FRONTIER

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Introduction

The 2023–24 edition of the undergraduate journal provides an intellectual feast for the hungry reader. Organized around the theme of "frontiers" – a perennial in the field of American Studies – it ranges excitedly from studies of the contemporary southern border to a creative readings of video gaming and recent Black cinema. These articles showcase the remarkable ability of our students to conduct in-depth research and present their findings in sophisticated and nuanced ways. Especially impressive is the range of methodologies on display in this journal, as well as the way the authors combine different approaches to their subjects.

I congratulate the editors for putting together a journal that reflects the best of what we aim to accomplish in the American Studies Program: provide students with the critical skills they need to make sense of the world around them and to do so in a spirit of joy and possibility. I am confident readers will discern this as they move through the assembled articles. I also congratulate the authors for sharing their work and for producing such exemplary and informed scholarship.

Professor Rick Halpern
Director, Centre for the Study of the United States

Letter from the Editors

We proudly present the 2023–2024 edition of the *Undergraduate Journal of American Studies*. This year's diverse collection of essays encapsulates American Studies' interdisciplinary spirit with papers in political science, gender studies, history, media studies, and geography.

Our theme – *Frontiers* – touches on the anxiety at the heart of the American settler-colonial project: the line between "civilization" and "savagery"; order and anarchy; in-group and the formless *'other.'* In focusing on *Frontiers,* we chose pieces that rearticulate the classical image of the American frontier and utilize contemporary subjects to reframe historical ideas: papers on media representations, immigration history, metaphors of the foreign, as well as the policing and enfranchisement battles that define the colour line in Black America.

In the last year, images of razor-wire fences, concrete barriers, struggling migrants, and armed border guards spread like wildfire across social media, and newspaper stands as Texas and the American federal government engaged in their perennial showdown over sovereignty and the limits of state violence against non-citizens. In the Middle East, America's premier ally tore through the Gaza Strip and tightened the screws on the occupied West Bank with full-throated support from the White House and billions in U.S. armaments. *Frontiers* are alive as ever in America's national psyche.

The untrammeled West – imagined as empty and unclaimed – formed the basis of American identity. In the vast expanse of prairie and the skyward stretching heights of the Rockies, as Greg Grandin puts it, "liberty and empire [advanced] in lockstep." These dialectical forces, 'freedom' and subjugation, were sublimated into a sleek PR image that admitted only the former into America's self-conception: a jean-jacketed

Ronald Reagan smiling in his cowboy hat beside a saddled horse; John Wayne slouching through swinging saloon doors; a pearly-white memorial floating over the remains of the *USS Arizona*, still spewing oil into indigenous Hawaiian fishing grounds.

The essays included in this volume map the contours of these contradictions.

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Structural Racism

Possible Source of
Substance Use Disorder

Ho Jin Choi

I. Introduction

Does structural discrimination lead to a more severe drug addiction? Substance use disorder (SUD) has become one of the most urgent health issues for US citizens in the 21st century. More than one million people have died from drug overdoses since 1999, while age-adjusted overdose deaths increased by 14% from 2020 to 2021.[1] This trend is primarily led by the opioid crisis starting from the 1990s and rising synthetic opioid usage.[2] Moreover, recent studies find that structural racism adversely impacts the current and future health of racial minorities.[3] Unfortunately, these problems of population health could be compounded. Earlier studies found that racial minorities were more likely to suffer from SUD and drug overdose deaths (DOD).[4] Multiple scholars have found possible links that lead to the racial disparities in SUD. For example, Sara Matsuzaka and Margaret Knapp have pointed to economic barriers that prevent POC from accessing proper SUD treatments.[5]

This research focuses on assessing the causal relationship between structural racism and the overall prevalence of SUD in a community. Subsequently, it looks in particular at the link between structural discrimination and SUD for people of color (POC). As the topic of higher SUD rates among POC is a relatively new one that has drawn the recent attention of the health sector, this study seeks to add knowledge to existing academia and research regarding the issue of whether structural discrimination exacerbates the prevalence of SUD and other related mortalities in the US. I use a panel dataset with 2020-2023 annual health data from the Country Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHR&R) program to consider fixed effects.

II. Data

I constructed a panel dataset by merging yearly analytic data from the Country Health Rankings (CHR) used to measure and rank the different counties in the United States based on various dimensions of health. CHR&R synthesizes different health surveys from various providers every year into one dataset. **Table 1** provides the summary statistics of the variables used in the analysis. The footnote below **Table 1** elaborates on what aspect of population health each variable used in this study captures. The CHR&R website explains the method of calculation for each variable in detail.

Nonetheless, the period of observation for some of the variables is heterogeneous. Therefore, I assume that the trends of county health aspects that each variable captures do not experience an abrupt shock in one period for all counties. Moreover, the observations for American Indian and Alaska Native Resources (AIAN) were dropped from the dataset due to the limited amount of observation.

III. Method

This analysis employs a linear regression model to examine the causal relationship between structural racism and the prevalence of SUD in a community. To measure the degree of structural racism within a community, this study uses residential segregation between black and white county residents as a proxy. Moreover, the number of DOD per 100,000 population is a proxy for SUD's prevalence. The model of the study can be represented in the following formula:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \, ln(\text{Residential Segregation})_{it} + \Gamma X_{it} + a_i + \theta_t + u_{it}$$

$_{it}$ is the outcome of interest: DOD per 100,000 population or the DOD per 100,000 population for people of color. The variable of interest is Residential Segregation, an index of residential segregation between black and white county residents.[6] X_{it} is the vector of control variables. $_i$ and $_t$ reflect the county and time-fixed effects, respectively. $_{it}$ is the error term. Since Residential Segregation is scaled from 1 to 100, I take the log of the variable to allow a more straightforward interpretation of results. For instance, the results can be interpreted as the unit change in drug overdose per 100,000 population, given a percentage change in the residential segregation index score. Moreover, I control for socioeconomic factors, healthcare quality and accessibility, and health behaviors that affect the likelihood of engaging in SUD.[7] In Table 5, the control variables have non-zero correlations with the variable of interest.

County-specific characteristics such as norms, culture, and the dominant religion can prevent or promote engagement in SUD and its treatment.[8] In addition, during the epidemic of COVID-19, problems related to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl have been extremely exacerbated, where the rate of DOD rose sharply among the POC population.[9] Therefore, this study tries to determine the causal relationship between structural discrimination and the prevalence of SUD in the "normal" state. Consequently, I use fixed effects regression with panel data to control for county and time-fixed effects.

IV. Results

IV.1. Overall Prevalence of SUD

Table 2 presents the results of the analysis regarding the relationship between structural racism and the occurrence of SUD in a county. Specification (1) uses the absolute score for residential segregation as the variable of interest. Specification (2) to (5) illustrates the change in the estimated OLS coefficient, $_1$ after introducing each type of control variable. According to the table, the model introduced in ***III*** explains about 15% of the variation in DOD per 100,000 population across countries. The estimated coefficient is 1.158 and is statistically significant at the 5% level. Despite its statistical significance, the magnitude of the effect is economically marginal. If the residential segregation index decreases by 10%, meaning a 10% improvement in the degree of structural racism in a county, it leads to a reduction of 0.1158 in the number of DoD. This change is negligible considering the variance of DoD across counties since it accounts for only 0.009% of its standard deviation.

IV.2. Prevalence of SUD for People of Color (POC)

Table 3 presents the estimation result on the relationship between structural discrimination and the occurrence of SUD for POC in a county. Like *Table 2*, specifications (2) through (5) show how the estimated effect changes after controlling for each factor of society, and the first specification employs the raw Residential Segregation score. What is most striking is how the estimated coefficient in specification (2) became approximately 25 times bigger compared to the result for the same specification in ***IV.1***. This indicates that the effect of structural racism on the risk of engaging in SUD is much stronger for people of color. After controlling for socioeconomic factors, healthcare accessibility and quality, and health behaviors, the estimated effect decreases by approximately 7% and becomes statistically insignificant even at the 10% level. Despite the huge reduction from (2), the estimated effect is still about seven times higher than (5) in *Table II*. Note that the results of *Table III* should be interpreted with caution because of the limited amount of observation for

DOD among POC. Considering the estimation in (4), as it is statistically significant after controlling for some proportion of social aspects, the effect of structural racism on SUD for POC is still modest. A 10% improvement in structural racism prevents only 3.389 DOD of POC per 100,000 population, which accounts for about 14% of the standard deviation for DOD among POC.

V. Discussion

The results from *IV.1.* indicate that a higher degree of structural disparity is associated with more cases of DOD in a community after controlling for health behavior, healthcare accessibility and quality, and socioeconomic factors. This suggests that structural racism has some degree of impact on one's vulnerability to substance abuse or misuse, regardless of the color of their skin. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the effect was nearly negligible.

IV.2. presents us with an astounding result, which shows that the effect of structural racism on the prevalence of DOD is about seven to thirty times bigger (depending on what is being taken into account) for POC compared to the overall population. Therefore, obvious and latent systemic discrimination against racial minorities leads to an increased risk of POC having SUD. This is consistent with the results of Farahmand et al.'s study, which finds that structural racism and biased perspectives on POC can exacerbate the SUD problem in the community.[10]

However, there are limitations to the analysis as well. Firstly, there could be other omitted variables that cannot be controlled due to data limitations. According to the conclusion of Matsuzaka and Knapp, the barriers to SUD treatment that POC experience can exacerbate the DOD problem of POC. Note that this would be a third variable if the barriers are irrelevant from structural racism.[11] Moreover, areas with higher residential segregation may be more prone to organized crimes, including drug trafficking and selling. Sanders suggests that gang membership is an indicator of a higher frequency of lifetime rates of illegal substance usage.[12] In addition, although I neglected the observations for AIAN, they have the worst health outcome among all the racial minority groups in the US.[13] Hence, the estimated effect of structural discrimination on the prevalence of SUD among POC may be substantially different from the true magnitude of the effect.

Secondly, using proxies for both the outcome variable and the variable of interest may depict a less clear relationship between structural racism and the rate of SUD. Structural racism could be present in many other social settings than just the place of residence, including the job market and workplace. This means that structural racism could be rampant even in areas with a lower degree of physical segregation. Moreover, drug overdose death is the most extreme outcome of SUD, and SUD does not always result in death from a drug overdose. Therefore, the true effect of

structural discrimination on the prevalence of SUD can be more severe in magnitude compared to the estimation results.

Finally, the results have limited external validity. The United States is one of the most racially diverse countries in the world. However, other countries may show significantly less racial diversity in the population. For these countries, the structural racism against minorities may be more severe than in countries such as the US or Canada. However, these countries would also have different legislations, social perspectives, and availability regarding illegal substances. For instance, some countries penalize illegal drug usage and distribution with immediate death sentences. Therefore, the analysis results only apply to countries with higher racial diversity but would not be replicated in countries with different compositions of race.

These limitations could be the domain of future research. First, future studies can delve into the mechanisms through which structural racism exacerbates racial disparities in SUD. Understanding *how* structural racism makes POC more vulnerable to SUD compared to their white counterparts will guide politicians and researchers when designing effective policies that can close the gap. Moreover, future research must incorporate AIAN in the study since they have the worst health outcomes, including substance-use-related problems. Including the AIAN population in the study will potentially show that structural racism has a bigger negative effect on the racial disparities in SUD compared to what has been found in this study.

VI. Conclusion

In this study, I focused on determining the causal effect of structural racism on the prevalence of SUD in a community. The result suggests that higher residential segregation is associated with higher drug overdose deaths for the overall population. However, I also find that POC is remarkably more vulnerable to the risk of SUD when facing the same degree of structural racism compared to their white counterparts. For POC, the estimated effect of structural discrimination was almost 30 times bigger than that for the whole population before controlling for any covariates. Even after controlling for health behaviors, healthcare accessibility, and quality, the estimated effect was 15 times larger. Therefore, these results also suggest that structural racism has a particularly more detrimental effect on the substance use problem of POC than on white Americans. Nonetheless, we should bear in mind that the estimated effects, even for POC, were economically insignificant, while the potential limitation of the study makes it difficult to validate the causality. Finally, in future research, it is important to consider the AIAN group and to understand the underlying channels through which structural racism exacerbates the problem of SUD to find a sound policy implication.

Notes

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Cop City in the Empire

Internal Coloniality in
Unincorporated Dekalb County

Amelia Collet

Introduction

Atlanta's South River Forest has been a site of controversy since 2021 when the municipal government announced their intention to construct "Cop City," a $90 million, 85-acre police training center.[1] Despite protracted protests involving several activists losing their lives, academic research on environmental risks and social harm, and significant testimonial opposition by the public, the city council approved a $31 million budget, footed by taxpayers.[2] To understand the municipal government's blatantly anti-democratic actions, this paper will apply three overarching human geography concepts to the Case of Cop City: *terra nullius*, sacrifice zones, and forgotten places. I will use these concepts to analyze how environmental racism, gentrification, policing, and the carceral system produce relational spaces[3] that co-constitute and reinforce the production of racial difference. Drawing on data analysis, interviews, and scholarly work, I argue that these relational spaces caused the settler colonial state to relegate Black citizens of DeKalb County to colonial subjects resulting in the undemocratic imposition of Cop City.

Terra Nullius and Internal Colonialism

To make sense of the present construction of Cop City, it is important to understand the history behind the project and the land, why this space was chosen for Cop City, and the implications of that decision. The Atlanta Training Center writes that the City of Atlanta's Department of Enterprise and Asset Management (DEAM) conducted a land analysis,   ultimately selecting municipally-owned land on Key Road in unincorporated DeKalb County for the project.[4] The City outlines that this area "became the clear choice" due to its proximity to the city and "amount of space available for

use.[5]" To make sense of how this forested space, which the City recognizes as the "Lungs of Atlanta" and borders primarily Black communities, was determined to be ideal and "available" for Cop City, we must examine the settler colonial logic of *terra nullius*.[6] *Terra nullius* is a legal concept on which European colonies and settler states built their empires. The phrase, meaning "no one's land", was used to justify the colonial expropriation of land deemed wild or vacant. Often, though, these supposedly "empty" spaces were already occupied or used by Indigenous peoples.[7] The settler colonial state regularly proclaimed land "empty" or "available" to justify the expansion of the state into new spaces.

The land that the settler colonial state has deemed "available" for the imposition of Cop City was forcibly taken from Indigenous peoples through the Indian Removal Act of 1830.[8] The Weelaunee Forest was home to the Muscogee Creek Nation for thousands of years. Land Defenders maintain that the land is not empty and has great significance as underneath it holds generations worth of Indigenous burial and ceremonial sites.[9] It must be acknowledged that colonialism is an ongoing project and every decision that expands or renews the settler state's monopoly on violence reaffirms the US as an occupying colonial presence on Indigenous land. Moreover, Vasudevan and Smith use the term "internal colonialism" to describe that racialized geographies within the US are fundamentally linked with colonialism, global militarism, and imperialism.[10] In this way, we can understand that the state maintains power through forging the same asymmetrical relationships internally and externally. The next section will expand on how these dynamics are created.

Racialized Spaces, Forgotten Places, and Sacrifice Zones

Racialized Spaces, Forgotten Places, and Sacrifice Zones: The identification of unincorporated DeKalb County as the ideal place for the Atlanta Training Centre is largely a result of this area's status as both a "forgotten place" and "sacrifice zone". This section will investigate how these relational geographies were produced. First, I will define these terms to establish foundational knowledge and unpack the significance of DeKalb being an unincorporated county. Unincorporated counties are not recognized as municipalities and consequently do not have their own elected officials or government services.[11] Hence, unincorporated DeKalb has decisions made on its behalf, without having political representation in the process. This illustrates the production of relational spaces as the relationship between unincorporated DeKalb and Atlanta is inherently unequal. One holds power over the other, and unincorporated DeKalb has no formal political representation or jurisdiction over its land. In cases like Cop City, the City of Atlanta leverages this power dynamic to put an

unpopular project with grave externalities in unincorporated DeKalb. This allows Atlanta to ignore the thousands of residents who have spoken against it and 70 percent of public comments have opposed the project.[12]

The racialization of these relational spaces must also be recognized to address the injustice of the City of Atlanta making this undemocratic decision. First, the racialization of relational spaces and sacrifice zones can be understood through DeKalb's demographics. Unincorporated DeKalb is a primarily Black jurisdiction with a majority of low-income households. The three census tracts surrounding the facility are home to 13,000 people, 67 percent of whom are Black. The White House Climate and Economic Justice Screening tool classifies the area as "disadvantaged", with it being in the 94th percentile for the share of people with asthma; 88th for impoverished households; 93rd for wastewater discharge, and 92nd for people living in poverty.[13] The residents of DeKalb are already subjected to environmental racism as a result of relational spaces, where the negative externalities of industrialism are disproportionately pushed onto these communities. Pulido et al. write that "[The] process of racialization is inherently spatial in that racism is a dynamic force in place-making, and places… are inherently racialized.[14]" This conceptualization of race is important for understanding how places, such as DeKalb, have been racialized, and how this power differential is foundational to spaces and the concept of racialization itself. One core aspect of environmental racism is that the disproportionate exposure to harm not only results from but also reproduces racial differentiation.[15] Therefore, relational spaces and racialization are co-constituted and mutually reinforced power differentials, resulting in cyclical violence to which unincorporated DeKalb is exposed.

Research has expanded on this concept to understand how policing is linked to environmental justice. Both policing and environmental racism are implicated in the production of relational spaces which have led to Cop City. In 2023, the Brookings Institute released a report exploring the relationship between "place, policing, and climate.[16]" This report draws on the concept of "sacrifice zones", which describes how zoning and land-use policies concentrate toxic pollutants and extractive industries in predominantly low-income and racialized communities. This results in vulnerable people experiencing a disproportionate amount of environmental harm. The report corroborates that the differential health risks that residents of DeKalb face are results of environmental racism, which the report characterized as a "sacrifice zone". The report goes on to connect "sacrifice zones" to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's concept of "forgotten places", examining the connection between the carceral system and environmental racism. Gilmore uses the term "Forgotten Places" to describe how land-use and economic development policies work in

tandem to concentrate the harms of incarceration, environmental degradation, underemployment, and violence in Black and Latinx communities.[17] The report analyzes data from Atlanta, Chicago, and New York, finding that the same communities are exposed to higher climate impacts and rates of policing relative to other neighborhoods.[18] All three cities had strong relationships between census tracts with higher heat island effects and higher rates of arrests for nonviolent property crimes. Notably, this correlation was strongest in Atlanta. With these findings, the report emphasizes that these inequities are not natural processes, but the expected result of intentional land use policies. Cop City is yet another example where the state has disregarded the violence that Black communities are exposed to as a result of these policies.

The Brookings report also finds that many of these neighborhoods have histories of disinvestment and economic exclusion, which is another element of "forgotten places.[19]" Gilmore conceptualizes the places in which prisons are built and the places from which prisoners come as one discontinuous place, connected by the police violence and abandonment by the neoliberal state.[20] These characteristics are found in unincorporated DeKalb, evidenced by the county's high poverty rate.[21] Moreover, this is not new. DeKalb has long existed as a "forgotten place." Throughout the 1900s, the site operated as a prison farm that housed mostly non-violent offenders.[22] As a result of the violence of the settler colonial state, many Black inmates were lynched and incarcerated for minimal offenses. These include being accused of whistling at white women or breaking curfew.[23] This criminalization of Blackness is one of the most prominent ways that the violence of the carceral system manifests. As the Brookings report illustrates, the connection between "sacrifice zones" and "forgotten places" is that both concepts characterize Black neighborhoods across the United States. Vasudevan and Smith connect this to internal colonialism, arguing that the racialization of environmental risk exposure domesticates racialized geographies, rendering residents of these sacrifice zones colonial subjects rather than citizens.[24] In this section, I have illustrated the connection between environmental racism and the carceral system. Therefore, the carceral violence – often manifesting as the criminalization of Blackness – can be incorporated into the concept of internal colonialism. This provides a framework to understand the colonial nature of the violence that residents of unincorporated DeKalb face. As follows, Cop City can be conceptualized as a military occupation.

This conclusion is corroborated by the site plans which boast military-grade training facilities, a mock city to practice urban warfare, explosives testing areas, dozens of shooting ranges, and a Black Hawk helicopter landing pad.[25] Residents have voiced concern about the

psychological trauma that living near a shooting range has already caused, and how this will be amplified by Cop City.[26] The militarization of the Atlanta Police Department makes it resemble a military base, bolstering the image of imperialist occupation. While US ties to foreign affairs are outside of the scope of this paper, it should be acknowledged that the Atlanta Police Department is part of the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE) where they train with police departments of foreign countries, notably including Israel's International Institute for Counter-Terrorism.[27] The implication that Atlanta Police Officers are training to use Israel's "counter-terrorism" tactics in the cases of "urban warfare" the APD is training for should be cause for concern. All in all, the militarization of the APD and the exchanges they participate in both illustrate how the internal policing practices resemble those that the US military uses on foreign citizens and are being exported in a similar way to the United States.

Gentrification, Policing, and Relational Spaces

This section will describe how policing – as a function of the carceral system – serves as a tool of gentrification. Therefore, policing contributes to the production of relational spaces, leading to the undemocratic imposition of Cop City. From the prison farm to industrial externalities to Cop City, Southeast Atlanta has long been a dumping ground for unpopular public projects. As previously noted, most in the tracts surrounding Cop City oppose the project. This raises the question, who supports Cop City and why is their agenda being forced onto a population that opposes it? To answer this question, Professor Taylor Shelton draws on a combination of publicly accessible property ownership records, voter registration data, and online directory information.[28] This allows them to identify and map where the actors responsible for Cop City live. Through this analysis, they found the vast majority of support for the project comes from wealthy, white neighborhoods and corporate actors, both far from the site.[29] Most support comes from those outside of Atlanta. Examining support from within Atlanta's city limits, nearly two-thirds of Cop Cit's proponents live in Buckhead. This neighborhood is 77% white and has a per capita income of $85,452, more than twice then the rest of Atlanta at $40,717.[30] The other major supporters are corporations, with the Atlantion Police Foundation raising $60m from corporate funders to build Cop City (Simon, 2023). As Shelton points out, this reflects the spatial power structure where actors with greater capital (corporations and wealthier neighborhoods) can non-consensually enact their agenda on predominantly Black, poorer neighborhoods.

Another way that the inequitable organizing power of capital manifests is through gentrification. One of the reasons that Black

communities are disproportionately impacted by negative industrial externalities and the carceral system is because of gentrification, tenant exploitation, and racist lending practices that push Black people out of their ancestral homes and into sacrifice zones.[31] Margaret Ramirez writes that hyper-criminalization and policing are two of the main tools of gentrification and displacement. Ramiriez found that in Oakland, hyper-criminalization restricted and criminalized the lives of Black and Latinx youth to detain populations to maintain economic stability under white supremacist power structures.[32] Regarding Cop City, the increased police presence will contribute to hyper criminalization as a tool of gentrification and dispossession, which is justified by the belief that Black communities are displaceable, a-spatial actors.[33] When analyzing the undemocratic actions of the city of Atlanta and the willingness to inflict violence on Black communities, the state shows that it does not care for the lives and spaces of Black people. Recognizing that the state views Black communities as a-spatial actors is important to understand the lack of consultation and respect towards Black communities in Atlanta regarding Cop City. Vasudevan and Smith argue that this is because the state views the Black population in unincorporated DeKalb as colonial subjects, not citizens.[34] Cop City, which exists to expand the power of the state through increasing militarization of the police, is being forced onto unincorporated DeKalb without the consent of its citizens in the same way that a colonizing country enacts its agenda on a colony. This creates an asymmetrical relationship that undermines the autonomy of the subjugated community and serves the interests of the colonizing entity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the production of relational space in Atlanta has allowed for the undemocratic imposition of Cop City on unincorporated DeKalb County. This power imbalance results from a long history of colonialism, environmental racism, disinvestment, policing, criminalization of Blackness, and gentrification. Many of these processes are interconnected and simultaneously result from and reproduce racial differences. This paper seeks to understand the different manifestations of relational spaces through the framework of *terra nullius*, sacrifice zones, and forgotten places. One common thread across these frameworks is the racialization of relational space, which reveals how the white settler colonial state has continuously reproduced these unequal geographies over time to maintain power over racialized people and spaces and benefit from this exploitation. In this way, the state has robbed countless Black communities, such as unincorporated DeKalb of their right to self-governance. Residents are rendered as colonial subjects rather than

citizens. In this way, Cop City mirrors a foreign military occupation enacting psychological and physical terror on its subjects. The blood that has already been shed as a result of Cop City will only multiply as the construction continues and the police presence is expanded. It is not too late to stop Cop City, and doing so is essential for mitigating the violence of the settler colonial state.

Notes

1. Sean Keenan and Rick Rojas, "Atlanta City Council Approves 'Cop City' Funding Despite Protests," The New York Times, June 6, 2023.

2. Ibid.

3. Relational spaces: understanding the geography of a place as it is shaped by social relations and power dynamics. The term is used here, as it was used by Professor McCormack, to describe the asymmetrical power dynamic between communities expressed through one actor having power over the geography of the other.

4. Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, "Atlanta Public Safety Training Center."

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Allan Greer, "Settler Colonialism and Empire in Early America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2019): 384.

8. Nic Sanford Belgard, "The Land at the Center of Cop City and Why We Must Defend It," Indigenous Peoples Power Project, March 13, 2023.

9. Ibid.

10. Pavithra Vasudevan and Sara Smith, "The Domestic Geopolitics of Racial Capitalism," Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space 38, no. 7-8 (2020): 1161.

11. Cristina Gomez-Vidal and Anu Manchikanti Gomez, "Invisible and Unequal: Unincorporated Community Status as a Structural Determinant of Health," Social Science & Medicine 285 (2021): 1.

12. Charles Bethea, "The New Fight Over an Old Forest in Atlanta," The New Yorker, August 3, 2022.

13. Akilah Wise, "The Health Risks Behind 'Cop City,'" Atlanta, September 28, 2023.

14. Laura Pulido, Steve Sidawi, and Robert O. Vos, "An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Los Angeles," Urban Geography 17, no. 5 (1996): 422.

15. Ibid, 422.

16. Hanna Love and Manann Donoghoe, "Atlanta's 'Cop City' and the Relationship Between Place, Policing, and Climate," Brookings, September 21, 2023.

17. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," in Engaging Contradictions (2008): 31.

18. Love and Donoghoe, "Atlanta's 'Cop City.'"

19. Love and Donogoe, "Atlanta's 'Cop City.'"; Gilmore, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," 31.

20. Ibid, 31.

21. Wise, "The Health Risks Behind 'Cop City,'"

22. Belgard, "The Land at the Center of Cop City and Why We Must Defend It."

23. Ibid.

24. Vasudevan and Sara Smith, "The Domestic Geopolitics of Racial Capitalism," 1173.

25. Sean Keenan and Joseph Goldstein, "A New Front Line in the Debate Over Policing: A Forest Near

Atlanta," The New York Times, March 4, 2023.

26. Wise, "The Health Risks Behind 'Cop City,'"

27. Georgia State University, "GILEE Homepage," Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange.

28. Taylor Shelton, "The Real Outside Agitators," Mapping Atlanta, May 30, 2023.

29. Wise, "The Health Risks Behind 'Cop City,'"

30. John Ruch, "Buckhead by the Numbers: A Look at the Latest U.S. Census Data," Buckhead, August 12, 2022.

31. Wise, "The Health Risks Behind 'Cop City,'"

32. Margaret M. Ramírez, "City as Borderland: Gentrification and the Policing of Black and Latinx Geographies in Oakland," Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 38, no. 1 (2019): 148.

33. Ibid, 149.

34. Vasudevan and Sara Smith, "The Domestic Geopolitics of Racial Capitalism," 1172.

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Going Somewhere? Besides Jail?

Megamind and the Criminalization
of the Undesirable Immigrant in America

Rosemary Crowley

In her article titled "'Justice Has a Bad Side': Figurations of Law and Justice in 21st-Century Superhero Movies," Nicole Maruo-Schrder argues that "popular cultural texts such as comics and films do not exist in a vacuum or merely for entertainment [...] popular culture both serves as a reflection of "real-world" concerns and issues regarding law and justice."[1] This idea that "law and popular culture interpenetrate each other"[2] is apparent in Tom McGrath's 2010 animated superhero comedy film *Megamind.* A parody of the *Superman* comics, *Megamind* chronicles the lives of two aliens forced to flee to Earth after a black hole destroys both of their planets. Immigration and xenophobia were at the forefront of national conscious-ness in the United States in 2010. It had been less than a decade since the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center, and Islamophobia was still rampant. The number of Mexican immigrants living in the United States peaked in 2007 at 12.8 million – almost three times what it was in 1990.[3] In reaction, the Obama administration adopted a tough-on-immigration policy approach and deported a record 438,421 immigrants in its first five years.[4] By 2016, this number had risen to over three million[5] – far higher than any other presidential administration, earning Obama the nickname "Deporter-in-Chief." Therefore, it is not surprising that stories reflecting themes of immigrant narratives – changing identities, racial and ethnic prejudice, and criminalization – made their way to the big screen. In this paper, I look at how *Megamind* used both contemporary and historic immigration politics, as well as themes common in traditional immigrant narratives, such as having multiple identities, to tell a story about the consequences of being an "undesirable" immigrant in the United States.

    Megamind tells the story of an alien who was sent to Earth as an infant by his parents as their planet was sucked into a black hole. At that

exact moment, an infant from a nearby planet was also sent to Earth. Both find their way to Metro City, where the second child, Metro Man (Brad Pitt), is lucky enough to be adopted by a wealthy family while Megamind's (Will Ferrell) spaceship crash-landed in a prison where he spent the rest of his childhood being raised by his fellow prisoners under the watchful eye of the Warden (J. K. Simmons). His "criminal" background, as well as his blue complexion, made Megamind an outsider at school. At the same time, his fellow alien managed to fit in due to possessing "good" qualities and being both wealthy and white-passing. After many failed attempts at assimilation and acceptance, Megamind concludes that if being bad is the one thing he is good at, he will be "the baddest boy of them all."[6] In his semi-autobi-ographical book, *America Is In the Heart*, Carlos Bulosan writes about how this shift from "good" to "bad" happens. He recalls arriving in the United States as a hopeful and idealistic young man who is surprised to see how much this new country has changed his older brother, who, unable to find work, became a bootlegger to support himself. Bulosan is dismayed that his brother has turned to a life of crime and fears that the same won't happen to him. "Please, God," he prays, "don't change me in America!"[7]

The film immediately establishes Megamind as the embodiment of the undesirable immigrant. Undesirable immigrants are socially constructed as poor racialized criminals who not only have no desire to assimilate into American society but actively hope for its downfall. Megamind is a parody of the *Superman* villains Brainiac and Lex Luthor. While the former is a transient alien who travels around the universe seeking ways to control it, the latter is a man who refuses to hide his baldness despite living in a world that places value on having the perfect hair. Both characters embrace their outsider status and refuse to alter their identities to assimilate – unless it's part of a larger plot to defeat Superman. Megamind also embraces his outsider status by wearing large and theatrical costumes, drawing attention to his most distinctive feature – his large blue head. He also holds on to the gifts his parents gave him before sending him away – his glow-in-the-dark binky and fish-like sidekick and best friend, Minion (David Cross). This is in direct contrast to Metro Man, who casts off all vestiges of his alien past and shapes his new identity around the city that embraced him, even going so far as to name himself in honour of Metro City.

Immigrants in the United States are often assumed to be criminals who pose a threat to the Americans around them, particularly when they're non-white. Cuban immigrants have historically been welcomed as the United States likes to think of itself as a haven safe from communism. However, this changed with the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, despite President Jimmy Carter's promise that the country would "continue to provide an open heart and open arms to refugees seeking freedom from Communist

domination and economic deprivation."[8] While previous Cuban immigrants – most of whom had been wealthy or middle-class white people – were reunited with family or resettled in Florida, this new group of immigrants was considered undesirable and even sparked protests by the Ku Klux Klan due to the demographic makeup of the group[9] – many of whom were working-class, sex workers, gay, or Black.[10] Many Haitians fleeing the brutal dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier (nicknamed "Baby Doc") arrived around the same time and were categorized as equally, if not more, undesirable. Because the United States was a supporter of Duvalier, they refused to accept Haitians as refugees and placed everyone in detention centers, many of which were current or former prisons not too different from the one Megamind grew up in.

Increased investment in detention facilities and staff led to an expansion of the government's scope and capacity to detain immigrants.[11] After all, what use is a prison when there aren't enough prisoners to fill it? Categorizing immigration as a crime created thousands of new prisoners. In the case of Cubans and Haitians, one might argue that they were being detained not as dangerous criminals but as a large group of people who were ill-equipped and unprepared to enter American society. However, even the people running these detention centers disagree with this argument. In 1998, facility director of Batavia Federal Detention Facility in Western New York, Terry Nelson, said in an interview, "We are a criminal facility as we've always said. I don't think we've ever hidden that fact. The facility was designed to hold criminal aliens. [...] They're criminals. We don't expect to be housing non-criminal aliens."[12]

The increased criminalization and incarceration of immigrants, while failing to decrease crime levels, reinforces misconceptions that immigrants commit a disproportionate number of serious or violent crimes, which increases public pressure for even more aggressive immigration enforcement policies.[13] In 1981, one Texas woman opposing the opening of an immigration detention facility near her home said, "I don't want to see my house robbed or homosexuality brought in. [...] If you bring them in here you're opening a can of worms. I don't want to see my children or my neighbors raped or murdered."[14] Three decades later, in 2012, nearly half of all defendants sentenced in federal courts were Hispanic – the ethnicity most associated with illegal immigration. By 2014, so were roughly thirty-five percent of all federal prisoners.[15] These misconceptions are not new, however. Throughout American history, racialized groups of immigrants have frequently been considered inferior due to their racial and non-American status. In his 1840 memoir *Two Years Before the Mast*, Richard Henry Dana, Jr. writes of Irish Catholics having "intelligence in so small a proportion to the number of faces."[16] Racialized people were

frequently stereotyped as being unintelligent. They were considered a major political threat due to their incompetence for self-governance and were described in print in dehumanizing terms such as "savages," "demons," and "incarnate devils."[17] However, as time passed and earlier European immigrants assimilated into American society, they were gradually accepted, especially with the arrival of new groups of undesirable immigrants.

But if Megamind embodies the undesirable immigrant, then who is the ideal immigrant? According to Julian Chambliss, the answer is Superman – an alien from the planet Krypton who came to the United States as a young child. Raised in the heartland, he adopted the values of individualism, self-reliance, and equality of opportunity often associated with the frontier before moving to the city as an adult, where he combined his wholesome rural upbringing and innate immigrant traits to improve the society that adopted him.[18]

Superman was created in 1938 by two second-generation Jewish immigrants from Cleveland, Ohio. Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster introduced the character of Superman in *Action Comics* #1. Referred to as a "Champion of the Oppressed," Superman is a physical marvel who has sworn to promote and protect Americanism and American values despite being an immigrant himself. In many ways, Superman was a wish-fulfillment fantasy. His alter ego, Clark Kent, was an average-looking working-class man from humble midwestern roots who possessed secret god-like powers.[19] However, unlike Metro Man, who casts off his alien identity, Superman holds on to his Kryptonian roots. His iconic red cape is fashioned from his baby blanket, and the large yellow "S" is the crest of his biological family's crest.[20] The 2020 documentary *From Here* features the story of a Romani man living in Germany named Miman Jasarovski. Despite living in a place where people of his ethnicity are regularly persecuted, Jasarovski chooses to tattoo a Roman wheel on his forearm to assert his pride in his heritage and prevent him from hiding it.[21] Similarly, Superman celebrates his heritage by wearing his native garment as he flies around Metropolis. For Siegel and Schuster, this seamless shifting between different identities – successful cultural assimilation and integration into American society while maintaining a cultural identity – was something they yearned for but found difficult to achieve.[22]

While Megamind does not have a secret alter ego, he does switch between identities throughout the film to be accepted. When wooing TV reporter Roxanne Ritchi (Tina Fey), he takes on the identity of museum curator Bernard (Ben Stiller). In his mind, adopting this human and white identity is the only way he can be treated as an equal and viewed as a potential romantic partner rather than the "incredibly handsome criminal

genius and master of all villainy" he has been up until now. At the end of the film, Megamind even takes on the identity of Metro Man when saving Metro City from the new supervillain, Tighten (Jonah Hill). He is only identified because of his mispronunciation of "Metro City." In Ocean Vuong's semi-autobiographical novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous, a similar event occurs*. The main character's mother is attempting to buy oxtail at a grocery store meat counter but doesn't know the English word for what she's looking for. At first, she's treated as a regular customer, but as soon as she opens her mouth and begins speaking in Vietnamese, the man behind the counter identifies her as a foreigner and laughs at her desperate attempts at communication.[23] This experience taught Vuong at a young age that he would only be taken seriously if he could blend into society. "I code switched," he writes. "I took off our language and wore my English, like a mask, so that others would see my face, and therefore [my mother's]."[24]

In *Megamind*, McGrath successfully uses common themes of immigrant narratives in the story and incorporates aspects of historic and contemporary immigration experiences and policies. While the film does an excellent job of addressing the strong ties between immigration and the justice system, deportation is never discussed. To a certain extent, this makes sense. Megamind's and Metro Man's home planets no longer exist, and, as Kenyon Zimmer mentions in "The Voyage of the Buford," it can be challenging to deport someone without a relationship between the two countries.[25] Nevertheless, considering the outsized role deportation plays in American immigration politics, it would have been interesting for the Warden to mention that Megamind's eighty-eight consecutive life sentences are a result of not being able to send him back where he came from.

Notes

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7. Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1946), 126.

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10. Ibid, 57.

11. Ibid, 182.

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13. Marie Gottschalk, *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 216.

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It's Hard to be Black and Harder if You're Queer

How *Moonlight* Sheds Trut on Intersectional Oppression, the "Glass Closet," and the Realities of the Black Queer Community

Anna Sofia Alemany Gilleland

Introduction

When under the pressure of multiple layers of oppression, one is forced to suppress parts of their identity that would add yet another dimension to avoid suffocating under the weight. Barry Jenkins' 2016 film *Moonlight* showcases the life of a black gay man, from boyhood to adulthood, and the difficulties he faces with the development of his identity amidst neglect, bullying, and homophobia. It navigates how blackness and gayness are in themselves identifiers that lead to oppression, but when put together, they create a unique and more grueling experience. This essay will discuss intersectional oppression, the intersection crossing between sex, sexuality, and black culture, its inherent connection with the "glass closet," and how *Moonlight* serves as a portal for understanding these concepts in depth.

Contents of the Film

The film follows the growth of Chiron, a black boy in Liberty City, Miami, amidst the height of the crack epidemic in three parts: *Little*, *Chiron*, and *Black*. Starting with *Little,* the film begins with Chiron being chased by a group of bullies and finding refuge with Juan, a drug dealer, and his wife, Teresa. When he returns Chiron to his mother, she scolds them both and punishes Chiron for worrying her. Despite her hostility, Chiron continues to spend time with Juan, who mentors him and serves as a fatherly figure in his life. One afternoon, Juan catches Chiron's mother smoking crack. He confronts her while arguing about his upbringing, to which she responds, "You gon' tell him why the other boys kick his ass all the time?" (29:18), implying her awareness of her son's homosexuality. One day in Juan's house, Chiron asks what a "faggot" is, which Juan answers, saying it's a derogatory term for gay people but that there is nothing wrong with

homosexuality.

Continuing with the next chapter, *Chiron*, Chiron is now a teenager facing bullying from a classmate named Terrel and the emotional consequences of Juan's death, whose causes are unknown. He spends time with his childhood friend, Kevin, and during one of their conversations, he mentions to Chiron that he was given detention for having sex with a girl at school. One night while they are sitting on the beach, they both kiss, and Kevin offers Chiron a handjob. The next day, Terrel dares Kevin to punch Chiron, which he agrees and does savagely. Pained, Chiron takes a chair and throws it at Terrel, leading to his being taken away and arrested.

Finally, in *Black*, we see Chiron as an adult with a tough, traditionally masculine façade and selling drugs in Atlanta. He receives a friendly call from Kevin asking him to visit, which he agrees to do after seeing his mother in a treatment center. They meet at the diner where Kevin works, talk briefly, and then go back to Kevin's apartment. There, Chiron sheepishly admits that Kevin was the first and last sexual encounter he had. They finally enter a warm embrace and comfort one another, ending the film.[1]

Placing Concepts in *Moonlight*

The film's contents highlight an existence resulting from two key concepts: intersectional oppression and the "glass closet." Intersectional oppression is "oppression that arises out of the combination of various oppressions which produce something unique and distinct from any one form of discrimination standing alone."[2] Forms of oppression can include those that come from sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. In the intersection of blackness and homosexuality arises a new concept: the "glass closet." This term, coined by C. Riley Snorton, is used to describe the hypervisibility, confinement, and surveillance of black sexuality.[3] In other words, it is the detrimental outcome that derives from the meeting point between blackness, sex, and sexuality that is unique in this form of intersectional oppression and seen in the film. *Moonlight* grasps these concepts and places them into cinematic light, taking on the task of showcasing how black men are forced into a culture of toxic masculinity and how if a man strays from this, say due to being queer, he is systematically punished.[4] Historically, this behavior has grounds. Black men have continuously been expected to be rugged and stereotypically masculine from the beginning of slavery to modern-day labor. Femininity was seen as soft and weak and, therefore, the opposite of what was typically expected from the black man.[5] Chiron consistently demonstrates queerness, from the way he walks as a child to his thin frame as a teenager, which places him within the closet of hypervisibility that shapes his growth.[6] As once stated by a classmate of the character's, he faces "woman problems"

and is placed within the "glass closet" because of his peers' interpretation of his femininity and queerness. The fact he is black adds weight to the need that he must be masculine and makes the oppression he receives from showing queer traits worse.

With blackness specifically, there is an air of mutual exclusivity between being black and being gay within the black community. As stated by Snorton:

...black queer body, however eroticized, might stand as a representation of blackness but could never seem to embody queerness itself, and a more or less openly homophobic African American community by whom the queerness of any black figure must be denied, suppressed, or overridden for that figure to be allowed to function as an embodiment of black identity or struggle.[7]

Being black while being gay is shaped as impossible, hence the existence of the "glass closet" and an excessive amount of attention paid to black queers: they are seen as anomalies. With Chiron being in the middle of the intersection and within the "glass closet," he is forced to choose between his blackness and his queer identity, and for his survival in the community chooses the former. In *Black*, Chiron becomes a large, physically fit, and intimidating man, wears gold teeth caps, and sells drugs, a job generally ascribed to men. Essentially, he takes on a similar appearance as Juan, the man he saw as the embodiment of *success related to straightness,* as he acknowledges he could never reach it as an openly gay man.

Examining the act itself, the film screens sex as an activity that must be portrayed as heterosexual and hidden if gay, demonstrating a "universal" fear of the "glass closet" and being within it. In *Chiron*, Kevin pridefully boasts about having sex with another girl from school in an open setting, during the day, and in a fashion that insinuates him not mind if others overhear. In contrast, his sexual encounter with Chiron is private and during the night, creating an aura of concealment and secrecy. Additionally, when Terrel pushes Kevin to punch Chiron as a hazing ritual, he does so in fear he will be accused of being gay as well, emphasizing his perceived need to be as far from homosexuality as possible. He is aware of the "glass closet" Chiron is in and manipulates his actions to avoid similar torment from others. Ultimately, there is a sense of privateness about this intersection and the necessity to conceal whatever part of oneself may fall into it and visibly punish others who do.

Conclusion

Chiron's coming-of-age exemplifies the existence of black queers and the struggles they face regarding their social location and how it differs from others. The intersectionality between blackness and queerness, as well as

"the glass closet" portrayed in *Moonlight,* provide much-needed perspective on an under-researched area of race and its direct influence on demonstrations of sexuality and identity that cannot be obtained if not directly observed. It raises questions on what could be done to improve the struggles of the black community, the queer community, and more specifically, the black queer community for them to receive a better quality of life than that of Chiron and forces viewers to rethink their conceptions of other's minority experiences.

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3. Snorton, "Nobody is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low."

4. Copeland, "MOONLIGHT, Directed by Berry Jenkins" 687.

5. University of San Diego, "Moonlight: The Intersectionality of African American Men", NA.

6. Jenkins, "Moonlight", 36:26.

7. Snorton, "Nobody is Supposed to Know," 30.

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The Big Peach and the Six

An Analysis of the Stark Dichotomy Between Atlanta and Toronto's Electoral Systems

Noah Goldstein

Representative democracies exist worldwide in some of the globe's most powerful nations, with The United States, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom being several of the most prominent examples. However, not every electoral system is created equally, and the uniformity of electoral systems across nations and even within cities is not guaranteed. This complex phenomenon is exacerbated by the division of territory within nations, making it so different cities within states in the United States, or provinces within Canada, could have different sets of rules than municipalities with which they share borders. The urban-rural divide is ever-present in and around America and Canada's largest cities with respect to cultural, socioeconomic, electoral, and other factors, leading to divisions between these city centers and the areas that surround them. One interesting comparison of this phenomenon is Metropolitan Atlanta and Metropolitan Toronto. Though their city centers differ greatly in population size, their populations are relatively comparable when including their surrounding suburbs and communities, bringing Atlanta to roughly 6,144,050 residents, and the Greater Toronto Area to a population of 6,202,000, according to the most recent census data in their respective areas[1]. Atlanta and Toronto also each possess large minority populations and are interesting case studies independently and in comparison with each other. Atlanta boasts a population with over 50% visible minorities, with 47.6% of its total population identifying as Black or African American[2]. Toronto sits at a similar juncture, with 55.7% of its populace identifying as belonging to a racialized group[3]. In addition to this, both areas have exhibited massive population bumps in recent years. Georgia surpassed 10.5 million residents in 2018, making it the eighth most populous state in the U.S., surpassing Michigan and New Jersey. Over 56% of Georgia's population is housed in Atlanta and its surrounding

areas, with the area serving as a true melting pot[4]. Toronto has seen a bump as well and was recently identified as the second fastest-growing metropolitan area in the United States or Canada, surpassed only by the Dallas-Fort Worth–Arlington, Texas, area. Toronto was also the fastest-growing city in 2022 by population, surpassing Fort Worth (America's fastest-growing city) by 19,170 people. While Fort Worth's population boom is directly correlated to an accelerated birthing rate, and Atlanta's is to internal migration within the U.S., Toronto's is encapsulated by net immigration, with 46.6% of the area being foreign-born[5]. Despite their booming populations, both metropolises have recently encountered electoral difficulties centered around turnout. While Toronto's issues are centered around their historically low voter turnout in the 2022 provincial elections, Atlanta is struggling with a wave of voter suppression pushed on the city's Black citizens by the state government.

Toronto and the GTA are presented with a problem that is not unique to them but sits in contrast to the issues faced by Georgia and its voters. In 2018, Ontario saw 57% voter turnout – its highest voter turnout in over a decade[6]. Though the provincial government hoped this was an indicator of future turnout increases, the 2022 provincial elections told another story entirely. According to Elections Ontario, just 43.5% of eligible voters participated in the election. While Ontario holds the largest population of any province in Canada (14 million, a staggering 6 million higher than Quebec; the next closest in population size), only 4.6 million of the province's 10.7 million registered voters voted in 2022 – a marked 13.5% decrease from the 2018 provincial election, just four years earlier[7]. Atlanta saw a similarly high number in the 2018 midterm and gubernatorial election, with 70% participation from registered voters, a 1.5 million voter increase from the previous midterm in 2014. Unlike Ontario, Georgia saw an overall massive increase between 2018 and 2022 – jumping to 82%, the highest turnout in the South and among the highest in the nation[8]. So, what are Toronto, and Ontario at large, doing wrong? The first consideration is deliberating on what factors will influence whether or not a voter casts their ballot, either in person or absentee. Civic duty and perceived competitiveness play a part, as does the ease of casting a ballot. There is a plethora of research on ways to make the voting process easier – making lines faster, making polling stations more accessible, extending early voting periods, and reducing or even eliminating the time it takes to travel to the polls entirely. Research on expanding absentee ballot voting has shown that the elimination/reduction of travel and the costs and considerations associated with in-person voting can have a positive impact on turnout. This is achieved through either absentee voting or through hand-delivering sealed ballots to conveniently located ballot drop boxes. Some municipalities in the Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, and Ontario have offered online voting in the past, as well as some European

nations (prominently Estonia), though evidence of its ability to improve voter turnout in Canada is lacking[9]. Empirically, the distance between an individual's dwelling and the closest polling station "ranged from close to 0 meters to nearly 85 kilometers" in 2022. Very few individuals fell on the higher end of the spectrum, with 75% of voters living within 1.05 kilometers of their nearest polling station. Alarmingly, as the Indigenous population in a given area increases by 1%, the distance to the nearest polling station also increases, on average, by .31 kilometers. Though this statistic may seem damning for the treatment of Indigenous individuals in the GTA, the reality is that Indigenous communities are more likely to live in smaller and more remote towns, further from polling stations. Additionally, as the Indigenous population in a town grows, the driving time to the nearest polling station also decreases because these rural areas have direct highway access to more speedily travel to polling locations and therefore have shorter driving times to the polls. The urban-rural divide is a consideration in this instance, however, given that there is less access to public transportation, salaries are on average lower, and jobs are less abundant, making it more difficult for lower-income rural individuals to travel to the polls than their urban counterparts making on average, more money[10].

Though these factors certainly account for some percentage of the disparity in the 2022 provincial election turnout debacle, they were also present in 2018 which saw the GTA's highest turnout in over a decade[11]. The true reason could lie in Ontario's first-past-the-post electoral system. Ontario's elections allow for a winner-take-all system where the individual with the highest vote count is declared the victor – regardless of whether they managed to collect even a simple 50% majority of the votes. In both the premier election and in ridings across Ontario, 2022 saw victories up and down the ballot in which some of the highest vote-getters had less than 35% of the vote. Premier Doug Ford, whose Progressive Conservatives party gained 40% of the total vote – hardly a mandate to rule – also fell victim to this. Democracy Watch, a non-profit voting rights advocacy group in Ontario, believes that voters have become disillusioned with the electoral system given that their candidate could lose to an individual who gained less than a majority of votes. Democracy Watch co-founder Duff Conacher agrees with this notion, stating in an interview with CBC that "more and more voters know from their experience of the past few decades of elections that they are not going to get what they vote for." Cameron Anderson, professor of political science at Western University, concurred, calling the phenomenon "unpalatable" for many Canadians[12]. It is easy to predict why Torontonians may not feel inclined to exercise their right to vote when they feel slighted by the system. While Toronto and Ontario at large search for ways to improve voter turnout, state officials in Georgia have been working

to suppress the vote in Atlanta. Before delving into the modern-day standing, it is critical to understand Atlanta's history. Atlanta had long existed as a midsize southern city, similar in size to Birmingham, Alabama, and was heavily engaged in the Jim Crow politics of the late 1800s to mid-1900s, disenfranchising Black voters through literacy tests, the Grandfather Clause, poll taxes, and more in the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. The "separate but equal" legislation brought on by the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* set a discriminatory precedent in the South that existed in law until *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-60s. Atlanta was determined to reinvent itself and rehabilitate its image into the "dominant city of the 'New South' – a New York of the South"[13]. To this end, Atlanta's long-serving mayor, William Hartsfield, began an intense advertising campaign to display the city's newfound push for diversity, famously proclaiming that Atlanta was "a city too busy to hate," attempting to contrast Atlanta with Birmingham – the place where Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was jailed[14].

Mayor Hartsfield's campaign was ultimately successful, and the "Big Peach" began attracting waves of interstate and in-state migrants alike, seeking a move to a larger city with a New York "feel," but still with that classic Southern charm. Atlanta's suburbs especially, saw a large influx of educated Black migrants whose parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents had fled the South for northern states during periods of heightened racism and discrimination. The

increase in diversity and the growing number of college-educated residents in the region have contributed to a shift in political dynamics[15].

To give some quick statistics to exemplify Atlanta's increased diversity:

- 52.6% of Georgians identify as white – 50.4% of that group reside in Atlanta and its suburbs.

- 31.1% of Georgians identify as Black and/or African American – 60.6% of that group reside in Atlanta and its suburbs.

- 3.9% of Georgians identify as Asian – 83.7% of that group reside in Atlanta and its suburbs.

- 9.6% of Georgians identify as Latino – 63.3% of that group reside in Atlanta and its suburbs.

- 10.2% of Georgians identify as foreign-born – 77.5% of that group reside in Atlanta and its suburbs.

- 30.9% of Georgians identify as college-educated – 69.1% of that group reside in Atlanta and its suburbs. (Lang 2021, 131)[16]

Districts in and around Atlanta are now voting more progressively, showing increased support for Democrats, particularly among educated white female voters – a demographic that historically has voted more consistently for Republicans, defying previously perceived voting patterns. While Atlanta and its affluent northern suburbs have seen an uptick in blue voters, north Georgia has remained a Republican stronghold, especially in towns along the I-85 Corridor, which provides direct access to the ultra-conservative towns of Spartanburg and Greenville, South Carolina. White Georgians living in rural high-elevation areas along the Appalachia largely sit on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, and form some of the deepest red areas

in the United States. One of the only exceptions in contrast to the deep red areas it is surrounded by, Athens, Georgia, home of the University of Georgia, follows suit with many college towns in the former Confederacy, typically electing Democrats at all levels of government[17].

Metropolitan Atlanta and its increasing diversity have turned the blue metropolis into a certified Democratic bastion. While 2012 and 2014's general election and gubernatorial elections saw Democrats secure victory in Atlanta by a mere 0.4%, Hillary Clinton claimed the city by 8.1% in 2016, and Stacey Abrams secured her gubernatorial victories in Atlanta and its blue suburbs by 14% and 33.5% in 2018 and 2022 respectfully, despite her loss in Georgia at large to Republican Governor Brian Kemp. Joe Biden also became the first Democrat to win Georgia since Bill Clinton in 1992, and the state won a pair of Democratic senators, Jon Ossoff and Reverend Raphael Warnock, who won successive elections and runoffs to Republicans Kelley Loeffler and Herschel Walker (Lang 2022, 133; New York Times 2022)[18].

In response to President Biden's victory in 2020, red states across the United States released a flurry of voter suppression laws masquerading as legislation designed to bring more credibility to election results. Governor Brian Kemp signed one such bill into law, a 98-page omnibus bill called SB 202, but known broadly as the Election Integrity Act of 2021. The law alleges that Fulton County, the Democratic powerhouse that contains the majority of downtown Atlanta, has a history of sloppiness and potential miscounts, and aims to solve these issues. SB 202 contains a myriad of voter suppression tactics. First and foremost, it requires a strict new voter ID process for absentee voting. Originally a voter would request an absentee ballot from county officials, who upon deeming the individual was a registered voter, would send a ballot that the voter would fill out, sign, and send back, where officials verified the voter's signature on

file before being counted. SB 202 requires a Georgia State driver's license or identification number, and voters are required to attach a

photocopy of their identification to both the original ballot application and to the inside of their ballot envelope. The window for requesting an absentee ballot has also been significantly shortened. While prior to SB 202 a voter could request to vote absentee in Georgia as early as six months before an election and as late as four days in advance, that period has been altered to as early as eleven weeks prior to an election, and the absentee ballot request period ends eleven days before an election takes place. The new law also changes how ballot drop boxes work. While they were originally available 24/7 and were placed in areas of convenience around a given town or city, drop boxes post-SB 202 must be located inside of "early voting locations" which operate during normal working hours and not before or after. Additionally, SB 202 bans mobile polling places (prominent in Fulton), puts restrictions on Sunday voting, and makes "line warming" illegal – the practice of handing out water or coffee to voters waiting in line to vote. Regardless of how hot or cold it may be, how early or late, or how long the individual has been waiting to vote, SB 202 prohibits line warming[19].

Voting rights activists have fought against SB 202, citing concerns of politically motivated election interference following former President Trump's obsession with Fulton's supposed electoral shortcomings, despite his claims of fraud bearing no fruit. University of Georgia political science professor Charles Bullock admitted that the law "does feed the Democrats' concern that Republicans are going to interfere with the actions of the board which is in charge of elections in the county which gave Democrats their biggest total margin of votes," and Fulton Country Board of Commissioners Chairman Robb Pitts concurred, stating his belief that the law would be used to subject Fulton County to untold levels of voter suppression. "This is the result of a cynical ploy to undermine faith in our elections process and democracy itself – it is shameful partisan politics at its very worst"[20]. Voter suppression laws by their very nature are intended to appear objectively neutral so that they are not called out for discrimina-tion and could be reasonably expected to pass a strict scrutiny test if brought to court. The proof lies in the context behind these bills. A litany of organizations including Common Cause, the League of Women Voters in Georgia, and the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP have filed suit against Georgia and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger. The case is known as *Georgia State Conference of the NAACP et al. v. Raffensperger et al.* and alleges that SB 202 violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act which prohibits legislation that may deny minority voters equal opportunity to cast ballots. The complaint states that African Americans, specifically, are being targeted with "uncanny accuracy"[21].

The numbers show that the NAACP's complaint is correct. 30% of Black voters in Georgia vote by absentee, compared to nearly 24% of white voters. Ballot drop boxes have also been historically relied upon by Black voters, with the complaint stating that SB 202 has made drop boxes "essentially useless to voters who can vote early in person or who cannot access early voting hours at all due to work or other commitments during early voting hours"[22]. Black adults in Georgia are also statistically more likely to work multiple jobs and rely on drop boxes to submit their ballots at odd hours. The shortening of drop box hours disproportionately burdens Black voters, especially in areas like majority non-white Fulton County, where the majority of absentee ballots were submitted through these drop boxes [23]. The complaint also talks about a practice in Atlanta called "Souls to the Polls," a get-out-the-vote event organized by predominantly Black churches in which the church's community members provide the church-goers with rides to polling places after Sunday Mass. On Sundays in 2020, Black voters accounted for 36.5% of voters, while on all other days of the week, they accounted for 26.8%. Black voters turned out in percentages on Sunday that were 6% higher than their total voter registration in the state, while white voters were 6% lower[24]. Line warming was also critical in predominantly Black districts, where good samaritans would hand out food, beverages, umbrellas, and chairs to voters waiting in long lines. The complaint cites a statistic detailing that in neighborhoods that were at least 90% white, wait times at polling places were on average six minutes – while averages in areas that were at least 90% non-white averaged nearly an hour[25]. Given that POC voters are more likely to experience long wait times and SB 202 eliminates assistance that would make that wait more tolerable, it is not difficult to infer who Republican lawmakers are attempting to keep out of the voting booth. This speaks not only to the lack of polling places in predominantly POC neighborhoods, but also to the fact that Black voters are engaged and want to perform their civic duty and exercise their right to vote. SB 202's effects were felt in the 2022 midterm elections. White voters made up a higher portion of the electorate than in any election in the last ten years, 8.6% higher than Black voters. This gap between white and Black voters is nearly double the gap between white and Black voters in the 2014 and 2018 midterms and had POC voters voted at the same rate as white voters in the 2022 midterms, they would have accounted for an additional 267,000 votes. Roughly 176,000 of these missing ballots would have been submitted by Black Georgians, and while Black voters are not a monolith, given that 73% of Black voters in Georgia skew Democrat it is reasonable to assume that they would have made the difference in helping Senator Raphael Warnock win his initial election (he needed 43,690 votes) and avoid the December 2022 runoff[26].

Toronto and Atlanta (and Ontario and Georgia at large) are presented with significant, yet opposite issues. Toronto is faced with a crisis in need of electoral reform – the people have become unwilling to vote in elections because Ontario's first-past-the-post system makes it so thousands of voters are effectively disenfranchised when it happens that an individual is elected with less than 50% of the vote and lacks a legitimate mandate to govern. Georgia's Election Integrity Act of 2021 is effectively Jim Crow 2.0 for non-white voters, disenfranchising them en masse as a last-ditch effort for Governor Kemp and Secretary of State Raffensperger to hold onto power in a purple Georgia that is turning more and more blue every election cycle. Both regions are in need of radical electoral reform. In Toronto, that could come in the form of rank-choice voting. Giving voters the option to rank their top three, four, or five options would automatically eliminate the lowest vote-getters and allocate those votes toward candidates who could gain a legitimate majority. In Atlanta, outside of the NAACP's legal attempts, the answer could simply be voter education and mobilization. Vote out those in power restricting the vote, and replace them with those who understand the importance and beauty of a citizen performing their civic duty. Until Toronto and Atlanta reform their off-kilter voting systems, these problems will not be solved.

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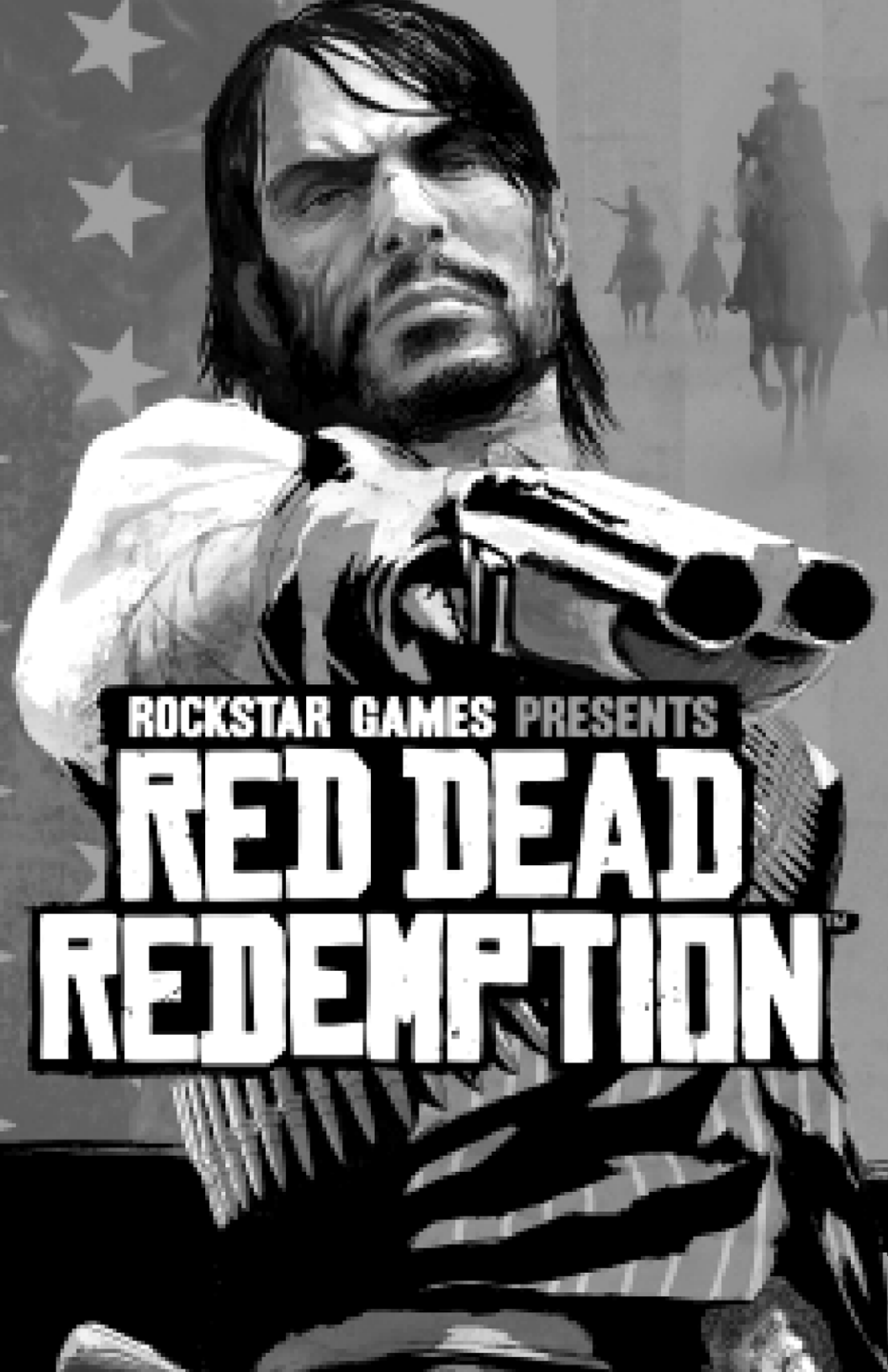
ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS

RED DEAD REDEMPTION™

Gamic Cultures of Settler Colonialism

Indigeneity and the Turnerian Frontier
in *Red Dead Redemption 2*

Andrew Jennings

Red Dead Redemption 2 Summary

Red Dead Redemption 2 (*RDR2*) is a 2018 open-world video game developed by Rockstar. Set in the American West during the 1890s, the action-adventure game follows Arthur Morgan, a Van Der Linde Gang lieutenant, as he grows disillusioned with outlawry and his perpetual state of fugitivity. The Gang, led by utopian dreamer Dutch Van Der Linde, struggles to cope with the so-called "machine in the garden," lamenting the inexorable march of civilization and the demise of the "Old West."[1] The "main story" narrates their conflict with industrialist Leviticus Cornwall and the Pinkerton Detective Agency across a vast frontier gameworld. Due to mounting pressure from law enforcement, they are serially displaced from their camp and must stage heists to finance their escape to "new frontiers," such as Australia.

The fictive landscape – stretching from the Rural South across the Great Plains to the Mountain West – is rich with Western iconography and emblems of the closing frontier.[2] As players navigate the gamespace, they encounter portents of the "new age," such as railroads, smoke-plumed factories, and an expansive telegraph network. Thus, *RDR2* foregrounds the effects of "progress" and modernity on the American West and its people, including the Van De Linde Gang. Arthur perceives their besieged lifestyle as a vestige of the condemned frontier ethos, at odds with the structure and regulations of a burgeoning industrial state. Consequently, he likens the Gang's trials to the plight of Native Americans, whom he also perceives as marginalized and existentially threatened by civilization's westward crawl. He ultimately allies with the fictional Wapiti tribe to oppose Cornwall's efforts to seize their land for oil extraction. This moment serves as a microcosm for the broader conflicts of the Gilded Age and subsequent Progressive Era.

Introduction

Rockstar and *RDR2's* developers heralded the game's realism during its media rollout, promising players an "authentic" experience of frontier history and geography. In addition to geo-historical accuracy, developers intended to "evoke contemporary politics" of representation and critique settler colonialism, a goal that I will term its "moral agenda."[3] Rockstar, therefore, assumes the pedagogical role of "developer-historian" to provide "an indictment rather than homage" of the American West and its portrayal in popular media.[4] The narrative and gameplay mechanics are engineered to promote specific ways of engaging with the landscape and historical period. For instance, the developers highlight Arthur's sense of solidarity with the Wapiti tribe to challenge schematized portraits of Indigeneity and spotlight the violence of settler colonialism.[5] Furthermore, Rockstar quantifies its moral agenda through the game's "honor system." Positive deeds – such as killing Ku Klux Klan members or robbing former enslavers – increase the player's honor. By contrast, negative actions – such as murder, letting wounded animals suffer, or neglecting to aid the Wapiti – decrease the player's honor. Arthur's honor level influences the gameworld's response to him. High honor levels improve loot quality, resource availability, and goods pricing, among other bonuses. Further, it changes the story's progression and emotional finale; an honorable Arthur experiences a noble and peaceful death, whereas a dishonorable Arthur is physically beaten and shot. This system rewards players for adopting Rockstar's moral agenda and considering their actions within broader sociohistorical discourses.

However, Rockstar's moral agenda is incommensurable with its spatial-historical simulation of the "closing frontier." In crafting a game-world that audiences perceive as "authentic," RDR2 uses its landscape, storytelling, and gameplay mechanics to reinforce the binary between "wilderness" and "civilization."[6] This dominant social and spatial imaginary of the American West arises from F.J. Turner's, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In this essay, Turner narrates the process by which Euro-American frontiersmen "won the West" and erected civilization from a transformed wilderness.[7] Thus, he extols settlers as the "essential formative influence" on America's development.[8] This framework reflects Edward Said's concept of "imagined geographies," or discursive representations of space that codify the hegemonic identity's preconceptions and desires. As an imagined geography, the Turnerian Frontier has more "to do with structures of power" than it does geographic or historical "actualities."[9] His commemoration of Westward expansion relegates Indigeneity to America's geo-historical periphery and obscures the violent structures of settler colonialism. Therefore, despite Rockstar's

moral agenda, *RDR2's* gameworld is laden with geo-historical myths that privilege and reify the "Anglo-Saxon, manifest destiny understanding" of Western space.[10] Because it mobilizes the imagined geography of the Turnerian frontier, RDR2 cannot accurately render Indigenous histories and perpetuates an exclusionary national culture.

The Turnerian Frontier in *Red Dead Redemption 2's* Gameworld

RDR2 instantiates the Turnerian Frontier by mapping the "stages of frontier advance" onto the game's "pictorial space.[11] Turner asserts that the ever-shifting frontier was traversed in several waves: first by hunters and trappers, then by ranchers, farmers, the military, and "men of capital and enterprise."[12] Correspondingly, as players navigate RDR2's landscape from west to east, fur traders give way to ranches, commercial agriculture, and industry in that order. The game's Western regions include rustic frontier settlements such as Colter, Tumbleweed, and Armadillo, all surrounded by vast expanses of open country. Notably, none of these towns connect to the rail system that facilitates player and non-player character (NPC) movement in the eastern regions. The central Heartlands features several transitional zones where players perceive the emergence of so-called civilization from the Wilderness. These include the towns of Valentine and Emerald Ranch, which boast small livestock farms, homesteads, and basic amenities, namely saloons and general stores. Diverse non-player characters, such as farmers, hunters, immigrant families, and entrepreneurs, populate both towns, illustrating the gradual advance of civilization behind various settler groups. To the South lies Blackwater – a bustling frontier city that draws inspiration from St. Louis, the "Gateway to the West." Further East is Annesburg, an Appalachian coal company town, and Rhodes, a "prim and proper Southern town" (*RDR2*). Finally, Saint-Denis, a stand-in for an industrializing New Orleans, occupies the map's extreme Southeast corner.

Blackwater and Saint-Denis, the two largest cities, feature cobblestone streets, rail access, and telegraph stations. Notably, Saint-Denis even sports a robust tram system. Furthermore, both cities offer hairdressers, portrait studies, tailors, theatres, and casinos to demonstrate that "all the luxuries, elegancies, frivolities, and fashions are in vogue.[13] Despite their distance, they share a distinct urban character, illustrating the "potent nationalizing effects" of "internal improvement.[14] Together, the two cities represent an emerging, standardized, and civilized industrial America. A journey across *RDR2's* gameworld illustrates the progression from "small villages" to "spacious towns" and eventually cities with "substantial edifices of brick . . ., gardens, colleges, and churches."[15]

Additionally, the vast and uninhabited wilderness areas that separate these towns and cities demonstrate that the frontier did not advance in unison but in discrete waves.[16] These "empty" spaces also imply that settlers occupied "an area of free land" from which indigenous peoples had already passed.[17] This narrative obscures the power imbalances of settler colonialism by portraying westward expansion as a peaceful transition predicated on legitimate claims of uncultivated land. *RDR2's* gameworld sits atop an imagined geography that necessarily effaces indigenous persons from history, contradicting the game's moral agenda and critical stance towards so-called progress.

(Fig. 1. Tumbleweed)   *(Fig. 2. Saint-Denis)*

Conforming to the Turnerian Frontier, *RDR2's* virtual landscape portrays the frontier as the meeting point between the incompatible spaces of Wilderness and civilization. In Turner's essay, he conceives of Wilderness as unoccupied and uncultivated land. Frequently termed "virgin soil," this notion of Wilderness implies that the settler must make it productive.[18] Civilization, on the other hand, connotes structure, urbanity, commerce, and government. The frontier is often expressed through dichotomous attributions, most notably "savage-tame," that encourage the mastery of Wilderness or justify the unilateral imposition of settler power.[19] *RDR2's* gameworld constantly portrays the contrast between "wild" and "civilized" spaces to emphasize their disharmony. Nature areas are "rendered in acute detail" and steeped in the "pastoral cliché of a raw wilderness," reminiscent of the *Hudson River School*.[20] Additionally, Rockstar depicts these spaces with diverse textures, dramatic lighting, rich soundscapes, and dynamic weather systems. In contrast, towns and cities are "rendered in industrial tones of grime."[21] The Turnerian conflict between these spaces appears in the factories, oil derricks, mines, and military outposts that populate and

visibly pollute wilderness spaces. Even from "unoccupied" areas, smoke-stacks loom in the distance, serving as visual cues of 'the disintegrating forces of civilization entering the wilderness."[22]

Notably, Wilderness is a space of "freedom" and rejuvenation for the player; horseback movement is effortless, and cinematic shots of the land-scape delight.[23] In the confined and chaotic cities, which Arthur deems "crowded" and "stuffed up," movement is obstructed and may draw attention from law enforcement. Evidently, Arthur is an archetypal "overmountain man" who feels displaced in the transition from Wilderness to urbanity.[24] Rockstar encourages players to share this perspective through gameplay mechanics that inhibit spatial navigation and increase user stress. RDR2's landscape embodies Turner's imagined geography by portraying the frontier as the "threshold of difference" between the irreconcilable spaces of Wilderness and encroaching civilization.[25] Although Rockstar intends to critique "progress," it appears they "do not understand [this binary's] implic-itly white supremacist" connotations.[26] Turner positions "The Indian" within the "savage" and "inanimate" geography of Wilderness. Thus, delineating the "wild" from the "civilized" naturalizes Indigenous people as constituents of the "other space."[27] Demonstrated by the "stages of frontier advance," Wilderness – and therefore Indigeneity – is predestined for mastery by the settler. *RDR2* cannot accurately render indigenous personhood or historicity because its binary gameworld is encoded with Turner's exclusionary logic.

(Fig. 3. Big Valley region, pastoral landscape)

The Wapiti at the Periphery

By relegating indigenous peoples outside the spaces of civilization, Turner portrays them as passive observers of Euro-American historical processes. Accordingly, Rockstar relegates Indigenous characters to the geographic and narrative outer strata. In Turner's thesis, Indigenous

peoples are a "present absence," meaning they appear most conspicu-
ously in the ways they are missing.[28] These footprints include remnant
"Indian trails" and "Indian clearings" that populate the "inanimate
nature" of the "inert continent."[29] Similarly, for most of the story,
Indigeneity in *RDR2* is most perceptible in the form of its azoic traces.
"Wapiti Avenue" connects Blackwater to the Van Horn trading post.
However, indigenous NPCs do not spawn in this region. This absence
insinuates that the tribe was historically present without detailing the
events of their displacement. In addition, several white NPCs imply that
the town of Valentine is cursed because it sits upon an old Wapiti village.
Likewise, the game does not provide the specifics of their removal. Other
signs of Indigeneity – including an abandoned burial site in West
Elizabeth and an 'ancient tomahawk' in the Ambarino territory – are
also disconnected from the living context of the Wapiti people. Their
"present absence" reinforces the conviction that Indigeneity is disap-
pearing, omits the role of violence in this process, and justifies the
conquest of the supposedly vacant Wilderness.[30]

(Fig. 4. Wapiti Burial Site)

The sole in-game location with a significant indigenous presence is the
Wapiti Indian Reservation. Notably, the Reservation is situated North of
the 'Grizzlies' – a rugged mountain range that separates the "civilizing"
Heartlands from "wild" Ambarino. That the Wapiti people inhabit this
remote and inaccessible space evokes their peripherality in Turner's thesis.
Moreover, Rockstar positions Indigeneity on the "other" side of the
wild-civilized binary by placing the Reservation far from railroads and
"white" settlements. The only indigenous character who appears outside the
Reservation and its immediate surroundings is gang member Charles
Smith. Notably, Smith has only one indigenous parent: his mother, who

comes from an unnamed, dispossessed, and "long extinct" tribe. Discussing his heritage with Arthur, Smith proclaims, "I don't even know if I have a tribe. . . my whole life I've been on the run" (*RDR2*). Rockstar insinuates that he can traverse certain spatial thresholds, such as the Van Der Linde Camp because he is not thoroughly Indigenous in appearance or culture. On the other hand, the Wapiti are rendered in the paternalist tradition of the noble savage, residing in the Wilderness, untouched by civilization and its temptation.[31]

By casting Indigeneity to the periphery, Turner reduces diverse Indigenous peoples to an amorphous "out-group," defined by its oppositionality to whiteness. In his thesis, Turner refers to Indigenous peoples collectively as "Indians" who occupy "savage" spaces.[32] This reduces diverse ethnicities and dynamic cultures to an undesirable monolith. Alternatively, his concept of the "composite nationality" views the frontier as a crucible that forges diverse European cultures into a new American identity.[33] Reflecting this sentiment, the Van Der Linde Gang comprises German, Italian, Irish, Welsh, Black, Mexican, and English characters united by their shared frontier experience. Arthur encounters a race science pamphleteer in the non-frontier city of Saint-Denis, who warns him about the dangers of "miscegenation." In response, Arthur remarks, "I've got friends who's [sic] white, friends who's Mexican, friends who's Indian, known blacks, Irish, Italian. Good and bad in all" (*RDR2*). This interaction recalls the notion of "composite nationality" and Whitman's inclusive ode to "all the righteous, all the wicked" in "Pioneers! O Pioneers."[34]

In contrast, representations of Indigeneity are limited and thoroughly schematized. *RDR2's* token tribe, the Wapiti, is "a generic conglomerate of Native cultures" with no distinct identity, cultural practices, or real-world analog.[35] Visually, "feathered headdresses, teepees with smoke pouring from them, bare torsos, long black hair, tobacco pipes, and face paint" perpetuate the iconography of the Hollywood "Indian."[36] Rockstar audibly misrepresents Indigeneity through cliched "war cries," "flutes of native suffering," and a Frankenstein language that borrows from discrete tribes across far-flung regions.[37] Furthermore, *RDR2* provides ample visual cues of their inevitable extermination. The Wapiti community is perceptively ravaged by disease and malnutrition. Emaciated and ill NPCs reduce the lived experience of Indigeneity to a struggle for survival on their peripheral Reservation. At one point, a nameless Wapiti character requests Arthur's aid in stealing smallpox vaccines. This moment attempts to serve Rockstar's moral agenda by foregrounding the use of disease as a tool of colonial oppression, whether through neglect or intentional spread. However, it reinforces the Wapiti's precarious existence and apparent incapacity to alter their fate. Random encounters around the reservation

depict the U.S. Army harassing, brutalizing, and kidnapping Wapiti NPCs.[38] Once more, these interactions intend to present evocative representations of systemic oppression and culture under siege. However, the Wapiti tribe's portrayal naturalizes the Turnerian perception of Indigeneity as a singular, marginal, and doomed "object" upon which the settler coheres its identity as the "subject."[39]

(Fig. 5. Eagle Flies, a Wapiti character)

Exclusionary Mechanics: Indigenous Passivity and the Logic of Settler Colonialism

In conjunction with the geographic distances players must overcome to encounter Indigenous characters, Rockstar subverts their personhood by restricting interactivity with Wapiti NPCs. RDR2's dialogue system allows players to "interact with almost any living creature," including humans, dogs, cats, and horses.[40] Players can choose to 'greet,' 'antagonize,' 'threaten,' or 'defuse' any NPC to pick fights, form alliances, receive side quests, or simply for entertainment. However, these options are unavailable in the Wapiti Reservation, effectively silencing Indigeneity through exclusionary design. Additionally, players can physically interact with any NPC by bumping into, shaking hands with, fighting, or killing them. Likewise, *RDR2* does not extend these options to Wapiti characters. While this prevents players from subverting Rockstar's moral agenda through anti-indigenous violence, it makes the Wapiti "less understandable as living, responsive humans. . . and more understandable as environmental objects."[41] The Reservation space is also "less interactable" than the rest of the game world, as you cannot sprint, gallop, or use your weapons. Moreover, the Reservation's teepees are not enterable, unlike homes and

buildings elsewhere in the Gameworld. The fact that RDR2 limits options for player engagement with Wapiti characters is especially significant "against the backdrop of maximum freedom that the game otherwise offers.[42] Like "the Indian" in Turner's thesis, the Wapiti appear as cinematic elements of the virtual background rather than fleshed-out, agentive humans.[43] Significantly, Indigenous characters appear outside the map's boundaries at several points throughout the story, beyond the player's reach. These "Poor Bastards," as a Gang member terms them, literally watch the player's progress with no capacity to influence it. *RDR2's* mechanics reflect and reify Indigeneity's "othered" position in the Turnerian geography by stripping agency and humanity from Wapiti characters.

Beyond impeding user engagement with indigenous characters, *RDR2* encourages the player to interact with the landscape according to Turner's extractive logic. In his essay, Turner portrays the frontier as "open for conquest" and encourages the exploitation of its beasts, grasses, and soil.[44] Furthermore, he describes the American West as a source of resources for which the country once relied on England. Thus, the Wilderness is an abundant repository of resources, and "dominion over inanimate nature" is essential for developing and maintaining a prosperous America.[45] *RDR2* expresses this logic by encouraging players to access Wilderness spaces in exploitive ways.[46] For instance, players can hunt all animals – from mice and toads to bears and bison – for pelts, skins, bones, or other materials. These resources are sold, crafted into cosmetic accessories, or used to improve carrying capacity for weapons, munitions, food, or medicine.[47] Much as Turner encourages the settler to "master the wilderness" for national development and internal improvement, this utilitarian system requires players to extract natural resources for in-game progress. Importantly, animals respawn indefinitely, meaning a player can shoot a herd of Buffalo and reencounter it the next day. This mechanic reinforces the colonial myth of "infinite access" and the illusion of inexhaustibility.[48] Rewarding the violent and wanton "domination" of the environment portrays the expropriation of land and resources as not only justified but imperative.[49] In conclusion, *RDR2* inherits Turner's extractive slant in its gameplay mechanics. Much like the Turnerian West, the player must master and consume this digital frontier, reproducing narratives that licensed the dispossession of indigenous peoples.

"We Can't Change What's Done, We Can Only Move On": Outlawry and the "Vanished Indian"

RDR2's themes of fate and morality exacerbate the effects of the Wapiti peoples' mechanical passivity and geographic marginality. The game is, first and foremost, a lament of progress and modernization. The

introduction begins with white text on a black background that reads, "The age of outlaws was at an end. . . America was becoming a land of laws," and the remaining gangs were being "hunted down and destroyed." Thus, the Van Der Linde Gang's demise, and that of their lifestyle, is preordained. Later, Arthur – who survives innumerable near-death experiences – must confront his mortality when diagnosed with tuberculosis. As he stumbles through a hallucinatory fit, he remarks, "We can't change what's done, we can only move on" (*RDR2*). This admission establishes that his death, like the Gang's, is a foregone conclusion. Moreover, it verbalizes the game's pervasive theme that some courses, once set in motion, cannot be altered.

"Chapter One" commences by thrusting players into a violent frontier landscape. Following a failed heist and narrow getaway, the Gang flees to the Western Grizzlies in the gameworld's extreme northwest corner. The player must navigate the darkness and roaring winds as they confront dangers such as wolves, rival gangs, and, most notably, law enforcement. Reflecting on their predicament, Arthur states, "We got lawmen from three states after us. They chased us from the west. They chased us over the mountain. It ain't ever been like this before" (*RDR2*). It is, therefore, apparent that the civilized world is tightening its grip around the Gang, who can no longer find refuge in the West's dwindling Wilderness spaces. Thus, their death is only a matter of time; as the Wilderness disappears, so too will they. Arthur, the ever-introspective "bad man with a good heart," declares, "I wish things were different... but it weren't us who changed. We're in a world that don't want us no more. It always seems to be more, more, more civilization. I wanna get back in the open country, or what's left of it, but even that ain't the way I remember it."

Here, he suggests that the rugged individualism and penchant for individual freedom that his Gang developed at the frontier is incompatible with the demands of an encroaching civilization.[50] In addition, Arthur reproduces the trope of 'The Machine in the Garden.'[51] This topos refers to the cultural contradictions and internal neuroses that arise from the sudden intrusion of industry into the natural landscape. His statement suggests that the dialectical tension between "the garden" and "the machine" is insurmountable, emphasizing "the certainty of the machine's triumph."[52] Therefore, the Wilderness *itself* is mortal and destined to disappear alongside its occupants.

Throughout the story, Arthur likens himself to "othered" groups based on their common marginality and fate as the "losers of modernization."[53] Speaking to Rains Fall, the chief of the Wapiti people, Arthur proclaims:

The government doesn't like me any more than it likes you. Like you, I've been running for as long as I can remember. And, like you, my time is nigh on done.

Therefore, the Van Der Linde Gang's destiny is bound to the Wapiti through their shared, transient relationship with space.[54] By equating Indigeneity to outlawry, Rockstar reconstitutes the motif of the vanished Indian. The Gang, Arthur, and the Wapiti are powerless against Turner's "disintegration of the wilderness." *RDR2* portrays their terminal decline as "lamentable but inevitable, and a natural concomitant of progress."[55] Just as Indigeneity "passed by" in Turner's thesis, *RDR2* imagines the Wapiti as relics of a bygone era, not as a living culture.

(Fig. 6. A Machine in the Garden)

A significant "Wapiti Arc" in *RDR2's* final chapter brings the conflict between Wilderness and civilization to the fore and accentuates its toll on Indigenous peoples. In this chapter, Rains Fall and his son, Eagle Flies, enlist Arthur's assistance with a land dispute against Leviticus Cornwall. Speculating that their land contains oil reserves, Cornwall conspires with the State Government to "modernize" the Reservation. However, this is a ruse to seize Wapiti land in contravention of their treaties with the Federal government.[56] Across the gameworld, Cornwall's railroads, oil refineries, and factories represent the "disintegrating forces" of civilization. As such, his perpetual conflicts with the Van Der Linde Gang and the Wapiti Tribe denote Turner's "meeting point between civilization and savagery." Cornwall's portrait as a predatory financier and merciless robber baron is the most prominent way Rockstar asserts its moral agenda. His domestic enterprises include exploitive coal mines and substantial oil operations, among other wicked ventures. As such, the developers stress that industrial society's insatiable demand for fuel engendered deep-seated corruption and labor abuse.[57] In addition, his ruthless sugar plantations in the Caribbean illustrates that the "men of capital" who financed the settler project were also implicated in the imperial milieu.[58] Thus, Cornwall is more than a simple antagonist. He is cast as an irredeemable villain

because he is "a progenitor of mass destruction and widespread suffering" who is bent on "winning the West."[59] To distinguish his crimes from Cornwall's indiscriminate carnage, Dutch contends, "[The] difference between you and me is I choose whom I kill and rob, and you destroy everything in your path." Thus, Rockstar critiques the systemic oppression and devastation wrought by the architects of Westward expansion.

(Fig. 7. Cornwall Kerosene and Tar)

However, this critique of settler colonialism and capitalism suffers due to the overriding logic of the Turnerian frontier. With Arthur's help, Eagle Flies stages an attack on the Cornwall owned Heartland Oil Fields. Rains Fall opposes his son's plans and seeks a peaceful settlement by treaty, echoing Chief Seattle's reflection that "It matters little where we pass the remnant of our days, for they will not be many."[60] However, Eagle Flies disobeys his father and dies in his short-lived rebellion. Arthur's final view of the Wapiti is of the Army retaliating with disproportionate force and indiscriminate violence. If the player returns to the Reservation in the epilogue, they will find a Cornwall oil derrick where teepees once stood. A disheartened Rain Fall appears at the Annesburg train station, informing the player that the remaining Wapiti fled north to Canada. Thus, the logic of elimination is complete; the Wapiti are thoroughly vanished, and the time of "the Indian" has "passed by."[61] In the Wapiti Arc, *RDR2* vividly depicts the violence and consequences of Indigenous dispossession.[62] However, the Wapiti's reliance on the Gang evokes white saviorism by insinuating that Indigenous peoples can only exercise agency or engage colonial power structures through a white intermediary. This flaw arises from the game's deployment of the Turnerian frontier, which entails a model of center and periphery that confront one another in a one-way imposition of power.[63] Moreover, the tribe's displacement to Canada

implies that Indigenous peoples are helpless against their Turnerian fate to occupy the margins. Despite Rockstar's indictment of capitalism and settler colonialism through Cornwall, *RDR2* cannot transcend the historical architecture of its imagined geography. As follows, the game is more of a "ritual reenactment" of Turner's Thesis than a critical reinterpretation despite its purported moral agenda.[64]

(Fig. 8. Wapiti Reservation in the main story)

(Fig. 9. Wapiti Reservation in epilogue)

Conclusion

In "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," F.J. Turner deploys settler colonial myths about space and Indigeneity, which helped to consolidate a distinct historical cultural identity around white masculinity. By mobilizing the imagined geography of the Turnerian Frontier, *RDR2* advances his project and recycles its attendant anti-indigenous logic. Fleeting moments of Indigenous visibility and cursory commentaries on settler colonialism and capitalism cannot transcend a gameworld,

narrative, and mechanical infrastructure that collectively dehumanize and dehistoricize Indigeneity. Advertising the game's realism is, therefore, irresponsible and risks further conflating the "artful distortions of popular imagination" with legitimate methods of reading these histories.[65] In addition, the open-world genre, specifically "big budget" historical games like *RDR2*, reveals how cultures narrativize national spaces and histories.[66] As such, *RDR2's* critical and widespread praise for its "authenticity" demonstrates the *longue durée* of the settler colonial epistemic.

Settler colonialism as a political-economic system is inseparable from representations of race and space that refurbish its logic while occluding its historical violence and contemporary afterlife.[67] Thus, *RDR2's* well-meaning moral agenda fails because it attempts to critique this system from within its very own culture. To interrogate myths about the American nation and extricate inclusive histories from the settler logic, developers must privilege indigenous worldviews, not focalize them through the Anglo-Saxon (e.g., Arthur Morgan) gaze. Like the imagined geography upon which Rockstar built this game, *RDR2* is an instrument of hegemony and a vehicle of settler colonial axioms.[68] This precludes players from perceiving the afterlife of settler colonialism, which continues to affect the lived realities of Indigenous peoples through its "attendant legacies of racial hierarchy and oppression."[69]

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(All Images: *Red Dead Redemption 2*, 2018, still. Courtesy: Rockstar Games.)

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'Humanitarian Aid is Never a Crime'

Resistance Against the 'Landscape of Death' at the Arizona-Sonora Border

Taylor Simsovic

Introduction

Crossing the border between the United States and Mexico without proper authorization has become an increasingly deadly endeavor. Since 1994, the United States government has increased fortifications in popular urban crossing areas straddling the border. These fortifications are intended to funnel migrants into the more deadly desert areas in a supposed attempt to 'deter' people from making the journey. Over seventy-five percent of migrant deaths in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have occurred in the vast Arizonian desert as migrants seek to go to cities like Phoenix, Tucson and cities deeper in the U.S. interior.[1] It is in this context that humanitarian aid organizations like No More Deaths (NMD) operate to provide on-the-ground support to undocumented migrants making the dangerous journey through the desert.

This paper explores two primary research questions: firstly, how the border between the U.S. and Mexico became a site of illegalized migration and large numbers of deaths; second, how NMD's contestation of U.S. bordering practices results in the ongoing criminalization of their actions. I argue that, through humanitarian aid, NMD works against the 'Prevention Through Deterrence' (PTD) bordering strategy employed by the United States government. It is for this reason they have endured repression from federal and state law enforcement. The U.S. government seeks to limit the actions of migrant aid organizations to ensure that the Arizona-Sonora desert remains deadly as a part of its border securitization strategy.

Establishing the Border

In the mid-1840s, promises of westward expansion through Manifest Destiny (the belief that the U.S. should encompass the entire North American continent) provided the momentum for an invasion of Mexico in

1856.[2] Claims of Mexican 'backwardness' and American 'progress' were used to justify expansionist policy. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formally ended the U.S.-Mexico war. The subsequent Gadsden Purchase annexed 525,000 square miles for the United States – nearly half of Mexico's pre-war territory.[3] This territorial annexation cut through the Sonoran Desert and resulted in a new international boundary between the Mexican state of Sonora and the American state of Arizona.[4]

Until the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the border only existed as a line on a map. On the ground, it was scattered rock cairns, boundary markers, guard buildings, and telephone poles. In 1910 – in response to the Revolution – the U.S. government erected a single barbed wire fence splitting the cross-border city of Ambos Nogales ('Both Nogales'). The split created two cities in different countries called Nogales, newly divided by an international border fence. This was the first border fence between the United States and Mexico. By 1929, a six-foot-high chain-link fence equipped with electric lights, stone pillars, and updated gatehouses went up in Nogales.[5]

Making the 'Illegal Immigrant'

In American history, national boundaries and citizenship act as agents of ideological exclusion – separating the racialized "Other" from the white citizen. The 1790 Naturalization Act, for example, limited the naturalization of immigrants to men identified as white.[6] Today, the construction of the racialized 'Other' is most concretely seen in the racist association of Mexican and other Latin American migrants with an 'illegal' status. This association was solidified after 'Operation Wetback' in 1954, which involved the mass deportation of Mexican nationals. The operation was induced by rising public sentiment against the imagined economic cost of accepting Mexican immigrants: that they would take jobs from American workers.[7]

While the 1965 Immigration Act purportedly did away with racial criteria for immigration, race continues to play a significant role in the discourse surrounding immigration and in structuring the material conditions of migrants.[8] The Act imposed quotas on the number of visas that would be allocated to every country, limiting each to 20,000 immigrants with the justification that this would be a more 'equal' system; however, for Mexican and other Latin American migrants, the number of allocated visas for each country was far below the average number of migrants crossing before the Act. This resulted in a growing number of people crossing the border unofficially, causing a surge in arrests for unauthorized entry at the U.S.-Mexico border.

One of the major consequences of this change was that circular migration (people going back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico) was

effectively cut off, and the undocumented population ballooned.[9] Another causal factor for rising undocumented Mexican migration is that, just a year before the Act was passed, the agricultural labor migration program for Mexicans called the 'Bracero Program' was ended, closing a popular route for legal immigration.[10]

Neoliberalism and Deaths in the Desert

Through the 1970s and 1980s, an economic order of neoliberal capitalism gained traction, and a significant reconfiguration of many countries' economies took place, including those in the U.S. and Mexico. Neoliberal economic policies promoted privatization, limited social welfare spending, and reduced barriers to international trade.[11] The reconfiguration of the Mexican economy can generally be traced to the 1982 Mexican default. The Mexican government entered into the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank 'Structural Adjustment Programs' (SAPs) to service their debt. The United States dominated both institutions. Like many formerly colonized countries experiencing the 1980s debt crisis, Mexico was required to reform its government and economy and institute neoliberal policies.[12]

The new Mexican economic order was premised on a supposed "de-peasantization," which would 'bring Mexico into modernity.' However, rural economies and small-scale farmers were so devastated by the changes to agricultural industries (especially corn) that many chose to migrate in search of work. Moreover, the decreasing importance of small-scale agriculture in Mexico meant the focus was on emergent manufacturing industries.[13] At this time, American manufacturing was moved to countries that provided cheaper labor, such as Mexico. This resulted in the establishment of tariff-free manufacturing facilities known as *maquiladoras*. These facilities grew exponentially in areas of northern Mexico like Sonora, resulting in a large migration of Latin American laborers (many of whom were formerly employed in agriculture) northward.[14]

While neoliberalism promotes the free trade of goods and capital over borders, it also necessitates that those same borders be fortified against migrants constructed as the 'Other.'[15] This was demonstrated in 1994 when the United States government adopted two seemingly contradictory policies: the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) – which liberalized markets between the US, Mexico, and Canada – and 'Operation Gatekeeper,' a program to expand border enforcement."[16]

Stemming from the Operation Gatekeeper program, the United States government officially adopted a policy of 'Prevention Through Deterrence' (PTD) wherein they would "rely on a militarized border to raise the physical divide and, in doing so, discourage undocumented

immigration."[17] The strategy of PTD has encouraged greater border fortifications in urban areas, where most migrants previously crossed through. The fortification of popular crossings in these safer areas was implemented to funnel migrants into the 'hostile terrain' of the vast deserts stretching the border.[18] Moreover, while neoliberalism promotes 'austerity measures,' since the mid-1990s, the number of Border Patrol (BP) agents has doubled alongside their budget.[19]

Nevins argues that, since the implementation of PTD strategies, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have become a "landscape of death."[20] The most remote and rugged parts of the border have been enlisted by the government as an "ally of enforcement," wielding hostile terrain as a cudgel against migrants.[21] The militarization of the border and weaponization of the desert is a form of low-level warfare waged in the borderlands, which has killed over five thousand people (a low estimate) since 1998.[22] Those who journey through the desert face the ever-looming threat of deportation. These deportations expanded after the 1996 Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act significantly expanded the list of crimes for which a person could be deported.[23] The framework provided by Nevins (2010) is important because it highlights how the migrant death crisis has been created as the result of specific government policies.

No More Deaths:
Organizing Against the 'Landscape of Death'

The geography of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands extends beyond the perilous physical topography of a desert landscape and the accompanying 120-degree heat. The landscape also includes on-the-ground manifestations of U.S.-government state power in the forms of a military bombing range (the Barry M. Goldwater Military Range) seen in Figure 1, as well as "highway checkpoints, surveillance towers, helicopter patrols, environmentally protected areas, cattle ranches, [and] omnipresent green and white 'dogcatcher' Border Patrol vehicles."[24] Also scattered throughout the terrain is evidence of migrants' passage through, with left-behind belongings like sun-bleached bandanas, discarded toothbrushes, and water bottles. Working against the 'landscape of death' through the provision of humanitarian aid to migrants, organizations like NMD are present in the borderlands. Evidence of their presence is found in the one-gallon water jugs laid along trails for migrants' usage and volunteers from various organizations posted throughout the desert.[25]

In 2004, a decade after Operation Gatekeeper and PTD strategies were enacted in Tucson, Arizona, an interfaith coalition was founded by Rev. John Fife. Inspired by the 1980s Sanctuary Movement, which he also founded, Fife and several other congregations in the area created the

volunteer-operated humanitarian aid organization NMD.[26] Their basic mission is to provide direct aid to migrants in the southern Arizona desert and to prevent migrant deaths, which have skyrocketed since the mid-1990s.[27] The group is motivated by the core belief that the current bordering strategies employed by the U.S. government are a violation of human rights, and therefore, see their actions that may violate state and federal law as acts of 'civil initiative,' wherein they exert their right to protect the victims of human rights abuses.[28]

To mitigate the lethality of the desert – which includes significant risks of dehydration, heat exhaustion, and exposure to the elements – NMD volunteers hike the trails of the desert to place jugs of water, food, blankets, clothes, and other life-preserving items along commonly traversed migrant trails.[29] The scope of the group's work has expanded to volunteers providing immediate first aid to migrants in medical distress, documenting the abuses of BP agents, providing aid to those in northern Sonora in Mexico, ministering to incarcerated migrants, and searching for missing migrants.[30]

Through the provision of on-the-ground humanitarian aid, NMD works against the 'landscape of death' that has been established at the Arizona-Sonora border.[31] It is through the provision of life-saving aid that NMD volunteers subvert the strategies that seek to use the physical environment of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands as an 'ally' of PTD border enforcement strategies.[32]

Criminalizing Humanitarian Aid

In their study of the criminalization of humanitarian aid for migrants in the Mediterranean Sea (which has seen increasingly large numbers of migrant deaths), Eleanor Gordon and Henrik Kjellmo Larsen argue that "the criminalisation of those who assist migrants is a component of the broader securitisation of migration."[33] This can be seen across the Global North. Since NMD aims to mitigate the lethality of the physical environment of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands, BP agents and law enforcement have routinely criminalized their efforts because they view the provision of aid as 'encouragement' for unofficial cross-border migration.[34] In 2005, in response to growing opposition from Border Patrol and other law enforcement, they launched a public relations campaign with the slogan, 'Humanitarian Aid is Never a Crime.'[35]

One of the ongoing low-level modes of antagonism from the state has arisen in BP agents' efforts to subvert the work of NMD volunteers through the slashing and destroying water jugs that are left on trails.[36] Increasingly hostile actions towards humanitarian aid volunteers were recorded in February 2008, when an NMD volunteer found the remains of a young girl

who died while making the journey through the desert. Two days later, that same volunteer was fined for 'littering' because he left water bottles for migrants along the trail in Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (seen on the bottom left in Figure 1). Incidentally, that same volunteer was also picking up 'litter' as he collected empty jugs of water left behind by migrants. The case culminated in September 2008 when he refused to pay the ordered $175 fine and was found guilty by a federal judge.[37] A similar event occurred in 2009 when an NMD volunteer named Walt Stanton was sentenced to 300 hours of community service for the 'crime' of leaving jugs of water for migrants.[38] These examples illustrate the strategies of law enforcement to criminalize humanitarian aid in their attempts to maintain the 'efficacy' of PTD strategies.

United States V. Scott Warren

Liz Kinnamon's 2019 article outlines one of the most high-profile instances of the criminalization of NMD operations: the January 17, 2018, arrest of geographer and NMD volunteer Scott Warren in Ajo, Arizona. On the morning of Scott's arrest, NMD published a report and video that displayed BP intentionally destroying water jugs in the desert.[39] In what NMD views as an act of retaliation, BP set up surveillance at a house called 'The Barn' used by multiple humanitarian aid organizations. Later that evening, BP arrested Warren and two men they suspected of being undocumented migrants. Warren was charged with "one count of conspiracy to transport illegal aliens and two counts of harboring and faced up to twenty years in prison.".[40]

In *United States V. Scott Daniel Warren*, Warren faced felony convictions for providing "food, water, clean clothes, and beds to two [undocumented migrants] who asked him for help," things which people in border communities have essentially always done but have only recently become criminal acts.[41] The judge who presided over this case was a Trump appointee, who adjudicated within the 'zero-tolerance' policy of the administration.[42] The federal prosecutors tried to spin Warren's provision of humanitarian aid as evidence of criminal intent that he was deliberately furthering the stay of undocumented migrants in the United States. The trial occurred between May 28 and June 11, 2019, and resulted in a hung jury with eight for 'not guilty' and four for 'guilty.'[43] The prosecution declined to drop the charges, and the case went to a second trial. The jury found him not guilty.[44]

Kinnamon highlighted the central lesson of Warren's case: "The state is trying to crowdsource the checkpoint. It is trying to make you into the border."[45] NMD volunteers are in a powerful position to address on-the-ground human rights violations that occur amid the escalating

militarization of the border through the provision of water along migrant trails by volunteers, mitigating the risk of dehydration and death.[46] The federal-level criminal prosecution of Warren was indicative of how the U.S. government seeks to criminalize humanitarian aid for migrants as a part of their broader strategy of border securitization.

Conclusion

The Arizona-Sonora border has come to be characterized as a 'landscape of death.' The U.S. government has funneled undocumented migrants into the dangerous and deadly desert as they seek to 'deter' migrants rather than address the root causes of migration.[47] Addressing the humanitarian crisis on the ground, NMD volunteers work to provide aid to migrants making the deadly trek through the desert. The criminalization of their actions should be understood as an extension of the broader securitization strategies employed by the U.S. government since the 1980s; however, the criminalization of humanitarian aid for migrants is not exclusive to the U.S: there has been a trend in many receiving countries towards "policing and punishing those who assist migrants."[48] The implications of this criminalization are vast. The neoliberal state seeks to address the insecurity caused by globalized trade through increased fortification and militarization of national boundaries.[49] With migration increasingly at the center of human tragedies, attention should be paid to the strategies the state employs to outsource the border to well-meaning civilian volunteers.[50]

Notes

1. D.K. Androff and K.Y. Tavassoli, "Deaths in the Desert: The Human Rights Crisis on the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Social Work* 57, no. 2 (2012): 165; S. Lawrence and J. Wildgen, "Manifold Destiny: Migrant Deaths and Destinations in the 13 Arizona Desert," *Growth and Change* 43, no. 3 (2012): 482; P. Macias-Rojas, *From Deportation to Prison: The Politics of Immigration Enforcement in Post-Civil Rights America* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 31.

2. D.J. Burge, *A Failed Vision of Empire: The Collapse of Manifest Destiny, 1845-1872* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 1; D. Correia, "Making Destiny Manifest: United States Territorial Expansion and the Dispossession of Two Mexican Property Claims in New Mexico, 1824–1899," *Journal of Historical Geography* 35, no. 1 (2009): 88.

3. Correia, "Making Destiny Manifest," 87–88.

4. G.L. Cadava, "Borderlands of Modernity and Abandonment: The Lines within Ambos Nogales and the Tohono O'odham Nation," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011): 365.

5. R.H. McGuire, "Steel Walls and Picket Fences: Rematerializing the U.S.–Mexican Border in Ambos Nogales," *American Anthropologist* 115, no. 3 (2013): 469.

6. E. Ironside and L.M. Corrigan, "Constituting Enemies Through Fear: The Rhetoric of Exclusionary Nationalism in the Control of 'Un-American' Immigrant Populations," in *The Rhetorics of US Immigration* (Penn State University Press, 2015), 157–58.

7. J. Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on Illegals and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 38–39.

8. Ibid, 128–29.

9. Macias-Rojas, *From Deportation to Prison*, 31–49.

10. Ibid, 2.

11. P. Fernandez-Kelly and D.S. Massey, "Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-U.S. Migration," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, no. 1 (2007): 103.

12. A. Galvez, *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies, and the Destruction of Mexico* (University of California Press, 2018), 14.

13. Ibid, 13–15.

14. Ibid, 13; Macias-Rojas, *From Deportation to Prison*, 31.

15. McGuire, "Steel Walls and Picket Fences," 468.

16. E. Ackerman, "NAFTA and Gatekeeper: A Theoretical Assessment of Border Enforcement in the Era of the Neoliberal State," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 55 (2011): 40.

17. Ibid, 41.

18. McGuire, "Steel Walls and Picket Fences," 472.

19. Androff and Tavassoli, "Deaths in the Desert," 167.

20. Ibid, 174.

21. S.D. Warren, "Across Papagueria: Copper, Conservation, And Boundary Security in The Arizona-Mexico Borderlands" (Tempe, Arizona State University, 2015), 93, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

22. McGuire, "Steel Walls and Picket Fences," 471–72.

23. Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 176–79.

24. L. Johnson, "Material Interventions on the US-Mexico Border: Investigating a Sited Politics of Migrant Solidarity," *Antipode* 47, no. 5 (2015): 1245.

25. Ibid, 1245.

26. M. Caminero-Santangelo, "Responding to the Human Costs of US Immigration Policy: No More Deaths and the New Sanctuary Movement," *Latino Studies* 7, no. 1 (2009): 112–13.c

27. Ibid, 112; Johnson, "Material Interventions on the US-Mexico Border," 1245.

28. Caminero-Santangelo, "Responding to the Human Costs of US Immigration Policy," 112.c

29. Johnson, "Material Interventions on the US-Mexico Border," 1245.

30. "About No More Deaths," No More Deaths, n.d., https://nomoredeaths.org/about-no-more-deaths/.

31. Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*.

32. Johnson, "Material Interventions on the US-Mexico Border," 1245.

33. E. Gordon and H.K. Larsen, "'Sea of Blood': The Intended and Unintended Effects of Criminalising Humanitarian Volunteers Assisting Migrants in Distress at Sea," *Disasters* 46, no. 1 (2022): 4.

34. Androff and Tavassoli, "Deaths in the Desert," 168.

35. Caminero-Santangelo, "Responding to the Human Costs of US Immigration Policy," 117.

36. J.A. Cade, "'Water Is Life!' : Death, Dissent, and Democracy in the Borderlands," *Indiana Law Journal* 96, no. 1 (2020): 263; "About No More Deaths."

37. Caminero-Santangelo, "Responding to the Human Costs of US Immigration Policy," 114.

38. Androff and Tavassoli, "Deaths in the Desert," 168.

39. "About No More Deaths."

40. M. Oztaskin, "'USA v Scott' and the Fight to Prove That Humanitarian Aid Is Not a Crime," *The New Yorker*, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-documentary/usa-v-scott-and-the-fig ht-to-prove-that-humanitarian-aid-is-not-a-crime.

41. "Scott Warren Provided Food & Water to Migrants in Arizona; He Now Faces Up to 20 Years in

Prison" (Washington D.C: Democracy Now, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u4VBUSPSqM&t=21s.

42. Oztaskin, "'USA v Scott' and the Fight to Prove That Humanitarian Aid Is Not a Crime."

43. L. Kinnamon, "United States v. Scott Daniel Warren," *The New Inquiry*, 2019, https://thenewinquiry.com/united-states-v-scott-daniel-warren/.

44. Oztaskin, "'USA v Scott' and the Fight to Prove That Humanitarian Aid Is Not a Crime."

45. Kinnamon, "United States v. Scott Daniel Warren."

46. Caminero-Santangelo, "Responding to the Human Costs of US Immigration Policy," 119.

47. Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*.

48. Caminero-Santangelo, "Responding to the Human Costs of US Immigration Policy"; Kinnamon, "United States v. Scott Daniel Warren"; Gordon and Larsen, "'Sea of Blood,'" 3.

49. Macias-Rojas, *From Deportation to Prison*, 20.

50. Gordon and Larsen, "'Sea of Blood,'" 3.

51. S.D. Warren, "Across Papagueria: Copper, Conservation, And Boundary Security in The Arizona-Mexico Borderlands" (Tempe, Arizona State University, 2015), xii, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Map of the Arizona-Sonora Borderlands, from Warren (2015, p. xii).[51]
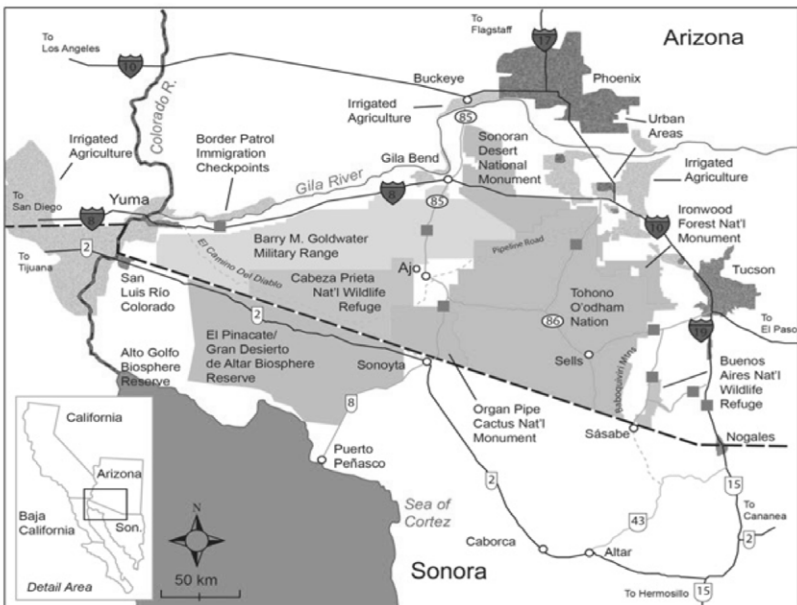
0.2. The Papaguería, early 21st century.
Map by author.