of hate of the same caliber as a Swastika, nor would one suspect YouTube creators like PewDiePie to have held enough influence to be referenced by a mass shooter moments before his act. However, both are cases that can be speculated and are heavily documented. There is a clear and undeniable link between the ideas pushed with edgy humor and meme culture and the ideas pushed by the alt-right. To get a better understanding, YouTube creators who were most active and influential during the peak of the “edgy” humor era on YouTube around 2015-2018, including creators like PewDiePie, FilthyFrank, and iDubbbz, should be speculated for the part that they play in the pipeline. Long-term exposure to edgy or dark humorous content can cause desensitization and indoctrination into extremist online groups such as the Alt-Right or the Manosphere, which then incite hate that can transition to violence, and they primarily recruit adolescents and young adults.

### Defining the Influences

*“The Alt-Right has been declared the winner. The Alt-Right is more deeply connected to Trumpian populism than the ‘conservative movement.’ We’re the establishment now.”*

- Richard B. Spencer, X

To begin with, both the Alt-Right and the Manosphere<sup>13</sup> have substantial influence in all forms of media, whether it be through pop culture or on the political level. The Alt-Right movement’s presence in American politics can be most notably observed in the year before the 2016 election, specifically regarding the Republican candidate Donald J. Trump. The term Alt-Right was originally used to refer to Richard B. Spencer<sup>14</sup> and his white supremacist supporters. However, the term was popularized when Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton used it to describe Trump’s right-wing supporters as White Supremacists. That statement would prove to be not far from the truth, given that in an interview at the 2016 Republican National Convention, former White House Strategist Steve Bannon told a Mother Jones reporter that his former publication, Breitbart News, was “the platform for the alt-right.” For male users on the internet, there is a push into online communities that fall within the

---

<sup>13</sup> Manosphere: Network of online communities promoting masculinity and misogyny, the community started in response to feminism and other female empowerment movements

<sup>14</sup> Richard B. Spencer: A White Supremacist, Neo-Nazi conspiracy theorist, a prominent leader of the Alt-Right

Manosphere, including subcommunities like that of Incels<sup>15</sup> and Men's Rights Activists<sup>16</sup>. While the Alt-Right and the Manosphere are not interconnected entirely, members of the Manosphere often share the same ideology as members of the Alt-Right and vice versa, and once again, there is a shared bond that can be speculated in the form of humor and memes. These jokes often come in the form of misogyny, racism, anti-feminism, or anti-PC/SJW's<sup>17</sup>. In the mainstream world, traces of the humor utilized by these communities can be seen most prominently in politics. Take Pepe the Frog, a former comic character adopted by websites like Reddit, 4Chan, and 8Chan<sup>18</sup> in the year before the 2016 election. Members of the right in support of Donald Trump on these websites made memes of Pepe with the phrase "Can't Stump the Trump," which ended up getting shared by Donald Trump himself on his social media. It didn't stop at that, after a speech where Clinton had said, "...You could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables... The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic... He has given voice to their websites that used to only have 11,000 people — now 11 million. He tweets and retweets their offensive hateful mean-spirited rhetoric.", eliciting Donald Trump Jr. to share a meme made by these online communities of Pepe the Frog with various controversial right-wing figures with the title "The Deplorables." Hillary's team responded once more, claiming, "That cartoon frog is more sinister than you might realize," ultimately calling Pepe the Frog a "symbol associated with white supremacy." There are also Sigma edits, which stem from Incel terminology about a (now debunked) theory of wolf pack hierarchy, referring to men as either Alphas (strong men) or Betas (weak men). Around 2020 or 2021, there was an emergence of a new category of men in these Manosphere communities called the Sigma, which, unlike an Alpha male, does not need the validation of others to do his own thing and but unlike a Beta male, does not allow himself to get pushed around. It is essentially a manosphere-branded idea to place themselves at the top of their male hierarchy by glamorizing traits such as introversion, failing to understand that there is no correct way to be a man. Branded by fictional characters like John Wick, Bruce Wayne, and most notably, Patrick Bateman, the term Sigma was propelled into the mainstream through apps like TikTok and Instagram. Thus came about a new trend called Sigma Edits, which were popularized by TikTok edits of Patrick Bateman featuring clips of the movie *American Psycho*, usually followed by punk music, glorifying Bateman all the while not comprehending that the film was a satire of masculinity, consumerism and "yuppie" culture. Going back to the real world, in 2023, to gain approval for his 2024 presidential campaign, presidential candidate Ron DeSantis reposted a video on X that follows the Sigma edit format, equating himself to characters like Patrick Bateman, to push anti-LGBT, more specifically anti-transgender views. The video starts with clips of Donald Trump's progressive attitudes towards transgender individuals. Then it cuts to Ron DeSantis painting himself as a "Sigma" because his policies are strictly anti-LGBT, followed by news article titles of his homophobic and transphobic policies to prove it. It can be noted that not all renditions of Pepe the Frog are far-right extremist or hateful, and not all Sigma edits endorse the male Alpha-Beta-Sigma hierarchy. Still, it must be addressed that these two are examples of both the Alt-Right and the Manosphere's influence in popular culture, meme culture, and even American Politics. The origins of these mainstream memes and ideas must be addressed because they demonstrate how these

---

<sup>15</sup> Incels: Short for "Involuntary Celibate", meaning they are unable to attract partners despite wanting one and express hostility to others who are sexually active.

<sup>16</sup> Men's Rights Activists (MRA's): A misogynistic, male supremacist community who believe feminism causes male oppression

<sup>17</sup> PC= Political Correctness, SJW= Social Justice Warriors, both are frequently used as derogatory terms

<sup>18</sup> Reddit and 4chan are (anonymous) forum social network websites, 8chan however was created in response to 4chan's guidelines as a "free-speech-friendly" forum. 8chan is also a meeting place for mass shooters, Neo Nazis, White Supremacists, and the Alt Right

communities orchestrate the humor that gets pushed into the mainstream. Additionally, they determine the desensitization to certain topics that ordinary people, termed “normies” by these communities, are exposed to.

### Pyramid of Hate

*“The Pyramid of Hate illustrates the prevalence of bias, hate, and oppression in our society...When we challenge those biased attitudes and behaviors in ourselves, others, and institutions, we can interrupt the escalation of bias and make it more difficult for discrimination and hate to flourish.”*

- Anti-Defamation League

*Genocide:* The act or intent to kill an entire group/community

*Bias Motivated Violence:* Threats/Assault/Rape/Homicide/Vandalism

*Systemic Discrimination:* Political/Educational/Economic/Employment Discrimination

*Acts of Bias:* Verbal Expression, Dehumanization, Social Avoidance, Belittling Jokes

*Biased Attitudes:* Microaggressions, Confirmation Bias, Lack of Self Reflection, Stereotyping

- Info taken from Pyramid of Hate, ADL 2021

How primarily adolescent and young adult boys are exposed to the Alt-Right pipeline or Manosphere communities on YouTube is not an overnight process; it is a slow and steady transition up the Pyramid of Hate and Violence. The Five Stages listed above depict how ideas become hate, and that hate then turns into violence. It is worth noting that many nations, such as America, are systematically discriminatory to communities such as ethnic minorities, women, LGBT, etc., fostering an environment for the first stage, Biased Attitudes, to be the default for many, whether they are aware of their implicit prejudices or not. It’s worth noting that Donald Trump’s campaign for the presidency in 2016 was full of racism against ethnic minorities, sexist and misogynistic comments, as well as subtle white supremacist rhetoric, exposing larger communities to this kind of ideology and almost influencing the use of these topics in humor. When adolescents and young adults raised in systemically racist environments are exposed to YouTube channels that were popular during 2015-2018 and further normalized the use of offensive or edgy language and humor, they are already being funneled up the pyramid into Acts of Bias through verbal expression, primarily in the form of humor, given that many would go on to mimic what the content they were consuming.

Now take, for example, former most subscribed Youtuber Felix Kjellberg and the topology in which he unknowingly connected his primarily adolescent audience to Nazi humor and ultimately Neo-Nazi communities. Known online as PewDiePie, Kjellberg is a Swedish content creator who garnered his mass following through his mix of video game plays, reviews, vlogs, and commentary videos, having held the position of most subscribed Youtuber for a little over five years. Around August of 2018, Felix Kjellberg first noticed that another YouTube channel, T-Series, an Indian music and film company, was nearly overtaking him in subscriber count, jokingly urging his viewers to subscribe to him to take over T-Series. This would later come to be referred to as the Great Subscriber War, with various fans and even creators active in campaigning for PewDiePie’s victory against T-Series in the battle to reach 100 million subscribers, not wanting Kjellberg to lose his position as number one. Youtubers like Mr. Beast were also very active in this campaign, buying billboards and advertising it at the Super Bowl. Others who supported PewDiePie include JackSepticEye, Markiplier, and Logan Paul, who share adolescent and young adult audiences like PewDiePie himself. While the Great Subscriber War was never meant to be taken so seriously, there were still many who felt that if PewDiePie lost the number one position to a media company channel like T-Series, it would be a loss for indie creators and a shift for major corporations. However, Felix Kjellberg is no stranger to

controversy. His campaign against T-Series was littered with subtle racist jokes against Indians. Take, for example a diss track<sup>19</sup> he had written about T-Series titled Bitch Lasagna in which he says phrases like “I’m a Blue Eyes White Dragon<sup>20</sup>, while you’re just Dark Magician<sup>21</sup>” that is not inherently racist on its own, but the double entendre of referring to himself as a Blue Eyes White Dragon is difficult to dismiss when he is notorious for making Nazi jokes, constantly coming under fire from all sorts of media publications for his antisemitic rhetoric all the while being a white blonde man with blue eyes. A second song, titled Congratulations, was released to congratulate T-Series on passing him in subscriber count; however, this song was made after a cease and desist from T-Series claiming defamation, so the song pushes insulting phrases such as “Did you know that Indians have poo-poo in their brains? That’s a blatant racist lie. Yeah, but still not defamation” to poke fun. The situation escalated when legal action was pursued, resulting in both songs and any other iterations being banned in the entire country of India. His use of offensive and edgy humor, while having such a large platform to the point of legal action against his racist jokes, shows how even if he was joking, he was inciting enough hate on Indians for India as a whole to take action. Other of Kjellberg’s controversies include a video in which he commissions men on Fiverr<sup>22</sup> to hold signs reading “Death to All Jews.” At the same time, they laughed and danced, later claiming it was a commentary to prove that people on the internet will do anything if you pay them. One event that wasn’t Kjellberg’s own doing occurred during the Great Subscriber War when a fan vandalized a World War II memorial with “Subscribe to PewDiePie” graffiti tags. While Kjellberg himself has stated time and time again that he is not a Nazi, that he is not racist or antisemitic, and that the jokes he makes are just jokes and nothing more, there is, while small, a portion of his audience that *are* Nazis, that *are* racist, and that *are* antisemitic, and this small portion of his audience feels validated by him. The Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi website, had praised PewDiePie, claiming that it didn’t matter whether Felix’s views aligned with what he said or not, saying, “The effect is the same; it normalizes Nazism and marginalizes our enemies.” In a now-deleted video titled “I guess this needed to be said.” Felix reacts to the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, showing how up to this point he had been making these jokes from a detached standpoint given that he has never lived in America, saying, “...I was sorta like, ‘I mean, they’re just jokes. There’s not actual Nazis out there, what are you talking about?’ and then I look at this, and I’m like, ‘Oh! Oh, OK. I see.’ And if, for some reason, Nazis think it’s great that I’m making these jokes, I don’t want to give them that benefit. So I’m going to stop doing it”. After a publication by the *Wall Street Journal*, compiling many events such as the ones listed above and more, Disney’s subsidiary brand, Maker Studios, ultimately canceled its deal with Pewdiepie. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March in 2019, in Christchurch, New Zealand, about fifty people were killed, and another fifty were gravely wounded when Alt-Right extremist Brenton Tarrant opened fire on two mosques, all the while livestreaming his atrocity on Facebook. Before his act, Tarrant had name-dropped Felix Kjellberg, telling his viewers, “Remember lads, subscribe to PewDiePie,” in reference to the active campaigning many were doing at the time to prevent T-Series from dethroning Kjellberg. By this point, “Subscribe to PewDiePie” had transgressed from a joke to prevent T-Series from passing him in subscribers into a meme of itself, and PewDiePie had inadvertently been turned into a symbol of all the controversies that he had found himself in both by media outlets and by extremist communities. The case of PewDiePie demonstrates how Alt-Right communities praise the normalization of this kind of offensive humor. The jump up the Pyramid of Hate from verbal expression, whether the jokes were sincere or not, to

---

<sup>19</sup> Diss track: A song made for the purpose of (verbally) attacking another person/group

<sup>20</sup> Blue Eyes White Dragon: A powerful rare card in the Trading Card Game Yugioh

<sup>21</sup> Dark Magician: Another card from Yugioh, it's possible Kjellberg was making a race joke by calling Indians Dark Magician

<sup>22</sup> Fiverr: An online marketplace for freelance digital services

the vandalism for him on the WWII memorial and even the shout-out given during an act of genocide shows how quickly the transition from humor to violence is. It also shows how young audiences are being exposed to communities such as that of Neo-Nazis and Alt-Right extremists through the internet that they would have never been exposed to if not for the internet and if not for creators like PewDiePie.

Satire and irony play a huge part in the humor styles of creators such as PewDiePie. However, audiences often don't know how or are not old enough to interpret this media in any form other than at face value, not only pulling them in but then pushing them down the pipeline to extremism. Some creators on the platform play a character whose main purpose is to be funny through satire and irony to create commentary and discourse through dark humor at the subjects they portray. Take George Kusunoki Miller, a Japanese content creator who began his channel TVFilthyFrank in 2011 at age 18. Miller's characters, such as Filthy Frank and Pink Guy, are known for their edgy and offensive humor, responsible for viral worldwide memes such as the Harlem Shake 11 and the Cake Trilogy<sup>23</sup> series that has since been removed from Youtube in 2019/2020 because of its graphic content. Filthy Frank was meant to be a controversial character, constantly pushing the boundaries of what was socially acceptable; the description for the TVFilthyFrank channel on YouTube reads, "Filthy Frank is the embodiment of everything a person should not be. He is anti-PC, anti-social, and anti-couth.... He also sets an example to show how easy it is in social media for any zany material to gain traction/followings by simply sharing unsavory opinions and joking about topics many find offensive. There is no denying that the show is terribly offensive, but this terrible offensiveness is a deliberate and unapologetic parody of the whole social media machine...". Around 2017, when Miller decided to stop the Filthy Frank character out of concern for his health, he successfully rebranded himself as Joji, a popular singer/songwriter with over 19 million monthly listeners on Spotify. In an interview with Billboard, when asked about his past, he stated, "It was a humor that I started when I was in high school, so naturally, as I got older, I got tired of that humor. People's tastes change. People's humor changes". Miller's age at the start of his channel was also indicative of the ages of his viewers. Much like with PewDiePie, it was primarily adolescents and young adults who would consume this type of media; however, because many were so young and impressionable, they would often take the content at face value. Many adolescents and young adults would go on to model their behavior and humor after what they saw, further normalizing the rhetoric used, all the while not comprehending that the humor was not made to be replicated; it was made to entertain. This then leaves the door open for youth to be exposed to extremist ideas and, ultimately, extremist groups. In an article by Laine Brotherton in the Michigan Daily, she points out, "This phenomenon is analogous to the algorithmic radicalization YouTube caused in the mid-2010s. The existence of Filthy Frank fans who are led down the infamous extremism rabbit hole might devalue the high-concept art that his channel could be — understandably, Miller may have quit for this exact reason".

Next is Ian Jomha, a friend of both Miller's and Kjellberg's, who had normalized the use of slurs and harassment for the sake of humor and social commentary, and how his realization of the indoctrination he was creating led to backlash from his community when he apologized for the hateful environment that he was fostering. Jomha, known as IDubbbzTv on YouTube, is most known for his series Content Cop, which ran from 2015 to 2017. The premise of Content Cop was to critique other Youtubers who were usually controversial, with the consensus of iDubbbz's fans at the time being that most of the people getting Content Cops made about them generally deserved them. Another thing to note is that this content was not underground or difficult to reach; when the diss track made by Jomha against another creator, Ricegum, was released for digital download, it peaked at #24 on the

---

<sup>23</sup> Cake Trilogy, A series of three videos (Vomit Cake, Hair Cake, and Human Cake) in which Frank and other creators made three disgusting cakes, each one viler than the last, that they would then eat

*Billboard* R&B/Hip-hop Digital Song Sales chart. A second Content Cop made about the YouTube creator Ricegum had a short cameo feature from Post Malone. Infamously, one of the most popular Content Cops made, which Ian personally apologized for later in 2023, was about internet personality Tana Mongeau. Tana Mongeau, who was about 18 at the time, and Ian, who was 26, had a mutual dislike of each other after she had tweeted angrily at him for his frequent use of derogatory language, leaving Tana to suspect that he was going to make a video defaming her, but never would she have suspected that he would go on to harass her in person.

The Content Cop video about Tana Mongeau was released long after events had transpired. In it, Jomha talks about the irony of her criticizing him for using the same slurs and offensive language that she had been using in contexts more derogatory than him, later saying, “Either it's all okay or none of it is okay,” referring to the slurs. He then goes on to document his journey to an event Mongeau hosted called Tana Concert, leading up to a moment where he poses as a fan to get a photo with Mongeau and then prompts her to “Say N\*\*\*\*er,” scaring her away and getting himself escorted out by security. This would also be the only time Jomha’s harassment escalated from commentary and skits to in-person confrontation. Impressionable minds watching this content begin to adopt this language and behavior themselves, feeling justified and even inspired to replicate the events they witnessed. These events depict the jump up the Pyramid of Hate from Biased Attitudes (like implicit prejudices against communities) to Acts of Bias (like frequent use of derogatory language to the point of normalization) to almost reaching Bias Motivated Violence (the threat of face-to-face confrontation, leaving Mongeau unsure if her safety had been compromised). In 2023, in a video titled “I miss the old iDubbbz,” Ian Jomha officially apologized for his past behaviors, condemning them and stating they had “indoctrinated a lot of people into thinking this is an ok way to behave, and it’s not.” This video was met with many different reactions. There were those who congratulated him for taking accountability and educating himself, being able to admit what he had done was wrong. There were some who felt that the apology was not necessary and that Ian Jomha was beating himself up because of “woke” culture, defending his past use of edgy humor for shock value. There were others who said the apology and charity donations he made following the video were not enough to make up for the culture he had fostered and that it was likely a stunt to get advertisers back on his side. Long-term fans also felt wronged, betrayed, and distraught that Ian had turned their back on them and put such a heavy distance on the very culture he had created. On an episode of *I Spent a Day With* by YouTube creator Anthony Padilla 12, Jomha describes his interactions with his fanbase, saying, “I did not like the interaction that I had with fans...I attracted a lot of people who sucked...cringey behavior that maybe I do on a video because I got a camera pointed at me, there’d be some of that energy matched in person...It’s just antisocial weird behavior” and “After having enough of these experiences and being like “These are the people that I’m attracting, these are the people that I’m entertaining. I need to reevaluate things. They’re relating and enjoying this content for a reason, and that's not (maybe) the same reason that I’m trying to make”. This realization that Jomha admits to is in parallel with how Felix Kjellberg also realized that groups such as Neo-Nazis were enjoying the antisemitic jokes he was making or the speculations about how George Miller may have quit because of his deliberate offensive behavior being misconstrued and mimicked.

### **The Alt-Right, Incels and Accessibility**

Adolescents place a huge emphasis on peer relationships, which can lead them to risk caving into peer pressure and feeling a strong necessity to conform to the behaviors of a dominant or popular culture. When exposed to Youtubers such as Kjellberg, Miller, and Jomha, adolescents can feel influenced to adopt the same kind of language and humor that they see these creators exhibit, later influencing their

peers to act the same way because of homophily<sup>24</sup>. This phenomenon, studied by Thomas J. Dishion and Jessica M. Tipsord, is known as peer contagion or deviant peer contagion, meaning deviant behaviors, in this context being racism, misogyny, antisemitism, islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, etc., through humor, can be transmitted between adolescents by positive acknowledgment and signs of approval such as laughing or playing along. The trouble lies within their lack of understanding of the concepts being toyed with through vulgar and offensive language, leading youth down a spiral of conformer bias to justify their behavior. Take, for example, Ian Jomha's infamous statement, "Either all of it is okay, or none of it is okay" in regards to picking and choosing slurs. Another theory that can describe these behaviors is the social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura, which states that people learn by observation. Exposure to this kind of humor sets an example for adolescents and young adults to mimic. The illusory truth effect also plays a part here, with communities thinking that this humor genre is acceptable the more they are exposed to it.

In the same way that drugs are addictive and reprogram the brain to require larger doses for the same high, the echo chamber of socially maladapted adolescents' and young adults' edgy and offensive humor starts requiring more extreme material to get a laugh. The accessibility of this content can be seen on applications such as iFunny, which had several extremist users pushing their ideologies through memes. In fact, a very popular Alt-Right user on the platform who went by the username "Saboteur," real name Samuel Woodward, went on to murder his former high school classmate who was openly gay and Jewish named Blaze Bernstein, with various iFunny users showing support of Woodward by turning Bernstein's death into a meme. Other sites include LiveLeak, which was a website that hosted explicit, violent, and gory content for the sake of news broadcasting, infamous for hosting videos such as the beheading of journalist James Foley by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the execution of Saddam Hussein. There was also 4chan, which had many Alt-Right recruiters for its Alt-Right counterpart, 8chan, made by Frederick Brennan. 8chan is incredibly similar to 4chan, but much less regulated or monitored, with the creator of the platform aware of the existence of gore, violence, and even child s/a content, ultimately defending it by saying, "...It is simply the cost of free speech and being the only active site not to impose more 'laws' than those that were passed in Washington, D.C."

It should be noted that 8chan is also the home base of many mass shooters (some examples being the Christchurch shooter and the El Paso shooter, who both posted their manifestos on the site), Qanon conspiracy, Gamergate, and various memes that were reposted on X by Trump in 2016. Following the Christchurch shooting in New Zealand, the Australian telecom company Telstra banned access to websites such as Liveleak, 4chan, and 8chan, among others, in Australia for hosting the live stream video of Tarrant's massacre. In a culture and time period where offensive content was so easily accessible, humor was in demand; it suddenly became a competition for many to see who could make the most offensive and innovative joke, to the point where people started outdoing themselves and each other. Subject matters would evolve from verbal jokes about offensive topics to visual media, such as depictions of gore, rape, violence, or other obscene material. A less extreme example would be troll<sup>25</sup> content creator Frank Hassle who was banned from YouTube for the overall nature of his videos, getting a lot of traction for videos in which he harassed, or in his terms "Hassled," individuals. Frank Hassle is known within offensive and edgy meme communities for his crudely drawn full-back tattoo of the Twin Towers being hit by an airplane with dismembered bodies jumping out of the buildings.

Another thing to note is how meme culture works with hate campaigns such as Kekistan, Gamergate, and even Boogaloo Boys. This shows how this humorous media leads people, primarily

---

<sup>24</sup> Homophily: People seek out relationships with people similar to them

<sup>25</sup> Troll: A person who is purposely offensive online or in person

young boys, down a rabbit hole of hatred and violence. In his apology video, Ian Jomha referred to this when he said he had indoctrinated people into certain beliefs. By the time adolescents and young adults reach these communities, many have already been “redpilled<sup>26</sup>” by YouTube subcommunities such as the Intellectual Dark Web<sup>27</sup>, later driving them up the Pyramid of Hate into Systemic Discrimination, giving them a voice in politics through their votes, matching their ideology that stemmed from their humor. Going back to Jomha’s statement about his fans being “Antisocial” and “Weird,” Jomha himself, being the most open about his past out of the three creators talked about, spoke about not having many friends in his life. In Jomha’s case, it can be said that, while toxic and parasocial, he created a community of his own to make up for it. For adolescents and young adults who experience loneliness or rejection, especially when they are male, there is a pull into the Incel subcommunities of the Manosphere. These communities, also based on satire and irony, have been identified as domestic terrorists by the FBI, which has created a Domestic Terrorism Reference guide to track Involuntary Celibate Violent Extremism, umbrella terming both “Incel” and “Alt-Right” within the same guide. One of the main perpetrators in the shift to violence from Incel communities would be a young adult, only 22 years of age, by the name of Elliot Rodger. Elliot Rodger, known as the Supreme Gentleman, is renowned in these communities for his shooting in Isla Vista, with other mass murderers, such as Alek Minassian, better known as the Toronto van murderer, praising and almost worshiping him. Another notable mass murder is the El Paso, Texas mall shooter Mauricio Garcia who was a self-described Incel and member of the Alt-Right community, even branding large Nazi tattoos over his chest and arms. Garcia, a Hispanic man, shows how Alt-Right Neo-Nazi ideology is not exclusive to Aryan individuals. It is essentially brainwashing, slowly but steadily, teaching hate against Jews, women, and racial/ethnic minorities, even to individuals who fall within these communities.

All three creators mentioned, Felix Kjellberg, George Miller, and Ian Jomha, played some part in introducing hateful, offensive, and derogatory language and behaviors. The topics of antisemitism, the normalization of slurs, or the encouragement of offensive humor all open the doors to both Alt-Right and Manosphere ideology. From here, adolescents and young adults may get pushed further down the Alt-Right YouTube pipeline, which has been officially acknowledged by academic institutions such as Berkeley, Harvard, and Davis, into politically charged material. At this stage, there is exposure to “SJW Cringe” compilations, “Feminist Gets Owned” debates, “Facts don’t care about your feelings” rhetoric, or even “All Lives Matter” arguments. This transition is not because PewDiePie, FilthyFrank, and iDubbbz are bigoted, antisemitic racists; it is because they microdosed hateful ideology to their fans inadvertently through humor, desensitizing, and teaching young viewers to laugh at dark topics at an age where many are not even educated or versed in the issues they are laughing at. That makes digesting even more extreme rhetoric easier, making the transition into the Intellectual Dark Web much easier.

Additionally, YouTube’s algorithm once played a part in this. Despite little information about how it works, it can be speculated that YouTube would categorize videos or creators into niches, later recommending content adjacent to those niches and finally recommending content adjacent to the adjoining niche. For example, watching creators like PewDiePie, FilthyFrank, and iDubbbz opened the doors to Intellectual Dark Web Youtubers such as Ben Shapiro or Alex Jones, who share similar commentary and humor styles and later expose users to much more extreme content.

---

<sup>26</sup> Redpill: Originating from the 1999 film *The Matrix*, this term refers to an awakening to difficult truths among reality, often used by extremist communities

<sup>27</sup> Intellectual Dark Web: An online network of academic renegades in opposition of political correctness, cancel culture and identity politics

All in all, the influence of meme culture in politics and extremist ideology should not be overlooked. As this new wave of extremist ideology is on the rise, the takeaway question to conclude here is now: what can be done to intervene? Understanding that adolescents and young adults are most impressionable to indoctrination into the Manosphere or the Alt-Right and that often, they wander into these groups in search of community, how can spaces be created to educate and guide them while providing the community they desire? Creators such as PewDiePie, FilthyFrank, and iDubbz have all changed who they were because of these communities, so there is always time for others to educate themselves and redefine who they are as people.

## Sources

1. NonCompete. (2019, March 23). The PewDiePipeline: How racist humor leads to violence [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnmRYRRDbuw>
2. Russell, A. (2023, December 13). YouTube video recommendations lead to more extremist content for right-leaning users, researchers suggest. UC Davis. <https://www.ucdavis.edu/curiosity/news/youtube-video-recommendations-lead-more-extremist-content-right-leaning-users-researchers>
3. Haroon, M., Wojcieszak, M., Chhabra, A., Liu, X., Mohapatra, P., & Shafiq, Z. (2023). Auditing YouTube's recommendation system for ideologically congenial, extreme, and problematic recommendations. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 120(50). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2213020120>
4. Roose, K. (2017, June 8). The making of a YouTube radical. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/06/08/technology/youtube-radical.html>
5. Basu, T. (2020, January 29). YouTube's algorithm seems to be funneling people to alt-right videos. *MIT Technology Review*. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/01/29/276000/a-study-of-youtube-comments-shows-how-its-turning-people-onto-the-alt-right/>
6. Nagle, A. (2017, December). The lost boys. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/brotherhood-of-losers/544158/>
7. Aleem, Z. (2023, July 3). The Ron DeSantis video all but calls for eliminating trans people. *MSNBC*. <https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/ron-desantis-ad-video-trans-lgbtq-rcna92392>
8. Bailey, D., Brown, D., Qurashi, S., Louizu, D., Rodgers, L., & Shah, P. (2019, March 18). Christchurch shootings: How the attacks unfolded. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47582183>
9. Macklin, G. (2019). The Christchurch attacks: Livestream terror in the viral video age. *CTC Sentinel*, 12(6), 18–29. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/christchurch-attacks-livestream-terror-viral-video-age/>
10. Brotherton, L. (2021, March 7). While Joji takes over, we still haven't forgotten about Filthy Frank. *The Michigan Daily*. <https://www.michigandaily.com/arts/while-joji-takes-over-we-still-havent-forgotten-about-filthy-frank/>
11. Kelley, C. (2017, December 7). Singer/Producer Joji on his career flip from crude viral comedy to understated R&B: 'Now I get to do stuff that I want to hear.' *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/joji-interview-will-he-filthy-frank-8061822/>
12. Crow, D. (2020, April 14). American Psycho: A vital satire of fragile masculinity. *Den of Geek*. <https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/american-psycho-vital-satire-of-masculinity/>
13. Vincent, J. (2021, May 7). LiveLeak, the internet's font of gore and violence, has shut down. *The Verge*. <https://www.theverge.com/2021/5/7/22424356/liveleak-shock-site-shuts-down-itemfix>
14. Pappas, S. (2023, February 28). Is the alpha wolf idea a myth? *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/is-the-alpha-wolf-idea-a-myth/>
15. Arduini-VanHoose, N. (2020). Peer relationships. *Pressbooks*. <https://adolescentpsychology.pressbooks.sunycreate.cloud/chapter/peer-relationships/>

16. Dishion, T. J., & Tipsord, J. M. (2011). Peer contagion in child and adolescent social and emotional development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 62, 189-214.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100412>
17. Ghosh, S. (2017, August 17). PewDiePie said he won't make any more Nazi jokes after Charlottesville. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/pewdiepie-said-he-wont-make-any-more-nazi-jokes-after-charlottesville-2017-8>
18. Anti-Defamation League. (2021). Pyramid of hate. [https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pyramid-of-hate-web-english\\_1.pdf](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pyramid-of-hate-web-english_1.pdf)
19. Nelson, L. (2016, September 28). Why the Anti-Defamation League just put the Pepe the Frog meme on its hate symbols list. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/2016/9/21/12893656/pepe-frog-donald-trump>
20. BBC News. (2018, April 25). Elliot Rodger: How misogynist killer became "incel hero." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43892189>
21. Zadrozny, B., Kube, C., Dilanian, K., & Ortiz, E. (2023, May 8). Texas mall shooter ranted against Jews, women and racial minorities on apparent social media page. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbc.com/news/us-news/texas-mall-shooter-shared-extremist-beliefs-jews-women-apparent-social-rcna83336>
22. Rodger, E. (n.d.). *My twisted world: The story of Elliot Rodger*. [https://www.karenfranklin.com/files/rodger\\_manifesto.pdf](https://www.karenfranklin.com/files/rodger_manifesto.pdf)
23. Martínez, V., Jiménez-Molina, Á., & Gerber, M. M. (2023). Social contagion, violence, and suicide among adolescents. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 36(3), 237-242.  
<https://doi.org/10.1097/YCO.0000000000000858>
24. Willinger, U., Hergovich, A., Schmoeger, M., Deckert, M., Stoettner, S., Bunda, I., Witting, A., Seidler, M., Moser, R., Kacena, S., Jaeckle, D., Loader, B., Mueller, C., & Auff, E. (2017). Cognitive and emotional demands of black humour processing: The role of intelligence, aggressiveness and mood. *Cognitive Processing*, 18(2), 159-167. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10339-016-0789-y>
25. Anti-Defamation League. (2019). From alt right to alt lite: Naming the hate. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190422202936/https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/from-alt-right-to-alt-lite-naming-the-hate>
26. Ribeiro, M. H., Ottoni, R., West, R., Almeida, V. A., & Meira Jr, W. (2020, January). Auditing radicalization pathways on YouTube. In *Proceedings of the 2020 conference on fairness, accountability, and transparency* (pp. 131-141).
27. Bernardini, G. (2021, February 16). Why Swedish YouTube star PewDiePie's videos have been banned in India. *Distractify*. [https://www.distractify.com/p/pewdiepie-banned-in-india?fbclid=IwAR3DscOhG2dMYLBCN-bfroj-\\_NgrIT0FyBTCabYYOtKxbCcwYQGoeCgpPo4](https://www.distractify.com/p/pewdiepie-banned-in-india?fbclid=IwAR3DscOhG2dMYLBCN-bfroj-_NgrIT0FyBTCabYYOtKxbCcwYQGoeCgpPo4)
28. Winkler, R., Nicas, J., & Fritz, B. (2017). Disney severs ties with YouTube star PewDiePie after anti-Semitic posts. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/disney-severs-ties-with-youtube-star-pewdiepie-after-anti-semitic-posts-1487034533>

## On Mexican American Identity

Zachary Gomez

The immigrant experience in America is plagued with forced assimilation, xenophobia, and colonial methods of violence. Here, the effects of these attitudes will be analyzed in the context of the Mexican American community. The Mexican American people have had a long, intertwined history with the United States. Yet, their emergence as a distinct ethnic and politically conscious group would be fought for well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, their experience creating a new identity has been co-opted in attempts to homogenize and erase their culture, traditions, and values. Incarceration, education, and cultural hegemony will be heavily considered here.

In this essay, Mexican American will be used to refer to any person of Mexican origin who has immigrated to the United States or those who are US-born children of Mexican immigrants. This will help to see systemic impacts on these people as a whole. It will also serve as a boundary on which to focus. Due to its political connotation and relatively recent conception of this identity, I will refrain from using Chicano to refer to the larger group. This is mainly because Chicano will be used to discuss the political consciousness and activism that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, violence will be used in reference to Fanon's identification of physical and psychological colonial violence. Finally, I will form this analysis through a decolonial, Marxist, and theoretical approach.

The history of Mexican American people dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the origins of this group coming as a result of the Mexican-American War. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded about half of Mexico's land to the United States (Smith & Green, 2019, p. 51). This land would later become states, including California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Once absorbed into the US, former Mexican nationals became alienated from their land. This cession can be considered the creation of the Mexican American identity. The politics of thousands of newly patriated people served to create this binational identity. However, in this new territory, they faced forced assimilation through the enforcement of American values.

In this situation, decolonial thinker Frantz Fanon poses that all colonial establishments are violent, especially regarding the mind. "The colonist makes history. His life is an epic, an odyssey... 'We made this land.' He is the guarantor for its existence. 'If we leave, all will be lost, and this land will return to the dark ages'" (Fanon, 2021, pp. 14-15). The enforcement of the colonial nation becomes a violent act because it is rooted in the upheaval of all previous ways of knowing and being. The colonial conception operates based on order--a supposed state of order that otherwise would have been lost to "less advanced" people. Furthermore, Fanon (2021) states, "The colonist makes history, and he knows it... The history he writes is therefore not the history of the country he is despoiling, but the history of his own nation's looting, raping, and starving to death" (p. 15). The narrative of the US simply moving west during the 19<sup>th</sup> century is clearly disproven by the Mexican-American War. The politics behind the escalation to war deserve its discourse, but it bears acknowledging that in Mexico, the event is known as the "War of the North American Invasion" (Smith & Green, 2019, p. 52). This fabricated narrative completely erases the cruel realities of war and the loss of national identity of all those who lived in what is now the American Southwest.

In the contemporary stage, Mexican Americans are among the poorest and least educated demographics in the US. Inaccessible education results in non-existent social credit among Mexican Americans, which also inhibits their social mobility. This exclusion from being able to participate in society intellectually is a standard tool of oppression but also serves to homogenize and assimilate a group of people. Here, the Chicano identity is fundamental to understanding the motivation behind this. The Chicano identity became prominent in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and represented the rise of

political consciousness among Mexican Americans. The Chicano attitude was broadly anti-capitalist, decolonial, and emancipatory. This represented a danger to American hegemony and, in the eyes of the nation, necessitated a counter-revolutionary force in response.

The US prison industrial complex is primarily among the systems of oppression that shape and depoliticize Mexican Americans. Where this converges with the Mexican American identity is the creation of easily manipulatable people. Foucault similarly used the prison analogy to show how societies of discipline enact docility in people to strip them of their self-possession and self-assertion. Most importantly, Foucault uses this example to demonstrate that the disciplinary methods of the prison are present in all facets of our life. “On the whole, therefore, one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social ‘quarantine,’ to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of ‘panopticism’” (Foucault, 2009, p. 216). It becomes then that the individual conducts themselves in conformity to the disciplinary society through coercion or the threat of violence. There is a direct correlation between the incarceration of Mexican Americans serving as a general crime deterrent and as a deterrent from acting outside of conformity to white society.

Settler colonial violence is not only confined to these previous methods of oppression we see in society. We can see that even the manufactured narrative of the “immigrant story” is also a tool of control and violence in forging the Mexican American identity. Throughout history, the US has set out to create a unified and homogenized “American” identity to rid individuals of their culture, heritage, and traditions. This is present in how the US attempts to homogenize immigration. The “immigrant story” refers to the model minority that immigrates legally to the US. This completely revises the experiences of millions who have fled their homes in search of economic opportunity, education, and refuge, for example.

This observation is based on Fanon’s analysis of settler-colonial violence but also becomes a fitting example of Deleuze’s theories on difference and repetition. Specifically, this theory presents itself in two significant ways. Deleuze (1994) gives a brief overview of difference and repetition, saying:

Far from grounding repetition, law shows, rather, how repetition would remain impossible for pure subjects of law – particulars. It condemns them to change. As an empty form of difference, an invariable form of variation, a law compels its subjects to illustrate it only at the cost of their own change. (p. 2)

The primary instance of this philosophy is present in the concept of the narrative of the “immigrant story.” The hegemonic structures of the US attempt to create a singular and deeply structured story to distort the reality of immigrant diversity. Here, the difference is followed by violence through integration. First-generation Americans, the children of immigrant parents, are subjected to repetition as they are again homogenized, not as a singular model immigrant but, instead, they become integrated as Americans.

Feminist writer Elizabeth Martinez explores the erasure of Mexican and Chicano identity in the US education system. On the historical outline in a California state fourth-grade level book, Martinez (2017) says:

Nowhere can we see the laborers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who were violently repressed and driven off the land – often even lynched... It doesn’t say that they [Mexicans] formed the original population of Los Angeles and have continued to be a strong presence for more than 200 years. (p. 34)

This is a clear example of Deleuze's theory in practice. We see here that Mexican Americans, in this case, are constrained by systems of oppression, which, in turn, subjects them to the violence of similarity. The "empty difference" comes by way of the attempts to homogenize the immigrant story and erase the Mexican American identity.

Education and cultural hegemony are essential to understanding the molding of Mexican American identity. Working from the traditional Marxist framework, Antonio Gramsci proposed that capitalist society is not only informed by the base mode of production. Instead, he highlighted that the state, media, economic forces, and public institutions unified to instill conformity in the people. The previous quote from Elizabeth Martinez is vital because it is directly from a California fourth-grade textbook. This demonstrates an apparent effort to use structures of power in the erasure of a minority group.

This weaponization of a public institution is reminiscent of Gramsci's writing on education. Gramsci (1971) observed the Italian education system of his time, saying, "The fundamental division into classical and vocational (professional) schools was a rational formula: the vocational school for the instrumental classes, the classical school for the dominant classes and the intellectuals" (p. 26). It is important to note that both these groups of children were ultimately pushed to serve the interests of capital, physically and intellectually. Here, the example used for Mexican American identity does not directly correlate to an outcome determining children's future careers. Instead, it shows the state apparatus using education to deprive this group of their true history. They are intellectually confined to the standards and learning outcomes created by a state working against their capabilities to understand the realities of settler-colonialism. Political consciousness is stunted by this, in turn, because Mexican Americans are effectively being robbed of their heritage and history.

Overall, the Mexican American identity journey has been fraught with resistance from settler-colonial forces. These forces have worked to homogenize Mexican Americans to assimilate them into a more unified "white" nation. The orchestrated efforts between these forces have seen success in "Americanizing" Mexican Americans, especially those who have been in the US for several generations. This has been in retaliation to the growing political awareness of Mexican Americans, whose fight for representation and equality is still alive and well. In conclusion, this exploration of Mexican American identity is not only an analysis of the systems of oppression that shape people. Instead, I aim to use this as a motivator for readers to understand the plight of Mexican Americans and to continue to resist the systems that try to "Americanize" all who exist in contradiction to whiteness. This struggle extends beyond politics; it is a fight for dignity, emancipation, and humanity.

## References

- Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and Repetition*. Columbia University Press.
- Fanon, F. (2021). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.
- Foucault, M. (2009). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison notebooks*. International Publishers.
- Martínez, E. S. (2017). *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century*. Verso.
- Smith, P. H., & Green, J. N. (2019). *Modern Latin America* (9th ed.). Oxford University Press.

## Is the American Dream Realistic for the Average American?

Kathia Contreras

The United States has claimed equal opportunities for success; it is a place where all your goals, hopes, and dreams can come true, but is this the case for most Americans? We claim democracy and freedom, but contrary to some beliefs, the U.S. has never been perfect. I am sure most Americans have heard the saying, “If you work hard enough, you can achieve anything,” which some might argue that this quote could be debatable, and it really could. Undoubtedly, the U.S. has positively impacted people’s lives, but there is always a negative side to everything.

### Important Issues and Billionaires

For quite a while now, the American people have kept repeating the same thing: that the American Dream is “at stake.” In the podcast *Bernie: The Podcast*, Bernie Sanders, the United States Senator of Vermont, speaks about important issues that are not discussed in politics:

“What is the most important issue? I would say it’s the growth of oligarchy in the United States of America....it means that as a nation today, we have more income and wealth inequality than we ever had in the history of this country... We talk about America being the nation of opportunity and democracy. Everybody gets a fair share of all of that nice rhetoric. Where is the outrage? *Where is* the outrage? A few blocks away from you, people are sleeping out on the streets, schools are falling apart, moms can’t afford to take care of their kids because we have the highest rates of child poverty of almost any major country on earth.”

This is one of the many issues in the United States that contribute to the death of the American Dream. Whether you prefer capitalism, socialism, communism, etc., we must face that billionaires should not exist. The wealth gap between the 1% of extremely wealthy people and the rest of the American people is unimaginable and should not be made something that is normal.

No person needs to have billions of dollars when so many people in need have nothing. There can be no equality in America when you only have a small group of highly successful wealthy people who have so much more influence in politics and our world. That is not what democracy is. How can one have the American Dream when we cannot determine our fates? It is not an opinion that the wealth gap keeps widening; it is a fact. So, what does this tell us? The American Compass website shares that:

“With income growth concentrated at the top, middle-income households have not successfully accumulated savings in recent decades, which also means they have not shared in the gains from rapidly rising asset values. Over the past 30 years, top-quintile households gained nearly \$500,000 in liquid net worth on average (after excluding the top 1%), while households in the middle quintile saw their debt rise faster than their financial assets. This is not the widespread prosperity that market capitalism is supposed to generate, and it is not an outcome that Americans at any income level should accept.”

You will struggle financially if you are not in the top 1% of wealthy individuals. With inflation hitting everywhere, more and more Americans are living paycheck to paycheck.

## Wealth Taxation

This brings us to our next topic: should we tax the rich more? I cannot speak for everyone, but most people I have met do not like paying taxes. Although taxes are necessary for the construction of roads, funding of schools, parks, etc., many Americans seem to be upset about the amount of money taxes take away from our paychecks. According to Oxfam America:

“Billionaires in the U.S. pay a smaller tax rate than most teachers and retail workers. Thanks to a tax code that favors income from wealth over income from work—and a slew of tax-avoidance strategies—the richest among us end up paying a smaller percentage of their income to the federal government than most working families. Here's what we know: U.S. billionaires are 46 percent, or \$1.6 trillion, richer than in 2020. According to a 2021 White House study, the wealthiest 400 billionaire families in the U.S. paid an average federal individual tax rate of just 8.2 percent. For comparison, the average American taxpayer in the same year paid 13 percent... Taxing the rich would pay incredible dividends in ending poverty and injustice. Calculations from Oxfam found that a progressive wealth tax on US multi-millionaires and billionaires could generate \$664 billion every year to help lift people out of poverty.”

There is no reasonable excuse for billionaires not to pay their fair share. Why do working-class Americans spend more than wealthier Americans who will not be affected as much when that money is reduced from their paycheck? These top percenters of wealthy individuals are often worth so much because of their stock money; unfortunately, it is not taxable. For example, according to *Vox*—a journalistic YouTube channel—Jeff Bezos, the richest person in America, is wealthy because of his stocks on Amazon, so he pays “almost nothing in taxes.” In the video, they state: “Some billionaires, like Elon Musk, can get loans against their stocks and live off that. They don’t need to sell the stock to turn it into spendable money. No sale, no taxes.” This is how easily these billionaires can avoid paying their fair share, and it is not ethical when there are people in the working class who live paycheck to paycheck and yet pay higher percentages of their little earnings.

## Regressive and Progressive Tax

There is a difference between regressive taxing and progressive taxing. In progressive taxing, the more the individual makes, the more they pay taxes. Our federal income tax system is seen as progressive taxing because the tax brackets increase the more you make. Regressive taxing takes a more significant percentage from low-income earners. Sales taxes are more regressive because lower-income families have less money they can afford to save, so 5 percent of all their spending becomes a higher percentage than the higher-income families that have more money available to save. A 2019 research paper titled “Progressive Wealth Taxation” stated that:

“A well-enforced wealth tax would be a powerful tool to restore progressivity at the top of the U.S. income and wealth distribution. It would increase the tax rate of wealthy families who can currently escape progressive income taxation by realizing little income relative to their true economic income. Despite the rise of inequality, the U.S. tax system has become less progressive in recent decades. The three traditional progressive taxes—the individual income tax, the corporate income tax, and the estate tax—have weakened.”

## Case Study

The website *nttm* has a case study of several people struggling to live in America. Melissa Fonseca is one of many struggling Americans in the working class. She works as a cashier clerk in Walgreens and works full-time at minimum wage. She has unfortunately lived in poverty for most of her life, and she also has bad credit, which keeps her out of resources that she needs, like buying a car. Fonseca expresses that “[She] can’t really finance anything because [her] interest rates are going to be high because of [her] credit. [She doesn’t] want [the] [Bickerdike] to be [her] forever home, but [she] [doesn’t] think [she] can afford it.” Fonseca is tied to her poverty, and the only loan she ever qualified for was a payday loan, which is high interest and can equal her paying more money than the actual loan if she doesn’t pay it back after her next payday. Fonseca also wants an education, hoping this could help her move upward financially. She expresses her concerns in the article:

“I was stuck. How many classes do I take? How am I able to work and go to school? I just can’t work and do not have an income because I’m the only person in the house with an income. I was overwhelmed.” Fonseca says she ‘doesn’t want this to be it’ and is contemplating taking time off work to ‘figure out how to do school... It was all so complicated, but I need to get it done.’”

Many Americans are in this exact situation. They are stopped from advancing and living with stability because they have always been in an unlucky position that has prevented them from moving forward. How is this the American Dream? People like Fonseca deserve better. They deserve opportunities that help them and their families have peace at least once.

## Homelessness

When it comes to buying homes, there are not many affordable options. There has been an increase in the prices of homes in recent years. This issue affects most of the working-class population and is mainly caused by wealthy investors who buy homes only to rent them out to others at a higher price. This creates competition between homeowners and sellers as well. This is also one of the many reasons why many younger people in America do not move out of their parent's homes at 18 anymore. This, unfortunately, also causes a vast amount of homelessness. Whether it was to escape an abusive home, get kicked out of your home, or get pushed out of the foster system, lots of young people can quickly go homeless considering that they genuinely cannot afford a home, especially in states like California, where most livable homes are selling at about \$500,000 for just three rooms and two bathrooms. This money is not reasonable for young Americans, especially not while earning minimum wage.

## Labor Unions

People who are in labor unions are usually working-class individuals. Many do not always view them positively, but what they fight for tries to help the American Dream become a reality for many lower-class people. Unions protest working conditions and unethical wages. Unfortunately, policy decisions such as *Glacier Northwest Inc. v. International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local Union No. 174* have favored “job creators” rather than the working class. The website *EPI*, short for *Economic Policy Institute*, states that:

“Workers still clearly have the right to strike, but the Court’s decision opens the floodgates for employers to weaponize financially burdensome state court litigation as a pressure tactic against workers and unions. The decision could have been worse—it contains some guardrails that may help limit the damage and provide unions with defenses because it doesn’t allow lawsuits for economic harm under any and all

circumstances. But it's still a very harmful decision that hands employers another way to suppress worker organizing and reduce worker power.”

They further state what exactly happened in this case:

“Workers for Glacier, a corporation that sells and delivers quick-dry concrete, went on strike during an impasse in negotiations after their prior contract—with its no-strike clause— expired. Once the strike started, drivers returned to the company parking lot, leaving the trucks running with the drums that contained the concrete, which were still turning to avoid drying the concrete and damaging the trucks. Although the strike was predictable, Glacier had no contingency plan and scrambled to remove the concrete from the trucks’ drums. The trucks were unharmed, but some concrete was unusable. Glacier filed a tort lawsuit against the union in Washington state court for financial damages caused by the strike.”

This example shows how harmful the consequences of these strikes can be. Because these policies sided with the job creators, they could easily be sued for the damage they caused. This also gives labor unions a bad reputation, which will not look good for them or other unions.

### **Overall Inequality**

Inequality in America can have so many meanings. There is racial inequality, sexism, homophobia, healthcare, and so much more. This essay would never end if I discussed every topic that hurts the American Dream. Whether it is economic or social issues, the United States has not heard of the end of it. It is not all bad here in the U.S., and there are numerous upsides to living here, but much work needs to be done. We must make America a place where the younger generations can live and afford to live. If the economy gets worse, it will be impossible to live the American Dream, and there might be an increase in homelessness and suicide rates. What America wants to be is being gatekept by the higher elites in our society, who want to ensure that there is no room for the working class to rise and live that dream. This makes us wonder if there ever was a true American Dream for everybody and if that ever happened.

### **Counterargument**

Jeffrey McNeil wrote an interesting essay titled “The American Dream Isn’t Dead, It’s Just Misunderstood.” McNeil writes a positive and inspiring message that includes the hardships that he went through and how he overcame them. He believes, “It’s one thing to dream, but don’t complain about America if you are not willing to fight, get knocked down, and pick yourself back up again.” This is true; you cannot be willing to give up on your first try after failing, and sometimes, certain things are just not meant for you. For McNeil, the American Dream is “Follow your dreams, and you will succeed in America. It might not be a success as you think of it right now. The American Dream isn’t about getting rich. It’s about living life the way you want to, and that is something we still have the freedom to choose every single day.” I agree with this statement, but only to a certain extent. His viewpoint of the American Dream differs from what I have spoken of in this essay, but it does not mean that what he says is false. Money is not equivalent to happiness but is also not comparable to stability and equality. His message is positive, which can be inspiring. Still, the happiness and level of satisfaction with the American Dream is on a personal level of being content with the little opportunities that you get, which is a good message, but not the overall idea of the American Dream as a whole; that is why I assume it is misunderstood.

## Conclusion

So, is the American Dream realistic for the average American? Not exactly, unless you are a white man in the 50s. There is still racism going on (contrary to some people's beliefs), sexism is still very prominent, and there is a political divide, economic disasters, and corrupt politicians. We need to progress positively in society, starting in politics and government. Working hard enough is not the answer: we must work smarter and be kinder to one another. There will always be issues, but there are always answers to those issues.

## Bibliography

- Sanders, Bernie. "Oligarchy". Bernie: The Podcast. March 27, 2024.  
[https://open.spotify.com/episode/60V1x4aDuRmK1rQIULGg6l?si=qQkJ20MMSmKfjAe\\_kQbjHw](https://open.spotify.com/episode/60V1x4aDuRmK1rQIULGg6l?si=qQkJ20MMSmKfjAe_kQbjHw)
- American Compass. "A Guide to U.S. Economic Inequality." American Compass, November 8, 2023.  
[https://americancompass.org/economic-inequality-guide/?gad\\_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwzZmwBhD8ARIsAH4v1gVzc3NAipmaMWfeYQLXdiqtTqTJ6g0cb1T6Je30mbsQizDxI9GCLiYaAnPREALw\\_wcB](https://americancompass.org/economic-inequality-guide/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwzZmwBhD8ARIsAH4v1gVzc3NAipmaMWfeYQLXdiqtTqTJ6g0cb1T6Je30mbsQizDxI9GCLiYaAnPREALw_wcB).
- Oxfam. "Do the Rich Pay Their Fair Share?" Oxfam, January 14, 2024.  
<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/stories/do-the-rich-pay-their-fair-share/>.
- Vox. "How the Rich Avoid Paying Taxes." YouTube, July 8, 2021.  
<https://youtu.be/t6V9i8fFADI?si=grDVvLeuOVf0jK9S>.
- Saez, Emmanuel, and Gabriel Zucman. "Progressive Wealth Taxation." Gabriel Zucman, 2019.  
<https://gabriel-zucman.eu/files/SaezZucman2019BPEA.pdf>.
- Asiegbu, Grace. "Melissa Fonseca: Stories: FIRSTHAND: Living in Poverty." WTTW Chicago, January 5, 2024. <https://interactive.wttw.com/firsthand/living-in-poverty/stories/melissa-fonseca>.
- Asiegbu, Grace. "Melissa Fonseca: Stories: FIRSTHAND: Living in Poverty." WTTW Chicago, January 5, 2024. <https://interactive.wttw.com/firsthand/living-in-poverty/stories/melissa-fonseca>.
- Gerstein, Terri. "The Supreme Court Sided with Corporations over Workers-Again." Economic Policy Institute, 2023. <https://www.epi.org/blog/the-supreme-court-sided-with-corporations-over-workers-again/>.

## HandiCapitalism

Jesus Gabriel Valdez Huezo

Capitalism shapes who we are and how we value ourselves and everyone else under the system. Everywhere, people define who they are and see their value based on their work. Sometimes, someone might introduce themselves with their name and what they do for a living because both become part of their identity. This, of course, comes with exceptions; few of us would rarely, if ever, openly introduce ourselves with our disabilities during our first interactions with others, but both what someone does for work and how someone is defined as disabled are a product of the labor market under a capitalist economic infrastructure. The labor market creates the opportunities to employ a worker and makes the rules as to why someone would not have these opportunities, but we hardly ever focus on the latter. Russell and Rosenthal write, “In Social Security law, disabled means medically unable to engage in work activity” (2019). This legal definition focuses on how an individual is a problem, labeling them as defective, which directs the attention to what they cannot do when, in reality, this is an infrastructural problem. Doing this shifts the blame on the individual and critiques them for the lack of participation when the infrastructure should be to blame. Still, capitalist interests try to exclude less exploitable workers from the labor market to maximize profitability. Through a feminist lens, we see that the constraints placed on individuals with disabilities are rooted in the structural design of our societies that inherently perpetuates inequalities under the economic infrastructure of a capitalist system.

Skills are situational, meaning their usefulness varies depending on the time and place. However, because of the way society has been constructed, only a specific set of skills can be effectively utilized if the worker is deemed fit. People get opportunities to join the workforce and apply these skills only if they fit into a mold using compulsory able-bodiedness. All humans are unique, which means their skills can manifest in different ways, which implies that diversity is natural, and being open to accepting these skills is crucial because they can play an important role in helping improve society. Unfortunately, when someone lacks in a specific area, whether that is mentally or physically, a capitalist system does an excellent job of focusing on where that person lacks strength using compulsory able-bodiedness; after all, the infrastructure created is for the able-bodied. These structures materialize the conditions of what makes someone a candidate for production, using able-bodiedness as a marker to decide whether someone can adapt to the workplace conditions or not. This is done by those at the top of the hierarchy; the managers and owners are oppressive and use their power and privilege to maintain normalcy since that is what is easy and most cost-effective.

Compulsory able-bodiedness functions as a marker for what the worker should resemble. A white male who is not differently-abled is the mold we are expected to fit in the workforce, which is an unrealistic measure but still has a hold on the labor market. This marker imposes a romantic version of what we could have been onto ourselves because, in theory, there is a perfect version of ourselves that has no disabilities and fits the ideal mold. After all, it would eliminate all inequalities that come with having an identity that is not as favorable. Feminists fight for equality through acceptance; this means getting rid of the marker that compulsory able-bodiedness creates because, in reality, you are the only version of yourself, and that is what should be acceptable. Growth can occur, but people cannot and should not feel like they need to outgrow their disabilities when that is not an option. Navigating spaces should not make people feel like they are the problem because of their inability to adapt to the environment when structures could be changed and adapted. Humans created these spaces, but they still only include people who fit the mold; it is open to more than anyone.

When competing for jobs, they try to present themselves as the perfect fit for that position. Sometimes, that means not talking about your disabilities to get the job because you need to work to survive. Concealing a disability can happen in many different ways: for example, in an interview, when the person trying to get the job refrains from voluntarily letting the employer know they have a disability until after they are hired, or when someone decides not to seek disability support programs on their school campus when they do provide the support because the label disability becomes even more accurate when it is carried around social spaces. The stigmas surrounding the labels “disabled” or “handicapped” sometimes make one feel like a burden when they simply are just navigating life to the best of their ability.

In the advancement of industrialization, we are expected to function as machines, which is where the value of our bodies is materialized. If one cannot effectively and efficiently use one's body, that person will not get hired because it would negatively affect production. The problems of commodifying the human body remain overlooked. When people are viewed through the lens of a capitalist, individuals are reduced to mere commodities, valued primarily for their profitability rather than their inherent worth as human beings. This perspective often ignores the human consequences. When people are wage laborers, they are objectified and hold a specific value. That value is based on their ability to perform work, which creates competition between the workers. Competition is good because it creates a friendly way to push each other to do better. Still, the labor market is becoming competitive in accessing education, healthcare, food, and housing. People have to compete for survival. Reducing humans to commodities not only takes a toll on those who have to do the work, but it also displaces those who are differently-abled. People with disabilities might not be able to physically or mentally keep up with the demands of a job without the proper accommodations to the workplace. Looking at the human consequences within a capitalist economic system reveals that discrimination is deeply ingrained in its foundation.

Changing and adapting infrastructure and modes of production will affect capital gains, which is why it is avoided. The central oppression faced by the differently-abled is a lack of accommodation. Now that technology exists because of advancements, structural design has yet to be addressed in many places. For example, some areas might be inaccessible to people if the only way to get to them requires stairs. Creating ramps to help make places more accessible is not impossible; it just requires more holistic thinking because there needs to be more consideration for differently-abled people. There are also options like adding elevators and automatic doors. Other technological advancements that would help accommodate differently-abled people are called “Assistive Technologies,” which are, according to Access Force, “Any piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to improve the functional capabilities of people with disabilities is considered assistive technology” (2023). These different technologies include mobility devices, voice-activated devices, and speaking machines. The hard part about acquiring these technologies is how expensive they can be. Other accommodations would help, like having cognitive aids and sensory aids available to workers. Still, there is pushback for creating accommodations in the workplace because it would require spending, but that adds to the cost of production, which is why there has been resistance from the owners and managers (Russell & Rosenthal, 2019). When looking at the complaints of differently-abled people to see why they were fired, employment discrimination is highlighted because 32.1 percent of the people with disabilities were laid off. After all, the employer failed to provide reasonable accommodation (Russell & Rosenthal, 2019). Once again, the infrastructure prohibits differently-abled people from working: it is not the individual; the problem lies in the infrastructure's framework. Instead of working with differently-abled people, managers and owners work against them and reproduce disabilities by resisting spending on accommodation.

While accommodation is possible and would allow differently-abled people in the workplace, it comes with a price that companies want to avoid paying. Russell and Rosenthal write, “The ADA itself explicitly states that employers are not required to provide an accommodation if it would impose an “undue hardship” on the business. The disabled person’s theoretical right to an accommodation is no right at all; it is dependent upon the employer’s calculus” (Russell, 2019). Anything that will harm profits will be excluded, and people who need accommodations will be no exception. Once capitalism sees how much it can exploit the non-disabled, those profits will be set as a sort of marker for the baseline of production. The non-disabled creates the expectations; if you cannot keep up, you will not be part of the production. Changing the infrastructure will impact the company's capital, which is something to avoid at all costs because, in the mind of the bourgeoisie, profits end up being protected above all else.

Being disabled not only imposes infrastructural restrictions by excluding individuals from the workforce but also carries social stigma, limiting opportunities and perpetuating inequalities outside the workplace. If the workers cannot adapt, then they are deemed unfit and sometimes labeled as disabled, creating yet another hierarchy that is not biological but social. We can break molds and be more inclusive to differently-abled people only after we start asking questions about how we fit into the system. Inckle (2015) describes how to overcome this by looking at ourselves and analyzing our positions of privilege. Only then do we question what strengths and abilities are valued and normalized around us? Being mindful of these privileges can help break the molds and be more inclusive to differently-abled people. Marx (1959) describes that the worker's value is inverse to the size and value of what they produce. Still, if the individual is not allowed to work, they cannot even be considered a worker, which means they will not generate or have any value. When differently-abled people are allowed to work, they are paid less because their employers think the exploitability is not at the same level as a non-disabled person; this perpetuates a cycle of poverty, even when differently-abled people can secure employment, which restricts social mobility for those who are differently-abled. The inequalities then continue to be perpetuated through the societal hierarchy and will not stop because of the capitalist goals and mindset of forever increasing profitability. If there are individuals who cannot achieve an employment status because of physical or mental limitations, then not only is their economic standing impacted, but so is their social status. Naturally, being displaced from work creates people who are disadvantaged economically and socially because when you are not contributing and producing, you are not earning a wage-- therefore, living becomes an obstacle because of the infrastructural restrictions. Russell and Rosenthal argue, “For working-age persons with no disability, the likelihood of having a job is 82.1 percent. For people with a non-severe disability, the rate is 76.9 percent; the rate drops to 26.1 percent for those with a significant disability” (Russell, 2019). The majority of those who are at a disadvantage economically and socially are differently-abled people; in fact, it is reflected not only in the likelihood of having a job but also through the systems in place, whether that is the job market or, more specifically, the homeless community and prisons.

Many differently-abled people are in prison, and instead of adapting society to be more inclusive or providing the help necessary for success, there are large percentages of people who are differently-abled on the streets trying to survive or in prison as a direct result of the labor market's exclusivity. Russell and Rosenthal explain, “At any given moment, 40 percent of all Americans with serious mental illness are estimated to be in jail or prison” (Russell, 2019). The overwhelming number of Americans with disabilities who end up in jail or prison is not by accident; there is a pattern of people with disabilities being sent to these institutions for many reasons, one of them being social control. When incarcerated, the individual is removed from society and then blamed for their inability to integrate. Society then tries to justify the commodification of the human body and their imprisonment through disabilities. Russell and Rosenthal write, “People with so-called mental illnesses are generally deemed to have little or no production value. Their unemployment rate is the highest

among the disabled population at 80 percent, and disproportionately high within the incarcerated population” (Russell, 2019). Differently-abled people are left unemployed and live in poverty because of their disabilities, or they are punished for them through imprisonment, further oppressing them and separating them from society, forever impacting their social lives.

Those who are differently-abled feel alienated from society because of the stigmas that come with the labels and because they are thrown into institutions to keep them out of society. In a capitalist economic society, their bodies and minds hold no value; they become the opposite, sometimes seen as demons, inhuman, and insane. The names used to describe people with disabilities are not only dehumanizing, but they also replicate the oppression, further alienating differently-abled people in society. We see the demonization of differently-abled people throughout history, especially when eugenics became a widespread practice. Around the 1900s, the idea of making a perfect human race was adopted in America. It was presumed to be making a genetically and morally superior race. This practice included the sterilization of those who were not seen as fully functioning humans. The people who were sterilized were considered “feeble-minded,” and scientists thought because of their genes that, these people would not survive (National Constitution, 2019). Once again, we see the blame being shifted to the individuals, spreading this idea around the country. In one specific part of the United States, this idea based on junk science was turned into a processing facility for humans that later on went on to inspire the construction of the Nazi concentration camps in WW2. This processing facility was on the border of Texas. It was for processing the Mexican immigrants through the Bracero program; they did this because cheap labor was being imported, but it had to fit the mold. When the United States decided to use labor from across the border, there were a few problems with the laborers that Americans did not like. The greaser stereotype that was super racist made Americans uncomfortable about bringing in Mexicans for labor. These stereotypes claimed that Mexicans were inferior and unclean, which was already hard on the Mexican immigrants but paired with the obsession with cleanliness that came from El Paso's mayor at the time. Tom Lea created a new disinfection plant at the border in 1916. In this facility, immigrants went through inspections. First, they would be stripped naked and had their clothes taken from them, where the clothes would be sent to a gas room to be cleaned with toxic chemicals; one of these chemicals was Zyklon B. While the clothes were being treated, an inspector would check all of the humans for diseases and physical defects. If they found lice on the people, they would have them shaved and then chemically bathed. If the person passed and was accepted, they would be given an IQ test or had to complete puzzles to demonstrate they were fit for entry. This process would be repeated every eight days to be allowed to re-enter the United States to be able to work. (Chakraborty, 2019). This humiliating process ensured that only those deemed fit were allowed to enter the United States to work.

When a system fails to adopt a holistic perspective and instead reduces people to mere commodities, it disregards the entirety of the worker, specifically their physical well-being and mental capacity. If workers cannot produce labor as expected, all value is lost because there is no labor to exploit for profit. How does the structural design of our societies that inherently perpetuates inequalities feel if you hold no value? It should be addressed if people cannot work because of lack of accommodation. Claiming that individuals cannot do it is a lie to keep people out of the labor market. After infrastructural adjustments, those who are differently abled can produce labor. I want to highlight a group of activists because of their fight for change that was done in a very symbolic way by the people who did the “Capitol Crawl,” a historical moment that happened on March 12, 1990. A group of protestors decided to leave the main protest and embark on their own extremely symbolic protest, which forever changed the future of people with disabilities around the country. This subgroup left their wheelchairs, powerchairs, crutches, and canes to crawl up the 83 steps of the capital (Rembis, 2019). This protest was for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which ended up

being signed into law only a few months later on July 26, 1990, proving change is possible. I bring this moment up because we need to listen to those fighting for change holistically.

When we do not listen to the people whom the system does not work for and to those asking for equal opportunities, we limit the progress we can make. It all starts with listening, sometimes even listening to yourself. I urge you to ask yourself questions about the capitalist economic infrastructure in America because, under capitalism, you are not a person; you are a worker. Not everyone is disabled, but everyone ages; as time passes, you keep aging and eventually reach a stage where you might not have the same ability. Rather than allowing capitalism to remove what it deems defective in production, specifically regarding people labeled as “defective,” we should instead focus on addressing the inherent flaws within capitalism to create a more inclusive system that fosters growth and acceptance.

### References

- AccessForce. n.d. *Understanding assistive technology for disabled people*. Retrieved May 10, 2024, from <https://accessforce.org/article/assistive-technology-for-disabled-people/>
- Chakraborty, R. (2019, July 29). *The dark history of “gasoline baths” at the border*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/2019/7/29/8934848/gasoline-baths-border-mexico-dark-history>
- Inckle, K. (2015). Debilitating times: Compulsory able-bodiedness and white privilege in theory and practice. *Feminist Review*, (111), 42–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24572215>.
- Marx, K. (1959). *Economic & philosophical manuscripts of 1844*. Progress Publishers.
- National Constitution Center. (2019, May 10). *A Dangerous Idea: The History of Eugenics in America* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rt1YWvV1fA&t=78s>
- Rembis, M. (2019). *Disability: A reference handbook*. ABC-CLIO.
- Russell, M., & Rosenthal, K. (2019). *Capitalism and disability: Selected writings by Marta Russell*. Haymarket Books.

# The Yellow House: Community Gardens and Their Role in the De-commodification of Food and Third Places

Maggie Devins

Post-pandemic, we are seeing an uptick in the demolition of community places and an overall depressive attitude toward fighting for rights as a collective against oppressive forces in society. Modern corporate empires make it almost impossible to buy necessities to live, as well as discourage the public from leisure. Community gardens are a light shining in the darkness, paving the way for a potentially de-commodified food system and providing a third space for people to congregate. Using Marxist economic and political-ecological theory, this paper aims to explore community gardens as a hallmark in de-commodifying food and third places in modern urban places, using the 18<sup>th</sup> Street People's Garden in Merced as a prime example.

## Part 1: The 18<sup>th</sup> Street People's Garden and De-commodifying Food

The 18<sup>th</sup> Street People's Garden was created and funded by a county participatory budget, which is a nationwide first, as well as the first participatory budget in the Central Valley (Miller, 2023). The people of District 2, the city of Merced, could decide where funds should be allocated and what projects they would like to see in the area. The garden was born with efforts from many community organizers and District 2 Supervisor Lee Lor. The garden was created as a spot for socialization and organization to address food problems in Merced County and the Central Valley. There is a community garden, a pantry and refrigerator with free food, and a little library and art from community organizers who volunteer (Ledezma, 2019). The introduction of the 18<sup>th</sup> Street People's Garden in Merced is taking a much-needed step toward de-commodifying our food systems in the Central Valley.

The Central Valley produces much of the country's produce: 25% of the nation's food overall, 40% of nuts and fruits, and 8% of all agricultural products in value (United States Geological Survey [USGS], n.d.). Despite this, we in Merced County are food insecure, with most of our groceries coming from company distribution warehouses and local produce being sold for a much higher price. The food that is produced here is not accessible by the residents. The community garden provides food for those in need through a Pop-Up Pantry program with rotating stock and the garden, where people can pick fresh produce straight from the soil. Community gardens are an important step in the de-commodification of food and agriculture. In Marxist theory, the commodification of natural resources, ideas, and the human body results from prioritizing profit over moral or social reasoning. There are two main faults of commodification in our contemporary society, especially with food.

### *The determination of value due to commodification*

One, commodities are only treated as commodities, with their cultural or social value stripped in favor of market value. The social value or use-value of an item is determined by its physical properties and how humans use it, compared to the market value or exchange value, which determines how much the product is valued based on how much capital (or, in this case, money) can be traded for it. The priority of exchange-value ignores the consequences of intensifying the production of the object, whether it be ecologically, morally, or aesthetically. The object's value under commodification is now determined by the labor it takes to make it. Something is only commodified if seen as having a value, and something with use-value does not have to be commodified. As described by Marx,

A thing can be a *use-value* without being an *exchange-value*. This is the case wherever the human relevance of the thing is not mediated by labor. So air, virgin land, brush in a

wild state, wood growing in wild conditions, etc. A thing can be useful and be the product of human labor without being a *commodity*. A man who satisfies his own need through his product creates use-value, to be sure, but not a commodity. In order to produce a commodity, he must produce not merely use-value, *but use-value for others – social use-value*. Finally, no entity can be a *value* without being an object of use. If it is useless, then the labor contained in it is also useless, does not count as labor, and, hence, does not form a value (Marx, 1867/1887, pp. 27–29).

Commodification, therefore, is a social construction. In this case, food is made a commodity, and that commodification results in the supposed scarcity of food to maximize profit. We in the Central Valley are alienated from our own food production due to prioritizing food as a commodity rather than a commons. This constructed scarcity creates the second problem of commodification of food: commodity fetishization.

### *Commodity fetishization*

In the commercial exchange of a product, there is an attempt to create an air of mystery surrounding where it comes from. (Vandenbroeck, 2019). Marx (1867/1887) defines this as “commodity fetishization.”

As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labor, within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation, between men, themselves, which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.

Companies use commodity fetishization to create a fantastical look for their products. We see this heavily in the marketing of food and the creation of corporate-run grocers; slabs of meat are placed on refrigerated shelves, removing any indication that they came from an animal, and eggs are bleached and stamped, giving them a “perfect” uniformity, and produce has no indication of the processes making it, besides maybe what country it comes from. Any product that does not keep up the facade of perfect food is not sold.

Much of the food given through the Pop-Up Pantry program comes from businesses and distributors that would otherwise throw it out. With America throwing away almost half of its food, much of this is done by businesses (Bloom, 2011). “Imperfect produce” is produce that companies would rather throw away than sell, and it can be for multiple reasons. Produce can be deemed too small or maybe slightly damaged in packaging and shipping, while some might not be harvested at all. This food, while perfectly fine to eat, is not appealing enough to sell on a competitive market, according to corporate grocers.

Receiving these donations of imperfect food helps reduce waste, while not monetizing the acquisition of these “ugly” foods like how subscription services such as Hungry Harvest do. It is argued that monetizing these “anti-food waste” services can only make the demand even higher: “The company has helped to create a market for the “waste” created by industrial agribusiness, selling it to conscious (rather than needy) buyers by branding it as a form of environmental activism. This produce used to be readily available to food banks, but now that “ugly” and “imperfect” produce can turn a profit, they are less available to those in need.” (Food First, 2018). The commodification of this food not only saturates the competitive market of agribusiness but also does little to prevent food waste. These services would be taking away the potential of community places to provide to citizens, only amplifying the effects of food scarcity in a world that produces too much. This example of the

commodification of a non-commodity shows how concepts and ideas can be easily changed and manipulated for profit and how commodification is a social construction. We see this with not only tangible things like food but also concepts and places.

## **Part 2: Third Places and Them as a Commodity**

When volunteering at the community garden, the yellow house was not only a place to receive food but to socialize as well. Not only did I personally strengthen my relationships with fellow volunteers, but I also met new people, all with different stories and reasons for being there. A community garden in an urban setting creates social capital, creating a strong relationship between the volunteers and those in need. This type of place alleviates the lack of social relationships in a society that does not value them by combining the acquisition of essentials with community. This community garden and others are examples of third places.

### *Third places and their importance*

Third places as a theoretical concept were popularized by urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his book “The Great Good Place,” originally published in 1989, as a solution to the increasing social isolation created by the American suburbs. According to Oldenburg, there are three categories of social environments. These are first places, the home; second places, the workplace; and third places, separate from these two. While Oldenburg used an eight-characteristic criteria for third places, their concept can be summarized by two core ideas: anyone—no matter class, race, or identity—is accommodated in a third place, and positive socialization is the main goal of these places. Third places are a hotspot for cross-cultural and interclass communication. They also aim to appeal to everyone, with cozy, functional structures and playful nature. Being accessible to everyone makes it feel like home to regulars and newcomers, prioritizing people over their money. Places like these are often sought out to meet new people or catch up with old friends, and because of this, they are common spots for children to meet others their own age. Third places, because of the priority of socialization, are critical in creating social capital. Community gardens, especially the People’s Garden, fit these criteria well. While volunteering at the garden, people not only came for the pantry items but also to talk. While being physically small and relatively simple compared to a business space, that did not stop people from conversing on the porch, in the back garden, or in line for the pantry to open. With no obligation to stay or money to be paid, this allows people to feel comfortable visiting the People’s Garden often. This is how third places should be; however, they face a similar problem to food.

### *Commodification of third places*

One contemporary problem with most third places is that they have become commodified. Cafés, restaurants, and other indoor places often have a policy that only lets you stay if you purchase something. Moreover, even if this policy does not exist, there is pressure to buy something anyway; it is seen as “weird” to stay in a coffee shop and not buy a drink or pastry. If a third place cannot be commodified or is managed publicly, they and the organizations that run it are often neglected. Take, for example, Parks and Recreation: parks are great third places for all ages but are severely neglected, with them having crippling infrastructure, outdated and dirty public utilities like bathrooms, and poor waste management. Public third places are ignored by law enforcement, as they do not produce economic capital. These places are vandalized and stolen from, and because of this, they are seen negatively by the public.

In contrast, we can compare how some places are when commodified, in how they look and how they are treated. Take, for example, a fast-food place like McDonald’s. While still a corporate entity, McDonald’s was still seen as a third place for many, especially those with lower incomes. Food was cheap and fast, which was accommodating for the hard worker. Also, children were

accommodated, with the PlayPlace being a great spot for birthday parties and general cross-cultural socialization. Now we see a fully commodified system, with food being pricier, the PlayPlaces being shut down and removed, and the iconic architecture of a McDonald's being traded for the generic, beige block we see in most modern establishments.

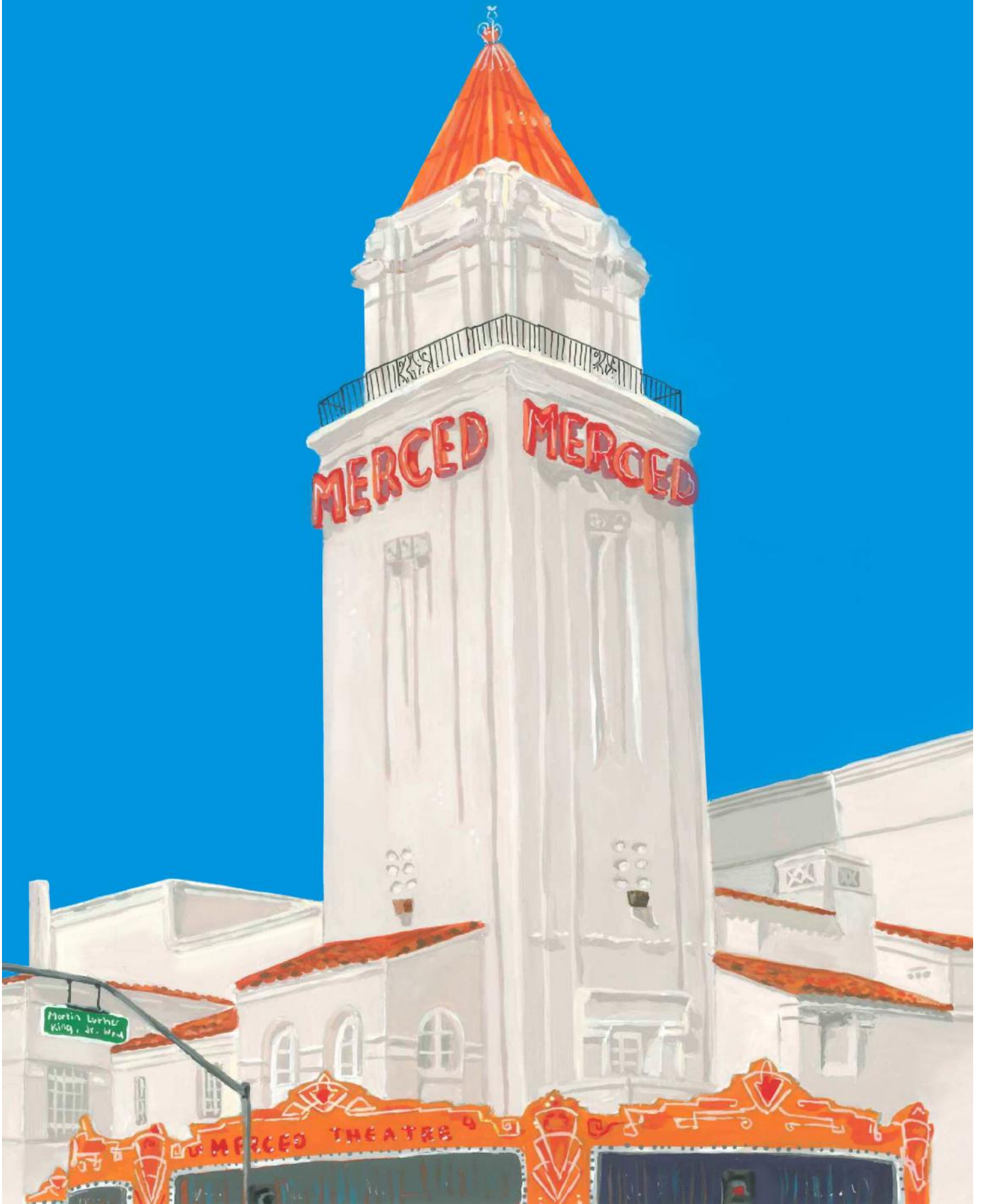
We can see the difference when comparing community gardens with commodified third places. This sentiment is seen when discussing crime against the community garden with volunteers. People have stolen food and plants and destroyed property, and even though one volunteer lives close by, nothing has ever come from reporting the damage to the police. We have reached the point where a place is deemed worth protection depending on how much money it makes, despite public third places producing other forms of capital. Not only this, but the commodification of commercial or residential land results in the loss of spaces like community gardens in favor of cookie-cutter houses that can be sold at incredibly high prices. The negative attention plus the favor of profits before food security are serious hurdles to getting more third places like this accessible. Even so, many examples exist of how this de-commodified third place should be fought for. The People's Garden has character, reusing a yellow house on a residential lot, acquiring art from community members and volunteers, and rejecting the uniformity that can come with corporate modernity. Using this residential lot as a third space alleviates the alienation between the community and food, which is important in the combat against both the constructed scarcity and the commodity fetishization in the Central Valley. The community garden is quite successful, and the people who volunteer at the garden and those who benefit from their services understand the importance of it as a third place. The trouble is how we, as a collective, can ensure their survival.

### Part 3: Conclusion

The People's Garden in Merced is a huge step in how we in the Central Valley can create food as a commons and normalize third places in our otherwise lacking urban areas. With the participatory fund being the first of its kind in the country, we can see how people are once again learning the importance of third places and food as a necessity rather than a commodity, alleviating the alienation we see due to capitalist philosophies of prioritizing exchange-value over a space's use-value.

### References

- Bloom, J. (2011). *American wasteland: how America throws away nearly half of its food (and what we can do about it)*. Lifelong Books/Da Capo Press.
- Food First. (2018). *Op-ed | Here's the ugly truth about the ugly produce movement*. The Counter. <https://thecounter.org/imperfect-produce-ugly-food-waste-commodification-community-supported-agriculture/>
- Ledezma, Y. (2019, July 4). *Community garden grows on 18th Street*. Merced County Times. <https://mercedcountytimes.com/community-garden-grows-on-18th-street>
- Marx, K. (1887). *Capital* (S. Moore & E. Aveling, Trans.; Vol. I, pp. 27–29) [Review of *Capital*]. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> (Original work published 1867)
- Miller, J. (2023). *PB Processes Map* [Map]. Participatory Budgeting Project. <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/jude.miller6504/viz/PBPDraft/Sheet1>
- Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. Da Capo Press.
- USGS. (n.d.). *California's Central Valley | USGS California Water Science Center*. [ca.water.usgs.gov](https://ca.water.usgs.gov/projects/central-valley/about-central-valley.html). <https://ca.water.usgs.gov/projects/central-valley/about-central-valley.html>
- Vandenbroeck, E. (2019). *Food: to feed or to profit? (De)commodification in the food system and Community Supported Agriculture* (pp. 9–21). <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1384838/FULLTEXT01.pdf>



Martin Luther King, Jr. West

MERCED THEATRE