

THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL IMAGINARY: CONTESTED NARRATIVES OF
THE PAST IN MASS CULTURE

by

Caroline Guthrie
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Committee:

_____ Director

_____ Program Director

_____ Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

Caroline Guthrie
Master of Arts
New York University, 2012
Bachelor of Arts
The College of Charleston, 2010

Director: Alison Landsberg, Professor
Department of Cultural Studies, History and Art History

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George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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DEDICATION

For Dottie and Penny, who never cease to inspire, surprise, and thrill me. Every day with you is better than any day without you.

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ABSTRACT

THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL IMAGINARY: CONTESTED NARRATIVES OF THE PAST IN MASS CULTURE

Caroline Guthrie, Ph.D.

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Alison Landsberg

This dissertation examines mass culture sites that present fictionalized and counterfactual depictions of the past as entertainment for consumers. I seek to understand these spaces in terms of their relation to the historical imaginary, which I am describing as shared cultural understanding of the dominant narratives of “history” in the United States that is continuously shaped through depictions and discourses about the past in entertainment, education, and politics. The primary cultural function of the historical imaginary is the maintenance and defense of hegemonic national identity, and as such it is highly resistant to intervention through even the most rigorous historical scholarship. To uncover these dynamics, I use discourse and textual analysis, as they have been mobilized by visual culture studies, to examine the American history themed sections of the Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World, recent television series which center around time-travel, and alternate history narratives of film and television. The Magic Kingdom works to erase conflict from the past to present a narrative of American exceptionalism as a forgone

conclusion, while using the physical experience of the park's attractions to position viewers as passive or helpless in their experience of Disney "history." Time travel series portray historians' interventions into the past as irresponsible, and offer the advantages of the present moment as sufficient compensation for any wrongs of history. However, alternate history narratives use their departures from the viewers' accepted narratives to foster understanding of the fact that past and current events are not inevitabilities, providing a potentially useful model for using mass cultural depictions of history to re-imagine the past as a dynamic space of possibility.

INTRODUCTION

History is typically conceived of as a somber and weighty responsibility; in American political discourses it is often invoked as a genealogy of great deeds and noble sacrifices and thus a source of national pride. However, the maintenance of that national pride in America's past frequently demands a rejection of the methods of historians, and instead an adherence to ideological narratives unsupported by the historical record. Further complicating understandings of the past is the fact that in American mass culture outside of politics the past is frequently treated as a playground, one in which the rigors of history as a discipline are discarded in favor of imagined pasts that do not attempt to distinguish fact from fiction. Many historians have been disapproving or dismissive of the retellings of the past that dominate the popular imagination. Of particular concern is the possibility that these representations of history untether cause from effect in the formation of American culture, creating an ever-widening disconnect between the past and the present. When our current moment is divorced from its history, crises that arise from long-standing systemic injustices appear as isolated incidents.

This dissertation seeks to understand the work being done by mass cultural engagements with the past that use the question, "What if...?" as their entry point into the past, rather than maintaining fidelity to historical accuracy. I have chosen a variety of mass culture narratives which depict the past in ways that the consumer is meant to

understand as selectively fantastical; each foregrounds some clear departure from the expectation of “historical accuracy,” but also purports to provide some form of worthwhile insight into America’s past. These are Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom, where the contemporary consumer is a participant in a clearly fanciful facsimile of a past that never was; depictions of time-travel in television series, where a representative of the contemporary world is shown to enter the past and directly engage with it; and alternate history narratives in film and television, which feature some major departure from the expected timeline in narratives of historical fiction. I selected these sites because the ways in which they flag themselves as “play” or “entertainment” elides the impacts they have on cultural imaginings and understandings of the past. These sites are not afterthoughts to the formation of historical understanding in American culture – spaces of imaginative engagement with America’s past provide some of the clearest distillations of how it has come to be understood. I argue that the broader cultural misrecognition of the connection between injustices of the past and the turbulence of the present is not rooted in straightforward lack of information or denial, but a complex relation between history and identity which can be made visible at sites of imaginative engagement. While this means of examining the past is at odds with the work of traditional historians, it is in keeping with Walter Benjamin’s frequently quoted passage from “On the Concept of History,” in which he writes, “to articulate what is past does not mean to recognize ‘how it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (*Illuminations* 255). In popular locations in which American history is rewritten, I hope

to uncover the particular ways in which relationships to the past are shaped through the moments of national trauma which repeatedly “flash up” in American mass culture.

Review of Literature

Mass Culture as a Site of Possibility

In their highly influential 1944 essay, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” Marxist theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer foreclose the possibility of mass culture serving any purpose beyond total domination of the masses. They write, “entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism” (109), and argue that technologies of mass culture have solidified hierarchies that serve capitalist interests. They frequently describe the culture industry’s work in terms of violence, including damages “inflicted on and unmistakably demonstrated to its victims” (113). As members of the group of Jewish intellectuals forced to flee Europe with the rise of the Nazis, Adorno and Horkheimer were understandably suspicious of mass media, which had aided and abetted Hitler’s rise in Germany. Thomas Elsaesser describes the experience of these scholars in *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary*. He writes,

With a certain shock of recognition they realized that the commercial culture they encountered in the United States recalled nothing more vividly than the ‘administered culture’ they had fled, especially in the way the arts under both capitalism and Nazism had been – as it seemed to them, cynically – appropriated and pillaged [. . .] as commodities (13).

Adorno and Horkheimer's critiques of mass culture has remained influential through decades of media scholarship, and there are theorists today who continue to dismiss products of mass culture as commodities without meaning beyond entertainment and profit. While my engagement of mass culture does not ignore the concerns about structures of power raised by Adorno and Horkheimer, my project will align more closely with others who have held open a glimmer of hope that mass media and its technologies might actually serve progressive goals.

Among the most significant early theorizations of the social and political possibilities of mass culture is Walter Benjamin's widely read essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." In it, Benjamin describes the destruction of the "aura" of art through its reproduction as a potential catalyst to revolutionary awakening for the masses by teaching them a means of perceiving the mechanization of capitalism. Siegfried Kracauer, one of Benjamin's interlocutors, also had hopes for an awakening through entertainments, such as cinema, which "convey precisely and openly to thousands of eyes and ears the *disorder* of society – this is precisely what would enable them to evoke and maintain the tension that must precede the inevitable and radical change" ("Cult of Distraction," 327). Kracauer believed this identification could come from the technology of film; the flat, disjointed experience of watching the screen could reflect modernity's "actual state of disintegration" (328) back at the viewers. While Kracauer recognized that the reification of the economic social and political order made such recognition extremely difficult, he found reason for optimism in the technology of mass culture. This potential is significant to both Benjamin and Kracauer's work. Neither

sees visual technology as inherently serving the needs of capitalism or the masses. The recognition of the gaze as a powerful tool for naturalizing social construction and acknowledgement of the possibility of it serving either oppression or liberation is central to my examination of the historical imaginary. In my dissertation, I take up Benjamin and Kracauer's conceptions of mass culture as potentially rendering the unseen visible by teaching new ways of seeing or thinking, particularly in the construction or reshaping of the historical imaginary.

Beyond the technology of mass culture, the images it produces also provide a lens for examining social and economic forces. As Griselda Pollock argues in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, "representation can be understood as 'articulating' in a visible or socially palpable form social processes which determine the representation but then are actually affected and altered by the forms, practices and effects of representation" (6). Thus, the flow of influence between social, lived reality and its representations is bidirectional; art may attempt to recreate the real, but the real is also frequently shaped by art.

The continued proliferation of media technologies has continued to create space to shape new forms of consciousness, much in the way Benjamin argued the camera could construct new ways of making class visible and conceiving of temporality. While the ramifications of this convergence have yet to be fully theorized, an early take is offered by Vivian Sobchack in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*. Sobchack argues that new technologies have altered our perception of time and – by extension – history. She explains,

These new twentieth century technologies of representation and narration (most significantly, television) have increasingly collapsed the temporal distance between present, past, and future that structured our previously conceived notion of the temporal dimensions of what we call history (as the latter is differentiated from experience) (4-5).

Thus, for Sobchack, convergence is not merely a phenomenon of technologies, but one which alters understandings of our lived experiences and histories. Like Benjamin, Sobchack sees technology as potentially altering perception and creating new ways of seeing. She argues that this “has led to the most disheartening and hopeful of conditions,” histories are being transformed into commodities, but increasingly people recognize “that we are subjectively implicated in and responsible for the histories we tell ourselves or others tell us” (6). The question of the relationship between these commodified histories and their consumers is taken up by Alison Landsberg in *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, where she argues engagement with mass culture depictions of history has created a new form of public cultural memory, wherein people may have an empathetic relation to historical events they did not directly experience. My dissertation research examines whether the counterfactual histories I have identified, which are undoubtedly commodified retellings of the past, have the potential to create the kind of shifts that Sobchack and Landsberg see as potentially useful or counter-hegemonic in their shaping of national identity.

All of the technologies of mass culture have faced skepticism and critique from those theorists concerned with their tendency to foster complacency, exhaustion, or

simply to reinforce dominant ideologies. However, each has also been theorized as containing political potential that could be harnessed for counter-hegemonic purposes. This dissertation builds on previous work that holds open the possibility for progressive work being achieved through mass media, even as it recognizes ways in which mass culture is frequently mobilized to serve hegemonic interests.

The Historical Imaginary

The past as it has come to be popularly understood (as opposed to what the historical record may support), may be most clearly distilled through analysis of what I term the historical imaginary, a socially constructed understanding of the past formed through public discourse and representations, including those mobilized for entertainment, education, and politics. The historical imaginary is formed at a point of intersection between what has been established through the work of historians, and what has been represented in mass culture. It is shaped by fictionalized accounts of history, what is taught in school, popular political discourse, and spaces of cultural memory – all of which are influential in shaping what we “know” about the past. Unlike history, however, the historical imaginary is not required to root its claims in reliable sources to gain credibility, and so at any moment it may or may not be reflective of what actually occurred. While history may need to reconfigure its understanding of past events based on newly uncovered evidence or competing interpretations, the historical imaginary tends to withstand such revelations - as is apparent in the persistent myths around America’s Founding Fathers or the first Thanksgiving.

In *Weimar Cinema and After*, Thomas Elsaesser uses the term “historical imaginary” to describe a “kind of slippage between cinematic representation and a nation’s history” (4). Jerome de Groot also mobilizes concept of the historical imaginary in *Consuming History*, in which he writes that through the historical imaginary, history is bound up with “nationhood, nostalgia, commodity, revelation and knowledge [. . .] it is at once a deferred, distanced discourse and simultaneously something that the individual could literally at times hold in their hand, change in their own way, or experience in a variety of mediums” (4). My own use of the concept of the historical imaginary is not at odds with these; however, I am seeking to further delineate the term in order to provide a framework for understanding the ways in which a single, nationally shared understanding of the past is culturally constructed and perpetuated in hegemonic terms.

The American historical imaginary is the narrative of the past dominant in national culture, and it is simultaneously susceptible to reshaping by shifting cultural values or highly influential interventions, and resistant to change through traditional historical methods. Like the National Symbolic described by Lauren Berlant, the historical imaginary works “through images, narratives, monuments, and sites that circulate through personal/collective consciousness” (5). However, the function of the National Symbolic is to form individuals within a nation into political subjects; the National Symbolic’s shaping of what it means to be a citizen “not only affects profoundly the citizen’s subjective experience of his/her political rights, but also of civil life, private life, the life of the body itself” (Berlant 20). The historical imaginary, by contrast, is not directly enmeshed with regulatory categories such as citizenship. Its inclusions and

exclusions have political implications and it is frequently deployed in political rhetoric, but it is primarily a space of social relation. Unlike the National Symbolic, which uses the idea of patriotism to disguise its political implications, the historical imaginary attempts to use the supposed impartiality of history as an alibi to obscure any political investments.

While the historical imaginary appears on the surface to serve mainly cognitive purposes, in that it is the space where past events as they are popularly conceived come to be understood, it is also ineluctably bound up with affective relations to that history, which tend to set the limits for what kinds of understandings are tolerable within the historical imaginary; in other words, what is “known” about the past is inextricable from how hegemonic groups feel (or want to feel) about it. Like the social imaginary described by Charles Taylor, the historical imaginary is “common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (*Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23). It is its ubiquity and the highly recognizable nature of its discourses, rather than archival evidence, that rationalizes the narratives of the historical imaginary.

The historical imaginary is frequently contested and renegotiated, however it is inextricably intertwined with dominant ideologies, and generally serves to rationalize and reinforce popular conceptions of national identity. This is not to say that every member of a given society is equally invested in the narratives of the historical imaginary. As Gary Edgerton writes in “Ken Burns’s America,” “multiple renditions of the past can and do simultaneously coexist. On the other hand, not every version of history is permitted access to the country’s airwaves” (50). Edgerton’s mention of mass media resources is

useful in understanding how the historical imaginary is constructed; without the broadly shared experiences made possible by mass media technologies – exposure to the same interpretations of the past on screen, in textbooks, and in political discourse – a national historical imaginary could not exist.

However, rather than conceive of multiple, competing historical imaginaries, I believe it is more useful to understand the historical imaginary as functioning in terms of Antonio Gramsci's theorization of hegemony. Like hegemonic capitalism as defined by Gramsci, the historical imaginary has "accentuated the fragmentation and the divisions in the concrete whole formed by human beings, precisely in order to reinforce consensus and to legitimate itself" (Francisco Fernández Buey 107). In *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*, Peter Ives identifies one of the main themes of hegemony as the "expansion of the definition of politics from activities of government and operations of state power to questions of how people come to understand the world" (70-71), and it is precisely this theme which illustrates the importance of examining the historical imaginary and the way in which it functions. This conception of the historical imaginary preserves space for subaltern understanding of past events that challenge dominant narratives without undercutting them. While we may not all subscribe to the ideologies mobilized by the historical imaginary, and there are many individuals who recognize the convenient fictions bound up within it for what they are, we all live with the repercussions of the world which shapes it and which it shapes in return.

The historical imaginary informs feelings about history as well as what is believed to have occurred in the past, and recent works that examine the potential uses of mass

culture depictions of the past have frequently examined film and television's potential to elicit affective engagement from viewers. Marnie Hughes-Warrington describes historical films as "sites of relation" (*History Goes to the Movies* 6), where understandings of history are formed, set forth, and either accepted or contested. For Hughes-Warrington, it is important to see the relationship between filmmakers and viewers as dynamic; she argues that neither group consistently dominates the other. Similarly, in *Pastiche*, Richard Dyer explores how cinema elicits an emotional connection to the past through styles of filmmaking, offering another means of examining representations of the past without foregrounding questions of accuracy. Dyer rejects the negative connotations and critiques of postmodernism typically associated with the term pastiche, and instead writes that, "[pastiche] can at its best, allow us to feel our connection to the affective frameworks, the structures of feeling, past and present, that we inherit and pass on. That is to say, *it can enable us to know ourselves affectively as historical beings* [emphasis added]" (180).

The possibility of media functioning as a site of meaningful encounters with history is examined by Alison Landsberg in *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*. Landsberg argues that mass-mediated encounters with historical events can result in serious engagements with the past that are primarily affective but not aimed at producing identification. When well-mobilized, they have the potential to foster historical consciousness by simultaneously engaging the viewer emotionally and stymieing straightforward identification, thus encouraging the viewer to consider the gap between their own experience and the experiences of different historical moments. Not all (or even most) depictions of the past create the engagement Landsberg

argues is politically useful. In discussing film, she points to those “that foreground mediation, that produce epistemological uncertainty through the layering of different types of footage, and that in a range of ways prevent us from losing ourselves in the illusion” (59) as most effective vehicles for this experience. By forcing viewers to remain aware of their distance from the past and the mediation of their experience of it, encounters with the past that occur through film, television, or digital media may help form historical consciousness.

The historical imaginary’s connection to history is necessarily slippery; it may have been best articulated in the film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) by a reporter who explains rejecting the opportunity to correct a widely-held falsehood by saying, “This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” In such a formulation rigorous historical methods are not irrelevant, but they rapidly lose ground to knowledge of the past based in a sense of emotional truth or fidelity to a hegemonically determined national identity. As de Groot points out, “in the contemporary Anglophone world, the ways in which individuals encounter time, the past, ‘history,’ and memory mostly fall outside an academic or professional framework;” (*Consuming History* 7) in order to examine social understandings of history, those encounters must be taken seriously. The construction of the historical imaginary is one of the “processes by which meaning is attached to the past” (*Film, History, and Memory* 1); it results from a shared negotiation of what members of American society are willing to accept as the implications of its history, and is therefore central to understanding how people come to “know,” and know how to feel about, the past.

American national identity has long been bound up with an understanding of the past that is influenced more by a drive to rationalize mainstream values and practices than by a rigorous look at the historical record. In *Birth of a Nation*, Robert Lang describes one of the foremost examples of this phenomenon – the way the American Civil War is understood – and how rapidly mythology overcame fact on that subject. Lang writes, “the process of turning the bloody, traumatic reality into a Victorian melodrama began shortly after the fighting ceased. For Southerners and Northerners alike, it was a psychological necessity to make a legend out of the chaos and contradiction of the experience” (3). While the Civil War and the attendant horrors that both predate it (slavery) and emerged as consequences of it (particularly segregation, Jim Crow, and lynching) remain the most prominent instances of American trauma eased by melodramatic re-scripting, they do not represent an isolated instance. Historical moments in which violent oppression were taken to their most extreme – Westward expansion and the genocide of the Native Americans, slavery, as well as the Vietnam War and innumerable other international engagements – are most often the moments when myth emerges to ease historical discomfort for hegemonic national identity. The rewriting of American history for this purpose is not a new phenomenon however it is an increasingly widespread and entrenched one, and consequences may be seen from the way the teaching of history is politicized, as in recent controversy concerning the AP American History Exam¹, to

¹ In 2014, the College Board updated the curriculum for the A.P. U.S. History exam to increase focus on the United States’ history of racism and the importance of protest and organized resistance in American history. After considerable conservative backlash, the College Board changed the curriculum again to be more in line with previous requirements. This incident is discussed in more detail in this dissertation’s conclusion.

increasingly heated political discourse on who may be included in the category of “American.”

Methodology

This dissertation examines manifestations of counterfactual histories and their relation to the historical imaginary across a variety of mass culture sites. I have chosen these sites because they each position the consumer to relate to their version of the past in a way that emphasizes the counterfactual nature of their narrative, and that positioning is distinct in each site. The Magic Kingdom offers a depiction of the past that consumers may physically enter in to – consumers are meant to understand they are in a constructed and highly regulated space. The experience of physically negotiating and experiencing the space of an imagined past forms a complex and under-examined means of engagement with the historical imaginary. Time travel narratives provide a representative of the present moment that journeys to the past, encouraging the viewer to use that character’s experience as a proxy for what their own response to life in other times would be. Including a representative of the present moment in the past necessitates a self-conscious consideration of the dynamic between the past and present which is rarely made explicit in other forms of mass media. Alternate history narratives depart from the established timeline, highlighting their counterfactual nature by thwarting viewer expectations of what “historical fiction” does. This departure positions viewers into a stronger identification with individuals in the past – rather than maintaining insights characters lack due to their privileged position in the future, viewers are encouraged to

think of the past as a dynamic space where anything can happen. Taken together, these three positionings – physical experience of a constructed past, identification with a representative of the present intervening in the past, and identification with individuals of the past without knowing what will happen in their future – provide a broad base of understanding for how the counterfactual histories interact with the historical imaginary.

Visual culture theory provides a useful framework for examining the various iterations of the historical imaginary, as visual culture is foremost an examination of relations of power; through interrogation of the dynamics created by practices and technologies of looking, theorists denaturalize and render legible the ways in which the visual is implicated in relations of dominance, as well as how it may be mobilized for resistance. Visual culture has examined the way the technology of various mediums positions and constructs spectators, and the repercussions of that construction for knowledge production. Denaturalizing the gaze and looking practices that are typically taken for granted allows scholars to make visible, and in so doing, challenge relations of dominance organized via visual technologies. Understanding the politics of the visual allows for a more complete conception of both broad cultural constructs and the way in which the individual is positioned within them in an increasingly mass media saturated culture. While visual culture as a distinct field of inquiry is relatively new, and at times still controversial, its foundations are based in well-established social theory concerning possibilities of social change, technologies of visibility, and subject formation. I perform close textual analysis of sources, informed by film theorists such as Linda Williams and Vivian Sobchack, as well as critical discourse analysis of the relation between these

works and their broader social context, following the example of theorists such as Richard Dyer and Lauren Berlant. In my study of Disney World, I visited the park in order to gain first-hand experience into its construction of the past for a mass audience, and consider for analysis both the flow and narrativization of the space of the park, as well as the more explicit narratives within the rides and attractions.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation seeks to theorize the historical imaginary by interrogating the interventions of mass culture narratives that foreground themselves as counterfactual. While works that attempt to maintain the impression of historical accuracy have received far more scholarly attention over the years, I believe that these sites of imaginative and/or playful engagement with depictions of the past, which in various ways offer constant reminders to their audiences that what they are experiencing is not the past as it existed, but as it is being consciously reimagined, are a vital element of the American historical imaginary. In the following chapters I examine the three sites I have identified, in order to understand their consequences for American national identity and for popular understandings of the past.

Chapter one focuses on the American history themed sections in the Magic Kingdom at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. While there has been some previous study of the corporate practices of the Disney Corporation and the film and media they produce, comparatively little attention has been paid to the physical space of the theme parks. The Magic Kingdom is the world's most popular theme park, with hundreds of millions of visitors annually, and functions as an iconic symbol of childhood.

This chapter examines the narrative that emerges in the experience constructed for guests moving through the space of the park, and taking part in the various rides and attractions. The narratives of the Magic Kingdom make extensive use of the logics of the historical imaginary, seamlessly blending historical facts with familiar narratives from literature in order to create a version of history that forecloses any discussion of difference or struggle while using the highly recognizable nature of its stories to bolster claims of legitimacy. Customers are constantly made aware of the fabricated and fanciful nature of the space, but this knowledge of the space's constructed nature does not lessen its effectiveness.

Chapter two examines four television series about time travelers to different eras in American history: *11.22.63*, *Timeless*, *Making History*, and *Legends of Tomorrow*.

These programs premiered in rapid succession (all began airing in 2016), and most feature both an educator in the role of time traveler (*11.22.63*, *Timeless*, and *Making History*) and an exploration of the dynamics that emerge when Americans of different races time travel together (*Timeless*, *Making History*, and *Legends of Tomorrow*).

Through analysis of these series, I examine the way perceptions of the past, the role of historians, and the status of racial relations in recent years are positioned in the historical imaginary. Unlike the Magic Kingdom, the narratives of these programs do not attempt to entirely erase uncomfortable moments of American history. However, they do position the present as exonerating of any of the past's unpleasantness, and posit that the struggles of history are an unfortunate necessity in shaping the best possible version of the present.

Chapter three examines alternate history narratives that rupture with the known historical timeline in dramatic fashion: the Quentin Tarantino films *Inglourious Basterds*

and *Django Unchained*, and the Amazon.com series *The Man in the High Castle*. These narratives work to challenge those entrenched in the historical imaginary by presenting the past as a dynamic space of possibility, rather than a foretold inevitability. The stories' departure from the expected has the potential to cause audiences to experience the role of the past in shaping the present more immediately, and to potentially consider their own role as historical actors.

These sites do not act uniformly, and most serve hegemonic interests. However, by understanding the role of counterfactual fiction and imaginative engagement with the past in shaping the historical imaginary, we may be able to better understand strategies of challenging entrenched hegemonic narratives in national consciousness.

CHAPTER ONE: WALT DISNEY WORLD'S MAGIC KINGDOM

One of the most influential producers of mass media shaping the historical imaginary today is the Walt Disney Corporation. Disney films and products are a pervasive aspect of American childhood; Christopher Bell refers to Disney as having achieved “one hundred percent penetration in our society. Every single person has been exposed to Disney” (Bell 2015). The omnipresence and effectiveness of Disney storytelling as a force for reifying and reaffirming hegemonic ideology has been examined and bemoaned at length over the years. However, while the content and ideology of Disney’s films have been examined, very little attention has been paid to the ways in which storytelling occurs in the physical space of the company’s theme parks, in spite of their extreme popularity and profitability. Globally, Disney’s parks represent nearly a third of the company’s revenue, and attract well over one hundred million visitors each year. In this chapter I will examine way the historical imaginary is narrativized for the customers as they move through the historical-themed areas of the Magic Kingdom of the Walt Disney World resort in Florida, and consider the ways in which Disney positions customers to understand their relation to the past. The moments of American history Disney chooses to engage are often periods of traumatic histories such as slavery, segregation, and genocide; the experience of the park is designed to ameliorate or erase the discomfort of those moments from a national consciousness which

is heavily coded as white within the Magic Kingdom. Disney uses a variety of sites of reception, from the passivity of sitting in a theater to the physical thrills beyond the rider's control of a roller coaster, to interpellate consumers in an understanding of the past as a conflict-free space in which most people have no responsibility (or, indeed, ability), to respond to the circumstances of their time.

I choose to focus on the Magic Kingdom because, in addition to its being the most visited theme park in the world, Disney's Florida location is the space in which the company faces the least imposed limitations on its desired shape, expansion, and presentation due to the corporation's ownership of huge expanses of land surrounding the resort and extreme influence in local politics. When Disney first purchased property in Florida in 1967, the company was permitted to form its own political jurisdiction – the Reedy Creek Improvement District. The Disney Company is thus largely autonomous from any potential local regulations and able to act as its own county government. The company also influences Florida policy due to its importance to tourism, employment, and active lobbying of state lawmakers who generally act to protect Disney's interest. Disney's representatives weigh in on wide-ranging issues, from “employee wage and benefit issues, worker's compensation and changes in the Tax Code” to “water conservation rules, which might affect the company's 27,000 acres in Central Florida, or even minutiae about legal process in the event a document server might seize on an opportunity to serve Disney guests on resort property” (Liston). As such, the Magic Kingdom represents the Disney Company's vision for its parks largely unfettered by outside regulation.

The series of theme parks and resort properties that constitute Walt Disney World are a considerable departure from Walt Disney's conception of what was initially referred to within the company as "The Florida Project." While the Magic Kingdom – a larger and improved version of Disneyland – and accompanying hotels were always part of the plan, Walt Disney's primary interest was in constructing EPCOT – the Experimental Prototypical Community of Tomorrow. In this "city of the future" residents and innovators "would bring together the latest systems and technologies to demonstrate the imagination of American free enterprise. Visitors from around the world would come watch how people worked, lived and played at EPCOT, and then take what they had learned back home to help solve problems in their own cities" (Koenig 14). This is in marked contrast to Walt Disney's original intention for the Disneyland park in California, which he conceived of as a "kiddieland" called "Walt Disney's America," where children would "learn something about their heritage" in addition to being entertained (Broggie 192). Walt Disney and his brother/business partner Roy Disney were both dismayed by the "disorganized urban sprawl" (Koenig 19) that had grown around their California property, and the ability to dictate all that could be seen and built within view of the Florida park appealed to both. But Walt Disney considered the Magic Kingdom to be the least interesting element of the project; he had already designed a theme park, and was much more invested in what he saw as the potential for meaningful and continuous innovation of daily life in EPCOT.

Walt Disney's death in December 1966, after the company had secured its land in Florida and begun to cultivate corporate sponsors for its planned attractions and

showcases, but before construction had begun, permanently ended the EPCOT project as he had intended it. Roy Disney, whose reputation was that of the fiscally cautious pragmatist to his brother's visionary dreamer, "insisted that the Magic Kingdom be as faithful as possible to the proven layout of Disneyland, incorporating only suggestions that Walt had earmarked for improvement in Anaheim or that would take better advantage of Disney World's unique climate and ample acreage" (Koenig). A second theme park, named EPCOT, was added to the Walt Disney World resort property in 1982, but this "permanent World's Fair" (EPCOT Origins), with its precarious balance between paleofuturist nostalgia and technological showcase, is a far departure from the inhabited city Walt Disney intended. The later failure of the Disney Corporation-built town, Celebration (Campbell-Dollaghan), indicates that Roy Disney may well have been correct about the feasibility of his brother's vision for EPCOT, but for better or worse, the redirecting of corporate focus from constructing a utopian future to securing a perfected past, and continuing the original intent of Disneyland to blend entertainment and education, permeates the ambiance of the Magic Kingdom.

Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom is divided into six themed lands: Main Street, U.S.A., a collection of shops and restaurants designed to recreate an early 20th century American town; Adventureland, which evokes fantasies of exploration via attractions like "Jungle Cruise," and "Pirates of the Caribbean;" Frontierland, which promises adventure in the mold of the 19th century American frontier; Liberty Square, which is themed around 18th-century Colonial America; Fantasyland, the park's best-known section, which is largely dedicated to recreating Disney versions of traditional

European fairy tales; and Tomorrowland, which offers a vision of the future as imagined in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Each of these spaces are, in some way, in dialogue with the past and popular histories, though my interest here is only in those spaces which are in direct engagement with the historical imaginary's understanding of American history (Main Street, U.S.A.; Liberty Square; and Frontierland).

The lands of the Magic Kingdom border on and blend into each other, but each may also be directly accessed by the park's central "Hub," a circular space in front of Cinderella's Castle with a path to each land. Karal Ann Marling argues that the organization of the park's lands around the Hub indicates the influence of the logics of television on the physical space of the amusement park, "like a Wednesday-night viewer [of the *Disneyland* series] the tourist standing in the Hub at Disneyland was presented with a whole range of possibilities. Like an impatient viewer in front of the set, the tourist could switch from one channel [or] Land to another in just a few steps" (74). The logic of television may also be seen in the way the lands of the Magic Kingdom make use of flow, which Raymond Williams described as "the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form," (86). Flow is the means by which television programs and their embedded advertisements serve capitalist interest by encouraging viewers to remain engaged with a viewing experience that can continue indefinitely. It is through the creation of flow that visitors who choose to move directly from one land to another once within the park (rather than making use of the channel-changing short cut of the Hub) experience the transitions as smooth rather than jarring, and the ways in which Disney's numerous gift shops (which are present at, but not

limited to, the exit of every ride) and restaurants are integrated into the experience of the park.

In his examination of the ride Splash Mountain, Jason Isaac Mauro argues that Disney's popularity is largely rooted in the fact that "Disney provides for each of its rides a narrative frame [. . .] The narrative net in which we are caught at the bottom of a precipitous fall matters. The story determines and structures who we are" (114). Marty Sklar, a member of the design team for numerous early Disney attractions and the scriptwriter for a number of Walt Disney's personal television appearances, notes in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance* that this narrative goes beyond the individual rides and argues, "the continuity of Disney theme-park design is clearly one of its greatest strengths" (15). Indeed, to form an understanding of the way Disney World uses flow to create a cohesive narrative of the historical imaginary, it is essential to expand understanding the function of narrative in the park beyond individual attractions, to include the experience of the park as a whole. Because the Magic Kingdom was (and continues to be) very consciously designed as one continuous experience, it is necessary to consider it as a unified space, rather than a collection of discrete rides, shops, and performances. Just as flow in television serves the interest of capitalism by encouraging people to "stay tuned" through the programs and advertising, the flow of the Magic Kingdom works to keep people engaged, relaxed, and satisfied within the park (and, by extension, continuing to spend money on that trip and desiring to come back for future visits). As such, the narrative logics of the park are carefully managed at each stage – the particular narratives of history that are brought forward must present the past

as an enjoyable space to inhabit. While “excitement,” via the thrills of the ride or the spectacle of a performance is desirable, controversy and conflict, which would disrupt the flow of Disney, are carefully deprogrammed from Disney’s presentation of “history.”

Disney parks are well-known for being extensively designed and controlled; in *Walt Disney Imagineering* the park’s designers describe the ways in which “everything Guests see, hear, feel, touch, smell, taste is considered ‘onstage’ [. . .] The overall experience is one that is both physical and emotional, as subtle sensory cues work within large, designed environments to heighten reality and involve the Guests” (30). However, the park is not reliant on maintaining the illusions of the space in order to be effective. Numerous guidebooks published by Disney, behind-the-scenes tours customers may purchase tickets to, and promotional videos are available to reveal the park’s “secrets” to any who desire to know more about the “backstage” functions. The Imagineers (the company’s preferred term for members of their parks’ design teams), secret pathways, and rigorous protocols of Disney parks are thus also mythologized in their own ways, inoculating the Magic Kingdom from any attempts to puncture its illusions – Disney will, on its terms, happily allow customers to look behind the curtain. As in any magic show, knowing that it is all fake does not make its effect on viewers any less real. By relying on customers’ willing, even eager, participation in its world building, Disney shapes the theme park experience as one which requires customers to “buy in” in order to fully enjoy. If a customer is unwilling to make that effort, their disenchantment with the theme park is understood as a failure of imagination or childlike innocence (as adults in Disney should “feel like a kid again”), not a failure of Disney design.

Disney's attractions are a mix of performances and rides, offering a wide range of intensity in terms of both physical experience (from sitting motionlessly in a darkened theater to the thrills of a roller coaster) and interactivity (from completely automated animatronics to devices that respond to an individual customer's activation). However, despite this range of available experiences, all of these modes of reception work together to narrativize an understanding of the past as inert and to valorize inaction in customers' own relation to history. Throughout the American history-themed areas of the Magic Kingdom, narratives of melodrama² and nostalgia are continually and cyclically offered as justification of each to create an experience of the past as a space of innocence to which every individual longs to be transported to, working to shape a space in which the visitor's experience of the park is used to confirm a utopian version of history that erases difference and struggle in service of a unified national identity.

Main Street, U.S.A.

The only entrance and exit for the Magic Kingdom is at one of end of Main Street, U.S.A., and as such it is the first and last land that all visitors encounter. An image of small-town America is thus the gateway to the magical fantasies of childhood innocence within the park. The privileging of this space resonates with the political discourse that was reinvigorated in 2008, when Sarah Palin began referring to rural regions away from the coasts as "real America," in spite of the fact that the vast majority

² I am using the definition of melodrama as described by Linda Williams in "Mega-Melodrama! Vertical and Horizontal Suspensions of the 'Classical'" – I explain this particular understanding of the function of melodrama in relation to Disney parks on page 37.

of Americans live in urban spaces (Smith “Real America?”). In both contemporary political discourse, and the post-white flight moment in which the Magic Kingdom was constructed, the rural space Main Street, USA valorizes is implicitly a space of racial exclusion – its fantasies are middle-class white fantasies presented as both universal and universally accessible. The space is designed to “take you back to a turn-of-the century small town from Walt’s boyhood” (*The Imagineering Field Guide*, 20), though “it is more closely tied to his *memories* of Marceline, Missouri than the reality of what Marceline was at the time” (23). This description, from a Disney-published guide to behind-the-scenes “secrets” of the design of the park, provides a useful case study in the ways mediation of the past and memory rapidly accumulate layers of complication in the Magic Kingdom. It is well-known that, counter to the implication of sunny memories provided by “the Imagineers,” Walt Disney had an extremely difficult childhood – marked by poverty and grueling work. Rich Karlgaard argues that Disney’s fondness for utopianism grew from a desire to escape his “Dickensian boyhood.” The sunny memories of Marceline appear to spring not from Walt Disney the man, but the assumed backstory of the television-character version of himself he cultivated in series such as *Walt Disney’s Disneyland* and *Walt Disney Presents*. Marty Sklar, who scripted much of Walt Disney’s television dialogue, recounted how Disney told him, “I’m not “Walt Disney” anymore. Disney is a thing, an attitude, an image in the eyes of the public. I’ve spent my whole career creating that image, and I’m a great believer in what Disney is. But it’s not me, the person, anymore” (14). The memories of Main Street, U.S.A., are thus not the actual Walt Disney’s memories, but the memories that the fictionalized “Uncle Walt” of

television would have had. This illustrates the ways in which the past in the Magic Kingdom is always already mediated by mass culture representations – Disney World constantly treats well-known fictions as interchangeable with well-known histories.

The narrative theme of Main Street, U.S.A. is one of homecoming – the space is intended to represent a perfected version of any and every American town, standing ready to welcome its sons and daughters (which every customer is positioned as) into the fold. This theming marks from the beginning the ways in which the narrative arcs of the Magic Kingdom are heavily racialized and classed – paradise here is an idyllic and prosperous small town at the beginning of the Industrial Age. Customers enter/exit the park by a train station, and Cinderella’s Castle, which marks the end of Main Street, U.S.A. at the Hub and the entrance to Fantasyland, is visible at the end of the street. Main Street, U.S.A. offers a representation of a “home” that exists between the real world outside the park and the thrilling world of imagination within it – its promise is one of pure reassurance and innocence, without the banalities of daily life or the anticipation or adrenaline that accompany theme park thrills.

Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom is in many ways a space of extreme contradiction – it promises customers an experience which is simultaneously thrilling and reassuring, unique and infinitely reproduceable, magical and predictable. Perhaps the greatest of these contradictions is in its portrayal of American history, which may best be described as joyfully nostalgic. Nostalgia is an affective relation to temporality, one predicated on a longing for what lies in the past and can never be revisited. Janelle Wilson writes, “nostalgia comes from the Greek word *nostos*, meaning ‘return home,’

and *algia*, meaning pain or longing. Hence, nostalgia literally means ‘homesickness’” (21). However, the home of nostalgic longing is one that may never be reclaimed; either the place itself never existed as we remember it, no longer exists, we are somehow barred from it, or we ourselves are so changed that returning would not provide the experience we so miss. Disney World and Disney products are designed to cultivate feelings of nostalgia in consumers; Jason Sperb argues that “Disney’s phenomenal, largely self-generating, success in historical terms” lies in the company’s acumen in creating “the plan to sell generational experiences, or more precisely, to sell the *always already nostalgic* experience of being a member of a particular kind of generation” (ix). But the spaces of the Magic Kingdom form nostalgia for the purposes of immediately satisfying it – rather than left longing for a lost home, customers are presented with Main Street U.S.A. as a perfected home where they may always return. There is a multilayered engagement with nostalgia here: nostalgia for the imagined happy American past Main Street, U.S.A. purports to recreate, but also a nostalgia for the space and experience of Main Street, U.S.A. Due to Disney’s aggressive self-mythologizing – in television, home videos, books, and music – many individuals, particularly children, who have never visited Disney World still hold strong emotional attachments to it as a site infused with magic, innocence, and happiness. Even adults who have never visited Disney World previously are presumed to recognize the nostalgic tug of Disney’s particular brand of childhood, due to their encounters with Disney’s ubiquitous mass media products (films, television series, books, etc) in their own youths. In blurring nostalgia for an imagined

past with nostalgia for Disney itself, the Magic Kingdom claims to fulfill what should be, by definition, impossible: the complete satisfaction of nostalgic longing.

This is demonstrated in the recent film *The Florida Project*, which, in part, depicts the way in which impoverished children who live near Disney World but have never been still wish to imagine themselves there. The children live on the brink of homelessness in Kissimmee motels named after Disney World attractions (“The Magic Castle” and “Futureland”), where their mothers attempt to eke out a living on the fringes of the tourist industry. In the film’s final scene, six year old Moonee realizes she is about to be taken into state custody, and thus separated from her mother and best friend. She flees to her friend’s room at a neighboring motel, where the other little girl takes in Moonee’s sobbing explanation of their impending separation with a look of understanding. *The Florida Project* then ends with an unexplained fantasy sequence of the two children running, hand in hand, to the Magic Kingdom, through the entrance, and down Main Street, U.S.A., where they stand together in front of Cinderella’s Castle. The scene was filmed on an iPhone in the park without the permission of Walt Disney World, and as such has a completely different look from the rest of the movie - further emphasizing its departure from the “real.” The shared cultural significance of Disney World and its promise to fulfill impossible longings, here nostalgia for the innocence of friendship and childhood the girls stand on the brink of losing, allows the scene to function without explanation. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* Sean Baker, the film’s director, clarified “It’s left up to interpretation but it’s not supposed to be literal, it’s supposed to be a moment in which we’re putting the audience in the headspace

of a child’” and that “the final shots are not intended to blame Disney in any way. They’re intended to be uplifting” (Lee). This further illustrates the way even those excluded from privileged spaces in the formation of the historical imaginary are encouraged to understand themselves through, and may be willing to partake of, its myths.

Part of the way Main Street, U.S.A. evokes the aesthetic of a welcoming home (which customers can either long to see for the first time or return to) is through the extensive use of forced perspective in its architecture (*The Imagineering Field Guide*). Almost all of the buildings of Main Street, U.S.A. are built with the first floor to scale, the second floor to 5/8 scale, and the third floor (if there is one) to 1/2 scale. This creates the impression that the buildings are taller than they are, but because the tops of the buildings are smaller than their bases, it avoids the impression that they are looming over or closing in on guests – the thoroughfare instead feels open and enlarged. The angle of the road itself and the scale of the buildings (which are almost imperceptibly angled towards the Hub) is such that the street appears longer than it is when guests arrive – from the town hall entrance, Cinderella’s Castle appears distant. However, when the view is reversed and customers are making their way to the exit, the distance appears shorter than it is. In this way, Disney uses the design and layout of the street to structure the flow of the experience of Main Street, U.S.A. – its angles and illusions shift the meaning of customers’ movement through the space to maintain their engagement with Disney’s narrative in both the beginning and end of their time in the park.

Disney's Imagineers are extremely attentive to color in designing the parks, to the extent that "each castle, sporting a palette that emphasizes fantasy, is custom-painted to match the interplay of sunlight and clouds of [Disney Park locations] Paris, Hong Kong, Orlando, Tokyo, or Anaheim" (*Walt Disney Imagineering* 96) The dominant colors of Main Street, U.S.A. are burnt tones of primary colors – red brick sidewalks, and building facades which are either the same shade of red, mustard yellow, or turquoise. Greens and oranges are used largely as accents in awnings or doors. Most of the buildings are Victorian style, and feature either porticos, lattice work decorations, or bay windows on their first floors. In addition to turn of the century Marceline, Missouri, the Disney film *Lady and the Tramp* is often cited as an inspiration for the color palette and design of the buildings along Main Street, U.S.A. ("6 Amazing Facts About Main Street, USA"). Small trees line the sidewalk at consistent intervals, and planters with seasonal flowers hang from the light posts. The smell of shortbread permeates the air, and the instrumental soundtrack loop piped through hidden speakers includes both recognizable classics like "Maple Leaf Rag" and "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and songs from Disney movies arranged in the style of the early 20th-century. The design of Main Street, U.S.A. is apparently so effectively reassuring, recognizable, and appealing that the space has been extensively studied in architecture, and formed the basis of design of facilities providing care for individuals with Alzheimer's and other forms of memory loss (Montgomery). In these "dementia villages," patients and their families engage in "reminiscence therapy" by moving through spaces designed to appear nonthreatening and familiar, "providing the

same intergenerational opportunities and sparks of joy that are a hallmark of the Disney theme parks” (Snelling).

While I am examining only the Main Street, U.S.A. of the Florida Resort’s Magic Kingdom, it is important to note that some version of Main Street, U.S.A. is the sole entry and exit point for all six Disney parks worldwide – in each case, customers enter near the “City Hall” (a guest relations and information office) and then walk down a thoroughfare which leads to a fairytale castle and the “Hub,” a circular, centrally located space from which each of the park’s “lands” are accessible. Its global ubiquity is an indication of how essential Main Street, U.S.A. is to the particular fantasy Disney seeks to fulfill for its visitors. That fantasy is detailed in the song, “Walkin’ Right Down the Main Street, U.S.A.,” written by Stu Nunnery, which is featured in multiple *Disney SingAlong Songs* home videos and is performed in the Main Street Trolley Show in the Magic Kingdom. The song’s lyrics begin with a fairly accurate, if fanciful description of the title experience (“I hear the music playing / From the old time ragtime band / I feel the whole place swaying / With people from across the land”) but quickly moves to the strangely contradictory (“I know it’s no illusion; it’s a dream that’s here to stay”) and untrue (“No one’s rushing; there’s no big hurry” or “You’re welcome anytime you have the mind to appear”). The song vacillates between describing Main Street, U.S.A. in terms of the utopian small town of the past it is meant to represent, and the entry into the ideal contemporary family vacation space Disney is marketed to be. It is presented as both a physical space, and an ever-present state of mind. It is this soothing mental state that the dementia villages modeled on Main Street, U.S.A. work to create for the families

of Alzheimer's patients; they represent a broader cultural buy-in to Main Street U.S.A.'s promise of a space where happiness and contentment are can be programmed into people via architecture and design.

The only "ride" available in Main Street, U.S.A. is the "Walt Disney World Railroad," which is located immediately by the entrance. The trains move along a loop from Main Street, U.S.A., through the more historically-themed areas of Adventureland and Frontierland, before passing through Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, and returning to Main Street, U.S.A. Walt Disney World's official website describes the trains as "a blast from the past [. . .] four meticulously restored, working narrow-gauge trains you can ride, originally built between 1916 and 1928." This claim to object authenticity is unusual for a theme park, but a frequent strategy in the Magic Kingdom. The privileging of the railroad in Disney park mythology is in no small part due to Walt Disney's passionate interest in steam railroading – his backyard miniature railroad predated Disneyland and provided much of the original impetus for the creation of that theme park (Broggie). However, the railroad is a method of transportation particularly laden with meaning in American culture; it represents the aggressive destruction and entitlement of manifest destiny. As described by Vivian Sobchack in *Screening Space*, railroads in American cinema are,

both complex and richly paradoxical, yet they are also circumscribed in scope from movie to movie. The railroad is not merely its physical manifestation, it *is* progress and civilization. It threatens the openness and freedom of the west and individual enterprise, but it also promises the advantages of civilized life [. . .]

The ambiguity and paradox contained in the Western's image of the Iron Horse are as rich as are mixed feelings about civilization and progress (67)

The aim or implied promise of the attractions of the Magic Kingdom is not to convince visitors that what they are experiencing is "real" but to create an absorbing fantasy that provides superior pleasure than those available in the constraints of the realities of daily life. However, the "realness" of the trains of the Walt Disney World railroad, is indicative of the ways the narrative of the Magic Kingdom intervenes in the American historical imaginary by blurring the boundaries between what is perceived to be authentic versus fantastic. As Walt Disney originally intended in creating Disneyland, the Magic Kingdom is constantly working to teach customers the Disney version of American history – reaffirming the past as generally pleasant and serving a clear trajectory of progress. Incorporations of the "real" artifacts or materials throughout the park work to undercut the protestations that the narrative of the Magic Kingdom is pure fantasy, because, after all, it is constructed from authentic pieces. This is the same logic that Richard Handler and Eric Gable describe as governing Colonial Williamsburg in their book *The New History in an Old Museum*:

Museums, it is assumed, amass real things, authentic objects; and their didactic, political, and moral work, as well as their cultural prestige, stems from the display of those items [. . .] While critics like Ada Louise Huxtable might damn Colonial Williamsburg for adulterating its core reality, for failing to preserve and present 'the real thing,' both the museum and its critics share a commitment to 'the real' as embodied in authentic, old objects" (222).

Throughout the Magic Kingdom, Disney makes similar use of various objects' authenticity as a means of invoking pedagogical authority over a given narrative.

Both methods of movement through Main Street, U.S.A. – the train and the street itself – work to ease visitors into a mindset to accept the “magic” of the theme park's various spaces by traversing through spaces which present themselves as trustworthy either because of the legitimacy of their materials, in the case of the railroad, or their fidelity to a certain ethos of American history. Disney Imagineers have described Main Street, U.S.A. as representing “‘Disney Realism,’ sort of Utopian in nature, where we carefully program out all the negative, unwanted elements and program in the positive elements [. . .] This is what the real Main Street should have been like” (Wallace 35-36). Walt Disney World's official website highlights a utopian view of history in connection to almost every potential attraction of Main Street U.S.A.: the piano player near Casey's Corner (a baseball themed quick-service hot dog restaurant) will take you “back to the good ol' days;” The Citizens of Main Street performers “celebrate the good old days every day;” the Harmony Barber Shop is “charmingly old-fashioned;” with Main Street Vehicles you can “travel back in time” to “next stop: Memory Lane;” the Plaza Ice Cream Parlor is “sweetly nostalgic;” and so on. However, despite this commitment to a meticulously recreated utopian past, Main Street, U.S.A. provides a much thinner façade than most Disney attractions. The illusion of an idealized Victorian street is only maintained for customers who remain in constant motion from the entrance of Main Street, U.S.A. to the Hub in front of Cinderella's Castle, a central space from which all of the park's “lands” are immediately accessible. Anyone who stops to peruse one of the

many souvenir stores along the way will find that the theming within the stores is fairly halfhearted, and the same t-shirts, hats, and toys available in the space of the “good old days” as in the stores of Disney Springs and other parks. Similarly, those who stop at the Main Street Bakery for a snack will find themselves transported, not to a quaint local business of yore, but a Starbucks, with the ubiquitous chain’s familiar menu, the option to pay with the Starbucks app and use rewards points, just like in the Starbucks of everyday life.

The fact that Main Street, U.S.A.’s commitment to portraying a utopian space of history only extends as far as the entrance of many of its attractions further underscores that the illusions of Main Street, U.S.A. function not through forming a complete or convincing experience of immersion in the past, but by providing a space where customers are able to choose how deeply to indulge in the fantasies being offered. Starbucks locations were added to Disney parks in 2013 (Smith “Starbucks Locations at Magic Kingdom Park”), but the addition of a highly recognizable, contemporary brand does not threaten the authenticity claims of Main Street, U.S.A. because Disney uses claims of material authenticity selectively, and otherwise acknowledges its constructed nature. Within Disney’s logic, to repudiate Main Street, U.S.A. based on the thinness of its façade would represent a failure of imagination and innocence on the part of the critic, not a flaw in the park’s design. Additionally, Main Street, U.S.A. functions as a space of transition between the “real” and the “magical” – customers are within the Magic Kingdom, but only just, and the necessities and realities of the outside world (a favorite blended coffee on the way in, a souvenir on the way out) can be accessed and attended to

at one's convenience. Main Street, U.S.A. is meant to be enjoyably different from customers' daily lives, but not disorienting. In *Happy City*, Charles Montgomery describes the way the design of Main Street, U.S.A. triggers positive feelings in customers:

Main Street U.S.A.'s evocative landmarks – quaint train station, city hall, distant Sleeping Beauty castle – instantly orient you to the landscape, reducing the anxiety you are hardwired to feel when you are unsure of your location in a complex environment. At the same time, those elements serve as emotional triggers [. . .] Disney's references trigger memories that produce feelings of safety and calm – though these memories are just as likely to have been drawn from an invented past as from our own experiences (160).

Montgomery notes that Main Street, U.S.A. is designed to function like the setting of a movie, rather than an actual street – it is the space where customers orient themselves to the narrative they are entering in the Magic Kingdom. Many of Disney's early Imagineers had backgrounds in film production, and the memories that serve as references for the nostalgia and happiness conjured on Main Street, U.S.A. are largely those of classical Hollywood cinema over any actually existing town.

Main Street, U.S.A. is designed to be what Linda Williams describes as “a home ‘space of innocence’ in her examination of “mega-melodrama;” a space which “support[s] the belief that moral good is possible. Most often that good is located in a distant childhood, or even an imagined ‘back in the day’” (525). Williams argues that melodrama is not a genre, but a larger narrative mode present in a variety of genres and

mediums, including, but not limited to, action films, prestige serial dramas, and political discourse. Williams argues that the three defining characteristics of the melodramatic mode are suspense, “the drive to achieve moral legibility in the eventual resolution of the suspense” (524), and “the need to locate the goodness that deserves to live in the home ‘space of innocence’” (525). This mode structures the narrative flow throughout the Magic Kingdom, where the various visible landmarks, waits for rides, and the experience of the rides themselves, all make use of suspense and excitement to frame customers as heroic adventurers. Main Street, U.S.A. represents the space of innocence in the melodramatic narrative Disney World provides to customers, counterweighing the two worlds it bridges – the compromised and chaotic reality the Disney brothers built the space to keep at a distance from their property, and the world of thrills, adventures, and villains to be triumphed over in the park. It is the existence of goodness located in the space of innocence which, according to Williams, motivates the heroes of melodrama, and it is the joy and innocence promised in Main Street, U.S.A. that is both the offer to incentivize customers to enter the park and what drives its narrative.

Disney positions its customers as the heroes of its melodramatic narrative, who thus deserve to inhabit the space of innocence of Main Street, U.S.A. Because they must eventually leave the park, they will again “lose” the space when their time in the Magic Kingdom ends. However, the promise of Disney World and Main Street, U.S.A. is the maintenance of an accessible space of innocence, rather than one which is truly lost – it bookends the park experience; as in a melodrama with a happy ending, the Disney customer/protagonist begins and ends their adventure in the space of innocence. At the

park's closing time, staff members stand near the exit holding signs with friendly farewells such as "See you real soon!," implying that customers who later find themselves experiencing nostalgic longing for the lost space of innocence have only to book another vacation to Florida to have that longing completely fulfilled. Henry Giroux argues that the idea of innocence is the primary ideology that defines all Disney products; he writes that "the Disney Company has become synonymous with a notion of innocence that aggressively rewrites the historical and collective identity of the American past" (45) and insists that "Disney's appeal to pristine innocence and high adventure is profoundly pedagogical in its attempt to produce specific knowledge, values, and desires" (48). Because Main Street, U.S.A. is such a highly racialized space, the "innocence" it promises is very specifically an innocence which exonerates white people of historical wrongdoing.

The ideology of innocence Giroux identifies is mobilized throughout the Magic Kingdom through a blending of nostalgia and melodrama. The two converge at the point where Disney's brand of nostalgia moves from cultural memory to personal identity. John Hench, a high-ranking employee of the Disney company for more than sixty years, described Main Street, U.S.A. saying, "There's some nostalgia involved, of course. But nostalgia for what? There was never a main street like this one. But it reminds you of some things about yourself that you've forgotten about" (Montgomery 159). This idea of awakening the inner goodness, innocence, or childhood wonder of visitors through the experience of nostalgia allows Disney to valorize its customers as the heroes of the melodramatic narrative it constructs throughout the park. The Magic Kingdom's design

positions customers to understand themselves as the protagonists of a story that begins with their journey through Main Street, U.S.A., and to then be carried along in the television-style flow of the park as that narrative unfolds. Williams argues that the purpose of melodrama is to make goodness legible through the noble suffering of its heroes; nostalgic longing for a space of innocence serves as the suffering which verifies the morality of Disney and its customers, whose goodness is rewarded in their experience of Disney's perfected version of the past.

Liberty Square

Liberty Square can be accessed via the central Hub, its boundary with Fantasyland, or its boundary with Frontierland. The land's theme is generally Colonial America, particularly Philadelphia, but the depicted temporality and location are often somewhat slippery from attraction to attraction. The space blends a variety of architectural styles, including Dutch New Amsterdam, Williamsburg Georgian, "the flavor of New England," and the "rougher-hewn replicas of structures from the old Northwest Territory" (*The Imagineering Field Guide* 67). Throughout the area, "authentic" building materials are used in attempts to further solidify the pedagogical authority of the space, much like the appeals to authentic objects which Handler and Gable describe as the museum ideology central to Colonial Williamsburg. Imagineer Bill Hoeslcher recalled that the rocks on either side of the bridge connecting Liberty Square to the Hub "were quarried about six miles from where Washington crossed the Delaware, and they were bought at a lot of expense. We could have gotten rocks in Kissimmee. But

we wanted some significance there.” Other “real” building materials in Liberty Square include “some of the slate stoops of those buildings [that] were actually bought in Philadelphia and were in place when our country was still going through its Revolutionary War and when they were signing the Declaration of Independence. All of the lights are of the period, too” (Koenig 57-58). The fact that these materials are “authentic” is not prominently advertised within the park, but is readily available “behind-the-scenes” information available to those customers inclined to read guidebooks or Disney-managed websites. As such, any customer who wishes to dig deeper into the accuracy of Disney’s account will likely first encounter the museum logic of authentic materials being equated with accurate historical knowledge. In the design of Liberty Square, Disney seizes on disparate recognizable designs that connote “American history” and sutures them with seemingly random “real” materials of “significance” to create a section of theme park positioned as an all-encompassing space of American Colonial history. That this results in design styles neighboring one another that would never be seen together in reality does not undercut Disney’s claim to authority in teaching history, because the point is not to thoroughly teach any one aspect of the past, but to demonstrate mastery of its totality – by including recognizable elements of a number of historical moments, Disney posits its own history as complete, both without need of and impervious to intervention. Within Liberty Square, visitors are offered a view of the past which begins, at the Haunted Mansion, with the pre-Revolutionary Hudson River Valley, and then moves forward chronologically and south geographically into the time of the writing

of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, then further forward chronologically and west geographically into Frontierland (*The Imagineering Field Guide*).

The first attractions encountered by guests who access Liberty Square via the Hub at the end of Main Street, U.S.A. or via its boundary with Frontierland are not simply aesthetically themed around the colonial period, but ostensibly dedicated to teaching American history. Visitors who access Liberty Square directly from the central Hub pass a plaque establishing the area's setting:

Past this gateway stirs a new nation waiting to be born. Thirteen separate colonies have banded together to declare their independence from the bonds of tyranny. It is a time when silversmiths put away their tools and march to the drums of a revolution, a time when gentleman planters leave their farms to become generals, a time when tradesmen leave the safety of home to become heroes. Welcome to Liberty Square!

This text is very much in keeping with the kind of descriptions used to set the scene in “living history museums” such as Colonial Williamsburg, but it is phrased in such a way that highlights the kind of passivity in relation to history the narrative flow of the Magic Kingdom cultivates. This is a space where history simply happens, without apparent human intervention. Customers are not encouraged to conceive of themselves as historical actors with an influence over their destiny or the fate of the nation, but as viewers of a trajectory of history that will care for itself. The phrasing of the plaque resonates with television previews of upcoming programs encouraging viewers to “stay tuned,” and uses that same logic of flow to draw customers into the area's narrative

space. By ending with the hailing “welcome,” customers are reminded to understand themselves as within the story the story they are witnessing. In addition to encouraging a passive reception of history, here customers (and the colonists) may witness Revolutionary history without any of the conflict or challenge of Revolution. In this phrasing, the United States comes into being of its own volition – it is a pre-ordained “birth,” overseen by Disney. Past the “Sleepy Hollow Refreshments” stand, which serves funnel cakes and waffle sandwiches, is a reproduction of Philadelphia’s Independence Hall. This site houses two attractions which purport to teach American history – inside is The Hall of Presidents, a combination museum, movie, and animatronic show which offers a fervently patriotic telling of American history and the office of the president; outside is “The Muppets Present . . . Great Moments in History,” where at set times throughout the day the building’s windows open to reveal Kermit the Frog, Fozzie Bear, and other Muppets performing musical comedy reenactments of either Paul Revere’s ride or the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Between The Hall of Presidents and the Liberty Square Riverboat are two popular photo ops which further emphasize this as a space of colonial American history – a reproduction of the Liberty Bell accompanied by a sign offering a detailed description of the bell’s uses from 1751-1846, and a replica pillory and stocks for guests to pose in.

In the Hall of Presidents, Disney works first to make overt use of authentic historical objects as a means to claim pedagogical credibility, and then to interpellate customers into a view of American history wherein they, and the American people at large, look on passively as heroic presidents shape the course of the nation. The attraction

is housed inside a building whose exterior is a recreation of Philadelphia's Independence Hall. Inside, customers are offered a view of what Disney presents as the grand destiny awaiting the nation after its birth in the colonial era depicted in Liberty Square. Visitors who elect to view the Hall of Presidents first enter into what Disney's website describes as "an awe-inspiring grand rotunda," decorated with presidential portraits and display cases housing artifacts such as "George Washington's dental instruments and Abraham Lincoln's leather portfolio." As with the train, Disney highlights the authenticity of these objects, though here they are used as a claim to authority – presenting material objects of history in the familiar format of a museum allows Disney to position itself as an authority on the history being presented. Like the building materials of Liberty Square sourced from spaces connected with colonial history, these auratic objects are presented as validation of the authenticity of Disney's presentation of history. While the Hall of Presidents is designed to be engaging, it is clearly presented as a space for patriotic edification rather than whimsy. In spite of the museum-like design, the rotunda does not actually function like a museum, but rather becomes more and more crowded with visitors waiting for the next show. Quickly, it is too crowded to move freely through, and only those customers who happen to be positioned near a given artifact are likely to have the opportunity to engage with it.

Once customers are seated inside the theater, a blue curtain is slowly pulled back to reveal large screens bearing the seal of the president. As the curtain moves, a voiceover recording solemnly intones, "This program is dedicated to the memory of Walt Disney. In 1971, his love for America inspired the creation of the Hall of Presidents, a

place to celebrate the optimism and goodwill he saw at the heart of the American story. Walt's vision was to honor the nation by honoring the American presidency." Here the attraction emphasizes Disney's patriarchal role as the head of the Disney park "family" (he is setting out to both teach and comfort through this story), and using that as a means of segueing into a view of the American president as a similarly benevolent patriarch. Walt Disney had initially been interested in creating a space similar to the Hall of Presidents in Disneyland, but he was unhappy with the technology available. The idea was one of the improvements to Disneyland's design that Roy Disney allowed to be brought forward in the design of the Magic Kingdom, and strategically connected with America's bicentennial. This dedication exaggerates Walt Disney's connection to the attraction as it was ultimately built (five years after his death), and obfuscates the Disney Company's actual relation to "the American story" at that time. The protests and outrage of the Vietnam War and student protests affected Disney Parks directly, when in 1970 a Yippie Protest was staged in Disneyland. Members of the radical group scaled structures on Tom Sawyer Island, smoked marijuana, chanted in support of Ho Chi Minh and Charles Manson, and attempted to parade down Main Street, U.S.A. before fights broke out, large numbers of police were called in, and the park was closed five hours early (Hunt). The rigorous ideology presented in the Hall of Presidents is not so much a rebuke of civil unrest, protest, and dissent as a rewriting of American history in which such things simply do not exist. The erasure of conflict is necessary in valorizing the passivity Disney positions for its customers as the most appropriate relation to history. If the past is a space of conflict, with multiple stakeholders, it is challenging to make a strong case for

sitting by. However, without conflict, customers are encouraged to be courteous citizens who allow the flow of the park's logic to carry them through its story. Eliding and erasing conflict is an essential function of the Magic Kingdom's use of flow, both in that it creates a pleasant experience for customers to remain immersed in, and the momentum of the continuing narrative works to prevent customers from stopping to take note of what is missing in Disney's telling of history.

The Hall of Presidents offers a "Great Man" version of American history through its presidents, each of which, according to the feature, "stand at that fiery intersection where personal character meets the challenges of the times." The movie begins with a brief narration of the establishment of the office of the presidency in the Constitution, George Washington's surrender of power, the election of Abraham Lincoln, and the Civil War illustrated by portraits, newspaper illustrations, photographs, and video footage. The film does identify slavery as the cause of the Civil War, but only acknowledges Lincoln's efforts in its result: "The war becomes a dividing passage in the American story. The president's own inner strength and depth of character change the course of history." The show's mode of address then briefly changes; the screen rises and an animatronic Lincoln stands from his chair to deliver the Gettysburg Address. The animatronic Abraham Lincoln is a significant figure in the history of The Disney Company – Walt Disney first ordered an animatronic Lincoln created for "Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln," an attraction at the 1964 World's Fair. This came after his initial plans for a "Hall of Presidents" had been put on hold, due to the expense and complications of the intended attraction. The popularity of that show led to a version of it being installed in the

Disneyland (California). When planning the Magic Kingdom for Walt Disney World, Imagineers returned to the research done in preparation for The Hall of Presidents, though the show they created is much milder than the one Walt Disney intended. Rather than a film interspersed with animatronic presidents, Disney's initial plan was described as follows:

Its first portion would employ Circarama technology to create a five-screen wrap around, 180-degree film presentation, featuring enlarged paintings that would depict moments from our nation's founding. The climax would send audiences right into the middle of a violent Civil War battle. WED artist Sam McKim explained this multi-sensory moment: 'Walt wanted artillery that would fire from one screen across to the enemy on a screen on the other side . . . And you'd see things blow up, and then you could smell cordite' (D23 "The Hall of Presidents Story").

Clearly, Walt Disney envisioned The Hall of Presidents as a more immersive experience and a more direct engagement with past violence than the show as it ultimately was built, one where customers' felt his version of history viscerally, rather than through the familiar reception of the theater. In the park today, this style of more intensive engagement is an aspect of the "thrill" rides (e.g. roller coasters, dark rides). The mode of address in The Hall of Presidents as it actually exists presents a version of the past where, through America's history, individuals have passively sat and witnessed leadership of great presidents, through whom the pre-ordained grandeur of the American story has unfolded. In its most solemnly pedagogical attraction, Disney expects customers to sit

quietly in the darkened theater and listen attentively, which is valorized as the most appropriate way to experience the events of one's time.

After the Gettysburg Address, the screen returns, and the movie skips forward to Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, where he is "a knight on a crusade" to right the injustices of working conditions and poverty in early 20th-century industry, elevates the role of America internationally, and establishes the National Parks system to preserve the American landscape. From Teddy Roosevelt the film jumps to Franklin D. Roosevelt, who "knows how to restore the faith of people paralyzed by the Great Depression." From Roosevelt and the end of World War II, the film quickly glosses the presidents following him up through Barack Obama in a brief montage of notable speeches and images of their eras. Perhaps the best illustration of the totality of the attraction's commitment to its narrative of the presidency as providing "a guiding vision that calls forth the best that America can be" is the photograph used to illustrate Lyndon B. Johnson's 1965 address to Congress, which shows Martin Luther King, Jr. watching the speech on television. The moment did occur – according to aides who watched the speech with King, the only time they ever saw the civil rights icon cry was when Johnson said, "we shall overcome," (Caro). But decontextualized, it is wildly misleading, positioning Johnson as the leader of Civil Rights and King as a member of his audience, rather than King as having effectively pressured and persuaded Johnson in the lead up to his support of Civil Rights legislation. This moment shows the ideology of white innocence which structures Main Street, U.S.A. applied to the history of the Civil Rights movement. Conflict, protest, and unrest are erased, and replaced with a heroic white man serving as leader and protector of

a unified nation. As Wallace notes, “corporate Walt’s history is a top-down version. Popular political movements don’t exist in this past. Rendering ordinary people invisible as makers of history hardly encourages visitors to believe they can make their own future” (48-49).

As the montage ends, the screen again rises, to reveal animatronic figures of all forty-three presidents sitting and standing on stage. Each is individually identified, then the figure of George Washington rises and speaks on the importance of the oath of office, which the animatronic figure of Donald Trump then recites. After the oath, the animatronic Trump briefly discusses the promise of America’s founding, the great leaders he shares the stage with, and his dedication to the American people. Every president since Bill Clinton has recorded a short speech for his animatronic figure when the Hall of Presidents is updated after his election. However, there are a few notable differences between framing of Donald Trump in the current presentation and Barack Obama as the attraction existed before its most recent refurbishment. In the earlier version, after Obama’s animatronic representative recited the Oath of Office, he paused for horn fanfare and an announcer intoning, “Ladies and gentlemen, President Barack Obama,” (which often cued audience applause) before continuing his speech. By contrast, the animatronic of Donald Trump is never announced or trumpeted; the name “Donald Trump” is only spoken by Trump himself, during his Oath of Office, and there is no clear space for an applause break in support of the current president. At the end of Obama’s remarks, a loud choral version of the finale of “America the Beautiful” played, while an image of the flag waved in the background. In the new version, Trump’s animatronic

does not have the last word in the way Obama's did – the narrator from the film instead offers further remarks on the “genius” of the “idea of the American presidency” before the image of the flag returns and a decidedly more subdued instrumental arrangement ends the show.

The differences between the presentation of Obama and Trump offers a contrast between Disney's handling of a presidency whose narrative can be fit within the ideological view of the presidency as occupied by great men driving a great nation forward and one who offers a much more challenging match. During the attraction's refurbishment, there were rumors that the animatronic of Trump would not be permitted to speak, as the president's rhetoric is so at odds with the theme of the show, and at least one petition gathered thousands of signatures demanding that the animatronic Trump not speak (Bevil). While Disney ultimately chose not to break with the tradition established during Clinton's presidency of having the current president record remarks for the Hall of Presidents, the attraction does subtly de-emphasize Trump, in spite of the fact that Trump's slogan of “Make America Great Again,” policies of deregulation, and view of American history demonstrated through statements such as “Our ancestors tamed a continent [. . .] we are not going to apologize for America” (Le Miere) would seem to be in keeping with the ideology of the park.

Much of this may be rooted in Trump's combative persona; Disney's ideology is predicated on the total erasure of conflict – the point is to naturalize its position, rather than to win an argument that may arise from the acknowledgement of other possibilities. Disney's portrayal of history, especially in spaces such as the Hall of Presidents, relies

almost completely on myth as described by Roland Barthes in “Myth Today.” According to Barthes,

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but a statement of fact. If I *state the fact* [. . .] without explaining it, I am very near to finding that it is natural and *goes without saying*: I am reassured (143).

Undoubtedly, Trump’s more outlandish controversies and scandals led to his downplaying in the Hall of Presidents. However, his presidency also threatens Disney’s ideology of history because it reveals it to be ideological. Disney’s version of history is predicated on the naturalizing of erasure – customers are not meant to notice the ways in which its fantasies are white fantasies – that there are no indications of slavery in Liberty Square, segregation on Main Street U.S.A., or Native Americans in Frontierland. Donald Trump’s eagerness to make those kind of erasures visible by valorizing them works against Disney’s interest to create a completely deracialized and unified national identity in the historical imaginary. Trump is anathema to Disney ideology because of his quickness to court every controversy Disney works to deprogram from possible conversations.

In the square outside The Hall of Presidents, there are regular performances of “The Muppets Present . . . Great Moments in American History,” a recent addition to the park which tweaks the sanctimony of the Hall of Presidents. In the introduction to the show depicting the signing of the Declaration of Independence, for example, the town

crier sings, “There were battles! There was violence! There were spies and traitors too-” before Sam the Eagle (a long-standing Muppet character whose stodgy patriotism has been an object of Muppet humor since the 1970s) interrupts with, “But we won’t speak about all that! This is wholesome, through and through.” The Muppets’ humorous hand-waving is the closest any space in the Magic Kingdom comes to acknowledging the ways in which Disney’s version of history has been radically rewritten to align with its ideology of innocence. The Muppets demonstrate a shaky-at-best understanding of history throughout, and continuously frustrate Sam’s demand that they “do it with dignity.” The humor is mildly subversive of Disney’s typical messages about American history – the show’s characters unapologetically flout the typical reverential styles of “teaching” history. Miss Piggy, annoyed by the lack of roles for women, inserts herself into the story as both “Queen Georgette” and “Georgette Washington.” When Sam blusters in frustration, “this is not historically accurate!” she deadpans, “You got a bear playing Ben Franklin,” at which point the audience is encouraged to chant in support of Fozzy Bear’s performance. Raising the issue that anything one may see in the park is not historically accurate is a large departure from the rest of Liberty Square’s tone, though it does also raise the possibility that customers will interpret the inaccuracies as limited to the Muppets’ performance. The show’s finale features the Muppets singing “And here’s what you will take away in all your minds and hearts: great moments in history – but just the American parts!” as streamers fly over the crowd. The final line of the show is the Town Crier saying, “I’m feeling patriotic, I’m going to go visit the Hall of Presidents!” This is an uncharacteristically heavy-handed use of flow – to have a performer explicitly

tell the audience how they should feel at the end of one attraction and why that should lead them to the next one, which may be indicative of some anxiety from the show's creators on how its tone fits into Liberty Square.

The irreverence and fun of the Muppet performance serves to puncture any critique of the incompleteness of history as it is seen in Liberty Square – this is all for fun, and Disney is now in on the joke – without taking steps to make it any more complete. That this is in contrast to the rest of the park's presentation of completeness is potentially subversive, but the moment is so small and limited that instead it inoculates the space against a larger criticism rather than meaningfully undercutting its message. The show is first “wholesome,” according to Sam the Eagle, then “entertaining,” according to Kermit the Frog, and the stated end result should be a feeling of patriotism. This show effectively serves as an alibi for Liberty Square – in spite of the descriptive plaque, the recreated and historical artifacts, and the multiple claims to authority to be teaching accurate history, only a fuddy-duddy on the level of Sam the Eagle would harp about accuracy at a theme park. Additionally, by playfully tweaking stodgy complaints of “inaccuracy” from Sam the Eagle, Disney is treating all criticisms as inherently petty, anti-fun, and nit-picky, thus waving aside potential critiques of the pervasive erasures of histories of people of color in favor of bolstering a narrative flow underpinned by an ideology of white innocence throughout the park.

The next available attraction is the “Liberty Square Riverboat,” which demonstrates the way Disney draws on well-known fiction as a means of legitimizing its narratives, similarly to the way it makes use of authentic objects to legitimize its version

of history. Similar to the trains discussed in the section on Main Street, U.S.A., the Liberty Square Riverboat offers customers an iconic means of conveyance from the past as a means of viewing and being oriented to the narrative of various sections of the park. It works to reinforce the flow of Liberty Square and Frontierland by linking to the two and using narration to explain their connection within the fictional world of the Magic Kingdom. However, unlike the trains, the steamboat that visitors board here is not a restored artifact, but a reproduction. The riverboat, “Liberty Belle,” is powered by a working steam engine, but runs along an underwater track. The seventeen-minute long ride circles Tom Sawyer Island, an attraction which serves as another illustration of the way Disney intervenes in the historical imaginary by using the wide recognizability of famous historical fictions as a means of bolstering the claims to authority its depictions of the past are making. The slippery logic of Disney’s version of history is that it is immediately recognizable because it is largely built from preexisting, mediated representations, and that recognizability then becomes evidence of its authenticity. Disney makes use of well-known, “classics,” of American literature in much the same way it makes use of “authentic” building materials on various attractions – as a means of laying claim to a specific type of authority over narratives of the historical imaginary. Much in the way Disney presents authentic “artifacts” of the past when attempting to establish pedagogical authority over the past, the Magic Kingdom deploys “classics” of American literature as a means of authenticating areas and attractions that foreground themes of play and adventure. Mark Twain’s 1876 novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is particularly prominent in the American-themed sections of the Magic Kingdom, and

the steamboat ride is accompanied by a prerecorded narration by an actor playing Mark Twain; the script mixes famous quotes from Twain, trivia about the mechanics of 19th-century riverboat travel, and fictionalized descriptions of the nearby attractions (e.g. “That’s Chickapin Hill – or at least it used to be. Dam burst a few years back, and folks been callin’ it ‘Splash Mountain’ ever since. Some have even taken to ridin’ hollowed-out logs over the big falls”).

In its description of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*’s legacy, the National Endowment for the Arts argues, it “is not merely a literary classic. It is part of the American imagination. More than any other work in our culture, it established America’s vision of childhood.” Written after the Civil War but set before it, the novel casts the slave state of Missouri as something of a boyhood paradise, where Tom and his friends create harmless mischief, vex the adults of the town - whom Richard Locke describes as “conspicuously compromised, diminished figures” (50) - and ultimately defeat “Injun Joe, a melodramatic, terrifying, almost Gothic figure of evil” whose depravity “is ontological, apparently intrinsic to his mixed race” (51). The appeal of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, wherein a past space that aggressively naturalizes and minimizes rigid racial hierarchies (in this case, antebellum Missouri), is rewritten and inscribed in the American historical imaginary as an idyllic space of childhood innocence, is the most prominent early example of the style of hegemonic naturalization The Magic Kingdom works to create in the historical imaginary. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where Twain repudiated both the racial hierarchies and the protagonist of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, “famously explored” the ways in which black men are “ever the secret

source of American cultural strength” (56), but is unacknowledged in Disney parks. Much as the Magic Kingdom presents artifacts and building materials of the past to position itself as the rightful keeper of the narrative of American history and an authentic space of information and patriotism, the park draws on *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as a means of justifying the version of the past it is presenting, and claiming the cultural authority of the “classics” for its own form of storytelling. That Walt Disney was, like Mark Twain and his fictional protagonist, a native of Missouri is used to further bolster the company’s claim to the novel’s legacy.

In spite of being based in Liberty Square, the primary focus of the riverboat ride’s narration is Frontierland; both its individual attractions and the narrative space linking them. However, the inclusion of the riverboat in Liberty Square helps to establish the ways in which both geography and temporality are muddled in the Magic Kingdom’s depiction of the past. On the one hand, the narration of the Liberty Square Riverboat indicates that Frontierland and Liberty Square are neighboring towns that exist concurrently with one another (“That river town we’re passin’ is Frontierland. A few years back, it was no more than a boomtown, carved out of the wilderness by a handful of settlers lookin’ to start a new life”). However, the spaces of American history they are meant to depict are strikingly disparate – the 18th century American colonies and the 19th century frontier. The design of the lands suggests the customer is moving forwards or backwards in time, and across geography, depending on the path they choose. But these details primarily function as subtext, and so guests are also provided the option of experiencing them as simultaneous and co-existing; the past is as immediate or distant as

customers choose to interpret. This supports Disney's positing of the space as representing a totalizing and impervious view of the past – every necessary element of history is readily available to customers, in whatever form they choose to experience it. While the Liberty Square Riverboat and, as I will examine next, the Haunted Mansion, may not seem closely connected to the stated theme of Colonial America, they do much of the work of setting the tone and establishing the logics of the space.

The final attraction in Liberty Square before the boundary with Fantasyland (the park's area themed around Disney adaptations of European fairy tales) is the Haunted Mansion, which is what is known in the company's terms as a "dark ride," where customers are taken through various scenes and tableaux along an indoor track. The Haunted Mansion marks further transition away from the patriotic theming that defines the areas of Liberty Square first encountered from the Hub, and is separated from the land's other attractions by a considerable amount of space devoted to gift shops and quick service restaurants. Positioned at the boundary of Liberty Square and Fantasyland, the ride sutures elements of both the historical (through its architecture, music, costuming of employees, and depictions of scenes such as a grand ball) and the fantastical (ghosts, optical illusions, and special effects) in order to serve as a transitional space between the two lands. The attraction functions as a bridge between the geographic and temporal disparity of Fantasyland and Liberty Square – its use of pre-Revolutionary Dutch New Amsterdam architecture evokes American geography, but in the time of European colonization. This thematic bridging is apparent in Jason Surrell's description of the ride's architecture:

The final design incorporated a number of strong Gothic design elements typical of pre-Revolutionary New York's lower Hudson River Valley, including arches thrusting upward into the sky, large stone foundations and cornerstones, and the stone and brickwork common to the English Tudor style. This particularly type of architecture is referred to as Perpendicular Style for its use of strong vertical lines, which enhances the sense that the Mansion is towering above you, tall and forbidding [. . .] Claude Coats himself played with the scale and some of the ornamentation to make the Mansion appear even more sinister and foreboding. The Mansion's two wings seem almost clawlike in appearance, as though the house is looming over you, ready to attack. (*The Haunted Mansion* 37).

Through the use of this architecture and the specific time and place it evokes, the Haunted Mansion is able to function as a piece of Liberty Square and Fantasyland simultaneously and maintain the flow between those spaces without a jarring transition.

Customers riding the Haunted Mansion move through a waiting area that brings them past a graveyard, attractions they may interact with such as a "haunted" bookcase (when one book is pushed in another will pop out), and finally into a circular room that "stretches" to reveal the sinister nature of portraits on the walls. After a brief narration in that room, customers move to the ride's boarding area, and groups of one to three board the "doom buggies" that take them through the ride – a guided tour of the mansion narrated by a "Ghost Host" voiced by Paul Frees. Each of the rooms have different effects and optical illusions, most of which have been present since the park's opening and rely on animatronics, mirrors, and lighting, but some of which are more

recent and computer generated. Though the ride's scares are primarily intended to be humorous and are unlikely to frighten anyone other than the very young, the essential beats of its plot – that visitors find themselves trapped in a labyrinthine mansion haunted by 999 ghosts and eventually escape only to be followed out by “hitchhiking ghosts” – is strikingly macabre for a park which promises to be “The Happiest Place on Earth.” In the pre-boarding stretch room, the Ghost Host instructs visitors to “Consider this dismaying observation, this chamber has no windows and no doors. Which offers you this chilling challenge, find a way out! Of course, there's always my way,” at which point the lights flash, and the figure of a hanging man becomes visible at the ceiling, accompanied by the sound of a woman screaming.

It is jarringly out-of-step with contemporary mainstream American sensibilities for a popular children's attraction to begin by instructing visitors to consider committing suicide, and also uncharacteristic of both Fantasyland and Liberty Square to include a depictions or discussions of violence and death. In his book on the attraction, Surrell argues that Walt Disney's death, after the ride had already been designed, debated, and redesigned among Disney Imagineers for ten years, resulted in the “loss of his ‘final say’ [which] had a serious effect on the Haunted Mansion.” This led to the Haunted Mansion as a ride fractured by debate between designers who felt it should be genuinely frightening (led by animator and set designer Claude Coats), and those who believed it should be made silly (led by animator Marc Davis). As a result, “the first half of the show is all about the environment – a testament to Claude's experience as a background artist. It is more ominous and scarier, with nary a character in sight.” However, midway through

the ride the mood switches to one “less reliant on strong set design and filled to overflowing with Marc Davis’ whimsical characters and sight gags” (*The Haunted Mansion* 28). It is in this half that the popular, bouncy theme song for the ride “Grim Grinning Ghosts” can be heard. That the darkness of the first half goes largely unmentioned on in discussions of Disney attractions is likely due to the ride’s status as a “Disney classic.” Nostalgia structures much in the way Disney portrays the past, the park also strategically deploys nostalgia in propagating the popularity of its attractions and experiences; the Haunted Mansion has been at the Magic Kingdom since its opening, and many Disney customers are parents who visited during childhood and want to recreate their experience for their own children. While the Haunted Mansion was recently updated in some areas, most of the ride has remained unaltered in spite of many of the effects now appearing dated. The new additions did not moderate the tone or acknowledge the ride’s tie-in movie *The Haunted Mansion* (2003) – unlike the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film franchise, which was a massive financial success, *The Haunted Mansion* was a critical and commercial failure – but instead added the interactive attractions to the ride’s waiting area, and incorporated digital effects into a few select rooms.

There is a version of the Haunted Mansion in every Magic Kingdom park around the world, and in each of those it is positioned in a different land – in Disneyland, for instance, it is a part of New Orleans Square, and in Mystic Point in Hong Kong Disneyland. In each case, the idea of a foreboding mansion where guests are hosted and playfully threatened by the supernatural is adapted to the thematic needs of the individual park. The Haunted Mansion is a part of Liberty Square in Disney World because the park

was opened a few years before America's Bicentennial, and the Imagineer team wanted a section of the park that worked in synergy with that event – the Haunted Mansion was intended to work alongside the show the Hall of Presidents to support this colonial history-themed land. However, in addition to the thematic bridging of Fantasyland and Liberty Square, the Haunted Mansion also serves the flow of the park through its role as the only attraction in the American history themed areas that directly engages with violence and death (albeit in a style more evocative of spooky fun than true horror). The Haunted Mansion represents what may be feared from the past – the restless dead – as a threat contained. The inclusion of the Haunted Mansion relieves any pressure to consider the risks and violence of the past in other areas of the park, within the flow of the Magic Kingdom's narration, the story of violence within America's past is finished in that attraction – one which situates danger as a result of zany aristocrats of the colonial era doing harm to one another, rather than any of the state violence that the park works to erase from discussion.

The Haunted Mansion is the final attraction before Liberty Square transitions into Fantasyland, where the first rides available after the transition are “It's a Small World” to one side and “Peter Pan's Flight,” to the other. It is notable that the narrative of both rides are significantly more connected to the “real world” than the majority of Fantasyland attractions. “It's a Small World,” is described on Walt Disney World's website as “the happiest cruise that ever sailed,” in which “almost 300 traditionally dressed, dimpled darling [children] from nearly every corner of the globe sing a simple song in their native language about universal harmony and dance;” as such its connection to the idea of

“fantasy” is in its aggressive (even for Disney) utopianism rather than the more typical Fantasyland focus on wishes and magic. “Peter Pan’s Flight,” based on the Disney movie adaptation of the J.M. Barrie story, depicts a flight over the magical space of Neverland, but begins and ends in the mundane space of the Darling children’s bedroom. Both of these attractions posit the rider as entering from and then returning to the real world; the space outside those rides is thus positioned as in contrast to the magic of Fantasyland’s attractions. In the narrative of their experience of the Magic Kingdom, customers are exiting the land of imagination and moving into the land of the “real” past, while making use of the recognizability of narratives such as *Peter Pan* and Disney’s depiction of it to continue legitimizing the authenticity of the customer’s experience of the flow of their own story/adventure through the park.

Outside of these attractions, the first marker of transition into Fantasyland is a bend in the pathway. As visitors walk around that corner, the architecture on one side shifts from the red shingled roofs of Colonial architecture to the flags and multicolored stripes that dominate the rooftops of Fantasyland. To visitors’ other side the first marker of Fantasyland is visible in the recently-added Rapunzel Tower, which is not a ride or shop, but a popular photo opportunity and a landmark for the nearby restrooms. This further distances customers from the fairy tales of Fantasyland – unlike other castles in that land, Rapunzel’s Tower is always inaccessible – it stands in the distances as a backdrop. This close to Liberty Square, a magical princess’s tower is necessarily out of reach.

For guests who choose to approach Liberty Square from Fantasyland, flow is effectively maintained in reverse as well. The Haunted Mansion is thematically consistent with It's a Small World and Peter Pan's Flight, in that its internal narrative is also one in which visitors are taken from "reality" and moved through a fantastical space before arriving back where they began. However, the Haunted Mansion's story introduces an element of threat absent from the Fantasyland attractions. Unlike the attractions of Fantasyland, where customers are supposed to savor the supernatural as an escape from reality, the Haunted Mansion prepares visitors to appreciate the "real" as it is presented in Liberty Square by reframing the fantastical space as one from which to escape. Guests then encounter the Liberty Square Riverboat and Hall of Presidents as the space becomes more concerned with straightforward pedagogy. They may then either cross back to the Hub via the bridge, or continue on to Frontierland.

Frontierland

The boundary between Liberty Square and Frontierland is a smoother transition than the one between Fantasyland and Liberty Square. It occurs between two restaurants: the Liberty Tree Tavern and the Diamond Horseshoe. Unlike the gradual thematic transition between Fantasyland and Liberty Square marked by the Haunted Mansion, the Liberty Tree Tavern and the Diamond Horseshoe are each fully committed to their respective land's theme. The Liberty Tree Tavern is modeled after a "stately colonial-style inn," serves foods mainly associated with Thanksgiving (e.g. turkey and stuffing) and is made up of different dining rooms dedicated to commemorating Benjamin

Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Paul Jones, Paul Revere, Betsy Ross, and George Washington. The Diamond Horseshoe is advertised as an “Old West music hall” serving frontier-themed foods such as cowboy beans and campfire brownies. Once guests cross into Frontierland, the background music shifts to instrumental arrangements of songs such as “The Yellow Rose of Texas” and “On Top of Old Smokey” performed by banjo, harmonica, and violin.

As in Liberty Square, Frontierland purports to create an all-encompassing view of a period of American history that stretches across time and geography by treating different times and spaces as concurrent. Frontierland is primarily themed around the idea of the Old West, and this is reinforced by its description from the Liberty Square Riverboat as a boomtown transitioning into “a fine big city” in spite of still having “its share of footloose trappers, keelboaters, prospectors, and an Indian or two.” The gift shops (“trading posts”), restaurants (The Diamond Horseshoe and Pecos Bill Tall Tale Inn and Café), and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride all adhere to that narrative. However, interspersed among these are the raft to Tom Sawyer Island (set in antebellum Missouri), the Country Bear Jamboree (performing Appalachian-style music), and Splash Mountain (set in Georgia during Reconstruction). According to *The Imagineering Field Guide to the Magic Kingdom*, Frontierland is designed to invoke, “the wooded frontier of Davy Crockett, the Southern banks of the Mighty Mississippi, recalling the world of Tom Sawyer, the Southwestern U.S. [and] the Great Gold Rush of 1849” (52). The treatment of these as one amorphous space is, at least according to Disney, due to Walt Disney’s “fondest memories of childhood” and the joy he took in various adventure stories. Unlike

Liberty Square, Frontierland does not make use of authentic materials, but instead uses the complementary logic of the historical imaginary in which highly recognizable mass cultural historical fictions of the American past are remediated into a space of “real” history for customers to experience as historical knowledge.

There is no overt indication in Frontierland of any significant history of struggle or conflict in any of the regions it depicts; all are reduced to an interchangeable space signified by banjo music and funny accents, but without any acknowledgement of the genocide, poverty, and atrocities that defined these regions. And while it is not surprising that a family-friendly amusement park that famously advertises itself as “the happiest place on earth” would want to steer clear of such histories, without them the narrative of American history presented is essentially incoherent – a space of adventure without a source of risk or conflict. The primary narrative of Frontierland is one of narrow escape – both Big Thunder Mountain Railroad and Splash Mountain feature fairly involved storylines where the rider is on a perilous journey. Both of these attractions align the rider with an historically marginalized group – on Big Thunder Mountain riders are placed in the role of miners fleeing a mine collapse, and Splash Mountain focuses on characters of African-American folklore – but largely transform the source of danger from systems of oppression to the landscape.

Thunder Mountain is set in a recently repopulated mining town called “Tumbleweed.” According to the description of the ride on Walt Disney World’s website, gold was discovered by prospectors in Tumbleweed in the 1850s, but the mines were eventually abandoned due to eerie, ghostly activity. Since then, new prospectors have

resettled the area and begun blasting into the mountain again. But the hostile ghosts remain, and now the mines are collapsing. Riders of Big Thunder Mountain Railroad are aligned with the oppressed miners, forced to work in unsafe conditions and kept impoverished by a greedy company. The ride is a mild roller coaster, where customers board open-air cars fashioned to look like 19th century steam engines, and are secured with a lap bar. The train rapidly goes up and down hills and around corners through a set designed to resemble the red desert and rock formations made famous in the Westerns of John Ford. Riders can catch glimpses of animatronic animals such as possums, vultures, and (in the brief period the train speeds through the “mines”) bats, and catch a quick glimpse of silhouettes of miners who are ignoring the danger and drinking in a nearby saloon before being returned to the loading/unloading area.

The narrative is an awkward fit for the theming of Big Thunder Mountain and Frontierland more generally; the story relies on treating gold prospectors of the 1849 gold rush as interchangeable with coal miners of states like West Virginia and Kentucky in the early 20th century. This conflation demonstrates how quickly Disney becomes disinterested in the actual past once the narrative shifts away from the great (white) man versions of history that dominate Liberty Square. Prospectors and miners may be separated by time and distance historically, but they are interchangeable for Disney’s narrative purpose – unlike the president gloriously leading the nation, as shown in The Hall of Presidents, they are ordinary people, and thus treated as helpless in their historical moment. In attractions like The Hall of Presidents, Disney valorizes passivity in relation to history. Rides like Big Thunder Mountain adhere to a similar ideology, but the

cultivated experience may be more accurately understood as one of learned helplessness rather than simple passivity. Customers are presented with a narrative of ordinary people unable to muster resistance in the face of the powerful industry dominating them, and then board the ride where they experience the physical shocks and thrills of the rollercoaster, which they have no control over. The experience is supposed to be enjoyable, but it is also a means of having riders learn, through their embodied experience, that they have no power or influence in the past as Disney has constructed it. Like the prospectors/miners, they are simply along for the ride.

In 2013, the queue area of Big Thunder Mountain was updated with interactive features that draw on the ride's narrative of an active, but troubled, mine – an Explosives Magazine Room, where visitors can set off an “explosion” effect of a plume of smoke rising within the landscape of ride; a Foreman's stand, where visitors can view humorous videos of miners at work (for instance, having a classic Looney Tunes-style reaction to being unexpectedly handed a stick of dynamite), and a Ventilation Room, where visitors can verify the safety of the mine's air by checking on digital/animatronic birds. This expansion also further developed the backstory of the attraction – Big Thunder Mining Company is now owned by Barnabas T. Bullion, whose foreboding portrait is part of the queue's decorations. As customers wind through the queue, waiting their turn to board the ride, they are confronted with signs indicating the miners face difficult or unfair conditions, such as “ALL MINERS are required to bunk on premises [. . .] A fee has been deducted from your pay for services rendered plus gratuity” and “Miners are required to purchase mining equipment, clothing, and personal items from company store [. . .] Fees

deducted from earnings. All sales mandatory. All sales final.” However, all of these elements are played for humor and fun. These moments serve to simultaneously nod towards the harrowing history of the way miners have been treated and effectively erase it. These interactive comedy bits do provide, at the very least, some vague impression of the dangerous and oppressive conditions faced by 19th and 20th century laborers, which for most Disney customers may well be new information. However, the cartoonish nature likely forecloses the sparking of any meaningful affective engagement in customers, and presenting it in a space of physical comfort (the air-conditioning of the queue), in anticipation of the joy of the ride, for comedic effect, transforms the traumatic into the whimsical. Of equal importance is that while the relation of bosses to workers in the mine provides the setting for the narrative, the “story” of Big Thunder Mountain is not of challenging or overcoming the exploitative labor practices of the mining company, but simply surviving a runaway train ride triggered by that company’s disregard for worker safety. All the narrative elements of the setting introduced in the queue remain constant throughout the attraction – the adventure that visitors are encouraged to view themselves as the protagonists of is one of surviving a dangerous terrain, which acknowledges but does not engage with the fact that the landscape is made dangerous by the choices of powerful individuals. The roller coaster provides a different strategy for cultivating Disney’s particular combination of passivity and learned helplessness in relation to history – rather than the more typical address where customers are encouraged to sit still and reverentially absorb Disney’s telling of American history in the Hall of Presidents, on Thunder Mountain customers are presented with an indication of a harrowing history that

could inspire discussions of resistance or struggle, but then instead encouraged to trust the physical thrill of the roller coaster experience, where all ends well and all who enter the minds exit safe and a little giddy from the safe adrenaline rush (assuming they enjoy the thrills of a mild roller coaster). Consistent with the idea of flow, the only way through the story is to remain passive for it – to “ride it out.”

Splash Mountain retells the animated portions of the Disney’s *Song of the South*, a film which has become so controversial for its aggressively cheery and caricatured depiction of former slaves on a Georgia plantation that it is no longer in distribution. In his discussion of the adaptation of the film into the ride, Michael Eisner evades the issue of the film’s racism by saying, “We’d never release that on home video because you’d have to do so much explaining, historically, about the time it was made and the attitudes people had. But that doesn’t negate the strong music, or the characters other than Uncle Remus” (Surrell *The Disney Mountains* 83). As demonstrated at length by Jason Sperb in *Disney’s Most Notorious Film*, every aspect of that claim is untrue – the film was immediately recognized as racially offensive at the time of its release, and Uncle Remus is far from the only troubling character. Splash Mountain offers a demonstration of Disney effecting the erasure of controversy and conflict from American history and its own history simultaneously. By eliminating the narrative of the plainly racist live-action storyline, the history of the American South is presented through another remediation of a pre-existing popular fiction – in this case, the Disney adaptation of the folkloric trickster Brer Rabbit. The log flume ride’s story follows Disney’s version of Brer Rabbit as he repeatedly outsmarts and escapes Brer Fox and Brer Bear’s traps, finally manipulating

them into throwing him over “Splash Mountain” (the ride’s five-story drop) and into the briar patch that is his home. Splash Mountain attempts to elide the more troubling aspects of its source material – there is no mention or acknowledgement of the plantation setting or characters that made up the bulk of *Song of the South*. Instead, the characters and music from the film’s animated segments, which depict folktales told by Uncle Remus, are given without their original context. The infamous “tar baby” that traps Brer Rabbit in the movie is replaced with a beehive on the ride, but otherwise the ride’s narrative closely adheres to the movie.

Sperb describes Splash Mountain as one of the ways in which Disney “strategically remediated” (198) *Song of the South*, removing objectionable material and refusing to engage with the racial discourses that have led to Disney’s decision not to circulate the film. However, Sperb notes that this new version of the story does not “avoid issues of race so much as they train their respective audiences *not to see racial difference* in any meaningful way” [emphasis original] (199). It continues the ideological work of the Disney park at large – to render difference unrecognizable or meaningless in the service of a unified narrative of national identity. In Splash Mountain, antebellum or reconstruction Georgia (using the time period established in the movie), becomes a completely deracialized space. The ride is populated with characters of traditional African-America folklore (though they are in no way identified as such), and to that extent the rider is encouraged to identify with the culture of the disappeared character of Uncle Remus. However, there is no connection to the context of that originating culture – especially given Disney’s obscuring of their movie adaptation which serves as the bridge

from folktales to amusement park ride. Guests ride on a log flume through a variety of scenes depicting Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Brer Bear, and numerous cheerful animals singing songs such as “Pretty Good, Sure as You’re Born.” The log flume gradually climbs and experiences small drops on its climactic drop, which is visible from a distance and the prime attraction of the ride.

Sperb notes that “it’s difficult to ‘read’ Splash Mountain’s retelling of *Song of the South*, since the ride is designed to completely, if momentarily, engulf the senses of the visitor” (182). The moment of the drop builds from the general anticipation of the ride, to nervousness or dread as the final drop approaches (animatronic vultures taunt riders with comments like, “Bet you wish you could turn back!”), to exhilaration and relief as the drop is finished. The scene afterwards shows the animals celebrating Brer Rabbit’s final escape from Brer Fox and Brer Bear – dancers on a steamboat sing “Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah” under a sign that reads “Welcome Home, Brer Rabbit,” before the scene progresses past Brer Rabbit relaxing outside his home in the briar patch, contentedly singing the same song. Disney combines the relief and happiness that accompanies the physical thrill of the theme park ride with the song and imagery they are most eager to preserve from *Song of the South*. Mauro argues that in this moment, “we are welcomed into the antebellum South [. . .] We are relieved and grateful for this welcome, yet this overpowering relief overwrites and blinds us to the troubling and brutal implications of the narrative world into which we are ushered” (116). This is a different form of conflict erasure from what occurs at Big Thunder Mountain – obscuring rather than rewriting as humorous – but it serves the same ideological purpose. Both rides transform historical

periods marked by conflict and transition to static times of uncontested or untroubled power structures.

Conclusion

Whichever route through the Magic Kingdom customers use to structure the flow of their experience, the narrative ends with a return to Main Street, U.S.A. Moving away from Cinderella's Castle towards Town Hall and the train station works visually and spatially to signal the end of fantasy and a return to the "real world." In the Magic Kingdom's circular use of melodramatic logic, this is both the return to the lost space of innocence that indicates the triumphant end of the story (we have survived our adventures and, as good citizens who remained within the flow of the park are rewarded with a happy ending), and the exiting from it that indicates the story's beginning (we are leaving the paradise of Main Street, U.S.A. behind and embarking into an unpredictable world). Near the park's closing time, Disney staff are positioned near the exit, waving and holding signs that bear friendly farewells such as "see you real soon," emphasizing the expectation that customers will experience nostalgic longing for the space until they return. If and when they do, the same circular logics will apply – upon entering Main Street U.S.A. they will be both returning to the space of innocence (a happy ending to whatever their "adventure" has been since last leaving) and embarking from it into the park (an exciting beginning to a new melodramatic and valorizing narrative).

Undoubtedly, the counterargument to any critique of the way history is presented in the Magic Kingdom is that the park is meant for entertainment rather than education. It

is a sentiment that has been put forth frequently over the years; as Sperb notes, “the affect of nostalgia generates defenses just as passionately as do the feelings of joy and pleasure. Fans try to protect not only Disney, but their own memories” (212). People who go to Disney World, as hundreds of millions do every year, spend a great deal of money to go there, and are likely motivated to defend the space and their experience of it. But this fallback, offered by Disney itself at points, is a dramatic oversimplification of what these spaces actually set out to do, and have since first conceived of by Walt Disney; in some instances, such as the Hall of Presidents, Magic Kingdom attractions explicitly seek to be educational. Others, such as Big Thunder Mountain and Splash Mountain, are a presentation of aspects of American history which are ineluctably intertwined with poverty and exploitation that continue to have meaningful ramifications in the lives of many Americans today. However, the Magic Kingdom does not simply present American history as wholesome, entertaining, and inspiring. It naturalizes the ideology of that history through the narrative visitors construct for themselves by navigating the physical space of the park. The journey from Main Street, U.S.A. through Liberty Square and Frontierland, and eventually back down Main Street, U.S.A. is one in which every detail – from the background music, to the smells, to the proportions of the buildings – is crafted to make visitors feel absorbed in the illusion of the idealized past; Disney’s history is easier to buy in to when our own physical and affective experience seems to be verifying it. The Magic Kingdom’s use of flow throughout allows this ideology to maintain its consistent and self-evident presentation through the numerous forms it takes throughout the park. The soothing architecture and strategic forced perspective of Main

Street, U.S.A., the use of authentic objects to draw on the institutional authority of the museum for the more straightforward pedagogy of The Hall of Presidents and Liberty Square, and the physical thrills of the “mountains” of Frontierland which cultivate an understanding of helplessness as the only response to the past’s turmoil all contribute to a total experience of the park wherein the customers are absorbed in one of the most conservative narratives of the past available in American culture. In this way Disney’s shaping of the historical imaginary through its theme parks may be more pervasive and difficult to contest than what is found in its movies and other media; visitors in the midst of the park are participants, rather than merely viewers. Visitors are encouraged to either take pride in noble aspects of American history, or view themselves as survivors the challenges of its terrain. These two relations to the past, one of nostalgia, and one wherein history is a melodrama and our reward for allowing ourselves to be carried along in the narrative flow Disney constructs is that we are its heroes, teach a very particular understanding of the past, and its ideology is one which insistently and damagingly recasts every aspect of American history as a necessary building block towards creating an idealized white fantasy given form with Main Street, U.S.A.

CHAPTER TWO: TIME TRAVEL TELEVISION SERIES

One of the most recent frameworks for exploring cultural relations to temporality is the concept of time travel – which has maintained a presence in science fiction, with moments of intensified mass popularity, since its introduction in the late nineteenth century. There were isolated instances of stories of individuals being somehow temporally displaced, generally by sleeping for an extremely long time (most famously Washington Irving’s Rip Van Winkle), prior to the publication of Edward Page Mitchell’s short story “The Clock that Went Backward” and H.G. Wells’ novel *The Time Machine* (which is credited with simultaneously popularizing both the device of time travel and the new genre of science fiction). However, the idea of being voluntarily transported through time, by mechanical means, with the possibility of returning to one’s temporal point of origin, is an invention of the industrial age. As James Gleick writes in *Time Travel: A History*, “Time travel feels like an ancient tradition, rooted in old mythologies, old as gods and dragons. It isn’t [. . .] When Wells, in his lamp-lit room imagined a time machine, he also invented a new mode of thought. Why not before? And why now?” (4-5). This chapter examines the recent surge in popularity of time travel television series. By analyzing several series which use the device of time travel to allow a representative of the present to directly engage the past (*11.22.63*, *Timeless*, *Making History*, and *Legends of Tomorrow*), I explore the role of popular narratives of time travel

in the historical imaginary, both in its depictions of the past and, more importantly, in the direct connections they draw between the past and the present moment. Unlike previously dominant narratives of time travel, which tended to focus on interventions by everyday people into the past in order to avert an unhappy future, these time travel series foreground historians and educators venturing in to the past in order to preserve it, and thus maintain the status quo of the present. These representations of the existing past as both necessary and in need of protection from historians serves the function of the historical imaginary to shore up national identity by smoothing over traumatic histories, particularly histories of racism, in depicting them as unpleasant but necessary in the formation of the best possible present moment. The shows work to keep discussions of contemporary racial discrimination at bay by depicting the present as a post-racial space whose integrity must be protected from historians' interventions into the past.

It seems clear that at least part of the answer to Gleick's question of why time travel fiction emerged in the late nineteenth century is rooted in the proliferation of technologies that allowed the easy capture and unlimited reproduction of moments in time: the camera and early cinema. René Thoreau Bruckner writes that "time travel is a fantasy that seems to stem directly, and quite simply, from our habit of spatializing time" (2), and it was through camera technologies that moments of time became understandable as objects that could be held, manipulated, examined, and relived. As Walter Benjamin argues in "The Work of Art in Its Age of Technological Reproducibility," these technologies taught new ways of perceiving the world and daily life through: "all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a

sequence, enlarging or reducing an object [. . .] It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious” (37). The sense of mastery over time that is available through the camera – that it may be frozen, sped up, slowed down, and indefinitely replayed – almost certainly lies at the root of the idea that one may, through mechanical means, overcome the bounds of temporality to journey backwards or forwards in time.

Bruckner understands the drive to time travel in terms of Freud’s “A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad.” Published in 1925 (only a few decades after time travel emerged as a popular device in fiction), Freud’s essay argues that time and consciousness are ineluctably bound with one another; our consciousness and understanding of time both emerge in the organizing of perceptions into memories. Neuroses arise from repressed memories, which are “timeless,” and it is only by revisiting these memories on the analyst’s couch/time machine that an individual has “hope of destroying the timelessness of which neuroses are made and putting ‘time’ there instead: mutability, the possibility of progress, transformation” (Bruckner 8). Building on Freud’s description of the relation between desire and time consciousness, Bruckner argues that time as spatialized in time travel fiction may be best understood in the shape of the spiral, “One never passes directly through an already-past moment a second time but is always reeling toward one and always reeling away at the same time [. . .] The spiral envisions the relationship between present and past as one of proximity, of swinging past, a perpetual tease” (11). As such, history never exactly repeats – one may pass by the same moment again, however the traveler has been altered by their experiences, and is thus shifted to a parallel but removed space on the spiral. There is no true return to the previous point, and

attempting to reach it only offers longing and frustration. These themes emerge across repeatedly across all the series I examine here – time travelers who intensely desire to occupy the past (either because of their interest in the era, or their emotional attachment to someone in it) are left in some way unhappy and unfulfilled by their experiences outside of their own temporality.

This idea of time travel as providing “a perpetual tease,” emerges again and again in narratives which feature the device. Given its origin, it is unsurprising that while time travel has remained a reasonably popular device in literature, its best-known uses have been on-screen. Several television series of the 1960s - *The Twilight Zone*, *Star Trek*, and *Doctor Who* - remain among the most iconic examples of time travel, particularly *The Twilight Zone*'s “Walking Distance” (in which a man returns to an idealized summer of his youth only to be told by his father he must return to the present) and *Star Trek*'s “The City on the Edge of Forever” (in which, after time travelling to the 1930s, Captain Kirk must allow a woman he loves to die to prevent the Nazis from winning World War II). Many of the most famous films to feature time travel were made in the 1980s, which saw the release of the *Back to the Future* films and the beginning of the *Terminator* saga, as well as *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*; *Time Bandits*; *Star Trek IV*, which is centered on using time travel to save humpback whales; and numerous others. The most iconic of these films center on a time traveler returning to the past to prevent an unwelcome future – in *The Terminator* time travelers come to the 1980s to effect the outcome of a future robot uprising, and *Back to the Future*'s Marty McFly ultimately turns his parents from unhappy schlubs to fashionable successes. These films engage specific anxieties of the

Reagan era – the apocalyptic future of *The Terminator* resonates strongly with Cold War anxieties of nuclear annihilation, and the use of the McFlys' transformation to signify the happy ending of *Back to the Future* illustrates fears of being left behind in a time of increasingly conspicuous material consumption.

Unlike the nineteenth-century science fiction in which the idea of a time travel device first emerged, and which is broadly characterized by a sense of optimism concerning human innovation and exploration, science fiction on-screen has often been perceived as a largely pessimistic genre. Vivian Sobchack critiques this position as an oversimplification, but also points out that the broader genre of science fiction in films “only emerged as a critically recognized genre *after* Hiroshima” and that “the film genre, emerging when it did, had no roots in the philosophical attitudes of the nineteenth century” (21). Like all science fiction, the uses and meaning of time travel, or any depiction of temporality, are highly specific to their own times. This idea is well-established in examinations of screened history; Robert Burgoyne writes that any depiction of history, “like the mythic image of Janus, looks to both the past and the present” (11), but this is especially true of time travel narratives, which relate directly to the present moment; almost all protagonists of time travel narratives are contemporary with their intended audience, and as such their adventure is directly filtered through the present in a way other period films do not have to be.

Andrew Gordon argues that the proliferation of time travel films in the 1980s was indicative of a broader cultural belief that society had taken a wrong turn, and that the past was a more desirable space to inhabit:

These time-travel films rarely attempt a vision of the future, and when they do, as in *The Terminator*, the future is bleak and post-apocalyptic [. . .] They reflect a growing dissatisfaction with a present that is sensed as dehumanized, diseased, out of control, and perhaps doomed. Somewhere along the line, the unspoken feeling goes, something went drastically wrong; if we could only return to the appropriate crossroads in the past and correct things, we could mend history and return to a revised, glorious present or future, the time line we truly deserve (373).

This idea that the present can be corrected through an intervention in the past seemingly runs counter to what David Wittenberg identifies as “the ‘conservative’ characteristic of time travel fiction,” which, he argues, “tends to restore histories rather than to destroy or subvert them” (2). However, the root of the distinction lies in the scale of the history being changed; time travel fiction generally allows the characters to improve their personal circumstances – as Marty McFly does in *Back to the Future* by improving his parents’ love story, or as the protagonist in *About Time* (2013) uses his ability to return to his own past to improve his familial connections. But time travel fictions which engage directly with major cultural events – rather than daily life in the past or future – almost universally portray the past as something which must be preserved, as in *Star Trek’s* “The City on the Edge of Forever,” or is apparently immune to intervention, as in *Doctor Who*. Jerome de Groot (2008) describes *Doctor Who* and other depictions of time travel that do not “consider movement *between* times so much as movement *to* particular periods” as treating the past as “simply a backdrop to have the particular episodes’ narrative projected onto rather than inextricably intertwined with the events unfolding.” For de

Groot, the most interesting time travel series are those that consider the relation between past and present, rather than simply treating other times as destinations. De Groot argues time travel narratives which foreground an dynamic interplay between past and present “suggest a fluidity – the barrier between us and the past is more permeable than we would think, either imaginatively or physically” (240). In programs where characters find they must protect or preserve the past as it is “known,” that fluidity and permeability becomes a threat to contemporary stability.

The recent surge in time travel fiction, unlike the 1980s film wave examined by Gordon, has primarily been in television series that in some way examine the relationship between past and present. Television has long been a popular site for examining the past; as Malgorzata Rymsza-Pawlowska points out, “because of the medium’s unique relationship with history and temporality, developments in television programming are a particularly apt site at which to examine shifts in American understandings of and relationships with the past” (83). Rymsza-Pawlowska writes that because of the television format’s shared characteristics with time – particularly its ongoing nature, as described in Raymond William’s idea of television’s “flow,” it serves as a particularly apt site for understanding the continual progression of time.

If we accept this reasoning as part of the popularity of the straightforward depictions of the past on television (i.e. without time travel) described by Rymsza-Pawlowska, then it seems likely that the form of television’s current moment – which is increasingly defined by on-demand streaming services and binge-watching – plays a role in the sudden popularity of time travel narratives. Flow – which, as discussed in the

previous chapter, was described by Raymond Williams in the broadcast era of television as serving capitalist interest by maintaining continuity between programs, ads, and the programs that followed – has been largely interrupted by streaming services, which tend not to include ads or programs that feed in to one another, or devices like TiVo, which make the easy manipulation of flow (through pausing, fast-forwarding, and rewinding shows as they are watched) an embedded aspect of the television experience. Like the time traveler, contemporary viewers find themselves suddenly empowered to escape the long-prevailing logics of flow; as the time traveler is free to traverse the timeline, the viewer is free to jump between episodes, revisit favorites, and skip what is not engaging. Outside of television, internet and social media technologies frequently use the language of time travel to describe means of relating to user's personal pasts. Social media users regularly attach the highly recognizable hashtags “throwback Thursday” and “flashback Friday” to old photos of themselves or others that they are posting or re-posting, and the “Time Hop” feature on Facebook re-posts photographs from past years to users' pages on the anniversary of their initial upload, along with a label indicating how many years have passed. Free internet archives, such as The Wayback Machine (which is clearly so named in reference to time travel), allow users to access webpages that have been removed or altered as they previously existed, further underscoring the common caution that nothing online is ever truly forgotten. These technologies emphasize, in De Groot's terms, the permeability of the barrier between past and present, and may well inform the most recent surge in time travel narratives. All of the three series that pioneered the genre of time travel television, *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek*, and *The Twilight Zone* have recently

returned to the air, and since 2015 numerous other series centered around time travel have been released – including *Timeless*, *Travelers*, *11.22.63*, *Legends of Tomorrow*, *Dark*, *12 Monkeys*, *Making History*, and *Time after Time*. Not all of these series have been successful – *Time After Time*, which centered on H.G. Wells following Jack the Ripper from the nineteenth century to 2017, aired only five episodes. However, if nothing else the sheer quantity of serialized time travel programs suddenly available seems indicative of an increased interest in the ways in which histories reverberate through each other and lines of continuity between the past and present, raising the question of how things may have been different today if past individuals had made different choices.

In this chapter I examine the Hulu miniseries *11.22.63*, and NBC series *Timeless*, as well as two programs which use time travel's interventions in history to comedic effect: *Making History* and *Legends of Tomorrow*. Each of these shows focuses on a protagonist or a team of protagonists from our own time who use time travel to directly intervene in the past. Unlike Marty McFly of *Back to the Future*, these protagonists are seeking some form of direct engagement with well-known historical events and figures; their time travel missions are not fueled by their domestic lives, but an interest in significant moments in national history. While some of these programs contain moments of subversive potential in their depictions of the way the past unfolds and how we come to understand history, each ultimately adheres to the conservative impulse identified by Wittenberg, and portrays the preservation of known history as an ultimate good. As such, unlike previous depictions of time travel which idealized the past as a space of possibility (i.e. where positive changes could and should occur), these series present an exalted view

of the present moment as the past's best possible outcome – individuals who have devoted themselves to the study of history find their desire to explore the past or change the present can only be harmful. Most work to reinforce what Catherine Squires describes as post-racial strategies which “obfuscate institutional racism and blame continuing racial inequalities on individuals who make poor choices” (6). Their intervention into the historical imaginary discourages any questioning or re-examining of hegemonic narratives of the past, and position the work of historians as a significant threat to the social order.

11.22.63

11.22.63, a miniseries based on a Stephen King novel of the same name, is centered on Jake Epping (James Franco), a high school teacher who is persuaded to travel to 1960 to preemptively investigate and avert the assassination of President Kennedy. Rather than a time machine, Jake travels through an unexplained portal in the closet of a diner owned by his friend, Al (Chris Cooper). Anyone leaving through the portal always arrives at 11:58am on October 21, 1960, and, regardless of how long they stay, returns two minutes from the time of their departure. Traveling to 1960 resets the timeline; any changes that may have been effected on previous journeys are erased. Al, a Vietnam veteran, believes that Kennedy's survival will prevent the escalation in Vietnam overseen by President Johnson, saving numerous lives and leading to a better world. He had been attempting to use the portal to accomplish this himself, but succumbs to terminal cancer before he is able to. Armed with Al's notes about the assassination and tips on how to

blend in once he arrives in the past, Jake travels to 1960 to investigate Lee Harvey Oswald and prevent the assassination. Along the way, he falls in love with a Texas librarian named Sadie (Sarah Gadon).

The series' opening credit sequence features a scale model of the site of the Kennedy assassination, with a long strand of red string weaving together various key objects – the car, the gun, the clock – and connecting various newspaper articles and cut out images of the key players. These items, the fragile pieces of some conspiracy (real or imagined), tacked to walls and connected with a web of red threads is an image so strongly associated with paranoia and delusion it has been endlessly subject to pastiche. However, much of *11.22.63* is premised on Jake, and by extension the viewer, taking the question of who is responsible for Kennedy's death seriously, rather than (as Jake initially does) scoffing at decades of obsession and theories as the purview of cranks. There is nothing in the opening credits that immediately conjures the idea of time travel, all details pointing instead to a conspiracy theorist obsessed with a famous event, someone who might constantly long for the ability to revisit the moment and find out what really happened, but will never be able to fully recreate it. The vast majority of the series is much more focused on the intrigues of the Kennedy assassination and the events leading up to it than on the time travel that enables Jake to reluctantly fulfill the dream of the model's creator. In its telling of those events, the series draws on the understandings of this period as it has been repeatedly portrayed and solidified in the historical imaginary rather than disrupting it – the intrigues of the FBI and CIA; the bright, messianic figure of

Kennedy; the troubled, increasingly threatening Oswald; and the general air of Russian-accented, Cold War machinations.

When Jake travels through the portal he can only arrive on October 21, 1960, and as a result he must spend three years waiting and preparing for the series' titular date of the Kennedy assassination in order to avert it. Events often do not go as he wishes, but he cannot return to the present day and reset the timeline without losing all progress he may have made, along with the relationships he has formed since his arrival (in addition to his romance with Sadie, Jake is befriended and helped by a young man named Bill). As such, of *11.22.63*'s eight episodes, only the first and last directly depict time travel. In the intervening episodes, Jake benefits less and less from the advantages of having traveled in time – he loses Al's notes early on in his adventure, and his knowledge of upcoming events is less useful as he is increasingly enmeshed in daily life of the early 1960s. Indeed, his adjustment to the past is remarkably smooth; the show quickly moves beyond Jake's surprise at the low prices, and momentary frown at a segregated restroom he encounters, in his journey from Maine to Texas.

11.22.63 attempts to address the racism of the early 1960s, but the series' sole black character of note is understood exclusively through her relationship with benevolent white men. Ultimately, the show frames the struggles of the civil rights era as primarily an interpersonal conflict between bad white racists, and good white men who oppose them. There is no consideration of contemporary racism – the first episode includes a brief scene between Jake and his soon-to-be ex-wife Christy, a black woman, but the series never develops her as a character or evinces any interest in her experience.

Her brief presence only serves to establish from the beginning that Jake is a post-racial individual without prejudices (as, by post-racial logics, his marriage to a black woman is proof he cannot hold racial biases). Once settled in Dallas, Jake rarely takes note of the differences between the time he now inhabits and the world as he has known it, and when he does his response is usually mild irritation. The viewer is positioned to identify with Jake, and the series does not attempt to draw viewers' attention to distinctions between past and present other than at the moments when Jake has some jarring experience. One exception to Jake's general equanimity in adjusting to social differences between the 1960s and 2016 occurs in the third episode, "Other Voices, Other Rooms," when Jake encounters Miss Mimi, a black woman and a member of the administrative staff in the high school where he is teaching, who has run out of gas and walked twelve blocks to the station to buy some. Prior to this moment, the episode includes a scene where the entire school office comes to a silent and scandalized halt when Jake offers to get Miss Mimi a cup of coffee, which she politely deflects (thus defusing the situation). In that moment, Jake's only response was to roll his eyes and grit his teeth at the petty racism of the time he is in. However, after he the gas station attendant refuses to sell gas to Miss Mimi, or Jake acting on her behalf, he snaps. Jake shoves the attendant, seizes his arm, and yells, "Why don't you shut your fucking mouth?" before helping himself to the gas can, throwing the money for it on the ground. The station attendant is cowed and bewildered, and though Jake smiles politely at Miss Mimi as he opens the door to his car for her to drive her back to her own vehicle, she appears uncomfortable.

Miss Mimi appears as a minor character in four episodes of *11.22.63*, and it is solely through her that the show addresses questions of race. As the show's representative of black Americans living during segregation, she is portrayed as perceptive, kind, and – above all – dignified. In the fourth episode, “The Eyes of Texas,” she tells Jake that misleading people denies them their dignity, and in a moment the show gives significant weight (through the background music, the emotional waver in Miss Mimi's voice, and the lingering close up on her face as she delivers the line) she tells him, “And for some of us, dignity matters.” However, one aspect of the portrayal of Miss Mimi as dignified is her unwavering acceptance of the social circumstances she finds herself in. Miss Mimi consistently finds Jake's moments of disruption to established racial hierarchies on her behalf unsettling, though the show gives no indication of potential consequences to either arising from them. She is also portrayed as the only black person existing in an entirely white space – she is employed at a segregated school for white students, maintains a cautiously friendly but professional relationship with Jake, and is engaged in a secret long-term affair with the school's principal (Mr. Simmons). When she confides to Jake that she has terminal cancer and Mr. Simmons wants to take her to Mexico to pursue experimental treatment she dismisses the idea with a smirk saying, “That's just borrowing trouble.” Her final requests to Jake are to be a friend to Mr. Simmons after her death, and to not hesitate to pursue happiness in his relationship with Sadie. Miss Mimi's choice to adhere to the hegemonic social order that oppresses her, in spite of the multiple white men in her life urging her to step outside of it (in both significant and minor ways), could be an opportunity for the show to note the uneven risks of such resistance; Jake and

Mr. Simmons face significantly less danger than Miss Mimi for such choices. However, *11.22.63* never alludes to any potential pushback to these moments, and thus Miss Mimi serves as a tragic figure purely to motivate and develop the emotional interiority of the white male characters she interacts with. In its attempt to portray Miss Mimi as sympathetic and dignified, *11.22.63* ultimately depicts its only significant black character as resistant to the racially progressive interventions of the white men who want to help.

Jake shares a frame of reference with the viewer, but the more he embeds himself in day-to-day life in the 1960s, the more often the knowledge he brings from the future fails to help him. In contrast to typical depictions of time travel, where information or technology from the future provides a significant advantage for the time traveler (such as Biff in *Back to the Future II*, who builds a fortune winning bets on sporting events he knows the outcome to, or Ash in *Army of Darkness*, who cows the medieval peasantry with his shotgun/“boom stick”), Jake frequently scrambles to simply pass as an everyday individual. While his primary interest is in averting the Kennedy assassination, the nature of the rabbit hole forces him to embed himself in the past while he waits for that event, and his broader historical knowledge in no way prepares him to cope with the emotional attachments he forms in the community of which he becomes a part. His lies are exposed numerous times: first by Bill, then by Miss Mimi when she attempts to verify his credentials for employment at the high school, by Sadie when she discovers surveillance equipment in his house, and by Mr. Simmons when he is arrested. In most instances, Jake offers some weak excuse, but ultimately it is the other characters’ fondness for him that causes them to forgive his deception, rather than any superior knowledge or insight he

brings. When he and Sadie are attacked by her abusive ex-husband, for example, there is no advantage to Jake in having come from the future.

These instances serve to underscore the view of history the show presents through Jake's lecture to an inattentive high school class in the series' first episode: "People tend to think the important stories are wars, elections, political movements – but these [unknown] people matter. The little things matter." *11.22.63*'s focus on Jake's adaptations to daily life in 1960-1963, and the personal lives of the people in the community he embeds himself in, works to underscore this position in relating to history. Jake's knowledge of the "important stories" are useless as his priorities shift. Increasingly throughout the series, his mission to prevent the Kennedy assassination shifts from sacred charge to grim duty; his actual investment is in the interpersonal relationships he has formed, particularly with Sadie. When the fabricated nature of Jake's identity is revealed to Mr. Simmons in the fifth episode of the series, Jake argues against being fired from teaching by saying, "I'm the same guy that walked through that door every day for the past two years. I got [troubled student] Mike Coslow to act. I got Jim LaDue to memorize poetry, Yates for Christ's sake. Doesn't that count for anything? [. . .] I thought we were friends." His appeal is sincere – rather than motivated by a need to maintain a convenient cover or an excuse to stay near Lee Harvey Oswald, Jake is hurt that a man he had come to see as a friend is now treating him as a stranger. That Jake's attempts to redirect the larger events of history have negative repercussions for the individual people he has become close to – Sadie is left traumatized and scarred by her the attack her ex-husband's jealousy of Jake set off, and Bill suffers a mental breakdown and commits suicide in an

asylum Jake has him confined to in an attempt protect his plan to save Kennedy – create the emotional stakes of the show. Jake believes the suffering he is inflicting on people he has come to care for is in the service of the greater good of future society, but by the series' final episode, the price of saving Kennedy has become intolerably high for Jake.

However, Jake, along with the audience, is never permitted to forget his status as a man out of place in time. While most of the show's plot revolves around Jake and Bill's investigation of Oswald, the soon-to-be assassin is not the villain of the series. Instead, that role is filled by time, which continually resists Jake's interventions in the past and attempts to maintain history as we know it. Al explains this to Jake as time "pushing back." Throughout the series, seemingly random and often violent events interfere with Jake, Bill, and Sadie – going in to a restaurant in the first episode, Jake must avoid being set on fire by a knocked over candle igniting a drink near his suit, and a heavy chandelier that nearly falls on him (in addition to the smaller inconveniences of having to bribe the *maître d'*, the interruptions of a persistently over-friendly waitress, and the interfering noise of a blender, laughter, and a dropped tray of glasses as he tries to eavesdrop). A random fire consumes the house he is staying in, destroying Al's notes and killing the landlady's young son. Cars drive off the road, nearly mowing him down, and strangers frequently tell Jake, "You shouldn't be here." At various important moments, Jake, Bill, and Sadie are all distracted by visions of people from their past who have died, which "time" conjures to thwart them. Sadie is nearly killed multiple times – first by her ex-husband, then by the interference of time during a surgical attempt to correct the scar his violence inflicted – before time's ability to create coincidence and accidents leads to her

being fatally shot during Jake's struggle with Oswald in the Texas School Book Depository. The presence of "time," or its active/vengeful intervention in a given moment, is generally signified by a change in pacing of the camera movements or soundtrack, a look of panic from Jake, or the nondiegetic sound of high pitched music. In the final episode, as Jake and Sadie race towards the Texas School Book Depository, Jake first encounters a vision of a violent man he killed earlier in the series. The panning motion of the camera stops as Jake and the man lock eyes, and the diegetic sounds of the crowd chattering around them drops out, replaced with what sounds like a slow fan. Visually and aurally, the moment is warped by time. The show chooses to make this interference from "time" explicit rather than ambiguous – we are given no reason to doubt that Al and Jake are correct in that the timeline is attempting to right itself, and in the finale this is confirmed by the "yellow card man" Jake frequently catches glimpses of at the moment of time's intercedence in events.

The attacks of time and other unexpected dangers work throughout the series to disrupt the view of the past as an idealized space. Initially, in the first episode ("Rabbit Hole"), *11.22.63* depicts the present as dull and disaffecting, and Jake's life as one he should be eager to escape. Before Jake visits 1960, every scene is dominated by the color grey, and the characters are universally unhappy – some bored, some cruel, and some unfairly disadvantaged. Jake's students nap and watch cell phone videos as he tries to teach, he is recently divorced, and his father died while he was on the plane en route to say goodbye. The city he lives in appears dilapidated, with boarded up windows and empty streets. When Jake passes through, as Al terms it, "the rabbit hole," to arrive in

1960, he is suddenly awash in sunshine and surrounded by bustling industry. A factory whistle blows, and blue collar workers cheerfully mill about. Jake's eye is immediately drawn to various signifiers of wholesomeness and Americana, particularly a milkman in a pristine white uniform, and a trio of beautiful, giggling blondes driving by in a pink convertible. The montage of Jake initially exploring 1960 is set to the Paul Evans' song "Happy-Go-Lucky Me," as Jake delights in delicious food and the low prices of the apparent paradise he now inhabits. But this view of the past is short-lived. As evening falls and Jake arrives in a bar on the wrong side of town, the laughter in "Happy-Go-Lucky Me" takes on ominous tones as the city darkens. The saturated colors of Jake's initial arrival in the past do not return, and while not as grey as the present was, the remainder of 1960-1963 are mainly shot in more subdued tones, particularly blues and greens.

In the final episode ("The Day in Question"), Jake successfully saves President Kennedy, but Sadie is accidentally killed as he confronts Oswald. Jake resolves to reset the timeline and try again, assuming that he will now be able to save both Kennedy and Sadie. To do so, Jake must first return to 2016, where he sees the results of Kennedy's survival. However, the present, unlike the improved world AI envisioned, is now a post-apocalyptic wasteland. This version of 2016 is far bleaker than the grim present of "The Rabbit Hole," which, by comparison to the world Jake has created, no longer seems grey or run down. The diner is gone, most buildings are flattened, and groups of violent scavengers wander around, assaulting whoever they encounter. Their faces are obscured, both by filth and the grey haze that permeates the air. Jake discovers that after Kennedy

served two terms, George Wallace was elected president, and before the end of the 1970s, life as it was known was shattered by global bombings and widespread, horrific suffering. Jake returns to the rabbit hole and transports himself back to the reset point in 1960, thus returning the timeline to its original, unaltered version. He returns to the light and color saturated version of an apparently perfect past, where he now recognizes one of the three blondes in the convertible as Sadie and races after her, intent on finding a way to live their love story again.

However, Jake is dissuaded from any attempt to reshape the past again by “the yellow card man,” another time traveler who warns him that while he may tell himself things will be different “It’s always the same loop. It goes and it goes [. . .] It’s always the same end.” Jake swears, increasingly desperate, that he will not save Kennedy or interfere with history; he simply wants to be with Sadie. However, the other traveler insists that Jake’s involvement with Sadie will always lead to her death, and so Jake returns, heartbroken, to 2016, leaving the past unaltered. He eventually looks up Sadie, and finds that she is receiving an award for her lifetime of service to her community, and travels from Maine to Texas to see her accept it. In her acceptance speech, she reads a poem that summarizes the series’ theme of relating to our own temporality:

We did not ask for this room or this music. We were invited in.

Therefore, because the dark surrounds us, let us turn our faces to the light.

Let us endure hardship, to be grateful for plenty.

We have been given pain, to be astounded by joy.

We have been given life, to deny death.

We did not ask for this room, or this music.

But because we are here, let us dance.

The clear implication of the poem (which is original to the series, though presented as if it were a well-known standard), is that life is a gift to be enjoyed, and to dwell on the imperfections of a moment is folly. This is not an especially controversial philosophical position, but in relation to the series treatment of history and time, it further emphasizes the idea individuals should concern themselves with interpersonal relationships rather than the broader circumstances of their moment, and that an attempt to meaningfully engage the past, to revise or rewrite history, is to invite disaster – individually and culturally. Those who insist on how things could be better, like Al and the unnamed time traveler who urges Jake to escape the loop he is embarking on while remaining in his own, are destroyed by their fixation on changing “the room, or this music” to what they would have “asked” for. Preserving the known past is ultimately vital both for the safety of people like Sadie and Bill, but also for the entire nation, which faces annihilation due to Jake’s interference.

At one point during her recitation, Sadie is shown from behind, silhouetted by the spotlight shining on her. This is an echo of the way John F. Kennedy is shot in “The Rabbit Hole,” when Jake attends one of his speeches. While the various shots of Kennedy seem primarily designed to obscure the actor portraying him, the recreation of that moment here emphasizes Sadie as an equally important figure. Ultimately, the show offers a view of the past as immutable, and the act of looking (or traveling) back as inherently counterproductive. Jake is forced to tragically bid farewell to his vision of a

life with Sadie, but because she has only lived in her own moment, she is able to be happy.

The presentation of the past as a space which is initially seductive – with low prices, delicious food, and endearing people – but becomes dangerous when interfered with, and time itself as a malevolent and active participant in events when Jake attempts to change them, reflects a dominant ideology of the American historical imaginary – that history is static and its narratives should not shift. When debates about how the past should be understood in the United States enter public discourse, a common charge among those who favor maintaining the status quo, adhering to the dominate narratives of the historical imaginary rather than attempting to challenge or reshape them, is these subaltern or counter-hegemonic narratives are “revisionist” or “history-washing” (Hesse). These terms were recently mobilized in debates around the removal of confederate memorials, which, according to Monica Hesse, some “see historic and important artwork that should not be taken down” and others “see a mass-produced symbol of racism.” This adherence to a static view of history, wherein the specific narratives or images of the past take on cultural significance independent of what the historical record may support, is what *11.22.63* validates in its portrayal of time as hostile to an educator’s interference. In spite of the show’s many signifiers of conspiracy theory and espionage, it is completely disinterested in drawing any new conclusions. When Jake is asked by an F.B.I. agent in 1963, “Why do you think Oswald wanted to kill JFK? He loved Castro or he was working for the Russians?” Jake evinces no interest or emotion as he responds, “No one will ever know, I don’t think.” In spite of being an individual tasked with teaching

history, the show portrays Jake as dramatically out of his league when he actually becomes part of the past, and without any new insight into major events he has now lived through. The implicit argument that historians should simply memorize and regurgitate familiar narratives rather than “changing” history is an ideological attack on the discipline, and its prominence here is indicative of why the American historical imaginary is so resistant to intervention by traditional methods of history.

Timeless

The NBC series *Timeless*, like *11.22.63*, premiered in 2016 and is centered on an educator who travels to the past. The circumstances presented are very different; in *Timeless* Lucy (Abigail Spencer), a professor of history, is recruited by government agents to aid in the capture of Flynn (Goran Visnjic), a terrorist who has stolen a time machine. Along with Wyatt (Matt Lanter), a soldier, and Rufus (Malcolm Barrett), one of the engineers who designed the time machines, Lucy must follow Flynn to different points in history and try to prevent him from altering the timeline. While the show’s plot grows increasingly complex over the course of its two seasons and feature-length finale, the consistent conflict is between villains who wish to change the past to suit their goals, and heroes who work to maintain the current timeline, even when that requires significant sacrifice. In each episode, the team travels to a different location in time – as recently as the 1980s, and as far back as the Salem Witch Trials – and simultaneously work to thwart Flynn (and later a broader shadow-government conspiracy) while leaving the past unaltered. Within the mythology of the show, it is fatal for an individual to pass through

their own timeline – thus, characters cannot travel back to moments in which they have lived or previously traveled. In their first mission, Flynn causes the Hindenberg to complete its initial journey without incident, and upon returning to the present Lucy finds that as a result of that alteration to the timeline, her sister no longer exists. Lucy continues her missions, determined to restore her sister and stop Flynn. Whenever the past is altered, only those who have journeyed through time retain memories of how it is “supposed” to be; when they return, the new history is the only one those who remained in the present are aware of. Their losses tend to be exclusively personal; other effects of the team’s adventures tend to be humorous or without meaningful impact. For example, after the episode “Party at Castle Varlar,” in which the team encounters a young Ian Fleming, they return to the present to find there is now a James Bond novel based on their exploits with the author/spy.

Unlike in *11.22.63*, where the fact that Jake sometimes taught high school history was coincidental to his being recruited to time travel (he happened to be in the diner when Al returned from the past, rather than being actively sought by Al as his successor), Lucy is chosen to time travel specifically because she is a historian. By focusing on Lucy as the primary protagonist, the show actively foregrounds discussions about how the past should be understood, and what an acceptable degree of interference in known history is. Throughout *Timeless*, Lucy is shown to have a strong ideological commitment to maintaining the past – she often functions as a protector of historical narratives, and is distressed by even minor alterations to the past – including those that the rest of the team finds laughable or insubstantial. Lucy’s role on the team as an historian is twofold –

because of her knowledge of past events, she knows how history is “supposed” to unfold and can thus prevent the crew from inadvertently altering major events (in the world of *Timeless*, historians carry within them an encyclopedic knowledge of every detail of every past event and era). She is also tasked with using her expertise to make sure that she and her team blend in to each era; she explains customs and social expectations, though the team rarely faces much difficulty in acclimating to other periods. This is in spite of the fact that Rufus is black, and frequently expresses displeasure and irritation at the increased dangers he faces in traveling to times of segregation or slavery.

Rufus’ unhappiness is generally treated as a source of humor – during their time in 1937 in the series’ pilot episode, Rufus quips, “Well, the back of the bus was great,” as Lucy gleefully marvels at exploring the past, and grimaces when she apologetically advises him, “Don’t make eye contact with anyone” while he waits outside the bar she and Wyatt are entering. Rufus’ catharsis for these indignities comes later in the episode, when Wyatt tells him to distract a racist police officer. Rufus obliges by telling the cop, who repeatedly calls him “boy,”

I’m in the damn stone age. But man, I hope you live a long, long life. Long enough to see Michael Jordan dunk, Michael Jackson dance, Mike Tyson punch – really just any black guy named Michael. O.J.? Yeah, he gets off! He did it, but we don’t care. And Obama? He’s the president! 2008. That’s gonna suck for you! I hope you see it all. Because the future is not on your side, boy.

In this moment, the world of 2016 is presented as compensation for the history of discrimination and violence. The monologue is positioned as an empowering moment for

Rufus – Lucy and Wyatt look on from another jail cell, Wyatt smiling, Lucy mouth agape in shock. The cop is clearly bewildered, but unhappy that Rufus is somehow getting the better of him. He leaves in order to find other officers to help him beat or murder Rufus (his plan is not made explicit, but is clearly violent).

Presenting this list as an effective answer to the racism of the late 1930s is a complete trivialization of both the horrors of the past and Rufus' anger at being forced to experience them, as well as a means of glossing over a troubling moment of Wyatt demanding that Rufus place himself in further peril. There is little doubt that if this police officer were to live long enough to see O.J. Simpson's acquittal he would be unhappy about it, but this monologue seems to position that verdict as a Civil Rights victory on par with Obama's election, rather than part of a moment of persistent, systemic racism that this officer would be right at home in. Similarly, while there would certainly be aspects of Michael Jackson's celebrity that would meet with this cop's disapproval, the existence of successful black entertainers would not be shocking, as they existed then too. That Rufus does not draw on school integration, the Voting Rights Act, or the legalization of interracial marriage, is indicative of the way *Timeless* reinforces the historical imaginary's toned-down vision of the history of racism – that it was an issue of interpersonal unpleasantness rather than extreme, systemic oppression. This one racist is counterbalanced by the future successes of individual black men.

Rufus' discomfort with traveling through the past while leaving the tragedies experienced by black Americans unaltered is explored in "The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln." Rufus argues to Lucy that they should just "shoot this asshat [Booth], save

Lincoln here and now.” When she argues “it might change things too much,” he responds, “there might be a lot less lynchings,” and that she is protecting, “rich, white guys’ history.” He points out that as a black man, “a lot of my history sucks.” Lucy, who is white, makes an impassioned plea for maintaining known history, referencing the kind of consequences of altering the past incurred in *11.22.63*: “We would come back to an entirely different world. Who knows if it would be better, or if there would be anything left to come back to at all? The present isn’t perfect, but it’s ours. Awful as it is, what happens to Lincoln is meant to be.” However, in the moment of the assassination, Lucy does try to save Lincoln. She is unable to and events remain largely unchanged. This episode introduces a discussion of fate to the series, which, while not nearly as omnipresent as the interference of “time” in *11.22.63*, does play a role in understandings of what should and should not be allowed to happen. When Lucy returns to the time machine, shaken, guilt-ridden, and with Lincoln’s blood still staining her dress, Rufus comforts her, confirming that there was nothing she could do and the Lincoln’s death is a tragedy of history, but an unavoidable one. Similarly to his interaction with a racist police officer in the 1930s, Rufus again offers the present/future as compensation for the wrongs of the past; he attempts to comfort a black soldier with the promise that eventually, things will get better. That the improvements he is referring to will not occur within that soldier’s lifetime is left unspoken by the show, as is the continued existence of systemic racism and inequality in the present day.

Almost all episodes of *Timeless* include members of the team encountering major historical figures, including individuals as varied as Abraham Lincoln, Hedy Lamarr, and

John Hinkley, Jr. Rather than the idea of ordinary people living their daily lives as the true stuff of history, as in *11.22.63*, *Timeless* zealously commits to a “great men and women,” view of the past, and history as the events that arise from the actions of special individuals. This is established from Lucy’s introduction early on in the pilot. She is seen lecturing a class, and telling them that when asked why America was in Vietnam, President Johnson responded by stating that his penis (“It’s true, he called it jumbo”) was the reason. She explains that these stories are “real history” and “to understand it, we’ve gotta get inside these people’s heads. Their loves, their quirks, their ‘jumbos.’” Her expertise in history throughout the series is repeatedly demonstrated in her knowledge of the details of world-historical people’s lives. In “The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln,” Wyatt challenges her certainty of what will happen that day, asking, “So Booth walks into Ford’s Theater at exactly ten a.m.? Not nine fifty-six? Not ten oh-seven?” She immediately brushes aside the possibility, telling him, “Hundreds of books have been written about Booth’s movements today” and they all agree that he arrived at the theater at precisely ten.

The idea that historians could, with pinpoint accuracy, know the exact moment that Booth checked his mail on the morning of the assassination is outlandish for any number of reasons. Prominent among them, is the fact that standard time was a new development in the 19th century (Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, U.S. time zones were not established until 1883); and in 1865 many towns still used the sun to set their local time, and variations were common – 9:56, 10:00, and 10:07 were very likely to fall within an acceptable margin of error for people living their day to day lives (Andrewes).

But this instance illustrates the ways in which *Timeless* portrays the past as anachronistically legible in terms of the present, and significantly misrepresents the work of historians, who within the series serve solely as a repository of facts and minutiae.

Like *11.22.63*, *Timeless* presents the past as a space which should not be interfered with, as that interference poses a threat to the present moment. Any alteration is seen, particularly to Lucy, as detrimental. Lucy's protectiveness of the known past positions her as a figure very much at odds with the actual work of historians. As described by the National Council on Public History, "Revisiting and often revising earlier interpretations is actually at the very core of what historians do. And that's because the *present* is continually changing [. . .] This is inescapably a task of interpreting rather than simply collecting data." Lucy is a conservative construct of a keeper of the historical imaginary – an enthusiast for the minutia of the past, a fetishist of notable personalities and accomplishments, but in no way willing to do the kind of questioning and interpretative work of an actual historian. As the series progresses, the intrigues and plots that unfold become more convoluted – shifts in time revive individuals who have died, and one character begins to experience psychic visions of the future – further emphasizing the role of fate in dictating how history unfolds. In "The Salem Witch Hunt," for instance, Jiya, an initially minor member of the engineering team who becomes Rufus' love interest, experiences a vision that Rufus will kill Judge Sewall. He avoids this fate, but Sewall is promptly run over by a carriage instead. Unlike the rigid demands of time to adhere to the known in *11.22.63*, the forces of fate in *Timeless* seem to operate by a standard of "close enough." The series largely dismisses Lucy's concern

about specific details in favor of broad strokes – a government agent sternly instructs her to “take the win,” when she protests that their interference altered the events of April 14th, 1865; Lincoln was still assassinated after all, and the other figures targeted in the conspiracy were not. This cavalier attitude towards the finer points of the past – the details only matter to those select individuals, like Lucy, who are obsessed with them – reinforces a strongly presentist ideology threading through the American historical imaginary. While big events and big moments are vital, the contexts and details are portrayed as the specialized purview of historians, whose knowledge may be impressive, but is largely irrelevant. The role of historians in the world of *Timeless* is protecting history from those who may selfishly work to change it, never in questioning or rewriting.

Making History and Legends of Tomorrow

Not all of the recent time travel series have treated the question of how shifts in the past may impact the present with the tragedy and drama of *11.22.63* and *Timeless*. I will next briefly examine two series that use time travel as a primarily comedic device – *Making History*, which ran for one season on Fox in 2017, and *Legends of Tomorrow*, an ongoing CW series that premiered in 2016. Neither of these shows demonstrates much investment in the idea of historical accuracy (*Legends of Tomorrow*, as I will discuss, is particularly over-the-top), but their engagements with the historical imaginary are still useful to examine, as they illustrate the pervasiveness of the themes of both the

presentism and that too much interest in the past is detrimental which currently dominate time travel narratives.

Making History centers on a college facilities manager, Daniel (Adam Pally), who regularly travels to 1775, where he is popular with locals and in love with a woman named Deborah (Leighton Meester). He frequently quotes popular movies and songs to the colonists, who admire him for this as well as his good hygiene. Daniel eventually realizes that he has somehow prevented the beginning of the American Revolution, and convinces Chris (Yassir Lester), a history professor, to travel back to 1775 with him to fix it. Deborah chooses to come to the present day with them, and after setting history right, they continue to make use of time travel for goals as varied as attempting to aid Chris' academic career to allowing Deborah to buy an ice cream shop.

Part of what sets *Making History* apart from *11.22.63* and *Timeless*, beyond their distinction in tone, is the ways in which *Making History* treats the past as dramatically foreign from the present. While Daniel's easygoing nature and familiarity with 1775 allows him to transition into that space fairly easily, Chris has a very difficult time adjusting to the past. Upon arriving in 1775, he immediately vomits due to the horrible smell that permeates the town (Daniel offhandedly apologizes, saying "the past smells like poop because there is doody everywhere"). No other show deals directly with the visceral physical shocks of traveling between times, or engages with the consequences of a character accustomed to contemporary standards of hygiene and waste disposal attempting to adjust to a space without them. Additionally, Chris, who is black, is constantly irritated by the racism and general immaturity of the colonists. At one point

tells her a horse, “You get treated better than I do in this time.” Unlike the recognizable historical figures of *Timeless*, who are consistently shown to be worthy of Lucy and the team’s admiration, the Founding Fathers of *Making History* are selfish buffoons, more concerned with pranks and partying than forming a nation. In the first episode Daniel argues, “You teach history. I brought you back in time. You haven’t even said ‘Thank you,’” and Chris snaps back, “Thank you for what? All that’s happened is I puked, I had an axe thrown at my head, I was treated like a slave, and I drank John Hancock’s urine.” Unlike Lucy in *Timeless*, Chris is depicted in *Making History* as a historian who is constantly let down by the past, who must adjust his understanding of history to grapple with its disappointments.

However, while *Making History* does portray the present as a more desirable space to inhabit than the physically and socially alienating experience (for Chris) of the past, it also portrays a continuity between past and present that is absent from other time travel series. Much of this occurs through the character of Daniel – his ignorance, selfishness, and carelessness when it comes to others, particularly Chris, is shown as of a piece with the way the Founding Fathers behave. Daniel has less power and influence in the present than the past, but he continues to benefit from the effort and energy of others – the time machine, for instance, was invented by Daniel’s father, and Daniel is simply able to claim and benefit from it after his father’s death. The show also uses Daniel’s ignorance as an opportunity to criticize contemporary race relations, even while mocking the racism of the past. When Deborah asks Daniel and Chris, “So, in 2016 white people and black people are friends?” Chris says, “Not at all,” at the same moment Daniel says,

“Absolutely.” The show clearly intends to align with Chris’ contempt for the idea that the status quo deserves applause simply for being an improvement on the horrors of the past. Unlike in *Timeless*, where an imagined post-racial present day is frequently offered as compensation for racism of the past, or *11.22.63*, where racism exists only in the 1960s, *Making History* gives some indication of continuity between past and present discrimination.

As in *11.22.63* and *Timeless*, *Making History*’s first episode includes a scene in which a teacher/soon to be time traveler lectures a class on what history truly is. Daniel enters Chris’ classroom as Chris tells his students, “history isn’t made by remarkable people. It’s made by unremarkable people, doing remarkable things.” The show then goes on to emphasize the extreme ordinariness of people in the past. While Chris believes his knowledge of the Founding Fathers will allow him to serve as an inspirational figure for them, he finds they are largely disappointing; when trying to understand why Paul Revere did not take his famous “midnight ride,” Revere morosely explains that he is preoccupied with concerns that his daughter may be sneaking out without his permission, and asks, “Do you have any idea what’s going on in my life right now?” In this encounter and others, Chris is constantly shocked and horrified by the behaviors and personalities of the Founding Fathers he has long idealized. However, Chris’ critiques of the colonists is positioned to serve as a critique of contemporary American discourse as well. In his attempt to repair the timeline and spark the beginning of the Revolutionary War, Chris initially attempts to motivate the colonists with high-minded rhetoric about liberty and self-determination he believes motivated them. However, this fails, and ultimately he

instead rallies them to action by convincing them the British are going to confiscate their guns, which is immediately effective and a clear critique of the priorities within contemporary American discourse as well. In this, as well as in the character of Daniel, *Making History* argues that the public at large has essentially remained unchanged throughout history – while technologies, cleanliness, and civil rights may have improved, society is still dominated by the ignorant and selfish. Chris is constantly punished throughout the series for his attempts to intervene in the past or use time travel to his advantage – in addition to his mistreatment in 1775, by the series end he has lost his chance at receiving tenure as well as his teaching position at the university, and his department head/mentor has died, all as a direct result of time travel. While the series has a dramatically different tone and includes a critique of the present absent from the other series, it still presents an argument that a historian meddling with the past is inviting disaster. Chris had hoped that traveling to 1775, or bringing John Hancock and Samuel Adams to the present, would provide him with more meaningful historical knowledge, and allow him to make a meaningful contribution to his field. Instead, he suffers repeated losses and humiliations.

Unlike the other shows examined here, *Legends of Tomorrow* does not center on a teacher who travels through time. It is a superhero series, which features a variety of supporting characters from other CW superhero shows, as they travel through time. Each season has shifted their focus somewhat, however the third season follows their attempts to remove anomalies (many of which they may be responsible for) from the timeline, as they serve as guardians of history. While the plot is ultimately too convoluted to usefully

untangle here, and features many elements of the comic book genre other than time travel, I want to focus specifically on scenes from the season three episode “Guest Starring John Noble,” as it provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which very recent history is being shaped in the historical imaginary.

The episode begins with the team dispatching members to Occidental College in 1979, to save a young Barack Obama (Lovell Adams-Gray) from attack by a psychic gorilla. In the brief scene of his confrontation with Gorilla Grodd, the young Obama shows overconfidence in his ability to reason with a determinedly unreasonable foe. Cornered, he takes a deep breath and then says, “I can see you have some grievances, but perhaps we can look for common ground.” The gorilla seizes him by the throat and responds, “It’s time to make America Grodd again.” The joke in the moment is Obama’s calm and (over)confidence in the face of fundamentally unreasonable behavior, and illustrates the way in which he is coming to be understood within the historical imaginary primarily as a consensus figure – rather than an association with any particular policy or governing style, Obama is defined here by his unflappable focus on compromise. The team intervenes at this point, and Obama escapes, indicating the moment is simply a brief joke. However, later in the episode, team leader Sarah (Caity Lotz) faces a difficult decision, and announces she is leaving. When asked where she is going, Sarah responds, “To go talk to someone who can think straight when the whole world has gone crazy,” and then scene immediately cuts to Obama sitting in his dorm room.

The actor playing Obama in this episode is especially skilled at capturing the former president’s cadence and voice without it sounding like an imitation, and even at

this early point in his life, he provides exactly the insight Sarah needs. He summarizes the problems Sarah has faced, advises she be patient with her girlfriend (who is dealing with the revelation that she is a clone), and consider an “unorthodox approach,” to combatting the demon the team faces. While some of this ease is no doubt to wink at the audience about the ridiculousness of the show’s plot, it also speaks to the way the Obama is being shaped as a character in the historical imaginary – cool, wise, and self-possessed. Even as a college student, confronted with a time-travelling, lesbian, assassin, who needs advice on what to do to defeat a literal demon, Obama is measured, reliable, and compassionate. At the end of their conversation Sarah tells Obama, “I really miss you.”

“Guest Starring John Noble,” is the only episode examined here that came out after the 2016 election. While the characters here are still focused on maintaining the timeline, there is also an idealization of Obama, much in the way that significant historical figures are idealized in *Timeless*. Obama is such a contemporary that his presence in a time travel series at all may seem surprising, however, by mythologizing Obama as a figure of the past – facing superheroes and monsters in the 1970s, rather than living and working in the present day – the show also works to define the former president as a purely historical figure, and thus erase any need to consider ways in which his policies or positions may still be influential, useful, or detrimental in contemporary political discourse. This use of Obama shows how quickly and aggressively he has been shifted within the historical imaginary from being understood as contemporary to historical, and how rapidly the historical imaginary works to solidify its narratives.

Conclusion

The time travel series examined here all mediate an encounter between a representative of the present and a significant moment – or as in *Timeless*, many moments – in the historical imaginary. These encounters resist the highly nostalgic and idealized views of the past depicted in the 1980s surge of time travel movies, in favor of a presentist view that does not entirely ignore wrongs of the past, but dismisses them as necessary steps to reach the existing present moment – which is always the past’s best possible outcome. Most emphasize a message of racial harmony in the present, portraying 2016 as a post-racial society that makes up for past injustices. In so doing, they obfuscate continuities between past and present in ways that serve the historical imaginary’s conservative, self-preserving ideological impulse. This, as well as the series’ consistent misrepresentation of the role of historians, who are shown as facing disaster when they attempt to shift or question the past, demonstrate how strongly conservative the ideology of contemporary time-travel television series are. These series’ focus on fate, as well as their marked consistency in either punishing educators who interfere in the past or valorizing historians who protect established narratives of history, serve as an attack on progressive uses of the discipline of history. They demonstrate the ways in which the historical imaginary uses a narrative device which purports to open unlimited possibility of interacting with the past to foreclose any scrutiny of history whatsoever.

CHAPTER THREE: ALTERNATE HISTORIES

In *Remaking History*, Jerome de Groot argues that the main critique of fictionalized representations of the past – that they are inaccurate and incapable of providing rigorous historical knowledge – misses the point of what historical fictions do: “challenge, ‘pervert,’ critique, and queer a normative, straightforward, linear, self-proscribing History [. . .] while suggesting instead a set of very strange templates for a type of understanding that does not neatly fit with perceived notions of the ‘historical’”

(2). De Groot calls for understanding historical fictions on their own terms, not as straightforward representations of what has occurred, “but modes of knowing the past”

(3). In this, he is in keeping with other scholars interested in the depiction of the past through film and television, a field Mia Treacey argues should be termed “Screened History” (*Reframing the Past*, 2016). Robert Rosenstone, one of the foundational thinkers of Screened History, sees the examination of historical film as a vital path of inquiry (*Visions of the Past*), and Robert Burgoyne offers film’s “ability to establish an emotional connection to the past, a connection that can awaken a powerful sense of national belonging or a probing sense of national self-scrutiny” (2) as an alternative to discussions of historical accuracy in *The Hollywood Historical Film*. In *Engaging the Past*, Alison Landsberg argues that representations of the past which complicate viewer identification by including alienating reminders of how different the past was from the present have the

potential to form a historical consciousness in viewers. This chapter builds on the body of theory established by Rosenstone, Burgoyne, Landsberg, and others who argue for the usefulness of Screened History beyond a recreation of past events judged by the exactness of their reproduction. As de Groot argues, screened histories contribute to the historical imaginary “both in their diegetic content and also in the modes of narrativization, knowing, and articulation that they deploy” (*Remaking History 2*).

This chapter examines the role of screened history in the historical imaginary through analysis of a vital but under-examined category of historical representation – those whose actions dramatically depart from the accepted historical timeline. These works of alternate, or counterfactual, history diverge from audience expectations to form a unique engagement with both the past as it is shown on screen, and history as it has come to be known by more traditional means. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of such works; as Gavriel Rosenfeld writes in “Why Do We Ask ‘What If?’” “so dramatic has the emergence of alternate history been that it has been reported on by the mass media and even grudgingly acknowledged by its most hostile critics – historians [. . .] Alternate history has become a veritable phenomenon in contemporary Western culture” (90-91). Rosenfeld argues that alternate history is “inherently presentist. It explores the past less for its own sake than to utilize it instrumentally to comment upon the present” (92). Catherine Gallagher comes to a similar conclusion in her study of the alternate history novels *Bring the Jubilee* and *The Man in the High Castle*: that such speculative novels remain popular because “they ask important questions – such as, are the American people [in the present] living according to the principles for which they

fought?” (59). I argue that rather than being purely presentist, counterfactual depictions of the past provide a dialectical means of engaging the volatility of the present moment’s relation to history. Because the departure from the facts is foregrounded in counterfactual histories, accepted discourses of the past are not erased even as they are written over; the contrast between the two historical narratives remains in constant tension through the experience of the simultaneously familiar and strange past. In this, I am taking up Burgoyne’s description of the function of the historical film generally, which he argues “like the mythic figure of Janus, looks to both the past and the present” (11). This chapter analyzes the ways in which alternate screened histories intervene in the historical imaginary and investigates the uses of such histories in augmenting historical knowledge.

Chris Wahl argues that film is a particularly useful medium for alternate history, both because the on-screen format is immediately legible as different from the form of conventional history, and because audiences are accustomed to seeing parallel worlds in film and television. I examine the way in which counterfactual screened histories that depart from the accepted timeline intervene in the historical imaginary by analyzing three particularly prominent examples: the Quentin Tarantino films *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) and *Django Unchained* (2012), and the ongoing Amazon.com series *The Man in the High Castle*. While there is some overlap in the way these three texts approach rewriting the past and what they attempt to indicate about the present, they are also distinct in which strategies of cinematic address they mobilize in their attempts to reconfigure history. I focus particularly on Tarantino’s work because his engagement with the past is unique among major Hollywood productions; his historical films use

strategies of alternating minimalism and excess, realism and pastiche, and aspects of various genres to create a film style that is legible to mainstream viewers while also challenging to typical narratives that have dominated screened histories. Tarantino's engagements with history are often messy and consistently controversial, but their wide distribution and audience penetration, combined with Tarantino's status as a frequently critically-acclaimed auteur, means they are especially well-positioned to have a sustained impact on the historical imaginary.

Inglourious Basterds

Writer-director Quentin Tarantino's 2009 film, *Inglourious Basterds*, rescripts the end of World War II as a violent spectacle of Jewish revenge for Nazi atrocities. The title refers to a guerilla unit consisting primarily of Jewish American soldiers who wage a campaign of terror and mayhem against Nazi soldiers in occupied France. The film is also the story of Shosanna Dreyfus, a French Jew who escapes the slaughter of her family and successfully hides her identity as a movie theater owner in Paris. When a Nazi war hero becomes smitten with Shosanna, he insists that the premiere of the movie based on his exploits be screened at her theater. Shosanna and the Basterds, each unaware of the existence of the other, separately resolve to blow up the theater and thus kill the entire Nazi high command at the premiere. While most of the film adheres to typical genre conventions of historical fiction – telling a story in which the audience is aware that the main characters are fictional, but adhering to a widely-accepted vision of the past enough to not challenge viewer expectations – the final chapter of the film ruptures the accepted

narrative of the historical imaginary, as the dual plans of sabotage unexpectedly succeed, trapping the Nazi high command in a cinema set ablaze by Shoshanna, as two of the Basterds armed with machine guns obliterate Hitler and Goebbels. By alternating between aesthetics of excess and realism throughout the film, Tarantino defamiliarizes the war film genre, creating space to re-examine what we think we know about World War II. Ultimately, when *Inglourious Basterds* fully embraces the aesthetic of excess Tarantino is famous for in the climactic cinema fire, the moment is constructed in such a way to thwart the viewer's desire to identify with the protagonists, and instead positions the viewer as one of the occupying Nazis.

De Groot refers to *Inglourious Basterds* as “historical exploitation” (*Remaking History* 179), and categorizes it as a film which makes “the past something trashy, sensational, excessive, exploitative, flashy – aesthetically part of modernity, rather than a discourse of ‘history’” (175). De Groot argues that that such an aesthetic brings audience attention to the act of representation, and potentially offers audiences a means of seeing through cliché in order to “achieve a better communication of the grimness of events than can be achieved by a discourse – costume drama – that is somehow now a compromised mode” (179). However, the exploitation aesthetic is only one aspect of *Inglourious Basterds*, and it stands in contrast to the way in which Tarantino uses spoken language throughout the film to create an enhanced sense of historical realism. Unlike the majority of mainstream Hollywood films that have an international setting, which typically feature actors speaking English regardless of the characters' purported nationalities, *Inglourious Basterds* has international characters speak in their native languages unless some

believable justification is offered (as when a German character and a French character opt to converse in English because it is their strongest shared language). This choice creates a sense of realism that undercuts the expectations of the over-the-top exploitation aesthetic Tarantino has become known for, and also serves to underscore the distance between the viewer and the characters on screen – a forced reliance on subtitles is a means of hindering straightforward identification and encouraging a more circumspect engagement. This inclusion of and insistence on the foreignness of languages may function as a similar tactic to those examined by Landsberg in *Engaging the Past*; by constantly reminding the audience of the mediated nature of the film’s engagement with the past, they create a possible space for the formation of historical consciousness.

This historical consciousness, which Tarantino uses frequently-changing aesthetics and languages to foment, is often in direct opposition to the existing understanding of World War II in the historical imaginary. Rather than a clear-cut conflict in which the greatest members of the Greatest Generation triumph over the evils of Nazism on the battlefield, *Inglourious Basterds* focuses on guerilla warfare, spies, and sabotage. In recruiting the Basterds, Lt. Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) speaks exclusively about the need to do violence to Nazis (“Nazi ain’t got no humanity. They’re the foot soldiers of a Jew-hatin’, mass-muderin’ maniac and they need to be destroyed”), without any indication of patriotic sentiment. This is a striking departure from other cinematic monologues that have shaped conceptions of the period. For example, in *Patton* (1970), General Patton’s speech to the troops begins with an affirmation of American triumphalism. Patton declares that “All real Americans love the sting of battle,”

“Americans play to win all the time,” and “Americans have never lost and will never lose a war, because the very thought of losing is hateful to Americans.” By contrast, *Inglourious Basterds* does not include any discussion or demonstration of inherent American virtue.

Additionally, throughout the film, Tarantino includes reminders of America’s own history of racial oppressions. In one aside, Goebbels is seen in conversation with other Nazis saying [subtitled] “It’s only the offspring of slaves that allows America to be competitive athletically.” This moment frames Jesse Owens’ famous victory in the 1936 Olympics, which is frequently remembered as a triumph of American meritocracy over Nazi racism, in terms of American racism. In another sequence, Nazi soldiers are shown playing multiple rounds of a barroom game in which a person tries to determine the famous individual they have been assigned by asking yes or no questions. In the first round depicted on-screen, a Nazi soldier excitedly deduces that he is “Winnetou, chief of the Apaches!” This is a character from American Western themed German stories published by Karl May between 1875 and 1910, which remain popular in Germany to this day (Kimmelman “In Germany, Wild for Winnetou”). The second time we see the game played, the participants are a Gestapo officer and a group of spies attempting to maintain their cover. The Gestapo officer’s card reads “King Kong,” however the answers to his questions (including, [subtitled] “Am I German?” “Am I American?” “My native land, is it what one would call, exotic?” “Okay, my native land is the jungle, I visited America, my visit was not fortuitous for me, but the implication is that it was to somebody else [. . .] Did I go against my will?”) leads him to ask “Am I the story of the

Negro in America?” before guessing correctly. The dialogue pointedly references forced transportation, being bound in chains, and being displayed in America for the profit of others, and this, along with the more fleeting reference to Native Americans, complicate a tendency of representations of World War II to portray Nazi racism as in direct opposition to American tolerance. *Inglourious Basterds* depicts multiple instances of Nazis speaking approvingly or joking about American racism – something with which they clearly feel in sympathy.

One of Tarantino’s most consistent challenges to the historical imaginary throughout the film is this discarding of hagiographic narratives of American participation in World War II. Characters on either side of the conflict are equally likely as individuals to be charming or grating, or to be savvy or incompetent. All engage in acts of extreme brutality towards their enemies, and the film largely relies on the viewers preexisting knowledge of the Nazis’ crimes to justify the acts perpetrated against them by the Allied protagonists. Tarantino repeatedly puts the viewer in a position of uncertainty regarding the motivations of the characters and whether or not to be sympathetic toward them, thus urging more complex engagements than are typically present in the historical imaginary. This can be seen in two of the film’s most memorable scenes: the behind-enemy-lines infiltration of tavern populated with Nazi soldiers by three guerillas making contact with a spy, and the opening interrogation of a French farmer as to the whereabouts of his Jewish neighbors by SS Colonel Hans Landa (Christoph Waltz).

The tavern scene in particular appears to serve primarily as a critique of previous World War II movies that portray such spy work as near-effortless; much of the scene’s

tension arises from the fact that, though he speaks fluent German, one of the infiltrators (Lieutenant Archie Hicox, played by Michael Fassbender) raises the suspicion of a gestapo officer with his “very unusual” (i.e. British) accent. This comes as a surprise to Hicox and the presumed English-speaking American viewer, who are equally unable to immediately hear the nuances of German pronunciation. Indeed, Hicox is so confident in his German that he speaks more frequently and louder than the actual Germans accompanying him, thus drawing the attention of the Gestapo in the first place. Though Hicox is able to offer a convincing story to explain his accent, this moment of wrong-footedness establishes the extremely tenuous nature of the deception, and creates an environment of heightened tension, in which both the characters and the viewer increasingly scrutinize every moment for its potential to raise suspicion. When Hicox finally does blow his cover, leading to his own death and the death of almost everyone else in the tavern, neither he nor the viewer is meant to know what he did wrong. The moment is not explained until a later scene, when the tavern’s sole survivor tells Raine that Hicox outed himself by ordering three glasses by holding up three fingers, and the German gesture for three is two fingers and the thumb. This moment of confusion further underlines the precarity of spy work, in which a literal small gesture can collapse an entire mission. In an interview with Elvis Mitchell, Tarantino explains the significance of language to his writing of the film saying,

If you can pull off the language, you could survive in enemy territory [. . .] That’s the thing when they leave out of other war movies – because in *Where Eagles Dare*, German is English and apparently Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood

...speak German so magnificently great all they have to do is put on a costume and they can hang out in the general's club. To me – forget about the fact I don't buy it, it's also the fact that you've got possibly one of the most suspenseful sequences here, but you're pissing it away by English being German. (Brad Pitt & Quentin Tarantino Interview)

While Tarantino's critique of other World War II movies is primarily an artistic one about a wasted storytelling opportunity, he prefaces it with the idea that using English to represent all languages in a multilingual world is insufficiently realistic. At significant moments throughout the film, Tarantino avoids his usual over-the-top aesthetic, minimizing music and editing in favor of focusing viewer attention on the tension between characters and the growing sense of dread that someone will eventually slip up. In terms of engagement with the historical imaginary, these moments serve to establish the film's credibility as a meaningful engagement with the past. Here the history of World War II is presented to the audience in scenes which echo previous cinematic engagements with the era, and the legitimacy of this version is heightened by the use of the complications of language and disguise – something that viewers may not have considered before, but should immediately ring true – as the primary drivers of suspense and conflict, rather than the so-called excesses that viewers familiar with Tarantino's work have come to expect. Importantly, they also serve to denaturalize the experience of simply watching the movie, and instead invite the viewer to apply increased scrutiny to character interactions. This, combined with the use of multiple languages and subtitles and significant consequences for mistakes invisible to both characters and the audience,

holds the viewer at a distance from the characters, inviting a more meaningful cognitive engagement with the world of the film.

However, even before the major departure from expected history in the film's third act, *Inglourious Basterds* frequently includes signals (such as title cards, voice over, and visual and aural homages to 1970s films) to remind the viewer of its fictional nature – oscillating back and forth between realism and excess numerous times. The film opens with a title card which reads “Chapter One: Once Upon a Time..... in Nazi-Occupied France,” followed by a fade-in on an idyllic hillside farm – a small cottage, laundry on the line, cows, and the figure of a man chopping wood, with an overlaid title giving the year as 1941. The only sound is the diegetic noise of the man's ax hitting the stump at regular intervals, until one of his daughters spreads a sheet on the clothes line and, after a moment's hesitation, pulls it back like a curtain to reveal an approaching car and motorcycles. This triggers both the film's soundtrack – an apparent blending of Beethoven's “Für Elise” and music inspired by the well-known themes of Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns – and an immediate response from the characters on-screen. The initial moments of quiet realism are thus surrounded by three signals that what we are about to see is fiction, rooting the film primarily in references to performativity and other films rather than in history: the opening of “Once Upon a Time.....,” the visual of the sheet acting as a stage curtain, and the beginning of a soundtrack which connects this moment to a specific era and style of genre filmmaking. This aural reference to Leone also raises the possibility of a dual meaning in the chapter title – is it the invocation of a fairy tale, a

reference to the Leone film *Once Upon a Time in the West*, which shares *Inglourious Basterds*' concern with vengeance as well as stylistic elements, or both?

These choices do, in de Groot's terms, "render explicit the action of representing the past" (*Remaking History* 175), but the fact that the act of representation is alternately foregrounded and diminished throughout the film indicates that this should not be read simply as a film about historical filmmaking. A key element of Tarantino's filmmaking style is pastiche, a combination of recognizable elements from other sources or, in Richard Dyer's definition, "a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation" (1). Dyer argues that pastiche is not a necessarily hollow gesture, but one which can "allow us to feel our connection to the affective frameworks, the structures of feeling, past and present, that we inherit and pass on" (180). While the use of music to evoke a certain mood is an almost universal tool in cinema, Tarantino uses pastiche, particularly aural pastiche, to provide more exact signals to the audience as to how to feel about the action on screen – the pastiche of Leone's music to indicate the approaching motorcade is likely a threat, the use of 1970s exploitation film-style title fonts and music to establish Hugo Stiglitz (Til Schweiger) as single-minded killer of Nazis, and the playing of David Bowie's "Cat People (Putting Out Fire)" as Shosanna prepares for her ultimate plan to burn down her theater on "Nazi Night," all evoke affective connections to previous films or eras of filmmaking and are in keeping with Tarantino's intertextual style.

However, in sequences which are inflected with ambiguity these signals to the viewer disappear entirely, and their sudden absence creates a greater sense of unease than

if Tarantino's pastiche-filled "trash aesthetic" had never been present. To continue the earlier example of the film's beginning: after the arrival of the Nazi motorcade – accompanied by a striking soundtrack, visual cues of the film's fictional nature, and unobtrusive but very active editing (in which the camera cuts between a variety of shots) – SS Colonel Hans Landa (Christoph Waltz) questions the French farmer Monsieur LaPadite alone in the farmhouse. LaPadite's three daughters as well as the soldiers who accompanied Landa wait outside. Introducing the presence of these characters in order to exclude them heightens the sense of intimacy in the conversation between Landa and LaPadite; they are alone by Landa's design, rather than by chance, leaving the audience to wonder why. At this point the viewer knows very little about the characters. LaPadite is physically imposing, rugged, and taciturn, while Landa is apparently charming, gregarious, and loquacious. He behaves ingratiatingly as he introduces himself to LaPadite, and his aggressive friendliness as he praises quality of the milk produced by the farmer's cows and the beauty of his daughters is at odds with the horrors signified by his uniform and rank. The audience thus goes into the scene of their conversation (or interrogation masquerading as conversation) with one character who provides us with very little, and another who purports to provide a great deal but whom we have reason to distrust.

Rather than continuing to signal the audience as to how to feel or what type of story is being told, Tarantino presents this scene with a minimalist aesthetic that stands in stark contrast to the action immediately preceding it. Just as the isolation of Landa and LaPadite is heightened by our having seen the other characters being sent outside, the

ambiguous quiet of this scene is heightened by the almost bombastic surplus of meanings provided immediately before. The scene is not accompanied by any music and little editing. Landa and LaPadite sit facing each other, and both are shown in profile. Throughout the scene, the camera is restricted to one of three framings: either a shot in which both men are visible, or a closer view that shows one of the conversation's participants and then the other using shot-reverse shot formation. Throughout, the position of the camera remains unchanged; the men are only shown in profile from the same vantage point. The only exception to this is a brief shot of Shosanna, a young Jewish woman hiding beneath the floorboards with her family, attempting to stifle any noise she may make by covering her mouth. This shot replaces ambiguity with suspense; the viewer now knows that LaPadite is hiding the family and Landa is looking for them. The scene's minimalism continues, and neither character indicates the internal state beneath what we now know to be their façade (the farmer's projection of ignorance as to the whereabouts of the Dreyfus family, and the Nazi's projection of genteel friendliness). The scene requires the viewer to attempt to parse the internal states of unreadable characters, without any assistance from the type of visual and aural signals Tarantino has primed viewers to expect through the opening that led in to this moment. The portrayal of the characters here is in contradistinction to the stock types present in the historical imaginary, which does not tend to include charming, solicitous Nazis or gruff, hyper-masculine Frenchmen. The narratives of the historical imaginary do not sufficiently prepare a viewer to read the scene, and as a result it asks us to consider what is missing from our understanding of this period. It is not until LaPadite breaks down in tears,

betraying the location of the Dreyfus family and watching Landa order their execution, that an aesthetic of excess is reasserted.

By contrast the climactic scene in which the Nazi high command is destroyed in a burning movie theater, which serves as the Dreyfus family's sole survivor's response to the scene described above, is highly stylized, and based far more in a violent demonstration than in dialogue. She interrupts the film at a moment which is meant to represent the triumph of hegemonic power – the unstoppable soldier calling, “Does anyone have a message for Germany?” She then claims both a voice and visibility, seizing the spotlight and unmasking herself in a near-exact inverse of her introduction huddled beneath the floorboards. Rather than a lengthy monologue, in her film she says simply, “I have a message for Germany. That you are all going to die. And I want you to look deep into the face of the Jew that is going to do it. Marcel, burn it down.” As the theater rapidly burns due to a fire set by hundreds of nitrate films and those in the cinema scream and attempt to flee, Shosanna's voice can be heard saying, “My name is Shosanna Dreyfus, and this is Jewish vengeance” accompanied by her laughter and her ghostly image reflecting within the ruined cinema.

While Landa could be confident that his position of power meant that he could command the attention of whomever he addressed, Shosanna is aware that the Nazis will attempt to reject her words and destroy her person – though the Holocaust is never directly addressed on screen in *Inglourious Basterds*, it is the near-constant subtext which motivates every Jewish character. It is only through spectacular violence – her “giant face” (as it is referred to in the chapter title that precedes the scene) on screen, and the

massive fire consuming the theater – that she can effectively contest the Nazi definition of her. As the “giant face” she destroys the story the Nazis’ attempt to tell their own story, puncturing the narrative of hegemonic power with her insistence on her own visibility and self-definition. Her vengeance can also only occur through the mediation of the camera; she forces the Nazis into the position of passive viewer, who have no option to leave or look away, and the fact that she has chosen to make her address through film means that even her death (which occurs before her film plays), cannot silence her. As the theater burns, two of the Basterds burst into the box where Hitler and Goebbels were seated, destroying both beyond all recognition with machine gun fire.

This is the moment at which the film breaks, entirely and irrevocably, with the historical imaginary. World War II, at least in Europe, ends in a literal blaze of Jewish fury and vengeance for Nazi crimes. This likely comes as a surprise to the viewer, as it is in defiance of the genre conventions of historical fiction. More importantly, it opens space to consider both the past and the present moment in ways leaving the historical imaginary unchallenged does not. On the one hand, it is the fulfillment of what is likely a common revenge fantasy – the desire to punish the wrongs of the past as no one who was present at the time did. But it also challenges the conception of the past as something inert and inevitable, and asks us to take seriously the possibility that things could very easily have been different than they were.

However, it is also a scene which is very much in dialogue with the present in its construction. Throughout, Tarantino aligns the viewers with the doomed Nazis and collaborators, rather than the Jewish characters we have followed up to this point. While

the viewer has been positioned to identify with Shosanna throughout the film, it is telling that at this moment in the narrative the spectator has far more in common with the Nazi high command than the woman seeking to destroy them. The Nazis have gathered in Shosanna's cinema to watch a film that glorifies a World War II victory they are eager to re-live. Beyond that, the film they are watching is – judging by the characters' reactions and what little is shown on screen – a particularly violent one, and one in which the spectators find humor in the violence. While the film has made explicit that all in attendance are Nazis and their French collaborators, they overwhelmingly do not look that way (i.e. many do not wear military uniforms or other symbols of their affiliation), rather they appear simply as a large gathering of men and women watching a violent war movie – the exact position of the spectator who in previous moments may have cheered vicious stabbings, beatings, and shootings carried out against their perceived onscreen enemies. Shosanna is interrupting *our* movie as well as theirs – her cut to the Nazi film is also what severs *Inglourious Basterds* from the expectations we have brought to the trajectory of the history we believed it would tell. Most importantly, Shosanna's on-screen persona hails the cinema audience in English, despite the fact that her supposed audience is German-speaking, and that *Inglourious Basterds* has already established that the character only speaks French. In spite of saying that her message is for Germany, it is the contemporary American audience that has been forced into the position of the startled Nazis. Tarantino's construction of a shared moment of spectatorship between contemporary viewers of his film and Nazi viewers of the film within it suggest a shared complicity between the two groups. This moment encourages us to consider our

culpability in the present moment – who is being victimized by state violence, and where do we stand in the conflict?

Inglourious Basterds was positively reviewed for its artistic merits, but its portrayal of Jewish characters engaged in violent revenge against the Nazis was controversial. As discussed by Rosenfeld in *Hi, Hitler!*, some critics celebrated the way the film “liberated the Jew from his cinematic role as victim” (285), while others “objected to the film’s fictional depiction of Jews doing to the Nazis what they had actually suffered at their hands in real history” (286). This concern is likely rooted in Tarantino’s decision to rely almost entirely on the viewer’s knowledge of the Holocaust as sufficient motivation for its Jewish characters. While the Basterds and Shosanna do enact brutal violence against the Nazis, it is entirely focused on military targets. To say the film portrays Jews as acting like Nazis because they engage in brutality against Nazi soldiers is to lose sight of the systematic murder of millions of civilians that defines the Nazi regime (even in Tarantino’s film, it is only Nazis who are shown killing civilians). According to Rosenfeld, the film was also seen by various critics as speaking to both sides of the current Israeli-Palestinian debate; it was alternately read as an affirmation of the need for strong military self-defense for Israel, and an unflattering depiction of Jews as terrorists (287). This wide variety of critical readings demonstrates the challenges of legibility outside the bounds of the historical imaginary, but also demonstrates some of the ways in which challenging accepted narratives can open spaces for new kinds of understanding of both the past and the way it reflects on the present. *Inglourious Basterds* is undoubtedly a messy engagement with cinematic depictions and popular

understandings of the fighting of World War II in Europe, but that messiness is potentially useful in disrupting the overly-tidy narratives that have come to dominate the historical imaginary. Tarantino's decision to save the film's departure from audience's expectations of historic events from the timeline until the third act and to structure the first two acts around stylistic choices designed to build the film's credibility as a work of historical fiction, while maintaining the pastiche and ultraviolence audiences expect of Tarantino, means that the demise of the Nazi high command at the hands of vengeful Jews is a potent moment with potential to shock audience members. Subverting the expectations of historical fiction the film has built, without any initial signal it is intended to function as alternate history, creates a potent moment which challenges the sense of history's inevitability that dominates the historical imaginary.

Django Unchained

Tarantino followed *Inglourious Basterds* with another film likely to fit the categorization of historical exploitation, *Django Unchained* (2012). Like *Inglourious Basterds*, *Django Unchained* addresses a systemic historical atrocity through the lens of a revenge fantasy; while *Inglourious Basterds* depicted American and French Jews seeking spectacular revenge on the Nazi high command and their collaborators for the horrors of the Holocaust, *Django Unchained* is the story of a freed slave's destruction of the beneficiaries of the plantation system and those who support them as vengeance for the degradations he and his wife have suffered. *Django Unchained* follows Django (Jamie Foxx), a slave who is bought, freed, and befriended by King Shultz (Christoph Waltz), a

white bounty hunter who needs his help finding the men who were once overseers at the plantation where he lived. After those men are dispatched, Shultz convinces Django to become his business partner for the winter, with the understanding that in the Spring they will return to Mississippi to find and free Django's wife, Broomhilda. They find she has been purchased by Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio), the wealthy of the Candieland plantation whose main hobby is forcing slaves to fight to the death for his amusement. They feign the intention of purchasing one of his fighters for a high price in order to gain access to the plantation and find Broomhilda. However, they are discovered, and after Schultz kills Candie, and is then killed by Candie's men in return, Django and Hildy are recaptured and separated. Django escapes from slavery once again, and returns to rescue Candieland and free Hildy. Throughout *Django Unchained*, Tarantino seeks to mediate two narratives of American slavery that compete for primacy in the American historical imaginary, and uses alternately aestheticized and gruesome violence to contest portrayals of slavery that romanticize the antebellum South, or portray chattel slavery as unfortunate but palatable. *Django Unchained* ultimately rejects the depiction of slavery as the result of a few bad actors or simply a product of its time, but instead seeks to implicate all who benefitted from or tolerated slavery, as well as contemporary viewers in the perpetuation of racial violence. This works in direct contradiction to the prevailing narratives of the historical imaginary, which as previous chapters have demonstrate, tend to regard racial violence and oppression of the past being defined by interpersonal interactions, rather than systemic injustices.

Though *Django Unchained* was, like *Inglourious Basterds*, well reviewed (the two films earned 88% and 89% on the review aggregate site *Rotten Tomatoes*), it proved to be a more controversial film. In all likelihood, this is because American chattel slavery remains a more controversial topic in the United States than the Holocaust – whether slavery was really “all that bad,” continues to be the subject of mainstream debates about history in a way the events of the Holocaust are not. For example, a 2014 review (later withdrawn) of Edward Baptist’s *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* in *The Economist* included the critique, “Mr. Baptist has not written an objective history of slavery. Almost all the blacks in his book are victims, almost all the whites villains. This is not history; it is advocacy.” In response to criticism *The Economist* issued an apology which acknowledged, “slavery was an evil system, in which the great majority of victims were blacks, and the great majority of whites involved in slavery were willing participants and beneficiaries of that evil.” It remains striking, however, that this clarification was necessary, and that a review which assumed a true work of “history” would find the ways in which the system of slavery did not uniquely oppress black people or reflect poorly on white people in the name of objectivity was published at all. In another revealing instance, during her 2016 Democratic National Convention speech, Michelle Obama mentioned the fact that the White House had been built by slaves (a well-documented historical reality). As described in the *New York Times*, this fact “was met with derision and disbelief by some, who questioned whether it was true and said her choice to mention it amounted to an attempt to divide the country along racial lines” (Davis). These instances illustrate how

the realities of slavery and its atrocities remain up for debate in mainstream discourse, unlike the accepted history of Nazi atrocities in World War II.

In terms of the historical imaginary, the history of slavery remains more in flux in the United States than many other aspects of the nation's past – idyllic images of the antebellum South from magnolia myth films like *Gone With the Wind* compete with those, like the landmark miniseries *Roots*, which attempt to unflinchingly portray the horrors of slavery. Understandings of the historical imaginary have come to uneasy compromises in their narratives of slavery as bad, but not “too bad.” Individuals who owned slaves, particularly Founding Fathers, may still be beloved and admired, and are defended today as a product of their time, who did not and could not be expected to know better. This sanitized version of slavery's history is often challenged, but has not yet been overthrown. As a result of this continuing tension, any major Hollywood film about slavery faces intense scrutiny from an array of viewers with strongly held stakes in the depiction of that chapter in American history – those seeking a depiction of slavery which is not so negative as to be troubling, or at least one which provides sympathetic white characters with which to identify, and those seeking a depiction which challenges the sanitized view of American history, and provides a “realistic” depiction of a system of oppression which has been given sparse on-screen attention over the years.

Django Unchained seems almost intentionally crafted to trouble both groups. The film goes out of its way to show, in often-grotesque imagery, the violent degradations of slavery, which serves as a constant challenge to the persistent myths of benevolent slave ownership. In addition to scenes that show slaves being whipped, which have come to be

expected in depictions of slavery, *Django Unchained* depicts tortures that most viewers are unlikely to have seen before, such as pronged iron collars, iron gags, and a hot box. Django is nearly castrated at one point, and his wife, Hildy, is offered as a sexual plaything to multiple men. In a particularly gruesome scene, a slave who has attempted to escape is ripped apart by dogs. This scene is unexpectedly flashed back to later, so even those viewers who choose to avert their eyes when the moment initially occurs will be forced to see images from it. The plot is driven, in part, by the practice of “Mandingo fighting,” forcing slaves to fight to the death for their owner’s amusement, and one such fight is shown at length. In all of these choices, *Django Unchained* seeks to very intentionally challenge narratives that portray slavery as “not so bad,” or are more interested in the perceived glamour of the antebellum plantation than in examining the suffering which it was built upon.

However, *Django Unchained* provides a white benefactor and mentor for Django in the character of Dr. King Schultz, who frees Django from slavery, offers him a path forward as his partner in bounty hunting, teaches him to read and shoot, masterminds their plan to free Django’s wife from her enslavement, and ultimately kills the sadistic plantation owner, Calvin Candie. In his critique of the film, actor and activist Jesse Williams argues that it is Schultz, rather than Django, who is the film’s true hero, and that black characters exhibit little agency or interest in obtaining their freedom. However, this critique also overlooks the ways in which Schultz bears responsibility for the difficulties Django faces throughout the movie. Schultz, it is repeatedly demonstrated in sequences in which he and Django locate various fugitives as bounty hunters, has a

fondness for dramatics and unnecessarily complex plans. It is his insistence on disguise and subterfuge that leads to disaster when they are found out as having come to Calvin Candie's plantation on false pretenses. In what could have been their final moments on the plantation, he ruins his and Django's attempt to purchase Hildy's freedom by first humiliating Candie through his superior knowledge of French literature (an area of sensitivity he was warned about before meeting Candie), refusing to shake his hand, and then finally killing him. Schultz, as portrayed by Christoph Waltz, is a charming presence on-screen, and the scene in which Django bids a fond "Auf wiedersehen" (that Schultz is a foreigner is repeatedly emphasized throughout the film) to Schultz's corpse is presented, through the soundtrack, lighting, and lingering camera shots, as a straightforward moment of melodramatic tragedy. However, in spite of the bond between Schultz and Django, it would be an oversimplification to understand Schultz as simply a good white man who serves as a convenient character that lets white people off the hook. While Schultz helps Django in many ways, he also serves as an unnecessary hinderance to enslaved characters' freedom due to his insistence on spinning complex fantasies, much as Tom Sawyer does in the final chapters of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This, and the fact that the film continues beyond Schultz's death – that Django must ultimately free himself and rescue his wife without any benefactor – demonstrates that the character's function to the story is more complex than criticism such as Williams' allows.

Williams also argues that while Tarantino has stated the film's near-constant use of the word "nigger" is in the service of "authenticity," that commitment to authenticity

disappears when actually depicting historical conditions. Williams notes that the film almost completely ignores the existence of slaves forced to work in the fields, much less their backbreaking labor. In describing Candie's plantation Williams writes, "is this one of those rare slave plantations that primarily trades in polished silverware and gossip? That authenticity card that Tarantino used to buy all those 'niggers' has an awfully selective memory." This and other inaccuracies about the material reality of plantation life leads Williams to describe *Django Unchained* as a "lazy, oversimplified reduction of our history." However, as in *Inglourious Basterds*, Tarantino seems to be seeking a visceral response, one which raises questions about the past via affective engagement, rather than a conveyance of historical fact. This is a potentially useful means of challenging the historical imaginary; by pushing the viewer towards a different kind of affective engagement with the past, Tarantino may trigger a re-examination of what has previously been uncritically accepted. In an interview with Terry Gross, Tarantino states,

There haven't been that many slave narratives in the last 40 years of cinema, and usually when there are, they're usually done on television, and for the most part [. . .] they're historical movies, like history with a capital H. [. . .] And that can be fine, well enough, but for the most part they keep you at arm's length dramatically. Because also there is this kind of level of good taste that they're trying to deal with [. . .] and frankly oftentimes they just feel like dusty textbooks just barely dramatized (NPR).

Like *Inglourious Basterds*, *Django Unchained* does not attempt to function as a text which teaches a given history, but one in which the audience is encouraged to imagine a

particular history in an unexpected way. This challenges the sense of inevitability that often accompanies the telling of historical events. By encouraging viewers to understand the past as a dynamic space of possibilities, where the course of history was determined not by fate, but by the choices of the individuals who lived then, this strategy for intervening in the historical imaginary may also encourage viewers to consider themselves as active in their own historic moment. While most of the dramatic devices Tarantino draws on have some basis in history, the “Mandingo fighting,” notably, does not. Rather, this is a device which originates in the 1975 blaxploitation film *Mandingo* – a genre of which Tarantino is a well-known enthusiast (Harris). This, and the above quote, are both indications of the fact that *Django Unchained* is, in many ways, a direct response to understandings of the history of slavery which are firmly ensconced in the historical imaginary, but were not generated by conventional historical methods.

As Linda Williams argues in *Playing the Race Card*, the history of slavery in the United States and, by extension, contemporary race relations, has been worked and reworked through media since before the Civil War. She identifies two conflicting narratives of American racial identity – “the vision of a black man beaten by a white and the responding ‘counter’ vision of the white woman endangered or raped by the emancipated and uppity black villain” (5). Williams sees the former as originating in the Harriet Beecher Stowe novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (and particularly its stage and early screen adaptations) and the latter as first crystallizing in D.W. Griffith’s notorious film *The Birth of a Nation*. Williams writes that these two narratives are foundational texts in the formation of American identity, and their uses of melodrama – either in “discovering

the suffering humanity of slaves” or in introducing “the racially threatened white woman” (7) – continue to be the narratives by which we understand the history and contemporary reality of race in the United States. In spite of their conflicting nature, both of these narratives are present in the historical imaginary.

Django Unchained's intervention into the historical imaginary is that it attempts to rework both of these narratives simultaneously; the film draws on the familiar tropes established in melodramas of suffering black bodies outlined by Williams, but it also works to subvert what she refers to as the “‘anti-Tom’ reversal” (7) generated in works such *The Birth of a Nation*. The suffering inflicted on Django and other slaves throughout the film is of a piece with previous narratives’ “generation of ‘moral legibility’ (Brooks, 1995) through the spectacle of racialized bodily suffering” (xiv). However, Django’s response to his suffering is a marked departure from that of the black protagonists of other melodramatic works. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as well as in the landmark 1977 miniseries *Roots*, the black men through whose bodily suffering the audience sees the outrage of slavery and the indefensibility of the slave system ultimately die at the end of their suffering. Tom is beaten to death after refusing to betray the location of two escaped slaves, and Kunta Kinte, the founding patriarch of the family whose story *Roots* follows, endures whipping and the severing of his foot, as well as the emotional trauma of family separation when his wife and daughter are sold to different plantations before he dies. Django, by contrast, does not perform perfect victimhood in response to his suffering. After entering into partnership with Schultz, Django ultimately kills all the white people (with the exception of Calvin Candie, previously dispatched by Schultz) who have

worked to support the plantations where he and his wife endured the traumas of slavery – the overseers who beat them; the slave catchers who apprehend Hildy and other slaves in their attempts to escape; the henchmen who threaten and torture Django; Calvin Candie’s sister, who supervises the prostituting of attractive slaves like Hildy to plantation guests; and Stephen, the head house slave, whose near-minstrel levels of obsequious devotion to Candie masks the fact that he masterminds much of the plantation’s management.

While Django’s vengeance is thematically of a piece with the Jewish vengeance portrayed in *Inglourious Basterds*, it is a dramatic departure from the responses to racial violence that have been deemed acceptable in discourses around slavery and its aftermath. The victims of slavery are seen as a threat to the current social order in a way the victims of the Holocaust are not, and as a result claims that black men are innocent victims of racial violence continue to be aggressively interrogated in media discourses. The framing of black men as inherently criminal and threatening has persisted for centuries, and must be addressed before black men can be conceived of as victims. One real-world example of a successful navigation of those narratives is Mamie Till, the mother of lynching victim Emmett Till, who mobilized her son’s murder as a major moment in Civil Rights history. In an interview with Rich Juzwiak, Timothy Tyson, author of *The Blood of Emmett Till*, argues that Mamie Till “dramatizes the lynching of her son as a way to topple the social order that killed him,” and was able to do so, in part, because she was savvy enough to rescript part of the events that led to his killing. As Tyson recounts,

She knows that any perception of sexual interest or sexual playfulness from her son to Carolyn Bryant will turn that into justifiable homicide in the unconsciousness of America, but also in the literal sense, and so regarding the whistling piece of it, she says, ‘He had a speech impediment and so I told him if he couldn’t get his words out to whistle.’ That’s just a fabrication, but she’s spinning a difficult piece of it – he did whistle at [Bryant], that’s sort of agreed upon – but she’s trying to get America to look at his humanity and to look at the inhumanity of the racial caste system in America.

Tyson’s description of Mamie Till’s recognition of the need to shift the narrative of her son’s lynching from, in William’s terms, an “anti-Tom” to a “Tom” narrative in order to establish her son’s killing as unjust continues to be relevant in the contemporary media landscape, where victims of racial violence such as Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Eric Garner are argued to have somehow brought on their deaths by alleged wrongdoings in their lives prior to their final moments. Throughout American history to the present moment, black men’s claims to victimhood have been routinely rejected because of the presumption that black men cannot be innocent.

While racial melodramas such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* tend to combat this by portraying the suffering black man as beyond reproach, *Django Unchained* instead rejects the impulse to shape its hero as a martyr in order to claim audience sympathy. Like his cinematic predecessors, Django suffers the physical traumas and humiliations of slavery. However, rather than remaining morally superior by remaining unbroken in spirit and refusing to sink to his oppressors’ level of cruelty, thus creating the easy moral legibility

typical of melodrama, Django eagerly repays humiliation with humiliation. When he encounters the overseers who whipped his wife, he first shoots the one who mocked his pleas to spare her, repeating back the overseer's sadistic "I like the way you beg, boy," as, "I like the way you die, boy." He then drops his gun and takes up the whip himself, brutally beating the second overseer as he squirms on the ground. When Django realizes other slaves are watching him, his rage at seeing the men he could not prevent from torturing his wife fades, and he calmly asks, "Y'all want to see something?" before once again taking up his gun and shooting the beaten man multiple times.

This moment is the first illustration of a theme that continues the length of the movie, wherein in order to free his wife and seek revenge for what they have suffered, Django repeatedly duplicates the actions or attitudes of his hated oppressors. In order to infiltrate Candie's plantation, Django takes on the role of a black slaver, which forces him to berate slaves and overrule Schultz's attempt to save the slave d'Artagnan from being eaten by dogs. Their charade ultimately fails, but in the final scene Django once again echoes the actions of his oppressors with his own in enacting his revenge. Like the movie theater finale of *Inglourious Basterds*, the conclusion of *Django Unchained* is a dramatic departure from expected history, in which the forces of hegemonic power are abruptly overturned, rather than preserved in the name of historical authenticity.

Django's mirroring of his despicable tormentors throughout the film does not, in turn, reduce him to a despicable figure, but it does render him more morally complex than the typical protagonist of a racial melodrama. One way in which the film elevates Django above his antagonists is through its portrayal of their violence. The violence

enacted by the proponents of the slave system is graphic and difficult to watch – Hildy being whipped, d’Artagnan being devoured by dogs, and Django nearly being castrated are all moments that repel the viewer with visceral gruesomeness. Django’s violence, by contrast, is highly aestheticized – the camera lingers admiringly on Django in outlandish costumes striking powerful poses, and one of the film’s most famous shots is of the vibrant red blood of an executed overseer attractively sprayed across bright white cotton. The violence inflicted by Django is shot to be attractive rather than gruesome, and condoned by Tarantino’s aesthetic of excess.

In the film’s finale, Django appears at the top of the house’s staircase, wearing Candie’s clothes and smoking with his cigarette holder, a visual display of his contempt for a man and system that positioned him as lower. Rather than an inherent inferior, as Candie insists Django is via a monologue about phrenology, Django is positioning himself as in every way equal to and above the beneficiaries of plantation life. In Homi Bhabha’s terms, Django is offering resistance through mimicry, a moment in which “the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity*” [emphasis original] (129). Django uses his gun to castrate Billy Crash, Candie’s henchman who gleefully attempted to do the same to him earlier in the film, and kills Candie’s sister after first instructing another slave to say goodbye to her – a nod to the insidious gentility with which the woman has participated in the functioning of the plantation. Django then instructs the remaining slaves to flee, except Stephen, the head house slave.

Throughout the film, Stephen (portrayed by Samuel L. Jackson) is revealed to be the true mastermind behind the plantation on which he lives. While he performs over-the-top subservience around other people, in private with Calvin Candie he shows himself to be the equal, or even superior, of his supposed master. He is also the one who recognizes the connection between Hildy and Django, ruining Django's attempt to buy his wife's freedom, and it is Stephen who devises Django's punishment for his role in the death of Calvin Candie. While on the surface it may seem unsatisfying that it is Schultz, not Django, who kills Calvin Candie, the fact that the film continues well after Candie's death indicates that he is not the true villain as the audience has been led to expect. The plantation continues to exist, and the system by which it is run will remain unchanged, without him. While Candie is the primary beneficiary of the plantation system, he does not have the power to perpetuate it alone. By setting Django against Candie's supporters and collaborators in the final scene, this film, much like *Inglourious Basterds* is making a larger argument about systemic oppression – that it is the collaborators who capitulate to hegemonic power for their own benefit (however minimal) who bear greatest responsibility for its perpetuation. This plays out in Django's final confrontation with Stephen, as he asserts his superiority to the plantation system. As Django descends the staircase towards Stephen he says,

Seventy-six years, Stephen. How many niggers you think you seen come and go?
Seven thousand? Eight thousand? Nine thousand? Nine thousand nine hundred
and ninety nine? Every single word that came out of Calvin Candie's mouth was

nothing but horseshit, but he was right about one thing: I am that one nigger in ten thousand.

As Django speaks, he descends the stairs towards Stephen, and the low angle shot camera's upward angle towards him emphasizes him as a powerful figure. The light shining from above causes the outline of his hat to take on the appearance of a halo, lending him the appearance of almost supernatural power. Stephen largely ignores what Django says, instead screaming and cursing at him, vowing that the plantation can never be destroyed. Django, in turn, ignores Stephen, setting off a fuse and completing his destruction of the authority built on Candie's words by having both the plantation house and Stephen consumed in a massive fireball.

The main way in which *Django Unchained* counters the melodramatic impulse to make Django sympathetic through a performance of perfect, noble, suffering is by inverting the typical "anti-Tom," melodramatic narrative. Rather than focusing on a sexually threatened white woman, *Django Unchained* is instead driven by the danger faced by a sexually threatened black woman. Like the white heroes of racist melodramas such as *Birth of a Nation* and its descendants, Django is valorized and his violence redeemed because he is motivated by a desire to defend the honor of the woman he loves. Django's devotion to his wife, and disinterest bordering on disdain for the film's only white female character, is a direct challenge to the stereotype of black men as sexually obsessed with white women, which Linda Williams traces to *Birth of a Nation*. The only reason the film seems to include a white woman at all, in the form of Calvin Candie's sister, Lara Lee Candie-Fitzwilly, is so that the protagonists can ignore her. The only man

who shows any interest in her at all is her own brother, whose somewhat too-intense fixation on his sister belies a troubling dynamic between the two and on the historic territoriality of white men around the sexuality of white women. Hildy, by contrast, spends the entire film facing the threat of rape and forced prostitution – first simply because she is a beautiful, enslaved woman, and then as retribution for her husband’s actions. It is thus Hildy’s virtue, rather than Django’s, that must remain beyond reproach for the morality of the film to function (in melodramatic terms, at least), and Hildy who performs noble, uncomplaining suffering. An unfortunate side effect of this is that Hildy is dramatically underwritten, and functions more as a MacGuffin motivating her husband than an individual with agency and ambitions of her own.

Django Unchained works to disrupt both the cinematic history and contemporary discourses of race in the American historical imaginary by subverting the two melodramatic discourses that have structured our understanding of the topic. In the final scene of the film, *Django Unchained* defies audience expectations of how a story about slavery must end – with the system of slavery either intact or ended with the conclusion of the Civil War. While the broader slave system continues to exist as Django and Hildy ride off from the smoldering ashes of Candie Land, this particular plantation (contrary to Stephen’s final words), is gone forever. Django’s successful vengeance and his focus on Candie’s enablers, rather than on Candie himself, invites the viewer to consider the fact that the trajectory of the history of slavery was not inevitable, and it was sustained for hundreds of years not by a few villainous individuals, but by widespread collaborative effort and indifference to black suffering. The film consistently challenges the narratives

of the historical imaginary in which slavery is simply an unfortunate chapter of American history by insisting on its horrific practices, and foregrounding its protagonist's righteous rage, rather than a more palatable performance of victimhood.

The Man in the High Castle

Unlike Tarantino's counterfactual history films, which depart from the expected trajectory of the past at the film's climactic moment, the Amazon.com series, *The Man in the High Castle* (based on Philip K. Dick's novel), takes place well after a dramatic departure from established history. The series is set in an alternative 1962 in which the Axis powers won World War II and the United States has been divided; the eastern portion of the country is controlled by the Germans and the western portion is controlled by the Japanese, with a slender "neutral zone" in between. At the point the series begins, Hitler's health is faltering, and the transition of power in the Nazi state threatens to destabilize relations between the two occupying nations. The series focuses on Joe Blake, a Nazi double agent, and Juliana Crain, a young woman who becomes caught up in the resistance after witnessing her sister's execution, as they navigate the ever-shifting political landscape and its frequent intersection with their family and personal lives. *The Man in the High Castle* is most effective in its construction of a simultaneously familiar and strange world that the characters inhabit, which works to denaturalize any sense of the inevitability of the past familiar to the viewer. As I address at below, the series also effectively challenges the viewer to consider their own complicity with state violence through the sometimes-frustrating inaction of its characters.

The question of “what would the world look like if the outcome of World War II had been different?” is one that has been asked in fiction from the time the war ended; Noël Coward’s play, *Peace in Our Time*, which imagines life in England if the Nazis had successfully invaded, was first produced in 1947. Both Gavriel Rosenfeld and Catherine Gallagher identified the question of a Nazi victory as among the most popular premises in alternate history works. Gallagher argues that World War II is a popular point of departure among alternate histories because “wars are believed to be full of unpredictable turning points, meeting the criteria of both contingency and plausibility” and “wars have long-range and wide-spread ramifications that affect all citizens in the nation, meeting the criterion of self-evident significance” (57). These criteria of contingency, plausibility, and self-evident significance are all met in *The Man in the High Castle*. However, the series is unique in that it is not simply a work of alternate history, but a work of multiple histories – in the second season it is revealed that newsreel footage is available from countless alternative timelines; there is no one *correct* history, simply the history with which characters are familiar. The audience is thus able to witness their own confusion and fascination with the familiar-but-strange world of an occupied United States reflected back at them by characters witnessing the defeat of the Axis powers on the man in the high castle’s mysterious newsreels. This affective mirroring between audience and characters emphasizes both the seemingly self-evident reality that history is not inevitable, that things could have been different, and the extreme difficulty of fathoming the full implications of such differences. In “Alternative History(s) and the Amazon Series *The Man in the High Castle*,” Chris Wahl describes this mirroring as “poetic and

evocative” (16). *The Man in the High Castle* also does not participate in the tradition of time-travel science fiction, a genre in which there tends to be a focus on the restoration or preservation of the “correct” timeline – characters may use knowledge gained from the newsreels to attempt to protect the future of their own world (such as to avert a nuclear attack on the Japanese territory) or even travel between realities, but there is no indication that characters can or want to change their timeline so it more closely resembles our own.

The Man in the High Castle focuses more on its function as a spy thriller than an exploration of its alternate history, and the unique world in which it is set often fades to the background in favor of story actions that could be set behind any number of enemy lines. However, the world building that occurs in the *mise-en-scène* throughout the series is engaging and unsettling, drawing the audience in with familiar markers of 1960s Americana, but then puncturing the moment with unsettling or shocking details. This is in keeping with Gallagher’s analysis of alternate history novels, including *The Man in the High Castle*. Gallagher writes, “the historical alteration in the novels permeates the level of commonplace individual lives, where habits of thought, modes of speech, and routines of daily life are registered” (58). The alternate history of *The Man in the High Castle* is most striking at this level of mundane, daily life: movie marquees advertising real actors in movies they never made, unfamiliar diegetic music with familiar genre markers, American characters absorbed in watch a sumo wrestling match on television in place of a football game, and so on. These smaller moments, more than the omnipresence of Nazi insignia or the threat of atomic warfare, emphasize the ways in which our daily lived experience is shaped by historic events. *The Man in the High Castle* challenges the

historical imaginary's tendency to hold the past at a comfortable distance from our choices in the present by asking us to consider how historic events continue to reverberate through daily life decades later. One of the most effective examples of this occurs during the first episode; a character driving a truck finds himself stranded on the side of the road with a flat tire. He is approached by a friendly highway patrolman, who helps change the tire with the toolkit he carries and then offers him a sandwich. The scene is shot in front of a corn field, and the neighborly officer's helpfulness and generosity are such that he seems like a character who could be at home on almost any post-War family sitcom.

But the moment remains uneasy for the viewer, who is unlikely to be able to overlook the officer's swastika armband or reichsadler badge. When curiosity about the officer's tattoo leads the characters to briefly reflect on the war, the officer casually says, "We lost the war, didn't we? Now I can't even remember what we were fighting for." This shrugging acceptance of the Nazis' global conquest would likely be unsettling enough, but before the viewer has time to process it, flakes of ash begin to fall on the two men. When the young truck driver asks what it is, the officer, without changing the casually affable tone he used when saying the other man must make his father proud, answers, "Oh, it's the hospital. Tuesdays they burn cripples, the terminally ill, [people who] drag on the state." Moments such as this encourage viewers to examine the ramifications of what might have been – an America that did not fight to end Nazi atrocities, but became so inured in them that they cease to be recognizable as horrifying. By allowing the viewer to contrast their own response with that of the characters, *The*

Man in the High Castle creates a disquieting picture of the ramifications of complacency with one's historic moment. This is especially relevant to audiences today, as debates and warnings about the dangers of "normalizing" extreme political rhetoric have proliferated since the 2016 election. *The Man in the High Castle*, on one level, offers an extended examination of the effects of normalizing the once-shocking.

The Man in the High Castle concerns two periods of American history simultaneously: the World War II era of the 1940s and the postwar era of the 1960s. While the events of World War II and its aftermath are shown to have shaped the world and its characters in significant ways, the series is set in the 1960s, and its aesthetic – particularly the hair and costuming of its characters – echoes the image of that time popularized on *Mad Men*. Viewers are thus required to examine what they know about both eras simultaneously in order to fully grasp the repercussions of the series' alternate history. For this reason, the decision to repurpose the highly recognizable Rodgers and Hammerstein song, "Eidelweiss" from *The Sound of Music* is a particularly appropriate choice for the opening credits. *The Sound of Music* was first produced on Broadway in 1959, and was adapted into a now-iconic 1965 film, making it, in some ways, an inverted mirror of *The Man in the High Castle* – a 1960s production about the 1940s in which the historical impacts of Nazism are dramatically diminished. Nazis in *The Sound of Music* are interpersonally unpleasant, but not overtly threatening – enthusiasm for the Third Reich makes teenaged Liesel's once-enthusiastic suitor Rolf an unsuitable partner for her, but largely because he becomes brusque and inattentive. Captain Von Trapp refuses to become a Nazi naval commander because he is an ardent Austrian patriot; he never

articulates an actual objection to Nazism. “Eidelweiss,” sung by Captain Von Trapp before the Anschluss as a symbol of familial affection and after as a message of resistance to German rule, “represented the indomitable spirit of the Austrians under Nazi control” (Garber).

This is a troubling reinterpretation of the relationship between Austria and Nazi Germany at the time of the Anschluss, one that casts resistance as the default stance of Austrians. The flower described in the song is hearty but, of course, passive. In this formulation, Austrians challenged the Nazis simply by their continued existence, and by remaining Austrian in their hearts. It ignores those who actually offered meaningful resistance to Nazism, and covers over the reality that silence and a focus on a continued peaceful existence, born either of pro-Nazi enthusiasm or the threat of violence, meant the default stance towards Nazi rule in Austria was acquiescence, not resistance. This reality is borne out in the depiction of the occupied United States in *The Man in the High Castle*, where, as Rosenfeld notes, “resistance is portrayed as less common than collaboration [. . .] For many Americans, resistance is too psychologically difficult to consider” (“Trump Gives Frightening New Relevance to *The Man in the High Castle*”). *The Man in the High Castle* thus invokes the depictions of responses to Nazi occupation in works such as *The Sound of Music*, whose iconic status has lent it a powerful status in the American historical imaginary, in order to very deliberately subvert them. Rather than inherently good people whose uncompromised inner beliefs combat Nazism with their very existence, the series argues “most people are affected by the conditions of their time, and they adjust their principles accordingly” (Rosenfeld).

The Man in the High Castle takes up the themes of family and resistance presented in *The Sound of Music*, but in ways which subvert the comforting identifications of *The Sound of Music*. In that story, Nazism is set in opposition to family, and escape from Nazi control is a means of preserving the union of the Von Trapp family. In *The Man in the High Castle*, however, loyalty to family is frequently intertwined with loyalty to Nazism, and resistance becomes an isolating, dangerous, and frequently cruel undertaking. Characters in the resistance are frequently unsympathetic, indifferent to the bystanders who may be harmed in their attacks on the regime, and quick to turn on one another. Nazi characters, by contrast, are frequently depicted as being driven by loyalty to family above ideology, as Joe Blake is during the second season when his desire for familial connection leads him to accept his father's Nazi ideology, or are humanized by their love of their families, as the family of Obergruppenführer Smith is in the eyes of Juliana Crain. In his analysis of the series' second season, Rosenfeld notes that *The Man in the High Castle* "is careful not to glamorize the resistance" and "offers few moral certainties. By showing how members of both groups are capable of evil deeds, the show reveals how the fascist system compromises everyone" ("Trump Gives Frightening New Relevance to *The Man in the High Castle*"). *The Man in the High Castle* depicts a world in which the evils of Nazism are so enmeshed in American daily life, that characters are often incapable of fully recognizing, much less attempting to counter, its brutality.

The first character we are introduced to in *The Man in the High Castle*'s opening episode is Joe Blake, who is eventually revealed to be a Nazi spy tasked with infiltrating the Resistance. However, while Joe is comfortable enough with the status quo of his

world to serve the Nazi cause, he does so without any apparent conviction – he is reprimanded for disobeying orders, expresses the desire to leave his position, and seems largely indifferent to both Nazi and Resistance rhetoric. Joe’s loyalties are ultimately driven by his connections to other characters, and these bonds, rather than any other considerations, drive his decision-making. When, in the second season, Joe is drawn into the world of Nazi power and privilege in Berlin, and outfitted with uniform and armband, he does so because of a desire to bond with the father he has just met. His choice to turn against the Nazi high command is determined less by a disenchantment with his father’s principles than by the revelation that Juliana, a woman he bonded with in the first season and believed had been killed, was actually alive and aligned with a different political position. Similarly, Juliana Crain only entered the story action in the first season because of her sister’s death; prior to that there is no indication that she had any intention of acting against the authoritarian powers governing her world. Juliana spends the second season initially spying on, and then becoming closer to, the family of Obergruppenführer John Smith, an SS leader hiding the fact that his son is suffering from a degenerative disease. Because Nazi eugenics principles dictate policy in the world of *The Man in the High Castle*, Smith’s son Thomas would be immediately executed if his medical condition were discovered. Smith, in spite of the atrocities he has unhesitatingly committed throughout the series, gradually becomes more sympathetic as we witness his refusal to kill and drive to protect his son. Juliana’s choice to kill a Resistance leader, rather than allow him to expose Thomas’ illness to hurt Smith, is lauded as one of compassion which averts disaster, even though as an SS commander Smith is responsible

for incalculable death and suffering, and his teenaged son (who does not know he is sick) is an enthusiastic adherent to Nazi ideology.

The series, particularly the second season, has been criticized for the moral aimlessness of its protagonists and the softening of its authoritarian characters. However, while the vaguely defined interior lives of both Joe and Juliana may make them less compelling as characters than those that populate other prestige dramas, they also effectively reflect contemporary values, and raise questions about the ramifications of cordoning off political morality from interpersonal connections. In contemporary American discourse, it is acceptable, even laudable, to consider oneself an individual above or separate from the political fray, and patience with all positions is expected. However, those values, when embodied by characters on *The Man in the High Castle*, lead to characters making their peace with the horrors of Nazism in unsettling ways. This may provide a unique challenge to series viewers, given that the series has emerged at a time of global resurgence of right-wing authoritarian political movements, and increasingly vocal, visible, and powerful white supremacist movements in the United States. Rosenfeld argues “the series asks Americans to reflect: Was their political behavior in the recent election guided by their principles, or did they abandon them in order to adjust to new condition? It further challenges them to decide how they will respond as the new American political order takes shape” (“Trump Gives Frightening New Relevance to *The Man in the High Castle*”). This reading of the series as an examination of autocratic impulses in contemporary politics was bolstered in a particularly striking moment in March of 2017, when Amazon.com started streaming a

“Resistance Radio” station, broadcast by the series’ fictional anti-Nazi group. “Resistance Radio” angered a number of supporters of Donald Trump, who believed it was their political convictions and those who represented them, rather than fictional Nazis, who were the target of resistance (Andrews). This kind of resonance between the alternate history of *The Man in the High Castle* and our current moment invites viewers to consider not only the possibility of a different past, but potentially opens up space to consider the consequences of acquiescence for the sake of ease of interpersonal connection in the current moment as well.

Conclusion

Each of the works examined here uses a dramatic departure from audience expectations of history to intervene in the historical imaginary, and challenge widely-held conceptions of the past. While there is no guarantee of their effectiveness in shifting the perspective of individual viewers, they provide a means of engaging with history and challenging the status quo of the historical imaginary in ways unavailable to traditional methods of history. By conceiving of the possible trajectory of the past in unexpected ways, these alternate history works may teach audiences new ways of thinking about both the events of the past and their reverberations in the present moment. Perhaps most effectively, they insist to the viewer that history is not inert or inevitable – our shared past is the result of numerous choices which could have been made differently, and (particularly in the case of Tarantino’s films) we should be allowed to feel rage not only at those who perpetuated history’s atrocities, but also those who failed to act against

them. But more importantly, these works which rupture the accepted narratives of the historical imaginary have a shared preoccupation with the role of collaboration and passivity in the shaping of the past. All depict the trajectory of history, not as shaped primarily by the actions of powerful individuals (either villainous or admirable), but as determined by the action or inaction of individuals who faced the temptation to compromise in the name of ease or safety. In this, they encourage us to find new understandings of the present moment through a more critical engagement with the past.

CONCLUSION

The examination of contested mass culture narratives in the preceding chapters demonstrates the ways in which the historical imaginary constantly works to maintain hegemonic social structure by shoring up its narratives of the past, either by glossing over the injustices and struggles that have shaped American history, or by presenting those as the necessary “growing pains” which have resulted in an idealized present. It also illustrates that the national traumas of American racism and racial discrimination are, in Walter Benjamin’s terms, flashing up repeatedly in our current moment. Although the narratives of the historical imaginary evident in the Magic Kingdom, time-travel series, and alternate history narratives are not exclusively histories of racial oppression, all are preoccupied in some way with shaping the way contemporary Americans understand national histories of race and race relations. The sanitization and erasures of the Magic Kingdom, the post-racial rationalizations of the time-travel series, and the more complex engagements of alternate history narratives are all different strategies of making sense of slavery, segregation, and racism in the historical imaginary. Alternate history narratives provide one model for how the historical imaginary may begin to be shifted – by pushing back against expected narratives, rejecting familiar tropes, and pushing viewers into uncomfortable affective identification positions. Mass culture narratives that work in this way do exist. And they are a form of representation worth pursuing, because the

historical imaginary is foundational to many of the logics undergirding American political discourse. To illustrate this point, I will offer a brief overview of the way the logics of the narratives examined throughout this dissertation function when they are mobilized as public policy.

The use of the historical imaginary as a justification for political rhetoric is not a new phenomenon. Famously, in 1863 Abraham Lincoln began the Gettysburg Address with an invocation of the historical imaginary's narrative of the founding of the United States – “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” The intention and presumed vision of the Founding Fathers has remained a popular trope of American political debate, particularly concerning questions of race, religion, and gun ownership. Writing in the *Washington Post*, Sam Haselby points out that the debate between “liberals [who] tend to see religious pluralism and equality as definitive American values” and conservatives who argue that “those with a ‘secular mind-set’ do not understand ‘who we are’ and advance a worldview ‘directly contrary to the founding of our republic’” has continued unabated since conflicts between New England Christian nationalists and Southern deists in the 18th century. Similarly, questions about the intentions of the second amendment dominant debates around gun control and gun safety, with advocates on both sides seeking a justification in past texts and founding documents for a particular course of action in the present. What the Founding Fathers being cited may or may not have actually believed about firearm regulation is often incidental to the discussion – misattributed and invented quotations are

consistently debunked, but continue to circulate unabated. For example, in 2016 a gun rights bill introduced in the Washington state legislature included six quotations attributed to various Founding Fathers – three were fabricated, and at least one other was a misattribution. In her article on the bill, Melissa Santos notes that both Mount Vernon and Monticello maintain online lists of “spurious quotations” incorrectly attributed to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The persistence of these misattributions in political rhetoric illustrates the disregard for accuracy in the historical imaginary; these moments are about shaping national identity to match a particular, contemporary ideology – the actual past is entirely incidental, yet claims of “respecting history” are used to side-step any meaningful engagements with the ideas “history” is being invoked to justify.

This use of the historical imaginary also plays an outsized role in the shaping of the teaching of history in American schools compared to actual methods and findings of historians. One space in which this is visible is in the ongoing spectacle of the educational standards set by Texas State Board of Education, whose curriculum choices have received increased media scrutiny in the last ten years. As detailed by Jonna Perrillo in “Once again, Texas’s board of education exposed how poorly we teach history,” conservative activist groups have used the educational standards set by the Texas State Board of Education as a means of mandating conservatively ideological narratives of the past in the classroom since the Cold War and, “the board enthusiastically accepted the task. It repeatedly mandated the censorship or diminishment in history textbooks of, among other things, labor unions, Social Security, the United Nations, racial integration

and the Supreme Court.” At the same time, “it compelled the inclusion of ‘the Christian tradition,’ the free market and conservative heroes Joseph McCarthy, Herbert Hoover, Douglas MacArthur and Chiang Kai-shek.” Texas continues to drive the framework adopted by most major textbook publishers; because one-tenth of American public school students are in Texas, publishers are unwilling to counter the State Board’s standards and risk a book being unusable there.

Debates around what to include and what to exclude, based not on historical fact but on the narrative that supports a given view of national identity, is in no way limited to Texas. In 2014, when the AP U.S. History curriculum added standards which “address[ed] the conflicts between Native American and European settlers” and material which covered the contemporary “rise of social conservatism and the battles over issues such as abortion, as well as the fight against terrorism after the attacks of September 11, 2001,” there was national outcry and pushback from conservatives, particularly in Colorado. Jefferson County School District’s in Colorado appointed a committee to review the curriculum with the goal of ensuring classes “present the positive aspects of the United States and its heritage, and promote citizenship, patriotism, essentials and benefits of the free enterprise system.” One parent, speaking in support of that action said she distrusted the new curriculum because it was “reviewed by college professors, and college professors are, by and large, on the left . . . American exceptionalism is something our kids need to believe in” (Karen Tumulty and Lyndsey Layton, “Changes in AP history trigger a culture clash in Colorado”). A few weeks later, the College Board revised the standards, emphasizing the teachers should focus their instruction on

“Founding Documents, WWII, key leaders in the civil rights movement, and other topics” and that “teachers should help students understand that the statements in the framework represent common perspectives in college survey courses that merit familiarity, discussion, and debate. The AP Exam questions do not require students to agree with the statements” (Canedo). This incident serves as a particularly useful example of the reason why traditional methods of History are ineffective in combatting the persistent falsehoods of the historical imaginary – those narratives persist because they are foundational to a conservative sense of national identity, and undergirded by a logic that distrusts historians’ research as a source of information about the past. The swiftness with which The College Board re-revised standards to be more palatable to a conservative ideology of American history, including asking teachers to remind students that they should not feel pressure to believe what they are being taught, indicates the lack of effective strategy for coping with ideological pushback to an understanding of the past supported by the historical record.

However, the most heated debates occur around questions of race, which should not be surprising given the preoccupation with racial histories in the historical imaginary demonstrated throughout the preceding chapters. These have increased in prominence in recent years, shifting from a space of frequently-ignored subtext in the “post-racial” glow of Barack Obama’s presidency to increasingly conspicuous text since the election of Donald Trump. One of the most notorious displays of Confederate memorialization, the flying of the Confederate battle flag over the South Carolina State House, ended in 2015, largely in response to the mass shooting at the Emanuel A.M.E. Church by white

supremacist Dylann Roof. However, every year since, protestors have marked the anniversary of the flag's removal by gathering at the statehouse and re-raising it "as Dixie blare[s] over loudspeakers" (Glantz). The question of whether monuments to the confederacy represent "heritage or hate," remains highly contentious. Particularly, discussions of the appropriateness and legacy of Civil War memorials became a national flashpoint of controversy in 2017, when white supremacists violently protested the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia, resulting in one death. In his now-notorious responses, Donald Trump defended the white nationalists, and argued that people seeking the removal of confederate monuments are "trying to take away our culture. They're trying to take away our history" (Greenwood). While some monuments have been removed, most remain, and the uneasy status quo has essentially persisted.

Each of these instances demonstrates the intensity of passionate resistance that is often inflamed when conservatively ideological narratives of the historical imaginary face challenges based on the methods and criteria of traditional History. This is not to say that such challenges are immaterial – indeed, they remain of vital importance, and the tenacity of those committed to defending counterfactual histories in the name of ideological convenience must be met with equal tenacity by educators, activists, and individuals committed to an honest national reckoning with the events of the past. However, that door will be made easier to open if we can find new ways to narrativize the past within the historical imaginary; shifting understandings of what the past means in the realm of

imagination, play, and entertainment, may provide a fruitful way of challenging those narratives before they calcify into ideology.

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BIOGRAPHY

Caroline Guthrie received her Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the College of Charleston in South Carolina in 2010. She received her Master of Arts in Media, Culture and Communication at New York University in 2012. Upon completion of her Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies in 2019, she will continue teaching at the College of Charleston.