HAUNTING: THE GHOST OF COLONIALISM IN ANTARCTICA

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It's a windy spring evening when Elizabeth Rush is offered a place on a research expedition to Antarctica—the opportunity of a lifetime. A continent shrouded in snow and uncertainty, Antarctica and its glaciers are kingpins in the conversation on climate change, and Rush takes seriously this opportunity to better understand its complexities, detailing her experiences before, during, and after the expedition in her narrative essay "Searching for Women's Voices in the Harshest Landscape on Earth." The title suggests that this essay will be concerned with a gender-specific approach to the icy continent.

However, as Rush delves into the history of Antarctic exploration in an effort to prepare for her upcoming trip, the words on the page puzzle together like an optical illusion revealing itself to faintly spell out another: colonialism. Yet nowhere in the text does the word or any of its variants appear explicitly. In fact, the only mention of a "colony" refers to a group of emperor penguins, who—despite their name—have nothing to do with human political or economic systems. Why, then, does Rush employ language and imagery associated with colonialism to describe Antarctic exploration without ever naming it? The answer lies in the driving factors behind the initial Antarctic expeditions that she investigates.

Upon initial reading, it appears that Rush characterizes historical Antarctic expeditions and the dated perspectives that frame them in two main ways: through violence and through the urge to conquer. The latter comes through explicitly—shortly before embarking on her own expedition, Rush reads a *New York Times* article that describes two men, Colin O'Brady and Louis Rudd, as "[hoping] to conquer a continent that has become the new Everest for extreme athletes." Pushing back against this narrative of conquest, Rush writes that

> [t]o pit O'Brady and Rudd against the elements is to continue to drive a wedge between man and nature, to make of this place that we know so very little about, into a hurdle, a hindrance, a problem. . . . a poetic metaphor, a thing that must be overcome in order for the singular human being to rise up. . . . a place to be conquered. . . .

In her critique of the traditional lens of understanding Antarctic exploration, Rush evokes language reminiscent of the rhetoric justifying Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century through the fantasy of a region unfamiliar to humans and instead run only by nature. Unsubdued and untamed, this land is meant to be subdued, to be tamed. The use of the verbs "overcome" and "conquer" in particular fuels this

allusion, as nature becomes a wild thing to subjugate, to domesticate, to assert superiority over. The verb "must" is also vital, evoking the inevitability that defined Manifest Destiny; just as Manifest Destiny was framed as a pressing duty, so too does this perspective on Antarctic exploration push for domination as an act of human triumph.

Consequently, it is also a perspective that is underlined by violence. Rush quotes Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita*, which makes the declaration that "[m]en have been quarrelling over Antarctica since it emerged from the southern mists, perceiving it as another trophy, a particularly meaty beast to be clubbed to death outside the cave." Not only is the exploration of Antarctica compared to the killing of an animal, but this killing is described viscerally and brutally through the specificity and vividity of "clubbed to death" as opposed to "killed." So too is the attitude of these men toward female explorers entering Antarctica shadowed by violence; Rush writes that "[w]hen *New York Times* journalist Walter Sullivan wrote of the first all-women scientific expedition to the South Pole . . . he described the undertaking as 'an incursion of females' into 'the largest male sanctuary remaining on this planet.'" In this framework, the first all-women expedition is an "incursion" on the existing "sanctuary"—language that echoes aggressive warfare and military campaigns. The men of the time viewed Antarctic expeditions through the lens of violence and accordingly framed an all-women expedition through that same violence, unable to conceive of it as different from another instance of invasive violence. The echoes of invasion, in turn, call to mind colonialism, which haunts readings of early Antarctic explorations.

The ghost of colonialism makes the time that Rush spends with Ursula K. Le Guin's short story "Sur"—a fictional account of an all-female Antarctic expedition—even more striking; the characters are not only all women but also all Latin-American, an ancestry influenced by Spanish, Portuguese, and French colonization. It is this stark inversion of the identities of traditional and historical Antarctic explorers that renders "Sur" so revolutionary. Men from the Global North, bearing legacies as colonizers, are instead reimagined as women from Latin America, bearing legacies as colonized. The contrast between these fictional characters and their historically accurate counterparts is what allows the piece not only to stray from but fully break and abandon the chains of accuracy that other texts, such as biographies and historical accounts, are necessarily bound to by the nature of their genres. Instead, as a work of fiction, Le Guin's work is able to reimagine not only the characters' identities but Antarctic exploration as a whole, informed by these new identities. This kind of reimagination is what fundamentally shifts Rush's own understanding of Antarctic expeditions, as "boundaries long built between two gendered ways of inhabiting the world blur a little." However, Rush only speaks explicitly on the axis of gender. The juxtaposition of "a relic of exploration" amidst "domestic bobbles" is what she names as striking, while the juxtaposition of "Rosita's christening dress and Juanito's silver rattle," prized mementos belonging to children with names that reflect their ethnic

background and culture, against the Norwegian "finneskos" remains unmentioned. Again, Rush shies away from the axis of colonized versus colonizer.

More thorough examination of Rush's investigation of these expeditions, however, complicates this reading. In her mention of the "Heroic Age of Antarctica Exploration," Rush remarks that the explorations were "undeniably driven and largely dominated by countries from the global north." The mention of the Global North here and its domination calls to mind colonization—nations that gained wealth through such conquest again seeking more land to exert control over. The complication arises only a few words later, as Rush explains that this domination occurred because "such folly was affordable" to the Global North. The word "folly" here stands out. It is not a practical endeavor but, rather, an instance of imprudence. The Antarctic explorations are not an effort to gain capital but, instead, are a drain on disposable resources, a waste that wealthier nations can take on without so much as a dent in their infrastructure. Further, the South Pole is notably barren of life—the continent is unfriendly and devoid of "indigenous history," as "[f]or the majority of human history no one glimpsed, let alone set foot, on Antarctica." Definitions of colonization naturally vary from source to source. The Oxford English Dictionary, for instance, defines it as "the action or process of establishing a colony or colonies in a place, esp. as part of an effort (typically by a foreign state) to appropriate the area settled and to assert political control over any Indigenous inhabitants" ("Colonization, N."), while the *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* defines it as "the combination of territorial, juridical, cultural, linguistic, political, mental/epistemic, and/or economic domination of one group of people or groups of people by another (external) group of people" (Murrey 315). But the existence of a people to colonize is necessary—notably, a people who cannot be found in the harsh Antarctic landscape. Can the conquest of Antarctica, then, be called colonization if there is no population to colonize? If there is no capital to be gained, as has historically driven colonization? Or is this movement—despite its framework of violence and conquest and triumph over nature—not an instance of colonization but, rather, a symptom of it? Through prior colonization, countries in the Global North acquired capital, enabling them to pursue the "folly" of Antarctic expeditions. Combined with the values of individual triumph that defined colonialism and the violence that framed it, though without that same capital to gain, such expeditions are not a direct continuation of colonization but are still inherently tainted by its legacy. Colonization is driven by greed; early exploration of Antarctica was driven by pride.

To invoke colonization explicitly would be to bring alongside it the desire for economic and/or political gain that drives and is thus associated with colonization, a desire that does not align with the phenomenon that Rush details. Rush's avoidance may also have roots in her identity. Rather than theorizing on the Latin-American perspective of the women of "Sur," for example, Rush is able to make more confident assertions from the female lens. By not explicitly addressing colonization, so too does

Rush avoid overstepping or extrapolating. She instead grounds her argument in what she knows. Identifying her avoidance allows for greater insight on the impetus behind the dominant narrative of Antarctic exploration. Further, it points to the pervasive nature of colonization. Hints of colonization come through in spite of Rush shying away from it; the themes of conquest, superiority over nature, individuality, and even the patriarchy are inextricably tied to colonial structures. The text is consequently haunted by colonization, just as the expeditions it addresses are. Thus, it is ever the more crucial to grapple with its inescapable ghost.

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PRESERVING PARTS OF OURSELVES: RETHINKING WHAT MAKES ENGLISH GOOD AND ENGLISH TEACHERS GREAT

VICTORIA NGAI

On the first day of tenth grade, Mr. Reese looked like a substitute teacher to me. His teaching attire consisted of Adidas sweatpants, a soccer zip-up, and black sneakers—not the collared shirt, slacks, and dress shoes that I had expected based on how all the other teachers dressed. I had also anticipated a white teacher, partially because I assumed that the last name "Reese" was Dutch or German, but more so because I had only ever had white English teachers before. From kindergarten until twelfth grade, I went to the same private school. In all that time, Mr. Reese, a half-black and half-Korean man, was my only non-white English teacher.

Mr. Reese was also my only English teacher to use what he called "hood language" in class, often saying phrases such as "that's messed up, yo" and "quit playin'." Still, *how* Mr. Reese spoke wasn't as surprising as *what* he spoke about. Mr. Reese talked about his personal life almost every single day, unlike my previous teachers who never dared to muddy the line between their private and professional lives. My previous teachers connected in-class texts to societal problems such as racism or gender inequality, but Mr. Reese connected academic readings to his own personal experiences and memories.

The newness of Mr. Reese and his teaching style intrigued me, and, by the end of the year, he was my favorite English teacher I'd ever had. For my last assignment of tenth grade English, I wrote a letter to my younger self who had not yet met Mr. Reese. In the first line of that letter, I wrote, "Victoria, you might not know this yet, but English 10 Honors is much more than another academic class" (Ngai 1). In other courses, I simply completed classwork with the course material that I'd been taught in class. In Mr. Reese's class, I looked at writing assignments as a chance for self-expression. I replaced my mechanical essays that simply got the job done with passionate essays that I felt excited to write. I discovered the joy of writing. For this reason, Mr. Reese was my most effective English teacher, even though he didn't look, speak, or act the way that I had expected.

Mr. Reese is not the only teacher to understand the power of deviating from expectations. In his chapter "Casualties of Literacy" from *Your Average N****: *Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*, black literacy teacher Vershawn Ashanti Young argues that "code meshing" of black English vernacular (BEV) and white English vernacular (WEV) in classrooms ought to replace the normalized "code switching" pedagogy—an approach that permits only WEV to be used at school and sidelines BEV to the home and playground. Young practices what he preaches by incorporating BEV at the beginning of his chapter, writing, "BEV ain't goin' nowhere" even though

WEV has been the norm in academic writing (105). Similarly, Mr. Reese used "hood language" in the classroom even though this wasn't the norm at my school. For both Young and Mr. Reese, an adjustment to WEV was expected. By "code meshing," Young and Mr. Reese set an example for their colleagues and students to be inclusive of non-white vernaculars, expanding the idea of what qualifies as classroom language.

But, if code meshing could so easily be implemented in classrooms, everyone would do it. The persistence of a norm suggests that there is difficulty in deviating from the standard of code switching. Richard Rodriguez, a Mexican American second-generation immigrant, sheds some light on this difficulty. As the only non-white student in his elementary school, Rodriguez recalls that he was "fated to be the 'problem student'" (25). The word "fated" implies that Rodriguez's race and culture doomed him to be involuntarily viewed as problematic because he differed from his classmates who were white and spoke English. Rodriguez believes his native culture and language prevented him from finding a sense of belonging among his classmates. Mr. Reese faced similar difficulties fitting in as the only half-black, half-Korean teacher in an otherwise majority-white English department. Unlike how Rodriguez saw his difficulties as a reason to assimilate, Mr. Reese resisted the impulse to assimilate, even when other teachers reported him as unprofessional for using "hood language," wearing sweats, and not tying his afro into a man bun. Though Rodriguez avoided his fate of being "the problem student" by learning and speaking English, Mr. Reese continued to dress and act in the way that made him most comfortable. Thus, he remained the problem teacher.

To be honest, the ease with which Mr. Reese spoke "hood language" in class was also concerning to me at first. I had never considered the possibility of an effective English teacher using "hood language" in class, just as Rodriguez never believed it "possible for a child . . . to use his family's language in school" (26). The purpose of English class, I thought, was to help me achieve a sense of belonging in intellectual and, eventually, professional environments by elevating my formal diction from my casual diction. Similarly, Rodriguez advocates for students to replace their family language with English in the classroom because he believes learning English will help students find the sense of "[*belonging*] in public" which he himself previously lacked before switching to English (31). Like Rodriguez, I believed that separating an everyday way of writing and speaking from the proper English taught in class was a necessity for acceptance amongst our peers and, especially, our superiors. However, quoting Victor Villanueva, another linguist, Young points out that "[l]imiting the student's language to the playground and home . . . still speaks of who's right and who's wrong, who holds the power" (112). Considering both Rodriguez's and Young's thoughts, we realize that, though the intention behind promoting a formal English is to help students feel confident in academic and social spheres, doing so still creates a hierarchy of language which encourages certain dialects to be viewed as inferior. Attempts to extinguish Mr. Reese's nonstandard teaching language were carried out

with the belief that his "hood language" was inherently lesser-than and ineffective for teaching students the English skills they needed for success as future scholars.

Nevertheless, because of my transformative experience in Mr. Reese's class, I have come to agree with Young when he argues that "[o]ur job should be educating students, not refashioning them into what we imagine the 'marketplace' demands they should be" (112). The "marketplace" is the professional world that students enter post-education, a place that we typically assume rewards formal language. Our solution, however, should not be to sift out the unique parts of our dialects in an attempt to produce cookie-cutter formal voices. If teachers continue teaching students to be like one another, then we lose diversity and the valuable knowledge founded in it. For example, Young tells us about Guamán Poma, a skilled thinker who wrote in his native language, Quechua. "[T]hose who used [Quechua] were considered illiterate," and, because Guamán Poma used Quechua, "it took 350 years for Guamán Poma's letter to be recognized as the 'extraordinary intellectual tour de force that it was'" (119). The reason scholars didn't recognize Guamán Poma's brilliance until much later is because they let their reluctance to deviate from the standard language limit their reception of new knowledge. Likewise, my initial reluctance to Mr. Reese's "hood language" and casual classroom attire prevented me from seeing the value of his style of teaching.

You would think that my bias, on top of the fact that I knew it was Mr. Reese's first year teaching, would have prevented me from learning from him indefinitely. However, I've since realized that, along with Mr. Reese's "hood language" and hoodies came something more. Because he chose not to assimilate, Mr. Reese did not face (or at least face to the same extent) the "'self-annihilation' and 'cultural suicide'" described by English professor Keith Gilyard in relation to Richard Rodriguez's rejection of bilingual education (Young 111). Mr. Reese brought an aspect of himself to class that my previous teachers did not. Prior teachers connected literary texts to broad universal themes—topics that would help me write essays that were socially relevant—whereas Mr. Reese connected texts to his mother's passing, his love life, and his experiences with God. Mr. Reese's stories told in his "hood language" were specific, which made them more engaging than the general lectures on racism, misogyny, and social structures that I received year after year from my previous English teachers. Just as I compare Mr. Reese's way of telling stories to my previous teachers' lectures, Rodriguez compares his father's speech in Spanish to his father's speech in English. He notes, "Using Spanish, [his father] was quickly effusive. . . his voice would spark, flicker, flare alive with varied sounds. In Spanish he expressed ideas and feelings he rarely revealed when speaking English" (Rodriguez 33). Mr. Reese's stories, told in "hood language," had an immediacy that would have been missing if he tried to speak in the same vernacular as my previous English teachers—vernacular that was not his own.

Beyond the initial engaging aspect of Mr. Reese's "hood language," it also felt personal, as if I were not just a student but a friend. Rodriguez experiences a similar sensation when reflecting on his Spanish interactions with his parents: "To hear

[Spanish's] sounds was to feel myself specially recognized as one of the family" (28). When Mr. Reese taught, I felt like our class was special compared to the other English classes that I'd been in, as if we were being let in on secrets about Mr. Reese that only his students had the luxury of knowing.

The difference between Rodriguez's situation and mine, however, is that Rodriguez and his parents were both comfortable with Spanish. I, on the other hand, had never spoken "hood language." My connection with Mr. Reese's way of speaking, though different from my own, is not unique. Citing Gerald Graff, a white American English professor, Young recounts a similar situation. As Graff comments on American linguist William Labov's interview with Larry, a black teenager, he describes Larry's BEV as "powerful, cogent, and interesting" (qtd. in Young 106). Despite the difference in Larry's vernacular from his own, Graff extracted value and meaning from Larry's interview answers. However, the answers were "powerful" *because* Larry's vernacular differed from Graff's, and it allowed him to express himself. Similarly, even though I never spoke "hood language," I was able to connect with Mr. Reese more deeply because he did, so I was even more receptive to what he taught.

And why wouldn't I be? Rodriguez argues that "[i]ntimacy cannot be trapped within words; it passes through words" (41). So even Rodriguez might see that I connected with Mr. Reese's personality and voice that was so present and passionate in his language. I think Mr. Reese would be pleased to hear this. He once explained that English class isn't just a place where you learn how to write. It's a place where you learn *to care about* what you write. As an author himself, Mr. Reese told me that the difference between a writer and an author is that an author cares enough about what they write that they feel other people have to know about it. For Mr. Reese, this meant writing and publishing poetry about his personal life. He showed me that our personal lives are something worth authoring. What impressed me as I read Mr. Reese's poetry was that the universal themes that my previous teachers had taught me—themes of family and love and death and heartbreak—were all present in Mr. Reese's writing.

His willingness to transcend traditional barriers, to upend the typical notions of what was "correct," and to explore his identity even in unforgiving settings inspired me. Because Mr. Reese was bold enough to author his own life, I realized I could do the same. I connected my essays to universal themes not by avoiding my personal input but by speaking through my own life. I grew invested in writing in a way that I'd never been before. I wrote to myself at the end of tenth grade, "[i]f you do nothing else, carry one lesson with you throughout the rest of the school year: writing requires a personality," because readers connect with the people behind the words, not the words themselves (Ngai 1).

At the end of my letter, I told myself, "[b]e passionate about the topics you choose. The prompt never confines you as much as your mindset does" (2). My old mindset was that a good teacher would be unlike Mr. Reese and that a good student would write about anything but herself. That mindset convinced me to hide the parts of

myself that would eventually make my essays exciting both to write and to read. Thankfully, Mr. Reese helped me realize the place that my personal life has in my writing. Without Mr. Reese, I wouldn't care about my writing as much as I do now. Now, I approach everything that I write with the hopes of having somebody connect with me through it. As an author, it is my job to put myself into my essays, to provide something for my readers to connect to, just as Mr. Reese gave me something to connect to by preserving the parts of himself that made him different.

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VERDI'S GOT TO BE REAL: RECKONING WITH OPERA IN *PARIS IS BURNING*

JAKE RICHARDS

Opera. That word that, when dropped in conversation, lowers the room's temperature, heightens the gravitas of dialogue, and, for some, provokes the irresistible urge to seek the nearest exit. Opera. Yes, let it melt over the tongue; roll it around your palate. *Op*-er-a. Taste the *mustiness*, the distinct tang of *haute* culture, that delightful hint of aged dust. It's an acquired flavor, one that Western societal consciousness has traditionally believed is only able to be enjoyed by its wealthier white hegemony. The edifice of opera has been constructed in popular thought to be impenetrable; its gates only open to the privileged, the prosperous, the powerful. Why, then, in Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning*, a film exploring the Black queer community in New York City during the late 1980s, while the ball scene raged, does 120-year-old opera music feature prominently?

Halfway through the film, the "Triumphal March" from Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida* soars over a clip of two Black drag queens dressed in sailors' suits and drinking champagne during a ball (*Paris* 00:41:50). These balls are stages where the queer community seeks "realness," the attempt to attain, through performance, "everybody's dream and ambition as a minority—to live, and look, as well as a white person is pictured as being in America" (*Paris* 00:42:26–38). However, Verdi's composition continues to play even as these ball scenes cut away, the operatic theme recursively defined as it cycles through chordal space, inexorably tying these balls—and the gay Black men who participate in them—to scenes of upper-class white America. Verdi's score permeates both worlds. I—a classical musician who has played clarinet for over a decade—must ask: why Verdi, here? After all, the dead Italian's music is situated in the same cinematic breath as disco tunes like Cheryl Lynn's "Got to Be Real," seemingly more appropriate to the time and place on which *Paris is Burning* focuses.

But why do I, a musician, feel the knee-jerk reaction to deem one cinematic appropriation of music "appropriate" and another not so? African-American feminist scholar bell hooks, author of the provocative analysis of *Paris is Burning* titled "Is Paris Burning?" posits that our shared social perceptions tend to skew towards binaries. We do not often think of opera as the native cultural language of the demographics illuminated in *Paris is Burning*. Rather, as hooks states, we see Black gay drag queens "worship[ping] at the throne of whiteness" (149) when Verdi's music plays, in a perpetuation of the very colonialist narratives that attempt to strip Black Americans of their inherent self-worth and beauty. hooks forces us to question whether *Paris is Burning* is subversive to the status quo, or whether it maintains that very status quo whereby the white ruling class is comfortable and safe within its own power because the way they live and look is idolized by those they have historically oppressed.

Judith Butler, on the other hand, pushes back against this binary lens. In "Gender is Burning," a critical response to hooks's claims, Butler defines Livingston's *Paris is Burning* as an entity that exists in-between: in-between a subversion and an acceptance of the socio-cultural beliefs of hegemonic power structures, in between a parodying of dominant socio-cultural norms and a grounds for their displacement (386). They state that drag is the implication of the self in "the very regimes of power that one opposes" (384). This self-implication opens space for subversion while, at the same time, it engenders the risk of self-subsumption by and into a hegemonic heteronormative white culture. Perhaps, then, the "Triumphal March" scene in *Paris is Burning* shifts our perceptions of opera as a binary entity, one that has been closed up in the dusty lock-box of *haute* whiteness under the towering, imposing edifice of "high" western culture, into opera as an entity existing in-between—one that applies to and holds significance for both Black drag culture and the white upper-class with which it has been traditionally associated.

This in-betweenness, this socio-cultural transference of opera, forces us to ask whether we can think of the drag balls in *Paris is Burning* as a sort of operatic performance themselves. I say yes; the implication of the self that Butler describes in their work is central not only to opera but to how *Paris is Burning* utilizes an appropriation of Verdi's music to subvert opera's traditional social image as well. Opera is an art form parallel to drag wherein actors take on new identities through costume, makeup, acting, and music. Drag echoes with some familiarity to me—a heterosexual white male classical musician—because it might be thought of as a cultural permutation of opera. Yet the acrobatics of instinct which illuminate such a permutation are checked in their course; Verdi's *Aida* focuses only on heterosexual relationships. It seems that the drag balls—foundationally homosexual—and the opera *Aida* are inverse images of the same cultural and artistic act. Butler claims that heterosexuality in dominant social culture is grounded in the repeated imitation of self-idealization, whereby the performativity of heterosexuality points toward the unachievable nature of its idealizations that destabilize heterosexuality's claim to "naturalness and originality" (384). But, if Butler states that imitation lies at the root of the creation of a heterosexual norm, where "naturalness and originality" are no more natural or original than that which is performed onstage, what are we to make of hooks's claims about the physical, tangible dangers of minorities attempting to emulate that norm through performance, whereby misogyny and colonialism are born and bred? This must point toward performances as cultural acts, yes, but with implications that travel beyond the hermetic venues where performances occur and influence, in their hermeneutics, the realities of the world. When society views opera as the performance of hegemonic norms that are themselves created through performance, thus having little claim to "naturalness or originality," we are complicit contributors to the further detrimental idealization of those norms. This social re-idealization of hegemonic norms circularly influences the image of "realness" that the

drag minority attempt to emulate through the ball scene. In Butler's words, this only leads to further "disappointment and disidentification" (388) when the minority cannot assimilate into the idealized, socially crafted hegemonic norm, even with the most "real" drag performance.

As a classical musician, I often find myself ruminating on these personal, social, and cultural implications of performance, of an audience accepting music in one space and breaking hermetic seals to carry it into others. *Paris is Burning* forces everyone to consider this same question when the "Triumphal March" is carried across scenes from two different worlds. In the world of the ballroom, the opera score feels expatriated. An audio-visual repatriation occurs, perhaps, in our socially-molded psychology when scenes of "white America" are spliced in under the same music. However, the music seems to originate, diegetic, from the ballroom and is superimposed, post-editing, over the scenes of white America. Here, *Paris is Burning* forces the binaries of a viewer's social preconceptions to fracture in confusion; preconceived notions about opera are supposed to be validated by its return to images of hegemonic, wealthy white America, yet it is in these very scenes that the music feels least organic, least like it belongs. In this way, *Paris is Burning* offers us performances of both the heteronormative hegemony and the oppressed minority, asking us to determine which presents as more "real." The greatest performance is that which makes the audience suspend disbelief for its duration. And so, as the captive audience ourselves, of our question of disbelief we must ask: to whom is the victory wreath handed? Who triumphs? With our psychological tendencies laid bare, we hesitate, wreath in hand.

But this decision feels impossible to make. That group with which we traditionally associate opera, whose performance of claim on the art form we would normally not hesitate to name, has been made to appear ironically estranged from it. Instead, the drag queens of the New York City ballroom seem to take up opera as their own, twisting it free from its binaries to implicate the white hegemony in their own privilege in a new culturally regenerative manner. The threefold performance that maintains this scene's structure—of drag, of hegemony, and of music—forces a perspective shift in the viewer, fundamentally altering deeply-ingrained socio-psychological preconceptions. Maybe we are not meant to choose a victor, lest triumph turn to tragedy. By choosing, we would enact a binary—either the drag queens of *Paris is Burning* "triumph" and are seen as attempting to transform into the idealized image of a norm they can never attain, or white America "triumphs," and the hegemonic norms, destructive both to opera itself and to the minorities who participate in drag, are upheld without further thought. Instead, this scene shows that we would be remiss in choosing either option. It opens space for reflection and begs, from some region of the self usually unlit by a critical light, this question: have I been guilty of perceiving opera through such a binary lens? It is an admittance by a heterosexual white male classical musician that seems at once unsurprising yet feels deeply troubling. I do not

want opera to die—I've grown to appreciate its taste. But, nonetheless, it is dying. Whether due to a failure to modernize, an aging-out of its traditional audience, or the social image of opera as exclusive in every socio-economic and cultural sense, opera draws breath on cultural life-support. And a society which views opera as binary will only hasten its untimely demise.

By situating Verdi's music next to Cheryl Lynn's 1978 hit "Got to Be Real," *Paris is Burning* forces the viewer to consider the historical evolution of culture and reveals, through such artistic relativism, its capacity to act as an operatic life-preserver. Popular music of the late 20th century, while trending toward anarchic, is historically situated within a distinct artistic evolution. The music of Lynn is one artistic node in the western cultural timeline, inexorably connected to the operas of Verdi and his contemporaries. The musical breakthroughs of Verdi and other opera composers vaulted music forward into the modern day—phantom memories acting in all too tangible aural manners on the music of artists like Lynn. Here, again, the physical cultural impacts of performance are felt. In collapsing this temporal distance by positioning two seemingly estranged pieces of music next to each other, *Paris is Burning* creates space for the viewer to reckon with how the music of an artist like Lynn emerged from that of Verdi in the same way that drag culture must have emerged from a cultural evolutionary precedent based on the very hegemony from which it attempts to break away. Am I arguing that *Paris is Burning* is part of the legacy of opera? Yes. But *Paris is Burning* also provides us a space where—by reckoning with the socio-cultural ambiguities, transpositions, and inversions of the "Triumphal March" scene—we can move toward a redefinition of opera that can and should survive into the present day and beyond, rather than disappear into the past.

I was a young child, maybe five, when I tasted opera for the first time. I remember it sporadically, vividly—Tom and Jerry conducting the overture to Johann Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus* operetta at the Hollywood Bowl. I consider this earliest memory of opera somehow an authentic and authenticating origin (to mis-present the words of Adam Phillips) in my evolution as a musician and like to think I owe my career in classical music at least partially to an opera overture conducted by a cat and a mouse. During Saturday morning cartoons, I fell in love with a vision of opera free from the gold chains with which society has shackled it, a vision I am convinced is worth saving. So do we tear down the edifice of opera-as-white, opera-as-privileged, opera-as-binary? Perhaps, but triumph stems not from destruction, which only serves to deepen the binary rifts that have sundered social groups. The destruction of one problematic norm simply opens space for another to replace it. Triumph will stem, rather, from "realness." It seems fitting that we use the very criterion by which ball victories are won to begin a fundamental perspective shift, a social redefinition of opera. We've got to let opera be real for it to survive, to become the complex narrative tool of social commentary and individual revelation that we seem to forget lies at its core, cutting it free from its popular image and creating space for opera to hold meaning for more

groups than solely the wealthy white hegemony. Let us remember: "Got to Be Real" has a taste of opera. *Paris is Burning* has a taste of opera.

Is that not enough for *us* to develop a new taste for opera?

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AI AND THE UGLY ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT IT LEAVES BEHIND

CHRISTINE LI

On November 30th, 2022, OpenAI launched ChatGPT, the seemingly magical AI chatbot that can do anything from writing Shakespearean-style poetry and catchy song lyrics to teaching you to solve an iterated integral. In the weeks and months after its launch, ChatGPT experienced a meteoric rise. With this came an onslaught of criticisms about its implications, from concerns about its tendency to "hallucinate"—generating confident-sounding but completely false statements—to worries about its algorithmic bias, reflecting the entrenched inequities in its training data, to predictions that plagiarism would proliferate in academia (Hao, "What is ChatGPT"). ChatGPT represents a tipping point, testing the boundaries between human and artificial intelligence.

Meanwhile, humanity has brought the planet to the edge of another tipping point. Over the past several years, climate change has quickly morphed from a problem of the distant future into one that is immediate. As the world reels from increasingly destructive catastrophes, from historic storms in California to extreme droughts in East Africa, there is a flurry of conversation, international agreements, and pledges from corporations to make amends.

Amid the urgent search for better solutions, AI is seen as a key component in combatting climate change. In the same month that ChatGPT was released, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) published an article explaining the role of AI in tackling climate challenges. According to David Jensen, coordinator of the UNEP Digital Transformation team, AI has the potential to revolutionize a multitude of climate-related efforts, from planetary-scale "satellite monitoring of global emissions" to granular-level energy-efficient smart homes. For example, the World Environment Situation Room online platform launched by UNEP leverages AI to analyze "complex, multifaceted datasets" tracking atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations, sea levels, and glacier mass in order to help policymakers make data-driven decisions ("How Artificial Intelligence"). As climate change is an immensely complex problem with an enormous number of shifting variables, AI is uniquely suited to streamline the process of collecting and analyzing climate datasets to build predictive models and provide invaluable insights into policymaking and mitigation strategies.

But there's a catch. Even though artificial intelligence may be pivotal in our fight against climate change, the technology itself is a massive culprit in accelerating the crisis that is humanity's greatest existential threat.

Lost in the flurry of excitement about the future potential of AI is the ugly reality of its immense environmental costs. As highlighted in the title of a recent *Bloomberg* article from March 2023, "Artificial Intelligence is Booming—So is Its Carbon

Footprint." Authors Josh Saul and Dina Bass explain that, due to the massive amounts of data used in the training process, and the fundamental structure of deep learning models, AI requires orders of magnitude more energy consumption than traditional forms of computing. However, the exact energy usage and carbon emissions of most AI models remain a mystery due to the lack of transparency from the large technology companies developing them.

Out of curiosity, I turned to ChatGPT itself and asked, "What is your carbon footprint?" But, like a seasoned politician trained to weasel its way out of a thorny topic, ChatGPT gave a cautious reply coated in ambiguity: "As an artificial intelligence language model, I do not have a physical form and therefore do not have a direct carbon footprint. However, the computers and servers that power my operation do require energy, which may contribute to carbon emissions" ("What").

In the absence of any openly reported emissions data from OpenAI, independent researchers in academia and non-profit organizations have attempted to calculate the carbon footprint of GPT and other large AI models—and the results are terrifying. The earliest work in this area stems from a seminal 2019 paper by Strubell, Ganesh, and McCallem from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Presenting their study at the Association of Computational Linguistics conference that year, they stunned the computer science community by revealing that the process of training the BERT transformer model—a type of large AI model with over 200 million parameters—emits more than 626,000 pounds of carbon dioxide (Strubell et al. 3645). This is equivalent to "nearly five times the lifetime emissions of the average American car. . . [including] manufacture of the car itself" (Hao, "Training"). Since then, the size of large AI language models has grown exponentially, alongside their energy usage and carbon emissions. In 2021, OpenAI released GPT-3. With 175 billion parameters (Heaven), this large generative language model is nearly 100 times larger than BERT from two years prior. Researchers from the AI startup Hugging Face estimated the training emits more than 500 metric tons (over one million pounds) of carbon dioxide (Luccioni et al. 7), which is around 610 one-way direct flights from New York to Paris. By the release of GPT-4 in March 2023, the parameter count ballooned to a purported 170 trillion, representing another hundred-fold increase from their previous model two years prior (Zaveria). Assuming the computational costs required scale proportionally, this entails that a single training process of the new model emits the equivalent of 61,000 transatlantic flights.

Perhaps the most terrifying thought is that this is only a fraction of the computational resources used in the entire lifecycle of developing a model. As Strubell explains, "Training a single model is the minimum amount of work you can do" (qtd. in Hao, "Training"). In practice, the full development pipeline involves many, many more rounds of training and fine-tuning. Strubell and her colleagues estimate that building and testing a "final paper-worthy model required training 4,789 models over a six-month period" (qtd. in Hao, "Training"). In the case of a commercialized product

like ChatGPT, model training was just the first step. In the two months following its launch, it amassed over 100 million unique users at an unprecedented rate of growth (Milmo). Generating responses to hundreds of millions of prompts requires even more computational power. It is almost beyond comprehension just how much power GPT consumes.

As it becomes increasingly clear that AI has a monstrous appetite for energy, OpenAI is desperately trying to hide this ugly truth by keeping silent on the issue. An article by *MIT Tech Review* shortly after the launch of GPT-4 in March 2023 calls the new model "the most secretive release the company has ever put out, marking its full transition from nonprofit research lab to for-profit tech firm" (Heaven). When asked just how large the model is, the company's chief scientist, Ilya Sutskever, claimed that it is something he "can't really comment on at this time" because "[i]t's pretty competitive out there" (Heaven).

The field of AI research is split into two major theories regarding artificial general intelligence (AGI): one is that AGI can be achieved by simply scaling existing models, and the other is that the current approach, through deep learning, is fundamentally insufficient. OpenAI has doggedly pursued the former path in its quest for AGI. As evident through the exponentially growing size of its GPT language models, most of the breakthroughs by OpenAI "have been the product of sinking dramatically greater computational resources into technical innovations developed in other labs." For the leadership team, this computation-driven strategy is their "primary competitive advantage" over other research labs (Hao, "Messy, Secretive Reality"). Caught in a race with other giant tech companies such as Google and Meta to build the best AI model, the company has grown increasingly guarded about its research process and increasingly closed off to the public. Ironically, OpenAI is no longer so open.

It wasn't always this way. Originally founded by Sam Altman as a non-profit research organization in 2015, OpenAI had the goal of democratizing AI. Their core charter states, "Our primary fiduciary duty is to humanity." But the document later reveals, "We anticipate needing to marshal substantial resources to fulfill our mission," and "we expect that safety and security concerns will reduce our traditional publishing in the future" ("OpenAI Charter"). This language already insinuates their shift in priorities. In 2019, when OpenAI initially announced the $1-billion investment from Microsoft and the transition to a capped for-profit model, the leadership team claimed that "any commercialization efforts would be far away." But, in an internal meeting just months later, Altman's bottom line was clear: "OpenAI needs to make money in order to do research—not the other way around" (Hao, "Messy, Secretive Reality"). In February 2023, OpenAI began charging users twenty dollars per month for premium subscriptions that offered faster results through ChatGPT and API access to GPT-4. But, to satisfy its insatiable hunger for computational resources, OpenAI also agreed to give up almost half of its profits to Microsoft in exchange for access to the company's Azure cloud computing network. Clement Delangue, the

CEO of Hugging Face, which develops open-source AI language models, fears this type of investment is leading to "cloud money laundering" (Bass). The easy access to computing resources crushes incentives to develop more efficient, environmentally friendly solutions. The trend toward larger and larger models creates "unsustainable use cases for machine learning" that threatens both the development of AI and the future of the planet (Bass).

But it does not have to be this way. As outlined by a correspondence in *Nature* from March 2023, the carbon emissions of large AI models can be drastically reduced by "tailoring the structure of the model and by promoting energy-efficient hardware and the use of clean energy sources" (An et al. 586). For example, Strubell et al. discovered that the fine-tuning process called neural architecture search, used to increase the final accuracy of the model through exhaustive trial-and-error, had "extraordinarily high associated costs for little performance benefit" (Hao, "Training"). Eliminating this step in the BERT model reduced the carbon footprint to less than 400 times that of the original. Another study found that the open-source BLOOM model developed by Hugging Face produced around 25 metric tons of carbon dioxide, which is just five percent of the estimated carbon footprint of GPT-3 (Luccioni et al. 7). Even though the two models are roughly the same size, with around 175 billion parameters, BLOOM has a much smaller carbon footprint because it was "trained on a French supercomputer powered mostly by nuclear energy." On the other hand, "[m]odels trained in China, Australia, or some parts of the US, which have energy grids that rely more on fossil fuels, are likely to be more polluting" (Heikkila). With the right incentives and regulations, large AI models can be optimized to be much more efficient through environmentally conscious engineering practices.

However, in our capitalist economy where researchers at for-profit companies are locked in cutthroat competition, they are forced to take whatever steps are necessary to produce better AI results. In this race, any considerations about the consequences on the climate get completely thrown out of the picture. OpenAI "chases a computationally heavy strategy—not because it's seen as the only way to AGI, but because it seems like the fastest" (Hao, "Messy, Secretive Reality"). It's not that AI researchers and scientists are inherently evil or don't care about the environment. In fact, most are good people who genuinely believe in AI's potential for helping humanity. I recall, in November last year, I had a FaceTime call with a longtime family friend of mine. Two months prior, he had completed his doctorate at MIT and joined OpenAI's research team working on GPT-3. When I asked him why he chose this path, he explained that he had actually turned down lucrative offers from quant firms to pursue AI research in academia, and he was truly drawn to OpenAI's founding mission of advancing artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity.

Humanity's greatest challenge is climate change, and AI indeed has the potential to be of great service in our search for a solution. But, as it stands today, AI inflicts far greater harm to humanity and the planet at large with its unabated carbon footprint.

In order for researchers to not just pay lip service to noble aspirations of advancing AI to help humanity, two key issues must be addressed: the lack of transparency and the misalignment of incentives.

The root of these complications in contending with AI's carbon footprint problem stems from the privatization of AI research. Strubell explains that "training huge models on tons of data is not feasible for academics—grad students especially, because we don't have the computational resources" (qtd. in Hao, "Training"). Since the publication of her study on the carbon footprint of AI models, which she wrote as a grad student, Strubell has joined the Computer Science department at Carnegie Mellon University as an Assistant Professor, but her decision to remain in academia places her in the minority. As shown in the most recent 2023 report from Stanford's Institute for Human-Centered AI, the past decade has witnessed the unrelenting trend of more and more new AI PhDs in North America leaving academia and entering jobs in industry upon graduation, rising steadily from approximately forty percent in 2011 to nearly sixty-five percent in 2021 (Lynch). This phenomenon is intertwined with the trend toward larger AI models. Due to the inequitable access to computational resources, researchers are increasingly drawn to large tech companies whose for-profit natures necessitate a research agenda motivated by drastically different incentives compared to purely academic research. Granted, it might be too late to completely reverse this shift. However, it is not too late to demand more transparency from large tech companies and to push for policies mandating public disclosure of carbon emissions from their AI models. According to a paper from 2022, coauthored by Strubell, Luccioni, and other researchers, some AI and machine learning "[c]onferences such as NeurIPS and NAACL have recently added emissions reporting as an optional part of the submission process," but "both carbon estimation and reporting in ML publications and technical reports remain a relatively rare phenomenon" (Dodge et al. 1886). The practice is even rarer in industry, where the stakes are higher with larger models. Greater transparency is essential to sparking dialogue, which is the first step to action.

To connect discourse to action, there must be greater efforts to educate computer scientists about the role of AI in accelerating climate change. As it turns out, there is a course offered here at Columbia called "Machine Learning and Climate," taught by Professor Alp Kucukelbir. Based on the syllabus, of the twelve weeks of the course, eleven are devoted to learning how AI can be used to tackle climate challenges, from tracking worldwide power-plant emissions to modeling stratospheric aerosol injection. However, the question of AI's own carbon footprint is unaddressed until the last week of the course (Syllabus). While the course still serves as a small step towards raising awareness about the issue, it is only a graduate-level elective. The vast majority of CS students pass through the curriculum without ever touching on the environmental costs of AI ("CS@CU Undergraduate Programs"). This issue must be integrated into the core curriculum for all students majoring in Computer Science and related fields.

Education goes hand-in-hand with greater transparency in laying the basis for change. As students become future researchers, they must understand how the AI technologies they build impact the environment. As demonstrated by Strubell and Luccioni, the computational toll of large AI models can be drastically decreased through small steps in the engineering process. The problem is that most researchers are still completely unaware of this issue.

In recent weeks, there have been growing calls for a six-month moratorium on research into AI models more powerful than GPT-4. So far, the petition, "Pause Giant AI Experiments: An Open Letter," spearheaded by Max Tegmark, an AI researcher at MIT, has been signed by over 30,000 researchers, industry leaders, and policymakers. Among its supporters are Elon Musk, Steve Wozniak, Andrew Yang, Yuval Harari, and Columbia CS Professor Daniel Bauer, who teaches a popular course on Natural Language Processing—which lays the groundwork for the technology behind GPT-4. The letter cites concerns about unknown "risks to society and humanity" as justification for the moratorium but fails to explicitly mention the immense environmental toll of AI models ("Pause"). On a recent episode of fellow MIT AI research scientist Lex Fridman's podcast, Tegmark discusses fears of GPT-4 replacing human jobs, daydreams about using AI to search for extraterrestrial life—and even engages with catastrophic predictions of how AI might end humankind. But, during the entire three-hour-long interview, the issue of the immense impact of AI on global climate never directly surfaces. It simply feels like the elephant in the room. Clearly, despite the handful of voices sounding the sirens about the alarming carbon footprint of AI models, the issue remains relatively unacknowledged within the wider CS research community. And, even if it is known, there is a lack of incentive to address the problem, as the inconvenient truth is shunned in the frenzied race towards bigger, more accurate models.

Taking a pause on the development of larger AI models presents the perfect opportunity for researchers and policymakers to face the uncomfortable reality. It provides precisely the impetus needed to dissect the true carbon footprint of large AI models and to reevaluate the feasibility of continued research in this direction. This issue must be addressed before we continue spiraling down the dangerous path of chasing ever larger models in the search for greater artificial intelligence. It is, after all, *artificial* intelligence. We cannot get so caught up in its hype that we forget what it means to be human—especially what it means to be humans residing on planet Earth. It does not matter how much AI advances if we recklessly ignore the terrifying reality of climate change. We must prioritize protecting our only home. This is humanity's only path forward.

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WEAPONIZING INNOCENCE: THE DANGER OF ANTI-TRANS LEGISLATION

JACOB RANDALL

When I was four years old, I confidently told my parents, "I am a boy," and I demanded they call me Kade. Like most parents might do, they laughed it off, claiming they had a tomboy. However, my feelings persisted, and it wasn't until I was eleven years old that I discovered the language to describe what I had been feeling. I have gender dysphoria; I am transgender. I was lucky enough to start my medical transition in my teens. At fifteen years old, I began testosterone, and, at sixteen years old, I got top surgery. If my parents had denied me access to gender-affirming care (GAC), I would not be here today. Unfortunately, that is the reality facing transgender youths in the United States.

In early 2020, the effort to restrict gender-affirming care began as states started proposing bills to ban such care for minors. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines gender-affirming care as "a supportive form of healthcare" (HHS Office of Population 1) made up of "psychological, social, medical, and legal aspects" (Substance Abuse 37). This care involves interventions such as social affirmation, legal name and gender change, therapy, puberty blockers, hormone replacement therapy, and gender-affirming surgeries. As someone nearing their sixteenth birthday at that time, I was terrified. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed these bills from passing, but 2021 brought a surge of even more anti-trans bills. Shortly after my seventeenth birthday, on April 6, 2021, Arkansas became the first state to ban GAC for youth when they enacted House Bill 1570—the Save Adolescents From Experimentation (SAFE) Act. The situation has only gotten worse since. For example, Tennessee Senate Bill 1 (SB1) will go into effect on July 1, 2023. This bill prevents minors from accessing GAC and demands that youths already receiving GAC (such as puberty blockers or hormones) must stop it by March 31, 2024. I have never been so glad to be an adult.

This surge of anti-trans legislation began due to the increased visibility of the transgender community. The HBO documentary *Transhood*, released on May 28, 2020, specifically sparked outrage. *Transhood* follows four children (ages four, seven, twelve, and fifteen at the beginning) over five years as they navigate their gender identities. Although this film cannot be held accountable for the anti-trans legislation, it exacerbated a long-standing controversy by portraying the realities of gender-diverse children, ultimately leading to the final breaking point for some conservatives. On *X*, political commentator Matt Walsh (@MattWalshBlog) quote-posted a clip of *Transhood* with the message, "[b]y the way, this is from a new HBO documentary called 'Transhood.' I can tell you it's even worse and more exploitative and dangerous and sadistic than 'Cuties' was, and it should provoke an even stronger backlash from us."

The clip shows four-year-old Phoenix being too shy to tell their congregation they are a girl, so their mother does it for them. Walsh's claim that *Transhood* is worse than *Cuties* is grossly misleading. *Cuties* is a Netflix film with young girls in sexually suggestive scenes—which prompted Republican Congress members to appropriately call *Cuties* child pornography (Banks 1). Walsh then posts about Phoenix again: "A mother puts her 4 year old son in a dress and reads him LGBT propaganda. You're literally watching her brainwash the child into thinking he's a girl. It's no mystery how children end up 'trans.' This is it. Right here." Walsh's posts brought public attention to *Transhood*, and the film received much more criticism from the public. For example: "[s]uch a horrific video, transing children is a crime and people involved in this should be held accountable for their actions," as one citizen posted (qtd. in Wynne). Thus, proponents of such legislation argue that transgender youths do not actually exist—it is an ideology that parents are forcing onto their kids; it is abuse. People on this side of the debate believe that all GAC is inherently harmful and will cause irreversible damage to children. According to this logic, it must be prohibited since minors do not understand what they are "consenting" to.

On the other hand, opponents of such legislation believe youth know more about their gender identity than anti-trans adults give them credit for. They think we should use a gender-affirmative model to provide youth with GAC that is deemed essential. For example, one *X* user said, "[w]ithholding gender affirming care from trans youth is absolutely abusive. This will kill children" (@EuphoriTori). Montana State Representative Zooey Zephyr (@ZoAndBehold) posted a clip of herself addressing the House alongside the quote: "If you are denying gender-affirming care and forcing a trans child to go through puberty, that is tantamount to torture, and this body should be ashamed. If you vote yes on this bill, I hope the next time you bow your heads in prayer, you see the blood on your hands." Parents of trans youth have also spoken out that they fear this type of legislation will kill their children, a fear exemplified in the perspectives collected in a study by Kidd et al. One parent shared, "I asked [my child] the other night how he thinks his life would look without [puberty blockers]. Without needing to think about it, he said, 'I'd probably be dead.' He's 14" (1084). Another parent expressed, "[Legislators] may as well provide the blade for my child to slit his wrists with" (1084).

So, while the passage of bills such as the Arkansas SAFE Act and Tennessee's SB1 has garnered national attention and sparked controversy, the impact on transgender youth cannot be understated. As someone who accessed gender-affirming care as a minor, I know firsthand how beneficial it is and that its positive impact on one's mental health can be outstanding. However, the political debate overlooks complex ethical issues that the debate surrounding transgender youth has raised. Both sides of the debate argue that they are "thinking of the children," albeit in different ways, but neither side addresses the actual impact of this legislation on all transgender people.

Thus, the question arises: how do anti-trans legislative measures contribute to a harmful and dangerous climate for transgender individuals?

Now, to understand where both sides are coming from in the context of "protecting the children," it will be helpful to understand what "the child[ren]" means. Literary critic and scholar Lee Edelman analyzes the concept of "the Child" in American politics and culture. Edelman reveals that the idea of the child is a symbol of futurity—a representation of the continuation of society. However, queerness does not fit into this vision of the future because "[t]he Child… marks the fetishistic fixation on heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity" (Edelman 21). That is, invoking "the Child" is a way to replicate the past and maintain the heteronormativity of society. Edelman argues that "the sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer" (28) because conservatives seek to eliminate the "queerness of resistance to futurism" (27). Queer identity inherently resists this idea of a future-oriented society, as the normative ideas inherent in futurism—such as reproduction and traditional family structures—marginalize queer people whose mere existence challenges them. The right-wing tries to eliminate queerness through confrontation and repression. As the issue of trans youth healthcare has become completely politicized, it is productive to examine the legislation through the lens of Edelman's understanding of "the Child" to understand the negative impact on the trans community.

As it happens, the Arkansas SAFE Act displays how the right-wing desires "the elimination of queers" (28). The title of the act, "Save Adolescents from Experimentation," immediately sets the tone of the bill, implying that GAC is an unproven and inherently dangerous experiment on adolescents. The opening line emphasizes this: "Arkansas has a compelling government interest in protecting the health and safety of its citizens, especially vulnerable children" (State of Arkansas, Legislature, House 1). People associate the use of words such as "compelling," "protecting," "safety," and "vulnerable" with the manipulation of innocents. In turn, the general public is more likely to agree with the bill, as such images will remain in mind. The bill uses the word "irreversible" five times, all in the context of infertility and sterilization (3, 5). This repetitiveness and focus on the ability to reproduce aligns with Edelman's theory of futurism. The Arkansas SAFE Act cares about "reproduc[ing] the past" and maintaining the heteronormativity of society (Edelman 31). Tennessee SB1 also opens with a similar message: "The legislature declares that it must take action to protect the health and welfare of minors" (State of Tennessee 1). This language is slightly less emotive but has the same intent as the Arkansas SAFE Act. Plus, Tennessee SB1 also uses phrases such as "harmful" (1, 2, 4), "experimental" (1, 2), "minor's best interest" (2), "protecting minors" (2) "minor injured" (4), and "threat" (5) to evoke the same message found in the Arkansas SAFE Act. The word "purported" shows up 12 times in the bill (1-4), delegitimizing the lived experience of transgender people and further pushing the message of coercion. The fear-mongering

language purposefully evokes the image of a helpless and highly impressionable child, pushing the notion that children cannot make decisions for themselves and implying that children are being manipulated or forced into transitioning.

Thus, the proponents of anti-trans legislation argue that children do not have the right to autonomy for "decisions" as consequential as their gender. This lack of autonomy comes from the notion that children constantly play make-believe, so a child claiming they are not their assigned gender at birth (AGAB) is just pretending. Indulging children in this "fantasy" by allowing them to transition sets them up for future regret. Walsh expresses this viewpoint well in a conversation with Tucker Carlson about *Transhood* when Walsh states, "Children literally cannot differentiate between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy. I have a four-year-old boy who thinks he's a stegosaurus, so I'm not going to take him to Jurassic Park" (Carlson 3:24-34). In this same conversation, Carlson claims that "four-year-olds don't make decisions like that. They can't," when referring to Phoenix (1:35-8). Journalist Jesse Singal builds off Walsh and Carlson by reminding us that teenagers are constantly going through phases and trying to be rebellious. Singal goes on to explain that teenagers are often lost and trying to find their place in society, so teenagers believing they are not their assigned gender at birth "[stems] from rigid views of gender roles that [are] internalized" (91). Ultimately, this argument against GAC for minors boils down to what some believe will result in their future regret. They believe the minor in question will regret transitioning because they did not understand the repercussions, and they will then detransition and live as a broken, scarred version of their AGAB. So, by banning GAC, they are "saving" the children from "radical gender ideology" (Shapiro 1:04:14-15). They are "fighting for the children" by protecting them from "abusive" parents. They are trying to ensure what they believe will be a healthy future as their AGAB. They are arguing that they know what's better for children in the long run than the parents and doctors of these children and, especially, the children themselves.

However, children are not too young to know their gender. Biologist and activist Julia Serano explains subconscious sex as "this unconscious self-understanding that (for many trans people) precedes any conscious or deliberate grappling with questions of gender identity" (178). Most people know their gender without consciously thinking about it and the language that describes it. Plus, evidence supports that "children develop the ability to label gender groups and to use gender labels…between 18 and 24 months," begin developing an "awareness of their own 'self' at roughly 18 months," and develop an understanding of gendered stereotypes by age three (Martin and Ruble 3). So comprehending gender stereotypes helps children understand what role they want to play in society, which can lead to "falsely" identifying as trans. However, even then, that misunderstanding occurs at an age when only a social transition would occur anyway. There is no harm in allowing children to explore their gender. Even Singal agrees. For example, a boy wearing "girls" clothes is only deemed unacceptable because of the rigid gender roles that Singal claims cause people to regret transitioning.

Furthermore, the anti-trans argument stems from the idea that gender and sex are entirely biological. These individuals believe that genetics dictate gender, so, if a child claims they are transgender, the parents are forcing that identity onto their child, or elderly trans people are indoctrinating the child. For example, while reviewing *Transhood*, Walsh claimed that parents (primarily mothers) supporting their trans kids is an example of "Munchausen Syndrome by proxy" (Walsh, "SHOCKING" 9:20-22), a condition in which parents convince their healthy children that they are sick and force them into unnecessary medical procedures. Walsh and Carlson are not alone in this belief. One "whistleblowing" educator expressed her concerns about the growing number of children identifying as trans. This teacher believes children are "easily influenced" and learn to identify as trans from older students and *YouTube* stars (Manning). This article describes younger children as "vulnerable," "exploited," "brainwashed," and "tricked." The story portrays the *YouTube* stars and older trans kids as villains, describing them with words such as "to blame," and "groom[ers]" (Manning). The article weaponizes trans identity and transition, characterizing them as "mutilation," "harmful," "tragedy," "nightmare," "agenda," and so on (Manning). Such language portrays children as being harmed and requiring protection. This piece uses such language to create a pedophilic overtone that further pushes the idea of these children needing to be saved from trans ideology.

Popular books also showcase this opinion. One of *The Economist's* 2020 books of the year gives the same message as above. *Irreversible Damage* uses "indoctrination," "cult," "coach," and "propaganda" repeatedly, as well as "brainwashed" (Shrier). This type of language evokes the image of people endangering and coercing innocent children, promoting the erasure of queerness and transness from the public view. The reason kids identify as trans, according to this thinking, is because they were tricked and forced to by older trans people or parents who have fallen victim to "radical left-wing gender theory" (Walsh, "SHOCKING" 9:59-10:00). Some of this legislation banning GAC for youth was born from people like Walsh and Carlson voicing their "concerns." Such legislation publicizes the belief that children need to be prevented from mutilating their bodies and causing irreversible damage, simultaneously promoting the belief that trans adults are sick and damaged. However, these anti-trans advocates fail to acknowledge all of the scientific and medical research showing how vital GAC is for mental health and overall well-being, only focusing on the minute number of people who detransition (Coleman et al. S41).

The medical consensus is that gender-affirming care is lifesaving for many trans individuals. "[R]esults align with past literature, suggesting that pubertal suppression for transgender adolescents who want this treatment is associated with favorable mental health outcomes," and "participants' suicidality scores…significantly decreased following administration of [gender affirming hormones], . . . [and] participants' general well-being scores significantly increased" (Turban et al. 1; Allen et al. 307). A study published in 2022 followed 317 binary trans children (between ages three and

twelve) who had already socially transitioned over a five-year timeline. After five years, only 7.3% of those children changed their identity; a mere 2.5% detransitioned, and the rest maintained a transgender identity (Olson et al. 2-3). This indicates that just 2.5% ultimately identified with their AGAB, while the majority continued to identify as transgender, albeit with some fluctuations in certainty during the study period (the 7.3%). Plus, most adults who stop transitioning do so due to external pressures, not the regret that anti-trans advocates suggest (Roberts 2).

While some may claim that anti-trans rhetoric comes from concern for children, this rhetoric in fact seems to come from hate and ignorance. Those who spread this rhetoric do not understand that there are many guidelines for treating transgender youth—all of which give timelines on when to start medical care. For example, individuals must reach Tanner stage 2 of puberty before starting puberty blockers "because the experience of physical puberty may be critical for further gender identity development for some" adolescents (Coleman et al. S64). Individuals must be at least fourteen (and usually sixteen) years old to start hormones, and eighteen years old to get genital surgeries (Mahfouda et al. 486). Plus, surgeons (no matter their patient's age) typically require at least two letters from mental health care professionals supporting the patient getting the surgery (Milrod and Karasic 628). For me to access any gender-affirming medical procedures, even as an adult, I had to fulfill the requirement of living as male for at least a year and obtaining letters from both a therapist and an evaluative psychologist. Perhaps, then, this anti-trans rhetoric comes not merely from hate or ignorance, but from a desire to do battle with the queer and trans survival instinct that Professor Jack Halberstam would call "failure" (88). Halberstam argues that mainstream society is oppressively obsessed with the notion of success, so failure is a way to resist these dominant structures—and queer people have long been resisting social norms. Heteronormative society has made it so that "the queer body and queer social worlds become the evidence of that failure" (94). Queer people have long been seen as "failures" in society because they subvert societal norms, and queer people have learned to embrace that, making it their version of success. Those spewing anti-trans rhetoric fear the redefining of "success," as they need to maintain the heteronormativity of society. The only way to do so is to protect children from seeing happy queer and trans adults. The so-called epidemic of trans youth threatens the "default heteronormativity of modern culture with its worst nightmare, a queer planet" (Warner 16).

Thus, bills such as the Arkansas SAFE Act and Tennessee SB1 are crucial aspects of a much larger problem facing the transgender community. These extreme anti-trans bills make less severe bills, such as the bathroom bills, look reasonable. They stoke fear against transgender people, making us seem like a public enemy with our supposedly predatory ways, which, in turn, emboldens transphobia and gives people a sense of justification for hating trans people—so much so that, nationwide, there were 615 anti-trans bills proposed in 2023 (Trans Legislation Tracker). Some bills try to

make it illegal for me to continue hormones, as I am younger than 26 (State of Texas 6). In other states, I can go to jail if I do not use the women's restroom (State of Arkansas, Legislature, Senate 2). States are trying to write us out of existence by doing the very thing they are accusing us of doing: redefining "sex" (State of Montana 1). Ultimately, anti-trans legislation does more than deny medical care—it erodes the humanity of trans people. By framing trans existence as a threat to children, society denies us our right to live authentically. These bills are not about protecting society but about dehumanizing, criminalizing, and erasing trans people. These bills restrict our lives, take away our rights, and oppress us with the goal of making it impossible for us to exist. My survival is a testament to the life-saving power of GAC—and my story is just one of thousands that reflect this sentiment. At the Conservative Political Action Conference in 2023, Michael Knowles said, "[T]ransgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely," and the crowd cheered (qtd. in Hawkinson). It was never about "the children"; it was always about the utter elimination of transgender people.

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COLUMBIA'S AFRICAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION DEEP IN DIASPORA WAR

CHINONYE OMEIRONDI

My friends and I walked into ASA (African Student Association) late, like usual. The room was filled with lively chatter, and the attendees were scattered across the room, split into discussion groups. That day, the club was discussing "hot takes and hot topics," a discussion inspired by the once popular *YouTube* series "BK Chat London." We settled on the couch and quickly got comfortable, chatting and joking about each topic that appeared on the screen. A topic about African parent stereotypes came up, and my group of friends, the comedians they are, made me laugh until I shed tears. After the group discussion ended, we watched the club come together and discuss the topic, nodding our heads and snapping. It was a productive discussion. Then, a topic concerning HBCUs vs. PWIs—Historically Black Colleges and Universities vs. Predominantly White Institutions—came up, and my group quickly veered off-topic. One of the African American members of my group made a *very* hot take about the n-word, and, when the group discussion concluded, they were pushed to share it with the club. As they spoke, the atmosphere in the room shifted instantly. Heads whipped up from phones. Faces twisted into frowns and grimaces. Strange laughter and confused chatter bounced around the lounge until a board member led the room to a hush. The evening progressed, and the room remained tense as more African Americans expressed their opinions, one of them being that there was no space for African Americans on campus, and that admissions were intentionally accepting more Africans than African Americans to top schools in an effort to promote African American erasure.

When the club meeting ended, we walked out of the room, tension sparking amongst the group like electricity. Once we reached John Jay lounge, we hurriedly took out our folders and laptops and LitHum readings to do homework. But, instead of moving our pencils across paper, we looked up at each other, tugged at the tension hung taut in the air, and moved our mouths instead. In the time that chatter prevailed over homework, some African American students made a few inflammatory comments concerning Africans, and, by the end of the conversation, my African friend had angrily blocked one of them.

As I witnessed this play out from behind my computer screen—the eyerolls, the pointed comments, the side-eyes, and private messages sent to my phone—a mixture of sadness and slight irritation settled in the pit of my stomach. I wanted to flee, to leave and go to my dorm, the bathroom, anywhere but there. I couldn't stand witnessing this sudden divide between friends, but, more importantly, I couldn't stand watching this divide within Columbia's small Black community. It made me—*makes* me—sick. Even now, as I write this, I am frustrated. I ask myself now as I did then:

why? Why do we argue and point fingers? Why does this conflict and hostility arise between African Americans and Black Africans in higher education when, after all is said and done, we're all Black students attempting to achieve the same feat?

This divide, whether it be between Black students at Columbia's African Student Association, or between members of the Black community within America, exists because of how ideas of white supremacy have manifested themselves within these two groups—African Americans and Black Africans. As a result, these groups see each other with differing levels of humanity. *This* is the reason behind the frowns and pointed comments, behind the tension in the air at Columbia's ASA. Those frowning eyes were seeing through a lens clouded by white, reducing their Black peers to a single dimension of ethnicity or, rather, a perceived notion of what that ethnicity represents, stripping us of mutual understanding and dividing us in a room that was meant to unite.

This white-supremacy-promoting division is highlighted in Onoso Imoagene's "Broken Bridges," a study about the exchange of slurs between second-generation Nigerians and African Americans, and its subsequent impact on identity formation. The findings of this study highlight white supremacy's influence on the identity-formation process. Imoagene writes that "America operates a racialized system that categorizes people by race and slots these races into a racial hierarchy that has whites at the top and blacks at the bottom," and, as a result, "ethnic diversity among black people is often underplayed" (176-7). In the eyes of white America, Black people are a "monolithic group" (177). But there is great ethnic diversity within the Black community at Columbia, and the same applies for ASA; we have members from Togo, Kenya, Cameroon, Ghana, Ethiopia, America, and more. Yet, when the acknowledgment of this diversity starts to disappear, as it did in that ASA meeting, "boundar[ies]" are drawn (181). An "us-versus-them divide" arises "between African Americans and Africans" (181). In Imoagene's study, this divide was drawn by slurs. African respondents to the interview reported being called "*African booty scratcher* because African Americans saw themselves as more civilized and superior to Africans" (181). To be an *African booty scratcher*, one must be "too dark complexioned" and "black as night"; one must be "an uncivilized person from the African jungle" and "ugly" with "a . . . (flat and broad) nose, and thick lips" (181). These *African booty scratcher* qualities clearly stem from white supremacy, a system where skin that's "black as night" "communicates one's position . . . within the dominant power structure" as "inferior" (Blay 37). In turn, to call Africans *African booty scratchers* is to dehumanize them, to solidify the position of the African as below the African American, to perpetuate the system of white supremacy that created the slur, widening the divide. In Imoagene's study, African American respondents recall hearing "*Akata*," a Yoruba word meaning "a wild cat or a wandering cat without a home" (182). This is a slur that has formed "ethnic boundaries between Nigerians and African Americans," for, to be an *Akata*, one must be "wild, rude, impetuous, aggressive, and uncultured" (182). Again, we find

white supremacy at work, feeding these narratives and "negative stereotypes" to Africans through "media's portrayal of African Americans" (183). Now, during the ASA meeting, there were no slurs said aloud. Rather, this "us-versus-them divide" was created through reactionary facial expressions and tones of voice. To egg on an African American to share their controversial opinion on the n-word, and to proceed to allow the entire club to laugh and snicker at them after they've built the courage to share it, is just as dehumanizing as calling them an *Akata*. Imoagene writes of a divide that needs biting words, but, at Columbia, the divide was present with or without words. That system of white supremacy—the urge for one group to be or *feel* superior to the other, to inch closer to the "whites at the top" within our "racial hierarchy," whether that be through mocking laughter or turned, frowning faces—shaped the divide at ASA and laid the foundation for the slurs in Imoagene's study.

The day of that club meeting, the Malcolm X Lounge, a space created for the congregation of Black students, became a space for a more exclusive group: Black Africans—and it was treated as such. The questions asked and discussions facilitated were all pointed to the first- and second-generation African experience. Yet, during this meeting in particular, the space was also shared by a few African Americans, students who couldn't contribute to the discussion of strict African parenting, who don't know enough afrobeats to choose the best song of the semester. This African American minority among the Black students within the lounge that night reflects the population of African American students among Black students at Columbia. One of the African American attendees said it themselves: "There is a lack of space for us on campus." And, throughout my short time on campus, I've heard that statement said in many different ways. Upon introducing myself to other Black students, their response is often "Why is everybody here Nigerian?" followed by a series of awkward laughs. That familiar tension rises again.

Dr. Chrystal A. George Mwangi approaches this rift in her article, "Complicating Blackness," questioning "why there is an overrepresentation of Black immigrants in higher education," (7) bringing forth the "historical context" (10) of both ethnicities within the United States and, in turn, their "racial positioning" (3). Throughout her paper, George Mwangi constantly highlights how "the arrival of new [African] immigrants has added another level of complexity regarding how race is considered" (10-11), especially in "programs/policies initially developed for historically marginalized populations" (15) like affirmative action. George Mwangi considers the argument that, within an "historical context . . . Black immigrants' race should not be positioned in the same manner as African Americans in higher education because Black immigrants are not a historically marginalized group in the United States and often arrive with high levels of . . . capital" (11). She parallels this "historical" argument with that of "racialization" (14); despite "Black immigrants' ethnic difference . . . eventually the system of racial stratification in the United States imposes a Black racial identity" (14). As a result, "Black immigrants [become] susceptible to racial

marginalization and injustices that can negatively impact their educational pursuits" (16). This conflict between arguments, this *divide*, is the same divide that occurred at ASA. Although, in George Mwangi's terms, the divide that occurred in ASA was less of a divide of physical groups—African Americans and Black Africans—but more so a divide of understanding. To some of the African Americans present at the meeting, race was more historical. Rather than a merely present condition, it was an accumulation of pasts, of generations, or, as Michelle Alexander describes it in *The New Jim Crow*, Blackness was bearing the "continuing legacy of slavery and Jim Crow" (3) and suffering "legalized discrimination . . . just as [one's] parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents once were" (1-2). It's safe to assume that this is why one of the African Americans at the meeting was so firm in their idea that non-African Americans shouldn't be saying the n-word. As Imoagene states, "slurs can become a critical part of the identity formation process" (177), and, to them, first- and second-generation Africans didn't fit into the *historical* context of their Black identity—many aren't products of the generations of society-inflicted trauma that Alexander illustrates in her essay. In response to the claim about the n-word, and after the snickering and sounds of confusion died down, a Kenyan in the club spoke up in response. They respectfully disagreed, explaining that if any of the Africans in the room were taken and placed in the Antebellum South, they too would be called and treated as the "n-word," and if any of the Africans had an encounter with the police today, they would also face the same set of risks and fears as an African American. Their response was a resounding echo of George Mwangi's "racialization."

Reexamining how ideas of white supremacy have manifested within African Americans and Black Africans with George Mwangi's argument in mind offers a more nuanced view. Rather than these groups seeing *each other* with differing levels of humanity, it seems that they see *themselves* with differing levels of humanity. Through the lens of white supremacy or, rather, through the eyes of white people, there is no difference between African Americans and Black Africans. The Africans within Columbia's ASA believe their own identities, their own humanity, is perceived this way. So, they act and think accordingly. As a result, they are left with two separate yet intertwining identities. This is what Dialika Sall demonstrates in her article "Convergent Identifications, Divergent Meanings: The Racial and Ethnic Identities of Second-Generation West African Youth." "[S]econd-generation Black immigrant youth," like the members of Columbia's ASA, "no longer choose between a Black racial identity and an ethnic identity" (Sall 137). Rather, they "identify simultaneously as both Black and with their nationality-based ethnicities" (137). At first glance, it seems that this idea of simultaneous identities and my developed claim of white supremacy causing groups to view themselves with a different level of humanity does not fit with the concept of historical and racialized identity perception. However, a focus on Africans, or African students in particular, puts the pieces together. Because this group sees itself as (monolithically) Black through both racialization and the lens

of white supremacy, it ends up working to distance itself from that identity while simultaneously holding on to it, creating a push-and-pull that attempts to dodge this internal conflict. Like Sall, Tamar Becker affirms this in the article "Black Africans and Black Americans on an American Campus: The African View." In an exploration of relations between "Africans and [B]lack Americans on the UCLA campus" (168), Becker writes that, by "emphasizing their special [African] identity," Africans are able to "take on the role of the detached observer of racial strife [or Blackness] in the United States" (179), which "softens the impact of unpleasant experiences they are bound to encounter due to their race" (172).

With Becker's and Sall's words in mind, let's turn back to that ASA meeting. There was a moment in the meeting when African American students spent some time voicing concerns about the lack of space for them on campus. In response, one of the ASA members offered BSO (Black Student Organization) as an example of a space for African Americans. They didn't find that answer adequate. They then spoke about how Columbia's BSO played a few afrobeats during a cookout event, rather than prioritizing more traditional cookout songs. Members of the board quickly agreed and provided them with resources to address their concerns, and the room swiftly slipped into silence. That silence spoke volumes. It echoed the ideas of Sall and Becker, for the first- and second-generation African members of ASA, like myself, hold simultaneous identities of African and Black-in-America. In the same way Black Africans and African Americans conflict with one another, those identities conflict as well. That conflict resulted in the resounding silence that settled in the room when African American students expressed that they had no space for them—we occupied two spaces where, seemingly, they occupied none. We could not relate to their grievances.

The African Student Association was one of my favorite clubs at Columbia, and it still is. At first, the knowledge that the club I'd dedicated my Monday nights to wasn't as flawless as I originally envisioned had saddened me. This white-supremacy-fueled divide, whether it be between African American and Black African students, or between the Black and African identities within oneself, is a roadblock that I, as a second-generation African, find difficult to overcome. Yet, through careful examination of various studies and articles, an understanding of this divide has been developed, and with this newfound knowledge we can work to create a space where African American and Black African students can thrive in harmony. Most of the African American students who attended the ASA meeting detailed here haven't appeared at another meeting since. Perhaps we could start by inviting them once more and facilitating a discussion where we can all feel welcome.

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CAN THE NFL'S ROONEY RULE BE REVISED?

MICHAEL ZHANG

Brian Flores, who led the Miami Dolphins to two winning seasons as head coach, was about to interview for the New York Giants' head coaching position when he received a suspicious text message—"sounds like you have landed – congrats!!"—from the legendary NFL head coach Bill Belichick. "I hear from Buffalo and NYG (Giants) that you are their guy," Belichick added. "Hope it works out if you want it to!!" (Schrotenboer). Flores had not been interviewed yet, so he was confused and reached out for clarification. Belichick admitted he meant to congratulate a different Brian, Brian Daboll, a white coach who was eventually hired by the Giants. Since the Giants had already decided who to hire before interviewing Flores, who is Black, the upcoming interview was a sham interview designed to satisfy the NFL's Rooney Rule (Harper). "I've worked so hard to get to where I am in football to become a head coach, for 18 years in this league, and to go on what was a sham interview," Flores said, "I was hurt" (Fieldstadt). In January 2022, Flores filed a lawsuit against the NFL alleging racial discrimination in hiring practices, drawing significant attention to the Rooney Rule's failure almost twenty years after its implementation (Sheinin et al.).

The Rooney Rule, established in 2003, requires NFL teams to interview at least one minority candidate for every head coaching vacancy before making a hire ("Rooney Rule"). This was set in response to a drastically low number of Black head coaches; only three out of thirty-two were Black, while almost seventy percent of NFL players were Black. Despite many qualified minority candidates, even the most successful assistant coaches were unable to land head coaching positions (Garcia-Roberts). In the years following the Rooney Rule's adoption, there was an immediate improvement, as the number of Black head coaches jumped to seven by 2006 (Sheinin et al.). However, the improvement leveled off. Today, there are only three Black head coaches in the NFL, demonstrating that the Rooney Rule did not meet its goal of increasing the number of minority head coaches long-term. From 2012 to 2022, according to the 2022 NFL Diversity and Inclusion Report, there were fifty-eight white head coaches hired and thirteen Black head coaches hired (Harrison and Bukstein 9). Despite the NFL's strong Black culture, reinforced by the fifty-eight percent of players nowadays identifying as Black ("Key Findings"), why do Black coaches continuously fail to land and retain head coaching jobs, even with increased interviewing opportunities from the Rooney Rule?

To understand the failure of the Rooney Rule, it's important to examine the main problems that Black coaches face. Head coaches are hired by team owners and their executives who are predominantly white. Out of the NFL's thirty-two teams, there are only two non-white majority owners: a Pakistani American and an Asian American

(Sheinin et al.). White owners tend to trust white coaches with the responsibility of leading the franchise to success and growth because of their feelings of similarity. For example, white owners frequently say white candidates remind them of themselves when justifying their hires (Sheinin et al.). On the other hand, Black coaches are unable to resonate with white owners as strongly in interviews, possibly because of cultural differences in mannerisms and expressions (Sheinin et al.). In this way, Black coaching candidates are judged beyond their leadership ability or game knowledge, and these biased mindsets are not addressed by simply requiring owners to interview more minority candidates with the Rooney Rule.

For owners intent on hiring head coaches who look like them, the Rooney Rule becomes a check-in-the-box exercise. The Rooney Rule was established with language that was "worded more like a gentlemen's agreement than a contract"; the possibility of sham interviews was known from the start, but the league hoped the teams would be sincere about their interviews (Garcia-Roberts). However, the "football mentality" of circumventing rules and gaining advantages, prevalent throughout the NFL, conquered the Rooney Rule almost immediately after its passage. Two weeks after its implementation in 2003, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones hired a white coach named Bill Parcels after a five-hour meeting on a private jet. To satisfy the Rooney Rule, Jones interviewed a Black coach on the phone shortly after (Garcia-Roberts). That same year, before the Detroit Lions hired a white coach named Steve Mariucci, no minority candidates agreed to interview because they all knew the Lions were going to hire Mariucci (Garcia-Roberts). Black candidates rightfully feared that their interviews could be shams, which was extremely demoralizing, as weeks of preparation were required for these pivotal meetings. Anthony Lynn, former head coach of the Los Angeles Chargers, received many more interview offers than he actually accepted because he said he "refused to meet 'with an organization that had not already interviewed a minority because [he] did not want to be a token interview'" (Sheinin et al.). In some extreme cases, the Black candidates were directly told they were not being seriously considered. In 2004, Maurice Carthon was directly told by an Oakland Raiders senior personnel executive, "[y]ou know, you're not going to get this job" (Sheinin et al.). In this way, the Rooney Rule negatively affected Black coaching candidates, as they were thrown into interviews where they stood no chance of being hired. The rule became a time waster that benefitted no one in the process.

However, even if owners' biases were not a factor, this policy would still not be effective, as a research group at the University of Colorado's Leeds School of Business showed that having one candidate of a certain race or gender in a hiring pool almost never leads to the minority being hired. In their study, they showed 144 undergraduate students profiles of three candidates with the same credentials for an athletic director job. When there were multiple white candidates and one Black candidate, the majority of participants recommended hiring a white candidate, but, when they presented one white candidate and multiple Black candidates, participants tended to recommend a

Black candidate for the job. The research group also performed an observational study on various university finalist pools, ranging from three to eleven candidates. When there were two or more minorities in the finalist pool, the odds that a minority was hired were 193.72 times greater than if there was only one minority in the pool (Johnson et al.). These results suggest that the Rooney Rule was set up to fail because of its design, as giving one minority an interview has virtually no sway on the racial biases of team owners.

Even if the Rooney Rule effectively addressed the interviewing process, it would still only be half of the fight. It is equally, if not more, difficult for a head coach to keep his job than to get hired, and Black coaches who get the job still face discrimination. Black head coaches are held to a higher standard than white coaches; they are fired more quickly and are fired, on average, after having better seasons than fired white coaches. Since 1990, Black head coaches who lead their teams to a losing season are fired nine percent of the time, whereas white head coaches are fired four percent of the time for doing the same ("Key Findings"). When they win nine or more games in a season, which increased from a total of sixteen to seventeen games in 2021, Black head coaches are fired eight percent of the time while white head coaches are fired two percent of the time, showing that even success is often not enough for Black coaches to keep their jobs (Sheinin et al.). In a position where it takes time to fully bond with and earn the trust of players, assistant coaches, and other staff members, a lack of patience for success is especially detrimental to Black head coaches. These short leashes are contradictory to the time required to achieve success and further decrease their chances of becoming a long-term head coach. These racial biases faced by Black coaches extend past the interview process into an area unaddressed by the Rooney Rule, and this failure is largely responsible for the lack of Black head coaches in the NFL.

It is evident that the Rooney Rule fails to address the main problems facing Black coaches. But can the Rooney Rule be revised to make it more effective? Some individuals point to corporate hiring policies as a framework for revising the Rooney Rule. Across the board, creating diverse interview committees and committing to a diverse culture have been cited as factors for increased diversity in corporate settings (Reiser and Mackenzie). For example, Mozilla is committed to doubling the percentage of Black and Latinx representation with "dedicated and comprehensive recruiting, development and inclusion efforts" (Baker), and Google is working towards this goal by training their employees on racial consciousness (Langley). However, these strategies are not applicable to the NFL. Hiring efforts for head coach vacancies are typically led by white-dominated positions—owners, general managers, and/or team presidents—meaning there are few opportunities for diverse committees to impact the hiring decisions (Tomlinson). In addition, head coaches play a much greater role in the team's success than an average corporate employee. Winning games is closely related to "[t]he financial success of the franchise" through fan attendance and television

deals, so the NFL will never force teams to hire specific kinds of people for such pivotal positions (Tomlinson). Due to a team-centric power structure in the NFL, the NFL's policies can only improve diversity if teams respond favorably to them, and history has shown that teams will find ways to circumvent them. Presently, the NFL requires at least two in-person interviews of minority candidates for head coaching jobs as well as for offensive and defensive coordinator positions, but the prospects of increased diversity still seem bleak since the Rooney Rule is still unable to change the biases of team owners (Garcia-Roberts). When trying to bring social change to an institution with a long history of bias, a single rule or policy is not enough to force large-scale change. However, a social movement involving players, coaches, and fans could create enough noise to make a meaningful difference.

To increase Black representation in head coaching, it is helpful to use past social breakthroughs as a model. In *Does the Civil Rights Movement Model Still Work?*, Nicole Austin-Hillery studies the Civil Rights Movement as a model for present-day applications of social change. She argues that a successful social movement relies on four key features: visionary leaders, legal support from the courts, support of the public, and an effective mass movement (Austin-Hillery 110). A movement to increase Black head coaches has the potential to have all four components. Brian Flores could be a visionary leader, the face of the movement, and a figure who is brave enough to risk his own career for social change. His lawsuit, if successful, could provide direct change through the courts and spark confidence in this movement—like how the *Brown v. Board of Education* court victory led to desegregation in more than just schools. This could also increase public awareness and support, which are critical, as the NFL is a product for fans. Finally, an effective mass movement would have to come from other coaches and executives of all backgrounds across the NFL who recognize the problem and use their unique platforms to advocate for change.

Some white head coaches have already been advocating for Black coaching candidates. In a meeting between NFL head coaches, executives, and owners just weeks after the Flores lawsuit, current white NFL head coaches broke a "vexing culture of silence" by giving impassioned speeches and challenging the status quo with their honesty (Brewer, "Voices"). Andy Reid, head coach of the recent Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs, said, "I want to know about my guy. . . . About one-third of the teams in this room have interviewed him. I've had a few of my guys become head coaches, none of them more prepared than Eric Bieniemy" (Brewer, "Voices") in reference to the Chiefs' Black offensive coordinator who was passed over for multiple head coaching positions. More coaches of all races spoke, too, further demanding equality and increasing the discomfort in the room. It is yet to be seen whether this uncomfortably honest meeting will lead to real change. Numerous head coaching positions are expected to be vacant after this season, and the pool of qualified Black candidates continues to grow (Giambalvo).

During the 2016 season, the NFL released a video featuring prominent players from the past and present repeating the phrase "Football is America." Filled with patriotic imagery and music, the video was supposed to reassert football as "America's game" after Colin Kaepernick kneeling to the national anthem caused controversy that preseason (Brewer, "Football"). However, the video epitomized a common theme that stands today: the NFL's shallow responses to social justice issues and false pioneering of support. In a game where predominantly Black players put their bodies and brains on the line every week for the profit of white owners, the teams and executives of the NFL must do more for them than flattering themselves with military symbolism and social justice hashtags. The NFL instituting the Rooney Rule in 2003 was an ambitious idea, but, after almost twenty years of waiting, seeing, and revising, it is time to recognize its failure. NFL owners, executives, and coaches engaging in a movement to increase the number of Black head coaches would be a powerful statement to make to America. If the NFL truly wants to be "America's game," it must use its platform to set an example for the nation beyond the gridiron.

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AIR CONDITIONERS: THE HOTTEST WAY TO STAY COOL

KATIE LIU

"You'll get death threats," my writing partner joked as I shared my intention to argue against Columbia installing air conditioners in dorm rooms.

And I get it—the university recently announced plans to install air conditioners in all freshman dorm rooms, and, had this news come earlier this fall, I would've been ecstatic; after my first night in Wallach, I'd woken up feeling extremely sticky and gross, the suffocating heat and humidity of my room leaving me grumbling all day about the lack of air conditioning in dorms.

However, my grumbling quickly ceased when I discovered that the absence of air conditioners may actually have been a good thing. Air conditioners, it turns out, are extremely harmful to the environment.

Air conditioners depend on substances called refrigerants to facilitate their cooling effects, but these refrigerants are typically highly potent greenhouse gases that are prone to leaking into the environment. For example, R-410A is one of the most commonly used refrigerants, and it has a global warming effect that is two-thousand-times stronger than that of carbon dioxide.

Air conditioners are also highly energy intensive, requiring great amounts of electricity to function. Because electricity is typically generated from fossil fuels which emit greenhouse gases when burned, the energy demand of air conditioners becomes a major source of greenhouse gas emissions; in fact, approximately 117 million metric tons of carbon dioxide are released into the environment each year by the US alone as a result of air conditioner usage.

Thanks to the greenhouse effect, this means that the very devices we use to stay cool are contributing to the rapid warming of our planet. Then, as the planet gets hotter, and it becomes even more important to stay cool . . . well, you can see the problem; air conditioning is not a sustainable solution to heat.

So, if air conditioning isn't the answer to staying cool, then what is? For starters, there are plenty of long-term, sustainable design features that Columbia could implement in dorm rooms that would decrease the need for air conditioning altogether.

For example, the school could install energy efficient windows, windows that are specifically designed to prevent heat from moving in and out of places. These windows typically make use of insulating frames, special low-emissivity coatings, and multiple panes separated by dense gases to block heat from entering and cold air from escaping. On window exteriors, installing shading devices such as solar screens or retractable awnings could block up to seventy-seven percent of the heat from the sun that would enter our rooms otherwise.

In addition to window upgrades, another sustainable cooling initiative that Columbia could undertake would be to build green roofs, which would involve planting a layer of vegetation to cover rooftops. Green roofs provide insulation for buildings, thereby reducing the amount of heat that travels inside. They also remove heat from the air through a process called evapotranspiration, which has the potential to reduce ambient temperatures by up to 5°F. And green roofs don't require much maintenance once they've been established, so there's really no reason not to build them.

Energy efficient windows and green roofs are both relatively quick upgrades that could be implemented over the summer while students are away from dorms. They're also unobtrusive changes (compared to other solutions like passive solar design that would require more drastic, modernist renovations), so Columbia wouldn't have to desecrate its beloved neoclassical architecture in order to apply them (did you know that Columbia once transplanted a whole building just to keep campus symmetrical?).

Us students come into the equation through using our voices to push for the university to adopt these sustainable cooling designs instead of installing more air conditioners in dorm rooms. We can also advocate for more responsible usage of the air conditioners that already exist on campus.

I've had to bring hoodies to lectures in Pupin, despite it being 90°F and sunny outside, because the building's air conditioning is always blowing at full force. I've seen students layering on sweaters in preparation to enter Butler for the same reason. These environmentally reckless practices can be addressed through policy changes that we, as students, have the power to call for.

Asking the university to change its policies isn't the only way for students to get involved, though. For example, if you're an engineering student, you could work to revolutionize air conditioning by researching and designing systems that don't rely on refrigerants to function. Or, if you're an education student, you could help suggest revisions to the Frontiers of Science climate unit curriculum to teach students about concrete steps they can take to decrease their carbon footprint, such as being more conscientious about air conditioner usage.

These are just some preliminary suggestions—our campus is filled with some of our generation's brightest minds, so why not use those minds to create a more sustainable future? There's something that every one of us can contribute, even if that contribution starts out as simple as reaching for the fan instead of the air conditioner the next time things start to get hot (and hot, in NYC, things will get—anyone else remember the 60°F winter of 2023?). Though that may mean sleeping in a room that's just a bit less hot rather than completely chilled, I'd say it's a small price to pay for a healthier, cooler planet down the road—wouldn't you?

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